

CHAPTER 25

CAMPS IN BORNEO, JAPAN AND ELSEWHERE

TWO of the larger forces containing Australians which left Changi in 1942 and 1943 went eastwards to Borneo; others, both from Java and Singapore, were taken to Japan. The Australians captured in Timor remained there for six to eight months before being transferred to Java or Singapore, where many of them joined working parties bound for Thailand. In June and July 1942 an attempt was made to transfer to Japan in two drafts the Australians captured on New Britain. One draft containing about 60 officers and 19 Australian women (including 6 Army nurses) arrived safely; the other draft of 1,050 composed principally of troops of the 2/22nd Battalion and 1st Independent Company but also containing about 200 civilians travelled in the *Montevideo Maru*, which was sunk off Luzon in the South China Sea on 1st July. There were no survivors among the prisoners. About 20 Japanese were saved.¹

These transfers from the outer ring of islands seem to have been part of a systematic attempt by the Japanese to remove European prisoners to areas from which it would be harder to escape, and to replace them by labour forces of Indian and other Asian troops captured in Malaya and elsewhere. (This helps to explain the recovery by Australians of Indian troops during the campaigns in New Guinea in 1945.) In fact by September only the group of Australians captured on Ambon had not been moved elsewhere.

The second large force of Australians to leave Changi was "B" Force (1,496 strong, including 145 officers and an adequate medical staff) commanded by Lieut-Colonel Walsh of the 2/10th Field Regiment. It left Singapore in the *Ubi Maru* on 8th July 1942, and after a nine-days' journey in deplorable conditions disembarked at Sandakan, on the north-east coast of British North Borneo on 18th July. The men were crowded between decks, and had insufficient water. To add to the discomfort of sea travel the between-deck space was covered with about six inches of coal dust. From Sandakan the prisoners were marched to a compound about eight miles from the town, where 1,500 men were housed in huts designed for 300 internees.

At the outset the food ration was 17 ounces of rice a day, supplemented for a time by food brought from Changi. Water was pumped to the camp through a power station and was "muddy and full of bacteria". After about five weeks work was begun on an airstrip about two miles from the camp, on a site selected by the R.A.F. before the war, and the building of a road to the site was commenced. Two runways and extensive bays, revetments and other dispersal and protection areas were to be built. Rations now improved; an issue of fish weighing between 150 and 250

¹ It seems possible that the destination of the second draft was Hainan.

pounds was made to the camp thrice weekly, and vegetables also were supplied.

Soon after the arrival of "B" Force the foundations of an elaborate Intelligence organisation were laid, when contact was made with Dr J. P. Taylor, an Australian in charge of the Government hospital at Sandakan, and between the prisoners at Sandakan and the civilian internees who were imprisoned on Berhala Island.² The latter were guarded by Japanese and by members of the British North Borneo Constabulary (a locally raised force of Sikhs, Malays and Dusuns—one of the peoples of Borneo—formerly led by British officers) most of whom preferred the old administration to the new. With the aid of the constabulary and of some of the natives of the area, messages, sometimes in cipher, were soon being passed between the two groups of prisoners and Taylor.

In this period some of the officers, particularly Captain Matthews and Lieutenant Wells³ employed on gardening and fuel parties respectively, were allowed to move outside the compound, and this brought them in touch with friendly Asian inhabitants, including Chinese. These supplied them with a revolver, survey maps of British North Borneo and other local information, and a crystal detector and headphones.

In November a radio receiver was completed by Lieutenant Weynton⁴ of the 8th Divisional Signals, helped by Corporals Small⁵ and Mills.⁶ At first the reception and distribution of news was left to Lieutenant Weynton and Corporal Rickards,⁷ but at length the production and distribution within the camp was taken over in its entirety by Lieutenant Weynton, while Matthews and Wells continued the outside contacts. In May 1943 Lieutenant Wells began the building of a radio transmitter from parts built in Sandakan to the prisoners' design.

A devoted corporal of the constabulary was used as a go-between to carry messages from Dr Taylor to the Australian prisoners, and also to supply them between September 1942 and July 1943 with "almost weekly" supplies of medicines, including such items as atabrin, quinine and various sulphur drugs, as well as radio batteries and Intelligence information. On behalf of the Governor, who was interned on Berhala Island, Dr Taylor also organised the collection of money from trusted civilians to form a fund to provide assistance for the prisoners. Gradually an increasingly elaborate Intelligence organisation was built up. Native inhabitants supplied the prisoners with stolen maps of the Sandakan area, showing Japanese dispositions, machine-gun posts and communications, and a message was sent

² Taylor and other medical staff had been instructed by the Governor to carry on their duties until relieved by the Japanese. When the Japanese occupied Sandakan Taylor had reserves of medical stores sufficient to last "the whole of British North Borneo for at least two years".

³ Maj R. G. Wells, VX14024; 8 Div Sigs. School teacher; of Tatura, Vic; b. Tatura, 1 Jan 1920.

⁴ Lt A. G. Weynton, VX28397; 8 Div Sigs. Secretary and accountant; of Castlemaine, Vic; b. Sydney, 25 Feb 1905.

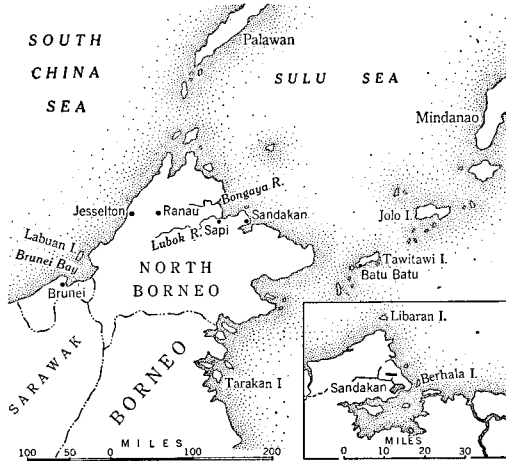
⁵ Cpl A. L. Small, NX26960; 8 Div AASC. Fruit agent; of Coogee, NSW; b. Ballina, NSW, 27 May 1903. Died while prisoner 19 Nov 1944.

⁶ Cpl C. C. Mills, TX4197; 2/3 MAC. Motor mechanic; of Bothwell, Tas; b. Hobart, 13 Nov 1906.

⁷ Cpl J. Rickards, NX68389; 2/3 MAC. Motor trade employee; of Sydney; b. Torquay, England, 25 Feb 1900.

as far afield as Jesselton, where a force of British prisoners was known to be stationed.⁸ As additional information was received, Matthews and Wells collated and tabulated it, each taking responsibility for half the documents thus prepared. Matthews buried his within the camp; Wells arranged to bury his portion outside the local police post.

Meanwhile in September 1942 the Sandakan compound, which was under the control of Captain Susumi Hoshijima from July 1942 to April 1945, was visited by Major (later Lieut-Colonel) Suga, officer-in-charge of all Borneo prison camps,⁹ and thereafter control of the prisoners became more rigid. The prisoners were made to count in Japanese on parade, and mistakes in counting resulted in prisoners being slapped, struck with rifle butts, or kicked in the shins. During this period beatings were administered by the Japanese guards, but these "were old soldiers and not so bad". On 12th September a no-escape document was signed by the prisoners after Colonel Walsh had refused to sign and been threatened by a firing squad. Here as elsewhere the prisoners considered that a promise was not morally



binding once duress had been established. Soon afterwards Colonel Walsh and other senior officers were removed to Kuching, and Major Fleming¹ became commander. In October a Filipino-Chinese guerilla, Mu Sing (one of many such men who had evaded the Japanese and established themselves on Batu Batu, Jolo and other islands unoccupied by the Japanese between North-East Borneo and the Philippines) who had formerly traded in sandalwood round Borneo and owned two power boats, contacted the prisoners, again through the native police, and reported the presence of "B" Force to his commander on Batu Batu. A few weeks later the Australians received a message from Batu Batu stating that Allied submarines would be visiting the island and asking for a report on "B" Force to pass on to them. This was supplied, and at the end of December a second message was received stating that the report had gone on. At the same time (somewhat trustingly perhaps in the circumstances) a map of Batu Batu and details of the organisation of the guerilla force were delivered.

⁸ These were eventually brought to Sandakan in April-May 1943.

⁹ There were evidently four main prisoner-of-war camps in Borneo: at Sandakan, Kuching, Labuan and Jesselton.

¹ Maj F. A. Fleming, VX39089; 2/4 A-Tk Regt. School teacher; of Hawthorn, Vic; b. Kyogle, NSW, 15 Mar 1907.

In January 1943 the civilian internees were transferred from Berhala Island to Kuching, and unofficial control of the constabulary, hitherto vested in a British officer, Major Rice-Oxley, passed to Captain Matthews. In May the guerilla organisation asked Matthews whether he and his party wished to join them, but Major Fleming said that he would prefer them to remain and they did so. Messages from the guerillas were now being regularly passed to the prisoners through the native police by Felix Aziona, a Filipino whose father owned a radio shop in Sandakan; and also to a second group of prisoners now established on Berhala Island.

These newcomers to the area were 500 Australians of "E" Force, which had set out from Singapore in the steamer *de Klerk* on 29th March 1943. Originally 1,000 strong (including 500 British prisoners) "E" Force had suffered the usual discomforts associated with sea travel as guests of the Imperial Japanese Army. The Australians (commanded by Major Fairley) had the choice of sharing the aft hold which housed a leaking cargo of petrol, two small holds adjoining the engine room which were very hot, or a small section of cattle stalls, with double tiers. Indeed the accommodation was so limited that the Japanese guards had used bayonets and rifle butts to force the troops into the space allotted. After disembarkation at Kuching on 1st April, Fairley and Major Carter were removed from command of the Australians by the Japanese, who said that no officer higher than the rank of captain could accompany the force. Thus when the Australian section of the force re-embarked on 9th April it was commanded by Captain R. J. Richardson of the 2/20th Battalion. (The 500 British prisoners remained at Kuching.) On the 14th April the Australians had arrived at Berhala Island by way of Labuan. There, until early June, the time was spent clearing scrub and cutting wood. Although accommodation was limited (500 men in three huts capable of sheltering about 150) the troops were permitted to fish and bathe when off duty, they enjoyed rations good both as to quantity and quality, and a canteen was established. In May a message was sent to "B" Force through the constabulary asking whether Matthews' organisation would help a party of "E" Force, led by Captain Steele, to escape; this was agreed to.

Within a few weeks of the arrival of "B" Force at Sandakan a number of enterprising soldiers had tried to achieve freedom. Four of six A.A.S.C. men who made the earliest recorded attempt were at large only a few days before they were recaptured; two reached a point on the coast about 40 miles south of Sandakan when they too were caught. These six were tried at Kuching and sentenced to four years' imprisonment in Outram Road Gaol, Singapore.

Five men of the 2/29th Battalion who formed a second escape party contacted a wealthy Chinese, Siew Cheow, and with his aid and that of the fund established by the Governor and Dr Taylor lived for some five months in the jungle before being recaptured by the Japanese when

attempting to leave Borneo by boat. The average penalty imposed by the Japanese was five years' imprisonment.

On 8th May 1943 Sergeant Wallace² and Signalmen Harvey³ and McKenzie⁴ also attempted escape. Some days later Harvey and McKenzie were shot and captured by Japanese guards as they were gathering coconuts near the aerodrome; and Wallace, now alone in the jungle, sought the aid of Captain Matthews and the underground organisation. Because of strict roll calls it was impossible to return Wallace to the compound, and Matthews decided that he should join Steele's party of "E" Force—arrangements for their escape were then well advanced—rather than remain at large.

Meanwhile in April Sergeant Blain,⁵ Member of Parliament for the Northern Territory who was imprisoned at Sandakan, approached Lieutenant Wells with a proposal to escape and asked for assistance. At this stage, because of difficulties within the organisation, both Wells and Matthews were reluctant to help, and Blain sent his parliamentary gold pass to Dr Taylor, seeking his assistance. Taylor too was unwilling to help, as were some Chinese from whom Blain also sought aid. At length a message from Blain addressed to Mr Forde, the Australian Minister for the Army, appealing for help, was delivered to Sergeant Wallace.

On 4th June "E" Force was warned to prepare to move to Sandakan, and next night Steele, Lieutenants Wagner, Blow⁶ and Gillon,⁷ and Privates Butler,⁸ McLaren⁹ and Kennedy¹ made an uneventful exit from the camp; they were joined by Sergeant Wallace, brought across to Berhala by canoe. It was the beginning of one of the very few successful escapes recorded by prisoners of the Japanese. Three left that night in a small native boat stolen by Wagner and Blow; the others remained on the island for twenty-two days, for the most part within 400 yards of the prison camp. At the end of a tense period of waiting they were taken to Tawitawi, where they rejoined their comrades, and joined the guerilla movement. Wagner and Butler were killed serving with the guerillas; the others survived and subsequently reached Australia.²

² WO2 W. Wallace, NX58809. 2/15 Fd Regt; guerilla forces in Philippines 1943-44. Gaol warder; of Parramatta, NSW; b. Sydney, 1 Mar 1907.

³ Sig H. F. Harvey, NX49419; 8 Div Sigs. Labourer; of Ingham, Qld; b. Cairns, Qld, 12 Oct 1921. Executed by Japanese 11 May 1943.

⁴ Sig D. S. McKenzie (true name T. R. B. Mackay), QX15656; 8 Div Sigs. Pastoral employee; of Roseville, NSW; b. Rockhampton, Qld, 24 May 1910. Executed by Japanese 18 May 1943.

⁵ Sgt A. M. Blain, NX56669. (1st AIF: Cpl 32 Bn.) MHR for NT 1939-49. 2/1 Survey Regt 1940-42. Surveyor; of Nanango, Qld; b. Inverell, NSW, 21 Nov 1894.

⁶ Maj R. Blow, DSO, QX4648. 2/10 Fd Regt; guerilla forces in Philippines 1943-44; "Z" Special Unit 1945. Bank clerk; of Hamilton, Qld; b. Grafton, NSW, 13 Nov 1917.

⁷ Maj L. M. Gillon, DSO, VX34838. 2/10 Fd Regt; guerilla forces in Philippines 1943-45. Accountant's clerk; of South Yarra, Vic; b. Aspendale, Vic, 17 May 1916.

⁸ Sgt R. W. Butler, SX2600. 8 Div Amn Sub Park; guerilla forces in Philippines 1943. Grazier; of Kongorong, SA; b. Mount Gambier, SA, 13 Feb 1913. Killed in action Tawitawi 18 Aug 1943.

⁹ Capt R. K. McLaren, MC, QX21058. 2/10 Fd Workshops 1940-42; guerilla forces in Philippines 1943-45. Veterinary surgeon; of Bundaberg, Qld; b. Kirrhoaldy, Scotland, 27 Apr 1902. Killed in car accident 3 Mar 1956.

¹ Sgt R. J. Kennedy, VX60861. 2/10 Ord Workshops; guerilla forces in Philippines 1943-44. Rigger; of Moe, Vic; b. Maffra, Vic, 22 Dec 1907.

² An account of the subsequent experiences of the party may be found in *Men May Smoke* (a chronicle of the 2/18th Battalion), pp. 82-3, and in H. Richardson, *One Man War* (1957).

Meanwhile in June "E" Force had joined "B" Force at Sandakan which had been reinforced in April by the arrival of about 750 British prisoners from Jesselton. That month the Japanese guards had been relieved by about 100 Formosan guards. During the first twelve months spent at Sandakan only about 24 men had died; except for short periods when mass punishment in the way of reduced rations had been inflicted on the camp the food was adequate. With the advent of the Formosans the treatment worsened. Prisoners on work parties were beaten with pick handles and sword sticks, and stones were thrown at them by the guards. Mass beatings occurred regularly and for no apparent reason:

My gang would be working all right and then would be suddenly told to stop (said an Australian afterwards). The men would then be stood with their arms outstretched horizontally, shoulder high, facing the sun without hats. The guards would be formed into two sections, one standing back with rifles and the others doing the actual beating. They would walk along the back of us and . . . smack us underneath the arms, across the ribs and on the back. They would give each man a couple of bashes . . . if they whimpered or flinched they would get a bit more.³

There seems to have been a fairly severe line drawn between camp technical and administrative staffs and the work parties, and prisoners allotted to camp tasks were not permitted also to work on the airfield. The adequate medical staff of 136 other ranks which had accompanied "B" Force was reduced to 74, and these were given the task of looking after the hospital carrying, in June 1943, some 300 patients. Some of the camp staff who took part in the work parties secretly to make up the numbers and avoid sick men being sent out were punished, when discovered, by confinement to the "cage", among them being Padre Wardale-Greenwood, who was deprived also of his ecclesiastical books. The "cage" at this time was a wooden structure, measuring 4 feet 6 inches by 5 feet 6 inches, barred on all sides, and high enough only to sit in. To enter it a prisoner crawled through a small aperture. Generally confinement in the cage meant sitting to attention throughout the day clad only in shorts or sarong, without mosquito nets, blankets or bed clothing of any kind. Beatings were administered outside the cage twice daily, at the changing of the guard. Sentences varied from a few days to as long as a month, usually for offences trivial by any standards; as much as a week sometimes passed before prisoners were permitted food, and then only on a reduced scale.

