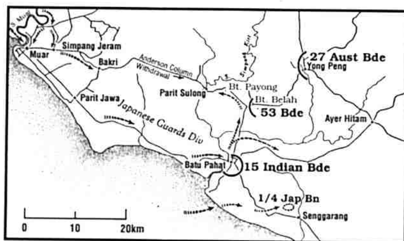
Massacre at Parit Sulong

Malacca
(Melaka)
Segamat
Muar River
Muar
Labis
Parit Sulong
Batu Pahat
Keluang
Mersing
Jemaluang
Johore Bahru
SINGAPORE
Changi
N



MASSACRE AT PARIT SULONG

GILBERT MANT

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Introduction

Lieutenant Ben Charles Hackney was a 26-year-old Australian officer of 2/29 (Victoria) Battalion, 8 Division, AIF during World War II. His battalion, with other Australian and Indian troops were involved in the epic Battle of Muar in January 1942 during the disastrous Malayan campaign, resulting in the fall of Singapore. This small force of less than 4 000 held more than 13 000 crack Japanese storm troops at bay for five days, saving the British left flank in Malaya at a critical period, and possibly saving Australia from invasion (a Japanese Governor-General had already been selected—see Appendix I).

The Australian losses at Muar were grievous and Lieutenant Hackney was one of those severely wounded in the action. When orders were given for the force to disengage and escape, the decision was made to leave the badly wounded behind in trucks and ambulances in the belief that the Japanese would tend to them. What resulted was one of the most cold-blooded massacres on record near the small village of Parit Sulong.

The badly wounded prisoners were thrown from the trucks, kicked and made to sit, some in the nude, in a circle ringed by Japanese guards. About sunset, the prisoners, their hands tied behind their backs with rope or wire, were herded together and shot. The officers were tied together first, then other ranks in the same manner. Japanese soldiers poured petrol from tins over prisoners, many of them still conscious, and set them alight. There were 110 Australians and 35 Indian victims of the atrocity but two miraculously stayed alive to tell the story after the war, Ben Hackney and Reg Wharton, aged only eighteen, of Victoria. Both of them displayed extraordinary fortitude by feigning death, despite repeated bashings and bayoneting.

It seemed that the older Hackney, in particular, was perhaps conscious that he must stay alive to assure that some day the perpetrators of this atrocity would be brought to justice. As he feigned death, Hackney was kicked on countless occasions on all parts of the body, especially on the

wound on his back. He was battered over the head with rifle butts, prodded with bayonets eleven times to see if he was still alive. A big, powerful countryman, he survived it all and spent 36 days crawling about the Malayan jungle, with a bullet wound in his left leg, shell splinters in his back, right calf and behind the knee. He was eventually recaptured by Malayan policemen and taken to Pudu Gaol in Kuala Lumpur and later to Changi in Singapore. At Changi he wrote an account of the massacre and secretly buried it in a shell case 'for future reference'.

The shell case was recovered after the Japanese surrender in August 1945. Its contents were condensed into twelve typewritten pages of sworn evidence given by Hackney in June, 1950, at an Australian War Crimes Court at Los Negros near Manus Island. In the dock was Lieutenant-General Takamo Nishimura, charged with the Parit Sulong massacre eight and a half years before. Nishimura was found guilty of ordering the massacre and sentenced to hang. When sentenced, he said contritely from the dock: 'I am deeply sorry that, due to my carelessness, such an incident as this happened. I wish to give prayers with sorrow to those who were killed'. Nishimura was hanged at Los Negros a year later, on 11 June 1951. Death was instantaneous and he was buried at sea because torrential rains upset plans for the cremation of the body. He thus had a far more merciful death than the victims of his men's atrocity.

(In his war diaries, General Tomoyuri Yamashita, the Japanese commander in Malaya, described the Parit Sulong massacre as being 'monstrous'. He attributed the atrocity to an expression of the 'pent-up feelings' of Japan's elite troops after the first time they had come up against a fierce, determined opposition, causing them much 'trouble and damage'.)

So Ben Hackney had kept his vow to see that justice would be done but had not escaped unscathed physically or emotionally himself. He had returned to the Hackney grazing property at Bathurst, New South Wales, nursing intense bitterness towards the Japanese. From his property he continued his crusade for retribution, culminating in the execution of Nishimura six years later. Ben Hackney died in 1984, aged 68, never forgiving or forgetting. The horror caught up with Reg Wharton, too, and he died in 1987 at the age of 64.

I first met Hackney when I was working as a feature writer and columnist for the Sydney *Sunday Sun*. In 1950 I flew to Bathurst with a photographer to interview him as 'The Man They Couldn't Kill'. It was

a difficult and awkward interview. He declined our request for a photograph of his multi-scarred back. I met him on other occasions in Sydney over the years. Some time in the 1950s he wrote a 116-page account of his experience entitled 'Dark Evening'. Extracts from it appeared in Lionel Wigmore's official history volume, *The Japanese Thrust*, published by the Australian War Memorial in 1957. Excerpts have also appeared in various Australian army unit histories. In 1968 Hackney donated the manuscript to the Australian War Memorial where it has remained ever since. This is the first time it has been published in book form.

The bitterness remained with Hackney and in 1975 he asked me to help him put 'Dark Evening' into book form; he felt strongly that the general public should be informed and reminded of the Japanese excesses in World War II. He turned to me because I had written two books about the Malayan campaign and he knew that I understood and had an empathy with prisoners of war. One book, *Grim Glory*, had been about the Battle of Muar, but I knew nothing at the time about the massacre at Parit Sulong. Hackney's request came at a time when Australia's trade with Japan was expanding and Japanese tourists were coming to Australia in increasing numbers. I began to wonder whether the time was opportune or correct to maintain a sort of 'hate' campaign. What did the young Japanese boys and girls know or care about massacres committed 30 years ago? Their government had told them nothing about these things. Should we visit the sins of the Japanese fathers on their children? I knew that I had lost Ben's friendship for ever when I wrote to him from Port Macquarie, where I had retired:

> Dear Ben,
>
> I don't expect you to agree with this, but I feel it would not be a good thing for the peace of the world to resurrect massacres and atrocities at this time. This may seem illogical as I helped to edit the 2/19 history, which is full of them. Nevertheless, I think we should give the young Japs of today the benefit of the doubt.
>
> Please don't be offended by this. You asked for my opinion and here it is. I think your full story should stay in the War Memorial archives until such time as events demand its release.

Ben Hackney never wrote back and never spoke to me again. I kept my letter to him and now, 20 years later in the fiftieth anniversary year of

the end of World War II, my attitude has changed. I am disturbed that certain people today are trying to persuade the new generation that the Holocaust never happened, that it was just Allied war propaganda. Soon they will be saying that the dreadful Sandakan Death Marches never happened, when there were only six survivors of 2 500 British and Australian soldiers forced to walk across Borneo to their deaths. The Japanese Army's record of atrocities was appalling and widespread in all their theatres of war—torture, bashings and beheadings in prison camps, described in Lionel Wigmore's history as 'frenzied brutality'.

In February 1942, Japanese troops reached the Alexandra military hospital in Singapore in pursuit of some detached Indian soldiers, who fell back into the hospital, still firing. The Japanese bayoneted a number of the hospital staff and patients, including a patient lying on an operating table. They herded 150 into a bungalow, and the next morning executed them.

On 12 February, 65 Australian nurses were among those escaping from Singapore on the steamer *Vyner Brooke* when it was bombed and sunk off Banka Island. Twelve nurses were killed or subsequently lost at sea. One group of twenty-two nurses reached the north-west of the island and surrendered to the Japanese. On 16 February, they were ordered into the sea and machine-gunned and bayoneted to death by Japanese soldiers. Only one nurse survived, Sister Vivien Bullwinkle. She saw one Japanese soldier laughing as he wiped the blood from his bayonet.

Nearer home, there was another atrocity at Ambon Island in the Dutch East Indies, garrisoned by a small Australian force. They were overwhelmed by a large Japanese invasion fleet. Afterwards, more than 200 Australian soldiers who had surrendered were butchered. The same thing happened a little later when the Australian garrison at Rabaul on New Britain Island was similarly overwhelmed. There were at least four separate massacres of Australian soldiers taken prisoner. They had surrendered and apparently the Japanese just wanted to get rid of them. One party of about 100 were asked whether they preferred to be bayoneted to death or shot. Most preferred the bullet and they were taken into bushland and callously slaughtered.

The Parit Sulong massacre was chillingly different, according to Hackney's account, as the perpetrators giggled and laughed and joked at the victims' sufferings and death throes.

There were many, many more, instances of this 'frenzied brutality' but whether it was a deliberate Japanese policy of terrorism, I do not know. In his book, *The Knights of Bushido*, Lord Russell had no doubts about it. He summed up his indictment of Japanese behaviour in World War II in these words:

Murder, massacre, death marches, mutilation, vivisection and even cannibalism were all practised by the proud descendants of the Knights of Bushido of the Order of the Rising Sun and apparently condoned by their High Command. The mass destruction by starvation and forced labour which turned tens of thousands of healthy men into disease-ridden skeletons was deliberate military policy. The rape of women was not enough for Japanese soldiers; their most heinous tortures were kept for victims of their animal lust, torture which apparently provided them with the most intense enjoyment.

Perhaps it had something to do with the Japanese psyche at the time. The Japanese nation (so my encyclopaedia tells me) probably arose from the fusion of two peoples, one from the Malay Peninsula or Polynesia, the other from Asia, such as the Chinese and Koreans, who conquered the original Ainu people. This unlikely racial mixture led Russell Braddon to observe that the Japanese have almost nothing in common with the rest of the world. 'Alien, complex and illogical,' Braddon described them.

Perhaps there's a clue to the Japanese psyche in their behaviour at the time of the surrender, as told in *Hirohito—Behind the Myth* by Edward Behr, an ex-Reuters man. Behr convincingly argues that Hirohito was not the weak puppet of the military-politicians, as popularly presented, but was fully aware of Japan's plans for conquest and approved them.

The Japanese people had been advised in advance that the Emperor would deliver an Imperial Rescript at noon on 15 August 1945. The Son of Heaven's choice was simple—surrender or order his people to commit national seppuka (suicide) and most Japanese fully expected and were prepared for the Honourable Death of the Hundred Million. Even shopkeepers had taken their Japanese swords from their sheaths and sat staring at the bare blades. Even the poorest of them swore, and doubtless believed, that they would commit harakiri rather than surrender. Behr believed 75 million Japanese would have killed themselves had the Emperor so ordered.

As it happened, Hirohito called off the war (chiefly to preserve the throne, Behr believed). The Rescript was cunningly worded. The word 'shusen' was used, not 'haisen', so that Japan believed herself simply to have stopped fighting, not to have surrendered. There was a vast sigh of relief in Japan. 'It was like a miraculous and unexpected cure after a long illness,' a Japanese reporter wrote. All over Japan, civilians remained in their homes for several days, weeping continuously. 'The Japanese see self-assertion as immoral and self-sacrifice as a sensible course to take in life,' wrote a Japanese commentator. 'We were accustomed to this teaching and never thought to question it. In wartime we were all like deaf-mutes.' (Were there also millions of deaf-mutes in Germany, who did not know what Hitler was doing?)

Two generations on, the Japanese now have an Emperor who no longer claims to be a living-God or a Son of Heaven. Presumably that means that the new generation are not deaf-mutes. I venture to suggest that if the present Emperor ordered 75 million of his now enlightened subjects to commit mass harakiri, the chances are they would tell him to jump into the nearest lake, with polite bows, of course.

But does this mean we should sweep the evil events of the past under the carpet, as we did for more than 100 years with the British massacres of Australian Aborigines? I think not. I think it behoves us to place these things on permanent record for our own people and for a Japanese generation who have never been told the truth about World War II. This is not a book about hate, but about Remembrance and Lest We Forget and a fervent prayer that it will never happen again. My feelings are reflected in a thoughtful editorial in the *Sydney Morning Herald* earlier this year about the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp: 'It is right then for the Jews to note this anniversary. It is one more way of focussing the mind of the present generation on the truth of a terrible event in the memory of a generation which is now passing. It is right for non-Jews, too, to pause at such a time as this, to focus on these events. That is how the world will learn to recognise a special kind of evil and, it must be hoped, learn to guard against it. As events since 1945 have shown, there is still far to go. That is not a cause for despair about the human condition. It is rather all the more reason to reflect on the terrible events of half a century ago and remember them as they should be, with absolute regard for the truth.'

This, then, is the story of a dark evening 53 years ago that should never be forgotten. It seems fitting that I should write it 20 years after Ben Hackney asked me to do so.

Gilbert Mant
July 1995

PS It must be emphasised that this book deals only with one battle. Other Australian units also held up the Japanese for vital days, such as the ambush at Gemas and the fighting at Nithsdale Estate near Mersing on the east coast. It is not my purpose to deal with scurrilous stories of mass cowardice and wholesale desertions by Australian troops in Malaya, as purveyed by Peter Elphick and others. I leave that to Sydney war historian Lynne Silver, who, having been appointed honorary historian for the Eighth Australian Division, is writing a history of that Division in all its theatres of war. Her research is expected to be completed by the end of 1996, with publication to follow.

CHAPTER 1

The Battle of Muar

Japanese supreme military commander in Malaya, General Tomoyuri Yamashita, was well pleased with himself and his soldiers. Everything was going according to plan. There seemed no reason why he would not keep his faithful promise to God-Emperor Hirohito, Son of Heaven, to capture Singapore by 11 February, Founding of the Nation Day (Kenkoku Kinembi) in Japan, celebrating the accession of the first Japanese Emperor Jimmu in 660 BC, more than 2 600 years ago. It was now 17 January, 1942, and his troops had advanced about 400 miles from Malaya's borders with Thailand in 35 days. There were about 150 miles to go and, at the present rate of progress, they would reach the causeway leading on to Singapore Island long before the Emperor's anniversary.

The general's pleasure was strengthened by news that Lieutenant-General Takuma Nishimura and his crack Japanese Imperial Guards Division had captured the historic old town of Malacca and had quickly pushed southwards down the coast to a place called Muar. The division's total strength was 12 640, with tanks, artillery and 914 motor vehicles and the troops were well-trained and seasoned in jungle warfare. The two generals were not on good terms with one another. Indeed, Yamashita suspected that Nishimura was trying to steal some of his commander's thunder by pretending it was his plan to attempt a daring encircling movement of the enemy's forces. The Yamashita plan was to quickly seize Muar and push east to cut off the main north-south highway. Yamashita was a pragmatist—let Nishimura boast about it if he succeeded but in the end the glory would be Yamashita's and the Emperor's anniversary would be kept with days to spare. It had all been so easy, General Yamashita reflected, thanks mainly to the Emperor's

air forces blasting the enemy's ships and aeroplanes out of the sea and skies in the first week. But Yamashita was about to receive an unexpected setback and the name of it was the Battle of Muar.

The Japanese Pacific onslaught had begun on 8 December 1941,* with the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Manila, Hong Kong and Singapore. Japanese troops had invaded Malaya on the east and west coasts from within the borders of Thailand. Within a week, the British battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* and the battle cruiser HMS *Repulse* had been sunk and most of the meagre obsolete Allied air forces shot out of the skies. From then on, began a long retreat down the Malayan peninsula by the British land forces, brilliantly described by their High Command's official communiques as a 'successful disengagement of our forces'. All references to the words 'retreat' or 'withdrawal' were deleted from war correspondents' stories by military censors.

Roads were the key factors in the 'successful disengagements'. There were more than 3 000 miles of metalled roads (76 per cent bitumen) in Malaya. The main north-south trunk road ran from the Thai border to Singapore Island. Much of it passed through dense jungle and rubber plantations, ideal landscapes for ambushes and infiltrations. It was down this highway that the bulk of the British forces retreated. Other roads on the east and west coasts were mere tributaries to it, joining it as the peninsula narrowed through the State of Johore to the causeway linking it with Singapore Island. The ever-present danger was the Japanese skill in using minor roads and jungle tracks to infiltrate and outflank the retreating columns.

Day by day Japanese air strength grew as the retreat continued. Day by day British fighting troops were subjected to persistent aerial bombardment and machine-gunning. There was little night bombing at the front, though night raids continued on Singapore city. Why bomb at night when you can bomb throughout the day and pick your target without opposition except from ground fire?

So the great 'disengagement' took place after darkness set in. Night after night the long convoys wound along the roads, carrying ammunition, food and the wounded. Food was a major worry. Indian troops needed special food. British soldiers had not learnt, as the Dutch taught their white officers in Java, to live on rice. The Japanese had

* Because Pearl Harbour was on the other side of the International Date Line, the date there of the attack was 7 December.

none of these worries, they lived off the country as they moved relentlessly through it.

As they retreated, army engineers did a great job demolishing bridges and other delaying tactics likely to hinder the Japanese. It was a wasted effort as each Japanese army division was equipped with 6 000 bicycles. Because of their cheapness, Japanese manufactured bicycles had become one of the chief exports from Japan to the whole of South-East Asia, with replacements and spare parts freely available in Malaya. With the infantry on bicycles, there was no traffic congestion or delays when the bridges were destroyed. The soldiers simply waded or swam across rivers and streams, carrying the bicycles on their shoulders, maintaining a hot pursuit of the enemy along the bitumen roads. A bicycle repair squad was attached to each Japanese company to fix tyres frequently punctured in the severe heat. Often the bicycles were ridden on their rims, running smoothly on the perfect paved roads and making a noise like tanks. Each Japanese bicycle soldier was equipped with a light machine-gun and a small rifle over his shoulder, often riding 20 hours a day.

It was a three-pronged retreat, with the left flank on the west coast, the centre on the north-south trunk road and the right flank on the east coast. The Japanese tactics were simple—keep pushing the defenders on the trunk road relentlessly southward by threats to their lines of communication to their right and left flanks. It presented acute chessboard problems to the British commanders. Battalions had to be moved at short notice to different positions in order to keep the defensive line across the peninsula intact. These sudden moves involved immense logistic problems.

In mid-January a major crisis of this nature arose on the west coast left flank, when Japanese troops were reported as approaching by land and sea the seaside town of Muar at the mouth of the Muar River. The possibility of enemy coastal landings between Muar and Batu Pahat, 30 miles south, had long been recognised as a dangerous threat. The road along the coast and the one inland road through Bakri afforded the only access from Muar to the trunk road at Yong Peng, far to the rear of the main body of retreating British troops. A defensive force had been stationed in the Muar area consisting of the 45th Indian Brigade, supported by 65th Battery of the 2/15th Field Regiment, Australian Artillery. The Indian brigade consisted of the 4/19th Jats, the 7/6th Rajputana Rifles and the 5/18th Garhwalis. They were mostly young

Indian recruits who had been in the army only six months or so, with no jungle training. They had been in Malaya for only a few weeks to fight for a cause few comprehended. When the time came, the seasoned Japanese soldiers overwhelmed them; in many instances they simply bolted, especially after their officers were killed (see Appendix III). The Muar force was under the command of Lieutenant-General H. Gordon Bennett, the Australian divisional commander, with headquarters at Yong Peng.

First reports to Bennett indicated that a small force of about 200 Japanese had taken Muar, but the alarm bells rang when it was established that far larger forces were involved. Bennett immediately ordered the Australian 2/29th Battalion to the rescue, supported by a troop of the 2/4th Australian Anti-Tank Regiment. They were to move up the Muar road to Bakri where they would come under the command of the 45th Indian Brigade. Bennett emphasised that the Muar-Yong Peng road was vital and should the Japanese be encountered in strength, it must be held for seven days to enable the British force concentrated north of Yong Peng, to be withdrawn down the north-south highway.

The 65th Battery, the 2/29th Battalion and the 2/4 Anti-Tank Regiment bore the brunt of the initial action of what has become known as the Battle of Muar. The 65th were sent to reinforce the Indian Brigade and were soon in action with their 25-pounders under Japanese ground and air attack. Their guns dispersed the first Japanese attempts to cross the Muar River in landing craft and continued to engage the enemy in heavy, close and indirect fire. The Japanese three-pronged attack was based on a river crossing at Muar township, a crossing further upstream and an outflanking landing further south down the coast near Batu Pahat.

With the Indians in disarray, the 65th were forced to evacuate Muar and link up with the 2/29th Battalion, which had now moved into position. There followed two days and nights of desperate hand-to-hand fighting. General Yamashita was to write '. . . our troops made slow, bloody progress. For about 48 hours it was anybody's battle'. Nishimura called up his tanks, expecting quick results, but the Australian artillerymen were to knock out a whole company of them before the battle was over. On one occasion, the guns of the 2/4th Anti-Tank Regiment put out of action all five Japanese tanks as they advanced down the Bakri Road. A total of 29 Japanese tanks were to be destroyed during the battle.

Meantime, General Bennett had ordered the 2/19th Battalion, then stationed at Jemaluang on the east coast, to Bakri to the relief of the beleaguered Muar forces. They arrived at Bakri on 18 January to find Japanese forces between them and the 2/29th. 2/19th troops cleared the roadblock at Bakri and another roadblock a few hundred yards on the Muar road. Anderson then dispatched the carriers to contact Captain N.W. Gibson, acting CO of the 2/29th, and take him back to Bakri for a conference. As a result it was decided that the 2/29th should move their perimeter up the road to join the 2/19th.

More bad news was to follow. The 2/29th Battalion's C.O., Lieutenant-Colonel J.C. Robertson, was mortally wounded while riding pillion on a motorcycle, returning from a brigade conference at Bakri. John Robertson, a veteran of World War I, had been revered by his men. Next day, there was more bad news. A lone Japanese bomber made a direct hit with a high-calibre bomb on the 45th Indian Brigade headquarters in a small house near Bakri, while a conference was in motion. All the brigade staff, except Brigadier Duncan and his acting brigade-major, Major R. Anderson, were killed or wounded. Major W.W. Julius, commander of the 65th Battery, was mortally wounded.

Our troops were now aware that they were fighting a superior type of Japanese soldier. They were soon identified by the bodies of dead soldiers as members of the elite Japanese Imperial Guards Division. They were larger physically than those encountered in earlier battles. They were dressed in olive green uniforms and equipped with respirators, grenades and entrenching tools. Swords captured from officers and senior NCO's were genuine Samurai swords.

After the bombing of the 45th Indian Brigade headquarters, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Anderson (see Appendix II), CO of the 2/19th Battalion, was put in command of the composite force, including an indeterminate number of Indians. The unseasoned Indians were causing embarrassment at times. By calling out bogus orders, the Japanese induced them to waste thousands of rounds of ammunition, as well as disclosing their positions.

There was more savage fighting with heavy casualties on both sides, as the men of the 2/29th and 65th Battery battled their way through rubber plantations and jungle to join the 2/19th at Bakri. They were surrounded and subject to continual air attack and gunfire but the remnants got through. Other small parties were cut off and made their

way back to the British lines or joined up with Chinese guerilla forces after incredible adventures in the jungles and swamps.

Recognising that they were hopelessly outnumbered, Anderson decided that a general withdrawal must be made along the one road leading from Bakri to Parit Sulong and thence to Yong Peng. The small village of Parit Sulong was on the banks of the Simpang River, with a concrete arc bridge over it. The bridge (so Anderson believed) and the high ground surrounding it was held by five platoons of the Norfolk Regiment. The village lay behind eight miles of straight causeway through swampy ground devoid of cover but then there were three miles through rubber trees. Anderson figured that if he could reach this cover, his force might be able to concentrate on the enemy coming along the causeway. So Anderson gave orders before daylight on 20 January for a five-mile withdrawal towards Yong Peng by nightfall to the edge of the open swampland, where further passage would expose it to air attack. The force was organised as a battalion of five rifle companies with two companies of Rajputs and Garhwhalis attached. The body of the column included transport, guns and a convoy of trucks and ambulances with the wounded.

So began a rearguard action of epic proportions. Long before dawn the wounded were made as comfortable as possible and all unessential equipment was destroyed. An advance guard went ahead, then the carriers trundled along at the head of the main body. The infantry marched in single file on each side of the road. The 'walking wounded' limped on, some of them with blood-soaked bandages across their foreheads, others with arms in slings. It was a tragic cavalcade of gaunt, bearded men, perilously on the edge of physical exhaustion but still full of fight.

Now there were fewer than 1 000 Australians and a small number of Indians. On all sides of them were closing in more than 10 000 crack Japanese troops with tanks, artillery and absolute command of the air. The first of the roadblocks was encountered an hour after the withdrawal began—there were to be many more road blocks before the day was through. Unit histories of the troops engaged during the next three days contain heroic and tragic stories and individual feats of great gallantry and self-sacrifice. The artillerymen manned their guns and mortars, they joined the men of the infantry in bayonet counter-attacks. They sang 'Waltzing Matilda' at times as they charged because they knew it was a

death-or-glory affair. In repulsing one frenzied Japanese attack, the gunners fired more than 400 rounds of mortar fire into a massed attack, killing more than 400 Japanese.

Gunner Walter Styles told a story that illustrated the spirit of the men. He told of an infantryman with a badly wounded left upper arm who was unable to get into a truck packed with severely wounded soldiers. 'He told me his name was Lou,' said Styles, 'and that he had been in the 1914-18 stoush. He said "I understand" when there was no room for him, then picking up his rifle and bayonet, he walked back into the battle, saying that he'd get some more of the bastards before he went. Eyewitnesses told me in Pudu afterwards that Lou had got three Japanese, single-handed, and was jumped on by five more a few minutes later. He bayoneted three of them and the other two called it a day and decamped into the rubber'.

A most vivid and harrowing account is given in the 2/29th history by Captain Victor Brand, the battalion's medical officer: 'Fighting was heavy, automatic fire seemed to come from all directions. Mortaring was constant and an artillery barrage began to open up. The area became a frightful shambles. Wounded and killed were lying everywhere. Wounded were being twice and thrice wounded in the trucks. There were fearful sights. During this time messages were coming through by wireless encouraging us with news that relief was coming. But as time went on, we lost hope. Passing by the ambulance, Pte Browning pointed to his feet with a wry smile and said "they got me again, Doc!". I had to hurry away to restrain my emotion, but when I saw Lieutenant Ben Hackney, who had been wounded again on the calf, I broke down. I remember crying bitterly and repeating "They're machine-gunning the wounded in the trucks", while Hackney stroked my arm and muttered "Don't worry, there's help coming soon . . ." '

The Lieutenant Ben Hackney mentioned by Captain Brand was a 26-year-old grazier from the Bathurst district of NSW. He and a fellow lieutenant, Ian McKibbin, another young grazier from the Bathurst district, had been life long friends. They had played football together at Bathurst and been officers in the 54th Militia Battalion before the war. After the outbreak of war they had both transferred to the AIF and been posted to the 2/29th Battalion. Although a Victorian battalion, the unit had spent some months training at Bathurst before embarking for Malaya in July 1941. Ian McKibbin, still operating his property, Kildrummie,

at Rockley, particularly remembers a meeting in the heat of the Battle of Muar with Ben Hackney. He had been shot in the ankle as he hurled a grenade into a Japanese tank. 'I remember Ben sitting with his back to a tree and I cut him a pineapple with my bayonet and gave it to him'. Fate was to bind McKibbin and Hackney even closer together in the days and years to come.

After night-long fighting, the indomitable little force struggled into sight of the village of Parit Sulong at dawn on 21 January and there a shock awaited Anderson. Instead of the vital bridge being in British hands, it was held by the Japanese and very strongly defended by machine-gun nests in adjoining houses nearby. Counter-attacks failed under a hail of Japanese bullets. Anderson's force was trapped and encircled in a triangular perimeter, from which there seemed to be no escape. It has never been clear why the Norfolk Regiment platoons withdrew from the bridge. According to one report, they had left on the approach of a small Japanese force; another suggests they were unaware of Anderson's plight.

Throughout the action, Lieutenant-Colonel Anderson had been an inspiration to his men of all units. An Englishman, born in South Africa, he was a compact, shortish and sturdily built man, who wore glasses. He was in his element in the Malayan jungles as he had been a big game hunter in Kenya and served with the King's African Rifles in World War I, being awarded the Military Cross. He had migrated to Australia in 1937, taking up land at Young in NSW. He was completely fearless and always carried grenades, as a result of his experiences in World War I. During the withdrawal he personally led an attack on a bridge and put two Japanese machine-gun posts out of action with grenades and shot two Japanese with his pistol. Captain Brand said: 'I saw quite a lot of Anderson and admired his coolness. On one occasion I remember him saying "It will be a disaster if the Japanese get through us and cut off our main army". He seemed to be quite unworried in spite of the appalling position we were in.' (Anderson was awarded the Victoria Cross for 'brave leadership, determination and outstanding courage'. He always made a point of saying that his VC belonged also to all his men).

