# WORLD WAR II EXPERIENCES

# OF

# WX17634 PTE W HOLDING

Taken in Sydney in my way home

# World War II Experience of WX17634 Pte. W. Holding

Most of the books written about the different things that happened when we were POW's in Changi and on the Burma -Thailand railway have been written from second hand stories. A lot of these stories by Officers have been drawn from what was reported to them about incidents that happened on work parties. Very few of the books are quite true to the actual events and incidents, of course one incident might be seen two or three different ways by different people. 1997 saw the release of "Ghosts in Khaki" by Les Cody which gives a detailed history of the 2/4th Machine Gun Battalion and contains reports from a number of men of the 2/4th, including myself. This is my story of some of the incidents that happened to me and my mates.

I attended school in Katanning in the great southern area of WA, leaving school at 14. I believe that last year of my schooling, under a Mr Thorpe, taught me more than all the previous years. For some reason two of his statements have stayed with me all my life. These are:

- History is not the rule of kings; and
- Life is conscious contact with one's environment

I believe my education was completed during the 3½ years I was a POW. Often I stand back and judge people against those I have had the honour to know. Now it is hard to make a judgement.

When World War II started I was employed by the WA Railways at Mullewa.

## ENLISTING

In June 1940 I went down to Perth for a weekend and with my brother Fred, went in to join the AIF. Fred had been in the 10th Light Horse Militia and was welcomed with open arms, but as soon as I mentioned that I was in the Railways I was knocked back. Railways staff were man-powered.

I continued my efforts to enlist for a long time. I tried to enlist in Geraldton and I tried with the recruiting crowd that came around the country but could not get in. Then one day Jim Baker, who was shed foreman at the Railways in Mullewa, said to me "Fill in the papers and give them to me". I did and about 10 days later I got the call up to report to Claremont to go into the AIF. I reported very promptly and so I signed up on 12 November 1941. I found out later that Jim Baker had been Regimental Sergeant Major in the 11th Battalion at one stage during the First World War.

It turned out that my sister, Bet (Alice), had joined the AIF four days ahead of me, on 8 November 1941. As she was a trained nurse Bet was appointed as a Lieutenant.

## TRAINING

While I was waiting to get into the AIF I had been, like everyone else in my group, called up to do Militia camp where I was in B Company 11th Battalion. B Company came from Geraldton and the Mullewa boys were taken in with them. We did three months Militia camp at Melville. I was always very

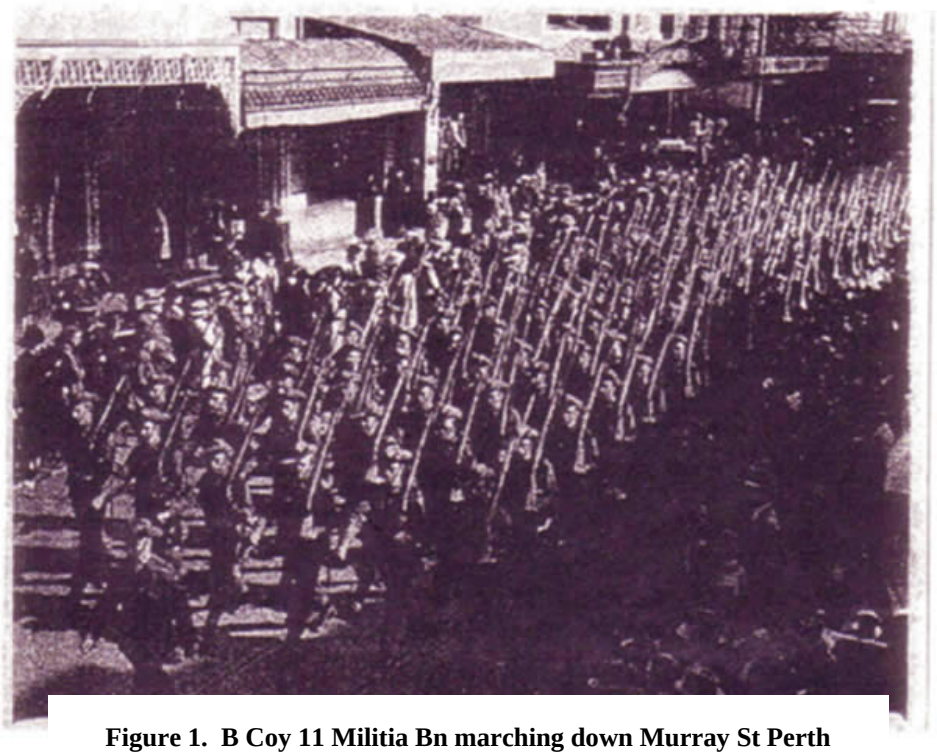


**Figure 1. B Coy 11 Militia Bn marching down Murray St Perth**

thankful that I had done Militia training as it gave me some idea of the Army and an understanding of what goes on, this proved very handy later as our AIF training was so brief and basic.

When I got into the AIF the Store did not have a hat big enough, or boots small enough for me. I take a 7¼ in hats and a size 5 in boots. As I still had my Militia hat and boots I was allowed to wear them. Going out on Parade, when the old Warrant Officers conducting the parades looked for a marker they spotted my old, well broken in hat so I was made marker.

After about a week or ten days we went up to Northam where I was put into the 13th Training Battalion. I immediately applied to join the reinforcements of the 28th Battalion to catch up with Fred.

Our training continued until on Saturday morning in early January, 1942. That morning we were out on the rifle range when a message came to double back to camp. We all hurried back to camp.

## 2/4th REINFORCEMENTS

On the way back to camp one of our boys, who had special leave to go away for the weekend, said that reinforcements were being taken for the 2/4th. We knew the 2/4th were in Darwin. When they lined us up and they called for volunteers to join the 2/4th no-one volunteered, so they just lined us up and counted us off. 6 Officers who had been with the 2/4th had been to an Officer Training Course. That was how it came about that there were 136 ORs and 6 Officers detailed to go to the 2/4th.

By the time the "volunteering" was finished it was after 1 o'clock. We were given leave passes for 36 hours pre-embarkation leave starting from midday – which was already well behind us by then, and we were given colour patches to shove in our pockets. We still had to shower, get ourselves sorted out and get into uniform. After that we were taken to Northam and put on the train to Perth, I headed home to Bassendean.

While I was with the Militia a mate from Mullewa and I had gone to a Saturday night dance at the Bassendean Scouts Hall where I met Wyn de Worbois. The following morning I went to church with Mum and Wyn was in the choir, so we caught up and started corresponding. When I lobbed home on pre-embarkation leave Wyn was over home visiting so she had the job of sewing on my 2/4th colour patches.

At this time Wyn's Father was a POW in Germany. In WWI he was in France with the 16th Battalion when he was 17 years old. In WWII he was with the 2/7th Field Ambulance and stopped on Crete with the wounded. Luckily he was in a POW exchange arranged through Alexandria of "Wingy's and Stumpy's and over age" so he came home in January 1944. I never met him until I got home.

We had been back in camp at Northam a little over a week when we got orders to pack up as it was time to go.

## EMBARKATION

We were taken by train to Fremantle then by ferry to the Aquatania which was standing out at Gage Roads. A number of troops were already on board the Aquatania.

The 2/4th boys who were already on the Aquatania had been called the caretakers of Northam camp because they were there for about 15 months training. After that they had been at Woodside in SA, for 3 months, then they went overland to Darwin for 3 months before being taken over on small boats to Moresby and then put on the Aquatania. They had been all around Australia and when they were outside Fremantle they were told they were not going to get any leave.

When the water lighters went out to the Aquatania to fill its water tanker the boys slipped down ropes, and any other way they could, to get onto the water lighters. As a result, all the water could not be transferred to the Aquatania because if the water lighters had been emptied they would have risen up in the water and, with the troops on board, they would have been too top heavy. The water lighters with the men on board had to return ashore and a big lot of the Battalion came off. The MP's were going to stop them at Fremantle but the boys fell in and just marched out and that's how they got pre-embarkation leave.

It turned out that two of the boys we knew at Bassendean, Archie McIntosh and Roy McConachie, were amongst the mob that hopped off the Aquatania. As they went along Ivanhoe Street past Wyn's home they were spotted and told Wyn's family that we were going aboard the Aquatania as they were coming off. Neither Roy nor Archie came home. Archie McIntosh was in "F" Force and was sick, he went up to Tanbaya, Burma where he died on 10.11.1943. Roy McConachie went to Sandakan and died there.

The Aquatania left Fremantle on 15 January 1942 and headed up to the Sundra Straits. Going up we had the HMAS Canberra as escort. During the day a zigzag course was set – the boats would go so far one way then change course, we could feel the boat turn. We were quartered down in G deck, which was either side of the propeller transmission hump, it was a great big thing about 5 ft high, we had to jump up and slide to the other side to get to our cabin. At night a straight course was set and the speed increased. Everything we had, we had to wrap up, even our tin pannikins because the whole area we were in just used to shake.

On the Aquatania I volunteered for dish-washing duty. There was this great big bloody dish washing machine – you loaded all the plates at one end then stacked them up as they came out the other end. We did that to get out of boat drill, otherwise every now and then throughout the day and night the sirens would go and you had to go to boat drill.

While we were anchored in Sunda Strait the natives in canoes with outriggers would dive for anything thrown over. It was a lovely sight – green islands, a narrow strip of sand and deep blue water. Later this was where the "Perth" and "Houston" went down.

When we got up to the Sunda Straits we had to tranship to three little Dutch Coastal Traders. There was the Van Swoll, the Van Der Linj and I cannot remember the name of the other one. We were on the Van der Linj and our meat supply came with us – alive. They brought a bullock or yak, as they called it up there, and just walked it in onto the deck. Of course there was just the one deck and we had to put our gear all around the place. In the morning, they told us we had to shift our gear out the way while they slaughtered this bullock, that was our meat.

It was Saturday January 25, 1942 when we arrived in Singapore.

## SINGAPORE

On arrival in Singapore we were taken by trucks up to Woodlands camp, that was on the East side of the Causeway towards the Naval base, where our quarters were huts furnished with things called chowpoys. Chowpoys were Indian beds with rope bedding. When we got onto these chowpoys we found out straight away that there were lice in them. That was the start.

We were told that the day we arrived was the only day for quite a while that there had not been air raids on Singapore.

That night we experienced our first air raid. Of course when the sirens went everyone made a mad dash to get out and down to the railway cutting that was our shelter. After a couple of days it got that way that when the sirens went we would go out, have a look around, and then carry on with what we were doing.

We had only been there for a matter of days when on Sunday 8 February they decided to pull us out. The Japanese made their landing on that Sunday night.

Of course in the meantime the 2/4$^{th}$ Battalion had been chopped up all over the place and the guns and men were sent on loan wherever it was thought that they would be needed most. A Gun Company was made up of 4 Platoons, each Platoon had 3 Sections with 1 Vickers gun each, giving the Battalion 48 Vickers. There were four gun companies that were scattered around amongst the Indian and British troops the whole lot on coastal defence that was their main job. They said some of the boys past the Causeway sat behind their guns and watched the Japanese putting their ramps down to their barges into the water and everything else. Of course they had their sights all worked out so once they knew the game was on they could just open up. This happened on the Sunday night.

When the Japanese started to cross the Johore Straits they had powered boats pulling half a dozen barges loaded with troops. The boys behind the Vickers guns had been trained for just such a show. After the firing started some of the barges caught fire and lit up the area.

The artillery wanted to knock the tower off the Sultan of Johore's Palace, which was being used by the Japanese as an observation post, but they were not allowed to fire on it.

## THE AUSTRALIAN SPECIAL RESERVE BATTALION

In the morning we were taken straight out from our camp, out onto the rubber. We did not know at the time but we were to form what they called a composite Battalion. Major Saggers, who had been a Company Commander in the 2/4$^{th}$ was made CO of the Australian Special Reserve Battalion.

Of the group that came on at Fremantle some had gone into the 2/4th to replace those who did not get back on the Aquatania at Fremantle. The blokes who did not get back on the Aquatania came up later and were caught in Java. We finished up with Officers who came mainly from gun Platoons in the 2/4th M.G. Battalion. We had 7 lieutenants and Major Saggers, that was the composition of our officers. All up we were 91 WX numbers.

The other two companies of the Battalion were troops of the Australian Army Service Corps, the AASC. The AASC blokes, like us, had come up on the Aquatania and had very little training. I had done three months militia camp but a lot of these chaps had joined up between November and the beginning of December, 1941 – as they sailed on 15 January 1942, they had very little time for training. At any rate that was the formation of the Battalion as we were set up in the rubber.

Major Saggers was a strange little bloke, probably about 5'7'', he was a lay preacher in Church; he was the champion pistol shot in the Army Militia; and he was a real gentleman to talk to. Just not the sort of bloke one would expect to be in the position he was in, but he was a wonderful leader. He ran 2 shoe stores in Perth for years after the war.

When we formed up out there our Section Corporal was an older chap and he was made Platoon Sergeant. Then it was a toss up as to who got stripes – Arthur Magill or me – the rest were virtually all novices. Arthur came from Collie and had done a Militia camp the same as I had. On the rifle range I had topped the school on the bren gun. We were issued with one bren per section so as I was tops on the bren I got the bren and Arthur got the stripes. We were good mates so it did not matter much then – only afterwards, when I thought about it, I was on 5 bob a day and he was on 7 bob a day for the next 3½ years.

So that was the formation of the Australian Special Reserves Battalion, but we never actually caught up with the ASSC boys much at all. On the Tuesday afternoon, 10 February, we were out and taking up positions when word came through to Jimmy Till, our Platoon Commander, to send out a patrol. Jimmy was a permanent Army chap and a hell of a nice bloke. He was given work to send a section patrol out, no more than two miles, in front of our camp, not necessarily to get into any trouble but to see what was going on around the place.

## FIRST CONTACT

We went out on patrol about a mile or a mile and a half in front of the section and we were having a wander around. Then we came across this big tent covering a whole lot of food stuff, there was tin fruit and all sorts of food. Evidently these food dumps had been set up throughout the island.

We were having a pretty good inspection of this place having nothing much to do as it seemed a nice, quiet afternoon stroll that was until somebody saw some blokes wandering along in a valley down below us, some 200-250 yards

away. No-one took any notice until somebody said, “They have bloody rifles”. These Japanese did not appear to be wearing regular uniforms, we took them to be coolies until we saw the rifles. So of course down we went around the food tent and then the game was on for a while. The Japanese got to a Chinese hut that had a garden, they got in there, so it was pretty lively for a matter of minutes. I do not know how long it was, it seemed a long, long time but it was not that long, when two Japanese ran out the front of the house and hid behind some scrub.

As I was on the right of this food dump I had to get myself out into the open and lie down behind the bren to get a bead on where they were, then I gave them a pretty good sort of a burst. It has always stuck in my mind, when I see someone getting shot on TV they nice and pleasantly fall over but it doesn’t happen like that. These blokes were behind the bushes and I think I chopped the bushes around pretty well – I could see arms and legs waving around. It was on for a while, then Arthur yelled out, “Get up and get back out the way we came” which was over the rise behind us. So we took off and once we got out of sight we stopped to rest and regroup and found out that we were three shy.

Syd Darby, Ern Munday and Ernie Thomsett had not come back out from that bit of a show. They were our first casualties. Syd Darby had been a great little bloke – he was known as “The Kid”. On Christmas Day, in Northam camp, he had no family present so he had joined my family for dinner.

We headed back to where the rest of the company was. During that action Arthur Magill got a bit of a scratch across the back of the neck, a bit of blood but nothing much.

## BALD HILL

That night, 10 February, we took up position on Bald Hill – there always seems to be a Bald Hill on shows like that. We were told we had an Indian Group on one side of us and a Pommy Regiment on the other. Of course the normal thing was for the blokes on the flanks to get out and make contact, but there were no contacts. This was reported back to Major Saggers, by which time it was about 8pm, so he went out on his own bat and made contact with Army headquarters. He found out that the troops that were supposed to be on either side had been withdrawn early that morning.

When Major Saggers came back he made the decision, rather than try and get us out then, particularly as we had had a pretty lively sort of day, to let us stop there that night and move off at dawn, which we did.

During the night the Japanese kept putting out patrols, feeling out for what was going on so we would have a bit of a bang away from time to time. Arthur Magill got a bit of a scratch through his side that time – he always seemed to be getting in the way of something.

In the morning as soon as we moved off we were in trouble. The Japanese seemed to know pretty well what strength we had and they opened up with two inch mortars. Half the time we did not know where they were, but these things kept lobbing in among us and they caused quite a lot of trouble.

The youngest boy we had with us was a bloke named Harry (HHR) Norton, aged 16, he was the first to go, he got a charge to himself. One of the boys went back and said that there was not much we could do about him so we just kept on going.

Throughout the day we were getting knocked about pretty badly. Jimmy Till was with our Section, we were up on one flank heading up a bit of a valley, going up hill all the time when we ran into trouble – a machine gun. What we did not know was Major Saggers made a turn there and he took quite a big lot of the Battalion back out and they got away from the Japanese. However we were pinned down, Jimmy Till spotted where the machine gun was, he took my bren and he emptied the magazine into the machine gun position. I started looking for some of our boys, because spare magazines were distributed amongst the section, but the only other bloke around was Arthur Magill and he did not have any. So we finished up with a bren gun without any loaded magazines and it was not the time to be sitting down trying to load a magazine. The last I saw of Jimmy he was carrying a bren gun with an empty magazine on it.

I took a rifle from a body. We headed straight through where the machine gun was. I told them afterwards it was a strange one I had never seen the likes of it before. It was very slow firing machine gun but it was hopper fed not belt fed. The bullets were put into hopper like a grain crusher at the top, so long as they were pointing the one way and they fed themselves down into the machine gun. Around the gun there were quite a few dead Japanese and a few of our boys' bodies. After that we headed off up the hill around there were a few trees, and then we got into the scrub.

On the side of the hill as we went up there was a complete line of Japanese heading down the hill, about 15 yards apart. There was no point in going that way or standing up and showing ourselves we would have been in trouble straight away. There was Danny Crane, "Blue" Evans – who is still here in Mandurah, two lads from the AASC and myself – we went down into the scrub and let the Japanese go through.

The Japanese went through over the top of us and did not pick us up. Occasionally we would hear a bullet when they picked someone up amongst the scrub but then they got down behind us and we stopped where we were. We could hear a few bullets at times so anyone who was wounded copped it. The Japanese did not worry about taking prisoners!

After the Japanese had gone we headed on towards Singapore, we laid up during the daytime and travelled at night. Old Danny Crane was a pretty fair sort of bushman and I had spent a bit of time in the bush, Singapore is north of the equator but we could still see the Southern Cross so once we picked up

the Southern Cross we knew we had to head south to get back down to the city of Singapore.

The first day, Thursday February 12, we camped alongside a house in a big Tapioca patch. The Tapioca was about 6' or 7' high and quite thick so we stopped in there because we thought we would be out of sight. Later, during the day, we discovered that the house was occupied by Japanese as a headquarters and there were guards out the front. Every time a car pulled up, or someone came along, they would all start yelling and shouting in their lingo challenging everyone, so we laid low.

On the Friday morning we struck a bitumen road heading straight south, we had had enough by this time so we decided to follow that road. We found out later it was the west coast road. We spread out on either side of the road keeping well apart, we came around a corner and about three quarters of a mile in front of us we saw a road block. Now the road block was facing north, so we knew it would not be the Japanese, so we kept on walking towards it.

By this time the oil tanks on Blakang Mati had been burning right through so this black soot kept coming down. Oil when it burns does not burn completely and black soot soaked through to our skin and clothes. We were covered, soaked in this oily stuff so it was impossible to tell what colour we were or to identify our clothes or anything else. The sweat running down our faces streaked white lines down through the grime and oil. Blakang Mati is now known as Sentosa Island – a must for tourists.

We went on down this road and as we got closer we could see the snout of a Vickers gun pointing straight at us. We kept on walking – there was nothing else we could do so we walked straight in and it turned out that the road block was manned by a Malay Volunteer Regiment. They said they had not seen anything for the two days they had been there. They had a truck and said they would take us straight back to Singapore, that suited us.
I am not sure where the others got to but the first mob I struck, that I knew straight away by their colour patches, were 9 Platoon B Company of the 2/4$^{th}$ so I said right I am here, so I will stop with these blokes. The Platoon Commander was a chap named Lieutenant Don Lee – we had two Lieutenant Lees – Ken, who had come on at Fremantle and Don. He got to quite efficiently, give me a trenching tool and said, "You dig your hole there, and put your dirt up there" and everything else. As soon as he gave me instructions he walked off, I put the shovel down, put my head on it and went to sleep, that was about 4 o'clock on the Friday afternoon. Incidentally, it was Friday 13$^{th}$ – the 13$^{th}$ was my Birthday so it was a good day.

