The Burma Railway

One Man's Story

By James William (Jim) Jacobs

MAJOR 8TH DIVISION SIGNALS

VX 40983

1947

This book is written in memory of a darling wife Dorothy who dedicated herself to her Children and Home duties always wondering if Jim would survive this terrible war and imprisonment.

Joan

Raymond

John

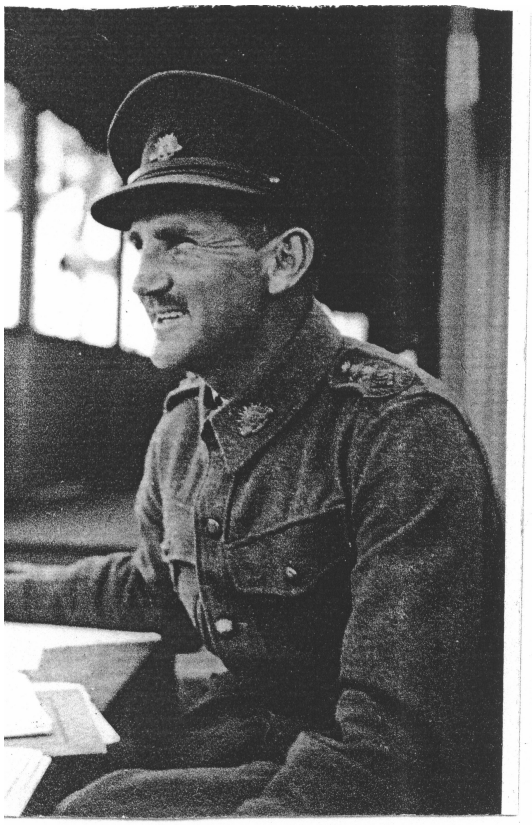

Figure 1. Major James W Jacobs

Origin of this disk

This book was published in 1947 by VX 40983 Major James W (Jim) Jacobs (known affectionately as "Jake"), for distribution to his family. A few years ago his son, Ray offered to make a copy of a disk containing the text of the book available to the 8 Division Signals Association (NSW). We considered his offer and although we would have liked to print the book, the cost was prohibitive and the matter lapsed.

Subsequently, Ray agreed with a proposal from the Association that it distribute a copy of the story to members and readers of the Association's Journal *Vic Eddy,* free of charge, on floppy disks. The book has been lightly edited and reformatted to make the pages on the disk the same size as *Vic Eddy*. The disk offers a choice to those who have access to a computer: it can be read from the screen or printed out. Additionally, for reading or printing, the copy can be reformatted to any font style or size and to any page size to suit the reader.

Now a bit about the author and the book contents.

Jake's life as a civilian is not covered in the book, which starts in conversational style with his recollections of the surrender day, 15 February 1942 and proceeds through all his experiences until he returned to Australia. Reading the Eulogy rendered at his funeral gives insight to his background, character and personality and adds to the understanding of the book itself, hence its inclusion on the disk.

The Association expresses its thanks to Ray and to Jake's family for this opportunity. Additional copies may be obtained from

Ray Jacobs, 20 Vincent Street, Oak Park VIC (03 9306 4553) or from

Russ Ewin, 15/2 Dawes Road, Belrose NSW 2085 (02 9451 3832)

R W Ewin, Editor *Vic Eddy*
For 8 Division Signals Association (NSW) February 2006

Eulogy for Jim Jacobs

James William Samuel (Jim) Jacobs was born in Brighton on 11th March 1902. Son of Maggie and James, his father, a champion boxer and instructor was killed under tragic circumstances when Jim was two.

At a very early age he found it necessary to assist his mother through difficult years earning money as a paper boy and any odd job he could find.

In 1916 he started his first job and soon after joined the PMG. Eager to learn, he further educated himself in many subjects, spending many hours a week at the Public Library and Parliament House. His position at the PMG enabled him to train as a telegraphist and his interest in radio began.

In 1924, with a strong desire to seek adventure, he applied for a position as a ship's radio operator. Eventually a phone call advised him a position was available on a vessel to depart from Sydney the next day; immediately he let the PMG know the situation, went home, packed and was on his way.

His job as a ship's radio operator led him to positions on various vessels visiting England, Canada, America, China, Japan, New Zealand and many other countries,

After a period of great experiences he settled back in Melbourne and continued his job with AWA, who controlled the radio operations on vessels at that time.

It was here he met Dorothy Lycett and they were married on 26th April 1930.

Jim joined the Cremorne Lodge in Richmond and soon after joined the CMF.

In 1932 Joan was born and four years later a son, Raymond.

The continued interest in radio led him to help establish a radio school in Essendon and he moved to a new job with Oliver J Nielsen, the owners of 3UZ at that time.

In his early years Jim had a speech impediment but with determination he was able to overcome this and it led to him becoming a most accomplished debater over a very long period, some of which were broadcast on radio.

Again, ever active and looking to new horizons, he had continued his duties with the CMF and joined the Australian army with the aim of entering the Signals Corps.

This aim was achieved and he joined the 8th Division Signals where he became a major. Jim sailed with the 8th division to Malaya, war broke out and he became a prisoner of war for 3½ years.

In spite of the conditions and tragedy that surrounded them all, it is a matter of record that through those years his leadership, cheerfulness and optimism increased as the situation deteriorated and he was highly commended by fellow officers and prisoners. During these years Jim assisted in organising and performing in concert parties to entertain the troops.

After the war he returned home to his loved ones and administrated the army signals headquarters in Albert Park. A son, John, was born and he successfully applied for the position of secretary of the Freemasons Homes in 1947.

With imagination and wonderful support the homes moved from a series of cottages to the great establishment it is today. He wrote the history of the homes, "Let Them be Admitted", and a further update is to be released. Freemasonry played a

significant part in Jim's life and he became Worshipful Master of his Lodge in 1962 and later to Grand Lodge honors.

After his retirement from the homes Jim's energy remained unabated and he worked as office manager at a city real estate company. In fact it was not until the age of 73 years that he actually ceased fulltime work.

In 1981 after a long illness his loved wife Dorothy passed away and after a period of mourning he decided to keep active and made many trips throughout Australia and abroad.

He had become a resident of the hostel and assisted whenever he could as he knew action keeps the mind and memory young.

This remarkable memory never failed him and he could clearly regale his life from the earliest years in great detail.

In January 1988 he learned he must face amputation of a leg and this he did with great courage and was able to charm the medical staff, who spent hours with him learning of his wonderful life.

Later it was necessary to have the second leg amputated but undeterred he looked at the world in the same manner remaining ever-cheerful.

In December 1988 a wing of the hostel was named the J W Jacobs Wing and stands in perpetuity as recognition of over 20 years service as secretary/superintendent during the long period of development.

Courtesy had always been a way of life and he remained a true gentleman under any type of pressure throughout his life. Jim Jacobs looked at the world and life as a challenge.

He saw only the positive side.

He loved his family and his fellow man.

Further complications meant a rapid deterioration in Jim's health and he was called by his maker on 23 March 1990.

While leaving behind three children, Joan, Raymond and John and their families, including 14 grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren, a son-in-law Norm and daughters-in-law Barbara and Ann, he leaves us with a challenge.

The world is a wonderful place and it is up to us to make the very best of every opportunity.

His message to you today would be "mourn for me today but life goes on—be strong, look to the future, serve your fellow man and see no evil but only love".

THE SURRENDER

There was a lull in hostilities at Singapore on that fateful afternoon of 15th February, 1942. When the C.O. sent for me, at about half past two, I had a feeling that something was in the wind. From the Botanical Gardens to Tanglin Barracks, where 8 Div. H.Q. was situated, is a short distance, only half a mile or so. As I approached Holland Road a group of Aussie soldiers stopped me.

"Excuse me Sir, what's this yarn about every man for himself?"

I was amazed.

"I've heard nothing about it," I answered.

"What have you heard?"

"Well, we were told that it was all over, and it was every man for himself now."

"As far as I know, there's nothing in it" I said, "I'm going over to Tanglin Barracks for a conference now, so wait here till I come back and I'll let you know if there's any truth in it."

"Alright Major, we'll see you on the way back."

The Signal Office at Tanglin was in the basement of a solidly built barracks building. Fred Stahl was on duty and everything seemed to be normal. The C.O., Bridgland, Paterson, Chown, Hardacre, and Matthews were there. The C.O. looked worried. As we sat in the far corner of the Signal Office, below ground level, I remember seeing daylight through a gating just above our heads.

"Gentleman, this is confidential" said the C.O. earnestly.

We gathered a bit closer.

"The Governor General has been in touch with the Japanese Commander. We can't hold out any longer. The water supply's gone and we're nearly out of ammunition. The cease fire is expected at three o'clock. Singapore is finished".

The news stunned me. The others looked very grave, but no one spoke. I looked at the Signals Office clock. Ten minutes to three! Quietly, dispassionately, we discussed the situation. Nobody tried to put his feelings into words.

At five minutes to three we heard the familiar sound of Jap bombers, the engines roaring louder as they came nearer, flying low.

"Looks as if its still on", said the C.O. reaching his for his steel helmet. Then we heard the first explosion. I looked longingly at the grating above my head and anxiously calculated the chances of escaping that way if the place was hit and the door entrance blocked. Three more loud explosions followed and then the noise of the planes swiftly died away in the distance.

Someone said, "That was close." I looked around at the men working in the Signal Office. There was no panic, everything was going on quietly and efficiently. These men were used to air raids, but I felt a thrill of pride as I observed how they carried on their job as though nothing had happened. It made me feel better too.

We finished our conference uninterrupted by further incident. It was decided that the news should be told to the other officers and to the senior N.C.O.s. The men were not to be informed until something more definite was known about the time of the cease fire. It was now well past three o'clock and fighting was still going on. Less than a mile away, over the Bukit Timah Road, planes were flying low, machine-gunning and bombing at will. Only very occasionally now did we hear our own Anti-Aircraft guns in action.

On my back to the Gardens I met the group of men I had spoken to earlier.

"Any news Major?"

"Yes," I said, "You are to stand by with your unit and await further instructions. There's to be no panic, and there's nothing to the story about every man for himself."

They seemed satisfied and asked no further questions.

Back at the Gardens and officers and N.C.O.'s took the news calmly. Later on we got definite instructions that the "Cease Fire" was to be at half past eight that evening.

I was having a cup of tea when word came. Some of us were at the improvised kitchen under the trees, snatching a bit to eat and having a hot drink.

When the news was announced one young fellow lost his head for a few minutes and starting waving his arms about, raving something about the "bloody Japs" and that now we were all done for. The R.S.M. quickly grabbed him and threw him to the ground, grimly threatening him with extreme violence if he did not calm down. I went over and spoke to him quietly.

"Its no use B....., we're all in the same boat now, and making a fuss won't improve matters."

The R.S.M. let him get up. He brushed his clothes, breathed deeply and walked away. His mates watched him in sympathetic silence. Somehow we felt that he had expressed what we were all feeling. Later that evening the young chap came to me and apologised for his outburst. During the years that followed he never again let himself go, and maintained a cheerful demeanour throughout 3½ years of captivity, although reduced at one stage to an emaciated condition.

At 8.30 pm, the Cease Fire was put into effect. Singapore, mighty outpost of Empire, had fallen!!

The quiet that followed the cessation of firing was eerie in the extreme. Most of us however were too tired to worry about anything, or even to contemplate the knowledge that we were now prisoners of war. With my batman sleeping on my valise in the trench alongside my stretcher, I turned in about half past nine and slept more soundly than I had done for weeks.

On Monday morning, 16th February, the day after the surrender, Signals held a roll-call assembly on the spacious lawns of the Gardens. During this parade the first Japanese troops made their appearance. One well dressed smiling Nip. in civilian clothes produced a miniature movie camera and took a few shots. These pictures were probably taken for propaganda purposes and later published in Tokio newspapers.

After the parade a few more Japs came around looking for cameras and watches. There was no force or coercion used, and I will say that most of them were polite enough. As we all expected to be rigorously searched and relieved of our valuables any way, some cameras and a few watches were handed over without demur.

Most of the Monday was spent checking the unit rolls, and in the evening a message arrived from A.I.F. H.Q., ordering us to be ready to move to Changi the following day. The whole of the A.I.F., just over 15,000 strong, was to proceed by road to Singapore's largest barracks areas on the Eastern tip of Singapore Island, where, at the well-known Changi Barracks we were to be imprisoned with 25,000 British troops. The Indian troops, of whom there were about 35,000, were to be sent to another barracks.

CHANGI INTERLUDE

Lunch on Tuesday 17th February was the last good meal I was to have for 3½ years. My batman had saved for me, from various parcels received from my wife, a few delicacies such as tinned tongue, fruit salads, cream, and preserved fruits. With Fred Stahl, Ben Barnett, and our batmen Johnny and Mac, we sat down to a regular feast, served on Royal Doulton china souvenired from a nearby deserted house. At the conclusion of the meal we tossed the beautiful plates and other dishes into a slit trench. We could not taken them with us, and did not want the Japs to have the use of them.

We crammed our packs and haversacks with tinned food, army biscuits, and a change of clothing, and at 2 p.m. moved off on our 17 miles trek to Changi. It was not a long march as army marches go, but loaded with all our possession as we were, and taking into account our physical condition following several weeks of intense mental and physical strain, it was to prove an ordeal.

Just outside the Botanical Gardens I saw a drunken Australian soldier lying in the gutter. Like many others he had sought relief from the incessant bombardment of the last few by drinking himself into insensibility. As the white civilian population of Singapore moved out of their homes, the troops moved in, and invariably raided the cellar. I could not leave him lying there. He seemed dead to the world, and groaned as I tried to wake him. Eventually I succeeded in piling him on to our water cart, which in addition to a three ton truck, was the only transport we had been allowed. The water cart was already loaded with men who could not march, and their gear.

The three-ton truck which the Japs had allowed us was filled with spare clothing and a few officer's valises, including mine. In addition we had hidden amongst the clothing two portable battery-operated radio sets, which we hoped the Japs would miss if they searched the truck.

Near Serangoon Road we had to pass a Jap sentry post, where all unauthorised vehicles were stopped and examined. The road nearby was strewn with kit and clothing which the Japs had ruthlessly dragged from any truck which did not have a permit.

The march dragged wearily on all the afternoon, and by evening we were tired out with the weight of our packs and enervating heat. Along the route we noticed that nearly every second house and shop displayed a Japanese flag, many of them home made and obviously prepared for the occasion. Poor devils, they probably thought that a Jap flag would save there from any ill-treatment at the hands of their new masters. From shops and houses the native population, mostly Chinese and Tamils, came out in force to watch the spectacle of the conquered white army marching out to its place of imprisonment.

Alas for the prestige of the white man in the East. Most of the Asiatics stared at us with interest, others seemed contemptuous, but a few of them openly expressed their sympathy and came out with buckets of drinking water and cups to offer us a much needed relief from our thirst.

This handful of people earned our lasting gratitude and one felt that they regarded our misfortune as a passing phase, and that they would be ready to welcome the white man back again when the temporary reign of the little yellow men had ended.

It was a sweltering night as we trudged on towards Changi. I remember that at about ten o'clock we passed a hedge of trees on the left of the road, and thousands of fireflies flitted in and out among the branches, giving a Christmas tree effect which was really beautiful. I'm afraid that most of us were too tired to appreciate it.

It was nearly two o'clock in the morning when we finally arrived at Selerang Barracks, that portion of the Changi area allotted to the A.I.F. Jimmy Hardacre, our quartermaster, had arrived earlier with the advance party, and welcomed us on arrival with a hot cup of tea. That cup of tea was one of the most welcome I ever remember having. It was a real life saver!

We had left hundreds of men lying on the roadside over the last few miles and they kept straggling in all night. Poor old Mac, my batman, had "conked out" a few miles back, but I had succeeded in getting him a lift on a passing water cart, and he was already asleep on the grass when I came in.

The barracks building loomed up out of the darkness and we were guided to our quarters on the ground floor of a large brick and concrete block of flats. I stretched out on blanket on the hard tiled floor and in spite of its cold unyielding surface I slept soundly.

Next morning my limbs were so stiff I could hardly move, but I managed to hobble – yes, "hobble" is the word - around the area to see the men. They were lying all over the lawn which surrounded the modern barracks buildings, many of them still asleep, although it had been daylight for two hours or more. Others had slept on the roadside some distance from Changi and were only now arriving in the barracks area.

My first impression was that for a prison camp we were in comparative paradise. Although most of the buildings, and there were over fifty of them, had been severely damaged by bombs, they were clean and spacious. The largest of these were two stories high and were built around the main barracks square. Before the Japs entered the war these had been occupied by the rank and file of the 2nd Battalion, Gordon Highlanders.

Next came several groups of flats built for the married N.C.O.'s and their families. Each flat contained lounge, kitchen and dining room downstairs, with bathroom, verandah, sleepout and two bedrooms upstairs. Six of these flats were built into one block, and there were several such blocks.

Then there were the officers' houses, large, modern brick and concrete homes, most of them two stories high. The rooms were large and airy, built for tropical conditions; with big windows and spacious verandahs.

The barrack roads were excellent, and there were large gardens and lawns, hibiscus hedges and a profusion of tropical trees and palms. In fact, for a prisoner of war camp one could hardly expect more. Another favourable factor was the absence of Japanese guards in the prison camp area.

We were told that the A.I.F. was to arrange its own accommodation in the barracks, and each unit was thus able to maintain its own identity. Contact with Japanese H.Q. was by means of an interpreter, who visited A.I.F. headquarters daily with orders and instructions. To offset these advantages there were certain drawbacks. The electric light system had been completely destroyed by enemy bombing, and as candles and other means of illumination were practically non-existent, we usually went to bed in the dark. However, this was a minor discomfort compared with the destruction of the sewerage system, which presented a far bigger problem.

Deep pit latrines had to be dug everywhere, and there were not enough tools to go round, consequently shallow pits were first dug as a makeshift. These soon bred millions of flies, causing an epidemic of diarrhoea and dysentery, hundreds of fresh cases breaking out every week. Frantic efforts were made to improve the sanitation, and from

somewhere or other the engineers produced a boring outfit which was loaned out to each unit on a roaster basis. Deep borehole latrines were dug in all unit areas, men working in shifts throughout the 24 hours in a desperate effort to finish the job before the whole A.I.F. was laid low with dysentery.

The shallow latrines were filled in, and a fly swatting campaign was launched, proving so effective that within a few weeks the number of fresh cases of sickness was reduced by 75 per cent.

In addition to the sewerage system being out of action we had no water supply for the first few weeks, and until permission was granted for our water carts to bring water from a tap on the road outside the camp boundary, we had to get what water we could from within the area.

Bob Chown, John Paterson, Colin Johnson and myself worked out a plan to tide us over the temporary shortage of water. On a prowl around the camp I discovered an unoccupied building which had been a N.A.A.F.I canteen, and here I found dozens of empty milk bottles. I commandeered about three dozen of them and brought them to our upstairs room in one of the blocks of married N.C.O.'s quarters in which Signals were accommodated.

At the rear of each flat was a small laundry. Ours had been almost demolished by a bomb, but the copper was intact. We scrounged a bucket from somewhere and then discovered a small trickle of water in an anti-malarial drain in the small depression nearby. It took several minutes to fill the bucket and many trips back and forth to fill the copper. When this was accomplished we used the splintered woods from the doors and window frames of the bomb damaged building to build a fire.

The first copper of boiling water was to sterilise the milk bottles. A few more trips to the drain and we filled the copper again, intending this lot to be boiled and used as drinking water. We eyed it doubtfully as the water came to the boil, bringing a thick scum to the surface. After debating as to its quality we decided to give the copper a good scouring out and to try again. The next attempt was more successful, but it still looked a bit cloudy and had a peculiar odour. Back and forth to the drain again we went, filling up the copper and bring it to the boil for the fourth time.

This lot looked alright, so we carefully poured the water into the sterilised milk bottles. We were so thirsty by this time that we could hardly wait for the water to cool off before taking a swig to it. The water had a strange taste, but we got used to it. It was reported that cholera was ranging on the island and that the water supply was contaminated, so all water drawn from the standpipe in the road outside had to be boiled before being used for drinking or cooking. This was awkward because of the shortage of firewood, but we managed somehow. In any case we decided to stick to our own private supply for drinking for the time being.

Overcrowding was another problem, especially at first, many buildings being so badly damaged as to be almost uninhabitable. A great cleaning up campaign was instituted the day after our arrival, and by degrees the camp was made more comfortable. Tiled roofs were repaired, bomb holes in walls were blocked up, stormwater drains cleared of rubble, and the place generally made as clean and tidy as possible, under the circumstances.

It is difficult for anyone who did not witness the overcrowding to realise just how tightly packed we were. For instance, a block of buildings in the barrack square which

had previously housed one company of the Gordon Highlanders, (about 180 men) now accommodated up to 2,000 Australians. Two and three storey bunks were improvised to relieve the congestion and to allow some room to walk between the bunks.

In the married N.C.O.'s quarters where Signals were billeted we managed to squeeze 700 officers and men into four blocks of flats which had previously accommodated 24 married couples and possibly a few children. To make matters worse, several of the flats were untenable because of bomb damage.

However, all these inconveniences were nothing compared with the food shortage. For the first few days we lived on bully beef, biscuits, cheese and tinned stuff which we had carried to Changi with us. It took the Japs a few days to organise the food supply, and when our ration scale was announced we found that all it consisted of was rice and very little else. Minute quantities of sugar, salt and cooking oil, plus a little dried fish and vegetables were all that we had to supplement the main diet of rice.

This ration scale was not only lacking in variety, but was seriously deficient in vitamins, and in calorific value. Instead of the 3,000 calories or so a day to which we had been accustomed, we were now drastically reduced to about 1,700 calories a day. We took a very dim view of this and protested to the Japanese administration, but without avail.

In an effort to secure more food many adventurous spirits broke out of camp at night and purchased tinned fish, bully beef, cheese, coffee and even bread rolls from the Chinese and Malays. Much of this food had been looted by the natives from abandoned army food dumps.

A flourishing black market in food grew up inside the camp, and the men responsible soon came out into the open and offered their goods for sale in an area of the camp which became known as "Paddy's Market." Every evening after dark the market was thronged with loud voiced vendors and eager purchasers, the air ringing with their cries.

"Salmon, five dollars a tin" cried one salesman.

"A bread roll and a slice of bully for a dollar," shouted another. The buyers went from one vendor to another in an endeavour to get the utmost in vitamin and calorific value for their money. We soon became vitamin conscious and weighed up the value of the articles for sale more for their food value than for their tastiness.

A.I.F. headquarters declared "Paddy's Market" black, and policed the area until the trade was driven underground, where it continued to flourish as before. Night after night men went out through the wire, often going as far as Singapore, and returning with their kit bags laden with food, mostly tinned army rations. Many were caught by the Japs, and some paid for their enterprise with their lives, but the trade went on.

Two of my men, Stan Raft and Bert Barrett, went out one night and were not missed until roll call next morning.

One night nearly a week late they returned to camp and told me their story. They had intended to search for a boat as that they could get away to Java or Sumatra, but before going very far, they had been apprehended by a Jap soldier and taken into custody. Both were locked in an enclosed tennis court with several other British and Australian troops who had been caught under similar circumstances, and here they were kept for two days and nights without food or water.

When Raft was questioned by a Jap officer he told the Jap that he and Barrett were only out looking for food. The Jap believed this story and told Raft that he and Barrett would not be shot but would be returned to Changi after being suitably punished. For the next day or two the two lads were stood up at the guardhouse and subjected to severe beatings by the guards. Then one morning a group of men were selected by the guard sergeant and marched off to be shot. Raft was included in this group, and was marching out with the firing party when the officer to whom he had spoken previously spotted him. Halting the party he ordered Raft back to the guardhouse and next day returned the two of them to Changi. They reported to me soon after arrival and told me of their experience.

"Well" I asked Raft, "do you still think it worth while making another attempt at escaping?"

"Not for me Sir," he replied, "I've had enough." His pal Barrett was of the same opinion. They still bore the marks of their beatings, and their experience had taught them a severe lesson. Neither they or any other members of Signals attempted to escape while I was a Changi, although a year or two later an unsuccessful attempt was made by one or two others.

Members of other units still continued to embark on nightly buying expeditions, and one day we were officially informed by the Japanese of the names of several whom they had caught and executed. In spite of this solemn warning the others were not deterred, and the black market continued to operate.

Some of the black marketeers, as they came to be called, amassed huge profits from their venturesome activities, man of them holding thousands of dollars in their possession.

Another profit making agency was the two up school, which attracted hundreds nightly. Although forbidden by camp standing orders, the game flourished at Changi as it always has done at any place where Australian troops are gathered. The prevalence of two up, and the operations of the black marketeers were responsible for the bulk of the money held by the prisoners gradually accumulating in the hands of a comparative few. This had its adverse repercussions on the camp as a whole, although the result was not foreseen.

A.I.P. headquarters had approached the Japanese authorities for permission to open a canteen in the camp and for authorised personnel to go to Singapore under Japanese supervision for the purpose of buying tinned food stuffs and other necessities such as soap, razor blades, toothpaste etc. The Japanese refused at first, but later said they would consider the matter if we could produce a lump sum - 20,000 dollars I think - to make the initial purchases.

An appeal for donations to put the scheme into operation brought very poor results, and it soon became apparent that most of the available funds had found their way into the pockets of the enterprising few. These people, naturally enough, did not want to disclose the extent of their profits b subscribing large amounts to the canteen fund, so the plan fell through.

Our C.O. was adamant in his condemnation of the black market, and strictly enforced obedience to the camp instructions that no one was to make purchases either outside the camp or through the black market within the camp. Although these orders

were flagrantly disobeyed in many units, even by senior Officers, Signals were strictly controlled.

I remember one occasion when the C.O. met some of our men returning from another part of the camp with some freshly killed poultry which they "procured" by subterranean methods. They were promptly ordered to dispose of their prize by burying it. The order was obeyed, but the incident caused much heartburning in the unit.

The subject of food had become a very touchy one, in fact it dominated our lives, and was the never ending subject of most conversations. It would not be too much to say that nearly every man became suspicious of his neighbour in the matter of food, and jealously watched the other man's plate to see that he was not served more than his share.

Cooks were carefully watched to make sure that they had cooked all the rations issued to them, and had not misappropriated them for their own use. However, most unit cooks did their best to try and vary the monotonous menu by experimenting with various methods of cooking rice. We in Signals visited the other units and investigated their cook's methods, bringing them to our own cooks in an endeavour to introduce variety, and to stem the rising tide of complaints against the monotony of inadequacy of the diet.

Some cooks took advantage of their position to consume more than their share of the available food, thus depriving the remainder. With rice this did not matter so much, but when it came to meat the offence was more serious. Imagine being cut off almost entirely from the foods to which you had become accustomed all your lives. Bread, milk, sugar, salt and meat were practically non-existent in our diet. Occasionally the Japs sent in a small quantity of fresh meat with the rice and dried fish, and when this happened the cooks were jealously watched to see that they issued the full amount to each man. The quantities were pitifully small, not more than 2 or 3 ozs. per man as a rule.

I remember once Lieut. Arthur Stewart reporting to me that one of the cooks was using half of his section's meat ration to make meat pies which he sold to a few of this cronies or swapped for cigarettes, which were very scarce at that time. When I had satisfied myself that the cook really was misusing the rations in this way, I had no hesitation in dismissing him and putting another man in his place. There was no lack of volunteers for the position of cook!

In an endeavour to check the constant stream of complaints about favouritism in the serving of food, we devised special serving utensils, with a "scraper" so that each man got the same amount of rice. Some mess orderlies were suspected of dealing out more to their own mates, so I had to appoint a conscientious N.C.O. to supervise every mess parade.

Any left over rice or stew was served as an extra issue on a roster basis. The roster was displayed in a prominent place near each kitchen, and was known to one and all as the "back-up roster." Woe betide the man who tried to get an extra serve out of his turn on the roster!

The Japanese granted our request to start a vegetable garden and supplied us with some seeds. When we asked for some fertiliser to assist the growth of the young plants, they sent us a few loads of peanut meal to spread on the soil.

The M.O.s" inspected this "fertiliser" and pronounced it edible, so instead of putting it on the gardens we gave it to the cooks to mix in with the rice. We found it quite tasty, and asked the Japs for more. The meal was full of protein, and was really a valuable addition to the diet, but I doubt whether we would have eaten it under any other

circumstances. In any case the stuff did not go far among 15,000 of us, and the Japs stopped sending it after a while.

We increased our intake of Vitamin "C" by picking the young leaves from the hibiscus hedges and eating them raw!

During the three months I was at Changi, we saw very little of the Japanese, for which we were truly grateful. The Jap administrative headquarters was some miles away, and contact was through an interpreter who visited us daily, as I mentioned earlier. However, there were three memorable occasions on which we saw more of them than we liked.

The first time was soon after the fall of Singapore, when Lieut. General Tomoyuki Yamashita, "The Tiger of Malaya", ordered all the British and Australian troops of Changi to line the camp roads while he made a triumphal tour of inspection. We were instructed to be properly dressed for the review, so we put on the best of the few clothes we had and formed up on the roads three deep on both sides. This was known as "Lining the Route".

On the way to the assembly point for our unit I felt a jab in the back of the knees. I thought it was one of our chaps who had kicked me in fun and turned around to remonstrate, but I found that it was a Jap sentry who was impatient to pass me.

The words of remonstrance died on my lips - I had no desire to test the uncertain temper of our captors. We were kept waiting in the hot sun for about an hour and a half, but at last Yamashita arrived. Truckloads of armed Japs in front and in rear of Yamashita's staff car formed the escort, and a long procession of captured limousines followed him. It was very galling to see the grinning yellow so and so's riding in triumph in luxurious cars which had belonged to the British just a few weeks before. The "Tiger of Malaya" was a tough looking guy and looked quite capable of the heinous crimes with which he was charged after the war and for which he paid with his life.

A few days later, we were lined up again for a similar humiliating inspection by the senior Japanese Naval Commander. Not to be outdone, the Senior Air Force Commander had to have his parade also, so back we went for the third time. We were fed up with processions of pompous looking Jap staff officers leering at us from captured sedans, and were glad when the whole beastly business was over.

Although we saw very little of the Japs apart from these three occasions we felt their heavy hand through the medium of an endless stream of orders and instructions which were passed onto us daily. Most of them were petty and pin-pricking, but the most important were those concerning escape, and relations with the native population. All contact with the Chinese and other peoples of Singapore was strictly forbidden under pain of severest punishment, whilst we were warned in no uncertain terms that any attempt to escape would bring the death penalty.

The Japs were firm believers of the efficiency of communal punishment, and threatened all sorts of nasty things to the senior officers if any of us were captured in attempting to escape, or if any succeeded in getting away. They also said that they would reduce the rations for the whole camp for the same offence, but as far as I know they never did put this treat into operation, at least not while I was at Changi.

To break out of camp was the easiest thing in the world, but where to go, there was the problem. With the fall of Java and Sumatra there was no island unoccupied by the Japanese within hundreds of miles, even if it was possible to secure a boat or raft.

Everything that would float had already been used by the evacuees who escaped before the surrender, so the chances of a successful getaway were very remote indeed. Plans were discussed by a few of the more optimistic, and some parties went out of the camp at night searching for small craft that might be hidden along the coast, but as far as I know none of them was successful.

The Japs were pretty confident that we had no chance of getting away, and did not bother about putting their own guards over us, but they did use as sentries some disloyal Indian troops who had offered their services to the Japanese as soon as Singapore fell. These Indians were under the command of a certain Captain Dillion, an English-speaking Indian Officer who had been in the Indian Corps of Signals.

Dillion came to be more cordially hated than the Japs themselves, for whenever he came into the camp he invariably bashed some British or Australian soldier for not saluting him. As he usually came in a staff car and had often passed the men before they saw him, he had plenty of opportunities to indulge in his favourable pastime.

His usual method was to pass a group of men in his car, pull up suddenly and then go back and beat them with his officer's cane because they had not saluted him. Quite a pleasant gentleman!

The Indian guards occupied one of the houses at Changi, and were used to guard the gateways to the camp and to patrol outside the double apron wire fence, which, incidentally, we had erected ourselves under Jap orders. Fortunately we never saw them inside the camp itself, they kept to the gates and boundaries.

I remember passing one of them one day as I was going over to Roberts Barracks, the portion of Changi area allotted to British troops. He was under a tree just off the road and as I passed I gave the customary salute which the Japanese had ordered must be given to all sentries, whether Indian or Jap.

Instead of returning the salute, the sentry - a Punjabi infantryman - hung his head. I am certain that he had a guilty conscience and was ashamed that he had turned traitor and gone over to the Japanese. After we had passed him I turned round to see if he took any notice of us, but he seemed deliberately to avoid looking in our direction.

When we had been at Changi for a few weeks the Japanese began to send large working parties into Singapore. Several hundred were camped at the Great World amusement park, and the Japs used them on all sorts of odd jobs, loading and unloading ships, and cleaning up the bomb-damaged town and dock area. They also instituted an organised looting campaign, and took systematic search of every house and shop, taking everything of value and shipping it to Japan. The refrigerating machinery from the Singapore Cold Storage was shipped away, and electric motors, machine tools and even the panes of glass from the shop fronts were ruthlessly salvaged and sent to Japan.

These working parties fared better than we who stayed at Changi, for they were able to do a bit of looting on their own account, mainly in the matter of food. Some even managed to work a racket selling Jap petrol to the Chinese and using the money to buy extra food for themselves and their mates.

Another large group of prisoners was billeted at Bukit Timah village in the centre of the Island. These men were put to work building a war memorial to the hundreds of Japanese who were killed in the Allied bombardment of troop concentrations on the Bukit Timah racecourse a few days before the surrender.

At Changi we had no work to do for the Japanese except to build a wire fence around the entire camp. As a reward for completing this task on time, our generous captors promised us a few cooking utensils, which we badly needed.

To fill in our days an educational system was established, and soon it was possible to attend classes in almost every conceivable subject, even languages, shorthand, farming, sociology and music. Within our ranks we were able to find experts in all these subjects, and the classes were well attended. One very excellent lecture which I heard was on Pacific Affairs by Major Charles Cousens. Debating also became very popular and I acted as adjudicating officer in one or two of them, and also took part in one which was adjudicated by Cousens.

About a month after we arrived at Changi, Colonel Kent-Hughes appointed a committee consisting of Lieut. Val Mack of 2/10 Fd. Regt., Signalman John Wood, and myself for the purpose of organising a concert party to entertain the A.I.F.; and with full authority to draw on the best talent available in the camp.

This was a labour of love and the committee set to with a will. With the exception of three lads from the 2/29th Bn. who had been killed in action on Singapore Island during the last days of the fighting, the whole of the previous A.I.F. Concert Party was still available. These men formed the nucleus of the new party, and to them we added many new performers whom we discovered in the camp. The committee was formed on my birthday, 11th March, 1942, and we were ready for the first concert a week later.

Production was in the capable hands of Val Mack, who had made a name for himself in Queensland as a comedian in a travelling concert party a few years before the war. John Wood was already well known as a young juvenile lead in both radio and the movies, having made some films at Esltree Studios in England.

Other acquisitions to the concert party were Gunner Eric Beatty, a well known concert violinist, and Doug Peart, a tenor with an excellent voice. Then there was Slim De Grey, a splendid hill-billy singer and yodeller, Sgt. Keith Stevens, vocalist and raconteur, and the popular Jack Smith, our comedian, who had been many years with J.C.Williamson.

My own job was manager of the party, and consisted mainly of arranging for the men to be released from other duties, and generally being responsible for the administration, especially scrounging materials for costumes and for the building of new concert platforms, as well as the acquisition of musical instruments. These latter were had to get, and we got no assistance from the Japs, but it was surprising what we found tucked away in the men's kits. We finished up with a portable organ, several trumpets and cornets, violins, clarinets, a banjo, and two piano accordions. Later the Japanese did allow us to bring in a piano from the abandoned submarine base a couple of miles away. With this start we got together a rather good orchestra, and were able to put on six shows a week, including a matinee at the hospital on Saturday afternoons.

From Monday to Friday we gave a concert in a different area of the camp each night, and the shows were well attended, some of our patrons coming to see the same performance five times. I really enjoyed my association with the Concert Party, but all good things come to an end.

FAREWELL TO CHANGI

Early in May there were rumours that a large party of Australians was to be sent overseas to some unknown destination. First the Japs said that a force of 7,000 British and Australian troops were to go but finally the composition of the force was announced as 3,000 Australians only. Brigadier A.L.Varley of the 22nd Brigade was to be in command, with Lt.Col. Charles Anderson V.C. as his chief staff officer.

The Brigadier organised the force on a brigade basis, with three battalions of four companies each. We were officially known as "A" Force, and the three battalions were commanded by the following officers. No. 1 Bn. Lt. Col. George Ramsay, No. 2 Bn. Maj. D.R. Keer, No. 3 Bn. Major (Later Lt. Col) Charles Green.

Each company was about 200 strong and there was much speculation in our unit as to who would be selected to take "D" Coy. of No. 2 Bn. We were not left long in doubt, for about the 9th of May the C.O. sent for me and told me that I was to be in charge of the Signals Company.

Pat Giddings, Arthur Shakes and Rae Nixon were platoon commanders from Sigs, while Lieut. Campbell Smith of 4 Anti-Tank Regiment commanded the fourth platoon, which was made up mostly of men from 8 Div. H.Q.

I was busy for the next few days interviewing and selecting the men who came to go with me. Two days before our departure from Changi, Major General Callaghan addressed the whole of "A" Force at a parade held on the barrack square, and wished us luck, wherever we were going.

Naturally there was much speculation as to our destination, and many wild guesses were made. Some thought it was Japan or Formosa, other plumped for Java or Borneo. There were even some who were optimistic enough to think that we were to be the first batch of Australians prisoners to be sent back to our own country in exchange for interned civilian Japanese. The only grounds which these people had for their optimistic hope were the predictions of Gunner Eric Beatty, the violinist in the A.I.F. concert party.

Beatty had announced some weeks before that on the 15th May a large party of Australians was to be sent overseas. His story was pooh-poohed at first, but when the overseas party was officially announced, Beatty's story was proved correct, and he was besieged for further news. How he got hold of the first bit of news before anyone else in the camp knew about it I do not know, but his own story was that he had seen a confidential memo over at Div. H.Q. one day when he was over there.

Pressed for further information he ventured the prediction that we were to be sent to Australia as the first batch of P.O.W.s to be exchanged. He even went so far as to lay bets on this, and he had a large number of takers. I thought it was significant however, that he made no serious attempt to join "A" Force himself, at least he did not approach me on the subject, although several other members of the concert party did. I sought a ruling on the matter from the G.O.C. and was told that the concert party was not to be broken up but would remain intact at Changi. My position as O.C. concert party was to be taken over by Lieut. Val Mack.

Those who persisted in the belief that we were to be sent to Australia supported their argument by quoting from Major General Callaghan's address on the barrack square, in which we were referred to by him as "the overseas party".

"See", the wishful thinkers said triumphantly, "he deliberately did not call us a working party, he said that we were just "an overseas party". He's in the know alright, but is not allowed to tell us".

Poor devils, they were doomed to bitter disappointment. Although the Japs gave us no clue regarding our destination, they promised that we were being sent to a place where there was "a big city and plenty of food, and many hospitals". We were assured that there was no need to take any food or medical supplies with us, as we would be well looked after.

I know that Major General Callaghan put no faith in these promises, for in an informal farewell address to all the "A" Force officers on 13th May be told us that we were to take with us a pro-rata proportion of all the available medical supplies, and a sufficient number of experienced physicians, surgeons and medical orderlies to operate a field hospital. Each man was to carry two days supply of cooked rice and tinned food, with a central reserve of bully beef and condensed milk to be used in an emergency only.

Up to the day before our departure we had expected to march the 17 miles to Singapore, but at the last moment the Japanese relented and promised motor transport for all of us. This was welcome news indeed, for it enabled us to take more than we could have carried on a long march.

My company was to act as baggage party for the force, and was to be on parade at the barrack square at five a.m. on the 14th. We were up at four o'clock for an early breakfast, and in the dim light before the dawn we picked up our luggage and marched off to the assembly point, where the baggage was piled in neat rows ready for us to load on the trucks when they arrived. They were due at six o'clock, and arrived right on time. To our surprise we found that all the drivers were Indian troops who had been our allies for only a few months before, and who were now working for their new masters.

The luggage was soon loaded, and after checking to make sure that all my men were present I climbed into the seat of the leading truck alongside the Punjabi driver. With mixed feelings we waved goodbye to those who had come down to the square to see us off, and wondered whether we would ever see them again. The last man I farewelled was my old friend - Major Glyn White, D.A.D.M.S.

On the way to Keppel Harbour I had time to think about the events of the last three months, to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of life at Changi, and to wonder whether the future would be any better or any worse. On the credit side I reflected that so far we had suffered practically no physical ill-treatment, we had seen very little of the guards, and had enjoyed a fair amount of freedom in the camp area. There was plenty to do during the day in the way of lectures and classes, and a concert nearly every night. Our quarters were weatherproof, and our surroundings pleasant enough, while with the large number of books which the Gordons left behind there was no lack of good reading matter.

On the debit side there was the dominating factor that we were members of a defeated army, in the custody of an enemy whose future attitude towards us was unpredictable, and who had so far not adhered to the Hague and Geneva Conventions concerning treatment of war prisoners. We had been given no communication with our friends or relations, and the Japs had refused to permit the Red Cross to send us any relief in the way of food parcels, clothing, or medical supplies. With the exception of the men working in the city of Singapore for a miserable ten cents a day, we had not been

receiving any pay. We were overcrowded, underfed, and very short of many essential drugs and medicines.

With these thoughts in my mind, the convoy sped along the road to Keppel Harbour, where we arrived soon after eight o'clock. Here we unloaded the baggage and sat down to await the arrival of the remainder, for whom the trucks had returned to Changi as soon as the unloading was finished. The docks were still a shambles even though three months had elapsed since the surrender, and scores of Chinese workmen were leisurely dismantling the bomb shattered godowns.

On the way to the docks I had noticed that the Japs had restored the electric trolley-bus service, but many of the buildings were still bearing signs of the terrific hammering which the Jap air force had subjected them to in the last few days of the fighting.

The undamaged godowns on the wharf were packed full of cases of tinned food, and we eyed them longingly. A Jap soldier appeared from one of the sheds carrying a case of condensed milk on his shoulder, and we noticed that the case was open at the top, bringing the bright shiny tins tantalisingly into our view.

One Aussie, a little bolder than the rest, sneaked up behind the Jap and snatched a tin of milk from the case. To our surprise, the Jap took no notice, although he must have been aware of what had happened. He went on his way apparently unconcerned, so half a dozen others, encouraged by the success of their comrade, made a concerted rush upon the Jap. Eager hands clutched at tins of milk, and then scores of others joined in the general melee which ensued. This was too much for the Nip, who dropped the case and yelled out something nasty in Japanese, while the Aussies scattered in all directions with their booty clutched in their hands.

We spent all that day lounging round the docks, the tedium being relieved by the attempts of the Japs to count us. First the whole 3,000 of us were lined up in threes, but the men were so restless that the Japs gave it up. Our chaps kept breaking the ranks and wandering off to talk to someone further up the line, and for a start the whole thing was a fiasco. About an hour later the Japs tried again, this time we were in rows of five, which made a more compact body of us, and seemed to make it easier for the Japs, who found it easier to count in fives and tens. This time they seemed satisfied with the result, and when it was over we sat down again to await further orders.

All that day we waited in the heat, and were forbidden to smoke or move away from the area. A bespectacled Jap corporal rode up and down on a bicycle for hours, on the lookout for anyone who disobeyed the "no smoking" order. When he caught anybody having a surreptitious puff at a cigarette he dismounted and beat up the offender with a thick bamboo stick.

During the afternoon I ventured on to the wharf in the hope of seeing the transports which were to take us to wherever we were going. There was not a likely looking ship in sight and I thought perhaps that was why we were kept waiting - our ships had not yet arrived. Alongside the wharf were a couple of ancient and dilapidated cargo boats, one about 9,000 tons and the other about 6,000 tons.

Towards evening we were called on to load supplies on to these two ships, and then to our horror we learned that they were our "transports". Captain Bill Drower, an English officer who was attached to "A" Force as Japanese speaking interpreter,

informed Brig. Varley that 2,000 of us were to go on the larger vessel, “Toyohasi Maru”. The remaining 1,000 were to go abroad the “Celebes Maru”, the smaller of the two.

After an inspection of both vessels, Brig. Varley protested against the inadequacy of the accommodation provided, but his protests were of no avail. As soon as the loading was finished we were to go aboard, and so we were kept busy handling cargo until midnight. The only bright spot was the opportunity of looting tinned food and tobacco, and the Aussies took full advantage of it. Hundreds and hundreds of tins of condensed milk, bully beef, salmon and a lot of 2 oz. tins of Barney’s tobacco found their way into the pockets and kitbags of the men.

It was two o’clock in the morning before I was able to get aboard, my batman helping me to struggle up the narrow gangway with my gear. I found a place to sleep in one of the holds and lay down fully dressed, being not at all impressed with the travel accommodation provided by our hosts.

The Japs continued with the loading, which carried on all night, but in spite of the rattle of the winches I slept like a log.

The next morning was 15th May, 1942, exactly three months after the fall of Singapore. With profound misgivings I set out to explore the ship, which was still moored at Keppel Harbour. A large part of the upper deck space was taken up by four large motor landing craft, while spare fresh water tanks and temporary latrines took nearly all the space that was left. It was obvious that most of us would have to spend the greater part of the voyage below decks, so I went down to explore these regions.

I was simply appalled at the overcrowding in the murky fetid holds where the men had to sleep and spend the greater part of each day. Seven hundred and fifty men were crowded into one filthy hold, the only entrance being one narrow companion way which would barely take two men abreast. The men were packed in like sardines, and there was literally no room to lie down at full length, or for a man to turn over once he had squeezed himself into a position on the sleeping platforms. The hold was indescribably dirty, there was practically no ventilation, and the whole place was littered with old iron chains, greasy ropes, empty boxes and all sorts of rubbish.

I had heard of the German hell-ship “Altmark” but I am quite sure it could not have been nearly as bad as this. In spite of these conditions, the men were fairly cheerful, and were more inclined to curse the Japs than to bemoan their own ill fate. They derived a lot of pleasure from the fact that they had outwitted the Japs on the wharf by pinching so much tinned food and tobacco from under their noses.

WE JOURNEY NORTH

Just before noon the two ships left the wharf and came to anchor out in the stream, about two miles off shore. It would be about two o'clock when the "Toyohasi Maru" weighed anchor and sailed out of Singapore, followed by the "Celebes Maru" with the rest of "A" Force on board.

We were still unaware of our destination and the optimists still held high hopes that we were bound for good old Aussie, and every man who could find a foothold on deck was anxiously watching our course. When the two ships described a wide arc towards the west and then turned North to steam up the Straits of Malacca, you could almost hear their hearts drop down into their boots.

Our choice of destination was now limited to Sumatra or Burma, with the odds in favour of the latter. Many and loud were the curses heaped upon the head of Eric Beatty, who now seemed to be held responsible for the turn of events by many whose disappointment ran away with their reason.

During the day I found a new spot to spread my blanket, in one of the holds which a few of us shared with some Jap soldiers and some Malay postal officials who said they were going to a new job in Sumatra. Captain Bob Concannon, who could speak Malay, got in conversation with these men, who told him that were being sent to Burma.

At dawn on the 17th May, after an uneventful, but comfortless journey of two days we arrived at Belawan, the port of Medan, on the East coast of Sumatra, and anchored a couple of miles off shore. We stayed until dusk the following day unloading and loading cargo, and were joined on our departure by two other ships which we were told contained Dutch prisoners of war who were also going to Burma. From Belawan we were escorted by a Japanese sloop which steamed just ahead of us, plunging her nose into the waters of Malacca Straits. It was not until after we left Belawan that the Japs told us we were bound for Burma, and that our next stop would be Victoria Point, where we knew an emergency airfield was situated.

A number of Jap soldiers had come aboard at Belawan, so we officers who had shared the small hold with the Malays and Japs were told to move out to make room for the new arrivals. Brig. Varley protested to the Jap commander, but the only relief we got was permission for all officers above the rank of Captain to sleep on the small boat beck . As there were only about fifty of us in that category, it did not offer much relief to the remaining 1950, but I admit that I was glad to move my gear up to the boat deck with the others, where I had about three feet of deck space instead of eighteen inches into which I had squeezed down below.

My relief was short-lived however, for that night we ran into a tropical storm. The rain came down in torrents and poured through the flimsy tarpaulins which had been rigged up as a temporary roof over the deck. There was no sleep for us that night, so we just sat on our packs like a lot of washed out hens on a hen roost and wrapped our capes around us, while the wind roared through the rigging and the tropical rain lashed all around us.

I spent all the next day holding my blanket and clothes up against the warm funnel, which was just near my sleeping place, in an attempt to dry them. It was time largely wasted, however, for the next night was just as wet, but in the meantime I had scrounged a couple of planks and raised them on blocks above the level of the deck to make an improvised bed. It was hard and most uncomfortable, but I was able to get a

little sleep, although an inch of rainwater was swishing round the boat deck, making a rhythmical accompaniment to my fitful slumbers. Captain Len Lawson of Sydney was curled up on a similar contraption alongside me, while Major Joel Harris of Melbourne was wrapped up in a groundsheet over in the corner of the lifeboat.

And so on 20th May at about half past three in the afternoon we arrived at Victoria Point, and dropped anchor a mile or two from the shore. Here we were ordered to disembark 1,000 men, so the Brigadier detailed No. 3 Battalion, under Major Charles Green, to get ready for disembarkation on the following morning.

No. 3 Battalion was built up to a strength of 1,000 by the addition of detachments of the 2/4th C.C.S., Engineers and Sigs. Brig. Varley asked me to detail an officer and 22 men from my company, so I selected Capt. Keith Mann and gave him as many of his own Line Section as I could.

Included among the men disembarked at Victoria Point were the worst of the dysentery cases, and one of these was Signalman Frank Jesse of Blackburn, and looked so ill that we never thought to see him alive again. A severe attack of dysentery had reduced him to skin and bone within a few days, and so he was carried down the gangway to the barge. One of the men remarked that Frank looked as near death as a man could be.

It was nearly two years before I saw Frank again, and he had not only recovered from his dysentery, but had become well enough to be chosen among the several hundred fittest men to be sent to Japan to work in the mines.

The story of the sinking of the "Rakuyo Maru" off the Philippines on September 12th, 1944, by an Allied submarine is already well known. Frank Jesse was one of the handful of survivors to be picked up by an American submarine after an ordeal of four days and nights on a raft with no food or water. Once again he had cheated death, and at the time of writing (October 1946) he was serving in a Signal Unit at Balcombe in Victoria.

To replace the Sigs who had joined Majors Green's force at Victoria Point, the Brigadier posted to my company 21 men from the Field Bakery and the A.A.S.C., under Lieut. Harry Vowell of Sydney.

At nine o'clock on the morning of 22nd May, our convoy sailed North again, and with the disembarkation of a thousand men from the two ships, our living conditions became less crowded, but were still deplorable. Fresh water was available to us only once a day for washing and drinking, and the decks in the vicinity of the water tanks were so crowded at this time it became a matter of the survival of the fittest. Hundreds of men milled around the tanks trying to fill their water bottles and have a quick wash at the same time, and the confusion was indescribable.

To make matters worse the water tanks were right alongside the foul smelling, filthy latrines, which were temporary wooden box like structures built over a shallow tin gutter about six inches deep. There were no seats in these boxed horrors, and at any time of the day and until late at night one could see queues of men waiting outside the flimsy doors of the latrines, which the Japs allowed us to hose out only once in the morning and once in the afternoon. At all other times the salt water was turned off, and the hose taken away. Within a few days some of the men were so weak with dysentery that they had to crawl on their hands and knees or be carried to the latrines, while at least half our number were suffering from a severe form of diarrhoea.

The food consisted entirely of rice and stew, and while the amount of rice was sufficient to fill, it did and most unappetisingly. The Japs were well fed and had food to spare, and after each mean crowds of men hang around the Jap galley waiting for the scraps of food and buckets of soup which were left over.

It was a most degrading spectacle to see Australian men scrambling for scraps of meat and vegetable, especially in the presence of the detestable Japs for whom we had so much contempt. I was beginning to learn to what depths of degradation white men can be driven by hunger.

After leaving Victoria Point we came to the picturesque islands of the Mergui Archipelago, sometimes called the "Archipelago of a thousand islands". We steamed between the islands and the coast of Burma, charmed by the beauty of our surroundings. For the tie being we forgot our discomfort, and enjoyed to the full the picturesque beauty of these tropical islands.

The following afternoon we arrived at the town of Mergui, and once again we anchored off shore. Another 1,000 men of "A" Force were to go ashore here, and an advance party of 200 disembarked that afternoon. The remaining 800, under Lit. Col. George Ramsay of Sydney, were disembarked the following day, 24th May, 1942.

We sailed from Mergui at breakfast time next morning, and late that afternoon dropped anchor at Tavoy Point, situated at the mouth of the Tavoy River on the west coast of Burma, to the South of Moulmein. This was the end of our sea voyage, and on the following morning, 26th May, an advance party of 200 men under Major Rupert Barraclough of Brisbane left by motor landing craft for the town of Tavoy, some hours journey up the river.

We were informed that the balance of "A" Force under our commander, Brigadier Varley, as well as the Dutch troops, were to proceed to Tavoy the following day, and so on the morning of 27th May, we left the "Toyohasi Maru" and proceeded up the Tavoy River. Our barge was loaded with 44 gallon petrol drums, so we were not allowed to smoke. Each of these craft carried about 50 to 100 men, according to the amount of cargo aboard. Many of my men were on the same barge as myself, including Pat Giddings, Merv Reid and my batman Roy McInerney.

For some reason or other we were not taken right up the river to Tavoy, but disembarked at a small village called Simbin, where there was a large rice mill, and a warehouse, or godown as they call warehouses in the East.

A rather amusing incident occurred at Simbin, when a party of Dutch and Australian prisoners was told to assist in getting a steam roller ashore from one of the barges. Two long ropes were attached to the roller, and a platform of heavy planks led from the barge to the shore. The prisoners started to heave on the ropes, but the roller weighed several tons and refused to budge. Extra men were put on the ropes, and whether by accident or design (and I strongly suspect the latter) the men started pulling the roller to one side, causing the barge to list to the left. The Japs yelled frantically for the men to pull in the opposite direction, but the prisoners took no notice and started to shout "Heave Ho", and "Heave Ho" they did, with the result that the steam roller toppled over out of the barge and sunk out of sight in the mud of the river. This delightful little bit of sabotage was greatly enjoyed by all except the Japs, but even they soon forgot about it, and as far as I know there were no repercussions.

We were given a hasty meal of the inevitable rice and stew just before two o'clock, and told to leave our heavy baggage in the godown, as it would be sent on by truck that evening. The Japs gave us a few bags of uncooked rice and some dried fish, plus a tin of M and V between six men, and soon after two o'clock we set off on the march to Tavoy. Our party was 104 strong, with Lt. Col. Anderson V.C. in charge. The other officers with us were Major John Shaw, D.S.O. and Lieut. Arthur Watchorn, M.C. of the Engineers, and Pat Giddings. Four Jap guards armed with rifles were our only escort.

After about four hours march we stopped at a Burmese village to cook our rice, and as the Japs had provided us with no cooking gear, we had to ask the Burmese villagers for some. They willingly produced a couple of kerosene tins, and we lit a fire and waited for the rice to cook. A crowd of villagers soon gathered round to watch us, and one old chap eyed our rather amateur efforts with much interest, shaking his head from time to time. Finally he could stand it no longer, and waving us away from the fire he took complete charge of the situation. First he produced some large palm leaves which he bound over the rim of the tins with strips of bark, and then attended to the fire, which was smoking badly. He soon had a fire of hot ashes, which he drew after a while, and left the rice to steam.

When it was ready the old fellow got a ladle and with a benevolent grin on his fact he served us with the best cooked rice we had tasted so far. In the meantime the other villagers had been handing out pineapples, bananas, cigars and cigarettes to the men, so all in all we had the best meal in months. The kindness of the Burmese villagers was one of the bright spots of our imprisonment, and I shall always remember their generosity to us.

It was dark when we picked up our packs and continued on our way to Tavoy. Two of the Jap guards had already cracked up and thumbed a ride on a passing supply truck. The remaining two guards were beginning to tire and they ordered halts about every mile or so. This was worse than continued marching, for our limbs soon got stiff from sitting on the wet roadway in soaking rain.

It was nearly midnight when a Jap staff car going in the same direction pulled up, and the officer asked us if we had any men who were unable to finish the march to Tavoy, which was still several miles away. The car was a large roomy sedan and contained only the Jap officer and his driver. Lt. Col. Anderson and I chose six men to get into the car, and then two more managed to stand on the running boards. To our surprise the car returned in half an hour and picked up another nine men, the officer having stayed in Tavoy and sent the driver back. Once again the car returned for another load of footsore Australians, and a further nine men, including Merv Reid and McInerney, were put aboard.

This humanitarian act by an unknown Japanese officer stood out as one of the very few deeds of kindness towards prisoners of war which I witnessed during our three and a half years of captivity. By this time I could hardly walk myself, and I had taken the opportunity of lightening my load by giving my pack to Merv Reid to take on to Tavoy in the car. Lt. Col. Anderson, who was marching with me at the head of the column, told me that if the car came back I was to go with it, but I replied that I would rather stay with the men as long as I could walk. Lt.Col. Anderson then said he would order me into the

car, but as it happened the Jap did not come back again. I was not trying to be heroic but I did feel there were others worse off than I was.