On 21 January, Anderson read out a message received by the wireless truck—'Australia is proud of you—H.Q. 8 Aust. Div.' A private soldier commented ironically, 'After that we gave up all hope of relief. It sounded too like a kiss of death.'

Earlier in the day, the medical officers of the two battalions, Captain Brand (2/29th) and Captain Lloyd Cahill (2/19th) drew Anderson's attention to the terrible plight of the wounded in the trucks. They suggested that some trucks should proceed slowly towards the Japanese roadblock, headed by an ambulance with a Red Cross in the hope that the Japanese would give them safe conduct to the British lines.

Anderson agreed and at dusk fifteen of the most severely wounded set off in an ambulance and a civilian truck, driven by a volunteer driver and a stretcher-bearer with a white flag. The Japanese commander spoke to the stretcher-bearer and told him he would allow the wounded through only if there was a total surrender of all our troops. If not, the two vehicles would be held as a further obstacle to the sandbag barricade on the bridge. Anderson refused but still believed the Japanese would respect the Red Cross and treat the wounded humanely.

There was high drama at midnight. A young lieutenant named Richard Austin, himself badly wounded, and a private soldier stole out into the darkness and crawled towards the two vehicles. The darkness and the continuing noise of battle protected them from discovery. Austin reached the back of the truck and whispered into it, 'Hang tight, boys! I'm going to let the brakes off!' Austin and his companion loosened the brakes of the trucks and guided them as silently as possible into the perimeter.

Brand paints a grim picture of the perimeter on what was to be their last night at Parit Sulong: 'The night was full of strange sounds. On the right a gong sounded twice—it was answered by a hooter on the left. A few yards from us someone started a horrible blood-curdling caterwauling—it faded off to a continual moaning and whining which persisted all night. Japanese bugles blew calls and there were many isolated bayonet clashes, but not a shot was fired. Early next morning the barrage recommenced. We were given a frightful pounding all the morning. The Japanese hit us with everything they had. The area received such a battering that the rubber trees began to fall, one landed right across a poor fellow's back. Casualties were numerous. I saw one section of which almost every man had been killed or wounded in their shallow firing position by shell splinters but the unwounded grimly lay in their scooped out holes and faced their fronts. The stretcher-bearers were doing a magnificent job, carrying on with their work up and down the road without troubling to take cover from the intense fire which was being poured on us'.

There was a welcome surprise at dawn the next day, 22 January. Two cumbersome Allied aircraft, RAF Albecores, dropped three canisters of morphine, bully beef and water. At five minutes past eleven, General Bennett sent the following message to Anderson from Yong Peng: 'Regret that there is little prospect any success attacks 78M-80M to help you . . . 20 of your men and many Indians already returned via river to mine then track to road which is present our possession 78M. You may at your discretion leave wounded with volunteers destroy heavy equipment and escape. Sorry unable help after your heroic effort. Good luck. Gordon Bennett'.

Anderson never received this final message as the wireless batteries had by then faded away. But he had already decided that further resistance would only result in the annihilation of his small force. The order was given to abandon the killing fields of Parit Sulong. Providence came to the aid of the remnants as they moved out in deployed formation on a bearing of 340 degrees to a distance of 1 000 yards, then swung east in the direction of Yong Peng. The Japanese saw them coming and misinterpreted it to be a strong counter-attack. They hurriedly withdrew and left a gap of 400 yards up the Simpang River, between the edge of the Japanese line and the river. The troops hurried through the gap towards Bukit Incas. There were to be many hours of wading through swamps, struggling through jungle before reaching the safe haven of Yong Peng but many small parties made it.

Only about 500 Australians and 400 Indians out of the 4 000 or so who comprised the force succeeded in rejoining their formations. Ninety-eight men of the 65th Battery escaped. During the battle they had fired 6 519 rounds. It is estimated that more than 2 000 Japanese soldiers were killed and a company of tanks destroyed during the week's fighting.

The day had been saved and the main British forces were able to elude a Japanese encircling movement on the Segamat front. General Yamashita gave the ultimate praise by describing the Battle of Muar as the 'most savage action of the whole campaign . . . the survivors can feel proud because in a week-long bloody battle, without heavy tank or air support, they had held up the whole of my army. This action threw out the whole of my timing for the Singapore invasion which I faithfully promised my Emperor that I would complete on 11 February.'

(After the war, Anderson claimed a far greater achievement. Yamashita, he wrote, after Malaya wanted to go on to Australia, while

Japanese Prime Minister Hideki Tojo wanted Burma and India. 'It is interesting to conjecture', wrote Anderson, 'if, without the determined resistance in the Battle of Muar, the rapidity of the campaign would have been sufficient in time to turn the odds in Yamashita's favour and Australia would have faced invasion.')

But the six-day delay merely prolonged the agony of the British forces and Singapore. Yamashita let them continue the three-pronged 'disengagement' southwards, herding them all on to the main road to the causeway, gateway to Singapore Island. After fifteen days of some fierce fighting, with heavy casualties on both sides, the 'impregnable fortress' entered its death throes. Supplies of water, petrol and ammunition were running out. The city was in panic, its population swollen to a million by refugees from the north, and the streets were full of unburied bodies from air attacks. The oil tanks were aflame, the docks jammed with ships and people trying to get away, but there was nowhere to go to. The inevitable capitulation took place on 15 February, 1942. Yamashita lamented that it was four days too late to keep his promise to the Emperor, but it was a very rich prize for the Son of Heaven just the same.

The survivors of Muar were to be incarcerated for the next three and a half years in Japanese prisons and labour camps, subjected to unspeakable torture and barbarism. As they trudged into captivity to Changi Gaol in Singapore, they wondered and worried about the fate of the wounded left behind at Parit Sulong. The farewells to their stricken comrades that day had been the hardest moments of all. The trucks had been pulled to the side of the road as Japanese heavy tanks had been observed coming from the direction of Bakri with scant regard for any obstacles in their path.

A young Australian officer, himself with a shrapnel wound in his thigh, had limped along the line of trucks. He had four clean white towels and the last of the morphia tablets. These he distributed to those who were suffering the most. He gave a large white towel to the senior officer of the wounded to use as an official flag of surrender to the Japanese. He said huskily, 'Goodbye, old man' to a fellow officer, but by the time he had come to the last truck, he could not speak at all. It was to be more than a month before the dreadful truth was known.

CHAPTER 2
The Massacre

Lieutenant Ben Hackney and fellow officer, Lieutenant Hugh Tibbetts, had been together in the truck convoy of wounded men for days, running the gauntlet of incessant Japanese land and air assaults. Hackney was to write about the 'feeling of utter helplessness; wounds sometimes preventing any movement; continued reports from fellows coming in of tremendous odds in favour of the enemy; knowing that so many were fighting so hard, barely giving an inch, and hitting back all the time; the convoy forever being halted because of enemy action; just lying there and being exposed to everything; fellows even right alongside being mutilated and killed; lots of fellows mad or near-mad from pain; and not anything to drink . . .'

They were still under fire for some time after the remnants of Anderson Force slipped away—the Japanese were slow to realise the disengagement of their enemy. A few of the wounded in the trucks attempted to hobble away to the shelter of the trees but were quickly shot by Japanese snipers. Hackney found a Bren gun and fired occasional bursts in fury and frustration towards the Japanese, also with the thought that his fire might delude the enemy into believing the main force was still in action.

As the afternoon wore on, the Japanese fire on the convoy lessened as they moved in closer and closer; Japanese soldiers could be seen moving among the trees. By about 3 pm there was only occasional rifle and machine-gun fire. Then for a while there was an uncanny silence, a deathly and frightening silence after days of hellish noises of battle.

Here we take up Hackney's own chilling narrative 'Dark Evening', kindly made available by the Australian War Memorial in Canberra:

From all directions, but particularly north and west, chattering creatures began to come into sight—often screaming something to somebody not far away—the Japs. There was much shouting and yelling as they moved closer to our position—that portion of the roadway immediately north of the bridge crammed with vehicles—where there were so many dead, dying and wounded lying about everywhere on the ground and piled in vehicles.*

As they came in greater numbers and began swarming about the vehicles, it was indicated that all our people were to assemble in front of a native dwelling west of the road and not far north of the bridge. This information given by signs, a tremendous amount of unintelligible yelling, much jabbering and the use of many forceful means.

Soon a small group of our fellows were assembled—to reach the point they had to cross a small bridge over the parit (wide irrigation ditch) which ran along the western side of the road. The very few who were unhurt, and those who were able to give a little assistance then began taking the more unfortunate to this position. Unfortunately this was a slow process, as many were incapable of movement. Sometimes fit men after delivering one body were allowed to return to help others. Men were lying about in all directions—some dead, others seriously wounded, who had been unable to get any shelter whatsoever; others unable to make much progress had managed to crawl or drag themselves to one of the many vehicles, and there lie exhausted.

On many occasions the Jap approaching a wounded man would make signs for him to move along with the rest; however, sometimes the soldier would be incapable perhaps of any movement whatsoever. Upon failing to do as was indicated, (and sometimes the gesticulations were entirely without meaning) the Jap would immediately begin yelling and making more signs, and the soldier still not moving would be bashed about with a rifle, kicked and on some occasions eventually either run through many times with the bayonet, or with the rifle close to his head, shot. This was the fate of a good many wounded men. Sometimes a man hobbling towards the little bridge over the parit which led to the

* Hackney's narrative, while graphic and moving, does at times stretch the bounds of grammatical convention. Here the text is presented almost entirely intact (including his frequent use of one particular contentious noun). Only the most minor changes have been made to a handful of passages where his meaning would otherwise be almost completely obscure.

assembly place, and others crawling would be dealt a terrific blow, sometimes to the body, but most always to the head with the butt of a rifle, by a Jap who walked up to them deliberately or as he went past them. Some of course were knocked down and they would then be kicked.

The fate of others was to be hurried (goodness knows they were going as fast as possible) by some Japs using a variety of methods—some kicking, some often striking with their rifles, and other times prodding the men with their bayonets. One poor fellow, badly wounded in the chest and thigh, was making to the bridge very, very slowly by crawling and dragging himself along the ground. He was hit several times by Japs, but of course was not capable of moving faster. One Jap drove his bayonet into the man, made as if to push him, or heave him, along the edge of the road—the fellow fell full length downwards—the Jap then thrust in his bayonet several times and left, moving off to some other unfortunate who would also be brutally treated to make him move faster. It was by these various means that the prisoners were either herded into the assembly place, or killed, or left dying on the road.

A Jap came to where Hugh and I had been sheltering. Whether because of the gun which lay close to us, or because we were not already moving, he began to yell. Hugh, who then stood up, was pushed away by the Jap, and the Jap then indicated for me to move also. But, even knowing what was wanted and with the urge to avoid the foul treatment, I was unable to stand. He then struck me several times with his rifle, then prodded me with his bayonet. Finally he let Hugh, who was standing close by and trying to indicate that he would help me, come back, and with his assistance I got up on one leg but this I could hardly endure; as for walking, well that was impossible, even with Hugh on one side of me; my right leg was still numb and my left leg altogether too painful—I was absolutely useless. The Jap started screaming again, and began hitting us both with his rifle butt. Fortunately another fellow came by and with his help also, I managed to get along by swinging myself on their shoulders.

Upon approaching the bridge over the parit all personnel were made to take off helmets, any other equipment, watches, pens, pencils, in fact everything that was visible except clothing had to be dropped on the roadside. Our helmets seemed to cause the Japs tremendous annoyance, sometimes they would kick them viciously, or pick them up and throw

them with great force, either onto the ground only a few feet away, or into the parit. After crossing the bridge, most everybody being struck as they did so with a rifle by any or all of the Japs on both sides, all persons had to remove all their clothing (except boots and socks) which was thrown into a heap. When all had assembled we were then made to sit in a circle, cramped and huddled together, within a ring of Jap guards. There were approximately 110 AIF troops and about 40 Indian Army troops.

A great number of Japanese troops were by this time moving along the road, some on foot, and many of them carrying huge loads—packs and equipment—on their backs, others on bicycles and many in lorries (both Jap and civilian). Occasionally there would be a halt, and some of them would come over and have a look at the prisoners. What a queer sight they must have seemed—about 150 nude bodies, unshaven, dirty, mostly wounded, some wounds being bandaged but most gaping, dirty and blood clotted, some fresh or reopened by movement, still bleeding.

To the Japs the prisoners seemed to be of great interest—some showing mirth, others all temper and wickedness—and a number of them treated the prisoners brutally. Many hit or kicked (or both) the nearest person, prodded them with bayonets and punched them. All those prisoners around the outside of the group being the closest to the Japs, and particularly those closest to the road, who comprised mostly the last assembled, were treated worst and not one escaped this foul treatment, and being battered in some place or places by the Japs using their rifle butts with vicious force. Many Japs seemed to delight in kicking where a wound lay open, and so great was their satisfaction of any visible sign of pain that often the dose was repeated. The one in my back from which the bandage had long ago slipped and from which blood was again running freely attracted the attention of many.

One Jap greatly amused himself and some of the others, by drawing his sword and wiping it on the throat of a prisoner, then by dipping it in the water in the parit and repeating the action several times, the sword was eventually cleaned of its bloodstains. Then with his sword shining, he began playing with some of the prisoners: measuring the distance and drawing back the sword as if to run them through, or forcibly making a man hold his head back, and then swinging the sword with a great swish so as to pass very close to his throat. The nervous strain during all this sadistic torment was great for, because of the performance of

the other Japs, who knew but that the indicated action would not be carried right through? During these visits some of the prisoners were killed, and many knocked unconscious, when struck with terrific blows on the head with rifle butts.

Whilst the prisoners were in the nude many suffered unpleasant treatment to the more private parts of their bodies—pulled, bounced with rifles and swords, hairs plucked out or pulled, punched and sometimes kicked and hit with rifles—while many of the Japs made crude sexual signs. Whilst this was going on the prisoners' clothes were thoroughly searched, garment by garment, by an English-speaking white man dressed as a British soldier. He was hatless, otherwise fully dressed—black boots, hose tops, short puttees, shirt and turn-up shorts—no equipment. He was himself clean and clean-shaven; his clothes were clean as were also his boots—none of our fellows likewise after five days continuous fighting. Paybooks were put in one heap; papers, wallets in another; pens, pencils, money, knives, etc. etc. in another.

Shortly after all the clothes had been searched the lot was thrown into the circle by this white fellow, who told the prisoners that they could now put them on. It was strange to be so particularly grateful to be able to put on some clothes, no matter to whom they belonged. Oddly, because there were so many and they were all mixed, I was fortunate enough to get my own shirt; the trousers I got were altogether too big. Blood-stained and dirty as the garments were, I was glad to have something to wear—not because of the cold, or because the sun was hot, but because they somehow, in some way or other, offered or seemed to offer some protection.

A Jap officer, who was apparently in charge of the prisoners and the guard, then went through all the papers, paybooks and wallets; paying particular attention to any written matter, but generally to read only a few lines and then throw it away—a letter perhaps, or something equally useless to them. After he finished his task he wrote and sent a message by runner.

This Jap then gave orders to the guard, and the prisoners were soon moved from the open and forced into a little shed. 'Forced' was quite right. The Japs grunted, yelled and screamed as they kicked, bit, battered and prodded, until most of the poor fellows scrambled into this shed. Some walked on top of the more helpless; a wounded man, standing unsteadily on perhaps wounded legs, would be pushed and unavoidably

fall on many others. There were often terrific yells of pain and some, by this time delirious, would shriek and scream intermittently throughout the process. These hideous sounds increasing in volume as some poor creature, perhaps already with two or three men criss cross on top of him, would feel the pressure of yet another helpless body falling on top of him. Fellows beneath fighting against suffocation. Those closest to the door were the first to be put in the shed, which soon became a stinking, scrambling hell-hole full of tortured, tormented, groaning, delirious, wounded soldiers. Those few still fit were unable to do anything except for those immediately around them. Many of the wounded still sane, were perhaps wondering how long it would be before they too, with their paining wounds, many still bleeding freely and the continual awful nerve-racking shrieks of their crazy or near-crazy fellows, would be crazy also.

The shed was much too small, but forced and forced they were—fellows near the doorway being hit and kicked would scramble in, endeavouring in vain to avoid hurting their comrades, but no, there was no room, not even to put a foot down without stepping on some part of somebody, perhaps already twisted with bodies above and below. Again and again fellows were forced in on top of others, until it became evident even to those merciless Japs that the room was tremendously overcrowded. The remainder outside were allowed to stay by the doorway provided they kept pushed up tightly. Hugh and I being amongst the last to arrive from the road, had been with those closest to the road when all were in the circle and were again with the last to move towards the shed, and after much ill-treatment were allowed to remain outside.

The yells were less frequent, and after movement stopped they nearly died down altogether, except occasionally from one delirious, or borderline insane, or when some fellow unable to endure any longer the pain of his present position, or perhaps had become cramped, would endeavour to ease his aching body or limb, and in so doing would inevitably upset someone else.

Many men were groaning most of the time, and there were yells and requests, repeated time and time again by many for water; 'WATER' some of them would scream with delirious fury, as if nothing else in the whole world mattered. It was hours and hours, and for some a day or more, since they had had a drink, for water and those to issue it had been scarce during those days of the convoy's progress along the road.

One of our battalion mess stewards was beside me—almost crazy—he had been wounded the night the unit went to Bakri, and had suffered much during the next five days. The bandages and splints above his left knee and been displaced during all the movement, and I tried to rearrange them for him whilst Hugh endeavoured to hold him still, but did not do very well. We knew that Scottie would not be with us very much longer—his appearance was like that of quite a few now, with drooling mouths and vacant faces with lustreless eyes.

The Jap officer in charge—dressed quite differently to those personnel of the guard—a dark coloured tunic, breeches knee-high boots, armed with a pistol and sword with some braid at the hilt, and carrying a large map case—handed a few paybooks to the white English-speaking man dressed as a British soldier—who quite apparently was an assistant to the Japs—with what appeared instructions in a tongue foreign to the prisoners. This white man then read from the paybooks the names of the officers—six—and told them to come to where he was standing, about six or seven yards away from the shed and the other prisoners. Two of the officers were capable of helping others, being only slightly wounded; two could get along with some assistance; and two were practically helpless.

With Hugh on one side of me and the white fellow on the other side, they managed to get me to the place indicated, and the two officers who were able to help and this other fellow eventually got us all together. By answering names read by the fellow, the Jap officer was shown who was who. Although the Jap apparently could read English, he refused to speak English. One of the officers requested medical attention for the prisoners but got only a dumb look in response; he asked that they be allowed to get water—the same result.

Stream upon stream of Japanese troop trucks were moving along the road; artillery guns were passing in tremendous numbers; many tanks in groups now and again taking their place in this convoy. A large number of tanks were also coming out of the area west of the road, proceeding where there was only just enough room between the shed containing the prisoners and the coolie building next to it, then over the bridge across the parit which was just wide enough for them, thence on to the road to join the other vehicles proceeding southward.

The Jap officer spoke again to the one who appeared to be the NCO of the guard, and in a little while another move was made. Once again the prisoners were subjected to violence and brutality by the guard.

This time all the ORs [other ranks] were put into rooms of the raised building immediately south of the shed. This was a long process, for many had to be carried and although not far, steps had to be climbed to a narrow verandah, then through a doorway into the rooms. The building was divided by partitions running from front to rear, so that each room had a portion of the verandah. The dead were not allowed to be left; their bodies too had to be taken into the rooms. The worst wounded ones were again treated wickedly; they were expected to move as if fit, and when failing to do so were struck and kicked. Some, incapable of any movement without assistance, were killed by the guards with bayonets, and sometimes also battered on the head many times with rifle butts.

All the ORs were herded into two of these small rooms, then the doors were closed on them. The six officers were put on the steps outside one of the rooms. A little Malay boy, who had been in the convoy with the wounded for days, was allowed to remain outside the building. Once again the Jap officer was asked to allow the prisoners to get water from a small tank which was nearby, and for medical treatment, also to allow the prisoners out of the rooms; but to these requests, repeated often, he paid no attention whatsoever.

The noise of the battle was long gone—had completely faded away from anywhere near us—only an occasional bomb or shell explosion could be heard in the distance. What had happened to our fellows, and to the fellows who earlier were supposed to be coming up to our assistance? Had they too been driven back? But surely not so far, so quickly, after our fellows had hung on to that little piece of road so hard for so long.

Occasionally an enemy plane overhead; even upon the approach, far in the distance, of these the Japs would dive for cover. This seemed strange to us because no one ever saw any of our own large aircraft during the battle—it had been Jap, Jap, Jap planes all the time. Still down the road went lorry after lorry of Japanese soldiers, and very seldom now was there a halt, but each time the convoy did stop, Jap soldiers invariably ran across to the building to see the prisoners. The white Jap assistant had not been seen since the fellows were put into the rooms.

On the road, one of our fellows who had been wounded and placed by our men upon a table top and put inside an office truck had been seen earlier by a Jap. The tabletop was dragged out and left leaning

against the back of the truck and the body—the fellow had been dead for some time—was then put onto it in an upright position. Situated like that, it seemed to create enormous amusement to the Jap concerned, and was an object of ridicule to many Japs afterwards.

In this instance, and others where and whenever Japs gathered, as they often did, around the bodies of either dead or nearly dead soldiers, their actions resembled those of blowflies, only instead of the buzz as they swarmed around there was a lot of jabbering, and instead of the maggots which would have been compatible with them, they left behind instead, the marks of their kicks, punches, strikes with and bullets from rifles, thrusts and prods of bayonets. They left behind also, in our minds, an utter and lasting contempt.

Many staff cars came along, two of which were preceded by tanks and motorcyclists and followed similarly. They halted on the roadside in front of the building containing the prisoners and many Japs got out. As they moved towards us they were met by the Jap in charge, amid much shouting, saluting and bowing by this Jap and the personnel of the guard; other Jap soldiers in the area also gave their attention to this party. There was no misapprehension on our part—these were officers and some very senior ones too.

One in particular was outstanding and presumably the commander of the Japanese forces in the area. A shortish, stocky fellow to whom a bodyguard kept close always. He was well dressed; his sword dangling low had a great amount of brown cord at the hilt; knee-high boots and spurs all glistened. The attitude of the Japs to this officer was as though he was something far and above any of them; as if to them he was as a god. From all the bowing and very apparent humbleness expressed by the others, it seemed as if they were sorry he had to walk, or did not have a carpet put down for him to walk upon.

He looked scowlingly at the officer prisoners who were made to move off the steps and stand, and from the gruff abrupt manner we were made do this, it seemed as though we were expected to have realised, and were most insubordinate not to have realised, that that is what we should have done long before he came towards us. He then mounted the steps with the bodyguard keeping very close, and looked through the window at the mass inside one of the rooms. Upon leaving the building he spoke to one of the officers accompanying him, who in turn passed on what apparently were orders to the Jap in charge of the prisoners.

Again all the yelling, bowing and saluting when, after leaving a couple behind, this party departed. At first the tanks, then the cycles, then the cars moved off, then after them were more cycles and tanks. Along the road wherever Japs were to be seen they paid their compliments in a very obvious manner to the occupants of these cars.

One of those remaining then spoke to the officers. He was asked to allow water to be given to the prisoners, some of whom were all the time yelling or asking for it, and those who did not call wanted it too. The little Malay boy was told to get some, and he went with an aluminium mug to the tank close by. On returning, however, the Jap in charge of the prisoners noticed the mug, immediately hit it out of his hand, then kicked the kiddie. Needless to say the little fellow did not leave his shelter beneath the steps again.

This Jap who had spoken to us—the first and only one who had shown any signs of ordinary human feeling—was then asked about medical treatment for the prisoners. To this he asked first where were our own medical men, then he asked how many prisoners there were. When given an estimate, he informed the officers that the Japanese medical men were very busy, but later on they may come and give the prisoners something. Again asked if water could be provided, he said that if the Jap officer in charge said 'No', there was nothing he could do about the matter. Could the cigarettes be got from the bundle of prisoners' belongings? 'Not yet'.

The Indian on the ground in front of the building had moved slightly a few times, and now showed signs of returning consciousness. He had a bad wound on one hand, the top part of which had been torn away, and one leg of his trousers saturated with blood as if bleeding from some wound in his thigh. He looked terrible, but no more so than scores of others who were prisoners in that place.

The Jap in charge was watching the Indian. Taking no notice whatever of the requests, repeated time and time again by the officer prisoners, and the calls from the rooms, for water and smokes. The Indian began to sit up—the Jap kicked him over again—up again, this time many vicious kicks, and for a while the Indian lay still, groaning and occasionally chattering something to himself, with the Jap yelling something at him as if to tell him to be quiet. He then took a rifle from one of the guards and bashed the Indian who groaned even louder. Then the bayonet. Once, twice and again the blade was thrust into that writhing

body; then another thrust and a heave—the body went close to the edge of the Parit—again, and the Indian rolled into the water. After a few seconds his stained horrible-looking face emerged, the Jap levelled the rifle and fired—a jerk of the head but it remained above the water—another shot, and then the head disappeared. The Jap turned, looked towards the prisoners with a snarl upon his face, and threw the rifle back to the guard.

Presently another party of Japs arrived with one of the officers of the previous group. This officer spoke to the Jap in charge, who then went up the steps, opened the door and allowed a few who could walk to come to the edge of the verandah. He then yelled to the personnel of the guard, who came forward, some, collecting a few helmets and mugs, filled them with water, a few more produced packets of cigarettes. Of the Japs who had arrived, some produced cameras, others notepaper and pencils, and they were busy for some time photographing the prisoners. Then those with the water and cigarettes moved to the verandah, and whilst more photos were taken held these up to the prisoners, but just out of reach. Some of the poor fellows, crazy from thirst, grabbed at the water which was only withdrawn still further away. When the photographers had finished there happened another despicable action: the water and containers were thrown away, and the cigarettes retained by the Japs. Those sniggering swine seemed always to delight in tormenting the already near-despairing men, whose fate it was to be unfortunately in their hands. The men who had been allowed out were again hunted inside the room and the door closed.

Before the Jap who had spoken to the officers left, he was asked if permission be given to collect the wallets etc. that were still lying about. These had been raked over and looked at many times by Japs as they passed by, but none of them took anything away. He spoke to the Jap in charge but got 'No' for an answer. Could the tobacco and cigarettes be picked up so that the prisoners may smoke? 'No', again. He gave out a packet of his own—some English brand—a packet no doubt he had pilfered somewhere along his route.

The sentries, patrolling the building, were relieved from a small body of about thirty—a cruel looking lot—who had assembled just north of the shed shortly after the prisoners had been put into the coolie building. Previously to that they had all been herding the prisoners, and it was to them that the Jap in charge often gave orders.

Our belongings, except those we had to leave on the roadside before crossing the bridge over the parit, still lay in a heap in front of the steps. My wallet lay there with the rest. It always remained open, even on the occasions when some inquisitive Japs having looked at it, would drop it to pick up something else, it would fall, still open, and the photograph therein always visible to me, for which I was very pleased.

About sunset all the guards began to move about the area; some of them brought machine-guns from where they had been resting between tours of duty, and placed them in front of the building, the others carried rifles.

Two guards then approached the officers, each undoing as they came a small coil of rope which they took from their belts. A great number of the Japs who had passed by that day carried similar coils. The officers were then made to stand. One other and myself unable to do so without assistance, and then only to remain upright by leaning on the one standing next, and both incapable of walking. Both hands of each person were tightly tied behind their backs; after which another length of rope was tied to the wrists, passed up over the shoulder, under the chin, then round the neck, then over the other shoulder and down again to the wrists, there it was pulled tight, forcing the hands well up the back and the rope terribly tight against the throat. The rope was not then cut, but passed on to the wrists of the next officer, where a similar procedure was carried out; then again on to the next and so on, so that, as well as making more secure the tying of each, we were all linked together.

Whilst this was being done the two Japs who seemed to be more imbued with the devil than most others, treated the officers unmercifully. Jerking the ropes this way and then that, and many times bashing severely about the head, face and body, time and time again with loose lengths. Often kicking ferociously at some part of the body that was swaying or stumbling—through the Japs' own rough handling or jerking—in the wrong direction for them to do whatever they wished. During this process I was kicked in the legs and lashed about the body and head, particularly the latter, many times; this being mainly because I was unable to stand without leaning on one of either of the fellows close beside me, and each time a rope was pulled I, of course, swayed this way or that, thus continually hindering the work of those Japs considerably.

