

the game demanding to know who had started it.

Told it was Sheehan, the officer said: "Well, the man deserves a VC."

Sheehan survived to return to the goldfields of Western Australia, becoming in 1985 the owner of the first legal two-up game in Kalgoorlie. He had run the thing there since the end of the war anyway.

Tony White, owner of Napoleon's Military Bookshop in Brisbane and a man whose eyes glint at the rustle of pennies, expects half a dozen or more RSL clubs to stage two-up games on Tuesday.

"They've always done it. The tradition is there," he said yesterday.

At each game someone would be rattling a tin for the club's charities.

The game itself is a ritual of remembrance, with just hundreds, rather than thousands, of dollars at stake.

"I guess the stakes might be a little higher than last year," he said. "The two-dollar note which was the minimum has gone so now it could be five.

"But no one is going to stop it. Would you like to be the policeman who tried?"

EDITOR: *Courtesy "Bulla Tait" and thanks for the story. Am sure you were among the lucky ones!!!*

THE PETER ALEXANDER STORY — Part 2

The forty five men on board the Jap landing barge headed out towards the ship anchored in the bay, consisted of twenty officers and twenty five OR's.

The ship turned out to be a captured Dutch cargo vessel, which the Japs turned into a troop carrier. Up the side of the boat on a rope ladder, across the deck to the forward hole where a steel ladder went from the top down some thirty or forty feet to the bottom. Wooden platforms about three feet apart ran right around the hole, one can imagine how many Jap troops went to a watery grave, when one of these troop ships went to the bottom.

We were not sure where we were headed, but according to some of the hundred odd Japs who were camped in the hole, Java was their destination.

Conditions were not too bad, we were allowed on deck for about twenty minutes each day.

To use the loo was a real balancing act, two planks extended at an angle over the stern with a hand rail and a box on the end. It was OK if the sea was calm, but a bit awkward if the ship had a roll up.

The food was rice twice a day with a mug of fish soup. Although the hole of the boat used to get a bit hot during the day, there was no shortage of water for drinking.

The twenty minute break on deck each day was interesting, the ships course took her just off the islands of Flores, Sumba, Lombok and Bali, a wonderful sight viewed from the ship. Another great sight was the number of porpoises swimming alongside. Would have made a great trip under different circumstances.

The last island in this group was Madura, this is where the boat docked. The POW's were told to get what gear they had and get up on

deck. This is where they were going to spend the rest of the trip. No one had any argument against this, if there happened to be any bombs or torpedoes flying around, that hole was the last place we would want to be.

When the hole was emptied out, the locals proceeded to fill it with block salt. This took the best part of two days. When the hole was finally filled, the boat cast off and headed north along the coast of Java.

After another two days we eventually berthed at "Tanjong Pryok" the port for the capital city of Java "Batavia."

After leaving the boat we were marched across the wharf and onto a train, which then proceeded to take us in to Batavia, about a half hour run.

On reaching the station we were bundled out and onto trucks which took us to a camp on the edge of the city

The camp was a Dutch Barracks called "Bicycle Camp." There was a real mixture of nationalities here, Dutch, Poms, Yanks and Aussies. The Yanks consisted of sailors off the "Houston" which was sunk along with the "Perth" in the "Sunda Straights" battle. There was also a Texan Artillery unit.

Bicycle camp was a big improvement on the one in Timor. Most of the buildings were tiled roof and cement floors, which proved a bit hard to sleep on.

The meals were still rice and watery stew, although a couple of days we did get a small bun which tasted great.

The Yanks appeared to live a bit better than other POW's, they seemed to have an endless supply of Dutch money which was the only money the local native vendors would take, if you were lucky enough to contact one while

on a working party. Jap invasion money was taboo — the locals called it "monkey money."

There was one way to get a few Dutch guilders off the Yanks, if you were lucky enough to come across a cat while out on a working party, the Yanks called them "Alley rabbits." Six guilders for a good size one.

Work consisted mainly of going down to "Tanjong Pryok" the port and helping load boats heading for Japan. Items included furniture, cars, trucks and fridges. They ransacked most of the Dutch homes.

Life was not exactly boring, working around the wharfs took up about eight hours, then the drive back to camp was usually full of interest. The road was always teeming with bikes and I got the impression the Jap drivers must have had a bet to see who could knock the most over. The locals sure took evasive action when they seen the trucks bearing down on them.