The next morning, Saturday 14 February, about 10 o'clock Frank Hinds, who was in 9 Platoon came over and woke me with a cup of tea. He said "There must be something wrong with you" I said there was not much wrong with me, I just wanted a bit of a sleep. So I stopped there with them right through and there was no further action. On the Sunday night, 15 February 1942, word came through that it was all over, we had surrendered. We stopped there and waited for what was to come.

During the week of the action on the island the “Empress of Asia” brought in a lot of troops who virtually landed into a POW camp. They brought in the song “There Will Be Blue Birds Over The White Cliffs of Dover” which was top of the pops for the next 3½ years.

## REVIEW OF CASUALTIES

When we got back to the Selerang area Major Saggers got together with what was left of E Company and checked out who was still going. We did not have many left. I was the only one from my section still there.

We found out later on that some more of our boys had come through. Claudie Dow, had got out amongst the islands and was later picked up by the Japanese. Also, after the Wednesday night Arthur Magill was in the scrub there when we got past the Japanese, he got through as far as Sumatra where he was picked up and taken prisoner. He was very lucky coming back, they brought him back on a boat from Sumatra. Coming through the Malacca Straits a Dutch Submarine came along and torpedoed the boat. A lot of the blokes jumped into the water, the Dutch fired a second torpedo into the boat – and the percussion killed the blokes in the water. Arthur had stayed on the boat and he came back to us. It was when we had this get together sorting things out that Major Saggers made the recommendation for Arthur to get the Military Medal. Les McCann also got through at the time. We sorted it all out and then that was the finish.

Major Saggers had 7 Lieutenants with him, 6 were killed in action, the only one to come back was Vic Mentiplay, who later took the WA Victory Contingent to England for the Victory Parade. Of the 6 men in the Battalion Headquarters that was set up under Major Saggers 2 were killed in action, 3 have died and 1 is still alive. Of E Company:

| | K I A | D I P | D S R | ALIVE | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Btn HQ | 2 | | 3 | 1 | 6 |
| E Coy HQ | 5 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 9 |
| Lt Green Pltn | 12 | 3 | 8 | 4 | 27 |
| Lt Till Pltn | 17 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 26 |
| Lt Mazza Pltn | 6 | 5 | 9 | 3 | 23 |
| TOTAL | 42 | 11 | 27 | 11 | 91 |

K I A = Killed In Action
D I P = Died in Prison
D S R = Died Since Return
ALIVE = Alive @ 1.1.1998

Lieutenant Till’s Platoon, which I was in, had a high number of killed in action because we were left behind when we were cut off. I have never seen the details of the 2 ASSC Companies casualties but they were in quite a bad way.

Our officers buried all the information relating to our action. We found this out after we had been prisoners a month or so when a work party was given a job to bury some 44 gallon drums that were coated in bitumen or something similar. Later we found out that this was done right through the time we were

prisoners. The Japanese conducted searches and destroyed any records they found.

## AFTER THE FALL OF SINGAPORE

Singapore capitulated at 8pm on Sunday 15 February, 1942.

On the Monday morning after the capitulation we just sat about – we did not know what to do with ourselves and we did not know what was going to happen to us or anything else. I was with 9 Platoon "B" Company in the Botanical Gardens, one of the other blokes there happened to be Slew Baxter. Many tales can be told of Slew and his escapades, he was one of the reasons why the 2/4th was such a great unit.

Before the war Slew worked in the Northern Goldfields, he was well known from Mount Magnet to Wiluna. I got to know him when I was working in Mullewa as he used to visit his mother in a boarding house in the centre of town – by then she was very frail and confined to a wheelchair. In size Slew was not a big man, probably 5'9'', weighed about 10½ stone and loved a fight – the opponent's size was no problem.

At the outbreak of WWII Slew was one of the first to enlist, but he had a problem, when he paid he usually went AWOL till he was broke. The Army took a dim view of this so after a while he was discharged – his papers were marked "Unlikely to make an efficient soldier". Later he enlisted again, hence his number 8140.

When the 2/4th were in Adelaide, Slew had to front the Lt Col after being AWOL and when asked "Where do you sleep in Adelaide Baxter?" His reply "In Faddens Flats Sir" (Fadden was a Federal Minister) – the Lt Col was the only man who did not know that Fadden Flats were the trams in carbarns.

That Monday morning after the capitulation we were in the Botanical Gardens at a loose end so a two up game got under way. After a couple of hours Slew had Malay dollars sticking out of all his pockets and he broke the school. He went around giving hands full of notes to all the big bettors to keep the game going. A Malay dollar was 2 shillings and eleven pence in our pay books. In the early days we could buy eggs and lots of things through the wire.

When the first Japanese came through they were great big blokes – yet we talk of Japanese as being little blokes. When we were in Woodlands camp they sent a pommy lieutenant and a sergeant down to give us a talk about the Japanese – they told us they had poor eyesight, they could not see to shoot, their armament was poor and everything. They did not tell us that the Japanese were coming down the Malayan Peninsula, at about 10 mile a day.

When the Japanese came through we found out they were part of the Tokyo Imperial Guard and they were 5'9'' minimum height – among them some blokes were well over 6'. The nearly all did wear big thick glasses. They were quite reasonable, they did not seem to take too much notice of us. The only

thing that got them in properly was the way our blokes did rifle drill. The Japanese were the same as the yanks, they carried their rifle on one side and put it straight up to their shoulder, whereas in our training the rifle was held on one side and swapped it across to the other side to shoulder arms. They would get three or four blokes doing this, and stand amongst themselves and laugh and get them to do it again.

We did not know until later on about all the things that had gone on in Singapore, like the Alexandra Hospital being ransacked and the staff and patients being massacred.

## CHANGI

On the Tuesday morning they decided that we had to march out to Selerang Barracks, which were in the Changi area. When that march started there were close to 80,000 troops, Australian, British and Indian, on the road to Changi so it was a pretty busy road. We carried what we had, we had a bit of stuff with us but it was not much. When we arrived out there we were put into private houses around the area.

Roberts Barracks, which was a bit further out, was turned into a hospital because we had quite a lot of casualties that had come through.

Our engineers erected the barbwire fences around the perimeter of the camp. Our own barbwire was used.

We settled into our quarters and then we just sat around the place, we did not know what to do, it was a bloody terrible set up – or so it seemed at the time.

They brought in truckloads of rice, but our cooks did not know how to boil bloody rice properly. I always get into trouble at home now when I see someone cooking rice. After a time they got to and some of the Australian boys brought in some Malays to show us how to cook rice, so we got quite used to it, but of course there was not much else with it.

During the march out to Changi I met a chap, Len Bullock from Kalgoorlie who knew Merle de Worbois, Wyn's sister. Later I caught up with Len who was in Battalion Headquarters he said, "Do you want something to do?"

I said "Any bloody thing. What is there to do?"

He said "I want you to start and go around all the different companies and see what has happened to so and so". He gave me a name and number WX so and so, he was in such and such Platoon in a different company. Well, this was a great old job, I spent days and days wandering around the camp finding out what happened to some of our blokes. I would go up to a bloke and say: "When did you last see so and so?" then get to and go through it all. This went on the whole time just trying to build up a record because so many of our blokes were, like our boys, just missing. We had lost them on the day and that was it. A party was sent out to identify those killed – this is reported by

Ron Lee in Appendix 5. So I stuck this out and this went on for quite a while. I had a pretty good memory for numbers, so although I had never been with the Battalion except for the short time on the boat, I got that way I could tell you the names and numbers of a hell of a lot of blokes in the Battalion that I had never seen.

The rice diet led to some strange situations. One of our blokes went to see the Doctor, the Battalion Doctor was Captain Anderson, who was known as "Pills". So this bloke fronted up to "Pills" who said, "What is wrong with you?"

The bloke said "I have not been to the toilet for four days".

Old "Pills" said, "When you have not been for a fortnight come back and see me".

On a rice diet there is nothing else to it – its all bloody water.

## "MISSING BELIEVED POW"

After the capitulation my family, like so many others, was notified that I was "Missing believed POW".

In late 1942 the Japanese gave out a few message letters restricted to 25 words, which they stated would be sent home. These were drawn for and Slew Baxter had a win.

His message was broadcast on short wave over "Radio Saigon" and picked up by someone on the coast below Geraldton. In it Slew put that he was with Wally Holding. The Army traced this back to Mullewa. My parents received a letter from the Army with part of Slew's message which stated that the "Wally Holding named was believed to be WX 17634 Pte W Holding" and "that authenticity cannot be relied on as it comes from enemy sources." That message got home in early 1943 and was the first word received since that original notice – "Missing believed POW".

For the rest of the war we had almost no communication with the world outside. Eventually the Red Cross did get a little information about us to our families, a copy of this is included as Appendix 1.

## PASIR PANJANG 19 FEBRUARY 1942

Les McCann who came home with Bob Murray and myself had quite an experience after the capitulation of our forces at Singapore. The Japanese rounded up quite a lot of people, Les did not know too much about it, but he said there were about 15 of them and they were taken out to a big ditch, lined up facing the ditch and then they were shot in the back. That was on Thursday 19 February 1942 at Pasir Panjang.

Afterwards when Les came to, everyone else was dead so he went off. He had a bit of a pinhole in his back but there was a hell of a mess in the front of

his chest where the bullet came out and ripped him apart. He wandered around and a Japanese picked him up. Les told him a tale about how he had been driving an ambulance and something else and he finished up put with the civilians at the jail. When they got the full story they returned him back to us.

When Les came through to us he told the Officers his story, and when he told them about the 15 odd being lined up and shot they would not believe him. They said “Who was there that you know?”

He said “The only bloke I know was Fred Airey, our Regimental Sergeant Major.” Well Airey was a permanent soldier, he had been in the Army all his life.

Our Officers were never too sure about Les’s tale, but a few months later the Java party came up, these were the people taken prisoner on Java. Word came through that Airey was one of the Java party. So of course the Officers raced over there and said “Righto, what’s this tale we had heard about you being lined up and shot with a firing squad?”

Fred Airey said “I have not mentioned that to anyone”. He said “I have never ever mentioned that since it happened – they would knock me off quick and lively if they knew. How do you know?” And they told him about McCann, and he said “That’s right”.

Fred said the Japanese lined them up, then with the first volley the Japanese fired into them they were falling over so he took a dive, he went down in the ditch and laid still, he did not move at all. He said after they were all down some of the blokes were moving about a bit, then the Japanese came through and shot them again. Luckily McCann was out to it so he did not move. Airey said he waited until after the Japanese had gone, then had a look around and said everyone else was dead so he took off. He made it down as far as Java – if he had not turned up no one would have believed McCann’s tale. Some years ago Les McCann’s story appeared in the “Listening Post”, the RSL Paper – it is included as Appendix 2.

There were so many stories like that about, it is hard to ever believe these things happened but they did and we carried on.

## CHANGEOVER OF THE GUARDS

The first few months we were there under Japanese normal front line troops. Then the changeover came when other troops were brought in as guards and the Koreans came in. During the changeover we had about a 10-day period when no-one was responsible for guarding us. The first mob vacated on a certain date but the other mob had not taken over, so the boys used to go walkabout.

Several of us went into Singapore about 12 miles away. Three of us got in there one day and we went down to Lavender Street – where the brothels

were, not that we were interested in brothels but we were just being sticky, so we went down to have a look around. People came out and the girls came out and said “Round the back” so we went around the back. We sat down out the back of the house and had a beautiful feed, they put on a lovely meal for us. The Japanese and all the other mob were going in the front and paying their money – we were out the back eating all the profits.

It was quite a strange period we could walk past the Japanese in the main street in Singapore, walk past them and completely ignore them. Normally we had to salute them but at this stage no-one gave a damn. They were not responsible, that was the main thing, as long as they were not responsible for us we kept going.

When the changeover came we did not know where we stood. The whole lot the Koreans or Japanese were the same. One lot would be quite reasonable to handle, the next bloke if we walked past and did not salute we would get a hiding, we had to be wary about how we treated each lot.

One day in 1942 in the Selerang area, about 200 2/4$^{th}$ were lined up on parade for a Japanese inspection. A Lieutenant, whose Father was a General in WWI, was walking across the parade ground. He was a strange little bloke with a round body – no shoulders, could have only got a commission on his name, he wore his pips on his elbows. As he progressed Slew started to whistle a marching tune – you could see him brighten up. After about 50 yards he came to a halt, turned and yelled “Step forward the man whistling”. All he saw was 200 grinning faces.

## CONFINEMENT IN SELERANG BARRACKS

Selerang Barracks had been home to the Gordon Highlanders Battalion. It was built for a battalion of troops, there were about 7 buildings. The buildings formed the outer limits of the area leaving a parade ground in the centre. The Japanese locked about 19,000 of us up in the Selerang Barracks because we would not sign a form stating that we would not attempt to escape. The guards had machine guns lined up on all the corners and so forth. So they shut us up there and of course the thing we did was to work continually day and night, digging bore holes for latrines to try improve the facilities in the place as it housed so many people. Of course we could not draw enough water for the mob that were in there from the different camps, it was quite a mix up.

The Japanese caught two young chaps that tried to escape – one was a corporal and one was a private. They made Lieutenant Colonel Galleghan, Black Jack, go out there to watch and they used these Indian troops to shoot them.

When the Lieutenant Colonel came back he gave us a bit of a talk. The Indians could not shoot properly, one bloke was down and the other was still

trying to stand up with bullet wounds in him, in the finish they killed them. He came back and he said "Righto, you have just got to sign this form. You are signing under duress so it does not mean much." He stood up with tears running down his face as he told us the story.

So then we had to all line up to go through and sign these forms, each one of us had to sign a form to state they we would not attempt to escape. I would have loved to have seen the forms when they finished because all the blokes were going through and signing them, but not all with their own names. They used every name they could think of, there were bloody film stars, Ned Kelly and Adolf Hitler the whole lot and they all signed these bloody forms. Then they got us back into our own barracks again.

Old Black Jack Galleghan was a mighty man, he had been the CO of 30th Battalion. He was a First World War man, he had been through the whole box and dice. He stood up to the Japanese all along the line, then after a time some of the other officers did also. All Officers above Lieutenant Colonel had been taken to Japan.

When the Java party lobbed back into the Selerang area they did not march in, they were put off trucks and walked back like Brown's cows up through the mob. Old Black Jack gave them the nickname, he called them "Java Rabble". It hurt those blokes a lot it but that was the first time it was brought very, very much to our notice, the fact that when we went anywhere we marched. This crowd lobbed in from Java and they just did not fall in they just came and wandered up to where they had to have the check parade. It brought home to all of us along the line, that we just had to stick together in everything we did.

## THE INDIAN NATIONAL ARMY

One of the big problems we had right through was that quite a few Indians went over to the Japanese. They had their own camp away from us. They were looked after quite well, they had better rations and everything else and they were known as the Indian National Army. They were the mob that made up the firing squad at Changi Beach during the Barrack Square incident.

The Indian National Army were commanded by an Indian Commissioned Officer, a Captain. I could not find out what happened to him after the war finished – he probably got treated like Toyama!!

Talking about the Indian National Army – a little tale about one of them. One of them followed one of the boys into camp one day in the Selerang area. I do not know what the boys had been up to, but they decided that this Indian could not go back and tell the Japanese what was going on, so they had to fix him up out of the way. A few of us had the job of lifting the seat on one of the bore holes and he was sent on his way down the bore hole – he did not make much complaint about it at all. Later on the Japanese came through and had a good search but there was no chance of finding him.

Another time, at Selerang a chap named Nybo and Dick Ridgwell were outside the camp after coconuts (they used to put a strap around their insteps to go up the tree). An Indian caught them with one up the tree. Dick was quite good at unarmed defence, so he knocked the Indian over. It was like playing Russian roulette, they had rifles but you did not know who had bullets! At the time both our boys had full black beards so they raced back to our lines and got a shave from Len Armstrong, the barber. The Indian and 2 Japanese came straight to our lines and searched for 2 men with black beards. They knew where they came from so we were all lined up on parade and it was quite comical, it looked so bloody obvious, two blokes with white faces when everyone else had a really dark tan but they never thought or connected that with the two blokes with black beards. Those stupid things would be obvious to a little child and yet the Japanese never seemed to wake up to these things that were being put over them.

## WORK PARTIES

Then the Japanese started sending out work parties. At first they wanted a work party to go to Johore, about 4 miles around on the west coast from Johore Bahru, to put a shrine where they had put the barges in the water. They picked the 2/4$^{th}$ because they blamed them for the machine gun fire when they were putting the barges in.

So about 250 of us went up there and we were quartered in beautiful homes not far from the water around the sides of Johore Straits. These great big two storey homes were all around there and we were put into about three of them. The Officers were in the house upstairs above us and all the cooking was done native style in a separate building behind the house.

We were supplied with bagged rice by the truck load and were swapping it for pigs with the locals, with the knowledge of the Japanese who ate their share. We had all these pigs so the Officers upstairs were eating roast pork and we were having plenty of pork in our rice, but our food was still a lot different to theirs.

The junior Officers had to come downstairs to pick up their big tray of meat and take it back upstairs, as they walked along the back of the house we could see them through the window. One day Lieutenant George Branson (he had been in charge of the 144 who came on at Fremantle) was taking the meat tray upstairs. As he walked around the house he was holding this great big dish of roast pork against himself with one hand and poking pork into his mouth as quick as he could with the other hand. Of course we were watching him, so was Major Cough, the Officer in charge of the party. Major Cough leant over the balcony and said “We will have the pork upstairs Mr Branson!” Of course after that George was called “Porky”, and still is even now.

Later on George Branson became a Liberal Senator for Western Australia in Federal Parliament and then he had some job in Canberra for many years. He is back here in WA now and he is pretty sick, but he is still “Porky”.

Major Cough came home and later was in charge of the State Housing Commission.

Later, we found a burnt out pineapple factory up the road. It had been a two story wooden building and when the fire went through it the whole thing collapsed and the labels burnt off the tins. We gathered up any of the tins that did not have the ends blown and it was good, how it helped our rice to have a tin of pineapple in it. Without the labels we did not know when we opened a tin whether it was juice or pieces of pineapple etc, but it was still good tucker.

While we were there most of our rations were coming out from the Selerang area in trucks. The Japanese were using our trucks because they had plenty of fuel. We raided all the houses in the area, gathered up all the books we could, then packed them up and when the trucks came out we sent the books back so we helped to build up a wonderful library in Changi.

When the heavy work was finished most of the blokes went back to Changi, 55 of us stayed on there to finish the job. It was strange up there we could dig up a tree, shift it and it did not even lose a leaf. There were beautiful lawns around a lot of those houses so we just chopped them out in squares and took them down and built this memorial. I think it was the best work party that ever left Singapore.

About five years ago there was a notice in "The Listening Post", the RSL Paper over here, asking if anyone knew anything about this memorial so I wrote the following piece and sent it in.

**"THE FIRST WORK PARTY OUT OF SINGAPORE**

> The 2/4th were picked as punishment to build the shrine in Johor because their Vickers were blamed for the high Jap casualties in the barges used for the crossing to the island. The boys had sat for days behind their guns watching the Japs build ramps into the water to get barges into the water and even at night once they knew the invasion was on had the exact location and range set.
>
> I cannot recall numbers of main party all 2/4th under Major Cough around 200, I think, we were quartered in the lovely homes above the west coast road. All the homes were two storey. The officers were on the top floor of the house we were in. Later Major Cough was with the WA State Housing Commission.
>
> Two officers always come to mind. Lt Blue Wilson who was a very good pianist. Late at night the Japs always got him out of bed to play when they had been to town (Johore Bahru) on leave. Also Lt Branson (later a Liberal senator for WA) got the nickname Porky but that was another story.
>
> The rice ration came by truck-load, we were swapping rice for pigs with full knowledge of our guards who were eating their fill.