Poor old John Shaw, for instance, developed a stiff knee and it was all he could do to hobble along, but he never let out a word of complaint.

About one o'clock in the morning we came to the outskirts of Tavoy, and the guards called another halt. In the darkness I could dimly see a fairly large Burmese house, with three of four steps leading up to a front veranda. There was no fence, so I went up to the steps and sat down for a rest. A light appeared inside and the front door opened, to reveal a well-dressed, middle-aged Burman, who asked in excellent English if there was anything he could do for us. I asked for drinking water for myself and my men, he then called his wife, who took a few of the men to the back of the house to fill their water bottles.

I started a conversation with the Burman, who told me he had been a police officer in the district for twenty-five years under the British administration.

"Would you like some sweets?" he asked. I replied that I would, and he disappeared into the house and came back with a handful of what looked like dried sea wood. “I bought these from a jungle woman" he said, "she makes them from young palm leaves and palm syrup."

I thanked him and took my leave, but before going he asked me to call and see him again if ever I got the opportunity. The confection tasted much better than it looked, but it was the kind thought which prompted the gift that I appreciated.

We were nearing our destination now, and at about two a.m. we arrived outside the Tavoy gaol, where we were to spend the night, or what was left of it, in some wooden huts just outside the walls of the gaol. A hot meal of rice and stew was already prepared for us by those who had arrived earlier, and after partaking of this we looked for somewhere to sleep. The Brigadier, Lt.Col. Anderson, John Shaw, Pat Giddings and myself lay down fully dressed on the veranda of one of the huts. I was too tired to bother looking for Merv Reid and Mac, who had my haversack and pack, so I lay down as I was, with only my gas cape for cover.

Pat and I "borrowed" a couple of leather cushion seats from a Jap truck nearby and used them as pillows, but we had nothing else to soften the hard wooden floor of the veranda.

In spite of the discomfort we slept like logs. I doubt whether any of us had been so tired in our lives before. At daylight I woke up stiff and sore after the 22 mile trek of the previous day. We had the usual breakfast and were told to get ready to march out to the aerodrome as soon as the meal was over.

We were soon on the road again, but this time the journey was a short one of two or three miles. Chatting to Lieut. Benny Cook on the way to the drome I discovered that he was a pal of Stan Williams, a radio inspector of the P.M.G. Dept., with whom I had worked in Melbourne about eighteen years earlier. It’s a small world!

On arrival at the aerodrome we were marched up to a huge hangar and lined up outside one of the large sliding doors at one end. Then along came a pompous looking Japanese officer, fully booted and spurred and complete with Samurai sword. He looked us over with a supercilious air, and then struck an attitude, with one hand on the hilt of his sword.

Speaking in broken English he made a short speech of welcome. As far as I can

remember it went something like this. “I am Lieutenant Chiina. You are my prisoners. You must obey my orders. If you want go free, Japan soldier shoot dead.”

His meaning was painfully clear, and a feeling of hatred for the sneering yellow braggart surged up in me as I watched him gloating over us. After this pretty speech we were ordered into the hangar, which was nearly full of Aussies who had arrived the day before under Rupert Barraclough. Our party brought the total up to eight or nine hundred.

We were pretty crowded in there, each man had about six feet by three feet of floor space, and as the Japs left us all day without food we had plenty of time to take stock of the situation.

Things looked pretty gloomy, and our thoughts were not at all pleasant. Here we were, after a twelve day journey in a filthy cargo boat, most of us weakened by dysentery or diarrhoea, forced to march over twenty miles as soon as we had left the ship, and now huddled into a big draughty hangar without food or water.

Captain Bill Drower, our interpreter, succeeded in having the order restricting our movement made a little more clear. After pointing out that the hangar contained no latrines, Drower was told that we could move about within a radius of fifty metres from the outside of the hangar, but that any excursion beyond that limit would be construed as an attempt to escape, and would result in the offenders being shot. The Japs meant what they said, as we were soon to discover.

We had no tools to dig latrines, so were forced to use a shallow gutter, six inches deep, which carried storm water from the roofs of the hangar to a ditch across the drome. Once again we were faced with lack of sanitation, but our protests were of no avail. We were filthy from the sweat and dirt of our journey, and as no water was provided it looked as though we would have to remain so. But by a strange coincidence our arrival coincided with the breaking of the monsoon, and during the afternoon the rain came down with tropical violence. The monsoon had broken with a vengeance. As the water poured off the hangar roofs many hundreds of naked Australians could be seen under the eaves washing their sweaty bodies in the refreshing first rains of the wet season.

Requests for food resulted in a few bags of rice arriving long after dark, and it was nearly ten o'clock before we had it cooked. As we had no proper cooking utensils we had to use some old petrol drums for boiling the rice. Those who had arrived the day before had not eaten for thirty-six hours, so even plain rice was welcome. We did not mind the oily flavour.

The floor of the hangar, on which we had to sleep, was anything but a bed of roses. It consisted of sharp pieces of road metal, some of the rocks being as large as footballs. Evidently the Japs had captured Tavoy aerodrome while the British were in process of building it, and the floor had just reached the stage of having the first layer of large road metal dumped on it. In spite of the fact that I had only my gas cape between me and the rocks, I again slept soundly, with Lt.Col. Anderson on a ground sheet alongside me. The following day, 29th May, a truck load of heavy baggage arrived from Simbin, but my bedroll and kitbag were not on board, so I faced another night on the rocks, with only my gas cape to lie on. During the day I had a look around within the restricted area of fifty metres from the hangar. The first thing I noticed was the damage done by machine gun bullets to the roof, which was full of holes. Just outside the hangar was a grim reminder of the air battle over Tavoy in the shape of a wrecked Brewster

Buffalo fighter.

Across on the other side of the drome was another hangar similar to ours, which was occupied by the Dutch prisoners who had joined our convoy at Belawan in Sumatra. Towards evening we received a visit from the senior Dutch officer, who was accompanied by a Dutch R.C. padre in a long brown surplice. They had received special permission to visit Brigadier Varley, to whom they complained that they had no food.

"Didn't you get some rice issued to you last night?" asked the Brig.

"Oh yes" said the Dutch officer, "But we have eaten it all."

"Well we got only a few bags ourselves," said the Brig, “but we thought ahead a bit and saved some in case the Japs gave us none today.”

The Dutch then asked us if we could give them some and the Brig. relented and let them although it left us pretty short. He warned them however to be more careful of their rations, and always to keep some in reserve. They thanked the Brig. and said they would take more care in future, and also promised to pay him back as soon as they had enough to spare.

Most of the second day was spent in checking our rolls, and arranging for a lot of sick men to be transferred to a hospital camp which was being established nearby under Lt.Col Hamilton.

WE BUILD AN AERODROME

On the third day, 31st May, we were left in no doubt as to whether or not we were sent to Burma as a working party, for early that morning the Japs asked for a hundred men to be ready after the morning roll call to do a task on the aerodrome. Brig. Varley detailed me to take charge of them, with Lieutenant Lawton of Queensland as my assistant.

A Japanese private named Akiyama came to take us to our job, and to my surprise he saluted me! Then beckoning me to follow with the men he led the way across the drome. I gave the order to march and off we went on our first job of work for the Japanese.

Akiyama led us to a heap of rusty rails on the far side of the drome and motioned us to pick them up and carry them to the place where they were to be laid. It appeared that a light rail line was to run from the high ground at one end to the low ground at the other, with the intention of using small trucks, or skips as they were called, to convey earth and gravel to the low lying portion. This job lasted all that day and the next, for the rails were rusty and bent, and we had to straighten them out and lay them on sleepers, and then spike them in position.

We discovered that the Japanese at Tavoy had not been warned of our arrival, and that accounted for the lack of food and accommodation. Repeated protests by the Brigadier through the interpreter, Bill Drower, brought about a slight improvement in our conditions. The first step was a move from the uncomfortable hangars on June 4th, to a group of huts across the road from the drome. These huts had been occupied some months earlier by a unit of the Burma Rifles, and from some old envelopes and letters we found in the camp, we learned that they had also housed some of our Australian commando troops known as "Tulip Force", which had been formed in Malaya about a year earlier. Some of our chaps found letters addressed to friends of theirs whom they had last seen at Port Dickson and Seremban in Malaya twelve months or so before.

These huts had wooden floors and atap (palm leaf) roofs, and were clean and weatherproof. A wide veranda ran the full length of each unit, and although they contained no furniture, they were a distinct improvement on the draughty hangars.

Fortunately two trucks containing our missing kit came the day we moved in, and I again had my blanket, mosquito net, and ground sheet. With the latter I managed to construct a sort of stretcher, which made a comfortable night's sleep easier of attainment.

These improved conditions came just too late to avert an incident which cast a gloom over the whole camp for many weeks. While we were living in the hangars a group of Victorian gunners from the 4th Anti Tank Regiment, determined to put up with the inhuman conditions no longer, decided to escape. At morning roll call on 2nd June, eight men were found to be missing. Some of the others had known of their plan to get away but had said nothing about it in order to give them a chance of getting as far from Tavoy as possible before they were missed.

Lieut. Chiina was furious, and told the Brig. that they would receive no mercy if they were recaptured. Brig. Varley pointed out that it was the duty of every prisoner of war to try and escape if it was humanly possible, but Chiina said that his country made its own rules on these matters, and that Japan was not bound by any Convention. We heard nothing of the escapees for a few days, and then Chiina told the Brig. that the eight men had been recaptured and were now in Tavoy gaol awaiting the decision of Major Itsui, the local commander, as to their fate. Chiina left us in no doubt that in his opinion they would be shot.

From what we were told it appeared that when trying to get food and water from a Burmese village they had been forcibly held by the natives and handed over to the Japanese. This was the first indication that not all the Burmese were as sympathetic as those we had met on the march. Chiina said that a successful escape was not possible, because in every Burmese village were some pro-Japanese natives who had been organised into an efficient information service which reported to the Japanese whenever any stranger, of no matter what nationality, passed through their village.

When the Brigadier asked for permission to interview the eight men at the Tavoy gaol, he was refused. Nothing further happened for a day or two, then a truck pulled up at one of my company huts, which were the first inside the gate, and some Japs jumped out and ordered twenty of my men to board the truck at once. Some hours later they came back to the camp and told their story.

The truck had taken them to a Burmese cemetery over near the hospital camp at the far side of the drome, and there the men were set to work digging eight graves. Two feet from the head of each grave they drove in a stout stake. This task completed they were told to rest under a nearby tree. All this had happened while I was at the drome with the working party. While the twenty gravediggers were resting another truck arrived at the cemetery with the recaptured men. We on the drome saw this truck go past and waved at the men on board, who waved in return. We were not certain at the time that they were the escapees, as the distance was too great for us to recognise their faces.

Brigadier Varley, who was in camp with his staff while we were working at the drome, had been informed earlier that the eight men were to be executed at five o'clock. He immediately wrote a very strong letter of protest to Major Itsui, the Jap. commander in Tavoy, but his letter was ignored. The Brigadier pointed out that those responsible for this breach of international law would be punished by the Allies at the conclusion of

hostilities. The Jap response to this was to insolently declare that they were going to win the war and that there was no chance of the Allies having any say in the matter.

Personal protests through Captain Drower were also of no avail. When the Brigadier, Drower and the two padres were taken to witness the execution the protests were renewed to Lieut. Chiina, who was in charge of the firing party. Chiina refused the Brig. permission even to speak to the men before they were executed. Then Chaplain Fred Bashford, our C. of E. Padre, and Chaplain Smith, our R.C. Padre, asked to be allowed to say a prayer with the men before they met their death.

Chiina again refused, saying, “If Japanese soldier shot dead, he cannot speak before shooting, Australia soldier just the same. After dead you can see".

Bashford and Smith pleaded in vain, but Chiina just brushed them aside and proceeded with the ceremony of execution. First the men were blindfolded and their hands were tied behind their backs. Each man was then made to sit in front of the stake facing his own open grave, while his wrists were secured to the stake behind him. The firing party then lined up about thirty paces in front of the doomed men, about to be brutally murdered for no other crime than that of doing their simple duty.

The orders to the firing party were given in Japanese by that arch beast Chiina, who grinned like a chimpanzee throughout the ceremony of execution, and seemed to take a keen delight in the whole ghastly business. Just before the order to fire was given the men exchanged greetings with one another. With such expressions as "Cheerio Bill, see you on the other side” they bravely awaited their fate.

Sixteen pairs of Japanese eyes squinted along sixteen rifle barrels, each pair of Japanese executioners training their sights on the head of the man directly in front of them. Chiina gave the order to fire, and each Jap fired twice, aiming to hit between the eyes.

With their faces smashed to pulp by the impact of four bullets, they all slumped forward; everyone of them having died a hero's death. The men who had dug the graves were then called forward to cut their comrades loose, while the Brigadier and the padres were now allowed to view the bodies. Their faces were unrecognisable, but one of my men, Bombardier "Tich" Jelley of Melbourne, who had been in the same regiment, knew the men well enough to identify each of them. He was the only man present able to do this, and as the men were lowered to their last resting place Jelley was able to note into which grave each was buried. This ensured that the crosses which were made later were in their correct positions.

By the time we came back from working at the drome the Brig. had returned from the cemetery, and the grim story was told to us all. A wave of indignation and bitter resentment at this flagrant violation of all the rules governing treatment of prisoners of war swept throughout the camp. We were powerless to retaliate, but the memory of that day will never be effaced from our minds.

As soon as we were settled in our new hutted camp we started a campaign to still further improve our conditions. Fortunately Bill Drower, whose fluency in the Japanese language was increasing daily, was on good terms with a Jap sergeant on the staff named Hanawa. This N.C.O. controlled our ration supply, and was one of the few humane Japs I have met. He seemed anxious to help us, and although he was restricted by the attitude of his superiors, especially Chiina, he did his best.

Hanawa secured permission for us to purchase a few extra supplies in Tavoy. Our pay was small, being only 25 cents a day for officers, 15 cents for N.C.O.s, and 10 cents for the men. Payment was made every ten days, and every second Sunday morning Major Peter Campbell, our Senior Supply Officer, was escorted into Tavoy for the purpose of securing supplies such as eggs, pineapples, cigars and molasses. The cigars were cheap and surprisingly good, but then Burma is the home of the cheroot, which is smoked by children of both sexes at an early age.

Peter Campbell and his two offsiders, Johnny Brooks and Joe Mayo, established good relations with a Mahommed merchant in Tavoy whose real name I have forgotten, but who was soon known to everyone in the camp as "Ali Baba". In addition to the Sunday excursions into Tavoy, when Peter Campbell made his purchases, Ali Baba persuaded the Japs to allow him to call at the camp at odd times with cigars and foodstuffs. This service was much appreciated, and Ali became very popular with all of us.

After a few weeks the canteen became so well organised that we were able to purchase live chickens, which the officers mess cook kept till Sunday, when they were killed to provide the best meal of the week, chicken stew and chicken broth!

Buying chickens made a big hole in our 25 cents a day, but it was worth it. Unfortunately the men could not afford these luxuries on their ten cents a day, but their meals gradually improved as the canteen service got properly on its feet.

Joe Mayo was a well known jockey in Malaya before the war, and I had seen him ride at the Kuala Lumpur racecourse just over a year before. He was a friend of Peter Campbell, and when the Japs invaded Malaya, Joe, with true Aussie spirit, had joined up with the A.I.F. Owing to his small size and lack of previous training, he had to accept the rank of private, but Peter had Joe posted as his batman, and they managed to remain together for most of their service both before and after capture.

For the first time since the surrender we started to get reasonable supplies of fresh meat after we had been about a month at Tavoy. The meat ration came in on the hoof, and once or twice a week a Burmese led a beast into the camp for slaughter. We killed and dressed our own meat, and it was usually pretty tough, for the Burmese took the opportunity of disposing first of their oldest and skinniest cattle. The day we got our first beast was a memorable one. The Burmese dealer was told by the Japs to hand over the animal to Bill Drower at the camp gate. This he did, and the sight of Bill leading an ancient and angular ox into the camp caused roars of laughter. “Put it in the hall, Bill, and we'll use it as a hat rack,” they shouted in delight. The emaciated bullock was more bone than meat, but still it was a welcome addition to our monotonous diet of rice and vegetables.

After a while the quality and weight of the bullocks began to improve, with a consequent increase in the amount of meat in our stew. No doubt the locals were happy that they had got rid of their worst cattle at a good profit, and were now letting us have some of the better and bigger beasts. With the improvement of conditions the number of sick rapidly grew less. Camp hygiene and sanitation was in the capable hands of Captain Ron Greville, who was O.C. of the 2/5 Field Hygiene Section in Malaya. The dysentery rate dropped from 25 per cent in the first week to about 5 per cent by the end of August.

The hospital camp was situated nearly two miles away in a collection of brick and concrete rooms which had previously been occupied by Tamil coolies employed by the

Public Works Dept. The sudden arrival of a thousand Australians threw too great a strain on the local Jap administration, particularly as we were unexpected. The problem was added to by the several hundred Dutch troops who swelled the total to nearly 1,500. Matters were made worse by the indifferent attitude of the Japs towards our sick.

Through either mismanagement or wilful neglect, scores of men suffering from dysentery were loaded on trucks at Simbin and dumped in these coolie lines. There was no organisation to receive them, for the doctors and medical orderlies who were to establish the hospital had been kept behind at Tavoy for two or three days unloading barges for the Japs. The worst of the dysentery sufferers were too weak to climb up the steps of the coolie huts for shelter, and just lay where they were in the open, unable even to wash or clean themselves after fouling their clothing. To make things worse the monsoon had broken and these poor unfortunate men were out in the tropical rain without food, and with no sanitation.

Their plight was discovered by the Burmese from the nearby village, and if it had not been for the kindness of these people, who brought food and drink, many of our men must have died from neglect.

After a few days the doctors and medical orderlies arrived, and soon had the place running as a camp hospital. The medical staff was increased by the arrival of Lt.Col. Coates, who had been senior surgeon with the 2/10th A.G.H in Malaya. Coates was captured at Padang in Sumatra and had now been sent on to Tavoy by the Japs. "Bertie" Coates, as he was popularly known, was one of those selected to join the official escape party just before the fall of Singapore, but on arrival at Padang he had volunteered to stay behind and nurse the sick and wounded, although he could have escaped by boat just before the Japs entered Padang.

By his self sacrifice and devotion he condemned himself to a long term of imprisonment, but his unselfish action undoubtedly saved many lives in the years to follow. There was a humorous incident connected with Bertie Coates' stay at Tavoy which caused much amusement at the time.

One day a Jap staff car arrived from Tavoy town and pulled up at the camp hospital. Bertie was ordered to get aboard the car at once, which he did, and they rushed him back to Tavoy Hospital where he was conducted hurriedly to the operating theatre. There on the operating table, under a local anaesthetic, was a son of Nippon with a large cut in his abdomen. A puzzled Jap doctor then explained to Coates that he was unable to find the appendix.

Bertie got to work and soon located the appendix, and was about to remove it when the Jap doctor gruffly pushed him aside and took it out himself. As a reward for his skilled professional services the Australian surgeon was handed a packet of cigarettes, surely a record low fee for a famous surgeon!

The other medical officers at the camp hospital were Major Syd Krantz, a well known Adelaide surgeon, Major Ted Fisher, a Sydney physician; and the C.O. of the hospital, Lt.Col. Tom Hamilton of Newcastle.

Cases not serious enough to be sent to the hospital were treated in our own camp by Captain C.R.B. Richards, formerly M.O. of the 2/15th Field Regiment. Rowley Richards was young and very enthusiastic, and did a splendid job in looking after our "light sick". Youthful-looking to the point of boyishness, Rowley was old in the ways of the Army, for he had previously been in the militia as an Artillery officer. Malingerers,

deceived by his boyish face, soon discovered that Rowley was expert in detecting the "lead swinger".

Early in July I began to suffer a queer nausea after every meal. My appetite left me and I lost weight rapidly. One day Brig. Varley told me that he was concerned at my loss of weight, and urged me to eat more rice. I promised to try, although the effort always made me feel worse. A morning or two later I was talking to Merv Reid outside the officer's hut, when I suddenly felt very ill. Then all of a sudden I vomited violently, lost all my breakfast, and at the same time disgorged a large worm about eight or nine inches long, and very like an earthworm in appearance.

I took this along to Rowley, who put the worm in a bottle.

"What is it? I asked.

"Ascaris Lumbricordia" said Rowley.

"What does that mean?".

"Round worm" replied Rowley cheerfully, "I wonder how many more you've got".

When I asked him how I could have got the worm, he said that I probably got the egg in my system through drinking unboiled water from a well or river. I remembered then that I had drunk some water from a well in the village where we stopped for tea on the march from Simbin to Tavoy. There and then I resolved never to drink unboiled water again. My health improved after I got rid of the worm and I was absent from work on the drome for only a few days. During my short illness my batman McInerney looked after me like a Dutch uncle. I have reason to be grateful for the loyal service rendered to me by Mac, who insisted on making me eat a couple of eggs which he had managed to get from one of the other Sigs. He also procured some soya bean sauce from which he brewed some excellent broth.

For the first few weeks the Japs could not spare enough troops to mount a guard over us, so they enlisted some local Burmese lads, gave them a belt and a rifle, and set them to work as sentries.

The young Burmans did not take the job too seriously, and spent most of their time on duty wandering round the camp like yokels at the Royal Show. Holding their rifles awkwardly, and looking very self-conscious, they would stand and gape at us as though we were curiosities. The men would usually tell them to buzz off, or just wave them away when they hung around too long.

Eventually the Japanese decided to dispense with their services altogether, and ordered us to provide our own sentries. This we did, employing a few men who were not fit enough to stand up to the heavy work on the drome, but who were able to do a turn of duty on sentry-go.

The Japanese issued our guards with the following written instructions:-

TAVOY BURMA PRISONERS GUARD

1. DUTY. By order of the Head of the Prisoners quarters (Australian) prisoners guards are chiefly to watch prisoners and to prevent flight of prisoners and also to enforce military discipline and morale of all the prisoners.

2. FORMATION. (a) The Chief of Guards - 1 person.

(b) The guard in charge of guard in charge of guardhouse - 1 person.

(c) The Chief of Sentry - 1 person.

(d) Sentries - 12 persons.

3. SERVICE REGULATIONS.
   (a) All the guards and sentry to be in service for 24 hours. Sentinel to be in service shifts of an hour.
   (b) To wear usual uniform and have club.
   (c) To thrash anyone with club who is illegal and not to be obedient to the instructions of guard and sentinel, and to give him an advice for his illegality and wrongdoing.
   (d) To be allowed to take a nap within one third (1/3) of the service hour in the night.
4. Sentry places are as per another indication.
5. The instructions to be given to sentinel, for instance, as follows:-
   (a) This sentinel is to be the first sentinel.
   (b) Having fixed so and so place as the definite sentry place, the sentinel is to watch prisoners going out and coming in and specially to prevent flight of prisoners.
   (c) If anything unusual or wrong is found it must be immediately and promptly informed to the Head of the Prisoners Quarters or Japanese soldiers.

The Japanese made no attempt to force the officers into manual labour, but we had to go to the drome every day except Sunday, which was a day of rest, to act at overseers. Each morning all the fit officers and men would fall in after the morning meal, and under command of Major Don Kerr would march over to the drome. We were met outside the tool shed by Sgt. Kamida and his henchmen, Musso and Co. Don Kerr would hand Kamida a slip of paper showing the total number of officers, N.C.O.s and men reporting for work that day. These figures were the basis for calculating the amount of pay due to us.

At first “Horace”, as we nicknamed Kamida, used to check us in by a roll call on the drome, but when he found that our figures were always correct he never bothered to count us after the first few weeks. However we always put the proper numbers on the “parade state”, for we never knew when Horace might decide to make a check.

The first thing Horace did each morning was to sort us into working parties for the different jobs, although after a while he left us to do the sorting out ourselves, merely telling Don Kerr how many men he wanted in each group. Perhaps 200 men would be separated to work on the light railway, or the "skips" as we called the trucks. The job of this party was to excavate soil from the high ground at the Northern end of the drome, load it on to the skips, ready for the rest of the gang to push the loaded skips to the South end of the drome, where the soil was being washed away by the heavy rains.

Another party, mostly sappers from the engineers, under Arthur Watchorn, was busily engaged building dams across the deep gullies scored out by heavy tropical downpours. A third group, known as the “bag and pole party”, was kept busy filling hessian bags with soil from an embankment, and emptying them into these gullies. This was a monotonous task, and was the most unpopular job on the drome. The method used was most primitive. The bag was suspended by ropes tied to its four corners and secured

to a strong bamboo pole about six feet long. Two men carried the bag and pole to a third man, who was armed with a shovel. The third man filled the bag with soil, and the other two then carried the load over to one of the numerous gullies and emptied the contents into it. They then returned to the shoveller for another load.

The soul destroying monotony of this task caused much grumbling among the men. They complained to each other and to their officers, and many asked to be put on to some other job. We tried to arrange for change overs as much as possible, but it was not possible to please everybody. It was just as monotonous, although of course, not so tiring, for the officers who had to stand by and watch the men all day. After a while the men realised that there was no sense in complaining, and with true Australian optimism they resigned themselves to their jobs, and even finished up by joking about the whole thing.

It did not take Chiina long to find out that John Shaw was a civil engineer, so he ordered John to make an inspection of the drome and submit a plan to prevent the soil erosion which was so bad once the rainy season got properly started that the drome was being washed away at the rate of hundreds of tons of soil per day. John told Chiina how best to prevent this, so Chiina promptly ordered Horace and his henchmen to do something different. With typical Japanese distrust of all foreigners, Chiina took the view that John's advice could not be other than deliberate sabotage, therefore he ignored it, which was what we expected he would do.

As a result of this the drome erosion was worse than ever, and we all took a great delight in noting each morning that the amount of soil washed away during the night was greater than that placed there during the day. John was ordered not to go near the drome, which suited him alright, for it gave him the day free to play bridge with the Brigadier, Lt.Col. Anderson and Rowley Richards, who were not required to act as overseers.

The hours of work at the drome were from ten in the morning till one o'clock, and three till seven in the afternoon. This may seem a late start, but the reason was that after the fall of Singapore the Japanese had put all occupied territories on Tokio time, which was two hours ahead of Burma time, so ten in the morning was only eight o'clock local time.

As the monsoon season developed we worked in almost continuous rain, but we soon got used to it, and strange though it may seem, we suffered no ill effects from being wet most of the time. The rains were so heavy in June and July that it was quite common to discover in the morning that all the work done for days previously had been washed away overnight. To overcome this the Japanese employed hundreds of Burmese and Tamil coolies to supplement the P.O.W. labour already employed on the drome. When they first reported for work they marched on to the drome dressed in all sorts of weird costumes, but we soon got used to the motley throng. Many of them carried umbrellas, and a large number carried pots and pans in which they cooked their rice for their midday meal. Whenever it rained, which was often, these coolies presented a comical sight trotting along holding the bamboo pole on to their shoulders with the one hand, and holding an umbrella over their heads with the other.

An unpleasant incident occurred in connection with the Tamil coolies, when one of them complained to the Japs that his saucepan had been stolen by one of the war prisoners. The Japs got quite nasty over the matter, and threatened to stop our canteen supplies if the saucepan was not returned to its owner. Enquiries made on our camp

convinced the Brig. that none of our men was responsible for the theft. It seemed a lot of fuss over nothing, but the affair throws a sidelight on the Japanese character. Liars and cheats though they were, the Japs were very much against outright stealing. They said the Australians were a gang of thieves, and even threatened physical punishment to all of us if the wretched saucepan was not returned.

The affair dragged on for two or three days, and when the tension was at its height, the saucepan was found by a Dutchman, who said he discovered it in a drainpipe on the drome. We never really found out how it got there, but suspected that it had either been planted by one of the Nips, probably "Little Sebastian", as we called Akiyama, or had been stolen by one of the Dutch and then accidentally "discovered" just when things looked like getting serious for all of us.

Another incident which caused some concern and not a little amusement, occurred when some men in my company carried back to the camp a few sleepers and some good sawn timber which they had picked up on the drome. We were always short of firewood for our kitchens, and the men often brought back to the camp chips and scraps of wood and bark which they found lying about. The Japs did not mind this but they took exception when they found that some of their good timber was missing. Little Sebastian came over to the camp that evening to search for the missing timber, and found it in my camp kitchen.

Bill Drower was sent for and through him the Brig. was ordered to find out which men were responsible. I was called for and the Brig. asked me to find out who the offenders were. I went round to the company hut and got the men together, explaining the situation to them and pointing out that it would be better to get the matter cleaned up now than to have the whole camp punished through those responsible not owning up.

They saw my point of view and about fourteen of them, including Paul Crane, Cecil Ramalli, and Toby Johnson, stepped forward. I marched them over to the drome, with Bill Drower coming along as mediator and interpreter. At the drome we reported to a Japanese officer, who was surrounded by Akiyama and several of his associates. Akiyama (Little Sebastian) was out for our blood, and I could see that he was urging the officer on to punish the men by tying them up for the night at the guardhouse, after giving them all a severe bashing. Bill Drower did his best by explaining to the officer that the men did not mean to do wrong, and that they thought the wood was of no use, and surely the generous Japanese did not begrudge us a few pieces of wood when we needed them so urgently to cook our meals.

The officer countered by pointing out that it was wrong to steal, and that if we were short of firewood we should have asked the Japanese commander for some more. This particular Jap, officer was a mild ineffectual type, not at all suited to hold a commission in the Japanese Army which probably accounted for him being in a backwater like Tavoy. He was being dominated by the more aggressive Akiyama, and I could see that unless something was done quickly the men would spend the night, and perhaps the next day, tied up at the guardhouse. I then took the bull by the horns and asked Bill to get permission from the officer for me to punish the men, as I felt that Japanese honour would be satisfied as long as somebody punished somebody for the offence. Bill agreed that it was worth trying and put the suggestion to the officer, who hesitated for a minute or two before replying. While he was considering the proposition, Toby Johnson, who was standing in the front rank, whispered to me out of the corner of

his mouth,

"Come on Major, give us all a bashing and let's get it over."

Feeling that the men were with me, I added my weight to the suggestion by asking the officer myself if I could punish the men. He nodded his head in agreement, so without giving him a chance to alter his mind I strode up to the men and slapped the face of each of them twice, at the same roaring at them in true Jap style.

"Don't you dare take any more wood from the drome without permission from the Japanese Army".

With a maximum of noise and a minimum of force I finished the face slapping in about forty seconds, and while the disappointed Akiyama looked on in baffled fury I gave the order.

"Left turn - quick march" and off we went back to camp. Bill Drower was highly delighted at the outcome, for he had feared much worse for the men.

As soon as we got out of sight of the Nips I halted the men and apologised to them for the indignity they had suffered, and told them I had only done it to save them from something much more unpleasant. I am glad to say that they all agreed that what I had done was for the best, and then we all had a good laugh over it.

A few days later Arthur Watchorn had a similar experience with one of his men, who was tied to a stake at the aerodrome for some trivial offence. Arthur secured the man's release by pretending to slap him very hard in the face by way of punishment.

This tying up of men to stakes was a favourite method of punishment with the Japs. I remember another occasion when two men were tied up for a couple of hours because they had been caught loafing on the job. It was the general rule while we were at Tavoy for all workers on the drome to have ten minutes "smoko" every hour. While these two were tied up their mates enjoyed a couple of these ten minutes rest periods. When the two returned to work after being untied they picked up their bag and pole and started in to work right away, but Horace waved them aside and told them to "resto" for twenty minutes.

The Japanese mind works in a weird and wonderful way. Horace's attitude in this instance was that as the two men had already been punished for their offence they were now entitled to any privileges enjoyed by their comrades while they were undergoing punishment. It seemed to be the Jap point of view that when an offence had been paid for it was as though that offence had never been committed.

Acting on this principle Horace saw nothing incongruous in granting these two men their smokos after they had missed two of them by being tied up for a couple of hours. It was incidents such as this which kept us constantly amused during our years of association with the Nips.

We had nicknames for all the Jap engineers on the drome, and some of them were very apt. First of all there was our old friend Horace, as we called Sgt. Kamida, a big bespectacled Jap who was a sort of foreman and engineer N.C.O. in charge of repair work on the drome. Horace proudly informed us that he was Japan's champion back stroke swimmer, and that he had once represented his country in Australia, which place he had visited with a touring team from Japan.

Usually affable, Horace was liable to fly into a tearing rage over the most trifling incident, and to ignore those which we considered much more serious. For instance on one occasion when heavy rains had washed away the result of several days work on a

dam built by Arthur Watchorn and his men, Horace just grinned and told Arthur to try again. As a contrast to this attitude there was another occasion when the rain was so heavy that we all had to stop work and take shelter in one of the hangars.

Horace had omitted to bring his rain coat with him that day and as he came into the hangar looking like a drowned rat, Captain Len Lawson said to him,

"What, no coat, sergeant?" Whether it was the cheery grin on Len's face as he said it, or whether Horace felt that he had been insulted, I don't know, but he turned on Len like an infuriated tiger and gave him a terrific beating, using fists and boots in a savage attack which lasted several minutes.

Another individual who caused much amusement was a Japanese Gocho, or Corporal, whom we nicknamed "Mussolini". Musso was big, for a Jap, and he had a tremendous jaw, which at once reminded us of Benito Mussolini. Old Musso seldom struck a prisoner, but he urged them on to greater efforts by using his voice to bully and coerce, and also by showing off his muscular strength, which was considerable.

Whenever a loaded skip came off the line, and this happened many times a day, Musso would rush up with a long pole and assist the men to lever the skip back on to the line. On these occasions he loved to demonstrate his physical strength and skill, and it was quite common for the men to stand by and watch Musso put a heavily loaded skip back on to the rails unaided.

Then there was another Corporal named Harada, not as hefty as Musso, but very solidly built. Harada had a stentorian voice which he used tirelessly to spur the men on. He was on the skips with Musso, and soon earned the nickname of "The Bull". His voice could be heard all over the drome. Like his pal Musso, he seldom struck the prisoners, but relied on his bullying manner and loud voice to extract the maximum effort from the men.

Private Sato was an entirely different type. Much smaller than either Musso or The Bull, Sato was clever and cunning, and soon became known as "Jimmy". I think he reminded someone of a monkey of the same name. It was Jimmy's habit to stroll round among the workers with a sly grin on his face, and a thick bamboo stick clasped in one hand behind his back. Except for his size, he reminded one of a policeman with a concealed truncheon walking through a hostile crowd looking for an excuse to crack a skull.

The crafty Jimmy found plenty of excuses. His specialty was keeping a sharp lookout for men loafing on the job, particularly the bag and pole parties. These men would often pretend to be working when in reality their bag was practically empty of earth. Jimmy would stand off a few score yards and watch for these chaps, and he could detect by the sag of the pole and the walk of the men whether or not they were carrying a full load. As soon as he caught anyone out, he would sneak up quietly behind them and deal out a few clouts with his stick. His attacks were not as savage as those of Horace, and somehow or other the men had a grudging respect for him. He was never known to hit a man without reason, and any who tried to loaf while Jimmy was around did so with a full knowledge that they were for it if he spotted them.

It thus became a battle of wits, and in the long run the honours were on our side, for the men became expert in the art of appearing to work hard, when in actual fact they were doing very little. I always remember an occasion when some British troops who had arrived in Tavoy were working on the drome with us. One of the English prisoners

was sitting down while all the others were working, and Jimmy was in the offering. I went over to this chap and warned him that he would soon be in trouble if Jimmy spotted him.

"Its alright," he said, "I'm watching the fooker". Luckily for him, Jimmy did not spot him.

Another one of the bunch was a Jap private whom we called "The Black Prince". More like a Malay than a Jap in colouring, The Black Prince was in charge of the gang engaged in building a new runway at right angles to the old one. Lieut. Joe Pickup and myself were the two officers acting as overseers for this group which was known as the "Rock Party", because we picked up truckloads of road metal from various dumps around Tavoy, and unloaded them on to the new runway. Here we broke up the rocks into smaller pieces and then rammed them into position with picks and rammers. This work was the least monotonous of all the jobs on the drome, for it took the men to various parts of Tavoy collecting road metal.

The Black Prince was a regular Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and changed from one character to the other in the twinkling of an eye. A typical incident will illustrate what I mean. After a day's work we were returning our picks and shovels to the tool shed when The Black Prince noticed that one of the groups had left a shovel out on the drome. During the afternoon he had been most affable, and yet when he noticed the missing shovel he changed suddenly into a sadistic maniac.

Sending one man to recover the shovel, he lined the rest of us up in our respective groups. Yelling and cursing in Japanese he rushed up and down the ranks like a madman, hitting out right and left at random. When he appeared to have finished his outburst, Lieut. Johnny Wagstaff, acting on a signal from Pte. Soiyama, started to move his group back to camp.

Wagstaff had just given the order to quick march, when the Prince pounced on him like a tiger, knocked him to the ground, and commenced to kick him on the head and body, causing blood to flow from one ear. The Jap kept this up till he was panting from sheer exhaustion and the violence of his own temper.

Finally we were all permitted to go. All this took place in the presence of the ineffectual Nip officer and several of the N.C.O.s and men from the Jap engineers. The officer made no attempt to interfere in the action of his subordinate, and the others seemed afraid to do anything to restrain The Black Prince. On other occasions I have known this particular Jap to be most agreeable, and often he would stop at a village while we were out collecting road metal and buy us fruit or get the Burmese to make us a drink of tea.

The more I saw of the Japanese the more inexplicable they were. One could never predict their reaction to any given set of circumstances, and we always had to be careful not to make them appear ridiculous. Next on the list comes the hated Akiyama, or "Little Sebastian" as he was known to all of us. He was the Jap who saluted me the first time he met me on the drome, an act which he never repeated. His unpopularity was due to his nasty attitude towards prisoners of war at all times. He kept the men working longer than any of the other Japs, and if a man was sick it was always more difficult to get Akiyama to allow the man to knock off work and return to camp than it was with any of the others. He was in charge of unloading operations at the lower end of the drome, and often kept the men standing for hours up to their knees in mud as they worked to

build up the level of the lower end to that of the higher.

Last but not least comes Pte. Soiyama, a genial little Nip who worked with the party on the skips. Soiyama was soon known as George, and was the most human of all the Japs on the drome. George used to hand over the running of the skips to Don Kerr or one of the other officers, and then disappear in the direction of a nearby village, where he had a girlfriend. After a while George would emerge from the village with a satisfied grin on his face, and then go and have a sleep under a tree, or, if it was raining, in the tool shed. If all the other Nips had been like George, work on the drome would have been much more bearable.

The morale of all ranks greatly improved after the first few weeks at Tavoy, and one of the greatest contributing factors was the constant supply of news from the outside world which we picked up on our wireless set, or "dicky bird" as we called it.

For some reason, probably because they expected to win the war in a few months after the surrender of Singapore, the Japanese had made no attempt to search us since we were taken prisoner. As a result a large number of portable A.W.A. wireless sets were taken out to Changi, as well as scores of compasses, and quite a few pistols. When "A" Force was formed it was arranged that two or three of these sets should be taken to pieces and the parts given to a few selected men of the Engineers to carry with them wherever the Force was sent.

Lieut. Arthur Watchorn, of the 2/12th Field Company, a young engineer student from Hobart whose courage and coolness in action had won him a Military Cross, was one of the few chosen to carry the radio parts to Tavoy. Soon after our arrival there the set was secretly assembled and hidden in the ceiling of the officer's hut.

Very few knew of its whereabouts, as access to the set was through a manhole in the ceiling of a small room off one end of the hut. This room was occupied by Lt. Col. Anderson, John Shaw and Lt. Watchorn, who all took good care that the secret hiding place was well guarded. About twice a week, just after dark, Arthur and one of his men would climb through the manhole, don the headphones, and listen in direct to the news broadcast from the B.B.C. London.

As soon as the session was over, Arthur would pass on the news to Brig. Varley, Lt.Col. Anderson, John Shaw, Don Kerr and a few others. The news would then quickly be passed on to the other officers, who never gathered in groups of more than three or four, and always kept a good lookout for stray Japs.

Whilst at Changi we had a regular news service, but at that time the Japs were winning all along the line, and the news was most discouraging. After Singapore came the fall of Java, then Burma fell, and in the Philippines the Americans were being hard pressed, all of which news pointed to an early attempt on the mainland of Australia.

However, following the absence of any news during the voyage to Tavoy, and the further gap while we found a suitable hiding place for the set in the officer's hut, it was cheering to learn that the Russians were still holding out at Stalingrad, and that at last the Japanese were slowly but surely being pushed back over the Owen Stanleys from their positions North of Moresby.

When places like Milne Bay, Kokoda and Lae were mentioned in the broadcasts from London, we eagerly sought out Bombardier "Hoot" Gibson, who had spent many years with Burns Philp & Co. in New Guinea and in New Britain, and could tell us where these places were and what they were like. The set was used sparingly in order to

conserve the batteries for we relied solely on torch cells to provide power for the set. As we had only a few months supply left, it was necessary to make them last as long as possible.

Early in July we were all very grieved to learn that one of my men, Cpl. Clyne Manson of Northcote, had died of jaundice and dysentery over at the hospital camp. The news came rather as a shock, for with the exception of the eight men executed in June, Clyne's death was the first to occur among the Australians at Tavoy. Starting with severe dysentery, Clyne's condition had grown steadily worse, and when jaundice developed his weakened body was unable to resist. He was buried in the same cemetery with the others, his funeral being attended by a few men from the hospital.

The majority of his friends were working on the drome at the time, and in any case the Japs would not allow the death of a P.O.W. to interfere with the task of completing the repair of the aerodrome.

We had been at Tavoy about three months when the Japanese instructed the Brigadier to submit the names of those men whom he considered had worked most diligently during the period. Bill Drower asked for an amplification of this instruction, and was told that what was required were the names of the four best workers in each group or company. The Brig. was not anxious to make distinctions between the men, and tried to stall the Japs off, but they were very insistent, so at last the names were sent in.

In typical Japanese fashion they ignored the Brig's nominations, and then announced that they had selected the best officers and men themselves, and would duly reward them for their diligence.

Sure enough a few days later Sgt. Hanawa came over with the rewards. Each officer and man selected received a tin of jam, on tin of condensed milk, two bottles of soft drink, and a CERTIFICATE!

The "piece de resistance" was the certificate, which the Japs considered the only portion of the prize really worth having. The winners had an entirely different set of values, and looked on the food and drink as manna from heaven. Sgt. Jim Cortis, one of my Sig. N.C.O.s, showed me his certificate, which was inscribed on the top in Japanese characters, whilst underneath was the following in English –

CERTIFICATE OF OFFICIAL COMMEDATION

The above mentioned man gave satisfactory results in leading and superintending his men, while exclusively following the works of arranging gasoline's.

The above is a good example to the others, so that herewith we officially commend the aforesaid man.

THE COMMANDER OF THE JAPANESE ARMY IN TENASSERIM.
JULY 20, 1942.

Don Kerr and Arthur Watchorn were among the others who received these magnificent rewards for their labours.

After some weeks spent in trying to make the runway usable we were informed one afternoon that a Japanese plane, the first to arrive at Tavoy since the repair work had commenced, was due to come in the next morning with some senior Japanese officers on board. The Japs on the drome went into a flat spin and called on every available prisoner to take part in a last minute rush to fill up the few remaining holes and soft spots on the main runway.

Lorry loads of road metal were hurriedly tipped into the depressions, which were still muddy and half filled with water. We were ordered to level out the metal and ram it into the soft earth. I pointed out to the Jap officer that a steamroller would be needed to do the job properly. We both knew that the roller meant for that job was now resting on the muddy bottom of the Tavoy River at Simbin. The officer said we would still have to ram the rocks in somehow.

"But how?" I asked, "We have no tools".

He looked at me quizzically.

"With foots" he said.

It was getting dark and past our mealtime. I told the men that they would have to try and make a show of ramming the road metal down with their feet. They looked at me incredibly, and I told them I knew it was impossible but that the officer had ordered it.

Then followed a ludicrous scene, with hundreds of men, some in boots, some in clogs, and many in bare feet stamping around on heaps of road metal in a futile attempt to weld the stuff into a hard surface. After a while the officer realised the futility of our efforts and said we could go back to camp.

The next morning we all watched for the arrival of the plane with keen interest. At about twelve noon the sun cam out from the clouds and in the distance we heard the familiar drone of a twin engine Japanese plane. As it circled the drome every P.O.W. who saw it prayed fervently that it would crash on landing.

Now, I thought, is a chance to prove the efficacy of communal prayer. Guards and prisoners alike watched as the plane neared the runway for the landing.

"Come on, crash you beauty" said a bunch of men near me.

And crash it did - but not as badly as we hoped. One wheel sank in a soft portion of the runway, causing the nose to dive into the gravel. Both propellers were ripped off, the wings partly broken, and the under-carriage wrecked beyond repair. To our great amazement and disappointment we saw the occupants emerge from the plane badly shaken, but otherwise unhurt.

A couple of days later the Japs removed the engines and radio equipment, and pushed the remains of the wrecked plane into the hangar, where it was abandoned. During smoko periods we swarmed all over the plane souveniring any pieces which might be useful. The rubber cushions from the seat arms made excellent pads for our pack straps, the fuel lines were turned into cigar and cigarette holders, while the sheet aluminium made neat match-box covers and wrist watch bands.

During August we heard the first rumours of a projected move, and at about the same time officers and men from Mergui and Victoria Point began to arrive at Tavoy, where they were quartered at the school. From them we learned news of their treatment, and found it was much the same as ours. They had been working on the aerodromes at both places. Now their work was finished and they had been told that after a while at Tavoy they would be sent elsewhere. In fact some of them were transferred to a place called Ye soon after they arrived, where they joined our "A" Company, under Major Leicester Hellyer, whom the Japs had sent to Ye a few weeks before.

I was sorry to learn from the chaps at Victoria Point that Signalman Gordon Spreadborough, a digger and Military Medal winner of the first Great War, had died of dysentery and myocardial failure two months before. To their credit be it said, the Japs had given him a proper military funeral and allowed his remains to be buried in the Christian Cemetery there.

We told the new arrivals of the eight men who had been executed for attempted escape, and were informed by them that exactly the same punishment had been awarded the two or three who had tried to escape from Victoria Point and Mergui. There is no doubt that right from the start the Japs intended to defy the Hague and Geneva Conventions regarding the treatment of escaping prisoners of war. The following order promulgated to all prisoners, and of which I still have the original, proves this.

PROCLAMATION

(1) Those who are obedient to the orders of Japanese troops and who are diligent will be sent back first to their desired lands as soon as the peace is restored.
(2) Those who escape or plan to escape shall be shot dead.
(3) In case there is a fugitive, the guard as well as the officers to whom the fugitive belongs should take the responsibility.

COMMANDER OF THE GARRISON IN TENASSERIM

The men at Victoria Point also had a secret radio which they had brought to Tavoy with them, and I was able to swap news with Major Cohn Cameron of the 2/14 Machine Gun Battalion from West Australia. Colin was in charge of the set, and was able to fill in many gaps in our news because they had listened in on different nights from us.

Col. Cameron was one of the most popular officers in the force, and got along very well with everybody. He had joined the Australian Light Horse as a lad of fifteen in the 1914-1918 War, and had fought in the historic battle of Beer-Sheba, when the Australian horsemen had captured the Turkish held town after a magnificent cavalry charge in which the Australians used bayonets instead of sabres.

For several weeks we had another source of checking the news received on our own secret radio. About two months before the Japs had asked the Brig. if we had a radio mechanic in the camp who could go into Tavoy and repair the radio sets at Japanese H.Q. The Brig. sent Pat Giddings, who had been a radio engineer with the P.M.G.'s Dept. in Adelaide. Pat repaired the set in quick time, and a couple of days later he was ordered to move into Jap H.Q. and live there so that he would be on the spot for the purpose of keeping in working order the many sets which the Japs had looted from the former British homes. Pat was allowed to take his pal Lieut. Rae Nixon to assist him, and Stan Raft was permitted to accompany them as batman.

Dozens of different sets were brought in to Pat for repair, and he always managed to keep one of them in working order on the repair bench overnight. Using some concealed wiring in the walls as head-phone leads, he connected the set on the workshop bench to a pair of phones hidden under his pillow on his bed. As the bed was covered with a mosquito net, Pat was able to lie down pretending to be asleep while the B.B.C. news was on, leaving Ray Nixon and Stan Raft to keep a lookout for stray Nips. They were never detected, and about once a week they contrived to call at our camp on some manufactured excuse, and pass on their news to us.

Incidentally the Japs treated them very well, and gave them so many gifts of food that they all put on weight. I will always remember one evening when they came into our camp from Tavoy with a bottle of wine which some Jap officer had given them, and they gave me a long sip which paved the way for a good night's sleep.

Early in September the Jap P.O.W. Administration was changed, and the first

thing the new H.Q. did was to check all our rolls and give every officer and other rank a number. We were supplied with small metal tags which we had to wear around our necks tied to a piece of string.

It was about this time that we finished the repair work on the drome, and as the wet season was nearly over, planes began to arrive from Singapore and Rangoon almost daily. To our great disappointment there were no more crash landings. Those who were on the drome for the last day's work on the runways will never forget it, for it marked the occasion of a farewell speech by Lieut. Chiina.

On arrival at the drome that morning, instead of drawing tools as usual, we were sent out on an "emu parade" picking up pieces of paper, sticks and scraps of rubbish. This job took about an hour, and when we had finished we were lined up near the tool shed to await the arrival of Chiina. He appeared on the scene looking mighty pleased with himself, and obviously in good humour.

With his usual imbecilic grin on his face he climbed on top of a concrete machine gun post and motioned us to gather round closer. Then striking an attitude and speaking in the irritating high pitched voice which is typical of so many Japs when making a speech, he delivered his farewell speech.

"I am Mr. Chiina. I am the commander of the aerodrome". Then pointing suddenly at one of the men standing in front of him, he said in a high pitched squeal "Understand?" The man nodded his head, he could not trust himself to speak for fear of bursting out laughing.

"You have been very good mens. The work on the aerodrome is all finish. Soon you go new place".

Pointing dramatically to another man, he squealed again, "Understand?"

We all understood, and in spite of the possible effect on Chiina, everyone started to laugh. It is impossible to predict the reactions of a Jap. Under other circumstances Chiina might have been furious, especially if he thought he was losing face, but to our surprise he joined in the laugh himself, and seemed to be thoroughly enjoying the situation.

The rest of his speech was accompanied by roars of laughter as he told us what a good job we had done on the drome and how pleased he was with us all. Someone started an ironical cheer, which was taken up by all the others. Chiina thought the cheering was a tribute to his popularity, and he started to wave his arms about acknowledging the applause. Dismounting from the pill-box, he strutted off in high glee, leaving the rest of us literally shrieking with mirth.

Our stay at Tavoy was drawing to a close, and after a few false alarms we were finally warned to be ready to move to Moulmein by the end of the month. We spent the last week cutting a road through the scrub to provide direct access to the drome from a house where the wireless sets for communication with aircraft were situated. We had been working on this job for about a week when we were suddenly recalled to camp in the middle of the morning's work to be informed that we had to pack up and get ready to move in a day or two.

Lt. Col. Anderson, who always liked to be on the move, was pleased with the news. Anderson had spent most of his life rearing cattle in Kenya Colony, and had roved all over East Africa shooting big game prior to coming to Australia in 1935 to take over a large property at Crowther N.S.W. John Shaw was not so pleased, and I too would have

preferred to stay at Tavoy. On the principle that the devil you know is better than the devil you don't know, we thought it better to stay put.

Looking back on our four month's stay in this area we could see that things could have been much worse, and in fact had been far worse when we first arrived. Rations and quarters had improved, and we had a rest day every Sunday, with church service in the morning and a concert in the evening.

Every night there was something to do. I had arranged a series of debates and lectures, which were usually held in the open before dark, and after that there was always chess and bridge till lights out. Hours of work had been long but regular, and now that the wet season was over it was not at all unpleasant out in the warm sunlight on the drome. The canteen was functioning very well, and Ali Baba was doing his best to get us all the supplies we wanted.

FAREWELL TO TAVOY

So it was with feelings of misgiving that we left Tavoy soon after lunch on 29 September 1942, and marched through the town to the waiting barges on the river. Our journey through the streets was like a Palm Sunday procession, for the Burmese handed out to us stalks of sugar cane about four feet long with the fronds still on them. The men marching through the streets with these stalks in their hands reminded me of a biblical picture of a pilgrimage in the Holy Land.

We numbered exactly 1,000 officers and men all told, our numbers having been made up by the addition of men from the Mergui and Victoria Point units. At the Tavoy River landing stage we were split up into four parties of 250 each. The barges were pretty well crowded, but the journey was not a long one, and after about seven hours we arrived at Tavoy Point, where we had disembarked from the “Toyohasi Maru” just four months before. It was about ten p.m. and quite dark when the barges tied up alongside a small coastal steamer of about 900 tons. The “Unkai Maru”, as she was named, had much less accommodation than either of the two vessels which had brought “A” Force to Burma, yet we were expected to pack 1,000 men into the one hold which the ship possessed.

Bill Drower, always ready to put up a battle on behalf of the prisoners, protested to the Jap Sergeant in charge, who just grinned and said he was sorry, but he had orders to put all the men in this ship. Besides, didn't we know that Japanese soldiers travelled in these ships, and they did not complain?

So Bill had an urgent conference with Ray Griffin, the Brigadier's Staff Captain. Griffin had a brain wave. Knowing the Japanese dread of cholera and other diseases, he staged a little scene.

Picking out a man whom he knew he could trust to “turn on an act” if required, Griffin nodded to Drower. Bill re-opened the argument with the Jap sergeant, and pointed out that if any more men were crowded on to the ship, cholera would break out and not only would the prisoners die, but the Japanese would also be caught up in the epidemic, and all would perish.

“Look” said Bill, “that man over there is collapsing from cholera already”.

At that instant Ray Griffin's stooge obligingly collapsed on the deck. Filled with alarm, the Sergeant ordered embarkation to cease at once, and all men still on the barges to return to Tavoy at once. And so, instead of 1,000 men, we took only 715 on the "Unkai Maru", the remainder going back to Tavoy in charge of Captain Jack Carey, a popular personality from the outback of New South Wales.

The Japanese were dead scared of Cholera, but I will give full marks to the Jap sergeant who took on himself the full responsibility of sending over 25 per cent of the P.O.W.s back to Tavoy, where they would not be expected. I imagine that he got a severe ticking off from some senior Japanese officer for taking the law into his own hands.

Officers were allowed to sleep on deck, which was preferable to the stuffy hold, where about 650 men were forced to spend the voyage. Luckily the journey to Moulmein was a short one of only thirty hours, for the men had literally no room to lie down, and were obliged to sit with their knees up and nurse their kit.

We received orders not to talk loudly in case an Allied submarine heard the voices and torpedoed us! When a few men sat on the deck rail they were told to get off in case the ship tipped over. The voyage was uneventful - no meals were served on board as each of us had been issued with a little linen bag of hard dry, sweet biscuits, the Jap soldier's "hard ration".

In the mid afternoon of 1st October 1942, we steamed up the broad muddy waters of the Salween River and tied up at the wharf.

Someone pointed out a pagoda which he claimed was the original of Kipling's famous song "The Road to Mandalay". Whether it really was the "Old Moulmein Pagoda" we could not prove, but it was nice to believe that it was.

No time was lost in getting us off the ship, and as we lined up in the road near the wharf, crowds of Burmese gathered round to watch us. Here as at Tavoy the natives were very friendly, and I remember one old chap in particular who presented Captain McBain with a felt hat, because Mac had lost his Aussie hat and was wearing a handkerchief around his head.

As we marched through the town people pressed drinks, fruit and rice cakes upon us. The guards made one or two half-hearted attempts to stop them, but gave it up after a while. Somehow or other Johnny Brooks, the wag of our party, managed to secure a small native pony cart, and with his Aussie hat perched cheekily on one side and a cheerful grin on his face, Johnny drove in triumph to our destination about two miles from the wharf. We found ourselves quartered in a girl's school and the adjacent Baptist Church. After we had settled down and had a meal the Jap officer who had arranged our accommodation called the Brigadier and told him that as he - the Jap Officer - would be busy that night, he would leave the Brig. in charge of all the prisoners, and would return the next morning with further instructions. And so we were left there with not a single Jap Officer or soldier to guard us. They must have been pretty confident that we would not attempt to escape. In the meantime a small party under John Shaw and Lieut. Les Stupart had remained at the wharf to look after the heavy baggage and medical supplies. Here they were well treated by the Japs and the Burmese, who gave them food and some Burma whisky. Les Stupart brought back a bottle to the school, and a few of us enjoyed a nightcap before turning in for the night.

John told us of an amusing incident which throws another sidelight on the Japanese character. Whilst he was guarding the luggage a Burmese walked past and dropped a five rupee note on the ground where John could pick it up. A Jap saw John recover the note, and not be to outdone by the Burmese in generosity, he called John over and handed him another note of the same value. He did not want to lose face, I suppose, but another Jap in the same situation might have either bashed the Burman, or bashed

John for taking the money. You never could tell what they would do under any given set of circumstances.

The following morning we marched back to the railway station and again the locals turned out in force to see us on our way. I remember one old Chinaman who watched us with a rueful smile on his face. As I drew level with him he raised his hand in a friendly gesture.

"Cheer up" he said in English.

I waved back at him and gave him a cheerful grin. Somehow his sympathy made things seem not so bad after all. Here we were thousands of miles away from home, with God knows what fate in store for us, and a friendly Chinese encourages us with a word of cheer. I thought of the untold suffering which his kinsfolk in China were undergoing at that very moment at the hands of our captors the Japanese, and I felt that perhaps we were not so badly off after all. It was little incidents such as this which stuck in the memory.

