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I was a member of D Company 2/3rd Machine Battalion in Palestine in January 1942 having recently returned from Syria. We were preparing to be shipped, we thought to Australia and as a Motorised Infantry Battalion, all our vehicles loaded with our guns and equipment for their drivers left. A few days later we were entrained and eventually arrived at Suez and boarded the liner Orcades. The trip to the ship, in retrospect, was hilarious. But that's another story.

For days the ship sailed in a zigzag course, which made sleeping on deck rather uncomfortable as it changed course frequently, obviously to avoid submarine attack. A group of us were plotting our course by the stars and were convinced we were heading to Australia. Each day the sun came up on the port side meaning we were heading south until one morning the sun came up on the starboard side, we were heading north. Shortly after, we sighted land and not long after, we had land on either side. We were in Sundra Straits between Java and Sumatra.

Next day we were prepared to disembark. Many of the troops had no weapons. There were mainly the remnants of two battalions on board plus a few odd small units, in all, less than 2000. The ship had a supply of ancient 303 rifles and these were distributed, but still some had no rifles. Ammunition was also in very short supply. In the afternoon, we embarked on an oil-rig tender and sailed into Oosthaven on the south tip of Sumatra. We came alongside in the late afternoon and were confronted by a Brigadier. I can still hear him saying, "What the hell are you doing here? The Japs are 6 miles away and there's nothing between them and us. Get the hell out of here".

Getting back on the Orcades is another story, but we did get back. It was about 2 am when I came through the side of the ship. During the trip, I had been in charge of a daily fatigue party organised by the ships Purser. He was there as I came aboard and pulled me aside and said "Singapore surrendered at 8 o'clock last night". A few of us went with him to his cabin and between us drank a bottle of scotch.

The ship sailed along the Java coast and fortunately, there was a complete low cloud cover. We could hear planes overhead and knew that they were enemy, as in our experience, any thing that flew wasn't ours. We arrived at Tanjong Priok, the port of Batavia (now Jakarta) and eventually came alongside.

Shortly after a group of high-ranking officers arrived, including General Wavell and a conference was held with our officers. It was soon after, that we were ordered to prepare to disembark. We got off that ship four times, in the morning, in the afternoon and in the evening and each time in different gear and at different times. We got off in slouch hats, tin hats, summer gear, winter gear, even in great coats. Eventually, we got off late one night and were taken to the Kemajoran Airport where we slept exhausted, where we dropped. In the morning, we found we were in horse stables, fortunately, the horses had not been there for some time. We were to guard the airport from parachute enemy troops.

Boys selling newspapers soon appeared and sold us the local paper containing pages of photos of Australian troops landing at various ports in Java. They were all of us landing at various times in different gear at Tanjong Priok.

It was some time later that we realised that this was to fool the Japs into believing that three divisions of Australian troops would be on Java. Maybe it was so because the Japs landed ten divisions on Java and must have known that the Dutch army comprising a large number of Indonesian troops would not put up much resistance, which of course, is just what did happen.

A few days later we were taken to the west end of Java to a village named Leuwiliang where we engaged the Japanese but soon ran out of supplies and were forced to retreat. The Dutch surrendered on the 8th March and we were forced to follow suit. So commenced three and half years as a P.O.W. two and a half of which I spent in Siam (now Thailand) on the infamous Burma Railway.