Meanwhile the "underground" had continued to function. Preparations for the organisation of the prisoners into a force capable of action in the event of an Allied landing in north-east Borneo were under way when, in July 1943, four Chinese members of the organisation were betrayed to the Japanese. Under torture the Chinese at length admitted having supplied radio parts to Wallace (who had already gone) and unfortunately Matthews' name was mentioned. Thereupon the Japanese instituted a series of *Kempei*-controlled searches of the prison camp, whose object

³ WO1 W. H. Sticpewich.

was obviously the secret radio. Before long not one, but two radios had been discovered and many officers and men (including Matthews, Wells and Weynton) had been arrested. The plot to cooperate with the native inhabitants in the event of Allied landings was also uncovered; Taylor and other civilians concerned in the movement were also arrested. The prisoners were taken to the Military Police headquarters on the outskirts of Sandakan, where all of them were subjected to privations of various kinds, and some were beaten and cruelly tortured. On 25th October 22 Australians, 5 Europeans and about 50 natives—in fact all who had been arrested with the exception of a few natives acquitted of minor charges—were transferred to Kuching, where on 2nd November they entered Kuching gaol. Interrogations began in mid-November and continued at spasmodic intervals until March 1944, when all trials had been completed. Of the 22 Australians one died before trial, one was acquitted, one received six months' imprisonment and the remainder received sentences ranging from 1½ years' imprisonment to 12 years' penal servitude. In March Matthews, the leader of the Australians, was sentenced to death, as were two members of the native constabulary and six natives.⁴ Dr Taylor, who had served the Australians so well, was sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment.

Meanwhile at Sandakan the widespread nature of the underground movement which the investigations had uncovered had evidently convinced the Japanese that a wise course would be to separate the officers from the men. In October surprise marching orders caught the officers unprepared and, within a few hours, having had no time to farewell their men, most were on board a river steamer bound for Kuching, where they remained until the end of the war.⁵ A few officers, including Captain Cook⁶ (the senior combatant officer), two medical officers, Captains Picone⁷ and Jeffrey,⁸ and Chaplains Wardale-Greenwood and Thompson⁹ remained at Sandakan.

After the departure of the officers the Australians were merged in No. 1 Compound, the British remained in No. 2, and the No. 3 Compound was used as a hospital area. Thenceforward the treatment of the men became increasingly severe. The sickening spectacle of beatings—in which men lost eyes, had teeth knocked out and jaws broken, or were kicked on ulcers or private parts—became almost daily occurrences; prolonged torture of individuals was not uncommon. As the numbers of sick increased the Japanese daily demanded more troops for work than were fit. In the absence of officers the control of the camp and work fell heavily on

⁴ That month Blain's appeal for help was delivered to Mr Forde in Canberra.

⁵ The Australians at Kuching then amounted to 149 officers and 20 other ranks.

⁶ Capt G. R. Cook, NX76184; Aust Gen Base Depot, Singapore. School teacher; of Mittagong, NSW; b. Failford, NSW, 27 Oct 1906. Died while prisoner 12 Aug 1945.

⁷ Capt D. G. Picone, OX6380; RMO 2/10 Fd Regt. Medical practitioner; of Cooroy, Qld; b. Perth, WA, 14 Mar 1909. Died while prisoner 6 Aug 1945.

⁸ Capt R. L. Jeffrey, NX34761; 2/10 AGH. Medical practitioner; of Little Bay, NSW; b. Sydney, 24 Jul 1909. Died while prisoner 24 Jul 1945.

⁹ Rev A. H. Thompson, TX6093. Church of England clergyman; of Smithton, Tas; b. London, 27 Mar 1903. Died while prisoner 19 Jun 1945.

N.C.O.'s. Some of these interposed themselves between the Japanese and their men, and fought to preserve the few rights still remaining.¹

In August 1944 the Japanese authorised the construction of a prisoner-of-war sign with the letters "P.O.W." in white on a black background. The airport was raided on 23rd September 1944 and two aircraft strafed the camp, killing three prisoners. After that raids ceased—the P.O.W. sign evidently having had the desired effect—until April 1945, when the sign was removed on Japanese orders and destroyed. Soon afterwards the camp was again raided, and about 30 prisoners were killed.

In September 1944 the Japanese had reduced the meals to two a day—at 11.30 a.m. and 5.30 p.m. Up to that time about 120 Australians and 90 British had died at Sandakan. In December the rice ration was reduced to between 5 and 7 ounces daily, although there seems to have been ample rice available even within the camp; in January it ceased altogether. On the 10th work on the airfield also ceased (it had begun to slacken off in September) and work was confined to wood parties, camp duties and the vegetable gardens. At this stage the health of the prisoners was very poor. Rations consisted of about 3 ounces of rice a day issued from a reserve of about 2,000 pounds built up by the prisoners over the previous twenty months, and tapioca and sweet potatoes. Few greens were available—invariably the best produce of the gardens had gone to the Japanese guards—and the canteen had ceased to function in September. The Japanese selected men for work irrespective of their physical condition, and when men complained they were kicked and beaten.

That month eight starving men were arrested for stealing rations from the Japanese quartermaster's store. They were badly beaten and confined for 28 days to the "cage"—an enlarged version of the one already described with slightly more head room—denied blankets or clothes and placed on reduced rations. Each day they were taken out, beaten with sticks and kicked. Two died soon after release; the remainder within a short time. The wonder is not that they died but that they survived so long. Two men caught outside the wire while attempting to reach the tapioca patch suffered similar ordeals and died; another was shot.

Late in January 1945 the Japanese, evidently fearing invasion, began moving the prisoners from Sandakan to Ranau, a small village about 160 miles west of Sandakan. The first group of prisoners totalling 470 (including 350 Australians) began leaving Sandakan in batches of about 50 prisoners a day from 29th January onwards. None of the men were fit on departure; all were suffering from beri beri and malnutrition; 60 per cent were bootless. The Australians were led by Warrant-Officer Watson² of the A.I.F. and about 30 guards accompanied them. Captain Jeffrey and the two chaplains, Greenwood and Thompson, also went with the prisoners.

¹ An outstanding leader in this regard was Warrant-Officer N. G. Cummings (of East Malvern, Vic) of the 8th Divisional Signals.

² WO2 C. Y. Watson, QX17783; 8 Div AASC. Regular soldier; of Ingham, Qld; b. Townsville, Qld, 29 Jan 1900. Died while prisoner 6 Mar 1945.

In March the ghastly policy of withholding medical supplies, of which the Japanese held adequate quantities, and of systematic starvation, resulted in 317 deaths, including 221 Australians. The men were now "walking skeletons"; most weighed between 5 and 6 stone. On the other hand, the Japanese guards were still eating large quantities of rice, and had fish or meat daily as well as soya beans and potatoes. All "looked healthy and well fed".

In May the British prisoners in No. 2 Compound joined the Australians in No. 1. On the 29th the Japanese blew ammunition dumps, and having ordered the prisoners to clear the compound, set fire to the camp, destroying all the force's records. (The 26th Australian Brigade Group had landed on 1st May on Tarakan Island off the north-east coast of Borneo, and by the 28th organised opposition had been overcome.) At that stage about 400 of the 700 prisoners remaining were hospital cases. That evening Captain Cook was told that all prisoners able to walk would be required to move within an hour on a "very short journey"; 500 of the marchers would be supplied by the A.I.F. and 100 by the English. Finally the prisoners were split up into ten parties of 50 and one of 66; the tenth party was composed partly of Australians, partly of British troops, and the last group of 66 were all British. A company of Japanese soldiers acted as escort for the march. These were stationed four to the head and four to the flanks of each group of prisoners, with the remainder of the company at the rear of the column.

As the prisoners assembled for departure the prison buildings and the Japanese barracks were burnt down. For the remaining 290 prisoners, too ill to be moved, no accommodation remained.

Each party was issued with two 100-pound bags of rice, enough for 4 pounds a man, and told that it represented 10 days' rations. Later some salt and sugar were issued. Long before the first halt men were falling by the wayside; at this stage those who lagged behind were driven along with blows from rifle butts. Rice was cooked at the end of each day's march; from that meal sufficient had to be saved for a second meal next morning. Each man's daily ration was reckoned at 100 grammes of rice, but this was reduced after the Japanese had plundered some of the original issue. At the end of the first day's march, when the end of a tarred road was reached, the track became deplorable. The mud was knee deep most of the way for the first part of the journey and the track led over hills so steep that the men had to crawl up and slide down. When stragglers fell out they were not seen again. At each overnight halt the many who could not continue were grouped together and shot after those able to march had been moved on.³

On 26th June 142 Australians and 61 Englishmen mustered at Ranau, all that remained of the men who had set out from Sandakan four weeks before. There they joined five Australian prisoners and one Englishman, the only survivors so far as is known of the 470 prisoners who had set

* Statement by Masao Fukushima of the *Suga Butai*.

out from Sandakan on the first march. From them they learnt that the first group had completed the march in a shorter period, and that only 20 had died before reaching Ranau. They were fitter than the second group when they set out, having been less long on starvation rations. Since then, however, most of the others had died of malnutrition and exhaustion.

At Ranau no provision had been made for the accommodation of the prisoners. The Japanese occupied three huts; the prisoners camped in a valley above the Japanese quarters in an area about 50 yards square devoid of buildings or tents and without provision for cooking. The only shelter was beneath surrounding shrubs, and rain fell constantly. No medical supplies were available to the weary men or treatment of any kind; water had to be carried by hand from a creek half a mile away; the daily food ration amounted to between 70 and 75 grammes of rice, the equivalent of a small cup of rice water with about an inch of rice in the bottom. Within three days 19 men had died. The Japanese ordered out working parties of desperately tired and sick men to cut bamboo for the building of huts (including one for the prisoners), and to carry wood and vegetables. The vegetable-carrying parties had to struggle a distance of 18 to 20 miles a day with loads of between 40 and 50 pounds. The only vegetables the prisoners had were those they stole. At the end of the third day the prisoners were allowed to spread out and build shelters, provided they were well camouflaged. The vegetable-carrying and bamboo-cutting parties continued; and rice-carrying parties, involving the carriage of about 50 pounds of rice over distances of 12 to 13 miles a day, were instituted. Between 30th June and 13th July about 40 Australians and a larger percentage of Englishmen died. The men were now so weak that it was impossible for them to lift the dead to the site of shallow graves; and four men, constantly harried and beaten by the Japanese were taking from three hours and a half to four hours to dig graves two feet deep.

On 18th July a hut 30 feet long by 18 feet wide with a raised floor was completed by the prisoners. Only 72 then survived; 38 occupied the raised floor of the hut; the remainder were so weak and helpless from dysentery that an attempt was made to segregate them by allotting them the area below the floor into which they were able to crawl. As the problem of burying the dead increased the Japanese opened a new cemetery about 20 yards from the prisoners' hut.

The strongest of the starving prisoners were now employed on kitchen duties for the Japanese, or killing, cleaning and carrying cattle for distribution to various Japanese detachments in the area. Eighteen men died on the task of carrying water to the Japanese officers' kitchen alone. This involved carrying daily about 130 buckets of water for 400 yards up an incline so steep that the prisoners could scarcely stand. As the prisoners grew weaker the Japanese openly plundered their gear, beating those who protested, sometimes until unconscious.

On 27th July Warrant-Officer Sticpewich,⁴ one of the fittest of the survivors, was warned by a friendly Japanese guard that the time to escape into the jungle had come. If he stayed, the Japanese said, in a very short time he would be killed. Sticpewich, who had received earlier warnings of the impending massacre, warned his comrades and invited them to join him in an attempt to escape. There were then 32 men still alive; six were unconscious; of the others only Private Reither⁵ was able to make the attempt.

On the night of 28 July (said Sticpewich) I cooked the meal . . . served it as usual and about half past nine Reither and I sneaked out of camp. The guards on the camp had been doubled from the time we moved . . . to the new hut. . . . The guard house was just above us and there were no sides to our huts so that they had a good view of us. We . . . laid low next day. We were still in the camp area and could see the general confusion in the camp at our escape. . . . We saw the search party go out looking for us and return. . . . At dusk that evening we made our way out along the road towards Ranau. . . . On 2 August, after a lot of adventures I . . . contacted a Kampong chief and prevailed upon him to help us. . . . He did feed and help us and at my instigation sent a coolie with vegetables into the Jap camp to find out how many were still there. The coolie came back and reported that there were still 20 to 21 alive.

If the evidence of the Japanese themselves is to be believed the prisoners remaining at the Ranau camp were already dead. On 1st August all who were able to walk were taken away and shot. The remainder—15 or 17 in so pitiful a condition that it was “impossible for them to attempt to escape”⁶—were hunted out of the hut by Japanese guards.

They were able to just struggle out (said a guard). These people were then taken up the rise at the back of the camp. . . . I then heard the sound of firing and when I went up to look the prisoners were all dead.⁷

Meanwhile a guerilla party operating in the area north of Sandakan had already rescued one Australian. He was Gunner Campbell,⁸ who was evacuated on 26th July by flying-boat from the mouth of the Bongaya River to Tawitawi Island, and thence to Morotai. Between 8th and 24th August, a second guerilla party led by Flight Lieutenant Ripley¹ picked up four more survivors. These were Warrant-Officer Sticpewich, whose comrade, Private Reither, overcome by starvation, dysentery and malaria, had died the day Sticpewich was rescued, and Lance-Bombardier Moxham,² Privates Botterill³ and Short.⁴ A disused Japanese airstrip on the

⁴ Capt W. H. Sticpewich, MBE, QX9538; 8 Div AASC. Meat inspector; of Wickham, NSW; b. Carrington, NSW, 4 Jun 1908.

⁵ Pte H. Reither, VX48478; 2/4 Res MT Coy. Farm labourer; of Ballarat, Vic; b. Gre Gre via St Arnaud, Vic, 9 Oct 1906. Died 8 Aug 1945.

⁶ Statement of Tatsuhiko Yoshikawa.

⁷ Statement of Nobunaza Matsuda.

⁸ Gnr O. C. Campbell, QX14380; 2/10 Fd Regt. Labourer; of Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 27 Mar 1916.

¹ F-Lt G. C. Ripley, MBE. 1 and 3 Wireless Units RAAF 1943-44; Allied Intelligence Bureau 1944-45. Colonial police officer; of Palestine and Malaya; b. Leeds, England, 30 Apr 1909.

² L-Bdr W. D. Moxham, NX19750; 2/15 Fd Regt. Station overseer; of Toongabbie, NSW; b. Sydney, 15 Mar 1912.

³ Pte K. Botterill, NX42191; 2/19 Bn. Silk and textile printer; of Katoomba, NSW; b. Nyngan, NSW, 1 Mar 1922. The remarkable tenacity and endurance of Pte Botterill are exemplified by the fact that he had spent two periods in “the cage”—one of 12 days, the other of 40 days.

⁴ Pte N. A. E. Short, NX58617; 2/18 Bn. Cook; of Woollahra, NSW; b. Enfield, NSW, 30 Aug 1917.

Ranau plain was repaired and at length, on 20th September, the men were flown by Auster aircraft to Labuan.

A sixth survivor had already reached safety. He was Bombardier Braithwaite,⁵ who had escaped on 8th June, during the second march to Ranau, soon after crossing the Lubok River. He followed the river northwards towards its mouth, and after a series of remarkable adventures and hardships reached Sapi village, where the native people befriended him and at length took him by boat to Liberan Island. There he was picked up by P.T. boats manned by Americans, and on 15th June reached Tawitawi. He then weighed only 70 lbs.

These six men—Sticpewich, Campbell, Moxham, Botterill, Short and Braithwaite—were the only survivors of some 2,500 British and Australian prisoners who had remained at Sandakan after the transfer of the officers to Kuching. What little is known of the sick who remained at Sandakan after the second march to Ranau is based on the statements of Japanese guards. According to these accounts there were then 292 prisoners in the area. By 10th June 30 had died “from natural causes”; that day 75 were taken under escort to the 8-Mile Post and were not seen again. There were then 185 alive.⁶ On 13th July only 53 were still living; that day 23 of the fittest were taken to the airfield and shot; the remainder were now so desperately ill that the Japanese considered they could not last more than a few days “so they were left to die”. All were dead by 15th August.

Some 800 miles westward of Borneo lies Ambon where, in February 1942, 791 Australians comprising “Gull Force” entered captivity under naval jurisdiction. The Australians were concentrated at the Tantui Camp, and the Dutch prisoners in a near-by compound. As at Singapore, the Japanese informed the Australian and Dutch commanders that they would be held responsible for the administration and discipline of their men. The commander of the Australians, Lieut-Colonel Scott, thereupon established a headquarters and organised the men into companies and platoons.