On the way to the station we noticed scores of adjustable bogies parked on the railway siding near the level crossing. These had apparently been constructed in Japan and brought to Burma for use on the metre gauge railway in the country. We could not help thinking that these railway bogies were built long before the war and kept ready for use in the countries which the yellow men occupied.

At the station we were loaded into open trucks and at about ten a.m. we left Moulmein. The journey took us through paddy field country and a few large and prosperous looking villages. Our engines burned wood fuel and showers of sparks fell on us every time they stoked the fires. After a few of the chaps had holes burned in their shirts they adopted the simple precaution of each man watching his neighbour's back and extinguishing the sparks as soon as they alighted.

After two hours we detrained at the village of Thanbyuzayat, 35 miles south of Moulmein. A few hundred yards from the station was situated a large encampment of native huts, and we were marched through the camp gates and allotted to four of the largest huts. These buildings were of the usual bamboo and attap construction with a doorway at each end and another opening in the centre. On either side of the centre passage which ran the length of the hut was a platform of bamboo slats, about eight feet wide and raised some eighteen inches from the floor. On these platforms we were to sleep, each man having about three feet of bed space.

There was an earthen floor, and the huts were fairly clean by native standards, but the bamboo slats were infected with bugs. The accommodation was far below the standard of that provided at Tavoy. We found Dutch troops already quartered in the camp, and learned that several hundred Australians of Major Charles Green's force had left here for their first jungle camp a few days previously.

Thanbyuzayat was the base camp through which all Allied prisoners of war passed on their way to the construction camps which were being established along the route of the proposed line to Bangkok in Siam. It was also the headquarters of No. 3 Branch Thai War Prisoners Camp, under the command of Lt. Col. Yoshitada Nagatomo.

During the afternoon the Brigadier read to us a copy of the "House Rules" as they were called, compiled by Nagatomo and his staff, and which were henceforth to guide our conduct. Couched in quaint English, some of the rules are worth quoting, and give some idea of the restrictions which were now to be placed upon us.

Article 2. War Prisoners should never try to escape from either outside or inside of the office.

Article 3. War prisoners who have no intention to escape should submit a declaration.

Article 4. War prisoners who have not submitted a declaration shall be locked in.

Article 5. In case of war prisoners who have submitted such declaration and try to escape, they will be punished strictly under the military law, and if necessary they will be shot dead on the spot.

Article 6. For any action of insubordination or violence against an officer or watchman of War Prisoners Camp, the Military Law for punishment shall be very severe.

Article 7. War Prisoners more than two in number, have any such attitude as mentioned in article 5 or 6, the leader of them shall be shot to death according to Military Law.

Article 9. War Prisoners should answer earnestly all enquiries made by officers.

Article 12. In spite of being an Officer or N.C.0. the proper right of command is not recognised except that such right is only given by an Officer of the Camp.

Article 13. A meeting of War Prisoners is prohibited except by the permission of the Chief of the Branch Office.

Article 14. Delivery of speech or issue of printed matter is prohibited without the permission of the Chief of the same office.

Article 15. War Prisoners should dignify the salutation and its manners, and they should also march keeping steps.

Article 16. For any Nippon Military Officer or all other staff of this camp the war prisoners should give the salute, but while they are working, not to salute except Hancho (the Section Commandant).

Article 17. The Commander of the Thai War Prisoners Camp and Chief of the Branch Office, the prisoners should give stop salutation i.e. they must stop and give the salute.

Article 18. When Nippon Military Officer approaches a room of the War Prisoners or a place where a number of prisoners are gathered the prisoner who first sights the Officers should call “attention” and all the other prisoners should stand and facing the said officer should respect him with the salutation.

Article 19. For inspection purposes, if previous notice has already been given to war prisoners, they should stand in front of their bedsteads in a row and should call the attention and give the salutation at the call of Kumicho (Head Warden or Senior).

Article 20. Symbols given by the office should always be attached to the uniform as instructed.

Article 21. Serial numbers shall be given to all war prisoners instead of their real names.

Article 22. The number given to each of the respective war prisoners should be marked and affixed at the front part of the loin of the body.

Article 24. About 50 war prisoners should live in one house. One Kumicho (Head Warden) shall be selected from one of the Non-commissioned Officers by the Chief of the Office.
(In the case of commissioned officers one of them shall be appointed Kumicho).

Article 25. Kumicho should be responsible for conveying orders or instructions and should carry them into practice. Consequently Kumicho should manage all the affairs of the Wardens and shall also take up a petition. (He shall be given a yellow armband or badge).

Article 26. Kumicho should mention to everyday working of the War Prisoners in a report book in which the work of War Prisoners, their diligence or idleness should be recorded.

Article 27. Some of the War Prisoners shall be required to report for duty to serve the Commissioned Officers of the highest rank.

Article 28. The number of persons for duty as mentioned in the previous article shall be the rate of one for four officers and one for four non commissioned officers of the highest rank. These persons shall be appointed by the Chief of the Office according to the recommendation made by the Shomu-Kakari (General Affairs Dept.)

Article 29. Time table for daily work is as follows.

TIME.

8.00 ……. Getting up
8.30 …….. Breakfast
9.00 ……. Replace of the service of the day. Muster roll call in the morning. Start for work.
10.00 ……... Diagnosis. (Sick Parade)
14.00 ……... Luncheon
19.30 ……... Dinner
22.00 …… Muster roll calling in the evening.
22.00 ……... Putting out light.

Article 30. Time of daily work shall be signaled by the blowing of the trumpet or by the sound of the alarm. Chief of the Office can alter time of work if necessary.

As one can well imagine we had a good laugh over some of them, especially those referring to saluting. Up to the present we had not been bothered very much on this point, but it appeared that now we would be expected to be more punctilious in paying respect to our captors.

The day after our arrival was Sunday, October 3rd 1942, and Padre Fred Bashford was permitted to hold a church service in the morning. We spent the whole afternoon arranging ourselves into new groups of fifty men and one officer per group. This new group was called a Kumi, and the officer in charge was called a Kumicho. Each two kumis was known as a “Han”, and was commanded by a Major or a Captain known as a Hancho. This formation of new groups was to be the basis of the organisation of No. 3 Branch.

Thirty six Kumis had so far been formed from the Australian and Dutch troops

who had already passed through Thanbyuzayat. Our first Kumi was therefore numbered 37, and I became P.0.W. No.1904. John Shaw was made Kumicho of the officer's Kumi, 38 and 39 was composed of Warrant Officers and Sergeants, 40 and 41 the Corporals and Lance-corporals, the remaining Kumis were numbered 42 to 51, and contained all the sappers, privates, gunners and signal men. I found myself appointed Hancho of the Han comprising No. 40 and 41 Kumis. My two Kumichos were Lieut. Harry Vowell of Sydney, an A.A.S.C. officer, and Lieut. Roger Martin of the 2/15 Field Regiment, a young Sydney barrister.

The highlight of the day was the address given to us by Lieut. Colonel Nagatomo, or "Naggers" as we soon came to call him. We were all lined up in our respective Kumis and each of us was issued with a small wooden tag with our P.O.W. number written on it. As we filed past the table from which the tags were issued, we were handed a piece of string with which to tie the number plate so that it was suspended over "the front part of the loin of the body", according to Article 22 of the farcical house rules. We were also solemnly warned not to lose the piece of string, as the Imperial Japanese Army was very short of twine. Each Kumicho and Hancho received his coloured arm band, the Kumichot 5 was yellow, and the hancho's the same colour with a red stripe through it.

Amid much laughter and not a little swearing at Japanese stupidity, we donned our number plates and armbands and awaited the arrival of Naggers. It was on this parade that we saw for the first time the Japanese officer who held our destiny in his hands.

Seldom have I seen such a pompous, arrogant and cynical looking specimen. He reminded us of Chiina at Tavoy, except that he looked more relentless and cruel. Nagatomo was dressed in a white shirt, green riding breeches and black top boots, and he wore the usual Samurai sword carried by all Jap officers. Mounting a table, he drew himself up to his full height of four feet eleven and surveyed the seven hundred or so Australians with an insolent air. Alongside him on the table was his second in command, Lieut. Naito, who was dressed in shirt and shorts. A typical Japanese incongruity was the pair of garters which kept Naito's socks up.

It was Naito's job to translate Nagger's address into English sentence by sentence as it was delivered. I am sure that seldom has any body of men been compelled to listen to such a conglomeration of boastfulness, lies, deceit and sheer nonsense such as we heard that afternoon. Here is the speech in its entirety, and I will leave the reader to judge its effect on any body of men situated as we were at the particular moment.

INSTRUCTIONS TO BE GIVEN TO THE WAR PRISONERS WHO ARE QUARTERED IN THE NEW NO.3 BRANCH OFFICE OF THE THAI WAR PRISONERS CAMP AT THANBYUZAYAT.

It is a great pleasure to me to see you at this place, as I am appointed Chief of the War Prisoners Camp in obedience to the Imperial Command issued by His Majesty the Emperor.

The Great East Asiatic War has broken out due to the rising of the Asiatic Nations whose hearts were burnt with the desire to live and preserve their nations on account of the intrusion of the British and Americans for the past many years.

There is therefore no other reason for Japan to drive out the anti-Axis powers of the arrogant and insolent British and Americans from East Asia in co-operation with our neighbours of China or other East Asiatic Nations and to establish the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere for the benefit of all human beings and to establish ever-lasting peace in the world.

During the last few centuries Nippon has made extreme endeavour and made sacrifices to become the leader of the East Asiatic Nations who were mercilessly and pitifully treated by the outside forces of the Americans and British, and Nippon without disgracing anybody has been doing her best up till now for fostering Nippon's real power.

You are all only a few remaining skeletons after the invasion of East Asia for the past few centuries and are pitiful victims. It is not your fault but until your government do not wake up from the dreams and discontinue their resistance all of you will not be released. However I shall not treat you badly for the sake of humanity as you have no fighting power at all. His Majesty the Emperor has been deeply anxious about all the War Prisoners and has ordered us to enable opening of War Prisoners Camps at almost all the places in the Southward countries. The Imperial thoughts are unestimable and the Imperial favours are infinite and as such you should weep with gratitude at the Greatness of them and should correct or mend the misleading and improper anti-Japanese ideas.

I shall meet with you hereafter and at the beginning of the opening of the Office I require you to observe the four following points:-

1.I heard that you complain about the insufficiency of various items. Although there may be lack of materials, it is difficult to meet all of your requirements.

Just turn your eyes towards the present condition of the world. It is entirely different from the pre-war times. In all countries and lands all materials are considerably short and it is not easy to obtain even a small piece of cigarette or a small match stick, and the present position is such that it is not possible even for the needy women and children to get sufficient food. Needless to say therefore that at such inconvenient place even our respectable Imperial Army is also not able to get mosquito nets, foodstuffs, medicines and cigarettes freely and frequently. As conditions are such, how can you expect me to treat you better than the Imperial Nippon Army.

I do not persecute according to my own wish and it is not due to the expense but due to the shortness of materials at such distant places. In spite of my wishes to meet your requirements I cannot do so with money. I shall however supply you if I can do so with my best efforts and I hope that you will rely upon me and render your lives before me.

2.I shall strictly manage all of you. Going out, coming back, meeting with friends, communications, possessions of money, etc. shall of course be limited. Living manners, deportment, salutation and attitude shall be strict and according to the rules of the Nippon Army, because it is only possible to manage you all, who are merely rabbles, by the order of the Military Regulations.

3.My biggest requirement from you is escape. The rules for escape shall naturally be very severe. This rule may be quite useless and only binding to some of the War Prisoners, but it is most important for all of you in the management of the camp. You should therefore be contented accordingly. If there is a man here who has at least one per cent chance of escape, we shall make him to face the extreme penalty. If there is one foolish man who is trying to escape, he shall see big jungles towards the east which are

absolutely impossible for communication, towards the West he shall see boundless ocean and above all in the main points of North and South, our Nippon Army is staying and guarding.

You will easily understand the difficulty of complete escape. A few such cases of ill-omened matters which happened in Singapore shall prove the above and you should not repeat such foolish things although it is a last chance after great embarrassment.

Hereafter I shall require all of you to work, as nobody is permitted to do nothing and eat as at present. In addition the Imperial Nippons have great work to promote at the places newly occupied by them and this is an essential and important matter. At the time of such shortness of materials, your lives are preserved by the Military and all of you must reward them with your labour.

By the hand of the Nippon Army, railway works to connect Thailand and Burma have started to the great interest of the world. There are deep jungles where no man comes to clear them by cutting the trees. There is also countless difficulties and sufferings but you shall have the honour to join in this great work which was never done before and you should do your best efforts.

I shall check and investigate carefully about your non-attendance, so all of you except those who are really unable to work, shall be taken out for labour. At the same time I shall expect all of you to work earnestly and confidently every day.

In conclusion I say to you "Work cheerfully" and from henceforth you shall be guided by this motto.

The above instructions have been given to you on the opening of the War Prisoners Camp at Thanbyuzayat.

Dated the 15th September 42.
Lt.Col. Y. Nagatomo
Chief of No. 3 Branch
Office of Thai War
Prisoners Camp. Thanbyuzayat.

Having delivered himself of this fanfaronade, Nagatomo, after taking the salute from the assembled prisoners, strode off to his office. After he left there was a buzz of conversation as we discussed the whole ridiculous situation. Although there was a lot of nonsense to laugh at, the speech had a depressing effect, for it now showed clearly for the first time what the Japanese intended to do with us. It was with no feeling of optimism that we contemplated the future.

The Japanese lost no time in getting us started on this "great Work" of "connecting Thailand with Burma". The day following Nagatomo's address we were sent out to do our first job of work on the new line, which actually commenced just about a mile from the camp. The existing line from Moulmein to the South terminated at the town of Ye, situated near the coast about half way between Tavoy and Moulmein. Thanbyuzayat was selected as the most suitable junction with the proposed link to Bangkok, and was the obvious place to establish the P.O.W. base camp.

On our way out to the Junction we picked up our tools at a Burmese house where for some reason or other they had been stored in readiness. The Burman and his wife were evidently expecting us, for they had a lot of food ready to sell - mostly small

pancakes made of rice flour and yeast, which the natives called mooblahs. There were about six hundred of us in that party and the Burman soon sold all he had, and many of us had to go without. The Jap engineer in charge of us did not seem to mind the men buying the mooblahs, as long as we did not delay too long.

Shouldering our shovels and chungkuls we set off to do our first day's work on the now notorious Burma-Siam railway. It was Monday 4th October 1942. The work was fairly easy, and consisted of digging earth from the side of the line and carrying it from the borrow pit so made to the site of line itself. Bamboo profiles had been constructed and placed about fifty metres apart along the surveyed route of the line. We started building an embankment to raise the track about five feet above the level of the paddy-field through which the line was to run.

By about five in the afternoon we had finished our allotted task of one cubic metre of earth per man, and were then permitted to return to camp. The men did not complain at the work, which was no harder than what they had been doing at Tavoy. The bag and pole method of carrying the spoil was in vogue here as at Tavoy, so the men were used to it. Under different circumstances the work could have been quite interesting.

We went out again for five more days, and then received orders to move out to our first jungle camp. The Brigadier and certain selected personnel were not coming with us. Nagatomo had decided to save himself a lot of trouble, and detailed administration work, by appointing an Allied P.O.W. headquarters to administer all the prisoners in No. 3 Branch, under Japanese supervision of course. It was anticipated that this Branch would build up to a total of 10,000 prisoners. Brigadier Varley's special administrative group was to be known as the Shomu-Ka, and the Brigadier rejoiced in the title of Shomu-Ka-Cho. (Cho is a Jap word meaning Chief).

Lt.Col. Tom Hamilton was to be the Senior Medical Officer, Ray Griffin was still Staff Captain, Major Ted Fisher was in charge of the base hospital, and Warrant Officer Pat Levy, an ex-officer of the Irish Guards and a well known Sydney stock-broker, was the interpreter. This last appointment was a surprise, but it was due to the conceit of Nagatomo, who was proud of the fact that he spoke French. Naggers insisted on passing on his verbal orders in French, so it was necessary to appoint somebody who could speak that language so that these orders could be passed on to the Brig.

In view of the fact that Naggers also spoke English, it was sheer vanity on his part to insist on using French. One can never tell what is going on in the Jap mind, so it may have been just pure cussedness, I don't know. Besides we had a Dutch interpreter in the camp, a tall blonde fellow who spoke Japanese, English and French with equal fluency. Peter Campbell and his two trusty henchmen, Johnny Brooks and Joe Mayo, were also on the Shomu-Ka in charge of the base canteen.

WE MOVE INTO THE JUNGLE

On Sunday 10 October 1942 we started on our 18 kilometre march to our first construction camp in the jungle. The place we were going to was called Hlepauk (pronounced Le-Pok) and was close to a small village consisting of half a dozen or so dilapidated native huts. The weather was hot and dry and by the time we got to our destination we were pretty tired, and our clothing was saturated with perspiration. Our first glance at the place we were to live in for the next few months gave us a nasty shock.

We had thought Thanbyuzayat far behind Tavoy in the matter of accommodation, but Thanbyuzayat was a paradise compared with Hlepauk. The squalid huts were not nearly so well built as those we had just left, but the worst feature was the disgusting condition in which they had been left by the Tamil coolies who vacated them in order to make room for us. Piles of offal and human refuse were everywhere, and the bamboo sleeping platforms were soiled with heaps of fermenting rice. There was no alternative but to set to and clean the place up. One of the huts was built over a piece of swamp land, and the sleeping platform was only a few inches above the foul smelling water.

The sight of our dismal surroundings caused one of the gunners to say gloomily, "What a place to put us into. There's nothing to look forward to but death." "Happy Haydon" was a confirmed pessimist, and his mates howled him down. "Snap out of it "Happy", things will be a lot worse yet."

Fortunately not many were as pessimistic as "Happy Haydon", but it could hardly be said that things augured well for the future. After a couple of hours hard work we managed to make the place liveable, but there was still a lot to do in the matter of digging latrines and getting the camp kitchen going properly.

The Japanese N.C.O. in charge of the camp was Corporal Tanaka, an arrogant, bad tempered little rat who appeared to have an intense dislike of all P.O.W.s. We were surprised to find that a junior N.C.O. had full command of the whole camp, but it was typical of the Japanese to delegate authority over senior P.O.W. officers to non-commissioned ranks. It was either part of the plan to humiliate us in the eyes of the natives, or else they were short of officers.

The huts were built right alongside the railway cutting through which the line was to run, and some preliminary work had already been done by the coolies. As far as we could judge at that stage, it was the job of the coolies to work ahead of the P.0.W.s and clear the jungle. They cut a track about fifty yards wide, which left enough room for us to build an embankment, or dig out a cutting, without having to do any further clearing.

The worst feature of this plan was that it meant we would always have to occupy a camp just vacated by the coolies.

The day after our arrival we started work on the line. Each Kumi in charge of its Kumicho was counted by the engineer in charge of working parties, and on arrival at its location was given a specific task. The work was similar to that we had just been doing at Thanbyuzayat, except that the sergeants Kumis were put on to the job of bridge building after a week or two.

The timber for the bridges was cut on the spot, there being plenty of tall trees in the timber clad hills right behind the camp. All day we could hear the crash of falling trees and the shouts of the Burmese as they pushed the logs down the steep hillside. A wide path had been cleared from top to bottom of the hill, and the logs were dragged to

this by elephants, who were specially trained by the Burmese for this work.

The logs were brought from the bottom of the hill to the site of the bridges by bullock-cart, where they were unloaded and rolled into position by the prisoners. A rather primitive gantry was erected and moved into position along side each pile in turn.

A heavy weight called the "monkey" was used for driving the piles into the river bed. Attached to the monkey were two long ropes, one on each side of the gantry. About thirty men laid hold of each rope, and keeping time to a monotonous chant set up by the Jap engineer perched precariously on top of the gantry, they pulled on the rope and then let the weight drop.

"Ichi ni no san yon" (One two and three four) sang the Jap, and the cry was taken up by the men, who sometimes varied it by singing to the same tune – "We want a smoke-oh".

The Nips had a simple method of dealing with any pile which struck a rock or hard ground and could not be driven in the required length. They merely sawed off the top of the pile to the level of the others and let it go at that. Any pile which was not driven in straight enough was pulled in to an upright position by an elephant harnessed to the pile with a strong chain.

Although this treatment often caused the pile to crack at the base, the Nips did not seem to worry; time was the essence of the contract.

About a fortnight after we arrived at Hlepauk several truckloads of Australians passed the camp of their way to a new construction camp which they were to establish at Tanyin, 17 kilometres further South. We hailed them as they went by.

"You'll be sorry"

"How's things down at base?"

"Here comes the Navy, it wont be long now"

These men under command of Lt.Col. Jack Williams, were mostly from 2/2 Pioneer Battalion, which had been captured in Java, and survivors from H.M.A.S. "Perth", which had been sunk in a heroic struggle against terrific odds in the Battle of Sunda Straits.

The Japanese had provided us with some cattle at Hlepauk, and we were allowed to kill a beast about every second day. By the time the Japs had taken their share, which consisted of the best part of the animal, there was not much meat left to be divided between nearly 700 men.

On Melbourne Cup Day, November 1942, Lt.Col. Anderson was told to send two officers and twelve men to Tanyin with a dozen beasts for Lt.Col. William's Force. Lieut. Roger Martin and I were selected to go, and after roping the cattle we set off on the seventeen kilometre walk to the 35 kilo camp. There was one lone Nip in charge of us, and on arrival at Tanyin we were allowed to have lunch and stay a couple of hours, which gave us an opportunity to have a long yarn to Lt.Col. Williams, C.O. of the 2/2 Pioneers, and Major Ray Meagher and Padre Frank Kellow of the same unit.

It was refreshing to get their views on things, for although their experiences had been similar to ours, they were able to tell us something of the campaign in Java, and of the battle of Sunda Straits. These events had taken place while we were at Changi, and we had only heard of them through the B.B.C. news. In turn we were able to tell them something of the Malayan campaign.

After two hours of mutual ear bashing our Nip guard turned up to take us back to

Hlepauk. On the way to Tanyin and again on our return we had to pass a Tamil coolie camp where cholera was raging. Across the road the Japs had sprinkled a thick layer of lime, through which we had to walk, and in addition they insisted on spraying our boots with some disinfectant. How they expected to stop us from carrying cholera infection by spraying and liming our feet I do not know, but it was just another example of Japanese ignorance. On our return to Hlepauk we were kept busy answering questions about Lt.Col. William's Force. It turned out that several of their officers and men were known to chaps in Anderson Force, and letters were written in anticipation of another cattle party being sent to Tanyin. In fact this happened a couple of weeks later, and I was able to arrange for Signalman Ian Campbell to be one of the cattle party, with the result that he was able to meet and have a long talk with his brother, Lieut Gavin Campbell, one of the survivors of H.M.A.S. Perth. Till our first visit to Tanyin on Cup Day neither knew whether or not the other was still alive.

By the end of October the radio we had brought from Tavoy was in full working order again. Arthur Watchorn and a few of his trusty sappers had hidden the valves and other components in their kits, and the set was reassembled as soon as it seemed likely that we would be at Hlepauk for some time Up till that time the Japs had still made no attempt to search our meagre belongings.

One of the first items we picked up from London was the news of Montgomery's 8th Army in its historic dash from El Alamein. Needless to say we followed this campaign with breathless interest, and spirits rose high as we heard of the fall of Bardia, Tobruk, and Benghazi in rapid succession.

We had visions of the war being over in about nine months, and the officers started a sweepstake on the date the war would end. The super optimists nominated 30 June 1943, while others who were more conservative went as far ahead as March 1944. Rae Nixon was howled down as a super pessimist when he gave April 1945 as his estimate. If we had known then that even this forecast was to be short of the mark by several months we would have been very depressed indeed.

Work on the line progressed slowly. The task was still one cubic metre per man per day, but we managed to trick the engineers very often by doing even less than this. Before starting work in the morning each Kumicho was responsible for marking out on the ground the task for that day. For a Kumi of 40 men the Kumicho would mark out an area say ten by four metres and drive in a peg at each corner. This ground would then excavated to a depth of one metre. We always endeavoured to get one of the Jap engineers to check the measurement before the men started work, and then later in the day, if we thought we could get away with it, we would move the pegs in a few feet and hope that the engineers would not check the measurement again.

We learned by experience which Japs were fussy over getting the full metre per man, and which were careless. If we were found out, it usually resulted in a bashing for the Kumicho or the Hancho. After a while even the stupid Japs began to realise that they were being systematically tricked, so they increased the daily task to 1.2 cubic metres.

During November a party of about 400 British Army, Navy and Air Force personnel arrived at Hlepauk and came under command of Lt.Col. Anderson. This group consisted of men who had been captured after the fall of Malaya. Most of them were taken prisoner in Java or Sumatra following their attempt to escape from Singapore, but I am afraid that a large number of them were deserters who made a break from Singapore

before the surrender. As a matter of fact many of them were given the cold shoulder at first, but after a while we realised that quite a number of them had fought as guerrillas behind the Japanese lines for weeks after Singapore fell. There was also a sprinkling of R.A.F. men who had been shot down in Java, plus a number of British Navy ratings who had been engaged in evacuating soldiers and civilians and whose craft had been sunk between Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies. (Now Indonesia).

There was sufficient material in their collective exploits to fill many adventure magazines. Many interesting hours were spent yarning to these new arrivals, and although we called them "the Pommies" many friendships were made, for their ranks included many fine types of Britisher.

Corporal Tanaka continued to live up to our first impressions of him. Although the local Burmese were anxious to sell us bananas, eggs, and tobacco, he often refused them permission to enter the camp, or even to sell their goods to the Japanese for resale to us. The camp rations were the worst we had encountered so far, and it was infuriating to see the Burmese, laden with baskets of eggs and fruit, being hounded away from the camp gate by Tanaka in one of his tantrums.

Like a lot of other Japs, Tanaka developed a liking for meats, and on the days when we were permitted to kill a bullock he would demand that the camp P.O.W. cooks prepare him a steak.

Although the Japs had their own cooks, Tanaka insisted that white men knew more about cooking meat than the Japanese, whose national diet consisted mainly of rice, fish and vegetables. Our cooks soon got browned off with his insistent demands for steak, and sometimes spoiled the grill on purpose. On these occasions I have known him to grab the steak from the mess orderly and hurl it to the ground in a fit of temper.

The only time I remember Tanaka being in an amiable mood was one night when he sent for Lt.Col. Anderson and ordered him to bring to his office all the Hanchos, together with Rowley Richards, Don Kerr, and of course Bill Drower our interpreter. As we filed into Tanaka's office we all wondered whether he had discovered some of our attempts to sabotage the railway by burying old tree trunks in the embankment, and what punishment was in store for us.

We stood solemnly around the office table, and awaited the arrival of Tanaka. When he came in he spoke to Bill Drower in Japanese for some minutes. Bill turned to us, "Gentlemen, Corporal Tanaka has instructed me to inform you that he is very pleased with the progress of the work on the railway. He states that you have all worked diligently, and he now intends to reward you."

We looked at one another in amazement as Tanaka left the room. In a few moments he returned carrying a large water melon, which he ceremoniously placed upon the table. He then spoke rapidly in Japanese to one of the soldiers in the next office, who quickly produced a bayonet. Tanaka handed the bayonet to Bill, and motioned him to cut up the melon. Grasping the bayonet, Bill plunged it into the melon and cut it up into slices, handing a juicy portion to each of us. He then thanked Tanaka in Japanese, and said to us in English,

"That's all gentlemen, you'd better bow to him and say "Thank you", and then file out."

Clutching our precious slice of melon, we all bowed from the waist, and, our sides aching from suppressed laughter, we walked back to our hut, where we gleefully

recounted the ridiculous incident to the others.

This event, small in itself, provided another clue to the complex puzzle of the Japanese character. It was just another example of their childish system of reward and punishment.

If wrong is done, then someone must be punished, it does not matter very much if the wrong party is punished, but; someone must be punished! If work is considered well done - then someone must be rewarded. The extent of the reward does not rally matter, it is the principle that counts.

After we had settled down at Hlepauk the various Kumis arranged several series of talks and lectures, with an occasional debate or a sing-song, to pass away the time in the evening.

I was detailed to arrange the concerts and debates.

We were allowed to have fires between the huts at night, and each Kumi usually gathered some firewood on the way from work, and the members all sat around at night and listened to talks and discussions on all sorts of subjects. It was surprising the number and variety of subjects on which it was possible to find speakers.

All aspects of Army, Navy and Air Force life were related, including life on a submarine, fighting rebels on the North-West Frontier and manning; Anti-aircraft guns during the Battle for Britain. Survivors from the heroic evacuation at Dunkirk were there to tell us all about the Battle of the Bulge, and Commandos who had frozen in the snows at Narvik, Norway, in 1940 thrilled their listeners with tales of their adventures. Every imaginable phase of civilian occupation produced its expert to tell us about making movies in Hollywood, farming in Canada, or tin mining in Tasmania. There was one chap in particular who recounted his adventures in practically every Kumi in camp. An artificer from the ill-fated Prince of Wales, he related to all who would listen, the story of his five sinking's since 1939, including one occasion when the submarine on which he was serving was sunk by another of the R.N. in mistake for a U boat. He was a big blonde bearded fellow with a gift for story telling, and once tried to interest John Shaw in assisting him to publish his adventures in book form after the war. John was not having any, he thought the fellow was a second rate Baron Munchausen

In November the Japanese finally decided to pay the officers the same rates of pay as Japanese officers of equal rank, irrespective of whether we worked or not.

The pay was to be retrospective to 15 August 1942, so we had quite a bit of back pay to collect. Brigadier Varley at base camp called a conference of senior officers on the subject, as a result of which it was agreed that all officers, irrespective of rank, would actually draw 20 rupees per month, and the balance would be retained at Thanbyuzayat for the purchase of extra food for the men in hospital. Before the pay was handed to the Brigadier for distribution to the various camps along the line, the Japs made a compulsory deduction of 60 rupees a month for "board and lodging", plus a further deduction of 50 rupees a month as a compulsory deposit in the Tokio Savings Bank.

My pay as a Major was, on paper, 170 rupees a month, but after deducting 110 rupees for the Tokio Bank and "board and lodgings", the amount I actually signed for was 60 rupees. Of this, 40 rupees went to our hospital fund, and I received 20 rupees for myself. All other officers were subject to the same deductions by the Japanese, but the amount of their contribution to the hospital fund varied according to rank.

Don Kerr was appointed "Economic Officer", and it was his job to go down to

Thanbyuzayat on the first of each month with the camp pay sheets, and to bring back the pay for officers and men after the sheets had been compiled and checked. We all envied Don this job, for the trip to base usually meant a stay of two weeks there, with much better opportunities for making canteen purchases of eggs and bananas. Another popular buy was a bundle of a sweet called "Shindegar" by the Burmese. It was made of palm sugar, and done up in slabs a half inch thick, each measuring about three by eight inches. Five or six slabs went to the "viss", a Burmese measure equal to about two and a half pounds weight.

One of the Britishers who had served in the Indian Army told us that shindegar was made up for export to India before the war, and was used to mix with horse feed. Pre-war price was said to be ten cents per viss, but we were glad to buy it for seventy cents, and I am sure we enjoyed it every bit as much as the horses!

During November we received our first newspapers. The publication was known as "Greater Asia", and consisted of a two page spread, printed in English at Rangoon. All the news was Japanese Domei Agency stuff, and was mostly anti-British and anti-American propaganda. The propaganda was almost unbelievably childish, and caused great amusement. The following extracts from 1943 issues of Greater Asia are a fair sample of the type of story we were expected to believe.

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ANOTHER ENEMY PLANE SURRENDERS
HOW A "MOSQUITO" WAS CAPTURED IN AIR
Sensational incident over Arakan Yomar

E. Suzuki, our special correspondent, wires from a certain base in Burma on December 11, --CAPTAIN KUROE (KAGOSHIMA) WHO SHOT DOWN THE ENEMY'S NEW RECONNAISSANCE PLANE, "MOSQUITO", IN A SINGLE BLOW ON NOVEMBER 2 WHEN IT FLEW OVER RANGOON DURING A RAID, RECENTLY DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF BY CAPTURING ANOTHER PLANE OF THE SAME TYPE IN THE AIR.

On December 10, about noon, while Captain Kuroe was on patrol duty flying over a certain area in search of enemy planes, he discovered a "mosquito" plane flying at a very high altitude and trying to penetrate a certain place. Thereupon Captain Kuroe gave a hot chase delivering a ferocious attack on the enemy. The enemy plane, taking advantage of its high speed began to flee but was pursued several hundred kilometres, as far as the southern extremity of the Arakan Yomah, when Captain Kuroe apprehended the enemy plane in the sky over the foot of the mountain, instantly dealing a severe blow to the enemy.

Firing in rapid succession Captain Kuroe hit the vertical rudder and the elevator of the enemy aircraft. As soon as this happened, the left motor of the enemy plane came to a standstill, leaving only a single motor to fly with.

Just as Captain Kuroe was about to deliver a second blow, he recalled the incident in which Lieutenant Yukimoto captured a P-38 in the earlier part of May in the sky above Rangoon.

"Well I'll get him" said he.

Commanding a predominant position he adopted intimidating tactics. When they were about 50 kilometres from a certain island, the Captain's plane closed in on the left side of the enemy plane.

Then showing his fist and pretending to hit, he signalled to the enemy to surrender. The two occupants of the enemy plane looked at him with red faces and discussed whether they should surrender or not. Finally they waved a white handkerchief, indicating their surrender.

The Captain then commanded "Turn Back" by swinging his hand pointing towards the East. The mosquito thereupon reluctantly turned back.

Flying behind the enemy plane, the Captain placed himself in a position from where he could fire at any moment in case the worst should happen. The enemy plane gradually descended. At an altitude of 500 metres while approaching a certain place the enemy plane, which was flying with a single motor went out of control.

As soon as they came within the river area the enemy plane dropped on a village and was heavily damaged by crashing into a big tree. As the crew did not come out the Captain thought they were dead. The plane was badly damaged, but did not catch fire.

Thus the enemy' s much boasted of new type plane, the "Mosquito", fell an easy prey due to the extraordinary fighting tactics of Captain Kuroe.

Here is another piece of drivel which was the joke of the camp for months.

RICE CAKES DOWN AMERICAN PLANES.

Domei

Nippon Base in South Pacific, Jan 24, 1944.- On the occasion of the Fifth Air Battle off Bougainville in the South Pacific a fast thinking crew of a Nippon fighting plane single handedly destroyed two enemy fighters by flinging rice cakes at the enemy planes at the psychological moment, it was revealed here today.

The Nippon fighter plane whose ammunition supply had been depleted was being hotly pursued by two enemy fighters. Finding themselves cornered and in desperation the crew of the Nippon fighter plane threw rice cakes at the enemy. The first enemy plane, mistaking the rice cakes for hand grenades or bombs, suddenly altered its course and in doing so while near the surface of the sea plunged to a watery grave.

The second fighter in trying to avoid collision with the first, lost control and likewise plunged into the sea. The Nippon plane, running short of fuel as well as developing engine trouble, crashed against a hillside on one of the nearby islands, but the crew survived and reported their story when they returned to their base.

Then we were subjected to the type of propaganda which was designed to drive a wedge between the Australians on the one hand, and the British and Americans on the other. The following leading article in Greater Asia of 16 May 1943 is typical of the type of propaganda being put over all the time.

AUSTRALIA IN GRAVE PERIL

"Australia finds herself in grave peril today, as she is exposed to repeated attacks of the mighty Nippon Air Forces. Of course her vulnerability to aerial and naval attacks is not a new thing; it has been proved ever since the outbreak of the war in the Pacific. But why Australia has suddenly become nervous is because the assaults by the Nipponese

Forces by air and in sea have the late been intensified. Australia perhaps feels that these attacks are beyond her power to bear and she is not in a position to resist them.

Before and after the outbreak of the Pacific war, Australia's position was as perilous as it is today. She cried hoarse for strengthening her defensive position but her appeal did not produce the desired result. The continuous supply of arms, including aeroplanes from the United States was hopelessly inadequate to meet the present day needs …… That Australia has been treated as a neglected orphan by Britain cannot be denied.

It may be mentioned that the population of Australia is only 6,620,000, which is nearly equal to that of Tokio. The reason for this sorry state of affairs in Australia is that Britain in her selfishness and greed wanted to have Australia as a sole monopoly for her. That this continent with her vast and rich natural resources should still remain undeveloped is because Britain would not allow any other race but the white to migrate and settle down there. If Australia had only paid heed to the well meaning and sincere invitation of Nippon to join the Co-Prosperity Sphere in the Greater East Asia, at the earlier stages of the Pacific War, she would not have found herself in the perilous state that she is today. The promises of help held out to her both by Britain and America have not so far been fulfilled, and, we think, that they will never be fulfilled ..... Whether she likes it or not, the fate of Australia is linked with the new order from which she cannot escape."

Although such articles as these were a great source of amusement, we were able to gather from the actual news items a fair idea of the progress of the war by reading between the lines. By comparing the Domei news with our own B.B.C. broadcasts we formed a broad picture of events in the outside world, and in particular were able to convince ourselves that the tide had turned in our favour once the Japs had been pushed back along the Kokoda Trail and Montgomery appeared to be pushing Rommel out of North Africa.

After a few weeks on the poor diet at Hlepauk, tropical ulcers made their appearance for the first time. The slightest scratch was enough to start one off, and I managed to keep in the fashion by getting two on my shin. The percentage of malaria cases soon began to increase, and just before Christmas Lieut. Joe Staples and Arthur Watchorn got very severe attacks. Arthur nearly died, and I am certain that only the careful nursing of John Shaw saved his life. John hardly left his side for days, as it was impossible for the doctors to give Arthur the individual attention which he needed when they had so many sick men to look after. Poor Joe Staples was sent down to base hospital, where he died a few days later, the first officer of "A" Force to lose his life.

Signalman Larry Oakeshott got a severe attack of appendicitis and Lt.Col. Anderson asked Tanaka to provide a truck to take him to Thanbyuzayat, where it would be possible to operate. Tanaka refused, although plenty of trucks were available, and as a result Major Syd Krantz was forced to perform the operation at Hlepauk. The only place available was the orderly room at the end of the officer's hut, but most of the surgical instruments were improvised. In addition there was only enough anaesthetic on hand to last about one hour.

In spite of these handicaps the operation was carried out on the orderly room table. Rowley Richards gave the anaesthetic and John Shaw was permitted to assist, and

so got a full view of the proceedings. Always interested in medicine, John was loud in his praise of the efficient manner in which Syd Krantz performed the operation. Larry seemed to be making good recovery for a week afterwards, but then he suffered a relapse and died of peritonitis a few days later. If the spiteful Tanaka had allowed the use of a truck to take Oakeshott to base - only 18 kilometres away, his life would have been saved.

An important change in administration occurred in November when for the first time Korean guard detachments arrived at Thanbyuzayat and were sent to all P.O.W camps along the line. Up till now the engineers working on the railroad had to act as both overseers of the work and guards to the prisoners. The arrival of the Koreans meant that the engineers could concentrate on the railway work, and leave such things as the roll call parade, or "tenko", as the Japs called it, and the guarding of the camp to the new arrivals.

Most of these myrmidons of the Imperial Japanese Army were young boyish looking soldiers who had been pressed into Service and sent to all Japanese occupied zones as prison guards. They were forced to adopt Japanese names and were forbidden to use their native language. As their country had been under Japanese domination for over fifty years they all spoke Japanese in addition to their native tongue, which they often used among themselves when out of hearing of the Japs.

For the first few days these guards were very zealous in their duties. They lined us up in our respective Kumis and counted us before going out to work. When we had collected our tools and arrived on the job they counted us again. The roll call was repeated before we left work to go back to lunch, and again on arrival at camp. The whole process was repeated again in the afternoon, and finished up with a grand tenko of the whole camp in the evening, making a total of nine tenkos a day.

After a week or two they grew tired of this and counted us only twice daily, in the morning and again in the evening. The Japanese are notoriously bad at figures, and without a counting frame (or abacus) they are lost. Consequently they often kept us standing on tenko for an hour or more while they endeavoured to make their figures agree. These interminable roll calls were no joke to men with ulcers on their legs, especially after a hard day's work digging in the tropical sun.

The pay for the men was ridiculously low, ten cents for privates and fifteen or twenty for N.C.O.s, so they tried to obtain extra money to buy food by selling their personal possessions to the Japanese and Koreans. Watches, fountain pens, and wallets found a ready sale, and a good watch would fetch anything from fifty to a hundred rupees. This was equivalent to 500 up to a thousand days pay for a private, so it was only natural that men who were under nourished should endeavour to obtain money to buy eggs and bananas which might make all the difference between life and death. Although the Japs and the guards always tried to drive a hard bargain when making purchases from prisoners, they never confiscated any watches or other valuables from any of us. They could easily have demanded that we hand over anything that they wanted, but something in their code prevented them doing this.

Owing to the language difficulty Bill Drower was often called to assist in these transactions between the prisoners and the Japs or Koreans. Serious trouble arising out of the sale of a cigarette case was once narrowly averted. One of the Sigs. – Harry Mills, had sold a metal cigarette case to a Japanese sapper, who brought it back to Bill a few

days later and demanded that the man who sold it to him should refund the money, as the case was no good.

The Japs are like children, and always treated their purchases as a child treats a toy. After breaking the catch on the case, this Jap wanted his money back. Bill was always a battler for the men, and he refused to get the man who sold the case, saying that the demand was unreasonable. The Jap was infuriated, and started to yell at Bill, waving his arms about like a madman.

Bill was usually imperturbable in all his dealings with the Japs, but the injustice of this claim was so obvious, and the Jap's manner was so offensive that Bill lost all patience with him, called him a liar and told him to go away.

It was just about time for morning tenko and we all went out on parade as the Jap went off fuming to the engineer's quarters. Then, while we were all on parade, Bill was called over to the engineer's hut, from which we soon heard sounds of a violent struggle.

"Help, Help". It was Bill's voice.

"Hold on, I'm coming."

Lt.Col. Anderson ran over to the hut, where he found about seven Japs attacking Bill with sticks, fists and boots.

There was a general flutter of movement through the ranks, and it looked for a moment as though the whole camp was going to rush to Bill's aid. Les Stupart, a venturesome young subaltern from Brisbane, called out to Anderson,

"Do you want the mob, Sir?"

"No, stay where you are"

The guards on the camp gate approached our ranks and there was a clicking of bolts as they "put one up the spout."

John Shaw, as Kumicho of the officer's Kumi, was out in front of the parade. Sensing the danger of a riot, and quickly realising the dangerous repercussions, he snapped out the order,

"Stand steady, don't move."

Those who had surged forward now settled down as others took up the cry to "stand steady". If a riot had occurred, we would probably have soon overpowered all the Nips in the camp, but that would not have got us anywhere. We were unarmed, and a lot of lives would have been lost in the struggle. There would have been no alternative but to surrender ourselves afterwards, and the punishment would have been very severe.

Luckily the situation did not get out of hand, and when Lt.Col. Anderson intervened the Japs let up on Bill and referred the dispute to Tanaka, who had stood aloof while the tension was at its height. The affair was closed by the engineer agreeing to keep the cigarette case, so we picked up our tools and went out to work on the line, where the incident was excitedly discussed for the rest of the day. The atmosphere in camp was very tense for a couple of days, and then settled down to normal again.

It was not very long after the Drower incident that a shocking tragedy occurred which roused the temper of the whole camp in a violent upsurge of hatred against the Koreans.

One of the new guards was a moronic individual, who, because of his high narrow forehead, was nick-named "Pinhead". He had a childish love of firearms, and during the day when he was supposed to be guarding the prisoners, he would often wander into the jungle looking for something to shoot at. If he saw a bird, or even a stray ox belonging to

one of the villagers, he would let fly at it, and usually missed. We often heard the sound of his shots coming from the jungle nearby.

Sometimes he would order one of the prisoners to accompany him on his shooting expeditions, an assignment which no one relished, but which one could not refuse. One afternoon "Pinhead" ordered Sgt. O'Donnell of Queensland to go with him, as he intended to shoot an ox which was straying in the jungle.

O'Donnell had no choice, and the two of them disappeared into the tangle of trees which grew right up to the track. When our day's work was finished and we were ready to return to camp O'Donnell and Pinhead were still absent, so we went back to camp without them. As we were walking back we heard three shots in the distance, but did not pay much attention at the time, as we knew that Pinhead was still out on his shooting spree.

We had been back about half an hour or so when the guards came rushing over to our huts and ordered the whole camp to go on tenko at once. Lt.Col. Anderson was informed that one of the prisoners had escaped. The guards were in a terrific flap, and rushed about all over the place demanding that the rolls be checked at once and the missing man's name reported.

We all knew that O'Donnell was the missing man, but when Anderson tried to explain to Tanaka what had happened, Tanaka denied that Pinhead had taken one of the prisoners into the jungle with him, and insisted that one of our men had tried to escape, and that it was up to us to find out who the man was.

The whole camp was furious at being kept standing on tenko for nearly two hours while the farce was proceeded with, for we knew full well that Tanaka was bluffing, but could not make out just why. Finally we were allowed to break off and have our evening meal.

Anderson was then sent for and told to accompany Tanaka and some of the guards. They went into the jungle, where Anderson was shown the dead body of O'Donnell, lying on the bank of a creek.

Tanaka said that O'Donnell had been shot while attempting to escape, but an examination of the bullet wounds clearly showed that he had been shot in the chest, and that two more shots had then been fired at close range while he was lying on the sloping bank.

Anderson pointed this out to Tanaka, who would not listen to any explanation other than that O'Donnell had been shot while he was attempting to escape. When Anderson pointed out that a man wearing only a pair of shorts, boots and a hat, and carrying no food or water, would not be so foolish as to try and escape, he was told not to argue.

A little later Pat Giddings and a couple of men were sent out under escort to bring the body back to camp. The story of the shooting soon spread like wildfire throughout the camp, and feelings ran very high. We were impotent to take any action against the murdering Pinhead, and we one and all felt sick with baffled fury.

As I lay on the bamboo sleeping platform that night after lights out, I could hear our carpenters down at the tool shed making a coffin, and I felt more depressed and sick at heart than at any time since being taken prisoner ten months before.

The beastly incident was the talk of the camp for days. Thereafter Pinhead lost his first nick-name, and became known to one and all as "Dillinger", after the notorious

American gangster-killer.

Christmas Day 1942 found us still at Hlepauk, and to celebrate the festive season the cooks had contrived to accumulate a few extra rations in order to provide a better than average meal. In addition to the inevitable rice and stew, we had a little extra meat ration, plus some rather tasty sweet potatoes and baked pumpkin.

The military band which had accompanied "A" Force, and which had been at Mergui with George Ramsay, was now at Thetkaw, eight kilometres from Thanbyuzayat. Permission was granted for the band to give a short programme at each camp on Christmas Day, and during the afternoon a truck arrived with the whole bank on board.

The bandsmen had of course worked on the line the same as all the others, but they had managed to keep their instruments intact, and had been permitted a little practice after the day's work in preparation for their Christmas tour.

We thoroughly enjoyed an hour of popular band numbers, including the old favourite "Colonel Bogey". Under the baton of their bandmaster, Sergeant Norman Whittaker, the bandsmen put on a splendid programme which made us forget for a short time that we were prisoners of war. At the conclusion of the performance some wag called out,

"Come again next year".

This raised a good laugh, as most of us expected to be home before Christmas 1943. While the band was playing one of our chaps who still had his camera with him took a couple of snapshots of the performance. A few of us gathered round him closely to prevent him being seen by any of the Japs.

During the evening we had a camp concert, the star performer being an English sailor named Gibson who brought the house down with a couple of bawdy songs, one of which concerned the adventures of a sailor in the red light district of Singapore.

The sergeant's Kumi had a Christmas tree, and W.0. Bob Purdy dressed up as Father Christmas. Most of the presents had been lifted from the recipient's kit bags earlier in the day, and were returned as presents by Santa Claus. Simple pleasures these, but then we had so little to make us forget our present circumstances.

Writing of Christmas reminds me of one of the most detested Nips in the camp, a nasty piece of work whom we nick-named "Scrooge". In charge of the tool shed, it was Scrooge's job to issue the picks, shovels, chunkuls, etc. to each Kumi before the troops went out to work each morning. He guarded his precious tools in a miserly fashion, and raised a hullabaloo if any shovel was brought back with a dent in it, or if a pick handle was broken.

On 3rd January 1943 we were transferred to Tanyin, 17 kilometres south, and before being allowed to leave, the whole camp was lined up for a tenko and tool check. Scrooge held up our departure for over an hour while he went through the ranks searching the men's kits for some axes which he had missed. Every man had to spread his kit on the ground in front of him. Scrooge commandeered even small pieces of string and rope which the men were using to tie up their blanket rolls. In spite of the search we managed to get away with a couple of axes. Tools of all kinds were very scarce and we were not taking the chance of arriving at a new camp and finding no means of cutting wood for the kitchen.

THE 35 KILO CAMP.

Tanyin was a much better camp than Hlepauk, and it was a relief to get away from the hated Tanaka. There was a much more reasonable Jap in command here, one Lieut. Yamada. We shared the camp with Williams Force, commanded by Lt.Col. J.M. Williams of the 2/2 Pioneer Battalion. Many new friendships were formed, and Sig. Ian Campbell was re-united with his brother Gavin of H.M.A.S. Perth, after a long separation. The Japs allowed a rest day on every tenth day, so with the co-operation of Lieut. Peter Rossiter of the Pioneers, I arranged a concert for these occasions.

We built a small stage and used a blanket for a curtain. The concerts were not particularly good, as the only musical instruments we had were a clarinet and two mouth organs. What we lacked in materials we made up for in enthusiasm. "Poodles" Norley, a young, petty officer from the "Perth", was introduced to me as the female impersonator from the concert party in Java. When I first met him he had a blonde beard, in true naval style, but he obligingly shaved this off in time for the first concert.

Gunner Jillett and Gunner Vince Broe achieved fame and popularity by their rendering of up-to-the-minute versions of "Mr. Gallagher and Mr. Shean". The lewd sailor songs of Seamen Gibson continued to amuse all except perhaps the padres.

The concerts were usually attended by the Japs, and if they were pleased with the show they would often give the concert party presents of cigars and fruit.

Lieut. Yamada was a much better type of Japanese officer than any we had met with so far. Most of the administrative work was delegated by him to a couple of subordinates, two privates named Yamamoto and Matsuoka. The former was in charge of tenkos and camp calls, while the latter was camp quartermaster, and was responsible for the collection and distribution of our rations.

Matsuoka had a very husky voice, which Syd Krantz said was due to congenital syphilis. Many of the Japanese suffered from this disease, and often they would come to Syd or to Rowley Richards and ask if they could be cured. They had a childlike faith in the ability of our medical men to work miracles without drugs.

In February another hospital camp was established at Retpu, five kilometres to the North of Tanyin and thirty kilos from Thanbyuzayat. At first this camp was occupied by Dutch troops, but after a few weeks the sick from Tanyin were sent there instead of to Thanbyuzayat, which was reserved for the more serious cases.

The Dutch at Retpu were survivors from a convoy of two ships containing Dutch and Australians en route from Java to Burma, who had been bombed off the coast of Burma. One ship in the convoy had been sunk, and the other had picked up the survivors, many of whom later died of dysentery at Rangoon. In all nearly two hundred lost their lives either by drowning or as a result of the hardships of the voyage.

The Japanese received a large supply of quinine in January, and ordered that every prisoner take two tablets per day as a suppressive measure. We were supposed to take the quinine on the evening tenko, but a lot of us stowed the tablets away for a rainy day. As we suspected, the supply ran out after a couple of months, but by that time I had over a hundred tablets in reserve against the day when I should get my first attack of malaria. So far I had dodged this complaint, but I knew that my luck would not hold for ever.

Late in January 1943 Lt.Col. Ramsay's force moved to a camp at the 26 kilo peg, a place called Kunknitkway. Here they were joined by a further group from Java known as "Black Force", and commanded by Lt.Col. Chris Black of the 2/3rd. Reserve M.T. Coy.

When the Japs ordered another cattle party to drive some oxen to Kunknitkway, Roger Martin and I were again detailed to go. It was known that there a radio set at the 26 kilo camp, and Lt.Col. Anderson instructed us to bring back the news, but not to make any notes on paper.

It was dirty work driving the beasts along the dry track, for Jap trucks using this route had worn the surface to a layer of red dust about three inches deep. Most of our chaps were barefooted, and the hot sand blistered their unprotected feet.

At Kunknitkway we met Flight Lieutenant Ken Smith of the R.A.A.F., who operated a radio set which had been brought from Java. Ken had been a member of No.1 Squadron, which had done such excellent work bombing Jap transports in the landing at Kota Bahru in North East Malaya. From him we learned of the Russian Winter offensive, and of the progress of the war in the South West Pacific.

We carefully memorised all the items so that we could pass them on to our mates at Tanyin, for Arthur Watchorn's set was out of action for the time being owing to lack of batteries.

On February 15th. 1943 we had been prisoners of war for twelve months. Looking back on our year of captivity we compared our position now with that of a year ago. Then we were pretty sure that within a year we would be liberated. Now, after twelve months in Japanese hands, we seemed further from release than ever.

However, we were still optimistic enough to hope that we would be released before another twelve months elapsed.

About this time we were sorry to learn that Lieut. Yamada was to be sent to another camp. He had proved himself quite the best officer we had met so far. Soon after he left, a party of about two hundred Americans joined us at Tanyin. They comprised members of the 131st. Field Artillery Regiment, and some survivors from the U.S. cruiser "Houston". The Artillery Regiment had been on its way to the Philippines when the Japs entered the war, but they were diverted to Australia, when they arrived in Brisbane about Christmas 1941. They were full of praise for the welcome and hospitality extended to them in Australia, and our chaps got on very well with them. From Brisbane the regiment was sent to Java, where it was captured intact when the Dutch capitulated. Most of these Yanks came from Texas, as did the majority of the "Houston" survivors.

I remember yarning with one of them one day, and this chap was proclaiming the virtues of his home state.

"Say, when you've been to Texas, you wonder what the heck they want the other forty-eight states for".

The arrival of the Americans created a new interest in the camp, and provided another source of speakers for our nightly talks. Although the days were hot, the nights were very chilly, and we usually sat huddled around the camp fires until bed time.

Towards the end of March we noticed an increasing urgency in the Japanese demands for labour. It was about this time too, that we were first ordered to give all commands on roll call parades in Japanese instead of in English. The daily task was now increased to 1.7 cubic metres per man, and in order to still further increase the amount of work done, the "light sick" were ordered to work. Anderson protested against this, but

was compelled to accept a compromise that these men would work for half a day.

I was put in charge of this party, and was kept busy trying to convince the Japs on the job that these men were not capable of the same output as the more fit ones. The cunning Jap, once he got the light sick on the job, tried to extract the last ounce out of them. The "heavy sick" were still being sent to Retpu or to Thanbyuzayat, but a man with a short attack of malaria was classified as light sick for the first days after his temperature dropped to normal. Other light sick were men with tropical ulcers, which were now becoming more prevalent; or those with mild beri-beri or pellagra.

Up till now we had been living largely on our reserves of energy. Although the number of deaths from disease had so far been very few, the doctors were beginning to get anxious about the future, especially in view of the Japanese policy of sending the light sick to work. As the end of March approached there was an intensification of the demand for workers, and we were told that the line in our section had to be completed by 29 March, as we were being transferred to the 26 Kilo camp, now being vacated by Black Force and Ramsay Force, which were moving on to the 75 Kilo Camp.

This news was received with joy by Harry Vowell and his kumi, who had been building a bridge about two kilos from the camp. The Nip in charge of this job was a particularly vicious type, and bashings were the order of the day. The men had to handle enormous logs and girders, and the screaming Japs hounded them all day in an effort to get the bridge finished before the move.

Poor old Harry and his men came back to camp physically and mentally exhausted every night, and were often in a condition bordering on hysteria. Attempts were made to give his Kumi a break, and have another Kumi put on the job, but the Nip would not listen to this, saying that Harry's Kumi understood the work, and new men would take longer to finish the bridge. And so they had to stick it out, but not before many of them had become so weakened that their chances of surviving a severe illness were very remote.

A couple of days before we left Tanyin we witnessed a perfect example of Jap makeshift methods in building this railroad. The embankment leading to one particular bridge was still five feet lower than the bridge for several hundred yards to the bridge approach. To build the embankment to the required height would have taken several more weeks at the rate we were going at the time. That section of the line had to be finished in two or three days. Was the Jap dismayed? No, they tackled the problem in characteristic fashion by simply knocking the bearers from the bridge piles and then sawing the piles down to the level of the embankment. Then they replaced the bearers. Of course there was a dip like a switchback railway in that portion of the line, but that did not seem to worry the Jap, whose only concern was to get that section completed on schedule.

The day before our projected move the embankment was still unfinished, and the men were kept working till midnight. It was the first time the men had been kept working after dark, and they resented it very strongly. Fires were lit to provide light, but hundreds "went bush" and hid in the jungle just out of sight, determined not to do more than what they considered a fair day's work. The Jap ramped and raved, and tried to round up the slackers in the dark, but it was hopeless. Finally they gave up in despair and carried on with the remainder.

Tired and weary, the men were marched back to camp at about midnight, utterly

fed up with the job and with their tormentors. Many of them tossed their shovels and chunkuls into the jungle as they trudged wearily back along the line. The Japs must have suspected what was going on for they checked the tools on arrival at camp, and found dozens missing. Col. Anderson and Bill Drower, together with the Hanchos, were ordered to the Jap office, where they found the Engineer in charge in an angry mood.