This done—the ORs were brought out from the rooms. One by one as they came down the steps they were tied brutally with their hands

behind their backs; the first then connected with the second—the rope being passed directly from wrists to wrists and not over the shoulders and around the neck as with the officers—the second to the third and so on, the first then being tied to the nearest of the small line of officers.

Complaints were made to the Japanese officer in charge regarding this ill-treatment. Nearly every man was either bashed or kicked by the Japs and some—generally the worst wounded who were unable so well to control the movements of their bodies when they were jerked—were very badly treated; occasionally another guard, seeing his fellow soldiers beating a prisoner, would rush up and add to that prisoner's misery and torture, by whaling him with his rifle butt. This habit of one Jap coming to another when that other was ill-treating a prisoner, so as to add to his efforts also, occurred very often. The Jap in charge took no notice of those complaints.

It soon became necessary to move those already tied at the bottom of the steps, to make room for others to come down and be tied as they reached the bottom. Starting with the officers they moved the line towards the shed which before had been filled with prisoners. One of the officers fell immediately; he had been wounded badly and was just about done before the tying started, and since then had been supported by each of the fellows on the side leaning heavily against him. After being kicked in all parts of the body, and being struck many times with rifle butts, he did not show any signs of movement and was cut free from the chain, and left quite close to the steps of the building where we had previously been sitting. Hugh had supported me whilst we were standing waiting, but I fell after very little movement. The Japs becoming more annoyed I suppose because I was the second to fall, began their battering and their kicking with greater ferocity. I was kicked all over the body and struck many times on the body and sometimes on the head with rifles; one kick split my right eyebrow which then hung down over the eye, the blood pouring over my face; my head was aching and very sore from some of the blows. I struggled to get to my knees, and after a few hits the Japs would force the others along and I would fall right out again, and whilst being dragged and pushing myself along as best I could with the right leg, which was not as painful as the other, again would commence that rain of blows, then again dragged again for a few more feet. Eventually giving up, the Japs cut me loose, and left me lying upon the ground in front of the shed, in a much worse, painful and

aching condition than before. The wound in my back had been kicked many times and that kept it bleeding freely, as was also the one on the side of my leg; the blood still coming over my face from my eyebrow and also from cuts now in my head, and I could feel it trickling on my neck.

Apparently the supply of rope was inadequate as some Japs were bringing pieces of wire, and with these were tying others. The noise from the Japs who were tying the prisoners became greater—yelling and screaming—and the bashing and kicking was very cruel. Most of the more fit ones had come from the rooms first, and now the Japs were having more trouble as those badly wounded emerged. The wire being yet another implement of torture with which they whaled the bodies of those unfortunates.

Towards the end, and as it was nearing darkness, either the supply of both rope and wire was exhausted, or else the Japs became tired of tying the prisoners as a few, about twenty, were left untied. The remainder had been tied in groups of about twenty to twenty-five. The dead were left in the rooms, and the worst wounded were lying where they had been dragged to be tied to their fellows, some unconscious now through pain, suffering and exhaustion, or where they had been so brutally beaten to the ground by the Japs. Some killed by being clubbed ferociously with rifle butts wielded by seemingly maniacally possessed Japs, who seemed to have lost what semblance of sense they may have possessed, and to have become obsessed with the idea of killing but not in normal wartime-like manner—others killed by bayoneting, because their injuries prevented them taking their places in the cruelly tied chains made up of their fellows; and lying along the chains there were some now dead, and others near dead or dying.

These groups, or chains of prisoners, were then made move along the front of the building towards, and then around, the south end. There were the many who were unable to move at all, and others, because they were all tied, who could not get the necessary assistance, so that many stumbled and some fell, causing others also to fall. These were then kicked and struck until as many as could do so were again standing, then the line slowly proceeded with some still being dragged. Of these a few occasionally raised themselves to their knees only to be again pulled along before regaining their feet and once more thrown off balance. Eventually as the lines neared the end of the building some of

those being dragged were freed and left lying there. The Japs grasped many and dragged them along; some were deeply prodded and pushed with bayonets in their bodies, or killed with bayonet thrusts; and many were still being dragged as they passed out of my sight around the sound end of the building.

It had by then become quite evident what was to happen. Later that night I learnt from Sergeant Ron Croft what actually did happen around the southern end of those coolie quarters. Previously I had thought, and mentioned to Hugh, that they would probably take us away somewhere. I even felt that our future treatment would assuredly be improved after the visit of the Japanese staff officers, one of whom I was sure was the commander of the local Japanese forces which I now estimated as more than a division.

Before long, firing began in the area south of the coolie quarters—many bursts of machine-gun fire and some single shots—at first it was very intense. There were many loud calls which I took to be our fellows cursing and abusing the Japs—and yells of some perhaps delirious or near crazy poor creatures came to me as I lay there thinking of what was happening to them all. After a while the firing became less; an occasional burst of machine-gun and fairly regular rifle shots.

Some Jap soldiers then returned to the front of the house and began taking away the bodies of those who had been cut free from the chains. These they dragged around the corner in the same direction as the others had been taken. First they took those near the furthermost end of the coolie quarters from me; it was there that most of them lay. A few more lay between them and the body of the other officer which, sometimes twisted in queer shapes, was quite a way from me, these were also taken and lastly the officer was dragged away. To me their fate was quite evident, and my only hope of escape was, apart from being so far away from the others, to endeavour to make the Japs believe that I was dead, and perhaps stand a chance of being left lying there.

It was now getting dark, but even in full daylight I knew I should have appeared dead enough, provided that I remained quite still. Blood had been running over my face from the wound in my eyebrow, and also a good deal of blood had come from the few cuts in my head; I was of course hatless; had not done my hair for ages; I was unshaven for five days; my head, neck and shirt top must have been a bloody sight; the wound in my back was still bleeding—it seemed to me incredible

that one could bleed so much and still be alive—and a small pool of blood was on the ground, and my shirt, torn to ribbons in the back, was saturated below the wound and all along one side, also with some blood from the small holes in my back where I had been prodded with bayonets; the turn-up shorts that I had on, to whom they belonged I knew not, were also stained—the blood from the wound of another who had been leaning on them whilst all the prisoners had been jammed into the little shed; my right leg from the knee down was also bloody, the small wound behind the knee having bled somewhat at first, and the one on my calf had bled profusely at first, and was often aggravated by kicks from Japs, and the blood had saturated my sock and soaked into my boot; my left leg from below the knee must also have looked fairly bad: the old bandage about my first wound was long since dirty and very discoloured, one bayonet had gone through the bandage and entered the calf above the exit hole of the bullet, also above the back of my boot where I had been prodded rather heavily, was another gash which had bled freely.

I lay quite still, very uncomfortable as I was still bound securely, and although I had managed to work a certain amount of freedom into the ropes, they were still painfully tight, as the rope was still round my neck I was unable even to stretch my arms, the hands still being in the vicinity of my shoulder blades.

I was left alone for quite a while and I was glad of the semi-darkness, as I guessed that that, and being so far from where any of the other bodies had been, would help.

Then some Japs came and stood over me for a few seconds, and as if to make sure of what I hoped they thought, one of them pushed me several times with his boot. I allowed my body to move quite freely in whatever direction it was forced. One or more of them then kicked me in several places and with that they left [Hackney was prodded with bayonets eleven times].

I was unable to see all around me, and afraid that there may be still someone nearby, I had to remain just as they had left me, unable to move just a little to a less aching and painful position.

The outburst of curses and yells that had accompanied the beginning of the firing and had since somewhat subsided, was not very long after revived again. I could see the flickers of a fire which occasionally would burst out very brightly. I guessed what was happening; those poor fellows, and apparently from the noise there were many of them still

Ben Hackney in uniform

The rear 2-pounder of the 13th 2/4 Anti-Tank Regiment in action ahead of Bakri during the Battle of Muar *(AWM 11302)*

Two of the nine Japanese tanks knocked out by anti-tank guns forward of Bakri *(AWM 11307)*

alive, were now being burnt, and many of them were screaming with pain—or other causes. If any doubt existed as to this, it was soon expelled as there came to me the smell of burning rag, and what was just as distinguishable and unmistakable, the odour of burnt flesh.

I had managed to be dead as far as some of the Japs were concerned, and now was determined even more than ever before that no matter what pain I suffered, how my body ached, or what discomfort or cramps I endured, I would remain dead until such time as the Japs departed. Hateful, painful, maddening as it was, that was far better than the heathen terrorising fate that was befalling the remainder of the prisoners.

Sgt Croft, when I was with him later that night, gave me an account of what happened when the prisoners were herded in a group south of the building. It was there that the most base, dastardly and heinous crime of all was committed.

The Japs lined up, many with rifles and some with machine-guns, in front of the prisoners, of whom practically all were tied. Many already upon the ground, others fallen from sheer exhaustion; most all suffering from battle wounds and from cuts, bruises, lacerations, and broken limbs, inflicted by the Japs during the last few hours of their seemingly insanely possessed actions: and all having been deprived of even the most simple and easily available necessity—water.

Rifles and machine-guns belched forth a storm of death on to those helplessly tied prisoners—a few fell, some were dragged down, a group fell—after the first while a few remained standing, these were either struck by rifle fire or hit by a burst of bullets from a machine-gun. Some in the heap yelled, perhaps from pain, perhaps deliriously, and again a single shot to quieten them, or perhaps machine-gun fire. Not satisfied with those atrocities already committed many Japs then went to the road, leaving behind a few who fired again at any body that moved, or in the direction of a groan; for there were a few who had fallen, not because of death, but because they had either been pulled down by others falling, or because the indiscriminate firing had just only added to the number of their wounds, and the pain they suffered. It seemed as though they wanted to kill the prisoners as slowly and as sufferingly as possible.

The Japs returned from the road, bringing many of the two gallon tins of petrol which were carried as spare on our vehicles. They proceeded to pour this over the prisoners, and the bodies were then set alight. There were many still alive and conscious, the unfortunate

creatures, it would have been much better had they been killed outright at first. The yells of pain, fright and nervousness, the curses and abuses and the screams of those whom this ordeal was sending mad were frightful. Mad—no wonder—to be already suffering from so much pain and torment, and then to be burnt when still tied and conscious, unable even to move away from that flame which was fast approaching, and which would soon begin to blister and burn and sizzle as it ate into the flesh, or even to reach a hand to that patch already burning and getting larger and larger. Yes—no wonder.

Of about 150 only two got away from that massacre at Parit Sulong. The officer whose body was left lying in front of the shed, and a sergeant who managed to crawl away from the burning heap in the darkness, assisting as he did so, another fellow, who unfortunately died the next day from wounds received during the burning.

Occasionally throughout a long period, after everything about the coolie quarters became comparatively quiet, a few Japs would come from the road to see what was going on. In passing me, I would sometimes only be pushed, maybe left alone altogether, and on other occasions as if one of them, having for some reason a terrific hatred for our soldiers, would vent upon me his emotions. How many times I was kicked and battered by those Japs passing by I know not, but all the time I had to maintain that lifeless attitude.

For a while some Japs seemed to be patrolling the area. Sometimes one or more of them in their wanderings came across my body; some would just pass by, others would I presumed, satisfy themselves that I was dead by previously used methods, kicking and hitting; some fortunately used their bayonets, mostly just prodding me in the back, but on two occasions however they were more than prods: once the Jap jumped and grunted as he lunged forward, but unfortunately he was standing too far away, and the bayonet entered between the ribs of my left side doing apparently no harm; the other when a bayonet point struck my right elbow, making it nearly useless for many days. I was by this time so bruised, cut and aching that it was practically impossible to distinguish the pain of one sore place from another.

One Jap coming across the bridge from the road evidently saw my boots and decided he would have them. This was one of the occasions when it was most difficult for me to remain dead, as whilst he was twisting my feet about the pain in my legs was almost unbearable.

As time went on, activity in the area became less and less, until eventually there was no sign or sound of any Japs about. I waited long after that before being certain that there was nobody still patrolling, for I knew that to be seen moving would be the end.

After such a long time of enduring so much in such an endeavour to remain alive, as I had tried ever so hard to stay 'dead', once more I had for many reasons a certain sense of freedom, although I was still bound securely; being relieved of the eternal strain of waiting, watching and listening; not having to maintain any longer that complete stillness and dead-like appearance which had until now been vital to my survival; realising that now there was no likelihood of having to suffer any longer from ill-treatment; no longer to keep wondering whether what had been endured, would be all made of no use or benefit, because of what might happen the next minute; or wonder if at any minute during the next hour I would feel perhaps only the beginning of that which would bring the end. All these thoughts brought that sense of freedom and a great relief, and that relief brought more than an equivalent of hope; from now on I thought that whether I lived or not would be entirely my own doing. I relaxed completely, realising what a terrific strain it had all been.

My next worry was to free myself of the bonds which still held firm, and painfully and very very slowly I made towards the coolie building. Each time I heard a vehicle upon the road I lay perfectly still until it and the reflection from the headlamps passed by. Eventually after ever such a long time I reached the building, but that I thought was not safe, because if any of the Japs came back it would be best if I was out of sight; so once again that slow painful movement until I was beneath the building with my back against one of the foundation blocks. I was amazed at my lack of strength—and fearful of it, for I realised then, more than ever, my nearly complete and utterly helpless condition—and now I had that to contend with and impede whatever I was able to do, as well as the hindrance and discomfort of the injuries.

It had taken me, I estimated, well over an hour to move only the few yards from in front of the shed to the building. Because of being tied I thought at first the best method would be to roll, but because I was sore and aching from head to foot, and it was necessary to strain all parts of my body to make any progress that way, and also because I had little control of my left leg, and it hurt very much each time it was moved, I

gave up the idea of rolling. There was not now that imperative necessity—before vital to my keeping alive—to endure so much if an easier way could be found. So I moved, lying straight out and on my stomach, resting often on the way, inch by inch, by gathering myself up and then stretching out, just like a worm.

Then began a tiresome and tedious process—rubbing the rope around my wrists against a corner of the foundation block—and often I was compelled to rest as my arms and shoulders ached so much. Again and again I rested, then resumed the rubbing, just moving a few inches each time, back and forth, from left to right, right to left and so on. Would these damn ropes never fray through? My arms were nearly numb but I could not give up—it was, I knew, my only chance. Through straining in an attempt to break the pieces that I thought often should be ravelled enough to snap, my wrists became more sore, and the little freedom that existed before was becoming less and less as my wrists swelled more; my throat was sore and also felt raw where the rope was rubbing. At last one broke. With this encouragement I worked hard again until eventually one hand was released. It was not long then before I was quite free, and with my back against the pillar, my arms by my side, I relaxed and rested, very grateful to be free.

The next thing was water. I had passed, whilst wriggling towards the building, the aluminium Indian army issue container in which the little Malay boy had started to bring water to the prisoners earlier, and the tank I knew was close by. With some difficulty I was able to get on my hands and knees, then crawled very slowly and with considerable pain to where the mug lay. It was away from the building, and to reach it I had once more to expose myself. After making quite sure that there was no one about I got the mug, then back to the building, beneath which I flopped down on my stomach exhausted.

When I reached the water I remembered that one should not drink too quickly when suffering from thirst, but was unable to refrain from greedily gulping down the first mug full and again the second. I drank an enormous quantity before being satisfied, and then lay quite still, and rested for a long time, thinking of what I was going to do.

I decided that regardless of whatever else I was able to do, I must firstly get well away from that area, and soon. Then I thought of finding somewhere along the river bank a craft of some kind, making for the coast, and down towards Singapore.

With those good thoughts in mind—and it was really good to be able, and have reason, to think like that again—I was about to get some more water when I heard the sounds of someone moving about outside the building. Trying not to make any noise, I moved as well and as quickly as possible into what in the darkness, seemed to be some kind of a low fireplace, but was only able to get partly into it. There were two fellows, and as they approached closer one of the spoke. An exultant feeling of relief came to me, for they were not only English-speaking men, but I recognised the voice. It was Sgt Ron Croft of my own unit who I knew was amongst the prisoners rounded up that day by the Japs.

I called to him in a low voice. The two of them stopped, stood still and quiet. It was not until I had spoken a couple of times and mentioned my name that they came on again, with one holding on to the other as if he was hurt. I told them where the water was and like myself, they drank a large quantity.

Sgt Croft had received no further injuries since he was wounded at Bakri, and during the period since had improved and was by then capable of almost normal movement; he was however very nervous. The other fellow, a tall chap, also of the Bn. was unfortunately badly wounded—he had been hit in the stomach by some of a burst of machine-gun fire—and was in bad shape. Both of them smelt very strongly of petrol.

Croft told me that they were amongst the few who had not been tied, and had been together when the prisoners were fired on. They had fallen with the first onslaught of firing—neither of them hit—and lay with the others. When the petrol was brought from the road they both had some thrown on them; the fellow beside Croft had yelled when the group was set alight, and was immediately fired upon. Ron had then got this fellow and himself free from the heap of tangled men, and had lain still and quite just some little distance out of the light of the flames, until once when he could not see any Japs, then moved further and waited.

I spoke to Ron regarding what was best to do, it being useless to remain, and necessary to get away from anywhere about the buildings and the road. It was decided that he leave and, taking the other fellow with him, proceed in a westerly direction to see if he could find a suitable hiding place in the rubber or jungle. I told him that I would proceed as well as possible in the same direction as he went, and would meet him on his way back. After another drink they set off.

The idea of collecting some of my belongings passed through my mind. However, they were well in front of the northern end of the coolie quarters, an exposure to the road would be necessary to enable me to get them; also my progress would be slow, which only added to the danger of being seen. I knew also that any energy I had would be required for what was most important—getting away from the place—and precious to me as were some of those things laying scattered about out there, and as much as I desired to have them with me again, it was a case of either them or perhaps my life. So sorrily, I left those things where they were, behind but by no means forgotten, and after much effort and pain, on to my hands and knees once more, I started out in the same direction that Sgt Ron Croft had taken—westerly, and, we hoped, to comparative safety and peace.

Progress was very slow as I made my way in the darkness on my hands and knees, and after a few yards I just flopped on my stomach to lie utterly exhausted. After a while I tried to get back into a moving position, but was unable to do so. Eventually after a very long rest I moved on again, foot by foot, and each one of them torturous and tiring. On I went, making only a few yards each time and sometimes only a few feet, before becoming too exhausted. Because I was so weak, and all my body just ached and ached, and as the suffering became too much, I was compelled to rest again and again.

When Sgt Croft returned he found me not very far from where I had started, and he had been away quite a long time. He said he had found some thick jungle near the river, and thought it would be a good place for us to rest. He helped me up, and with him beside and holding on to me, and one arm over his shoulder, I tried to walk—I tried ever so hard—but it was just useless. I was unable to move forward at all. He then said he would carry me. He was much shorter than I, and weighed a good deal less—I was at that time nearly 14 stone weight. However, he managed somehow, with me lying across his shoulders, to plod along. Ron was much weaker than normal, having been wounded, subjected to many nerve-racking experiences, he had been without food for days, and had suffered many tortures. Sheer strength alone did not enable him to carry his burden. It was something more than that—his wish and willingness to help, courage, guts and manliness.

In this manner, with occasional rests, we reached a spot quite close to the river where the jungle growth was thick, and remained there

resting. We were joined before daylight by a red-headed English soldier—one of the armoured vehicle drivers—who had been cut off north of Parit Sulong. He was very nervous and a little unbalanced mentally; sometimes he would mutter away, and when told to keep quiet, just looked blankly at us.

As dawn came on the 23rd January, we noticed that a track passed close by; it was too close to be safe. I asked Ron to have a look along the river to see if there was a boat, having in mind my previous idea of using it to get away altogether, but he returned and said there was nothing about. Across the track on the north side and a little further west, there seemed to be an area very thick with seedlings and semi-jungle growth, and we decided it would be a better position. Ron got the redhead, who had not been wounded, to help him and they carried the tall fellow there. He was much worse now and would only be alive a little longer; some of his intestines had come out the hole in his stomach, and he was only just conscious. They then returned, and with one on either side, managed to carry me to this new and much safer hiding place.

We stayed there resting until late afternoon, all scattered slightly and covered as best we could with branches, leaves, etc. I slept most of the time but it was disturbed rest. We did not see any Japs, but once heard a commotion somewhere between ourselves and the buildings, and all day we could hear vehicles moving both ways on the road. Except occasionally the sounds of shells or bombs far in the distance, we did not hear any noise of fighting.

Just after sunset, unfortunately not very refreshed from any sleep we had had, and all very thirsty again, we decided that if possible we would get further away from the roadway. None of us were worried about food although we knew we must eat something as soon as we got a chance; it was six days since having a meal and only a few little things since then. Myself, a scanty and interrupted meal on the morning of the 18th, a piece of the pineapple Ian McKibbin had given me, and then nothing except a couple of biscuits, and a tin of condensed milk on the night 20/21st when on the road in the convoy. I had not felt like eating and still was not hungry.

I always liked to remember that pineapple Ian brought me just before he left the morning he came up to the Bn HQ, not because it was a piece of fruit, but because of all that it somehow seemed to mean. We had had such a lot of good times together both at home and away, and there

was so very very much that was thought, but never uttered, that morning whilst we had a short talk; and I don't think either of us grinned very much as he came back when they were ready to leave, left the pineapple, spoke a few words, and immediately went to his truck and departed. Anyhow—who knows?—if old Smacker had not shown up that morning (and it would not be rude to add 'with red face and all', because it was red sometimes) and left me the pineapple, I might even have then been ready to begin fertilising a rubber tree somewhere about there on the Malayan mainland.

The tall fellow died early in the day, and except to leave him covered over as well as possible, with his body straight and his arms across his chest, there was nothing more we could do for him. With one on either side carrying me, we set off, once again going west and away from the road. We had not seen any Japs or natives, and felt quite safe moving whilst there was still a little light. The movement hurt me a good deal, and I was glad each time they stopped for a rest.

After going along for a while we reached a track, and sent the Englishman ahead to see if he could find a house, thinking that we may be allowed in and there get some attention, at least some water, and perhaps a wash, some bandages and something to eat.

We waited for him a long time, but neither did he come back, nor could we hear him anywhere, so Ron said he would carry me again, and see if we could find a place ourselves. The Englishman, we thought, had either been unable to find us in the dark, or had had to go a very long way. Rain had started whilst we waited, and this made us more miserable and progress far more difficult. Resting fairly often, we went on and on, and to both of us it seemed as though we were never going to find a house. Each time my left leg was jerked, through Ron slipping on the wet ground or stumbling over some tree roots, or even when it swayed about, the pain was great. We came to two drains during the trip and over each was just a single rubber tree log. To cross these I had to sit upon the log and gradually work my way sideways.

Eventually when nearing a house we met the Englishman. He said he had stayed there because it was so dark and wet, and had not moved until he heard us approaching. Ron was about exhausted, and the two of them carried me to the house, about thirty or forty yards. We had difficulty making the Malay who came to us understand anything as he could only speak few words of English. However he brought us a warm

drink, and a small bowl each of a stew in which were some fowl bones. Then a woman came out and provided a basin, some warm water and a large piece of black cloth to dry ourselves; then took our shirts and returned later with them dried. The Malay indicated that we could lie down and have a sleep beneath an overhanging roof.

After the warm drink, a little nourishment and a wash, I felt ever so much better, as my hair had still been matted and my face and neck covered with blood. The rain had loosened it to some extent but had also made me more uncomfortable. As the water ran down my face it was thick with blood and some ran into my mouth which I was forced to keep open, as I was still having difficulty in breathing sometimes, and my nose which previously bled heavily, would start bleeding every now and again. Although not very comfortable we were glad to be under shelter and all slept for a while. We felt a little better when, just before dawn, we began discussing what was best to do.

I told Sgt Croft that he and the Englishman had better leave and try to catch up with our forces. I realised that I was a tremendous encumbrance to them, and would greatly impede any progress they were likely to be able to make, whether it be by foot, by boat, or in whichever direction they went. Nothing could be done by remaining anywhere in our present locality, Jap patrols were probably already roaming the area, and we definitely intended to avoid all Japs at any cost. At first Ron was reluctant to leave but eventually, after discussing the matter fully, just after first light of the morning of 24th January, he decided they would go—make for the river, then along the bank until they found a boat, try to get to the sea, then head south hoping to reach our own forces somewhere along the coast.

At this stage my morale was perhaps lower than it had been at any other time. I told Ron my family's address and, making sure he knew it, asked him to deliver as soon as he had the opportunity, a message telling them what had happened, and an idea of where he had last seen me. I thought that perhaps after all this, there was not going to be much hope. I did not think I could exist on my own, and those 'boongs' although they had given us some food and shelter, were certainly not very hospitable; although I led Ron to believe that I thought they would allow me to stay in the house until at least I was able to walk, I knew that the chances of them doing so were indeed very remote. Thanking them both, but Sgt Croft in particular, for all they had done to help me,

I shook hands with them, and they moved off in a southerly direction towards the river, very soon to fade from sight in the half-light of early morning.

It was quite light when the Malay, who had been with us the previous evening, approached from around the side of the building bringing with him another who could speak English. The latter asked where the other two were and I told him. He said I would not be able to stay at the house because all the time 'Jar-pun' (as they all called the Japs) were wandering around the area, and if they came and found me, all Malays would get into trouble. I then suggested and tried to persuade them to dig a hole under the house, let me get into it, and then pile the wood which was in a heap under the roof nearby, on top of me. But he was quite firm in refusing to allow me to stay anywhere near the house, and said that they were going to carry me away. When I asked if they could give me some food, I was told they would bring me some after I was carried away, because I must not stop near the house any longer.

These two then spoke to each other for a while and walked away, but returned soon afterwards with two more Malays and a rice sack. The bag was placed on the ground and then they put me on top of it, and with a boong at each corner I was carried in a westerly direction, a distance of about five or six hundred yards into the rubber. I was put down near a small drain in which were growing many young rubber tree seedlings. The boongs then rushed away without a word, even leaving behind the sack on which I still lay.

I remained there all that day, but no food was brought, and I was very thirsty. Once during the afternoon I heard women shrieking, and not long after I could see three rushing through the rubber trees some distance away. Thinking that probably they had been molested and were being chased by the Japs, I dragged myself to the little drain and lay—fairly well hidden from view by the seedlings—in the muddy stinking water that was about two inches deep in the drain. There I remained for ages, peering in all directions trying to see the Japs I felt sure were somewhere in the area. After the women had run into the rubber, there was still an occasional yell or scream of a woman, which seemed to come if not from the house where I had been, then very close by. I got out of the drain when after quite a time there was a further noise of disturbance. At all times I had to lie either on my back or my stomach—to lie on my right side caused increased pain in my legs, particularly the

left one; my left side was impossible because of the hole in my ribs; to sit up was painful for my back.

By evening I was feeling a little better, as some of the aches either ceased or became less, but more thirsty and now also I was beginning to wish for food. I was not yet thirsty enough however to drink the polluted muck in the drain. There were thousands and thousands of mosquitoes about the area and their numbers increased by night.

I awoke early the following morning having slept a good deal though the night. I was then really hungry, but feeling very much better and certainly a little stronger. During the previous day and night I had heard dogs barking somewhere not far to the west, and guessed that there was either a house or Kampong fairly close. Sometimes I thought I could see the outline of a house, but was not sure as the rubber was fairly thick, and there was also a good deal of other tree growth. This certainly was not a well cared for plantation such as we had been accustomed to seeing about our camp at Segamat.

There seemed to be nothing for me to do but remain where I was; I still thought that the Malays may bring the food they had promised. However nobody came near me, and only rarely I saw an occasional native going along the track some distance away. In keeping with its customary recurrence, rain began in the afternoon; it was heavy and lasted quite some time. In desperation, about four or five o'clock in the afternoon, I began moving. Apparently there was no use at all remaining any longer, and there seemed to be only the one thing to do—to make some attempt to reach that house or whatever it was, where the dogs were barking.

Getting to my hands and knees was still a slow and painful process. I did not want to lose the sack so I dragged it for a yard or so, but it seemed heavy and sometimes got under my knee as I brought my leg forward, so then I put it across my back, and carried it as a saddle whilst I crawled; thus leaving my hands entirely free for movement and support, and not obstructing my knee which I could hardly lift, and practically had to drag forward each time. I was so disgusted when I found it even difficult to put the sack over my back; my right elbow was very painful when I put any weight on the arm, but I had to support myself with it whilst I tried to throw the bag with my left, but the sack was wet and heavy and I did not have the strength to throw it, so gathering it up beside me I raised and pushed it; it fell off a couple of times but

eventually, after resting on my right elbow instead of the hand and making the front of my body lower, by gradually pushing the sack a little one way, and pulling it in other places, I got it evenly spread across my back.