There was always some entertainment each night. The Yanks had a really good band and the concert party that had been brought together put on some great shows.

The Yanks also introduced Volleyball. A team made up from the "Perth" became real experts at the game and had some great tussles against the Yanks.

Health in the camp was reasonable, apart from the occasional bout of Malaria and skin rashes.

The guards were always on the prowl, ready to put the boot into anyone who failed to salute them. The worst two Japs were known as "B.B." and "B.B.C." — "Boy Bastard" and "Boy Bastards Cobber." They would always get around together and would go off duty feeling, I'm sure, very disappointed if they had not bashed at least three or four victims.

We had been in the camp about six weeks, when orders came to pack our gear we were on the move again. There was much guessing as to where we were headed, one comedian said he had an idea we were headed for the "Garden City of Bandung" way up in the hills for a well earned rest.

Guessing as to our destination soon came to an end when the trucks stopped outside the Batavia railway station. With the guards screaming orders (they always liked to put on a show if there were any locals around) it was into the station and on to the train. There was only one way that train was going — down to the wharf. It looked like another boat ride to somewhere.

There were one or two respectable looking boats tied up at the wharf and there was also one that looked like it should have been sent to the breakers yard years ago, looked a sad sight with great chunks of rust peeling off the sides. Sure enough this was the one we were

ordered up the side of, across the decks and down into the hole.

I think everyone had the same thoughts, if there were any subs around they stayed away from this boat, one torpedo and it would disintegrate.

The hole set up was the same as the boat we arrived on, the wooden platforms running right around and the steel ladders going down to the bottom.

There were quite a few Japs in the hole, they appeared to be in good spirits. Told us they were going home on leave. I wonder how many of them made it, we were to learn later that the Japs were beginning to loose quite a few ships in the South China sea.

It was well into the night when we felt the ship get under way. A few POS's who had gone up top to use the loo said the going would be slow for a start owing to the number of wrecks that lay in and around the harbour.

Condition in the hole was not too bad. I expect we were lucky being a part of only forty five and having Japs down there too.

There was much speculation as to where we were headed. Having Japs on board going home on leave, it could be Japan or perhaps Singapore seeing we were headed north.

The meals were mainly rice and fish soup. I was passing the kitchen on my way to the loo and stopped to have a look at the soup being made. The fish being used were not gutted, they were chopped into four or five pieces then swept into the boiler set against the chopping block.

After three days of sailing what must have been through rather calm seas, we were ordered up out of the hole to get our first look at Singapore.

After tying up we went down onto the wharf, then onto some trucks which came alongside, so it now appeared certain we were not going to Japan. I don't think anyone was unhappy about leaving that "rust bucket."

There were a few prisoners working around the wharf but no one had a chance to have a yarn with them.

After travelling quite a few miles a huge grey building appeared on the horizon. "Changi Jail" not a very nice sight. I think everyone heaved a sigh of relief when the trucks rolled past.

We did not realise it then but the jail would become our home in another eighteen months or so.

The trucks continued on their way for another two or three miles to Selarang, which in peace time housed the main units of the British forces on Singapore.

It consisted of many huge barracks which housed the soldiers and there were also areas of parkland on which were built many homes for the Officers.

What a marvellous time these officers must have enjoyed during peace time on Singapore and Malay. Wonderful parties, Malay and Chinese servants to do their every bidding. How they must have hated those Japs for interrupting all this.

Settling in at Selarang did not take much doing, plenty of open space to move around in and there did not appear to be a lot of Jap guards around, mainly Indian Sikhs who had gone over to the Japs at the end of hostilities.

One of the barracks had been converted into a hospital and the Doctors did have some medical supplies, so the sick were able to get some attention.

The meals were even an improvement, now and again one found a very small portion of meat in the stew, it was a change to get a big of fried rice apart from the boiled stuff.

The Japs even allowed the POW's to start their own garden, this began by clearing a large rubber plantation.

Entertainment was provided by a concert party, which put on some really good shows. There was some really great talent in that camp.

It was in Selarang we were to spend our first Christmas. I can still remember Christmas dinner, a pie made from bully beef. There was also a pudding, I can't remember what the ingredients were, but there was one thing I won't forget in a hurry, it had chocolate sauce poured over it, what a feast.

The camp had quite a good library, so there was no shortage of reading material.