He accused them of trying to sabotage the railway, an offence which he said was punishable by death. Bill handled the situation with his usual tact and patience, but things looked very serious when the Engineer drew his sword and threatened to kill them all. Fortunately he thought better of it, and dismissed the party after uttering dire threats as to their fate if any more such acts of sabotage were discovered.

Col. Anderson was very worried over the whole affair, and feared that adverse repercussions would quickly follow. As far as we could judge there were no repercussions, at least none which could be directly attributed to that particular incident.

26 KILO CAMP – KUNKNITKWAY

The following morning, 30 March 1943, we were up before daybreak and on our way to Kunknitkway. Just as the sun was coming up we passed Retpu hospital camp, and our bugler, by way of making our presence known, blew the "Reveille" when we drew opposite the camp gate. Just before we reached Kunknitkway we came to a high wooden bridge spanning a deep gully. There were big gaps between the sleepers, and to cross the bridge one had to do the "Blondin" act along the bearers for about 150 yards. It was no easy task, and required a steady nerve, as we were carrying all our possessions on our backs. Many decided not to risk it, and climbed laboriously down the steep bank and up the other side. Luckily there was no water flowing in the creek bed at that time of the year. In the wet season that gully was a raging torrent. I decided to risk the bridge crossing, and followed behind Col. Anderson, who was as surefooted as a cat, and I was glad when we reached the other side safely.

After a short stop for a breather, we moved into the 26 Kilo camp, to find small rear party still there from Ramsay Force, in charge of Major Ron Merrett. The rest of Black Force and Ramsay Force had moved on a few days before to the 75 Kilo camp.

Kunknitkway camp was in a dilapidated condition, the rickety huts looked as though they might collapse at any moment. As the dry season was now well advanced, the local water supply was very low. A small creek on the camp boundary supplied all the water for ourselves and the Japs, and it was now reduced to a mere trickle. Flies swarmed everywhere, and the huts were infested with bugs and rats.

I was lucky enough to purchase a good camp stretcher the day after we arrived. One of the Ramsay Force lads came round to the officer's hut asking if anyone wanted to buy a folding stretcher. I got it for fifteen rupees, and that night I slept more comfortably than I had done for months.

It was nearly a week after our arrival that we started work again. Our role had been changed, and the combined Williams and Anderson Forces were now known as No.1 Mobile Camp.

Our new job was to lay the rails from the 26 Kilo Camp onwards, and a week elapsed before the party of Americans and British laying the rails from Thanbyuzayat reached Kunknitkway. We were to take over from them as soon as they had completed the rails to our camp boundary, so we spent the first few days repairing the huts and

cleaning up the camp, a very necessary job indeed.

About three days after our arrival the new Jap camp commander, Sergeant Shimojo, arrived. His reputation as a strict disciplinarian had proceed him, and we awaited his appearance on tenko with interest. He made his presence felt on the very first occasion in no uncertain manner. The parade ground was rather awkwardly situated, being on steep sloping ground. It had been the habit of Yamomoto to take our parade from the bottom of the slope, with the prisoners facing down hill.

This did not suit Shimojo, who strutted on to the parade with the light of battle in his eyes. Seeing the Korean checkers counting the men from the bottom of the slope, he called for the interpreter.

"Tsuyakku, Tsuyakkyu."

Bill Drower came forward, and Shimojo barked at him in rapid Japanese. Bill reported to Col. Anderson.

"He orders the parade to be turned around Sir. He wants to look down on us from the top of the hill."

"Alright Bill" said the colonel. We were turned about, and Shimojo placed himself on the high ground looking down on us.

"Kiotsuke." Col Anderson gave the order which brought us to attention.

"Keirei". This was the order for the salute. Shimojo drew himself up to his full height, and returned the salute in Japanese fashion, turning slowly from right to left as he included the whole parade in his acknowledgement.

We were kept standing to attention for several minutes, which was the Japanese method of showing who was boss. Some of the men grew restless and shuffled their feet. This was what Shimajo was looking for, and he barked at us in Japanese, the words spitting forth like bullets from a machine-gun,

"Kure! Bakayaro" (Look here you fools)

We stopped shuffling, and every man stood still, to see what Shimojo would do next. He surveyed us arrogantly for a few minutes and then gave the signal for the roll call to continue.

Having demonstrated that he was the complete master of the situation, he took the salute from Col. Anderson when the tenko was completed, and strode from the parade ground, as though to say "The will show them who is boss around here".

WE START TO LAY THE RAILS.

When the rails reached our camp we took over our new task, and found it much more exhausting than the old one. The Engineers insisted that every available man should be sent out to work, and it soon became apparent that the pressure was on in earnest.

Almost every day the men came back to camp long after dark, thoroughly exhausted after a grueling day in the sun. The British and Americans who had been with us at Tanyin had been sent on to Retpu, where they were engaged mostly in loading and unloading rations and stores. We heard that they were having a grand time pilfering the rations, and generally living like lords. We envied them their good fortune and yearned for the good old days at Tavoy.

One day a Jap cinema unit arrived and set up a portable screen in the open near the parade ground. That night we were all ordered to attend a screening of Japanese

films. After a couple of news reels we had to sit through two propaganda films. The first showed the training of a Japanese Naval Airman from the day of his entry into the Naval Academy as a cadet, to the culmination of his career as the leader of a bomber squadron in the attack on Pearl Harbour. The second showed the sinking of the "Repulse" and the "Prince of Wales" off the east coast of Malaya. (Now Malaysia). Although it was obvious that models were used in the re-enacting of these two events, it was no consolation to us to remember that the calamities being depicted had actually happened. It was quite evident from these films that the Japanese Navy, Army and Air Force had been trained for years in readiness for a war of aggression in the Pacific. Seeing these films left us a little depressed, for they brought home to us very forcibly the extent of Allied unpreparedness which was responsible for our present unenviable predicament.

Before very long an outbreak of diarrhoea and dysentery swept through the camp, brought about by the flies which swarmed everywhere. A heavy shower of rain in the middle of April heralded the approach of the wet season, and swelled the creek to such an extent that our water problem was solved for a long time to come.

Then Naito came. We remembered Lieut. Naito as second in command to Nagotomo at Thanbyuzayat. We had heard rumours that he did not get on very well with Naggers, who had now banished him to the jungle. Naito drowned his sorrows in drink, and when he was in one of his drunken fits he was a positive menace. Almost from the day of his arrival at Kunknitkway the reign of terror began.

The Korean guards went in fear of him, for he led them a life of misery. In a few days he succeeded in reducing them to a state of abject terror. They kept out of his sight as much as possible, but they could not dodge him altogether, for Naito demanded a roll call of his guards night and morning.

He took a delight in practising them in minor infantry tactics, and forced them to march along the dusty roads, carrying their kit and with rifles loaded and bayonets fixed. Every now and then he would order them to charge an imaginary foe, shouting the Japanese battle cry "Banzai, Banzai" at the top of their voices. They probably would not have minded this so much during the day, but Naito used to order them out of bed in the middle of the night, disturbing our slumbers with their maniacal yells.

One night after one of his drunken bouts he awoke all the guards about two hours after lights out, and set them to work erecting an emplacement for a machine gun by the side of the road.

He told them that Burma was being invaded by the British and Americans, who would arrive at the camp at any moment. If only he had been right.

He would prowl round the camp at night, demanding salutes from the night watchmen, who dreaded his visits, because he always went armed with a revolver. One night he asked one of the watchmen where the cattle sergeant slept. Sergeant Nason, who was in charge of the cattle in the camp, was a cattleman from Queensland. It was his job to take the beasts out to graze each day, and generally be responsible for their feeding, and to put them into the bamboo corral each night.

Nason was startled from his slumbers to find the drunken Naito sitting on the sleeping platform alongside him, pressing a revolver into his ribs.

"Sergeant Nason, Sergeant Nason, wake up"

"Yes" said Nason, "I am awake"

"You will go to the cattle and count them. Report to me at my office how many

cattle there are in the camp."

"Alright, Mr. Naito".

Scared and bewildered, Nason went and woke up Bill Drower.

"Naito's drunk again, he just woke me up, pressed a gun in my ribs, and said he wants me to go and count the cattle and report to him in his office. What do you think I'd better do?".

Bill yawned sleepily.

"Oh well, I suppose you had better go and count them, and report as he said, he'll probably go to sleep then".

Feeling anything but comfortable, Nason went over to the cattle yard and counted the beasts. He then reported to Naito, whom he found drinking in his office by the light of a candle.

"I have counted the cattle, Mr. Naito. Seventeen."

"Very good. You will now search the camp. There are four Burmese women here. You will find them and bring them to me".

Nason departed, more worried than ever, and woke Bill again.

"I reported to him about the cattle. Now the drunken b---- wants me to go and find four Burmese women he says are in the camp."

"What is he doing now?" asked Bill,

"Sitting in his office, drinking." Alright, take no notice of the drunken swine this time. If he is drinking he'll probably forget it. Go to bed and don't worry about him any more."

Bill was right. Nason went to bed, and never heard any more from Naito, although he was careful to keep out of Naito's way in case he remembered.

On another occasion Naito was drilling his guards on the parade ground. Near the top of the slope were the camp latrines. Of necessity they were out in the open, shielded only by a low brush fence about two feet high.

Suddenly Naito gave the order to charge. Drawing his sword, he led his Banzai shouting warriors up the slope at the double, scaring the wits out of men using the latrines, who grabbed their shorts or "G" strings, and fled for shelter as the screaming guards took the trenches in their stride. For days we joked about this incident, which became known as "The Battle of Benjo Hill", benjo being Japanese word for latrine.

It was owing to Naito that Bill Drower became separated from us for several weeks. For some reason connected with the tenko figures, Naito suspected Bill of falsifying the returns showing the numbers of officers and men available for work. There was no doubt that he was out to get Bill, and one afternoon while I was in the hut talking to John Shaw and Johnny Hordern, Naito came in, very drunk.

Bill was one of the few officers who possessed a stretcher, and Naito knew it. He pointed to Bill's bed. "Drower small-pox. Burn bed. Burn blanket."

None of us spoke, but between us we managed to hide a few of Bill's things which were not actually on his bed, from Naito's view. He kept poking about Bill's bed, looking for any other article to condemn. After a few minutes he seemed satisfied, and left the hut. We had to burn the bed and a few other things, including Bill's topee, which he had worn since Changi, and which made his tall figure so conspicuous. Bill was out of the hut when Naito called, but the drunken swine searched the camp for him, and as soon as he found Bill; ordered him to move the rest of his belongings to a hut on the other side of

the road, where two or three suspected smallpox cases, and one certainty had been isolated.

As an example of vindictiveness, Naito's action would be hard to beat. He went across to the isolation hut, and standing at a safe distance, he ordered the medical orderly to bathe Bill with a filthy pus-stained towel which had been used on the small pox patient.

In spite of this treatment, Bill did not catch the disease, although Naito ordered him to sleep alongside the man suffering from it. Luckily the complaint did not spread, and no further cases were reported.

Naito next vented his spite on Col. Anderson and Rowley Richards. He ordered them to stand to attention outside the office all one afternoon, and at intervals he sent his batman out to slap their faces. Now Naito's batman was not a bad little chap, rather good looking, with a smiling boyish face. Instead of slapping the Colonel and Rowley on the face, he placed his own hand against their cheeks, and slapped his palm with the other open hand. This was in case Naito was listening. If he had been looking on, then the batman would have had to do his stuff properly. However, the sound usually satisfied Naito, who did not bother to get up from his drinking any more than he could help. Late in the afternoon Naito dismissed the two of them, and then called them into his office, where he presented each with a tin of condensed milk and a packet of cigarettes! There was another occasion when Naito ordered the Colonel and Rowley to come to his office, where he forced them to drink with him while he related the exploits of the victorious Japanese Army. He said he was very sorry for all the prisoners of war, as one day he would have to kill them all.

About this time some of the Americans rejoined us from Retpu camp. It was the habit of the Japs to keep a few pigs for themselves, and whenever they wanted one killed, they called on one of the prisoners to take it down to the creek and cut its throat. One afternoon I heard the pitiful squeals of a dying pig, and went down to the creek to have a look.

Two men were holding the pig down, while a third, a full blooded Mexican Indian named “Snake”, held a dixie to the poor beast's throat, catching the spurting red blood. His dixie filled, “Snake” hurried off towards the kitchen.

“What are you going to do with it?” I asked him.

“Fry it,” he said, not pausing for an instant in his haste to get the delicacy over to the kitchen fire.

It was at Kunknitkway that I first had reason to be glad that I had learned a little Japanese. Pat Giddings, Rae Nixon and I were talking to some British officers one evening after dark, when a Korean guard approached. We did not see him until he was right on top of us, and there was no time to salute before he growled out “Kure, Kure”, the lowest form of address used by Japanese when speaking to inferiors.

As we were not wearing hats, we saluted by bowing from the waist. This did not satisfy the sentry, who marched us off to the guardhouse. Here we were given a lecture for about twenty minutes on the proper behaviour of prisoners towards their guards. It was in Japanese, but I got the gist of it.

Then trying out my newly learned “Nippon-go” for the first time, I tried to explain that we were very sorry that we did not see the guard approaching as it was dark, and our backs were turned from his direction. We had saluted as soon as we saw him, but

then he was quite close to us. The explanation was accepted, and we returned to the hut unmolested. I was rather pleased when the others congratulated me in talking the Japs out of what seemed a certain bashing.

There was one guard, whom we met for the first time at Kunknitkway, who was different from the others. His name was Ohio, but he was known to all of us as George. He had a puckish sense of humour, and took great delight in teasing the prisoners in a harmless sort of way.

George was always in trouble with the other guards for fraternising with us, and on one occasion Naito punished him by ordering that he eat no food for twenty four hours. Quite unabashed, George came to Bill Drower and told him of Naito's order. Would the kind Australians please give him something to eat? The kind Australians would, and they did. George went over to the kitchen, where our cooks gave him a feed of rice and stew. After he had eaten, George came back to Bill and thanked him profusely, using the most polite form of thanks in Japanese, "Arigato gozaimasu."

George's favourite joke was to beckon an Australian to him so that he could air his knowledge of English. Knowing what was coming, the Aussie would come over to George, who would give the order.

"Attention".

The soldier would spring to attention.

"Number"

"One"

The soldier would shout out the number as though on roll call parade.

"One man no ..... good"

George would swear in English, a habit he had picked up from the Australians. The soldier would grin and walk off, usually the richer by one or two cigarettes. George would be quite pleased with himself, and look around for approval from the onlookers.

He had picked up a number of swear words, and took delight in using them on every possible occasion. The story of George and the ox is already well-known, but is worth repeating. It appears that one day George was on the road outside the camp when he came across two Americans speaking to a Burmese who was seated in an ox-cart. The Americans of course were trying to buy some bananas and shindegar, and when they saw George approaching they thought that they were "for it", because speaking to the natives was an offence which could bring very severe punishment.

George spoke to the Burmese, "You speak English?"

The Burmese, not understanding, shook his head. George turned to the Americans,

"You speak Burmese?"

"No, we can't speak Burmese"

"Somebody tell ----- lie", said George, and he kicked the ox in the stomach.

It is a pity that the Japs in charge of railway construction were not as human as George. The hours of work on the line were beginning to get longer. Instead of returning to camp before the evening meal, and having an hour or two of daylight before lights out, the men were kept out till long after dark every day.

It was not that they were kept at physical labour all the time, but the long hours away from camp were very exhausting on the short rations. The working party would be up at daylight, and after a breakfast in the early dawn, would move down to the track and

board a train loaded with rails and sleepers. The bogies would then be hauled by Diesel motor truck to the end of the track, where the sleepers would be put into position and the rails laid.

While this work was going on the bogies would return for another load. When the first load of rails was spiked into position, the men would sit down and have lunch on the job. As the midday meal was sent out from the camp, and hot boxes were unknown in Burma, the rice and stew was usually cold by the time it was eaten. Unappetising enough when hot, this type of meal was positively nauseating when served cold.

After the meal the men often had to sit around for hours waiting for the next load of rails and sleepers to appear. When they arrived the Jap engineers would drive the men to get them laid before dark. In the meantime the evening meal had been sent out from camp, but it was often left standing for hours before the men were allowed to eat it.

Fires were lit to provide some light and to boil some water for tea, and then long after dark the men would return to camp utterly exhausted. They were usually too tired to wash, so they would go straight to bed, only to be awakened at dawn to repeat the ordeal next day.

It was little wonder then that the number of men fit for work began to dwindle, until about fifty per cent were in the camp hospital suffering from malaria, dysentery, exhaustion and tropical ulcers.

From about this time, April 1943, the Japanese started to put the pressure on in an endeavour to force every available man out to work, and this pressure grew more and more relentless as the weeks passed. Life was not at all pleasant at Kunknitkway.

The bamboo huts were infested with bed bugs, which bit fiercely at night and raised lumps on our legs and arms. One day Mac and I had a bug hunt in my new stretcher, and in a few minutes we killed one hundred and fifty. Rats were also a nuisance, and they raced over the bamboo slats every night searching for scraps of food, making sleep difficult and the night hideous with their scurrying and squeaking. It is no exaggeration to say that the bamboo platform literally shook as they scampered over it.

We got used to them after a while, as one can get used to any discomfort, and slept in spite of them. The danger of plague was always present however, and we managed to inspire the Japanese with sufficient fear of an outbreak to cause them to provide enough serum to inoculate everyone in the camp.

Towards the end of April 1943 we were ordered to be ready to move to the 45 Kilo camp, to which point the line had now reached. After the evening meal on April 24, the whole camp was lined up on the parade ground ready to board the trucks which were to take us to the new camp. The Jap N.C.O. in charge of the parade kept us sitting around for about two hours before ordering us to board the trucks. It was characteristic of Japanese muddling that the train would hold only half of us. The remainder were ordered to wait out on the parade ground till next morning, with their gear all packed. They were not permitted to go back into the huts, which had been swept clean before we vacated them.

I was among those to board the train, and was indeed glad to shake the dust of Kunknitkway from my feet. But the N.C.O. had reckoned without Naito. Drunk as usual, Naito staggered from his office and went over to the waiting train. He was furious when he found that the prisoners had boarded the train before him. Calling the N.C.O. he ordered that all the prisoners be detrained and stood to attention while he boarded the first

truck, which had been reserved for him and for Col. Anderson with his staff.

At this point the Jap engineer in charge of the train stepped in and asked Naito not to hold up the train and longer, but to get aboard himself and allow him to get going. But Naito felt he had suffered an affront to his dignity, in other words he had lost face, so he insisted that all the prisoners detrain while he got aboard first. The engineer, who was only a lance-corporal, stood his ground, but Naito fussed and stormed until it seemed he would finish up by striking the engineer with his sword.

The guard in our truck, a burly Korean called "Boofhead", looked on in great glee, anticipating that Naito would burst into physical violence.

"Boxing presento number one" he said, meaning that the engineer was in for a first class beating. But the situation did not develop that far, as Naito finally got his way. We all got out of the trucks and stood to attention while Naito, his offended honour now satisfied, climbed aboard. Once in his truck, he gave the signal for the rest of us to clamber aboard again, which we now did. As the train slowly gathered speed, Naito stood up and solemnly waved goodbye to the prisoners left behind on the parade ground. Struck by the absurdity of the situation, some of the men started to laugh and wave back. This seemed to please Naito, who commenced to wave vigorously, as though farewelling old friends.

We on the train joined in the general laughter, which encouraged Naito to more frantic waving. By this time the three hundred men on the parade ground were waving their arms and positively shrieking with mirth. Naito accepted this as a tribute to his popularity, and gained much face.

Rowley Richards, who was in the same truck with Naito, told us later that Naito got very confidential after the train left. Speaking to Col. Anderson, Don Kerr and the others, he said,

"I am very sorry, but I will have to kill you all".

He started to fondle his sword and brandishing his revolver, he was shaking his head in the maudlin manner of the typical drunkard, he kept repeating,

"Yes, very very sorry, but I will have to kill you all".

ANARKWAN

The journey took us once more over the double decker wooden bridge just outside the camp, and knowing how crazily it was built we had a few anxious moments until we were safely over on the other side. We arrived at Anarkwan, as the 45 Kilo camp was named, at about ten p.m., and sorted ourselves into the huts allotted to us. I saw some chaps inspecting the bamboo slats by the light of a slush lamp.

"What's the matter, lost something?"

"No, found something, bugs - thousands of them, worse than the 26 Kilo. I'm sleeping on the ground out in the open tonight".

I put up my stretcher in the open, and spent my first night at Anarkwan under the stars, as did scores of others. Next morning we dismantled the sleeping platform and beat the bugs out of the slats with a stout stick. In this way we killed thousands of them and so were able to sleep in the huts from then on. It was necessary however to take the slats out and beat them every few days in order to keep the bugs in check.

A few days after our arrival Naito was transferred to the 30 Kilo camp at Retpu, where he continued his drunken antics until finally dismissed by Nagatomo and sent back

to Japan. We were glad to see the last of him. Sgt. Shimojo was left in charge, and soon showed his teeth. Shimojo hated Col. Williams, whom he called "Number one bad man" of the Allied officers. One day a Japanese Cinema Unit arrived to take some shots in the camp. Shimojo ordered Williams to have the camp bugler sound the bugle calls. Williams replied that he could not do so as the bugler was out working on the railway. Shimojo stormed and called Williams a liar. The Colonel stood his ground, and retorted that if Shimojo had not ordered the bugler out to work, he would now be in camp, so Shimojo had only himself to blame.

This made Shimojo more furious than ever, he had now lost face, so he retaliated by ordering Williams to stand to attention outside the guard-house until further orders. I did not learn of this incident until the following morning, when I saw Col. Williams standing outside the guard-house. He was hatless, so I went over to his hut and got his hat, which I took to him. Shimojo was not yet about, and the guards nodded their assent when I asked if I could give the Colonel his hat.

A little later on another officer tried to take him a water bottle, but Shimojo was now up, and curtly ordered the officer away. All that day Williams was forced to stand there in the hot sun, and collapsed only once, during the hottest part of the afternoon, but he pulled himself together and stuck it out for just over twenty-five hours, when Shimojo finally released him.

There was a fairly large river just on the camp boundary, and those of us who did not have to work on the line had many a refreshing dip in its cool waters. The only drawback was the large number of flesh eating fish which infested the river. These little fish bit small pieces of flesh from various tender portions of our anatomy, if we did not keep moving. The only way to avoid their attention was to swim quickly and scare them off by making a bit of a splash.

The hours of work were still long, and as the line was pushed further and further south it took a little longer each day for the working party to get back and forth from the job. The Japs now insisted that the men remain at work until all the rails and sleepers delivered that day were laid in position. It was often midnight before the men returned to camp, but in spite of it all they remained cheerful. Rest days such as we had enjoyed at Tanyin were a thing of the past. Concerts were impossible to arrange, and even the nightly talks around the camp fires had lapsed.

We were not kept long at Anarkwan, for in less than three weeks the line had been built as far as the 60 Kilo peg, so on 9 May 1943 we left Anarkwan by railway truck for still another construction camp.

TAUNZUN

John Shaw and Col. Williams had gone on ahead with the advance party to allot the hut accommodation, and when I arrived with the main body during the afternoon I was amazed to find how filthy the place was. The camp was situated at the 62 Kilo peg, and was known as Taunzun. Once again we were to occupy huts just vacated by Tamil and Burmese coolies. Flies swarmed everywhere, attracted by heaps of fermenting rice and other refuse. We found John Shaw and his party hard at work burning the dry rubbish and burying the remainder.

We all joined in the job of cleaning the place up, and by evening meal time had the huts ready for occupation, though much remained to be done. Rowley Richards was

very concerned when he noticed a dead coolie being carried through our lines by some other Tamils, and he suspected cholera. The corpse was buried in a shallow grave about fifty yards from the end of our hut.

Rowley immediately went to the Japanese and asked for some anti-cholera serum. They quickly produced the required amount to inoculate every P.0.W. in camp, and Rowley was kept busy with the needle all that day. The Japs were inoculated themselves, for they were very scared of a cholera outbreak. In addition to this precaution, we were all tested for cholera ten days later. The cultures were taken in batches of ten, and when the slides were examined, several showed positive. These groups were immediately isolated from the rest, but the accommodation was so limited that it was only possible to put the suspects at the far end of a hut already occupied.

Then a few definite cases of cholera broke out, and these were quickly isolated to another hut which the Japanese, now thoroughly alarmed, hurriedly made available. Some of these men died in spite of Rowley's heroic efforts to pull them through.

Although not well himself, he worked night and day in his efforts to save the lives of the sufferers, and to stop the dread disease from spreading further. It is a tribute to his patience, skill and determination that we lost only a few men. In a few weeks the camp was declared free of cholera, as a later test showed that every slide was negative. A tribute should also be paid to Sgt. Jim Anderson, Rowley's right hand man in the R.A.P., (Regimental Mid Post) to Arthur Harris and the other medical orderlies who stood by Rowley in those difficult days.

For the first few weeks the flies were so bad that many of us ate our meals under our mosquito nets. The hot sun and the decaying vegetation provided ideal conditions for the breeding of flies, which became so numerous that even the Japanese took steps to reduce them. We were ordered to provide half a dozen “light sick” men to report each day to Jap H.Q. for fly swatting. Each man was provided with a fly swat and a small tin. He was not allowed to return to his hut until he had swatted four hundred flies, and produced the corpses to be counted. Of course the Japs soon got tired of counting dead flies, and after a day or two were satisfied as long as a reasonable “catch” was produced. Actually it was a good idea to use the men in this way, for the fly menace decreased rapidly as scores of others in the camp followed their example, and took up fly swatting in earnest.

And then, towards the end of May 1943 the monsoon broke. All one day we saw the storm clouds gathering, and late in the afternoon the tropical rain came pelting down in all its fury. It beat on the attap roofs with a roar that made conversation only possible by shouting. The river near the camp where we used to bathe became a raging torrent, and the whole camp was transformed into a quagmire.

Still the men had to go out to work, the nature of which became increasingly difficult, as the railway track was now a sea of mud. In many places the rails sunk out of sight in six inches of slush, but still the work went on. There was now a relentless purpose in the Japanese demands for more and more men to go out to work. The sudden drop in temperature due to the rains brought about fresh attacks of malaria, and further depleted the ranks of those fit to work.

With the coming of the rains the flies almost disappeared, which was the only redeeming feature of the wet season. Life was also made more bearable by an improvement in the rations, for the Korean “George” was now promoted to the job of

camp quartermaster.

A different type of Korean was a little chap whom we came to call "The Philosopher". He was not very well known to the men working on the line, for he had a job in the Jap office, and later in the kitchen. "The Philosopher" used to have long talks to Bill Drower on the subjects of history and literature. Strange though it appeared to us he had read translations of Shakespeare, Goethe, Milton and Joseph Conrad, Shelley and Keats, as well as many other well known poets and philosophers.

Another Korean, one who was cordially hated, was a subnormal type employed as cook to the Jap staff. This chap was known as "Boofhead", and he had established his kitchen near the bank of the river. We had to pass the place on our way to the river to bathe, and Boofhead insisted that each man salute him as he passed. The House Rules laid down that all guards and sentries had to be saluted, but made no mention of cooks.

However, Boofhead was determined to get his share of the salutations, and at bathing time in the afternoon he stood waiting to receive the bows of the half naked men as they went by. Any who neglected to pay him the compliment he thought was his due received a clout with a thick piece of bamboo.

George did his best to keep us supplied with a reasonable amount of rice and vegetables. He often spotted a stray ox on his way to the siding to collect the rations, and usually took a few men back with him to capture the beast. The extra meat ration so obtained was a very welcome addition to our scanty meal, and was much appreciated. At this time too, a few onions appeared with the vegetable ration, but after a few weeks the supply was exhausted, and we never saw them again.

When Don Kerr returned from Thanbyuzayat about the middle of June 1943 with the camp pay, he brought back startling and disturbing news. Thanbyuzayat had been bombed by Allied planes, and several prisoners had been killed. On June 12th, at about two thirty in the afternoon, the drone of plane engine had been heard, and the whole camp had turned out to see them. The planes turned out to be four-engined Liberators, the first Allied aircraft the prisoners had seen since their capture. As the men cheered and waved enthusiastically, the Jap machine gun posts opened up on the planes, which now began to make a run in on to the camp. Then it became evident that the camp itself was to be the target, and as the men made a wild rush for the slit trenches, the bombs began to fall. The raid lasted half an hour, and when it was over it was found that about fifteen prisoners had been killed and many more wounded. Not a single Jap was hurt.

The dead were buried in the camp cemetery, and Brigadier Varley made immediate representations to Nagotomo to have the camp properly marked, so that it could be identified as a P.0.W. camp. Nagotomo refused point blank.

At the same hour three days later the bombers returned, but this time all the prisoners took to the trenches as soon as the planes were heard. In spite of these precautions there were many more casualties, as the camp hospital received a direct hit.

We heard of the news with mixed feelings. Our first reaction was one of relief that we were 60 kilometres away from the scene. Of course we were horrified to learn of the loss of life. One group of men engaged in drawing water from the well and been almost wiped out by a direct hit in the first raid. One of these, Corporal Jim Salmon, of John Shaw's company, was one of those killed.

Jim had risked capture and death many times at Changi, when he had gone through the wire at night to bring back food from the nearby villages.

Some of the men were brutally practical when they heard the news.

"That'll make some of the bludgers down at base wish they'd stayed in the jungle and did a bit of work instead of bashing their spines down there" said one. "Yes" said another, "I'll bet they'll be getting back here as soon as they can. Old Johnno will wish he'd never bluffed the M.O. he had dysentery. The old jungle's not so bad after all. I'm sticking here as long as I can."

"Me too," remarked another, "The jungle will do me. Fancy a man being bombed by his own bloody planes. Cripes, we never saw the bloody Air Force while we were at Singapore. If you saw a plane you could bet your bottom dollar it was a Nip. Now we get stuck up here in the jungle, when the British and Yanks have plenty of planes, and what do they do? They come over and bomb us. Makes you mad when you think of it. If only the Japs would mark the camps they would know where we are."

Another bitter comment came from a browned off Aussie,

"Yes, and the worst of it is, they didn't kill a bloomin' Jap. Our blokes copped the lot. One of these days Naggers will swing for this, refusing to mark the camp when the Brig. asked him".

Some of the sappers were not so pleased when a party of tradesmen was ordered to proceed to Thanbyuzayat at once to build a new base camp four kilometres the other side of the site of the old camp.

On the 1st July 1943, two weeks after the bombing, I was sent down to base for the pay, my first trip out of the jungle since leaving Thanbyuzayat the previous October. After breakfast I boarded a train at the 60 Kilo siding, taking with me a Queensland Bombardier to assist me in compiling the pay sheets for the Anderson Force men who were now scattered in various camps along the line.

One Korean guard was in charge of us, but we saw little of him during the journey. While we were waiting for the train, a Burmese tried to buy my boots from me. He offered thirty rupees, and when I shook my head, he increased the offer to forty. I smiled and waved him away. Boots were now impossible to obtain, and I was nursing mine very carefully in case we were ever sent on a long march.

When the train came in, the Bombardier and I were perched on top of the wood fuel in the tender, as there was no room for us in the trucks, which were loaded with supplies. After many delays we arrived at Retpu siding just after midday. The Bombardier went over to the adjacent P.O.W. camp to try and scrounge some lunch.

He took our dixies while I remained on the tender and looked after our kit. While he was away we heard planes in the distance, and from my elevated position on top of the tender I could see several large four engine bombers circling over Thanbyuzayat, 30 kilometres away. The engine driver quickly uncoupled the engine from the trucks, and I found myself heading back toward the jungle, where we stopped out of sight under some tall trees whose overhanging branches completely hid us from observation from the air.

In the distance we heard several loud explosions, and then the planes disappeared towards the North. We returned to Retpu siding, and down the line I could see the Bombardier looking for me. He was carrying a dixie of rice and stew, and I waved to him to come over to me. He started to run towards the engine, balancing the dixie gingerly. After he had covered a couple of hundred yards the driver decided to move the engine to another siding, so off we went about a quarter of a mile down the track, with the Bombardier in hot pursuit. He finally caught up with us, completely out of breath, but

with most of the meal intact.

"Here it is, Sir. I've split about a quarter of it, and I'm afraid its gone pretty cold by now".

And cold it was. I could not eat it, so had to throw it away, hoping that I would be able to compensate myself by buying a few bananas down at base. We resumed our journey, and at dusk arrived at Kandaw, a small camp in a rubber plantation four kilometres south of Thanbyuzayat. It was here that the base camp was temporarily established after the evacuation of Thanbyuzayat two weeks before.

Here I met Captain Athol White and Lieut. Harry Farmer, Economic Officers from the 75 Kilo camp, where Green, Ramsay and Black Forces were now concentrated. The much hoped for bananas were not in the canteen, but Johnny Brooks managed to get half a dozen eggs, for which I was very grateful.

The next day bombers again came over Thanbyuzayat, and although we took shelter in the rubber trees away from the huts, we felt fairly safe here, as the camp was well hidden, and not near any military objective. We heard several bombs explode in the direction of the railway siding, but luckily there were no P.O.W.s within four kilometres of the target area.

The next fortnight at Kandaw was a refreshing change from the jungle camps. From nine till four each day we sat out under the rubber trees compiling the pay sheets, a task entailing nearly 22,000 entries. The Japs employed a complicated system of checking and cross checking the work figures on which the pay sheets were based. The evenings were passed away pleasantly enough playing bridge with the Brigadier, Ron Greville and John Hetherington.

After a couple of days I was able to get a regular supply of bananas, eggs and shindegar, and on these commodities I spent most of my spare cash. Up to this time I had been regularly taking two quinine tablets each day since leaving Tanyin, and my supply was running short. I had a chat with Lt.Col. Hamilton on the matter, and asked his opinion on the advisability of discontinuing this prophylactic dose, and holding my small supply against the day when I might get malaria.

Hamilton consulted a Dutch doctor who had had much experience of treating malaria in Java, and on the advice of both of them I discontinued the prophylactic dose of two per day.

Sharing my hut at Kandaw was a British artillery officer who was able to confirm a story which I had heard concerning an Australian warrant officer who been through an almost incredible experience. This W.O. whom I will call Miller, was one of a party of men whom the Japanese had ordered to be sent from Changi camp soon after the fall of Singapore for the purpose of collecting some Bren carriers which the Jap had been unable to move.

The Australians selected were all experienced Bren drivers, and they moved the carriers to a vehicle dump where the Japs were collecting all the captured transport. Instead of returning the party to Changi, the Japanese took them to a creek or ditch, and there lined them up and shot them. Most of the party were killed instantly, but by some freak of chance Miller and one other driver were only wounded. However they had enough presence of mind to fall into the ditch with the others, and there they lay still while the Japs fired a few more shots at them for good measure.

Luckily Miller escaped further injury, and after a few hours he had recovered

sufficiently to drag himself out of the ditch. He made his way to a hut where a friendly Chinese fed and sheltered him for a few days. As the risk of recapture was too great to allow him to remain in the hut, and as the Chinese was running short of food, Miller decided to try and make a getaway from the coast. He managed to secure a small boat, and set off for Sumatra.

In the meantime, the other man, who was only wounded, had recovered and wandered off looking for a means of escape. He was picked up by a Jap patrol, the members of which were unaware of his attempted execution. They thought he was a soldier who had lost contact with his unit during the last days of Singapore, so they returned him to Changi, where he assumed another name to avoid detection.

Meanwhile Miller had drifted for days in his open boat, without food or water. By another remarkable chance he was seen by the British artillery officer, who himself escaped from Singapore in a small boat, and was making for Sumatra. He found Miller in the last stages of exhaustion, delirious from hunger and privation.

After dressing his wounds, and giving him something to eat and drink, they made off towards Sumatra together, only to find on arrival that the Japanese were in occupation. They were both captured and sent on to Java, where the British, Dutch and Australian prisoners were being concentrated. Later Miller and the gunner officer were sent to Burma, and it was at Kandaw that I heard the remarkable story for the first time. I did not see Miller until nearly two years later, when I was able to confirm the story at first hand, although naturally he was reluctant to discuss the matter.

The fortnight at Kandaw passed all too quickly, and we finally received orders to move back to Taunzun. Early one morning, we picked up a passing train just outside the camp, there was no such thing as booking a passage. There were no passenger carriages as yet, only trucks, both open and closed types. To catch a train one walked to the nearest siding, and hailed the first one that came along.

When we got back to the 60 Kilo camp at dusk we found that Anderson and Williams Forces had moved on to Mezali at the 70 Kilo peg. The Dutch were now the only occupants at Taunzun, and they gave us a meal and a place to sleep for the night. Before leaving for Mezali the next morning I walked over to the camp cemetery, where several new crosses had been erected during the two weeks I had been away. The jungle was starting to take its toll.

Late in June the Japanese decided to open another hospital camp. As the line was pushed further and further south, the journey to the base hospital was becoming longer. An abandoned coolie camp at the 55 Kilo peg was the site chosen, and the advance party under Captain Newton Lee was warned to move at the end of June. Their job was to repair the huts and make the camp fit for the first batch of sick.

We went to Mezali by motor truck from the 60 Kilo siding, and were held up by motor trouble about a mile from our destination. The Jap driver had no idea how to fix it, but Capt. Athol White soon had the engine revving again, and finished up by driving the truck the rest of the way himself.

As we neared the camp I saw a group of Sigs working on the line and recognised "China" Mayberry, Len Atkinson and Mac, my batman. As we went past Len called out,

"Good day Major. Wait till you see the new camp. Its a beaut".

We found the camp situated on the west side of the road, built on steeply sloping ground falling back to a creek. The area around the huts was a sea of sticky yellow mud,

and the latrines were of necessity on the opposite side of the road from the camp.

The hygiene men were having great difficulty in digging the latrines because the ground was water logged. Although the others had moved in only three days before, a place had already been cleared for the camp cemetery.

As soon as I had handed over the pay to the Hanchos, and distributed the few eggs I had brought back with me, I passed on the latest war news to Col. Anderson and a group of officers, who in turn relayed it to the others. They were all delighted at the news of the landing in Sicily, and looked forward to the early collapse of Italy.

Mezali was not as dirty as the 60 Kilo camp, but the huts were more crowded. The others told me that when they arrived at Mezali, Arai had ordered every man, including the sick, to turn out and clean the camp. It was then that Arai earned his nickname of "The Stormtrooper".

The morning after my arrival at Mezali, Ray Meagher, Rowley Richards and I were sent to take the pay back to the 55, 45, and 40 Kilo camps. The Stormtrooper was our guard and escort, and we found him much easier to get on with when he was in charge of a small party. In fact this was characteristic of Japs and Koreans all along the railway.

We arrived at Khon Khan, the 55 Kilo hospital camp, in time to pay the camp staff and some of the patients before lunch. We found the sick here in a very sorry plight. Col. Coates was the senior medical officer, and he had already performed several leg amputations. The ulcer ward at Khon Khan was the grimmest sight I had seen so far, and the stench of rotting flesh was nauseating in the extreme.

We were told that a Dutch chemist named Boxall was distilling novocaine from Burmese brandy, and was able to keep up a sufficient supply to enable Coates to perform one or two amputations each day. Boxall had also succeeded in manufacturing a small quantity of Emertine from the ipepecuana plant. This precious drug was reserved for the more serious dysentery cases.

From Khon Khan we went on by truck to Anarkwan, the 45 Kilo camp which we had vacated a couple of months before. Anarkwan was now occupied by only two or three Japs and a cattle party of about a dozen Aussies whom we had come to pay. The Japs and the Aussies shared one hut, and were separated from each other by a partition of attap.

Sgt. Noble and Gunner Ned Jillett were here, and they greeted us with an offer of a grilled steak for evening meal. We accepted with alacrity and gratitude. We found these chaps in good health and spirits, for they were getting all the meat they wanted.

Whenever they ran out, they were ordered by the Japs to kill another beast, which they did with great gusto. We watched the steak sizzling in the frying pan, and our mouths watered in anticipation of the first decent feed of meat for eighteen months.

After a wonderful meal of freshly grilled steak, Arai came into our part of the hut and invited me to join him in a trip to the nearby village to buy some bananas, eggs and shindegar. I collected some cash from Ray and Rowley, took their orders, and set off for the village with Arai and a couple of other guards. We crossed a railway bridge and slid down a slippery embankment just as it was getting dusk, and took a short cut through the jungle to the village. Arai swaggered up to a Burmese stall and ordered about ten viss of shindegar, a couple of dozen eggs and four hands of bananas, much more than I had money to pay for.

I pointed this out to Arai, but he just waved his hand and said I could pay him the balance later. The Burmese had to use my waterproof cape to wrap the goods in, and the lot made a parcel of staggering proportions. Arai piled the lot into my arms, and as it was now dark he gave me his hurricane lamp to help me on the way back. He and his companions then left me, they had an assignment with some Burmese women in the village.

During the month of June there came to Taunzun a Korean guard who was destined to become known up and down the length of the line as the "The Stormtrooper". Arai Shikoku by name, he had been batman to Nagotom at base, but for some reason had been sent to the jungle. He lost no time in seeking out Bill Drower, who had been sent back to us from his isolation with the smallpox patient a few days previously.

Arai told Bill that he (Arai) was a reasonable type of fellow, and hoped that he would get on well with the prisoners.

"I have no desire to ill treat prisoners of war," he said, "but of course if they do not behave themselves, and obey the rules of the Imperial Japanese Army, then I will be forced to punish them. Please tell all the prisoners that I will only beat them if they deserve it."

Bill passed this interesting bit of information on, with a warning to beware of Arai, whom he regarded as a bully of the worst type. Bill's opinion of him was justified, for The Stormtrooper soon showed his teeth. Hardly a day passed but some luckless individual crossed Arai's path, and received a beating at his hands. Arai was a sadist who bashed people for the sheer love of it.

Tall, and of powerful physique, he seemed to have even the Japanese officers bluffed, for he often broke the rules laid down for the conduct of Japanese and Korean camp staff. He roamed around the camp looking for trouble, and invariably found it.

His nickname was indeed well earned, for his methods were identical with those of Hitler's Stormtroopers. There were rumours that he was a member of the Black Hand Society. If this were so, it would account for his apparent immunity from punishment by his superiors. Japanese officers were very severe on any member of their staff who broke the rules, but I have never seen Arai taken to task for any of his numerous breaches of the regulations.

I got half way back along the muddy jungle track to the railway, when the lantern went out, and I had no matches! In the dark I stumbled along, took the wrong turning where the track forked, and nearly fell into the river. I retraced my steps, still clinging to the precious bundle, and eventually found the embankment.

It was impossible to negotiate the steep, slippery bank with the heavy bundle, so I had to undo the cape and carry the eggs, bananas and shindegar to the top a few at a time.

Having got them safely there, I tied them in the cape again and walked along the track, stepping gingerly from sleeper to sleeper. When I came to the bridge I had to undo the bundle again and ferry the stuff across, taking several trips. The food was too precious to risk losing any of it. By the time I got it all safely across I was just about fed up, and as I walked along the line towards the cattle camp I heard voices from a hut on the other side of the line, where Arthur Shakes had a small working party doing odd jobs along that section of the route.

I put the bundle under a bush and went over to ask Arthur for assistance, which was quickly forthcoming. Between us we carried the stuff back to Ray and Rowley,

arriving just in time to partake of another grilled steak which Jillett was preparing. We sat and yarned for a while and turned in about eleven o'clock, feeling more comfortable and satisfied than at any time since the surrender.

About midnight Arai returned from the village and woke me up. He handed me a packet of biscuits, indicating that he expected me and my companions to get up and eat them there and then. I woke up Ray and Rowley, and we started munching the biscuits, when Arai returned with a lighted candle, saying that we could not be expected to eat in the dark. He had been drinking a little, and was in a good humour, quite different from the bully we had known.

We knew this mood would last only till we got back to our own camp, so we decided to make the most of it while the going was good. Next morning we set off for Beke Taung, as the 40 Kilo camp was named, and which was then occupied by a couple of hundred men of Williams Force. Sgt. Shimojo was the N.C.0. in charge of the camp at that time.

The road was under water for a kilometre or so, and we trudged through water up to our knees. We found men at the 40 Kilo in pretty bad shape. One man from the "Perth", who had been a regular performer in the concert party at Tanyin four or five months before, was hobbling around on a stick, so emaciated from dysentery that I hardly recognised him. His only possessions were a "G" string and a mess tin. Then I made enquiries about him from his mates I learned that several of them had clubbed together and got a few clothes for him, but the unfortunate fellow had a mania for gambling, and he sold the clothes to some others, and then lost the money at two-up to some of the more unscrupulous. A few months later he died of exhaustion and malnutrition.

Lt.Col. Norman Eadie, whom I had known in Melbourne before the war, was the only medical officer in this camp, and while we were there Shimojo was holding a "blitz Parade", as we called the farcical medical examination which the Japs frequently held. The men were lined up in three ranks, some of them almost too weak to stand. Shimojo walked along the ranks and stopped in front of each man for about one or two seconds, deciding at a glance which were considered fit to go out and work the next day.

Occasionally he asked a question of Col. Eadie, but the result was nearly always the same, a lot more sick men were sent out to labour on the railway. The protests of the doctors and camp commanders were in vain, they were powerless to prevent this inhuman treatment of sick prisoners, who were now beginning to die at an alarming rate.

We paid the men here and started to walk back to the 45 Kilo camp, but finished the journey by bullock cart. Arai stopped a convoy of them just outside Beke Taung, and ordered each of us on to a cart, where we sat alongside the Burmese driver. The Burman in charge of my cart handed the reins to me, then dismounted and walked along in front. And so for the first time in my life, I drove an ox-cart.

As I prodded the beast along with a spiked stick I mused on the incongruity of our present position. Here we were, thousands of miles from home, peacefully plodding along a jungle track in a Burmese ox-cart, our only escort an unarmed Korean. It was difficult to realise that the outside world was plunged in the bloodiest conflict that mankind has ever known. To us the war seemed very remote indeed, until we reflected that it was the war which was responsible for our present situation. It was a quiet and peaceful journey, and I was sorry when it ended. When we arrived at Anarkwan village we left the convoy, which proceeded on its journey south.

Arai bought us some cake and hot coffee at a refreshment stall, where we were served by a pretty young Burmese woman, whom we rather suspected was Arai's girl friend of the night before. The young woman had a large tropical ulcer on her instep, and Arai asked Rowley to have a look at it. I was able to use my small knowledge of Japanese to pass on Rowley's advice to the woman, who, like most of the Burmese we met, had picked up a smattering of their conqueror's tongue.

From Anarkwan we caught a passing train and reached Mezali at dusk, feeling rather elated at the two day break from the monotony of camp routine. A day or two later Col. Anderson received a demand for more men. He refused, saying that every man able to do even the smallest amount of work on the line was already being sent out to work. The Japs then said that if more men were not forthcoming, Col. Anderson and his camp staff would be sent out to work.

The Colonel decided to stick it out, so next morning the whole orderly room staff, including Don Kerr and Bill Drower, went out to work with the others. During the day several Japs came to the orderly room for information on various administrative matters, but found it empty. This caused them so much inconvenience that the camp staff were not sent out to work again, and so the Colonel gained his point.

On 30 July we moved on again, this time to Apparon, at the 80 Kilo peg. I felt feverish that morning – it was just ten days since I had ceased taking suppressive quinine. We marched down to the Mezali siding and awaited a train. Of course the train was not there, and we were kept waiting in the hot sun for about two hours.

Arai was in charge, and was back to his old brutal form again. We had several men on stretchers, severe dysentery cases whom the medical orderlies had placed in the shade of some trees. This did not suit the Stormtrooper, who ordered them to be put out in the sun in line with the others, so that we could all be counted more easily. The orderlies protested that the sun was too hot for the sick men, but Arai replied with kicks and curses, and the poor devils on the stretchers were dragged out into the sun, being helped along by some vicious kicking on the part of Arai.

By this time I was well on the way with my first attack of malaria, and from then on I ceased to take any interest in proceedings. I dimly remember being helped on to a truck by Harry Vowell and Arthur Watchorn, and of walking about a mile or so from Apparon siding to the 80 Kilo camp. Mac, who was also pretty sick at the time staggered along with me. I was too weak to carry all my gear, and Arthur kindly went back and collected the rest for me. John Shaw ordered me to lie down and keep still, and I gladly obeyed. I felt more wretched than at any time since I had been a prisoner, but compared to the condition of some of the men I was in good shape.

The fever passed away in a day or so, and I went for a walk around the camp, which was even muddier than Mezali. The only consolation was that the wet season was so far advanced that there were practically no flies left. We had noticed the year before at Tavoy that the flies seemed to disappear half way through the wet season. The lower end of the camp was occupied by Tamil coolies, who now worked side by side with the Allied prisoners on the railway. We felt that this was arranged deliberately by the Japs in order to lower our prestige with the races of the East. The Tamils were even worse off than we were. Although they were paid at a much higher rate than the prisoners of war, there was little that they could purchase in the way of extra food, for at this distance from Thanbyuzayat canteen supplies were meagre and irregular. In addition to this the Tamils

had no organisation such as we had, and were treated as a rabble.

Apparon was a dismal place. We seldom saw the sun, and the gloomy atmosphere of the camp, hemmed in by jungle clad hills, and overhung by heavy thunder clouds, was made worse by the poignant notes of the "Last Post", which echoed daily from the cemetery over the hill. Every day we buried two or three men, for starvation, exhaustion and disease was taking its toll in increasing measure.

Drugs and bandages were scarcer than ever, and the camp doctors were fighting a day and night battle against filth and disease. Rowley Richards was so worn out that he was sent down to Retpu for a rest, and Major John Chalmers was sent up to Apparon to relieve him. The men were so exhausted after each day's work that some means had to be devised to give them relief.

The Japs were constantly clamouring for more and more men, but their demands were impossible to meet. We deliberately held four or five of the fitter men back each day, and gave them a complete rest. In this way each of the regular workers got a complete day's rest once or twice a month. If this had not been done even the toughest and strongest of them would have collapsed from fatigue.

It was not uncommon for working parties to be out for 24 to 36 hours, come back to camp for a few hours sleep, and then be sent out again for a similar period. In spite of this the morale of the men was wonderful, they absolutely refused to let the Japs "get them down".

Apparon had previously been the headquarters of No.5 P.0.W. Group, which had been commanded by the notorious Captain Mizutani, probably the worst of the many brutal Japanese officers on the infamous railway. Most of No.5 Group had moved on to the 100 Kilo camp, but Mizutani had left behind at Apparon two hundred or so of the worst sick cases who were too ill to be moved.

These men were mostly severe ulcer and dysentery cases, and had been left there to die. As Mizutani callously remarked, "Sick men do not earn their food. As far as I am concerned, you may die".

Commander Epstein, an American naval surgeon from the U.S.S. "Houston" was the only doctor with them, and he had absolutely no drugs of any kind, and not one bandage. We helped them all we could from our meagre supply, and Syd Krantz managed to secure sufficient anaesthetic to operate on one poor fellow whose leg from knee to ankle was one huge loathsome tropical ulcer. Syd amputated the leg above the knee, but the unfortunate chap died a day or two later. He did not have sufficient stamina to withstand the shock of the operation.

One day I visited the ulcer ward to see one of the men from the "Perth", whom I heard had a good collection of sketches which he had made in Java. This man was mere skin and bone, and had a terrible ulcer on his shin. He looked as near death as a man could be, but he spoke to me with a quiet dignity, and did not mind at all when I hesitatingly suggested that he show me some of his sketches.

He forgot his pain for an hour or so as he displayed the excellent drawings in pencil and colour crayons which he had made of prison life in Java. The stench of decaying human flesh in that charnel house made me feel really ill, and I left as soon as I decently could. The sight of a hundred living skeletons, their begrimed bodies clad in filthy rags, and every man with an ulcer large enough to prevent him from walking, depressed me so much that I could not get the thought of the place out of my mind for

days, hardened though I was to scenes of misery and suffering.

One day towards the end of August 1943, we were subjected to the first search since our capture eighteen months earlier. Late in the afternoon a truckload of Japs drew up at the entrance to the camp and quickly dispersed to the doorways of all the huts. The prisoners were bundled out onto the parade ground, and then one officer per hut was detailed to assist the Japs in the search.

By a stroke of good fortune I was selected to assist in the search of the hut occupied by my own men of Signals. As I went over to the hut, Harry Mills said to me.

"There's a pair of binoculars under Archie Newton's pillow".

Two nips were conducting the search, and it was my job to empty out the contents of each kit bag or haversack while the Nips pawed the stuff over. It was a very desultory effort that they made, and all they confiscated were pieces of wire, table knives, jack knives and torches. Photographs and postcards fascinated them, and they spent a long time looking at any they came across in the men's kits. I had no difficulty in steering them past Archie Newton's pillow, which I covered with a couple of kitbags which had just been searched.

In another hut they found a pair of earphones in Arthur Watchorn's kitbag, and Col. Anderson was rather worried in case there were any repercussions. But strangely enough we heard nothing more of this discovery, and the Japs did not find any more radio parts. The following morning Anderson asked the Japs if they would return the table knives, which the men needed for their meals.

The naive reply was that we could have our knives back so long as we kept them blunt! So we got our knives back, but they kept the torches and pieces of wire. The torches were of no use anyhow, for we had run out of batteries long ago. The table knives were not of much use either, as we seldom got any food tough enough to use them on. On our diet of rice and stew we could manage very well with only a dessert spoon.

It was not for many months that we learned that the search was made as the result of the discovery of a secret radio set at Kanburi, in Siam. It was the discovery of this set which led to the beating to death of two British officers.

On September 1st, I was sent down to base camp again for the pay. This time Ray Meagher, who was Economic Officer for Col. William's Force, and I did the journey by motor truck instead of by rail. While we were waiting for the train a rather amusing incident occurred. It was the custom at that time for the Economic Officers to take with them to base any personal effects and clothing of personnel who had died since the last trip. May Meagher was loaded with the gear of two deceased men besides his own, and included was a good pair of boots. Now Ray's own boots were worn out and useless, but they were all he had, and he asked me to use my best Japanese on the guard, who spoke no English, and ask his permission for Ray to change the boots he was wearing for the other pair. At first the guard said that it was very wrong, but when I pressed him, he nodded his agreement, but evidently did not want to be a party to the transaction, for he turned his back while Ray quickly slipped off his own dilapidated boots and put on the good ones. His attitude seemed to be – "You shouldn't do it, but so long as I do not see you it does not matter".

Our motor trucks finally arrived, and we set off for Thanbyuzayat. The road was in such a shocking condition that it took us nearly all day to cover the 30 kilometres. For several miles we proceeded at slower than walking pace using the skid chains to get us

through the muddiest portions of the track.

Since my last visit to base, the H.Q. of No.3 Group had moved from Kandaw to the new camp site in a rubber plantation four kilometres south of Thanbyuzayat, well away from the railway yards which had been bombed several times since the tragedy on 12th and 15th June. We found the camp clean and comfortable by jungle standards, which was a welcome change from the depressing 80 Kilo camp.

We decided to make our visit last as long as possible, because eggs and bananas were in fairly good supply again. There was a canteen in the camp run by the Burmese, under Jap control of course, where one could buy sweet coffee and a mooblah for a few cents. I had not tasted a mooblah (a pancake made of rice flour) since leaving the original base camp nearly a year before, and it was very pleasant to be able to visit the canteen and buy a little extra food in this way.

Ned Condon, Economic Officer for the 55 Kilo Hospital, John Hetherington, Pay Officer for H.Q. No.3 Group, and myself took it in turns to buy the mooblahs and cook sweet bucks, as we called the sweet potatoes which were available in the ration at base. Sweet bucks were very tasty, but we seldom saw them in the jungle.

Merv Reid was there from Retpu hospital camp, and we had a good yarn over old times. Merv was in the canteen at Retpu, and was in constant touch with a Korean named Horoishii, who was the camp quartermaster. Horoishii was a Christian, and was probably the best of the Koreans in No.3 Group. He was very well disposed towards the P.O.W.s, and particularly towards Merv Reid, to whom he often confided his troubles.

Merv told me that Horoishii had visited him in the canteen a week or two previously, and had seemed very worried. The Korean had sat down with his head in his hands and wept as he confided to Merv his conviction that the Japanese intended to starve all the prisoners to death as soon as the railway was finished.

The secret radio had been moved from the old base camp to Retpu, where it was being operated by Sgt. Les Bullock of the R.A.F., and Sgt. Bob Skilton of the A.A.S.C. During the second week of September, Syd Rolfe, who was also one of the select band of workers in the canteen responsible for the security of the radio, arrived at base with the news for which we had all been waiting. Italy had surrendered! We discussed the news excitedly, and made fresh calculations as to the probable duration of the war. I'm afraid most of us were pretty wide of the mark, but the effect of the news was to infuse us all with a fresh optimism.

When we left base on 17 September we smuggled away with us a small quantity of quinine and bandages which had been filched from the Japs by an Australian medical orderly who was employed in the Japanese camp hospital. This chap systematically took small quantities of drugs and bandages each day, so that they would not be missed, and divided the stuff among the Economic Officers from the various jungle camps. It was one of those little risks which were gladly taken, but which meant so much to the medical officers struggling in the jungle camps with short supplies.

Ned Condon had a haversack full of precious drugs to take back to Col. Coates at the 55 Kilo Hospital, where it was sorely needed. We all took the risk of being searched and found with the stuff, but it was worth it.

The return journey was by rail to the 83 Kilo camp, where we stayed a day and a night. There was a small party of Dutch and Australians at this camp engaged in loading and unloading trucks at the nearby siding. The men here told us that the Japs at the 83

Kilo camp were the worst bunch they had yet met, especially the cook, who never let a day pass without bashing several of them. We soon saw this unpleasant gentleman in action.

