
Note: although this report is written in the third person it is wholly a product of Neil MacPherson, originally produced for his own family records and adapted in 2005 for this program

WX16572 NEIL ORMISTON MACPHERSON

2/2ND PIONEER BATTALION, 2ND AIF, JAPAN POW, BURMA RAILWAY, JAPAN



BORN 14TH MAY 1922 ABERDEEN SCOTLAND

**FAMILY MIGRATED TO WESTERN AUSTRALIA IN 1924
UNDER THE GROUP SETTLEMENT SCHEME, FAMILY
PIONEERED TWO SETTLEMENT BLOCKS IN THE SOUTH WEST
GROUP 72 WITCHCLIFFE, GROUP 6 MARGARET RIVER FAMILY LIVED IN
ROUGH TIMBER SHACKS DURING THIS TIME.**



Jemima Neil and Jean MacPherson Margaret River

**1927 MOST SETTLEMENTS FAILED, UNDER CAPITALISED, FAMILY MOVED TO PERTH,
DEPRESSION YEARS FOLLOWED, IN 1930 FAMILY MOVED TO LAKE GRACE, FATHER
WORKED ON LAKE GRACE HYDEN RAILWAY. FAMILY LIVED IN HESSION WALLED
WHITE WASH WALLED HUMPY, MOVING CAMP AS RAILWAY WORK EXTENDED, NEIL A
HIS SISTER AND ONE BROTHER WERE ON CORRESPONDENCE CLASSES, TWO
OTHER CHILDREN TOO YOUNG FOR CLASSES, OUT IN THE BUSH FOR 3 YEARS.**

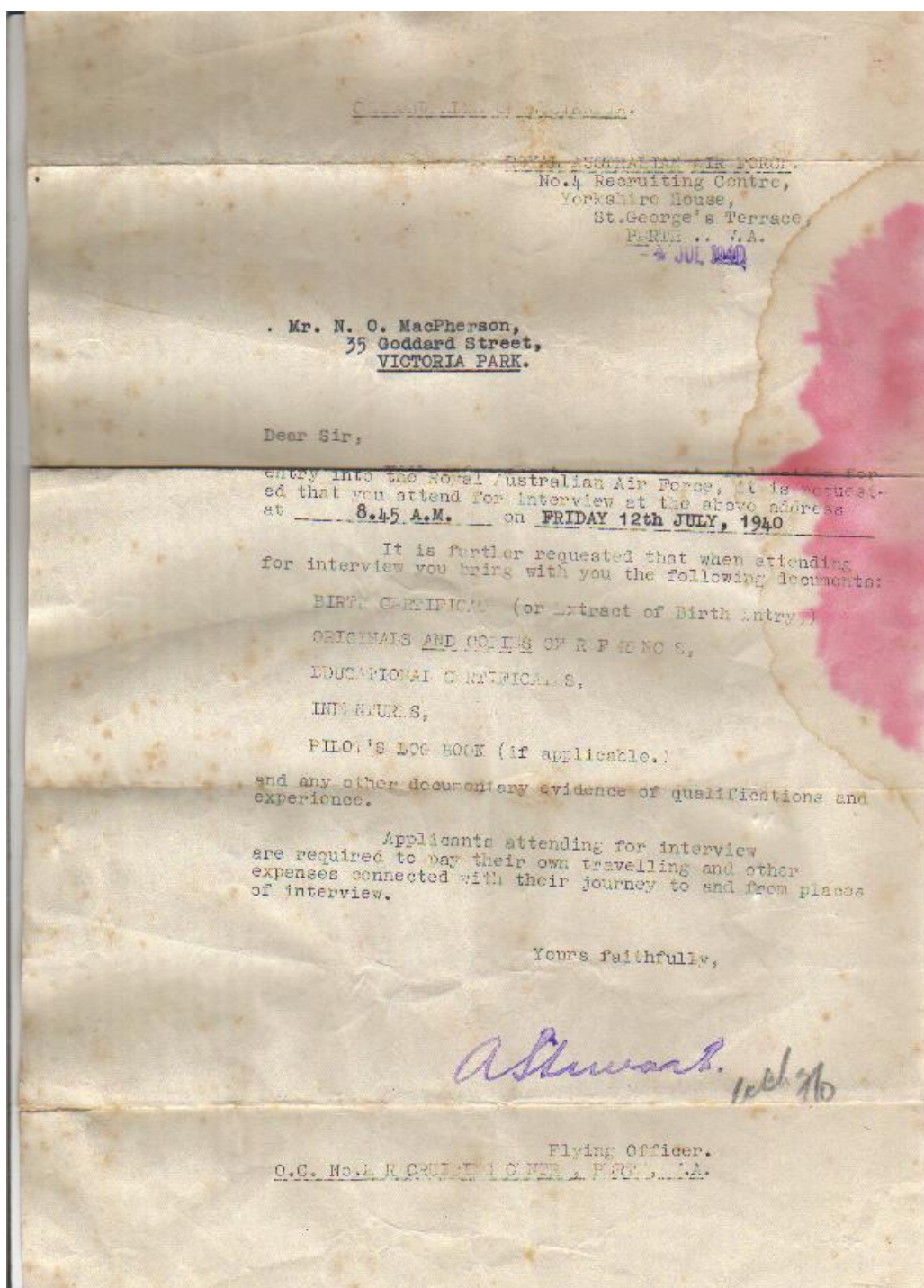
**NO ELECTRICITY NO SCHEME WATER, NO AMENITIES
FAMILY MOVED BACK TO PERTH 1934, STATE SCHOOL, CARGILL ST, VICTORIA PARK
GRADES 4-6, JUNIOR TECHNICAL SCHOOL FOR 4 MONTHS IN 1936**

In May 1936 on reaching the age of 14 as was custom in those days Neil found work to help support his family, father out of work, three younger children, no social security. He continued his education at night school several nights a week after work. Commencing at Hardie Trading Pty Ltd as a Messenger Boy, he progressed through to Office Boy to Clerk until he enlisted in the 2nd AIF in September 1941 at the age of 19 years. During 1938-39 Neil trained in the Army 11th Battalion Senior Cadets, which involved one night a week and some weekend, bivouacs at Swanbourne Barracks.

1940

On the 12th July Neil attended an interview for entry into the RAAF, Sandy Marshall, his mate in the Air Force got him the application form, these were only given to those people who could show they had passed their Junior Certificate as a minimum education level. Neil would not even have qualified for the form with his level, rather strange, Air Gunners survival rate during the war was about one in four, why such a high education rate was required to fire a machine gun, no one knew. Popular belief was that the Air Force only wanted top drawer recruits, in those days only the rich could afford to give their children a good education, needless to say Neil was not accepted for the Air Force, at the time Neil was devastated,

The letter from the Air Force advising Neil of his interview



Needless to say he did not get past first base when he told them of his education level.

In mid 1940 at the age of 18 he applied for enlistment in the 2nd AIF putting his age up to 19 years but was stymied when his father refused to sign the papers, he being under 21 years.

AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES -- EASTERN COMMAND.

Headquarters,
Swan Barracks,
PERTH.

28 AUG 1940

DATE.

Mr *N. O. Macpherson*
41. Saleham St.
Vic. Pk.

A.I.F.

Your application for enlistment in the Home Service has been received.

You will be notified in due course when and where you are to report for medical examination.

You are warned not to give up your employment until you are finally accepted.

G. W. Abjornsen Major.
AREA BRIGADE MAJOR.

Neil, still undaunted then applied for entry into the AIF under the false name of Neil Ormiston, when called up for his medical his father threatened to alert the Army of his age but promised to give his approval when Neil reached the age of 19 years

A.A. FORM A.201.

A.I.F. AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES.

NOTICE TO APPLICANT FOR ENLISTMENT.

19 BRIGADE AREA

To *N. Ormiston* Recruiting Office.

5 / DEC 1940 date.

With reference to your application for enlistment in the Australian Military Forces, for service in Australia or abroad, you are required to attend at

Showgrounds, OLAREMONT.

THURSDAY

at 1.30 a.m. on 12 DEC 1940 (date), for purposes of interview, medical examination, etc.

G. W. Abjornsen Major.
Recruiting Officer.

So it was back to Hardies and what he thought at the time was boring work, he badly wanted to enlist but realised that he would have to be patient, and the family still needed his contribution to survive, brothers Jim was 15, Jack 13, and Jess 9 years of age, still at school

1941

On 22nd Sept Neil joined the 2nd AIF, initially spent a week at the Claremont Show Grounds before being sent to the Northam Training Camp. He signed up at the rate of 5/- a day, he allocated 40% of his pay to his mother, teenagers who today often don't even pay their parents board when they become income earners would be amazed at the family responsibility of that era. During Neil's 4-½ years army service Jemima received this regular income, with out it the two younger siblings Jack & Jess would not have enjoyed the extended education they received.



Jemima and her five offspring 1941



Neil September 1941 newly enlisted 2nd AIF

Neil thrived in the army environment, plenty of exercise, good but plain food, he enjoyed the all male company, and accepted the discipline without protest, he soon made friends with his fellow soldiers. The happy, contented life did not last long, battle defeats in the Middle East, casualties were high, killed, wounded and those captured, so the word came down, send every recruit you can to fill the ranks.

Neil was one of the first selected because of his cadet training, within weeks he was given pre-embarkation leave, followed by a march through Perth city streets of the draft going overseas. It was a very emotional event, especially for the families of these troops in the march, some 3000 diggers, in full kit, steel helmets, with fixed bayonets accompanied by brass bands. The streets were crowded and when the marchers were dismissed at the rear of Wesley College the families were admitted and a picnic atmosphere prevailed.

By September 1941 the war had been in progress for 2 years and the tradition was that troops selected for departure over seas were to march through the city streets in full battle dress, probably introduced as a recruiting measure but was always well attended by families & friends



Neil in full marching order with niece Valerie

Middle East

Convoy No 13 left Fremantle on the 8th November 1941, the large convoy was made up of a great armada of ships, including the two largest passenger ships afloat the two Queens, Mary & Elizabeth, Fremantle was the last port of call as the convoy had already picked up troops from the Eastern States.

Neil's draft had left Northam camp in the early hours of darkness the previous night, with several hundred members of the 2nd A.I.F., destined for the middle East, after marching with full equipment the 3 miles to the Northam railway station, and the usual long wait, they boarded a train in the early hours of the morning of the 8th. It was customary for these troop movements to take place in darkness to confuse enemy spies, however most of Perth knew of the move and at stations along the route there were small groups waving goodbye to the troops as the train passed.

Like many others Neil wondered if this was his last view of his country, all knew that the casualty figures coming out of Libya, Greece & Crete illustrated that the war toll of Australians was mounting and that they soon would be in the thick of the action. As a member of the 13th reinforcements for the 2/16th Battalion, which had already taken significant casualties in the fighting in Syria, he was looking forward to soon joining the West Australian unit.

With Neil were two good mates Edward (Bluey Rowe) and Hugh Sorley, all of similar age and coincidently all migrants from the United Kingdom in the immediate post World War 1 period; all were participants in the Group Settlement scheme. The other two were part of the Northcliffe Group Settlement Scheme. At the Fremantle wharf the troops were loaded onto lighters and taken out into gage roads, where the magnificent sight of row upon row of huge troop transports greeted them.

It was soon evident that one of the huge vessels was the well known Queen Mary, and naturally they all hoped this would be their destination, what an experience to travel on the 2nd largest ship in the world, however this was not to be, as they soon changed course and approached a nearer vessel. Hiding their disappointment they were soon exchanging good-humoured banter with the troops lining the rails of the vessel, interstate rivalry was to be part of the game over the next few years.

One of the boys in the lighter asked the question, what ship is this? Imagine the joy and the pride when they found out they were about to board the largest and the newest vessel afloat the mighty **Queen Elizabeth**, with 3000 troops aboard and being the last to board it was not surprising for Neil and his mates to find that they were down in the bowels of the ship, in hammocks on O deck. Coincidentally, Stan Newhill, sister Jean's brother in Law, was also on board the ship, going over as reinforcements for another West Australian unit the 2/11th Battalion, Stan had been a class mate of Neil's at Victoria Park Cargill Street State School.

The sea voyage to the middle east was relaxing and pleasant, the cramped conditions down in O deck, where Neil was billeted and the sleeping in hammocks was all exciting and new to the young recruits, submarine dangers there were, but the speed of the two Queens were their greatest protection. En route to the middle East the convoy called in at Trinkamali, a British Naval Base, unknown to Neil at the time was the fact that his mother's brother George Forrest from Aberdeen was stationed there as a Sub Lieutenant in the British Navy. On arrival at Port Tewfik at the southern end of the Suez Canal they were taken to a transit camp run by the British Army, on arrival all were intrigued by a group of Tommies working over a deep hole, constructed over the hole was a tripod with a rope extending down into the hole. After watching the activity for several minutes, there was a wild scramble to distance them selves when the laconic Tommies told the Aussies that they were recovering an Italian Bomb that was dropped on the camp in last night's air raid.

Next day the troops travelled by train along the banks of the Suez Canal to El Kantara, a small station on the Egyptian side of the canal. Here they were taken by barge across to the Palestine side, which country was to be their training location for the coming months. After a very welcome meal, bully beef stew, they travelled by trucks to a camp 5 miles from Gaza Village

Dimra Camp Palestine

Situated 5 miles from ancient Gaza, this camp was on a cold wind swept piece of ancient Palestine, close by was the scene of the famous Light Horse charge of the 1914 war, Neil was part of the 24th ITB, (Infantry Training Battalion) one of the NCOs was Sgt Jock Craik, Ron Newhill's father in law, Ron, also a Sgt was with the battalion up in Syria, his brother George was married to Neil's sister Jean. The troops were quartered in EPI tents, a square tent that held some 12 cane framed beds, necessary to keep the bedding off the wet ground, which flooded during wet weather. An interesting point, at night the rifles of the soldiers, without bolts were chained to the tent uprights, the bolts were stored under the soldiers pillow, it had happened that Arabs had entered camps at night and stolen rifles. One of the first things new arrivals did was to throw away their plain grey hat band and replace it with a puggaree, if it could be bleached to a very light colour it would also help signify a seasoned digger

Training was hard, discipline was firm, a lot of time was devoted to weapon training, Tommy Guns, Boyes Anti Tank Rifles, 2 Inch Mortars, as well night marches and night patrols were regular features. Food was basic, poorly cooked repetitive and boring, Neil & Bluey often skipped kitchen meals to enjoy hamburgers served in the canteen, often from the winnings at two up. The Red Cross huts and the Australian Comforts Fund facilities were well patronised, the cheapest drink available was a local brew called Alacanti, a red wine of questionable origin which the impoverished troops were able to buy from local villagers.

A story is told with tongue in cheek of a warning issued to all troops to the effect that upon analysis it was found that the Alacanti contained up to 10% urine, to the amazement of the authorities, reports were coming in that consumption had increased dramatically. An investigation, which followed, came up with the result, that before the warning the troops thought the drink contained 20% urine, hence the increased consumption?

Leave was regular, and Neil was fortunate to get two lots of week end leave, in Tel Aviv and in Jerusalem, in both instances he partook in the pleasures young soldiers from time immemorial, far from home enjoyed, these experiences remained with Neil over the years. Both Arabs & Jews inhabited these cities, there was a truce in force between the two races, but only for the duration, neither race wanted to see the Germans take over the Middle East.



Jock Howarth & Neil 1941 Tel Aviv Leave

Notice the Australian soldiers in the background; this photo was taken in front of the King Solomon Hotel in Tel Aviv where most diggers were billeted when on leave in Tel Aviv

Jock Howarth was an old gold Prospector from the Marble Bar area in his mid 40s with a rich Scottish brogue. He took an interest in the 19 year old, even as POWs he always found a cigarette to give Neil, a born scavenger he survived 3 ½ years of hell and returned to Australia.

A story that typifies the nature of the Digger is that the Commander of the AIF, General Blamey was travelling in his chauffeured car with the Australian flag prominent when an Arab with a fuel Jerry can flagged his car down. Blamey ordered his driver to stop and find out what the Arab

wanted, reluctantly the driver obeyed as he knew the outcome, when it transpired that the Arab wanted to buy petrol from the driver, Blamey roared "We Do Not Sell Petrol to Arabs", the Arab replied "All The Other Australian Drivers Do."

In January 1942, a group of 52 West Australians including Neil, his two mates Bluey Rowe and Hugh Sorley from the Training Battalion in Dimra were transferred to the 2/2nd Pioneer Battalion, then in camp at Hill 69, to fill vacancies caused by the loss of many of their men in the fighting in Syria. Little did they realise that this was to be a turning point in their lives, in Neil's case the transfer into A Company was to be a defining moment in his life and was to see him soon come face to face with the enemy involving tragic loss of mates.

One of the Sand Gropers as they were called Tom Cream from Geraldton who was in the draft, a very good mate of Neil's told the story of his arrival in the tent he was allocated, laying around relaxing were several members of the Victorian unit. When they asked Tom in a less than friendly way "what the hell do you want" he said I have come to join you mob, I wasn't good enough for my West Australian unit but I have come to bolster your weak mob. Tom in later life would say, "After the fight we became the best of mates" which would be true he was one of those dry laconic Australian farmers. It was a true fact that British officers in charge of mixed camps on the Death Railway have repeatedly said; the greatest asset in any camp on the railway was to have an Australian farmer in camp. What they could do with a piece of wire or any other simple item was unbelievable and the way they could improvise, kill and butcher the odd cow, found wandering loose left the city dweller in a daze.

JOURNEY TO JAVA AND CONSEQUENCES

Java

The 3000 Australians boarded the fast Troop Ship SS Orcades in Port Tewfik on the last day of January 1942, without any delay the ship up anchored and departed at 0900 hours 1st February, in the desperate haste a lot of equipment including all the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion's Vickers guns were left behind. The full compliment of troops included

2/2nd Pioneer Battalion
2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion
2/2nd Anti Aircraft Regiment
2/6th Field Co, Royal Australian Engineers
105 General Transport Company
2/2nd Casualty Clearing Station
B Company of H.Q. Guard Battalion less 2 Platoons
Det of Lines 7 Communication Units, Pay. Postal Records

The Orcades was known as the Lone Wolf as it seldom travelled in convoy relying on its speed to avoid submarine attacks. After a one-day stay in Colombo, instead of continuing on a southerly course to Australia the ship turned east and headed at full speed for the Dutch East Indies. Initially the British cruiser HMS Dorsetshire escorted the vessel but as it approached the more dangerous water the HMAS Hobart took over.

On the 15th February 1942 the troopship Orcades with escorting Dutch destroyers entered the great harbour of Oosthaven on the south coast of Sumatra, with the 3000 Australians who had left the Middle East 15 days previously. Of these 2500 were told to prepare to land at the port and set up positions to defend the city against an imminent attack by Japanese forces already established in Palenbang to the north.

T Colonel E.B. Starret E.B. (RL) Royal Australian Corps Of Signals in his publication THE FORCE CODE NAMED "STEPSISTER" writes

The Commanding Officer of the 2/3rd Machine Gun Btn Lt Col A.S. Blackburn VC who had been appointed CO Troops for the voyage called all C.O.s and sub unit Commanders to attend a briefing in the ship's lounge and informed us of the situation and that he had been appointed to command the Force with the temporary rank of Brigadier. He then nominated the units which would comprise the force and a required their Co's and Ocs to remain for preliminary orders. The force was to be organised into an ad hoc Infantry Brigade .of which the 2/3 MG Bn, 2/2nd Pioneers Bn and 2/1 Lt AA Regt with its signals and workshop units which would form the three infantry battalions. One Troop of the RAA Regiment equipped with two of its 44mm Bofor guns which had been added to the ships armament was to provide meagre artillery support and the 2/6th Engineering Coy was to function as an independent company.

Brigadier Blackburn then concluded by saying "Gentlemen you realise that this is a suicide mission and leave it to you to decide what you say to your troops, but I suggest you spend 10 minutes or so to settle down and absorb the situation before you call your orders group and talk to your men

Along with this group the full Pioneer Battalion boarded a Dutch Lighter the **van Spillbergern** as darkness was falling, probably the best equipped of the force, but with only 50 rounds of ammunition per man, the unit was in full readiness to go into action on reaching the landing point, however before disembarkation could be commenced, orders were received to return to the Troopship. The reason being that a large force of Japanese were within 11 km of the port, in complete darkness, and with no other sound than the engines of the lighter the troops, despite much difficulty in locating the Orcades in the blackness of the night, and without lights to guide them gratefully returned on board. Neil & Bluey, who had psyched them selves up to face the enemy for the first time, felt it was an anti climax, but were content to wait for another day to find out whether they would pass the ultimate test of all their training.