The main job was helping to clear rubber trees to make more ground for gardening. It was beginning to produce sweet potatoes, Chinese cabbage and egg fruit. I think the Japs had the idea that at some stage the POW's might become self supporting.

Another job I helped in was trying to get the sewerage working again. The main blockages in the pipes were caused by hundreds of condoms — those Poms sure had other past times besides parade ground drill.

The life at Selarang was reasonably good but this was to come to an end in the middle of April. The Officers in charge were told to bring together some 10,000 men, these would be split into two groups "F" and "H" forces.

All the Japs would say was that we would be going to a land of "Milk and Honey" and could even take the sick personnel along if we liked.

Most of the twenty five O.R's who had travelled together from Timor were on "F"

force when the trucks eventually pulled away from Selarang and headed towards Singapore.

Was it to be another boat ride. Apparently not. When Singapore was reached the trucks turned away from the wharf and headed into the railway station.

Lined up in the station was a long string of steel railway waggons. Into each one was jammed forty men. I must say life down the hole of the boats was much more comfortable to this. Each man had to squat with his knees up under his chin. There was no way anyone was going to lie down.

The train eventually got underway, which did ease conditions slightly, by bringing a bit of air into a steel hot box. They proved to be hot boxes by day and freezers by night.

The train crawled across Singapore, over the causeway and into Malay.

Darkness came and with it the cold, no prisoner was dressed to be locked in a fridge and that is exactly what these railcars felt like. My mind went back to the night I spent tied to that tree in the hills of Timor.

The sun coming up the next morning was a welcome sight, but it was only a matter of two or three hours and we were all sweltering in that hot box again.

Sometime into the afternoon the train reached the capital of Malay "Kuala Lumpur" it was here we were given a feed of curry and rice, prepared by some Indians. Boy, those bastards must have been born with fire proof mouths. That curry was red hot. It had to be eaten, there was nothing else. Everyone was looking for water, but there was always a shortage of that.

The train journeyed on up through Alor Star, the last of the big towns in Malay, then on across the border into Thailand.

Conditions in the trucks were not improving. I think half the blokes in each truck were suffering from diarrhoea. To relieve the kidneys was no big deal, providing one stood right at the end of the doorway. One or two blokes were not very popular when they tried it standing in the middle of the doorway. The wind promptly sprayed it straight back inside and over the nearest bodies.

Using the bowels could be a risky business. There were many bridges along the line in Thailand, the edges of which were very close to the lines and there was also a hand rail on each side.

The bloke relieving himself had to hang onto the edge of the door with one hand, while a mate hung onto his other arm. There also had to be a lookout to spot the bridges coming up ahead. The chap was then pulled back inside.

I have heard the old saying — pull your head in, never pull your “arse” in.

The local natives apparently used to walk very close to the line, but they soon gave this idea away when they seen a train bearing down on them with thirty or forty bear arses sticking out of the trucks spraying excreta in all directions.

The ride into Thailand finally came to an end at a place called “Banpong.”

I don't think anyone was sorry to leave those trucks behind. We were marched through the town down to the edge of a river, where we were given a feed. There seemed to be no shortage of food, I never seen so much rice, eggs and green vegetables. The Japs said we were going to a land of milk and honey, they should have said “passing through.”

At dusk we were lined up on a road and then told to start walking. This went on right through the night with only two or three breaks. I was to find in the nights to come that it is possible to walk in one sleep.

The next morning we arrived at Kanburi, a reasonably big staging camp. There were many long bamboo huts to rest up in. It was still hard to get any sleep owing to the heat and the millions of sand flies. These little bastards loved to get into ones eyes and ears.

With the sun setting it was out onto the road and ready for the next leg of the journey north.

We had heard rumours at Kanburi that the Japs had started building a railway from Burma which was to come through Thailand and join up with the line which came north from Bankok.

Apparently the British had surveyed the line in peace time, but because of the jungle and rugged terrain, reckoned the cost in money and human lives would be too great, so they gave the idea away.

The Japs wanted this railway badly to get their troops and materials overland and into Burma, instead of having to take them by boat. The American subs were beginning to take a heavy toll of their shipping.

Once more it was off along the road, which continued on for another five or six miles, then it came to a sudden end and became a very narrow jungle path. The POW's must have been spread out over a mile or more and it was that black, one could hardly distinguish the man in front.

