

HODGSON ALEC WX7637 LANCE SERGEANT 2/6 FIELD PARK (RAE)

'OBEY, PRAY AND HOPE'

The diary (titled "Obey, Pray and Hope") of Alec Hodgson was first made available to me by his daughter Kathleen Hancock around 2008 when I (the website owner Lt Col (Retired) Peter Winstanley) was visiting the Royal Australian Air Force Association Retirement Estate at Bullcreek, Western Australia.

The diary had actually been typed by Alec Hodgson's grand-daughter Kate Dawson of Esperance in 1990.

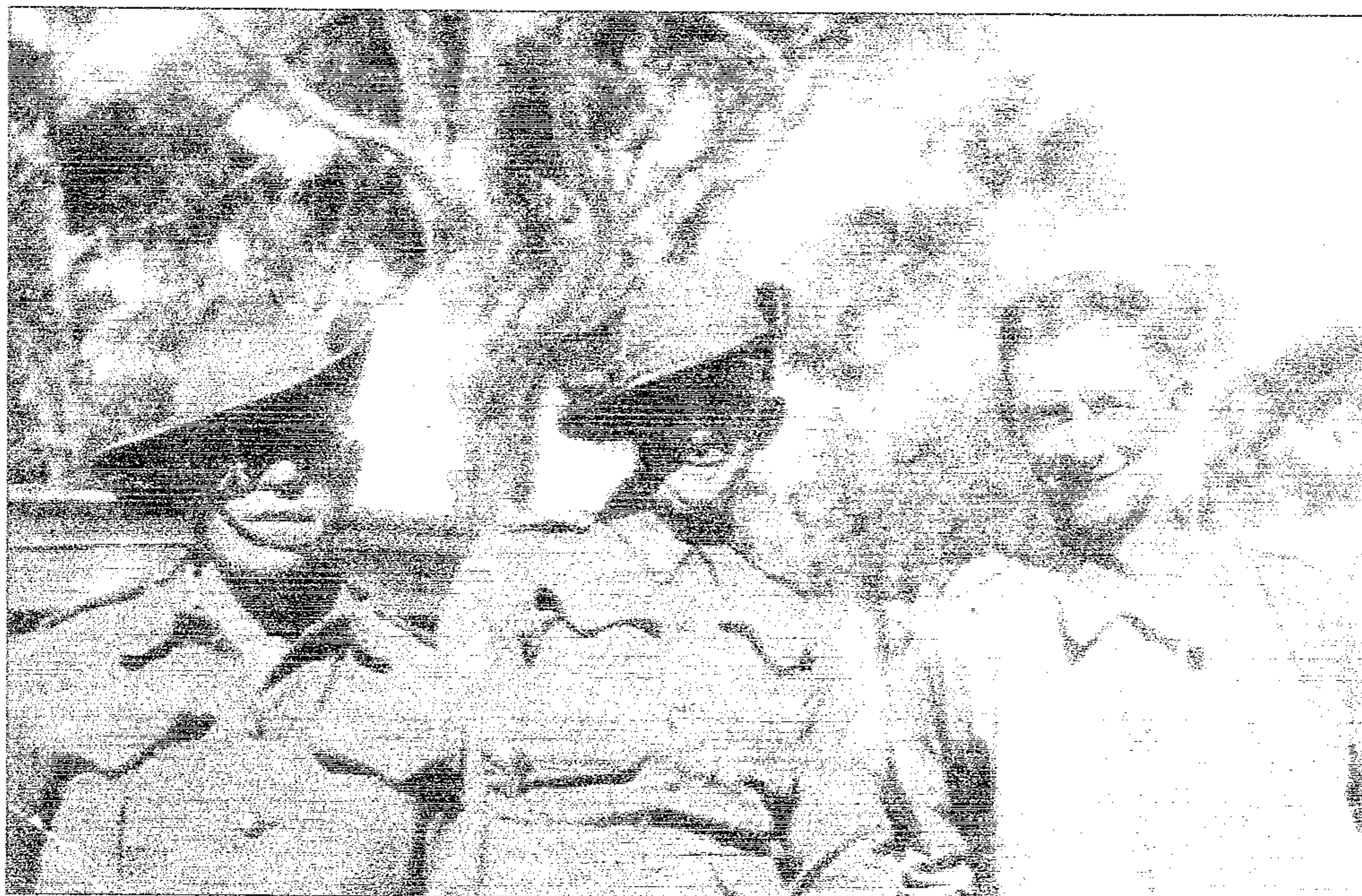
In 2010 Peter Winstanley sought permission to publish the diary on his website [www.pows-of-japan.net](http://www.pows-of-japan.net). This was concurred with by Alec Hodgson's son John and his daughter Kathleen Hancock and by his grand daughter Kate Dawson.