At first I made far better progress than I had been able to previously. During the rest I seemed to have regained some strength and energy, but this gave out before long however, and I was forced to rest. Then on again for a short distance—perhaps eight or ten yards—and once more flop down on my stomach. In that manner I proceeded slowly westward, sometimes resting for ten minutes, sometimes half an hour, and each time it became more difficult to get back into a moving position. When it got late into the night occasionally I slept for a short while. My knees soon got sore, as did also the tops of my feet, as I did not have sufficient control over my right leg from the knee down to always lift that foot off the ground as I went forward and my left leg was too painful. Even dragging my feet over the ground caused some pain, as the ground was strewn with little branches, twigs and roots often protruded above the surface, and all these added to the unevenness of the course I took.

I came upon a track where the ground was comparatively smooth, and what was more welcome—as by then I was desperately thirsty—an occasional indent full of water from the rain of the afternoon. It was muddy but smelt clean and I was glad of the drink; I drank from each one I came to for a while, until the water at the bottom got too gritty to swallow.

When I reached the house, the outline of which I had seen soon after coming onto the track, there was no noise or movement anywhere, and it must have been getting on towards daylight. I saw a door in the side of the building, and decided that I would try and enter unobserved and remain inside as long as possible. However, reaching up nearly as high as I could, still on my knees and with my hands upon the wall, I found the door locked. I made some noise trying to open the door, and just after I sat with my back against the wall to rest, a Malay came from the front of the house. He could not speak English, seemed rather annoyed and indicated for me to leave. I showed him that I was wounded, that my legs were useless, and remained sitting. Soon after some others appeared, apparently to see what was going on. After a little while one brought a large mug of water and some plain biscuits wrapped in a packet with newspaper. These of course I immediately

began eating—it was the first food I had had for more than forty-eight hours and I was very hungry—I asked for more, but no, that evidently was my issue. I lingered long over the water as I was not very thirsty, having drank a good deal on the track, and thought perhaps they might leave me alone.

With much gesticulation, they insisted that I leave, and one of them attempted to snatch the mug out of my hand. I indicated again that I was wounded, that I was tired and was going to sleep. Then one who appeared to be the leader came forward and grasped the bag. Afraid of losing it I snatched at one end, falling over as I did so; the fellow then began pulling the bag. Quick to observe the hostility on behalf of the leader, another came forward with a stick and waved it about me threateningly.

There was no chance now, I definitely had to go. So on my hands and knees I started off, the fellow ceased to pull the bag but kept hold of one corner. In this manner—as if leading me—with the other fellow close behind with the stick—they took me towards a footbridge across a parit about forty yards away. I had to rest before reaching it, but they seemed satisfied as long as I did not show signs of stopping altogether. Then on over the bridge and about ten yards beyond where, on leaving me, they made signs that I was to keep going and not turn back.

From there I could see, towards the south among the trees, the outline of another house, and after resting decided to go there. It was much larger than the one I had just left, and was well raised above the ground with three steps leading to a front verandah. I found an unhusked coconut beneath the steps and took it with me to the verandah. Climbing the steps was a difficult task, as I was just about exhausted after all the movement of the night, and I felt no stronger than I was two days before. However after much pulling and straining I reached the top, and then made for the door. This was not locked, but something had been put against it from inside the house, and for a while I tried hard to shift it but was unable. So with my back against the jamb I rested for a while, but as it had then got quite light, and the natives would soon be moving about, I knew that I must hide somewhere, and the house seemed quite empty. So I tried again and at last I managed to move the wedge, and pushed bit by bit until there was an opening big enough for me to enter. When inside I replaced the block against the door; it was a small cupboard.

The room was a fairly large one with an opening at the far end leading to another which, when I crawled across, I found was a bedroom. There were many large bundles of long straw lying about the floor, also some partly finished mats made of the straw. At one end a raised platform around which hung some cheap curtains, evidently the sleeping place. Also in the room, and much more important, were two large glass jars full of what appeared to be good clean water, an earthenware container full of uncooked rice; and beneath the platform lay a bunch of bananas; a few ripe, others very green and hard. I had a drink, ate the ripe bananas and also some of the others until the remainder were too dry and hard. Then with a piece of rag and some water tipped into a fifty Craven 'A' [cigarette] tin which was on the floor, I began cleaning the wounds I could reach. They, as was all my body and clothes too, were filthy and covered with mud.

This was indeed a good hiding place and I was quite happy with everything. After eating a little of the rice, which was however unpleasant, I put some in another tin and left it to soak whilst I unhusked the coconut I had brought from outside. This was a slow job as I did not have enough strength to tear off much each time, and my hands and arms soon became tired.

Either I had been watched since leaving the other house, or else I had made too much noise with the hut, because I had not progressed very far when some people came in the front door. They were soon at the opening to the second room looking at me sitting there with the nut between my legs. The first was an evil-looking creature, the chap who appeared to be the leader of the group at the other house during the night.

There was no waiting this time, some came straight in, all seemed very annoyed and hostile. They grabbed parts of my body and dragged me into the front room, to the door, and then the steps. They hurt my left leg very much and made it nearly as painful as ever. When at the bottom of the steps—they did ease me slightly over the bumps—they put me onto the bag, which I managed to indicate was the best way to carry me, and was the least painful for me, and carried me west for about one hundred and fifty yards where they dumped me and departed.

All that day I felt very dejected at having been denied what would have been an excellent hiding place, and was determined to return again as soon as it became dark. A few Malay children wandered to where I

was during the day, but only stood around and stared. Soon after dark that evening I began crawling back to the house. I found they had shifted the steps so I went beneath the verandah to rest thinking that, after all, I may not be able to get into the house. I was cranky with the Malays because I thought I was doing them no harm when using the empty house. However I had to at least try, because I certainly would not find anywhere better. And to hell with those boongs anyhow, they would not help.

So back to where the steps had been, and after a few tries and eventually getting myself in the right position by using one of the uprights, and putting a little weight on my right leg, I pulled myself up about halfway until my chest was over the verandah edge, then by wriggling inch by inch until I ultimately got right up, feeling very sore and exhausted. I got into the back room again, and after having a good drink and eating the rice I had left soaking, lay with my head on a bundle of straw and slept.

It was fairly light when I awoke, and I noticed that the jar of rice, the bananas and the nut had been taken. I again washed my wounds and then crawled beneath the sleeping platform, and untied two bundles of the straw with which I covered my body. About nine o'clock a crowd again came to the house. Probably they had noticed I was gone from the rubber where they had left me, or else noticed where the water had dripped through the floor when I was washing my wounds. However, covered as I was I thought I would escape detection.

The boongs came again to the room and they were chattering among themselves, and for quite a while I though I was safe. After two minutes or so they began poking the straw with sticks. This was something I had not anticipated, and soon I was revealed. The crowd looked even more hostile than before, and I was hit a few times with the sticks. This time I was put onto the bag whilst still in the room, and was able to gather a large piece of grey material and the Craven A tin before they carried me out.

This occasion they took no risks of my returning again and carried me far into the rubber going westward, where eventually I was put down between two old fallen rubber trees. About midday a small Chinese boy came across me and immediately ran for his life going west, and disappeared in the direction from which I had, since being there, heard dogs barking and fowls cackling. It seemed that at all the kampongs and houses they kept both dogs and fowls.

Later in the afternoon an aged Chinese woman came accompanied by the little boy who had seen me earlier; she gave me a small piece of paw-paw, some cigarettes and a box of matches. She could not speak English but certainly looked as though she was very sorry for me. Not long after their departure the little boy, who no longer seemed frightened, brought me a bottle of sweet coffee.

Dark came, and I slept much better for two reasons—with the Craven 'A' tin I was able to scoop a hollow in the ground so that when I lay down nothing pressed against the wound in my back; the large piece of gray material helped to keep the mosquitoes off my legs. My knees were by then very sore and scratched from moving on them, and apart from the old holes in my socks, I had also worn fresh ones where the tops of my insteps and toes dragged along the ground when crawling. The mosquitoes always seemed to settle on my knees and where the holes were, and everywhere I went there were thousands of the damn things buzzing about, not only all throughout the night when they were worst, but also during daylight.

Early the next morning the little Chinese boy came again; this time he brought some cooked rice wrapped in a leaf as well as a bottle of coffee. He took the old bottle and disappeared quickly. In the evening he came again with more coffee, some Chinese tobacco, papers and matches.

The next day was much the same until just after dark when two Chinese men came carrying two freshly-cut light poles, a bag and a bundle of rice. One could speak a little English, and told me that they were going to carry me a long distance away to where a friend of his had a house that I could go into, and that he and his friend would keep me supplied with food. This sounded a little too good to me, but I was incapable of doing anything for myself, and entirely in the hands of anyone who wished me to be out of the way; I got the same treatment whether I protested or not. But I was sorry to be leaving this place where I was fairly sure of receiving some food and something to drink each day.

Getting the bag I had with me, they made an improvised stretcher by cutting holes in the ends of each sack, and running the poles through them. I was told to get onto the stretcher, and with the poles on their shoulders they carried me, moving in the typical burdened-native jig-jog fashion—first south onto a track, then in a westerly direction.

Whether it was so as not to take me where I had been before, or in order to get further away from the Japs, or because they desired not to move towards the Muar road, I knew not, but always whenever I was moved, it was westward.

The two Chinese never rested, and it seemed as if they were never going to stop; they crossed two parits and soon afterwards a deep drain. After crossing the drain they left the track and turned north for about thirty yards, then put me down beside what was evidently the house he had referred to before. It was a little shelter, built in a vegetable garden area, consisting of a small raised platform made of bamboo slats, about eighteen inches high and measuring about four by seven feet, no sides, and an attap peaked roof. Telling me they would come in the morning with food, and bring the friend who was going to help look after me, they threw the bags and sticks into a heap of lalang nearby and departed. I did not see either of them again.

Next morning the first person I saw was a Malay who evidently owned the garden area, which was the only piece of ground anywhere about without timber, and lived in a house we had passed the night before just previous to crossing the drain. He was very annoyed when he saw me in the shelter and pointed for me to move, but I took no notice. He called and soon another came, and as they approached I sensed imminent danger, so I produced the bamboo slat I had removed to allow an opening for my wound in my back when lying down, and adopted as near as possible a threatening attitude. They left then and it was about half an hour before they returned, bringing reinforcements making a total of eight, this time armed with parangs and sticks. Once again I was at the mercy of these boongs. I showed them I was unable to walk, whereupon I was carried away but only across the track and about forty yards into the timber to the south. I asked them to bring water and food, using the Malay words for both, but I got nothing. I was very thirsty and as the afternoon passed I became even more so.

Somewhere about three o'clock it began to rain so I decided that despite the consequences I would again go to the shelter. The rain was not enough to make any puddles, and the drops I licked off the occasional leaves did nothing to appease my thirst, and I was terribly hungry. Still having matches and papers but no tobacco, I tore some of the attap off the roof, broke it into small pieces, and made from it a cigarette, but however, a couple of draws were quite sufficient each time.

Scores of boongs had been passing along the track when I was in the timber and back again in the shelter, and I called to many of them for food and water, but most continued on their way; others would come over just to have a look at me, some would laugh, others look sorry, but except for one old woman, that was the extent of their sympathy. She went into the garden and returned bringing a root which she showed me had to be peeled before it was eaten. This was the first time I had seen raw tapioca.

Before dark, being just about desperate from thirst, I crawled to the drain the Chinese had crossed when carrying me the night before, and had a drink of the most filthy, foul-smelling, polluted, thick, slimy water I had ever seen, but by that stage I did not care as long as it was water. I used the Craven A tin as a mug, and with it brushed away much of the slime and got the water, avoiding as much as possible the thick sediment. At first the foul smell did not worry me, but after I had a few tins full, and in some way quenched my thirst, I was very nearly sick while looking at the thick muck I had just been drinking.

Then on my hands and knees again I went back through the garden to the shelter, looking on my way to see if I could find any more such roots as the old woman had given me. I was very happy when I found two little ones at the butt of what appeared to me to be a small seedling of a tree.

The following morning I was not left alone for many hours of daylight. This time the Malay came bringing the others and again evident were the sticks and parangs. They found the improvised stretcher and laid it beside the platform. I did not shift, but after I was hit by the leader with a stick I thought it was about time to move. I was carried on to the track, and along it going west for about a mile, then in off the track and northward for about forty yards and dropped. As I hit the ground the leader or garden owner kicked me in the back of the neck. When I regained consciousness, still lying on the stretcher, there was not one person in sight. This was the first time I had been unconscious throughout the whole period.

I was close enough to the track to see all who passed, but far enough away to avoid observation if by any chance Japs should pass by. I was beginning to think that none were penetrating far, because I had not seen any since leaving the road, and the natives appeared to be moving around as usual. I called several times to the natives as they passed, but

the only result was that a few came across to have a look, and one huge Malay, the tallest and biggest I had ever seen, gave me some native tobacco, papers and matches. I always kept my smokes and matches in the Craven A tin—the vessel which to me had become very important.

During the late afternoon I called in a loud voice for water and food, using only the two Malay words. It was strange to hear the sound of my own voice so loudly again, and after I got over what really amounted to the surprise of the first few times, and became accustomed to it again, I called louder. What the natives thought of the white man lying there yelling loudly for mukkan and ayer, I knew not.

Just after dark I heard someone approaching quietly. My first thought was of a Jap, and I cursed myself for yelling so loudly, or at all for that matter. But I had reached that stage of suffering from hunger and cared not, until I heard that sound, very much what happened—having gained I suppose confidence during the days when I had seen nothing of the Japs—and my only thoughts had been for just anything that I could eat. Then when I heard the quiet movement I realised that I had been foolish, and realised that I could have much easier lingered on for yet awhile, instead of falling again into the hands of those swine—the atavistic brutality of whom I had already seen and experienced so much.

An aged Chinaman appeared, dropped a fairly big bundle wrapped in leaves and made off immediately. Opening the packet I found a big heap of cooked rice still warm, one little piece of fish and some vegetables. I set to and had the first food since two nights ago except for the pieces of tapioca root the evening before, and the largest meal I had had since the 17th. When I felt full there was still some rice left which I wrapped again in the leaves. I felt very contented and lay quite quiet and rested. This was the best thing that had happened for so many days—and after all the hunger I now had a fairly full stomach—and I could have a smoke when I desired from the tobacco the big Malay had given me.

The next morning I felt ever so much better and ate the remainder of the rice—also a fairly large quantity—for breakfast. I had had a good sleep although interrupted by rain, but by now I was getting accustomed to that. Also the rain provided a few puddles of water about the area, and I crawled from one to another until my thirst too was satisfied. I remembered many times our medical officer's warning about dirty water, but was now glad to have it no matter from where it came.

During the morning and afternoon I just rested. In the early evening thinking I may achieve the same result, I began calling again for food and water. Some little time after dark four men came; one had a bundle with him and a bottle. In broken English one of them stated they were going to take me away, and although I protested I was again carried westward in the stretcher.

They crossed one parit over which the bridge had been destroyed, or else they wished to avoid observation, as just before reaching it they left the track and turned north, and after some little distance lowered me down and waded through the water then up the other side and westward again through the timber.

The rubber in this area was uncared for and irregular, and many high seedlings grew among the trees. It was in a fairly large cluster of these that I was finally set down; after taking the poles out of the bags and throwing them quite a distance away, the carriers departed, but left the packet which was again a fairly large quantity of cooked rice, and the bottle of coffee.

Looking around the next morning I found I was out of sight of any tracks, and during the night there had not been the usual sounds of dogs about a house or Kampong nearby; there had only been the noise to which I had also by now become accustomed, of gongs being beaten at intervals. Nowhere could I see or hear anybody moving about.

However, as lonely and out of the way as it was, I decided to remain there and see if the people who had brought me food on the two previous evenings would do so again; if so it would be as good a place as it was possible for me to be. I had practically given up hoping to be allowed into a house, because all the natives to whom I could speak had refused emphatically.

The wounds on my back and side were discharging, as was also the one in the calf of my right leg, but they had healed to some extent; the others seemed to be healing really well. My right leg I could move about without much difficulty, although the muscles of the calf were still very sore and tender. My left leg although not quite so painful as before, was still utterly useless. Except for just an occasional short period, my head had long ago stopped aching, but it was still fairly sore, and in places I could still feel some bumps and cuts. My right elbow had lost its stiffness, and my eyebrow seemed to have mended and a dry top had formed on the cut. I was feeling much stronger and my hunger was satisfied.

I remained in that place for two more nights hoping that someone would turn up with some food. But not a soul came near, nor did I see anybody at any time during the period. So on the third morning I set off crawling again with the two bags swung over my back, in one of which I had put the coffee bottle which had the usual piece of string attached to the neck, and my much treasured Craven A tin. Tobacco I had finished long ago, and the remainder of the papers I had used to make smokes out of rubber tree leaves. I still had some matches.

I was not carried anywhere again until what was to me a very, very long time, crawling about in the rubber and semi-jungle and unable to do anything but remain at the mercy of those many who seemed to have a desire to hinder more than anything else, or be very grateful to those few who wished to help. For yet nearly another four weeks—another twenty-odd long, long days after what I had already spent—I just crawled from one area to another, always going westward towards the coast. I crossed two parits, the first I crawled through the mud and had much difficulty scrambling up the other side, the other I crossed on a bridge.

Never did I hear any sounds of battle, and the only sign of Japs was when quite often their planes flew over, practically all heading south. But always I felt sure our forces would return up the mainland. The planes that the air force fellows at Kluang Kahang were always saying would soon come would surely have arrived, and most likely some tanks too. I did not think there would be as many Japs everywhere as there had been against us; anyhow there would be more of our fellows too, and they would all fight like hell and soon be back.

Singapore wasn't going to fall, and in any case our fellows could not get back as far as there before they started up the mainland again. The going would be a bit tough for a while, but when they started to come they would make good progress. I wondered how I would look to them when they came, I did not suppose they would be too tidy either. I would have to get a couple of pictures taken before I got cleaned up and shaved; perhaps look at them when I felt like changing my clothes many times each day—as we had often felt since arriving in that steamy part of the would—instead of two or three times; or perhaps when I did not think it quite fair to have herrings and tomato sauce again for breakfast, or another stew for lunch.

I could take them home, too, and have a look at them perhaps some evening when I had donned my white tie and tails, to go out and meet a

little chickie somewhere. There certainly was so much difference in so many things. Yes, home; it was so far away at that time, and all the good grand things that it meant—but they were all there still, and I thought of them all so often.

I fortunately at no time, even not really I think when I said goodbye to Ron Croft, had any doubt but that I would eventually be back there some day, although the war was not over, and there would most likely be some other things to do. I thought of them all so often, because I had so much time to think, and I doubt if one of all those things was not remembered, and it all helped so much, and made everything so much easier. Fortunately, Faith, I had all the time; and many times during each day and through the night I said prayers, sometimes in a quiet voice, but mostly to myself; prayers about help for myself, yes, but then also about other people and things as well.

Each day I thought I would hear our fellows before evening was through; as each night came and yet no sounds, I became more disappointed, but thought then again of the next day. They would be back—of that I was sure.

I always tried to gain admission to a house, but both Malays and Chinese alike refused to allow me to stay anywhere near their homes. They always spoke of "Jar-pun" being about. Whenever I moved it was along one of the various tracks that seemed so numerous in that part of the country, but before halting I used to move off into the rubber or jungle, and remain far enough off the track to avoid observation if it should happen that I did not wish to be seen, yet close enough to see all who passed. I called to many natives as they went by—mostly to the Chinese, for I realised early that generally the Malays would do nothing for me and occasionally a Chinese was helpful—hoping they would bring me some food and something to drink. Occasionally they did but it was not often; one day every now and again I would be lucky enough to get three bundles of rice; an odd time I got two; but most of the days that food was brought it was only one, with days and days in between with nothing. Nearly always the food was brought out just after dark, and invariably wrapped in banana tree leaves.

What often occurred when I moved to a new place, I would perhaps be brought a couple of bundles the first day, mostly two in the evening by different people, but sometimes one in the morning and again in the evening by the same person; the next day one bundle, and after that

nothing. It was always rice. After waiting a couple of days, or sometimes less, I would move on again; still crawling, but able to make somewhat better and far less painful progress. Most of the time I drank water from the drains or puddles along the tracks, or after very heavy rain, sometimes from depressions of the ground among the timber. On a few occasions I was brought a bottle of coffee or tea, mostly sweetened. Occasionally I was brought cigarettes, but most of my smokes were of Chinese tobacco and boong papers; I nearly alway had a fair supply of matches.

Never did I light a fire as I considered it too dangerous, although throughout the whole period I did not see any Japs. Sometimes a few rifle shots could be heard, but I began to think that most likely it was a native playing with a rifle he had found somewhere. Very very often I was soaking wet as it rained nearly every day and often more than once; there was nothing I could do but just wait until I had dried out, although many times I thought of a fire. Most of my wounds were healing quickly, and I thought that perhaps I was unduly disappointed when two of them continued to discharge a little, because I had nothing to put on them at all, and they had received no attention, however nearly every day there seemed to be an improvement.

After a while I tried each morning to see if I could walk. Crawling to a tree and leaning on it for support, I would try to raise myself by putting my arms fairly high up around the trunk and pulling. Frequently I tried each time and for days and days, but at first I was unable even to get to my feet and would slump down sorry for myself and disheartened. Then later I could stand on my right leg; it was certainly weak and wobbly, but it was so wonderful to be able to do even that, and getting up off the ground after such a long time, made me feel much better, and so much more secure about my whole circumstance; but I was unable to put any weight whatever upon my left leg. I was still puzzled to know why the damn thing was still sore, because there was never anything broken, and the bullet hole, although still a little moist, and the two bayonet holes were practically healed.

My only means of obtaining information regarding the progress of the war, was by saying the names of towns to natives, to which they replied with either the words 'English' or 'Jar-pun', whichever in their opinion they thought to be true. Gradually I worked down the peninsula, and most times 'Jar-pun' would be said to indicate who occupied the town I mentioned. However, even with the reverses that this information

indicated, I still continued to think which would be the most expedient method of getting back to the road when our fellows came back. Finally one day in answer to my question regarding Singapore I was told 'Jarpun'. This I refused to believe until it was repeated many times by different individuals, and even then I was sceptical, and still hoped that this fact, which to me was incredible, would not be true.

After days of crawling about from one place to another and just after crossing a parit, and a very much used large track running north and south along by the side of the parit, I stopped in the trees not far from the track. I could hear the sounds of children, dogs and fowls, which I guessed came from a house nearby, but which I could not see.

The track was being used considerably but for some time after my arrival no one came near. At last a Chinaman came in answer to a call. He would speak a little English and I told him in simple words that I had been wounded, was unable to walk, that I had been out in the open for a long time, and was hungry and thirsty. He went away, and I was beginning to lose faith in this fellow who had seemed genuinely sorry, and said he would bring me something to eat, for it was about an hour before he returned. He brought a bowl of rice and some warm water in a billy, and stayed while I ate the food. I asked if I could go to his house, but he said he was sorry but that could not be done. Not very much later he brought me a packet of little cheroots, some Chinese tobacco, papers and matches.

This was the best stopping place of all and I remained there for six days, getting two bowls of rice each day, one in the morning and again at night, and plenty of water in the billy. I used a good deal of the water to keep my wounds clean, and they improved quickly. I asked, in fact pestered him many times, to be taken to his house, or to send me to the house of a friend, but always the answer was the same, and always emphatically.

One day this Chinaman brought his brother and sister. His brother could speak English quite well, and the girl who could also speak a little brought a book written in English, one that was apparently used in Malayan primary schools, and which she left with me. It was very simply written indeed, and described some business houses in a city such as bookshop and a post office, but juvenile though it was, I was very pleased to have it after so long without a single thing to read. The three stayed

for quite a long time and I was disappointed when they left as it was the first time anyone had come with whom I could talk.

Two days after my arrival the Chinaman came bringing an elderly Chinese man, and they were both carrying quite a few sheets of attap. With these they built a little peaked cover about three feet wide, and two and a half feet high, and open at one end; they then broke some branches off the trees and stuck them in the ground around the cover. This was a wonderful thing for me because, although a good deal leaked through, it prevented me being exposed entirely to all the rain, and in many other ways both physical and mental, it provided comfort.

His sister also brought one day an old exercise book with still a few pages in it and a pencil. On the cover was a map of Malaya showing the railways and the chief towns along them. I had asked for a map such as that, and some paper and pencil. From then I began to compile an English-Malay dictionary—by no means in its entirety, but of those words I would have need to know—by asking the Chinese for the Malay words. I had decided now that Singapore had gone, or apparently gone, that when I was able to walk and strong enough I would go to a place called Kangkar where, I had been told, an English airman was hiding, and see if he would join me; it being my intention to jump the trains and gradually work my way north.

I thought often of what I would do for instance when the trains got into towns, particularly places like Kuala Lumpur where they would probably wait for long periods, and where there would undoubtedly be many Japs and others about. Apart from realising that the only time likely to be successful for me to travel would be during darkness, and that I might sometimes have to kill people to get food—I wondered if legally or any other way it would be considered as murder—I decided to leave the other problems until they came, and work them out according to the circumstances and hope for the best.

On one of the many occasions when I was so anxiously trying to see if I could walk again, I was standing with some of my weight against a stump and holding on to a sapling, endeavouring to take a step with my left leg, when a very old Chinese woman came along with two children. She watched for a little while, then speaking to one of the children who brought her a stick, she gave it to me indicating by using it herself that I was to use it as a walking stick. I tried to do it—tried very hard—but to no avail.

I must have presented a queer picture to that old woman—my clothes filthy, my shirt torn to ribbons, my jungle trousers turned down as I always wore them to give more protection from the mosquitoes, and hanging low—they had been too large at first and now I was ever so much thinner; I had by then grown a thick long growth of face hair; my hair was terrifically long, coming well down over my ears, and had not been combed or brushed for five weeks; my skin was nearly black with dirt. The Chinese would never bring more water than they thought I needed for drinking, and some of this I used to clean my wounds regularly—and the rain had made it streaky, and soon after, because of the mud, it would become worse still; my fingernails about double their normal length; my old socks full of holes and caked with mud, and about half my foot showing; I would have discarded them long before had it not been for the mosquitoes; my whole body just a skeleton.

I asked the Chinese several times for meat and milk, and several other foods that I knew would do me good, but they told me each time that they had only rice. However, after so much starvation I was particularly glad to get that. At first I asked if I could have some more, but was told that they did not have very much, and being so helpless I did not like pressing too hard, as I realised that I was entirely in their hands, and if they so wished they could kick me out, away from the place altogether, and leave me without any help. I was far better off than I had been anywhere else, and possibly than I would be at any other place unless I could get into a house.

One day the Chinaman informed me that the Malays had said they would tell the Jap soldiers if I stayed there any longer, and that he was sorry but I would have to go. I ignored this, however, because when I asked him where I could go he just pointed to the rubber, and I did not wish to leave. He seemed rather annoyed, perhaps thinking they had done a good deal for me and that I should go when they said. Anyhow that evening my food came again—it was sometimes brought by this fellow and on other occasions by small children—and I was greatly relieved as I assumed this as evidence that they were prepared to let me stay. Now that my wounds were improving so well, food was the main consideration until I could walk. I was unable to do that yet but found when I tried I could put some weight on my left leg.

The following afternoon he came again, and said that I would have to go, and repeated the same reason. He was very worried and said they

would take me only a short distance away, and there re-erect the little shelter and continue to feed me. Just before he left he said he and some friends would be back after dark to take me away.

Two of them arrived, and carrying me between them they went back over the parit I had crossed a few days previously, then east through the rubber for about three hundred yards, and put me down in the centre of a very thick and high group of seedlings. To my surprise a small shelter, similar to that I had just left, had already been constructed. Apparently I was as well off as ever, safer in fact as there were no tracks nearby and I was well screened by the seedlings. As they left, telling me they would be back the next morning, I settled into my new position; unfortunately the mosquitoes were far worse than they had been anywhere else.