The fifteen minute break was sure welcome. I think half the men were asleep before their bodies hit the ground. Even the noise of monkeys and the millions of insects, especially the borers, they sounded for all the world like a saw mill going, failed to keep them awake.

With the breaking of the dawn we again entered another staging camp. The rice that we had to consume at each camp was usually dumped on a bamboo mat out in the open and covered not with a net but a mass of flies.

Half the men were suffering from diarrhoea and it seemed that the other half would soon be joining them. Most mens feet were a mass of blisters and a lot had discarded their boots, preferring to walk in bare feet.

Any protest by our Officers to the guards received little sympathy, usually a bashing for the one lodging the protest.

Night after night the march went on, many men falling by the way side. When this happened they were always help along by their mates.

The Japs made it quite clear that no man would be left on the side of the track alive. It would either be a bullet or a bayonet to put him out of his misery.

At last, after what seemed an eternity, we had covered a distance of some two hundred and fifty miles, we marched into what was to prove to be a real hell camp.

The camp contained about six unfinished bamboo huts and was set on the side of a small hill, the name “Songurai” would have been etched in the minds of the few hundred who survived, for years to come.

Luckily for “F” force we had a Dr Bruce Hunt with us. He stood up to the Japs and told them if they did not allow the camp to be completed and latrines dug there would not be any fit men left to help build the railway.

We already had our first death from Cholera on the march up. There was also another menace on they way, the wet season was just about to begin.

The Japs eventually gave us two days to finish the huts and latrines. The men were in no condition to handle the work, which was to come. Any strength they had left had been sapped on the march up.

The diet was still rice and a brown bean, both of which were riddled with weevils, so most of the goodness had been eaten out before it got to the POW's.

Work on the railway began, cutting away the jungle, forming the track, getting teak logs for the building of a bridge and blasting away an outcrop of rock for ballast.

The wet eventually arrived. The rain just bucketed out of the skies, turning the road which joined up the camps into a sea of black mud.

The trucks which brought the rice to Songurai from the camp further north found it impossible to get through.

The only way our camp survived was by a dozen men walking the fifteen miles or so through the mud and slush to bring back rice for the camp to eat.

Conditions gradually worsened. The men were going down with all types of diseases, Malaria, Dysentery, Diphtheria, Ulcers, Beri-Beri and the most frightening of all — Cholera.

The two or three doctors in the camp could do little, they had very few medical instruments and hardly any medical supplies.

A small ulcer on the shin would, in a matter of a few days, have eaten away half the shin. One doctor used to try gouging the rotting flesh out with a small spoon. The pain the patient suffered would have been indescribable. Nine out of ten would eventually pass out.

When the doctor would have to eventually amputate, this was done with a saw borrowed from the Japs. The operating theatre was a small table out in the open set under a mosquito net. Very few of the patients survived.

Work on the railway went on despite incessant rain. The Jap guards would arrive at the camp at day break and if they asked for one hundred men, one hundred it had to be.

One day I witnessed two patients being carried out of the so called hospital hut to make up the required number.

Those two men were to lie out in the rain for up to nine hours or more.

After about three weeks on the railway, I was given a job up on "Cholera Hill." What a horrific sight. Two tents full of near skeletons. Cholera and dysentery cases, the dysentery patients lying in their own excreta, too weak to crawl to the trenches, which had been dug for latrines.

These were a sorry sight filled by the rains and overflowing millions of maggots crawling all over the ground. I thought to myself, this has got to be "Hell."

The death toll was beginning to climb to as many as six a day, all these bodies had to be cremated and to find enough wood to keep the fire going was a major problem.

I finished up with a job on the cremation when one of the two blokes doing the job took sick. It was much better than being flogged to death out on the railway. There was a tent to sit in out of the rain when one was not gathering wood and best of all no Japs would come up there.

I was beginning to think someone up there was still watching over me, then the Japs put in an order for twenty fit men.

What a laugh, twenty fit men, we should have all been in intensive care.

One of the Doctors eventually sorted out twenty men, I was one of them.

It was at this point I was separated from the mates I had left Timor with. I was wondering if I would ever see them again.

The small group set off back down the road for a distance of some five miles to a camp called "Niki" which was situated on a river.

It was here we were handed over to a new guard who ushered us onto a small boat which looked to belong to a couple of local Thais.