> After the ground work was done the party was reduced to 55 who had to transplant trees and palms, build stone surrounds for the paths etc, dig up and plant lawns around the area. It was the best work party ever. A few miles away we found a pineapple factory burnt down. Any tin not blown up we took - the labels were burnt off so you didn't know if it was pieces, slices or juice.
>
> As our rations, or some of them, came from Changi we rounded up all the books we could from surrounding homes and sent them back. At this time the guards who were Jap fighting troops, never worried about us as long as the numbers checked.
>
> Of an evening a few of us cobbered up with some of the local young men, I always recall one young chap who had been a student at an English school, he told us all about Malay customs and attitudes. Listening to him made me realise how poor our control of the English language was."

By the time we got back to Changi the Japanese had started sending forces away from Singapore. The forces were identified alphabetically, and sent from Changi between May 1942 and August 1943. When all the Forces had gone less than 2,500 Australians were left at Changi. It effectively used up all of those the Japs could find work for.

About this time sickness started to show up, one of the first illnesses was beri beri. The early cases of beri beri worried a lot of the blokes, but it was not serious while it was just in the legs – our legs became swollen and it made it a bit hard to walk. When your legs were swollen you could push a thumb into your leg and the dent stayed there for a few hours before it would come out because the liquid built up and could not get out of your body. Later on of course beri beri got that way it killed quite a lot of people – the fluid built right up in our bodies, and if it got into the chest it stopped all the vital organs from working – then it killed.

## THE CHANGI FORCES

The dates of movement I have taken from a book put out by George Aspinall. He was the chap who took the photos of the Selerang incident, he also took photos on "F" Force. He used Xray paper and all sorts of stray materials. He got through a lot of the searches but put it in a bore hole before coming back to Singapore.

"A" Force was the first to leave Singapore, it was made up of 3,000 Australians and left Singapore in May 1942 for Burma. They went up to Southern Burma supposedly to build aerodromes. In September 1942 they were shifted to a place called Thanbyuzayat to start work on the railway line from the North. In late June 1942, 2,600 British POW's moved to Bampong to start work on the line from the Thailand end. In January 1943 "Dunlop" Force consisting of 900 Australians arrived from Java and went up to Konyu – that is further up the line than Bampong.

“B” Force – 1,496 men left Changi for Borneo in July 1942, they all went to Sandakan.

A Senior Officers Party involving all Officers above the rank of Lieutenant Colonel were taken off and went away.

“C” Force – numbered 2,200, including 563 Australians, they left Singapore for Japan in late November 1942.

“Don” Force was made up of 2,780 British and 2,200 Australians, they left Singapore from 14-18 March 1943 for Thailand, they were a variable force to start the camps. They were the force used to start the camps above the southern end of the line we went through on our march up.

“E” Force which was made up of 500 British and 500 Australians left Singapore 14 March 1943 for Borneo.

“F” Force was the party that I was with so I know that one. “F” Force was made up of 3,662 Australians, 3,338 British – total 7,000 men. The first train left Singapore on 18 April 1943. There was one train each day, 13 trains in all, 28 men to a steel wagon 20’ x 8’ x 8’, going to Bampong Thailand then we marched for 17 nights to Neike. Later various groups went on to next camps. Kami Sonkurai (Sonkurai No 3 Camp) was the last camp before the Burma border at Three Pagodas Pass.

“G” Force was made up of 1,000 Dutch, 300 British and 200 Australians and left in April 1943 for Japan.

“H” Force was made up of 3,270 including 600 Australians who left in May 1943 for Thailand, they went up there but only worked at the bottom end of the line. They included quite a lot of Officers – at that time they were scratching for labourers.

“J” Force totalled 900 including 300 Australians who left in May 1943 for Japan.

“K” Force was made up of 30 Medical Officers and 200 medic ORs, which included 5 Doctors and 50 Australians, went to Thailand in August 1943 – they were trying to look after some of those people still carrying on.

“L” Force was made up of 15 Medical Officers and 100 ORs who left in August 1943 for Thailand doing the same thing.

As far as civilians there were no reliable figures, but it was estimated that 270,000 Asians were impressed to work on the line.

## SINGAPORE WORK PARTIES

The Forces left Singapore in stages over a period of months, those still waiting to go away were kept busy on work parties that the Japanese started

sending out on Singapore. I went on about three different work parties. The first one was to Adam Park where we built a shrine.

In the final days before the capitulation, when the civilians were leaving Singapore by boat, they just drove their cars to the wharf and left them with the keys in the ignition. We had two cars at the camp at Woodlands – I am not sure who drove them.

The Japanese did some strange things – I was on a working party that was taking tyres and wheels off cars for days – these were loaded onto trucks. Why they did not take the cars we did not know, the cars were just left. This was the first time I had seen a 6 cylinder Ford – they had gone from 4 cylinder to V8s here.

On work parties in Singapore when you lobbed into a new camp the usual thing was for everyone to go out and scrounge to see what we could find that might be of use. In my general wandering I came across a stretcher – well I was made, we were sleeping with just a blanket and whatever you could find to use as a pillow on a concrete floor. I had a stretcher and got a lot of rubbishing but I was comfortable.

About that time we had a chap in the camp, in our house with us, who was pinching stuff, going through peoples gear. We could not catch him. The Captain-in-Charge of the group was Captain (Bull) Bowering, he said if you catch him I do not want to see him in the orderly room. This went on till finally somebody spotted him, and a check of his gear found quite a lot of the stolen gear. So he was taken outside and made to run between two lines of the boys, finally a big chap, Jack Carroll (he had been a cricketer for NSW and was a big bloke over 6', probably about 6'2"" hit him on the chin and lifted him off the ground, when he hit the ground he split his head open. So what did they do, pinch my bloody stretcher and take him to bloody hospital. I never saw it again.

Working for the Japanese we dug up the Royal Singapore Golf course, and built roads down across it over the end of MacRitchie reservoir, which was one of the main water supplies for Singapore. Now in Australia we are building golf courses for the Japanese tourists! If the Japanese had ever wanted to starve us out of Singapore all the main water storage was in Johore and it came through in pipelines into MacRitchie and another reservoir and was distributed all over Singapore. If the valves had been turned off in Johore as soon as there was a dry spell the city would have been buggered for water.

The Japanese put a shrine up on the hill above MacRitchie reservoir, they put up these shrines everywhere. The centre of the shrine was always a great big timber post, on four sides there was Japanese writing that got smaller as it went up, no cross or anything else but all this Japanese writing on it.

We just got to and put all these roads in. When they put a bridge in across the lake we had to swim, we found out the blokes who could swim and those who could not, we had to float the logs out for pile driving and everything else.

It was a bloody great waste of time but the conditions were not too bad. They were using a lot of Chinese labour as well as our mob so there were plenty of us there doing the jobs and we would get a bit of humour every now and again. At the time the Japanese believed that they controlled all of Asia for all time.

Occasionally the guards gave someone a hiding, just for something to do half the time. A chunkle is an Asian version of a hoe we use here but up there it was used for everything, for gardening and shifting dirt and the whole lot. One of their great capers, if we had done something wrong was to make you stand with this chunkle held above his head. Of course we would have only one or two guards around the place so we would go along with this for a while, then the boys would cause a bit of a disturbance to keep the guards occupied, so then they would swap over and different blokes would take a turn at holding the chunkle up. One day this was on and we had a big bloke there about 6'8'' with us, well when he took his turn and the guard had to wake up. The guard went over but he was about 5'2'' so he could not jump up to slap this big bloke in his face – as those guards liked to do. They would make us stand to attention and use a round arm swing and just slap the offender in the face – it was not very bright – we had to come straight back to attention after being hit. The guard could not slap this bloke in the face so he started kicking him in the shins, but luckily he had those Japanese boots with divided big toe so he could not do much damage. It helped to brighten the place up a bit with different capers.

The worst hiding I ever got on a work party I do not know what started it all or what this little guard picked me for, but he had had a few slaps at my face and so forth. Then he stood off having a bit of a look to see how he was going and he looked at my fingers. I was standing to attention fingers folded and my thumb down where my trouser seam should be. That upset him so he grabbed a bit of wood and started trying to hit my knuckles and at the last minute I always slipped my hands back out of sight and he kept hitting my legs – it made it darn hard to walk for a while. I always think of it now anywhere I have to stand to attention I am always very careful that my thumbs are straight down and fingers folded. Of course the Japanese always stood to attention with their fingers extended as far as they could go. That is something I will never forget.

Coming back from work parties some bloke would pipe up and start singing, it always had the Japanese a bit beat. It did not matter what they did, they could never manage to get the boys down – they would keep that happy style on.

The whole time on those jobs the main thing was always trying to see what we could scrounge, if there was anything around the place we would souvenir what we could, we never knew when it might be useful.

One strange thing about the Japanese if we wanted to take something they had around the place we had no chance of getting or sneaking in to get it. The only thing to do was to walk straight up put the item on our shoulder then

walk away with it, then they would take no notice of us, they expected that someone had sent us to get it. It did not matter what it was we took, even things that they knew bloody well we were not supposed to have.

While we were out at Adam Park one of our Lieutenants was Mick Wedge, since the war Mick has done a wonderful job here taking the boys through the Pensions Review Board over pensions business – I've been with him about three times. One day this guard said to Mick "It is a very slow train from Fremantle to Perth".

Mick asked "How do you know?"

He replied "I have ridden on it"

Mick said "What were you doing?"

He said "We were on the Whalers." He spoke perfect English and he knew all about the train, how long the trip took, about having a drink at the Savoy Hotel and a whole lot of other things.

While we were on another work party we had a Japanese Lieutenant who started talking and he wanted to know what unit we were from, we said 2/4$^{th}$ machine gunners."

He said "Oh yes" then he gave us the rundown on what day we came into Singapore, the boats we came in on, how many of us there were, roughly the whole story about it. We asked him "How do you know?"

He replied "I was selling food on the wharf".

Evidently the Japanese had Singapore marked off that well that they knew more about it than the British did.

Another trip, I cannot remember what camp we were in at the time, but we were working in what they called the godowns, known as the cabbage patch. They had stored enough stuff in Singapore to last for a siege for a number of years. The godowns were 100 metres long and 10 metres wide and they just filled them up, rows and rows filled with all the things needed in case of a siege. Of course the goods were all labelled in English and half the guards working with us there could not read English so they would clear a godown. They would start and we had to cart everything out of there case by case in a chain gang, pass it through then the guard would count it off and they would ask somebody what something was. They got some funny answers, someone told them that boot polish was shaving cream, all sorts of stupid things were put over them.

There is a tale, I have seen it reported in a couple of books, but our party did the job so I was there in the party at the time. We were carting out tin foodstuffs in these wooden cases – the boys would come out and someone would drop a case on it's corner so it would break, as it did they would throw

their hat over a tin, they would pack the rest up take it over to the stack, come back and pick up their hat, walk through and get the tin away. After a while this guard woke up so he had us all lined up, they always lined us up in fives so they could count us – two fives made ten otherwise they were buggered. He had us lined up there and he was going to give an exhibition of what we were doing. He went through the whole performance, he borrowed a hat dropped the hat over a tin. While he was carting the case away one of the boys in the front row grabbed the tin from under the hat then it was passed back and we shoved it away out of sight. The guard came back with a great big grin all over his face, lifted the hat up and there was nothing there. Well, we had to keep the grin off our faces because we knew bloody well someone was going to get a hiding but it was well worth someone taking the risk.

The guards were strange people, we could never sort them out, we would do something one time and they would laugh about it, the next time they would give us a bloody hiding. It was not much of a problem then but after the war if someone looked like giving us a slap in the face they were likely to get really into trouble.

By this time many of the forces had left Singapore and word came through that "F" Force was to go to Thailand. They told us that we were being taken up to Thailand because there was more food there and to save bringing the food to us they would take us to the food. There was a whole lot of stuff that we were to take. There were 7,000 troops to go.

At that time I was having trouble with my eyes and I had been in hospital with one complaint – scrotal dermatitis. With this dermatitis the scrotum just weeps – it does not sound too bright. It was a shocking bloody thing – we could not walk properly with it. The Australian concert party had quite a good song about it called "Rice Balls". It put quite a lot of us in hospital at the same time. Later on a couple of blokes got it so bad that their scrotums went black, then they found out they had diphtheria of all things. As a kid in Katanning I had Diphtheria in the nose – most kids had it in their throats. No-one thought of it downstairs.

After a while in hospital I started to come good and I was used as a stretcher bearer. A bloke went into hospital for piles, I will never forget it, we took this bloke in there on a stretcher, put him on the table and the doctor got to and operated on him for piles. I recently went to the doctor here, Frank Holland, who is quite a good mate, and he used a pair of Spencer Wills forceps. I said that I had seen them before and told him the tale about watching while they were operating on this bloke for piles when there were about a dozen pairs of Spencer Wills forceps hanging off him – it was a hell of a mess.

At this time Major Hunt used some tablets, M&B 693, for some other complaint and found it cured the chap's dysentery – it cleared up immediately. The civvy people would pay anything for them for the treatment of VD. The scroungers had been checking all the medical supplies in the godowns, then the Doctors put out an SOS for them for the Hospital – not for the treatment of VD.

By then there were people with all sorts of complaints like diarrhoea, skin complaints and a lot of bad eye complaints.

Just before “F” Force was formed up I was under Major Orr because my eyes had packed up and I could not see much. When all my mates were called up to go into “F” Force, I was paraded to Major Orr and told him our group was going away. He said “All right, if you want to go that is your problem”. So I put myself into “F” Force. The only way we could get along up there was to stick together as a group, if one was crook his mates looked after him.

Incidentally in the next month or so my eyes came good. If they had not I could not have gone back to the railways.

## “F” FORCE – JOURNEY TO THAILAND

“F” Force was 7,000 strong; there were 3,338 British and 3,662 Australians and the first train left Singapore on 18 April 1943. There was a train every day for 134 days to take the whole lot of us up to Thailand. The lines up there are all 1m gauge, smaller than our narrow gauge here in WA, and we were put into steel trucks, I think 27 or 28 men were supposed to go into a steel truck, which was 20’ x 8’ x 8’ high – it took 5 days for the train to get to Bampong. If we could talk the guard into leaving the door ajar it was not too bad. We could not all lie down at once, we had to take it in turns.

The train was supposed to spend time at food points and sometimes food was there and sometimes it was not. The only decent break we had was when we went to Ipoh and the steam engine took on water then for some reason it pulled away from the water column. Of course, I knew all about the water column, so I went over there and someone got a fire iron and turned the water on so we walked in clothes and all and had a shower. Some of the boys took their clothes off. The civilian population took no notice at all. That was the only break we got in the five days it took to reach a place called Bampong in Thailand, just about 80 kms short of Bangkok.

After that we were marched out of Bampong at night. Why we were marched at night no-one has ever been able to work out. We marched for 17 nights right up to, or close to the Burma border.

One of the first sights we got used to in Thailand were vultures sitting in all the trees right through the town. Whether it was an omen or not I do not know.

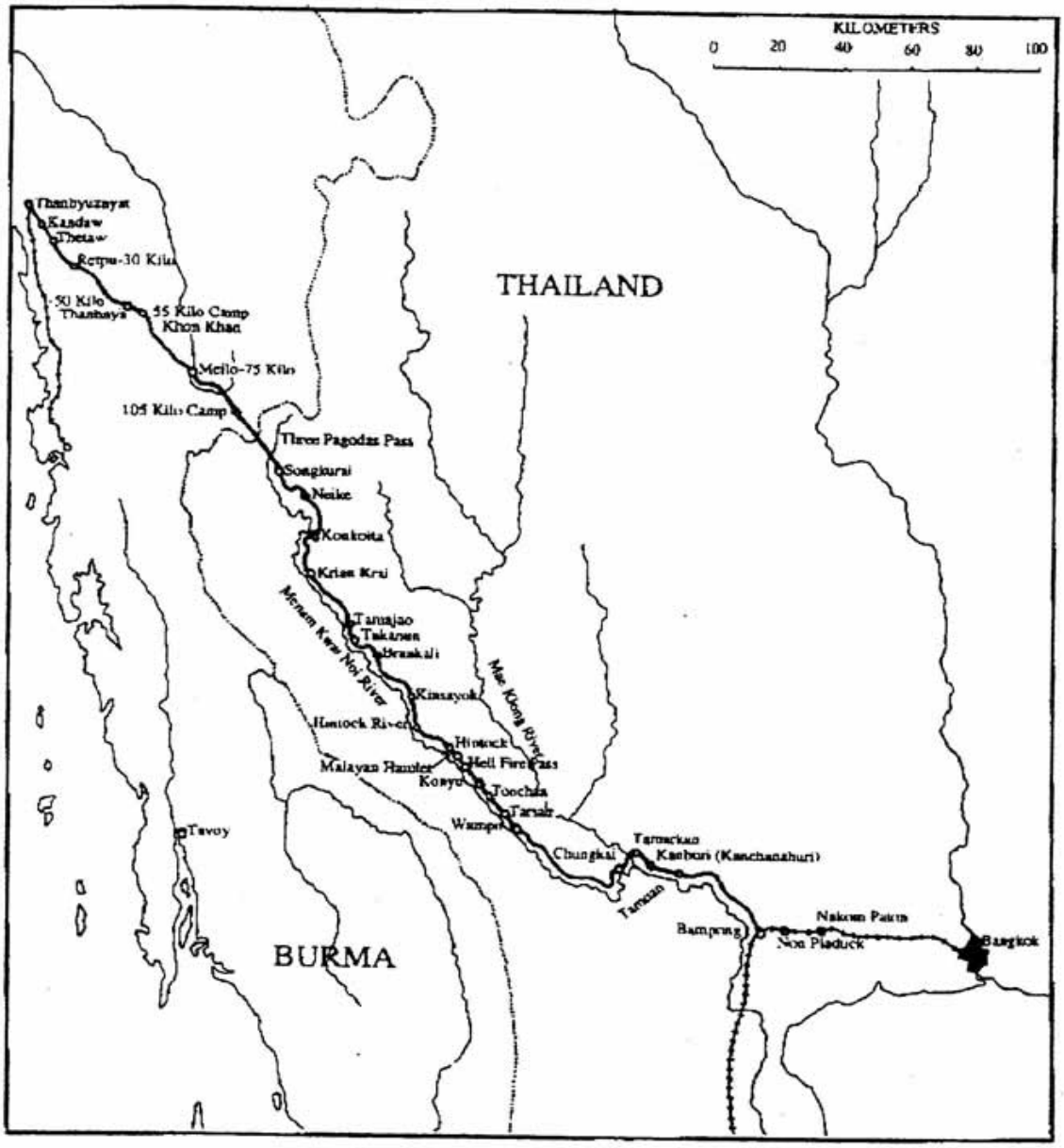
The first night we marched through to a little camp and we stopped there during the daytime. We went down close to the river where we could buy duck eggs and little fish on platters, all sorts of things – three tiny little fish for 10c. We had quite a feed of duck eggs, which was good oh, but that was only the beginning. The snag about the duck eggs became evident the next night. Marching in the dark we had to keep close up to one another – after eating duck eggs if someone shifted wind it was a bit of a problem, but we had to keep close to each other or get lost so we put up with that.

The next camp was Kanchanaburi, which everyone called Kanburi or Kamburi, from there on we started to catch up with “Don” Force they had gone up there before us, a pommy force had gone through and then “Don” Force. They were out working when we stopped in their camps through the day time and we marched out again at night before they came in. The guards would march us usually from around 8 o’clock at night through until daylight. This went on night after night. A map showing the march is on the next page.

“Don” Force at that time were building up the formation for the rail to go through and they were quite reasonable tracks that we were walking on. After we got a bit further up, when we got beyond their camps it was just a trail that we had to follow. We would wander along of a night time and we had to keep close to the bloke in front. The only thing was there were a lot of fire flies about and if we could catch a firefly, squash it on the shirt or the pack of the bloke in front that gave us something to follow to keep on going.

One night we were going along there was just enough light so I could see, off the side of our track were some trees planted in orchard style lines. I thought that these trees might have something edible on them so I made a break and there were things on the trees that looked like Kurrajong pods. At any rate I grabbed a few of these and got back into the lines. I gave a few around to the boys and then I started to try to chew into one. I had a hell of a job trying to get into it but finally got some stuff out of the centre of it and put it in my mouth and started to chew. The more I chewed the more I had in my mouth. Finally I took it out of my mouth put it in my pack to check it in daylight. It turned out it was kapok! They grow kapok there in orchards, evidently they then get it out and tease it out.