One of the Dutchmen was suffering from malaria while we were there, and the cook came round to the hut and started to abuse the poor chap for lying down on his bed instead of working. The Dutchman was then dragged to his feet and made to kneel outside in the mud. The brutal Nip then gave him a shovel, and ordered him to hold it at arm's length above his head. The unfortunate fellow was swaying with weakness and fever, but the merciless brute kept him there for hours. Several times the Dutchman fell forwards on his face in the mud from sheer exhaustion, and each time the Jap kicked and beat him, and dragged him back to a kneeling position.

When this torture was over the Dutchman was allowed to go back to his bed, looking more dead than alive. It was useless trying to interfere, we knew from experience that any action on our part would only make it worse not only for us, but for the victim as well, but it grieved us beyond description to have to sit and watch such brutal treatment.

At the 83 Kilo we learned that Anderson and Williams Force had moved on to the 116 Kilo camp while we were down at base, and in fact they had been in three different camps in the last two and a half weeks. From the 80 Kilo they had gone to the 95, then to the 108, and were now in process of moving to the 116 Kilo.

We finished the journey to the new camp site by motor truck, calling in at the 108 Kilo camp to pay some sick men who had been left there in charge of Major Allan Hobbs. I was surprised to find that my batman Mac was one of those left behind, he was suffering from dysentery, but looked cheerful enough. Mac had been one of the fittest men on the line up till now, but dysentery had caught him at last.

After leaving the 108 Kilo we crossed the Burma Siam border at the 113 Kilo peg. The border is marked by three small and dilapidated looking pagodas. The spot is shown on some atlases as the “Three Pagoda Pass”. The name is misleading, as the country hereabouts is not really a pass at all, but merely the flat top of the highest part of the range dividing Burma from Siam.

We were rather disappointed, as we expected something like the famous Khyber Pass on the North West Frontier of India. As our truck bumped over the rocky road near the 115 kilo peg, we passed a lot of our chaps carrying cooking and other camp gear from a dump near the line. I saw Arthur Watchorn, and he waved to me as we went past.

“Have you seen the new camp yet?” “No, we’re on our way there now”.

“Well, you’ve got a bit of a shock coming”, yelled Arthur as we sped past.

I knew that Arthur was not one to exaggerate, in fact he always minimised and laughed at our difficulties. I was therefore prepared for something unpleasant when we arrived at the 116 Kilo camp, but the place exceeded our worst expectations. It absolutely defies adequate description. The huts were built about 200 yards from the road, and the tracks to them, if there ever were any, were lost in a sea of mud. The cookhouse was a ramshackle lean-to through which was running a creek in full spate, and the gallant cooks, up to their ankles in mud and water, were trying their best to coax some heat out of the water soaked timber in order to boil the rice.

The feculent latrines were flooded with a horrible mixture of mud and excrement, and every time one visited them, the swarming maggots crawled over boots or clogs. The

huts were "Double deckers", that is to say there was a second sleeping platform built about five or six feet above the lower one. The congestion was terrible, for the men had less than eighteen inches of floor space each, and in this tiny area they had to eat, sleep and stow their gear.

The confusion was indescribable. Down the centre of the hut ran a small stream, and men had to wade through this to reach their bunks. The lower end of the hut was occupied by Tamil coolies, who had been crowded down there to make room for us. The officers were no less crowded than the men. I shared an upstairs bay with Col. Anderson, John Shaw, Don Kerr, Rupert Barraclough, John Chalmers, and Bill Drower.

The only bright spot was the news of the surrender of Italy, which they now heard from us for the first time. John Shaw, who had arrived with Major Gus Daly of the Pioneers in the advance party, told me that when the Japanese officer in charge of the camp went over with him to allot the accommodation, he hung his head in shame and did not come near the P.0.W.s again.

In fact during the few days we were there the only guard who came to see us was a Korean known as "The Maggot", who wanted a pair of boots mended. Bill Drower told him that we had no bootmaker, no leather and no tools, which at the time was quite true.

This did not satisfy The Maggot, who argued with Bill for half an hour, but got no satisfaction. Bill's urbanity in these situations was a constant source of wonder and admiration to us, and even when The Maggot finished up by hitting him over the head with the boots, Bill never turned a hair.

The Maggot was probably the most insignificant of the Korean guards, and the Aussies quickly coined his nickname, which was an apt one. He had been posted to our group at the 80 Kilo camp, and I remember him coming up to Bill one day soon after his arrival. He talked earnestly and confidentially for a few minutes. Finally Bill announced the gist of the conversation to the hut at large, evidently at the order of the guard, who stood by while Bill made the announcement.

"This soldier complains that the Australians look at him as though they despise him. This is a very wrong attitude, and the practice must cease at once." The Maggot appeared satisfied that the appropriate corrective action had been taken, and never mentioned the subject again.

However we continued to look at him as before, although we regarded him with more amusement and interest. He was about the most perfect example of the "inferiority complex" we had yet come across.

The guards and the Japanese administrative staff harassed Bill from morning till night, day after day and month after month, but except for the incident at the 18 Kilo camp, when he lost his temper for a few minutes, we never saw him ruffled.

While the Japs ramped and roared, cajoled and threatened, bullied and kicked him, Bill just stood and listened with a detached air. His understanding of the Japanese mind, plus his ability to read their language as well as speak it fluently, was a great asset to us. For the first year or so after he was attached to "A" Force as interpreter, Bill was sometimes inclined to exceed his duties of interpreting Japanese orders for the benefit of the Australian camp commander, and sometimes made decisions which should rightly have been made by Col. Anderson or Col. Williams.

This got him into hot water a few times, and he finally realised that he would save himself many bashings if he acted as interpreter only, and let the camp commander take

the responsibility of saying "Yes" or "No" to Japanese orders and demands.

Bill was thoroughly popular with Australians of all ranks. Standing six feet five inches in his socks, he positively towered over the diminutive Japs. He had a habit of tugging gently at his moustache while the Japs were talking to him. He gave the impression that his thoughts were miles away, although he always got the full import of what was said to him, no matter how fast they jabbered at him. His whole attitude seemed to say, "Hurry up and say what you've got to say, little man, I've got other things to do."

This incensed the Japanese immensely. They resented his physical superiority, his knowledge of themselves and of their language, and his unruffled calm.

While we were at the 116 Kilo camp the Japanese "speedo" methods reached the peak of their intensity. It would perhaps be appropriate at this stage to describe a typical day in the life of a man who was fit enough to stagger out to work on the line during these dark days.

An hour before dawn the workers would rise, and the mess orderlies would flounder through the mud to the kitchen and collect a bucket of rice pap, which they would bring back to the hut. The men would then file past, and by the light of a candle or slush lamp each would be served a dixie of pap. This would have to satisfy him for several hours. It would probably be raining, but no matter what the weather, they would be off to the tool shed to collect their picks and shovels, sledge hammers and dog spikes.

While it was still dark they would struggle through the mud to the railway line. Daylight would find them on the trucks or the bogies, bound for the end of the line, where they would start to lay another two or three kilometres of rails. By three or four in the afternoon a meal of rice and stew would have been sent out from the camp, and it was usually stone cold by the time it reached them.

Squatting on a sleeper or a water soaked log, the men would consume the unappetising mess, usually in the rain, for the wet season was not yet over. Back to work on the back breaking job of laying the rails and driving the dog spikes with a heavy sledge hammer. The sleepers often disappeared into the soft mud as soon as they were laid. This work continued until long after dark, fires and flares being lit to provide light. Finally they would come back to camp, have something to eat, and stagger into bed utterly exhausted, but unbroken in spirit.

After about a week of the appalling conditions at the 116 Kilo, we were ordered to move on once more, this time to a place called Songkrai, at the 122 Kilo peg. We left on the morning of the 21 September, and for once the sun was shining. John Shaw and I trudged along the road for the first kilometre, and then when the track became impassable owing to large pools of water, we continued our journey along the railway track, stepping gingerly from sleeper to sleeper. On the way we passed about a hundred men from "F" Force who were camped at the 118 Kilo. We exchanged greetings and a few words with them as we walked along, for the Japs would not allow us to linger.

I met one of my despatch riders, who told me that Colonel Kappe, who was the officer commanding the Australians in "F" Force, was in the area. We arrived at Songkrai just as the Tamils were moving out. The camp, as we expected, was in a filthy state, but we were so relieved to be clear of the 116 Kilo that we did not complain. I still retain a vivid picture in my memory of one poor Tamil with a huge tropical ulcer on his foot. The foot bones were exposed, and the poor devil was so weak and emaciated that

he could not walk. He dragged himself along on his buttocks, pushing his few miserable possessions, wrapped in a filthy rag, in front of him as he painfully edged his way to the road. Although moved to pity, we had grown so accustomed to neglect and suffering by now that we passed him by with a shrug of the shoulders, and set to work cleaning up the camp.

The huts were double deckers, and much the same as those at the 116 Kilo, but fortunately the surroundings were not a sea of mud. A large river ran right alongside the camp, promising plenty of facilities for washing. The large wooden bridge which spanned the river had been built by the British and Australians of "F" and "H" Forces, and had cost many scores of lives. Songkrai camp was divided into two portions, one of which was occupied by the men of "F" and "H" Forces, and the other by ourselves. A bamboo fence separated us, and communication between the two groups was forbidden.

In spite of this restriction, many chaps from each group managed to get into the opposite camp and to swap yarns. I was able to meet George Smith and Alf Speight, two Sigs of "F" Force who came into our camp to meet their pals of "A" Force. From them we learned something of their experiences, which in some respects were worse than our own. They had left Changi only six months before, and had journeyed by train from Singapore to Bampong in Siam.

From Bampong, which is thirty miles north of Bangkok, they had marched north towards the border of Burma, carrying their own gear, plus tents, cooking equipment and medical supplies. Although they were well equipped when they left Singapore, they had sold most of their personal possessions, which they could not carry, to the Siamese as they trudged along the jungle track.

The sick had to be carried too, and many dropped out along the route. Three Signalmen, Eric Symons, Max Benoit and Clem Miller, planned to escape, and were not seen again after the group left Bampong. (I learned after the war that Max Benoit had been captured and executed). Casualties at the end of six months were nearly thirty per cent. Cholera had raged in many of their camps, and hundreds had been cremated and buried in communal graves.

At Songkrai one of the drivers delivered to me a note from Mac, who wrote that he was improving, and hoped to rejoin us soon. The line was being pushed along rapidly now, and had already reached Nike, at the 133 Kilo peg, by the time we had been at Songkrai a week. We were not surprised therefore to learn that we had to move on again. This time our destination was the 131 Kilo, and we set off on our 9 Kilo trek along the line on 28 September, 1943.

On the way we noticed several P.0.W. cemeteries, where men of "F" and "H" Force were buried. On the rude crosses we noticed the names of several of our comrades. It was late afternoon when we arrived at our new quarters, and to our surprise we found that the huts had not been occupied before. There was one fly in the ointment however. The huts were not completed, in fact they had no roofs yet. There were three huts for the P.O.W.'s, and two on the opposite side of the road for the Japs. Even the Jap huts were not completely roofed, and a few coolies were working on these when we marched in.

Our huts were just a bare framework of bamboo, with a sleeping platform on each side of a narrow central passage. We were now nearing the end of the wet season, so did not mind the roofless huts until a heavy drizzle set in soon after our arrival.

We lit a fire just inside the entrance to our hut and sat around absorbing the

warmth. Sleep was impossible during the rain, so we sat up all night. Our kitchen equipment, rations and heavy gear, together with a lot of Jap camp equipment, arrived in a couple of railway trucks about midnight, and we all turned out in the dark to unload. Scores of men were milling about in the dark, struggling up and down the slippery embankment with their loads.

One Korean guard known as "The Jeep" added to the confusion by rushing about excitedly, giving conflicting orders. Col. Williams was doing his best to sort things out, and restore order out of chaos, and he got so impatient with The Jeep that he pushed him on one side, saying,

"Get out of the way - You're only making things worse."

Although The Jeep could not understand the words, there was no mistaking the tone, and he grew so infuriated that he lunged at Col. Williams with his rifle and bayonet. Williams drew back and protected himself by grabbing the bayonet in his hand and turning it aside. The Jeep then ordered the Colonel to the Jap office, and there he had to stand all night, with a badly cut hand, for which he received no bandage or other attention.

Several days passed before we received any attap for our huts, and in the meantime we covered one of them with large banana leaves from some palms which grew in the jungle nearby.

Camp hygiene was much better at this camp, for we started off from scratch by digging fresh latrines. In spite of this however, dysentery was still rife, and it became necessary to isolate the worst cases in a small hut which we specially built for the purpose. This hut was known as the Isolation Ward, and held twelve men. The camp was built within a few yards of the railway line, on a patch cleared from the virgin jungle. In an endeavour to keep the flies away from the kitchen, we dug some latrines on the hill on the far side of the creek which ran along one boundary of the camp, but it was necessary to dig one or two close to the hospital and the isolation hut, for the weaker dysentery patients could not walk more than a few yards.

The Korean "George" was still camp quartermaster, but although he was probably the best of the camp staff, we still felt that he was not getting us our full share of rations. Owing to our greater distance from base, there were increased opportunities for pilfering en route, and our meals suffered accordingly. For weeks the main ingredient of the stew was a vegetable resembling a turnip in flavour, but shaped rather like a potato. This vegetable was covered with hair like fibrous roots, and was soon christened "hairy mary". They turned black when boiled and discoloured the stew, converting it into an unsavoury looking mess which almost turned our stomachs. For another period the only vegetable we had was a tasteless sort of melon, which turned pale yellow when cooked. The resulting concoction was known as "melancholy stew".

By October the rainy season was over, and we had much better weather. We were now at a fairly high altitude, and the mountains were enveloped in fog till late in the morning. When the fog lifted and the sun shone through, the days were perfect. With the end of the rains the volume of water in the creek diminished daily, and fresh water for washing and cooking became very scarce. The problem was intensified by the Japanese polluting the creek above our kitchen by washing, bathing and dumping their kitchen refuse in it.

We had to be careful to thoroughly boil all our drinking water, but after a month

or two it became so tainted that no amount of boiling would get rid of the unpleasant taste.

The huts were still very crowded, and we built improvised bunks one on top of another that each man would have room enough to sleep. Some of these bunks were four tiers high, the man in the top being only a few inches from the attap roof. In the opposite bay to John Shaw and I, Lt. Col. Williams and 25 of his officers occupied a space about 13 by 15 feet. Their bay contained six of these four tier bunks, and was easily the most congested corner of any hut.

The rail laying proceeded as usual, the men still working long hours. On more than one occasion they were kept out for 36 hours at a stretch, but nothing could break their indomitable spirit. Men were dying at the rate of six or seven a week, rations were getting worse, but the Japanese continued their relentless drive to get the railway finished before the end of October.

One ruthless Japanese camp commander stated that the railway would be built, if necessary, over the bodies of the prisoners of war. At last, on 17 October, 1943, the two groups working from the North and from the South met at the 153 Kilo peg, and the railway was joined up. For the first time in history the peoples of Burma and Thailand were linked with a ribbon of steel.

I was not present at the ceremony, but those who were told me that the occasion was marked by great pomp. Several high ranking Japanese officers were present, and there was much playing of bands, bowing and saluting, and all the pageantry which the Japanese like so much. Newsreel and other photographers were present to make a pictorial record of the achievement which had cost so many thousands of Allied lives, in addition to those of thousands and thousands of Asiatic coolies. The number of Asiatics who were beaten and starved to death to make this railroad possible will probably never be known, but the figure has been estimated at one hundred thousand.

By 1 October, Nagotome had moved his headquarters from Thanbyuzayat to the 70 Kilo camp at Mezali. Major Barraclough had gone down there for the camp pay, and when he returned late in October, he brought me the sad news that Mac had died at the 105 Kilo camp on 16 October, just one day before the line was completed. Mac had been with me since July 1940, and we had not been separated until a few weeks previous to his death. The news was a sad blow to me, for I had grown very attached to him.

About this time Rowley Richards returned to us from Retpu camp, which had now closed down. He looked much better for his rest, and soon took up his duties again, thus relieving John Chalmers and Syd Krantz, who had been having a busy time with the increasing percentage of sick.

On 20 November the Japanese ordered a memorial service to be held at all camps simultaneously, to pay honour to those who had given their lives in the building of the railway. Huge wooden crosses were constructed at base, and delivered to the camps in time for the ceremony. They were to be erected at the various P.0.W. cemeteries by the due date. A letter of condolence was sent to each Allied camp commander, with instructions to read it out at the ceremony, which all except the very sick were compelled to attend. Here is the letter.

LETTER OF CONDOLENCE ON THE OCCASION OF THE MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR DECEASED P.O.W.

An this first stage of the railway construction has now been completed I have on this day of Commemoration, the honour of taking this opportunity of consoling the souls of the P.O.W.s of the 3rd. Branch, numbering 655, who have died in this district during the past year. In my opinion it is a virtue since ancient times to pay homage to the souls who have died in war, even though they be enemies. Moreover you were under my command and have endeavoured to work diligently in obedience to my orders, while always longing for the final repatriation to your own country once the war is over and peace is restored.

I have always done to my utmost to discharge my duty conscientiously taking responsibility for all of you as your commander. Now you have passed on to the other world, owing to the unavoidable diseases and indiscriminate bombing, I cannot see you in this world anymore.

Visualising your situation and that of your relatives and families, I cannot help shedding tears sympathising with your unfortunate circumstances.

This tragedy is the result of war, however it is owing to fate that you are in this condition and I consider that God has called you here.

However today I try to console your souls and pray for you in my capacity of your commander, together with the other members of my staff by dedicating a cross and placing a wreath in your cemetery.

In the very near future your comrades will be leaving this district, consequently it may be impossible to offer prayers and lay a wreath in your cemetery for some time to come. But undoubtedly some of your comrades will come here again after the war to pay sincere homage to your memory.

Please accept my deepest sympathy and regards and may you sleep peacefully and eternally.

Given on the 20th day of November, in the 18th year of Showa.

Yoshitida Nagotomo, Lieut-Col.
Chief of No. 3 Branch of the
Thai War Prisoner's Camps.

The whole ceremony was a hollow mockery, and an insult to our intelligence. The letter of condolence is a typical example of Japanese hypocrisy. The idea of blaming the alarming death rate on "unavoidable diseases" and "indiscriminate bombing" shows how they deceived themselves, but not us. The very idea of Nagotome shedding tears on our behalf was so ludicrous that it was all we could do to stop laughing outright when that particular passage was read out by Lt.Col. Anderson, who was in charge of the parade.

`The following day, 21 November, was to be a day of rejoicing, and we were ordered to erect a concert stage for the occasion. This we did, and on the 21st. the concert party from the 105 Kilo camp arrived. They gave us a splendid show that evening. Sgt. Bob Skilton and Les Bullock were very entertaining in comedy patter, while a Javanese vocal and instrumental trio proved excellent entertainers. Their harmonising in Hawaii and other popular numbers would have done credit to any first class vaudeville show at

home.

For some weeks there had been rumours of an impending move to an area call Kanchanaburi, on the flat country near Bangkok. This rumour gained favour as a result of the reference to leaving the district made in Nagotomo's letter. The men of "F" Force had told us of the camps in this area, which from all accounts was a prisoner's paradise.

We often sat around and discussed the possibility of this move. Eggs, we heard, were only ten cents each, and bananas one cent. Both these luxuries were unprocurable at the 131 Kilo, and the very thought of being able to buy them freely made our mouths water. However we had heard stories of "better times ahead" for so long that we had ceased to believe that our conditions would ever change.

It came as a pleasant surprise therefore, when the Japs announced early in December that an advance party of two officers and one doctor, together with fifty men, would proceed to Kanchanaburi at once to prepare the camp for the transfer of all P.O.W.'s in Burma and all camps as far south as the 131 Kilo.

Don Kerr and Rupert Barraclough were the officers selected, and Rowley Richards was to be the M.O. My old driver Charlie Mills, and Len Atkinson, "China" Mayberry and Toby Johnson were among the 50 men in the party. They left early one morning before the rest of the camp was awake. We envied them their selection, and looked forward with an intense longing for the day when we should follow them. We had "had" the jungle.

Rations were getting worse and the death rate was still averaging at least one per day. At this stage I was feeling weaker than at any time since I had been taken prisoner. About the middle of each morning I felt dizzy from weakness, and had to lie down. One of the gunners, a tall lad from Queensland, who acted as runner for Col. Anderson, earned my gratitude at this time. He made several trips to and from Jap H.Q. each day, and often had a billy of soup given to him by one of the Jap cooks.

Sometimes I was lucky enough to be given a cupful. It was delicious soup, for the Japs had the best of whatever food was available, and I looked forward to that cup of soup very anxiously. If ever I missed out, I was bitterly disappointed.

Like all the others, I had reached the stage when I felt that every extra bit of food I could get might make all the difference between survival and death from malnutrition. The subject of food was always uppermost in our minds. There were only two subjects of discussion at this critical period of our existence, food, and the progress of the war.

The two questions constantly being asked were,

"What's on for dinner today?" and "How much longer is this b..... war going to last?".

In December we received a welcome addition to our diet, although it was no credit to the Japs. The big camp at Nike, two kilometres down the line from us, was occupied mostly by Dutch prisoners at that time, and loading parties from our camp who were working at the Nike railway siding soon found out that the Dutch were successfully pilfering large supplies of oiled fish.

A brisk trade soon sprang up between the Dutch and our chaps working at the siding. The Dutch stole the fish from the ration trains and sold them to the Aussies at eight fish for one rupee. I was able to purchase some of these, and once I had established regular custom with one of the loading party, I was enjoying an extra four to six fish per day. My fits of dizziness stopped almost at once, and I could feel my strength growing

daily.

Just before Christmas the first batch of mail from Australia arrived. There were no letters for "A" Force, but quite a large batch for the men from Java. The whole camp was excited over the arrival of the letters, and scraps of home news of common interest to all were eagerly discussed. The Melbourne Cup, the Football Finals and other items provided topics of conversation which for the time being displaced even the universal topic of FOOD. Some letters contained news of domestic happenings which in themselves were tragic, but which gave rise to much good natured banter. One chap received news that his fiancée was now his stepmother. Having grown tired of waiting for him, she had married his father. Another fellow received word that his fiancée had married a Captain in the Pay Corps at Army H.Q. in Melbourne.

This was a bitter pill. As the fellow said in a complaining voice to his mates,

"I wouldn't have minded is she had married a dinkum soldier, but to go off with one of those base wallahs in Pay Corps-."

The rest of his remarks were unprintable, but were decidedly uncomplimentary to base wallahs in general.

The Tamils in the various camps up and down the line were living under frightful conditions, and we often saw them as they passed our camps en route to a new destination. I'll never forget one occasion when we saw a large party of coolies moving North along the line just as we were finishing our evening meal.

With a few others I was walking over to the camp refuse pit, where we usually emptied from our mess tins any gluey lumps of rice which were too unpalatable even for us, hungry as we were, to eat. There was one type of bean which we used to get in our stew which I could never eat whole. I was in the habit of chewing the husk and extracting the fleshy centre of the bean, but I could never swallow the stringy husks, which I always threw away.

They were so nauseating to me that they stuck in my throat and made me feel ill. I was abut to empty some gluey rice and some chewed husks into the refuse pit, when a young Tamil came over and held out his hand, pointing to his mouth with one hand and rubbing his stomach with the other. The poor lad looked so hungry that I gave him the rice, and was about to empty out the husks into the pit, when he indicated by gestures that he would like to have them.

I could not bring myself to let him eat them, but he looked so disappointed that I called out to some of our chaps, who came across and gave the lad some of their rice leavings, which he gratefully accepted, collecting the scraps in a small earthenware pot.

It was a common sight to see Tamil children working with the other coolies, and this lad could not have been more than ten or eleven years old.

On Christmas Day 1943 we were still at the 131 Kilo camp, but expected to move on to a new camp the next day. The cooks, by a superlative effort, had managed to save a little from the daily ration to prepare a special for the occasion. We had a small amount of meat, the first for several weeks, some sweet potatoes, and a stew which was not quite as thin as usual. As a special treat, there were no "hairy marys".

Our thoughts went back to the previous Christmas Day at the 18 Kilo camp, when we laughed at the chap who called out to the visiting band, "Come again next year".

Next year was now with us, and we were still prisoners of war. Many members of the band had since died in the jungle, and the remainder were split up among the other

camps. Still, we all prayed that Christmas 1944 would find us free men, and most of us now believed that the war would last only another six to nine months.

The weather gradually got colder as the end of the year approached, and we now seldom saw the sun before lunchtime each day. The surrounding hills were enveloped in a heavy mist until about twelve o'clock, when the sun started to break through.

At sunset each night we usually heard deer barking in the hills. One of the Japs could imitate the barking deer so well that he could get them to answer him.

Japanese cavalry units often passed by the camp headed for Burma, and we always turned out to look at the horses, some of which were magnificent animals. One day Joe Mayo, an ex jockey, got quite excited as he saw a Jap officer riding a beautiful thoroughbred.

"Look" he cried, "that's the horse I rode in the Singapore Gold Cup."

Most of the animals were mountain ponies, but there was a fair sprinkling of racehorses and other thoroughbreds which the Japs had captured in Malaya.

It was just before Christmas that I met Ben Barnett for the first time since leaving Changi. We knew that Ben was at Nike with a small rear party from "F" Force, and one day I saw him with a group of Aussies in charge of a Jap guard. They were just approaching our camp when I recognised Ben, and I went over to see if I could speak to him. Although we were not supposed to talk to any of the men in "F" Force, I decided to risk it. Luckily the Jap in charge of their party was decent enough to halt them long enough for me to have a chat with Ben for a few minutes.

We exchanged a lot of gossip in that short time, and a day or two later I received a long letter from Ben giving detailed news of the movements of other groups from Changi to Borneo and Japan since "A" Force left. John Paterson, Bob Chown, Doug Lush, Keith Stevens, Reg Hastings and others had gone to Japan, while "B" and "E" Forces had gone to Borneo. The first Borneo party had included several Sig Officers, among them Colin Johnstone, Lionel Matthews, Roderick Wells, and Gordon Weynton.

Ben's letter was wrapped round a tin of strawberry jam which he had thrown to one of our cooks as he passed the camp in a Jap truck.

About this time too I saw our C.O. Lt.Col. Kappe for the first time since we left Changi. A truck was passing the camp, and I recognised Col. Kappe in the back. I ran out on to the road and just had time to greet him and shake his hand as the truck went past. It was not till three and a half years later that I learned from Col. Kappe, over a glass of beer in the Signals Mess at Albert Park, that the Jap in charge of the truck had beaten him up for talking to me. Which goes to show that you never can tell with a Jap.

On Boxing Day 1943 we packed our gear and marched down the road to Nike, at the 133 Kilo peg. We left behind a rear party of one hundred of the fittest men under Lt.Col.Williams and Major Gus Daly of the Pioneers. Their job was to finish off the ballasting of the line.

As we walked down the jungle road to Nike, Lt.Col.Anderson, whose keen eyes never missed anything in the bush, pointed out deer tracks on the side of the road.

We arrived at Nike, the largest railway siding in that part of Siam, to find the camp occupied by Dutch and Tamils. Ben Barnett and his party had left for Kanburi some days before. A high bamboo fence separated the coolies from the Dutch and ourselves.

We were allotted two huts, one for Anderson Force and one for Williams Force,

which in the absence of Lt.Col. Williams, was now commanded by Major Ray Meagher. (After the war Ray entered Politics and held cabinet posts in the Bolte Government.)

The Dutch at Nike were living fairly well. The ration scale was much better, and in addition there was a lot of pilfering going on. Each day a party of Dutch went down to the siding to unload rations for the whole camp, but not all the rations found their way to the Q.M. store. After a day or two the Australians were put on this job, and they made the Dutch look like a bunch of amateurs when it came to stealing rations.

The Aussies did it on a grand scale. The first day they were on the job, two of John Shaw's men, Sappers Sullivan and Jack Shaw, walked boldly up to our hut and dumped a couple of sacks containing several hundred oiled fish at John's feet.

"There they are, you can sell them through the canteen at twenty to the rupee" they said.

John took the lot, and before long nearly every Australian in camp was eating fish three times a day. There was a Jap corporal in charge of the camp, the most nonchalant Nip I had yet known. He seldom left his room, where he sat all day dressed in a white kimono playing dominoes. He must have noticed the Australians frying fish at dozens of little fires all over the camp, but all he did was to tell Anderson that he expected the meat ration to increase shortly, and could the Australians please eat up all their fish in the next couple of days? The Australians could, and for the next two days we all ate fish till we looked like them. We could take a hint, and appreciated the action of the Corporal in giving us such fair warning.

The resourceful Aussies looked around for something else to supplement the ration. In the centre of the camp was a large ration store where the rice and vegetables for the coolies were kept.

Our own ration store was too difficult to raid, but the coolie's store was more isolated from the sleeping huts, and each night after the moon had set a few chaps would sneak up to the store and purloin several pumpkins from the dump just inside the door.

The Jap in charge noticed his stock diminishing rapidly, and set a trap to catch the thieves. Although he slept in his store every night, the Aussies had operated so silently that he had not been disturbed. He now tried the ruse of tying several thin strings to the pumpkins nearest the door, holding the other ends in his hand as he lay in bed.

About two o'clock one morning, after the moon had set, we were awakened by a great commotion outside our sleeping hut. We heard the patter of feet as someone rushed inside and dived on to the sleeping platform. Outside, the Jap Q.M. from the coolie store was yelling his head off for the interpreter. The din was enough to wake the dead, but we all pretended to be asleep.

Lt.Col. Anderson, John Shaw, Syd Krantz and myself were sleeping on a small island platform built over the entrance to the hut, which was a double decker. The Nip kept on yelling for the interpreter, until at last Anderson called out to Drower, who was sleeping just below us,

"Better see what he wants, Bill".

The Colonel and Bill then went outside to speak to the Jap, who started yelling excitedly at Bill, saying that the bad Australians had waited till O Tsuke Sama, (the moon) had gone down, and had then stolen his pumpkins. Bill listened with his usual patience and then gently pointed out that the poor Australians were very hungry after their months of hard work building the railway, and were now urgently in need of extra

food.

The Jap then calmed down a little, and said that if they were as hungry as all that he would have given them some pumpkins if only they had been polite enough to ask him, instead of stealing them.

At this stage the kimono clad corporal appeared on the scene, looking very cool and efficient in his pure white robes. He wanted to know what all the fuss was about, though we suspected that he knew all the time what was going on. He heard the Q.M.'s story, and then told him to go away and not to interfere with the Australians, who were not under his control. It was the quartermaster's job, said the Corporal, to look after the coolie's rations, and if he could not guard them properly, that was his fault.

As far as the Australians were concerned, they were the Corporal's responsibility, and the quartermaster would in future mind his own business. That seemed to end the matter, and we all went to bed highly pleased with the outcome.

A small group of Dutchmen ran a profitable business making and selling mooblahs, or rice pancakes, which were very popular. They had set up a stall in the camp, and when a batch was nearly ready the word would go forth and a queue would appear as if by magic. Very often, if the supply was limited, the Dutch would limit the sale to their own countrymen. The Aussies would line up hopefully in the queue, only to be told, "None for Australia today".

One of our chaps, a C.C.S. orderly named George Delphin, decided to enter the mooblah business for himself and sell only to Australians. He collected a few pots and pans, found himself a quiet corner, lit his fire and started work The Dutch resented this competition, and Delphin woke next morning to find that his entire stock in trade had disappeared overnight. All things considered, life was better at Nike than at any camp since Tanyin. The biggest drawback were the bugs and the rats. The bugs were as numerous and as ferocious as they had been at the 26 Kilo, but the rats outnumbered those at any other camp we had been in.

I stretched a ground sheet over my bed to form a canopy, in order to prevent the droppings from falling on my face, but the rats thought this was a great joke, for they used the canopy as a playground. I lay in bed with a long stick, and every time a rat jumped on to the ground sheet I made a swipe with the stick. I had the satisfaction of knocking several of them off, and of hearing their loud squeaks of pain and protest. I spent about half an hour swiping rats each night after lights out, until I grew tired of it and went to sleep.

New Years Day 1944 found us still at Nike, and still hopeful that we would not spend another New Year in captivity. A day or two later Lt.Col. Anderson was sent back to Burma to take charge of the rear party at the 105 Kilo camp, leaving me in charge of the remainder of Anderson Force at Nike.

The movement of all prisoners to the Kanburi area from all camps in Burma, and as far south as Nike had already commenced. Train loads were going through daily, and more than once we were called on to bury some unfortunate fellow who had died on the train.

Malaria, dysentery and malnutrition were still taking a heavy toll, and we lost one or two every day while we were at Nike.

Cerebral malaria was now more prevalent than ever, and the victims usually suffered from hallucinations and a persecution mania before death brought them release.

One chap gave the medical orderlies a lot of trouble at various times. He insisted on climbing up into the bamboo framework of the hut and sitting on one of the cross pieces. Here he perched precariously until Sgt. Jim Armstrong climbed up after him and tried to coax him down. The other orderlies waited anxiously below ready to catch him if he fell.

Then he decided to escape from the camp, and there was great consternation when it was discovered that he was missing. Search parties were hurriedly organised and after several hours the missing man was found sitting on the railway line, where some Japanese engineers had found him and fed him. They had made no attempt to inform the camp that they had discovered the fellow, who had to be kept in close confinement as soon as we got him back to the camp.

A common hallucination from which these cerebral malaria patients suffered was the belief that someone had knocked all their teeth out. One of the gunners sent for Don Kerr one day and demanded that he remove the motorbike from the foot of his bed.

Just after the New Year we received a visit from Major Lyle Andrews, an Australian doctor who had recently arrived in Siam from Changi. He told us some almost incredible stories of his experience since leaving Singapore.

The Japanese had sent three small groups of doctors and medical orderlies, known as "J", "K", and "L" Force, to work in the coolie camps along the railway. They were told that their mission was to look after the health of the Burmese, Tamil, Chinese and Malayan coolies, who up till then had received no medical attention.

Lyle Andrews and his assistants took a few drugs and medical instruments with them, but when the arrived in Siam they were absolutely staggered at the magnitude of the task confronting them. The groups were split into still smaller detachments, doctors and orderlies being dumped into coolie camps either singly or in twos and threes.

The coolies were dying off like flies, and when the medicos asked for drugs and bandages, the Japs laughed at them, and promptly set them to work digging latrines and doing other camp chores. Protests brought little relief, the Japs just regarded them as so much extra labour, except when they themselves got sick. Then they came seeking relief from the white doctors, whom they seemed to credit with supernatural powers of healing.

The Japs were cruelly neglectful of the health of the Tamils and other coolies, who lacked the will of the white man to fight disease. When one of them got cholera or dysentery, he would just lie down and await the death which, due to his weakened condition was not long in coming. Lyle and his colleagues in other camps were often ordered to inject poison into their veins to hasten the end.

This they refused to do, with the result that the Japanese medical orderlies gave the injections themselves. Another form of amusement with the brutal Japs was to force a coolie out on to a branch of a tree overhanging a river, and keep him there until he dropped from exhaustion. In most cases the unfortunate victims were drowned.

One night a Japanese Cinema Unit arrived at the camp and set up a screen out in the open. The performance was attended by Japs, Thais, Allied P.O.W.s, and Asiatic coolies of half a dozen nationalities. The films shown included propaganda newsreels and a historical drama. The latter was difficult to follow, but John and I sat next to Bill Drower, who translated enough of the dialogue to enable us to get the gist of the story.

It concerned a famous Japanese warrior of medieval times who was always getting himself involved in duels which inevitably resulted in the death of his opponent. This caused great concern to his future wife and to his aged parents, who finally induced

him to give up his duelling and settle down. It was a very boring performance because of the stilted mannerisms of the actors, but it gave some idea of life in medieval Japan.

Our sojourn at Nike lasted only a couple of weeks, and then we received orders for our move to Kanburi, or Kanchanaburi as it is sometimes called. Many of the men were not in a fit state to move, but there was no alternative. In any case those who arrived safely would stand a much better chance of survival if all reports of conditions in the Kanburi area were true.

On me devolved the responsibility of evacuating No.1 Mobile Camp from Nike to Kanburi. The move was to take two days, and on 11th January 1944, the first party moved off. Captain Stewart Handasyde of the Pioneers was in charge, as the ground consisted mainly of men from his unit. Syd Krantz was our only medical officer, so most of the serious malaria and dysentery cases were included in the first party under his care, with the assistance of some capable medical orderlies.

On January 12th, the second party cleaned up the camp and moved down to the siding to await the trucks which were to take us away from the hated jungle, we hoped for ever. I gave Doug McBain the job of entraining officer, and asked John Shaw to inspect the sick. We had no doctor now that Syd had gone, but John had an excellent knowledge of physiology and medicine, and could be relied on in an emergency. John reported that two of the men would almost certainly die before we finished the journey, which was expected to last about twenty four hours.

The Jap in charge of our party said that Bill Drower and I were to travel in a separate van with the four guards who were to accompany us. I did not want to be separated from John on the trip, so I asked Bill to get permission for him to travel with us. Good old Bill managed this alright, so the three of us piled our luggage in the last van. We had one half of the space to ourselves, the four Jap guards occupied the other end of the closed in truck.

The rest of the party were not so lucky, and were packed in 27 to a truck, which was very uncomfortable indeed. The train was made up of enclosed iron goods vans, with a door in the centre of each side. The iron was too hot to touch during the heat of the day, and became icy cold at night. We shunted about the siding for about an hour, arid were just about to leave when I heard Sgt. Nason calling for me. Looking out of the truck I saw Nason and a couple of others, who usually had the job of digging camp latrines and graves in the cemetery.

Nason had a shovel over his shoulder, and with him was Cpl. Kemp, the tall medical orderly in charge of the truck containing the stretcher cases.

“One of the Pioneers has just died, can we bury him now?” asked the Corporal.

“Just a moment, I'll ask the Jap”.

Bill asked the guard in charge if he would hold the train long enough for us to bury the body. It may have seemed a callous thing to do, but we knew that unless we could bury the man there and then, the body would have to remain on the train for at least twenty four hours, and corpses decomposed very rapidly in the tropics.

More important still, the presence of a corpse in the truck with the other stretcher cases would have a most depressing effect on them. The Jap refused to hold up the train, saying that the men had been counted, and that he was responsible to the officer at Kanburi that the number now on the train arrived there. (The sick man was Private R.J. Hovenden).

I asked Bill to persist, but the guard just shook his head, and would not budge. Bill tried again, and the Guard made a long speech in Japanese. Bill translated.

"He says his orders are that every man who entrained must be accounted for at Kanburi. If he arrives there with one man missing it may be thought that he has escaped, and then you will be shot. He wants to know if you are prepared to take the risk of being executed."

This put me in a bit of a spot, but after a moment's thought I decided that the Jap was bluffing.

"Tell him that I do not think the Japanese at Kanburi will shoot me. We cannot leave the dead man on the train because of the effect on the other sick, and it will not take long to bury him."

Bill spoke to the guard again, and while the discussion was still in progress another Jap from the camp staff at Nike arrived on the scene and asked what the fuss was about. Bill explained.

The new arrival quickly took command of the situation, he was evidently senior to our guard. He ordered the body to be left by the side of the track, and said that the Australians from the next camp would arrange for burial.

Nason and the others climbed aboard and we moved off. Half a mile down the line we passed a group of Aussies from the 131 Kilo camp. I leaned out of the truck and yelled to them as we went by,

"Pte. Hanrahan died just as we were leaving. You'll find his body on the West side of the track near the Nike siding. Better bury him in the camp cemetery before you go back."

They waved back to us as the train gathered speed, "Righto, we'll fix it".

Looking back on the incident now it seems altogether too callous and practical, but it certainly seemed the best thing to do at the time, and there was no time to consider the finer points of sentiment. There was one touch of humour to it all. The guard who had been so insistent that we take the dead man with us, missed the train. He was so busy seeing that Nason and the rest got on board that he was left behind, and the last we saw of him he was running down the track waving his arms and yelling frantically.

His three companions took no notice of him and settled down in their end of the truck. They opened up some food and handed us some bananas and biscuits. We gladly accepted. They seemed quite friendly, and were probably just as pleased to be getting out of the jungle as we were.

There was plenty of room in our end of the truck, so John and I decided to put up our stretchers. We made ourselves comfortable and even managed to erect our mosquito nets. The Japs watched our preparations with interest and some amusement. They contented themselves with a grass mat on the floor.

Darkness closed in on us while we were still in the jungle clad hills. We went to bed with Bill's long body stretched out on his valise between the stretchers. As I said to John, we were probably the first passengers on the Burma Siam railway to travel first class sleeper!

The journey was most interesting. When we awoke the next morning we found the train following the course of the river. We obtained some beautiful views as we rounded the hills, and from our elevated position we could clearly see fish in the river.

We passed over many large bridges, in which John, as an engineer, was very

interested. “The Jap must have had their best engineers on this end of the line,” he said, “these bridges are much better jobs than those they built in Burma.”

The bridge at Wampo was the most interesting, it was built on the edge of a sheer cliff. It had a grim history, for it had cost many scores of British lives to build.

By noon on 13 January we were out of the Verdant hills and were entering the flat padi field country. Huts and villages were frequently seen, and the industrious Siamese peasants, knee deep in mud and water, were tending their rice crops as their ancestors had done for centuries.

SIAM - THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

In the early afternoon we passed over the bridge at Tamarkan and pulled up at Kanburi, where we detrained. Opi. Kemp came along to tell me that just before the train stopped another man had died. John Shaw was right. The two men whom he predicted would not survive the journey were now dead.

A party of Dutch from the nearby Kanburi prisoner of war camp came down to the siding to assist us with our heavy baggage and to carry the stretcher cases. We could not help noticing the difference between their condition and ours. They all looked comparatively fit, and our hopes were raised that perhaps after all this was a land of milk and honey.

We were lined up and counted outside the Kanburi camp, with the stretcher cases, including the man who had just died, at the end of the line. There was the usual confusion while the Japs tried to make the figures agree, and then we were told that ill men who could not march four kilometres were to remain at Kanburi.

About sixty men fell out, including Sgt. Jim Stewart and Ray Carruthers, and were taken into the camp. John Hordern, although not sick, stayed with them to take charge of some canteen supplies, cooking gear and heavy baggage which we could not carry with us. This gear was to be picked up by truck later.

We passed along by the outskirts of the town, which in many ways reminded one of a medieval fortress. A large modern brick building with a tall chimney dominated the surroundings. This place, we learned later, was the paper factory. Four kilometres beyond the town we came in sight of Tamarkan P.O.W. camp, and as we walked along the road skirting the boundary fence we saw several friendly faces. The chaps inside the bamboo fence waved and shouted greetings to us, and again we noticed how well they looked. They seemed in even better condition than the Dutch at Kanburi.

Through the fence I spotted Toby Johnson.

“Hullo Major, would you like a cup of tea?”

“That’s just what I would like Toby”.

When we entered the camp gate we had to line up for the usual search. This time the Japs were not very thorough, for John and I were able to dodge it altogether. All we had to do was pick up our gear and move it to the other end of the line after the searchers had finished that end. We were not noticed in the general confusion.

While the search was in progress Toby Johnson arrived with a billy of hot tea, which John and I agreed was the best we had tasted. After a march in the hot sun a cup of tea was the most welcome thing we could wish for.

Don Kerr and Rowley Richards were there to guide the officers and men to their new quarters as soon as the perfunctory search was completed. John and I found

ourselves sharing a cubicle in a hut with a wooden floor, a luxury we had not enjoyed since Tavoy. This particular hut was reserved for field officers, and in the other cubicles were many old friends. Majors Joel Harris, George Kiernan, Arch Ewart, John Lloyd, Charles Green, Ray Meagher and Lieut. Commander Ralph Lowe were all there, and very pleased to be out of the jungle at last. As soon as we had put up our mosquito nets and unpacked our gear, Rowley took John and I over to the mess hut occupied by the British officers who had been at Tamarkan since last year. Here we were treated to a meal such as we had not enjoyed since the better days at Tavoy. True, the usual rice and stew were present, but the stew was thick with meat and vegetables, and we had not tasted meat for months. How we lapped up that meal!

The stew was followed by a sort of duff made from rice flour, over which was poured syrup made from brown sugar. Our eyes nearly popped out when we saw this, it seemed too good to be true. The rapid transition from the frightful conditions of the last twelve months to this comparative P.O.W. paradise left us in a daze. It all seemed unreal, we had to pinch ourselves to make sure we were not dreaming.

We went to bed that night tired but happy, and offered up a prayer of thanks. At last we had arrived at the promised land. The feeling of relief was overwhelming, and could be appreciated only by one who had journeyed with us through the dark days of 1943.

The following morning provided further surprises. John and I were awakened by a batman, who collected our dixies and asked us if we would like some sweetened pap. We said we would. His next question staggered us.

"How would you like you eggs, Sir, fried or boiled?"

John and I looked at one another in amazement. "Boiled" we said.

When it came to food, we thought of everything. We knew that fried eggs would be cold by the time they arrived from the kitchen, boiled eggs keep their heat longer. The final surprise came in the form of a voice calling through the hut,

"Hot sweet coffee, hot sweet coffee."

We purchased a mug of coffee for ten cents, and followed that up with a couple of bananas which the batman brought from the canteen. The bananas were only one cent each. This was the best breakfast we had tasted for two years, and our reactions can be imagined. For months we had eaten nothing but unsweetened pap for breakfast. Jungle stew and soggy rice had made up the balance of the meals, and we had been perpetually hungry. We seemed at last to have discovered the promised land.

After breakfast I walked round the camp, enjoying to the full the atmosphere of peace and calm. We met many friends whom we had not seen since "A" Force was broken up into three parties at Victoria Point and Mergui twenty months before.

Everybody was discussing the wonderful improvement in the conditions, the low prices in the canteen, the absence of work on the railway, and the chances of mail arriving from home in the near future. Many of the Britishers who had been here for months had never seen a jungle camp, and took all these things as a matter of course.

All things are comparative, and to us who had spent a gruelling year on the railway, Tamarkan was a paradise. The British troops were building a big stone memorial just outside the camp, near the approach to the steel bridge which spanned the river at that point. This monument was in memory of the thousands of Allied prisoners and Asiatic coolies who had perished in Burma and Siam during the building of the

railway. During the day Lt.Col. George Ramsay, the Australian Camp Commander, sent for me. He wanted me to take charge of entertainment for the troops, and to get a concert party under way. There were nearly three thousand British and Australian and some American troops in camp, and this provided a good field for talent, although at least 25 to 30 percent of the men were sick in hospital.

The C.O. nominated the committee he wanted to assist me, they were Norman Carter as producer, Lt. John Vance as secretary, Padre. Keith Mathieson of the "Perth" and Private Val Ballantyne as committee members. I was to be O.C. and manager. There was a concert platform in the centre of the camp, facing the parade ground, and with a few alterations we were able to convert this into a theatre suitable for producing concerts of a much more ambitious character than had been possible previously.

We made a drop curtain of rice bags, and scrounged enough rope and a couple of pulleys to operate it. Pte. Frank Purtell, a theatrical tailor from Melbourne, brother of well known jockey Jack Purtell, was put in charge of costumes, and he produced some amazingly clever tailored suits from the most unpromising material. From rice sacks dyed with black ink he made some excellent dinner suits, and from mosquito nets and other material he designed and made some wonderful evening frocks and a smart costume.

The ingenuity of the stage hands knew no bounds, and under the capable direction of Lt. George Plunket they produced some splendid stage props, including a suit of armour and a set of puppets. At first the concerts consisted mainly of songs and sketches, but after a month or two, as more talent was discovered and the standard of the performers improved, we got much more ambitious.

By the end of February Norm Carter had welded the concert party into a group capable of putting on a non stop show lasting an hour and a half. Our first big feature was "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves". Our comedian, Private Wally MacQueen, of the 2/29th Battalion went down with an attack of malaria on the eve of the show, and the versatile Norman stepped in at the last moment and took the comedy part.

Privates Bob Clare and Ron Wells were a great success as the donkey. The skin of this comic animal was made of rice bags, but nevertheless was very effective.

In March we produced "The Wizard of Oz", in which Lieut. Teddy Weller was a great success as Judy Blossom. In Teddy we had a female impersonator second to none. Bobby Clare as the Lion, Lick Moray as the Tin Man and Val Ballantyne in the role of the Straw Man gave splendid performances, but the real hit of the show was Lieut. Les Atyeo of Colac, who scored a personal triumph in a most delightful and whimsical interpretation of the Mayor of Munchkin.

Next month Norman produced the old favourite, "When Knights Were Bold", which he wrote entirely from memory. Norman had played several parts in this delightful comedy in England many years ago. Teddy Weller scored again as the Lady Rowena, Lieut, "Busty" Badger was the Bishop, Val Ballantyne the Butler, and I was cast as the villain of the piece, Sir Brian Ballymote. Sgt. Pat Fox, an English comedian, was the Jew, Isaacs.

Once again Les Atyeo stole the show, giving a convincing performance in the leading role of Sir Guy de Vera. The costumes in this show were a triumph of ingenuity on the part of the staff, while Frank Brydges and "Flip" Reif painted some wonderful scenery on grass sleeping mats. The show was so popular that we had to repeat it later in

the week.

Norman followed this success with an even more ambitious production, "The Gay Nineties". The catchy tunes of the eighteen nineties were sung and whistled all over the camp for weeks afterwards. The hit of the show was an old fashioned melodrama, "The Lights of London", with Teddy Weller as the heroine, and Lieut. Joe Harris as Frank Fearless, the dashing hero. Once again Norman made me the villain, and I was duly hissed every time I appeared on the stage. Of course in the end I was "foiled again", and taken off to the lockup by the comic policeman, played by Tich Wiley of the Royal Corps of Signals.

From the time of our arrival at Tamarkan the health of the men began to improve. For the first three months the sick from the jungle camps were dying at the rate of ten to fifteen each week. By May 1944 most of the men not in hospital were fairly fit, while the majority of the hospital patients were out of danger. Sgt. Nason, who caught a chill in the train on the way to Tamarkan, died of pneumonia about two weeks after our arrival. We were all very sorry to lose this popular N.C.O., who had done a sterling job all through the difficult days of 1943.

In February Lt. Col. Anderson arrived from the 105 Kilo camp with the balance of the rear party. By this time all the Allied prisoners from the Burma end of the line had been concentrated in the Kanburi - Tamarkan area. It was about this time too that the Japanese established a large prison hospital at Nakompaton, about half way between Kanburi and Bangkok. Lt. Col. Coates was sent there to take charge of the sick.

We heard that Nakompaton was to be the show place of the P.O.W. camps, and that it would probably be visited by neutral observers of the International Red Cross. I do not know whether these visits ever took place, but from reports we heard the new camp was a much better built place than Tamarkan, with wooden floors in the huts and concrete floors in the kitchens.

Just outside Tamarkan camp was an Anti-Aircraft battery for the protection of the bridge, which was a very important link in the supply line to Burma. A couple of nights after our arrival John and I were startled by loud explosions, and woke to find the A.A. guns firing rapidly at some planes which we could just hear in the distance. We soon learned that this was a frequent occurrence, especially on clear moonlit nights. The planes were Flying Fortresses on their way to bomb Bangkok and other targets to the south us.

The railway line and the river which it followed were reliable guides to their objectives. The battery was so close to the camp that we could see the flash from the guns reflected on the white mosquito nets. We soon got used to the firing, and after a while took no notice of it. Occasionally a few pieces of A.A. shell fell into the camp, but no one was injured.

A week after our arrival I was given permission to go over to Kanburi camp to collect the canteen supplies we had left there with John Hordern. Brig. Varley asked me to see Lea Bullock and Syd Rolfe, and tell them to destroy and bury the radio set which they had been operating in Burma, and which they had succeeded in smuggling into Kanburi undetected.

The Brigadier had received confirmation of the discovery of a radio set at Kanburi several months before, which resulted in the beating to death of two British officers. Rolfe and Bullock were disappointed when I passed on the Brig a message, and said they

were willing to take the risk of operating the set. When I told them that the Brig. was insistent, they promised to destroy it.

It was not till after the war that I was able to obtain the full story of the discovery of the sets which led to the death of the two officers. What happened was briefly as follows:-

On 28 August 1943, two Sergeants of the Royal Artillery were brought into Kanburi camp for questioning, and were stood up at the guardhouse. A Captain Renwick was brought over by the Japs to witness the beating up of these two men, who, after a brutal bashing, were left standing outside the guardhouse for 112 hours. Then, weak from exhaustion and the result of their ill-treatment, they were taken off by the Kempei Tai (Secret Police).

On 15 September five officers were arrested and beaten up by the guards for two days and nights, one of them so severely that he had to be taken away on a stretcher. All five of them were sent by the Kempei to Singapore to serve terms of imprisonment, where the chance of their survival was very remote.

Then on 23 September four more officers were arrested and stood up at the guardhouse. One of them was so maltreated that he was hardly recognizable. When asked if they knew of a radio set at Sacamoto camp, they all admitted knowledge. A Japanese officer and two Sergeants then ordered Lieutenant A---- to strip to his shorts and turn his stockings down. They then commenced to thrash him with bamboo sticks, 481 blows being counted by his comrades, who were listening in the adjoining huts, but who were powerless to intervene. If he fell down, he was dragged to his feet and the beating was continued.

Captain H---- of the Federated Malay States Volunteer Force was then subjected to the same brutal treatment. After a while a Dutch medical officer was sent for, presumably to examine the two poor devils and to see if they were still alive.

Whatever happened, the Dutch M.O. refused to talk about it. When asked whether the two officers were alive or dead, he just said that the Japs had sworn him to secrecy, and that he would say what he had to say after the war was over. Such is the fear which Japanese Gestapo methods can instill into a man.

The following morning picks and shovels, as well as a stretcher, were seen outside the guardhouse. There was fresh earth on the tools, and everyone rightly guessed that these two officers had been buried close by after being fiendishly beaten to death. Traces of blood and clothing were later seen near the guardhouse, mute testimony to the kind of treatment anyone could expect if discovered having any connection with the collection of news.

The names of Captain H---- and Lieutenant A---- were later seen on a death roll of prisoners in the Japanese office. Their only crime was that they had done their best to keep up the morale of their comrades by bringing them some news of what was happening in the outside world. There was no doubt at all that the Japanese were afraid to let the prisoners know anything of the progress of the war, and even if we had not been getting news via the secret radio, this attitude would have provided evidence that the tide had turned in favour of the Allies. Gone were the days when the guards used to boast to us of their victories in the South West Pacific.

The story had a gruesome climax. Two days after the death of the officers concerned one of the Japanese officers was seen wearing Lieutenant A----‘s watch and

another of the ghouls was observed walking about in Capt.H----'s suede shoes.

In May 1944 occurred two red letter days. The first was when a large batch of mail was released by the Japanese interpreter, Motojima. That day I received my first letters from home for two and a half years. My heart leaped with joy as I picked up the letters from the orderly room, seven of them. Eagerly I opened all the envelopes, and then put the letters in chronological order before settling down to a feast of reading. The oldest letter was written in June 1942, and had taken 25 months to reach me, the rest were written in July, August and September of the same year.

Although the news was old, it was none the less welcome, and brought a touch of home which made me forget for a few hours that I was in a prison camp thousands of miles from Melbourne. Dorothy still did not know whether I was alive or dead, but her letters were full of confidence that I would pull through. It was many months before I learned that she knew I was safe.

The second red letter day was when a batch of parcels from the International Red Cross arrived at Tamarkan. These were the first and only parcels that we received during the three and a half years that we were the guests of Nippon. The cartons contained chocolates, cigarettes and tinned food, all well packed and in excellent condition. By the time the Japs had taken what they wanted, there was only one parcel between every six men, but even one sixth of a Red Cross parcel was something to be thankful for.

There was great excitement as the parcels were opened and the contents laid out so that we could feast our eyes on them. I shared a parcel with John Shaw, Joe Harris, Leicester Hellyer and a couple of others. The only other Red Cross goods we received were an occasional issue of tobacco or soap, purchased by the Swiss Consul in Bangkok from funds made available by the British Government. Even these goods were misappropriated by the Japanese, and only a fraction of the stuff intended for the prisoners of war was ever issued to them.

In March the Japanese issued a list of 44 subjects on which we were instructed to write essays. The Brigadier and Lieut. Col. Anderson went through the subjects carefully and selected the people they considered best fitted to write about them. We could never quite make out what was behind this essay business. Some were optimistic enough to think that the Japanese wanted to know what we thought about our treatment, and what our requirements were, so that they could improve our conditions. In view of the fact that we were always asking the Japs for better food and more medical supplies it was hardly likely that they needed 44 essays from us in order to arrive at an estimate of our needs.

A more likely explanation was that they wanted to use a few selected extracts for propaganda purposes. Some of the subjects on which we were invited to write dealt with our treatment as prisoners of war, our requirements in food, medicine, entertainment and mail, etc. One of the questions was:- "What is your present wish and earnest desire?" Of course we all knew the answer to that one.

Rohan Rivett wrote the one asking for our views on the treatment of prisoners by the Japanese. He did not hold his punches. The medical staff of course wrote on our requirements in medicines and surgical equipment, and I wrote the one dealing with our needs in the way of concerts and other entertainment. What happened to the essays eventually we never heard, but they certainly had no effect on our future treatment In addition to these selected essays, every officer and man in camp had to write a short account of his experiences from the time of Japan's entry into the war until his capture.

At this time I was in charge of a company consisting of all the Warrant Officers and senior N.C.O.s, and it was my duty to censor their stories before submitting them to the Japanese. Some of them were very good, some were childish and futile, and a few were unintentionally funny. One of John Shaw's cooks submitted the following: "I did not see much of the fighting in Malaya. I was a cook in the Engineers, and all I done was cook and move, cook and move, all the way from Segamat to Singapore." (This was a corporal Lawrence.)