One of the Thais who appeared to be in charge of the boat, had trouble in getting the motor to fire, probably a bit of dampness, there sure was plenty of that about.

The river was running a banker, all types of debris was being carried along by the swift flowing current, including a few corpses, no one gave them a second glance.

The Japs had driven thousands of Asians up onto the railway to work and these were dying in their hundreds. We did have some organisation, they had none. It was survival of the fittest. The vultures must have thought all their birthdays had come at once.

The motor was eventually coaxed into starting and we headed out into the middle of the river where it was caught up in the current and really carried along at a fast rate. One or two other craft coming up stream hardly appeared to be making any progress at all.

After about half an hour travelling, the darkness began to close in, along with heavy rain, lightening and thunder. I was keeping the fingers crossed we did not tangle with one of those large logs I had seen skimming along on the surface of the water.

I think if we had gone into that water in our state of health, there would have been very few survivors.

After what seemed like a journey of some three hours, lights appeared in the distance. The Thais began the difficult job of edging the boat into the small jetty that ran along side the bank.

The Jap guards appeared much older than the ones we had come across in other camps. It appeared that when they got too old for the front line, they were put in charge of camps that were used to feed and water the thousands of Jap soldiers who passed through on their way to Burma.

When ordered off the boat onto the jetty there was no screaming or being urged along with rifle butts. They actually seemed human.

We were marched along the jetty, then up a slight incline and up to a small bamboo hut.

The hut appeared well built and with a bamboo floor raised about two feet off the ground, no sides, but the thatched roof came within a few feet of the ground, so no rain would blow in.

Accommodation wise we appeared to have taken a trick. It appeared much better than the stinking, leaking, lice infected huts at Songuai.

When we had unloaded what gear we had, which was very little, I still had my sleeping bag, a pair of tattered shorts, a shirt that had seen better days and a set of "Dutch" eating utensils. Boots were a thing of the past. The biggest percentage of the POW's were now bare-footed. One of the guards told us to get our eating gear and took us over to a large hut which housed many huge cast iron dishes used for the cooking of rice.

Here we were given a big serve of rice and a stew which actually had meat in it. Seemed too good to be true.

We were still wondering what the work was going to entail.

One thing we did enjoy was a good nights sleep away from the crys of the suffering ulcer patients and stench of the excreta from the dysentery victims.

The next morning we were all up at day break, no screaming guards, it seemed too good to be true. One or two of these old guards were doing exercises. We were told to join in. Although no one felt much like it we made an effort.

After a wash in the river, looking back I think it would have been the first wash we had since leaving Singapore, although we had hardly been dry since the rains started.

Another feed of rice and stew for breakfast, then we were lined up and given our jobs. A couple of men to give a hand in the kitchen. Two men to boil water in a couple of forty four gallon drums, a couple to cut wood, the rest to unload barges bringing rice and other supplies up the river.

This is the camp the Japs should have sent twenty sick men to after Songurai it was like a rest camp. There was even a Jap Doctor on site who spoke some English. He said he once went to England with a Jap soccer team and if we ever had any sickness to come and see him.

The Japs continued to pass through in their thousands heading for Burma. It sure done one good to see them arriving at Konquita dead beat, covered in mud and slush. There was always one or two with a small wooden box slung around the neck, this box would have contained a small portion of ashes from a Jap who had fallen by the wayside.

The one sorry sight was to witness Jap Officers mounted on beautiful thoroughbred race horses, taken from stables in Malay and Hong Kong and being ridden to death in these terrible conditions. Now and then one was seen to be pulling a mountain gun.

To kill germs, water must be boiled thoroughly. We made sure the water in those drums was never brought to the boil, luke warm was near enough for the Japs, after they had departed we would stoke up the fire and bring it to the boil for our own use.

Now and then one was even able to raise a laugh, something I was begining to think would never happen again.

I remember one day this Jap officer came running up saying "All men must come quick and build a meadow, the cows approach." We set to and built a bamboo yard into which a dozen or so Yaks were later driven.

The Asians would be lost without their bamboo. It is used for numerous purposes, the main one being for buildings. A four room home can be erected in a day, all from bamboo, except the roof covering, which is made from throngs off the palm trees. No nails are used only ties made from bark.

One afternoon I started to develop some aches and pains in the body and legs. It did not appear to be Malaria symptoms. Come evening the pain still persisted, so with two of the other blokes, one had diarrhoea and the other one felt he had Malaria coming on, we decided to go over and see the Jap doctor.