## The Burma-Thai Railway




*The Burma—Thailand Railway*

**Figure 2: Burma-Thai Railway**

We just kept on going. There was supposed to be food ready for us at the camps, half the time it was not cooked. We had all sorts of mixups in the daytime trying to get a feed. Then after about 5 or 6 nights up there we got an offer from some Thais with yak carts, which were like big old bullock carts, that they would take some of the packs up.
So we hired about 5 or 6 of these yaks carts and put our gear on so we could walk easier. That way we could give some of the other blokes a hand and spread the gear and the load around – that was quite good we reckoned. I cannot remember what it cost to hire the yak carts – I know I used the last of my money. But in the morning 2 of the yak carts did not turn up – one had my gear on board – everything I had my wallet, photos, stamps I had collected, what the devil I was collecting stamps for at that time I do not know. I lost everything I owned, all I had was what I stood up in, I did not even have a bloody dixie to eat out of or anything else.

By this time a lot of the boys were realising they had more gear than they could carry so far and they were starting to discard some items, so I finished up with a blanket, a tin pannikin, and a mug and so forth. We kept going, we kept on walking and we were fairly well up the track.

Our portion, the 2/4$^{th}$ portion of that force, was 30 odd men. I have never been sure of the exact number, some said 34 some said 37, we were under Captain Gwynne, who was quite a well-known solicitor here in Perth. He had been in the 10$^{th}$ Light Horse with Fred. He knew Fred and straight away asked what relation I was to Freddie Holding. He was also tied up with racehorses. He and his wife owned Raconteur and quite a lot of other horses in WA over the years.

Captain Gwynne said to us a few times, “If you can, give the bloke with the piano accordion a hand to carry that up, we want a bit of music round here.” So everyone had a turn at dragging this bloody piano accordion and cursing the bloody thing but we found out later that it had a wireless in it. I think it was a bloke from the 29$^{th}$ Battalion that had it, at any rate we kept this thing going, getting it up the track.

Of course later on when we tried to get news it was a bit of a problem because of the batteries. The only way they could get the radio to work was to pinch the batteries out of a truck for a time, or sneak over to a truck parked well away from the Japanese camp and couple onto the batteries there. They did get news every now and then, a bit of news coming through, about the time when Italy was chucking it in.

At that time the Japanese were taking thousands of natives up there. It did not matter if they were Chinese, Malay, Indian or anything else, they were just people gathered up off the street, they took the whole lot of them up to work on the line. It was estimated that 270,000 Asians were impressed to work on the railway line, very few returned.

We kept going and got to one camp where these blokes were lying around some were dead, some were very sick – of course we kept away from them as much as we could.

A few days later we got to below Neike (Nikki) and some of our blokes got crook, then the doctor said straight away, “Oh, its cholera”. We were supposed to have had cholera injections before we left Singapore but they evidently were not the dinkum McCoy and so then cholera started, well that was a nice old problem. At that time we were camped alongside a river, a fast flowing river, yet we could not go near it to drink or wash or anything else.

The Japanese gave us 44 gallon drums that were placed at the end of the huts, to keep them out of the rain, and had our boys stoking the fires and boiling the water in the 44 gallon drums. We were given a water bottle full of the boiled water each day and that was for everything – to drink, to wash, that was all we had, so we did not wash. Luckily someone had given me a water bottle. When it came time to line up for tucker, I had an Indian style dixie and I would just go and hold it over the flame for a while to burn off anything that might be in it and collect my tucker – it did not look very bright when I finished with it but I carried it right through the camps up there with “F” Force.

We were kept going and it finished up we got to Neike, which was the headquarters for “F” Force, then a lot of us went on to two camps above that. One camp was a pommy camp and we were at a camp at the river building a big bridge over the river. I think we had every sickness you could think of there – diarrhoea, cholera, dysentery, tropical ulcers. By this time a lot of the blokes were going bare footed because walking through the mud had made our boots pack up.

## THE BURMA-THAILAND RAILWAY

On the road back from our camp towards Neike the trucks were having a hell of a problem getting through. A lot of them were old Harringtons, or British Army trucks – four wheel drive – and they were battling to get through so we had to go back and corduroy the road through a lot of the dips. We used to cut logs about 8’ long, or timber about 6’’ in diameter and lay them across the tracks so that they could climb through on them. We were at that for a long time, it was a nasty old job and of course the main thing was building up the formations for the track.

The Japanese had specific instructions on what was to go into the track formations and all that, but they used logs and anything else it did not matter as long as it was built up to a height they did not give a damn, the engineers would go crook if they saw it but most of the time it went on.

Toyama was in charge of the Korean guards, he always reckoned he was Japanese but he was a Korean and he spoke fairly good English. Of course the Korean guards wore no rank. We had Major Hunt, Dr Bruce Hunt with us. Major Hunt was about 6’2’’, Toyama was about 5’2’’ and they had some

bloody arguments about how many men were going out to work and all sorts of things.

Of course we had a sick bay (what they called the hospital) which was a hut down the lower side of the river and all the sick boys went there – there were some shocking sights down there.

I worked in pretty long stretches because I was more afraid of going to hospital than of sickness – you would go in with one complaint and finish up with everything in the world. I kept pretty lucky right through the years of our confinement, I worked for 40 odd days straight at one stage. We would get malaria and still go to work, it sounds silly now but it was a case of have to, so many men had to go out to work each day.

Men with ulcers on their legs were going out to work. They were helped to go out and laid down till it was time to go back to camp – the numbers had to go out!

We were on parade one day and Major Hunt was giving us a talk he said "This little Japanese gentleman alongside me was born out of wedlock" and he carried on. Of course Toyama heard the Japanese gentleman and he was bowing and the boys all had great grins on their faces. It helped to break things down a bit, but Toyama was an awful little bastard.

The first time we met Toyama was when we got off the train at Bampong. Toyama always carried a light wooden stick with him, this stick was nearly as tall as he was, and he would swing this stick around. Captain Gwynne, and another Major from the 29th or 30th I think, must have upset Toyama or something. Well Toyama swung his stick at Captain Gwynne, who wore big horn rimmed glasses, and knocked him over and his glasses off. Everyone was ready to sail in, but we could not do anything about it because if anyone had made a move we would have all been in trouble. We had the awful little bastard Toyama right through.

The Koreans' camp was over the road from the jail and the Indian National Army camp was just down the road. After the war finished everyone volunteered to go and pick Toyama out of the camp, but the authorities gave Captain Gwynne the job. He never got as far as any court martial for war crimes or anything else they told them the whole story about him and they took him out and shot him.

While we were working on the business of building up the formation of the track and to get the trucks running through again I was lucky that I struck a job with a little Japanese, Matsidor, who had been conscripted into the army. He had been going to technical school or college in Japan and through reading quite a lot of books etc had some knowledge of English. He was given the job, with 10 of us, to go out and cut logs for the culverts at various places along the line.

Of course the usual thing was they would give us a quota of so much work to be done in a day. Matsidor had the lowest rank of all the Japanese there and they all used him for a punching bag sort of thing all along the track. He was a typical cartoon character – tiny little bloke with his "what's it names" on his trousers wound right up to this knees, big thick horn rimmed glasses and a great big pith helmet that just about covered him up, he looked like a mushroom. Matsidor was quite a reasonable little bloke, he was dead against the war and everything that was going on but he had his job to do.

He woke up straight away that we could meet our quota in about three hours or so, so we would go out in the morning, get quite a bit of work done, then we would sit down and have a discussion. Matsidor wanted to know about Australia and we quizzed him on everything else as long as we could keep him from getting on and doing work but he did not get our quotas increased which was good.

We had about a fortnight of this and it was quite a good break from what we had been doing. The only problem was we would cut a fairly big log then maybe 5 or 6 of us would have to get underneath to carry it and we would be going over humps and hollows and drains and over big logs and so forth. One minute we had no weight on our shoulder and the next we got the whole darn lot and it is because of this that I have a back problem and will continue to have it for the rest of my days.

This back problem shows up every now and again, sometimes I will go for a couple of years and it does not worry me then all of a sudden some little thing will happen and it flares up again. Playing bowls in Narrogin I was in a team which won the triples. In the games leading up to the final my back gave out – I could get down to deliver my bowl but could not straighten up, so I had to have a sub for the final. The local paper published a photo of the four that won the threes.

Matsidor is the only Japanese I would not mind catching up with again. He explained to us that as far as English goes Matsidor was what we would call a "wooden door". He was quite good on Japanese customs and habits so during the hours we sat down in the bush with him we got quite a lot of interesting information out of him. But like all good things it came to an end and then we were back to the old business of formations.

## HAMMER AND TAP

Then we had a job of quarrying which meant we had a big granite hill alongside us and we had to get to with that they called a hammer and tap. We were given about a 4ft bar with a chisel end on it and an 8lb hammer and we worked in pairs. They had about 6 or 8 pairs working on the face of the rock. We would drill a hole in about 3ft and when we had all reached our quotas they would put charges in and blow it. Then the hammer and tap boys would shift onto a different place on the rock face.

All the mob would come in behind the hammer and tap boys and they had to stack this blue metal, all broken into a certain size, into heaps about 2m long 1m wide and 1m high. Well, off course we could not stack it straight so it had to go in a taper, the guards would carry a stick to measure it every now and then and if it was not wide enough we had to make it bigger and so forth.

In the early stage, when we were working on the bridge they had a Burmese bloke with an elephant that could do some wonderful work, it could turn logs over so we could adze the flat tops on them and every thing else. But the elephant had a youngster – about 3 or 4 years old that was a bloody nuisance. We would get a nice stack of metal all stacked up and the Japanese would say that was OK and go onto the next one then this bloody little elephant would walk up, put his head against the stack and walk straight through the heap. The Japanese would laugh like hell and then we would have to put it all back together again. But, after a period of time, the Burmese bloke who handled the elephant got cholera so although the elephant was still in camp after that no one could get any sense out of it or make it work properly.

Working on this hammer and tap business did not worry me much as I had been on the farm swinging an axe and all that sort of caper, but it was a matter of getting someone decent to work with. If you got someone who did not know what they were doing when you were holding a 4ft long bar if they swung the 8lb hammer and missed the bloody bar it was your hands and wrists that were going to cop it. So I caught up with Jack Carroll again. I was pretty fine and he was this big tall bloke and twice my weight but we worked together for quite a while at the hammer and tap.

One night we came in after dark and were getting our rice when someone said, “You had better go and see your mate, he is pretty crook”. Well, I walked down to where I knew Jack was camped further down the hut and I could not recognise him, in about 2 hours since we had knocked off work he had lost probably half is body weight, he had cholera, he never saw that night out. The book “F” Force gives the details “NX 71966 Pte J.L. Carroll 2/30$^{th}$ Inf Lower Sonkurai 22.06.43 24 Murwillumbah NSW.”

## CHOLERA

It was shocking the way cholera could hit in such a short time. When cholera showed up the person passed grey slime from both ends, it just seemed to take all the fluid out of the body.

When anyone died of cholera if they fouled their gear, blanket or anything else they whole lot went out, everything was burnt. They would build up a great big fire on a base of logs to get a fire burning that went for days at a time. And the bodies of the cholera deaths were burnt – there was not much left when they passed on. Those that were too sick to go out and work got the job of burning the bodies. They would have two poles, drop a body across the poles and then run in towards the fire and throw the body in, then get back as quick as you could because of the heat of the fire. It was strange, you would

throw a body on the fire and all of a sudden you would see his arm come up or a head shift or some other movement. The heat of the fire pulled sinews in the body and caused the movement but it was a shocking thing.

I always remember we had two Doctors Cahill in the camp, Frank and Lloyd, they were both Captains. This day they were up there at the funeral fire and this little doctor was there and he had cloths around his legs because of the sores on them and wooden clogs on, he was squatting down over this body checking for something or other the body was all open up and he was pawing through it – probably a cholera case. When he finished he would wave to you then you had to go and pick up the body and throw it on the fire.

It is hard now when any of us go to a Doctor – we get sat down at DVA when we go to the Doctor and we try to explain some of the sickness and things that people had there and they just look at us, they just can not comprehend that things went on the way they did.

Two brothers that were away with us were the Gilmores. John Gilmore's pretty well known he holds most world records for running distances from a mile upwards, I was talking to him at the luncheon at Gloucester Park just a while ago and he said "I am still 9 stone 1 the same as when I joined the Army" it is hard to imagine a bloke like that holding world records. His brother Jim is quite a fair lump of a bloke, but he got through cholera. He owned a garden centre at Carousel Shopping Centre on the Albany Highway and he and his wife, daughter and son-in-law were running quite a big business. He had to front a Doctor at Hollywood Repatriation Hospital. The Doctor said what did you have while away and Jim went through all the usual complaints we had and then said cholera. The doctor said "Oh no, no cholera I won't have that". Jim was going on holidays going over to Queensland and the Doctor who treated him was still practising in Queensland so he went over and told the Doctor the story so he wrote out a screed about all the treatment he had given him. Jim took the letter to Hollywood and requested to see the same Doctor again. They classified him TPI on the spot so he had to hand over the business to his daughter and son-in-law. Jim is probably the fittest chap in our mob still going.

Another chap, one of the two Gregory brothers with us, died of cholera in the hut alongside me. It is a terrible thing cholera, yet quite a few chaps came back. One of my mates here in Mandurah got through cholera. Ken Lessels, who married my sister Peg, is another one that had cholera.

The camp above us was an English camp which had a terrible lot of sickness so they could hardly get any of their blokes to go out to work. A lot of us were sent up there to help out.

The English camp was a shocking mess: the latrines were not kept up, nothing was working, the cookhouse was not working properly and so forth so Major Hunt got the Japanese to give us two days off to try to sort out this camp. They had fouled the ground and it was a hell of a job to get it cleaned up. We finally got some bit of semblance of order around the place and then

we started going out to work from there. After we had finished the clean up the Lieutenant Colonel in charge of the camp had us on parade. He thanked us for coming up and, as he said, his chaps had got to the stage they had just thrown in the towel, they were dying of starvation and they just did not have the will to keep on going. It was a shocking bloody camp. We got it sorted out a bit.

After we had done what we could to clean up the English camp we had another lot of trouble with the trucks not getting through – it was the top camp, Kami Sonkurai. When the trucks could not get through the stores did not get through so we had to walk up through Three Pagodas Pass into Burma to collect rice for our camp. These trips went on over a period of about 20 days. They picked the fittest of the blokes to go on these trips, I did two trips.

In Burma we would get a feed of rice when we got there and then we had to turn round and walk back, it was quite a job, it was dark by the time we got back to our camp. We had ordinary army packs strapped together, one in front and one behind filled with dry rice. Of course we were pretty fine at the time and the straps used to cut into our shoulders so we would always get a heap of banana leaves and fold them up as padding under the straps to stop the straps cutting into our shoulders.

After the need for these trips was over, about three days later someone said to me “What is Three Pagodas Pass like?” I had to stop and think about it and I realised that I had never seen it. We were walking through mud in bare feet, just paddling along and we were watching where we were going all the time. We just did not give a damn so long as we kept going because the track had been chopped up with that much broken bamboo and stuff like that. Of course the bamboos there were 10 or 12 inches in diameter, they used them for carting water! Also they used bamboo for bedpans – cut outside two knots then open at the top. So when the bamboo were broken up if we got one of those splinters into a foot we were really in trouble.

I went through Three Pagodas Pass twice each way and I am buggered if I know what it looked like, I never saw it. We just kept going – but at that time of course we had so much sickness, everything we could possibly think of was going through the boys.

A few weeks before the rails came through Major Hunt took some of the sick through to Burma. Included in the party were Captain Gywnne and Bob Murray. I did not catch up with Bob again until we were both back in Singapore.

We all got through till we completed the embankments. The rail came through and passed us then the work eased off and we were just packing up, sorting out, checking up formations and covering/poking the blue metal in.

The rail laying gang came through the camp at night. They had their rail and sleeper trucks in front of the engine and they would push it through. This mob of blokes had come right through from the Burma end and they would run the

sleepers out in front and then run the rails out. Every bloke seemed to have his job, it was something to see. When they talk here in WA about when they put the rails down for the interstate line, I saw work on that down the Avon Valley, it just was not the same. These blokes had it down to a fine art. Strange to see people as skinny as they were the way they could get that job done. They pushed the line through down below to Neike to where they joined the rail from the south end then things eased off.

On one occasion, during the time at one of the Sonkurai camps, Bob Murray had to go and work in the Japanese cookhouse. He took the opportunity to bring a big piece of dried fish back with him. As the work party did not come in till 9 or 10 Bob boiled the fish and the maggots started coming to the top. After taking a few out he decided that we would not see them so he left them in. Then he left it outside so the smell would not attract attention. It put a good taste in the rice and was lovely and salty. A couple of days later he told me about the maggots! When he came home he loved telling that tale.

## THE RETURN TO CHANGI

From the end of 1943 onwards, when the work on the railway line ended the forces kept coming back to Changi – like "F" Force which came back Christmas 1943.

After the line finished we headed back down to Kanburi. The rail up there was 1m gauge and the Japanese trucks all had dual axles designed so that the trucks could be driven over the line, the tyres had to be taken off and then the flanges fitted straight onto the rail. There were places on the side of the truck to bolt the tyres back up and away the trucks would go.

When they decided to bring us back down the line we came in two open rail trucks pulled by a Japanese truck. It took two days to come down to Kanburi because we would go a certain distance and then there would be a train coming or work on the track. We would put the wheels on and get out of the way or go into a siding and wait.

By the time we got to Kanburi big lots of troops were being brought down the line so we were parked in the scrub around the camp. Jack Gorringe had a group of 2/4$^{th}$, I do not know how many there were now, but I got a really bad dose of malaria. I got to the stage where I was rambling – I reckoned the guards were after me – they put a bloke on to watch me as I was wandering. I just got weaker and I have no recollection of when we were put on the rail to return the Singapore the same way we had come up.

What remained of "F" Force were at Kanburi by this time. Most went back to Singapore by rail, some went back to Bangkok and went to Singapore by boat, and a few stayed in Thailand.

Ron Lee, WX 8208, Sapper 2/6$^{th}$ Field Park, a mate of mine here in Mandurah, tells a story of being on a boat out of Bangkok, packed like sardines and finding a senior Officer's trunk, the name was on it. The boys

decided to open it and found a lot of tinned food stuff. The food was rationed out, the trunk smashed and disposed off. How the Officer had kept it was a mystery. It must have been left at Bampong when we went up the line. In some cases the Japanese showed some respect for Officers, strange some of us did not.

We came back by rail and I have no recollection at all from when I was crook at Kanburi, but the boys carted me along, loaded me and unloaded me til we got back to Singapore.

The Japanese brought us out to the Selerang area by truck and we were held on parade for hours and hours – I did not know anything about it at the time but the boys were held on parade while the Japanese tried to work out how many "F" Force had come back. To count them the Japanese would line them up in fives one bloke would count them then the next bloke would count them and get a different tally so it went on and on.

When we came back from Singapore in trucks to Selerang area our people used trucks stripped down, they just had the seat, steering wheel and foot brake. They were pulled by ropes – 8 or 10 blokes and a rope out in front and a crossbar, 2 blokes to each crossbar. They shifted everything around the camp throughout POW days this way. I was loaded on top of the gear when we were shifted. I must have been a bit of a sight I had not had a wash for many days.

At Selerang I opened my eyes and I saw a 2/4$^{th}$ Officer, colour patches, pips, polished shoes, long socks – just as if he might be on the parade ground in Northam. I made a noise to attract his attention and he came over, I wanted to try and tell him who was not coming back. He headed across towards the truck, took one quick look at me and went off for his life out of the way. I supposed he reckoned whatever I had would be contagious and he did not want to have anything to do with it. He was Captain Smith-Ryan of the 2/4$^{th}$ Machine Gun Battalion, one of our own Officers. I never caught up with him again, not that I wanted to. He had died since we came home.

On the parade ground there was another bloke in the same condition as I was, they carried us into a new hut which had just been built, there was no flooring – they usually put bamboo flooring into the huts but this one had bare ground. While they were counting the troops off Jack Gorringe brought the guard over to show there were two extra bodies that they had not counted. I was laying there, I knew what was going on but I could not move. The guard walked over and gave me a kick in the ribs to find out if I was still alive. It sticks in my mind and it always will, I felt I would like to get up and belt the bastard but I could not move.