Considering that the enemy controlled the seas and the air for a thousand miles around the East Indies, it was pure luck that the Orcades survived, both the long voyage into these enemy controlled waters, and the time spent in the exposed enclosed waters of the Oosthaven approaches. The Japanese fleet and their air forces had sunk most of the Dutch navy along with elements of the Australian, British and U.S Navies. Neil vividly remembers the relief experienced by all aboard when the vessel broke out into the open sea after the long hours anchored in the enclosed bay.

Next day the ship arrived at Tandjoeng Priok, the port serving Batavia the capital of Java, outside the port dozens of ships were at anchor, some showing scars from bombing. At 1400 hours, soon after anchoring the BBC broadcast the announcement that Singapore had surrendered, Sumatra was under the control of the enemy and nothing but the 3000 Australians

were between a similar fate befalling Java. This may sound like an exaggeration, however none of the many Dutch troops on Java were prepared to or actually resisted the invasion of their Island, white officers and part native troops who deserted as soon as the enemy landed.

On the 16th February from ABDA headquarters in Java Field Marshall Lord Wavell sent a letter to Churchill reading in part,

***“Landings by the enemy in Java can only be prevented by our local naval & air superiority. Facts given show that it is most unlikely that this superiority can be obtained. Once enemy has effected landing there is at present little to prevent his rapidly occupying main naval and air bases on the island. To sum up Burma and Australia are absolutely vital for the war against Japan. Loss of Java though a severe blow from every point of view would not be fatal. Efforts should not, therefore be made to reinforce Java, which might compromise defence of Burma & Australia. Immediate Problem is the destination of the Australian Corps, if there seemed a good chance of establishing corps on the island and fighting Japanese on favourable terms, I should unhesitatingly recommend risks should be taken, as I did in matter of aid to Greece a year ago. In present instance I must recommend that I consider risk unjustifiable from tactical & strategically point of view. I fully recognise political considerations involved.*”**

An article Neil had printed in the Barb Wire & Bamboo magazine some 60 years later provides another aspect of this crisis period in Australia's history

60.000 Australians captured by Japanese

Not so, but for time running, out this could well have been the situation in 1942, this magazine ran some interesting and authentic articles on the 3000 Australians of Black Force. Lt General Sir Frank Berryman, Chief of staff of 1st Australian Corps who reported with Lavarack to Wavell's HQ in Bandoeng 27th January 1942 writes in a report. ***Wavell explained the situation and said that the Australian 7th Division was to be deployed in Southern Sumatra and the 6th Division in Central Java. Lavarack did not agree to the Australian Corps being split up and referred it back to the Australian government, surprisingly the response was to obey Wavell's orders but to press for the two divisions to be united as the situation permitted.***

Given that Japan had complete control of the air and the sea, and that there was no way for these two divisions to be supported or resupplied the obvious end would have been the 6th and 7th Divisions joining the 8th Australian Divisions as prisoners of war. Instead of 8000 Australian casualties among our POWs the probable toll could well have been 24,000. In the meantime Black Force of 3000 Australians on the S.S. Orcades returning from the Middle East were ordered to disembark at Oosthaven. It was due to the intervention of Lavarack that the 2/3rd Machine Gunners and the 2/2nd Pioneers were returned to the Orcades and taken to Batavia. Despite Lavarack urging the Australian Government not to agree to the landing of these troops in Java he was ordered to obey Wavell's orders.

Can one wonder what the outcome of the Kokoda Trail Battles would have been with the 7th Division prisoners in Java, despite the brave sacrifice of the 39th Battalion, Port

Moresby would surely have been occupied by the Japanese troops. With the gateway to Australia now wide-open history would have had to be rewritten,

This small part of history even after 60 years is still very controversial; it was the subject of much disagreement and ill feeling between British Supreme Commander Wavell and the Australian Cabinet. The order to disembark Black Force was issued then countermanded then reissued, Dr Homer War Historian and author of "High Command" records from official records the following

P 157 Curtin cabled Churchill, Page, Wavell and the NZ PM requesting urgent arrangements be made for the diversion of the AIF to Australia, this was confirmed as Government policy at a War Cabinet meeting on the 18th February

Laverack made it clear that he wanted the Australians, the troops on the Orcades to return to Australia and certainly not to disembark in Java.

Dr Horner goes on to write

The troops on the Orcades were really the advance party of the whole movement (6th & 7th Division return to Australia and as such were an integral part of the whole organisation and could not be readily replaced)

Page 164 Wavell was also in receipt of the recommendation of the Pacific War Council of the combined chief of staff, which included the statement that "Java should be defended with the utmost resolution by all forces at present on the island. There should be no withdrawal of troops or Air Force of any nationality and no surrender.

Major General Lloyd was reported to have said "a clear case of the evil of political influence on military dispositions "Black Force he said later "was in fact sacrificed to the cause of Dutch friendship

Despite the above, the Australians on board the Orcades disembarked on the 18th February, and were obviously a token sacrifice knowing they had no back up in stopping the hordes of Japs that were to storm ashore 14 days later. Neil's A Company led the Pioneers off the ship Dutch transport arrived to take the battalion out to an airport at Tjililitan, on the outskirts of Batavia, where they were billeted over night in one of the large aircraft hangers. The role of the troops was to guard the airport against Japanese paratroops, expected after the paratroops took Palenbang in Sumatra that month, next day the troops were visited by Lt General H, Gordon Bennett, C.O. of the 8th Australian Division, who had days before escaped from Singapore after the island surrendered.

At 1600 hours on February 24th Neil experienced his first taste of enemy action, while digging a trench on the edge of the aerodrome with other members of his platoon, a force of 27 enemy bombers bombed and strafed the area. Neil on sighting the planes grabbed his tommy gun, a great weapon against enemy troops but pretty useless against aircraft and dived into the partly dug trench, which was only about 9 inches deep

As the first bombs exploded he realised that not more than 15 yards away from his shallow refuge was a line of some 50 drums of aviation fuel, it needed no great stretch of imagination to picture the scene should the enemy decide to strafe the fuel dump. Fortunately they were intent on destroying the aircraft and buildings, this was the first of several raids on the airport.

Neil's section was responsible for an area of ground among trees some 500 yards from the landing zone, at night the mosquitos were in battalion strength and attacked all exposed areas of the body, especially when on guard duty when one expected a Jap to creep up behind you at any moment. As the only protection against the mosquitos was copious quantities of Citronella, which could be smelt at 50 yards, one was faced with deciding which was worse, being eaten alive by mosquitos or having marauding Japs locate your position by your smell.

More air raids took place and the section leader Corporal Frank McGrath, a huge man, a specialist in unarmed conflict, and a great gambler, detailed Bluey Rowe and Neil to prepare a weapon Pit in the middle of a small clearing in their defence area, which they would man with a bren gun set up on a tripod to fire at enemy fighters which were strafing our lines.

Attacking the job with great gusto they had got the pit down to 4 feet, when the air raid alarm went off, grabbing the Bren, and setting it up ready for action they waited, little knowing that their hole surrounded by red clay in the middle of a green clearing would be like a bullseye to the Zero pilots. Sure enough a flight of three enemy fighters in line abreast soon sighted the target and in a low treetop attack, came in all guns firing, too quick for our boys to line up the Bren, and seeing the flashes of the guns in the wings of the approaching aircraft, both dropped to the floor of the pit, where they stayed until the raiding planes disappeared over the trees. Imagine the horror of both boys when upon inspection they found a neat row of holes in the side walls of the pit at chest level, Frank McGrath decided after that the weapon pit should be better camouflaged, Frank in September 1944 was drowned after the Prison Ship Rakuyo Maru was torpedoed in the China Sea, not before however he killed several Japs with a huge lump of timber as they came up from below decks after the torpedo struck.

Soon after this raid the battalion was ordered to move south to a defence position south of Buitenzorg to meet the threat of any enemy advance from the west towards Bandoeng. The village of Tjampea was chosen as headquarters, the troops were billeted in an old asylum. It was not long before another air raid alert had all troops on stand by at 0330 hours, but after an hour the all clear sounded. The troops had little time to sleep as dawn stand to had them out and ready for any enemy attack.

On February 28th, the day large numbers of Japanese were landing on the north coast, where both the cruisers HMAS Perth and USN Houston were engaging the landing force, and were subsequently destroyed, the Pioneers took over the defence positions at the Llewiliang bridge. Neil's A Company were held in reserve back at the asylum, the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion without their machine guns took up position on the left rear of the bridge defences.

Also part of the defending force was the 131st Field Company United States Army, these Americans and those off the USS Houston were later to spend the rest of the war as prisoners with the Australians

In the series **Australian In the War of 1939-45**, “**The Japanese Thrust**” on page 497 Wigmore describes the Japanese final thrust for the biggest prize of the whole campaign Java, it would seem that their plans had envisaged a defence force involving two Australian battle hardened Divisions, not an ad hoc brigade of three under equipped battalions

The two invading forces involved the **Eastern Force** consisted of the 48th Division, which had captured the Philippines, and the 56th Regimental Group that had captured Ballikpapan were contained in a Naval force of **41 Transports**. The **Western Group** consisted of the 2nd Division from Japan and the 230th Regiment of the 38th Division made up of **56 Transports**

One wonders what the course of the war would have been if these 97 Transports with their escorting task force had instead of invading Java continued on to unprotected Australia, with all it's fighting men still in transit from overseas.

On the 2nd March at 1155 hours forward Australian troops at the bridge reported 5 light enemy tanks approaching the bridge the forward companies reactions were spontaneous, two of the tanks were disabled and many dismounted troops from trucks were seen to fall. This was the first that our troops knew of a landing, actually the landing took place in the early hours of March 1st and the enemy had advanced 150 miles without meeting any opposition, the Australians were the first troops the enemy had encountered since the landing.

Following their usual tactics that were so successful in Malaya the enemy, on meeting resistance, started their encircling action, feeling their way along the river with heavy patrols, when finding the extremity of our positions, they then started crossing in force, and our forces were then in danger of being encircled and cut off. On the 4th March at 1600 hours, A Company was then given the task of protecting the left flank, while the battalion retired to prepared defences further east. The three platoons of A Company were allotted different areas in which to seek out and to attack any Jap force that had crossed the river Neil's No 3 Platoon, under the command of newly promoted Lt Cliff Lang, was to advance to a native village where Japs were reported to have taken over. Moving over open ground across water filled paddy fields divided by narrow banks that provided the only means of progress in single file, in Neil's eyes went against all his training. One machine gun set up on the other side of the paddy fields would have decimated the whole platoon. Neil remembered this day well, his first contact with an enemy, reputed not to take prisoners, he consoled himself by thinking about early American Settlers who were always massacred when over whelmed by the Indians, maybe an illogical and fanciful thought but soldiers going into battle, each had their own method of bolstering their courage.

No 3 Platoon found the village, and proceeded a hut by hut search, and found it deserted of not only the enemy but the villagers who had decided to evacuate the war zone, proceeding on to a second village, the platoon in attack formation were half way through, when concentrated fire was directed at the platoon, from an enemy in strength who had set up an ambush, Lt Cliff Lang was the first casualty, taking bullets in the hip and abdomen, two of the men were killed and several wounded. After an extended exchange of fire Lt Lang ordered an immediate withdrawal, and elected to remain in the hope that the enemy may provide medical assistance.

Several of the walking wounded were sent in a group under the leadership of popular aborigine from West Australia Ted Nannup, nothing was ever heard of these men and it was surmised that they had run into a Japanese patrol and killed or were murdered by hostile natives.

Neil's section under Corporal Scottie McGinnis, who also was lost at sea when the Rakuyo Maru was torpedoed, in 1944, became separated from the rest of the platoon in the growing darkness, fortunately both Bluey Rowe and Neil had a good idea of direction and in due course the section reached the road where they had demounted from the trucks earlier in the evening.

In the meantime the Battalion in complete silence, and under cover of darkness had managed to break off the action at the bridge and withdrew to transport waiting some distance from the river, this was no easy task, to move several hundred men without letting the enemy know, who were only a short distance away on the other side of the river.

Neil's section on reaching the road were unsure which direction to travel, again after discussion it was decided to move left rather than in the other direction which would have been into enemy held territory. It was true that other ranks in those days were not privy to plans of action, and generally did what they were ordered to do without knowing any thing about the terrain they were too operate in. After walking for some time a vehicle was heard approaching and the section dived into a deep ditch beside the road, fortunately it was not an enemy vehicle, as the driver had sighted the troops before they took evasive action. The driver was Pioneer Captain Handasyde who had commandeered an armoured car to look for A Company which at that time was completely out of touch, the gunner in the turret turned out to be one of the West Australians who had been transferred with Neil, Harry Knudsen from Albany. On being told that the tail end of the convoy evacuating the battalion was only a mile or so along the road Neil and his section continued on and eventually found the tail end vehicle and climbed aboard. After spending all night in the truck, which as part of the convoy travelled in fits and starts, often held up by air raid alarms, they reached Soekaboemi, where the battalion less most of A Company who were still missing, dispersed into a rubber plantation for much needed rest.

It is worth recording that the majority of Pioneer casualties were from A Company; survivors of the three platoons after the action moved up into the mountains and conducted sporadic Guerrilla action against the Japanese who hunted them. Neil's mate Hugh Sorley was a member of this group, he was captured some weeks after the island surrendered, but the last of these brave men, Lt Allen, Stan Baade and Vin McCrae were surprised by an enemy patrol and capture in mid August. On the 1st of May the A company C.O. Capt Guild, along with Lt Ian Stewart Cpl Hynes and Pte A.C. Murray decided to gamble with fate and endeavour to make their way south in the hope of stealing a boat to make their way back to Australia. No word of their fate has ever been discovered, it is feared that natives, who generally were anti European, after 300 years of Dutch rule, massacred this group, they were brave men and died in the true spirit of the original Anzacs.

Mean while the main force of Australians decided that, as the Dutch were obviously intent in limiting the damage to their country by avoiding action, planned to move into the mountains and form a resistance group. Another problem that faced the Dutch army was the large number of Javanese in the ranks, as soon as it became clear that the Japanese had landed these troops shed their uniforms and melted into the population.

The convoy in travelling south rested over night where an abandoned RASC and NAAFI store was situated, the troops decided rather than let the enemy win these supplies helped them selves, additional weaponry and ammunition was also secured.

Initially the plan was to travel south to either Pameungpeuk or Tjilatjap on the coast to arrange ships to evacuate the force but when this was seen as impractical the course was set for the mountains to prepare for guerrilla fighting.

Although there was much enemy air activity and several air raid warnings the convoy was not attacked, some thing that caused some concern amongst the Australians, they had feared for some time that our Dutch Allies who in their opinion lacked the moral fibre to fight the enemy might surrender the island to the Japs.

The convoy eventually reached the mountains and commenced the ascent into the high country, the narrow mountain track, twisted and turned, at times the track was cut into the mountain, with a drop of hundreds of feet to the valley below. Late at night the convoy halted and word came through that the Dutch authorities had surrendered and the Australian Senior officer, Brigadier Blackburn had issued orders for all troops under his command to surrender. You can imagine the feelings of our troops, Neil's emotions at first were of shame, then concern about his family, how would they react to the news, all his visions of returning to Australia as a conquering hero were now dashed to the ground.

The surrender of Java can only be described as the completion of the biggest, quickest, the most extensive conquest of the largest area of the world, as a triumph of planning by the Japanese, in a period of six weeks the following surrenders took place.

**Ambon 6TH February, Rabaul 14TH February, Singapore 15th February,
Timor 23rd February Java 8th March**

Next morning the vehicles had to tackle the hazardous task of turning around on the narrow track, with a rock wall on one side & a drop of hundreds of feet on the other, despite instructions from Headquarters that all arms & ammunition were to be handed over undamaged, most troops did some thing to neutralise their weapons.

With heavy hearts all on all those board the convoy sadly boarded the vehicles and travelled back down the mountain to the village of Lilles, here they spent several weeks billeted in empty open shops, few Japanese were seen at this stage. Pioneer Officers retained control; periodically organised groups under the control of NCOs were marched to an adjoining village for swimming.

All this freedom from the full impact of imprisonment was soon to end, in a very short time the bulk of the Pioneers were loaded onto a train and taken to the Island Capital Batavia, from the railway station the prisoners were marched to a Dutch army barracks. Previously known as the Bicycle camp, it had been taken over by the Japanese Army and now was a Prisoner Of War Camp. After the initial shock of being enclosed in a prison with armed Jap Guards the camp settled down to some quick organisation, fortunately the unit organisation was strong and the officers were still in charge. Neil found himself in Hut No 8 with the survivors from HMAS Perth,

the cruiser which was sunk during the Battle of Sunda Straits, only a few of A Company survived the action so they were insufficient to have a hut of their own. The other companies of the battalion had their own huts, as did the Americans, it should be noted that none of the 2/3rd Machine Gun people were in Batavia, they were sent to a POW camp near Bandoeng in central Java.

Unlike the Germans, the Japanese refused to allow Red Cross access to their prisoners nor did they provide lists of prisoners through the Red Cross, this resulted in some families not knowing of the fate of their men till the end of the war. Neil's family were more fortunate, the Japanese in their propaganda broadcasts from Java would end each session with the names of some 10 or 12 POWs. It was late in 1942 when Neil's name was broadcast, the stationmaster at Victoria Park Railway station who was a radio ham and monitored these broadcasts, heard Neil's name and late at night cycled to his mother's house to advise her of the fact.

The last letter from Neil told his family he had arrived in Java in February, learning of the capture of Java in March, his family had no knowledge of his fate, they had to wait until July when the army letter listed him as "missing" the letter is copied below

These two notices were typical of over 30,000 sent to families of prisoners. Tragically for some 7000 Australian families it was the only advice to arrive until that fatal one at the war's end.

DISTRICT RECORDS
WESTERN COMMAND
Register

AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES

W. Aust. L of C Area Records Office,
PERTH.
1 July1942

Dear Madam,

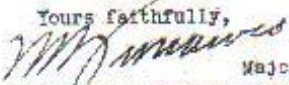
With reference to my recent letter informing you of the absence of news concerning your son

WX.16572 Private Neil Ormiston MacPHERSON
.....
2/2 Pioneer Battalion A.I.F.
.....

I am directed by the Minister for the Army to advise you that he/~~she~~ must now be posted as Missing and to again convey to you his sincere sympathy.

Your natural anxiety at the non receipt of further particulars is appreciated and you are assured that everything possible is being done by the Department and through the International Red Cross to obtain further news of him/~~her~~ on receipt of which you will be immediately notified by telegram.

Mrs Jamima P MacPherson,
41 Saleham St.,
VICTORIA PARK

Yours faithfully,

Major
Officer in Charge Records.

The next few months for the prisoners were to be the calm before the storm, the worst aspect was the change of diet to one of rice, little meat, few vegetables, a few working parties were sent out, but the work was not demanding. Neil & Bluey shared a room at the end of Hut 8 with the Lowe brothers from Melbourne, Herb & George; Herb was to drown when his ship was torpedoed in the China Sea in September 1944. Hunger was to bring on a decision for Neil to sell his watch a present from his mother who he was convinced would sanction the decision; the benefits included the purchase of additional food that he shared with his three roommates

BURMA

On the 7th October 1942 Neil, one of 1800 POWs were transported to Tanjong Priok and boarded the Emperor's Prison Ship Kenkon Maru, a 4574 ton battered, rusty, old hulk, which had been converted into a troop transport, conditions below deck were horrific, The Commanding Officer of the Pioneer Battalion Lt Colonel Jack Williams, was in charge of the prisoners, with Lt Colonel Black as second in command. Several tiered wooden shelves covered most of the hold, the head room between each layer would have been only 30 inches,

and each POW had only enough space to sit up on, in the humid tropical condition, this enclosed hold soon rivalled the Black Hole Of Calcutta.