The Doc and his assistant were in the hut, there was also another Jap, both he and the Doc were as drunk as lords.

Apparently this Jap had just arrived down from Burma. He was a Chemist and was on his way back to Japan and they were celebrating. The Doc was in a singing mood and asked if we knew "Dinah." Said he learnt that song when he was in England.

We finally got him round to listen to our woes.

The two mates were given tablets, then the Doc's assistant proceeded to fill a needle with some mixture which looked as though it should have been given to a horse, but it was eventually injected into my arm.

The mates told me the next day I was out on my feet before we reached the hut.

I woke the next day feeling pretty good, no aches, no pain. Whatever was in that needle sure worked.

One day an Asian was seen staggering along the road, probably one who had been driven up from Malay to work on the railway. He collapsed opposite the camp. The Japs made it clear no one was to go near him. I think they were scared stiff he was dying from cholera.

For three days he lay there, then a Jap finally arrived at our hut, he was dressed in overalls, rubber boots and wearing a mask over the nose. He told a couple of mates to get some digging tools and he led them over to the body. A hole was dug and the Asian

disappeared in — on the end of the Japs boot. One of the mates said he believed that the poor bloke was still breathing when the Jap booted him into the hole. Life was sure cheap in Burma and Thailand.

Elephants played a big part in the building of the railway, dragging the heavy teak logs out of the jungles for the construction of bridges. The Burmese and Thais, who were lucky enough to own one of these marvellous beasts, really doted over them. After each days work they would be taken down to the river for a wash and a scrub up.

We were to witness a sad spectacle. A large elephant was crossing a very old wooden bridge that spanned a stream flowing down to the main river. The elephant had on its back its owner and two Japs seated in a basket. When only a few yards on to the bridge, the decking gave way. The elephant let out a roar and disappeared from sight. For a few seconds he was caught up in the cross beams underneath, but these gave way under the weight and he crashed down on to the ground at the edge of the stream.

Luckily the Thai jumped clear but unluckily the Japs also escaped. There was no way the Thai's friends could console him, he was grief stricken.

About a week later that elephant was begining to make its presence felt by releasing a strong odour which drifted across the camp when the wind blew in the wrong direction.

The Japs told the POW's to get some shovels and go bury it.

What a hopeless job. The ground was rock hard, the elephant was blown up to almsot twice its original size. There was enough gas inside it to have lit up a small village for a week. Then someone go the bright idea of sharpening the end of a bamboo stick and driving it into the hide and so release the gas. It sure worked, the elephant was deflated like a pricked balloon and the escaping gas cleared the area for half a mile around.

The Japs were not amused, they were never noted for their sense of humour.

The problem was eventually solved by bringing in a truck load of wood and a couple of gallons of kerosene.

The weeks dragged by. We heard rumours to the effect that Italy was out of the war and the Russians were pushing the Germans back.

The Jap troops coming through the camp were getting younger. When we first came to Konquita the rank of the troops heading for Burma were three Star, then it got down to two Star, now it was one Star — mere school boys. The Jap recruiting officers back in Japan must have been scraping the bottom of the barrel looking for cannon fodder.

One day the Japs announced that the railway had been completed and that all the men would be going back to Niki, the camp we had boarded the boat at for the ride down the river.

The POW's were sorry to hear this, the treatment we received at Konquita was a far cry from that metered out at that "Hell" camp Songurai, we often wondered how many of our mates had survived.

Most of the twenty men had actually put on weight and sickness had mainly been an occasional bout of Malaria or Diarrhoea.

The thirty odd mile trek back up to Niki was a push-over compared with the same march we had covered some five months previous. Conditions had also improved with the finish of the wet.

There were other Australians at Niki. One of the Officers in charge was Ben Barnett. Ben went to England as wicket keeper in the Australian Eleven 1938.

The chores at Niki were much the same as Konquita. Fetching water from the river and cutting wood for the kitchen fires.

One day a mate and I happened to be sawing up a log of wood close to the railway siding, when we were to witness our first train pull in from the Burma end.

Among the assortment of trucks and vans was a flat top on which were seated twenty odd Chinese. When ordered off by the Jap guards, all but two or three just rolled over the side onto the ground. They then proceeded to shuffle along on their behinds, the reason for this was that the whole of their shins had been eaten away by tropical ulcers. They must have been in agony, but to have tried to stand up would have been torture.