The following morning a Chinaman whom I had not seen before came bringing two coconuts which he broke for me. I was amazed at how weak my jaw muscles had become; it was ages since I had eaten anything that required chewing, and after eating a little of the nut my jaws ached and my gums were sore. When I tried to walk I was still unable to do so, but found that I could put almost all my weight onto my left leg.

All that day passed and I did not see anybody, and it was not until the next morning that the same fellow brought some rice and water. I was getting very hungry again and asked him to bring some more. I was so pleased at first about this new position, but then became doubtful and disappointed. I did not think it would be very much longer before I was able to take that step with my left leg which I had been trying and waiting for for so long, and with the thought of the possibility of soon being able to walk again came a multitude of hopes and comforts. And now when I wanted so importantly for that reason, to have just a few more days with some food and a little shelter—perhaps two or three would do—it appeared that once again I was to begin that unsatisfactory wandering from place to place.

CHAPTER 3
Recaptured

Ben Hackney's wandering from place to place might have been 'unsatisfactory', but is was soon to come to an end . . .

I was a little away from the shelter later that morning—it was the 27th February and thirty six days since I had left the road at Parit Sulong with Sgt. Ron Croft on the night of 22/23 January; thirty six-long days and even longer nights of lonely wandering, crawling and waiting—and after having tried to see if I could walk, and finding that I was still unable, I was holding on to a small rubber tree, getting my left leg accustomed to supporting at least some of my body weight, and also giving myself the very pleasant and morale-building satisfaction of being entirely from my own efforts in an upright position after so long of crawling, sitting and lying down.

About midday I heard someone coming towards the shelter, and hoped it was the Chinaman I had asked to bring some more food. A small Chinese boy came running through the seedlings, and holding up three fingers, said 'Jar-pun', and indicated that they were coming and for me to go away. He was soon joined by two others; they quickly pulled down the attap shelter, picked up the coconut husks and shells, the water billy and the two sacks I had had with me for a long time and hurried away.

I thought that I had best move at least a short distance—if only I had been able to walk, I had ample time to get away—so, after getting the piece of cloth, the cigarette tin and exercise book, I crawled about thirty yards and lay in the fork of a fallen rubber tree. I gathered a few branches and leaves and covered myself as well as possible and waited.

I lay there for a considerable time before I heard people approaching, then they came through the seedlings and examined the place where I

had previously been lying—still unfortunately indicated by broken and trodden down seedlings, trampled grass, and generally a comparatively smooth appearance.

There were three of them, not Japs but Malayans, one dressed as a policeman, the others in civilian clothes. They then spread out and began wandering about, halting every few yards to look around. One of the civilians had a service rifle, and he and the policeman were proceeding to my right, with the closer about thirty yards distant. The other took a course that was bringing him within ten yards of my position, and when a few yards off he stopped and looked around but did not see me.

He moved on and stopped again when slightly past my position, looked around, and finally stared in my direction for what to me seemed minutes. He called to his associates and remained staring; I thought he must have been able to see my feet and legs, which were not as well hidden or covered as I lay with my head and shoulders towards the fork of the tree. He spoke excitedly to the others when they arrived, and the fellow with the rifle levelled it whilst the policeman, who I noticed was a sergeant, came towards me.

He was a fairly stout, shortish fellow who either could not, or did not wish to speak much English. He said in a gruff, arrogant and commanding voice for me to come and walk. I then uncovered myself, sat up and told them I was unable to walk. He sent the one who first saw me for a stick, then gave me this and made the Malay help me to my feet. However, I could only stand, and even with the stick was unable to do more than put my foot forward with little weight. The sergeant again sent the same Malay away after I sat on the log, and it was quite a while before he reappeared with the old Chinaman who had helped the other one carry me to this place and build the shelter.

With the Chinaman on one side and a Malay on the other, I managed to get along, trying most times to put some weight on my left leg; this hurt a good deal but the satisfaction I derived from being able to control, to some extent, its movement back and forth, and being able to put a little weight on it, more than compensated.

I was taken in a southerly direction, then over the parit and south again until we reached a dwelling on the bank of the river, which turned out to be the home of the Chinese who had looked after me during the previous few days. I was put on the verandah facing the river, whilst the police sergeant and his subordinates demanded and ate a meal. The

old Chinaman was also kept on the verandah; once he tried to dodge away but was quietly seized, hit, spoken to harshly, and roughly pushed back on to the verandah. During this period one of the two Malays, whilst the other ate, guarded me with the rifle either in his possession or close by.

My main thoughts were of escape, as the thing I dreaded so much was to once again fall into the hands of the Japs, not knowing but that their treatment would be the same as before. Thinking also that it would only be a few days before I could walk, and once I was able to move about freely, it would not be very long before I would be fairly fit again. However, there was no chance at present, but I watched and waited vigilantly. How I wished I was fit, for I knew my chances even against the three, with most likely assistance from the Chinese of the house, would be fairly good.

One of the Malays went along the pier which ran out into the river from near the house, and got into a fairly large canoe. The three bicycles which had apparently been used by my captors when coming to the area were then taken from the house to the canoe.

The Chinaman and the other Malay then took me to the boat and put me in one end. Facing me was the Malay with the rifle; behind him the bicycles; then the policeman and the other Malay, both facing me, and in the end the elderly Chinaman whom they made paddle and guide the canoe.

After going some distance, the handlebars of the bicycles began to drag in the water. The sergeant called to the Malay in front of these to adjust them. I thought my chance had come—to grab the rifle, hit the first Malay with it as I did so, then shoot the sergeant and the other Malay—but the policeman said something to the Malay, who handed the rifle back over the top of the bicycles to him. There was nothing I could do at all then; what seemed to be my only chance had gone, for the sergeant kept the rifle.

Further along the river the canoe was stopped beside another pier. The sergeant went into one of the few houses nearby, and after some little time he returned with a bundle of eggs tied in a piece of cloth. News must have travelled ahead, because there were quite a few gathered about the pier and all they seemed to be there for was to watch; amongst them I saw the little Chinese boy who had been frightened when he first saw me early in the days of my wandering.

The canoe was again guided well into the stream and with little effort by the Chinaman we again proceeded eastward. Eventually a bridge came into view and soon I recognised it as the Parit Sulong Bridge.

So after all that time—just over five weeks—I was back again in that area where there had been so much before and during that dark evening.

I was quite surprised at the distance we had come along the river, for it indicated that I must have penetrated far into the bush, much further than I had thought. The boat was pulled into a pier in front of a building to which I was then taken; it was the Parit Sulong police station.

On entering I was put on the floor behind the counter with my back to the wall. The sergeant produced a .45 revolver from beneath his tunic and unloaded it. The Malay put the rifle away in a rack—it was empty. How fortunate it had been not being able to get possession of that rifle at any time; I was unaware that the sergeant was armed, and the rifle would have been no more use than a heavy stick.

The sergeant had been very hostile, arrogant and gruff all the time, and although he never hit me, he many times threatened to do so, when I was perhaps a little slower than he thought I ought to be, or in some other way annoyed him.

Soon after arriving at the station, a Malay boy of about fifteen or sixteen years of age came in answer to the sergeant's call. He said he was the sergeant's son and had been at school in Malacca when the war began; he spoke English very well and the policeman used him as an interpreter. He wanted to know where I was when wounded, how I got to where they found me, who had fed me, my name, my age, my address and many other things.

I told them I had been wounded and left by the roadside well north of Parit Sulong and had been carried about and fed mostly by Malays. He asked me sceptically how did I know they were Malays, and I said that the fellows who helped me always wore a black head-covering. I did not wish to cause trouble for any Chinese, and was inclined vindictively towards the Malays, especially the one filthy coward who kicked me in the back of the neck. Neither did I want anyone to know I had witnessed the heinous crimes committed by the Japanese at Parit Sulong. I already regretted that I had given my correct name; I remembered the Japs having taken the names of the officers from our paybooks, and had I thought included them in a message that was sent

at the time. I still had the exercise book with me and the sergeant wanted to know what was in it, and I said I was trying to learn the language.

I asked the boy the date, and he told me that it was the 27th February. I had kept an uncertain tally of the days. I asked also if it were true that the Japanese had taken Singapore—he told me that it was true. I asked what had happened to all our soldiers, and he told me the Japs had them locked up on Singapore Island.

The boy later brought me a dish of water to wash in and a comb. Later he brought a meal of rice and dried fish, a dish of tapioca with sugar, and some smokes.

Both the Malays who had been with the sergeant were policemen, and one of them remained with me in the room that night and slept against the door. Many boongs came to the police station the next morning—no Chinese—and some handed in rifles and other ammunition; for these they were given a chit by the sergeant.

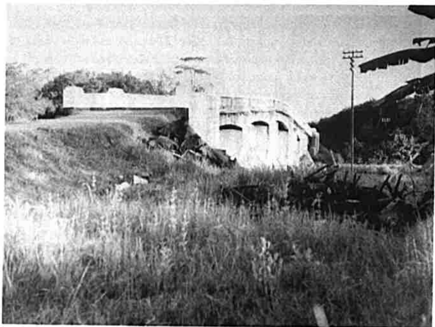
After breakfast which was brought by the boy, I was allowed to sit outside and remain there for a long time talking to him. He told me that his father had sent word to the Japanese and that I would be picked up during the afternoon. He appeared to be genuinely sorry for me and took much interest in anything I had to say. He produced an atlas and asked me to show him where I lived, and wrote down the name and address of my father, and said he would write to him when the war was over.

I gained from him some little information regarding the war; he said the British had surrendered at Singapore, and there were many prisoners of war locked up in buildings and gaols, and most of them were at Changi; that he had seen some in Batu Pahat a few days before. He told me that during the war in that area—Parit Sulong—the Japs had surprised some British soldiers south of the bridge, had killed them all and thrown their bodies into the river.

The boy said if I wished he would help me try to walk, and I thought that after the efforts of the previous day I may be able to do so. My legs were very stiff and all movement hurt to some extent, but after a while, with the boy taking practically all my weight, I eventually managed to limp forward a few steps. He helped me for a little while until I became too weary and went back to the verandah and rested.

About midday a Jap convoy came from the south and halted north of the bridge in front of a large building, which I saw later and thought

Lieut.-Col C. G. W. Anderson, commander of the 2/19 Battalion AIF who was awarded the Victoria Cross for his leadership and gallantry during the Battle of Muar.
(AWM 73661)


The bridge at Parit Sulong littered with the wreckage of a failed Australian counter-attack *(AWM 117520)*

The building into which the Japanese forced the wounded Australian and Indian prisoners shortly after they were captured *(AWM 117517)*

Reg Wharton aged 18 at his enlistment

Jubilant Japanese troops after the fall of Singapore *(AWM 127905)*

had been a picture theatre, and the Japs then debussed. The sergeant went along the road to where they were, and after a short while returned. He spoke to some of the Malays who were hanging around, and apparently he was telling two of them to help me, as they immediately walked to where I was sitting. With a little aid from them, and the use of a stick which they gave me, I limped along, very stiff and sore at first, but as I went on, although my left leg began to ache very badly, a lot of the stiffness went. As I progressed I watched for signs of that previous time, but apart from a few smashed useless vehicles by the side of the road, there was no evidence at all. I crossed the same bridge over the parit as I had on that grossly atrocious day, and then along the road towards the Japs. I stopped and rested twice, but the police sergeant who accompanied, seemed to be in no hurry, and unconcernedly chatted to the other boongs who were helping me.

An officer was already seated at a table in front of the big building, and just as we were approaching an orderly placed upon it some food, a jug and a cup. The Malay police sergeant approached the officer, bowed, and pointed at me, bowed again, and after stepping backwards from the table and bowing again, turned and departed. The Jap indicated to me to sit on the ground about ten yards in front of the table, and when I was seated the Malays who had assisted me bowed towards the table and left.

Although I had help, I had been able to use my left leg quite a little as I travelled from the police station to where the Japs were, which under the circumstances was quite a distance. But however great was the gratification I derived from being able to progress even as well as that it became second to the concerned state of mind, the trepidation, with which I viewed being in the hands of the Japs for the second time.

A few natives were moving along the road, mostly going south either on bicycles or on foot; some of them were carrying bundles and they were stopped and searched. Many times fruit was taken from them, and they were often hit by the Japanese. A Jap carrying a bag marked with a red cross came to me and had a look at my wounds. He then spoke to the officer and resumed his seat among the others. Their officer called to one of his men who then brought me a fairly large piece of pineapple. This action made a tremendous difference to my feelings as I was wondering what was to happen to me this time. After that, I thought perhaps they may be inclined to be somewhat kindly at least. Neither the officer nor any of the others spoke to me.

A small party of about twenty Japs came out of the timber on the eastern side of the road; they approached the table with much saluting and bowing, and the leader spoke to the officer; during the conversation I was scrutinised by the remainder, and two behind me, screened from sight by the others, kicked me in the back but not very hard. These then moved off to join the others.

Two lorries proceeding south were halted in front of the building by some of the Japs. They were crammed with Chinese, and after the officer had roared something to his men on the road, they were all brought towards the building. The women and girls were made sit in a bunch close to me; the men and boys were lined up and some Japs tied their hands behind their backs, linked them together, and made them sit in a line at the side of the building. Of course I immediately thought of another massacre, and that most likely I would be included. The grins, giggling, signs and pointing going on amongst the Jap soldiers left little doubt in my mind as to what was to happen to the women and girls.

Some little time after this a few of the vehicles of the convoy were turned about. The officer spoke to a Malay who apparently was acting as an interpreter, as he had accompanied some of the Japs who went to the two lorries that had been stopped, and now he spoke to two other boongs. These two came to me, helped me to my feet, and then along the road to the vehicles which had been turned. They stopped behind one large truck but a Jap indicated a vehicle further up; there was a long cushioned seat down one side of this truck, and as I was lifted in the Jap made signs for me to lie down.

I was indeed greatly relieved to be leaving the area, after the thought that had entered my mind when I saw the Chinese being tied together. Just before the convoy moved off shortly after I was put into the truck, a Jap gave me a packet of English cigarettes and some matches, and spoke to me, but the only words I could understand were—Batu Pahat. Upon arrival there I was taken to a large building situated a little away from, and approximately south of the main part of the town. There was a large flat grassed area about that building which seemed to be a headquarters of some considerable importance, and also a convalescent depot. I was taken around the side of the building by two Indians, and a chair was provided for me.

Many Japanese staff cars were about the building and others were continually coming and going; in all directions there were sentry boxes

and from these there came tremendous shouts as the staff cars passed; upstairs in the building and also roaming about were many Japs—some bandaged, some walking with sticks, some on crutches. Later in the afternoon the Indians who helped me from the vehicle, and appeared to be working as cleaners about the building, cooked a great pile of chupatties from which they gave me a few with a drink.

About sunset a Jap came to me and put a piece of rope he had brought around my neck with a slipknot, then calling for the Indians to help me, I was taken about one hundred and fifty yards to a guardroom, the Jap walking in front about four yards with the end of the rope in his hand swinging by his side. If I at any time lagged back the Jap would give the rope a severe pull, and often during that distance I thought my neck would be kinked, and many times was prevented from breathing as the rope pulled tight on my throat.

Upon my arrival at the guardroom which was entirely open in front, many of the Japs came out and watched as I was being lashed to a post. With my back against it, the rope was first wound around my throat and the post, then over my chest. More rope was brought, and then my hands were tied behind my back; after which the rope was then wound around and around, until I was securely and tightly bound to the post from my neck to my feet. Fortunately because it had to take all my weight, I had managed to get my right leg fairly square beneath me before they bound my legs. My left leg was wedged between it and the post and was not too bad at first, but began to pain and ache terribly after a short period.

The personnel of the guard who had been watching then went past in single file, each either hitting, punching or kicking me before they resumed again their positions on the benches in the room. Outside the room behind me lay two Chinese men who, I noticed when I first arrived, had been badly knocked about. I became very weary and occasionally sagged slightly down the post, and the ropes became tighter and tighter until, at last, I was afraid to let myself go any further for fear that I would not be able to breathe.

Several times the guard commander came out and looked at me; my beard greatly amused him, and he would stand laughing as he plucked hairs out of it one by one. Each time a relief came out of the room I was chastised in some way or other, and again when the relieved ones returned; generally by being smacked or punched in the face and chest, or kicked in the legs. One fellow used to walk out of the room every

little while with a piece of cord, with this he would lash me across the face, then he would tap me several times on top of my head with his knuckles; at first, or until the patch on top of my head became tender after a few occasions, this did not hurt, but that grinning face and the continued tap, tap, tap was so very aggravating. He, and the commander who plucked hairs out of my face whilst I was bound from neck to ankles, brought within me a vehement anger.

As someone approached there was a loud shout from the guard and the commander walked out to speak to an officer who came to the guardroom. He was apparently, I thought, the orderly officer on his rounds. After speaking for a while the officer unbuckled his scabbard and sword, and moved from my sight towards the two Chinese men lying behind me. I heard him beating the Chinese, and every now and again the sound of a heavy blow which made them groan loudly.

He then walked in front of me still holding his scabbard with the sword inserted—I thought that I would be next—but to my surprise he spoke to me in English, and asked me what I was, so I told him I was an Australian officer. He then began to talk about the war. He had not said much before I asked him to have me untied, but he took no notice of my request, and just continued talking of the war and of his experiences with some prisoners of war in Singapore. He mentioned Katong and Changi, and referred to the large number of prisoners in the big buildings at the latter. After about ten minutes he told the guard commander to untie me. This was one of the most grateful reliefs I had had throughout the whole period, as I was on the point of collapse, and had for quite a while been fighting to avoid the choking I knew would follow if I was to slump entirely.

The officer remained for fully forty-five minutes talking of various matters, but mostly the war and how the Japanese won Singapore. I sat with my back to the post after being untied and smoked a cigarette he gave me. I asked him if I could get some treatment, also some food, and he told me he would see what he could do. Before leaving he spoke to the guard commander and one of the guards left the room. The officer gave me some cigarettes saying he would instruct the guard to allow me to smoke, and remain sitting outside provided I did not attempt to escape. To which I answered that I was unable to do so even if I wished.

The guard soon returned bringing a groundsheet for me to sit upon, and several tins of cubed pineapple which were eaten by the Japs throughout the night; occasionally I was given some of these, and I sat

and smoked all night, still wondering what was going to be done. In the early hours of the morning it rained, and I was allowed to move inside the guardroom. For their breakfast the Japs had amongst other things several small loaves of bread from which they only pulled the centres to eat. I was given a dixie of rice, some of the bread crusts they had discarded, and a very sweet hot milk drink. I was permitted to remain inside until just before mid-day, when the guard commander indicated for me to move outside; he put a rope very loosely around my wrists and tied the other end to the post.

At midday the guard changed. On arrival the new guard broke off and some of the personnel began knocking me about, but the old commander yelled out and stopped them. Both guards then lined up on the road in front and went through a ceremony of changing, and during the time when both commanders were talking the old one turned and pointed at me; he must I thought, have been passing on the instructions given him by the orderly officer. After that I was left alone.

About two o'clock a Jap came from the direction of the headquarters and after much pointing and many signs, I understood that he was going to take me somewhere where I could have a wash and get my wounds bandaged. The guard commander gave me a short stick and soon after I started off with the other fellow, he brought me a piece of board that just reached my armpit. Using this as a crutch and the other as a walking stick I went on, but progress was very slow. I still had on my old socks but they were no protection against the metal on the road, or the small thorns of the sensitive weed which grew along either side.

Making many halts—the Jap fortunately did not mind how slowly I moved—we went east from the guardroom along a flat road; then up a winding road past an attap-hutted camp on the right, until we reached a house on the left hand side of the road which was being used as a hospital, and through the windows of which I could see many Japs in beds. It had been a considerably long journey under the conditions and had taken a long time, and by the time I arrived the board had torn a hole in my shirt, and made the skin of my armpit raw. The Jap took me to where there was a stool, and left and entered the building.

A small shrivelled-looking Japanese doctor came and enquired in English, abruptly and hastily, what was wrong with me, and then said he was sorry but the place was too full, and he would have to send me somewhere else. He got me a pair of crutches and although they were a

little too long, I was able to make much easier and faster progress than previously.

Back at the guardroom I waited until the Jap gave some particulars to the others in the office, then I was taken by another Jap who helped me as I moved, through one iron-barred gate, then along a corridor past many cells in which I could hear natives talking, then turned left through another gate, and guided into a cell on the right of another corridor. There were others in there but it was too dark for me to see them clearly. The Jap took the crutches and although he could not speak English, I asked and made signs that I wanted to keep them. He ignored them and left, locking the gate at the end of the corridor as he went.

As soon as he had gone, one of the fellows inside the cell asked in a low voice 'Aussie?' I knew then that I was amongst my own kind. It was the first time since I had said goodbye to Ron Croft that I had even seen a white man. There were eight Englishmen in the cell, seven from the Loyals Battalion and one Norfolk. They had only been locked up a few days previously, after having been taken direct to the police station when picked up a few miles out of town. The Norfolk man was badly wounded, bullets from a burst of machine-gun fire had hit him in the shoulder and made two nasty gashes in his head, one above the ear and the other along the top of his head.

In that section of the police station gaol the cells opened on to a narrow corridor, the side of it opposite the cells being barred from about halfway up, and through which one could look upon a central yard. A gate at one end of the corridor leading from the main section, which ran at right angles; at the other end a wash place and opposite that a typical native squat lavatory. The prisoners were allowed unrestricted movement within the section which contained four cells. The injured Norfolk man was very sick and suffering much from his wounds—these were stinking and maggoty but none of the others had done anything for him.

Early next morning—the 2nd March—I was helped to the ablution place, and there for the first time, stripped and washed as well as possible. Although there was no soap I managed however to get most of the dirt off, but the pores of my skin were still grimy. I also rinsed my clothes and hung them on the iron bars, and remained in the nude until they were dry enough to put on. That day was my birthday and it was ironical that under those circumstances with so much restriction and being without so much, I should have that which I desired most of all—a wash.

I told two of the others to take the injured man and clean him up as well as possible, and wash his bandages and clothes. He had a rest after they brought him back, and then he said he felt better than he had for days. It was no wonder either, because it must have been terrible for the poor fellow to have those dreadful stinking bandages and shirt so close to his face all the time, and the maggots continually crawling about. When our first small amount of food arrived at twelve o'clock he ate his heartily; the others said it was the first time he had eaten since being brought into the place. Why they had not washed him before I knew not, because the water was always available.

Some of the others were also very filthy, and I told them they also ought to clean themselves. After doing so they admitted that they felt ever so much better, and I failed to understand these fellows who were quite fit and able to look after themselves, but who still seemed quite content to remain in just the same very dirty, smelly and unkempt condition as they were when brought in from the jungle.

Running the full width of each cell and at the back of each, was a concrete slab about five feet deep from the back wall to the front, sloping slightly towards and about twenty inches high at the front. They were very smooth and it was difficult to lie on them for long without slipping. At first I was still unable to walk unaided, even by leaning with my hands against the wall, and whenever I wished to go for a wash or to the lavatory, two of the Englishmen used to help me. However as the days passed I became stronger, and after a while was able to limp about slowly by supporting myself against the wall. Before our departure I was able to get about slowly unaided.

Jap sentries and Malay policemen guarded the prisoners in the gaol; the Malays were very much afraid of, and strictly controlled by the Japs. One of the cells in the main section of the gaol contained Indians, the remainder were filled with Chinese, the gates into these cells were kept locked.

Our food was prepared and brought to us by Malays. The Chinese, Indians and ourselves receiving a like ration—two very small meals each day, one at twelve o'clock (Jap time) the other at six in the evening—consisting approximately one-third of a pint each meal of well-cooked rice, with generally some flavouring. The ration was entirely inadequate and everyone felt hungry always. Most of us adopted the idea of having a tremendous drink of water when we saw the meal

coming, so that after eating it we would at least feel more full. Plates and dishes were brought with the meal, and these had to be washed and returned afterwards. Some of the fellows had a spoon or a fork, others made spoons out of tins. Making a spoon from it was the last use to which I put the Craven A tin I had carried for so long.

However, the fact that the two meals came regularly (missing only one evening meal when the Malays said no rice had arrived); that they were well cooked; also because there was ample water and I was able to keep clean; and because I had someone with whom to talk, made an enormous difference to me, and I was rapidly regaining strength.

Never myself, but some unfortunately were occasionally physically ill-treated. One of the Jap sentries occasionally opened the gate into our section, walked to one of the cells and called a fellow out. He would punch him hard many times on the chest and sometimes the face, then finally, with one terrific blow most always to the face, knock the fellow back against the slab. Sometimes the same fellow was made return for further similar punishment, or else the Jap would select another, at other times he seemed satisfied after brutally and cowardly ill-treating the one. On two occasions he got one of our men, and took him into the ablution place of the other section, and there made him fight; of course if our fellow hit the Jap he was inevitably given a bashing, so they were fights where our fellow had to ward off all he could, take the balance, and give nothing.

Two Indian soldiers, who the English fellows said were Punjabis, were sometimes brought to our section by the same Jap guard, and after some of our fellows were taken out to the corridor and made form a line, the Indians were made strike them in the face. They indicated that they did not like doing it and used to pull the punches considerably; we knew they would be bashed by the Jap if they failed to do as he indicated. On one occasion a small Malay boy was brought from the office part of the police station and given a stick, told to strike three of our men who had been made kneel on the concrete corridor floor. The boy refused to do so; he was not hit but taken out very roughly.

During my stay in the lock-up, our numbers increased to twenty-two, comprising twelve English and ten Australian soldiers. They arrived in small parties and all had strange tales to relate. Some of them had fared excellently whilst in the jungle, having been looked after and fed mostly by Chinese. Without one exception they said they had eventually

either been forcibly taken, or had their positions reported to the Japs by Malays. As each lot arrived they were searched by Japs in the office before being brought to the cells.

Our supply of tobacco which at no time was plentiful often ran out. Sometimes some of the fellows who were brought in were able to bring a little with them, and twice a Malay policeman managed to slip some to us, which was particularly strong and lasted quite well; it was paid for with some money one of the men had brought to the cells.

Those hours of the mornings spent waiting for the first meal were the worst of all the days; all the fellows were terribly hungry, very cranky, snapping at one another, and irritable. There were no lights and the nights were very long, but instead of all going to sleep I used to keep them awake as long as possible. A few slept in each cell, and generally the fellows were quiet at night unless they became interested in something particular; so I used to go from one cell to another, and generally after not long get different ones to talk about something, generally civilian occupations or some incident or other, or if possible a controversial subject, and quite a few nights Australians and English took it in turns to tell about their own home districts or another they knew well, and in this way most of the fellows would stay awake until the early hours of the mornings, when one by one they would drop off to sleep. Then they generally slept until about ten or eleven, and did not have that long wait for the first meal.

Through being reminded to do so, or sometimes being chipped about being dirty, none were very long before they began going regularly for a wash. One of the fellows had a comb, we all used it, and made ourselves look a little more tidy. I was surprised whenever any of them needed reminding about washing, but some way or other they seemed to have forgotten many of the ordinary habits. Beginning about five days after I arrived, I induced the fellows to do some PT in the mornings after they had washed and before the first meal; not very much because the food was too light, but just sufficient to brighten them up. One of the Englishmen was a good PT instructor, and he took the fellows who were able to do the exercise; sometimes one or more did not feel well enough, but they liked doing it whenever they could. The Jap guards seemed to enjoy watching this, and after a few days if we were a little late turning out, they used to call and made signs that it was time for PT.

The last Sunday we were there I conducted two very short church services, and all except three attended them both. It was the first time I had done anything of that kind. It was decided that we would have some sort of a ceremony about eleven o'clock in the morning, and again in the evening after our meal. After saying a few prayers together, we sang or hummed what we were able to remember of two hymns, then I said prayers that I thought fitting for the time and occasion; after which one of the Roman Catholics said some prayers of their church, then another hymn, then a minute or so of silence during which time I asked all to pray for those and those things which they personally wished and hoped for most; then concluded with The King. We sung all the hymns and The King in a fairly low voice so as to avoid any trouble, because we did not know if we would create any by doing otherwise or not.

Both services followed the same lines, and although before the second there was no uttered enthusiasm, all gathered together far more manifestly and frankly than they had previously, and there was not that obvious shyness and uneasiness during the initial stages as there had been at first. I was so pleased that day and evening at the quite apparent difference the services made to us all, that I was very sorry indeed that I had not done the same beforehand. The fellows talked amongst themselves much more freely, particularly of their families and homes; seemed altogether fresher, carried themselves more erect, were brighter, in far better spirits, and altogether a far greater fraternal feeling and better companionship was brought into being.