It was fortunate that these prisoners only spent five days on board, but as it was, there was one death in the stifling conditions, October 12th saw the vessel pull into Singapore Harbour, which eight months after the surrender was still crammed with sunken wrecks from the enemy bombings. After the usual prolonged wait after disembarking, the several counts and searches, the POWs were loaded into trucks like cattle and taken through the city and out to Changi Barracks. The trip was most demoralising, bomb damage was to be seen across most of the city, and the civilian [population looked cowed and hurried about there business pointedly looking the other way as the convoy of prisoners passed.

The arrival at Changi Barracks was an experience that left the Java contingent bewildered, no Jap guards were to be seen within the vast complex, the Australians had taken over a large area of what had been a 5 star complex, multi storey stone buildings had housed British troops in comfort

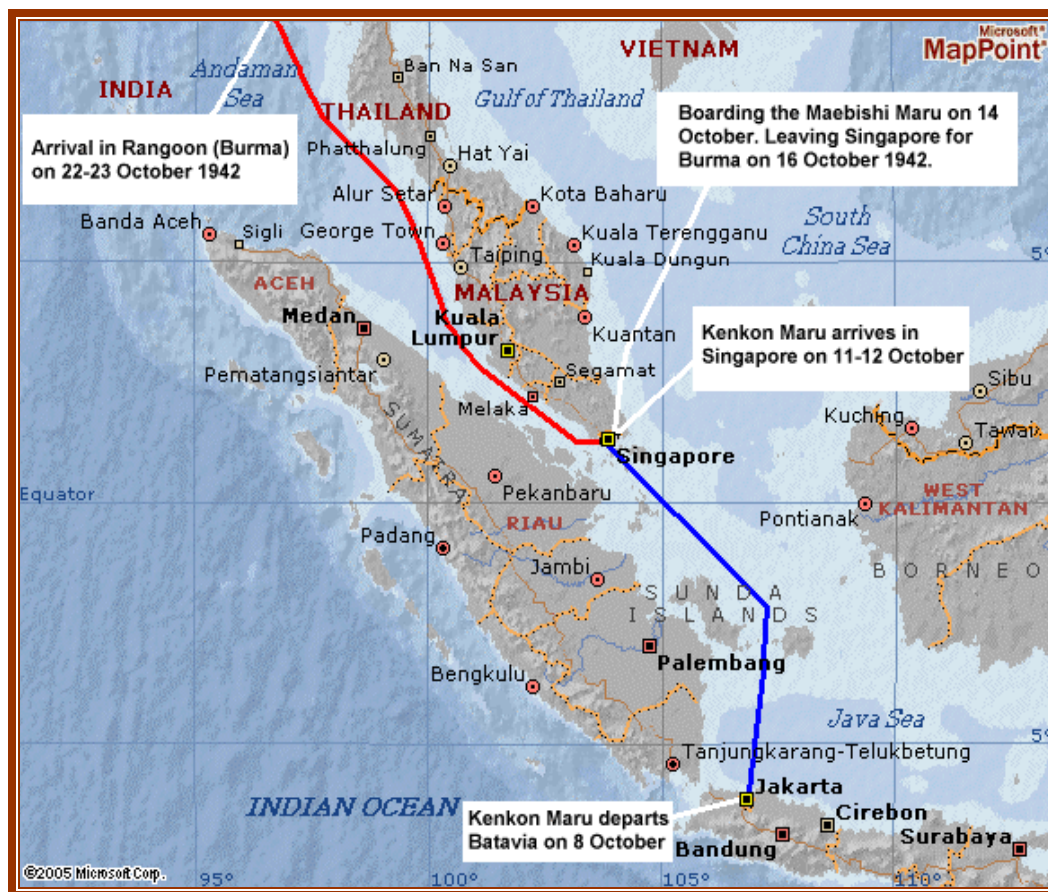
While there, the prisoners from Java shared in a very rare issue of Red Cross Parcels, one parcel between six prisoners, the next time they were to see another issue was 13 months later at the 105 Kilo camp again it was one parcel between eight POWs

Two days later, 14th October they boarded the 7005 ton Maebashi Maru, 1700 sweating dehydrated bodies crammed into several tiered holds and spent the next 5 hours sweltering below the steel decks, before the vessel departed to head north up the west coast of Malay.

On the 23rd October the vessel with its prisoners entered the Irrawaddy delta and finally moored at the wharf in Rangoon, in sight of a bombed and devastated city, the POWs were not only to suffer a night of suffocating heat in the deep holds they were invaded by thousands of hungry mosquitos.

On the same day another ship the 4621 ton Shinyu Maru left Singapore loaded with 500 Australian and Dutch POWs on its way to Burma, on the following day it was attacked by the Dutch Submarine O-23, 100 of the POWs on board were killed. Some of the survivors were picked up and returned to Singapore to travel later to Thailand by train, others were later picked up by vessels that continued to Rangoon, these prisoners eventually arrived at Thanbyuzayat in January 1943

The following two maps show the journeys of the three Hell Ships





24th October saw the men transferred to their third Hell Ship the 3807 ton Yamagata Maru for a short trip across the Gulf of Martaban and into the wide Salween River to the port of Moulmein. Arriving late in the evening, after being marshalled on the wharf, they were marched the 3 kilometres to the famous Moulmein Goal. Neil's strongest memories of this midnight march was the smell of dead bodies still entombed in bombed out dwellings some several months after hostilities ceased.

The prisoners were housed overnight in the Moulmein goal, after being cooped up in the holds of the prison ship for days the large prison dormitory with bare wooden bench beds, with a hollowed wooden block for a pillow, was a luxury, only spoilt by the dozens of bed bugs that shared their night.

Just above the goal could be seen the famous large gold pagoda that was featured in the Rudyard Kipling popular song "By The Old Moulmein Pagoda, Looking Eastward The Sea" In later months the Australians sang their own version of the song, the words "Come back you British Soldiers came ye back to Mandalay" to "Come back you Pommie Bastards" etc

Next day 800 prisoners that were to become Williams Force were marched the three kilometres through the town to the railway station, on the way they were treated to a wonderful display of generosity from the local people, despite being bashed repeatedly by the flanking guards they persistently broke through to hand fruit, biscuits and other food to the wretched looking white prisoners who had until a few months ago been their colonial masters



Neil centre with Owen Heron & Tom Cream
Revisit Rangoon station 57 years later

On reaching Thanbyuzayat, a small village some 60 km from Moulmein, the prisoners were marched into what was to be the base camp and hospital for the BURMA FORCE. Here they were paraded and had to listen to a prolonged harangue from Colonel Nagatoma, who was to be their Japanese commander. The prisoners were told that they had surrendered and were disgraced; it was only the generosity of the Emperor that they were allowed to live.

The same Nagatoma was executed as a war criminal for his part in ordering the execution of a number of prisoners under his control.,



The starting point of the Burmese section of the Burma-Thailand railway.
This photograph shows a Japanese soldier standing guard at the guardhouse near the entrance gate to the prisoner of war (POW) camp, Thanbyuzayat camp

This article is part of report on all the Railway Forces Neil prepared for an American Research group's URL www.mansell.com

Williams Force under Lt Col John Williams C.O. of the 2/2nd Pioneers

Made up of 884 men mainly 2/2 Pioneer Battalion, sailors of the Cruiser HMAS Perth. arrived Thanbyuzayat late **October 1942** and became part of 3 Group, moved to Tanyin 35 kilo camp first. Camp Commandant Lt Yamada was one of the best and tolerant Japanese Officers on the Railway who respected Col Williams, unfortunately he was later moved. The Medical Officer was Ear Nose & Throat Specialist Lt Col Eadie. In March 1943 with Anderson Force, they moved back to the 26 Kilo camp Kunknikway, here they were to come under the control of the unpredictable and drunkard Lt Naito. On April 4th they commenced the work of laying the rails & sleepers through to where the two ends joined on 17 October 1943, known as No 1 Mobile Force. It should be noted that in all Australian camps on the Burma end of the Railway, Officers accompanied the men on the work parties and actively intervened to protect the men from punishment, often taking the bashing themselves. This was very much the rule in Williams and Anderson Forces where the Officers had won the respect of the men in action in Syria, Java & Malaya, Col Anderson won his Victoria Cross in the Malaya fighting.

56 years later Neil returned with his son to Thanbyuzayat to pay his respects to so many of his mates with graves at the Commonwealth War Cemetery here



In 1998 Neil returns to where the railway started from in 1942

In October 1942 by truck those who were in Williams Force under Pioneer C.O. Lt Col Williams travelled to Tanyin the 35-kilo camp where work on the railway was to commence. Black Force made up of half the group from Java, a mixed lot Australian American and Dutch, were sent to the 40 kilo camp, work commenced on the railway on the 29th October, these Australians along with Green Force who arrived early October were the first Australians to work on the Death Railway and subsequently experienced the longest period of work of any other Australian forces

As day followed tedious day, as food supplies shrunk, as work quotas increased, few noticed the gradual deterioration in their health, fortunately the wet season with it's plethora of diseases had not yet arrived, despite this the daily sick parade lengthened.

In December Neil in his state of malnutrition, lack of a balanced diet, contracted conjunctivitis, his condition became so bad that he was sent down to Thanbyuzayat, where a base hospital camp existed, with very few drugs, there was little the medical staff could do to treat the sick. Major W.E. Fisher was Medical Officer in charge of the hospital and he ruled with a rod of iron, nick named the Fuhrer he ran a strict but caring, operation. It was late in 1942 and although the railway construction had only been going for 3 to 4 months, long hours, poor and insufficient food was already starting to take its toll. There was little that could be done for the conjunctivitis patients except to protect their eyes from the cruel glare of the sun, give them rest, they were all also allowed to stand at the head of the queues for meals.

1943

By January, with rest, and a work free regime, Neil's condition improved to the extent that he was discharged from hospital on the 16th February and returned to the work camp. By this time work had been in progress for 5 months and at the 35 Kilo camp most of the embankments were nearing completion the bridges in the area were also constructed.

From the 35 kilo William's Force moved back to the Kunknikway, 26kilo camp on the 29th March 1943, the camp commandant was the much feared drunken Capt Nito, a real mental case whose behaviour was quite unpredictable, when cholera broke out in the camp and the cases were isolated from the main camp, he told British interpreter Capt Drower that he had cholera and made him move up into the Cholera camp.

About this time prisoners were allowed to send home a post card, they were restricted in what they could say and although they all realised it was a propaganda stunt they also felt it important that their families got news of their survival

IMPERIAL JAPANESE ARMY

I am interned at The War Prisoners Camp at
Moulmein in Burma.

My health is (good, ~~bad~~, ~~very bad~~)
I have not had any illness.
~~I (am) (have been) in hospital.~~

I am (~~am~~) working (for pay at 10 CENTS per day).
My salary is 270 CENTS per month.

I am with friends EDWARD ROWE, KENNICK

AM IN GOOD SPIRITS, HOPE ALL WELL AT
HOME ALL MY LOVE KEEP SMILING

From N.O. MACPHERSON

SERVICE DES PRISONNIERS DE GUERRE.

FROM.
NAME NEIL MACPHERSON

NATIONALITY AUSTRALIAN

RANK PRIVATE

CAMP War Prisoners Camp,
Moulmein, BURMA.

To MRS J.E. MACPHERSON
41 SALEHAM STREET
VICTORIA PARK
WEST AUSTRALIA

By now the monsoon season was upon the area but there was no respite to the drive by the Japanese to have the railway operating by midyear to allow supplies & reinforcements to be transported to the fighting on the India Burma border.

For obvious reasons William's Force was selected for the arduous task of actually laying the rails, probably because they were still a disciplined group, still controlled by the battalion system, and with skills required by the Japs. Also chosen was Anderson Force, for similar

reasons, Colonel Anderson won a Victoria Cross in Malaya, he had the elements of his battalions in his force. Construction of the railway on the prepared trace involved the heavy work of carrying timber sleepers and the rails, in all weather; it also involved the more arduous task of ballasting. The worst aspect of ballasting was driving the heavy metal under the sleepers by the use of a heavy hammer headed pick, this involved striking the metal with the hammer at the base of the sleeper, a miss stroke and the shock of striking the sleeper caused many shoulder injuries.



Burma. 1943. Australian and British prisoners of war (POWs) laying track on the Burma-Thailand railway. The POWs working on the railway in Burma were all members of A Force, designated by the Japanese as Group 3 and Group 5. Most of the men in the track laying teams came from Anderson and Williams Force which came from Java and were part of "A" Force,.

Another serious hazard encountered by the Mobile Force was the movement from camp to camp as the line was extended, this meant that the Australians often moved into camps occupied by native labourers with all the filth and disease associated with these unfortunates whose deaths were in the thousands.

Another opportunity to send a message home was presented and again it held a strong propaganda content, all lies of course, Neil again grasped the opportunity. The second message was written as he was preparing for his departure from Tamarkan on the long journey to Japan

IMPERIAL JAPANESE ARMY.

I am still in a P. O. W. Camp near Moulmein, Burma. There are 20,000 Prisoners, being Australian, Dutch, English, and American. There are several camps of 2/3000 prisoners who work at settled labour daily.

We are quartered in very plain huts. The climate is good. Our life is now easier with regard to food, medicine and clothes. The Japanese Commander sincerely endeavours to treat prisoners kindly.

Officers' salary is based on salary of Japanese Officers of the same rank and every prisoner who performs labour or duty is given daily wages from 25 cents (minimum) to 45 cents, according to rank and work.

Canteens are established where we can buy some extra foods and smokes. By courtesy of the Japanese Commander we conduct concerts in the camps, and a limited number go to a picture show about once per month.

STILL GOOD HEALTH AND SPIRITS PLEASE DONOT
WORRY LOVE TO ALL AT HOME FROM NEIL

IMPERIAL JAPANESE ARMY

Date 19-5-44

Your mails (and) are received with thanks.

My health is (good, usual, poor).

~~I am ill in hospital.~~

I am working for pay (~~I am paid monthly salary~~).

~~I am not working.~~

My best regards to YOURSELF AND ALL THE FAMILY

ALL MY LOVE AND KISSES. KEEP SMILING

Yours ever, LOVING SON

NEIL

A copy of Neil's Pay Book with a list of his injections, these were given to Australian POWs by their own Army Doctors during 1942/3, Tanyin the 35 Kilo Camp was the first Railway Camp he worked in, Norman Eadie a Lt Colonel was a noted Ear Nose & Throat Specialist in Melbourne Pre War. Kunitkaway the 26 Kilo camp was where Dr Richards from Anderson Force joined Williams Force, Dr Rowley Richards was to be the only Officer to survive the sinking of the Hell Ship Rakuyo Maru in September 1944. His book, "The Survival Factor" is a classic account of the Death Railway and imprisonment in Japan. Taunzaun the 60 Kilo camp was the Cholera Camp, when Neil's group arrived in this camp they had to bury a number of rotting bodies of native Cholera victims left when the native force moved on.

Neil was one of the few POWs who managed to carry his pay book and personal papers and photos through his entire period of captivity, the following excerpts tell their own story

DAILY RATES
Promotions, Reductions, Appointments.

Deferred Pay	Arrears Pay (excluding Deferred)	Exchange Allowance	Allocations	NET RATE—		Commencing Date of new Rate
				In Figures	In Words	
2/-	5/-	16	2/-	3/-	Three Shillings	22.9.41
2/-	5/-	6	2/-	3/6	Three Shillings and sixpence	7.11.41
			2/-	4/6	Four Shillings and sixpence	

2 Soldier's Signature *Alfred Pearson*

Deferred pay starts

EARNINGS AND OTHER CREDITS.
Earnings to be entered Monthly and when any alteration of net rate is made.

EARNINGS AT NET RATES AND PARTICULARS OF OTHER CREDITS.					Progressive Total.	17 OCT 1941
From.	To.	No. of Days.	Net Rate.	Amount.		
22.9.41	7.10.41	15	3/-	2 10/-	2 10/-	<i>P. Army Bill</i>
10.10.41	23.10.41	14	3/-	8 8/-	4 16/-	<i>Robt - 246</i>
24.10.41	6.11.41	14	3/-	2 2/-	6 18/-	<i>Robt - 296</i>
7.11.41	14.12.41	78	3/6	4 18/-	11 16/-	<i>1st Shillings</i>
1.11.41	4.12.41	28	2/-	1 8/-	13 4/-	<i>1st Shillings</i>
5.12.41	18.12.41	14	4/6	3 3/-	16 7/-	<i>1st Shillings</i>
19.12.41	1.1.42	14	4/6	3 3/-	19 10/-	<i>Manchester.</i>
2.1.42	15.1.42	14	4/6	3 3/-	22 13/-	<i>Harry Barker</i>
16.1.42	29.1.42	14	4/6	3 3/-	25 16/-	<i>Harry Barker</i>
30.1.42	31.3.42	61	4/6	13 14/-	39 10 6	<i>Miss Copp</i>
Forward				39 10 6	39 10 6	

Last entry after capture

Soldier's Signature					
CASH PAYMENTS, FINES, FORFEITURES, AND OTHER DEBITS.					
Date	No. of Cash	Place	Amount	Progressive Total	Officer's Signature
26-9-41	1	Northam	12	12	Dr Rowley Richards
10-10-41	2	NORTHAM	22	34	Dr Rowley Richards
11-10-41	3	"	16	50	Dr Rowley Richards
23-10-41	4	"	6	56	Dr Rowley Richards
9-NOV-1941	5	"	21	77	Dr Rowley Richards
18-11-41	6	"	2	79	Dr Rowley Richards
14-12-41	7	On leave before	3	82	Dr Rowley Richards
18-12-41	8	" 3500	476	1296	Dr Rowley Richards
17-1-42	9	" 5000	65	1361	Dr Rowley Richards
26-1-42	10	"	176	1537	Dr Rowley Richards
Forward			248	1537	

A record of the inoculations received, Dr Rowley Richards maintained the Cholera injections saved the lives of hundreds of the Mobile Force from the fate of many others on the railway

OTHER INNOCULATIONS			
	DATE	LOCATION	SIGNATURE
TAB 1/2CC	20 Jan 42	In the Field	Dr Rowley Richards
TT 1CC	20 Jan 42	In the Field	Dr Rowley Richards
PLAGUE DIVER 1CC	2/10/42	POW Camp BATAVIA	Dr Rowley Richards
CHOLERA	1/2 CC 6/10/42	" BATAVIA	Dr Rowley Richards
TYPHOID	1 CC 3/11/42	" TANYIN BURMA	Dr Rowley Richards
DYSENTERY	1 1/2 CC 15/11/42	" TANYIN BURMA	Dr Rowley Richards
Anticholera vaccine	1cc 25/3/43	Tanyin Burma	Dr Rowley Richards
Vaccination	26/5/43	Kukilkaung "	Dr Rowley Richards
Prophyl	1CC 26/5/43	Tanyin "	Dr Rowley Richards
Cholera	1cc 28/5/43	" "	Dr Rowley Richards

Neil by now was suffering repeated bouts of malaria as well as dysentery, there were no drugs at this stage to treat the repeated attacks which left the sufferer weaker with each bout, Neil has only vague recollections of this period of his imprisonment. Coinciding with the malaria attacks, cholera, dysentery, ulcers, Berri Berri pellagra and malnutrition were taking their toll of the work force. The Japanese attitude to the prisoners was that they were all expendable, there was an endless supply of them, the non workers, the sick & dying were put on half rations, in the work

camps however all rations were averaged out by the camp leaders, in fact any extra food such as eggs or fruit coming into the camps was immediately reserved for the sick. In the hospital base camps with no workers rations were reduced which made recovery nigh impossible, some times the dead were kept on strength for a while to partly overcome this deficiency.

750 Pioneers worked on the Burma Thailand Railway, of these 177 died there, about 25% a further 73 Pioneers from the Railway drowned on their way to Japan when their transport was torpedoed, only 2/3rd of the 910 taken prisoner survived to get home, amongst them Neil

In the August September & October period multiple deaths were a daily occurrence, bodies were sewn into rice bags before burial in an attempt to preserve the remains for reburial at the war's end. Work continued through the worst areas for these diseases and camps at the 45 kilo 50 kilo & 60 kilo were cesspits, many had been occupied by native labourers whose hygiene left a lot to be desired. On several occasions on taking over a camp the Pioneers had to bury dead natives lying on the ground amongst the huts, not a very pleasant task, bed bugs left by previous occupants along with lice were also prevalent and made life miserable for all prisoners.