The diary is an incredible record of Alec Hodgson's experiences as a Prisoner of War (POW) of the Japanese over the period 1942 to 1945. His diary is peppered with mentions of many of his fellow POWs.

The following photo (right to left) is of

- Lance Sergeant Alec Hodgson                      WX7637
- Sapper Henry (Harry) Marsh                      WX8794
- Sergeant Sydney Cupitt                      QX9586

They were all members of the 2/6 Field Park Company Royal Australian Engineers (RAE).



Further into the diary readers will see a Water Colour Painting of Victoria Point the first POW Camp they entered in Burma in May 1942. A map showing the location of the POW camps which Alec Hodgson was in is also included elsewhere.

**OBEY, PRAY**

**AND**

**HOPE**

**THE P.O.W. DIARY OF SGT. ALEC HODGSON**

**2/6 FIELD PARK CO. R.A.E.**

**CHANGI AND THE BURMA - THAILAND RAILWAY 1942 - 1945**

**Transcribed by Kate Dawson**

**November 1990**

Dedication

I dedicate this book to the memory of Alec and Mary Hodgson.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

1. John and Ethel Hodgson, Joyce Dawson for their memories.
2. Ron Earl, a fellow P.O.W. of 2/6 Field Park Co., for his memories.
3. Wendy Heatley for typing this transcript.
4. Wal Eastman for helping with army terms and abbreviations.

## Foreword

Towards the end of 'Pop' Hodgson's life, I often had lunch with him and Grandma in their Mt. Lawley home. I had become interested in the "POW experience" and often asked Pop about his war time experiences.

Unfortunately, I've forgotten most of his stories but one story I didn't forget was his recounting of the moment he heard that the war was over, while travelling on a train in Thailand packed with other POW's. Pop cried as he told this story and at that moment I began to get an inkling of the pain and horrors behind those tears. I never asked about the war again.

When he died in 1980, this diary was found in his belongings. He'd never told anyone of its existence, not even his wife, yet he'd kept it for 35 years. It consisted of jottings in 2 notebooks and on scraps of paper, plus poems and other odds and ends (see "Notes on the Diary").

Reading the diary proved to be very difficult due to the tiny, at times indcipherable, pencil writing and the confusing order of entries, so I decided to transcribe it into correct order to make it readable for other members of the family. This proved to be an interesting challenge.

What started as an intention to just type the diary entries in order, came to mean much more to me than just a challenge. I found it an intensely moving experience.

To gain a greater understanding of Pop's experiences, I read diaries and recollections of other POW's and these added perspective, background information and gave valuable insights and understanding.

Pop's "death register" style of writing towards the end must have masked a great deal of emotion. To express it, or even to feel too deeply about what was happening may have jeopardised his own struggle for survival.

Keeping a secret diary for 3 1/2 years, in the most dangerous and trying circumstances, would have come to symbolise more for Pop than recording memories for a later date. It may have helped him survive a nightmare experience. As Ron Earl, fellow POW, remarked "Alec must have had more willpower than most of us. I think most of us started to keep a diary, but in the many searches, the Japs got most of them. What they didn't get, we used for cigarette papers." Pop took the treasured diary home but I doubt if he ever read it.

Work on the diary has made me think a great deal about Pop and Grandma; their lives, their characters, and how this and other experiences would have affected them. I have recalled many memories and understand them now with greater insight. It has been a rewarding, if emotionally draining, experience.

Much has been written about the POW experience in Asia and to dwell on the wrongs of the past is pointless but out of respect for what the POW's endured, we should perhaps heed the advice of the former Bishop of Singapore (himself a POW), "We should forgive but not forget".

K.D.