Although the Japanese disclaimed any responsibility for the prisoners and insisted that Japan had her own rules for the treatment of prisoners of war, the treatment accorded them was “reasonable”. The Australians were allowed access to their clothing and kit bags, which permitted of an equal distribution of clothing among the officers and men. Scott instructed that the prisoners should not cooperate on work likely to assist the Japanese in carrying on the war, and nominal rolls showing false occupations and ages were compiled. In March an escape party was organised which was considered to have reasonable chances of success. The adventures of the escape party which included Lieutenants Jinkins, Jack and Rudder have already been described. By various subterfuges the escape was concealed

⁵ Bdr J. R. Braithwaite, NX45378; 2/15 Fd Regt. Process engraver; of Coorparoo, Qld; b. Brisbane, 15 Jun 1917. (A detailed account of Braithwaite's experiences was published in *Stand To*, Nov-Dec 1956.)

⁶ The figures do not tally precisely.

from the Japanese until enough time had elapsed for it to be made good. Afterwards Japanese precautions were tightened, the area of the camp was restricted, and a double barbed wire fence 12 feet high erected round it, with raised machine-gun posts installed at all angles. The Japanese issued orders that the penalty for escape or concealing escape would be death. If escapers were not recovered an equal number of prisoners of equivalent rank would be executed.

Thereafter conditions at Tantui worsened. Discipline slackened, pilfering occurred, men refused fatigue duties, officers and N.C.O's were jeered at, and the whole organisation of the camp began to suffer. At length Scott paraded the camp and warned the men that if they refused to carry out orders he would have to hand them to the Japanese for punishment; N.C.O's would be "peremptorily reverted" for not doing their jobs. In June the camp at Tantui came under the harsh administration of Captain Ando of the Japanese Navy. Recreation of any form, conversation with Ambonese, instructional classes, keeping of diaries, were all forbidden, and nightly inspections took place. Men were beaten with canes or struck with swords, and surprise searches were instigated. In July the Japanese intercepted letters passed between the Dutch prisoners and their wives in an internment camp beyond Ambon. Thirty-four Dutch prisoners including nine officers, two doctors and the padre, their hands tied, were assembled on a rise overlooking the camp in full view of the prisoners. There with pickets, lengths of piping and pickhandles they were flogged by a platoon of young marines.

These marines fell upon the Dutch like wild beasts and desisted only when every man was unconscious. Ando then rose, struck each unconscious man a blow on the head with a pick handle, entered his car and drove off. The sight on the hill was a ghastly one . . . and at the conclusion the whole rise was slippery with blood. Everyone was filled with horror and fear as it was our first experience of the Japanese way of enforcing discipline.⁷

Soon afterwards the Japanese marines took over as camp guards and a reign of terror began, during which men were beaten and bashed without provocation. At this stage rations, consisting mainly of salvaged Australian stocks and weevily rice, were short, and the prisoners were already showing signs of severe loss of weight. The sick were having difficulty in recovering; drugs were lacking, and malaria cases went untreated; tinea was rife.

In October Scott learnt that a force of 500 (including 263 Australians) would soon leave for what was euphemistically described as a "convalescent camp". Scott and Major Macrae were to accompany the force. Otherwise only sick men were to be included. The stores and equipment of "Gull Force" were divided between the men who were to remain and the group selected for departure. No food was to be taken. Towards the end of the month the force embarked.

⁷ Lieut-Colonel W. J. R. Scott, "Report of Ambon and Hainan", on which this summary is mainly based.

After the departure of Scott's force 528 Australians remained on Ambon. These were commanded by Major Westley, the senior surviving Australian officer, who also assumed responsibility for a small group of 14 Americans and 7 Dutchmen. The Americans had been captured in New Guinea, whither they had escaped from the Philippines.

Conditions on Ambon continued to be relatively good. The original barracks buildings at Tantui near Galala village continued to be used by the force. These were clean and hygienic. The water supply, drawn from a reservoir, was fresh and clean, and required no treatment, although it was boiled as a precautionary measure. Reasonable opportunities for recreation and entertainment were permitted; weekly concerts were held, and for a time basket-ball was played.

In February the camp was bombed by an American Liberator, and a stick of six bombs blew up a dump of about 200,000 pounds of high explosive aerial bombs placed within the boundaries of the camp by the Japanese. The explosion blew flat most of the camp and more than half was destroyed by fire. Nine Australians were killed, including 5 officers, and about 75 wounded. Westley was then ordered to put a large Red Cross on the roof of one of the few remaining buildings. After some Japanese aircraft had flown over the camp, the Red Cross was taken down. Thereafter requests to the Japanese that the hospital be marked with a Red Cross brought threats of execution. Westley deduced that the area had been photographed for propaganda purposes.

After the bombing the attitude of the Japanese towards the prisoners appreciably hardened. They would not regard the Australian casualties as serious and refused to help. The only Australian medical officer, Captain Davidson,⁸ had been killed in the air raid, and the care of the sick and wounded was left to a Dutch medical officer, Captain J. H. W. Eehart and the Australian dental officer, Captain Marshall.⁹

In March the Japanese prohibited educational classes; and, as conditions became harder and harder, lectures and debates ceased. As 1943 passed the appearance of aircraft over Ambon became more frequent, and the prisoners were set to digging air raid shelters for themselves and the Japanese. In May, 1,200 English prisoners from Java arrived and were sent to Paso. These evidently fared worse than the Australians. A diarist records meeting in December "many Pommies who are army prisoners. They are in very poor health as compared with us. Collected tobacco and gave to them."

Continuously throughout the period of captivity the prisoners were forced to work on military tasks. These included loading and unloading ships, building roads and stores, air raid shelters, tank traps, and gun positions. Protests were disregarded, and if men refused to work they were beaten. At first the demands for working parties were well organised,

⁸ Capt P. M. Davidson, QX6476; 2/12 Fd Amb. Medical practitioner; of Murgon, Qld; b. Lisbane, Ireland, 1 Oct 1901. Killed in air raid 15 Feb 1943.

⁹ Capt G. C. Marshall, VX39263; OC No. 23 Dental Unit. Dentist; of Kew, Vic; b. Melbourne, 28 Sep 1913.

and officers or N.C.O's accompanied them; later officers were prohibited from leaving the camp area, and N.C.O's commanded the parties. At Ambon, as elsewhere, work parties were welcomed because of opportunities they provided for supplementing slender rations, particularly when the prisoners were employed unloading ships, or were brought into contact with the Ambonese who, generally speaking, remained well disposed to the Allies. Towards the end of 1943 mail was received at Ambon and letters were delivered in twos and threes to the men over a period of months. Many were withheld altogether, and not handed over until the end of the war. No outward mail was allowed although permission was repeatedly sought; no parcels were delivered at any time.

For about two months in 1944 the excellent supply of water for bathing purposes was discontinued, and all washing and bathing had to be done in sea water. This was a severe blow to the Australians who place cleanliness high among the virtues.

In March individual gardens which the prisoners assiduously cultivated were prohibited. "We expect that our fowls will be taken from us next," wrote Sergeant Swanton.¹ "The Japanese say there must be no individualism. Suppers are going to be very light in future. We can only cook porridge, as all green things are to be handed into the kitchen."

It is a very poor diet indeed and is having a very marked effect on the health of us all (noted Swanton). Coconuts are now very scarce and it is an island order that none be brought home from [work] parties. No trees are to be climbed and in fact it is almost impossible to get any. The last nut I had was six weeks ago. Any little pieces since then have cost me quite a few cigarettes. Incidentally cigarettes are now the camp currency and are used nearly exclusively for trading, food, etc. It is a great blessing that I am no smoker. . . . Every day one sees heavy smokers sacrificing their much needed meals for smokes. In fact men are now dying every few days from malnutrition.

In August 1944 the town of Ambon was severely damaged by bombing; twelve Liberators dropped bombs across the camp, destroying portion of it, and killing three men.² Building materials were then so scarce that damaged huts could not be wholly repaired. The building containing the library was damaged and many of the books were destroyed.

Until August the rice ration was 17 ounces, and some issues of fish and vegetables had been made. This was insufficient for men employed on arduous work, but as has been mentioned prisoners were able at times to supplement the meagre fare by looting and from their own camp gardens. In the period following the August air attack the Japanese

deliberately set out to kill off the prisoners by extra hard labour and short rations. Never at any time were medical supplies adequately available to treat the sick, and often the administration of our hospital was interfered with.

With some exceptions the average Jap guard was not willingly a party to this policy. The blame lies with the Jap Commandant, their officers and particularly

¹ Sgt S. M. Swanton, VX25850; 2/21 En. Buyer; of East Hawthorn, Vic; b. Elsternwick, Vic, 23 Dec 1913. Died while prisoner 14 Aug 1945.

Swanton wrote his diary in shorthand, which was translated after the war.

² The camp was strafed on two other occasions by low-flying aircraft.

Ikeuchi, the Camp Administrator. . . . All protests regarding any matter whatsoever were ignored and in many cases brought reprisal upon the camp. They had to be made through the Camp Administrator, and never got any further. In many cases he even refused to accept them or listen. This applied to both verbal and written requests.³

The short rations referred to above amounted in September-October 1944 to 1½ ounces of rice and 7½ ounces of tapioca flour; in January-March 1945 the daily ration was 8½ ounces of rice, supplemented on occasions by sweet potatoes, sometimes bad. Between April and May the ration was only 6 ounces of rice; in June this was reduced to 4 ounces. As part of their wearing down tactics the Japanese deliberately crowded the men in the remaining huts. The Japanese policy appeared to be directed towards breaking the morale of the remaining troops, but this they never succeeded in doing. At times, particularly towards the end when food was desperately scant and the death rate appalling—405 of the 528 Australians who remained on Ambon died in captivity—the men naturally became dispirited, but this was never for more than a few days at a time, and generally speaking morale remained high despite the efforts of the Japanese.

Scott's force disembarked on 5th November 1942 at Hainan, a barren, windswept island east of Indo-China. Though suffering fewer casualties than the group which remained on Ambon, it shared the rather special brutalities which seem to have been reserved by the Japanese for isolated groups which came within their power. The prison compound, four miles from the town of Haicho, covered an area of about ten acres, surrounded by a low barbed wire fence. The living quarters were coolie barracks of a primitive type made of scrap timber and iron. Men slept on the floor on grass mats. No separate accommodation existed for the sick, and officers and men shared huts infested by bugs, cockroaches, rats, lice and fleas. Relations with the Japanese were made increasingly difficult because of the lack of a camp interpreter.⁴ Soon after their arrival the prisoners began work on the roads. The Japanese informed them that all must work—it was good for their health—and exhorted them to live "a simple life like the Japanese and to be earnest and diligent". Scott was anxious that officers should accompany the work parties to act as buffers between the men and the Japanese, and he proposed that officers should supervise each work party. At length this was agreed to. An officers' garden was established outside the camp and short walks for officers were permitted. Sergeants were allowed to work in the garden by the Japanese but not compelled to accompany the work parties. On 19th November the Japanese, finding that threats to shoot Scott and his adjutant, Captain Turner,⁵ were insufficient to induce the Australian commander to sign

³ Report of Major G. Westley.

⁴ Eventually a Dutch chemist, Captain Sticklenberg, performed the remarkable feat of learning to read Japanese without the aid of a dictionary.

⁵ Capt J. M. Turner, MBE, EM, VX45196; 2/21 Bn. Bank officer; of North Balwyn, Vic; b. St Kilda, Vic, 26 Aug 1910.

a paper promising the cooperation of the prisoners in the "building of a New East Asia", succeeded by threatening that reprisals would be taken against the whole camp. Scott's health was now failing, in part probably as a result of his bitter and unavailing fight against the Japanese. By January the lack of news and the poor food had reduced the prisoners to a mental state "bordering on despair". Scott called a parade of all ranks and reiterated his policy. He forbade sales of clothing (the prisoners' only asset) and threatened, in cases of stealing, refusal to obey orders, and insolence, to take offenders to the Japanese for punishment.

In February 1943 six Dutch prisoners attempted to escape and punishment was given to the whole camp. A six weeks' period of work without time off began and the poor food and intense heat resulted in a decline in the men's health from which they never really recovered. That month the Japanese endeavoured to persuade Scott to sign a paper promising not to escape, and when Scott refused to comply and to order his men to do so, the Japanese threatened to shoot him. Cases of *beri beri* now began to occur in increasing numbers. In May and June no vitamin B was issued and only small amounts in July and August. At that stage

a scandalous state of affairs existed and the situation was very alarming (wrote the medical officer to the force, Captain Aitken). Five men had died and many more were dying. The hospital was full of men with atoxia, paralysis and oedema—some able to stagger about and others could not. Every bed held a man with complete oedema of the whole body and gasping for breath. Others in the same condition were being nursed on the floor, propped up against the wall and boxes with kit bags etc; everywhere one looked in the camp one saw men with oedema of the legs and almost every man in the force had the disease to some extent. The Japanese were insisting on 120 men going to work and the work party consisted partly of atoxic and oedematous men scarcely able to stagger to work at which they were flogged and kicked. . . . Various Japanese officers visited the camp during these months and men described above were subjected to roars of laughter.⁶

In August about 150 men were too sick to work. Next month a change of commandants brought an improvement in rations, and a fund established for the purchase of drugs and clothing considerably alleviated conditions. In November a change of command again occurred, the next commandant proving "one of the best commandants". Unfortunately he remained only a short time before being replaced by Warrant-Officer Hukunaga. Thenceforward the camp was commanded by N.C.O's or private soldiers, and the effect was as bad as it could be. Private soldiers had "almost unlimited power . . . over war prisoners"; and they would not pass on complaints or protests to their seniors. At Hainan as elsewhere Japanese photographers arrived during January 1944 to take propaganda pictures of the prisoners' living conditions.⁷

Brutal beatings, sometimes of individuals and at other times of entire working parties, became more frequent as the year progressed. In April

⁶ Report on Ambon and Hainan, Appendix 22.

⁷ For example the remnants of the band were ordered to play and laugh; tomatoes grown and collected for the sick were distributed to a group of men who were told to eat them, and they were photographed while doing so.

an Australian work party accompanied by armed guards was ambushed by Chinese guerillas on its way to a working site. Nine Australians were killed and ten taken prisoner by the Chinese.⁸

In May monthly payments to officers, which had begun in November 1943, were suspended, the officers being informed that the money would be paid into a bank account, but that no prisoner would be allowed to operate on the account; the prisoners must be encouraged to save money in the same way as the Japanese. In October an Australian soldier threatened and abused one of his officers and was sent for punishment to the Japanese. Although the fear of receiving punishment from the Japanese had acted as a considerable deterrent to wrong-doers, hitherto such punishments had not been harsh. On this occasion the offender was tied up and flogged. Thereafter the practice of referring Australians to the Japanese for punishment ceased.

In January 1945 the Japanese began steadily to reduce the prisoners' diet. Next month some Dutch prisoners escaped, and Scott, having learnt from friendly Formosans that the Japanese planned to execute the prisoners in the event of invasion, ordered that an escape team be organised to assist any invading forces and try to bring help to the camp before it was too late.

In March some of the work parties were subjected to "frightful beatings and unbelievable cruelty". On the 17th the sending out of work parties ceased; the electric fence round the compound was strengthened, and the rice ration was again reduced. All surplus rations were confiscated by the Japanese. At this stage starvation loomed as a real threat. Meals were reduced to two a day (at 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.) and there was no way of supplementing the official ration. The prisoners began eating rats and snails and there was a wave of stealing. The Australian commander lacked effective disciplinary powers and appeals to the men by the padre brought no result. At length the men themselves took a hand. They organised a vigilance committee and, after trial, administered corporal punishment to offenders. As a result, pilfering practically ceased. In April the rice ration was reduced to 200 grammes per man per day; drinking water was restricted because of a shortage of fuel to boil it; and the prisoners generally were in so weak a state that they were unable even to water their small gardens. "Most of the men," wrote Captain Aitken, "presented a ghastly picture walking around like skeletons with pot bellies and oedematous legs and faces and with various sores and boils etc. dressed with any old scrap of rag." Since January most of the men had lost about 16 pounds and the average weight of the prisoners was about 8 stone. In April Major Macrae and the special escape party broke out of camp and took to the hills. In May, despite continued protests from Scott, the rice was cut to 168 grammes. In June there was some slight improvement in rations, but men were dying of starvation. The doctor signing the death certificates was told that unless this diagnosis were altered the prisoners would soon learn "what starvation really meant". In July 21 died (includ-

⁸ Despite an extensive search after the war, none of these Australians was recovered.

ing 5 Australians). Allied aircraft were now appearing almost daily over Hainan, and at the end of the month the Japanese set the prisoners to work digging air raid shelters.

Early in August the rice ration was stopped altogether and the prisoners were placed on a diet of dried sweet potatoes. One prisoner records having tried "rat stew" for the first time on the 14th of that month. The appetite of the men may perhaps best be gauged by the prisoner's appreciation. It was "beautiful", he wrote, "resembling a mixture of chicken and rabbit". Towards the middle of the month the Japanese began to take some interest in the sick and in camp conditions generally. "It was regrettable that the food was difficult, but the men must be very cheerful and pray for release," they said. After the release of the prisoners 250 tons of rice were found in a near-by store.

The movement of Australian prisoners to Japan, Formosa and Korea began in 1942, continued during 1943, and was intensified in 1944, when large numbers began to arrive from Thailand and French Indo-China.