August saw Neil now in such a poor state after repeated malaria attacks and incapable of continuing with the work was transferred to the camp hospital, a hut situated in the lowest part of the camp surrounded with water, Colonel Edie an ear nose & throat specialist was camp doctor, with no drugs he could do little for the patients. When the work force moved out of the camp, Neil along with the chronically sick were transferred back to the 30 kilo camp which had recently been made the base hospital after repeated bombing of Thanbyuzayat had forced the evacuation of the patients there.

Allied bombing now was an added terror for the POWs, as the line progressed so did the tempo of the bombing raids increase, the Japanese deliberately placed the POW camps next to strategic targets such as rail junctions, army camps, bridges. Naturally the toll on prisoners was heavy, both in death & injury, morale also became effected, what with over work, malnutrition, disease, and death the raids were an additional threat.

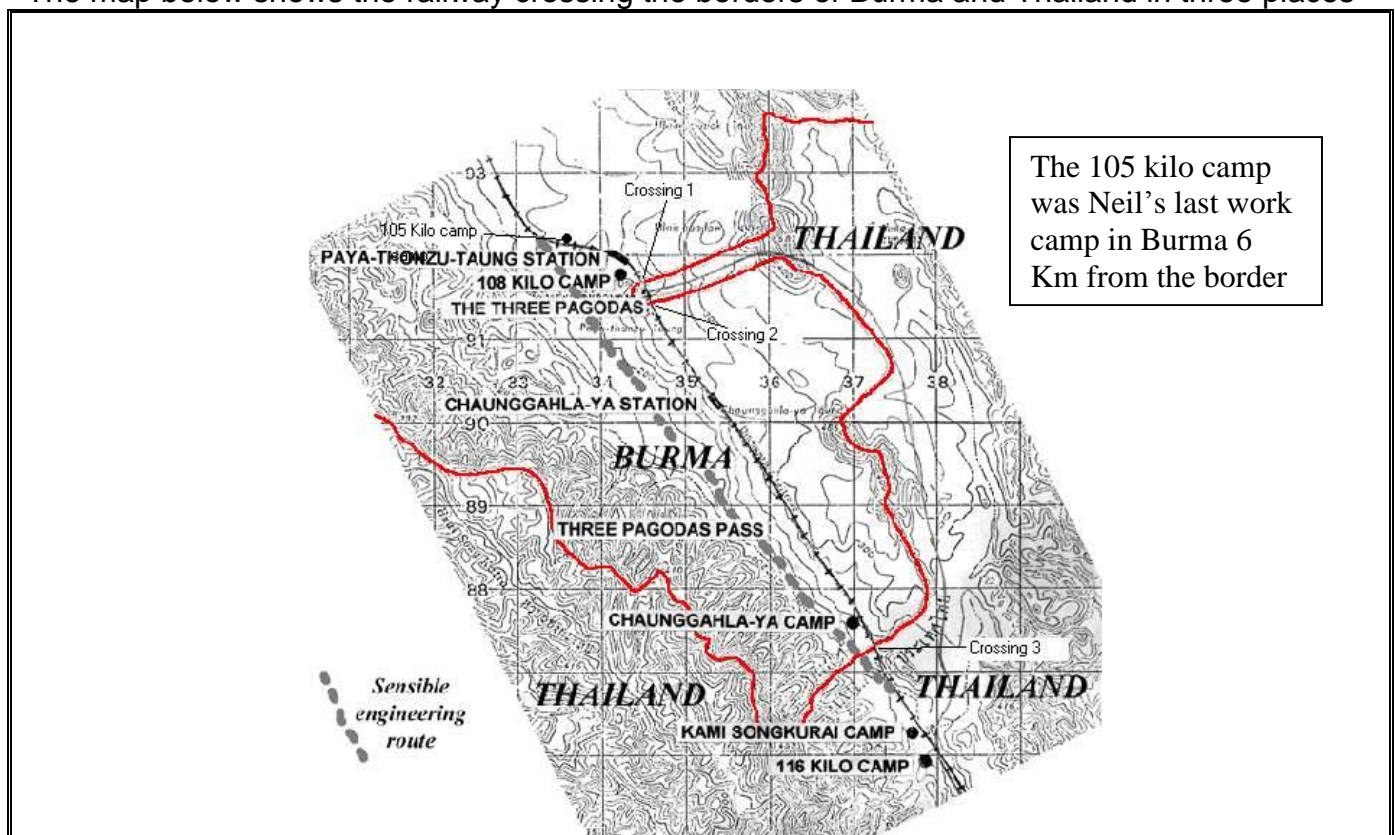
August & September were terrible times for Neil, deaths in the camp soared, he continued to have repeated bouts of Malaria and he was just a skeleton, with pellagra, tinea and lice infestation his nights were spent tossing on the bare bamboo slats. Throughout this period he kept himself alive with thoughts of home and how much his mother would be worried at no news, every night he said his prayers calling on God to bless each one of his family by name.

In October with the joining of the two ends of the railway at Nike with only maintenance work required most of the camps on the Burma end were closed and the prisoners concentrated at the 105 kilo camp about 6 km from the Burma Thailand border. Neil was one of the sick from the 30 kilo camp transferred to the 105 kilo camp, it was here that he fought the worst malaria bouts of his internment, for the first time quinine became available, up to eight large tablets a day was prescribed for the malaria sufferers. The side effects from quinine were almost as bad as the fever, also it was a cause of extreme depression, but it was here in December 1943, some 21 months after capture that letters from Jemima caught up with Neil. Oh how these letters were treasured, read & re-read it is possible that they were a major factor in his slow recovery, it was here also that he was reunited with his best mate Bluey Rowe who was one of

the few who worked through the full period of the railway construction. As the railway construction had finished work parties were needed only for light work, but food was in short supply still, disease was rampant in this jungle area and the death rate continued to soar.

A diversion occurred no doubt as a move to lift morale in the camp, the Senior Officer asked the camp commandant to allow a special holiday on the first Tuesday in November, a National holiday in Australia Melbourne Cup day. The whole camp got into the spirit, even dressed some POWs up as ladies with parasols, bookies plied their trade and one of the prisoners who had a remarkable memory and could recite every cup winner since the start of the race last century, volunteered as the race commentator. The workshop made up a cabinet similar to the wireless cabinets of the day large enough for the commentator to crouch inside and call the race, the starters were all well known cup winners and no one but the commentator knew who was going to win. The climax of the meeting was the race and the commentator was superb, his voice filled with the excitement reminiscent of real races resonated through the camp and for a short few minutes the prisoners forgot their misery the squalor and the sickness and became a typical Australian race crowd.

The map below shows the railway crossing the borders of Burma and Thailand in three places



Today the Three Pagoda Pass is thriving tourist Centre, with a village and a market place, tourists cannot pass through into Burma but daily busloads of tourists make the long journey to visit this historical site. For centuries the invading Burmese armies have entered rich Thailand down the same valley that the Japanese used to build the Death Railway, slaves captured by the Burmese centuries before travelled this pass, so history was repeating itself in 1943-44



The Three Pagoda Pass in 2004, flags at actual border crossing



This train photographed emerging from a cutting during the war could have contained POWs

Some back ground on the work force on the railway follows

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE BURMA END OF THE DEATH RAILWAY

Length of actual railway constructed in Burma 115 kilometres. Base camp Thanbyuzayat
2 separate POW groups under separate Japanese commands No 5 & No 3 were kept apart during construction.

A Force No 3 Group

Brigadier Varley A Force Australian prisoners from Singapore 3000 Sept 1942

Ex Sumatra 498 British 1200 Dutch 2 Australian Officers total 1700 Sept 42

Ex Java Colonel Williams 1500 Australians 200 USA 100 Dutch total 1800 Oct 42

No 5 Group

Ex Java 385 Australian, 455 American 885 Dutch January 1943

This group were on board two transports, which were bombed by British planes off the Burma coast, 51 prisoners were killed 71 wounded. 500 Japanese soldiers were killed when their hold took a direct hit. and their ship sunk.

Work commenced immediately on arrival and the 10500 prisoners were formed into work parties made up as follows (Note official figures 11760)

Williams Force Lt Colonel Williams 2/2nd Pioneer Battalion

Anderson Force Lt Colonel Anderson V.C. 2/19th Battalion

Green Force Major Charles Green 2/4th Machine Gun Battalion

Ramsay Force Lt Colonel George Ramsay 2/30th Battalion

Black Force Lt Colonel Black 2/3rd Reserve M.T. (610 Australians 190 USA ex Java)

British Sumatra Btn Major Apthorpe 498 British 1200 Dutch

War Cemetery Thanbyuzayat.

Over 4000 graves, contains some 1400 Australians, after the end of hostilities the British War Graves Commission drew a line through Nike, all graves north of that line were exhumed and the remains were buried at Thanbyuzayat. Those Australians buried south of that line, about 1400 were buried at Kanchanaburi many Thailand workers were transferred to a hospital at the 55-kilo camp and those that died there are buried in Thanbyuzayat. Many Burma end workers, evacuated to Thailand who subsequently died are also buried at Kanchanaburi.

PRISONER OF WAR STATISTICS

Death rate mong F Force prisoners to May 1944

Nationality	Max Numbers	Deaths	%
Australian	3662	1060	28.94
British	3400	2036	59.88
Total	7062	3096	43.84

POW deaths statistics combined 3 and 5 groups Burma Sept 1942 July 1944

Nationality	Max Numbers	Deaths	%
Australian	4851	771	15.8
British	482	133	27.6
American	650	128	19.7
Dutch	5554	697	12.4
	11537	1729	14.8

2ND WORLD WAR

8184 Australians became prisoners of the Germans 265 died rate 3%

22376 Australians became prisoners of the Japanese 8031 died rate 36%

Burma Thailand Death Railway

Number of prisoners who worked on railway	61806
Australians who worked on railway	13000
Deaths to the end of the war	12399
Australian railway deaths	2815
British railway deaths	6904
Dutch railway deaths over	2000
American railway deaths	337
Deaths during 6 months speedo period	7000
Deaths in F Force	3150 45%
British deaths in F Force	2333 61%
Deaths in H Force	898 27%

(The Australian deaths listed do not include those railway workers who died of the effects of their experiences on the railway, after being transported to other areas)

Total Australian prisoner of war deaths in Asia

Death Railway	35%
Borneo	23%
At Sea	20%
Ambon	9%
Other Areas	13%

Prisoner Deaths in the war against Japan

Note Australian death rate very high due partly to the huge numbers lost at sea on way to Japan, Australians who survived best on the death railway were preferred by Japs

Country	Total Deaths	Prisoners	Death Rate
Australia	7412	21726	34%
Canada	273	1691	16%
U.K.	12473	50016	25%

New Zealand	31	121	26%
United States	7107	25180	33%
Dutch (white)	8500	7000	23%
<hr/>			
Totals	35756	132134	27%

Additional Australians captured, Nurses 71

1944

In January the evacuation of prisoners from the jungle camps of Burma commenced, Neil was among the first batch to leave, loaded on open rail wagons they travelled the long journey to Tamarkan, over 200 km. On seeing the work that had been carried out by the Thailand Force they could only be staggered by the obstacles over come in building the Thailand section. Massive cuttings through solid rock, viaducts clinging to the sides of sheer cliffs, and shaky tiered wooden bridges over deep chasms, one many tiered bridge had been named "Pack Of Cards Bridge" because it had collapsed so many times during construction carrying several prisoners to their death.





A Railway Pass 1944



Hellfire Pass 50 years on

On reaching the River Kwai the Burma evacuees were amazed to see a magnificent steel bridge built from several large steel trusses, they found later that the Dutch originally built the bridge in Java to service an Oil Field. The Japs had taken it down and transported it to Thailand, an engineering feat in itself; the prisoners had worked for many months reconstructing the bridge over the River Kwai. The English Colonel in charge of the Tamarkan Camp was Colonel Philip Toosey, it was this Officer that the Colonel in the Movie Bridge Over The River Kwai, played by Alec Guinness was based, The part played by fictional Colonel Nicholson in the film had no resemblance to the real life Colonel Toosey who at every opportunity interceded with the Japanese to save his men who considered him a brave resourceful and respected officer.



River Kwai Bridge Post War showing repaired spans destroyed in bombing raid 1944
Picture taken in the dry season when the river level was extremely low, later a huge dam constructed up river by the Australian Snowy Mountain Engineers, now controls river flow.

The Khao Laem Dam now covers what was once the railway route, as well as controlling the river flow it produces power for the people in the area.



The two bridges – the upper, the steel – taken late in 1943.

The photo taken by a reconnaissance aircraft when the railway first commenced operation. The railway shown at the top left edge of the photo is heading towards Burma

The Burma prisoners soon settled in at the Tamarkan Camp, here they met many old friends from other camps on the Burma side, many mates had been separated when sickness broke up the partnerships, it was here that many learnt of the deaths of friends during the horror months.

Conditions in the camp were a great improvement after the work camps in the jungle, fresh vegetables and meat were coming into the camp regularly, being a long established camp many innovations were apparent, kitchens were well constructed, ovens, to produce the occasional bun, made out of ground rice. Because the camp was close to towns and transportation adequate a supply of food although insufficient to quell the pangs of hunger was still sufficient to add weight to skeletons, especially as work was light.

One of the perks was to volunteer for the water party to carry water up the mountain to the Jap look out post; this earned the volunteer double ration that night. Neil volunteered several times, each time he swore never again, the agony of struggling up a 45 degree slope mountain track, with a half 45 gallon drum full of water slung on a bamboo pole carried by two men, still in a weakened state was heart breaking. However time softens all and it wasn't long when hunger pains again arrived for the prisoners to say "that wasn't that bad was it?" so it was on again

In May 1944 Neil was fortunate to win a prized and sought after perk, joining a team of water carriers whose task was to keep water from the only well in the camp up to the Japanese kitchen, using cut down 45 gallon drums. After the Japanese staff and guards had finished their meal the water carriers were given access to what food was left in the cooking utensils, as the Japanese lived well, in the 6 weeks before he left for Japan he was able to build up his weight and physical strength.

In June 1944 a group of Australians from Tamarkan were selected for the start of a journey to Japan, Neil along with several of his close mates were among the 150 prisoners selected including Bluey Rowe, Dick Gill, Ken Swanson, Ken Robertson all Pioneers.

None knew that on the other side of the world on June 6th a massive invasion of the continent was taking place in Normandy, a million men were involved and the casualties were very high but it was to signal to all the free world that at last judgement was nigh for both German & Japanese aggressors.

The group of POWs in Neil's Japan party first moved to Non Ploduk, the junction of the Bangkok, Singapore railway and the new Burma Thai spur, from there they boarded steel rice wagons for the long journey down through the Malay Peninsula. Crammed 30 to an enclosed wagon, unbearably hot during the day and freezing cold at night, insufficient room to stretch out, they suffered endlessly for the 6 days of the journey. In retrospect as all of the Australians in the party had moved up to Burma in Hellships the vote was that the rail travel was on a scale of ten number 2 and the sea trip number 1 with ten the most comfortable.

60 years later Neil with three other exPOWs paused at Non Pladuc station for photographs, all four had passed through here at some time during their POW life, while Neil did one journey, Bill Haskell and Ernie Redman did the return journey, also on their way to Japan.



**Return to Non Pladuc 2004 ex POWS L-R Bill Haskell 84, George Wiseman 94
Neil MacPherson 82 Ernie Redman 87**



A rice wagon used to transport POWs,

This photo was taken in 2003 at Non Pladuc station in Thailand and shows Neil with his son Alan, it also puts into perspective the size of the wagon and leaves nothing to the imagination in picturing 30 bodies crammed into this space for 5 days

On arrival at Singapore the POWs were transported by trucks to the River Valley Road camp, a transit camp for prisoners waiting transport to Japan, where urgently needed slaves would labour to fill the gaps left by their own men now fighting a losing war at the extremities of their empire.

It was going to be a 6 months wait for Neil and his group, during this time they were to be used as labour in a number areas, on the wharves, loading ammunition, camped on an island building a Dry Dock, etc. It was here that they met up with other groups which had left Tamarkan weeks before they did, these contained Pioneers, sailors off the Perth and Americans that they had worked along side on the railway in Burma.

Singapore Island was over crowded in 1944, none of the inhabitants had been allowed to move away except for those sent away for slave labour, the island never having been self sufficient in food relied on it coming from the mainland. The Japanese would not allow sufficient transport for this task so the population was starving, resulting in most dogs, cats and animal pets ending up at the end of the food chain. In the River Valley Road camp the situation was similar and the good condition Neill had put on while enjoying the perks in Tamarkan was soon dissipating.

On Jeep Island where the Dry Dock was being built it was even more difficult to find any extra food, however Neil's young Pioneer mate Ken Robinson, a born scavenger from Benalla found a new source of food, mussels growing on the barb wire in the water surrounding the small island. Sneaking off one night they ate their fill, by next morning both were in dire straits vomiting up the contents of their stomach, this obviously saved their lives as another Australian Corporal Gorlick died from a similar diet of poisoned sea life.

Jeep Island got its name from the senior Japanese guard in charge of the 600 Australians on the Island, he was one of the most brutal guards encountered, he was responsible for directing the terrible bashing of Capt Rowley Richards the doctor on Jeep Island

A morale lifting arrival of mail happened while Neil was on Jeep Island working on the Dry Dock the envelope shown below contained a letter written in May 1943 some 15 months earlier



In September about 1000 prisoners left River Valley Rd boarding vessels bound for Japan, another 1000, mostly British left from another camp, these were loaded onto two transports, the Rakuyo Maru and the Katchidoki Maru, and sadly neither vessel was to finish the journey. On the 12th of September in the South China Seas both ships were torpedoed by US submarines and only about 600 of the 2000 prisoners survived. 10762 prisoners died while being transported on Japanese prison ships, all told 35,756 prisoners of the Japanese lost their lives, equal to 27% of all Japanese POWs

In December 1944 it was the turn of the rest of the POWs in River Valley Road camp to start the journey top Japan, the following article that Neil wrote for an American Research Group Internet site tells the story of that journey

Voyage of the Awa Maru

26th December 1944 to 15th January 1945

Singapore to Moji Japan

[Hell Ship Page](#) [Main Page](#) [POW Camp List](#)

**By Neil O. MacPherson, Australia - rescued at Sendyu, Fukuoka
#24**

At Singapore, on 15th December 1944, Neil and several hundred other prisoners lined up on the parade ground at River Valley Road Camp, with their pathetic little bundle of possessions, awaiting movement to the wharves, after many searches of their gear, and several counts, they boarded trucks for the trip to the docks. Naturally there was great excitement amongst the prisoners, this was a break from the boredom of an unchanging routine, reduced rations, and every one had visions of being rescued on by the US Navy on their voyage to Japan. Every one had vivid memories of the British destroyer **HMS Cossack** that rescued some hundred odd merchant navy crews from torpedoed ships on their way to Germany for internment.

On arrival at the docks which was familiar territory, for most prisoners had done long stints on the docks loading cargo for Japan, they could see that a large merchant ship, actually the last survivor of Japans larger merchant ships, the 11,249 ton **Awa Maru** was to be their means of transport to the land of the cherry blossom. By now they were accustomed to the conditions on these prison ships and with little protest made there way down into the bowels of the ship. They were to spend the next 11 days, down below anchored out in the outer harbour while the convoy assembled, the conditions below decks, with little ventilation, crammed into sardine like shelves, in the hot tropic climate was beyond description.

Allowed up on deck only for toilet needs, the two meals a day were cooked on deck by the Japanese cooks and taken down below for distribution. Weak tea was the only drink supplied. During toilet visits

the POWs were allowed to fill their water bottles with condensation escaping from steam pipes on the deck.

Life below decks was far from boring as survival was in every one's mind. How would so many of us be able to escape up the narrow ladder onto the deck in case of a torpedo or air attack? This was cause for endless discussion and, many sailors who survived the sinking of the **HMAS Perth** and the **USS Houston** gave instructions on how to proceed. Games of chess, checkers and draughts were popular while each prisoner counted the hours till the next food issue. Very few guards ventured down into the fetid holds, so we were free to pursue the few distractions available. Stories were told and retold, old jokes retold, the few letters received read and shared amongst friends. Neil had ten letters from home and friends by this time and they were read and re-read, and photographs were exchanged.

After 11 long days and nights in these sweltering conditions there was movement up on the decks. Christmas day was unmarked with any thing special and remains just another of the many days spent out in the outer harbour. On the 26th the anchor was raised and the vessel slowly made headway out to sea. Boxing Day 1944 will be a day that Neil will remember for the rest of his life.