Once they finished the check parade in a matter of minutes I was on a stretcher and the boys from Roberts Barracks, which was the hospital, had me on the way to a hospital bed. Checking the last lot of my medical records from DVA I found out I was admitted to Roberts Barracks Hospital on 23 December 1943, that was the day we got back to Singapore.

I often wonder what weight I had got down to, but no-one worried at the time. The hospital was the only place I know that had scales.

In 1944, when the war was going bad for the Japanese, they shifted the detainees out of Changi Jail into jails in town at Sime Road and another one, then we were put into Changi Jail.

## "F" FORCE SURVIVORS FROM THE BURMA-THAILAND RAILWAY

The exact figures on some of the Forces I am not sure about but of the 7,000 who were in "F" Force, 3,085 died in the 8 months in Thailand. That is 44% of the Force. Of that I think the British casualties were about double that of the Australians – it is hard to work out why, but I think a big thing was that they just could not keep their hygiene up and a lot of them sort of packed it in the finish – they just did not have the will to carry on.

Of course so many Australians were people who, like me, had been on the farm and been used to swinging an axe. Any physical work outside gave us a better chance than those blokes who had been working in offices and had not had a chance to rough it. Probably the troops that had been in the Army for a couple of years were a lot better off too, they were quite case hardened to that sort of business. The 144 of us that came on at Fremantle had only been in the AIF for 5 or 6 weeks and had little knowledge of army routine and had not been hardened up to what was ahead of us.

There were no reliable figures on the Asian civilians impressed to work on the line, but of the estimated 270,000 only 30,000 were ever traced or repatriated after the Japanese surrender.

## "B" AND "E" FORCES

We found out the fate of the other Forces that left Changi after the war was over. "B" and "E" Forces were the two forces who went over to Borneo and were lost. They started off working on aerodromes and were at Sandakan when it was obvious that the Allied troops were getting close towards the end of the war in late 1944. Then in 1945 the Japanese decided to shift them from Sandakan, of course, by that time big numbers of the forces had died. Those that were left the Japanese forced to march to Ranau – it was a shocking show from all accounts. Anyone that fell behind was either bayoneted or shot and those that did get through to Ranau, which was only a small number of them, they were killed only a month or so before the finish of the war.

The bad part about this was "Z" Force, including Jackie Sue, who was part Chinese from Australia, were at Sandakan and saw those boys and the condition they were in. "Z" Force tried to arrange for a force to go in and relieve them, but it was a long way behind the front line and they could not get aircraft in or anything else to go in with to relieve them and get them out.

On the march through from Sandakan to Ranau some of the boys broke away – the only hope they could see to get through was to break away and take their chance in the jungle. Of those that broke away only 6 finally got back to Australia. At the 1966 State Conference of the RSL there were 3 of those blokes still alive. It was a shocking thing there is a very good book on that story called "Sandakan The Last March" by Don Wall it's a shocking story but quite factual from all accounts of those that got out of it and know it happened.

## "G" FORCE

"G" Force were taken to Japan. Some of those blokes in Japan had quite a shocking story. Also the boat trip to Japan was hazardous. On the way up there some of the boats were attacked. One group of the blokes who we meet each year went up on the "Bioki Maru", Bioki means sick, sick ship, see Appendix 3. It was a boat that had been sunk and the Japanese got it up again – it had no superstructure on it – and they tell some weird stories about that trip. They were a couple of months getting up there, but they still gather for an annual get together at Anzac House.

## CHANGI DROME WORK PARTY

Then we started to build the Changi Drome. One leg went out over Johore Straits the other end of that leg came down right behind the jail. The other leg went out over the South China Sea and inland. We could walk out the back garden of the jail onto the airstrip.

It was a great old caper – too many men for the work they were doing – we would have two men with a little cane basket and a bloke with a chunkle (Asian hoe) to shift a bit of dirt from here and they would take levels and shift it again. They had a rail system of hand trolleys. In some places the embankments were up 30 or 40 feet and we had to take that down to the other side of the swamp to level it off.

We were working away there and it was quite pleasant in comparison to Thailand. Some of the Officers used to come out with us at times, most of the time the Officers kept out of the bloody way. Some of our blokes like Captain Gwynne and Lieutenants Bernie O'Sullivan and Mick Wedge were with us quite a bit. We used to hold quizzes to help to pass the time. One day a question was asked and Doug Sterrett was leaning on a chunkle, he knew the answer but could not think of it. At the same time a guard (they used to wander round all the time) had his eye on Doug who was imitating a statue. The guard got to Doug and found a piece of wood. Captain Gwynne raced over and said "What were you doing Sterrett?" Back came the answer "I wasn't doing a bloody thing!" There was a lot of humour out there. After what we had been through it was quite pleasant working just to do something, go and wander back and knock off in daylight.

After a while they started using the bottom end of the strip for training pilots. Their training planes looked a bit like the old Tiger Moth but they were

aluminium coated on the outside. We watched the planes each day hoping to see one crash.

This day, just as we were knocking off, a plane was taking off down towards the bottom of the jail and the pilot misjudged it, hit the trees, and down he went. Once we were in the jail area the guards left us. As soon as it was dark we went through the fence and we stripped all the aluminium off the plane. I still have a set of six serviette rings, I flattened them out and shaped them so that they would curl round on the piece at the bottom. I polished them up and a mate used a broken needle set in a piece of wood to draw scenes of palms, boats, rickshaws and things – one of the few things I brought home.

Of course the next morning the engineering mob and the airforce went down there to get this plane and all hell broke loose – half the plane was missing!! The boys had taken what pieces they wanted and the blokes chasing wireless parts and wiring had their lot. They conducted a search but there was no hope of finding anything. The boys knew straight away once we pinched anything like that there would be a search job so we planted everything.

Late in the piece, while on the drome one day we heard a plane high overhead there was a lot of cloud about, but through a break in the cloud someone spotted the plane and it had four engines. The Japanese, to our knowledge, had no four engine planes, the biggest we had seen was the Mitsubitsi known to us as the pencil bomber. After a while this plane on its daily patrol was nicknamed Heavy Harry. A few days later a guard pointed up and said “B NE DU KOO” B29. Through our news we found out they were flying out of Trincomalee. Later we saw them fly over in formation that gave us a hell of a lift.

## LATER WORK PARTIES

One day we were working at the Ordinance Depot near Keppel Harbour when a big formation of planes flew over. We had a slit trench, I do not know who dug it, in the form of an “L” open at each end with steel plate over it and a lot of earth on top. When the sirens went off we got down into the ground smartly. Jack Gorringe was at one opening and Ben Barnett (a Captain in the 8$^{th}$ Division Signals and an Australian Test Wicket keeper) was at the other end and they were giving us commentary on it as the planes came over. We were like rabbits taking turns to have a peep. Keppel Harbour was built like a saw tooth and the planes were coming in from each angle and dropped incendiaries. Behind the wharves there were three and four storey buildings which hardly got touched.

The incendiaries dropped from the plane looked like 44 gallon drums, after they fell a while there was a little bang and all the individual pieces separated. The Ordinance Depot was a steel building clad in asbestos with a concrete floor. The incendiaries dropped through the roof and stood up in the floor then belched fire. Most of the gear in the buildings was in wooden boxes which burnt up – it was that hot that the guards took us back to camp. The incendiaries fitted together like honeycomb when they dropped you saw the

metal or whatever was wrapped around them floating down after they hit. We thought the Japanese might take it out on us after the raid, but there was no reaction.

At that stage I was camped inside of the jail, I was up on about C Floor of the jail, we were playing cards one day, it's the only time in my life I ever got a royal routine, they were home made cards and we did not have any money to bet so I am still no richer.

## 8TH DIVISION CONCERT PARTY

At one stage Bob Murray and I were put in with the 8th Division concert party. They were in the European section of the jail and of course there were some wonderful artists among them. We had a week or ten days with them before we were shifted out again.

The concert party had some very fine acts – some of them are still going Ray Tulipan and Slim De Grey are still seen on some shows on TV. Another chap, I cannot remember his name, he later went to England and married an English girl – he put on a lot of shows. He came out to Australia a couple of times, his wife was in the theatre in Perth and he was in an aeroplane above, she would take something off a member of the audience and he would tell them what it was. The concert party had a female impersonator, Stan Garland, naturally he got called Judy – I think he took it a bit seriously but he was a wonderful artist.

Of course when the AIF Concert Party put on a show at the jail or before we went to the jail, the Japanese always had the front row of seats.

## WORK PARTY CAMP

After I finished on the drome I went into what they called a work party camp, it was on the south side of the jail. There were rows of huts the same old caper, they would not be 10m wide, but they were at least 100m long with attap roofs and bamboo walls. We were camped in there, and sent on work parties, quite often we would go into Singapore. At that time they were still taking us in by truck. You might have jobs anywhere around the island shifting stuff about or doing any stray work.

At one stage we shifted a whole lot of parachutes and put them in houses about 2 or 3 miles from the jail. Of course we kept the knowledge of where everything was just in case it might be handy some time.

The Japanese army were never issued underpants like ours. Their issue was a cloth about a metre and a half long and 6 inches wide, on a tape which was tied around the waist and brought up between the legs passed under the tape and the flap hung down the front. Actually they were quite comfortable. Their issue was always white with red writing on the flap – I never found out what was written on it.

Our boys soon woke up to make these double, anything pinched was put in this and hung between your legs. Coming in off work they would drop us off up the road. We had to fall in, five ranks open order, in front of the guard house at the corner of the jail to be searched. One day, the search over, a guard for something to do smacked one of the boys on the backside and nearly broke his hand, he hit a bag of salt. After a full search there was a great heap of salt on the ground in front of the guardhouse. The Japanese in charge of the guard spoke some English he told us it was very dirty to carry sea salt like that. Salt was always a problem the boys pulled tankers of salt, sea water, to the jail to boil the rice.

The "G" String as it was known was used right through our POW days. I got a carton of cotton into Selerang area, we were on 10 cents a day when we got it, and the carton of cotton was worth 8 dollars through the fence. Walking with the carton of cotton reels in my "G" string was a bit awkward. Usually the truck drove in to pick us up, this day we had to walk to the road – the boys kept me in the middle during the march.

Carrying things past the guard in your hat worked for a while but the guards would knock a hat off every now and then so it was not worth a hiding to take the risk.

## "THE WAR IS OVER"

I stayed on that party, "P" party as it was called, working in town right through till the war finished. We came in one evening, went through the usual search, walked right down the side of the jail parallel with Changi Road and as we went round the corner "Speed" Lieutenant Graham McKinnon was there jumping up and down saying "The war is over, the war is over." He was told in plain English where to go. We said we would find out when the work party lists come out. Sure enough that night the work partly lists came out there were still 200 men on "P" party. Graham McKinnon later became a member of the Legislative Council for the South West, situated down Bunbury way.

Later on that night the details started to come through about the atomic bomb and everything else was going on outside.

The Japanese Officers might have known that war was over but the ordinary troops and Koreans had no idea. We continued going to Singapore on work parties for another 5 days. We could tell that the local people knew that the war was over but the guards had the rifles and bayonets. Then we came in one night and they said "Right 2 days Yasumé" – 2 days holiday – that was good enough.

The next day our mob dropped pamphlets, a copy of one is on the next page, telling that the Japanese had surrendered unconditionally.

**To All Allied Prisoners of War**

# TO ALL ALLIED PRISONERS OF WAR

## THE JAPANESE FORCES HAVE SURRENDERED UNCONDITIONALLY AND THE WAR IS OVER

WE will get supplies to you as soon as is humanly possible and will make arrangements to get you out but, owing to the distances involved, it may be some time before we can achieve this.

YOU will help us and yourselves if you act as follows:

(1) Stay *in your camp* until you get further orders from us.

(2) Start preparing nominal rolls of personnel, giving fullest particulars.

(3) List your most urgent necessities.

(4) If you have been starved or underfed for long *periods DO NOT eat large quantities of* solid food, fruit or vegetables at first. It is dangerous for you to do so. Small quantities at frequent intervals are much safer and will strengthen you far more quickly. For those who are really ill or very weak, fluids such as broth and soup, making use of the water in which rice and other foods have been boiled, are much the best. Gifts of food from the local population should be cooked. We want to get you back home quickly, safe and sound, and we do not want to risk your chances from diarrhoea, dysentry and cholera at this last stage.

(5) Local authorities and/or Allied officers will take charge of your affairs in a very short time. Be guided by their advice.

**Figure 3: To All Allied Prisoners of War**

Instructions were not to leave camp, which was as good as telling the boys to get going. Bob Murray and I straight away remembered where we had put those bloody parachutes. The material in the parachutes goes to a point at the top, so we cut the biggest squares we could. Luckily it was in different colours and we started swapping it with the Chinese for poultry and all sorts of things.

Someone got to the cold storage works at Singapore and came home with a 56 lb box of butter – it had been there for 3½ years. In those days butter used to come in 56 lb three ply wooden boxes, with wire twisted around the boxes.

We brought the chooks back to camp and had them tied by a leg under our bunks. Frank Hinds and Doug Sterrett who camped along side us put a sign over our bunk the board written in charcoal said "Holding and Murray Dealers in Poultry". It was still there when we left to come home. We used to kill a chook, skin it – as we had no boiling water to pluck it in – then fry it in butter. No wonder our tummies rebelled.

Shortly after a pommy lieutenant and sergeant dropped on the drome by parachute, demanded a car and drove to the jail. They were done up with all the gear they could wear. At that time the Colonel in charge of the camp was Officer from a Malay regiment, we tacked "ama" onto his name.

This pair arrived in the jail and said "Who is the Japanese commander? Where is he?" The colonel said "I will take you to him". The pommy said "No, you send the message we want him here". Things were back the way they should be. The Japanese Commander handed over his sword and that was that.

In a matter of days our planes were flying low along the drome dropping various coloured parachutes, the colours were denoting food, medical, clothing, and all the other gear. Everything was carted to the jail and we started to get some decent tucker.

A postal unit was brought in with the mail and a cousin of mine, one of the Burgesses, Uncle Horrie's son, from Maylands sorted my mail and delivered it.

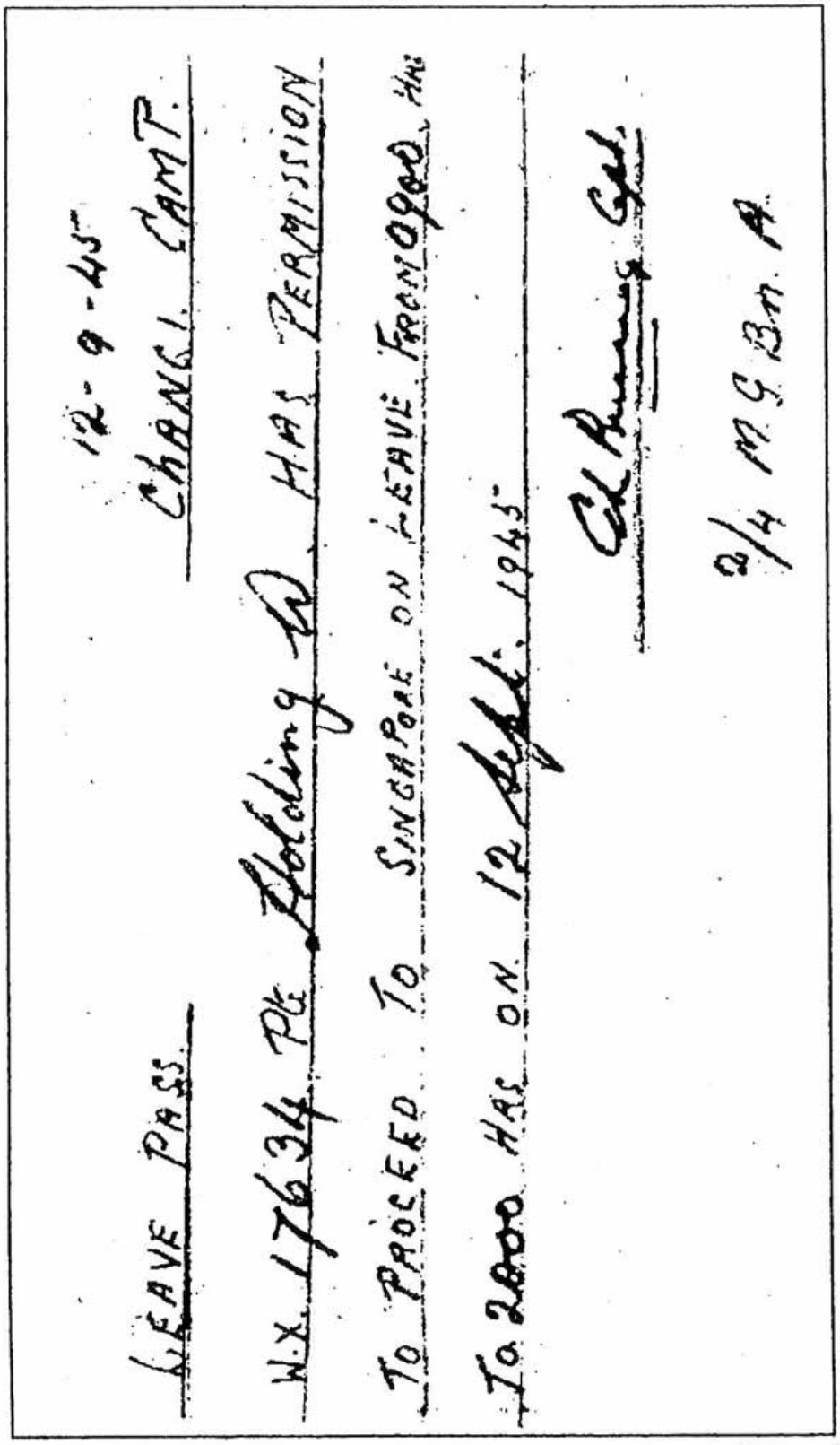
Before the planes used the drome a small plane buzzed us, it was flying from one of the islands in the Indian ocean a Lockheed Lightning, P38's the yanks called them, a twin fuselage job. He flew over our huts below the level of the jail wall and all the attap roofs on our huts started flapping up and down. We had showers rigged up so as soon as we knocked off we could have a shower. I had a piece of cloth about 3ft square – it was my towel. I would give myself a wipe and leave my towel over a line we had rigged between the huts. Well, when that plane flew over and the last I saw of my towel it was several hundred feet up chasing the plane. We cursed him then had a laugh.

Shortly after that other people started to come in, the Red Cross women came around, the first thing they did was give you a packet of cigarettes and a great big bar of chocolate. Which was bloody stupid when you think about it. We would see some poor bloke, as skinny as a rake, get a great big block of chocolate and eat it quickly then be violently sick.

Early in our POW days Major Hunt said to us "When you blokes get out of here" – he sort of never doubted that we would – "When you blokes get out of here they will shut you up and you will be given about six meals a day, little tiny meals, a little bit at a time to get your stomachs to settle down". If this had been done as Major Hunt said there is no doubt that they would not have had the boys in Hollywood hanging around in hospital all the time with crook stomachs. 90% of the boys had this trouble when we got home and I do not think it was so much through the rice as the things the blokes did straight afterwards when their stomachs were shrunk down to next to nothing and they abused themselves with food, some would get hold of something to drink and fade out.

There were a lot of silly things went on, there was no organisation at all as far as we were concerned, but we were doing pretty well. Bob and I and a few of us there – we were eating fairly well. I even got a leave pass made out by Captain Tom Bunning, he was a Company Commander 2/4$^{th}$, for me to go on leave to Singapore during that period. I still have that leave pass – a copy of it is shown below. Its quite strange that stuff we gathered up like that but I did not have that much to bring home.

## Leave Pass



Leave Pass

12-9-45

CHANGI CAMP.

LEAVE PASS.

W.X. 17634 Pte Kloddin J HAS PERMISSION

TO PROCEED TO SINGAPORE ON LEAVE FROM 0900 HRS

TO 2800 HRS ON 12 Sept. 1945

C.L. Rumsey Gnr.

2/4 M.G. Bn. A.

**Figure 4: Leave Pass**

## NICKNAMES

With the Japanese and the Koreans there was quite a lot of humour at times. The only thing you could not find out their names so they all had nicknames.

Between the temperature and humidity we could not carry things in our pockets – the sweat would get to it – so these little blighters used to carry the round fifty cigarette tins and put a cord through the lid and out through the side of the tin and hang it on their belt.