The hardships of overcrowding, primitive accommodation and scant rations normally associated with the sea transport of prisoners were intensified over the longer distances involved in transfers to Japan. The prisoners were usually taken in small cargo ships of 4,000 to 6,000 tons, in numbers aggregating between 500 and 1,500 prisoners. Sometimes the ships were smaller and the numbers of prisoners less. More often than not the prisoners occupied holds already loaded with supplies; some lived throughout the journey on top of coal bunkers. Sometimes holds were sub-divided horizontally at levels which prevented men from standing erect; usually the space allotted to a man and his kit prevented him from stretching out at full length. Holds were often ill-lit; nearly all were poorly ventilated, usually depending on air from open hatchways, or sometimes a wind sock rigged by the prisoners. During storms (and sometimes during submarine attacks) hatches were battened down to protect cargoes, and the prisoners were dependent on forced air systems, which functioned intermittently if at all. At times the atmosphere below decks was stifling, and the heat, particularly in ships of all steel construction, was almost unbearable. Latrines, built of deal and usually overhanging the sides of ships were never available on an adequate scale: on a transport taking prisoners to Korea in 1942 they were on a scale of 3 to 200 men, where normal conditions would demand 1 to 10 men; on a transport in 1943 latrines were on a scale of three to 700 men. The scenes during the inevitable periodic outbreaks of diarrhoea and dysentery were revolting in the extreme.

Rations at sea were usually on the scale prevailing ashore, with rice predominating. Sometimes they were better at sea, although an unexpected delay at a port of call might result in reduced rations for the remainder of the voyage. Such reductions seem to have been the result of poor organisation rather than any considered plan to cause discomfort to the

prisoners. Drinking water was rationed; fresh water was seldom available for washing. The length of voyages seems to have varied according to different stages of the war. Thus, in 1942, when ships were sailing direct to Japan, voyages of ten days were not uncommon; in 1943 voyages were taking between 20 and 30 days. In 1944, when the practice had developed of hugging coastlines and travelling by devious and roundabout routes to avoid submarines, voyages took up to 70 days.

At no stage do the Japanese seem to have adopted the practice of marking ships carrying prisoners of war, and this inevitably resulted in much loss of life, particularly during 1944 when the activity of American submarines was becoming more widespread.

A group of 60 officers and 19 women (including 6 army nursing sisters) under Colonel Scanlan was shipped from Rabaul on 6th July 1942 and reached Yokohama on the 15th. The only concession to privacy made by the Japanese was to separate male from female quarters in the hold by a rope. Treatment on board otherwise was reasonable, and after the second day out prisoners were allowed on deck almost without restriction.

Conditions rather more typical of Japanese transports at this time were endured by the Senior Officers' Party, and accompanying groups which embarked at Singapore on 16th August. The Senior Officers' Party, 47 strong, which included Generals Percival and Callaghan and all officers of the full rank of colonel and above then in Changi and fit to travel, was built up to a strength of about 400 by engineers and technicians, including some Australians. Thirteen of the senior officers were Australian. A second group, designated the working party, 1,000 strong, included 6 Australian officers and 90 men. Both groups were at first loaded on to a small tramp steamer, the *Fukai Maru*, but 400, including the senior officers, were embarked on another ship after General Percival had protested. Conditions on both ships remained cramped and uncomfortable even after this rearrangement, particularly so during the delay that occurred before sailing. The Australians on the *Fukai Maru*, for example, were placed in a hold 20 yards long by 15 yards wide with 108 other prisoners. A double tier of bunks, each bunk covered with thin straw matting, was built round the hatchway, allowing each man and his gear a space of 6 feet by 2 feet. Those on the bottom bunks were able only to sit up; those on the top were slightly better off but still unable to stand. The occupants of each hold were allowed on deck for 6 hours a day. Food was fair as to bulk, consisting of two cups of rice and barley, mixed in the proportion of two to one, a cup of watery stew flavoured with either a type of cabbage or onion; and meat and vegetable (36 tins to 1,000 men) five times a day. The ships reached Takao (Formosa), by way of Cape St Jacques, on 29th August, and there the senior officers and accompanying engineers and technicians were disembarked. The working party spent about a fortnight at Takao unloading a cargo of bauxite or working ashore with coolies. It reached Fusan, Korea, on 22nd September, and on the 25th entered a prison camp at Seoul. The engineers and technicians

remained on Formosa until November, when 200 of them (including 80 officers) were shipped to Moji together with 300 American prisoners who had arrived from Java. These reached Yokohama on 29th November.

As this group was arriving at Yokohama a force of more than 2,200 prisoners, including 563 Australians of "C" Force (commanded by Lieut-Colonel Robertson), 500 Americans, 950 Dutch, and 200 British airmen, was leaving Singapore on the *Kamakura Maru*. This fast 15,000-ton motor vessel reached Nagasaki on 8th December after a nine days' journey by way of Formosa (where General Heath and Brigadier Maxwell were disembarked). Conditions on board were good by Japanese standards, and all troops were accommodated below decks. This force was distributed to several destinations throughout Honshu. Some of the Australians went to Naoetsu, and the others to Kobe.

Only two substantial groups containing Australians seem to have reached Japan from Singapore in 1943. The first such group was "G" Force, 1,500 strong (commanded by Major Glasgow⁹). The force, formed at Changi, and including 1,000 Dutch, 300 British and 200 Australian prisoners sailed from Singapore in a convoy of five vessels on 26th April. The *Kyokko Maru* in which the prisoners travelled appeared to be the only transport in the convoy carrying prisoners. Conditions aboard this transport were typical of the wretched conditions already described: 700 prisoners (including the Australians) were placed in the forward holds; the aft holds were occupied by Dutch prisoners; ventilation forward was through the hatches; a wind sock was rigged for the aft holds. Men were crowded round the sides of the ship and down the centre of the holds. The individual space allotted worked out at about 5 feet by 2 feet with 4 feet of headroom. Latrines were on the usual inadequate scale. What rescue equipment existed was old and rotted. The rations, however, were comparatively good.

No medical officers or orderlies accompanied "G" Force officially from Changi, but unofficially the Australians took some small medical panniers, the British included four medical orderlies, and the Dutch included one. Dysentery broke out on the second day at sea and by the end of the voyage considerable sickness had developed. The Japanese allowed sick bays to be erected on deck, and the segregation of dysentery cases helped to avert what might easily have become a catastrophe. Two Dutch prisoners died on arrival at Moji on 21st May, and one Australian soon afterwards.

The treatment of Australian and British prisoners in this group was generally good; the Dutch were treated less well. In the early part of the voyage prisoners were permitted on deck for two hours in the morning and two in the afternoon. These periods were later reduced to one hour in the mornings and afternoons. At Moji "G" Force was broken up and contact was lost with the Dutch and British prisoners; the Australians were taken to Taisho sub-camp.

⁹ Maj R. V. Glasgow, ED, QX6204; 8 Div AASC. Baker and pastrycook; of Red Hill, Qld; b. Brisbane, 23 Mar 1906.

"G" Force was followed soon afterwards by "J" Force, commanded by Lieut-Colonel Byrne, comprising 600 British, 300 Australians (mainly convalescents) and a few American merchant seamen. It sailed from Singapore on 16th May in the *Weills Maru*, an old and slow cargo ship of about 6,000 tons in convoy with three other ships. The prisoners were equally divided between three of the four ship's holds, the fourth being occupied by Japanese troops. The voyage to Japan took 23 days, with halts of four days at Saigon and Takao. On 5th June a torpedo attack affected the ship's engines, resulted in loss of speed and the separation of *Weills Maru* from the remainder of the convoy. On 7th June Moji was reached. There "J" Force was divided into three parties: one party, 150 strong, of sick and unfit prisoners (including 50 Australians) went to a rest camp near Moji; a second, of 250 Australians, went to Kobe; a third, of 550 British, accompanied the Australians as far as Kobe and continued northwards to Hokkaido Island.

As has been mentioned, groups of the fittest prisoners who survived the ordeals of the Burma-Thailand railway were assembled in 1944 in Thailand and Indo-China preparatory to a large-scale movement of prisoners to Japan. Some of these were at first concentrated at Saigon, where they enjoyed good food and conditions. Then the Japanese, having discovered the difficulties and dangers of shipping troops to Japan, began between April and July to transfer large numbers to Singapore. Some remained in Saigon until the end of the war; others reached Singapore, where they were usually accommodated at the River Valley Camp awaiting shipment to Japan. These prisoners and some sent from Java by way of Singapore constituted the bulk of drafts to reach the Japanese islands in 1944 and 1945.

Among the first and largest of such parties to reach Japan in 1944 was a group of 2,250 (including about 1,000 Australians) commanded by Captain Newton. This group left Singapore in two ships on 1st July and arrived at Moji by way of Borneo, the Philippines and Formosa, on 8th September, a voyage of 70 days. The convoy which grew in size at each port of call was at times harassed by submarines and some ships were sunk, but the prisoners arrived without loss.

A force of 2,300 prisoners, under the command of Brigadier Varley, shipped in similar circumstances from Singapore on 6th September was less fortunate. About 1,000 British prisoners of this group were embarked on the *Kachidoki Maru*; 599 British and 649 Australians, with three senior officers including Brigadier Varley, were embarked on the *Rokyo Maru*. They left Singapore in a convoy reinforced by other ships off the Philippines until it totalled seven transports, two oil tankers, and six escorting vessels. The prisoners in the *Rokyo Maru* were crowded into one forward hold, capable of accommodating 187 steerage passengers at normal times, but horizontally subdivided to create two decks, neither of which had a ceiling of more than four feet.

Early on the 12th off Hainan the convoy was attacked by American submarines; an escort vessel was sunk and at 5.30 a.m. the two tankers blew up within a few minutes of each other.

The night which was pitch black was immediately turned into day. Our transport [the *Rokyu Maru*] which was on the tail end of the convoy was silhouetted beautifully against the two burning tankers. Screams from the Japanese on the bridge heralded the approach of a "tin fish" from the starboard side. It struck a little abaft of amidships and shook the ship from stem to stern. A minute or two later another explosion rocked the ship as yet another "fish" found its mark. Water from the explosion poured over the ship and down the hold in which the prisoners were standing. . . . An orderly evacuation of the hold was made, and although some men were naturally jittery . . . there was no sign of panic. Before the last prisoner was on deck the Japanese had left the ship.¹

The *Rokyu Maru* remained afloat for twelve hours, allowing the prisoners, none of whom suffered severe injury from the explosions, ample time to escape. The Japanese crew were eventually picked up by Japanese destroyers, whereupon the prisoners took over the abandoned life-boats and went among the rafts and wreckage that littered the sea, picking up their comrades. There were then eleven life-boats, including one which the prisoners had lowered themselves after the Japanese abandoned ship. These separated, one group of four sailing in a westerly direction, the other, of seven, sailing towards the east. On the 14th September the four life-boats were intercepted by Japanese destroyers, one of which picked up 80 Australian and 56 British survivors. The other group was not seen again but the survivors believed the life-boats carrying them had been sunk by naval gun fire which was heard to the east shortly before they themselves were picked up. Among the missing was Brigadier Varley. One hundred and forty-one survivors of the *Rokyu Maru* (including 80 Australians) who had clung to rafts and wreckage, were picked up by American submarines between the 13th and 17th September, taken to Saipan, and thence to Australia. They provided the first authentic news of conditions in Burma and Thailand to reach Australia and the rest of the world.

On the 15th the prisoners rescued from the four life-boats joined survivors of the *Kachidoki Maru* on a tanker in Hainan-To harbour. She had been torpedoed on the night of the 12th-13th September and had sunk within twenty minutes. Japanese naval craft had picked up 520 of the survivors, all of whom had been in the water for at least 24 hours and most for over 40 hours. The water had been coated in oil which burned their skins. Most were naked and were suffering from sunburn; some were moaning with the pain of fractured limbs. Their plight was, in the opinion of an Australian medical officer who had arrived with survivors of the *Rokyu Maru*, equalled only by the sufferings in the "death huts" on the Burma-Thailand railway. On the 16th all were transferred to a whaling mother-ship which sailed for Japan next day, and reached Moji on 28th September. Eight men died during the voyage.

¹ A. Bancroft and R. G. Roberts, *The Mikado's Guests*, pp. 163-4. Bancroft and Roberts were Australian naval ratings who had survived the sinking of the cruiser *Perth*.

The first and perhaps the last party to reach Japan from Singapore in 1945 was one, including 600 Australians, which had been assembled at Tamarkan in February of the previous year. After about two months in Saigon, they were taken like others to the River Valley camp in Singapore. During a prolonged stay there they were employed on relatively light duties, but rations were both poor and meagre. On 16th December they were embarked on a passenger ship, the *Awa Maru*, whose modernness led some to expect better conditions than were usual in Japanese transports. In the event, however, 600 men were crowded into a small triple-tiered hold, with about four feet of headroom between tiers. Each tier was capable of accommodating about 200 prisoners. The *Awa Maru* lay in Singapore harbour for ten days of acute discomfort while a convoy of four oil tankers and two merchant ships was assembled. A number of Japanese civilians—men, women and children—also travelled in the ship under similar conditions to the prisoners, except that they were less crowded. The better-class accommodation available on the ship was unoccupied. The prisoners were allowed freedom of the deck during daylight, but at night were herded into the hold. The convoy sailed on 26th December, hugging the coast by day, and often sheltering in small harbours by night. On 15th January it reached Moji, one of the few convoys to reach Japan unscathed in this period—a fact possibly attributable to American pre-occupation in the Philippines. At Moji the men were broken into groups, each of about 200, and, as with earlier drafts, were sent to separate destinations.

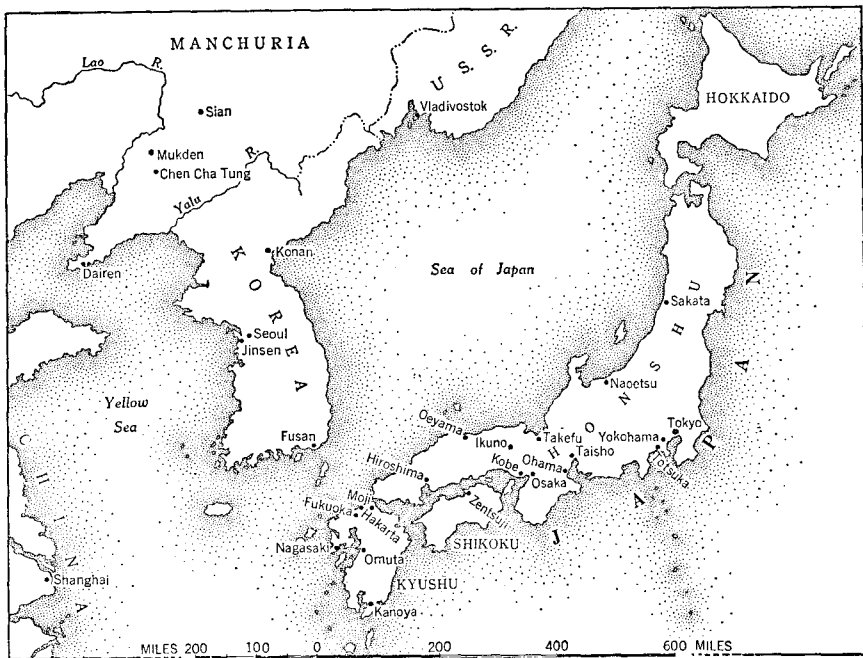
Not all the parties of Australians to reach Japan, nor all the convoys, have been mentioned above. Some travelled in small groups in which prisoners of other nationalities predominated and they were often unaccompanied by officers. Just as it would be difficult if not impossible to record the arrival in Japan of all these parties, so too it is impracticable to provide more than representative accounts of the experiences of the larger groups, most of which were broken up and dispersed to different destinations, after their arrival.

Among the first Australians to reach Japan in 1942 was a naval medical officer, Surgeon-Lieutenant Stening,² of HMAS *Perth*, who had spent about four weeks at Serang in Java before being suddenly transferred with about a dozen other officers to an interrogation camp near Yokohama. At this camp mass and individual beatings took place, and conditions were more brutal than elsewhere in Japan. The diet was estimated at about 1,200 calories. The men were told that they were not prisoners, but still the enemy, and that they would not be regarded as prisoners until they entered a recognised prisoner-of-war camp. They were treated accordingly. In October, after about five months of these conditions, Stening was transferred to a prisoner-of-war camp. There, after about two months' rest and recuperation, a party of medical officers (including Stening) and

* Surgeon Lt-Cdr S. E. L. Stening, DSC, RANR. HMAS *Canberra* 1940, *Waterhen* 1940-41, *Perth* 1941-42. Paediatrician; of Sydney; b. Sydney, 14 May 1910.

orderlies was hurriedly organised and sent to the west to the relief of a group of prisoners brought to Japan in a "hell ship". This ship had left Singapore with over 1,000 prisoners on board, and 80 had died of dysentery and starvation between Formosa and Japan; 200 more died after the ship reached its destination.