At intervals some of the Chinese who were locked up would be taken to a table in the passageway in front of their cells, where usually sat a couple of Jap officers. It appeared as if they were being questioned, and were many times slapped in the face or hit over the head. After this apparent interrogation they were always returned to their cells. One of the Malay policemen told us that amongst the Chinese were some who were very wealthy.

One Chinaman in a cell had become delirious, and often began chanting very loudly and yelling out. The Jap who had punched our fellows, and the only one to ill-treat any of us, who was most always on duty during daylight, one day got one of the crutches I had been given by the Japanese doctor. He entered the cell where the Chinaman was locked, and proceeded to strike him time and time again with the crutch until it broke; then in turn he picked up each long piece and continued

bashing the Chinaman until the entire crutch was broken into small pieces. Two days later he repeated the atrocity with the other crutch, and the Chinaman was afterwards put into a straitjacket and deprived of all food. They carried him out dead in a bag a couple of days later.

About ten o'clock in the morning of the 17th March, we were awakened by the sound of some Japs rattling the iron gate at the end of our section. One of the men said there were some strange Japs there, so I got off the slab and limped to the gate to see what was wanted. I had thought at first that it was the usual ones wanting us to do our PT. One of them, an officer who spoke English, told me that we were all to come out. We collected what few belongings we had, and those who had not washed were allowed to do so quickly, and went out past the cells of the Chinese, through the office where some of the men were given a few of the things that had been taken from them when they arrived, then out in front of the police station where we were told to sit and wait.

The Jap officer spoke to me for some time, mostly about the war and something of the fall of Singapore, and said we were going to Gemas and Kuala Lumpur. He asked me amongst many questions, how many soldiers I thought there were in Australia. I said I did not know as things had changed since we left, and our people were not allowed to send such information in their letters. Then he said it did not matter anyway, because they knew better than I.

We all got into a large lorry being driven by a Jap that pulled up in front of the police station, and it was not long before we started. We reached Ayer Hitam about one o'clock after a drive that did us all a lot of good, and which we all enjoyed, and were met by a Jap officer. We were then taken to a room in an empty house on the eastern side of the road, and south of the Kluang turn-off, and one guard was posted at each doorway at the front and back of the room. I asked the officer if we could have some food, and he was very surprised when informed that we had not had a meal that day. Soon afterwards a small loaf of bread each and a hot drink were brought. The fellows had found some tins of marmite in the room and unfortunately some of this, I think, was eaten too quickly; some of them were eating huge spoonfuls one after the other. Two days later two of them were very sick, and this probably helped to cause that illness.

Later an English-speaking Malay came to the house and informed me that he had been sent by the Japanese to find out what we ate, as

they did not understand the English. I told him we wanted meat, milk, salt and sugar. This was a complete reversal of all previous form on the part of the Jap, and we were all surprised, but of course elated as hunger was our main trouble. We were allowed to go to a tong about one hundred yards behind the house for a wash.

On the other side of the road and directly opposite, was a Japanese medical aid station. A Jap from there came to us soon after our arrival, to see if anyone needed treatment. There were four: the Norfolk fellow wounded in the shoulder and head being by far the worst—however, through being washed and cleaned twice each day whilst in the gaol at Batu Pahat, these wounds had improved and although still bad, were quite healthy-looking; another had a wound in his elbow that was still quite open, another with a lower leg wound, and myself. All my wounds except the one in my right calf had healed entirely with dry heads on them, and that one was only open slightly in the centre. We went across the road one by one and had them dressed. The work was done well and quite pleasantly.

The Jap officer who had first met us returned again, and supplied me with enough cigarettes for us all, and a small quantity of chocolate. Later some more bread arrived, and a large quantity of stew which was thick with an assortment of foodstuffs varying from poultry to vegetables. We managed to find around the house enough rubber cups for us all, and used them as containers. Each still had our spoons, forks or improvised eating tools, and we ate what was to each and every one of us a most wonderful meal—stew or not.

During the evening the fat Jap visited us many times. He was an amusing fool. Each visit he brought something which I immediately divided into twenty-two heaps and handed them out. This seemed to tickle the Jap tremendously. On one occasion he brought some packets of our own army biscuits, and when I opened and divided these, I found there were a few short of being six each. I began to adjust the distribution, but he stopped me and left; he returned very quickly with some more. Amongst the things this fellow brought were tinned pineapple, army biscuits, little white bags of Japanese issue biscuits, cigarettes, packets of loaf sugar, a half-pound tin of Players navy issue tobacco, a pipe, mosquito coils and matches. Very late in the night the guard stopped him from coming again. Each one of us had eaten a large quantity of mixed foods and were as full as possible. For the

first time for more than eight weeks my hunger had been really satisfied.

When we were ready to go to sleep, the guards made signs for some of us to lie down each side of the centre of the room, and with our head towards the centre. One of them then placed a mosquito coil on a tin every few feet and lit them. Throughout the remainder of the night he relit any that went out and replaced those that burnt out. Fairly early in the morning we all went to the tong and washed, and soon after our return breakfast came in the form of bread and stew. We had another excellent meal, and after sitting about for a while smoking some of our plentiful supply of cigarettes, we went outside in front of the house and did some PT with the English fellow again instructing. Unfortunately some of the fellows were lazy, not taking much notice of the instructions, and altogether spoiling the whole effort. I halted everything and pointed out to the fellows that apart from the necessity of the exercise, we were doing something under our own instruction, for ourselves and for our own good, and without restriction, and also we were being watched by many Japs as well as by natives, and were not to forget the fact that although we were prisoners for the time being, we were still British and Australian soldiers, and to do the job as best we could. The fellows who had lagged behind then joined in and did the job well. Everyone was in good spirits and nothing had been said about us leaving. Nobody wished to for that matter because each of us was weak, and if allowed to remain there for a while and receiving the same treatment, we would improve quickly and soon be strong.

I was absolutely astonished by the general good treatment on behalf of the Japs; the ones we encountered seemed to want to help and be human; none showed any signs of spite or a wish to ill-treat us in any way. Even the guards when coming on or going off duty would bow to me and salute beforehand.

About ten o'clock another meal was brought, and this time the stew was even thicker and better than previously. Just after getting it issued there came a yell from near the crossroads, and our guards indicated for us to hurry. We ate very quickly, and just as the guards began to move us off another bucket partly filled with stew arrived, but most of it had to be left. We were taken along the street and to my surprise I was saluted by odd Jap soldiers hanging about, then we were loaded into a lorry which soon started off along the Kluang road. Upon arrival at the

Kluang railway station, we were taken across the rails and told to clean out a cattle truck. Whilst this was being done, one of the two Jap guards who had come with us brought some light straw to put on the bottom. Everyone was then put into the truck and the door was closed. After some time, during which we were shunted back and forth several times, the cattle truck was attached to a goods train which then went northwards. It was very rough riding in the truck but we all enjoyed the trip. Regardless of the circumstances it somehow or other seemed good to be travelling.

About two o'clock the train pulled up at Peloh and our guards brought to the truck a tray of food which I thought must have been ordered previously. They took me out of the truck and along to the van in which they were travelling, and soon the train started off again. They gave me half a tin of salmon, some bread and some rice for my lunch. At Labis they bought, or rather took from a Chinese woman, a very big bunch of bananas. I asked if I could buy some for the fellows in the truck, as I had a dollar belonging to one of them. One of the guards got out, bought a few and took them to the truck, but he refused payment.

Many bridges and culverts had been repaired, and the train moved over these very very slowly and rocked considerably. From what could be seen from the train, all of the improvised structures were very rough and loosely constructed.

I was very pensive, and tried hard to see all that was possible as the train passed through Segamat, where we had been in camp before the war against the Japs began, and other places nearby which I knew so well, and about which I had such a lot to think. How different was everything then, and how much I wished that it could all come back again, because it had all been so very good. I remembered amongst many others even more pleasant, another day when another train went by, and I had nearly missed it as I ran across the rails, threw my suitcase aboard and jumped onto the train; on that occasion it was to proceed to Kuala Lumpur as we were then, but not as a prisoner who knew nothing of what the future may hold, instead as a happy, healthy young fellow going there to meet two very good friends, and proceed freely northward on leave.

When the train stopped at Gemas we were taken off and the guards took us first along a flat street, and then up a hill to what appeared to be some police barracks. There we were handed over to another group of

Japs by our guards. An Indian Army soldier was employed by the Japs to make us understand what was wanted. He gave me a book in which to write the army number, name, rank and nationality of each, and what we possessed in the form of money and valuables. After this was compiled and the book handed over, we were divided into two groups, one English, one Australian, and taken to different rooms although in the same row of quarters.

There was a number of Indian soldiers at the barracks, and we learnt that their work was to keep clean the Jap quarters nearby, in return for which they were given all the rice, flour, sugar and tea they required. The Indian brought some large cooking vessels, and informed me that we were to cook food for ourselves. I got two of our fellows and went with him to where the stores were kept. I put handful after handful of rice into the kerosene tin and the Indian nonchalantly expressed that they had a lot of rice there; so I decided that we would cook a good deal more than was necessary for one meal, in case we were moved before we had another. The Indian said he would get some chupatties made for us. We had a big meal with the rice and a lot of sugar, then the chupatties with thick sugar syrup. Apparently the segregation was only for sleeping as we all fed together.

During the evening a Jap brought me some cigarettes and a cup of coffee. When I began to hand around the cigarettes he stopped me, and went away and got some more, but did not bring any more coffee. I was also given a stretcher on which to sleep, and this of course brought forth during the night, the forever customary and habitual comments about the **** officers, etc., but that time they were facetious and jocular criticisms. The Jap stayed and talked to us for quite a while, and I referred to the bad treatment by some of the Japs; to which he answered that north of the Ayer Hitam all Japs were old and good, but south of there all the Japs were young and cruel.

The following morning we were informed that we would soon be going to the train again; and when some bread was brought for breakfast, another lot was issued which we were to keep for the journey. When we arrived at the railway station, we were put into an open coal truck, the bottom of which was covered thickly with coal dust and refuse.

The trip to Kuala Lumpur was a very slow one, and we did not arrive until just after midnight. The train was halted at Tampin for a long time; it was very very hot, and after some time we were taken

across the lines into the shade of a tin shed. Practically all were barefooted, and many had difficulty walking over the loose metal which was terrifically hot. At Seremban we stopped at the station for some time. From trains going south, many Chinese threw cigarettes and bananas into the truck, and several children on the platform brought us bunches of bananas. After we left there were sufficient bananas for eight each and a few over, and all had a few packets of cigarettes.

At another station north of Seremban some Japanese women, who occupied a carriage of a train going south, gave us some tinned food and cigarettes. The Jap guard—there was only one for that stage of our journey—with a great grin on this face pointed to the women as they passed and said 'Japanese soldier, jiggy jig'. Many Japs at stations during the journey took photographs of us. It became unbearably hot in the open truck in the middle of the day, and two of our fellows were suffering from bloated stomachs which caused them much pain. Others began to feel ill and some were bilious. The Jap guard had a large cape, and this was rigged in one corner of the truck to provide a shelter; he got under it himself, but left enough space for the two who were very sick. Before reaching KL a heavy rain storm began and lasted until just before our arrival.

Each had become filthy dirty during the day's journey; the coal dust blowing onto us, and the soot from the engine made everybody nearly black; the sweating state in which we had been for hours during the humid heat of the day had made us all very uncomfortably grimy; and then the rain in the evening which other than cleaning, made us more stickily wet.

On the Kuala Lumpur railway platform we waited—all soaked, shivering and miserable—for quite a while before a lorry came towards us being driven along the platform. After being counted and loaded into the truck with two grunting Jap guards, we were taken through part of the town and at about 0130 hours on the 20th March we arrived at Pudu gaol.

After moving through the main gates of the gaol, we were lined up just inside the wall and everyone was searched, but nobody had anything much except their few clothes, and the only things taken from us were matches. After four of the sick fellows had been taken elsewhere, a Jap carrying a lantern led us through an archway, then turned left along a road, through a large gateway in another wall, and to a big room in a

low building. In there amongst the bodies of many others, each found, by feeling about the floor, a place to lie. In a whispered conversation, I learnt that in the gaol were many prisoners of war, both English and Australian.

Repeatedly throughout the remainder of the night, many men moved outside the room and returned again. I wished myself to go to the lavatory, and stumblingly made my way past the sleeping men and limped outside. I spoke to someone coming towards me and asked where was the latrine. He spoke, and abruptly, even with tremulous agitation, fearful I be wrong, and interrupting what he was saying I asked—not 'Adj?' but as if to make my enquiry even more definite and precise—'You're Capt. Morgan?' and there in the darkness of early morning, in a place to me completely strange, and as I stood with a disturbed and harassed mind, anxious towards everything of the future, was standing before me my own battalion's adjutant. We talked for ages, but firstly, of course, about members of our unit and what had happened to them, and I found that there were quite a few in Pudu.

The following morning, at what had become known as a check parade, when all the prisoners were counted by the Japs, the new arrivals were lined up separately from the other prisoners in the area. An untidy, unshaven filthy dirty, partly clothed, unrecognisable group in tattered garments, and mostly barefooted.

Not long after my arrival at Padu I weighed myself and found that I was 8 stone 7 lbs, having lost 5 stone 3 lbs, or 73 pounds, since going into action 63 days previously; the majority of which I knew I had lost during the first two weeks. After everything that had happened, to be eventually in a place where there was some semblance of order and organisation, and amongst some friends once again, was to me a wonderful relief. The friends to whom I was always very very grateful, and to whom I will always be tremendously indebted; those whose companionship both in good times and bad has been to me a never failing pleasure.

Reference may well be made here to Sgt Ron Croft, who without thought of himself, gave me such wonderful and meritorious assistance as described within these pages.

This is where Hackney ends the story of his ordeals. Sergeant Ronald Frederick Arthur Croft was last seen at Scudai by a member of the 2/29th and was then reported to have joined a group of Chinese guerrillas.

He left their camp on 26 April and was probably recaptured and shot a few months later.

Hackney's account is the story of the extraordinary fortitude of a young Australian countryman. Apparently he was the only officer among the small group of prisoners at Batu Pahat and emerged as a true and resourceful leader. It is quite inspirational to read how he imbued his fellow soldier prisoners, mostly English, to regain a will to live, tending to the badly wounded man, insisting on the others to wash regularly, to do PT exercises and attend his impromptu church services.

CHAPTER 4
'Ten days of hell'

Hackney was mistaken when he wrote that he and Croft were the only survivors of the Parit Sulong horror. He had overlooked Lieutenant Hugh Tibbetts who escaped into the jungle but was never seen again, being posted 'missing, believed killed'. And there was a fourth man whose amazing story was by chance revealed to the author earlier this year.

His name was Reginald Arthur Wharton, a young Victorian country boy who enlisted one day after his eighteenth birthday, on 7 April 1941. He had been unmercifully teased for not being in uniform by his half dozen or so brothers, who had all enlisted. Reg tried hard to enlist when he was seventeen (putting his age on a year to conform with the enlistment minimum age), but his parents had stepped in and refused him permission. So the day after his eighteenth birthday he found himself VX52333 with the 2/29th Battalion AIF. He was to serve with that unit 1 704 days, 1 533 of them overseas, and lead as charmed a life as Ben Hackney, a lieutenant with his battalion.

Details of his experiences in Malaya were not known to his family until after his death at 64 in 1987. They found a small tin box containing war mementos, medals, a Japanese ten-dollar note autographed by fellow POWs and an eleven-page handwritten diary in a small exercise book. It gave a bald account of his miraculous escape from the Parit Sulong massacre, his time with Chinese guerillas and his recapture, then Changi and the Burma-Thailand Railway.

The whole thing totalled fewer than 800 words and the Parit Sulong massacre was dismissed in 60 words. It was clear that Reg Wharton wanted to forget and keep the horror of it from his family. When his young son, Jeff, asked about the deep purple scars on his stomach and

back, he merely said a Japanese bayonet had gone right through his body. Pressed for details, he would say, 'It's not for you to know, son'. It is not known whether he even told his wife much about the massacre. He wanted to obliterate the past from his memory but, of course, it proved to be impossible.

Wharton returned to Australia after the surrender of Japan in 1945, still only 22 and of a happy-go-lucky nature, but the years ahead were to take a tragic toll, physically and emotionally, on him. His diary is a simple summary of the 'days of hell' that he endured and conquered:

MY STORY OF ARMY LIFE

We had been in Australia quite long and very anxious to go overseas. We sailed on 29th of July, 1941, to Malaya much to our horror and landed in Singapore on the 15th of August and were immediately transported to a camp approximately 12 miles from city of Singapore and our stay there was very short only 6 weeks when we entrained to travel 200 miles up Malaya to a very nice village.

We were there some months training very hard when the Bomb went up. On 8th of December we were immediately rushed into battle stations ready for the Jap when he arrived, which was not very long to wait as he advanced down the mainland very fast. Some of us were used as commandos for a while then my battalion, the 2/29th were rushed up to a place on the west coast called Muar as we had received word that only 200 Japanese had landed there. We went up to clear them out but much to the horror of us all there were practically 2 Divisions instead of only 200 as we were first told and we had practically no modern equipment and no air force to back us up. We held them there for 5 days and nights and our wounded and killed were mounting up very fast for us to keep going much longer. But we were doing what was expected of us against such a great number of Japs. There were 20 Japs to one Australian and on the average we accounted for 10 Japs a piece. It was a very bitter and fierce struggle but was not in our favour and we received orders from our Brigadier to withdraw, so we started to back-pedal towards Singapore.

By this time there were only 300 men left and more getting killed and wounded as we retreated back. I myself had received three wounds which was a great hindrance to me but I managed to get along with the rest until I was ordered by an officer to get in the ambulance as my wounds were bleeding very badly and I was beginning to feel weak.

The ambulance was trying to get out with the rest when we struck a roadblock and the Japs took control, killing more of the wounded along Parit Sulong river and machine-gunning them, after which petrol was poured on them and set on fire. Men screamed in agony and one Jap officer was running round shooting men in the head. I myself escaped but with only a few burns under my left arm, but I was caught properly later with all my mates and they had us up against rubber trees, intending to finish us properly, but by some miracle they missed me when they fired their first volley. So I played doggo until one of them came too close and I encountered no more of them before they really nearly finished me by putting the bayonet through my ribs, piercing one lung and the other one into my stomach which was not very nice and then I was useless, so they threw me into a dirty swamp of water with the rest of my mates, one of which was alive and the Japs fired four more shots, three of which entered his head and the other one, which I should say, parted my hair, but luck was with me again and they missed. So that night I struggled out of the water and made my way slowly towards Singapore, by this time I had lost a terrible amount of blood and I was very weak and my wounds were still bleeding but I pushed doggedly onwards until I met a Chinese who gave me some water and biscuits to eat and away I went again. Three days later I decided to look at my wounds but much to my horror they were all fly-blown and the maggots were about an inch long but with the aid of a Chinese I managed to get them all out of my wounds and so I was able to keep them clean. It was 10 days later that I met up with the rest of the boys after travelling night and day and, boy, was I glad to see them, although there were no familiar faces to meet me as I expected, as most of them were dead or in hospital wounded and my battalion had been reformed with all new men as there were only about 75 of the old crowd left. During my ten days of hell getting back to the boys my food consisted of dirty water, a few green bananas and pineapples and a few biscuits the Chinese gave me and I suppose I lost about three stone or more in that short period, although it seems impossible but quite true. And so my wounds still sore we into the Japs again but it was no use. We had no air force or navy and the Japs could blast us from the air and shell us from the sea. And so after a very bitter struggle on Singapore Island the commander-in-chief of all troops signed a peace treaty with the Japs which made the boys very angry because we were all still full of fight and it came as

a great shock to us. But a few of us rather than become prisoners left Singapore Island to try and get back up the mainland through to India. This was two days after the peace treaty was signed but I got separated from the rest, so I plodded on up the mainland on my own and joined up with the Chines guerillas and worked with them for two months until I was given away by a Malayan who said he was a guerilla but proved to be a traitor and so I was in the Japs' hands again after having two months of freedom while the rest of the boys had been prisoners for about two months two weeks.

P.O.W. STORY

Well, after I was taken prisoner on 30 March the Japs threw myself and nine other Australians into a cell only big enough to hold three men and we remained there for 10 days on one meal a day which consisted of boiled rice and green leaves approximately six spoonfuls for each of the two meals and I said to myself this is the start. What will we be like when the war was over? Well, during our stay there on the sixth morning just at daylight, we were marched out on the road and across to a padang where there was an Indian with his hands tied behind his back and I said to one of the other lads, 'Looks like he is going to lose his head', because there was a Jap officer there with his sword out and a white coat on.

At this stage the writing is indecipherable and a whole page is missing. It must have been about his time on the infamous Burma-Thailand Railway. He worked on it from April 1943 to December 1944 and 'celebrated' his 21st birthday there. Perhaps he wanted to spare his family distress and destroyed the missing page himself. The diary goes on:

We also worked very hard at lifting bags of rice, petrol drums and other materials. Our working hours were from early in the morning until the Japs decided to knock us off, there was many a night we never arrived back at camp until one o'clock next morning and had to go to work the same day. This is the place where the bashings started. It was nothing to see one or more of the boys get knocked unconscious with a piece of wood or shovel or whatever the Japs could get hold of. I myself during my stay there was knocked unconscious several times and carried back to camp to wake up next morning wondering what happened. But out to work I would go next day to get another bashing or be lucky and come home without getting one. It was also nothing for us to be marched past

sometimes as many as 20 Chinese heads on sticks of wood which the Japs had beheaded. It was done to more or less frighten us but the Japs found out we were not easily frightened and they decided it was better to bash us than show us heads on sticks because by this time we had become very callous and cruel and if anybody died or was killed we took no notice of it and thought it just a matter of course, because before it was all over we were due to see a lot of our mates die or be killed by the Japs. Well, the next part of our journey was to be put on a train and taken down to Singapore where all the prisoners were and, boy, were we glad to get down there and we did not feel safe only a small number of men amongst about 20 000 Japs and we did not know when they might decide to shoot the lot of us and we were always under that dread during our prisoner of war days.

There is something inspirational to read of this young Australian country boy's sense of duty. He writes of 'doing what was expected of us' and at the capitulation of Singapore, commenting, 'The boys were very angry because we were still full of fight and it came as a great shock to us'. A somewhat different version to that of British muckraker, Peter Elphick, who wrote of wholesale Australian desertions and acts of cowardice.

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nearly finished me by putting the
bayonet through my ribs piercing one
lung & the other one into my stomach
which was not very nice & then I was
unconscious & they thrust me into a
dirty trench of water with the rest
of my mates one of which was alive
& the Japs fired four more shots there which

One section of Reg Wharton's diary discovered after his death in 1987

CHAPTER 5
The Changi Days

After his recapture, Reg Wharton was reported as a POW at Pudu Gaol, Kuala Lumpur, on 17 July, unaware that Ben Hackney was being held there. In late September, Hackney was transferred to Changi in Singapore and a few weeks later Wharton followed him there. The parallels between the movements of Hackney and Wharton are extraordinary, considering that there is no evidence to suggest that they ever met.

In Changi, Hackney was reunited with his old friend, Ian McKibbin. No doubt they talked about the pineapple that had been such a symbol of mateship. An X-ray in Changi revealed that the bone in Hackney's left leg, where he was first wounded, had been fractured.

Hackney also found a new friend in Lieutenant John Brindley, a young Sydney architect. Brindley was conducting highly successful morale-boosting lectures entitled 'Hints to Home Builders' for the prisoners. Hackney was a regular attendant and sought Brindley's advice about a pet project—the building of a super country homestead on one of the Hackney properties at Oberon in the mountains west of Katoomba. The pair spent hours together planning the brick two-storey mansion, with tiled roofs instead of the prevailing galvanised iron style. They designed innovative living and sleeping quarters, a barbecue area, a swimming pool, horse and cattle yards and landscaping suitable to the mountain environment. Every little detail was discussed and argued about—what timber to use, nails, screws, paint colours, decorating and so on. It was to be the biggest and most beautiful country homestead in Australia.

The planning of it kept Hackney's tortured mind away from his terrible experiences and it was valuable professional practice for

Brindley. (Ben Hackney's dream homestead was never built but in later years, when Brindley had become one of Australia's best-known architects, he travelled to Hackney's Wonalabee property at Bathurst and built him a fine veterinary laboratory and adjoining vet's cottage.) In Changi, Brindley found Hackney very easy to get along with but subject to moods and deep depression and introspection, which was not surprising. Hackney never spoke about his ordeal but obviously thought about it a lot. Brindley was horrified to see the extent of Hackney's wounds when he was under the shower.

In April 1943, Hackney and McKibbin were among the 3 662 Australian soldiers sent to Northern Thailand as 'F Force' to work on the infamous Burma-Thailand Railway. The pair were in the same camp at Shimo Sonkuri. So was Reg Wharton, who spent his twenty-first birthday slaving on 'the line', wondering whether he would receive a celebratory bashing from one of his guards. More than 1 000 had died by the time 'F Force' returned to Changi in December, 1944.

It was there that Hackney compiled a report of the massacre and buried it secretly in a shellcase. Before doing so, he showed it to senior British and Australian officers in case he did not survive to retrieve it after their release from captivity. He formed a new friendship with Captain Adrian Curlewis, one of General Bennett's staff officers who was a barrister in civil life and president of the Surf Life Saving Association of Australia. (Curlewis was to follow in his father's footsteps and become a NSW District Court Judge in 1948 and be knighted by the Queen in 1967. His mother, Ethel Turner, wrote the national best seller, *Seven Little Australians.*) During the three years they were in captivity together, Curlewis and Hackney spent hours preparing a legal case against the Japanese responsible for the massacre of Parit Sulong.

When the day of release came on 15 August 1945, the residents of Changi had got wind of its imminence as early as August 10 thanks to a secret wireless operating in the prison. Lionel Wigmore quoted the recollections of a young soldier:

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 of their impending release . . . The penalty for wireless operating was death. The only safeguard was secrecy. Yet who could resist 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 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. You are free, Digger. Think of that.'

The reaction of the prisoners when the news was confirmed varied according to individual temperament and circumstances, Wigmore wrote. Some, at first elated, later felt depressed, and were worried about what might have happened during prolonged absences from home; 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', more 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 said afterwards, 'various onlookers added perhaps another piece of fish or sambal, or a cup of excellent coffee . . . One stall-holder from a competitive stall brought me another meal of rice, while the stall-holder where I was eating added more food 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.'

The two boys from Bathurst, Ben Hackney and Ian McKibbin, stuck together and travelled back to Australia in the liner *Esperence Bay*. Another passenger was Private Reg Wharton. McKibbin has one abiding memory of a thrilling experience before sailing. He was flown over Singapore harbour by Neville Paul, an RAAF pilot from Bathurst. The harbour was chock-a-block with ships—warships, troopships, passenger liners and other craft, big and small. 'Nine hundred ships!' McKibbin remembers. 'A glorious sight!'

CHAPTER 6
Home, Sweet Home

So the boys came home again and never was home sweeter than to those who had suffered so much for so long. The people of Australia had by now become aware for the first time of the enormity of their ordeal as slaves of the Son of Heaven. They gave the men and women of the 8th Division a warm and understanding welcome home; the last thing the boys wanted was sympathy. Gunner Tom Shadlow, of the 2/15th Field Regiment, now living in retirement at Port Macquarie, gave a heart-warming description of what it felt like. He recalled that about Christmas time 1944, the prisoners were allowed to write home a card of 24 words (including the address). Tom wrote to his mother at their Singleton dairy farm in the Hunter Valley of NSW: 'Still alive, fairly good, miss your gramma pie'.

Tom went on to describe the feelings of the released prisoners as their ship approached Sydney nearly a year later:

When Manly beach came into view everyone crowded to that side of the boat. There was an attempt to raise a cheer, but somehow everybody seemed to have a restriction in their throats. Into the harbour as the submarine boom opened and it seemed that every craft on Sydney Harbour was making some sort of noise. From the ship and onto the old double-decker buses with big signs on the front '8th Division POW's from Singapore'. The convoy of buses did a tour of the city. There were streamers of all colours and lovely girls hanging out of office windows and most of our blokes hanging out of the bus windows. Out to Ingleburn, there were a million people, or so it seemed to me. We were given lunchtime leave before reporting back for interrogation, medical, outfitting, PAYING. I wandered off into this great crowd of people. Blokes were being recognised and swamped by their families and girl

friends. I'd nearly given up hope when all of a sudden I was swamped by brothers and sisters. Home in Singleton by train the next day to be met in town by my mother, then out home to Glennies Creek where dad walked out of the dairy, held out his hand and said, 'How are you, me shaver?'