It is interesting to record that Japanese nationals out numbered POWs on board the **Awa Maru**. Many women were on board; perhaps they were Comfort Ladies returning from entertaining the Jap soldiery or officers wives. We never learned who they were. Prisoners did however find it interesting to look up to the upper decks and see these ladies paying them much attention, especially as they were attending their toilet needs on the open platforms protruding over the side of the top deck.

As soon as the ship settled down onto a regular course, a compass secretly owned by a sailor on board established that the heading was in a north easterly direction, rumours set in that they were heading for Saigon and, sure enough, after some days the convoy anchored out side Saigon. Some POWs had been in Saigon before going to Singapore and recognized the harbour. The convoy took on more enemy troops and a few more vessels joined the convoy, by now it numbered some 20 or more vessels, tankers, merchant ships, and a couple of escorts that were judged to be frigates.

From Saigon the convoy was seldom far from land, hugging the shallow waters of the coastline. After all the losses of hundreds of merchant ships to Allied submarines, it was obvious that the only way to avoid the U.S. submarine blockade, was to hug the coast of China, anchoring each night in an enclosed bay, relatively safe from submarine attack. During the day low flying aircraft patrolled the waters around the convoy searching for signs of submarine activity.

In September 1945 when Neil was being evacuated from Japan in the American Aircraft Carrier, **USS Chenango (ACV-28)**, which had an illustrious war record against the enemy, an officer on board asked Neil when he was transported to Japan from Asia. When he was told

December 1944, he retorted "*Bullshit, our blockade was so tight even a rowing boat wouldn't have got through*" when told not only the **Awa Maru** got through to Japan unscathed but another 20 odd ships in the convoy.

As the days passed and the convoy moved further into northern waters the weather became colder. It was now mid winter in the northern hemisphere, and the prisoners with little clothing to protect them from the cold, found it harder to go up onto the wind swept upper deck for their ablutions. To use our bowels perched on the rickety platform attached to the deck railing, and extending over the water, was as hazardous as well as an uncomfortable and freezing experience. Many prisoners preferred to suffer the discomforts of constipation. Snow was often seen on the upper deck. Below decks, where in the tropics, we had sweltered in the enclosed spaces; the rusty steel side plates dripped cold water from the condensation.

The oppressively hot conditions in the earlier part of the journey now turned into a chilling cold. With little flesh to insulate them the POWS suffered badly, not having wintered for nearly three years while in the tropics meant that their blood had become very thin. Neil himself had lost all of the physical condition he had put on along the "Death Railway" in Tamarkan.

On the 15th January 1945 our ship entered the harbour of **Moji**. It was mid winter in Japan, many of us were without footwear, and we were not looking forward to lining up on the snow covered wharf while our guards went through the tedious task of counting their charges.

A very embarrassing episode took place on the upper deck of the vessel before we disembarked. As we had come from a cholera infected area the Japanese decided to check each prisoner to find out if any of us were carriers of the cholera germ. The standard procedure was for the prisoner to drop his trousers, bend over, and a glass rod was inserted into the rectum, not usually in a gentle manner I can tell you, the sample from the bowel was later tested. What made the whole exercise so demeaning was that Japanese women performed the task; most of them were of the bovine type. The job was punctuated by giggles from these women as they were comparing our equipment with their own countrymen -- a subject of much conjecture and fun in later months.

When we were marched off the ship with our few possessions, we were lined up and counted, recounted and counted again, this was important as the army was now handing us over to our new owners and every one had to be accounted for. It seemed like hours standing on the freezing wharf, with snow falling around us, and why none of us got pneumonia we will never know. Eventually they must have been satisfied, as they marched us off to a nearby hall, where we settled down on the plain wooden floor to wait the next move, it's worth reporting that in the toilets at the hall were scratched the names of many prisoners that had passed through on their way to their slave labour.

Among the names were notes of those prisoners that had survived the sinking of the ***Rakuyo Maru*** in September, there were scribbled details of the sinking, how the Japs had allowed the writings to remain is a puzzle, maybe no English speaking Jap had used the toilets.

One of Neil's strongest memories was the issue of a rice meal, which contained meat and vegetables, although almost frozen it was most nourishing. The prisoners slept on the floor of the hall that night, then next day were marched to the railway station where they were loaded into a railway carriage. Only the POWs and guards were in each car. It was interesting to see the civilians being pushed into already over crowded carriages by rail employees at the stations. Eventually the prisoners were unloaded and were marched to a camp which was surrounded by a high wooden fence, this was to be their home for the next 8 months, the village was **Sendyu, site of POW Camp Fukuoka #24**, coal mining was the main industry, the prisoners were to be slave labourers in the mine for the next 8 months

The never ending supply of slave labour was used to operate these mines and consequently the death rates were very high, the larger the camp, the worse the conditions were for the prisoners. Omuta 17 was an example where some 2000 POWs worked in horrific conditions. As Neil reports in another part of this narrative his group were fortunate in their location, a small village a more considerate employer and comfortable quarters.

For the POWs from the Awa Maru, although arriving in a mid winter that was the coldest for 40 years, they did not have to survive a full winter, and subsequently not one of their number died from pneumonia, one of the major causes of prisoner deaths.

Life in Camp 24 soon settled into a regular routine, a few weeks after arrival another group of prisoners arrive all English from Formosa, in shocking condition, they were a depressing site, dirty unwashed, in ragged clothing, bug and lice infected, the death rate was high with 19 dyeing in the next few months.

It was common practice in Japan for centuries to use the human excreta as fertiliser, a common site in the camp were the ladies with bullock drawn carts with big boxes who ladles the excreta out of the troughs and took it away for distribution on the vegetables growing on any vacant ground. The cabbages especially benefited from this treatment growing to a huge size up to 3 feet high, it was not unusual for a POW to be sitting straddling the trough to be disturbed by the lady with the ladle.

Another source of embarrassment in the early days was in the bath house, on arrival back in camp from the mine the first task was to try and get rid of the coal dust covering the body, in the bath house four big boxes about four feet high contained hot water surrounded by duck boards was soon crowded with naked bodies. The idea was to bucket the water from the boxes over the body and despite the absence of soap try and wash away the coal dust by scrubbing, during this process the Japanese cleaning ladies came and went, they seemed uninterested in the male bodies and as they were short and dumpy and so rugged up in layers of clothing the men found them of little interest as sex objects.

The map below shows the position of the many POW camps the Japanese operated in Kyushu during the war, Kyushu was well known for its coalmines, some like Omuta had been operating for over 100 years. In many cases mines closed due to hazardous conditions were reopened to meet Japan's demand for fuel to keep its war industries going.

Moji where most POW hell ship journeys terminated is shown as Moji Ku at the top of the map, the square marked Fukuoka Area contained a number of large POW camps that are not listed

Neil's camp No 24 shown as Emukae is the most western camp on the island, close to the famous island of Hirado where the famous Scottish navigator William Adams died, Richard Clavell's main character in his book Shogun, Anjin San was based on Adam's life.



The terrible toll on the lives of POWs en route to Japan through the sinking of the transports by United States Submarines and aircraft can best be illustrated by the following report

Ships Sunk Whilst Carrying Japanese Prisoners of War 1942-1945

Lisbon Maru

Hong Kong to Japan Sunk by submarine 2nd October 1942, 5 miles from Tung Fusham Island of China coast. Total prisoners on board 1816. **Missing or dead 839. Survivors 977**, plus two survivors died Shanghai

Nichimi 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 6.20S Lon 116.30

Tamabuku Maru

Singapore to Japan Torpedoed off Goto Nagasaki Japan 24th June 1944 Total prisoners on board 772 **dead or missing 560 survivors 212 Australians 186**

Haragiki Maru

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

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 Moaka Moaka 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 Lat 13.0N Long 114.0E Total number of prisoners on board 1214 **dead or missing 1079 survivors 135**

Australians lost in sinking 543

Kachidoki Maru

Singapore to Japan Torpedoed by aircraft 12 September 1944 off East Hainan Island Lat 18.0N Long 114.0E Total prisoners on board 950 **dead or missing 435 survivors 515**

Tyofuko Maru

Singapore to Japan Sunk by aircraft 21st September 1942 at Point Batta NW Philippines Total prisoners on board 1287 **dead or missing 907 Survivors 380**

Arisan Maru

Manilla/Japan Torpedoed in Bashi Straits 24th October 1944 Number of prisoners on board 1782 No Survivors dead or missing 1778 died later 4

Monteviedo Maru

Torpedoed by submarine 1st July 1942 off Bagador light house east of Luzon Total prisoners on board **1053 No Survivors Australians**

Oryyoku Maru, Enoura Maru Brazil Maru

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

Sinking Of The Awa Maru

The Awa Maru shown leaving Japan after unloading the POWs, although given safe passage by the US Government on the basis of carrying Red Cross Supplies it was later established that the Japs used the voyage to carry War Supplies. On its return journey, on the 1st April 1945 still in it's Red Cross colours despite carrying a full load of war supplies and Military personnel it was torpedoed and 2048 of its passengers were drowned only one survivor was saved. The

Captain of the US Submarine Queen fish was later court Martialled for his crew's action, his defence was that he never received the advice that the ship had been given a free passage. It was the same submarine that was part of the pack that sank the Rakuyo Maru, and was later involved in rescuing some of the survivors. 12 Australians, including Arthur Bancroft off the Cruiser Perth, a West Australian still alive today in March 2005 spent 5 days on a raft before rescue, in 1942 Neil met up with Arthur in Batavia POW camp and recognised him as the bank clerk at the Union Bank of Australia in Milligan Street where he took the Hardie daily bank deposit



Awamaru departs Moji on her last voyage February 17th 1945

It is perhaps fortunate for Neil that he was given the opportunity to see the Japanese as civilians and not only as the brutal Military that he was exposed to for three years of his captivity. At Senryu camp the prisoners were housed in quarters previously used to house Japanese miners, warm comfortable huts 12 to a room, sleeping on thick matting, ample hot water for cleaning after work, no soap but still refreshing. The Coal Mine Manager had obviously told the Camp Commandant that the prisoners were to be handed over each day at the mine in good condition, having had ample sleep to produce coal, so that the guards apart from the usual petty harassment refrained from ill treatment. The only down side was that insufficient food, hard work sent all the prisoners on a downward slide to their ultimate demise if the conditions they were experiencing continued for very long

Part of a report published in the National POW Magazine Neil wrote

150 of the group including 34 Americans, travelled to Senryu on the north west coast of Kyushu, after several days of training by Jap miners they were classified fit to work in the Sumitoma owned coalmine. Compared to the, horrors, death, disease, squalid conditions and brutal treatment on the railway conditions at camp 24 were 5 star, comfortable warm huts, 12 to an airy room. Apart from petty harassment by the guards, insufficient food to sustain the long shift in cramped and hazardous conditions underground the moral was excellent. The Jap miners under whom we worked were helpful in teaching the prisoners how to survive in this dangerous environment, and unlike other work areas no punishments were handed out. Towards the end their lunch boxes contained very little more than the prisoners.

.On the 16th August 1945 Neil was working underground on day shift, when half way through the shift the prisoners were returned to the camp with out explanation. The Camp Commandant addressed the prisoners with the words "The Order Has Been Given To Stop The Fight" one Australian in typical ocker humour called out "Who Won" The announcement was not

unexpected for the Japanese miners had for some weeks hinted at a climax approaching, the endless parade of B29 Bombers overhead with no resistance from the Japanese told its story also. Never the less the euphoria that followed the announcement is unimaginable to outsiders, to have survived so many hazards, dangers, diseases, hunger and brutality when so many of their mates had died was the dominant feeling.



Australian POWs Camp 24 August 1945

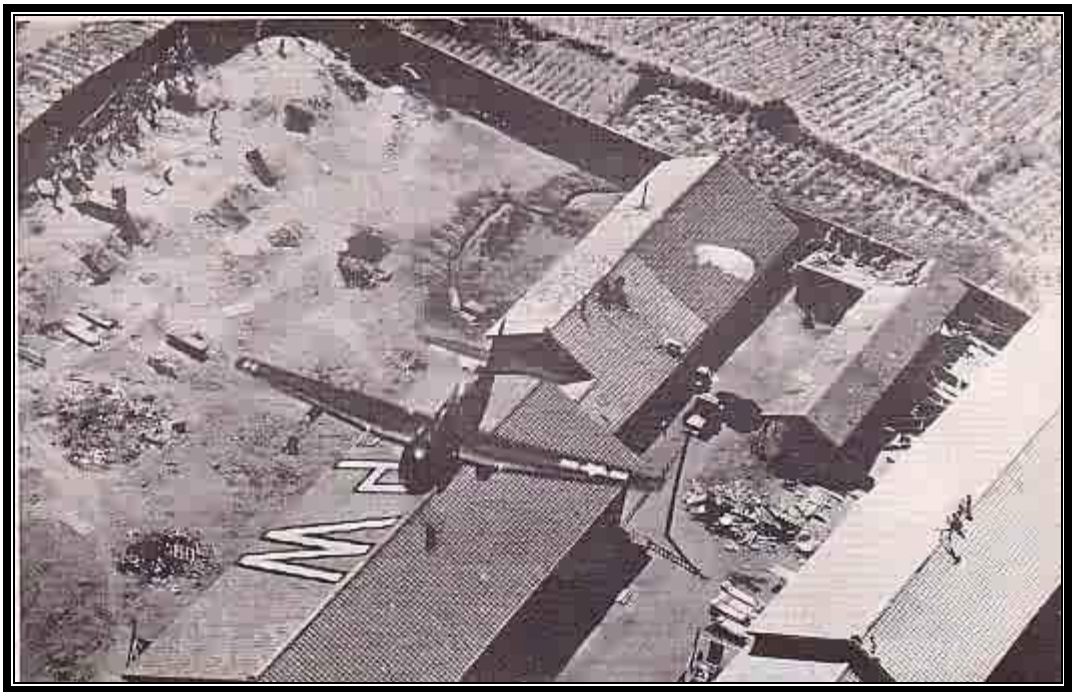
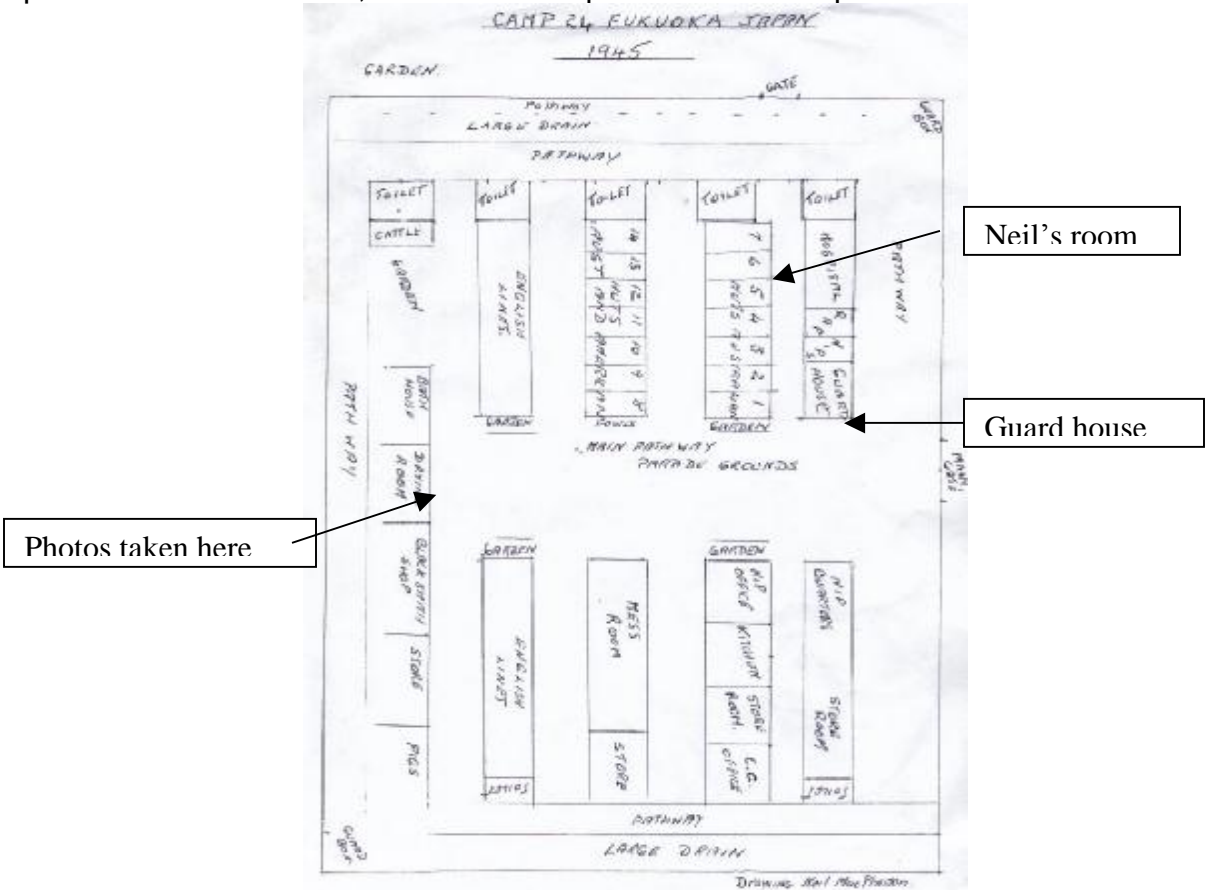


**American POWs Camp 24 Officers in centre front row, Dutch Air Force Flt Lt Aitzetter
US Doctor Capt Julian Goodman, Aust RAAF Flt Lt Sutherland, Aust Doctor Capt Higgins**

The following five weeks are a pleasant memory, the feeling of being free, of still being alive, of surviving all the odds, the promise of returning home to loved ones, five days later the dropping of supplies by US bombers and the surfeit of food of cigarettes of clothes. Many of the men took the opportunity to take hikes into the country they met farmers and their families and shared the bounty of food with them, with a sense of national pride, not one former prisoner took revenge on the civilians.

At a VIP reception in Emukae in 2002 that Neil attended an elderly Japanese lady told this story, she was on duty at the railway station when the Australian prisoners arrived, they knew of the arrival and expected to see a group of cowed, heads bowed slaves disembark. Instead she was surprised to see a cheery lot with lots of joking and laughter and they lined up with dignity heads erect to be counted, on leaving the station they showed courtesy and stepped aside to allow women and children to pass. The same lady was on duty when the prisoners departed and she said instead of an arrogant strutting lot as one would expect as part of a victorious army, they were still the same courteous cheerful lot that had arrived 9 months previously.

Camp 24 Neil was in room 6, behind the hospital and a short quick walk to the mess



A US Avenger reconnaissance aircraft identifies a POW camp for later airdrops

On the 15th September the men were transported by VIP train to Nagasaki, just 5 weeks after the atom bombing they saw the devastation, the train passed through the very centre of the blast area to the wharf where a US Naval Task Force had taken over and were there to greet the released prisoners. If the end of the war was an emotional event in the lives of the POWs, their first contact in 3 ½ years with our own Allied armed forces, the victors, and women as well was to surpass even that.

After being processed, deloused, issued clothing, given real coffee and donuts, they were taken out to US Air Craft Carrier Chenango; on board they were housed on stretchers in the cavernous hanger deck. Every thing possible was done to ensure their comfort and to bring them up to date with the events of the missing years, newsreels were run, movies shown, lectures given in the days before the POWs were transferred onto Okinawa. Japanese soldiers were still active in the hills and making night sorties on the Camp where the POWs were billeted. Next day Neil boarded a B24 Bomber which joined an endless stream of aircraft ferrying POWs to Manila, here the Australians came under the control of the AIF for the first time in 3 ½ years. Telegrams to and from the families was an emotional time for both the exPOWs and their kin, Neil found that both brothers were in the services one brother Jim was in the fighting in Borneo, his 17 year old brother was in training at Flinders naval Depot

On the 6th October the British Aircraft carrier HMS Formidable took on board 1600 released POWs in Manila for a speedy journey to Australia, at Sydney on the 13th October 1942 the men were amazed at the reception they received from the huge crowds that lined the streets and welcomed them. Most Japanese POWs harboured a feeling of shame during their incarceration at the humiliation of the surrender and the loss of dignity, not in the heat of battle, but from an order by their commander

13 October 1945
RAISE THE SUN
AIRCRAFT CARRIER BRINGS
HOME MORE P.O.W.s



Home ward bound



Camp 24 Pows on HMS Formidable Neil end middle row left in cap



The Formidable had a proud fighting record and the hospitality shown towards the POWs was quite fantastic, in the post war years many of the ship's crew returned to Australia for the occasional reunion of the Formidable POWs

A parade through Sydney and the throngs of cheering people was one of the very emotional experiences of the returning ex POWs, an over night stay at Ingleburn Army camp followed next day by a train trip to Melbourne for Neil. At Royal Park Camp he made contact with his young brother Jack at Flinders Naval Depot where an very understanding C.O. gave the just turned 18 year old recruit a compassionate 48 hour leave pass. So after nearly 5 years the two brothers were reunited, only 13 years old when Neil sailed for overseas this lad was now a mature seasoned if not fully trained member of the Royal Australian Navy.