One little bloke, he always had a Craven A tin hanging on his belt for his cigarettes, he was called “Craven A”.

Another little bloke carried a similar tin but he used to carry cubes of sugar, every now and then he would pop one of these cubes in his mouth. He was called “Sugar”.

We only had about three issues of Red Cross parcels and when they came in they would ration them out – a parcel to 17 men or a parcel to 22 men or something. Some things in the parcels, like vegemite, were taken by the doctors for the hospitals. We knew when red cross parcels were about – the guards would be smoking American cigarettes. When they rationed an issue of parcels out we all got a little bit of everything each, it was different that was good oh. Once when they rationed the parcels out they finished with a tin of marmalade left over. One of our Officers, I will not give his name now – but he is dead at any rate – he got to and of course the tin of marmalade went off so he was nicknamed “Marmalade Bob”, he was always known as “Marmalade Bob”. This day we were having a bit of a spell on a work party and the little Korean bloke was there he had this sugar tin on the side, he walked up to him, he spoke a very little English and said “Ha! Ha! You Marmalade, me Sugar” of course we had a very red faced Officer sitting down there with us!! It was quite humorous at the time. Nicknames cropped up like that.

The Koreans were strange people Toyama called himself a Japanese gentleman. “Craven A” was a Christian and told us that we had been prisoners for 2 years, his people had been prisoners for 20 years – Japan took over Korea in 1910.

Working on the drome we had a Japanese Sergeant, he was a big bloke with a very dark skin – but a big nasty piece of work – he would dish out a hiding just for something to do, to pass the time away sort of thing. He always came out dressed in white – he had white boots, puttees, white trousers, white jacket and big white pith helmet – of course. Naturally the boys would sing out “Look out the ice cream man is coming!”, and it was a regular thing – we would always find something to do – if we were not doing something we would look like we were doing something when he was about. What we did not know was that in Japan the ice cream man is on about a par with the bloke on the night cart. Evidently he caught on to what we were calling him and dished

out a couple of hidings quick and lively so that stopped the ice cream man business. From then on he was “Mr Peters” – then the call was “Look out Mr Peters is coming through” he was quite happy he went along with that – it was OK by him.

## THE PADRES

One group which does not seem to get a mention in the tales of POW days are the padres. One I got to know quite well was Padre Polain, he was in the 26th (Queensland Infantry Battalion). He was a WWI man. During Selerang days he used to organise discussion groups. I put in some wonderful evenings in those groups – he had the ability to bring out the best in a group discussion.

Anyone who has been in the services knows there is only one crime – getting caught. At Selerang early, the ruling came out that so many men had to attend Church Parade. The senior NCO who was in charge at this point was an older bloke, a sergeant cook, he probably had not taken a parade for years. Not enough men had attended Church so he read out a list of names, including mine, who should have been on parade. I objected and refused to take my hat off when fronting the Captain and said “Charge me if I have done something wrong!” I had seen Padre Polain before hand. That finished compulsory Church parades.

At Shimo Sonkurai, under Toyama, with Major Hunt we had this little bloke, Padre Duckworth, a pom and a gentleman. Every night he met us as we came off work, he always asked how did so and so behave – he knew every Japanese engineer and Korean guard by name – he was a wonderful man. On some occasions he was out around the boys early, when asked why he said: “They have dinner in there tonight.” Some Officers at the camp we never saw. One Lieutenant from the 26th got his pips during action, he worked with us regularly – I do not know his name, his boys know. There were two Infantry Majors in the camp but Major Hunt, besides his medical work, took over running the whole show, thank goodness.

## THE TRIP HOME

Of course after a time they decided to bring us home. Some of the boys were very sick, they were flown straight home. We were put on a boat, the RMS Arawa, and left Singapore for our first port of call, which was Darwin.

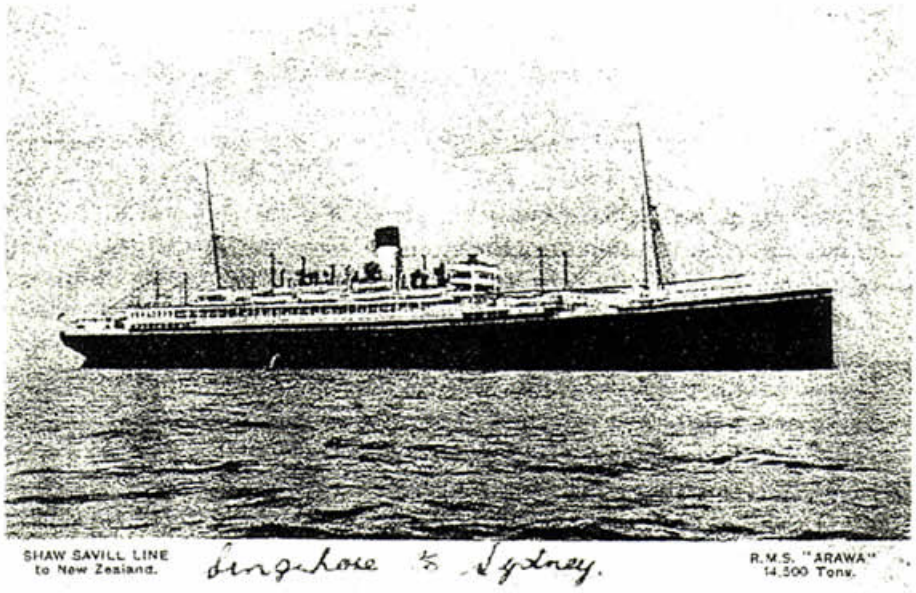



**Figure 5. RMS Arawa - Singapore to Sydney**

When we got going they wanted someone to go down the hold to issue clothing. They had clothing in the holds all done up in bales, like wool bales. Someone had to go down there to dish it out so we volunteered, that is Bob, myself and a few more – there were six of us with Jack Gorringe, that volunteered to go down the holds and open the bales up.

All the boots in the holds were Indian Army boots. You can imagine the blokes who had been barefoot, some of them for nearly 3 years, some only 12 months – the Japanese had issued some with Japanese boots but anyone with big feet missed out. The Japanese boots had divided toes. I could quite often get a pair, but most of the time they used to annoy my toes and I finished up going back to bare feet as I was used to that. Chaps putting on boots at first looked like a cow with its foot in a tin. At any rate there were these army boots, all sorts of stray clothing, bales of women's underclothes – why the hell they brought them we could not imagine – but it was all on board. We gathered all the stuff up and issued the gear. Bob Murray brought home some woman's underclothes – I got abused for not doing so. We had no idea of rationing or coupons.

Our first port of call was Darwin, we had 36 hours in Darwin. We had only been alongside the wharf a while when they called over the loud speaker

“Private Holding wanted at the gang plank”. Bob and I went down to the gangplank, Bob went with me for moral support. There were two girls in uniform waiting to see me – it turned out that one of them was a girl that Wyn had been working with before I went away. Of course we had never seen women in uniform – so we went down and had a yarn to her and she told me then that Wyn was in the Army over in Townsville and we had 36 hours in Darwin. They took us out and we had a meal with the AWAS they looked after us so well.

The next port of call was Brisbane, funny thing in Brisbane, they tied up at the wharf up in the river with no leave for those continuing on to Sydney. Queenlanders were getting off and that was it. We went down inside the boat where there was a big porthole and watched the rise and fall of the boat, up and down. When we went up the porthole would be completely clear above the wharf then it would go down and about three parts would be covered. Bob Murray, Les McCann and I watched this for a while then as it was going up one of us shot out. I have often thought since if the bloody thing had gone the other way we would have been just chopped off. We got off, had a look around the place and got a taxi, the bloke said “Where do you want to go?” We did not know Brisbane, we just wanted to have a look, see around so he took us up the town.

We went into a shoe shop – we had these bloody big Indian boots on, so Les McCann said he wanted a pair of dance pumps, I just wanted a pair of decent tan shoes. So we paddled around for quite a while and this elderly chap said “That’s so much money and so many coupons”.

We looked at him “Coupons? What’s this caper?” and he explained to us about coupons.

Then he said “Where the hell have you blokes been?’

So we told him about what was going on and he said “Well do you know so and so?”

Bob Murray said “Yes I know him”.

Then Les McCann added “He’ll be alright he will only want half the coupon’s he’s only got one leg!”

This bloke said “That’s my son”. Les was a mighty little bloke but you felt like cutting his throat at times he never stopped to think before he spoke. This bloke he turned around, we got our shoes without coupons.

When we went back to the boat they wanted to know “Where did you blokes get off, no-one went down the gangplank!” – we did not tell them but still we got on.

Then the boat went on down to Sydney, the first night we were placed in a private home. The next morning we were to be picked up and taken out to

Ingleburn. While I was there someone organised, through the Army, to get onto Wyn so I spoke with Wyn on the phone.

When we went out to Ingleburn they put us into huts and all the beds there and the sheets were done up in bundles with tapes around them. Bob Murray was still on the scrounge, he could not forget the habit of scrounging after years of that sort of thing. In the morning Bob said to the bloke "What's going to happen to all the sheets?"

The bloke said "I don't know, don't give a bugger much either, why?"

Bob said "Well I'll have a couple".

He said "Don't take those, go down to the next hut, they're all done up, they haven't been used." So Bob got to and brought quite a few sheets home, and I got abused for not doing the same thing. But still we had quite a lot of stuff, we brought about three extra kit bags between us when we got back but that is another story.

Then we were sent from Sydney to Melbourne by rail where we were driven through Melbourne in cars – that was quite a good show. Les McCann was in the front seat, Bob and I were in the back seat and we were driven through the place and Les said "What sort of car is this?"

The woman driving us said "It's a Rolls Royce" it turned out that she was Mrs McKay of the machinery crowd (H.V. McKay Sunshine Harvester Coy).

They drove us through Melbourne and we had quite a show there. We spent some time in a private home there too. Then we were taken in to board the Strathmore, which took us to Perth via Tasmania. We had about 300 Tasmanians on board they were members of the 40th Battalion, they had been caught on Timor and came through with the Java party.

We got on board in the afternoon and the first night out a beautiful start to a beautiful meal and then they brought the sweets out – rice custard. That nearly caused a bloody riot. The chef came out and he was very apologetic and he said "Rice is rationed in Australia and we saved this up as a special treat for you people!!" We had had 3½ years of rice so there was nothing very special about it to us. Some ate it and some did not.

After we got to Burnie in Tasmania and put the Tasmanians off we came back across the Bight. While we were tied up at the wharf in Burnie we got off to go for a walkabout to see what was going on. We went by the shops, and the shops were all wide open but there was not a soul about, everyone was down at the wharf. There were a couple of things we wanted so we left some money on the counter just took what we wanted. We got back on board and we sailed off. The wharf was stacked up with rows and rows of bags of potatoes and when we left there the top of the Strathmore was just covered in spuds – the kids had opened up the bags and thrown spuds all over the boat.

Then we came across the Bight and they told us there was a bit of a blow ahead of us so they were going to head south. We were issued with two extra blankets. Well the blow did not worry me, the Strathmore was a 20,000 tonner. To move around in an alleyway I had to hang onto a handrail on one side then over the other side then I got to the front. I do not know what they called it but I looked out over the front of the boat. All the chairs were stacked up in bundles and I tried to write a letter – one minute you would be looking down at the ocean and the next right up in the sky.

We got home to Fremantle and Gert Green, my eldest sister, had a little placard held up with my name on it – I still have it here as you can see.


**Figure 6: 1997 I still have that placard**

We got to and signalled the family that we had all these extra kitbags. We gave the signal clear the deck below and we chucked all these kit bags over the side – George Green had his old "A" model ute there so Fred and George shipped them away out of sight and we came home and that was that.

The trip home took 30 days and I put on 31 lb. People here, all the family, thought we would come home like skeletons and I came home at 11 stone 8lb – the heaviest I have ever been in my life – it was a funny old set up. Today I am 10 stone 4 lbs – as I was when I joined the AIF.

After we got home we had medical treatment at RGH Hollywood. One of the lots of treatments for hookworm or something similar was a small dose of liquid which made you drunk – Slew Baxter was keen for a repeat dose.

A batch of us were camped at Point Piper for a while. Parade was at 0630 and you were named for treatment or interrogation for the day, if you were not called you had to be on parade the next day. Slew used to arrive by taxi for parade and the Lieutenant in charge, Lieutenant Green, a brother of Lieutenant Harry Green of the 2/4$^{th}$ asked why the taxi, Slew said "If you look at the red ink in my pay book a taxi is cheap!"

After the war Slew worked at the Albany Woollen Mills when several men were threatened with the sack, he said the rest were married men with families so he took the rap and was sacked. Then he worked at the Abattoirs. While on an annual picnic he was sitting in the back of a traytop truck when it went over a bump, he landed on the road and the fall killed them. One thing he died as he would like – with his boots on.

Jack Gorringe, a Sergeant in the 2/4$^{th}$, worked with Major Hunt on "F" Force. He never seemed to stop. At one of the Sonkurai camps I was crook with

malaria one morning and Jack told me to go on sick parade. I fronted Major Hunt and he said "What's wrong with you?" I said "I've got malaria" – he went off his rocker – "You might be sick – you might have a fever – I'm the doctor I'll say if you have malaria." I could hear his voice going on and on and just blacked out. Later Jack was in charge of 2/4th group that brought me back to Changi when I was sick. Later Jack was awarded an MBE for his work on "F" Force. He went blind soon after the war was over and has passed away.

When Bob Murray joined the A.I.F. he had to produce his birth certificate, so in the army he was WX 15838 Pte E.J. McKenzie-Murray. In civil life he was just Bob Murray – a great mate. He was groomsman at our wedding and at the reception he sang "Malayan Moon" in English then Malay, he had a very good voice. Bob, his wife Jean and small son (born after we left) stayed at the farm at Pingelly for a holiday soon after we came home.

While we were away people used to talk about what they wanted when we got home. I always said the first thing I wanted was an RSL badge then I would know I had made it home. Well it is 50 years ago since I lined up to get my Discharge on 29 November 1945 the next bloke in the line was the RSL and I got my Badge then – I have still got the original Badge although I have swapped it over now. Over the years I have stuck with the RSL.

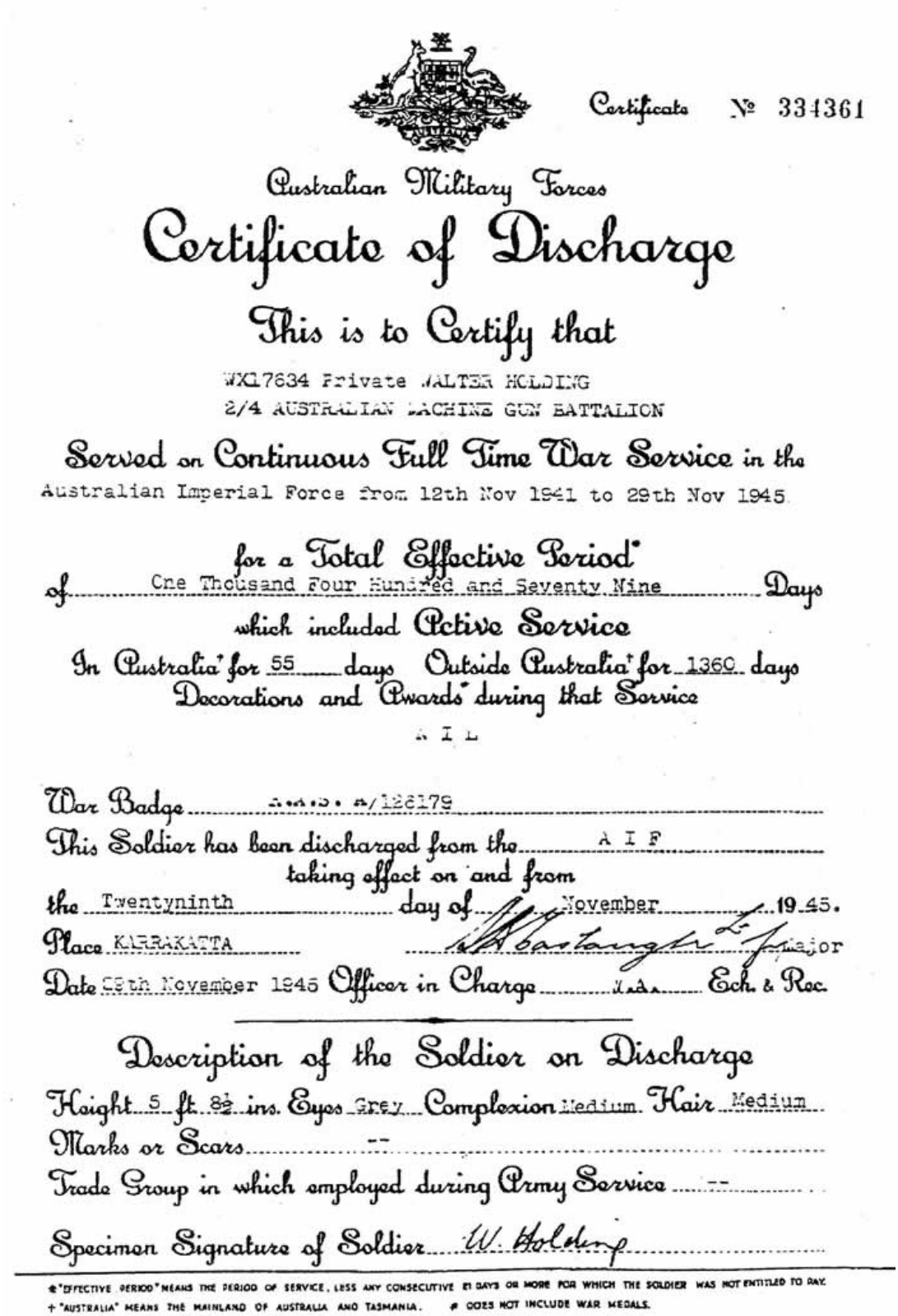
In Narrogin RSL meetings were held in the evenings and as I worked a lot of night shift I was away or in bed before going to work around midnight. Wyn was tied up with the Auxiliary in Narrogin – she was President of the Women's Auxiliary for a time so I always knew what was going on down there although I did not attend that many meetings.

Since we have been in Mandurah we have been involved with the RSL pretty well right through and we both have our certificate standing on the mantelpiece, which they gave us for service to the Sub Branch here. Also we both have a certificate for service to the State Branch and last year they turned around and gave me Life Membership Badge plus I have a Certificate to say I have done 50 years of service. This was all just trying to repay a little bit of debt to the boys who brought me back from Bampong to Singapore.

After our return I was classified fit A1 on Discharge. I returned to work to the railways in Narrogin. I lost 3 stone on returning to work and was in and out of RGH Hollywood with stomach trouble. I was off work for 8 months in 2 years.

When we left Changi to get on the boat to come home I remember the sight of the Ghurkas, who came down with the 14th Army, wandering around with rifles over their shoulders standing guard over the Japs weeding the gardens and sweeping the streets – it was a bloody lovely sight.

## Certificate of Discharge



Certificate № 334361

Australian Military Forces

# Certificate of Discharge

This is to Certify that

WX17634 Private WALTER HOLDING
2/4 AUSTRALIAN MACHINE GUN BATTALION

Served on Continuous Full Time War Service in the Australian Imperial Force from 12th Nov 1941 to 29th Nov 1945

for a Total Effective Period* of One Thousand Four Hundred and Seventy Nine Days

which included Active Service In Australia+ for 55 days Outside Australia+ for 1360 days

Decorations and Awards# during that Service

A I L

War Badge A.M.F. A/126179

This Soldier has been discharged from the A I F taking effect on and from the Twentyninth day of November 19 45.

Place KARRAKATTA

Date 29th November 1945 Officer in Charge W.A. Ech. & Rec. Major

## Description of the Soldier on Discharge

Height 5 ft. 8½ ins. Eyes Grey Complexion Medium. Hair Medium

Marks or Scars --

Trade Group in which employed during Army Service --

Specimen Signature of Soldier W. Holding

*"EFFECTIVE PERIOD" MEANS THE PERIOD OF SERVICE, LESS ANY CONSECUTIVE 21 DAYS OR MORE FOR WHICH THE SOLDIER WAS NOT ENTITLED TO PAY.
+"AUSTRALIA" MEANS THE MAINLAND OF AUSTRALIA AND TASMANIA. # DOES NOT INCLUDE WAR MEDALS.