A Warrant Officer from an artillery regiment wrote in more serious vein:- "Since time immemorial it has been the custom among civilised nations, that prior to the commencement of hostilities one nation would make a formal declaration of war. Imagine my horror and disgust therefore when I was awakened on the morning of December 8th, 1941, to find that the Japanese were bombing Singapore without warning," and so on. We never heard the outcome of these essays either, but all were warned by the Brigadier not to give away any information which might be of use for propaganda or other purposes. Most of the essays were so uninformative that the only conclusion the Japs could have reached by reading them was that every member of the A.I.F. was engaged on a job which prevented him from seeing any of the fighting.

On 21 March the memorial, which had just been completed, was unveiled. The ceremony was held during the morning, and was attended by Brigadier Varley and his camp staff, plus camp staffs from Kanburi. In addition there were many prominent Thais from the town, and a collection of high ranking Japanese officers.

Ben Barnett, the Australian Test Wicket Keeper, was there from Kanburi hospital camp, where he was in charge of a small rear party of "F" Force. I saw some of the ceremony through the fence, and was able to exchange a few words with Ben, who was accompanied by Corporal "London" Lowe of my old section in Sigs.

It was a grim mockery that the Japanese, after causing the death of thousands of prisoners of war and several times as many Asiatic coolies, should order them to build their own memorial. Then to cap it all, they held a service in which they professed to mourn for the souls of all those who had perished from their brutal ill treatment. The final touch was the distribution of food and drink to all those attending the ceremony, as if to say, "Look how kind and generous we are".

For months there had been rumours that all the fittest prisoners were to be sent to Japan. At first we regarded the story as just another "furphy". In April however the first parties were ordered to be ready to move. As a preliminary the whole camp was medically examined, first by our own medical officers, and later by the Japanese doctor, one Lieut. Higuchi, in whom we had no faith at all. Higuchi was responsible for the death of hundreds of prisoners in No. 3 Branch by his deliberate withholding of medical supplies and his refusal to listen to the requests of our senior medical officers for better supplies of drugs and instruments. We later discovered that he was not a doctor, but a dentist! The men selected for Japan were issued new shirts, shorts, and singlets, and formed into Kumis of 150 men each. Very few of the officers were to go, only one per kumi. It was apparent from the start that the Japanese wanted to select only the most presentable of the prisoners, probably because they would be seen by people of other countries en route.

The cunning Japs wanted to create the impression that all prisoners of war looked as well as those selected. It was noticeable also that the Dutch were not selected. Most

of the Netherlands, East Indies troops captured in Java and Sumatra were either pure Javanese or Eurasians, and to parade them through towns like Singapore and Bangkok would have been a bad advertisement for their "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere."

In keeping with this policy a couple of full blooded aborigines from a Queensland Artillery regiment were rejected in case they were mistaken for Asiatics. The choosing of the men for Japan caused a great deal of interest in the camp. To go, or not to go, that was the question. Many thought they would be better off in Japan, they said the food would be better, and they were sick of the tropics anyhow.

Others were not so sure. They looked at their few ragged garments and thought of the Japanese winter. Then there was the chance of being spotted by an Allied submarine. There was no fun in being torpedoed by your own Navy on the way to Japan. As one chap put it,

"I don't like these right angle trips. Straight out and straight down".

The first Japan party left in April, and the last in June. They had a long journey and many adventures before they were finally shipped to Japan. The first stage of their trip was by rail via Bangkok to the French-Indo-China border, where they were transferred to barges and taken down the river to Saigon, the capital. At Saigon many attempts were made to ship them to Japan, but so effective was the Allied bombing of enemy shipping in the harbour that all efforts to get them away failed. On one occasion they were actually loaded on barges and on their way to the ships when an Allied air raid sunk the transports which were to take them away.

After this the Japs gave up all attempts to ship them from Saigon, which was rapidly becoming a graveyard for enemy shipping. I was told later that no less than eighty ships had been counted in the river and harbour, all of them showing masts and funnels sticking above the water. The number sunk in deep water was not included in this total.

During their stay in Saigon the prisoners were employed mainly in the dock area, loading and unloading ships, a dangerous job when Allied planes raided the docks, which was very often. On these occasions they had to knock off work and take shelter in the slit trenches, but luckily none of the prisoners were injured.

The French treated them very well, and found ways and means of smuggling money and food into their camp. The Japs tried to stop this outside aid, but the Aussies were too clever for them, and adopted many schemes to outwit their captors.

In July most of the prisoners in Saigon were sent by barge and rail to Singapore, where they were quartered in River Valley Road. Finally, on 8 September 1944, nearly six months after leaving Tamarkan, 700 Australians were embarked for Japan on the "Rakuyo Maru".

Then followed one of the grimmest tragedies of the war. On 12 September, when off the Philippines, the ship was attacked by an Allied submarine, and quickly sunk. Hundreds were drowned, or killed by the depth charges dropped by the Japanese destroyer escort. At this stage no attempt was made by the Japs to rescue any of the prisoners. Those who escaped drowning or who were not killed by the depth charges, drifted in lifeboats or on rafts for days, and scores of them were never heard of again. Four days later, 92 survivors, more dead than alive, and suffering severely from hunger, thirst and exposure, were picked up by American submarines and eventually returned to Australia, where they were able to give to the world for the first time, news of the

Japanese treatment of war prisoners in Burma and Siam.

In addition to those rescued by submarine, there was one party in a lifeboat which was later picked up by a Japanese destroyer and taken to Japan. Rowley Richards was one of this party, he was the only officer who survived the tragedy. Brigadier Varley, John Chalmers, Les Stupart and Campbell Smith were among those who were lost, and Signalmen Toby Johnson, Frank Jesse and Harold New were among the fortunate few who were rescued by submarine.

Back at Tamarkan we heard the news that some survivors had been returned to Australia. A secret radio was being operated at Chunkai camp a few miles away, by two British officers, Don and Max Webber. We had maintained contact with Chunkai camp by the simple expedient of asking the Japanese permission to visit there on official business.

The Japanese were constantly going to and from Tamarkan, Kanburi and Chunkai on administrative duties. Peter Campbell asked to be allowed to accompany the Jap clerks on some of these trips on the pretext that he wished to consult the canteen officer at Chunkai on the matter of canteen prices. The Japs agreed without demur, and Peter made several trips, each time bringing back the latest news, which was of course, the real purpose of his visit.

I asked Lt. Col. Anderson to see if he could obtain permission for me to go with Peter on one of these trips, so that I could consult the concert party committee at Chunkai on the matter of exchanging ideas for programmes. The Japs agreed, and one fine afternoon in October, Peter Campbell and I, escorted by two Japs, went down to the "pom-pom house" as they called the landing stage and shed where the river barges pulled in. We boarded our barge, which was spotlessly clean, taking care not to soil the new grass mat on the deck.

The barge master was a Thai, and was accompanied by his wife and a chuckling, loveable little child of about two years. The little fellow was quite friendly, and played with me all the way down the river to Chunkai. The journey was about six miles, taking us past the town of Kanburi, where the two arms of the Mekong river meet. Right at the junction we noticed an old stone fort, probably built to protect the town from river pirates of the last century. Two or three miles up the eastern arm we came to the pleasantly situated P.O.W. camp at Chunkai.

Once we were ashore, the Japs left us to our own devices, giving orders to meet them at camp H.Q. two hours later. We met Lt. Col. Outram, the British camp commander, and from him we got the latest news of the fighting on the Western front, and of the Russian successes in the East. I had a chat with Leo Britt, the producer, and other members of the concert party, and finally returned to Tamarkan in time for tea.

Peter and I passed on the news to Col. Anderson and the others, and soon the whole camp knew. It was forbidden to discuss the news in large groups, and the utmost precaution had to be observed in passing it on to one individual or group to another.

Searches now began to be made at frequent, but irregular intervals, particularly after the landing in Normandy in June. We usually got some warning of these searches from a friendly Korean, and so were prepared for them. Diaries, casualty lists, watches, etc., were buried, or hidden in the hollow bamboo framework of the huts, or between the sheets of attap in the roof.

The Japanese invariably asked for some of our officers to help them in these

searches, and I was usually one of those chosen.

Knowing the hiding places, I was able to distract the attention of the Nips when they got close to something which was hidden. One certain method was to show them some photographs or postcards, in which they were always interested, often neglecting to search some packs altogether if side tracked in this way.

They showed a childish interest in anything of this nature, and often asked if we had any pictures to show them. We also found from experience that their enthusiasm dropped off considerably as the search progressed. The first few packs just inside the hut entrance would be searched very thoroughly, but as they got further into the hut they grew less and less interested, until by the time they were half way through they were not bothering very much.

Naturally we kept anything we wanted to hide away from the entrance to the huts, and so missed their first burst of enthusiasm. One thing I learned by "assisting" in these searches was the large amount of useless junk which many of our chaps, and the Dutch in particular, carried with them. One officer had a silk kimono and a length of dress material which he had purchased before the fail of Singapore. He guarded them carefully so that he could take them home to his wife after the war. He could have got a good price for them by selling to one of the traders, who would easily have disposed of them to the Thais.

One Indonesian had a bicycle pump, and another possessed two enormous Rolls Royce head lamps which took up half his kit bag. Then there was an English officer who had a dress suit complete with all accessories down to white tie and patent leather shoes. He guarded these treasured possessions very carefully, and steadfastly resisted all attempts of the concert party to borrow them as stage costume.

As time went on the prices in the canteen gradually increased as goods became scarcer. Bananas went up from one to two cents each, while cigarette papers trebled in price, and finally became unprocurable. The cigarette paper shortage forced the men to use substitutes, and so newspapers and books were cut up for the purpose. A brisk trade sprang up, and people with good books printed on fine paper cut the pages in size and collected as much as ten to twenty Thai ticals per book. New Testaments, books of verse and volumes of Shakespeare were particularly popular on account of the fine paper on which they were usually printed.

The propaganda newspaper "Greater Asia", which was printed in Rangoon, now ceased to be delivered to us. It had been a good source of cigarette papers in the past, and we missed it.

After the departure of the Japan parties there was a rearrangement of camp accommodation. Brigadier Varley had gone with one of these parties to join the group of senior officers above the rank of Colonel who had been sent from Changi to Formosa. Lt. Col. Anderson now became camp commander, and he and his staff moved to camp H.Q. This left a space in the centre of a hut, and a group of field officers, of which I was one, asked for permission to move into it. There were ten of us, including two American majors, one of whom had a dry sense of humour. On his suggestion we named our little group "The Drones Club". We even had a little shield made, bearing our emblem, a large drone bee.

The portion of the hut we occupied differed from the rest of the hut in that each of us had an individual sleeping platform. There was a table in the centre of the area at

which we could all sit down for our meals together, and we had a community batman to serve our meals, which were issued separately from the cookhouse.

The nine other members of The Drones Club were Major John Shaw, Major Joel Harris, a car sales executive from Melbourne, and 0.C. of the 2/4 Reserve Motor Transport Company, Major George Kiernan, a buyer and store executive of G.J.Coles and Co., who was second in command of the 2/5 Reserve M.T. Company. There was Major Arch Ewart of the 2/20 Battalion, a Sydney engineer, Major John Stringer of the 2/26 Battalion, a customs official from Brisbane, Major "Buck" Rogers and Major "Elkie" Elkin, both of the 131st Field Regiment, U.S. Army, and Lieut. Commander Ralph Lowe of H.M.A.S.Perth.

Last, but by no means least, was Bill Drower, our popular interpreter. The Japs had temporarily suspended Bill from his duties, because, they said, he knew too much. Bill, on his numerous visits to Japanese H.Q., had been detected more than once reading Japanese newspapers and other documents which had been carelessly left on tables and chairs.

In addition to speaking Japanese, Bill could read and write it. He often managed to secure a copy of a Tokio newspaper which had been thrown out among the rubbish, and from the information gained from this source we were able to compare the items with those received from the B.B.C., and so had a fairly complete picture of the progress of the war. Another source of news was provided by a Thai newspaper printed in English, and known as the "Bangkok Chronicle".

The Japanese forbade the entry of this paper into the camp, but we got it in spite of the ban. Sometimes friendly Thais hid copies among the canteen supplies, but a more regular source was a Thai doctor who sold the paper to us through contact with Major "Buck" Rogers. The method was as follows.

About a mile from the camp was a P.0.W. cemetery, where we had permission to send a party of about ten officers each day, under escort, to keep the graves in order, cut down the weeds, and carve new crosses as required. Rogers and another American officer, Captain "Ike" Parker, were permanent members of this cemetery party.

On the way to the graveyard was a small Thai village, where they were permitted to purchase fruit. As usual with small groups under a single guard away from the camp area, there was a relaxation of discipline, and a fair amount of freedom was tolerated. A Thai, purporting to be doctor, approached Rogers one day and offered him a copy of the "Bangkok Chronicle". He said he could obtain further copies at five ticals each if we wanted them.

Buck offered to take the papers as often as they could be procured, but as five ticals was more than one man could afford, the Drones Club agreed to share the cost. We put in fifty cents each, and thought it a reasonable amount to pay for the privilege of reading the war news in print, even though it was all "Lomel" News Agency stuff and therefore presented the news from the Jap point of view. Once or twice a week Buck would find the Thai waiting for him behind a bush, and it was a simple matter for him to reach out and take it as he went past, unseen by the guard.

After the landing in Normanby we began to notice a change in the attitude of the Korean guards. Some of them came over to the Drones Club to have a confidential chat with Bill Drower. They would bring the conversation round to the subject of the war, and then ask casually what sort of treatment the Koreans would receive in the (unlikely) event

of Japan losing the war.

Bill was careful not to drop a hint that he knew which way the war was going, and would stall for a while until he found out how much his man knew. The Korean would usually throw out a hint that Japan was not doing so well as they expected, and perhaps mention the probable collapse of Germany. One burly Korean, with features like an Australian aborigine, appropriately nicknamed "Mulga", spoke to Bill one day in a confidential mood. The conversation was on the following lines:- "Have you heard the war news?", Mulga would ask.

"No - we do not hear any news - we have no newspapers, no wireless, how can we get any news?"

"Italy is finished. Mussolini no good. Germany soon finish. Hitler no good."

"Oh" said Bill, "perhaps soon we all go home."

"I don't know. When Hitler finish only Japan left to fight Britain and America alone."

"Yes, but Japan is very strong" Bill would say, feeling his way carefully.

"Oh yes, Nippon very strong. Nippon soldier very brave. But America has much material and many soldiers, plenty aeroplanes and plenty battleships."

"How long will the war last, do you think?"

"I don't know. Maybe one year, maybe one hundred years".

"How can the war last a hundred years?" asked Bill.

"Japan will never surrender. But Japan cannot fight the whole world alone. Italy and Germany have betrayed her. But just suppose a peace is arranged, then what will happen to the Koreans?"

Here was the opportunity Bill had been waiting for, but he did not want to appear too confident.

"Japanese soldiers are very brave. We thought they were winning the war. But just suppose they should lose, then the British and Americans will not harm anyone who has been kind to the prisoners. Only those who have ill-treated them will be punished. The good Koreans will be sent home as soon as possible".

"I am not a Japanese. I am a Korean. The Japanese forced us to join the army, and then sent us to guard the war prisoners in Burma and Siam. Sometimes we had to beat prisoners who disobeyed orders, but we were only doing our duty".

"Yes, but many times sick men have been beaten for no reason at all. They were not given enough to eat, and were forced out to work when they were ill."

"Oh, but I have not beaten any prisoners without reason. I have always tried to be kind to them. Do you think anything will happen to me if Japan should lose the war?"

"I am sure I do not know. But if it is as you say, then I do not think you will be punished".

"Well, suppose Japan does not win, will you tell the British and Americans that I did not ill-treat the prisoners?"

"I will do what I can. If you have been good to the prisoners, then you have nothing to fear".

"Of course Japan is still very strong. Her airmen are brave and clever. They will sink many more battleships. Perhaps Britain and America will sign a peace treaty".

"Please tell the prisoners" Mulga continued, "that I have not beaten any of them unless it was necessary, and I was only obeying orders."

"That is alright. The prisoners know which guards have been good to them, and which have ill-treated them."

With that Mulga departed, leaving Bill a packet of cigarettes by way of insurance against the future.

Other guards attempted to square off with the men by handing out cigarettes here and there, endeavouring to create the impression that they had always been good fellows. "Dillinger", who had had been transferred to Tamarkan for a while, tried a different method. He approached a group of men one day, and asked, "You know me?"

"Yes, you're the guard who shot Sgt. O'Donnell at the ju hachi (18) kilo camp."

"No, No. That not me. That my brother. Me just come from Japan."

"Oh yeah? We know you alright".

Then there was the guard who gave a packet of cigarettes to a soldier of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. After accepting the present, the Scottie said in very broad Scottish.

"Thanks very mooch. But I'd like to cut your wee b..... throat just the same".

This "squaring off" was by no means general. Many of the Japs and Koreans were just as arrogant as ever. Motojima, the interpreter, still refused to censor our letters from home, though we knew there were thousands of them lying in his office untouched. It was infuriating to think of long awaited mail just being held back by this hateful Jap, who had been interned in Australia early in the war, and had been released in exchange for diplomatic internees in Japan. He complained that he had been badly treated in Australia, but we knew that he was only withholding the mail to show us he was master and we the slaves.

The Japanese adjutant was a black bearded fellow whom we called "Whiskers Blake". He was more reasonable to deal with than the average Japanese officer, though many of his staff went in fear of him. On one occasion he punished a guard for some misdemeanour by the picturesque method of slashing the buttons from his uniform with the tip of his sword.

The terrified guard stood stiffly to attention while the adjutant, standing a few feet from him, described graceful arcs with his sword, each slash neatly removing a button. The "coup de grace" was administered when "Whiskers", with a last deft thrust, severed the tape which held up the unfortunate fellow's trousers. Grinning cheerfully, "Whiskers" walked away, leaving the thoroughly frightened guard trembling in his white cotton underpants.

Life at the "Drones Club" proceeded smoothly. John and I commenced taking lessons in Latin every afternoon. Our teacher was Bill Drower, and though he wandered from the subject a few times, he was on the whole very patient with us. The only text book available was a Dutch-Latin grammar, but Bill managed with this, for he spoke fluent German, and had a fair knowledge of Dutch. Fred Stoep, a forestry inspector from Java who had been caught up in the Japanese occupation of the East Indies, often assisted.

Fred was a splendid fellow, quite the best type of Dutchman we had met. Like most of the Dutch officers, Fred spoke several languages well, including English, French, German, Spanish, Malay and Javanese. He had recently added Latin to his list, having taught himself during a period of six months since his capture.

Joe Harris took over the control of the camp kitchens, and an immediate

improvement in the rations was noticed, for Joe was experienced in the art of making the best out of what rations were available. Arch Ewart, who was very clever with machines and tools, rigged up a small lathe from bits and pieces, and started to manufacture chess sets out of suitable logs from the wood heap. The rest of us took turns to work the foot pedal which actuated the driving wheel, while Arch manipulated the cutting tool. He made a set for each of us, and I treasure mine to this day.

Ralph Lowe, ex Paymaster Commander of the "Perth", was appointed camp quartermaster, and moved over to live at the ration store. Ralph was an out and out "Imperialist", and fiercely patriotic, he was easily the best "bite" in camp on the subject of the Empire or the Navy. It was only necessary to make some slighting reference to the "Silent Service", or to cast a slur on the British Empire, and Ralph was up in arms, his naval beard fairly bristling and his keen blue eyes blazing. Even though he knew we were ragging him, he "came in" every time.

John had taught me to play chess just before we formed the Drones Club, and we had many a pleasant game together. Norman Carter often came over to challenge me, and we locked horns over the chess board after tenko several times a week. My mornings were usually taken up with rehearsals for the weekly concert. We had built up a splendid team of instrumentalists, actors, vocalists and stage staff, and the concerts were increasingly popular. This was a tribute to the excellent work put in by Norman, who wrote a lot of original scripts for the shows.

Earlier successes were followed by "The Dingbats Abroad", in which young Joe Harris, son of "Old Joe", took the leading part, that of an English valet who always did the right thing at the right time. Sergeant Jack Farmer took the female lead in place of Teddy Weller, who was not well at the time. Norman cast me as a sea captain, and insisted on me doing a sailor's hornpipe with Doug Coleman and "Butch" McCaffrey.

Norman seemed to take a delight in giving me parts in which I suffered some indignity. It was all in good fun of course, and I enjoyed the situations immensely. The troops enjoyed them still more, they thought it was great fun to see an officer getting the worst of it. In the show "When Knights Were Bold", I was knocked down by Les Atyeo (Sir Guy de Vere) who planted his foot on my chest and shouted "Victory". In "Pinocchio" I was "crowned" with a bottle by Wally McQueen, who played Pinoke. Incidentally, this show was written in its entirety by Norman, and every line was in verse. An American sergeant, Ed Worthington from Texas, stole the show with his droll interpretation of Jimmy Cricket. I suffered further indignities in Cinderella, in which as the Demon King, I was dragged on to the stage by my horned tail, Bobby Clare, as the dog Pluto, doing the dragging. In the "Gay Nineties", as the villain I was ignominiously beaten by the hero, Frank Fearless (Joe Harris) then handcuffed by the comic policeman (Sig. Tich Wiley) and booed by the audience as I hissed "Foiled again".

The stage hands and our property man, Lea Luff of the "Perth", performed miracles of improvisation. Wigs were made from ox tails, dresses from mosquito nets, stiff shirts from cardboard, scenery from grass mats painted with weird mixtures of tumeric, charcoal, crushed crayons, lime and ink. Lea Luff was a genius at making hand props, he even contrived to manufacture a set of puppets which were used as dancing marionettes in the Toy Shop scene from Pinocchio.

Frank Brydges, a compositor from the "Sydney Herald", was responsible for painting the scenery, and when the curtain went up there was invariably a round of

applause for the setting, because the audience fully realised the difficulties under which we were working.

To finance purchases we ran ten cent sweepstakes, with prizes of up to fifty ticals. We usually made a profit of 150 ticals on each sweep, and with this money we purchased all sorts of materials in the camp. It was really amazing what some of the fellows had stowed away in their kit bags. One chap sold us six pairs of silk stockings for ten ticals, another had a lot of imitation jewellery, which helped to make our female impersonators look more glamorous. From others we purchased a grey civilian overcoat, ladies handbags, lengths of dress material, crayons and paints, shirts, slacks and tonettes.

Through the Japanese we bought three petrol lamps for stage lighting, which enabled us to put on our shows at night instead of in the late afternoon as previously. Using cut down petrol tins as reflectors, we obtained a much better effect from our scenery in the night light than we had in daylight. The Japs also purchased for us such items as lipstick, face powder, and coloured inks. No doubt they made a good profit for themselves, for the prices they charged us were exorbitant.

Following my visit to Chunkai, and by arrangement with Major Bill Pyecock, O.C. of the Chunkai Concert Party, we obtained permission for their "Swingtette" to visit Tamarkan and give us a programme. This swing band was a very clever combination of drums, slap bass, trumpet and piano accordeon. The accordeonist was a Dutch Eurasian named Samathini, and was far and away the best performer on the instrument I have ever heard. A sound musician, and a showman to his fingertips, Samathini made a tremendous hit with the Tamarkanites.

In July 1944 came rumours that Tamarkan camp was to be closed, and that we were all to be transferred to Chunkai. Some time in August an advance party of Australians under Lon Kerr and Col Cameron left for Chunkai to prepare for the movement of the main body. But the Japanese had reckoned without the floods! In September the river at Chunkai overflowed its banks, and a large part of the camp was soon under water. As a result the Japs reversed their intention, and during October and November large parties from Chunkai began to arrive at Tamarkan. We had to build new huts to accommodate them.

It was at this time that the long standing dispute over the question of officers working came to a head. During the worst period of 1943 the Japanese had made no serious attempt to force the officers to work, although two or three times they had tried by threats to add a few score officers to the numbers employed on the railway. When we first came to Burma many of the men considered that the officers should work the same as they did, but this was a short-sighted view, as events proved. Admittedly there were some officers who did not do as much as they could have done for the men, but the majority did help them in many ways. Officers acted as a buffer between the Japanese and the men, and a lot of them suffered beatings as a result of their attempts to intercede on behalf of the men.

As time went on the men realised that the officers, by maintaining their status, were able to do a lot more for them than would have been possible had the Japanese reduced them to the position of labourers.

Now, in the closing months of 1944, the Japanese renewed the pressure to make officers work at Tamarkan. As the pressure increased, Lt. Col. Anderson and Lt. Col. Ramsay, the two senior Australian officers, decided to compromise by agreeing that a

certain number of officers should be engaged in the construction of the extra huts needed to accommodate the parties arriving from Chunkai. In addition, as many odd jobs as possible were found for idle officers, many of the jobs existing in name only.

One job which proved rather popular was a vegetable garden started by officers, on the bank of the river. The conditions here were very pleasant, and although the work was not easy, the occupation was a healthy one. Many others found employment in the canteen and kitchens. We could perform these tasks without loss of status, and most of those concerned came to find some pleasure in their new activity, for they realised that it was better to have something useful to do instead of spending the days "bashing their spines".

John Shaw took the opportunity of putting into operation a pet scheme of his which he had been urging Anderson to put to the Japanese for some months. John wanted to start a course of educational lectures for all ranks. He realised that our mental faculties were becoming sluggish for want of exercise, and that some stimulus was needed.

In the early days before the "blitz" on the railway, camp fire talks, debates, quizzes and lectures had provided this mental exercise. Now, with the end of the war in sight, John took the practical view that what was needed was some activity which would stimulate our mental processes, and prepare us for the place we would have to take in the community after the war.

The Japs were suspicious at first, but finally gave permission for lectures on such subjects as farming, business management, salesmanship, etc. John drew up a syllabus, and put in a lot of work getting together suitable teachers and lecturers. The scheme was well under way, and several classes had already commenced when suddenly the Japs vetoed the whole thing.

John was very disappointed, a lot of hard work had been wasted, and what looked like a promising beginning ended in failure through no fault of his own. Nor we were allowed to reintroduce the plan, although requests were made at intervals. The suspicious Nips probably thought we were plotting fifth column activities, it never occurred to them that if we wanted to do any plotting we did not need educational lectures to camouflage our activities.

One day we were ordered to prepare for a sports day. Races of various kinds were to be held, and the Nips said that they would compete with the prisoners in many of the events, and would also donate the prizes. We had about three weeks to prepare for the occasion, and decided to make a gala day of it. The parade ground was marked off for the various races, and a limited number of bookies were to be permitted to set up their stands.

The enthusiasm was tremendous, and when the great day dawned the whole camp turned out to witness the varied programme. To the surprise and mortification of the Japanese, most of the races were won by the prisoners. Captain Dave Thompson, in a wonderful burst of speed, left the Japs standing in the hundred yards sprint, and in the mile race a young Australian ex harrier easily outdistanced all his competitors. Sgt. Jack Farmer, hot favourite for the "hobby horse" novelty event, outpaced the rest of the field and won in a canter. The only event won by the Japs was the "bamboo race". Teams of six men had their right ankles joined together by tying each man's ankle to a long stick of bamboo. All the left ankles were similarly joined. With their hands resting on the

shoulders of the man in front, each member of the team had to move his feet exactly in unison with the others, or confusion resulted. The Japs had practised well, and beat us by team work. Chanting their "ichi, ni, san, shi" as they moved along in perfect unison, they won the race fairly easily.

The Japanese camp commander distributed the prizes, mostly in cash, with a wry grin on his face. We rather suspected that the sports day had been arranged to give the Japs an opportunity of taking us down a peg or two, and demonstrating their own superiority. Despite the much better physical condition of the Nips, it did not work out that way, and the experiment was not repeated. Our men won by sheer determination. The Jap is a bad loser, and after we had won the first event or two, the rest of them seemed discouraged, and did not put forth their best effort.

As time went on, the men's possessions dwindled. There was a group of traders in the camp who made regular visits to the neighbouring Thai villages to sell whatever clothing or other articles were available. The traders took many risks, but the profits they made were considerable. Opinion was divided on the ethics of "trading". There were those who considered that a man had a perfect right to sell what was his own. If he had a watch, or a pen, a blanket or a pair of shorts which he wanted to sell, then he was entitled to dispose of them, and to use the proceeds as he thought fit.

Undoubtedly many unselfish acts were performed. Many a man sold his watch, perhaps a parting gift from his wife or sweetheart, so that he could buy extra food for a sick comrade. Others of course sold their possessions in order to buy additional food for themselves, and nobody denied their right to do this. Those who were opposed to the activities of the traders maintained that it led to thieving, and there is no denying that many despicable things were done. It was not unknown for a man to steal his comrade's shirt or blanket and dispose of it through a trader so that he could fill his own stomach. Some even sunk as low as to steal medical supplies, which God knows were scarce enough already. There was a quick market for quinine and bandages in the villages, for these commodities had been in short supply since the war.

Others condemned the trader because of the possible repercussions on the whole camp if one of them was apprehended by the Japs outside the fence. We had been warned that the lot of us would be put on short rations if anyone was caught trading with the natives, but this threat never materialised.

There was another type of trader who carried on his activities inside the camp. These fellows would hear of someone who wanted to sell, say, a pair of shorts. One of them would undertake to dispose of the article on commission, and after ascertaining the owner's rock bottom price, the trader would then hawk the shorts around the officer's hut until he found a buyer. Sometimes he would bring them to me, and I would buy them for the concert party. Anything made over and above the owner's price was profit for the trader. Through these inside traders I was able to replenish my own dwindling wardrobe. Handkerchiefs were almost impossible to buy, and when I asked one of the traders to try and get me half a dozen, the best he could produce was a set of blue linen table d'oyleys which some chap had purchased in Malaya to take home to his wife.

Another source of clothing was the disposal of the effects of a prisoner who had just died. We got quite callous over these matters, familiarity with death bringing about an attitude of indifference. The camp quartermaster usually took control of the belongings of a deceased prisoner, and distributed them as he thought fit to those who

needed them. Many a man went to the Q.M. to ask for a shirt or a hat, and had been told to come back "after the next funeral".

One day a member of the 2/3rd, Reserve Motor Transport Company who died in the camp hospital, was found to have a large collection of jewellery among his belongings. The disposal of these trinkets gave Anderson and Ramsay quite a headache. Finally it was decided to take the Japanese Q.M. into their confidence, and to ask him to dispose of the stuff in Kanburi.

The object was to use the money to purchase extra food for the hospital. From that point of view our object was achieved. It was not known to us how much profit the Jap Q.M. made for himself, but he handed over three thousand ticals to Lt. Col. Ramsay, who used it to the best advantage for the sick. The outcome was not so pleasant for the Jap Q.M. because his superiors got to hear of it. Soon afterwards he was arrested by the Kempei, and taken away for "questioning". The Kempeis have their own methods of extracting information from their victims. We heard later that the Jap was shot, but that was probably an exaggeration. It was quite likely, however, that he was sent to prison.

As to the ethics of selling the dead man's jewellery, it was generally acknowledged that the camp commander's action was justified. The stuff was regarded by most of us as "loot". The 2/3rd M.T. Coy had earned the reputation, whether deservedly or not I do not know, of having looted deserted shops and homes in abandoned towns during the hurried retreat down the Malayan Peninsular.

The unit had been attached to the 3rd. Indian Corps at Alor Star in Northern Malaya. Their role in the retreat had been the transport of troops and ammunition to points further south. Often they were the last to leave a town before the rapidly advancing Japs entered it, and they certainly had rare opportunities to help themselves from the deserted shops. Some of their drivers had been indiscreet enough to boast that they had filled their pockets with rings and watches. As a result the whole unit had been designated "a gang of looters". Nobody blamed them very much, and the gibes at their expense were given in good part, but George Kiernan and other officers of the 2/3rd. M.T. took a poor view, and were loud in their denials.

For eleven months life at Tamarkan proceeded fairly smoothly. The improvement in our conditions had brought about a better state of health, and our general condition was much sounder than at any time since work commenced on the railway.

Then, on 29th November our peaceful existence was rudely shattered. The whole camp, except the sick in hospital and a few in each hut who were excused from tenko, were out on the parade ground for evening roll call at half past seven. The officer, a kumi, in charge of the Senior Major, Johnnie Stringer, was out in front of the parade. We were waiting for the Japs to come and count us, when we heard the sound of planes.

All heads turned towards the west, from whence the whirr of engines could be plainly heard. Headed in our direction, and coming out of the setting sun, we counted twenty-one large bombers flying at about five thousand feet.

Somebody said, "Its alright, they're Nips."

"Like hell they are", cried another, "the Nips haven't any four-engine bombers".

Swiftly, menacingly, the big planes continued their flight in our direction. We grew uneasy, and looked at one another in indecision. One or two started to move in the direction of the slit trenches, which ran the length of each hut just under the eaves.

"I think you had better take cover, gentlemen", said Johnnie Stringer quietly.

At that instant the Ack Ack battery opened up, but their aim was wild. Closer and closer came the planes, and louder and more ominous grew the roar of the mighty engines. I dived into the slit trench at the end of No.1 hut with Pat Giddings and Ray Nixon.

Suddenly the machine guns and cannon of the Liberators commenced firing at the "Ack Ack" post, about two hundred yards from where we were lying. As the planes passed overhead with a deafening roar, we heard the ominous swish of falling bombs.

The giant bombers came over in three waves, dropping their first death dealing load on the anti-aircraft post. The second wave dropped theirs a bit closer, and as I heard the third lot falling I got a horrible sick feeling in the stomach. I thought they were aiming at us. This last lot of explosions fairly shook the ground, and we felt the sides of the trench tremble, and a blast of hot air rush past our ears.

A piece of shrapnel hit the side of my hat and fell in the trench just in front of my face. For the first time in two and a half years I regretted the day I threw away my steel helmet in the Botanical Gardens at Singapore the night the fortress fell. I picked up the piece of shrap, but quickly dropped it, it was too hot to hold. Trying not to appear frightened, I looked around at the planes, which had now passed overhead and were circling the camp. Someone yelled, "Look out, they're coming back".

A cold fear gripped me, and I stood up, undecided whether to remain in my present trench, or to go to another one further from the Ack Ack post, from which clouds of smoke were now pouring. I looked at the planes again, they were still circling, so I decided to make for a bigger trench. There was a large ditch surrounding the rice store, it was dug to keep the rats out.

As I ran towards it one of the Korean guards pointed his rifle at me, and yelled out to stop. I was past worrying about guards, and covered the hundred yards to the rice store in record time. I looked up again, and saw that the formation was now headed back to the west. They kept on this course, and in a few minutes were out of sight.

By now I had recovered from my initial fright, and went back to No.1 hut. I was amazed to find that a large bomb had hit the hut dead centre, while another had landed between 1 and 2 huts. Two more had fallen on the boundary fence near the A.A. Battery. The craters were fifteen feet deep in the centre, and fifty feet across. The whole camp was seething with excitement, and men were feverishly digging among the ruins looking for survivors. My heart sank as I surveyed the ruins of the huts, and contemplated the fearful destructive power of the bombs which had hit them. There was not much time for reflection, however, plenty of work had to be done.

Working parties were quickly organised in relays, and I joined the first shift of officers, which was to dig until midnight. We had just started when the Japanese ordered another tenko, which everyone, including the hospital patients, had to attend. We assembled in the darkness and discussed the situation in excited undertones. The whole camp was stunned by the suddenness of the attack, and the question which occupied our minds was whether the camp itself would be the target next time.

It was generally agreed that the bombers had intended their lethal loads to fail on the anti-aircraft battery, and that the bombs which had fallen in the camp were "overs", and not intended for us. What worried us was that we did not know whether the Allies were aware that Tamarkan was a P.O.W. Camp. Would they come back again? Did they think Tamarkan was a Japanese troop concentration? If so, would they return and wipe it

out? This last idea did not bear thinking about.

Perhaps the bridge would be the target next time, but would the bombing be any more accurate? What if they missed the bridge and hit us? We discussed all these possibilities and many others while the tenko was being held, and then returned to our digging. The tenko revealed about thirty missing, and we now set to work in earnest to try and locate them.

Several were found buried beneath the bamboo slats where the huts had collapsed and fallen across the slit trench outside. One fellow was buried for several hours, but was quite cheerful when his comrades dug him out. I worked till midnight with about fifty other officers, clearing the rubble from the bomb craters. When we were relieved by the next shift, I turned in. At about half past three in the morning we were rudely awakened by the air raid siren in Kanburi, two miles away. There was a bright moon shining, a perfect night for bombers. Naturally our first thought was that the planes had returned to bomb the camp, so we streaked for a clump of trees beyond the camp boundary. This time the guards did not worry about trying to keep us in, they were all too busy racing for shelter.

I admit I was frightened. The prospect of being bombed by our own planes was not at all pleasant. During the action on the Island of Singapore Japanese bombing did not worry us nearly so much. We had a job to do, our minds were occupied, and our own A.A. guns were fighting back. In addition we were well fed and in good health.

But now things were different. We had been struggling to keep ourselves alive for nearly three years, and with victory for the Allies in sight we did not relish the prospect of being wiped out by our own Air Force. The closely packed huts offered a perfect target, and a few well placed bombs could easily have annihilated the lot of us. However, the planes continued on their southerly course, they were probably after more important targets in Bangkok, fifty miles away. It was rather disappointing to hear a couple of the Ack Ack guns still firing, we had hoped that at least they had suffered more severely than we had. We got the “All Clear” half an hour later, and returned to our huts, relieved but far from happy.

For the next three days we continued to search the ruins, and in all recovered sixteen dead bodies in addition to over twenty or more recovered alive. On the third day we found the last corpse. First we saw a hand protruding from the debris, the skin was a bluish tinge. Carefully we cleared the earth away from the body and finally got it clear. The poor fellow must have been killed instantly, there was a large splinter wound in the centre of his forehead. His body had been flung several yards from the centre of the hut, where he was known to have been sitting when the bombs fell. He was a Signalman from the Royal Corps of Signals, a unit which suffered more casualties from this raid than any other.

I assisted in carrying him on a stretcher to the concert party stage, where the rest of the recovered bodies were laid out. That afternoon I attended the mass funeral and burial service at the cemetery, nearly a mile from the camp. On the way out we passed the battery post, and were able to observe the damage done by the bombing.

The petrol dump had received a direct hit and was a mass of charred ruins, while every tree in the vicinity bore shrapnel scars. Many trees had been snapped off at the base by large fragments, and bore testimony to the efficiency of the anti-personnel bombs, or “daisy cutters”, as they were called. We could not see what had happened to

the guns, as they were surrounded by solid mounds of earth.

On the fourth day after the bombing Anderson reported to the Japanese that two men had been blown to pieces and their bodies could not be found. The Japs accepted this story, which was believed by most of the men in camp. It was not until after the war that we found out what had happened to these two men.

In the general confusion they had escaped from the camp, and had been sheltered by the Thais, who handed them over to the Underground. They were passed on to some American paratroops who had landed in the Kanburi area, and were secretly training and arming the Thais for a mass rebellion. The two men remained with these Underground troops until the end of the war, when they made themselves known and told a fascinating story of their experiences.

After the bombing of 29th November, air raid alerts became an almost daily occurrence. On 8th December, the third anniversary of America's entry into the war, there was an aerial blitz along the entire length of the Burma-Siam railway. For the first time the big steel and concrete bridge just outside the camp received some attention. The raid was in force, and lasted about out two hours.

We remained in our trenches while the bombs whistled down, and prayed that our bomber's aim would be true, and that no more would fall in the camp. Luckily none did, but we spent a very uncomfortable couple of hours, while pieces of shrapnel from the A.A. shells sprayed all over the camp. One or two men received slight wounds, but no other damage was done inside the fence. The next day a working party which the Japs had sent out to fill in the bomb craters near the bridge approaches reported that the bridge had not been hit. We moaned loudly. "That means they'll be back soon for: another try, and if they miss, they'll be back again, and again" said John.

They came back again alright - on 13th December. This time they tried different tactics. Instead of high level bombing by groups of six or nine planes, they came over singly at a few hundred feet, and we heard the explosions without the preliminary whistle of the falling bomb. This was more frightening than the high level attacks.

With a deafening roar of four mighty engines, and with all their machine guns and cannon vomiting sudden death, the giant Liberators dived again and again at the bridge until their bomb loads were exhausted. As they passed right overhead we looked up apprehensively and saw the gaping doors of the bomb bays wide open, and prayed fervently that the bomb aimer would not press the button too soon.

After the attack we learned that the steel bridge had received only slight damage from a near miss. Two hundred yards away the Japs had built a parallel wooden bridge, which was intended to be used in the event of the steel bridge being damaged enough to put it out of use. This wooden structure had several spans knocked out of it.

The trouble with these low level attacks was that the Jap machine gun posts around the camp perimeter opened fire at the planes as they came in low, and sprayed the camp with bullets. Several landed just outside the Drones Club, and we could see the spurts of dust where they hit the ground.

One point five machine gun bullet came through our roof, chipped the bamboo post over Major Elkin's bed, knocked a hole in the attap near Buck Rogers' bunk, and struck the ground between the feet of Frank Harding, a British Major who had just come to live with us.

Again we fumed at the inaccuracy of the bomb aimers, and loudly cursed the

Allied Air Force for frightening the wits out of us for so little result. Following these last two attacks, Lt. Col. Anderson renewed his endeavours to have Tamarkan evacuated. Finally the Japs decided to transfer everybody at Tamarkan across to Chunkai in stages On 16 December the first group was ordered to move. John Shaw, George Kiernan, Arch Ewart, Norman Carter and I were nominated for the first party, and I for one was glad to see the last of Tamarkan. With air alerts sounding at least once and sometimes three times a day, our nerves were being sadly frayed, and I doubt if any of the thousand who lined up for tenko before leaving for Chunkai on 16th, had any regrets.

John and I discussed the best method of carrying our gear over the bridge, which we had to cross in order to get to Chunkai. We did not wish to be handicapped by having heavy packs and haversacks strapped to our shoulders should the bridge be attacked whilst we were crossing it. The problem caused us some worry, but we finally decided that the best method was for the both of us to hang all our gear on to a stout bamboo pole which we could carry on our shoulders. Then, should it be necessary, we could dump the lot in a split second.

But suppose we were caught in the middle of the bridge with a thousand others, and an attack came, what was the best thing to do then? Should we jump thirty feet into the river, and try and race for the bank, or lie down on the bridge decking arid hope for the best? Would our Air Force, should it attack the bridge while we were crossing, be able to recognise us as friends, or would they assume that we were Japs, and try to wipe us out?

It was a worrying problem, and occupied our minds to the exclusion of all else. Just before we were due to leave there was an air alert, and we spent an hour waiting by the slit trenches until the "all clear" sounded. We were then moved over to the parade around and hurriedly counted before moving out of the camp gate.

As we approached the bridge we cast anxious eyes skyward, our ears keenly alert for the sound of planes. The head of the column had just reached the opposite side of the bridge when there was a hold up. John and I were near the centre of the column, and by craning our necks we could see a diesel engine on the track at the narrowest part of the bridge approach. Some sort of an argument seemed to be taking place. We in the rear grew impatient, not to say frightened. This was just what we did not want to happen to be in the middle of the bridge with the possibility of a raid, and a thousand milling men all trying to get off at once.

Suddenly a group of Japs working on the river bank started yelling and pointing upwards. I thought they had either seen or heard planes, and my stomach turned over. Everybody commenced to press forward, and after a few anxious minutes the jam at the head of the bridge was cleared, and the column moved ahead fairly quickly.

We breathed a sigh of relief as we got our feet on solid ground again, and soon left the bridge behind us. The holdup was caused by a rail motor with several Japanese officers aboard arriving at the bridge approach at the same time as the head of the column. Our guards wanted to get the prisoners clear before the rail motor crossed the bridge, but the officers had insisted that we stand aside to allow them to cross first. The argument was won by our guards, and as we passed the diesel we noticed a scowling bunch of Nip officers sitting in the passenger's seat.

Once we were clear of the bridge we lost no time in getting a safe distance from it. Four kilometres along the railway track we came to Chunkai, where an efficient

British camp staff under Lt. Col. Outram, a British artillery officer, was ready to receive us. We had not been searched before leaving Taijarkan, but as soon as we were lined up for tenko, the Japs made a casual search through our belongings. Practically nothing was confiscated, and we were soon allocated to our new quarters.

The huts were wider than those at Tamarkan, and instead of having a long sleeping platform, they were divided into cubicles, each holding two officers. Home-made tables and chairs were placed down the centre of the hut, and groups sat at each table for meals and for reading, playing cards, etc., a much better and more cosy arrangement than we had enjoyed at any other camp. It was like the Drones Club at Tamarkan, only on a much larger scale.

The Japanese camp commander was Lieut. Kokubu, a repulsive looking individual with a reputation for hard drinking. Brutal and ruthless when drunk, he was reasonable enough, by comparison with fiends like Mizutani, when he was sober.

There was a splendid concert party at Chunkai, and they put on a show soon after our arrival. The stage was larger than the one at Tamarkan, and was situated at the lower end of a natural auditorium, with a picturesque background of tall stately trees flanking the river. The first show we saw was Noel Coward's "Hay Fever", in which a talented cast of British officers treated an appreciative audience to an excellent performance. The producer was an English corporal named Leo Britt, to whom the whole show was a credit.

Major Bill Pyecock was still chairman of the concert party, and he had built up a great team of workers. For some reason or other, whenever he appeared on the stage to make an announcement, he was greeted with cries of "Taxi, Taxi" from the audience. In addition to his concert party activities, Bill was camp quartermaster. This job brought him in constant association with the Jap staff, and he had achieved a reputation for being able to handle the Japs very successfully. By a combination of shrewd commonsense and outright bluff, Bill Pyecock could get more out of the Japanese than any man I met. On Christmas morning, 1944 Kokubu walked into the quartermaster's hut, where Bill and a few of his cronies were having a quiet little celebration drinking a bottle or two of Thai whisky which had been smuggled into camp by means best known to Bill himself.

Kokubu looked around suspiciously. Drinking by prisoners was not allowed, and Kokubu must have known that the liquor could only have been procured by illegal methods. However, Bill was unabashed. Strolling over to Kokubu, he slapped him heartily on the shoulder.

"Merry Christmas, Mr. Kokubu. We're just having a Christmas party. If you want to join in, you'd better bring along your own whisky. We've got only one bottle left".

Kokubu was nonplussed for a moment, then he said,

"But I have only one bottle of Thai whisky".

"Never mind, that's better than nothing. Go and get it. Kokubu went off and got the bottle, which he brought back and shared with Bill and his companions. Nobody else could have treated Kokubu in this cavalier fashion and got away with it.

We were told another story which indicates Pyecock's highly successful methods of dealing with the Nipponese. One day he was sitting in his store reading the camp news sheet, which was a typed copy of the latest B.B.C. news handed round amongst certain officers for dissemination to the troops. A suspicious sentry was prowling round the camp, and he hovered near Bill's table trying to get a glimpse of the paper. Bill distracted

his attention and then quickly slipped the news sheet through the attap partition into the next cubicle, where one of his storemen recovered it.

Picking up another piece of paper of similar appearance, Bill pretended to read it, when, as expected, the sentry came right over to the table and demanded to know what he was reading. Bill feigned indignation.

"How dare you come into my store and demand to read my private papers. I will speak to Mr. Kokubu about this".

The sentry was puzzled, and uncertain as to his rights in the matter. He tried to bluff it out, but Bill's stronger personality prevailed, and the sentry left. Bill went straight over to Kokubu and complained of unwarranted interference in his private affairs, not forgetting to make it appear that the sentry had acted without the assent of Kokubu himself.

The bluff worked, and Kokubu instructed his guards that in future they were not to interfere with Major Pyecock without his (Kokubu's) permission. Soon afterwards the dangerous practice of committing the news to paper was discontinued, and it was passed on by word of mouth only.

On Christmas afternoon the Japanese camp commander showed his true form. Unluckily, I was not so successful in handling the situation as Bill Pyecock. There were about thirty Sigs in camp at the time, and I had arranged to meet them in a clearing beneath a clump of bamboos by the camp cemetery at three o'clock. We intended to have a cup of coffee together by way of a mild Christmas celebration, and to that end we all met together at the time arranged. We had just about finished the coffee and were yarning about old times when a Japanese sergeant and Lieut. Kokubu appeared.

Kokubu did not see us at first, but the N.C.O. did, and he pointed to Kokubu and indicated to us by gestures that we had better get away before Kokubu spotted us. We were in rather a dilemma, because the part of the camp we had chosen was out of bounds, and there were only two ways back to our huts. One way would have taken us past a Japanese sentry post, with the risk of being challenged and marched to the guard house for punishment. The other, they way we had come, was now barred by Kokubu. We decided to stay put, and hope the he would not see us.

However our luck was out, Kokubu did see us and came straight over. He was very drunk, and looked around belligerently, his red bleary eyes blinking under shaggy brows.

"Where officer?", he asked thickly.

I admitted that I was the only officer present. I was wearing only a thin shirt, a pair of shorts, and clogs. For some reason I had forgotten to wear my badges of rank, and this was a breach of regulations. Pointing to my shoulder, Kokubu growled at me,

"Where crown."

Knowing his knowledge of English was limited, I answered in Japanese,

"Koya desu." (It is in the hut)

He bared his teeth in a savage snarl, and aimed a blow with his fist at my head. I stepped back and took the punch on my upraised forearm. This was not to Kokubu's liking, and he tried a few more wild swings, which I parried similarly. Thoroughly enraged, he yelled at me,

"Bakayaro, kiotsuke." (Fool, stand to attention)

He then demanded to know why we were out of bounds. I endeavoured to

explain, as far as my limited knowledge of Japanese permitted, that we were celebrating Christmas by having a harmless cup of coffee together. My explanation did not please him at all, and he swung at me again. As I was now standing at attention, I was unable to raise my arm, but I saved my false teeth by quickly slipping them into my pocket. I thought that if I stood still the punishment would be over all the quicker. He let me have several punches on the left side of the jaw only, as his big samurai sword interfered with a free punch on the other side.

After half a dozen blows he paused, and started to berate me again. I was breaking the rules, he said, by not wearing my badges of rank, arid it was a breach of regulations for more than five prisoners to assemble out of doors in one group. Still swaying drunkenly, he tried to unfasten the buckle on the scabbard, but he was too drunk to manage even this simple task.

In baffled rage, he started to draw his sword from its scabbard. My mind worked furiously. Would he attack with the naked sword? He might even attempt to kill me, as I had known others to be killed in similar circumstances. He was so drunk that he was capable of almost any atrocity. My eyes darted to right and left, looking for a way of escape. Although I was prepared to take a bashing, I was determined not to stand there and let him run me through.

Much to my relief, he changed his mind, and pushed the weapon back in its scabbard. Then, swinging the scabbard from his hip, he started belting me up and down the left thigh. This was an awkward and undignified method of punishment, so he again fumbled with the catch, but failed to release it. Baffled once more, he snarled like an animal, and again drew the gleaming blade.

My heart beat fast, but I stood still, and tried to hold him with my eyes. It was a battle of wills. Kokubu glared back at me, and I could see that he was trying to steel himself to the task of "making his sword honourable", a Japanese euphemism for taking human life. To my great relief, he pushed the sword home, and clambered on to a nearby tree stump. He started yelling for a sentry, and in a moment the guard at the gate came up at the double.

The sentry presented arms and stood at attention while Kokubu spoke rapidly in Japanese. I could not catch all he said, but the gist of it was that the sentry was to hasten to the guard house and bring an escort to march us off under arrest.

All this time Sgt. Roy Stacey, Sigs Leo Ryan, Greg Nevin, Bluey Andrews and the others stood quietly by. They knew from experience that interference was worse than useless. I knew how they felt, but was thankful that Kokubu had confined his attention to me, instead of bashing the lot of them. After beating me a few more times with his sheathed sword, Kokubu turned and spoke to his N.C.O. who had been standing by all the time. Their conversation was too rapid for me to follow, but I watched Kokubu closely, and saw his mood changing. I had the feeling that the sergeant was sorry for what had happened, and was tactfully putting in a word on our behalf. Whatever the sergeant said brought about a complete reversal of form on the part of Kokubu, who now turned and looked at me with a new interest.

"You Ingris ka?" (Are you English?)

"No, I am an Australian", I replied.

"Ah", said Kokubu with a friendly grin, "you Anzac?"

I could see that the N.C.O. had said something about our nationality. Perhaps, I

thought, Kokubu has a soft spot for Aussies, and had mistaken me for a Dutchman or an Englishman.

"Yes," I said, "I am an Anzac".

"Ah, so. All men Anzac?" With a drunken sweep of his arm he included the thirty or so Sigs.

"Yes, all men Anzac".

He waved his arms around in a wide friendly gesture, as though to indicate that we were all friends together. "Go home" he said, "All men go home."

Surprised and relieved at his sudden and unexpected change of mood, we made for our huts as quickly as possible. On the way we passed a couple of armed guards coming up at the run to march us off to the guardhouse, but we pretended not to notice them, and went inside our huts without delay. It was the first time in nearly three years of captivity that I had been struck by a Japanese. Too bad that my long run of luck should have been broken on Christmas Day.

Kokubu's rapid change of mood was inexplicable, but typical of the Japs. Less than five minutes after dismissing us he reverted to his former ugly mood, and beat up a Dutchman unmercifully, giving him a far worse bashing than I had just experienced. Finding a hole in the bamboo fence, Kokubu picked on the nearest prisoner, who happened to be a Dutchman, and demanded to know who had made the opening. The Dutchman denied any knowledge of it, and was probably perfectly innocent, but Kokubu's ugly mood had returned. He knocked the unfortunate fellow down, and for several minutes brutally kicked him about the head and body. I did not witness the incident, but those who did assured me that my beating was nothing to what the poor Dutchman suffered. That night the concert party presented their Christmas pantomime, "Cinderella", which was preceded by some delightful singing of carols by the choir. The delightful rendering of the ever popular "Silent Night, Holy Night", and other Christmas carols made us forget for a little while that we were prisoners of war.

In the panto, a handsome young English subaltern, Dicky Lucas, made a charming Cinderella. Captain Freddie Thompson was the principal comedian, and was ably assisted by a capable cast. The painting of the ballroom scene was a miracle of achievement by a Dutch artist, who had the most meagre materials at his disposal. On a plain grass mat utilised as a backcloth, using lime wash, ink, tumeric and cow manure, the artist had painted a scene which for balance of colour and perspective would have been difficult to surpass.

On New Year's morning 1945 we held a sports carnival. The fittest men in camp competed with one another in relay races, tug of war and sprint events. British, Dutch and Australians formed rival teams, and at the close of the morning's sport the British had won on points, although the Aussie tug of war team, led by Arthur Watchorn, was undefeated. Kokubu was present, drunk as usual, but in a cheerful mood. He staggered about the playing field, cheering on the competitors. Finally he insisted on the Japanese competing in a tug of war with the Aussies, but our chaps pulled them over the line three times in succession with the greatest of ease.

The food at Chunkai was better and more plentiful than at any other camp we had been in, and in addition the P.R.I., as the British called their canteen, was fairly well stocked. We were able to buy eggs and bananas, and as a result the condition of the men at Chunkal was better than at any time during the last two years.

The canteen manager was Captain "Bunny" Gare, of the 2nd. (Selangor) Battalion, Federated Malay States Volunteer Force. I had known him in Kuala Lumpur while we were there in 1941, where he had been manager of the well known firm of Robinson's. Another old acquaintance from K.L. was also a volunteer officer, Captain Tommy Ross, who was able to give me news of several mutual friends of the "good old days" at Kuala Lumpur.

About a fortnight after our arrival at Chunkai we heard some disturbing news from Tamarkan. Captain "Ike" Parker, one of the Americans, had been taken away for interrogation by the Kempei Tai (Secret Police). Ike had been one of those on the cemetery party who had traded British and American money for Thai ticals.

A few days later we learned that Buck Rogers had also been arrested by the Kempeis. Buck had been responsible for getting us the "Bangkok Chronicle", and all the members of the Drones Club were implicated. Some of us were now at Chunkai, so John Shaw, Archie Ewart, Joe Harris, George Kiernan, Leicester Hellyer and I held a hurried council of war.

We had heard of the Kempei methods of torture, and realised the possibility of Ike or Buck being forced to give the names of any others concerned in the "Bangkok Chronicle" affair. It was difficult to estimate just how much Buck would tell if he should break down under torture. Our problem was to decide what to say in the event of our being arrested. Would we deny all knowledge of it (which the Japs would not believe anyhow) or tell the whole truth?

We decided that the latter course might implicate too many others, so we finally agreed to admit that we had seen the paper at Tamarkan, but to pretend that we did not know how it came into the camp. We had to agree that we should all tell the same story, no matter what happened. We spent an anxious time for the next three or four weeks, expecting any day to be arrested and taken to the Kempei H.Q. for torture and questioning. The prospect was not at all pleasant.

As the weeks went by and nothing happened, we stopped worrying about the affair, and finally forgot about it. We were not to meet Buck Rogers and Ike Porker till after the war, when at last we heard the full story. (Thirty-eight years later in 1982 I had a letter from Buck Rogers, now a retired Colonel and living at Tacoma.)

Life passed pleasantly enough at Chunkai during the seven weeks we were there. As fresh parties arrived from Tamarkan and from jungle camps, the numbers in camp swelled by some thousands. The men were grouped in companies of about two hundred, and I was given a job as a company commander. New huts were quickly built to accommodate the extra numbers, and time passed rapidly in administrative duties.

Any spare time I had during the day or evening was spent playing chess with Norman. We had many a stirring tussle over the chess board between evening meal and tenko, and later by the light of a slush lamp in the hut.