Better treatment was afforded the 60 officers who also arrived at Yokohama from New Britain in July of that year. These were for the first six weeks billeted at the Yokohama Yacht Club. They were then moved to Zentsuji, on the island of Shikoku, one of the first prisoner-of-war camps to be set up in Japan. In the first year of the war conditions at Zentsuji appear to have justified its description as a propaganda camp; thereafter conditions worsened. As elsewhere the principal discomfort was



lack of food. Big men suffered most, some losing as much as five stone, but loss of weight was general. Officers (including eventually about 90 Australians) were required to work, but such work was usually only a token—and consistent with the Japanese doctrine that all must work to eat. At Zentsuji the officers gardened for only about two hours a day, and probably benefited from the exercise.

Until mid-1944 at Zentsuji two Japanese newspapers printed in English—*Nippon Times* and *Mainichi*—were regularly received, and the dispatch and receipt of mail seems to have been less of a problem there than elsewhere. An officer has recorded that he received letters each month of 1943, that prisoners were permitted to write home once a month, and

that "a fair number" of these reached Australia. Some pay was made available; face-slappings were not severe (the humiliation being worse than the hurt involved); and only two officers died in a period of two years, including one Australian.³

In June 1944 the group in Zentsuji camp was broken up into small parties, and 45 officers (including Colonel Scanlan) were taken to a camp at Nisi Asi-Betu on Hokkaido Island. There American and British prisoners were employed in a near-by coal mine. At the Nisi Asi-Betu camp, although living conditions were not good, the officers were better fed than ever before as prisoners. The older officers were employed as gardeners; the younger at the mine head off-loading gravel and timber from the railway trucks; contact between the officers and the men working in the coal mine was forbidden.

The nineteen Australian women who reached Japan from New Britain with Scanlan's party in July 1942 were at length transferred to a camp at Totsuka, about 20 miles from Yokohama, where they remained until the end of the war. Despite the severity of Japanese winters no special issue of blankets was made, and no concessions in the way of additional heating appear to have been granted. Over the three years of captivity each nurse received as clothing a 4-yard length of warm material, tennis socks, a pair of briefs and a singlet. No shoes were issued. At times they were employed digging air raid shelters, carrying bundles of cut wood, or cutting down trees. They were allowed to cultivate their own vegetable gardens, but as happened elsewhere produce ready for eating was usually commandeered by the Japanese. They were also able to earn some pay by knitting small silk bags or manufacturing envelopes, but the rates of pay (for example, 1 sen for 1,000 envelopes) were paltry.

Rations were deficient in quality and quantity, particularly after the first two years. There was an issue each day of one (sometimes two) slices of "mouldy furred bread". Vegetables—the outside leaves of cauliflowers or cabbages, carrot tops, seaweed, lettuce leaves, rhubarb, potatoes, sweet potatoes or radishes—were issued on a diminishing scale.

During the three years spent in Japan the nurses received about 12 individual issues of Red Cross parcels, and one bulk issue. No letters were received and no news. There were no bath tubs in the camp and for the first twelve months only cold showers were available. Thereafter the nurses were able on occasions to obtain hot water from the guards' bath. Generally speaking their guards treated them well, with the exception of one or two who struck them, and Japanese civilians were well disposed. Despite the rigorous conditions and the inadequate rations and medical treatment, the nurses were able to remain moderately healthy and none died in Japan.⁴

The 200 prisoners who accompanied the Senior Officers' Party to Formosa, and were transferred to Japan in November 1942, went to Yoko-

³ The senior officer in this period was Captain Gordon of the cruiser *Exeter*, followed in seniority by Colonel Scanlan of the Australian Army.

⁴ Two had died on New Britain before the transfer took place.

hama, where they were billeted in two draughty godowns (bulk storehouses) near the Yokohama market on the sea-front. One godown was used for sleeping, the other for cooking, washing, and stores. The camp was known as Tokyo Branch Camp No. 2; on an average about 500 prisoners were camped there throughout the war. These included British, Australians, Dutch and (mostly) Americans.

The godowns lay in a poorly-drained area about three miles from the dockyard site, where the men were employed on building and repairs to shipping, including such work as welding, riveting and painting. Officers accompanied the daily work parties—principally to watch the interests of the men—for the first few days, but afterwards were not required by the Japanese. The Japanese enforced discipline by reducing rations, by beatings and by mass punishment. Men considered by the medical officers too sick to go to work were beaten and ordered to do so. Men returned to camp from the dockyard as unfit were often beaten personally by the brutal camp commander, Lieutenant Michizawa; in May 1943 when some prisoners were observed smoking in a prohibited area, about sixty men were beaten because the culprits refused to confess.⁵ In July 1943 about 50 of the officers who accompanied this group were transferred to Zentsuji, where they remained until that camp was broken up.

About 300 of the Australians, commanded by Lieut-Colonel Robertson, who reached Japan with "C" Force were sent to Naoetsu on the west coast of the island of Honshu; the others, under Captain Paterson,⁶ were sent to Kobe, the principal port on the south coast of that island. Robertson's men reached Naoetsu on 10th December 1942, after a 52-hour train journey. The sudden transition from a tropical climate to a northern latitude in midwinter imposed a great strain on the Australians, but the treatment both during the journey and on arrival was good, although food was not plentiful. Naoetsu, a town with a normal population of about 40,000, maintained three factories, and in the summer the port was used for unloading colliers. No. 4 Branch, Tokyo Camp, as it was called, was classified as a permanent camp by the Japanese and was thus included in the periodic distribution of Red Cross supplies. During the first two months the Japanese commander, Lieutenant Shikata, impressed the prisoners as being lenient and capable, and he exercised careful control of his staff. In February, however, he was replaced by a new commandant. Thereafter the prisoners became exposed to the brutality of the camp staff: beatings and bashings of the kind experienced on the Burma-Thailand railway were common; rations were at a starvation level; the steel mill at which the men worked was a mile from the camp; the men were forced to run to and from work, and if they fell down they were beaten. Some men worked 12 and 18 hour shifts for as long as 110 days without a break, either in factories or on the wharves. The lack of

⁵ The men were paraded by the Japanese and six guards were detailed to beat them up. Each prisoner was struck at least twelve times with full swings to the jaw, and pulled up each time as he fell.

⁶ Capt J. Paterson, VX29817; 8 Div Sigs. Accountant; of Balwyn, Vic; b. Kensington, Vic, 22 Mar 1904.

adequate interpreters was a source of continual misunderstanding throughout the whole period of imprisonment. Red Cross stores were pilfered or not issued; men went to work barefooted although adequate supplies of Red Cross boots were available in camp.

The brutal treatment, inadequate rations, and severe winters caused the death of 60 of the 300 Australians, including Lieut-Colonel Robertson, within the first thirteen months. Robertson, weakened by starvation and sickness, died of meningitis in March 1943, having been forced to run four miles every morning for the two months preceding his death. The wearing of overcoats was forbidden within barracks buildings although the temperature even within walls fell below zero during the winter months and snow drifts were as deep as 16 feet. The two-storeyed barracks buildings became infested with lice, fleas and bugs. Mail was withheld in the camp office because the censor refused to release it for as long as two or three months after it was received. None died in this force after about March 1944. Early in 1945 the camp was reinforced by some 400 British, American and Dutch prisoners. As the camp was designed to accommodate only 300 prisoners, conditions thereafter became shockingly overcrowded. Sleeping and messing accommodation was continuously in use, for of necessity one half of the prisoners slept during daylight and the other half during the night.

The Australians of "C" Force who were sent to Kobe under Captain Paterson entered the Kawasaki camp, an area originally used as a children's playground. The camp was new and reasonably well-equipped, and the new arrivals were each supplied with five blankets and eating utensils.

After a period of settling in and elementary tuition in Japanese drill, the troops were divided into working parties, and work at the shipyards became routine. Each day the men rose at 5 a.m., left camp at 6.30, and by route march and train were taken to the shipyards at Kobe. A weekly holiday either on Saturday or Sunday—but sometimes eliminated altogether according to the whim of their captors—was permitted.

In 1943 a concert party was formed. The only news seems to have been that derived from Korean guards at the shipping yards. In June troops were permitted to write home. In July 200 British troops arrived from Korea, bringing the strength at Kawasaki camp to about 600, including 250 Australians and 150 Dutchmen. At the end of the month, however, the officers, with the exception of a few including Captain Paterson were transferred to Zentsuji. By October the barracks rooms were infested with fleas, lice and bugs; and it became common to see fatigued prisoners sitting up at night delousing themselves. Red Cross parcels at the rate of one a man were issued in December. In April 1944 some 2,000 letters—the first from home—were received, and distributed to most men in the camp. At that time, as a result of an attempt by two British prisoners to escape, a number of restrictions were imposed, boundary fences were raised by six feet and sentry boxes were set up about the camp. The prisoners were subjected to roll calls throughout the night and other

needless irritations. However, these precautionary measures were gradually relaxed until sentry boxes became empty, and some of the guards, evidently tiring of taking roll calls, allowed prisoners to take them themselves.

Towards the end of 1944 air raid alerts were becoming more common, blackouts were imposed, and the troops' spirits rose at this evidence of increasing Allied power. By January reconnaissance planes were over the camp practically every day, and eventually all prisoners in camp were locked indoors and forbidden to look skywards. Those working at the shipyards were also removed to areas where they could be the more easily controlled. In February Captain Paterson and the other Australian officers were transferred to Ikuno, where they joined Australian officers from Kobe and surrounding camps, and spent the remainder of their captivity with American and British officers at a mining camp in the hills. On 17th March the first raid occurred in which Kawasaki camp was hit. The kitchen, bathroom and huts received direct hits from incendiaries, but no prisoners were injured. In June, as a result of further raids, the Japanese transferred the remaining troops to different camps in the Kobe and Hiroshima areas. Some prisoners were transferred to a mining village in southern Honshu, and were engaged in digging coal. Early in August the Japanese announced the new American "burning" bomb, and all prisoners were ordered to carry a blanket when air raid alarms were sounded.

Taisho sub-camp, to which the 200 Australians of "G" Force who left Singapore in April and arrived in Japan in May 1943 were allotted, was one of a group of camps round Osaka and Kobe.⁷ It was a small partially-completed camp containing a barracks, kitchens, wash benches, latrines and hospital, and was about one mile and a half from the Osaka ironworks, whither the men were marched daily, escorted by an armed guard and about eighty factory guards carrying sticks. The men left camp at 7 a.m., and returned about 5.30 p.m.

No medical officer had accompanied the Australians to Taisho, and until October all medical treatment was carried out by a young ordnance private, James Carr,⁸ who in the course of his duties had many arguments with the Japanese and received some severe beatings. Then Major Akeroyd, formerly at the Itchioka Stadium hospital, who had reached Japan from New Britain, arrived at Taisho to become the camp medical officer.⁹ Thenceforward a qualified medical officer was usually available.

The rations at Taisho, though at the usual modest level, were supplemented in December by some small Red Cross supplies—principally sugar, and tins of bully beef and meat and vegetable—and again in January 1944, when sufficient American Red Cross parcels arrived to issue one to each officer and man. In December 640 American Red Cross parcels

⁷ The headquarters camp was at Itchioka in Osaka.

⁸ Pte J. G. Carr, NX44072; AAOC. Storeman-clerk; of Croydon, NSW; b. Glebe, NSW, 16 Jun 1921.

⁹ Akeroyd was replaced in March 1944 by Lt Louis Indorf of the Dutch army, and subsequently by Surgeon Lt Stening of HMAS *Perth*.

were received at the camp, and out of this issue a half parcel was issued to each man at Christmas. The Japanese held the remainder of the parcels and thereafter "it was found advisable to give the Jap Q.M. a small present of cheese, cigarettes, jam or sugar, otherwise issues would have been so small as to be of no value to the men's health".¹

The treatment of prisoners at Taisho appears to have varied with individual guards. Discipline was at all times strict; sometimes it was unjust. The weaker prisoners, the sick, and the medical officers seem particularly to have suffered from the attentions of the Japanese medical staff and the Japanese camp commandant. The officers (only two had accompanied the force) were informed that under the Geneva Convention they were not compelled to work, but that there would be no food for them unless they did.

In March 1945 widespread fires caused by heavy incendiary raids on Osaka affected the Taisho camp, but there were no casualties. At the end of March Major Glasgow and Lieutenant Evans² were transferred to Oeyama, where they found themselves the only Australians in a camp of some 600 British, Canadian and American prisoners. The men were employed at a nickel mine and smelting works. The officers cultivated vegetable gardens and were employed twice daily hauling to the camp, by hand cart and on their backs, firewood from mountains about two miles distant. At other times they unloaded coal and rice trucks, or performed menial tasks about the camp. Glasgow and Evans, who arrived at this camp on 31st March with a group of other officers, were struck by the low morale and dull mentality of the prisoners, most of whom appeared to have had their spirits crushed by the inhuman treatment of the camp staff. Conditions improved somewhat after their arrival, but the food supplies, which are described as being "worse than at any other camp", continued to be bad and gradually became worse.

Soon after the departure of Glasgow the Taisho sub-camp was broken up; the medical officer, Stening, and 160 prisoners were moved to Takefu, and the remainder of "G" Force (between 20 and 30 prisoners) to Akanobe. At Takefu, a camp in a valley north of Osaka, the prisoners were employed as labourers in an ironworks. Food was reasonably good at first, with fair supplies of fish, but later it deteriorated. Stening fought hard both as camp commander and medical officer in the interests of the men, until 3rd September when he was joined by Glasgow and Evans from Oeyama. The group of prisoners who went to Akanobe were employed during the last few months in a copper mine; the poor food and long working hours caused all to lose weight and health deteriorated.

Most of the Australians who reached Japan in 1943 seem to have gone to the Kobe-Osaka area, as did the 300 Australians who arrived with "J" Force. The latter went to the Kobe House camp, situated within the Kobe city area, close to the harbour edge and a jumble of wharves and

¹ Maj R. V. Glasgow, Report on Taisho Sub-Camp, Osaka.

² Lt L. A. R. Evans, SX12186; 8 Div Ann Sub Park. Chartered accountant; of Adelaide; b. Adelaide, 15 Jun 1907.



(Drawn by Gnr J. B. Chalker, R.A.)

“Working men” on the Burma-Thailand railway, Kenyu area, January 1943.



(R.A.A.F.)

A 200-foot bridge, built by prisoners of war about ten miles south of Thanbyuzayat, after low-level attacks by R.A.F. Liberators, 22nd March 1945.



(Ex-Servicemen's P.O.W. Subsistence Claims Committee)

A better type of jungle camp on the Burma-Thailand railway.



(Drawn by Gnr J. B. Chalker, R.A.)

Cholera hospital, Hintok.

godowns. The camp itself consisted of two warehouses bounded by three streets and connected at the rear by a narrow, partly-covered alleyway, lined with wash benches and taps. It was poorly lit, ill-ventilated, dirty, verminous and crowded, with no exercise yard and very little entrance for sunlight.

The camp was already occupied, when the Australians arrived, by some 400 prisoners, mainly British from Hong Kong, but included a mixed lot of merchant seamen employed, as the Australians were soon to be, as wharf labourers and factory hands. Until the arrival of the Australians there had been no doctor at the Kobe House camp, and from the time of its inception in October 1942 about 120 prisoners had died.

The staple diet at Kobe was unpolished rice supplemented by beans, vegetables in season, and by fresh meat and dried and fresh fish. Kobe House was one of fourteen prisoner-of-war camps in the area, and although there as elsewhere a ration scale had been laid down, whether or not it was adhered to depended largely on the whims of the Japanese camp commandant.

Outdoor workers received extra food from companies for which they worked, and the prisoners supplemented their rations by stealing as opportunity offered. Non-workers—the sick and indoor staff and the officers—were allowed only half rations by the Japanese, but by common consent rations were pooled and evenly distributed. At first a Japanese doctor visited the sick at fortnightly intervals, and if a patient required surgical treatment or pathological investigation it was usually possible to persuade him to dispatch the patient to the Kobe prisoner-of-war hospital. Before the opening of this “show” place, such patients were sent to the Itchioka Stadium hospital, Osaka, “a cold place of cruelty, starvation and death”.

The Australians in this force were fortunate in that, being convalescents, they arrived in Japan fairly well equipped—too well equipped in fact, for they were at first denied current Japanese issues of clothing, except for blankets. Later they received work and rest suits for summer and winter wear, and appropriate shirts and underclothes. In summer blankets were issued on the scale of three a man; in winter the issue was increased to five. At the end of the first winter troops received a set of warm American Red Cross underwear.

Hot baths were provided during the winter on rest days—twice a month—when fuel was available, and wash benches and taps were numerous, but the latrines became a breeding ground for flies, and in summer “maggots abounded on the walls and floors”. Cigarettes were at first distributed regularly, soft drinks and cordials occasionally, and camp life gradually improved as a better understanding developed between prisoners and captors. This led to a relaxation of the harsh Japanese discipline, and the provision in August 1944 of musical instruments, the organisation of concerts, and the granting of permission on rest days for reading and card games.