F5756 O.D John Fraser MacPherson

Another long train journey across our wide country, an overnight break in Adelaide before the journey across the Nullarbor saw Neil arrive home on his mother's 45th birthday, she was to claim that it was the best birthday present ever. Norm Mitchell arranged for the Company car to collect Neil's family and take them to the Claremont railway station where the troop train was to arrive, then on Neil's arrival take him and his family home for the long awaited very emotional family reunion,.



Neil and his dog Sandy reunited

A few weeks leave, a spell in Hollywood Hospital for much urgent treatment, all POWs carried within their bodies among other parasites, a worm infestation that need radical treatment. The next few months was spent either at the Point Walter Rehabilitation Centre or on leave, settling back into civilization was to prove to be a big challenge for returning POWs. Some became alcoholics, some had marriage breakdowns, fathers who left behind small children found themselves rejected as strangers. Neil found a loving family environment help ease him back into society, his mate Bluey Rowe moved into the family home and became one of the family and together they weathered the transition from the brutality and the trauma of imprisonment into a new world for them.

In these days of counselling of any person exposed to violence, death of horror it would surprise a lot of people to know that 14,000 Australians returning from the horrors of Japanese imprisonment were discharged with indecent haste. First of all it was realised that these men were not amiable to the discipline of continued army life, also more important the army could not wait to pass the problems which most exPOWs faced onto their families, hence the large number of tragedies faced by these men.

It is worth noting that within a few weeks, especially in Perth, returning POWs started looking for the company of their fellow POWS, Neil felt that it was a need to find the companionship and rekindle the common bond that had bound them for so long. Also it was found that the demands of friends and family to repeat over and again the story of their imprisonment was telling on them, like reliving experiences that at that stage they wanted to draw a curtain over. So it became known that certain hotels in Perth were the hangouts of the ex POWs and so it was a meeting place.

At the Point Walter the rehabilitation centre for ex POWs control was minimal, they were not required to sleep in camp but each morning returned and paraded at 9am to find out who was required for treatments such as Dental, interrogation etc. Neil and Bluey would cycle from Victoria Park where they lived, some seven kilometres to attend the parade and if not required would return home to enjoy the new life.

The end of Neil's army life came on the 11th February 1946 his certificate of service reads



World War Two Service



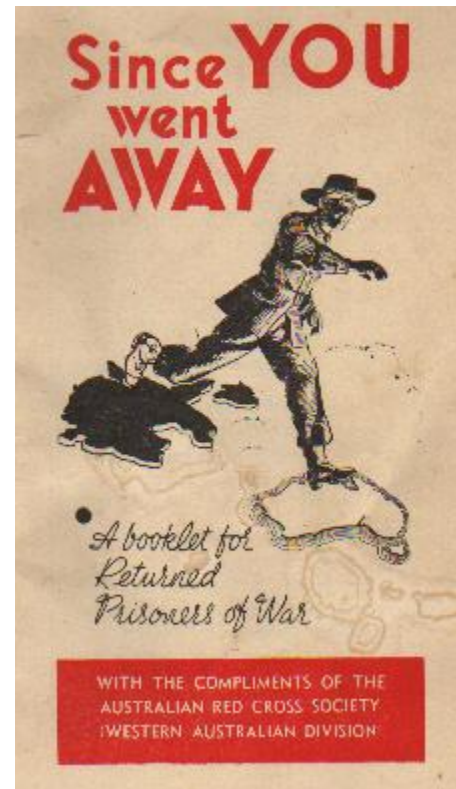
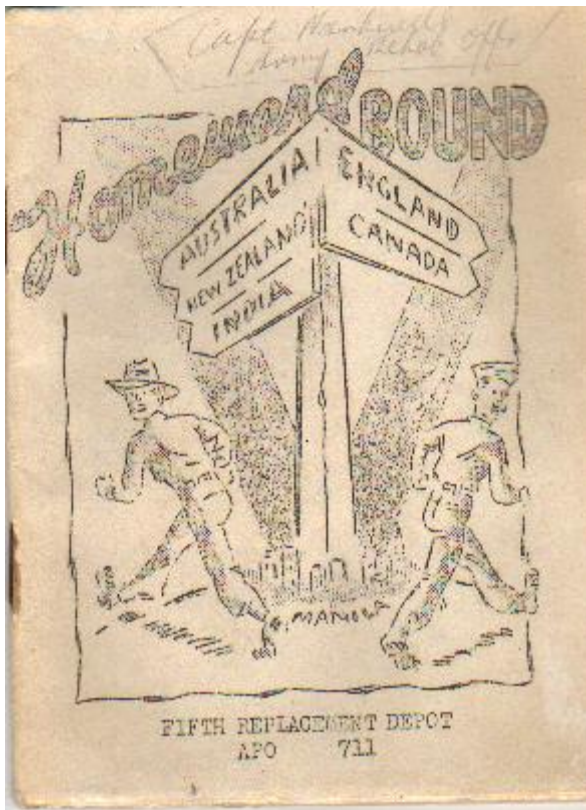
**PRIVATE
NEIL ORMISTON MACPHERSON
WX16572**

SERVICE	AUSTRALIAN ARMY
DATE OF BIRTH	14 MAY 1922
PLACE OF BIRTH	SCOTLAND
DATE OF ENLISTMENT	22 SEPTEMBER 1941
LOCALITY ON ENLISTMENT	VIC PARK, WA
PLACE OF ENLISTMENT	CLAREMONT, WA
NEXT OF KIN	MACPHERSON, JEMAMA
DATE OF DISCHARGE	11 FEBRUARY 1946
POSTING AT DISCHARGE	2/2 PIONEER BATTALION
PRISONER OF WAR	YES

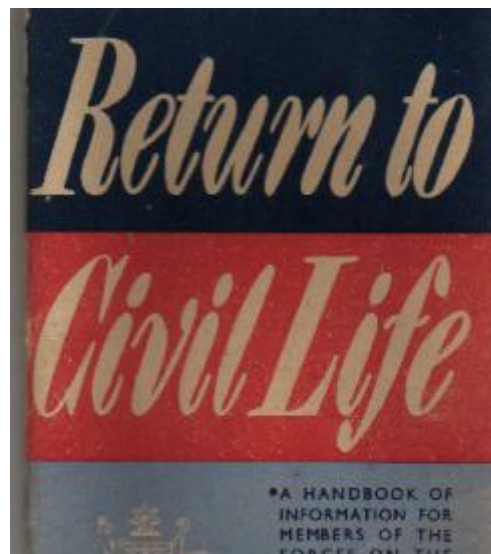


COMMONWEALTH DEPARTMENT OF
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

The Australian Government realised the problem facing so many men who had been isolated from not only the outside world but from what was happening in their own country, a genuine attempt to meet this challenge was the publication of several booklets, some are illustrated below



Finally a publication that was issued to all service men on discharge, on looking at this booklet 60 years after discharge Neil considered it a lot of gobbledegook created by desk bound public service people who could not get away from “public speak” not many returning POWs read it



Although the “Tell Us Your Story Program” requests a brief overview of the service man’s post war activities, the large amount of space devoted to this part of the narrative can be put down to the fact that most of it deals with the return to war time events and places and is part of the War experience. It also deals with the very important decision faced by all prisoners of the Japanese, that is reconciliation between two peoples, some will never be able to be other than bitter and

unforgiving, Neil has faced that point in his life early and now has many friends in the post war Japan generation

Another post war activity, which also has relevance to this story, is Neil's participation in the education process of exposing young Australians to the real story of the Death Railway, to see hundreds of teenagers over many years with tears in their eyes viewing the graves and learning the story of the hundreds of young Australians who gave their lives for their freedom

Before returning to his position with Hardies Neil took on a short 3-month rehabilitation course in Book Keeping, and in May 1945 he found himself sitting at a desk and taking up where he left off some 5 years previously. His Manager Norman Mitchell, who gave Neil the job back in 1936, made him very welcome and helped his rehabilitation by giving him extra responsibilities.

Neil's employer Hardie Trading Pty Ltd was a privately owned Company started in 1888 by a Scottish immigrant James Hardie, he later took in a partner Andrew Reid whose descendants were the major shareholder when Neil joined the firm. One of the few patriotic firms in Australia to acknowledge their employees sacrifice they arranged to make up the difference between their employees service pay and what they would have been paid by the firm. Here is a regular communication that Neil's mother received with a quarterly cheque for depositing in her bank account for Neil MacPherson, these payments went un interrupted during the period when Neil was posted as "missing believed prisoner. On Neil's return to civilian life he had a nest egg that enabled him to build his own home early in the 1950s, not a very simple task with the post war shortages of all building materials.

Some of the letters written to Neil's mother by Norm Mitchell during his imprisonment

Mrs. J. McPherson,
41, Saleham Street,
VICTORIA PARK W.A.

17th December 1942

Dear Mrs. McPherson,

I was very pleased to receive your letter advising that you had been informed by the Military authorities that Neil was a Prisoner of War.

This is very excellent news after so many months to know that he is alive and probably reasonably well.

Now that this suspense has ended no doubt you will feel greatly cheered about things in general.

I am,

Yours faithfully,



N.H. Mitchell.

Hardie Trading Pty. Ltd.

GENERAL MERCHANTS & MANUFACTURERS
IMPORT & EXPORT

CNR. STONE & HAVELOCK STREETS,
PERTH, W.A.

HEAD OFFICE: MELBOURNE
AND AT BRISBANE, SYDNEY, ADELAIDE, & WELLINGTON, N.Z.

15th December, 1944.

MANAGER:
A. T. REID
MANAGING DIRECTOR:
G. W. GIBSON
SALES OFFICE:
GRANDER'S ROAD,
FOOTSCRAY, VICTORIA
DEPARTMENT:
HEAVY CHEMICALS
DYESTUFFS
LAUNDRY & WOODLEN
MILL MACHINERY, ETC.
CANNED FRUITS, ETC.
SPRINKLERS
LACQUERS, ENAMELS
AND PAINTS

DIRECTORS:
J. T. REID
W. G. GAUNDERS
A. T. KENNEDY
BANKERS:
UNION BANK OF AUSTRALIA
LTD.
TELEGRAMS & TELEPHONE
ADDRESS:
"SHIPWATER" PERTH
TELEPHONE:
B 3024
G.P.O. BOX 182

Mrs. J. McPherson,
41 Saleham Street,
VICTORIA PARK, W.A.

Dear Madam,

This is to advise that we have today paid into your account, on behalf of Neil's War Service Pay, an amount of £5.14.10.

Attached hereto, is duplicate Bank Receipt, and voucher, and as usual, we ask you to sign the yellow voucher, and return to us, by earliest opportunity.

Please accept from us, best seasonal greetings, and a sincere hope that Neil is back with us, at no distant date.

Yours faithfully,
HARDIE TRADING PTY. LTD.



N.H. MITCHELL.

MANAGER FOR W.A.

Norman Mitchell was a very caring man, during the whole of Neil's imprisonment he maintained communication with Neil's mother, and as a measure of his compassion, when most in Australia were celebrating the end of the war Norm Mitchell sat at home and penned this letter

25 Hobbs Av.
Nedlands
Wed. 15/8/45!

Written VJ Day _____

Dear Mrs MacPherson

It is with great pleasure & relief that I have just heard of the final surrender of Japan.

I take the opportunity of expressing the earnest hope that you will quickly hear news of Neil's safety, & that his return to you will not be long delayed.

We have nothing but admiration for you & the thousands of other Mothers for the fortitude you have shown under the tremendous strain of these years of waiting.

Please accept my best wishes

Yours sincerely
— N.H. Mitchell

A brief summary of his post war life can be best illustrated in the following report prepared for circulation among new found family members while conducting a Family History Research

The life & times of Neil MacPherson

Revised June 2001

At the request of several newfound relative's world wide, for an exchange of personal details, the following represents briefly, my life to date.

Born in Aberdeen Scotland 14th may 1922, first son and second child of John McPherson & Jemima Forrest. My father an ex-serviceman from the 1914/18 war, gassed in the trenches, he migrated to Western Australia in 1923 to take up a Soldier's Group Settlers block at Margaret River, in the South West. This scheme which involved British ex servicemen, was under capitalised, under resourced, under equipped, settlers were virtually supplied with an axe and a cross cut saw to clear giant forest before production could commence. Few settlers succeeded and most like my family walked off their land with massive bank debt, to join the unemployment ranks in the state capital Perth, in the depression period.

Despite this inauspicious start, the majority of settlers weathered these difficult times and learnt to love their new land. After a few years battling in Perth our family now numbering seven, took up the offer of relief work building a new railway in an outback area, no amenities no electricity, no water supply. Life was rough, we lived in a two room hessian walled iron roof shanty, and moved it along the railway as construction proceeded, three of us older children were on Correspondence classes, supervised by an over worked mother. When the construction finished in 1934 we returned to Perth, but the family lived in near poverty until my sister & I left school at 14 years of age to help support the family, I continued my formal education including book keeping, at night school for several years.

Commencing work as a message boy for a National Company's Perth Branch, I was not to know that 50 years later I was to retire as State manager after serving the company in four states including head office. In 1941 after attaining the minimum age of 19 for enlistment in the Australian Army for overseas service and because of prior Army Cadet experience I was soon en route for the Middle East. Australia was then in dire need of reinforcements after the costly campaigns of Libya, Greece, Crete & Syria, after further training in desert warfare, posting to a Victorian based Pioneer Battalion with depleted ranks after intensive fighting in Syria. Japan by then had entered the war. Our battalion was selected as the vanguard for the return of the 7th division to Australia; en route we were landed first in Sumatra then in Java in an endeavour to halt the relentless march south of the enemy towards Australia. The 3000 troops had little chance against the hordes that landed in Java, after taking considerable casualties; we were finally forced to surrender when the Dutch, authorities that refused or could not defend the island capitulated to the enemy.

My family involvement in the war saw my father, falsifying his age at 47 also serving in the middle east, my brother Jim fought the Japs in Borneo my brother John joined the Navy, and brother in law George served in New Guinea, my mother worked in a munition factory

Then followed 31/2 years captivity, my 20th birthday was celebrated in Batavia prison camp, 21st in the jungles of Burma on the Death Railway 22nd on the River Kwai in Thailand, 23rd working in a coal mine in Kyushu Japan. My tour of Asia organised by the Japanese Army Tourist Service took me to Java, Singapore, Rangoon, Moulmein, Burma-Siam Death Railway, by rail in rice wagons down the Malay Peninsula to Singapore, then by prison hulk to Japan.

Rejoining Hardies in 1946, marriage in 1947, father of two daughters by 1949, there was no time to dwell on his war time traumas. Transferred to Head Office Melbourne in 1954, a short period on a

suburban sales territory, and then 3 years as a country Salesman. This latter period marketing the full range of Company products, prepared me to take over the flourishing Tasmanian Branch at Launceston, where I prospered for 5 years, increasing the sales force from one to five. 1965 saw the death of my wife in Tasmania, quickly followed by my return to Melbourne with my daughters to take up a promotion. In 1966 I married a former 41-year-old spinster work mate from my Perth days, who had chosen a career instead of marriage, and I took up a position as Sales Manager back at the Perth Branch.

We soon found an ideal home high in the ranges east of Perth, and the climate must have suited us both because between 1969 and 1973 we were blessed with three sons, the youngest born in my wife's 47th year, my 51st year. In 1969 I achieved my greatest ambition, I gained a private pilot's licence, my wife already had hers, as well as flying throughout our own vast state, on three occasions with our sons aboard we crossed the wide continent. Our destination each time was my wife's family 7000 acre grazing property on the Lachlan River in western NSW. These trips usually involved two-day flights, due to our flights being limited to daylight hours, however in 1975 I obtained a class IV instrument rating which authorised me for night flying. Christmas 1975 saw us flying out of Perth Airport in the dark at 3am with refuelling stops at Kalgoorlie, Ceduna South Australia & Mildura Victoria, before arriving at our destination just before nightfall, all of these flights were in four seater light planes, Cessnas or Pipers, such wonderful and fulfilling memories to look back on.

In 1980, on the retirement of the manager of Perth Branch, at the age of 58, I was offered the position of State Manager, the new and enlarged responsibilities of my job, on top of the pressures of a young family, saw cracks appear in our marriage. At this time my wife was studying for a BA in Sociology a part time tertiary course that had been spread over 9 years, this also brought added pressure, which culminated in an agreed no fault separation. I found an apartment within one mile of the family home and during the next 6 years the boys spent almost equal time between our two places. With a caravan permanently on site at an Indian Ocean beach resort 25 miles away saw us there every second weekend, swimming and snorkelling

In 1986 both my young brother John, then a Deputy Principal of a large primary school, & I retired, we bought a F100 Ford 4WD and a 22 foot caravan, built a home on the coast 84 km south of Perth, and we spend our winters travelling this vast continent of ours. Our summers we spend at home, entertaining our families on their week end visits, the area being famous for the Blue Manna crabs, a much sought after delicacy.

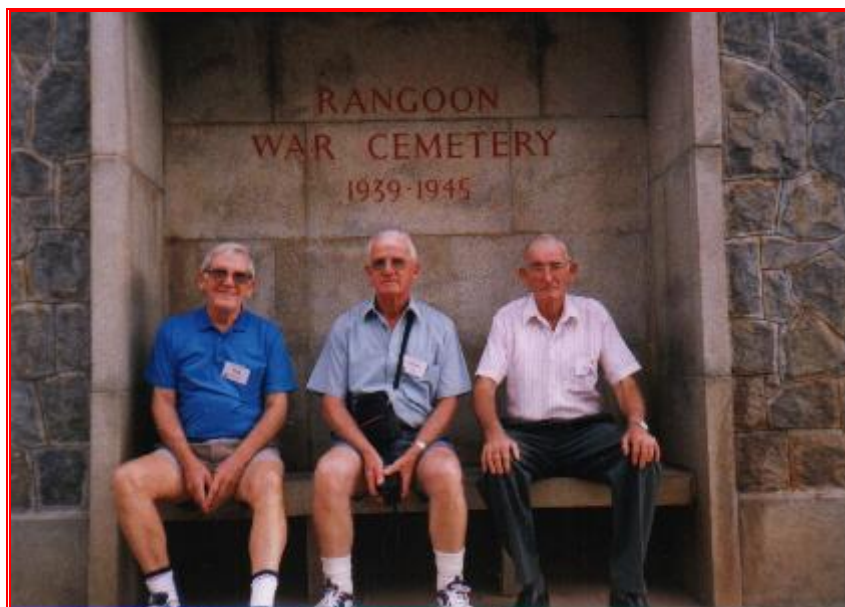
My elder son Ean spent a year in Thailand in 1987 as an exchange student, in 1988 he commenced a law degree at UWA, his love of Thailand & its people saw him returning there constantly to study the language. In 1990 he transferred to the National University in Canberra and added Asian Studies to his course, graduating in both in 1993, he won a 12 month Government scholarship to study Thai Law, at Thamaset University in Bangkok. That is when I found for the first time, an interest in revisiting the scenes of my youth, in 1994 my elder daughter Janice & I spent a month there, my son as our guide. We visited most of the Death Railway area, in Thailand as well as the war cemeteries there. In 1995 my son took up a 4-year tenure with an international Law firm in Bangkok. That was the incentive for me to return in 1996 with my second daughter Joanne, so she too could see for herself the scene of my war

time experience, both daughters were moved to tears when confronted with the graves of mere boys and the story of those war time horrors, a great shock to them, as it had mainly been a closed book with me and a very seldom discussed subject.