News from the B.B.C. came in regularly. For this blessing, too much praise cannot be given to the brothers Max and Don Webber, two British officers who operated the secret radio. In the face of certain death if they were discovered, the Webbers had been working the set for nearly two years, and they personally passed on the news to selected representatives from each officer's hut, who in turn relayed it to their own groups.

It was a strict rule that the news, once given, would under no circumstances be

discussed. English speaking sentries in rubber soled shoes were known to be prowling round the huts listening to scraps of conversation. We were very careful of course, and the Japs did not get a clue.

The radio operated on torch batteries, which were purchased by the traders in Kanburi. These chaps too, deserve great credit for the risks they took. The batteries were very expensive, and did not last long, so all the officers in camp made a regular contribution from their monthly pay to a secret fund for buying them.

Another source of supply was from the unsuspecting Nips. The hospital orderlies and doctors were permitted to use torches at night in doing the hospital rounds. It was a common practice to ask the Nip quartermaster for fresh batteries for the torches, and then to hand them over to the Webbers for use in the radio set.

By their unselfishness, efficiency and undoubted heroism, the Webber brothers did more towards sustaining our morale than all the doctors in Siam. This is not to decry the work of the medicos, who did a sterling job, but in my opinion the uplifting effect of news of Allied victories saved as many lives as did the efforts of the doctors, and gave us the will to carry on with the certainty that our arms would be victorious in the end.

Every Monday evening the whole camp turned out to see the weekly concert. The concert party was composed almost entirely of British officers, some of whom were excellent actors. Noel Coward's "Hay Fever" was a snappy show, and Shaw's "Major Barbara" would have done credit to any of the smaller dramatic companies at Home. Captain Howard Potts as the mother in this last show gave a noteworthy performance.

Norman Carter was asked to produce Sutton Vane's well known play "Outward Bound", which he rewrote entirely from memory. This was an astonishing feat under the circumstances Norman had this play almost ready for presentation, and had commenced rehearsals for "When Knights were bold", when we got word to prepare for another move. There had been rumours for some weeks that the officers and men were to be separated, and that all the officers in Siam were to be concentrated at Kanburi.

The move started early in February, when the first batch of officers from the camp at Tamuan, a few miles down the river, were transferred to Kanburi. Our orders quickly followed. On 5th February, the first group at Chunkai were lined up to be searched and counted. John and I were in this party, and we viewed our departure from Chunkai with many regrets. The seven weeks away from the tense and jittery atmosphere of Tamarkan had been a rest for our frayed nerves.

There had been a few air alerts, and we had often seen large numbers of Super Fortresses flying south at about 20,000 feet. Only once since we left had there been an attack on the bridge at Tamarkan, and that had been by a single plane. Only one bomb was dropped.

Now we were to change the picturesque and peaceful surroundings of Chunkai for the flat, uninteresting and already overcrowded camp at Kanburi. Worse still, we were to go via Tamarkan, where we had to spend a few days before moving on to Kanburi.

We lined up in five ranks and spread our gear out on the ground for the customary search. This time the Japanese made a pretty thorough job of it. I decided to take a chance on the diary I had written, and left it to the mercy of the searchers, as it was too bulky to hide on my person.

My propelling pencil, a gift from Dorothy while I was in Malaya, I hid in the lining at the top of my shorts. This time, however, we were subjected to a personal

search as well, and to my consternation the Jap who searched file went straight to my waist, felt the pencil, and extracted it. For once I had under rated the Nip.

I decided to appeal to his sentiment, and said "Wifu Presento", a phrase universally used among prisoners to indicate something of sentimental value, or a present from one's wife. This appeal had often proved effective in persuading an acquisitive Nip from forcing a prisoner to part with a treasured possession. The guard looked at the pencil, gave it a couple of twists, and handed it back to me.

"Arigato gozaimasu", (Thanks very much) I said, and with a sigh of relief put the pencil back in my pocket. It was probably just as well that I did not have in my possession compass, which I had been keeping for some time. Only a week or so before I had dropped it down one of the latrines, as most of us had long since given up any idea of escape. With the war progressing so well in Europe, it seemed only a matter of months before we would be free men again. When we went back to our kits after the search, John found that several of his papers had been confiscated, and he made a protest through the interpreter. The papers were harmless enough, and contained engineering notes, some of which were later returned to him. I was lucky, none of my papers had been taken, and my diary was still intact. Shouldering our packs, we marched back along the track to Tamarkan. This time we crossed the river by the low wooden bridge which ran parallel to the steel bridge over which we had passed a few weeks earlier. It was just about lunch time and although Allied planes were not usually about at this time of the day, we breathed more easily once we were safely on the other side.

Our gear was searched again when we arrived at the parade ground, but the Japs made a very perfunctory job of it, and nothing was confiscated. Harry Moverley was waiting to welcome us, and brought John and I a very welcome mug of tea.

Tamarkan was not the place it had been during the peaceful days of 1944 before the November bombing. Several of the huts had been demolished, and preparations were being made to abandon the camp completely. After lunch John and I selected a quiet corner of our hut, and made ourselves as comfortable as possible. We had just put up our mosquito nets and were preparing to settle down for a siesta, when we heard a scurrying of feet.

John looked up and saw hundreds of men running towards the slit trenches in the banana grove at the lower end of the camp. "Come on Jim, its on again."

We grabbed our blankets and ran. We were half way to the trenches before we heard the sound of planes. Keener ears than ours had heard them seconds before we did. By the time we had reached our trench the A.A. guns had opened up, and the planes were coming in for their attack on the bridge. We had just crouched down when we heard the "swish" of the first bombs falling, followed by terrific explosions. Once again we experienced that horrible sinking feeling in the stomach.

For the next two and a half hours we sat through the most fierce and terrifying raid we had yet experienced. An enemy air attack under any conditions is unpleasant enough, but it is nothing to the mental torture of an attack in force by one's own planes. What made it so excruciating for us was the uncertainty as to whether or not the camp itself would be attacked.

The Japanese had machine gun posts all around the camp perimeter, and these opened up on the planes as soon as they dived in for a low level attack. It was natural for us to expect that the fliers might mistake Tamarkan for a concentration of enemy troops,

and we knew that if the camp was attacked we would be caught like rats in a trap.

We were in a low physical condition after three years of captivity, and our nervous systems were not equal to the strain and suspense of these fierce raids. If only we knew whether or not our Air Force was aware that Tamarkan was a P.0.W. camp we would at least have been spared the horrible uncertainty. Our position was all the more hopeless because we knew that if we attempted to seek shelter outside the camp area, the Nips would turn their machine guns on us. There was no alternative but to cower in our trenches and hope fearfully for the best.

There was a lull of half an hour after the first attack, and John and I took the opportunity of putting a few bamboo slats and some rice bags over our trench to protect us from ack ack shell splinters which were falling all over the camp. In addition we folded our blankets into a thick pad and held them over our heads during the raid. The first attack was a high level one, but when the second wave came over after the lull they changed to low level tactics, the planes coming in one at a time from different directions. This type of attack was far more terrifying. It was nerve racking to hear the four engine monsters screaming. Just above at a few hundred feet, all machine guns blazing.

Bullets from the Jap machine gun posts were whining overhead, some of them so low that they smacked against the bamboo uprights of the hut just behind us. It was late in the afternoon before the raid ended, and we all breathed a sigh of relief when the all clear sounded from the siren at the paper factory in Kanburi.

We waited anxiously for news of damage to the bridge, but it was not till the following morning that we heard, much to our chagrin, that the concrete bridge had not been hit. It seemed incredible to us that with so many planes and so many bombs, not one had found its mark. Our disappointment knew no bounds, and loud and long were the curses heaped upon the heads of the Allied Air Force.

Even the R.A.A.F. officers with us, who usually found excuses for their compatriots after an unsuccessful raid, were bitter in their condemnation. The only damage to the camp was suffered by the canteen. A spark from the fireplace was carried on to the roof, where it smouldered, and then burst into flame. Under normal circumstances it would have been quickly extinguished, but although several saw the fire start, no one left his slit trench to put the fire out because the raid was then at its height. In the space of a few minutes the dry bamboo and attap of which the canteen building was built was completely consumed.

One or two men were wounded by falling shell splinters, but there were no other casualties. The Nips suffered no loss at all, and it was a bitter pill to swallow when we learned that not even the ack ack post had suffered any damage.

The following morning a small working party was taken out to the bridge, and to their dismay they were ordered to dig out several unexploded bombs. This dangerous task was accomplished without mishap, and in all, eight one thousand pound bombs were recovered. One of John's men who was in the working party told us about it afterwards.

He said it fairly made his hair stand on end and to see the Japs tackle the bombs after our chaps dug them out. Using hammers and cold chisels, the Nips nonchalantly tapped away at the nose caps while the prisoners worked alongside of them. The Jap engineers were either very brave or very ignorant of the dangers they were running, but they succeeded in defusing the bombs without any of them exploding.

John's man said he particularly noticed that the bombs were of American

manufacture, one of them being branded "Made in U.S.A. 1942, 1036 lbs." We recalled that the Rangoon newspaper "Greater Asia" had reported several cases of sabotage in American munitions factories in 1942. These dud bombs were probably some of those made by saboteurs before Roosevelt purged the fifth columnists from An$_1$erican War industry.

We were greatly relieved when orders came for the first officer party to leave Tamarkan for Kanburi on 9th February. We had been living in the same camp as the men, and under the same conditions, for just three years, and now we were to be segregated from them. Many of the men expressed regret that they should be parted from their officers at this late stage, for we all felt that the war could not last much longer.

Before leaving we handed over our reserve of canteen funds to the warrant officers who had been selected to take charge of the other ranks when the officers left. The future treatment of the men was uncertain, but a cash reserve would enable them to purchase extra food for the sick if canteens were available.

One again we were searched, but by now we had so little left to take that we had ceased to worry. After being counted and recounted, we set off on the short walk to Kanburi. John's knee was troubling him, it had never been right since the long tiring march from Simbin to Tavoy nearly three years earlier, so he was permitted to ride on a three ton truck which had been made available for the sick.

We covered the two miles to Kanburi without incident, and arrived at our destination at about eleven o'clock on a hot dry morning.

OFFICERS CONCENTRATION CAMP * KANBURI * SIAM

We were kept waiting outside the entrance gate for a few minutes while we were formed into columns of threes, and then marched into the camp which was to hold all the British, Dutch, Australian and American officers in Siam. Lt. Col. Williams, who had been the senior Australian officer there for nearly a year, was waiting to greet us.

The inevitable search took place again, but this time, on Col. William's advice I hid my pencil in my boot. The Japs went through our kits and searched our pockets, but the pencil got through safely, as we were not ordered to remove our boots.

We soon settled down in our new quarters, and took stock of our surroundings. The camp was built over a disused padi field, and measured about two hundred by three hundred yards. About one third of this small area was occupied by the Jap staff and the guards. The remaining two thirds was to accommodate three thousand Allied officers, and about sixty other ranks. Most of these latter were employed by the Japs on camp chores, such as wood chopping, waiter carrying and batmen to the Jap staff.

Some of them were allotted to the officers as batmen, on the basis of one batman per hundred officers! There were fourteen sleeping huts, each holding about two hundred and twenty, one hospital hut, plus kitchens, canteen, workshop, ration store and a concert platform. All were built of the usual bamboo and attap, and when we arrived several sleeping huts remained to be built. Hundreds of officers from Nakompaton and other camps were still to arrive.

A high bamboo fence surrounded the camp, and on the inside of this was a band, or moat, eight feet wide by ten feet deep. Outside the bamboo fence was a high barbed wire fence. The guard house was at the N.W. corner, and at the other three corners were sentry boxes built up on a platform to give a good view of the camp. Between the bamboo fence and the barbed wire was a high mound formed by the spoil thrown up from

the ditch. It was on this mound that the armed sentries paced back and forth. The Britishers called the revised enclosure "Whipsnade Drive". I wondered why until I discovered that Whipsnade was the site of the London Zoo.

The camp water supply came from two wells. Water from one was drawn by means of a large pump, to which was attached a massive handle about seven feet long. Teams of four officers working in relays operated it. Each team pumped five hundred "strokes" before being relieved by the next. Being operated mainly by English officers, with a sprinkling of Australians, this was known as the British pump.

The other well was really a borehole about forty feet deep, and being operated solely by the Dutch, was known as the Dutch pump. A copper tube about eight feet long and three inches in diameter, with a flap at the lower end was lowered into the bore by means of a long rope. The operator then sprinted back along a covered runway till the filled tube was withdrawn to a height nearly four feet, where a second operator released the flap, allowing the water to run down a spillway into a concrete tank.

These two pumps were operated continuously from dawn till dusk. Three thousand men use a lot of water, and the Japanese staff, with their hot baths and extravagant use of water generally, used at least ten times as much per head as the prisoners. We were rationed to one water bottle of boiled water daily, and one bucket of cold water for washing per man per day. In the late afternoon, long queues lined up at the Dutch pump to collect water for the daily bath.

Lt. Col. McEachern, an Australian officer, was now the Allied camp commander, with Captain Noguchi the Japanese Camp Commandant. Noguchi was the usual type of arrogant Jap officer, with an exaggerated inferiority complex which caused him to be more than usually punctilious in demanding salutes from the prisoners. His favourite pastime was to walk up quickly behind an officer and slap his face for not saluting. Any attempt to explain that Noguchi had not been seen approaching would only draw further wrath from the bad tempered wretch. The only thing to do was to stand still and "take it", but it was a humiliating experience.

His second in command was Lieut. Takasaki, whose lugubrious countenance earned him the nickname of "The Frog". The Japanese Adjutant was Lieut. Matsushista, a quiet bespectacled Nip whose policy was to make life as easy as possible for the prisoners. Unfortunately he was subordinate to Noguchi, who effectively curbed any attempts to make our conditions easier.

At Kanburi we renewed acquaintance with Sgt. Shimojo, whom we had last seen in Burma eighteen months earlier. He was the same Shimojo, as severe a martinet as ever, though he greeted John quite affably when he met him. John was one of the few with whom Shimojo got on quite well. The rest of the camp hated him.

We expected to stay at Kanburi till the end of the war. It seemed to be the intention of the Japanese to keep all the Allied officers together under close supervision. This course was probably dictated by the progress of the war. The collapse of Germany seemed to be only a matter of weeks, and Japan's position was precarious.

Opinion was divided as to the way our captors would treat us as the end of the war drew near. Some thought that our conditions would improve, but searched their memories in vain for historic parallels. Most were of the opinion that supervision would become more strict, and conditions harsher. A few of the more pessimistically inclined voiced the gloomy forecast that we were being concentrated so that it would be easier to

massacre the lot of us when the time came. This unpleasant prospect could not be lightly dismissed, and in the quiet hours of the night we lay awake assessing the chances of a mass attack on the Jap guards in the event of circumstances pointing towards any such intention on the part of the Nips.

The Japanese are always unpredictable. It had taken them three years to finally decide to separate the officers from the men. Now we were told that no officer should remain idle, and that each of us should find an occupation of some kind.

The senior officers were inclined to protest at first, but after discussion they realised that Noguchi mean business. In any case, as we soon discovered, it was better for our bodily and mental health that we should have some occupation. With 3,000 of us confined in such a small area, mental and physical stagnation would have been the inevitable consequence of idleness.

We therefore organised ourselves into working parties of one kind or another. There was a building party which rebuilt the cookhouse and erected extra sleeping huts, and the quality of their work was far better than that produced by native labour, which was used to build the original huts. Using bamboo poles and palm leaf thatch (attap), with no tools other than a few parangs (large native knives), a couple of rusty saws and a hammer or two, these officers soon erected huts which were as good as any we had seen.

The "levelling party" set to work improving camp drainage, canteen workers sold coffee, eggs and bananas, and manufactured sugar discs, which were a luxury at twenty cents each. There was an army of cooks, vegetable peelers, water carriers, wood choppers, pump operators, medical orderlies and a host of others engaged in more obscure activities.

Noguchi was by way of being a dabbler in chemistry, and he set up a workshop for the manufacture of dyes, soap, and even paper. This last was made from bamboo pulp, and was used for cigarette papers. For a time a large party was busily engaged in making bricks, which were sun dried, and used for building fireplaces and ovens. The younger and stronger officers were employed in the more strenuous tasks such as wood chopping and water carrying, while sedentary occupations such as vegetable peeling were reserved for elderly majors and lieutenant colonels.

However much we tried, it was still impossible to find full time occupation for every officer in camp. We therefore arranged matters so that the work was done in relays. The senior officers arranged a roster so that each of them spent about two hours peeling vegetables. John and I spent a few days at this aptly described "soul destroying task". We both gave it up after a while, and I found myself a job in the canteen as a "peanut basher". This work was more to my liking, for it provided an opportunity for consuming a little extra protein.

The canteen purchased shelled peanuts by the sackful, and these were roasted in large rice kwalis before being handed to the "bashers" for conversion into peanut butter. Each operator was armed with a large heavy pestle about three feet long, hewn from a solid close grained timber. The motor was a massive log about a foot high, and the same diameter, hollowed out by burning with charcoal. The freshly roasted nuts were pounded until they were of the same consistency as commercial peanut butter. It took an average of five hundred "bashes" to produce this result.

The finished product was sold at the canteen, spread on a roll made from rice flour. There was an unwritten law that the peanut bashers, as a reward for their labours,

could consume a small quantity of nuts. We watched one another jealously to see that no one overstepped the mark.

When I first started on this job, butter production was in charge of a bearded Dutch officer. He was dismissed a week or two later, when he and some of his Dutch colleagues were detected working a "racket". They were stealing large quantities of butter and selling to their countrymen. An "all British" team in charge of an ex-rubber planter from Malaya then took over.

One day in March Lt. Col. Lilley of the Sherwood Foresters and a couple of other senior officers were suddenly whisked away in a truck to Kempei headquarters in Kanburi. It was said that the Japs suspected them of contact with the Thais at another camp in 1944, and there was much speculation as to whose turn it would be next.

In the balmy days at Chunkai in 1944 contact with the local Siamese had been easy, for the Jap administration at that camp had been very lax. Trips by prisoners into the nearby Thai villages for the purpose of trading had been frequent until a new administration took over. Many officers who had retained their bank cheque books had been successful in getting the Thais to cash cheques for them. Others had written I.O.U.s for amounts up to two hundred pounds, which the Thais had accepted.

After a couple of days the British officers were returned to camp, looking worn and haggard. One of them was unable to walk, and went straight to bed. All three refused to discuss what had taken place. They had obviously been through some form of Kempei torture, and just as obviously had been threatened with severe reprisals if they did not keep their mouths shut.

Lt. Col. Knights of the Norfolks was taken away a few days later. It was well known that he had been cashing cheques with the Thais up country. He too was returned after a couple of days, showing signs of suffering, but like the others, he declined to talk. Knowing the effectiveness of Jap methods of torture, nobody blamed him. Scores of others who were implicated with him were on pins and needles for weeks afterwards, but nothing further happened.

By the end of March the last batch of officers had arrived from prison camps at Nakompaton and Saigon. The group from Saigon had left Tamarkan nearly a year earlier to go to Japan, but had been kept in French Indo China working on the Saigon docks. They were in good condition, and spoke in glowing terms of the kindness of the Free French, who had provided them with food, money and drugs. Lieut. Ken Briggs told some amusing stories of the many ways in which the Australians at Saigon had outwitted the Japanese in smuggling stuff into camp in spite of all Jap attempts to prevent them.

The arrival of the last group brought our total to over three thousand, the split up being 1800 British, 1,000 Dutch, 200 Australians, and a handful of Americans. There was also one Frenchman, who had been attached to the British Corps in Malaya.

Now that our numbers were completed, Noguchi ordered that we group ourselves by nationalities. We were also to submit nominal rolls by ranks in order of seniority. The officers huts were numbered 4 to 17, and were of uniform length. They were arranged in one long row, all huts running East and West.

Hut 4 contained all the British Lieut. Colonels and Majors, and was known as "The Imperial War Museum", because of the large number of elderly gentlemen in their ranks. The Aussies were concentrated in hut 17 at the southern end of the camp. The kitchens, canteen and concert stage were to the east of the sleeping huts, and just behind

them was the boundary fence which overlooked a disused padi field. The railway line and Kanburi siding were only two or three hundred yards from the eastern fence.

The western end of the huts looked out across a large field to the town of Kanburi, dominated by the tall chimney of the paper factory. The police station and the hospital were in plain view, and we often caught glimpses of the townspeople as they walked along the road in front of these buildings. We envied them their freedom.

Although we were all supposed to perform some task each day, we had a lot of time on our hands. There were many ways of filling in these idle hours. Firstly, a camp library was established under the supervision of Major E.W. Swanton, well known English cricket writer of the "Evening Standard". Joining fee was one book, and there was no further charge. The number and variety of books which had been brought up from Changi was amazing, and something could be found to suit every literary taste.

By far the most popular indoor games were bridge and chess, and many tournaments were arranged. One bridge hand was so unusual as to be worth recording. Each of the four players held twelve cards of one suit, plus the ace of another suit. As can be imagined, the bidding was hectic. Major Bowman, an ex-Grenadier guardsman, finished the bidding by calling seven no trumps.

The opponents ended, and Bowman's partner, holding an outside ace with twelve of a suit, redoubled. The opposing team led their ace, then laid down the rest, Bowman and partner went down 13 tricks redoubled. This amazing hand was the talk of the camp, and gave Captain "Fizzer" Pearson, the concert party comedian, an opportunity of singing a parody to the song, "Miss Otis Regrets", changing it to "Major Bowman regrets he's unable to play tonight". I'll leave it to the mathematicians to calculate the chances of such a combination of hands recurring.

For outdoor games we played basketball, volleyball, and circles, or deck tennis. Our physical condition at this time was better than it had been since early 1942. Siam was a land of plenty, and although our diet was monotonous, and still consisted mainly of rice and stew, there was more of it. In addition, canteen supplies were fairly regular. It was possible to supplement the standard ration with an average canteen purchase of one egg, two bananas and an ounce or two of peanut butter per day.

Additional luxuries, if finance permitted, were "peanut stars", a three inch diameter disc of toffee made from brown sugar studded with peanuts, sugar discs, (the same as the peanut stars, but without the nuts), rice flour rolls spread with peanut butter, and hot sweet coffee.

Then there was the weekly concert, to which the whole camp rolled up. Although the shows were not quite up to the Chunkai standard, they were excellent entertainment. They lacked the professional direction of Leo Britt, but there were many new actors and a couple of very convincing female impersonators. One in particular, known as "Sylvia Ray", had not only good looks, but was a graceful dancer. Another, known as "Popsie", specialised in rather risque monologues.

Clever topical verses on camp events and personalities were written by an English officer, whose brilliant satires drew roars of appreciation from the audience. There was an excellent orchestra of about twenty instruments, which occasionally treated us to a classical concert in place of the usual light revue.

Norman Carter and I took no part in these concerts, which were run almost entirely by British officers. We were content to sit and applaud. The only Aussie in the

show was Sgt. Bob Skilton, whose splendid tenor voice was always popular. Bob tried to persuade Teddy Weller to join the concert party, but Teddy steadfastly refused. He had pledged himself not to appear on the stage again after his long run of success at Tamarkan. Bob was anxious to "show the Pommies what a fair dinkum Aussie female impersonator could do".

The Japs usually attended the concerts in force, and seemed to enjoy the shows as much as we did. For some reason or other, Gus Haffy, the band leader, fell foul of the Japs, and they ordered him not to appear with the concert party again. His place was taken by a chap named Smith, a good musician, and the fattest man in camp.

After we had settled down the whole camp was running like a well oiled machine, and life would have been bearable if it had not been for Noguchi, who as an obstructionist and petty tyrant of the worst type. One restriction after another was placed upon us, and hardly a day passed without some new "shalt not" being issued from Jap H.Q. As Japan's chances of victory dwindled, the vigilance of the guards increased. After the collapse of Germany in May the sentries were doubled, and they could be seen almost daily practicing minor tactics on the field outside the camp. They let out blood curdling yells as they charged with fixed bayonet at a man size dummy, and crawled and wriggled in the grass as they crept up on an imaginary enemy.

The system of night watchmen, which had been dropped for a while at Tamarkan, was reintroduced. Each P.O.W. in turn had to take a spell of duty as guard, and stand at the entrance to his own hut. The first man went on duty at lights out - ten p.m. - and after an hour waked up his relief, who was usually the man sleeping next to him. Theoretically we were responsible that no one escaped. We also had to ensure that no man left the hut at night to go to the latrine without reporting to the picquet, who handed him a small wooden pass inscribed in Japanese characters. This was known as the "benjo pass", and had to be handed back to the night watchman when returning to the hut.

Every hour one of the guards would come around on a tour of inspection. Each night watchman had to salute, and report to the guard on Japanese.

"Ni haiku, ni ju ichi mei, ichi mei benjo, zembun ni hiaku ni ju ni mei, ijo arimasen." Which, being translated, meant, "221 men, 1 man at the latrine, total 222 men. There is nothing unusual to report."

The guard then stamped the watchman's report book with a rubber "chop", or stamp.

Tenkos were very strict. We had to line up on the parade ground in groups, each group comprising the personnel of one hut. As the checker came around, each group numbered in Japanese. The group totals were totted up and compared with the camp strength state. The whole parade was then called to attention by the Allied camp commander, who gave the order:-

"Kiotsuke" (Attention)

The next command was,:- "Kashira Naka" (Eyes to the centre)

On this command we all turned our head with a smart jerk towards the Jap officer taking the parade, who was usually perched on a stool facing us. He would then dismount from the stool after returning the salute, and march off. As soon as he was clear of the parade ground, we were given the order,:- "wakare" (Dismiss), upon which we broke off and returned to our huts.

The mounting total of petty restrictions included the following:-

No talking or singing after “Lights Out”.

No whistling at any time.

No card games or chess except between one o’clock and three o’clock in the afternoon, and after six p.m.

No lying down on beds except during above hours, and no smoking while lying down on beds.

Not permitted to walk between the huts when proceeding to the latrine at night. Must go straight from the end entrance to the latrine.

No spoken word allowed at the concerts. Singing only allowed, plus music.

No applause of any kind allowed at the concerts.

Smoking out doors only permitted alongside receptacles for pipe and cigarette ash.

All stools and tables to be returned to the Jap Q.M., except for five stools per hut.

No papers, pens or pencils, or written matter of any kind, except letters from home or approved library books, to be in the possession of any prisoner.

No washing until after one p.m.

All concert items to be censored by the Japanese interpreter before rehearsals commence.

No matter of a patriotic or martial nature to be included in the concert programmes.

Visiting friends in other huts prohibited.

These are a few of the senseless restrictions placed upon us by Noguchi as time went on. It was difficult for the guards to police the last order regarding visiting friends in other huts, and as far as we could so without detection, we ignored it.

The worst period was during the early part of June, when we were forbidden to leave our huts, except to visit the latrines, or to perform essential duties such as cooking meals, water carrying, wood chopping, etc. The officers employed on these jobs did have a chance of moving about, but for the remaining ninety per cent life was intensely boring. Reading, chess and card games being forbidden, some other means of passing away the time had to be devised. Arthur Watchorn, Joe Harris Junior and a few of the other younger officers even found amusement in reviving some of the old fashioned parlour games, such as dumb charades.

The spectacle of grown men gesticulating, and distorting their faces as they acted the chosen word in dumb show was ludicrous in the extreme, but it did help to pass away the time. Tenkos were held in the huts while the restriction was in force, but after ten days we were allowed to go out again, and life returned to normal.

Some time in June we suffered a major disaster in that our secret radio went off the air. The set and its batteries had been kept intact in a hole in the ground beneath some rice sacks in the kitchen. In this location it had survived frequent searches. Heavy June rains had caused the level of the water below the surface to rise to within six inches of ground level, with the result that one morning after a heavy and prolonged downpour the set was found to be under water. The set itself was not beyond repair, but the “birdseed”, as we called the batteries, were ruined.

Word was quietly passed round the camp that the dickie bird had been drowned, and our disappointment knew no bounds. This catastrophe, for it was a catastrophe to us,

occurred just at the time when we were expecting big things to happen. Germany had collapsed, New Guinea was in our hands, Borneo had been invaded, U.S. Marines were pushing ahead in Okinawa and Japanese heavy industries were being raided in force. We were all keyed up waiting for news of a landing in Malaya or French Indo China, or even on Japan itself. It was a great pity that circumstances prevented the Webber brothers from operating their set right up till the end of the war.

The smuggling of the set into Kanburi was a feat of amazing daring and ingenuity.

When the order came for all officers to evacuate Chunkai, the officer's had left the set behind and accompanied the rest of us to Tamarkan. The following day one of the brothers had asked permission to return to Chunkai for some medical supplies which had been "forgotten". Webber was granted approval to go back to Chunkai, accompanied by a Jap clerk who had to go there on some administrative errand. Taking a haversack with him to collect the "medical supplies", Webber packed the set in it, and slinging the haversack casually over his shoulder, he came back to Tamarkan with the unsuspecting clerk, who never attempted to search him.

It was a hazardous risk, and detection would have resulted in almost certain death. In order to get the set to Kanburi, where we expected to stay "for the duration", different tactics were required. The component parts were dismantled, and concealed in hollow bamboo poles. These poles were used for carrying personal kits from Tamarkan to Kanburi, and boldly taken into the camp, where they were lying on the ground while the luggage was searched.

It was a common enough practice for pairs of prisoners to carry all their gear slung on long bamboo poles carried on the shoulders, so no suspicion was aroused. Still, it took courage to do it, and those concerned spent a few anxious moments while the Nips stepped over the poles many times as they poked away among the baggage. We had lived with the Nips long enough now not to under estimate them, and it was always possible that one day they would take it into their heads to inspect the bamboo carrying poles.

During the frequent searches of the huts they had been observed poking sticks among the overlapping sheets of attap in the roofs, which had been a common hiding place for diaries, etc., and had also been seen peeping into the hollow ends of the bamboo posts of the framework, where they often found a pencil or a fountain pen. I used to keep my pencil in such a hiding place, but when I saw a Jap poking his fingers in the round openings, I buried it. This was rather a worry because it was difficult to locate in a hurry, so I finally adopted the expedient of drilling out a hole in the heel of each of my wooden clogs, and concealing the two parts of the pencil. A small wooden plug fitted in the top of the hole, and when rubbed with a little mud, effectually concealed the opening.

A couple of months after our arrival at Kanburi, there was a change of Allied camp commanders. Lt. Col. McEachern had been the senior Allied officer until the arrival of large numbers of British Lieutenant Colonels from other camps. Of these, Lt. Col. Swinton of the East Surrey Regiment was by far the most senior, but owing to his age and far from robust health, he had taken no active part in camp administration. When it was discovered that several British officers were senior to McEachern, there was resentment that "a bally colonial" should be in command.

Although the inside story is known only to a few, there was an intrigue of some

sort, as a result of which Lt. Colonel P.J.T. Toosey, D.S.0., of the 135 Field Regt. was appointed camp commander in place of McEachern. Toosey was a go-getter Irishman with an excellent reputation for firm dealing with the Japanese, and while the Australians did not doubt his ability, there was a nasty feeling at the back of our minds that he had been jockeyed into the position by Swinton and some of the senior British officers steeped in "the old school tie" tradition.

Relationships between British and Australian officers were excellent on the whole, but it cannot be denied that many of the British "Pukka Sahibs" still regarded all Australians as "colonials". On one occasion at Tamarkan, Rupert Barraclough had been discussing the subject of "the old school tie" with some Britishers who were on quite good terms with him. The conversation concluded with a parting shot to Rupert,

"You know, you're not quite out of the top drawer, old boy".

With the Yanks we were on more common ground, the lads from Texas and Australia teamed together splendidly, and there was a feeling of genuine comradeship between the two. Much good natured banter was exchanged, and in the volley ball, baseball and basket ball competitions there was a keen but friendly rivalry.

With the Dutch our relations were not so happy. The Dutchman has many splendid qualities, and it is perhaps unfair to judge them by their reactions to P.0.W. conditions, which often do not reveal a man at his best. However, they did earn the reputation of being selfish, and it must be admitted that many of them sought to benefit themselves at the expense of other nationalities. In spite of this, many Australians and Dutchman formed firm friendships.

John and I were very friendly with a forestry inspector from Java named Fred Stoep, who was really a civilian, but when Java surrendered he was wearing the insignia of an air raid warden. The Japs insisted on treating him as a Dutch officer, so Fred found himself a prisoner of war instead of an internee.

Many of the Dutch officers were Eurasians, and some were pure Indonesian, but it is to the credit of the Dutch that no colour bar existed. The Eurasians and Indonesians regarded themselves as Dutchmen, and were proud of their nationality. They resented being thought of as "natives".

I remember once at Tamarkan asking Johnny Ockerse, the leader of the concert party vocal and instrumental team known as "The Ockerse Trio", to sing a couple of Javanese songs. Johnny replied with quiet dignity,

"We sing only modern numbers. We are not natives, we are Dutch".

I realised that I had committed a faux pas, but the incident taught me the intense pride which some of the Indonesians took in their Dutch nationality.

One characteristic most noticeable amongst the Dutch was their loyalty to the royal family of Holland. They were always having little celebrations, which on enquiry usually turned out to be in honour of Queen Wilhemina, Prince Bernard Princess Juliana, or one of their children.

An amusing, but true story illustrates the loyalty of the Dutch to their queen. A Dutch officer complained to the Allied camp commander, a senior British officer, that one of the British prisoners had insulted the throne of Holland.

"Oh, what did he say?" asked the camp commander.

"He said that Queen Wilhemina was selling sambal outside Buckingham Palace" said the indignant Dutchman.

The British officer paused to consider this astounding affront to the Dutch Queen, to whom the British Royal family had given sanctuary after the fall of Holland.

"Er, what sort of sambal?" he asked.

The point of this story can best be appreciated by those with an understanding of the relationships between the Dutch and British at this stage. Sambal, by the way, is a very hot condiment beloved by the Dutch. It is concocted by them to give flavour to the rice, and its principal constituent is the chili. Some of our chaps tried it, but found it too hot for the palate.

Allied air activity along the railway increased in intensity as the months passed. On 13 February, 1945, three planes suddenly appeared and made several wide circles over the Tamarkan bridge, each time dropping a single heavy bomb. Flying at a few hundred feet, and ignoring the fire from the ack ack battery, the planes continued circling until all their bombs were dropped. They then disappeared, leaving us with an impression of a purpose relentlessly fulfilled.

This time we were not disappointed. Reports came in next day that the steel bridge had been wrecked beyond hope of repair, and that the wooden bridge had several spans knocked out of it. One efficient flight of three planes had achieved in an hour what several squadrons had failed to accomplish on three previous raids.

Just before daylight on 22 March we were awakened by the drone of planes, and throwing off our mosquito nets, we rushed out to the slit trenches. There were three planes in all, and they flew around the area as though searching for a target.

Finally two of them disappeared, but the last plane, after cruising around a while longer, finally dropped two sticks of four bombs each. They were apparently aimed at a railway engine parked on the line about two hundred and fifty yards from the eastern fence of the camp. Two bombs straddled the engine without hitting it, three dropped in the padi field just outside the fence, and the remaining three landed inside our fence, blowing away half the canteen.

Two Dutch officers were severely injured, and died of wounds a day or two later. I was selected to represent the Australians at the funeral, and so went to the Kanburi cemetery for the first time. Here I saw the graves of poor old "Pop" Nilton and Jim Picot, two Sigs who had died at Kanburi camp a year earlier.

Since the effective raid on 13 February, the wooden bridge had been repaired by gangs of prisoners from Tamuan. The work had been completed only a few days when the bridge was raided again. On Dorothy's birthday, 3rd April, about twenty planes returned to wipe it out again. The pattern bombing of earlier mass raids was abandoned, this group making its attack with single planes.

The planes crisscrossed each other, coming in at varying heights and from different directions, thus making it difficult for the ack ack gunners to concentrate. Once again the wooden bridge was knocked out, and had to be repaired once more. "Recce" planes came over almost daily – "Come look see, go back speakee planes" the Japs called them - and watched the progress of the repair work. By the middle of June the bridge was carrying traffic again, but on the 24th another attack similar to the last one was made.

It was just as effective, and the hard work of the last few weeks was reduced to rubble in the space of an hour or two. Work went on day and night to repair the damage, and in the distance we could see the glow from the flares and fires lit to enable the work to be carried on at night.

Not once during this or any other raid did we see any sign of the Japanese Air Force. The only times we ever saw "bamboo and attap" planes, as we scathingly referred to enemy aircraft, was when the courier service between Moulmein and Bangkok flew over head.

During the last two raids pamphlets were dropped over the town of Kanburi. The wind carried several of them into the camp, and Noguchi sent his guards rushing round to collect them. At the same time strict orders were issued to the prisoners not to touch any of the pamphlets under pain of severe punishment. In spite of this ban, we were able to collect a few which blew into the slit trenches undetected by the Japs.

The leaflets, measuring about four by six inches, were printed in Siamese. One of them had a group of miniature cartoons, depicting the Japanese army in various stages of ignominious retreat. One amusing little scene showed a terrified buck toothed Jap streaking for the horizon, with an Allied bayonet a few inches from his tail. Others showed bombs falling on Japanese cities, Jap planes falling from the skies, and Jap warships sinking beneath the waves.

In order that as many of us as possible could see this pamphlet, one of them was hidden under a stone in the latrine. Word was whispered around the camp, "Go to number three latrine, fourth cubicle from the North end. Look under the stone, but don't be long, others want to see it."

There was a procession to that particular latrine for days, and they did not all have diarrhoea! One leaflet floated down near a Dutch officer, who excitingly leaped out of his slit trench to retrieve it. He was so eager that he did not notice a Jap sentry who was also running to pick it up. The two collided, and the Dutchman was promptly marched off to the guardhouse, where he was so severely beaten up that his arm was broken. He was kept standing to attention for twenty four hours before Noguchi would allow him to have it attended to at the camp hospital.

We had with us at Kanburi a British major named Laming who had been a judge in Siam before the war. He could read and write Siamese, and was able to translate the pamphlets for us. "The Judge", as we called him, was a well known figure in the camp, and was the proud possessor of the only topee among the officers.

Wearing the topee and wooden clogs, and with his pendulous tummy hanging over a pair of very bedraggled shorts, he looked anything but judicial, but for all that he had a wealth of knowledge on Siamese customs and way of life, which he imparted to us in a series of interesting lectures.

Talks had become popular again. Every night after tenko groups of from six to a dozen would gather in the twilight, sip hot tea or coffee, and listen. Major John Bowman told us of his early days in the Grenadier Guards, while Major Swanton talked on Test Cricket. Jack Marsh explained "The Beveridge Plan" and other economic theories, Captain Storey told us about television , and another English captain who had been a set designer in New York and Hollywood gave us some intimate and revealing details of the lives of film stars.

There were many others, some dull and some interesting, but all provided a means of combating boredom. Even John stepped into the breach, and gave a series of talks to a selected group on the history of philosophy.

Life was not without its amusing incidents. There were two goats in the camp, a male and a female. They were quite tame, and used to wander through the huts nibbling

at the attap. The billy frequently made amorous approaches to Nellie, as we called the she goat, but Nellie always successfully resisted. For some reason or other Billy always chose the early evening to pursue Nellie, and the tedium of tenko was often relieved by a wild chase through the ranks of men waiting to be counted. Prisoners were scattered right and left as Nellie ducked between our legs, hotly pursued by an ardent, but unrequited Romeo.

Later a third billy was introduced into the camp, an immature fellow whom Nellie treated with disdain. Whenever he came close to her, she butted him out of the way. Another amusing animal was a tame monkey owned by one of the Jap staff, but given to the prisoners to look after because the other Japs used to torture it. This monkey was secured by a long chain with a loop at one end. The loop went over a long pole stretched between two trees. This arrangement enabled the animal to climb both trees, and to walk around on the ground for a distance of several yards.

During tenkos the monkey would often perch on the shoulder of the Jap officer or N.C.O. taking the parade. When the count was completed the Jap would take the monkey off his shoulder, mount the stool and solemnly take the salute. It was as much as we could do to keep from laughing outright, but under our breaths we made slighting reference to the similarity between the monkey and the Japs, with the difference, if any, in favour of the monkey.

One day somebody gave the Monk a kitten, which she clutched to her breast like a child. Taking the kitten into the tree, the Monk kept her there for hours, and snarled when anyone approached. At last we had to release the kitten to feed it, and this caused Monk to jump up and down, gibbering with rage.

Twice she broke free from her chain, and went careering over the hut roofs, mischievously exploring the hollow bamboo framework, and causing much consternation by throwing down fountain pens, rings and other forbidden articles which had been carefully hidden.

Then there was Donald Duck. One day a small duckling was found in a basket of canteen supplies which had just arrived. It had evidently been placed there by one of the Thai traders. The little fellow was immediately named “Donald”, and was adopted by the kitchen staff. Norman heard about Donald, saw him and fell in love with him. He begged to be allowed to adopt him as a pet, and after much persuasion, the cooks surrendered Donald to Norman, who thereafter became guide, philosopher and friend to the little creature. Norman said it helped him to preserve his sanity (Norman’s, not the duck’s). I assisted Norman in building a little house and a run for Donald, and spent hours looking on while Norman took the little fellow for a swim in the drain.

Last, but not least among the camp pets, was Ludwig, a thoroughbred Dachshund. Owned by a British officer, Ludwig had seen service in the Malayan campaign, and remained with his master for three and a half years at various prison camps. Ludwig was well trained. Absolutely loyal and obedient to his master, he kept out of sight of the Japs by day, and after evening tenko made his first appearance for the day, trotting at the heels of his master as they took their evening exercise.

Some time in May an incident occurred which upset the whole camp. Bill Drower fell foul of Noguchi over an incident at the pump house. A British officer working the pump refused to fill a bucket of water for a Japanese private. This officer and two others who were working with him were reported to Capt. Noguchi, who sent for

the interpreter.

Bill had not been officially employed as interpreter since the Japs had dismissed him from the job at Tamarkan. At the time of the incident Bill was standing in for the regular interpreter, who was ill, and he answered the summons to appear at Jap H.Q. Noguchi, who hated Bill, demanded to know by what right a British prisoner refused to draw water for a soldier of the Imperial Japanese Army.

Bill's reply was to the effect that whilst he knew that instructions in this camp required officers to work for Japanese privates if demanded, his own personal opinion was that it was not right. It appeared that Noguchi had trapped Bill into his admission of his personal opinion, and Noguchi now sought to interpret this an insult to Japanese policy.

It is highly probable that anything which Bill may have said would have been deliberately misinterpreted. In any case Noguchi flew into a tearing rage, and savagely attacked Bill with his sword stick, knocking him down and grappling with him on the floor. Lieut. Takasaki (The Frog) joined in the attack, and so severe was the melee that the Jap office was wrecked.

The Allied camp commander, Lt. Col. Toosey, who witnessed the incident, but was powerless to interfere, told us about it afterwards. Following this brutal assault on Bill, he and the three other officers were forced to stand to attention at the guardhouse. After three days of this punishment the others were released, but Noguchi was only just starting on Bill.

From the first week in June until the end of the war in August 1945, Bill was kept in solitary confinement in a deliberate attempt by Noguchi to kill him by slow starvation. Noguchi turned a deaf ear to all Toosey's pleas to have Bill released. Protest after protest was made on behalf of the whole camp, but the vindictive Noguchi refused even to discuss the matter.

"Drower must be punished" was the most he would say. When the other three were released, Bill was placed inside a disused air raid shelter and kept without food or water for three days. Thereafter he received only two rice balls and a drink of water each day. The air raid shelter was just a hole in the ground, with a few heavy beams of wood covered with earth across the top.

It was a dark noisome place, with several inches of water in it, and was infested with malarial mosquitoes Bill was not allowed to wash or shave, and as day after day passed without news of him the whole camp grew more and more worried on his behalf. One day someone reported to Toosey that he had seen Bill being led to the latrine by one of the guards. His condition was pitiful. Gaunt and unshaven, and delirious with fever, he was muttering incoherently, and could scarcely walk.

Toosey asked permission for the camp doctor to see him, but was curtly refused. John and I tried to pass a message to him by speaking loudly as we passed the air raid shelter on our way to bring firewood from a dump just outside the camp gate. We threw in a Latin phrase or two in order to help Bill identify us in case he should hear our voices. Had we but known it, he was too far gone to even hear us, let alone recognise our voices.

It was not until after the war that we heard the full story of Noguchi's vindictiveness. For sheer cruelty and diabolic fiendishness it surpassed anything we had so far experienced.

After keeping Bill without water for three days during the hottest part of the year,

the Japanese placed a bucket of water and a drinking mug at the entrance to the shelter. Here, at frequent intervals, members of the guard would ladle out a mug of water and sip noisily, smacking their lips and expatiating on its delicious coolness. Then, as a final touch to this refined form of torture, they would throw the last few drops down the hole to splash at their victim's feet.

At other times they would gather round the shelter entrance and en$_0$age in conversation meant for Bill's ears, but made to sound like ordinary camp chit-chat.

"They're going to torture Toosey again tonight" one would say.

"Yes" another would reply, "and that other colonel told us quite a lot before he died."

"Its all Drower's fault" another would join in, "if it had not been for him the others would not have suffered."

"Its his turn tonight" a fourth Jap would say, "I believe Noguchi is going to put him to the torture at six o'clock".

The next day the group would assemble again.

"I heard that Drower's torture has been postponed."

"Yes, Noguchi put Colonel …… through it. He died in awful agony not long afterwards."

The effect of these and other conversations on poor Bill's mind can be imagined. Weakened by lack of food, wracked by fever, and his mind tortured with uncertainty, he came to imagine himself responsible for other officers being tortured to death because of his attitude to Noguchi. He asked for pencil and paper, and wrote an abject apology to the Japanese camp commander, accepting the inferior position of Allied officers with respect to the Japanese private soldier.

The letter ended with a plea that no further torture be inflicted on others as a result of his action. It became known that later Noguchi gave a satisfied smirk when he read Bill's letter, and then threw it in the waste paper basket.

Receiving no reply to his letter, Bill, his mind now unbalanced as a result of his suffering, decided to commit suicide. Sharpening the edge of his spoon by rubbing it on his dixie, he attempted to sever the artery in his arm, but one of the guards caught him in the act. After that Bill was not allowed to retain his eating utensils.

When the attempted suicide was reported to Noguchi, his only response was,

"If he wants to die, he shall have satisfaction."

Poor Bill's cup of misery was full to overflowing. He made another attempt to take his life by hanging. Using his clothing to make a cord, he found a nail projecting from one of the beams, and tried to hang himself from this. However, the nail was rusty and would not stand his weight, and so his second attempt failed.

Day by day he grew weaker, his body reduced to skin and bone, with a long beard hanging down to his shrunken chest. Some efforts were made to smuggle extra food to him, and hard boiled eggs were hidden in the bottom of a kettle in which one of the cooks was occasionally allowed to carry him some hot tea The eggs were returned untouched, his mental state was such that he did not even notice them.

A message was scratched on the bottom of his dixie, asking him how he was, and to scratch a reply with his spoon. It went unanswered. In the meantime the refined mental torture went on.

Gathering again near the entrance to the shelter, the inhuman guards described in

detail the forms of torture being devised for Drower. The soles of his feet were to be burned with cigarette butts, his nose and ears were to be cut off, and eyes gouged out with a hot iron. His abdomen was to be ripped open and his entrails dragged out with hot pincers. These and other things too hideous and obscene to mention were all to happen "very soon". Each time the ghouls gathered, it was to announce a further postponement on the horrors in store, and to discuss in ghastly detail the fresh forms of torment which Noguchi had devised.

THE END APPROACHES

Not long after Bill's banishment to the flooded air raid shelter, we received news of an impending move to another area. We had all believed, and I think most of us hoped, that our move to Kanburi in February was to have been our last. Kanburi had its discomforts, but our camp routine was highly organised, and in spite of Noguchi and his petty persecutions, conditions could have been very much worse.

The new camp was to be built at Nakom Nyok, about one hundred miles to the northeast of Bangkok. We enquired about the new camp site from some friendly Koreans, who volunteered the information that the place was in the midst of a concentration of thirty to forty thousand Japanese troops. The news of the move coincided with the more welcome tidings of fresh victories in Burma and the Philippines, the last we received before the "dickie bird" went out of action.

We were told that there was a long march at the other end of the railway journey to Nakom Nyok. With the prospect of an early end to the war, and a tiring route march in the near future, the whole camp began to make preparations. The first step was to get ourselves as fit as possible physically. Classes in P.T. were held every morning. There was one class which specialised in easy exercises for the older officers, graduating up from simple breathing exercises to the more difficult bending and twisting exercises. For the younger and fitter members there was a strenuous two hour session under the energetic leadership of Captain Harry Bishop, of the 2/2 Pioneers.

Only the youngest and fittest could stand the strain of Harry's enthusiastic team. Norman Carter, Joe Harris, Ralph Lowe and I attended a thirty minute session of simple bending and stretching exercises under the instruction of our old friend Rupert Barraclough, of the 2/10 Field Regiment.

The second step was to lighten our loads for the expected 48 kilometre march from the railway terminal at Nakom Nyok. Personal possessions were laid out and inspected with a view to their anticipated usefulness. Blanket, ground sheet, mosquito net, mess gear and change of clothing were necessities.

There was a vast assortment of odds and ends collected during the past three years and hoarded against the day when they might be needed. A treasured book or two, clogs, an extra shirt or pair of shorts if you were lucky, all added weight, and the problem was whether to take them or not. Some officers had heavy winter greatcoats which they had been carrying since the fall of Singapore. Some cut these down and made shorts of them.

John cut down his heavy valise and sleeping bag in half size, and we both had a "trial pack" to see how the weight could best be distributed. All over the camp this activity was going on, it provided a relief from boredom. Prisoners could be seen with packs on their shoulders pacing up and down the parade ground, doing a mile or so each day by way of hardening themselves up for the march at the other end.

The time was well spent, for a few days after the first party left on the 28th of June some of the escorting guards returned with the news that the journey really did entail a march of nearly thirty miles after a long tiring journey by rail. The rest of the camp was to follow in parties of four hundred at a time, leaving at five day intervals from about the third week in July.

John and I decided to delay our departure till one of the later parties if possible. We had hopes of the war ending before we left, for we did not relish the prospect of a long exhausting march loaded with all our possessions. Another unhappy thought was the possibility of the train being bombed, and we knew that there would be little hope of escape from the packed trucks unless we had ample warning of an attack.

The last few days at Kanburi were the most tedious of our three and a half years existence as guests of Nippon. Uncertainty as to what was happening to Bill Drower had a depressing effect on all of us. The detestable Noguchi continued to make life as unpleasant as possible. Having previously forbidden applause at the concerts, and placed a ban on the spoken word from the stage, he now stopped the concerts altogether.

The whole camp was in a state of the jitters, wondering what Noguchi would do next. John, who slept next to me, was confident that as the end drew nearer, the Japanese official attitude would be one of fairer treatment; Johnny Stringer, who slept on the other side of me, was pessimistic. He argued that the Japs would massacre the lot of us if Mountbatten made an attack on Siam, or if Japan's defeat seemed imminent. He was just as certain that one day the Allied Air Force would bomb our camp.

His view was that from the air it was impossible for a plane to distinguish friend from foe. In any case, he said, they would not consider us so long as they killed a few Japs in the process. We were not very happy when the Japs ordered all the Australians out of hut 17 to make room for a lot of army horses. Johnny said they would bring Jap troops in next.

After a gloom session with Johnny it was a relief to go and. have a chat with Lieut. Arthur Watchorn, who was always bursting with optimism. Arthur always expected that the end of the war was only a few weeks off, and could produce evidence to prove it.

On August 14th, the long silence caused by the breakdown of our secret radio was broken. On that day a Korean guard told Capt. Sanderson, the interpreter, that the war had ended on August 12th. He said that he had heard this in Kanburi, but did not think that his officers knew. As the Korean was drunk when he told Sanderson this, most of us took the story with reserve, but Norman was inclined to believe it. As we took our evening stroll we discussed the possibility of the story being true, but I was determined not to put my faith in it. The shock of disappointment would have been too great.

THE END COMES

No.6 party, to which John and I were detailed, was to leave on 15th August. Noguchi departed for Nakum Nyok on 10th August with No.5 party, and no sooner had he gone than Lieut. Matsushista, who was left in charge, ordered the kitchen staff to prepare a “No.1 soup” for Bill Drower.

We had hopes that Bill would be released, but Noguchi had left strict orders that Bill was to be kept where he was until the last party left on 25th August. With the departure of No.5 party on 10th August, only about eight hundred officers and a few other

ranks were left in camp. We now had plenty of room to move about, and in comparison with our previous cramped conditions, the camp seemed almost deserted.

Wednesday 15th August 1945 was a day which will live forever in the memory of every prisoner of war in Siam. For us at Kanburi it was a day crammed with excitement and incident. In the morning while we were getting ready to pack, a rumour that the war had ended spread round the camp like wildfire.

A few days before a friendly Korean had told us that Japan had asked for an armistice, but we had treated the information with reserve. We had been caught so often with false rumours that nothing short of an official announcement would convince us. So, when Lieut. Meynell Davies came into our hut, did a war dance, and announced that the war was over, most of us just went on packing.

I must confess to a tight feeling in the chest, due to suppressed excitement. I just could not bear to be disappointed, so I forced myself not to believe it. Apparently the story had started when a Jap NCO had gone into the tool shed, where a British soldier was repairing a Jap bicycle.

"When are you leaving?" the Jap asked.

"With the last party on 25th August", the soldier replied.

"No", said the Jap, "I mean when are you going home?"

"Going home?"

"Yes, didn't you know the war was over?"

"Do you really mean that the war has ended?"

"Yes, war all finished. Soon all men go home".

This conversation, or something like it, was quickly spread all over the camp, and excited groups were discussing it everywhere. Later in the morning a further story went the rounds to the effect that the Jap medical officer had told Dr. De Soldenoff, the camp medical officer, that the war was over.

An Australian officer, Major John Champion de Crespigny, who was in charge of camp tools, and in fairly close touch with the Japs, was asked to confirm this story with the Jap quartermaster. He came back and said the Jap Q.M. had been annoyed with him for doubting that the war was over. Was not the word of a Japanese doctor enough?

"Old Discrepancy", as we called De Crespigny, soon had the camp seething with excitement as the news was passed on rapidly from hut to hut. However, in the absence of an official announcement by Lieut. Matsushista, I still did not believe it, much as I wanted to. John was more optimistic, but not yet wholly convinced. Norman said he was quite sure that the news was true this time, although if he felt elated he did not show it.

De Soldenoff, when questioned about the Jap medical officer's story, denied it, but there were others who were prepared to swear that they heard the Jap tell him. Perhaps it was wishful thinking on their part. Desperately though I wanted to believe the news, I could not face the nerve shattering disappointment which would have followed had I buoyed myself with hope, and then found the war was not over after all. I feverishly concentrated on my packing, and tried to think of other things.

My efforts were not very successful, for all the time a little gremlin kept whispering to me,

"It must be true. It is true. Why don't you believe it? Don't you understand? You're free – free – free!"

By lunch time the excitement had simmered down a little, and as it was not fed

with fresh rumours it had evaporated almost completely by five in the afternoon, when No.6 party, in charge of Lt. Col. (now Brigadier) McEachern fell in, was counted and marched off to the railway line to wait for the train.

Then the excitement flared up again, for a loading party at the siding, in charge of Lt. Col. Mapey of the 2nd Cambridgeshire Regiment, picked up fresh news from some Thais who were passing. The Russians had invaded Manchuria a few days before, and Japan had asked for an armistice, which had been granted that day.

Excitedly we discussed this latest information, but I still would not allow myself to be convinced. By this time Norman was thoroughly satisfied, so were most of the others. The Japs had still made no official announcement, and until they did I was determined to treat the news with reserve. For all that I was churned up inside, and prayed fervently that this time the rumours were true.

We were kept waiting at the siding till about seven o'clock, when the train arrived. It consisted of open freight trucks, with sides about three feet high. We piled into these thirty to a truck, with one armed guard for each truck load of prisoners. I looked around at the familiar faces of the other officers on my truck, and wondered how much longer we would all be together.

Some of them had been my constant companions for three and a half years, and between us there had developed a comradeship and understanding which had withstood many severe trials. Alongside me of course was John, who understood me better than most, and who was a friend in whom I could place implicit trust.

A man of wide education and of sterling character, holding a responsible position in civil life, and with a splendid war record, I had counted it an honour to have him by my side throughout the troublous time of the last forty two months.

Then there was Norman Carter, whom I had not known so long, but who had stood by me staunchly through the difficult period at Tamarkan, when we had both striven to build up an entertainment unit, which, as events proved, had been a valuable factor in keeping up morale.

There was Lt. Col. George Ramsay, who had backed me to the hilt at Tamarkan by upholding my decisions, and providing money from the camp fund to purchase material for the concert party. And Rupert Barraclough from Brisbane, with whom I had spent many an hour in the jungle discussing matters of common interest, the progress of the war, the prospects of moving into Thailand, and what we were both going to do when the war was over.

The senior officer in our truck was Lieut. Colonel Charles Grover Wright Anderson, V.C., M.C., whom I had known since those days on the "Queen Mary", which now seemed so long ago, when he had been second in command of the 2/19 Battalion. The story of his heroism at the battle of Muar in January 1941, was now a legend in the A.I.F., but wild horses would not drag a single word out of him regarding the part he played in that memorable action. There was one subject on which we could always get the Colonel to talk, and that was cattle. He had been on a cattle station in Kenya for many years, and was a mine of information on native customs and animal life in Africa. He often talked most interestingly on these subjects, as well as on cattle breeding in both Australia and East Africa. He had been our camp commander for nearly two years and had roughed it with us right from the start of the railway construction.