**Figure 7: Certificate of Discharge**

One of the South Australians when asked to propose a toast to the ladies at his Battalion Annual dinner in Adelaide said"

"Let us look back at what our wives, mothers, girl friends and relations must have suffered during the years of our imprisonment. Very little information came through from the European prisoners and virtually nothing from those imprisoned by the Japanese.

There were the ones who lived a life on uncertainty, dreading the knock on the door by a representative of the Government to tell them the worst. They were the ones who wrote letters which we never received and wondered why we did not write to them, not knowing the attitude of our captors towards prisoners.

When we returned many thought that we had come through our years of imprisonment very well, but what they did not know was the survival code that we had used to control our emotions. The average prisoner became an expert at holding back his feelings of rage, fear and utter disgust at having to be bashed by ugly ape like guards and seeing his mates suffer the same indignations when his normal reaction would have been to retaliate in no uncertain manner. For many these feelings are still within us and it has been our wives who have, during the past 44 years, borne the brunt of their husband's erratic behaviour. The inability to express feelings to their wives was perhaps the most damaging part of the post-war years. Inside them still existed the code of survival, not to let anyone know the unforgettable fears and stress built up during their years of captivity. Fortunately the majority of the wives realised that their husband's outlook on the outside world was unpredictable. Their personalities had changed to such an extent that their attitude towards the family, employment and life itself could change within minutes.

Despite all this these women stuck to the task of rearing a family and trying to understand what the years of captivity can do to not only the body but the mind of a loved one. Is it any wonder then that in proposing the toast to the Ladies I called on those present to toast:

"OUR WIVES, THE UNSUNG HEROINES"

## AUSTRALIAN DEATHS IN JAPANESE PRISONS

Two Australian Brigades of the 8th Division were on Singapore and one was scattered through Ambon, Timor and New Britain. Australian POW deaths in the region were:

| | |
|---|---|
| Thailand | 2336 |
| Borneo | 1783 |
| Ambon | 718 |
| Burma | 479 |
| Malaya | 284 |
| New Britain | 200 |
| Japan | 190 |
| At sea | 1515 |
| Executed Attempting Escape | 27 |
| Executed | 193 |
| Believed Executed | 375 |

## RESERVE BATTALION (E) COY ROLL CALL AT 1.1.1998

Of the original 91 members of (E) Company at 1 January, 1998, 11 were still living, they were:

H Wilkes
L G Ashbolt
C D Squance
L W McCann
N W Mathews
W Holding
F C Evans
L D Kearney
E W Wallin
C J Dow
N F T Gough

# APPENDIX

## APPENDIX 1a – Information sent to Parents via Red Cross

**APPENDIX 1**

**Information Sent To My Parents By The Red Cross**

PRESIDENT
LADY MITCHELL

TELEPHONE:
B 4883

ALL COMMUNICATIONS SHOULD BE ADDRESSED TO
BUREAU FOR WOUNDED, MISSING AND PRISONERS OF WAR.

AUSTRALIAN RED CROSS SOCIETY
WESTERN AUSTRALIAN DIVISION

[redacted]
2ND FLOOR, PERPETUAL TRUSTEES BUILDING,
ST. GEORGE'S TERRACE,
PERTH,
28th May, 1943.

Mr. Walter Holding,
84, West Road,
BASSENDEAN.

Dear Sir,

WX 17634 Pte. W. HOLDING

We feel sure it will interest you to know that the Central Red Cross Bureau has been notified that the above named is a prisoner of war in Malai Camp.

We are very pleased to pass on this piece of good news, and hope it will not be long before you hear from the prisoner of war himself.

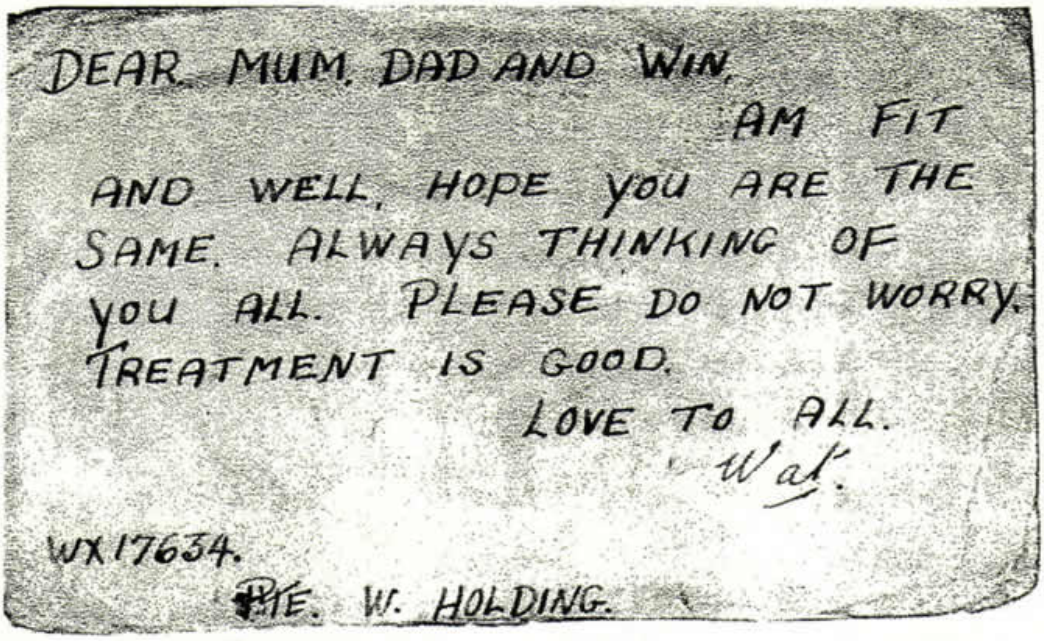
Yours faithfully,

M. McNeil

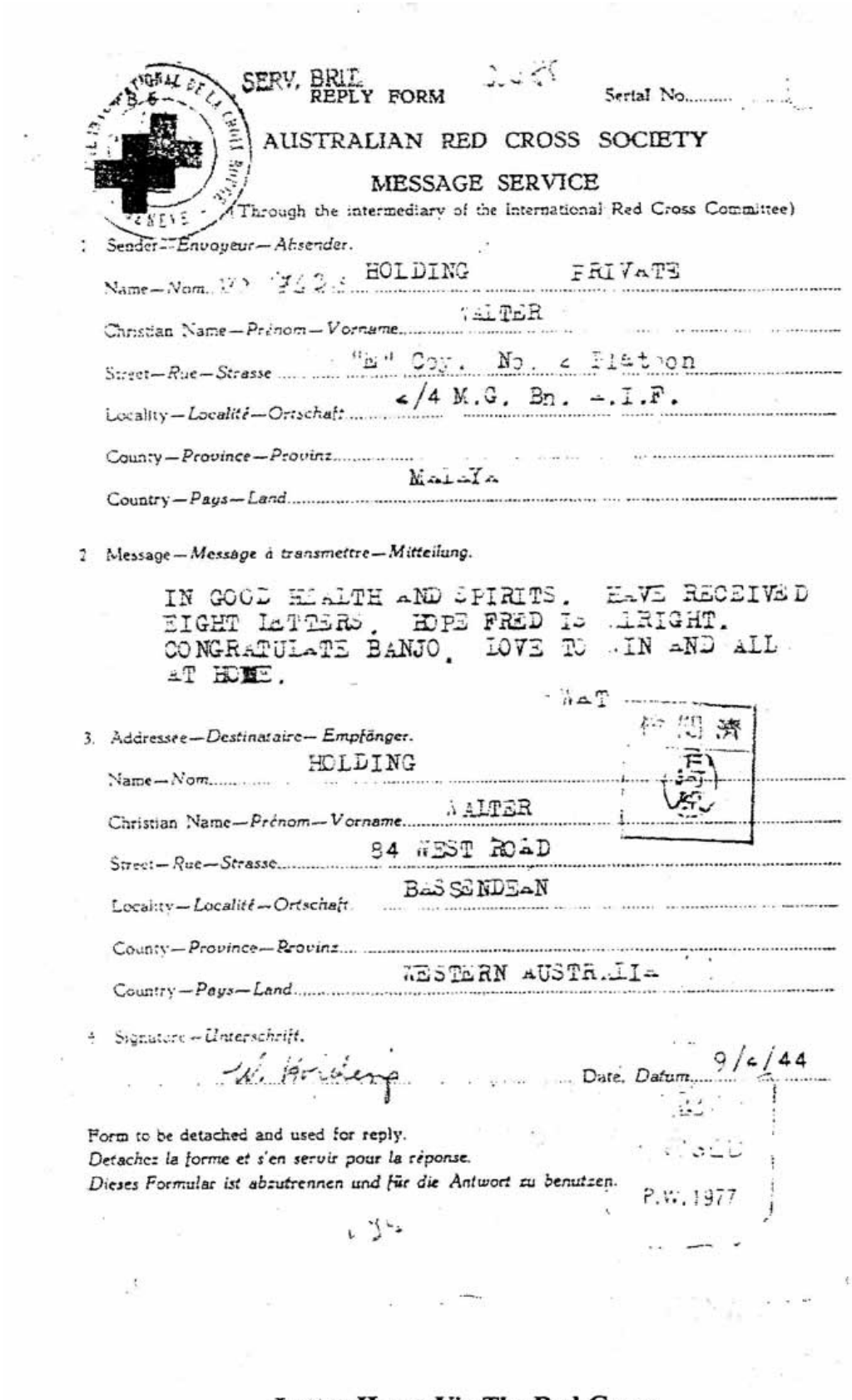
Mrs. A.T. McNeil.
Honorary Director.

**APPENDIX 1b: POW Letter to Parents via Red Cross**

A Letter I Sent To My Parents Via The Red Cross

**APPENDIX 1c: Red Cross Message Service Letter**



SERV. BRIL
REPLY FORM
Serial No.....

AUSTRALIAN RED CROSS SOCIETY

MESSAGE SERVICE

(Through the intermediary of the International Red Cross Committee)

1 Sender—*Envoyeur*—*Absender*.

Name—*Nom*. HOLDING PRIVATE

Christian Name—*Prénom*—*Vorname*. WALTER

Street—*Rue*—*Strasse*. "B" Coy. No. 2 Platoon

Locality—*Localité*—*Ortschaft*. 2/4 M.G. Bn. A.I.F.

County—*Province*—*Provinz*.

Country—*Pays*—*Land*. MALAYA

2 Message—*Message à transmettre*—*Mitteilung*.

IN GOOD HEALTH AND SPIRITS. HAVE RECEIVED EIGHT LETTERS. HOPE FRED IS ALRIGHT. CONGRATULATE BANJO. LOVE TO ALL AND ALL AT HOME.

3. Addressee—*Destinataire*—*Empfänger*.

Name—*Nom*. HOLDING

Christian Name—*Prénom*—*Vorname*. WALTER

Street—*Rue*—*Strasse*. 84 WEST ROAD

Locality—*Localité*—*Ortschaft*. BASSENDEAN

County—*Province*—*Provinz*.

Country—*Pays*—*Land*. WESTERN AUSTRALIA

4 Signature—*Unterschrift*.

W. Holding

Date. *Datum*. 9/6/44

Form to be detached and used for reply.
*Detachez la forme et s'en servir pour la réponse.*
*Dieses Formular ist abzutrennen und für die Antwort zu benutzen.*

P.W. 1977

**Letter Home Via The Red Cross**

**APPENDIX 2: L.M. McCann Story from a RSL Newsletter**

By L. W. McCann
Ex 2/4th M/G Btn. W A.
During Action in Singapore 1942.

Jurong area west Singapore: 11th Feb 1942.

Troops made up of members of various units British, Indian and Australians were subject to an ambush by Japanese troops. The order to disperse was passed on. Being in a local village area and a lot of dividing wire fences hampered the troops dispersal. This allowed the Japs to lift the sights of the mortars and a lot of troops were wounded during this action. Four of the wounded who were left behind as the troops moved east were two British Officers, Lieutenant Aldrich and a Captain Thomas of the Indian Brigade and myself and later Rupert Millhouse of the 2/4th Machine Gun Battalion of WA and N.C.O of our battalion and an Indian soldier not armed, they were not wounded. We found our refuge in a dugout under a large native Kampong.

Midday Wed 11th, 12th to 13th Feb.

This dugout has been well prepared by the owners, being on side of a small rise. There was an angled path to an entrance door, large bench bunk cut into hard earth wall-ally way that led to steps and trap door into interior, plenty of water, fruit, eggs and cloth. No occupants as they were more aware of where the Japes would be than our troops. They had gone from reports after the wars end. The reason we were not bothered by the Japs was they kept on advancing on to Singapore and thank the Lord fort that. We had obtained a medium oil stove from upstairs used for boiling eggs all done in an empty fruit tin.

It was decided that so far we were in luck and we should move out after early dawn Friday morning. Our arms consisted of two serviceable rifles, two service pistols, three bayonets. One was blocked with clay as it was used by Millhouse as a crutch before he was found wounded, glad it did not have to be fired.

Friday 13th Feb.

We moved out of the dugout one at a time to the creek at the bottom of the slope under cover of the jungle growth. These creeks run all over the Island continually because of the rainfall and because of the growth, provided good cover for movement. Permission to go out and scout around the area several times by the officers allowing me to find Pte Millhouse who I did not know was out there wounded. On reaching the creek cover some way down, Pte Millhouse said he would have to rest, his leg was giving him trouble. I suggested to the others to go on as the two officers knew their way to the coast, Millhouse and I would continue later. We wished them luck and they left. Not long after it started to rain, soaked to the skin we decided to make

our way back to the dugout. Some thirty years later a patient in a hospital where I worked confirmed confidentially they had got off the island and made it home.

On arrival back at the dugout after a rest, more boiled water and some fruit and coconut. Cleansed Rupert Js wound and rebound same. There was not a sign of movement of anyone in the area, as a constant watch by me until dark was kept.

We were both jumpy with nervous tension, there was no company to pass the time with, even the frogs stopped croaking. I thought to myself hopefully that the vibrations from the heavy sounds of guns and artillery fire which began in the distance may have been the cause. Friday the 13th had been a sad day, little sleep was had by us that night.

Day break Saturday 14th Feb.

Awake and ready to get out of there, filled water bottles with boiled water, observed no movement and left back down through cover to the creek and headed south. Smoke from fires in Singapore City could be seen looking from high ground. Our progress was rather slow. Scouting ahead resting when required. We made headway. Oh for some mode of transport. Water was main part of our diet apart from some coconut we had with us. Naturally the two of us had been trying to save our boiled water for as long as possible, well on one stretch of water we had been drinking after resting. To our disgust, we found dead bodies of a number of Japs just around the bend, they had been shot and were bloated and swollen, loin cloths were the only things they had on, no uniforms no boots. Not much further along was a small cluster of thatched villas, several old females were walking around. Some carried small children around. They did not appear to notice us. Revenge had been carried out I thought. When the Japs went through the area they must have stole the pigs that roam the village, the bodies would not be there otherwise.

Early afternoon 14th Feb.

Having passed this area we followed the water course in a westerly direction for some way hoping to find clearer water to drink, sounds of gunfire and aircraft were still increasing but we did not know to whose advantage. It was hot and sticky and we were resting after refilling our water bottles when we heard the sound of motors from over the rise on our right. After getting the sound of the direction, I said to Millhouse to stay put while I went up the rise to view the situation. For a long time I watched a convoy of Japanese troops and British vehicles go by on the road numbering three trucks, roughly three hundred troops marching along, no scouts. Not a care for anything. They must have used barges to land them from the straits of Johore. We rejoined company and pondered the situation for a while. It was obvious that the Japs were heading easterly in the direction of Singapore. But, where were our forces. Sick of the rain, mud and tired, we again headed south. About two hours later as it started to rain again we came across several Kampong huts. We chose the first one near us. After watching it for any signs of life we then

entered. Where were all the people hiding. There were a few household goods, no food but some coconuts of which had been dehusked 2nd was holed by my bayonet. The water tasted like lemonade from these nuts. The hut was dry and warm. I suggested Rupe take a sleep as I knew his leg was hurting like hell. It was hard to keep awake, so I dozed off and on during that night. The sound of rain, thunder and artillery was strange music this night.

Sunday 15th Feb.

This morning was bright. The area was viewed from the hut, not a soul, animal or bird, even a dog would have created some interest. We took the meat out of the two coconuts with us, made our way to the cover of the nearby jungle growth.

Sunday all day 15th Feb.

All Sunday we made our way in a south easterly direction according to the sun and the fires from Singapore, that way we must reach the coast before very long. We had past the Jurong east west area about midday this day but did not know that. We had not seen a person or villager to ask. Sometime after we knew, so about mid afternoon Rupe remarked that the gunfire was not so loud.

But I thought it was a change of wind. We were resting in the outside area of a fenced village in a dugout opening in the ground. About an hour before full sunset, strangely quiet, no heavy gunfire. Sitting on two woven mats having a rare cigarette from a steel case I had found earlier. I heard voices outside. I went out with rifle. Two Japs were running through the gate area of the fence. I fired two shots in their direction yelling at Rupe to get out onto the jungle growth ahead of us. I caught up with him helping him to hurry. Native women jumped up from amongst the bushes and quickly disappeared. I think they were hiding or praying as is their custom at sunset. Later when we stopped and got our breath I realised the Japs were only armed with bayonets. Just on dark we noticed some monks who were walking towards a building. We could not hear any gunfire. I approached one of the men and said we required help. He made it known to us that the British troops were agreeing to a surrender. He suggested we stay in another hut he pointed out and he would help us in the morning. This we did do and spent a very worrying night. It would appear the Japs were using the shelter for themselves as the matting in there was issued with their equipment.

Monday morning 16th Feb.

Not long after daybreak two monks came to the hut, told us the news of the surrender. Cleaned and dressed Rupert's wounds, we were offered some rice and fruit for which we were grateful. They told us Japs wanted all troops to go into Singapore quickly. It appeared that they knew more about what had been going on. Bush telegraph perhaps. We realised the danger we posed to these people as well as ourselves. We thanked them for the help given to us. We were given directions to the coast road and their blessing then left the

area as quickly as possible. We had retained our weapons. Rupe was able to go along a little better at this stage, and about two hours later on the west coast road, needed more stops. We were sitting in the shade at the side of the road when a person on a push bike came along riding in a westerly direction. This person, a lad about 12 or so old. The bike was in new condition. I requested he give me the bike so I could help my friend. He understood me. He looked back from the direction he came from and said Japanese gave me. No can have. With bad thoughts in my mind told him to go Pigi Lakas quick. We started walking east in the direction of Singapore. About half a mile further a man spoke to us from the side of the road. Can I help you. He was an Australian navy man, armed with a Thompson machine gun he had been issued with. He was actually going out in a western direction away from Singapore when he decided to rest, he offered to help us along. No gunfire had been heard since Sunday evening. He had heard the war was over also, so when we came to a bridge over a creek running towards the ocean we decided to dispose of our weapons. We dismantled them and threw the parts in different directions into the creek and jungle reluctantly. Well sometimes luck is a fortune. The boy on the bike knew there were Japs working on and over several Ford and Chev British service trucks, it appeared they had been driven into the ditches. The Japs just watched us go on past, no trouble there. Not long after we came into a village. This village was the junction of the then Reformatory Road, now renamed Clemently Road and West Coast Road. We could see two armed Jap sentries outside an arched gateway of a large building on the right had side of the road. The guards beckoned us over and into the courtyard. One stayed with us, the other hurried up the steps and inside the entrance. They took two pocket knives, Rupe's and the sailor's watches. We were allowed to keep our water bottles, cigs and pay books. No aggression was shown at this time. We were taken to one of two barred window and door cells, and locked up. It was a long time later before I could find out we were in Pasir Panjang Police post lock up. Later that afternoon we three were taken out of the cell and out onto the back of Army truck with eleven Australian soldiers, one Australian driving and one Jap guard. The men on the truck had been selected from a mixed group of prisoners in Singapore earlier on Monday morning by the Japs to move trucks and bodies from around some roads. Two members of the 2/4$^{th}$ M/B Battalion W/O Airey and Pte Ockerby were amongst his group. W/O Airey was the senior officer in charge of this group. The driver was instructed by guard to proceed and turn north into Reformatory Road. This road went past the Ford Motor Company at Bukit Timah. Some distance short of the Ford Company, the truck diverted left into an area by Jap troops and stopped. Field ambulances, three Bren carriers, several were out of action. Opposite where we stopped, bodies were still sitting in positions in the Bren carriers. I hate to think what happened here. I mention the ambulances here for they had a lot to do with helping me to survive as a driver. The Japs that were in this area were a pretty angry mob and tried to pull some of the men and their packs and haversacks from the truck. Fred Airey resisted strongly. He had written records during action. The Japs backed off after some senior officer shouted and order. After, some Japs conferred with our truck guard. We were returned back to where we started from. After we returned to the Police post, the Jap guard had a confab with other guards then off the truck, and all

of us fifteen men were put in one cell and locked in. We were given a bucket of water after some haggling. We started talking among ourselves after dark, discussing what the outcome would be. Well sometime later there was some action and lights outside the cell. The door was then opened, we had to move away from the door area. 15 men in a 12 by 10 cell is rather tight. A chair was put just to the right of the door inside. A Japanese man came in and said, I am an interpreter our officer wishes to ask you some questions. The Officer that came into the cell, I have since recognised him from photographs, and seeing him later, with and without a moustache. Through his interpreter, he asked information to the whereabouts of troops in Australia. How many Americans etc. As senior Officer W/O Airey became the spokesman for the rest of the group. Roughly an hour after the interrogation was over. No threats had been made to us and the Japs left the cell. Later that night we were given some blankets, we needed them as the cement floor was hard. Rupe Millhouse put up with this wound well that night.