Five times in the past six years I have returned to Thailand with organised parties to celebrate Anzac Day Dawn service in Hellfire Pass & then Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, the past four years as a member of the organising committee. In 1998 & 1999 I also visited Burma; our group commenced work in the Burma jungle end of the railway, so it was a pilgrimage for me. For years Burma and in particular Thanbyuzayat where the War cemetery is situated has been out of bounds to tourists, it is only recently that restrictions have been lifted. In 1999 I found the grave at the Thanbyuzayat War Cemetery of a 1st cousin, a Gordon Highlander who I did not know existed until that year, he died in 1943.

My interest in Family research commenced seven years ago, as a member of the ANESFHS and the West Australian Genealogical Society, my return to Scotland in 1997 with my son Ean, my first visit, made me realise that my Scottish heritage was a tangible part of my life. My parents lost touch with their families many years ago, but despite this I now can number in the hundreds, the living members of my family, in Scotland, England, New Zealand, Canada, & the USA. In 1996 I bought my first computer and the learning curve has been terrific, in 1997 through Hotmail I started making contact with overseas relatives, last year we got our own modem and now receive up to 7 E.Mails a day. from newly found family members

In 1998 Neil returned to Thanbyuzayat with his son Ean to pay his respects at the graves of his many mates who died on the railway, after 56 years it was still a very emotional pilgrimage. In 1999 he returned again with two of his Pioneer mates, this time to find the grave of a cousin he was unaware was buried there, in 1998, he placed wreaths on this Scottish soldier's grave whose family did not know of its existence



West Australian Pioneers Neil, Owen Heron and Tom Cream

Graduating from Electric Typewriter, to Word processor then in 1994 to a computer opened the door for Neil's 10 years of research, apart from Family History, he has carried out research in depth of the Death Railway and Japan POWs and the camps. The urge to revisit the village in Japan where he spent the last period of his imprisonment saw him organise a return with another POW mate and their two sons in 2002.



Owen Heron, Ean & Neil MacPherson Anzac Day 2002
Kanchanaburi War Cemetery Thailand

This visit was so successful and fulfilling that in 2004 he organised another party, on his own initiative and led the party of six Australians back to the POW camps where they had spent time. The wide publicity attracted by these visits, in Japan, Australia, America and Britain has resulted in a crop of Internet reports some of them included below will help tell the story

This series is included in Wes Injerd's comprehensive web site, Wes travelled to Japan in the 1980 as a Missionary, married a Japanese lass and has four teen age children, he lives a very Christian life and has spent 20 years researching Kyushu POW Camps
<http://home.comcast.net/~winjerd/POWCamp1.htm>

Neil MacPherson and Owen Heron

Neil and Owen are two wonderful Australian ex-POWs whom I've had the privilege to meet. I first started corresponding with Neil in June of 2001. His e-mail messages below pretty much explain his amazing story, a story of bitterness giving way to forgiveness and compassion. In April of 2002, I met Neil and

Owen face-to-face for the first time, and it was an honor to travel with them to the town of **Emukae** where they were both interned for 8 months at **POW Camp #24** in Senryu.

Correspondence

Sent: Thursday, June 28, 2001

Greetings from Australia.

Details of your organizations have been supplied to me by the Australian War Memorial in Canberra as a possible source of information I am seeking.

My name is Neil MacPherson aged 79 years, in 1945 I was a prisoner of war working in a coal mine in Fukuoka Kyushu Japan, the camp was designated as Camp 24, it was possibly situated in Senu, although I am not certain.

With the passing of the years I have a desire to make contact with some one in the small village where our camp was situated, we were on good terms with the inhabitants and the Japanese mine workers we worked with.

It would be great if I could establish contact via the Internet with some one in the area who understands the English language.

A railway passed through the village, the mine headquarters was on a hill, there was a big hall where we were issued with lamps, the mine was accessed by rail trucks down a 30-degree tunnel.

The camp held about 250 prisoners, Australian, English, and a small group of Americans; we were evacuated by train to Nagasaki on the 14th September 1945.

In Camp 24, there were 114 Australians, 32 Americans and over 100 British, unfortunately our Australian contingent is reduced to about 10.

*Our group had been working on the **Burma Thailand railway** for 2 years before being sent to Japan, we had a number of survivors from the US cruiser Houston as well as some chaps from the 141st Artillery captured in Java.*

Looking forward to receiving your help with my request.

With warmest wishes, Neil MacPherson

Date: Fri, 27 Jul 2001

Hi Wes

I can't thank you enough for giving me your time to look at my project, having read through some of your web site details, I can't access all of it until I get home, my experience in Japan was much different to those prisoners you have written about.

It was probably due to our terrible experiences on the Burma railway with our sadistic captors, disease, starvation long hours of toil and so much death that we found in our Japanese camp particularly a sort of sanctuary, with comfortable warm quarters.

Although we were virtually starving, drawing on our reserves day after day like over-drawing on your bank account, with the inevitable end getting closer, we were not harassed by our guards, petty bullying occasionally yes.

It is possible that the mine managers had stipulated that the prisoners were expected to maintain coal production and this would be jeopardised if they were molested and did not get regular rest, we worked two shifts each of 12 hours duration, camp back to camp.

We worked in a gallery with only 36 inches between floor and roof, working 10 hours in a crouched position, roof collapses were common and we relied wholly on the experienced Japanese foreman to warn us of imminent roof collapses.

We worked 13 days and rested on the 14th, we were in long barracks, divided into rooms which held 12 prisoners, sorted alphabetically, all my roommates were MacPherson, McGraw, Mason, etc.

Apart from our poor diet our main problem were fleas, which had no respect for rank, quite often we would see the camp commandant, a major, sitting on the step of his quarters going through his garments looking for fleas. You may smile at this story -- we slept on the floor on grass matting, we each had 30 inches of space, for our bedding with a small space between each we slept 6 on each side of the room with a 36-inch space between the two rows.

Our first experience with the flea were devastating, the first body to hit the bed attracted hundreds of the little blighters, one could even hear the stampede of the fleas, they made little clicking noises as they hopped across the matting. The solution was obvious, at a given command; we would all hit the floor at the same time, why, because that way the fleas were spread evenly and no one had more than their share.

My apologies for this lengthy epistle but in my 80th year my memories are flooding back and this is the result. If you are interested in learning more about my POW experiences let me know, I am a committee member of an ex-POW group who organise 9-day pilgrimages to Thailand each year to celebrate our Anzac Day in Hellfire Pass with a dawn service. The other members of the committee were with Weary Dunlop on the railway and our tour is a story-telling experience for the 80 members, which include 25 students.

With warmest regards, Neil

Date: Sat, 19 Jan 2002

Wes

It is great that you are continuing to help to make our visit a success; I look forward with great interest to receiving the photos and maps.

You will be interested to learn that British based Keiko Holmes arrives in Perth today, the local Ex POW Association has refused to allow her to address it's members on the basis that it would not change those who intend to maintain their anger.

I will attach a copy of the press articles, which includes a story on my feelings, which as you know is free of bitterness and anger, and need no reconciliation programme.

I was contacted by Akemi Brinkworth a Japanese born member of the Japanese language church who are arranging a service and later a function for Keiko to met some of us POWs, she says that she knows about you and Ishizuka-san and your efforts to make our visit a success

I have agreed to address the church gathering on my experiences as a POW I will not dwell on the railway story but will tell them of our experiences in Japan which as you know were not too bad, I will tell them however of the 11.000 prisoners who lost their lives on the way to Japan. To put that number in context I will tell them that is nearly four times the number who lost their lives on the 11th September.

I have written an article for publication in the National POW magazine about my trip to Japan. Maybe you would be interested in reading it. Here it is:

CAMP 24, SENRYU, KYUSHU, JAPAN

*On the 15th December 1944, 545 Australian prisoners from River Valley Road camp boarded the **Awa Maru** in Singapore harbour, all having been selected from the survivors of **A-Force on the Death Railway**. After 11 days batted down under scorching decks, the vessel sailed for Japan on Boxing Day. On the 15th January 1945 the prisoners staggered ashore at **Moji**, northern Kyushu, in mid-winter, snow on the ground.*

150 of the group including 34 Americans, travelled to Senryu on the northwest coast of Kyushu. After several days of training by Jap miners, they were classified fit to work in the Sumitomo-owned coalmine. Compared to the horrors, death, disease, squalid conditions and brutal treatment on the railway, conditions at Camp 24 were 5-star, comfortable warm huts, with 12 to an airy room. Apart from petty harassment by the guards, insufficient food to sustain the long shift in cramped and hazardous conditions underground, the morale was excellent.

The Jap miners under whom we worked were helpful in teaching the prisoners how to survive in this dangerous environment, and unlike other work areas, no punishments were handed out. Towards the end their lunch boxes contained very little more than the prisoners did. On the 16th August 1945 we were paraded and told "the order has been

given to stop the fight." In due course, the prisoners took over the camp. [Supplies dropped by US bombers](#) made the next 5 weeks a pleasant memory. Hikes into the surrounding countryside, invitations from farmers to visit their homes, sharing scarce food, prisoners in turn sharing the bounties from the US planes, are all pleasant memories.

Fifty-six years later I had the urge to return to the village and rekindle memories of those five weeks. Owen Heron, my close mate, another Pioneer, both 19-year-olds when captured in Java, who was in the camp, also nursed a wish to return. A problem confronted me -- I could not locate a Sendryu in Kyushu. Months were spent in the search, a letter to the Japanese Consulate was ignored, and the Australian War Museum had no records of prison camps in Kyushu. E-mails flashed to authorities in Japan, no result. Finally I located Yoshikazu Kondo, Director of the Japan-Australia Society of Joetsu, who put me in touch with an American, Wes Injerd, living in Fukuoka, who had been researching prison camps there for the past several years. Yes, he had the Camp 24 roster, along with details of all 26 Kyushu camps, details of which have now been passed to the AWM. The camp was situated in Senryu, not Sendryu, a village on the outskirts of Emukae, and then commenced a series of e-mail messages between the three of us. In April, both Owen and I, with our two sons, plan to spend 8 days in Japan before joining the Quiet Lion Tour in Thailand. We plan to fly into Tokyo for 4 days and travel to Yokohama to visit the War Graves Cemetery where three Australians who died in Camp 24 are buried. Then a train trip to Naoetsu to visit the Peace Park on the site of the notorious prison camp, and Yoshi Kondo will be our overnight host. From there we will travel to Fukuoka via Kyoto where we will be guests of my American friend, Wes Injerd, who will drive us across the island to the Senryu Camp Site.

The three Australians who died at Camp 24 did so soon after arrival, due to the rigours of the long sea trip. They were: L/Cpl. R Banks QX 8060, L/Cpl. J.A. McNabb NX 30302 and L/Sgt. O.V. Skinner. Should any relatives of these three soldiers like me to take photos of their graves when I visit the Yokohama War Cemetery, please contact me on 08 9534 4082 before 6th March. Here is a list of known survivors of the 114 Australians from Camp 24: HMAS Perth, Charlie Goodchap and Frank Chattaway, Pioneers Ted Rowe, Owen Heron, Neil MacPherson, W.A., Fred Barnstable, Max Cowden, Victoria, 2/12 RAE Bob Davis, 2/19th Fred Asser NSW. Are there any others? Would they like to access my research, names of all 280 camp inmates, group photos taken in camp, camp layout or any details gathered on my visit?

Warmest wishes, Neil

The West Australian
January 16, 2002

Veteran lets go of bitterness

NEIL MACPHERSON had ample reason to hate the Japanese by the time the war ended in 1945.

Captured in 1942, he spent 20 months as a slave labourer on the notorious Burma railroad before being shipped to Japan in mid-1944 to work in a coalmine with other Allied prisoners.

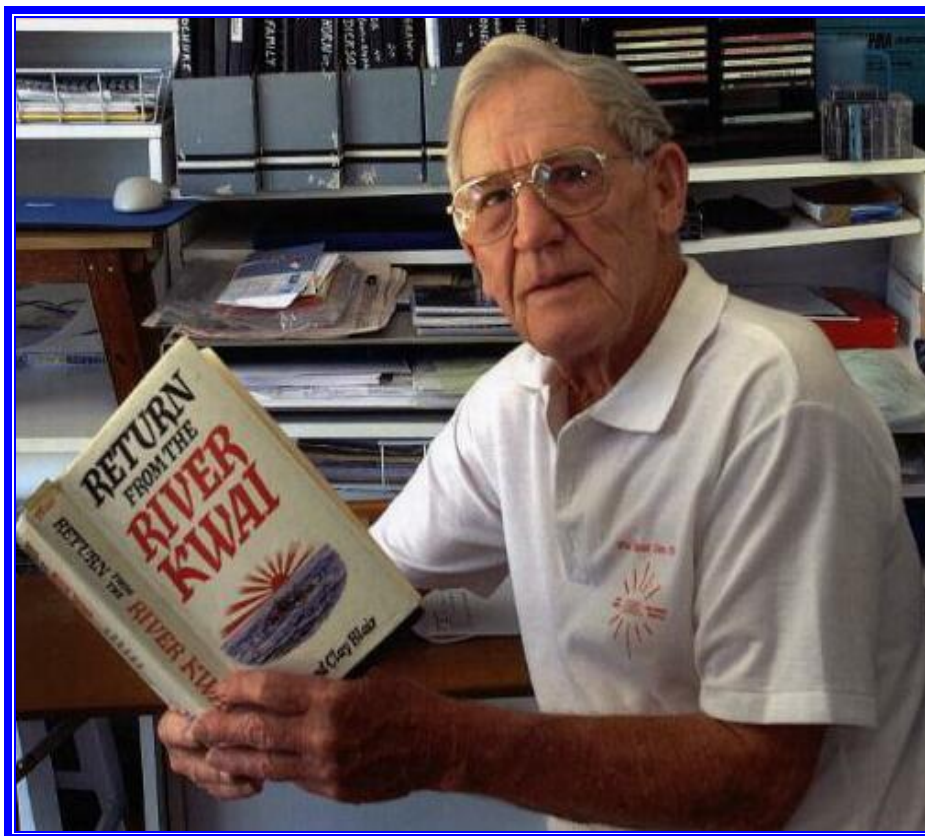


PHOTO: Mr MacPherson aged 23

But Mr MacPherson, who is 80 in May, made a conscious decision to put the cruelties behind him.

"I decided that I would not harbour bitterness for the rest of my life because, if I did, I would be the only one who would be affected," he said. "No one in Japan was going to lose any sleep over my carrying that bitterness."

He said he would attend the [special reconciliation service](#) on Sunday and a reception immediately after for Keiko Holmes. During the church service Mrs Holmes will apologise for the atrocities committed against PoWs.



Going back: Former prisoner Neil MacPherson, 79, of Falcon, reflects on his experiences in Japanese captivity. But he intends to attend a reconciliation service on Sunday.

Mr MacPherson said he respected what she was trying to do, especially in reconciling former prisoners with the Japanese people.

"We didn't have much of a problem with the people in Japan when shipped from Burma to the Sumitomo coal mine on Kyushu Island," Mr MacPherson said. "The conditions were five-star compared to the

Burma railroad and the Japanese miners working alongside us were helpful in teaching us to survive a dangerous environment."

He will visit Japan in May, and said the Japanese should not feel guilt for their grandfathers' actions any more than Australians should for what their grandfathers did to Aborigines.

The railway story is already known to the world.

What is not generally known is an equal number of POW lives were lost in transit to Japan for slave labour.

Thirteen ships were sunk while transporting 15,712 POWs from Asia to Japan. Some of the ships sunk had no survivors. All told, 10,720 prisoners lost their lives at sea -- many more while in Japan.

September 1944 -- I was one of 3,000 POWs in Singapore in late 1944 awaiting shipment.

Early September 1944 -- 2000 were loaded onto two transports, the *Rakuyo-Maru* and the *Kachidoki-maru*, and on 12th Sept. in the China Sea both were sunk -- 1,514 POWs were drowned.

15th December 1944 -- 545 POWs boarded the *Awa-Maru* in Singapore harbour not knowing the fate of our mates. I was one of these and we were crammed down below decks in searing temperatures for 11 days.

On Boxing Day, 26th Dec., the convoy of 23 ships sailed. Twenty-one days later we arrived unscathed at Moji, in mid-winter with snow on the ground, and poorly clothed. 150 of us were sent to Senryu, a mining village on the outskirts of Emukae, 60 km. north of Nagasaki.

Here we laboured in the Sumitomo coal mine in very hazardous conditions. The coal seam was only 1 metre high so we worked in a crouched position for up to 12 hours a day. For 8 months our daily ration provided only 75% of the energy used in our work -- we were working only on our reserves. Many of us weighed less than 38 kilos.

We worked under Japanese foremen, to whom we owe a debt of gratitude due to their skills, which they passed on to us -- not one death occurred in the midst of many cave-ins and rock falls.

On the 16th August 1945, I was working underground. Half-way through the shift we were taken back to our camp and we were told the "night had ended." Five days later, USA bombers dropped huge supplies of food and clothing near the camp.

Imagine the scene. Most of us were near skeletons, so we ate, drank and smoked to excess -- meat, butter, biscuits, milk, candy, chocolates, books and clean warm clothing.

Many of us took the opportunity to hike into the countryside. Here we met the kind farmers and their families and shared our bounty with them. We showed them photos of our families, they also theirs.

Not one of the 250 POWs looked for retribution for the wrongs done to them.

You will understand, therefore, why my mate, Owen Heron, and I are planning to visit this village in April this year to meet again the Senryu villagers and farmers.

This report by Nori Nagasawa of our year 2002 visit to the Head Office of the Sumitoma Metal Mining Co in Tokyo appears on the web site of Yoshikazu Konda

<http://www.max.hi-ho.ne.jp/yoshi-ko>



Sumitoma Mining Company Directors with Neil on left

**Guiding Mr. Neil MacPherson, Mr. Owen Heron, and their sons to
Sumitomo Metal Mining Co., Ltd.**

Written by Nori Nagasawa
Translated into English by Miyoko Uchiyama

At first, it seemed difficult for Neil and Owen, the ex-POWs visiting Japan then, to pay a courtesy call on the headquarters of Sumitomo Metal Mining Co., Ltd. on April 12, 2002; because it showed the attitude that they wouldn't like to meet them. Mr. Ishizuka, President of JASJ, persuaded the company so tenaciously as a go-between on behalf of Japan and Australia that it finally accepted them. He went the extra mile for them, insisting that the purpose of their visit would not aim at protesting against the company but rather showing their appreciation to the Japanese coal miners who worked together with them some 60 years ago. He also expressed

that the company should make what happened during the war time public for its employees.

As their interpreter, I was worried and nervous about what would happen, because that was their first meeting for both the ex-POWs and the executive officers of the company. Actually they waited for us with copies of the pictures of entrances and inside of coal mines taken in 1951. Moreover, they introduced us an interpreter who used to be a manager of a coal mining division in Australia and had resided there.

Today in Japan, since there is no coal mine, necessary coal is mainly imported from Australia. So the manager, understanding technical terms I didn't know and all about coal mining work could have a lively conversation with Neil and Owen.

Neil and Owen told us their hard experiences at that time. They said, "It was so hard for us to work for ten hours a day in a one-meter-high ceiling space underground. The fellow Japanese coal miners taught us how to work and survive in that dangerous environment. On sensing a cave-in from the faint sound of rumbling of earth, they let us escape through a mining hole outside."

In the end, Neil said, "Without their help, we could not have survived and definitely are not here." When company executives listened to his words, their eyes got wet with tears.

To our surprise, the company has found Mr. Nojiri, who used to work with ex-POWs and now is 90 years old. They explained to us that they would invite him to welcome party on 17th. I expected a big welcome party would be held in Emukae on the day. I hoped from the bottom of my heart that they could share the time for reconciliation.

Now I'm going to write about how they could come to visit Sumitomo Metal Mining Co., Ltd. The story is a little complicated. The coal mine was located in Senryu, Emukae, north of Sasebo City in Nagasaki Prefecture and was possessed by Sumitomo Metal Mining Co., Ltd which was called so those days.