In the next truck was Lieut. Colonel Jack Williams, that great little fighter whose

uncompromising attitude towards the Japanese had earned him the respect of every prisoner on the railway. With him were Majors Ray Meagher and Gus Daly, two officers who had ably assisted Williams in the administration of his force, and whom I had come to know very well during the last two and a half years.

Don Kerr, Ray Nixon and many others who had shared the experiences of P.O.W. life with me were also there, all buoyed up with the common hope that at last our days under Japanese domination had come to an end.

As usual with Japanese moves, our departure was delayed, but this time we did not mind so much, we were all too excited. The train moved along a few hundred yards to the Kanburi siding, where we found an open air market in full swing. Food stalls lit by gas flares were doing a roaring trade, and all sorts of goods were displayed on tables and on the ground, or on mats spread out by the roadside. We could not help noticing how well clothed and well fed the Thais appeared.

It seemed that the war had passed them by, for apart from the guards on the train, there was no outward sign that their country had been occupied by a foreign power for nearly four years. We watched the animated scene with close interest. At midnight we were still there, but some of the Thais were now packing up their wares and departing.

I had settled down in a corner of the truck, and was dozing fitfully, when I was awakened by a voice with a foreign accent, speaking in English,

"The war is over"

I opened my eyes, now thoroughly awake. Standing near our truck and looking up at us, was a well dressed, handsome looking Thai. From his bearing, I sensed that he was a man of some authority, and it seemed that here was a chance to confirm the rumours which we had been hearing all day.

"Is it true?", I asked anxiously.

"Yes, the bastards are running away. The war is over. It is all finished. Your friends will be here very soon. I am very glad".

We were about to ask him for more details, but he nodded in the direction of our guard, who was growing fidgety. Before we could ascertain any more, the Thai walked away. We found out later that our informant was Boon Pong, the local Thai trader who had been responsible for supplying our camp with canteen goods. Boon Pong, we were later to discover, was the number one man in the local underground movement.

It was he who had contrived to smuggle copies of the "Bangkok Chronicle" into the camps at Tamarkan, Chunkai and Kanburi, and who had cashed many cheques for British officers at Chunkai.

Our train did not leave the siding till one o'clock in the morning, we had then been in the trucks for six hours and had moved only a few hundred yards. After many delays en-route we finally arrived at Nompraduk, only twenty miles away, at daylight on 16th August. Here I suffered a great disappointment, for the engine was uncoupled from the trucks and the train broken up for dispersal.

A group of Thai labourers, superintended by Jap engineers, was engaged in building a large air raid shelter for railway engines, and we were marched well away from the track and told to have breakfast. All this seemed to add up to one thing - the war was not yet over - else why should the Japs still be taking air raid precautions? I pointed this out to John, who was just as much puzzled and worried as I was.

Nompraduk siding was a scene of desolation. A few months before it had been

one of the biggest Jap supply dumps in the Bangkok-Kanburi area, but frequent attacks by Allied bombers had flattened every building in the vicinity. Even the railway station was now non-existent. After a breakfast of rice flour bread and hard boiled eggs, we were kept hanging about till midday, when the train was assembled again and we resumed our journey south.

In the late afternoon we arrived at Nakompaton, where we had a good view of the massive gilded dome of the city Wat, or temple, said to be one of the largest and most beautiful in the Far East. Half a mile away we could see the huts which marked the site of Nakompaton P.O.W. hospital. On the railway platform was a group of prisoners from the hospital, they were busy loading goods on to our train. I spotted two of our Sigs, Bob Fitzpatrick and Cec Reeves, but could only wave to them.

We had moved only a few hundred yards out of Nakompaton station when the train stopped with a sudden jerk. Looking back we saw several 44 gallon petrol drums lying in the padi field alongside the track. Someone had evidently just rolled them out of the open door of an enclosed type truck in which they had been stacked. It looked like a spot of sabotage, but it puzzled us as to who could have been responsible. The Japs got excited, and dashed about asking questions. They soon had the drums aboard again, but the local Thais got a lot of fun out of it, for hundreds of them gathered round to watch.

We reached Bampong at dusk. All the way down the line the natives had been waving to us, giving the "thumbs up" sign, and shouting "OK, OK". On the platform at Bampong the Jap officer in charge of our train was seen in solemn conference with a group of Japanese officers who met the train. The Thai station master, who spoke English, gave a message to a group of prisoners in one of the trucks.

"Your king will broadcast to the Empire at six o'clock tonight. The war is over".

The news was passed quickly down the train. Following the puzzling situation at Nompraduk that morning, and the absence of fresh news during the day, our hopes were revived again.

There was still no official statement from the Japanese, but by now I was pretty well convinced that the great news for which we had been waiting so long and anxiously was authentic.

Just outside of Bampong we came to a deep wide river. Here we had an exciting and not altogether pleasant experience. The long steel bridge had been bombed so effectively that several spans were hanging in the river, and the Japs had hastily constructed a temporary wooden bridge alongside it.

This crazy structure was not considered safe enough to carry our engine, which was uncoupled and shunted on to another line. We now found that we had to uncouple all our trucks and push them across to the other side one at a time. This may seem a simple enough task, but in actual fact it turned out to be a harrowing experience.

In the first place there was no track to walk upon, the sleepers were just laid across the bearers in a haphazard manner, some of them only six inches apart, and others at varying distances up to two or three feet. The track was so uneven that in places it resembled a miniature switch-back railway, and it was so narrow that there was room for only four of us at the back of each truck. Stepping uneasily from sleeper to sleeper, three others and myself pushed our truck ahead of us, taking care to avoid a slip, which would have meant a fall into the river sixty feet below.

If the track had been level our task would have been much easier, but each time

we came to a downward slope the truck ran away from us, and we had to hang on like grim death until the reverse slope slowed the truck up. Then we had to push like fury until we got the cumbersome contraption over the rise, when the process would be repeated. It was a nightmare experience, for by now it was quite dark, making it impossible to judge the distance between each sleeper, so unevenly spaced were they. I was intensely thankful when we got our truck safely across to the other side. Here we found another engine waiting for us, and as each truck came over it was coupled up until the train was complete.

We had now been travelling nearly thirty hours, and had covered only as many miles. The final stage of the journey to Bangkok was over the old track which had been laid for many years, and we now made better progress.

At four o'clock on the morning of Friday 17th August, we pulled into the Bangkok Noi railway yards. The train stopped by a huge open shed, and lying on the platform we could dimly discern the figures of hundreds of Japanese soldiers. It was quite dark, and a light drizzle was falling, but the groups of sleeping soldiery were faintly illuminated by the glowing embers of several small fires around which they were huddled.

Here, in the bomb damaged railway yards of Thailand's capital, surrounded by the sleeping forms of hundreds of our ex-enemies, I experienced the most poignant moment of my life. Lt. Col. McEachern, the senior officer of our party, called us together. There was an expectant hush.

"Gentlemen, I have just been officially informed by the Japanese officer in charge that the war is over".

The emotions that had been pent up in our breasts since we first heard the rumours at Kanburi now welled up in our throats, and found expression in a jubilant burst of cheering, to be followed immediately by four hundred voices singing "God Save our King", for the Dutch joined us in our national anthem.

They then sang their Dutch national anthem in their own tongue. We could not join them, for we could not speak their language as they spoke ours. For my part I was too overcome by emotion to join in the singing, I just stood still and offered up a silent prayer of thanks to my Maker.

Having given expression to our emotions in song, we now surged round excitedly, but restrainedly, for we were very weary, and gripped one another by the hand; British, Australian and Dutch and one or two Americans, each nationality congratulating the other on the common victory.

Then, picking our way across the rails, we made for a ferry which took us across the Menam River. When we had assembled on the other side we learned that our destination was a large godown on the river about twelve miles the other side of Bangkok. With lights hearts, but with heavy tread, for we had scarcely slept for 48 hours, we set off at five o'clock for the godown.

It was an eerie experience, for we did not see a soul as we trudged along, our footsteps echoing hollowly on the concrete road. We passed first through the warehouse area, and then by the Imperial Palace with its high ornamental walls dimly outlined against the sky. Then we came to the more open spaces, where we paused for a rest just as dawn was breaking.

We were on a tree lined road in a residential portion of the city, and just across the way from where I was resting was a house with a light burning in the front room.

Silhouetted against the blind was the figure of a child sitting up in bed playing with a doll. I watched the shadow movements on the blind with a great longing, and thoughts of home raced through my mind.

Just as we moved off the blind was darkened by the shadow of a larger figure, and a pair of hands reached out and picked the child up.

A little further along we came across scores of Jap army horses tethered to ropes stretched between the trees. Although the hour was early, hundreds of soldiers were moving about, loading pack horses and motor trucks, and making what seemed preparations for departure.

It was broad daylight as we passed a massive bronze statue of a former King of Siam. Near the monument was an electric tramline flanking a canal. The city was now astir, and the trams were crowded with white clad Siamese. One of them who was passing on a tram handed a copy of the "Bangkok Chronicle" to one of the Dutch officers. Right across the top of the front page ran the headlines "JAPAN ACCEPTS ALLIED TERMS".

There was a certain amount of satisfaction in seeing the glorious news in print, and very reassuring to read a detailed account of the Emperor's "Cease Fire" order. As we passed through a row of shops on the outskirts of the city hundred of natives came out and waved to us, giving the universal "V" for "Victory" sign. We paused to buy some bananas, and grinned cheerfully at the enthusiastic townspeople as we continued our journey.

We were now in dockland, and ahead of us was a row of immense godowns, or warehouses, flanking the Menam river. As we came closer a crowd of British and Australian prisoners came out to greet us, and we exchanged handshakes with many of our men whom we had not seen for months. There were about one thousand of them, and they told us they had been working on the Bangkok aerodrome building anti-aircraft gun emplacements until a day or two earlier, when they too had heard the joyful news that the war had ended.

While we were lined up outside the second godown for checking I felt a hearty slap on the back, and turned round to find myself looking into the happy grinning face of Buck Rogers. His first greeting was typical, "Listen, you mugs, - If I hadn't Bull -----d those B----s for three and a half hours you would all have been in the jug with me."

We were relieved to find him looking comparatively well, and listened eagerly as he told us of his experiences since he and Ike Parker were arrested by the Kempeis seven months earlier.

In picturesque American slang Buck related how the Secret Police had swooped down on him at Tamarkan one day when he returned from the cemetery party, and took him to Kempei H.Q. at Kanburi for questioning. The Siamese doctor from whom Buck had been collecting the "Bangkok Chronicle" had been arrested previously, and under torture had revealed the names of Parker and Rogers. Poor old Ike Parker had been flogged into unconsciousness in an attempt to extract information from him. We asked Buck if he had been tortured too.

"No, I bull-----d the b----s out of it", said Buck.

The Kempei questioners had followed their usual form in extracting information from suspects.

"You are Major W.H. Rogers of the 131st. Field Regiment?"

"Yes, that's me"

"You have been obtaining Bangkok newspapers from a Siamese?"

"Yes, that's right"

"Do you not know that it is forbidden for prisoners to read newspapers?"

"Yes, but I could see no harm in it"

"That is for us to decide. Who else read the newspapers with you?"

"No one. I just read them by myself"

"Do you expect us to believe that? What about Lt. Col. Tharp, your commanding officer?"

"No, I did not show it to him"

"You and some other officers lived in a different part of the camp from the Americans. Why?"

(Apparently they knew of the "Drones Club", where Buck and the rest of us lived in a little mess of our own.)

"Well, to tell you the truth, just between ourselves, I can't stand Colonel Tharp. I just hate his God damned guts. So I left him and went to live in another part of the camp."

"What about the other officers who lived with you. Did you show them the papers?"

"No. You see I did not want to be found out, so I just read the papers myself and then destroyed them."

This was the sort of secretive and selfish attitude which the Jap mind could comprehend. Incredible though it may seem, they believed Roger's pack of lies, and did not torture him to extract further information. Of course they kept asking him the same questions over and over again, and altogether kept him on tenterhooks for over three hours. In the end they sentenced him to six years imprisonment, and he and Parker were sent to Bangkok gaol after a month in the cells at Kanburi.

BANGKOK INTERLUDE.

We found that our accommodation was to be in one of the godowns, a huge barn of a place with a concrete floor, galvanized iron roof and sides, and nothing else. The sleeping space worked out at only 6'. by 3'6" per.man, which was a little crowded, but we did not mind. We did not expect to remain here very long.

There were large bomb craters just outside the godown, and scores of bullet holes in the roof. We were told that the Japs had kept prisoners locked in these death traps during Allied air raids on the docks, and that one P.O.W. had been killed by a splinter from a bomb which exploded near by.

During the day a Chinese drove by in a car and handed an envelope to a British officer. It was marked "Confidential", and contained a hand written account of the events leading up to the surrender of Japan. From this letter we learned for the first time of the atomic bomb, and of the death of President Roosevelt. During the day the Japanese told McEachern that the officer's party would have to move on to Nakom Nyok as originally arranged. McEachern refused point blank, saying that we would remain where we were until Allied relief arrived.

The Japanese officer was embarrassed, and did not press the matter. Our position was rather peculiar. We were absolutely unarmed, in a city teeming with Japanese

troops. We had no idea what their reaction might be to the news of Japan's surrender, so it was necessary to proceed cautiously. We had no contact with the outside world, or with the Siamese government. It was decided to sit tight and see what happened.

That afternoon a Union Jack appeared, and was flown outside the godown. Lieut. John Ross of the 2/15 Field Regt. had successfully concealed it from the Japs for the whole three and a half years. It seemed the flag was scrounged from a regimental dance at the Sydney Town Hall nearly four years earlier.

We made ourselves as comfortable as possible under the crowded conditions, and retired to bed early. The concrete floor was hard and unyielding, the mosquitoes were fierce and persistent, but we were too tired and happy to care. On the second morning we all had a swim in the nearby waterhole, and felt much better. On the way back from the swim I saw an excited British officer talking to some friends.

"I've just seen a white woman at the end of the wharf. She looks wonderful, marvellous!"

None of us had seen a white woman since the collapse of Singapore. I had almost forgotten what they looked like. Trying to appear unconcerned, I strolled to the end of the godown, and there sitting in a sedan car, was a white woman - foreign looking, probably French - but still, a white woman. She was dressed in a simple white frock, and there was something clean and fragrant looking about her. I suddenly became aware of my own shabbiness, and slunk quietly away, hoping that I had not been seen.

August 18th - Paper is now available, so I have decided to keep a diary of daily events. Many more prisoners came in today from the Don Muang aerodrome just outside Bangkok, where they have been working on anti-aircraft defences. The very sick have been sent in to the Bangkok Hospital. The American pilot, Stivers, has been taken away with them. God knows how he survived the journey from Kanburi. He has a tumour on the brain, and they are trying to arrange an early trip to America by air. His case is too serious to be attempted here, but if he can be got to America quickly there is just a chance that he may be saved. If Coates had been granted permission to operate on him earlier he would probably have been well by now. When Bertie Coates asked permission to take Stivers to Bangkok as soon as the tumour appeared, the Japs refused.

I have seen the tumour. It is enormous, and bulges out from the side of his head like an ostrich egg, but it is larger than any ostrich egg I have seen. The poor fellow has been lying on the concrete floor of the godown since we arrived here. How he survived the journey from Kanburi is a mystery. We have not heard him utter a single word of complaint.

We held an impromptu concert on the wharf tonight. Norm Carter and I were strolling up and down listening to the music and singing when suddenly we heard the rattle of machine gun fire from a point just up the river. Norm and I sprinted smartly for cover, the audience and performers disappeared like magic. A few more isolated shots were heard, and then there was silence.

We decided to go to bed early. I had scrounged a few wooden planks and laid them across some heavy beams to keep me raised from the concrete floor. It was a great improvement.

August 19th - Rumours and news keep coming in all day. We hear that the Thai government has requested that no British troops come into Bangkok for some weeks. This is disturbing, because we are all anxious to get home as soon as possible.

There is a rumour that the British Military Mission will he here on the 25th

August. Perhaps we may learn something when they arrive. Everyone is wondering what is going to happen to us. One story is that we are all going to be sent to India by air, be refitted at Bangalore, and then sent home by ship.

The Menam river is mined near the mouth, and as the Thai Navy has no minesweepers, no transports can come to collect us. Japanese troops are clearing out by the dock area by hundreds. Strangely enough there are no incidents between their troops and ours. We just aren't interested in them. A drunken Jap soldier came into the godown today brandishing a revolver, and looking for trouble. Nobody too much notice of him, so he went away. We have no desire to take reprisals on the little yellow men.

An English resident named Duke came down to see us today, and promised that he would do his best to send us some extra food and clothing. It appears that he is one of the few Europeans who have not been interned. Apparently he had some sort of legal job with the Siamese government, and the Japs found him useful.

Norman, who was chafing at the bit because of the delay in making contact with the outside world, suggested we ask Duke if Bangkok Radio was in operation. Norman was anxious to make an early broadcast, telling the world something of our experiences and treatment. We went along together to have a word with Mr. Duke, but a worried looking Jap officer intervened. It seemed that Duke had not obtained permission from the Japs to come and see us. They went away to argue the matter out. Being unarmed, we are not yet in a position to take over complete control of the situation in Bangkok, and so far Thai officialdom has not been in touch with us.

August 20th - We are still living on Jap rations, but breakfast this morning is a distinct improvement. There is rice with a good stew, plus an egg and a peanut roastie.

Lt. Col. Swinton, with Lt. Col. Warren and the Dutch Lt. Col. Martell arrive from Kanburi today. They told us that a Jap Major had come into the camp on the 16th and sent for the hut commanders. He then informed them that the war was over. There were scenes of wild enthusiasm as the official announcement was made throughout the camp. Half an hour later Boon Pong arrived, carrying a portable radio set which he handed over to the prisoners for their use. He was accompanied by the Mayor of Kanburi, who asked that the camp refrain from entering the town just yet, as he was anxious to avoid any incidents with the Japs.

We asked for news of Bill Drower and they told us that Bill had been released as soon as the announcement had been made. He was in a shocking state, and was suffering from blackwater fever. For over 80 days he had not been allowed to wash or shave, and his condition was so low that two immediate blood transfusions had been necessary. He was now improving. Colonel Sugasawa, Chief of all War Prisoners in Thailand, had sent Bill a letter of apology, together with a bed, mattress, and a huge bucket of flowers.

Sugasawa said that Captain Noguchi had been arrested by the Imperial Japanese Army and reduced to the rank of private.

Today's best story is that the Webber Bros. radio set, which went out of action at Kanburi when the batteries were flooded, had been dismantled and sent on to Nakom Nyok, the parts being stowed away with a lot of junk in Noguchi's car.

There was excitement at the swimming pool this morning. I was just leaving after a swim when a Jap sentry had a shot at some Thais who came too near us. We are still not allowed communication with the outside world. However a radio set arrived today, and we start to listen in to regular news sessions.

Later. It looks as though we are beginning to have a say in things, Lt. Col. Swinton and Lt. Col McEachern and the senior Dutch officer have gone into Bangkok to establish a P.0.W. headquarters at a place called "Sathorn House".

Mr. Duke has kept his promise. Ready cooked cold chicken and salad was sent in from Bangkok for our lunch. It was wonderful, almost unbelievable. We had forgotten that such delicacies existed. In addition there are carrots, spinach, rice and bread pudding, and sweet tea. There is a heavy storm tonight, and rain comes pouring through a large bomb hole in the roof, but who cares?

August 21st – Yesterday's good food was too much for my poor tummy, unused to such luxuries for so long. I develop diarrhoaea. The Potsdam Declaration is read out to us on roll call parade this morning. We are just beginning to realise that the war is really over.

Another cooked meal arrived from Bangkok for lunch – half a roast duck per man. When the mess orderlies called out that there was a "back up" of half a duck each for thirty men, there was a wild rush. The Dutchmen win easily.

We have just come across a huge dump of Red Cross stores in the next godown today. We commandeered the lot. This is the stuff the Japs should have given us years ago. It has obviously been stored there for ages. I was issued with a clean white towel and a pair of shorts.

News comes in from the Bangkok hospital that the sick are having a wonderful time, with capable Siamese nurses to look after them, and beauteous white ladies bringing them cooked dainties every day. I found Johnny Stringer packing up today, he is to leave at once to take charge of a camp about two hundred miles south from here, at a place called Prachuab Kirikan. A report has come in that things are pretty grim down there, with hundreds of prisoners in very bad shape, and between two and three hundred already dead. The camp is on the narrow part of the Kra Isthmus near Mergui.

Wednesday. August 22nd - Lt. Col. Toosey arrived from Nakom Nyok today. He says that Noguchi started playing up as soon as he arrived there. Officers had been beaten and stood to attention at the guardhouse for accepting a Tical and an egg from a Thai on the way to the new camp. Two others had been severely beaten because they were so ill that they collapsed on the 48 kilometre march. However, Noguchi achieved a complete volte face when the end came. On the 16th he had returned from a conference and his first act was to release the officers who had been kept standing to attention. One of them had been there for three and a half days. Noguchi had said to them,

"Gentlemen, we are all officers together. You are serving your King, and I am serving my Emperor. You may go".

He then told Toosey that the war was over, and proceeded to hand over Red Cross supplies and thousand of letters which he had withheld for months. Toosey said that Noguchi was obviously afraid that the prisoners would take revenge on him for his treatment of Bill Drower, and tried to ingratiate himself with some of the officers by asking them to dine with him. They had refused.

We are all laughing over the sequel to the daring trick of sending the secret radio to Nakom Nyok in Noguchi's car. It appears that when the end was announced, someone had gone to him and asked for some batteries.

"Why do you want batteries?", asked the Nips.

"For our wireless set"

"What wireless set?"

"Oh, the one we have had all the time. Our last lot of batteries were spoiled at Kanburi".

I believe the Nips were furious, especially when they thanked Noguchi for carrying the set in his own car!

Thursday. 23rd August - Today the Australian news bulletin stated that at the Premier's Conference in Australia it had been recommended that there be a one day holiday when the men of the 8th Division return to Australia. Senator Keane had said,

"Australia can never do too much for those who had been captives of the Japanese for three and a half years."

This was received with ironic cheers.

Friday. 24th August - We are still at the godown. Further Red Cross supplies have been handed out, including soap, tobacco, handkerchiefs, and toothbrushes. My handkerchief has a red, white and black border, and is branded "MADE IN GERMANY". Still it is a clean one, and I have no scruples about using it.

Some of the men are already selling their new clothing to the Thais, who pull up near the wharf in junks and sampans. I saw fifteen ticals change hands for a pair of shorts this morning.

Saturday. 25th August - At lunch time we are told that all field officers are to be sent to the Oriental Hotel in Bangkok. We are to move almost immediately. There is some grumbling among some of the junior officers, but their turn will come soon.

John and I left with a bus load at half past four. Just as we were leaving we were drenched to the skin by one of the heaviest thunderstorms I had ever experienced. As the bus pulled out several truck loads of officers from Nakom Nyok arrived at the godown. I just had time to wave to Arch Ewart and Pat Giddings.

We found the Oriental Hotel a large two storey building overlooking the river. Our rooms were upstairs, and to our surprise Buck Rogers and Elkins were waiting for John and I, we were to share the same large room and balcony. John and I are to share an enormous bed, the largest I have ever seen. It is 8 feet long and six feet six inches wide, and covered with a huge mosquito net. There is a double spring mattress with springs six inches deep, and on top of this is a horse hair filled ticking about five inches thick. The furniture is massive, and includes writing desk and card tables, a floor lamp and a ceiling fan. The light is not on yet, the power house was put out of action by Allied bombers. Out on the balcony are three beds and a settee.

We have not seen such luxury for years, and had almost forgotten that such articles as chairs and beds existed. Wonder of wonders, there is a porcelain enamel bath and a wash basin in the bathroom which opens off our bedroom. The last time I sat in a bath was at Raffles Hotel, Singapore exactly four year ago!

Two large shuttered windows on the balcony open out to a view looking due west across the Menam River, or the Mother of Waters.

Just below was a large lawn flanked by palms and exotic tropical plants. The lawn was scarred by a series of slit trenches, which zig-zagged across its entire length. In each of the two corners on the river side is an air raid shelter.

There is an unceasing flow of picturesque river craft up and down the river, mostly launches and sampans. Across the river, which is about 180 yards wide at this point, are a lot of ramshackle wooden buildings which look like store sheds, most of them

have rusty iron roofs. There is a meal served downstairs at six o'clock this evening, but we still have to queue up with our mess tins and dixies. My mug is still a powdered tin with a piece of wire soldered on it for a handle.

During the evening another hundred officers arrive from the godown, they are bedded down in the adjacent building, which was used during the war as Kempei headquarters, but which was formerly the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank. In the yard at the rear of the bank building there still stands a circle of stout wooden stakes to which the sadistic Secret Police bound their victims during torture.

Sunday. 26th August - John and I woke up at dawn today after the most refreshing night's sleep either of us have had for four years. The bed was as comfortable as it appeared. Several curious people who have heard of the massive double bed which John and I are sharing come up to have a look at it. Some facetious wag dubbed it "John and Jake's Love Nest."

The Bangkok newspaper says that the electric light may be restored today, in the meantime we have found some candles. The water supply is available only at certain hours, so we kept a reserve in the large stone tong in the bathroom. Just before lunch today a B29 flew over Bangkok dropping leaflets. We heard the "Pop" as the canisters were ejected, and collected several leaflets which fluttered down on to the lawn. I collected one as a souvenir, but it was printed in Siamese and I cannot read it.

This afternoon I rummaged in the office, and discovered a book marked "Receipt for Messages". Among the signatures I saw those of Sir Josiah Crosby, British Consul in Bangkok just prior to the Japs entering the war, also those of the French, Swiss and Norwegian Consuls. After the 6th December 1941, there were no more British signatures in the book, and 95 per cent of the entries were for Siamese and Japanese officials.

There is a Japanese guard on duty at the hotel exits, and we are not permitted to leave the hotel without special permission. A couple of young Australian officers broke the rule and sneaked out to a nearby hotel called the Trocadero. They came back rather hurriedly when they discovered that beer was 17 Ticals a bottle!

Monday. 27th August – A couple of delightful French ladies invited Buck Rogers and Elkin to dinner last night, so they sneaked past the sentry and spent a most enjoyable evening at their home. Today the ladies sent the Americans a gift of some delicious white bread. Buck and Elkin invited John and I to share the bread with them, it is the first we have tasted for years. Only those who have been without this "staff of life" for so long can really appreciate how much we enjoyed it.

We heard today that an organisation has been set up in Calcutta to deal with the evacuation of prisoners of war and internees from one hundred and eighty prison camps in the Far East. Charles Green is flown to Ubon, over by the French-Indo-China border today. He is to take charge of an Allied P.O.W. camp there.

At ten o'clock tonight a British Lt. Col. arrived at the hotel and addressed all the officers in the lounge. He said he was the advance guard of a military mission which was coming in to Bangkok to organise our evacuation. We all hope it won't be long now. He gave us a very interesting talk on the closing stages of the war, especially with regard to the landing in Normanby, and about the new types of planes.

Lt. Col. Williams is to fly to Rangoon tomorrow morning at six. He is taking with him reports of Japanese atrocities, and the complete list of all Australian prisoners in Siam, as well as the names of all those who perished during captivity. He expects to fly

on to Australia via India. Lt. Col. Williamson of the B.E.F. is going with him to carry similar details on from Rangoon to England.

Tuesday. 28th August - Red Cross Depots have been opened all over Bangkok, and the townspeople are being asked to contribute gifts of clothing and necessities for the recovered prisoners of war. There is one of these depots right outside our hotel. Personally I do not like the idea, it smacks of charity. Most of us would rather wait till official supplies can be flown in.

There was a revolution scheduled for today, in which Thai guerrillas and American paratroops were to seize power from the Japanese at certain selected points, and set free all the war prisoners. The atomic bomb had upset the time tables, but the Japs knew that some such uprising was planned, although they did not know when or where. The Japs had planned to massacre all the war prisoners at the first sign of an uprising. PHEW! We had missed extermination by just 13 days. Who said 13 was unlucky?

Norman and I were playing chess by candlelight tonight, when suddenly the electric light came on. Loud cheers were heard from all over the hotel.

Wednesday. 29th August - Norman and Rohan Rivett were to go by plane today, but something happened and they missed it. Poor old John got a dose of food poisoning and went into a coma. He looked so ill that I thought he was going to die. We have only one M.O. on the hotel, I sent for him but he was too drunk to come. I was furious, but when I discovered that the poor devil had spent the last couple of years in several jungle coolie camps, I felt sorry for him. He had not seen a white man all that time. The Japs had forced him to carry out all sorts of degrading tasks, and at the same time had expected him to perform miracles by healing sick coolies without medical supplies. Its a wonder he preserved his sanity. John pulled through, and is a bit better tonight, but he cannot eat anything.

I've got a touch of food poisoning myself, but nothing like John. Our old friend Major McLaren, "The British Raj", as John calls him, collapsed today. He is suffering from the same complaint. I went over to his room to see him, but he is too weak even to talk to me. Some bad meat must have come in today.

Buck Rogers and Elkie have gone. They flew on the first stage of their journey home this morning. Two good fellows. I wonder if we shall ever see them again?

Thursday. 30th August - A terrific rain storm burst over Bangkok this morning. The claps of thunder were deafening, and literally shook the hotel. John is a bit better today, but is still not eating. I manage an omelette and a bit of fish. Lt. Col. Eadie and Major Bill Wearne came to stay the night on the balcony.

Friday. 31st August - John and I are much better, but are still confined to our room. At last a start has been made to evacuate the men. At least nine hundred got away by air to Singapore today.

Saturday. 1st September - The weather is perfect now. Jack Carey's brother, who is a pilot in the R.A.F., arrived unexpectedly at the hotel today. He is flying back to Rangoon tomorrow, and has offered to take air mail letters for Australia with him. I seized the opportunity, and wrote my first letter home for three years and eight months.

The Jap sentries, who have been picquetting the hotel until now, have gone at last. We are glad to see the end of them. Joe Harris has a cocktail bar operating in the hotel now. It is run by the Chinese, and we can buy a cocktail for 1½ ticals, a whisky for 2

ticals, and an ice cream for 1½ ticals.

At the present rate of exchange the tical is worth only fourpence, so the prices are very reasonable.

Sunday. 2nd September - The British Mission and some air borne troops arrive today, so we are looking forward to a speeding up in the evacuation of all Allied ex-prisoners.

This morning a party of 20 Japs under one of their own officers arrived at the hotel and reported to Lt. Col. George Ramsay, who is now in charge. He quickly put them to work on cleaning the place up. They set to and did the job properly. Strangely enough I did not get the kick I expected when I saw them working for us. All their old arrogance is gone. We have no desire to "take it out" on them, and feel only contempt and pity for them.

They have been the victims of the biggest hocus pocus ever perpetrated on the people of one race, the so called "Divine Descent" of their Emperor and their place in the sun as children of the divinity. The arrival of the Jap fatigue parties is well timed, for today their leaders signed the surrender terms on board U.S.S. "Missouri" in Tokio Bay. We listened in tonight to a description of the surrender ceremony. It was a thrill to hear the voices of General McArthur, Admiral Nimitz and President Truman.

Monday. 3rd September - Joe Harris and his two sons are living at the hotel now. Joe is sharing our balcony, and has been appointed hotel manager. The catering will be in his capable hands, and we are looking forward to better food.

Six years ago tonight, Sunday September 3rd, 1939, our radio programme was interrupted to announce that Great Britain had declared war on Germany. What a lot has happened to me since then. Training camps at Broadmeadows, Torquay, Seymour, Liverpool, Ingleburn and Bathurst, then the trip on the Queen Mary to Singapore, followed by training at Kuala Lumpur and Johore Bahru.

Then the fall of Singapore on 15th February 1942, Changi prison camp, the Burma-Siam railway, and now, six years later, at the Oriental Hotel, Bangkok, waiting to be sent home to dear old Aussie again.

We are told today that we may write our first official air mail letter home. It is a great thrill to sit down and communicate with our loved ones again, and we are all looking forward with eager anticipation to our first letters from home.

We have a piano now, it arrived yesterday. One of the Dutchman, a pianist with a beautiful touch, has been playing some of the classics from memory. It is a delight to listen to good music once more.

This afternoon I left the hotel for the first time since arriving here nine days ago. John has become friendly with a Swedish engineer named Rasmussen, he is the Far East representative of the well known engineering firm of Christiana, Neilsen. Rasmussen has offered his car and a Thai chauffer to take groups of officers on a tour of Bangkok. Today's party consists of Gus Dale, Ray Meagher, John Lloyd and myself. We went first to the Zoo, and were pleasantly surprised at the number and variety of the animals there, especially the monkeys, which are tethered to trees in the street OUTSIDE the Zoo. It is a novel arrangement.

Up in the tree is a large kennel or monkey house, where the monkey sleeps. From this tree to the next is stretched a tight wire rope, and the monkey, tethered by a chain to a ring looped over the tight rope, is free to move from one tree to the next. This they

frequently do, either going hand over hand, or by walking across “Blondin” fashion. The chain and ring, of course go with them.

Sometimes they would show off to the visitors by letting out a loud “whoop”, giving a spectacular jump and catching the chain and ring in mid air. The impetus carries the ring and chain along to the next tree like a flying fox. The monkeys seemed to enjoy this mode of transport, for they kept flying back and forth all the time we were there.

We next visited Bangkok's largest temple, known as the “Wat P0”, where we saw the gigantic “Sleeping Buddha”. This enormous idol was over fifty feet long and represented the Buddha in a reclining position. The soles of the feet were inlaid with mother of pearl and were a work of art in themselves.

Tuesday. 4th September - Jack Carey's brother came back from Rangoon and offered to take more letters, so I spent all day writing home. This evening Group Captain Bell of the R.A.A.F. gave a talk to all the officers in the lounge on conditions in Australia. We were all surprised to learn of the extensive rationing of food stuffs and clothing, and of the shortages in all sorts of raw materials.

Major Burphett of R.A.P.W.I. is with him, and after the talk they are both kept pretty busy answering questions on the conditions prevailing in Australia. We definitely obtained the impression that things at home are not all we expected them to be. Our eagerness to get home is in no way dampened, but we have been given some food for thought.

Wednesday. 5th September - Hearing that some Sigs were at the godown I went there on a D.R.L.S. truck and had a long yarn to Bruce Lang and Joe Tinning. There are still hundreds of men at the godown, they all look well and seem happy enough. As I left the wharf I carried away the memory of a diminutive Chinese boy, naked except for a felt hat, rummaging in the kitchen garbage bins for vegetable scraps. It was a grim reminder that there are millions in the Far East on the verge of starvation. We have felt the pangs of hunger continually over the last three years and more, but this wee lad is one of the millions who will go through life perpetually under nourished. It makes one realise that what we have been through is preferable to the life of semi-starvation to which untold millions is Asia are condemned.

We came back via P.0.W. headquarters at Sathorn House. Lady Mountbatten was there visiting the staff, so I waited to see her leave. She drove away in the Regent's pale blue Mercedes Benz, driven by a white uniformed Thai chauffer from the Imperial Palace. I saluted as she went by, and was rewarded with a charming smile. It is easy to understand why she is so popular with the troops.

While I was waiting at Sathorn House I chatted to a young Thai Lt. Col. He spoke perfect English. When I asked him about the boy king, who was then in Switzerland, he said he hoped his ruler would soon return to his people for the coronation.

I saw a jeep for the first time, and had a chat with the Ghurka driver. He was a tough looking little fellow, and in the course of conversation said that he would like to kill a Japanese Captain, and would I tell him how to recognise one. I told him!

Occupation troops from the Fourteenth Army in Burma are pouring in. Dakotas loaded with British and Indian troops are landing at the drome every hour. John is out today with the C.R.E. of the 7th Indian Division. With characteristic thoroughness John had already studied the water supply and workshop facilities of Bangkok and was now

passing on his knowledge to the Royal Engineers.

The cocktail bar is now putting on hot suppers. Before turning in tonight I had a great feed of fried eggs and noodles. The lot cost only 14 ticals, or one shilling and fourpence.

Thursday, 6th September - Met an interesting gentleman at the hotel today, he is Mr. Gersn, a Russian architect and interior decorator who has been in Thailand for over twenty years. He told us that his warehouse had been destroyed by Allied bombing, and he had lost a quarter of a million ticals worth of stock.

Two charming A.T.S. ladies, aides to Lady Mountbatten, called at the hotel to pay us an official visit. One of them, a Mrs. Miller, left London only four days ago. She is a Lt. Col. in the A.T.S., and had served as a driver in the First World War. The other is a tall Amazonian blonde of striking beauty, and wears the insignia of a Captain. Her name is Mrs. Girouard.

This afternoon John and I went out to the Don Muang aerodrome in an Army truck. Our driver is a Jap. I was surprised at the size and modernity of Bangkok's airport. While I was there I had a good look over Lady Mountbatten's private plane, a specially fitted Douglas DC3. The wireless officer showed me over the plane, and I commented on the comfortable furnishings.

"This is nothing," he said, "you should see Lord Louis' plane. Its a beauty".

While I was waiting back at the truck for John the Jap driver asked me for permission to visit the lavatory. The tables are turned. How many times, when working on the railway, have I asked the same question of the guards?

A Thai orchestra came to the hotel tonight to play for us, but I was tired and went to bed early.

Friday. 7th September - Lady Mountbatten, accompanied by a British Major General, Lt. Col. Miller and Captain Girouard of the A.T.S., visited us this morning. Joe Harris excelled himself, and turned on a splendid morning tea, with real cream cakes! Lady Louis specially commented on them, and Joe swelled up with justifiable pride. Lady Louis chatted freely with us, and explained how short of materials her husband was until the European war ended.

She said that when Lord Louis took over South East Asia Command he was told that he would have to wait at least a year before he could be spared enough men and materials to take the offensive.

At six o'clock this evening Mr. Gersn, the Russian architect, called for Captain Stewart Handasyde, John and myself. He took us to his home in the residential area, where we met his sister and his two charming nieces. His wife was away at their seaside home with his two sons. Peter was there when we arrived. We spent a delightful evening, following on the most perfect meal I had enjoyed since the good old days at Kuala Lumpur in 1941.

Soup, fish, chicken and beans, was followed by caramel custard for dessert, all deliciously cooked. Even if we had not been half starved for so long it would still have been a wonderful meal, but after 3850 consecutive meals of rice - well, words fail to do it justice. After dinner Mr. Gersn showed us his collection of art treasures. I had seen nothing like it outside a fashionable art dealer's shop, and he told us that most of his best pieces were locked away during the war and had not yet been unpacked.

Saturday. 8th September - Jack Carey's brother has brought us a stack of Aussie

newspapers for April, May, and June of this year. I spent the morning reading them. It seemed strange seeing all the old familiar advertisements once again.

The European internees invited us all to a concert at their camp tonight. Several truck loads of our chaps went over and spent an enjoyable evening, followed by drinks and supper in the basement of the concert hall. On the way out our trucks were stopped by Thai entries every half mile or so. We were told that Thai troops had manned every machine gun post in the city. It appears that they are expecting riots or trouble of some sort.

Sunday. 9th September - After a quiet day writing letters I had a most interesting evening. For the first time I visited a Siamese theatre. Major John Lloyd and Captain Arthur Hence, who knew a couple of English speaking Chinese lads, invited me to join them. We went to a theatre called Nakom Posit, where we saw a Siamese play and some vaudeville. The Chinese lads, who spoke Thai, explained the plot of the play.

The governor of a certain province is very ill, and his beautiful young wife has been unfaithful to him. The wife's lover is in turn loved by a young woman who happens to be the faithless wife's best friend. The governor's wife confided to her friend that she is going to have a baby, and that her lover is the father. Her friend confesses that she too is in love with the young man, whereupon the two heartbroken women embrace and weep upon each other's shoulders. They are very sympathetic and understanding towards each other, and are both very unhappy, the governor's wife because she cannot marry the man she loves, and her best friend because the man she loves does not return her affection.

However, the sick governor obligingly dies, and the young man, after vanquishing a rival suitor for the widow's hand, marries her and rules as governor in the place of his wife's former husband.

The vaudeville was excellent. It included two children about eight years of age who sang a love duet. They were dressed as adults, and their act was as polished and sophisticated as any adult vaudeville artists. A comic jazz band and a girl soprano with good looks and personality were other noteworthy items on a splendid programme. Although the whole performance was in Siamese I noticed that the principal comedian used the words "atomic bomb" several times in English. Each time he used the words the audience roared with laughter. I wonder if it really was something to laugh about?

Tonight we rode in "trishaws" for the first time. There are thousands of them here in Bangkok. They consist of a bicycle with a side car attached, and can carry two medium sized passengers. Bangkok is perfectly flat, there is not a hill for miles around, hence the popularity of the trishaw. Bicycles also are particularly abundant.

On the way home we had supper at a Siamese restaurant. From next door we heard a terrific din, and went in to investigate. It was a sort of miniature casino, and a few Chinese were gambling at a couple of tables. The noise was proceeding from a Chinese orchestra, who produced a weird cacophony of sound from stringed instruments, drums and cymbals.

The orchestra was ably assisted by a chorus of four quaint Chinese children whose ages ranged from five to ten years. These doll like little creatures were singing in the peculiar high pitched, squeaky voice typical of the Chinese. How the gamblers concentrated on their games was a mystery.

Monday. 10th September - Major General Evans, General Officer Commanding the 7th Indian Division, paid us an official visit today. He explained that he was doing his

best to get all of us away at the earliest possible moment, but that there was a shortage of shipping. Also it had been necessary to divert a lot of planes to Sumatra to repatriate some Dutch internees who had been discovered there in a pitiable plight.

Ray Carruthers, Bluey Andrews and Joe Tunsted called to see me tonight, we had a drink and a yarn together. Good fellows, all of them. Before going to bed tonight I listened in to a broadcast by General Blamey. It was the most scathing condemnation of the Japanese as a people I have yet heard. Needless to say we all heartily agreed with him.

Tuesday. 11th September - Brigadier "Gaffer" Lloyd, Chief of the Australian Recovery Group, arrived by plane from Singapore today. He said that he too is doing all he can to get us home as soon as possible. He tells the same story - shortage of ships and planes. I have resigned myself to a long wait, and have decided to eat as much as possible and to get myself fit. I do not want to go home looking as thin as I do now. I am still three stone underweight, but gaining rapidly.

Wednesday. 12th September - Went up town shopping with John Hordern this morning. Prices are pretty high in some places. A cup of coffee and two small cakes cost five ticals (1/8d.)

Other prices we noted were:- Lifebuoy Soap 2/-, small tin Nugget 1/8d., Johnny Walker whisky £13/6/8d., dress material £3/6/8d per yard, Max Factor makeup £2/10/-.

Went to the Odeon picture theatre tonight with Leicester Hellyer. The whole dress circle had been reserved for ex-prisoners and the place was filled. The Odeon is a modern theatre, with a stage show preceding the film. There was a good swing band, and two attractive Siamese soubrettes singing popular numbers in English. The Indian news reel showed Mountbatten's Victory Parade in Rangoon, while the Gaumont British News filmed the Australian 9th Division landing at Tarakan. The feature film was the popular comic team of Abbott and Costello in "Lost in a Harem".

Thursday. 13th September - John, who is acting as Adjutant for Lt. Col. Ramsay, told me today that I have a job. I was to report to "E" Group, H.Q. RAPWI at the internees camp situated in the College on the other side of the city. I arrived there in time for lunch and was allotted a room in a long hut with cubicles opening off the verandah. Rupert Barraclough is in the cubicle next to me, and Pat Giddings and Ray Nixon are further along the verandah.

Barra and Ray are working on RAPWI staff in connection with the evacuation of ex-prisoners and internees, while Pat is on communications. My job is to be the collection and collation of war crime reports. Four clerks are to arrive tomorrow to assist me. Before turning in Pat showed me one of the radio sets which has been set up for communications with RAPWI HQ at Bangkok and similar H.Q. at Rangoon, Singapore, Saigon and Calcutta.

Monday. 17th September - Have been working at RAPWI for a few days now. Our old friend Major Laming, "The Judge" from Kanburi is on the same job. We have collected hundreds and hundreds of atrocity stories from prison camps in Burma, Siam, Java, Sumatra, Malaya and French-Indo-China. I now have seven clerks assisting me to copy and index the reports. Among them are several from the area where Johnny Stringer was sent nearly a month ago. They make pretty grim reading. It's a gruesome business reading story after story of Japanese inhumanity and cruelty.

The RAPWI officer to whom I am responsible is a young British Lieutenant

Colonel , he is a charming young fellow and it is a pleasure to work with him. There is an English speaking Korean ex P.0.W. guard who reports to the judge every day, he has turned informer and is giving information as to the hideouts of Japs and Koreans, many of whom have gone underground to escape retribution.

It is very pleasant out here at the College, though I miss John. We help ourselves to meals at the camp cafeteria, the meals are excellent. Lt. Col. Coates, Newton Lee and Bill Tilny all have jobs out here. Before the war the college was known as "The Eton of the East". Civilian internees have been kept here under guard since they were transferred from another camp last year. They had to leave the last place because it was too close to a military target, and one or two had been killed in one of the many Allied raids.

They have been treated moderately well, mainly because the Thai government insisted on guarding the internees with their own troops, in spite of pressure from the Japanese, who wanted to place them under the "care" of the Imperial Japanese Army.

This afternoon I went out to the Bangkok Civil Hospital, I went specially to see Bill Drower, who was sharing a room there with Peter Campbell. Both expect to be evacuated soon. Bill looks comparatively well, in spite of what he has been through. It is the first time I have seen him since just before Noguchi had him placed in solitary confinement. He is the same old Bill.

Wednesday. 19th September - Pat and I went for a stroll tonight, and saw the stables where the Kings of Siam kept their white elephants. We noticed bright lights and sweet music in the direction of a large rotunda in the Umbon Gardens, and went over to investigate.

We stayed to listen to the orchestra, and finished up at the bar, where free drinks were being handed out to all and sundry. Altogether a most satisfactory arrangement. The Thai manager invited us to supper and told us to stay and drink as much as we wished. We did.

Friday. 21st September - Riots broke out in Bangkok yesterday. This morning I went out to the airport to interview several ex prisoners and to obtain some atrocity reports. Most of the chaps were reluctant to speak of their experiences, they wanted to forget. There were all too eager to get home as soon as possible, and I did not get much information from them.

This evening while I was out for a stroll with Bill Tilny we heard machine gun fire. There are picquets everywhere. The trouble seems to be between the Chinese and the Thais, and as a safety precaution the dangerous areas of the city have been placed out of bounds to the ex prisoners.

Saturday. 22nd September - Three Sigs - Jim Cortis, "Happy" Marshall and Morrie Turnbull arrived to assist me today. According to the newspapers two Australians were injured in the rioting last night trying to rescue a third companion from a drunken brawl. One of them died as a result of his wounds. A curfew has been imposed as from seven p.m. today until further notice.

Sunday. 23rd September - The Atrocity stories are mounting up by the hundred. Lieut. Des McCauley, Roger Martin and Flying Officer Don Capron arrived today to provide further assistance, there is so much work to do.

Tuesday. 25th September - Three Cheers! I received my first mail from home today, two from Dorothy and one from mother. They have not yet heard that I am safe. This evening some Chinese shops outside the college gate were stoned and attacked by

hooligans. Every night we can hear sounds of shooting in the city a mile or so away.

Saturday. 29th September - Yesterday evening I went to the Fine Arts Theatre to see an exhibition of Siamese national dancing. The movements of the dancers are graceful in the extreme, with accent on body posture and the positions of the hands and fingers. The picturesque traditional costumes are very beautiful, and the colouring magnificent.

Tonight Pat and I went to another dance at Umbon Park, and enjoyed ourselves as before.

Sunday. 30th September - Barra and I went to the races today - a novel experience. The course was crowded with people of all nationalities. There were Siamese, Indians, Chinese, Malays and servicemen of all the Allied nations. The jockeys were Siamese or Indians, and the horses were not much larger than a big St. Bernard dog. In fact they were rather like Shetland ponies, except that they were not so shaggy. We were rather surprised to find a modern totalisator in operation.

We had dinner at the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, which has been taken as a staging camp for ex prisoners. Ray Nixon, who has reformed the Tamarkan concert party, had a concert scheduled for tonight, so we stayed to see it. Ron Wells was producer, and he had induced Teddy Weller to make a re-appearance as female impersonator, the role in which he was so popular at Tamarkan.

The show was excellent, all the old favourites were there - Val Ballantyne, Dick Morey, Doug Coleman and the Ockerse Trio. Samathini, the popular piano accordeonist from Chunkai, was leader of the orchestra, which included Peter Beaton, Vince Broe, Scottie Patterson and Coles-Smith.

Monday. 1st October - Barra and I decided to have dinner at Bangkok's largest and swankiest hotel, the Ratana Kosin. We ran into Ray Nixon and his concert party, who were having a farewell dinner there prior to making a broadcast to Australia from Bangkok Radio.

Tuesday. 2nd October - My job at RAPWI HQ finished today. I returned to the Oriental to find John looking very tired. He has been working too hard and is not sleeping very well.

Wednesday. 3rd October - Loud Cheers. I am to be evacuated at last. My only regret is that I cannot wait for John, who is to stay till the last with Lt. Col. Ramsay. After being so long together it would have been wonderful if we could have returned on the same ship, but it is not to be. I said goodbye to him at two o'clock and went out to the airport, where there is a staging camp for ex prisoners to stay the night. This was to ensure that they were on the spot ready for an early departure the following morning. The officers dined at the Thai Air Force Officers Mess in the huge administrative building. We had no inclination to make “whoopee”, although there was plenty to drink. Most of us went to bed early.

Thursday. 14th October - After an early breakfast we drove out to the airstrip, where the din was terrific as Dakota after Dakota warmed up. We waited about for a while before being allotted to a plane. There were twenty in our party, which included Lt. Col. Norman Eadie, Buster Badger and Major Robertson. We took off at three minutes past nine, and Bangkok quickly disappeared in the distance.

This was my first long plane trip, and I settled down to enjoy it. Singapore was about a thousand miles away, and as we winged our way down the Malay peninsular I

looked down on the panorama of mountainous jungle country with occasional glimpses of coastline. Mersing, on the east coast of Malaya, where the Australians dug in to await the expected Japanese landing, was clearly visible.

At sixteen minutes past two we touched down at Kalang airport on the island of Singapore, having completed our thousand mile journey in five hours thirteen minutes.

It is only now, when I am on the first stage of the journey home after seven weeks in Bangkok, that I realise we are really free. I am looking forward to the next stage with suppressed excitement. On alighting from the plane we were given gifts of cigarettes by some Red Cross lasses, and were then driven out to No. 5 Recovery Group Camp at Changi.

There was an organisation there under Lt. Col. Brown to receive us. After three and a half years of Japanese administrative bungling it was a pleasure to find that the arrangements for our reception worked like clockwork. We were fitted out with new clothing and uniforms, and then paid in real Australian money. After that I went back to the officer's mess where we were served with Australian beer right out of the refrigerator.

During the evening we were entertained by an open air movie show, where we saw the film "Seven Sweethearts", with the attractive singing star Kathryn Grayson. Back at the mess a batman had prepared a bed for me in a tent overlooking the beach. It was a delightfully picturesque spot, and under different conditions I would have enjoyed a long holiday there.

Friday. 5th October - This morning the adjutant asked me if I would like to go home on a ship called the "Highland Brigade". I could not say "Yes" quickly enough, and I looked anxiously over his shoulder while he entered my name on the nominal roll. In all my life I have never obtained so much pleasure from watching somebody else write my name.

This morning we heard that the Australian nurses who have just been recovered from Sumatra are at the 14th Australian General Hospital, which is located at St. Patrick's School, Katong, formerly the site of the 13th A.G.H. to which many of the recovered nurses belonged. I managed to procure a jeep, and went out to the hospital with Lt. Col. Norman Eadie, only to find that the nurses had just been sent to the hospital ship "Manunda". While I was at the hospital I called to see Staff Sergeant Jim Stewart of Sigs, who had been very ill. Last night he was not expected to live, but when I saw him he had just passed the crisis. He was barely conscious when I spoke to him so I stayed only a few minutes.

For a few minutes before I left I had an interesting chat with Sister McIverhill, who had been a nursing sister with the 13th A.G.H. before the fall of Singapore, and had been one of the fortunate ones who got away in time to avoid capture. From the hospital I went down to the "Manunda" and was allowed on board to see the nurses.

I renewed acquaintance with many old friends, including Mavis Hannah, Ada Syer, Wilma Oram and Vivienne Bulwinkle. They all looked very happy, but were still showing signs of the terrible ordeal they had been through. Sister Molverhill at the hospital had told me that Vivienne Bulwinkle had done a marvellous job during captivity in keeping up the morale of the other girls, and had set a splendid example of patience, courage and cheerfulness during adversity.

Bulwinkle was the sole survivor of the Banka Island massacre, in which several Australian nurses were brutally murdered. The ship in which they were being evacuated

from Singapore had been bombed, and some of the nurses had made their way ashore to Banka Island, where they were met by a Japanese patrol. The officer had forced the girls to walk back into the sea, and when the water was over their waists he had ordered his men to fire at them with rifles and machine guns. All except Bulwinkle were killed or drowned. Although wounded, she managed to get back to the shore unseen by the patrol. After a series of incredible adventures she finally got to Sumatra, only to be captured and placed in captivity with the batch of nurses who had been captured from another vessel.

THE VOYAGE HOME

Saturday. 16th October - Perhaps today can be counted as one of the most exciting of my life, for I am now actually on board the ship which is to take me back to Australia after an absence of four years and eight months. I was up at five this morning and came down to Keppel Harbour in a jeep with Major Ron Merrett and Major Les Robertson. We were the first aboard at nine o'clock, and we leaned over the rail and watched the troops come aboard.

What a happy laughing lot they were, and to think that a few short weeks ago they were scattered in prison camps all over Siam. There are thirty of my Sigs among them so there will be plenty of pleasant company on the way home.

At three o'clock in the afternoon we pulled out of Keppel Harbour and waved farewell to Singapore, the scene of our triumphant arrival on the "Queen Mary" in February 1941, and of our humiliating surrender just a year later. An hour after we sailed we had a sharp reminder that even though the war was over, we were not yet out of danger. At four o'clock the captain called us all to "boat stations" and announced over the loud speaker system that we were now entering a minefield area.

Our route was to be due North up the Straits of Malacca, and then round the Northern tip of Sumatra. Although we were navigating a lane cleared through the minefields in the Straits we would not be out of danger until the ship rounded Sumatra. Until then everyone on board was to wear or carry a lifebelt continuously.

We have nearly eight hundred ex prisoners of war on board, as well as about fifty civilian internees, including women and children. They have been released from internment camps in Hong Kong, Borneo, Singapore, Java and Sumatra, and are mostly Britishers who have relatives or friends in Australia. Some of them still show signs of the ordeal they have been through, and a few of the children appear undernourished.

Before the war the "Highland Brigade" was a passenger liner on the UK-South America run, but throughout the war she has been a trooper. I am quartered in a large 16 berth cabin which was once the ship's nursery. With me are Lt. Col. Norman Eadie, Lt.Col. Chris Black, Majors Charles Green, Ron Merrett, John Stringer, Ewan Corlette, Lea Robertson and Sweeney, and Captain George Murphy. There is also a British Lt. Col. from a prison camp in Borneo and a New Zealand Naval officer on his way home after a long period of active service in these waters.

Sunday. 14th October - We have been at sea for eight days, and are due at Fremantle tomorrow. It has been a wonderful trip so far, with perfect weather all the way. I have been kept pretty busy, for Lt. Colonel Black, who is O.C. Troops, has appointed me Entertainment Officer. Johnny Vance has been a great help and has already arranged three concerts. I have been running picture shows, sweeps, deck games and a library. We are allowed a ration of two bottles of Australian beer a week, plus

cigarettes and chocolates. It all seems too good to be true. I am sure I will arrive home at least a stone heavier than when I left Singapore.

Monday. 15th October - This afternoon we sighted Rottnest Island - our first glimpse of Australian soil. It is difficult to analyse the emotions on seeing one's homeland for the first time after a long absence. I was intensely excited, and even Charles Green, who is usually the calmest of men, is all worked up. He tried not to show it, but with his wife and family waiting on the wharf, how can he help being excited?

We berthed at Fremantle at five p.m., and there was an enthusiastic crowd to welcome us. The Western Australians went ashore here, and I watched them hurry down the gang-planks to be embraced by their waiting wives, sweethearts and mothers, my emotions almost overcame me. I had to leave the deck until I regained control of myself. I had not been so close to tears since the morning of 17th August when we stood in the railway yards at Bangkok and sang the National Anthem following the glorious news that the war had ended.

This evening I stepped ashore on Australian soil for the first time in fifty six months. Later at a hotel lounge in Perth Johnny Ross of the "Perth", Colonel Chris Black, Lt. Lloyd Lawton and two British nurses from the ship drank with me in celebration of our return.

Tuesday. 16th October - After a morning shopping in Perth with Johnny Stringer we sailed for Melbourne during the afternoon. The weather is marvellous, and we had great fun getting the last few men aboard, for many of them had been up town celebrating. Although they were merry we had no real trouble with them, and all got aboard safely.

Sunday. 21st October - This part of my diary is now finished. I will not attempt to describe my emotions on seeing the Victorian coast this morning. The "Highland Brigade" sailed up Port Phillip Bay in perfect weather and berthed at Port Melbourne soon after lunch. Charabancs took us to the Show Grounds where our loved ones were waiting for us, and here I met Dorothy, Joan, Raymond and my mother.

A Red Cross car took us home to Essendon, and the most eventful period of my life had ended. We look forward to the future with new hope and confidence.