Life (wrote one Australian) was at first extremely unpleasant, but as time went on and our hosts discovered . . . that we had initiative, and that some sign of leniency or kindness produced more and better work, conditions of life improved. From our point of view it was realised too that some of the restrictions and impositions were actually for our benefit, and that all Nipponese were not brute beasts, and that by humouring them and by playing with them as with children many benefits could be obtained.

In the close confinement of the Kobe House camp, however, differences in outlook and temperament as between British and Australian prisoners became accentuated. The Australian group contained a large proportion of over-age men and all were considered to be convalescents on departure from Changi. As a result sick parades were at first immense, consisting mostly of Australians largely with trivial ailments. Captain Boyce³ concluded that the Australians were "pampered" so far as medical treatment was concerned. On the other hand, while the comparison between British and Australian sick rates was unflattering to the Australians, the British were acclimatised, and the Australians considered that they had all the best jobs and held on to them.

At the outset some Australians committed breaches of Japanese military discipline, leading to severe punishments, displayed a lack of gratitude for things done for them, and did little to help their comrades who were ill. (Later this attitude changed and in February 1944 the Australians were contributing a quarter of their supply of Red Cross milk for distribution among the sick.) On the credit side was the fact that they "would not and could not pretend to toady for favours to the Nips". As time went on and the health of the Australians began to improve they stood up to the cold better than the British, although they tended to succumb the more quickly to changes in temperature. By April 1944 sick parades had dwindled and the Australians, many of whom had never been employed on a working party before their arrival in Japan—and at first resented it—had "learned to loot and scrounge" and "could out-trade the British who played havoc with them earlier".

In March 1945 the incendiary bombing already mentioned played havoc with Kobe, and the end of that month saw the gradual transference of prisoners elsewhere. On the 31st all officers, except the medical officers, were transferred to an officers' camp in the mountains. Air raids continued, and in May three batches of Australians left the Kobe House camp. At that stage most of the working camps in Kobe had been evacuated to safer places, but Kobe House was evidently retained because of its proximity to the wharves and the need to continue the handling of cargoes. When the batches of Australians had gone only 76 of the original "J" Force remained, a minority group in a mixed camp without officers.

On 5th June all buildings in the camp were destroyed by fire in an incendiary raid lasting two and a half hours. Casualties were surprisingly light; the Australians escaped with a few burns of primary or secondary

³ Capt C. R. Boyce, QX23158. 2/13 AGH; 2 Convalescent Depot. Medical practitioner; of Goodna, Qld; b. Toowoomba, Qld, 21 Apr 1899. (Boyce, from whose report much of the information in this account is derived, was the medical officer to "J" Force.)

degree and some cuts and abrasions; British prisoners had a worse time, and three suffered burns of third degree, but all recovered. Three Japanese guards, occupying an air raid shelter built by the prisoners, received fatal burns. That night the whole camp began a long march with stretcher cases and salvaged kit through still-burning Kobe to Kawasaki camp, already evacuated as unsafe by other prisoners.⁵ The new camp was considered better from the prisoners' point of view because it gave greater access to fresh air and sunshine; but worse from the Japanese because its distance from the wharves, docks and factories led to loss of working time. This caused the Japanese to look for a suitable site nearer the town—a difficult task because all but a few buildings in the city area had been gutted by fire or bombing—and on 21st June the move of the prisoners to Wakinohama camp took place. At that stage only about 50 of the original "J" Force remained. The new camp was a partially burnt-out brick building, formerly used as a school. There was ample accommodation, and for the first time in Japan the prisoners had some of the advantages of sewerage. They were plagued, however, by mosquitoes, flies and fleas, and their food was mainly salvaged and dirty rice, but vegetables were becoming available. The Japanese declared that because of the food shortage in Japan all rations must be reduced to a minimum, but it so happened that from the end of July the prisoners received food in large quantities. However, rice did vanish from the rations and its place was taken by barley and sorghum.

Frequent air raids in the concluding stages of the war kept the men on the alert; kits and blankets were always packed and visits to shelters were many. Adequate rest was impossible and nerves and tempers were on edge.

The 1,000-odd Australians who reached Japan in September 1944 with Captain Newton, after a voyage lasting seventy days, were distributed to several destinations.⁶ One group of about 200, of which a record survives, went to Nagasaki, and thence by ferry to a vast dockyard built on an island in Nagasaki Bay. The island housed some 70,000 workers and was equipped with five docks. The camp, which already housed 1,000 American, British and Dutch prisoners, and was surrounded by barbed wire, was reasonably well built in a series of long low wings, each wing containing a row of cubicles and bunks in double tiers. The men slept side by side on mats with their personal equipment piled at their heads. After some cursory training the men were allotted tasks at the dockyards, connected with shipbuilding, usually as welders, riveters, drillers, riggers, or platers.

They rose each day at 4 a.m., marched about a mile to the dockyard, and worked until 6 p.m. with a break of half an hour for lunch. Summary slappings and punchings were accepted as a normal part of the day's

⁵ Thither the Kobe POW Hospital, situated before the raid in the foothills behind Kobe House, was also evacuated.

⁶ Captain Newton went to Hiroshima PW Camp 9B Ohama.

routine. Beatings about the buttocks with baseball bats (2 to 4 strokes) were administered by Japanese marines for the more serious offences. Their blows, struck with full force, were feared by the prisoners because of the damage an ill-judged or malicious stroke might cause to the spine.

Here as elsewhere in Japan the prisoners were plagued by a series of regulations which tended to make their lives within barracks a misery. Caps had to be worn outside the room—even to visit the latrine or clean teeth; yet to wear them within the barracks room was a punishable offence. Tags were issued in several colours, denoting that a prisoner was sick, on light duties, or insane; other tags hung at the end of a prisoner's bunk indicated his whereabouts. Thus a tag had to be hung on each occasion a prisoner visited the latrine, which on a rice diet was as often as nine times a night. Community baths of hot salt water were available every third night. A rest day was granted every tenth day.

The Australians were at first unable to eat all the food given to them, and for a time British, Dutch and American prisoners were able to gather surplus food from the tables. Gradually, however, the Australians became as hungry as the rest. Winter converted the island into a snow-bound quagmire and many died of pneumonia. Early in 1945 air raids began to occur with increasing severity and confined the prisoners to air raid shelters for long hours. Ships were sunk in the bay and the dockyards strafed. In May some of the Australians were transferred to Nakarma and came under command of Dutch officers. (Their own officers had been transferred elsewhere soon after arrival in Japan.) There they relieved "several hundred emaciated Dutchmen" who had been toiling in the coal mines for two years. From Nakarma the prisoners could see and hear Moji—40 miles away—being regularly bombed. Work in the coal mines ceased after a time and some of the Australians answered a call for experienced oil drillers.⁷ These were taken to Fukuoka, a well-made town on the west coast of Kyushu, as a preliminary to being moved to Manchuria. About half the prisoners at Fukuoka were Americans; the other half Dutch and Indonesians. The camp was situated in a thin forest of pine trees on the shores of the bay, and the huts, atap-roofed with earthen floors, looked as though they might have been transplanted bodily from Thailand. About 50 British sailors and soldiers were there, and also a small band of Australians from Nagasaki, who had answered a call for skilled carpenters and had been taken to Fukuoka to load trains! There the food was so bad and there was so little of it that hunger was seldom appeased. The Japanese, however, seemed little better off themselves. Each day and night B-29's raided the area, destroying supplies, dislocating transport and sinking shipping both at Fukuoka and near-by Hakarta.

⁷ One Australian has asserted that he was able to pass muster as an oil driller merely by describing what he had once seen of the drilling of an artesian bore in central Queensland. "Most primitive; most primitive," hissed the Japanese examining officer. "We will give you most modern equipment."—See "The Specialists" by Hugh V. Clarke in *Stand To*, Jan-Feb 1955.

The 600-odd survivors of the ill-fated expedition which included Brigadier Varley were also divided between several destinations after their arrival at Moji in late September. One group of 300 British prisoners went to Yokohama; 50 Australians went to Tokyo; 290, including 29 Australians, were taken to Sakata, on the west coast of the island of Honshu about the 39th Parallel. Ten seriously ill men remained at Moji.

There is no record available of the Australians who went to Tokyo but Captain Richards of the A.A.M.C. who accompanied the prisoners to Sakata considered that their physical state was one of extreme exhaustion aggravated by starvation and disease. Upon arrival they were billeted in a rice store, poorly ventilated and lit, and slept on wooden floors covered by grass mats. Work of a type usually done by coolies was begun three days after arrival, and about three days' holiday a month was granted thereafter. The working hours—9½ hours a day—were not long by coolie standards, but the ration scale—60 grammes of rice, barley and beans, plus horse or pig offal on rare occasions—was grossly deficient in protein, fats and vitamins. Apart from small quantities of seaweed, the only vegetable supplied was a particularly obnoxious form of dried spinach with small food value. Because of the long working hours no regular recreation or amusements were provided, and on holidays the men were too tired to play games. On Christmas Day 1944, however, the Japanese staff made genuine efforts to arrange an impromptu concert, which was thoroughly enjoyed.

In 1945 eight men died of pneumonia during what was described as the severest winter experienced in Japan for 70 years, and a further ten died of other causes before the war ended.

The final force of Australians to reach Japan with which this account is concerned were the 600 who reached Moji in January 1945. Like preceding forces it was broken into groups which were sent to separate destinations.

One group of 90 Australians went to Fukuoka Camp No. 22, where they were accommodated in a good building divided into rooms each holding ten men. Blankets and mattresses were provided and facilities for bathing were adequate. For the first three weeks the new arrivals were officially resting; in fact they were employed digging air raid shelters. Food during this period was on an extremely low scale. At the end of that time most of the prisoners were employed in a coal mine about a mile from the camp, and rations improved slightly. The men worked on a quota system—which meant that when the quota was finished they returned to camp—but the quota was remorselessly increased until they were working about 15 hours a day and getting little sleep off duty because of the constant air raids. In February 1945 Red Cross parcels were received and issued to the prisoners; afterwards much of the supplies were plundered by the Japanese and only minute quantities were issued to the prisoners of war.

As elsewhere, individual beatings were common, and sometimes Sergeant Irio, regarded as a particularly cruel Japanese, indulged in mass punishments, in which all of the prisoners were compelled to kneel for hours in the snow, sometimes with bamboo sticks under their knees. By 15th August there was not a fit man in the camp (for months there had been no meat or fish issue) and Sergeant Irio's savagery had reduced the prisoners to a state of nervous breakdown.

A second group of about 200 went by rail to Omuta, at that time one of the largest prisoner-of-war camps in Kyushu, containing about 1,700 British, American, Dutch and Australian prisoners, where they also were employed in a coal mine. The Americans, having arrived first in 1943, held all the best jobs in the camp, such as in the hospital and kitchen. The camp was sited between the town of Omuta and the sea on ground reclaimed by tipplings from mine workings; the organisation of the camp was complex (regulations similar to those at Nagasaki were rigidly policed), but on the whole was considered fairly efficient. There was, for example, a reasonably equipped hospital run by four medical officers (including Captain Duncan⁸ of the A.A.M.C.); a communal bath; a barber's shop, and a canteen of sorts. The camp, surrounded by a 12-foot high wooden fence electrified at its top by three strands of wire, provided the best accommodation the Australians had seen since Changi, though it was midwinter when they arrived and snow was falling.

Work was divided according to nationalities: the British prisoners worked in a zinc foundry; the Dutch (100 all told) in coal stalls near the camp and on coaling of ships; the Americans and Australians jointly worked the coal mine.

The work either at the pithead in the bitter winter, coaling the trucks below ground, or at the coal face itself, was arduous and at times dangerous. Water coursed through the mine from an underground stream, and none knew when a fall would take place. Although at the outset there were occasional Red Cross parcels—as a prize for the section having the highest attendance figures in a month!—the men were continually hungry and most of them found the starvation rations during the Japanese winter harder to bear than ever before. Some considered the work in the coal mines more arduous than on the railway because in the jungle they had rested for ten minutes every hour, whereas in Japan there were no rest periods. Much petty stealing took place, and an Australian commented that unlike other camps—River Valley Road, for example—it was rash even to hang out clothes for drying without mounting guard on them. An involved system brought by the Americans from the Philippines of trading in food had developed, and men craving tobacco were able to trade their meagre rations for cigarettes. "Rice now, for rice and soup tomorrow" meant that a prisoner was consuming only his soup at the present meal, and trading his rice with someone who would promise to

⁸ Capt I. L. Duncan, NX35135; RMO RAE 8 Div. Medical practitioner; of Wollongong, NSW; b. Glen Innes, NSW, 29 May 1915.

pay it back on the morrow plus soup as interest—in other words his entire meal.

In June the Japanese foremen in the coal mine were exhorted to produce more coal. Thenceforward the prisoners were relentlessly driven, and beatings and punchings became even more common. From the more brutal guards there was torture. The men were now at the limits of their physical resources, and rather than endure the tyrannical conditions imposed in the coal mines some chose to injure themselves in order to obtain release. That month, although the camp escaped damage, Omuta and the surrounding area were being regularly bombed. In July and August Allied aircraft were over Japan in force every day. Much of the off-shift time was spent in air raid shelters where proper rest was impossible; in July an incendiary raid destroyed many of the camp huts. On 9th August 730 multi-engined planes were counted in the skies above Omuta. That day the entire western sky seen from the prison camp “from sea level to zenith was a mass of billowing smoke”. About 40 miles to the west lay Nagasaki, laid waste in one awesome moment by an atomic bomb.

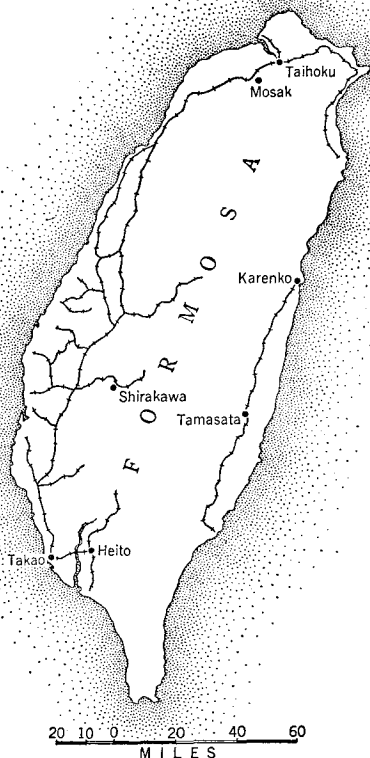
Meanwhile the Senior Officers' Party had also come to Japan, though only in passing. The larger part of their time had been spent on Formosa. After arrival there in August 1942 they had gone to a camp of crude coolie huts at Heito where they were compelled to sign declarations promising not to escape. About a fortnight later they were transferred to Karenko, on the east coast, where American senior officers from the Philippines had already arrived. (They were joined later by senior British and Dutch officers from the Netherlands East Indies, and by the Governor of Hong Kong, Sir Mark Young.) At this stage there were about 400 prisoners housed in a barracks designed to accommodate about 120. At Karenko the Japanese introduced a policy seemingly “calculated to degrade all officers and subject them to mental torture and physical starvation”, and the most senior officers were sometimes slapped or knocked down by Japanese privates without reason, or for trivial ones.

The food ration sank to a very low level; all lost weight—one officer whose normal weight was 13 stone 6 pounds dropped to 8 stone 8 pounds in the period spent at Karenko—and most of the prisoners suffered from dysentery and malaria. A work program was introduced; senior officers worked as farm labourers, clearing ground and planting gardens with sweet potatoes, tomatoes and beans. Although the work was not hard the prisoners were soon so debilitated that, in the words of one elderly officer, “we could hardly lift the hoes we were made to use on the farm”.

The Japanese introduced a pay system but the greater part of the pay went into a “Post Office Savings Account” which officers were unable to broach. However, the Japanese allowed the prisoners a small credit which they could use at the canteen to purchase fountain pens, notebooks and other such articles of which evidently there were plenty. No food was available at the canteen, although large supplies existed on the island.

Conditions improved early in 1943, and face-slapping practically ceased. In April about 80 officers of the rank of brigadier and above were transferred for a short period to Tamasata, about 60 miles to the south, where they remained until after the visit to Formosa of an International Red Cross inspecting officer had been completed. In June a small party of governors and generals was moved to a camp built for the purpose at Mosak near Taihoku, the capital of Formosa, where they enjoyed improved treatment and food. That month the remaining prisoners were transferred by boat and rail to Shirakawa, a dark and dismal camp in a marshy area encircled by hills. There farmwork was re-introduced and continued intermittently until June 1944. That month as a result of the refusal of officers to "volunteer" for work the Japanese began systematically to persecute them—night roll calls were instituted, music (except at weekends) and the playing of cards were forbidden, and prisoners were not allowed to go to bed before lights out (9.30 p.m.) or to lie on a bed during the day.