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Poem

We didn't gain much glory when we lost at Singapore  
 Historians will decide could we do more  
 And in Java and Sumatra, well,  
 the world can judge our worth  
 But, we've earned a place in history during  
 Three years hell on earth

We broiled in blazing sunshine, we toiled in monsoon rain  
 Through mountain pass, through swamp and dense bamboo  
 In steaming tropic jungles where man's foot had never trod  
 We built the Burma - Bangkok Railway with a life for every sod

Through miseries undreamt of, with disease of every kind  
 With charcoal, salt and patience for a cure  
 On rations that were just a tragic joke  
 And drawn out near starvation, helped to swell the awful price  
 Of 20,000 comrades and unnumbered natives lives

So we'll raise our hats in homage and we'll breathe a silent prayer  
 For those who slumber where the railway runs  
 And we trust that in the future  
 when History is writ  
 That this will be their epitaph,  
 "They also did their bit".

## Footnote:

I assume this poem was written by Alec as no poet is ascribed to it  
 whereas the other 2 poems in the diary have the poets noted. Also  
 there are alterations etc. (see photocopy of poem).

We didn't gain much glory when we lost at B'fore

Historians will decide could we do more

And in Java and Sumatra, well, we'll have the <sup>world to judge</sup> hell of earth.  
But we've earned a place in history during those years

Can steam through tropic jungles, where man had never tread

We built the Bangkok Railway, with a life for every foot

We tramped in blazing sunshine, we toiled in <sup>rain</sup> rain

Through mountain <sup>peaks</sup> peaks and dense bamboo

Through mires and swamps with dozens of every kind

With hard work and patience for a cure

At times that were just a <sup>man's</sup> man's job

And down our road a station, helped to swell the awful price

Of 30,000,000 and the number of returns less

So we'll raise our hats in homage and will breathe a silent prayer

For those who clambered where the railway runs

And we trust that in the future when history is writ

That this will done will be their epitaph They also did their bit

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30





## Introduction

### 1) Alec Hodgson's Life - a brief outline.

Alec was born on 25 May 1899 in Liscard, Cheshire, England, one of six children. When he was 15 1/2 years old, he put up his age to join the army and went to Africa in W.W.I., but saw very little action. In his words, they "marched around the desert" for most of the time.

Returning to England, he did labouring jobs and worked on the construction of the Blackpool Tower. While in Blackpool, he met Mary Irene Crossley and they were married on 31 October 1925 in Blackpool. They had one child, John, before emigrating to Australia, seeking a better life. They sailed on the "Balranald" and arrived in Fremantle on 8 December 1927.

As a part of the "Group Settlement Scheme", No 126, they settled on their block at Middlesex, 3 1/2 miles west of Pemberton in December 1928, knowing nothing of farming. Joyce, Enid, and Kathleen were born there and Enid died of diphtheria, aged 3.

They struggled on the farm until 1935, before abandoning it and moving into Pemberton. Frank was born that year and Alec worked on the roads in Pemberton and Greenbushes, before they moved to Bunbury in 1936. Alec worked with the Bunbury Roads Board, often working out of town and cycling home for weekends. Their last child, Brian, was born in 1939.

Alec joined the army on 10 August 1940, aged 41. He joined the 2/6 Field Park Co. of the Royal Australian Engineers and was made a sergeant. The headquarters was at Ascot Racecourse in Perth and he remained there until sailing for Singapore on 31 May 1941. Mary remained in Bunbury with the 5 children throughout the war.

After the fall of Singapore, on 15 Feb 1942, Alec was one of thousands of Allied troops taken prisoner. He spent 6 months in Changi and was then shipped to Burma to work on the Burma - Thailand Railway. He remained in railway camps until the end of the war on Aug 8, 1945.

Alec returned home on 13 October, 1945 on a U.S. plane. He was thin and yellow and spent a few days in Hollywood hospital before returning to Bunbury with Mary. His malaria and dysentery attacks continued for a year or so then tapered off over the next 5 or 6 years.

When he first got home, he recuperated for 3 or 4 months at home before beginning work, at first in insurance, then with the "South West Times" newspaper, doing general office work then advancing to a proof reader.

He transferred to Bridgetown with his family in 1949 and later became secretary of Bridgetown Hospital. The loss of their sons Brian (in a car accident) and Frank (in a plane crash) were bitter blows during this period.