They eventually disappeared into the jungle. We never needed to guess as to their fate, there were no hospitals or nursing homes in there.

But why make them suffer a bumpy ride on the train, why couldn't they have disposed of them at the place where they worked. One could never fathom out the Jap way of thinking. There was one thing for sure, if he could make his victim suffer a little more, he would.

After a few weeks had passed, one just semed to loose track of time. That old saying "You would not know what day it was" was sure true up on the railway. No one even knew what month it was, not that it mattered, they were not going any place.

Niki was overrun with a plague of rats, most camps had them but Niki appeared to have hundreds more. They were under huts, in huts, night time they made sleep almost impossible, what with their racing over ones body, fighting and squealing. Even the Pied

Piper would have had his work cut out trying to get rid of that plague.

I did see an Asian doing his bit, he was barbecuing three to supplement his meagre ration of rice.

I was to feel the effects of these rodents when I went down with a bout of typhus, a disease spread by the fleas, carried by rats. A high fever and vomiting stayed with me for about three days. The English doctor at the camp had nothing to give me, it was just a case of letting it run its course.

Luckily I had put on a few pound at Konquita, but I was still a bag of bones when I eventually managed to get on the feet again.

No one protested when the Japs told us to get our gear and go over to the railway siding, where we boarded a couple of railway trucks. It was to be a little more comfortable than the trip up from Singapore.

It was late in the afternoon when the train finally got underway. No records were being broken over this new line and it was well into the night when we pulled into a siding, given a feed of rice and a piece of dried fish and told to bed down on the edge of the track.

At daybreak we got underway again. I never realised on the march up that the country was so mountainous. Perhaps that was because we walked through the night. What a ride. I never seen so many bridges and cuttings. Passing over some of those bridges really took the breath away, especially the two tier ones. They swayed at least a foot.

Lots of rolling stock was seen lying at the foot of steep embankments.

Finally after two days of travel we reached Kanburi, the big base camp we left for the march up.

We had been in the camp a week when the remnants of "F" Force began to arrive. Boy what a horrific sight, the average man was just skin and bone.

About 4,000 died in camps occupied by "F" and "H" Forces and another 7,000 in other groups spread out along the track. Asian deaths would have been hard to number, the final figure would have run into thousands.

After about two weeks in Kanburi all the men who could make it to the railway were once again packed into vans which headed south to Singapore. No one was sorry to be heading away from that Hell Hole.

After one terrible journey, Singapore was finally reached. Trucks were waiting. We were loaded onto these and I think everyone heaved a sigh of relief when we headed out of the railway yards and away from the docks and once again on the road to Selarang.

We learnt later that some of the last few hundred POW's being brought down the line were to experience the tragedy of being bombed at one or two of the railway sidings by Allied planes and seeing quite a few of their mates killed.

To have come through the pain and the agony felt in building the railway, then to have ones life snuffed out by your own bombs, brings one to the conclusion that someone up there sure works in mysterious ways.

The woes of these POW's were not finished yet. On arriving at Singapore they were taken to the docks and herded into the holes of a couple of ships. On the way to Japan one of these boats was torpedoed by an Allied submarine.

Although many POW's lost their lives, for about one hundred and fifty their luck changed. They were rescued by subs operating in the area and taken to friendly ports.

Being back in Selarang was a real tonic and after several weeks most of the men were back to reasonable health again.

The days were again filled in with gardening and general jobs around the camp. Then in early May, 1944, the three thousand odd European civilians who occupied "Changi Prison" were transferred to a camp in Singapore.

The 12,000 POW's from Selarang were then transferred to the jail. 500 were concentrated in the main building and the rest in attap huts inside and outside the jail walls.

After settling in to jail life the Japs once again called for working parties. Some were taken into Singapore to work on the wharfs, but the bulk of men were put to work building an Air Base on the tip of Changi.

Two shifts were worked. One from day break to Midday and then from Midday to dusk. The work entailed the construction of two runways in the form of a cross.

Much of the land was swamp and had to be filled in with soil brought in by a small steam engine pulling a long rack of trucks. The POW's job was to empty these into the swamp.