These tactics continued until October when the Japanese, evidently fearing an invasion of Formosa, transferred the senior officers by air or by sea to Japan, and thence by sea and rail to Manchuria by way of Korea. The treatment in Japan during this move was easily the best they received as prisoners. At length most of the Australian officers, with British and American colleagues, were concentrated at Chen Cha Tung (Liayuanchow) in northern Manchuria where they occupied an old stone, two-storeyed barracks built by the Russians as a prison. The senior officers and governors had arrived a month earlier. The treatment at this camp was on the whole better than in Formosa and the rations—soya beans, bread and vegetables—more filling and sustaining than the normal rice diet. Also there were sufficient Red Cross supplies to enable parcels to be issued for a time on a scale of about one every three weeks. Except for digging



slit trenches, no work was done in Manchuria by the senior officers, and generally speaking other ranks who accompanied them had to perform only such camp duties as were essential to survival. Some clothing was provided by the Japanese, and although temperatures sometimes fell as low as minus 50 degrees Fahrenheit, and cases are reported of some officers remaining in bed practically all day in order to keep warm, the senior Australian officers seem not to have suffered unduly because of the cold.⁹

In May most of the prisoners in Manchuria were concentrated near Mukden, where before long some 2,000 Allied prisoners were gathered. Rations were twice reduced, and the buying of food outside camp was forbidden. Time dragged, but a secret wireless provided a daily news service that encouraged flagging spirits.

Two of the remoter northern camps where small numbers of Australians were imprisoned were at Seoul and Konan on the Asian mainland. Some ninety Australians had arrived at Seoul on 25th September 1942 with the working party of 1,000 which had left Singapore with the Senior Officers' Party the previous month. Seoul was the headquarters camp for all prisoners of war in Korea. There they were required to sign undertakings not to attempt to escape and were addressed by Colonel Noguchi in the following terms:

I am Colonel Noguchi (he said through an interpreter). We are fighting for the emancipation of the nations of East Asia, firm and unshakeable in our resolve that our enemy Britain and U.S.A. should be crushed. Australia is on the verge of capture, India of rebellion. We have already sunk 2,801 vessels and destroyed 4,500 aircraft. The Nippon Army is under the Imperial Command of the Emperor who is the personification of God, so that the Imperial troops are to be called the troops of God. Now you have become prisoners of war through struggling against God's army are you not feared to the marrow? Hostile feelings in your hearts against us cannot go permitted. We will punish you if you against our regulations or attempt to escape. According to your malice feelings so shall we limit your freedom or treat you with severity or lenity.

Sign parole as proof of your non-hostility or be placed under restraint. Grumbling against food, clothing, or housing is strictly prohibited.

You have come to Japan not as honoured guests—you must endure.

At Seoul all drill and commands had to be given in Japanese; blankets were issued on a scale of five per man. The first working parties were not sent out to local factories until 27th October—a month after the prisoners' arrival. Snow fell for the first time on 8th November, but stoves were not lit until 5th December. A Red Cross representative had visited the camp in November, and in February Red Cross rations arrived in camp and were issued—after a Japanese guard had been detected eating them! In March prisoners were allowed to write their first letters and an officers' garden was started. In August the first mail for the prisoners arrived at the camp, but there was none for the Australians. The flow of Red Cross parcels, which had been issued on a scale of 6½ a man, ceased at this

⁹ In December 1944 some senior officers, including Callaghan and Blackburn, were transferred to Sian.

time. In September a number of prisoners (including one Australian officer and 50 men) were transferred to Konan; Red Cross supplies were replenished in January, but by March food was scarce and eggs were not available. In May, as a result of complaints, the bread issue was increased to 10 ounces and the amount of rice for outside working parties also increased; rice for inside workers, however, was correspondingly reduced.

Conditions at Konan seem to have been similar to those which prisoners had been exhorted to endure at Seoul. The prisoners were accommodated in rooms 50 by 25 feet in which 40 men lived, slept and ate on Japanese bed platforms. Four to six blankets were issued, depending on the seasons. The rations—24 ounces of rice a man daily, plus plentiful supplies of vegetables in autumn and winter, and ample fish in winter and spring—were generally satisfactory as regards quantity. From November 1944 American Red Cross parcels on the scale of a half parcel per month were issued. Heating in the barracks was reasonable, with a concrete stove constantly burning in each room from 21st November to 21st March. The men were employed in factories, breaking stone, shifting limestone, and stoking furnaces. Discipline was greatly relaxed by Japanese standards, because this was a working camp with men out at all hours. Nevertheless the usual face slappings and unfair punishments persisted, although these were promptly taken up by British officers in the camp.

At Konan as at other places the Japanese seemed to reserve a special brand of ill-treatment for the sick. The hospital was ill-equipped, no extra food was provided for patients and the attitude of a visiting Japanese doctor was callous and arbitrary. Frequently men unable to perform their duties by reason of high temperatures, bad feet, or legs were ordered out to work. Only minute quantities of medical supplies were made available.

What steps had been taken by the Allies by August 1945 to organise for the impending liberation of the prisoners of the Japanese?

As early as 1942 the War Office in London had begun to consider problems involved in the repatriation of prisoners and was seeking Dominion agreement in principle to plans which had been drawn up by the Imperial Prisoners of War Committee covering prisoners in both Europe and Asia. In brief these plans envisaged British control of repatriation of Commonwealth prisoners in Europe, but the division of the Far East into convenient areas of Dominion responsibility, with some measure of United States control in Japan proper and the Philippines.

Towards the end of 1944 a draft directive was submitted to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, and detailed planning began. Commanders-in-Chief in the Pacific were made responsible for the protection, maintenance and evacuation of all United Nations prisoners of war within their respective operation zones, but were to coordinate their plans. These were to ensure provision for prisoners of war in any armistice agreement made with the enemy, to take control of prisoner-of-war camps, to see that liberated prisoners were properly cared for, to send back nominal rolls, to preserve

enemy records concerning prisoners, and to apprehend enemy personnel charged with their maltreatment. The directive required countries concerned to inform the British War Office and the American War Department of the numbers and locations of their nationals held by the Japanese (although this was a task beyond the capacity of most) as well as any special requirements for their handling after recovery. Members of national forces to which prisoners belonged were to be used in reception depots at the earliest possible stage of evacuation (a point which had been stressed by Australian planners from the outset). Priority in evacuation was to be given to sick and wounded, but no other distinction was to be made among recovered servicemen in respect either of rank or arm of the Service.

The surrender terms imposed obligations on the Japanese to ensure the safety and well-being of all prisoners and internees and to supply adequate food, shelter, clothing and medical care until Allied forces took over. Until this occurred prisoner-of-war camps were to be handed over to the command of the prisoners' leaders.

The task of recovery faced by the organisation created for this purpose, known as R.A.P.W. & I.—Repatriation of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees—was hardly less complex in August-September 1945 than that faced by the chronicler who endeavours to follow in detail a decade later the group and individual experiences of the prisoners. As an illustration of the widespread distribution of prisoners throughout East Asia,¹ the largest numbers of Australians were congregated on Singapore Island and Johore (5,549); 4,830 were distributed in several camps and on a number of working parties in Thailand and remote areas of Burma; 265 were in French Indo-China; about 750 were distributed throughout the islands of the Netherlands East Indies, with the largest group (385) in Java, and in Sumatra (243); about 100 were on Ambon; two were at Macassar, seven on Bali; another 150 were at Kuching in British North Borneo. About 2,700 were distributed between Japan, Korea and Manchuria. About 200 remained on Hainan.²

The Australian Army, however, was well organised for the imminent recovery operations, particularly in South-East Asia, for in June General Blamey had been warned by Admiral Mountbatten that impending operations in Malaya might result in the release of large numbers of prisoners of war (including Australians). Although these operations did not eventuate, the Australian contribution to a reception scheme based on India—advanced parties of the 2nd Australian P.W. Reception Group³ (Brigadier Lloyd⁴) and contact teams—had begun to arrive in Ceylon

¹ Estimated by the Japanese at 192,895, including 93,762 prisoners of war. The bulk of the internees were Dutch.

² This distribution of prisoners of war was not known to the Australian Government at the time. The best estimates placed 8,000 Australians in Japan, 5,000 in South-East Asia, 500 in Java, 2,000 in Borneo, and 2,000 in other locations. Some 3,000 were unaccounted for.

³ The 1st Australian P.W. Reception Group was based in the United Kingdom.

⁴ Brig J. E. Lloyd, CBE, DSO, MC, ED. (1st AIF: Lt 23 and 24 Bns; Indian Army.) CO 2/28 Bn 1940-42; comd 16 Bde 1942-43, 2 Aust PW Reception Gp 1945. Of Perth; b. Melbourne, 13 Apr 1894.

and India before the war ended. Then, when it became apparent that the Australian Reception Group would be receiving prisoners direct from the recovery areas, it was expanded to make it more self-contained until it included 1,250 officers and men, a 600-bed hospital, and some 10,000 tons of stores and equipment. Two ships (including the *Duntroon*) used for taking the group direct to Singapore would be used to evacuate prisoners to Australia. The hospital ship *Manunda* was to be used to evacuate unfit prisoners from Singapore to an Australian hospital at Labuan, thus speeding up its turn around. No plans could be made for the concentration or transfer of other Australians in South-East Asia until reliable estimates were received of their numbers. Eventually, however, the bulk of the prisoners from Saigon, Thailand, Java and Sumatra were transferred to Singapore for onwards passage. Prisoners recovered in western Borneo were accommodated by the 9th Australian Division at Labuan; others recovered in northern Borneo and in islands of the Netherlands East Indies (including Ambon) were to be taken to Morotai, where the 1st Australian P.W. and Internee Reception Unit had been established since June.

Whereas the 2nd Australian Reception Group in Singapore would work with British, Indian and Dutch recovery organisations and be principally concerned with the recovery of Australian prisoners and internees, the 3rd Reception Group (Brigadier Wrigley⁵), which established its headquarters near Manila in the Philippines on 19th August, would be required to work closely with American recovery organisations, with the larger task of being the principal receiving depot for all Commonwealth—except Canadian—prisoners and internees recovered in Formosa, Japan and Korea. Some 26 Australian contact teams were attached to American formations and reached Japan, but the bulk of the work there was done by Americans and in strict accordance with methods of procedure established by the American Army. The Australian and other contact teams were attached only to assist in dealing with specific problems applicable to their own nationals, and, in the case of the Australian contact teams, to British nationals also. The Australian Reception Group at Manila was augmented by the attachment of a British section (representing the three Services) about 250 strong, and a small Indian Army detachment of 32—a rather inadequate contribution so far as the British were concerned to the task of repatriating some 16,000 prisoners, the larger portion of whom would necessarily be British.

Meanwhile, on 15th August Mountbatten's South-East Asia Command had been extended to include part of the adjacent South-West Pacific Area, including Java, Borneo, Dutch New Guinea, and part of French Indo-China, but not Timor, and embraced the areas where most of the Australians were to be found. Mountbatten, his command poised for the capture of Malaya, had orders already in train for the occupation of that

⁵ Brig H. Wrigley, CBE, MC, VX171. (1st AIF: S-Sgt 3 Inf Bde, Capt 60 Bn; Indian Army.) CO 2/6 Bn 1941-42; comd 20 Bde Sep-Oct 1942, 3rd PW Reception Gp 1945. Oil company representative; of Sale, Vic; b. Scarsdale, Vic, 1 Dec 1891.

and other areas (ships were actually at sea) when General MacArthur, who had been created Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers to make arrangements for the surrender of the Japanese, issued orders that the actual documents of surrender in theatres other than his own might only be signed after his own had been signed; and that no landing or reoccupation by military forces might be made until after the formal signature of the surrender document in Tokyo. The formal surrender had been fixed for 31st August; but because of a typhoon striking the coast of Japan the ceremony was postponed until 2nd September. Thus the liberation of the prisoners was delayed for more than a fortnight.

On 27th August Japanese delegates, who had arrived in Rangoon in response to a request by Mountbatten, signed a preliminary agreement which enabled instructions to be sent out through Field-Marshal Terauchi to senior Japanese commanders concerned, ordering them to assist and obey the British commanders of the reoccupation forces, who would be acting with Mountbatten's authority and in his name. Operations for the recovery of the prisoners began next day when aircraft began dropping pamphlets over all known camps in the South-East Asia area, with the object of spreading the news of the Japanese capitulation to the guards and the prisoners themselves. Immediately afterwards the delivery of stores and relief troops began, and before the military landing in Malaya on 5th September took place some 120 relief personnel had been flown into known prison camps in the command, and 950 tons of supplies delivered. Between 3rd and 8th September the headquarters and a brigade of an Indian division were flown into Bangkok and about 190 tons of stores delivered by air. On 13th September the *Duntroon* and a cargo vessel arrived at Singapore from Sydney carrying the 2nd Australian P.W. Reception Group and its accompanying hospital.

Meanwhile news of the end of the war had reached the prisoners in most areas without delay, through unofficial sources such as secret wirelesses or from friendly civilians; the Japanese announcement usually followed some days later.

In Changi Gaol a secret wireless permitted the prisoners to follow the negotiations for surrender from the time of President Truman's broadcast from Washington on the Potsdam decisions, through the exchange of notes and broadcasts on 10th and 11th August, up to the joint announcement by Mr Attlee and President Truman on 15th August that Japan had accepted the Allied demand for unconditional surrender. One young soldier imprisoned in Changi Gaol who wrote his recollections of the events closely preceding that day recalled that on 10th August

shortly after midnight, the official and pirate radio operators had their greatest moment. Crouched in the darkness beside their faintly glowing machines they heard from London the breath-taking news. . . . The penalty for wireless operating was death. The only safeguard was secrecy. Yet who could rest all night with this stupendous fact bursting within him?

Out of the cells they came, dark shadows slipping along the corridors. "Wake up." Sleepers felt themselves shaken as the words were hissed in their ears.

"What's up?" Another party to unload rice perhaps, or another move.

"The news—it's all over son, Japan is out. Down at home they are going mad and God-knows-everything."

"Who says so?" a voice is heard drawling sarcastically. Everyone had been caught by rumours.

"It's right, I tell you, I heard it myself. The Nips are going for the Parker.⁶ You are free, Digger. Think of it; free."

In their excitement and desire to convince the doubters, the newsbringers were half choking.⁷

In the less settled camps round Singapore Island and in Johore the first indications of impending peace were rumours among native people and the cancellation of work parties. An Australian from Java employed on the Singapore waterfront recalled that there had been persistent rumours of peace or an armistice since 10th August, and that the date 24th August had been freely mentioned as having great significance. On the 17th the Japanese officially confirmed the news at Changi; at other camps some work parties were not sent out; others returned from work early. A warrant-officer in charge of a working party of 200 Australians at Jurong road was urgently summoned before a Japanese administrative officer about 5 p.m. and informed that, as it was raining and the ground slippery, there was a likelihood of "Australian soldiers slipping and hurting themselves", and that all men were to rest on the 18th and "have plenty of food". This perhaps unprecedented solicitude was almost as convincing as the official confirmation. The reactions of the prisoners varied according to individual temperament and circumstances. Some at first elated later felt depressed, or were worried about what might have occurred during prolonged absences from homes; an Australian in Thailand decided that there was "very little display of emotion; just a more cheerful atmosphere". The official announcement "fell absolutely flat". Some prayed; others visited comrades in hospital; one found the news "too big, too stunning for instant assimilation"; most complained of an inability to sleep. One Australian soldier employed on a work party in Singapore broke out of camp (as others must have done), sat down at a street stall and ate a gargantuan meal of rice, fish and sambal (generic name for condiments served with oriental dishes), at a cost of 25 dollars.

As I ate (he wrote soon afterwards) various onlookers added perhaps another piece of fish or sambal, or a cup of excellent coffee . . . one stall-holder from a competitor stall brought me another meal of rice, while the stall-holder where I was eating added more fish and sambal. . . . He then left to return with an excellent cigarette whilst I sipped away at my lovely coffee and, lolling back with cigarette and coffee, passed a remark that it was equal to Raffles, which brought down the house.⁸

On the day of the official Japanese announcement working parties began to return to Changi from Singapore and Johore. By 21st August Changi

⁶ Such was the power of American advertising that this was a way of saying the Japanese were reaching for a pen to sign a surrender document.

⁷ David Griffin, in *Stand-To*, February 1952.

⁸ Sgt A. E. Field. Field records having increased in weight by 21 pounds between 18th and 31st August.

camp held some 12,000 prisoners; 3,800 British, Dutch and Australian prisoners were distributed among three other camps on the island. About 14,000 Indian prisoners were also to be repatriated. On the 28th Allied aircraft dropped leaflets in English, Japanese and Korean, ordering the Japanese to lay down their arms but to continue to care for the prisoners of war and civilian population and giving advice to the prisoners on the organisation created for their recovery. On the 30th two combatant officers, two doctors and two medical orderlies as well as a small supply of stores were dropped by parachute; next day many stores were dropped by parachute on Changi airfield. On 5th September the 5th Indian Division and a number of recovery teams were landed, and within a week prisoners were leaving by air for the south.

Even to isolated working parties in Burma news of the liberation was not long delayed. At one camp on the Mergui road, where for the previous month the prisoners had been witnessing a pilgrimage of broken Japanese soldiery returning from Burma, only ten fit men remained out of about 300 British, Australian and American prisoners. About mid-August the attitude of the Japanese suddenly changed and liberal supplies of quinine and blankets were made available. Work ceased; then early on the 19th the Japanese announced excitedly that the war was over.⁹ A few days later parachute troops were dropped, and then with what seemed amazing celerity the men were transferred to a hastily erected seaside camp at Kerikan. They were next taken by Dakota aircraft to Rangoon, and eventually conveyed to Australia and other destinations.