Tues morning 17th Feb.

We all got to know one anther and discussed our situation again. We required to go to the toilets we wanted to get a wash and some bandages. The sailor, Rupe and myself did not have any eating gear, so when the Japs gave us some rice and stew, we borrowed from them. Our ablutions were carried out against the wall above the drain for one job and over the drain for the other. Two men at a time, then washee with water. My leg would was not giving me any trouble. Rupes, we kept a damp cloth under the bandage. We made swimming signs to the Jap guards through the bars but was answered with the words NUNU NUNI. W/O Airey was the only one with writing material, some of us wrote the names of the others in Pay books as I did. Rice and stew that evening. We were not bothered by the Japs today and things were the same on Wednesday. Food, water and toilets.

Thursday 19th Feb.

Thursday morning was much the same as previous. We were given rice and some greens, bamboo shoots. Then the usual ablutions parade two at a time. We were by now pretty worried about what was to happen to us all as we were not able to get any words out of the Jap guards. It was obvious no body but the Japs knew we were locked up. Other Australian Officers and troops, now prisoners of war knew that the twelve men had been taken away from their units. The sailor, Rupe and myself would also be missing. This was the topic of conversation plus that morning. There appeared to be more Jap troops in and around the place in the afternoon at one stage. The Jap who had been bringing the food to us, pushed some rice in banana leaves through the barred window and quickly left. There seemed to be a change of personnel outside the building and their attitude appeared to be sullen. What was going on. We were soon to find out. Towards late afternoon the cell door was unlocked, two armed Japs were standing back from the door one of the Japs was standing with lengths of what appeared to be Hessian. We were taken out one at a time, our hands were tied behind our backs and we were all taken to the courtyard. None of these Japs had we seen before. We were

pushed into threes then indicated to march out the gateway to the left. It seemed that we were expected at this time. There were local people mixed with Jap troops across Pasir Panjang road. When we arrived near them they jeered at us with closed fists shaking at us. My reaction to this was unbelievable. We turned into Reformatory Road and was marched up the hill for some distance. It seemed we were taken into the jungle at a pre arranged point. We were halted overlooking a gully with water running from the hills. We were arranged by Jap junior Officer, facing the gully. Seven Japanese troops appeared a few yards behind us. They were armed with British 303 rifles with bayonets fixed. Some of us had turned around, but the Officer yelled and gestured to look back toward the gully. I was on the left flank facing north, the other men to my right. Fred Airey was the man on the extreme right. I lent forward to speak to the man next to me and as I straightened up this Jap gave his men the order to fire. I was hit under the left shoulder blade. The bullet came out of my left chest, hitting my steel cigarette case and paybook, blew all the pocket off destroying the names of the men with it. After falling down into the water there was much yelling and shots fired. Shot in the back by a firing squad. That created a massacre.

Coincidentally the 19th February 1942 was the day the first bombs were dropped on Darwin.

## APPENDIX 3a: Byoki - Sickest ship afloat



# Hail to the brave Byoki, the sickest ship afloat

The little *Byoki Maru* began life proudly as the cargo ship *Canadian Princess*. Then she became the *Potomac* and, finally , battered and unlovely, the *Rushin Maru*.. But to the POWs who sailed in her on her last eventful voyage from Singapore to Moji in Japan, she will always be the *Byoki Maru*, the 'sick ship'. She was one of us.

Displacing between 3,000 and 4,000 tonnes, she had been bombed and burnt out in Singapore. Refloated, she had been patched up to carry cargo to Japan. mostly in the form of 1200 POWs who had worked on the Burma-Thailand railway and were now to be slave labour in Japan.

The *Byoki* was not a comforting sight. There was only a gaping hole where the bridge had been and the deck had dropped about 15 inches. The Japanese skipper was to direct her course from a small box-like cabin built over the stern.

Two great steel girders welded to the deck were all that was to keep her from breaking in two. There were no hatch covers for the two forward holds, with 400 POWs in each exposed alternatively to rain and the tropical sun.

The toilets were wooden boxes lashed to the ship's side with a gap in the centre of the floor to allow us to squat high above the ocean .

Definitely 'Not wanted on Voyage' were the lice and bugs that came aboard with us in Singapore. We didn't like the heat and sweat in the holds. They did. They bred as only lice and bugs can.

Our convoy crossed to Borneo and followed the coast north, hugging a chain of islands until we reached Manila. There we waited for three weeks with only an occasional break on deck from the stinking holds. On 9 August we left and it seemed only a few hours before the waiting American subs struck. A large freighter ahead of us was blown clean out of the water. A tanker suffered the same fate. The last ship in the convoy also went down.

It wasn't until an international POW reunion in 1986 that we heard why the *Byoki* might have been spared. A former US submarine commander told about an attack on a convoy near Manila in August 1944. After a look at a 'cruise' ship that may have been ours, he had told his men not to waste a torpedo on "that wreck" and to hit the next ship. It was surely our convoy and "that wreck' was surely the *Byoki Maru*. Some would say it was just luck. Believers say it was a miracle.

Some days later we were hit by the typhoon. In the early morning when I was allowed on deck to go the toilet the sea was dead calm but the crew were lashing down everything in sight. I was told there was "big wind coming". Within a few hours what had been a mill pond was a violent, turbulent ocean raging against everything on it.



The Japanese skipper, generally conceded to be a great seaman, ran before the storm to reach the lee of some small islands.There were no longer guards and prisoners; everybody was working for survival, feeding the boilers with all the coal they could take. At one stage a series of giant waves, 50 to 60 feet high, kept the *Byoki* on her side. But the battling ship righted herself and pushed on to sail into calm seas once again..

There the *Byoki* sprang a kindly leak in her thin plates. It was a heaven-sent opportunity for men stinking to high heaven to bathe in the stream of sea water jetting high into the forward hold before the leak was reluctantly reported. The ship's carpenter arrived with a piece 4" x 4" timber which he whittled down to a point and hammered in.

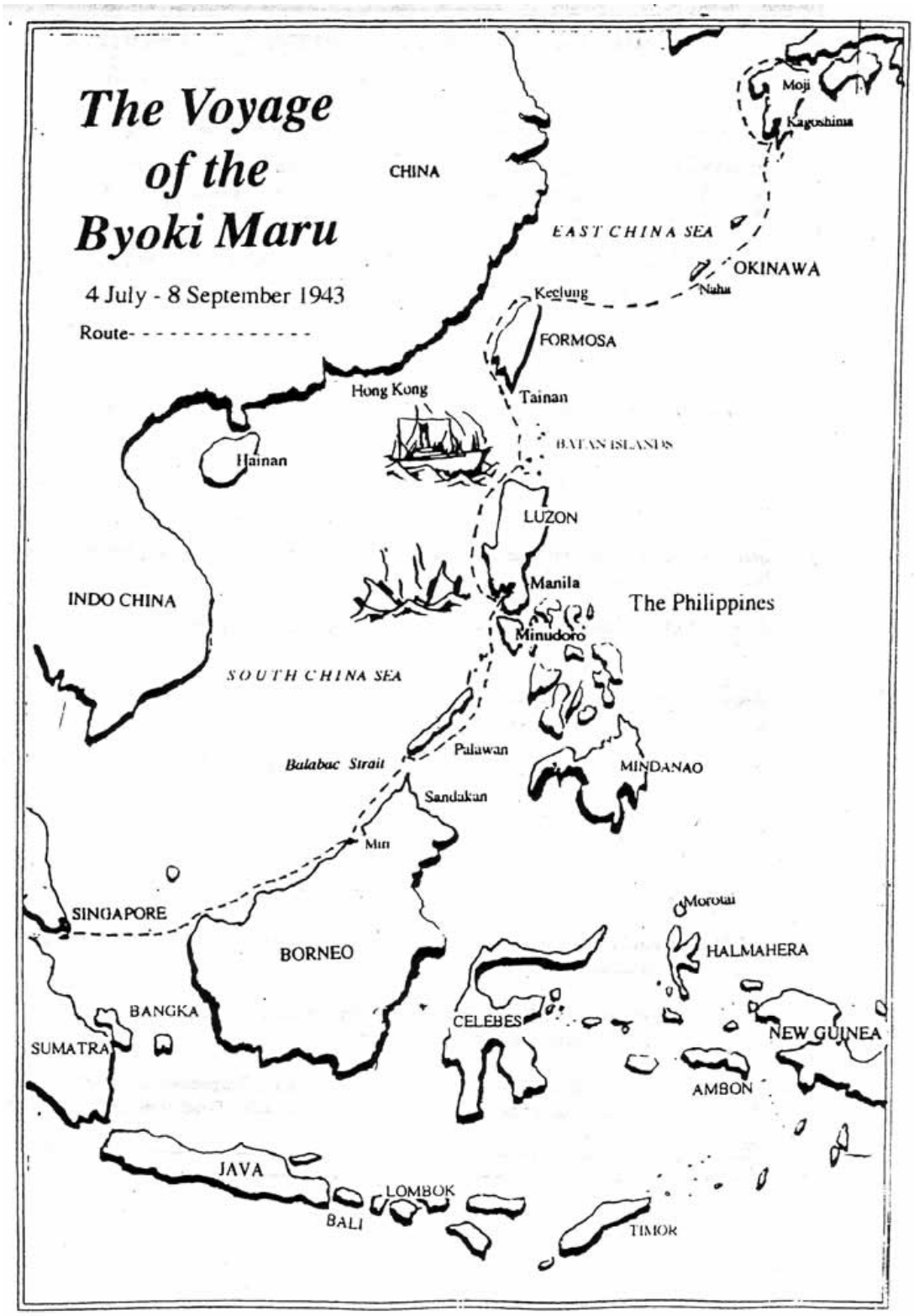
We made our first landfall in Japan at Kagoshima on the southern end of Kyushu on 3 September, five years to the day since war had been declared. Five days later we reached our destination, the port of Moji. It was 8 September 1944, less than a year before the Japanese surrender.

So ended the death-defying voyage of the *Byoki Maru*.

And May God bless all who sailed in her.

-- 'Banjo' Binstead

**APPENDIX 3b: Voyage of the Byoki Maru**



## APPENDIX 3c: Ships sunk whilst carrying prisoners

# Ships Sunk Whilst Carrying Prisoners

**It was the practise of the Japanese not to mark ships transporting prisoners of war**

**LISBON MARU.** Hong Kong to Japan. Sunk by submarine 2nd. October 1942, 6 miles from Tung Fusham Island off China coast. Total prisoners on board 1816. Missing or dead 839. Survivors 977, plus two survivors died Shanghai.

**NICHIMEI MARU.** Singapore to Moulmein, sunk by submarine 15th January 1943. Total prisoners 1000, missing or dead 53, survivors 947. Lat.32.43N, Lon. 97.27E.

**SUEZ MARU.** Amboina/Java, torpedoed near island of Kangean, 29th September 1943. Total prisoners on board 548. No survivors. Lat 660.20S. Lon. 116.30.

**TAMABUKO MARU.** Singapore to Japan. Torpedoed off Goto Nagasaki Japan, 24th. June 1944. Total prisoners on board 772. Dead or missing 560, survivors 212.

**HARAGIKU MARU.** Belawan/Pakabame, sunk by torpedo south of Balawan 26th June 1944. Total prisoners on board 720. Dead or missing 177, survivors 543. Lat. 30.15N Lon. 99.47E.

**SHINYU MARU.** Manila. Sunk by submarine 17th September 1944 off Mindanao. Total prisoners on board 750. No survivors.

**JUNYA MARU.** Java/Sumatra Japan. Sunk by submarine 18th September 1944 off MoakaMoakao. Lat. 20.53S Lon. 101.11E. Number of prisoners on board 2200, dead or missing 1477, survivors 723.

**RAKUYO MARU.** Singapore to Japan. Torpedoed off East Hainan Island 12th September 1944, Lt.13.0N Lon.114.0E. Total number of prisoners on board 1214, dead or missing 1179, survivors 135.

**KACHIDOKI MARU.** Singapore to Japan. Torpedoed by aircraft 12th September 1942 off East Hainan Island. Lat 18.0N Lon. 114.0E. Total number of prisoners on board 950. Dead or missing 435, survivors 515.

**TYOFUKU MARU.** Singapore Japan. Sunk by aircraft 21st September 1942 at the point Battan N.W. Philippines. Total number of prisoner on board 1287, dead or missing 907. Survivors 380.

**ARISAN MARU.** Manila/Japan. Torpedoed in Bashi Straits 24th October 1944. Number of prisoners on board 1782. Dead or missing 1778, 4 survivors died later.

**MONTEVIEDO MARU.** Torpedoed by submarine 1st July 1942 off Bagador lighthouse east of Luzon. Total number of prisoners on board 1053. No survivors.

**ORYOKU MARU. ENOURA MARU. BRAZIL MARU.** Torpedoed by aircraft in the Bay of Takaa 9th January 1945. Number of prisoners on board ships total 1620. Dead or missing 1002, survivors 618. 58 died later from illness and exposure.

## APPENDIX 4: Special Reserve Btn, (E) Coy, 2/4th and 1&2 Coy AASC

**APPENDIX 4**

### SPECIAL RESERVE BTN, (E) COY, 2/4TH AND 1&2 COY AASC

**Btn HQ**

Major Saggers OC * | Pte Tooze x | Lt V Mentiplay IO * | Pte Wilkes

**(E) Coy**

Lt Warhurst OC x | Pte Godfrey x | Lt De Moullin 2IC x | Pte Crane *

**1 PLATOON**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Lt Green x | Pte J Cook * | Pltn Sgt Rowlands * |
| Cpl Ashbolt + | Cpl Burchill x | Cpl Annettes x |
| Pte Ralph A * | Pte Wilson * | Pte Hargreaves x |
| Pte Ralph HW x | Pte Chambers x | Pte Squance |
| Pte Lake * | Pte Andrews x | Pte McCann |
| Pte Evans * | Pte Livingstone + | Pte Williams * |
| Pte Millhouse x | Pte Swann * | Pte Gibson x |
| Pte Cameron x | Pte Moher + | Pte Mathews |
| Pte Davies x | Pte Rochester x | |

**2 PLATOON**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Lt Till x | Pte Pershon x | Pltn Sgt Platts x |
| Cpl Magill * | Cpl Evans | Cpl Gardner x |
| Pte Darby x | Pte Hurst x | Pte Erskine * |
| Pte Munday x | Pte Dalrymple x | Pte Heinz Smith * |
| Pte Tomsett x | Pte Scott x | Pte Norton x |
| Pte Day x | Pte Ludge x | Pte Oswald + |
| Pte Leipold x | Pte Kearney | Pte Ronan * |
| Pte Murphy x | Pte Lymn * | |
| Pte Holding | Pte HM Smith | |

**3 PLATOON**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Lt Mazza x | Pte Chamberlain * | Pltn Sgt Lance* |
| Cpl Muldoon x | Cpl Kingdom + | Cpl Cornell * |
| Pte Stone + | Pte Flarty * | Pte Dow |
| Pte Peters x | Pte Poole x | Pte Gough |
| Pte Roberts x | Pte Slater + | Pte Johnson * |
| Pte Wallin | Pte McEwen * | Pte Turner + |
| Pte Ecclestone * | Pte Ridley + | Pte McLeod * |
| | Pte Butcher x | Pte Wilkins * |

L/Cpl Harvey +

| | KIA | Number |
|---|---|---|
| **Btn HQ** | 2 | 6 |
| **Coy HQ** | 5 | 9 |
| **1 Platoon** | 12 | 27 |
| **2 Platoon** | 17 | 26 |
| **3 Platoon** | 6 | 23 |
| **Total** | 42 | 91 |

x = KIA
+ = Died in Prison
* = Died since Return

**APPENDIX 5: R. Lee – Work Party to Identify Those Killed**

All POW's of the Japanese had a variety of experiences while in captivity for 3½ years. I have been requested by Wally Holding to put into writing the following episode I had spoken to Wally about.

It was 1942 and as POW's we Australians had been marched the 14 odd miles to Seletar which was close to Selerang where the "Barracks" incident took place. Our housing was quite good, the food not in short supply. We were in good condition, young and eager to spend our time playing sport and to recreate in whatever way we could.

We had been POWs approximately 1 month when one of our Sergeants, Viv Telfer, came seeking volunteers for a special exercise.

The exercise was for a small party to leave the POW area, there were no fences, and travel to the areas known as "Bukit Timah" then to search this area, mainly to the North towards Johore Strait and South of the Johore Causeway. We were to search for and reclaim any identification of dead bodies found, ie. Dog tags, Pay books etc.

This event took place 54 years ago and my mind is a little dim on the number of volunteers who went on this mission. I believe all told the number was 7, consisting of 1 Sergeant and 6 Sappers from 2/6 Field Park Company, RAE.

We left Seletar Camp in early daylight, lined up in 3 pairs with the Sergeant to the side but mainly in front. The Sergeant had a white piece of rag on his sleeve. I do not recall this relevance.

The distance we had to march was approximately 15 miles. We knew Singapore Island very well having spent around 10 months there prior to the February 1942 surrender. We were fit and showed this by the Military style of marching we kept up, especially going through a village, town or Kampong.

It was most interesting to see the local natives who greeted us quite warmly and made many offerings of bananas, fruits, drinks etc. We stopped for a rest and smoko for 10 minutes each hour, when the locals would supply us with drinks of coffee etc.

The few Japanese soldiers we did see were mainly driving vehicles and took no interest or caused us to stop and explain ourselves.

We slept that night at a Kampong a couple of miles from Bukit Timah, our destination.

Early next morning we went on our way crossing the Bukit Timah Road, which is the main road to the Johore Causeway. After crossing the road we came to a rubber plantation and patches of quite dense jungle with much overgrowth.

We immediately saw that heavy fighting had taken place here by the trees that had been ravaged by mortar and shell fire. There were a number of what were dead bodies and rusty firearms. The ground had been churned up by shell fire hitting the slit trenches.

Yes, we found some Pay Books and Dog Tags but they were, in the main allied soldiers, not Australian. The wild pigs had created quite a mess with their rooting around.

We left this area in early afternoon the same day and worked our way North towards where we knew the Johore Straits stretched through to the Causeway. An extremely large battle must have taken place here. There were a lot of trees which had been chopped down for a purpose and a lot more that had been blasted with mortar fire etc.

The scene was one of utter devastation and the dead, or what was left of the bodies must have numbered hundreds. Military equipment of all sorts could be found – Army webbing, rotting clothing, the bones of deceased that wild pigs had ravaged. We did what we came to do and as we assembled Dog Tags, Pay Books, some wallets were placed in a bag and presumably handed to the Australian Headquarters when we returned the next day, via the same method and route originally taken.

In hindsight, we made this foray to do something for our dead, ie their identification.

The Japanese authorities had not, up to the time we were there one month after surrender, been in themselves to give their dead the benefit of a decent burial.

WX 8208
Sapper Ron Lee
2/6 Field Park Coy RAE