Neil and Owen, ex-POWs living in Australia, wanted to visit their unforgettable place: "Senryu." They only remembered the name of the place, "Sendryu in Kyushu," and therefore it was too hard for them to obtain information about it. They tried to get the information on its location through Japanese Foreign Ministry or Consulate, but the inquiry letters to the authorities were just ignored. Finally they reached to Mr. Yoshikazu Kondo, Director of JASJ. As soon as he got an e-mail from Neil, he got in touch with Mr. Ishizuka and got him involved in finding-out mission. Mr. Kondo, an expert both in computer and English, also accessed to Mr. Wes Injerd, living in Fukuoka, who had been researching prison camps there for the past several years. Right after Wes got information from Mr. Kondo, he made contact with Neil. Since then e-mail between Perth, Naoetsu, and Fukuoka started and lasted for ten months. At last the great endeavour between those people made their visit come true.

Only after all those difficulties, the schedule of their visit was organized for the first time. I hear that Mr. Ishizuka went to Emukae and gave them some advice on how to welcome Neil and Owen.



**At War Cemetery in Hodogaya
(from left to right) Neil, Ms Tamura,
Ms Nagasawa, Ms. Sasamoto, Owen**

The next day after their visit to the company, we Yokohama residents guided them to the British Commonwealth War Cemetery in Yokohama, and guided them to the historic town Kamakura.

Since the four people in the party were invited to Naoetsu, they would see the monuments and the museum in the Peace Park, which stands at the site of the former prison camp. After their visit to Naoetsu, they were to leave for Fukuoka by bullet train, and the five, including Mr. Ishizuka, were

planning to stay at Mr. Injerd's in Dazaifu. On the morning of 17th, they were scheduled to go to Emukae in his mini-van. How tight their schedule!

I'm sure Neil and Owen's visit this time would not have been realized without the cooperation works and volunteers' spirits among Mr. Ishizuka, Mr. Kondo, and Mr. Injerd.

**The Daily Yomiuri
April 18, 2002
By Kenichi Oishi, Staff Writer**

Two Australian Ex-POWs Visit Emukae for First Time in 57 years

On forced Labor: "No ill-treatment, the people were kind"

With deep emotion, memories come flooding back

Two former soldiers of the Australian Army who became prisoners of war of the Japanese military during World War II and forced to work at the Senryu Mining Office of the Sumitomo Mining Company in Senryu, Emukae township, visited the town on the 17th to remember the days they spent here 57 years ago.

Neil MacPherson (79) and Owen Heron (80) are both from Perth in Western Australia. They became POWs in 1942 and worked on building a railway

connecting Thailand and Burma (present-day Myanmar). In January 1945, they were sent to Fukuoka Camp #24 at Tanomoto in Emukae and worked in the coal mines until the end of the war.



Heron (right) and MacPherson after placing flowers at former gravesite of foreigners

According to MacPherson, there was no ill treatment at the camp and the Japanese foremen put safety first in teaching them to work in the mines. However, among the 267 POWs interned at this camp, 18 died of sickness and other causes.

Both men initially desired to come to Japan for memorial services. With only the name of "Senryu" in their memories, they were able to find its location through the help of the Joetsu Japan-Australia Society in Naoetsu (Shoichi Ishizuka, President), and Wes Injerd, an American residing in Dazaifu, Fukuoka-ken, who is doing research on POW camps.

The Executive Committee of Emukae organized a welcome party for the visitors. They also invited a number of Japanese who once worked at the mining company and together showed them the former site of the mine, the foreigner's cemetery, and other sites as well.

"It's completely different," remarked the two men, amazed at the change. At the old entrance to the mine, memories of the past came flooding back. "I remember the hills here. And I remember seeing in the Administrative Office a large mural depicting the Battle of the Coral Sea," said one of them, reflecting on the harsh yet memorable past.

At a cemetery, the men planted cherry trees and placed a plaque, which read, "We shall remember 1945."

"The mining company's dealings with us was good, and the people were very kind. I think it is important that we tell the facts about this camp to future generations," MacPherson related emotionally. Heron added, "I just had to come back to this place."

Earlier on the 12th. the two visited the head office of the Sumitomo Mining

Company in Tokyo where they had a friendly meeting. "It was a rare example of where reconciliation between former POWs and a Japanese company became a reality," commented Ishizuka.

The planning for the 2004 return of a group of ex POWs and their family member took Neil almost a full year, he received invaluable help from Japanese friends he met in 2002. see press report below

April 2004 visit to Emukae

**The Mainichi Shinbun
April 17, 2004**

Memorial plate for remembering POWs set up

Moved by the town's hospitality, he returns to Emukae again

Australian ex-POW attends unveiling ceremony



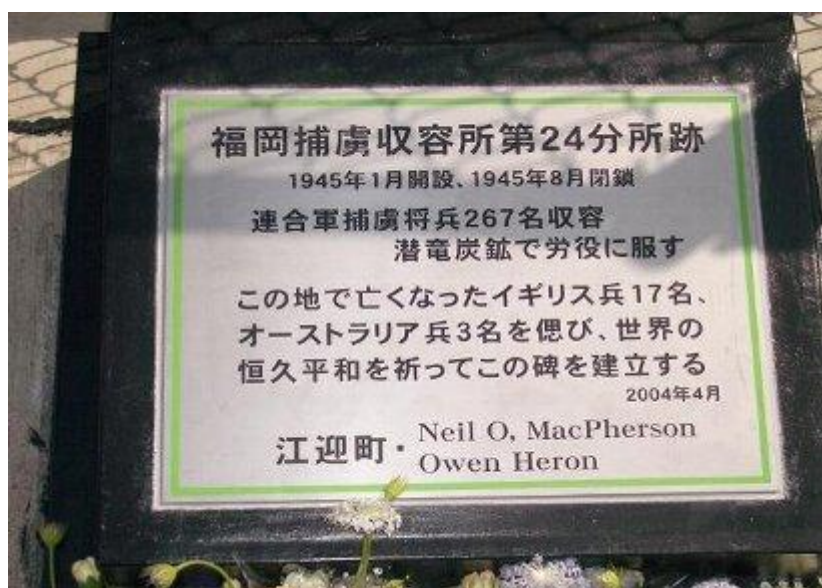
Neil MacPherson (left) is unveiling the monument

A memorial plate was set up at the site of the former POW camp in Emukae, where British and Australian men were forced to work in its coal mine during World War 2. On April 16, Neil MacPherson, 82, an ex-Australian POW, joined the unveiling ceremony for the memorial plate. MacPherson with a serious look on his face, together with his comrades, made an offering of flowers onto the memorial plate.

The plate was established on the compound of Iwashita Public Hall near the former campsite. With MacPherson's previous visit of 2 years ago to Emukae as a start, Shoichi Ishizuka, ex-president of Japan-Australia Association Joetsu, made the memorial plate, and the town did its pedestal.

MacPherson was brought to the Emukae POW camp and laboured at the Sumitomo Senryu Coal Mine. In April 2002, he visited the town with his son and other members for the first time after the war. With good impressions of his last visit in mind, he returned to the town again. This time, moved by MacPherson's story about Emukae, Jack Boon, 87, an Australian ex-POW, who was forced to work at Saganoseki in Oita and Omuta in Fukuoka, accompanied him to Emukae.

"Our Japanese workshop leader was kind to us and so I don't have only bad memories. Every time I return to Emukae, I'm happy to receive a warm welcome from the townspeople," said MacPherson.



Fukuoka Prison Camp 24th Division

January 1945 -- August 1945

**267 Allied Prisoners of War were imprisoned
and laboured here at the Senryu Coal Mine**

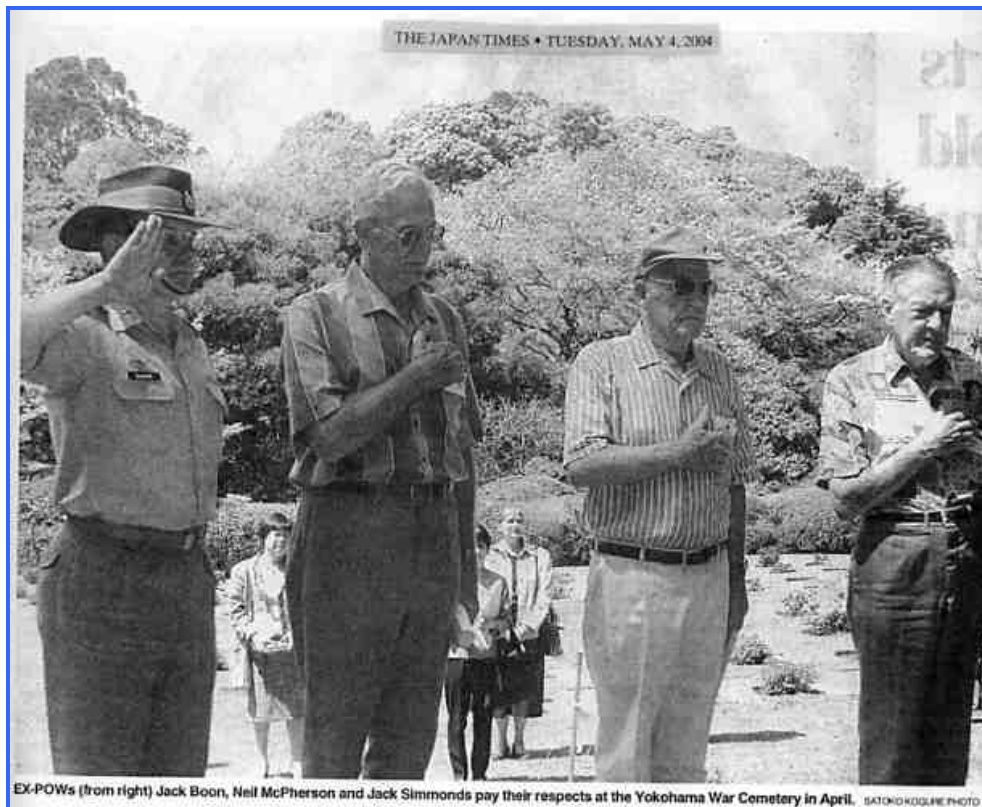
In memory of the 17 British and 3 Australian men who died here,

**we dedicate this monument with a prayer for everlasting peace
April 2004**

Emukae Council

Neil O. MacPherson

Owen Heron



Paying respects at the Australian War Cemetery Yokohama 10th April 2004

Defence Attaché Lt Colonel Mark Hoare, Jack Simmonds, Neil MacPherson, Jack Boon

It is Neil's contention that in recording the war experiences of Veterans for future generations, it is also a vital part of the story to relate the aftermath of the conflict and in doing so illustrate the effects of that experience on their post war life.

Each returning POW used his experiences differently, however most found that the maturity gained and the memory of those years motivated them to make something of their lives. Neil's motivation in devoting his later years to keeping alive the story of courage and fortitude was in these words by a un named dying Australian on the Burma Railway

WHEN YOU GO HOME

TELL THEM OF US AND SAY

WE GAVE OUR TODAY

FOR YOUR TOMORROW

In 1997 he made his first visit with what is now the Burma Thailand Railway Memorial Association of which he is one of three surviving ex POWs from the railway, in April 2005 he will make his eighth pilgrimage to Thailand. These men pay their own expenses each year to travel to Thailand, since 1997, over 200 High School age children have been taken on the 9 day tours, the objectives of the BTRMA are

To perpetuate the memory of the privations and sacrifices of Allied Military personnel and the selfless dedication of the medical personnel during the construction of the Burma Thailand Railway in World War 2 by informing current and future generations through all forms of education and particularly with the Annual Quiet Lion Tours featuring "Hellfire Pass and Anzac Day.

In April 2005 included in the party of 82 will be 31 students from country High Schools including Esperance, Three Springs and Nambour in Queensland. For several years since joining the committee he has worked as Publicity and Marketing Officer in the organising of the 2005 tour he has been Assistant Tour Organiser and will be Deputy Leader on tour

On Anzac Day 2004 he was invited to give the main address by an ex POW at the Kanchanaburi Anzac Service attended by over 600 people from many countries, Ambassadors and staff, as well as Thai Service chiefs, only the third such address in the history of the event, here is the address



Defence Attaché Capt Bruce Fraser RAN with Neil

Anzac Addresses 2003 and 2004 Kanchanaburi Thailand

**Recollections of Neil MacPherson WX16572 of 2/2nd Pioneer Battalion, Williams Force
Burma Railway 1942-1944 Japan 1945.**

In February 1942, 3000 Australians, the vanguard of the 7th Division, returning to Australia from the Middle East on the SS Orcades, were diverted to Java to help slow the invaders sweeping all in front of them towards Australia.

Despite lack of air and sea support our poorly equipped force inflicted severe losses on the invaders but at a cost, in my company alone we lost our Company C.O. two platoon officers and many others.

On the 8th March the Dutch authorities surrendered the island along with all allied forces, at 19 years of age I became a prisoner of a cruel and brutal regime and joined over 22,000 fellow Australians

Of these over 8,000 or 36% were to pay the supreme sacrifice, most were to suffer intolerably cruel and lingering deaths.

In September 1942 under the command of our legendary C.O. Lt Colonel Williams, 1800 prisoners from Java were shipped to Burma in conditions that today we would not allow sheep to travel. The journey involved journeys in three separate Hell Ships.

Arriving in Thanbyuzayat in October 1942, we joined Brigadier Varley's A Force of 3000 Australians just arrived from Tavoy, with them we were the first Australians to start work on the Burma Thailand railway.

The next Australians arrived in Burma in January 1943 also from Java, No 5 Group; the first Australians to commence work on the Thailand end were also from Java, Dunlop Force in January 1943

The following 15 months were to test the metal of, and the morale, and the Anzac spirit of the Australian prisoners in Burma.

We laboured on a starvation diet of a hand full of rice, and watery usually meatless stew, clearing the jungle, on embankments, on cuttings, on bridges in the heat of the dry, and the misery and slush of the wet. Then, we survivors along with the remnants of Lt Colonel Anderson V.C.s force, were selected as No 1 Mobile Force, to carry out the arduous and demanding task of laying the sleepers and rails, along our previously worked ground.

Our clothes and footwear, long destroyed in the fetid jungle, left our only protection from the burning heat and the rain, a loincloth. Bed bugs and lice left by native workers made for

harrowing and restless nights, from the start deaths were continuous and as our numbers dwindled so our work hours grew

No 1 force actually worked continually through the wet, from Thanbuzayat right through into Thailand where the two ends were joined on 17th October 1943

With no drugs whatsoever, malaria, dysentery, beri beri, pellagra, tropical ulcers smallpox and finally cholera took its toll. The dedicated Doctors and medical staff were supermen, working with make shift tools, without them our losses would have doubled

Our torment continued till January 1944 when the survivors, wrecks of men, in rags, staggered out of their jungle camps to be transported to the well organised better-equipped camps in Tamarkan & Kanburi.

Despite a continuing death rate from the results of our ordeal, after six months of improved food and lighter work we survivors regained some semblance of health, little did we know that this was part of a well designed plan by our captors.

Thousands of Railway workers, Australians in a majority were selected for shipment to Japan as slave labour, to work in mines, factories and on the docks. Thousands of them died in Hell Ships from attacks by US submarines and aircraft. My luck as a survivor continued, I was on the last ship, the Awa Maru, my fourth Hell Ship, to successfully make the journey. We arrived in Japan in January 1945, the coldest winter Japan experienced in 40 years, to spend the remaining months working in a coalmine

An unknown author described conditions on board these Hell Ships thus

“Crowded onto cramped platforms, with barely enough space to turn around, a mass of unwashed bodies struggling to survive in a sea of sweat and revolting smells, in the stifling heat of the holds. Initially in the tropical heat near the equator, but the ensuing month was to see us making our way across snow covered decks for our limited toilet functions”

Today we remember those who paid the supreme sacrifice, some of them are here in this well kept garden setting but we must also remember those the survivors who returned home.

They took up life where they left off, brought up families, helped build a great nation, most drew a curtain on the horrors through which they had lived.

But for many the hidden horrors surfaced in the unguarded hours of sleep, and to this day many still suffer the trauma of repeated night mares along with the ravages of the diseases they suffered.

Now, what were the positives that came out of our experiences, we the lucky ones, the survivors, discovered the will to survive, we discovered mate ship, we discovered compassion, a caring and a bond for our fellow prisoners that transcends that, and is different to that we have for the opposite sex.

For us teenagers, and there were many of us, just walk along the line of graves here and read the ages, we matured quickly, we adapted, we found a maturity far above our age, we learned self discipline, most importantly we discovered mate ship.

“No prisoner on the railway survived who did not have a mate”

I can best illustrate that special mate ship between Australian POWs by reciting a poem written by an Australian POW,

Duncan Butler 2/12th Field Ambulance an ex POW wrote this poem

**I've travelled down some lonely roads
Both crooked tracks and straight
An' I've learned life's noblest creed
Summed up in one word "Mate"**

**I'm thinking back across the years,
(A thing I do of late)
An' this word sticks between my ears
You've got to have a mate**

**Someone who'll take you as you are.
Regardless of your state
An' stand as firm as Ayers Rock
Because "e" is your mate**

**Me mind goes back to 43,
To slavery an' ate,
When man's one chance to stay alive
Depended on 'is mate.**

**With bamboo for a billie-can
An' bamboo for a plate,
A bamboo paradise for bugs,
Was bed for me and me mate.**

**You'd slip and slither through the mud
An' curse your rotten fate:
But then you'd hear a quiet word:
"Don't drop your bundle mate.**

**An' though it's all so long ago
This truth I ave to state:
A man don't know what lonely means,
Til 'e as lost is mate**

**If there's a life that follers this,
If there's a "Golden Gate"
The welcome that I want to hear
Is just: "Good on y mate"**

**An so to all who ask us why
We keep these special Dates
Like Anzac day, I answer: "Why"
We're thinking of our mates"**

**An when I've left the drivers seat
An handed in my plates,
I'll tell old Peter at the door:
"Ive come to join me MATES"**

To mark Neil's 83rd birthday next month, and as an example to motivate following generations, he along with another member of the BTRMA have produced a comprehensive Internet Web Site to tell the Burma Railway story of courage and sacrifice to a wider audience.

This story can be viewed on www.btrma.org.au or www.btrma.org

DETAILS

79 PAGES

25.879 WORDS

2505 Lines

21 Mb space

1939 - 1945 WORLD WAR CONTRIBUTION

HUSBAND
John Fraser MacPherson. WX 12192. April 47.
World War I veteran: enlisted in 2nd AIF May 1941, served in Middle East with the 1234th Infantry Battalion, 9th Division. 1940-1943.



SON
James Forrest MacPherson. WX 22438.
April 18. Enlisted in 2nd AIF May 1941,
after training in Western Australia and
Cape Town, Queensland was posted to the
371st Infantry Battalion, saw action in
Belghasse was present at Bandenbach
in witness the surrender of Japanese
forces to the C.D. Lt. Col. Murray
Robson. Later served with the British
Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan.
Discharged 1947.



SON-IN-LAW
George Frederick Newell. WX 219191.
April 18. Husband of daughter Jess.
Enlisted in 2nd AIF 2nd February
1943, served with 117 army trans-
port in Western Australia before
transfer to Queensland for flight
training at Cairns, subsequently
posted to New Guinea, served with
23rd Royal Australian Engineers,
4th Division in New Guinea. Discharged
4th February 1946.



SON
Neil Clement MacPherson. WX
14077. April 19. Enlisted in 2nd AIF
September 1941, served in the
Middle East, 9th Division, trans-
ferred to 37th Division, saw war
action against the Japanese in Java.
Captured, spent 1017 yrs in captivity,
worked on Burma-Thailand Death
Railway, then Singapore, finally in
the coal mines in Japan, repatriated
home October 1945. Discharged
February 1946.



SON
John Fraser MacPherson, Jun.
19346. April 13. Enlisted in the
Royal Australian Army 29th
May 1941, after extensive
training at Henden Naval
Depot, Victoria and Lonsdale
Fleet, Western Australia,
served on Corwin HMAS
Fremantle and Prigat HMAS
Bendin in an coastal patrol.
Discharged 6th June 1947.



SON-IN-LAW
Richard John Sells. WX 81656.
April 18. Husband to be of
daughter Jess. Enlisted
R.A.A.F. January 1943,
also initial training at
Beechey and Point Cook
Victoria served as Cypher
Assistant in Ensworth Hall
Exhibition area with 7th
Operational Base Unit.
Discharged 28th August 1946.



JENNIE



With all of her family involved in overseas service Jennie made her own personal contribution to the war effort labouring at the Welshpool Munition factory, working all shifts, including the night shift where she performed the critical task of quality control.