Similarly elsewhere in Burma and Thailand the news was not long delayed. An account which survives of one large working camp in Thailand reports that members of a working party first learnt of the impending liberation on 12th August from a Thai who had heard it on his wireless. The 15th August was a holiday, the first for many weeks. Next day working parties which had been marched out to working sites were returned to camp and dismissed. Work parties assembled after breakfast on the 17th were also dismissed. Half-way through the morning word was circulated that there would be a parade, to be announced by bugle call, at which all men in camp must be present.

At 11 a.m. the bugle sounded (wrote a chronicler of the 2/2nd Pioneer Battalion). It was not the lugubrious Japanese call which for so long had been the summons to parade. It was the old familiar "Fall in A, Fall in B, Fall in every Company!" There was a tremendous din of chatter as 2,500 British, Australians and Americans took their places on the parade ground.

The senior prisoner in the camp, a British warrant-officer, climbed on to a box in front of the parade. The noise subsided, and the silence was complete as he spoke. "Gentlemen!" he said, "this is the happiest moment of my life. The Japanese commandant has asked me to inform you that the war has ended!"

For perhaps ten seconds there was not a sound. The unbelievable had happened, and it first had to be believed. Then the air was rent with sound as 2,500 men yelled and shouted as they had never done before.¹

⁹ An Australian prisoner recorded that the Japanese themselves were so much out of touch with the progress of the war that they were unable to say who were the victors.

¹ *The Story of the 2/2nd Australian Pioneer Battalion*, p. 176.

By the end of September the majority of Australian prisoners recovered in Singapore, Java and Sumatra had been evacuated to Australia, either by ship or by air from Singapore; in addition half the prisoners from the Bangkok area had been similarly evacuated or were staging through Singapore.² Some 350 Australians were flown from Bangkok to Rangoon before the plan to repatriate them through Singapore was able to take effect. So rapid in fact had been the evacuation of the prisoners from these areas that some were arriving inadequately equipped for leave at Australian ports; and these arrivals were a source of complaints that eventually reached Mr Forde, the Minister for the Army. "Please have full report for me on my arrival Melbourne," he telegraphed General Blamey on 9th October . . . "and advise me who is responsible for neglect to supply clothing to these men and who has consequently brought disrepute upon army for its treatment of returning prisoners of war." The facts were that the speed of evacuation from Singapore was outstripping the time needed for adequate stocks of clothing to reach the reception group by sea. Rather than delay the departure of the prisoners arrangements were made for clothing to be dispatched by air to Darwin and other ports of call, but the difficulty of estimating the proportions of the different sizes required made it probable that whatever happened some prisoners would be lacking a few items.

Generally speaking, the more remote the area the longer the news of the surrender took to reach it. Thus at Hainan the prisoners were not informed until the evening of 25th August that the war had ended, although there as elsewhere the period after 15th August was made notable by improved rations after a long period of semi-starvation. On the 17th—the prisoners had then been confined to the compound for five months—they received their first meal of rice for over a fortnight; on the 21st much to the surprise of everyone two pigs arrived with the rations; on the 23rd the Japanese caused another surprise by providing some medical supplies. On the 25th the Japanese painted "P.W." in large letters on the roof of the camp, and that evening the men—no longer prisoners—were informed that the war was over and that soon "an American captain would be arriving by parachute to take charge of the Island of Hainan". The Japanese swamped the camp with medical supplies on the 26th, and next day an American bomber appeared and dropped 30 parachutes with other supplies. Colonel Scott conferred with an American recovery team which arrived that day, and learnt that his men would be moved to Samah, where Americans from Kunming had set up a headquarters, and be evacuated thence to the Philippines. This move took place on 5th September. Messages were dropped to Major Macrae and his party of escapers, telling them also to go to Samah. There was evidently some duplication of the arrangements for recovery of prisoners from Hainan—perhaps inevitable in the circumstances—for on 12th September the British

²The work of the reception group was facilitated both at Singapore and Bangkok by the excellence of the records maintained by the prisoners of war, and by the fact that nominal rolls, prepared by the prisoners themselves, were awaiting the Reception Group's arrival.

UNIT	ORIGINAL UNIT	1/3 Res M.L. Coy		RANK	NAME
	UNIT TRANSF. TO	1/3 R.C.C.		Lieut	Hamilton, G.F.
BATTLE TAKEN PART IN	DATE	Sept to 15/2/42		PLACE	Tralona border to Singapore
COMRADE(S) KILLED IN ACTION DIED OF WOUND OR SICKNESS	NAME	UNIT	DATE	PLACE	
	None killed				
A. Experiences on the battlefield (Battle conditions and situations under which one fought, battle conditions immediately prior to capitulation, things admired about the Japanese force, etc.)					
Was not on the battlefield					
B. Confessions from the battlefield (Tragical, from the standpoint of both individual and the unit, things that were sad, dreadful, frightful, suffering, happy, etc.)					
None for 'A'					
C. Your opinion, or impression, about the Japanese force (Before the battle, on the battlefield, since capitulation, etc.)					
Did not come in contact with them. Being a P.O.W. I have not had the opportunity to study the Japanese.					
D. Is it profitable, or advisable, for Great Britain to fight against Japan? Reasons.					
E. Your Opinion concerning the establishment of the Greater East Asia					
Have been a P.O.W. for 2 years; have not come in contact with the population since the establishment					
F. How long do you think this war will last? When do you think you can return to your home country?					
We will never					

A Japanese questionnaire circulated to prisoners of war in Korea in 1944.



(Australian War Memorial)

Prisoner-of-war camp hospital, Bakli Bay, Hainan Island, with the Dutch ward to the right.



(Australian War Memorial)

Members of an American recovery team giving plasma to a Dutch prisoner of war in the camp hospital at Bakli Bay.

TO ALL ALLIED PRISONERS OF WAR

THE JAPANESE FORCES HAVE SURRENDERED UNCONDITIONALLY
AND THE WAR IS OVER

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

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

- (1) Stay in your camp until you get further orders from us.
- (2) Start preparing nominal rolls of personnel giving fullest particulars.
- (3) List your most urgent necessities.

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

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

Dropped over
Changi for camp
on 28 Aug 45

Copies of this leaflet were dropped over Changi on 28th August 1945. The reverse side contained instructions to the Japanese about the treatment of prisoners. The annotation on the left of the leaflet has been made by the diarist of the 8th Australian Division.



(Australian War Memorial)

Released prisoners of war congregate round the entrance to Changi Gaol.



(R.A.A.F.)

Released prisoners of war about to embark on a hospital ship.



(Australian War Memorial)

Survivors from Ambon on board a corvette bound for Morotai. The rapid improvement in the physical appearance of the prisoners after a few weeks' rest and good treatment is illustrated by the contrast between the Ambon survivors, picked up directly from a Japanese prison camp, and those in the top photograph, after a short time in the hands of an Australian Reception Group.

destroyer *Queenborough* arrived at Samah (its captain knew nothing of the American organisation) and embarked Colonel Scott and 90 others (including 30 Australians) for Hong Kong, leaving Macrae in charge. "It was on the evening of this day," recorded Scott, "that we had our first taste of bread for more than three years." On the 18th the British aircraft carrier *Vindex*, having embarked the remainder of the Australian prisoners at Samah, also arrived at Hong Kong, collected Scott and his party and sailed that day direct for Australia.³ On 3rd October the men disembarked at Sydney.

On Ambon Island confirmation of the peace was not received until September, although on 21st August the Australian commander, Major Westley, was informed that a state of armistice existed. The Japanese, however, emphasised that it was not peace, but that terms were being discussed and the war might continue. Nevertheless, when Westley demanded improved rations and medical supplies, and the cessation of work parties, the Japanese agreed. For a fortnight, however, they refused to allow Westley to communicate with the nearest Allied commander. Then on 7th September, in response to renewed demands, a message addressed to Army Headquarters, Melbourne, written and signed by Westley was dispatched. The message which echoed the Australian's perplexity was picked up by signals control, 93rd United States Division on Morotai, and relayed to Australian advanced headquarters there. It read in part:

As senior officer of 123 Australian, 8 American, 7 Dutch troops and 1 American civilian prisoners of war in Amboina I request clarification of the situation and definition of our status.

On the 8th a reply was received from Morotai. A naval detachment was being sent and would reach Ambon on 10th September. Four corvettes arrived as promised and that afternoon the men embarked. On the 12th they reached Morotai, where 63 of the 123 survivors were admitted to hospital. Two died at Morotai.

In Manchuria rumours of the impending liberation reached the Mukden camps as early as 10th August. On 14th August the number of workers employed at factories was reduced; on the 16th work at the factories ceased altogether. That day five Americans flown in from General Wedemeyer's headquarters in China arrived before the Japanese had received the news, and were at first roughly handled. On the 17th the Japanese themselves confirmed the news, and next day the prisoners took over the administration of the camps. On the 20th a Russian commission arrived, disarmed the Japanese guards in front of the prisoners and placed them in the guard room, over which a guard formed by the prisoners was mounted. On the 24th began the evacuation of the sick and senior officers by air. On the 30th an American recovery team arrived; the prisoners began to receive American clothing, chocolates and tinned fruit in increasing quantities. On 11th September many were taken by rail to Dairen,

³ The deaths in the period spent at Hainan were estimated at 114, including 68 Australians.

near Port Arthur, whence they sailed in a hospital ship for Okinawa. The Australians were evacuated by air or sea to Manila to the reception camps very efficiently run by Brigadier Wrigley's group. The way home thence was by ship or air; some who had left documents buried in Changi were flown to Morotai and thence to Singapore where they were allotted transport to Australia.

News of the impending liberation reached some camps in Japan almost as quickly as it reached the Japanese people. At other camps official confirmation was delayed for one or two days. Throughout the morning of 15th August radios had been warning the Japanese people to stand by for a special announcement, and at noon long blasts on the air raid sirens summoned them to their radios.

At Wakinohama, in response to the air raid sirens, all Japanese staff were assembled at the camp office and the prisoners were herded to a distant end of the camp. The Japanese told the prisoners nothing of the Emperor's broadcast which followed, but at its end "all looked stunned and forlorn". Work parties returning to camp that evening brought back news that the war was over. Each told more or less the same story, wrote Captain Boyce: "Nips to the radio at noon . . . crying Nip women and dejected men; hanchos lining the men up for the return home, shaking hands with them and saying, 'Sayonara . . . aster shigoto ni', or 'Goodbye . . . no work tomorrow'; and in one case an indiscreet Nip said that Nippon had lost the war." Thenceforward work ceased. The Japanese commandant appealed to the prisoners to carry on as usual and to maintain law and order, and provided western food on demand and large quantities of medicines and surgical equipment which had been withheld for months. Discipline declined for a time, and a group of six officers (including one Australian) was sent to Wakinohama to endeavour to restore order. On the 26th Allied aircraft began dropping food and clothing, and next day a Red Cross representative visited the camp for the first time since the troops had arrived in Japan. Australians, mostly thin and gaunt, who had been transferred in May to other camps began to visit Wakinohama, and were given food and medicines.

On 6th September an American recovery team arrived at the camp to "process" the prisoners. "Processing" meant the preparation of nominal rolls, containing such supplementary information as the prisoner's next of kin, nationality and date of birth, and the examination by both a surgeon and a physician to determine each prisoner's state of health and, in consequence, his mode of travel—by air, hospital ship or other form of sea transport—from Japan. Before the end of the day men were leaving by train for Yokohama, and thence by air and sea for Okinawa and Manila.

The pattern of events was similar at most of the camps. Working parties were cancelled at Fukuoka on the 15th; on the 17th the prisoners were paraded and informed that the Emperor had decided to end hostilities. Prisoners were asked to be patient and remain in camp. In the following days clothing, food, medical supplies and other comforts were

dropped to them. Some went visiting near-by towns—such as Fukuoka and Hakarta—in the interval pending the arrival of recovery teams; others travelled farther afield to Tokyo. Fukuoka had been heavily pounded by bombers and offered few attractions; the city of Hakarta was a scene of desolation and chaos. The civilians were not hostile, and many of the Japanese soldiers saluted as they passed the prisoners. At Nakarma positions had been reversed to the extent that the former mine-*hanchos* had taken over positions as batmen to Australian prisoners, and on the occasion of one Australian's visit were industriously polishing their boots. On the whole the released prisoners both in Nakarma and Fukuoka acted without malice towards their former captors; and any incidents which occurred were provoked rather by high spirits than by revenge. The Japanese, in the opinion of one ex-prisoner, could hardly have been more hospitable, and "most of them changed overnight from sons of heaven to ordinary human beings". On 10th September an American aircraft landed at Fukuoka and that day thirty Australian prisoners left on the first leg of their journeys back to their homeland.

It was much the same at Omuta. Work stopped after the Emperor's broadcast of the 15th. That night Red Cross food was issued for the first time for months. Next morning the prisoners received jackets, long trousers and rubber boots. On the 17th they learnt that the war had ended, and huge yellow letters "PW" were laid about the camp on black backgrounds. On the 19th American aircraft dropped supplies by parachute.

One of the inexplicable things about the war was our sudden change of attitude towards the Japanese once peace was declared (wrote one Australian). Up to the very last day the fierce discussions which had taken place during the whole of our captivity as to what would happen to the Japs . . . when we were released were continued. . . . But when the day of release finally came there were very few . . . who remembered their threats, and not many Japs were beaten up. Our minds were wholly taken up with the wonderful realisation of being free men again. In our new-found happiness we wanted to forget the past.⁴

Recovery teams did not reach Omuta until 13th September. When they arrived they found that of the camp strength of 1,700, 506 (including 126 Australians), had, in the parlance of the day, "shot through" to Kanoya from where, an American war correspondent had told them, they could get away by plane. This proved "too much of a temptation," wrote an Australian contact officer, and a large number tried to make their own way. Those who patiently awaited rescue teams at Omuta began their journey homeward within 48 hours of their arrival.

The first British Commonwealth repatriates from Japan reached Australian reception camps at Manila on 4th September, and included the Australian nurses who had gone to Japan from Rabaul. From 9th September the liberated prisoners began to reach Manila by sea and air in increasing numbers. By 17th October, when the bulk of the recovery had

⁴R. H. Whitecross, *Slaves of the Son of Heaven*, p. 241.

been completed, 14,692 prisoners of war or internees had either passed through or were held by the Australian Reception Group. Of these 11,500 were British, 2,680 Australians, 27 New Zealanders, 160 Indians, 123 Burmese, 131 Malays, 48 Chinese, 8 Portuguese. Although the evacuation of British prisoners presented no great difficulty—most were shipped to the United Kingdom by way of the United States, and only negligible numbers by air—no shipping was made available for the transport of Australians until early October, and the number of R.A.A.F. Liberator aircraft was woefully inadequate. At the end of September fewer than 400 Australians had been evacuated from Manila. By 4th October some of the Australians had been in camp 24 days. That day some 1,500 were embarked on the aircraft carriers *Formidable* and *Speaker*, made available for the voyage to Australia by the Commander of the British Pacific Fleet, Admiral Fraser, after General Berryman, who was General Blamey's Chief of Staff, had placed before him the predicament of the Australian Reception Group. A steady outgoing by air continued until 16th October, when only 816 repatriates remained for evacuation of whom five only were Australian. Soon these too had gone. On the 24th the Australian Reception Group, its work at Manila completed, embarked for Australia.

The foregoing account of the experiences of Australian prisoners during three years and a half of adversity has been drawn from the writings and recollections of men of all ranks. Any comment is theirs. The present chronicler considers that any opinions he might offer would serve only to blur the record.⁵

More than one-third of the Australian soldiers who were prisoners of the Japanese died in captivity; 13,872 were recovered and 7,777 died—nearly three times the number killed in battle in, for example, the 9th Australian Division during its four campaigns. Among the 7,777 who died 123 were officers. Of those who did not return from Japanese prison camps, 2,336 died in Thailand, 1,783 in Borneo, 718 in Ambon, 479 in Burma, 284 in Malaya, 200 in New Britain, 190 in Japan. The number lost at sea was 1,515; 27 were executed for attempted escape, 193 were known to have been executed for other reasons, and 375 others were believed to have been executed. By comparison, of 7,116 Australian soldiers who were prisoners of Germany and Italy only 242 died in captivity. Australian soldiers who escaped from imprisonment in German or Italian camps numbered 582. Only about eight of the Australian soldiers captured in Malaya succeeded in escaping, evidence partly of the ruthless treatment of recaptured men by the Japanese, and partly of the difficulties in the way of successful escape by Europeans in Asian countries where they were conspicuous and whence, to reach Allies, they had to make long journeys through jungle and perhaps across the sea.

⁵ The impact of the period is reflected in the large number of books about prisoner-of-war life published both in Australia and abroad. A list of books by Australian prisoners of the Japanese is given in Appendix 7 to this volume.