Remember when I wrote the card home and told mum I was missing her gramma pie? Well, when she learned I was coming home, she had no grammas. She put an ad in the *Singleton Argus* about her POW son coming home and asking if anyone in the district had a gramma. I believe that Norm Hinwell landed out there with half a lorry load of them. Boy, did mum give me gramma pie! I ate them dutifully (although she did make a great pie). 'Have some more, son. Somebody go over to the dairy and get some of this morning's cream.' Yes, I was home but I was beginning to feel sorry that I'd ever mentioned gramma pies.

The Hackneys were there in force to welcome home their Ben at Ingleburn on that memorable day in 1945. It is not likely that there was anybody waiting for Reg Wharton before he went on to his Victorian home. He was by then 22 years old, still cheerful and cheeky despite his traumatic experiences. He and Ben Hackney may have passed each other in the crowd on that day, not knowing they were bonded together by an horrific event. Although utterly different in age, character and social background, their secret lives were to be strangely linked. Hackney was to pursue a crusade for retribution, Wharton to try to obliterate the memories of Parit Sulong which, of course, proved to be impossible. They both, it seemed, carried with them a lifetime legacy of war itself, living secret and sometimes tormented inner lives beyond the imagination and understanding of outsiders, and even themselves. Their inner anxieties were familiar to a host of other old soldiers, unable to banish the memory of horrors in the trenches of World War I, the jungles of Vietnam and all the other organised killing and maiming fields of history. And in the end it all caught up with the two survivors of Parit Sulong. Hackney died at 68 in 1984, Wharton at 64 in 1987.

At Ingleburn on that homecoming day, the returned POWs were interrogated by Army Intelligence and legal experts from the newly formed Australian War Crimes Section regarding their ill-treatment by prison guards and other kinds of brutality. They were shown photographs of Japanese suspects and asked to identify them. One of those grilled

was the young rebel, Russell Braddon, whose antipathy towards all officers and authority was shown in his best seller, *The Naked Island*. He was summoned to Army Headquarters at Victoria Barracks in Sydney for questioning and opted to make a mockery of it, regarding the examining officers as idiots.

Ben Hackney willingly cooperated as the desire for retribution for Parit Sulong had become almost an obsession with him. He believed General Nishimura was responsible for the massacre and he urged the military authorities to go after him. In nightmares he saw again and again the picture of the scowling Japanese general peering through the windows of the house of wounded men, ignoring their agonised cries of pain. It had to be Nishimura who he had written about in his 'Dark Evening': 'A shortish, stocky fellow to whom a bodyguard kept close always. He was well-dressed; his sword dangling low had a great amount of brown cord at the hilt; knee-high boots and spurs all glistened. The attitude of the Japs to this officer was as though he was something far and above any of them; as if to them he was a god . . . He mounted the steps of the building and looked through the window at the mass inside one of the rooms. Upon leaving the building he spoke to one of the officers accompanying him, who in turn passed on what apparently were orders to the Jap in charge of the prisoners.' It had to be Nishimura.

After spending some time in a convalescent depot in Sydney, Ben Hackney had returned to the family property at Burraga, about 40 miles from Bathurst. The Hackneys were early pioneers of the Bathurst district. The family first arrived in Australia by the sailing ship *Frederick* during December, 1853. There was Thomas Hackney, his wife Amelia (née Kenyon), three sons and a daughter. Thomas was a draper in Manchester with some rural interests and could trace back his family to at least 1176. It included a Sheriff of London who is said to have given his name to the inner London suburb of Hackney. The Hackneys went to Bathurst in early 1854 and leased a property named Walmer. Amelia Hackney's brother, Robert Kenyon, had also settled in Australia, taking up land at Burraga near Bathurst. After the death of Amelia in 1857, Kenyon influenced the Hackneys to settle on very rich land adjoining Jeremy Station. In 1863, Thomas Hackney and two of his sons purchased the show property of Buckburraga, the family home of Ben Hackney. Many of the original Thomas Hackney's descendants live in the Bathurst district today.

Hackney gradually adjusted to bush life again at Burraga but made frequent trips to Sydney in his fast car to pursue his case against Nishimura. On 12 November 1945, he gave sworn evidence before Mr Justice Mansfield in Sydney about the events at Parit Sulong, based on the notes he had hidden in the shellcase in Changi. All over the world the victors of the war were out in search of war criminals. Many were to escape the net because of the inexperience of military investigating officers. The case against Nishimura was largely undertaken by Captain J.G. Godwin, a New Zealander serving with the Australian War Crimes Section. He travelled to Singapore and Japan to trace Japanese soldier witnesses of the Parit Sulong massacre and take sworn evidence from them. It was to be a slow process and it was not until October 1949 that Godwin got the vital evidence he wanted.

Nishimura himself was not hard to find. The British had got hold of him first and he was safely locked up in Singapore's Changi Gaol, premises lately vacated by thousands of reluctant Australian residents. Nishimura was to languish there for two years until brought to trial in 1947 with other high-ranking Japanese officers for complicity in the monstrous 'Chinese Massacre' after the fall of Singapore.

CHAPTER 7
Chinese Massacre

When Japan launched its attack on Malaya in December 1942, Chinese residents of the country unanimously decided to cooperate with the British (there was a peacetime saying that 'Malaya is a country owned by the Malays and run by the Chinese for the benefit of the British'). The 'Chinese Massacre' after the Japanese triumph at Singapore was undoubtedly a savage revenge for such Chinese loyalty.

After the British capitulated on 15 February 1942, different parts of the island were allocated for garrison and administrative purposes to various formations under General Yamashita's command. Nishimura and his Imperial Guards Division were given the eastern half of the island. An order was then issued that all Chinese residents in Singapore were to be assembled in concentration areas and screened. Former members of volunteer forces, communists, looters, armed people or those found harbouring arms and those harbouring anti-Japanese sentiments were to be 'disposed of' secretly at various sites around Singapore. The killings began on 17 February, two days after the capitulation, and continued until 3 March.

Japanese witnesses at the subsequent trial of seven officers for responsibility for the crimes stated that the original plan was to kill 50 000 Chinese. They said that after half that number had been slaughtered, the killings had been called off. Japanese official figures give a total of not fewer than 5 000, but subsequent investigation gives a much higher figure.

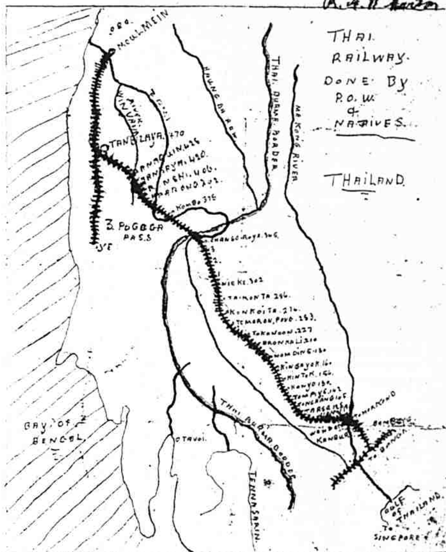
The Chinese were beheaded on beaches, pushed overboard from boats and shot. Hundreds of beheaded bodies floated in the harbour for days, the heads appearing to have been severed from the bodies by sword cuts. Hundreds were taken by lorries to beaches about half a

mile from Changi Gaol. A survivor told how they were tied up, eleven in a row, and taken to the water's edge and slaughtered by machine-gun.

It was Nishimura's turn on 28 February to kill all Chinese living in the Imperial Guards Division area. For days hundreds of corpses were seen strewn on the beaches and floating in the sea. Some were thrown into previously prepared trenches in the sand. Nishimura's carnage took place in the Changi area where Australian prisoners of war were being held. Ex-gunner Tom Shadlow of 2/15th Field Regiment vividly remembers the occasion. He and his fellow prisoners were being held temporarily in Birdwood, a British Army depot, before being moved to Changi Gaol. 'It wasn't far from the road that ran to the beach', he recalls. 'I saw the trucks go past. One open truck with sideboards held 30 or 40 Chinese men, standing tightly packed together in the back. I can still remember the hopeless, despairing look on their faces as the trucks went on to a beach area further out. I saw this happen on two occasions and we were told that the Japs were rounding up all the Chinese men they even suspected of being loyal to the British. They were being taken to this beach where a trench had been dug, made to stand along the edge of the trench and machine-gunned. Some fell into the trench, those that didn't were tipped in and the trench immediately filled in, it didn't matter that some were still alive'.

Caroline Oxley, of Boorowa, found a moving sequel to the massacre in the papers of her late grandfather, Sergeant Fred Howe, of the 2/19th Battalion. Howe was in charge of a party forced by the Japanese to bury the bodies washed ashore at Changi. Among them was a semi-conscious Chinese boy of about eleven with bullet wound in chest and arm. The Australians smuggled him into a rubber plantation and covered him in banana leaves. Late that night they carried the boy to a house and left him in the care of an old Chinese woman. After the surrender in 1945, Howe returned to the house for an emotional reunion with the old woman and the boy, then 15. The boy had become a Christian and prayed to God every day for Howe's welfare

The trial of seven Japanese officers charged with responsibility for the 'Chinese Massacre' opened in Singapore on 10 March, 1947, and lasted for 23 days. The officers were Lieutenant-General Takuma Nishimura, 59, Lieutenant-General Saburo Kawamura, 52, Colonel Yokota Yoshitaka, 48, Lieutenant-Colonel Masayuki Oishi, 50, Major



A POWs' map of the Burma-Thailand Railway

Ben Hackney at his Wonalabee property, near Bathurst, in June 1950, while General Nishimura *(pictured below)* was being tried at Manus Island for the massacre *(photograph by Bob Rice, courtesy Fairfax Photo Library)*

Tomatatsu Jyo, 47, Major Satorou Onishi, 45, and Captain Haruji Hisamatsu, 34. The trial was conducted by the International Military Tribunal, Far East, and all seven accused pleaded not guilty to a charge of responsibility for a series of 'close-set massacres' which had arisen from a 'common plan'.

Much interest centred on Nishimura, the renowned commander of Japan's most elite military division. When he entered the dock, he maintained he had only obeyed orders in carrying out the executions, according to the traditional doctrine of Bushido. He was closely questioned on the meaning of Bushido and his answers explained much of Japan's military criterion of the day.

'The soul of Bushido is only in the obeying of orders', Nishimura replied. 'The Japanese soldiers are human as well as any other people and they do not make light of life. To obey an order is to the Japanese soldier greater than life and this is the resolution held by we Japanese soldiers. The order issued by the Imperial Emperor to surrender unconditionally was carried out throughout the entire army without any bloodshed or resistance and that was all due to the absoluteness of the order.'

Prosecutor: Now, as a rational human being and one imbued with the spirit of Bushido, which would you rate more highly, your own life or the lives of countless unarmed civilians?

Nishimura: To obey an order is more important than my life and I merely obeyed orders.

The defence called General Takajo Numata, 55, a top-ranking Japanese staff officer, to substantiate the defence argument that, as orders in the Japanese Army were absolute, the accused had no option but to obey the command to massacre thousands of Chinese civilians.

The bench had a final question before Numata stepped from the witness box. As he had told the court that obedience to orders in the Japanese Army was absolute, was the bench to assume that officers of general and field rank were not expected to use their own initiative? Numata assured the bench that initiative was not precluded.

Prosecutor: May the witness be asked if he was ordered by his immediate superior to bayonet a small child would he bayonet the child?

Numata: Me as a private soldier?

Prosecutor: As an officer.

Numata: I should carry out the order.

The trial ended at midday on 4 April 1947. Less than two hours later all seven accused had been found guilty and the sentences handed down: Death by hanging for Lieutenant-General Kawamura and Lieutenant-Colonel Oishi, life sentences for the other five.

Responsibility for the Chinese Massacre has been a subject of controversy for war historians. It was generally supposed that the order for the massacres had come directly from General Yamashita, who was summarily hanged at Manila for alleged war crimes on 23 February, 1946. In a recent sensational book, *The Killer They Called a God*, British journalist and war correspondent Ian Ward puts forward an entirely new scenario. He asserts that the real villain was Lieutenant-Colonel Masanobu Tsuji, the Japanese High Command's Chief of Planning and Operations. Ward names Tsuji as also being responsible for the massacres of thousands of Filipino and U.S. servicemen in the Bataan Death Marches. He writes that after the war, Tsuji, disguised as a Buddhist monk, eluded war crimes investigators and, incredibly, became one of Japan's most popularly elected postwar parliamentarians.

So Nishimura found himself back in Changi Gaol and there he stayed for the next three years, cogitating over his fate, which was bleak and would become bleaker. In May, 1950, he found himself part of a repatriation of Japanese war criminals back to Tokyo where they were to serve the remainder of their sentences. This was at a time when there was emerging a noticeable softening in the attitude of the Americans and British towards Japanese war criminals, for political reasons. No doubt Nishimura's spirits rose at the thought of his homecoming, but nemesis awaited him at Hong Kong where the ship was to make a brief stopover.

There had been no softening in the attitude of the Australian government or the military authorities. They wanted retribution in full for the atrocities committed against Australian servicemen and women and were determined to get it. The fact that Nishimura was already serving a life sentence for the Chinese Massacre did not deter those engaged in the case against him for the Parit Sulong murders. By 1950, they reckoned they had enough evidence to take him to trial. Presumably with the concurrence of the British government, the avengers were waiting on the dockside when the ship carrying Nishimura from Singapore berthed. He was taken ashore to Stanley Prison on 21 May, and later formally charged by Australian military officers with

responsibility for the Parit Sulong massacre. Nishimura was shocked and protested afterwards: 'I was shown an abstract of the charge sheet and for the first time I come to know of this case and I am very surprised'.

Shortly afterwards, Nishimura and other Japanese prisoners boarded the steamer, *Changte*, destination Manus Island, in the Admiralty group north of Papua New Guinea, where the so-called Manus Island War Crimes Trials were being held. Actually, the trials were conducted on Los Negros, a little coral island off the easternmost coast of Manus. The island was already inhabited by hundreds of former Japanese soldiers convicted elsewhere and now serving hard-labour sentences in road gangs and works projects. They lived in barbed-wire compounds and worked under strong armed guards of native police from Papua. Ironically, these working parties, clad in blood-red prison uniforms, constructed the courthouse where their compatriots were tried, as well as the prison blocks, condemned cells and the gallows.

Among the welcoming party for the *Changte* at Los Negros was the ace reporter of the *Sydney Sun* (now defunct), George H. Johnston (later to become a famous novelist). He had been sent to cover the trials and he described it all in his usual colourful style. One of the highlights was the arrival of Lieutenant-General Takuma Nishimura. His story was to be headlined 'Jap General hopes he will be hanged', which shows that sometimes people's dreams come true:

Scowling, unshaven, bullet-headed Nishimura, with other prisoners, were brought from the ship handcuffed to Australian provosts of the B.C.O.F. (British Commonwealth Occupation Force) and handed over to a guard of eight native police armed with sub machine-guns.

The former commander of the Japs' crack division was pushed into the back of a five-ton truck unceremoniously and by the buttocks by native police. He sat on a crude swag he carried, with his back resolutely turned to his inferior fellow-prisoner. He waved cheerfully at Australian guards as the truck trundled away to the compound through lines of open-mouthed natives.

On the way to the cells Nishimura, who states he hopes he'll be condemned to death by the Australians—passed a vegetable garden where a few red-garbed Japanese POWs were working.

One bald-headed, elderly prisoner digging apathetically amid the vines looked up dully as the truck passed. The inoffensive-looking old

gardener was the notorious General Imamura, formerly Supreme Commander of the Jap forces, South-West Pacific, who was the arch-enemy of Australians during the early New Guinea campaigns.

Imamura was sentenced to death by the Dutch but was released by the Indonesians and is now working out a 10-year sentence imposed by Australians. He is now a mumbling, simple-minded old man, allowed to potter around his garden.

As the truck passed with Nishimura squatting on the truck floor surrounded by a ring of sub machine-guns, the eyes of the two former generals met briefly and expressionlessly—then Imamura bent again and began digging at his vines.

CHAPTER 8

The Trial of Nishimura

The trial of Nishimura was the last in the Australian Manus Island series. After the war, 296 war crimes trials were conducted under the Australian *War Crimes Act* passed in 1945. A total of 924 persons were tried, 280 being acquitted. Of those found guilty, 114 were hanged and 34 shot, the others being sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.

The trial of Takuma Nishimura began on 19 June 1950 and was unusual for a number of reasons. Nishimura was already serving a life sentence for the Chinese Massacre; it had been five years before he was taken from his Singapore prison to Los Negros; details of the crime were not challenged by the defence; there were no witnesses but only sworn statements; and there were political undertones involving the Australian, British, American and Japanese governments and the Holy See in Rome. Nishimura's Japanese defence counsel described the case as the 'most strange of modern times as it was conducted with only documentary evidence'.

The trial was conducted under the presidency of Brigadier K. R. Townley, a formidable Justice of the Queensland Supreme Court. Members of the court were Lieutenant-Colonel N. F. Quinton, Majors E. J. Gerling, H. F. Hayes and W. E. Clarke. The prosecuting counsel was C. V. Rooney, KC, assisted by Major Foster of the Australian Army Legal Corps. Nishimura's defence counsel was Shoji Nakayama, a lawyer and graduate of Tokyo University. As Nishimura did not speak English, there were three Japanese interpreters.

Nishimura and his personal aide, Captain Shoici Nonaka, were charged with the murder of 110 Australian and 35 Indian prisoners of war at Parit Sulong on 22 January 1942. Both pleaded not guilty.

The 64-dollar-question was: Did Nishimura give the order to execute the prisoners?

Nishimura was now 62 years old, of swarthy complexion, with dark hooded eyes and thick lips. He listened to the evidence impassively most of the time, with occasional scowls and flashes of anger.

The prosecution was based on twelve typewritten pages written by Ben Hackney from his sworn statement of 1945. The statement horrified the court and drew headlines in Australian newspapers. Mr Rooney, the senior prosecutor, told the court the prosecution would produce sworn evidence of five Japanese officers, all of whom alleged that Nishimura gave the order for the execution of the prisoners. This would be denied by Nishimura who had sworn that the order was to have all prisoners sent to headquarters. Nonaka, co-accused of the massacre, had admitted passing on the order for the execution and there was no dispute between his version of the facts and those alleged by the prosecution. Lieutenant Fujita, who was in charge of the actual executions, disappeared after being interrogated in Japan and disobeyed instructions to return for further questioning.

The trial lasted for four days and much time was taken up in arguing whether Nishiumura had used the Japanese word 'shobun', meaning that the prisoners were to be disposed of to the rear or the word 'shokei' meaning to execute. Hours of gruelling cross-examination and argument were to be given to this question.

To many questions, Nishimura answered 'My memory has completely faded away', or 'I do not remember of it'. But later his memory returned sufficiently for him to remember visiting the building where the wounded Australians were herded and inspecting them (Remember? Hackney wrote that he saw the staff cars arrive and suspected they contained top Japanese brass).

Rooney: Do you remember there was a stench of blood and filth that could be smelt some feet away from the building?

Nishimura: I did not notice it.

Rooney: Did you hear the groans of the wounded men?

Nishimura: I don't remember.

Asked by his defence counsel, Shoji Nakayama, what he had to say of the sworn statements of other Japanese officers that he had ordered an execution by firing squad, Nishimura replied, 'If I had wanted to execute, I would have been consulted by the Chief of Staff, Colonel Kamejiro Imai, who was then present'.

Rooney: Were the killings the result of a mistake, confusion or deliberate disobedience by subordinates?

Nishimura: I am not sure which.

Sworn statements had been taken from five Japanese officers by an Australian investigating officer, Captain J.G. Godwin. They were Captain Nonaka and Lieutenants Inagaki, Sono, Hinokuma and Fujita. They testified that they had heard Nishimura give the order, 'Instruct the officer-in-charge of the prisoners to execute all the prisoners'.

The most damning evidence of all came from Nishimura's personal aide, Nonaka, who said he went with Nishimura to inspect the prisoners: 'I looked through the lattice and could see many Australian prisoners, most of them wounded, in various postures. There was a nauseating stench of blood. The prisoners were making a considerable noise. On returning to his car, Nishimura turned to me and in the hearing of all the officers present he gave me the following order, "Instruct the officer-in-charge to execute all prisoners of war by firing squad". No sooner had I acknowledged this than the chief-of-staff, Colonel Kamejiro Imai, gave me the following order, "The bodies of the prisoners are to be cremated on the completion of the executions".' The court examined Nishimura on these statements:

Q: You have read the sworn statements of the five officers, Inagaki, Sono, Hinokuma, Nonaka and Fujita?

A: Yes, I have read them.

Q: And you know, do you not, that those five officers have all sworn that you gave the order to execute the prisoners of war?

A: Yes, I know.

Q: Then, all those five officers must either be lying or the whole five must have mistaken your order?

A: Yes, I think so.

The prosecution and defence counsels put forward somewhat different views about Nishimura's character in their closing addresses.

Rooney (prosecutor): Nishimura was an evil man, caring nothing for human life or suffering and having no regard for the conventions for international law or for the decencies of humanity.

Nakayama (defence): Nishimura as a soldier was a strong and able man. On the other hand, he is unusually soft-hearted and compassionate, and at home in his private life he is well-known for his sympathetic personality.

In his closing address, Nakayama said survivors of the divisional staff of Nishimura had manoeuvred to impute the whole responsibility of the Parit Sulong massacre to Nishimura and Nonaka. 'This is another aspect of the present defeat of Japan', he said.

When the defence case closed, Nishimura rose to his feet and said from the dock: 'I am very sorry that my carelessness in this case that such an incident as this happened. I wish to give praise with sorrow to those who were killed in this case. That is all'.

At 3.20 p.m. on 22 June 1950, the court found Nishimura and Nonaka guilty of the charge of murder and retired to consider their sentences. Precisely 20 minutes later they returned: Nishimura was to suffer death by hanging and Nonaka to serve six months imprisonment. Nearly a year was to pass before their sentences were carried out.

While the trial was proceeding, the author flew to Bathurst with photographer, Bob Rice, to interview Ben Hackney on his Wonalabee property for the Sydney *Sunday Sun*. He was living there alone in an old homestead, with an overseer in the cottage. It was an uncomfortable and difficult interview, although he said he did not mind talking about his terrible experiences. But he was obviously still uptight and haunted by it—you can see it in the photograph Bob took of him on his grey horse (*opposite page 73*). 'I've lost no sleep over it', he said quietly. 'Most of the bayonet thrusts were only pricks.'

Hackney did not use the word 'hate' when I asked him what he thought about the Japanese. He left no doubt, however, that he did not love them—and never would. He disciplined his bitterness. He said very quietly: 'I presume and hope that British justice will be done at Los Negros. After all, that was one of the main things we fought for, wasn't it?' He did not emotionally say 'Hang them!' He just looked at me and said 'Give them justice'. That was a fine and dignified thing to say when you consider what sort of justice the Japanese gave Hackney and others at Parit Sulong. It was finer still when he added, 'It's a bad thing to have kept those men for five years without a trial'.

A little while before, Bishop Michael Yashiro, of Japan, had paid an official visit to Bathurst, the first by a Japanese cleric to Australia since the war. Ben Hackney wasn't on the reception committee. 'I suppose', he said, 'we should all recognise the judgment and commonsense of those in charge of ecclesiastical matters in Australia, but I don't understand why Yashiro was invited to Australia. If he is what he is

supposed to be, by all means recognise him, but leave him in his own country. We don't want him here. If everything said about him is correct, then without any doubt he is a freak. Leave him over there to teach his own fellow men the meaning of Christianity. What sort of converting is he suppose to be doing here? We Australians are reasonably civilised. The Japanese are not, regardless of education or experience. Even Japs educated in England and America reverted to type. Perhaps they were emotionally upset or something.'

There was one thing Hackney was determined about—he would never reveal the names of the victims of Parit Sulong. And he never did. In fact, the names of the victims remain on the records as 'Missing' or 'Killed in action' to prevent needless suffering by relatives.

I telephoned him from Sydney a few days later to tell him Nishimura had been found guilty and sentenced to hang. Whether he thought the execution of one Japanese general made up for the horror of Parit Sulong was something Ben Hackney was keeping to himself. He declined to comment on the sentence.

An appeal for a new trial by Nishimura, petitions for clemency from individuals and organisations, new evidence from three Japanese officers, and an approach to the Holy See in Rome all combined to delay the execution of General Nishimura.

Nishimura petitioned for a new trial, claiming he had been falsely charged. 'Although I am a human being, even if I lose the will to live, my love to my family will not terminate', he wrote (He had a wife, Setsuko, a son of nineteen and a daughter of fourteen). 'Still if God commands that I must die of false charge, I trust in God and I shall die with his decision. I have often read about people suffering from false accusation, but today I, too, am in the same circumstance. And reflecting my trip to Europe many years ago I can not help imagine the horrible impression I get at the Tower of London. They say history repeats. Today I feel as if I am tortured like those who had been thrown into the Tower of London'.

His counsel, Nakayama, backed up his petition with a long screed:

If Nishimura is given capital punishment, his death may console the souls of the Australians murdered then, but there should be a large number of Christians among the Australians killed during the last war, who may object to such a retaliatory step. Today there is a man like Mr

> Walter Wales, president of the Sydney Taxi Company, who plainly objects to further punishment of war criminals. Supposing Nishimura is actually responsible for executing Australian prisoners, his capital punishment will be against the will of certain percentage of Australians.
>
> Today the world is divided into two groups of people; those for Communism and against Communism. It is my deepest regret to have such a case as this Nishimura trial happened within the anti-Communist bloc, ending in his capital punishment. Unfortunately this Nishimura case has happened when Japan's peace treaty is just around the corner. What degree of understanding will be reached by the coming peace treaty, I can not say, but it will be a great misfortune for any of the war criminals if they are capitally punished before the peace treaty is signed.

In raising the Communist issue, Nakayama reflected immediate post war fears of Western nations of a possible Russian 'Red Menace'. Historian Lynette Ramsay Silver in her book, *The Heroes of Rimau*, wrote that by this time Australia was attempting to enter into an anti-Communist alliance with Japan. For this reason, the British and Americans had been either acquitting or severely reducing the sentences handed down to war criminals.

Nishimura's appeal for a new trial was smartly dismissed by the Judge Advocate-General, Mr Justice W. B. Simpson, but consideration of other petitions and pleas dragged on into 1951.

The three Japanese officers, Hinukuma, Sono and Inagaki, appealed on the grounds that the investigating officer, Captain Godwin, had misled them during his interrogation. They claimed that their previous evidence had been obtained through leading questions, intimidation and suggestion. All three blamed the Japanese interpreter and said they had no clear memory of the nature of Nishimura's order.

Letters were sent to the Holy See via Cardinal Gilroy, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Sydney. A Vatican spokesman explained that he was acting in response to requests by relatives of the condemned men and he did not desire to minimise the crimes of which the men had been found guilty. Other appeals to the Prime Minister (Robert Gordon Menzies) came from G. M. Russell of the Pacifist Council of Australia and from a group of 'Christian Young Men of Japan'. Kenkyou Asai, a Buddhist priest at Manus Island, who was visiting Nishimura in prison twice a week, described him as a 'man of principle'.

The wives of both condemned men sent pleas for mercy to Prime Minister Menzies. Nishimura's wife, Setsuko, said he was of a gentle nature. He had repented and was living a life of contrition following the prison rules. She said she kept writing to him in the land of the Ever Summer.

Nonaka's wife, Hanako, made an impassioned plea:

I am Hanako, wife of Nonaka Shoici who was recently interned in Manus Island as one of the war-crime suspects. He is the only support of my family, I and my babies. I am firmly convinced of my husband's innocence and I beg, Sir, to file this petition so that you would, with your charitable assistance, try to have him acquitted. To look back, my husband, Nonaka was repatriated without any money or personal effects after the end of war, and did not know how to earn a living. He was purged by the screening board, could not find any work and was in despair. So, he made up his mind to run a private hosiery knitting works then in vogue. He had first to exert all his effort to learn the technics of handling the machine. But as we were unable to afford enough money for the machine and for materials, we sold all our clothes and furniture. With this sacrifice the purchase of machine was made, and we worked very hard, but were pleased to get sufficient money for a living. However, 'sorrow be with the untrained hands of a layman' and he at last blundered and became deeper in debts as his efforts achieved nothing. We could not help deploring our successive misfortunes, sighing with each other. He regretted very much that he has been compelled to participate in the war, and promised me that he will never fight another war. He was born in a farm village, and therefore, is a very honest and timid man. He was very unhappy, and this unhappiness hampered him gaining a livelihood. In the meantime his honesty was recognised by an owner of iron manufacturing plant located near our house. My husband was given a new job there. He was very grateful for this, worked hard, and became a member of the World Peace Establishment League. One might surely be touched at the sight of his strenuous work with peace loving organisations.