The Jap guards were still ranting and roaring. Apparently this aerodrome had to be finished in a hurry. There was one guard who was a real bastard. He always dressed in white. He was nicknamed the Icecream Man. He always carried a bamboo rod and would lay into anyone whose back wasn't bent.

One morning he arrived on the job and really went berserk. When an interpreter eventually came on the scene we were told that the Jap had looked Icecream Man up in a Japanese dictionary and the meaning given was a "man of very low standing."

The days continued to drag by. Our spirits were lifted a little by a "Super-Fortress" which flew over most days. We called him "Harry The Hawk." Comments were made about the crew, such as the lucky bastards heading back to base for a roast tea — probably getting stuck into a big bar of chocolate right now.

Food was always the main topic of conversation. Beer and sex were never mentioned.

One morning we had just sat down for a break when the air raid siren at the naval base began wailing. Then minutes or so later sounds of approaching planes could be heard. Looking to the north we spotted these huge silver planes approaching.

Everyone was thinking the same thing — they are going to wipe the naval base out. But no, they kept coming straight for the drome. There was no cover to dive for, so a hundred odd bodies lay prone on the ground waiting for the crunch of bombs, but nothing happened.

We looked up to see the planes, one hundred and twenty five of them, veering back in towards Singapore. After they had passed over Singapore there was still no sound of bombs, but suddenly great palls of smoke appeared in the sky. We learnt later that only incendiary bombs were dropped and that the whole of the wharf area was burnt out.

Christmas '44 was celebrated in the jail. That was the fourth Christmas away from home. The POW's did receive something to lift their spirits a little in the form of some mail. Although most of it was two years old it was still great to read.

Some of the POW's who still retained a sense of humour had to laugh when some people wrote to say things were tough in Australia, what with butter, clothing and petrol being rationed.

There were also lots of "Dear John" letters, apparently the women found the Yanks irresistible.

The news of the German surrender in May '45 was a great moral booster.

It was sad to see POW's still dying when we knew that this life on hell was drawing to a close.

It was about the end of May the Japs called for working parties. A hundred or so of us were loaded onto trucks and taken to camps set up on the outskirts of Singapore. The work entailed digging tunnels. The Japs were getting ready for the Allied invasion which they knew was not far distant.

Boy, working in those tunnels was really nerve wracking. The earth overhead never wanted to stay put. Timber frames were set up with head boards above. It sure wasn't a pretty sight to look back along a tunnel and see those head boards sagging with the weight of dirt on them.

Two tunnels would be dug about twenty yards apart then the real heart stopper would come when a cross cut would be dug so as to join the tunnels up. There were a couple of cave-ins, causing the deaths of three or four men.

The food situation on Singapore was becoming critical. Most of the Asians we passed to and from work appeared to be starving. Our ration was down to two small cups of rice and a mug of watery soup. Hardly a diet for pick and shovel work.

One day we returned from work and were told by the Australian Officer in charge of the camp that the Yanks had dropped a huge bomb on one of the Jap cities and the war was over.

The end did not arrive one day too soon. A huge Allied invasion force was standing off the Malay coast. I don't think the Japs would have spared any POW's if there had been a landing.

A couple of days later we were loaded onto trucks and taken back to Changi. POW's from all over the island were eventually congregated there. Transport planes flew in and dropped huge canisters containing food and medicine. A couple of paratroopers dropped in to tell the Jap guards their rule had come to an end and that they would be taking over.

Mountbatten and his good Lady paid us a visit. She was inspecting huts built on the outside of the jail, when on rounding a corner she came face to face with about a dozen or so POW's taking a shower. What a sight, not one of them would have weighed over five stone.

Singapore was out of bounds, but a mate and I managed to get a ride in. Met up with some Australian sailors who took us out to their boat, the H.M.A.S. Hawkesbury and put on a roast dinner and a beer. I will always remember that feed.

About a week after our liberation, we were given new clothes and footwear. The boots took a bit of getting used to.

There was one thing I was reluctant to part with, that was my sleeping bag, although I must admit there was the odd bug and lots of lice still sharing it with me.

Finally the trucks arrived to transport us to the Singapore docks and the boat we had waited three and a half years for. A British ship called the "Arawa." Up the gangway, across the deck but not down into the hole.

A four berth cabin with sheets on the bunks. This treatment was going to take a bit of getting used to.

Standing on the stern of the Arawa and watching Singapore slipping away in the distance, I vowed that was one place I never wanted to see again.