He was arrested suddenly as a war crime's suspect. This was something that he had never dreamed of. Out of our miserable life, my husband was taken away from me. I was left to take care of two babies aged one and three years. I have a weak constitution, and naturally

reached the bottom of despair. How could I continue to live as before although we have led a hand to mouth existence? When, recently, an interview with my husband who was detained in Tokyo Sugamo Prison was reportedly allowed, I burst into tears as I could not afford the expenses to such a long trip. Luckily however, by the virtue of donation of the necessary sum, I was able to leave for Tokyo and to see my husband although only briefly.

My younger baby is fed on the condensed milk owing to the lack of mother's milk. But as I have not enough money to buy the condensed milk, the baby's cry bursts on my ears day and night, while the elder who is aged three will seek for her missing father and every night when she goes to bed calls him 'Papa, Papa' in a bitter cry. I am deprived of my husband, and am weak in health. I am depressed to such an extent that I feel I will go mad. The management of the company where my husband had worked is facing a money deficit so the wages for my husband remain unpaid. I have no money with which to pay for the ration of staple foods. Helpless mother and babies, have nothing to do every day but cry for hunger. I wonder how we three will find a way to survive until my husband returns. Please please sir, help me to get my husband Nonaka back as soon as possible. I implore you, Sir, to do so for mercy's sake. Nonaka is really a devoted son. He used to take advantage of his holidays to see and console his parents living in the country. And every Sunday, he used to farm with the aim of boosting our poor family's living. He never wanted to amuse himself. I have, as his wife, been always thankful for him and have respected him. I swear by God that Nonaka is a man of sympathy. Please rescue him from this unhappiness. Please have him acquitted for his babies waiting for their loving father.

It was all in vain. On 30 May 1951, Prime Minister Menzies announced the fate of Japanese war criminals tried at Manus Island. On the Judge Advocate-General's advice, the government had confirmed the immediate execution of four major war criminals, including Lieutenant-General Takuma Nishimura. Seven other death sentences had been commuted to life imprisonment. Fifty-six other sentences, including sixteen of life imprisonment and seven of imprisonment for fifteen years had been confirmed.

One of the Australian journalists who witnessed the last hangings at Los Negros was David McNicoll, who filed a taut and finely written

piece for *The Bulletin*, Sydney. (McNicoll, now in his eightieth year, still writes a pungent and often controversial weekly column for the magazine.) On that day he witnessed the execution of five Japanese war criminals, General Nishimura, a lieutenant who had ordered the beheading of an Australian airman in Dutch New Guinea, a captain who had ordered the beheading of four prisoners of war in Surabaya, another lieutenant who had led the massacre of 200 Australians in Ambon in 1942, and a warrant officer who had played a leading role in the murder of Australian and allied prisoners in Dutch Timor in 1942.

David McNicoll's account, 'My Saddest Assignment', is included in his memoirs, *Deal Me In* (Allen & Unwin), published earlier this year, and he has kindly given me permission to use the following extracts from it:

A jeep arrived and dropped us deep into the jungle where the gallows had been erected in a gravel pit. In the little shed were all the accoutrements of execution—five new nooses, each with a name tag attached, each properly stretched, and with the exact length of the drop required for the man for whom it was intended. In a corner was the long, sand-filled canvas sack which had been used to stretch the ropes, the weight in the sack being adjusted to the exact weight of each victim before the sack was put in the noose and sent plummeting through the trap.

The trap itself was set in the middle of the floor in the tiny galvanised-roof hut, a wooden railing round it. A lever operated the trap, and when it opened it fell back with a deafening clang-thurrumph of wood and metal . . .

Not only is that morning etched in my memory, but alongside the memory of executions is the rather terrible realisation that as the hangings went on, the shock passed from my system and I started to take a clinical, detailed interest in the whole gruesome business. After that morning, I started to understand the mentality and actions of a concentration camp guard, all feeling drained, all sense of horror at violence neutralised.

One by one, at twenty-minute intervals, they were led up the short, beaten-coral path to the hut. Small, hooded men, shackled and shuffling. The rain had short-circuited the power generators and the dim bulbs in

the execution hut went out. So the colonel ordered vehicles to shine their headlights, and the first executions took place in the blaze from jeeps and trucks.

One hears and reads all sorts of accounts of death on the scaffold. Of crying, of whimpering, of pleas for forgiveness, of bravery, of defiance, of obscenity. Those five Japanese died with a bravery which was incredible. And sweat poured down my spine when the first man shouted at the top of his voice, '*Banzai*', the Japanese battlecry which means 'Ten thousand lives for the Emperor', and answering shouts came from his companions, waiting in the shrouded prison truck at the edge of the gravel pit.

The condemned men were dressed in orange shirts and shorts. Over each man's head was a hood on which his name was written. Feet were bare, hands cuffed, arms pinioned at the elbows. For a minute or two before each man entered the shed, he was allowed to talk to the Buddhist priest and the interpreter.

Then the hangman's assistants seized him by the arms and half-carried, half-walked him into the shed. Feet placed on the round circle of the trap, neck bare, noose slipped over it. Then the executioner ducked out of the trap enclosure, pulled a lever, and the little orange-garbed figure plummeted into the darkness.

The shock to the system was appalling. I thought I was certain to be ill, but wasn't. Nobody spoke. We filed out of the hut and stood round for ten minutes. Then I went back and looked through the trap. Doctors were doing things to the feet of the figure swaying at the end of the rope. Then they called out, the assistants lowered the rope and the silent figure was placed on a stretcher. One of the doctors removed the hood, examined the eyes, put his stethoscope to the heart, then—and this was the most blood-chilling—moved the head from side to side.

So it went on. Interpreter. Priest. Shouts. The clang of the trap. The dawn was fully broken by the time the general, a former commander of the Emperor's Imperial Guards Division, went to his death down the hole in the tin-roofed shed . . .'

Afterwards McNicoll tracked down the Japanese interpreter to find out what the men had said to him.

Well, he said, the general had assured the priest that he was 'going in good health'. One of the lieutenants had expressed the last-minute hope

that Australia and Japan would 'become and remain friends'. Others had given personal messages to their families.

And what, I asked, about the man who, just before he went on to the trap, kept talking and pointing to his mouth.

The interpreter spoke softly. 'He was telling the priest that his family in Japan was not well off. In his teeth he had many fillings of gold. He asked the priest to remove his teeth when he was cut down and send the gold fillings to help his family'.

General Takuma Nishimura was hanged on 11 June 1951. His dying wish that his body be cremated and the ashes sent back to Japan could not be granted because of torrential rain. So he was buried at sea from a naval vessel. An observer noted with much satisfaction that the waters thereabouts were notoriously shark-infested.

CHAPTER 9
Aftermath

Reg Wharton had a happy life until the memories caught up and overwhelmed him. He learnt the carpentry trade through the Repatriation Department, married and sired two sons. He went to great lengths to keep the horror of Parit Sulong from them. His son, Jeff, knew nothing of the gruesome details of the massacre until he read the Introduction to this book in manuscript earlier this year.

Wharton never attended battalion reunions or marched on Anzac Day—he just wanted to banish the war from his life but, of course, it continued to haunt him privately. He seldom talked about the massacre, except occasionally to close friends. It is puzzling that he was not called upon to give evidence in person or by sworn statement at Nishimura's trial. This suggests that the military authorities were not aware of his involvement in the massacre, or that he refused to relive publicly the event he was so desperately trying to forget. Wharton was 55 when he was granted a TPI (Totally and Permanently Incapacitated) pension in 1978. His working life was over because of multiple war-related ailments. He was in and out of Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital for the rest of his life undergoing treatment for spinal injury with osteoarthritis, chronic conjunctivitis, hyperopic astigmatism, paracentral scotomate, hypertension and hysteria.

Some time in later life, he began to write the story of his life under the title of 'The Unfound Horizon' but apparently abandoned the idea after only four pages. The handwritten manuscript was found after his death. It began: 'This is a story of a young Australian who enlisted in the Army to fight for his country and to find adventure and of which he found plenty of both in his travels. He had the good fortune to return to Australia and find untold happiness despite his broken body and blackened mind . . .'

His wife had died from cancer in 1976, when he was 53, and he lived alone for many years. In his later years he lived at Lakes Entrance in Victoria where he had the company of relatives. He enjoyed the fishing but his condition gradually deteriorated. He used to wander off for two days at a time and, after several heart attacks, a clot in the arm proved fatal. From all accounts he remained a cheerful, good-natured man. His daughter-in-law, Linda Wharton, said of him, 'He was a lovely chap, with a great sense of fun'.

Meanwhile Ben Hackney had bought for himself Mount Tamar, an historic property of 3 182 acres, four miles from Bathurst on the Macquarie River. He changed the name to Wonalabee, a made-up name of no special significance to him. He ran cattle and sheep and also managed other family properties. Friends say he was full of a restless energy and made frequent trips to Sydney in his high-speed car.

He was 35, often considered the 'prime of life', when General Nishimura was hanged at Los Negros in 1951. No doubt he felt much satisfaction that retribution had at last been attained, largely through his own efforts. But his life was to remain scarred physically and emotionally until the Man They Couldn't Kill finally succumbed.

He was a well-liked man in the Bathurst district, outwardly the essence of a young well-to-do Australian grazier, though difficult and moody at times, a man of strong self-will. The shadows of that dark evening so long ago never vanished and haunted him. His marriage broke up and he grieved over the loss of wartime comrades.

For many years after the war Hackney staged a huge Empire Night (24 May) public celebration at Wonalabee. There was a monster bonfire of more than ten tons of wood, with fireworks and rocket displays. The people of Bathurst flocked to it each year, especially the children. It was not the disintegration of the British Empire that ended Ben's Empire Nights but a group of vandals who set fire to the heap of wood a week before the event. Hackney was too disgusted to stage it again.

For the last ten years or so of his life, he became a virtual recluse at Wonalabee, crippled with arthritis (or was it bayonet wounds?) and tortured, no doubt, in his mind. If he did not actually shun old friends, he did not go out of his way to contact them.

Ben Hackney never lost his hatred of the Japanese for what they had done to him and his fellow soldiers. At the end of his 'Dark Evening' manuscript, he wrote a one-page chapter entitled 'It isn't the end'. It

began with this sentence: 'Far too many people are inclined to discount many stories that have been told about the Japanese and the things they did; and very few other than relatives and friends of those who know are sufficiently interested to realise fully the facts about those who belong to what may be euphemistically called a semi-civilised race.'

That was written more than 30 years ago and he never deviated from his view that the story of Parit Sulong should never be forgotten. What did he mean by 'It isn't the end'? Perhaps he was foreseeing that he would bear the scars of it all his life. Or perhaps he was remembering the constant refrain of Japanese guards in the prison camps, 'This war will last one hundred years'. It was a theme Russell Braddon (a gunner of 65th Battery at Muar and Parit Sulong) was to echo in his book, *The Other Hundred Years War*, published in 1983. It was subtitled 'Japan's bid for supremacy 1941-2041'. Braddon asserted that Japan's aim was to become the world's most influential nation in the twenty first century and already its once puny industrial machine had become a juggernaut. He predicted that Japan was on target to win the Hundred Years War, not on the battlefield but on the factory floor. Only 46 years to go!

The death of Ben Charles Hackney in 1984 passed almost unnoticed in Bathurst. There was a small family and RSL funeral service and, apart from formal paid death and funeral notices, the event went unrecorded in local newspapers.

Ben Hackney left generous bequests to benefit ex-servicemen and women. These included $100 000 to his old unit, the 2/29th Battalion AIF Association and another substantial sum to Legacy, that unique Australian volunteer organisation caring for war widows and their children. Legacy established a permanent memorial to him in the Ben Hackney Wing of the Ilumba Gardens Retirement Village Hostel at Kelso, near Bathurst. The wing was set up by arrangement with the Frank Whiddon Masonic Homes of NSW. The wing is illuminated by a Legacy Torch and a plaque. Eligible war widows are given priority of residence there. Other smaller NSW country towns, unable to finance their own Legacy villages, have similar arrangements with the Whiddon Homes.

You could say, in a way, that this book is another memorial to him and the fulfilment of a request made to the author twenty years ago.

APPENDIX I

General Yamashita

High praise for the fighting qualities of the Australian soldier was given in the war diaries of General Yamashita, quoted in a biography of him, *A Soldier Must Hang*, by John Deane Potter in 1963:

After the Slim River battle I realised that the British were faced with the fact that one more big battle would have to be fought for Singapore and from Intelligence reports it appeared that they would not withdraw to Johore. They had also drawn up plans for the destruction of the causeway preparatory to a withdrawal into Singapore.

The last remaining natural obstacle before me was the Muar River, spanned by a trunk road and a railway bridge. It was 600 yards wide at Muar township and surrounded by low-lying swampy country. Once across it the rest of the surrounding country consisted mostly of rubber plantations and cultivated rice fields which made easy going all the way to the Johore Straits.

On January 15 British Intelligence reported that the Japanese had taken the Malacca area and were moving down onto the township of Muar. The information was correct. Driving as fast as we could, the cyclist advance guards of the Imperial Guards Division were moving down towards the banks of the Muar. Waiting for our troops were the 45th Indian Brigade supported by Australian artillery and infantry. While the main force of the Imperial Guards led the frontal assault and the river crossing, I instructed General Nishimura to send a regiment detached to land further down the coast towards Batu Pahat behind the Australian lines.

In the middle of the night the Imperial Guards began to cross the river in collapsible boats carried by the Pursuit Battalion and in sampans from the flooded ricefields. Many were sunk by the Australian artillery

but the assault continued throughout the night until morning. Our troops were at first thrown back by the Australian artillery and infantry, but we managed to land more of our troops to the southern river bank. The Imperial Guards Division tried to force their way down the road but only made slow bloody progress.

For 48 hours it was anybody's battle. Then the Australians and Indians regained the initiative and began to push my troops back along the road. At dawn on the third day the Imperial Guards flanking brigade landing party appeared in the Australian rear and cut them off. Many roadblocks were set up so there was no escape except into the swampy jungle on each side of the road. This led to the most savage fighting of the whole campaign. It was very nice of General Percival, the British Malayan Commander, to report that the Japanese Imperial Guards Division fought with 'their traditional fanaticism'.

Even our brave Japanese wounded, unable to walk and dying painfully, pushed their rifles in front of them to make a last shot at the enemy. The Australians retaliated with bitter trapped ferocity. They machine-gunned our soldiers, bayoneted them and even clubbed our soldiers, wounded with their rifles. All day long they charged our well set-up road blocks, and the 45th Indian Commander Duncan was killed leading a bayonet charge and Colonel Anderson, the commander of one of the Australian battalions, the 2/19th, was awarded the highest British award, the Victoria Cross, for the gallantry of his battalion. Whilst we respect the bravery of our adversaries, it only emphasises the overall superiority of our brave forces, for bravery and bayonets cannot prevail against our might and our tanks and roadblocks.

Realising that they could not fight their way out of our trap, the enemy decided to break up into small forces and make their way back to the British lines as best they could through the swampy jungle. By this time not only had the enemy brigade commander and all of his officers been killed, but the battalion commanders and all their officers were dead. Out of the enemy forces which opposed our advance at Muar, a total of some 6 000 troops, only 450 Australians and 400 Indians were able to rejoin the British forces. They had also lost all the guns and tanks and vehicles, which they had to leave behind them when they vanished into the jungle. [The 'tanks' mentioned were actually carriers, small, lowline open-topped vehicles, lightly armoured in the front. They were used to carry between companies and battalion headquarters. The

carriers were armed with a Vicker's medium machine-gun and one light automatic machine-gun.]

In all fairness, the survivors, however can feel proud, because in a week-long bloody battle, without the heavy tank or air support, they had held up the whole of my army. This action threw out the whole of my timing for the Singapore invasion, which I faithfully promised my Emperor Imperial Highness that I would complete on 11 February.

After this memorable battle my troops were responsible for one of the worst atrocities of the Malayan campaign. When the Australians and Indians retreated into the jungle they left several hundred wounded in trucks and on the river bank at a small village named Parit Sulong. The Imperial Guards beheaded and burnt all of these wounded men and unfortunately for their commanders they were observed doing it by other wounded enemy soldiers hidden in the jungle. This was the type of monstrous behaviour that I feared might happen in the heat of battle and I had warned all my commanders by edict that our troops had to be controlled. But unfortunately in the case of the Imperial Guards it appeared that the commanders were utterly unable to control their men.

There is no doubt that the Imperial Guards had been badly mauled in the Muar Battle and the action against the wounded was no doubt a spontaneous one in expressing their pent-up feelings against an enemy which had caused them so much trouble and damage. The fact that the commander and the bulk of the officers and men of Japan's most famous regiment had been lost, may have had some bearing on the behaviour of the rest of General Nishimura's Imperial Guards. There is no doubt that this battle had a curious effect upon General Nishimura and his elite troops, for this was the first time that they had come up against a fierce determined opposition, and whether this had anything to do with their subsequent behaviour or not will always remain a matter of conjecture.

Yamashita, 'Tiger of Malaya', was arrested as a war criminal in the Philippines, convicted and executed in 1946. There are those who believed he received rough justice. One of them was Russell Braddon, who wrote: 'Yamashita's record in Malaya had been exemplary, the rapists and looters of Penang having been sumarily punished at his insistence and the atrocities at Alexandra Hospital were not of his doing.

The atrocities perpetrated against the citizens of Manila in the last days of the war . . . were committed by a naval contingent whose participation in the campaign he had expressly forbidden.'

While waiting for his execution in Bilibid Prison, near Manila, Yamashita granted an interview with a war correspondent and disclosed his plans for the invasion of Australia. He said that after Singapore had fallen he wanted to discuss an invasion plan with Tojo. This had been the original War Plan for the continuation of the line of advance through the Indonesian islands to Australia, through New Guinea, but because of pressures from Germany to push into India and to link up the Axis in western India in the Punjab area, the main thrust was taken away from him and given to the Burmese front:

This was coupled with the jealousies of Tojo that I was becoming too popular and powerful and might upset his own position in the hierarchy at home in Japan. I sent Tojo a message which said 'Singapore the great British military bastion in the Far East has fallen into our hands. The Allies are effectively sealed off. Can now continue to Australia.' Instead of advancing further west as Tojo wanted into Burma and perhaps India, my plan was to leave a strong garrison in Malaya and Burma and strike down the Pacific to the coast of Australia. Tojo turned down the plan, making the excuse of extended supply lines which would be precarious and open to enemy attack. But his real reason apparently was that he wanted to keep on driving west to try and effect a junction with Hitler. In those days when the Axis seemed unbeatable, Tojo thought this was the easiest of the plans.

[Yamashita's plan to conquer Australia was practically identical with his successful plan in Malaya. He planned to land on each side of the major Australian cities and cut them off, after first making a series of dummy landings to draw off the pitifully small number of Australian troops.]

Why, there are hardly enough Australians to have organised an effective resistance to the Japanese Army. All they could ever hope to do was to make a guerilla resistance in the bush. With only Sydney and Brisbane in my hands it would have been comparatively simple to subdue Australia. I never visualised occupying it entirely. It was too large. With its coastline anyone can always land there exactly as they want.

But it is a long way from anywhere and I could have poured enough troops to effectively resist any Anglo-American invasion. Although the Japanese General Staff felt that my supply lines might have been too long, so would the Americans and British. They might never have been able to reach the place at all. We could have been there forever.

The Japanese government machinery for ruling Australia was all prepared, Yamashita told the journalist, and all currency and government orders had been printed. Several diplomats who had represented Japan in Australia were all briefed and standing by to follow the Japanese armies into Australia and rule the country. The Governor-General elect had even been appointed.

APPENDIX II
Lieutenant-Colonel Anderson

The citation for the Victoria Cross awarded to Lieutenant-Colonel C. G. W. Anderson, VC, MC reads as follows:

During the operations in Malaya from January 18 to January 22 L/Col Anderson, in command of a small force, was sent to restore a vital position in north-west Johore and assist a brigade. His forces destroyed 10 enemy tanks and when later cut off defeated persistent attacks on his position from air and ground forces and fought his way through the enemy lines for a depth of fifteen miles. He was again surrounded and subjected to very heavy and frequent attacks, resulting in severe casualties to his force. He personally led an attack with great gallantry on the enemy who were holding a bridge and succeeded in destroying four guns. Lieut-Colonel Anderson throughout all this fighting protected his wounded and refused to leave them. He received news by wireless of the enemy position and attempted to fight his way through six miles of enemy occupied country. This proved impossible and the enemy was holding too strong a position to relieve him. On January 22, L/Col Anderson was ordered to destroy his equipment and make his way back as best he could round the enemy's positions. Throughout the fighting which lasted four days, he set a magnificent standard of brave leadership, determination and outstanding courage. He not only showed fighting qualities of a very high order but throughout exposed himself to danger without any regard for his own personal safety.

* * *

Charles Groves Wright Anderson was born at Capetown, South Africa, of English parents on 17 February 1897. His family took up land near Nairobi, Kenya, in 1890. At the outbreak of the World War I in 1914 he

immediately joined the 3rd Battalion of the King's East Rifles, the bulk of whom were native troops. He was promoted to lieutenant on 12 October 1916, aged nineteen years. He continued to serve with his unit over the whole of East Africa against the German-led forces until 1919. He was awarded the Military Cross for outstanding leadership at Mizama Springs near Kilimanjaro in 1917.

He met Australian Edith Tout of Young (NSW) while she was touring Kenya with friends in 1929-30. They were married in February 1931. In 1934 Charles Anderson moved to Australia and purchased a property near Crowther. He joined the local area CMF 56th Battalion (Riverina Regiment) as a captain and was located at Cootamundra. Promoted to major in the battalion on 26 October 1939, and on 1 July 1940 he was seconded to the AIF with that rank. He was appointed second-in-command of the newly formed 2/19th Battalion. On 1 August 1941, he was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel to command the 2/19th following the promotion of Lieutenant-Colonel Duncan Maxwell to command the newly-arrived to Malaya, 27th Brigade 8th Division.

Anderson's knowledge of jungle warfare gained in Africa was recognised and the 2/19th put his ideas into practice and training. His methods were adopted by the other Australians and a few British battalions, and summarised and sent back to Australia in September 1941. These formed the basis for the jungle training manuals issued to Australian and American units for the Islands campaigns and for General Slim's 14th Army in Burma.

After the loss of Singapore, Anderson moved with a prisoner of war work force to southern Burma in May 1942, and continued with command of work forces on the Burma-Thailand Railway and west Thailand until the end of the war. After the war he returned to his grazing property in the Young district. He served his country again as the Federal MP for the Hume electorate from 1949 to 1951 and from 1955 to 1961. In his later years he retired to Canberra where he died peacefully in his home on Remembrance Day, 11 November 1988. He was buried with full military honours at Canberra.

[Taken from the eulogy delivered at his funeral by N. S. Davidson, a former member of the 2/19th Battalion.]

APPENDIX III

Indian Troops at Muar

There was scarcely any mention of Indian troops in my book, *Grim Glory*, when it was first published in July 1942. I knew that they had been overwhelmed by the Japanese at Muar and had not performed well under fire. But I did not want to pass judgement on other Empire troops at such a critical time; in any case, the prevailing wartime censorship would never have passed a story of that nature for publication.

After the war I received a rather hurtful letter from an English officer of the 5/18th Royal Garhwhali Regiment, chiding me for my neglect of the Indian effort and enclosing an article he had written on the subject. I replied, explaining my reasons for disregarding the Indians' part in the battle. I had done so in order not to besmirch the reputation of such a famous British regiment. To my surprise, some time later, I received another letter, a most moving letter from a regular officer, to whom 'The Regiment' was his all. He might have come straight out of a story by Rudyard Kipling:

I was the only regular officer of the Bn to survive. I was not in the Muar Battle. When I returned to England as an ex POW it was my obvious duty to go round and see every next-of-kin of the officers we lost both at Muar and later, as a combined Bn on the Island. In most cases my letter was the first definite information that the next-of-kin had that their sons or husbands had been killed. I also reported to the Honorary Colonel of our Regiment, General Sir Ralph Deeds and Gen. Evatt (the latter was Adjutant when the Regiment was raised in 1887 and raised our 2nd Bn. himself in 1905). I also saw most of the retired colonels who had in the past and in the last war, commanded Bns of the Regiment.

During the war these officers and the next-of-kin had searched for news of any Bn of the Regiment especially of Malaya where we had

two battalions and your book *Grim Glory* was in most cases the only one they found on Malaya and they all spoke of it with the query 'But what did our Regiment do?', 'Why aren't we mentioned?' You know, and I know, what happened at Muar. The Indians were untrained and they broke, and I assure you all officers past and present of the Regiment now know it and we are not ashamed of it (very disappointed—yes). But that break did not come till most of our officers had been killed. You could not really blame the poor little devils, they were untrained—most of our men had less than a year's training, they came from the hills of Garhwal, 10 000 feet up in the Himalayas where there are no roads, no motors, no trains, no aeroplanes. We try to teach them about these, but of course they don't believe us, how can they? Later when we move down to the plains they are astounded to see engines, planes and all the things we told them of. The 5th Battalion moved down in July (1941) and six months later these men were fighting a modern war.

But I have rather got away from my point. I wrote this article for two reasons: first, as a memorial to our men to try to explain how they died; second, to explain to those at home why they were not mentioned in your book and although not mentioned, that they did play their part.

May I ask you to place yourself in the 'mind' of a retired officer of the regular army, aged anything from 54 to 65. His Regiment is his all. He joins it at 18 and retires at 54 and his Regiment lives on honour and can get honour and glory only in war. In the last war our Regiment (two battalions only) got a total of three VC's and one of our men got the first Indian VC, we and the 5th Royal Gurkhas were the only complete Indian regiments to be made 'Royal', for our work in France (1914-18) and Mesopotamia. These old senior officers looked and looked for news and were inclined to think, because they got none, 'The Regiment is not so good as it was when I was in it'. My article was to explain why they got no news and that we did all that could honestly be expected of us, raw as we were (only four officers were really fluent in the language—the CO, our first casualty, the Adj. killed on the 15th January, the 2 I/C, killed on the 16th, and myself, who was not there).

I have tried to explain *Grim Glory* was written by an Australian, for Australians at the darkest time of Australian history, when propaganda meant everything, so naturally it's all about Australians and because we are not mentioned it's no slight on our Regiment. I admit I wrote the

article before I got your letter, if I hadn't I might have let you off lighter, but I think you will agree, I haven't really been rude.

Finally, a word about myself. I fought with our 2nd Bn in Malaya and later commanded our combined battalion on the Island. As a POW I at first did Staff Captain to Indian Corps when we were under 'Blackjack' Galleghan in Selarang. I was with Australians in Thailand and later commanded a camp of 200 for 20 months at Pasir Pandjang. My AIF platoon were 65 strong and the salt of the earth (I grant you they were hand-picked!). I liked them and they liked me, we spoke the same language and since I've come back every week I get a letter or two from one or other of them, so don't consider me a bigoted and biased Pommy.

I am afraid this is rather a long letter, but I think it's only fair to explain to you why I wrote to you as I have written. I do hope, Mr Mant, it's a case of 'no offence taken', because I assure you there is none meant—not now.

Yours aye,
Robert Nesham.

I wrote back, assuring him that no offence was taken and that I understood perfectly what he was saying. And so we made our peace.

APPENDIX IV

Malayan Memorials

In January 1962, seven former members of the 2/19th Battalion travelled from Australia to the bridge at Parit Sulong to unveil a memorial to their dead comrades. The bridge was still pock-marked with the bomb and bullet scars of January 1942. To the melancholy notes of The Last Post, a tablet was unveiled with the following words:

THIS BRIDGE WAS THE SCENE OF
THE FINAL STAGE OF THE BATTLE OF MUAR
IN JANUARY, 1942.
TO THE EVERLASTING MEMORY OF
OUR FELLOW AUSTRALIANS WHO NOBLY
AND GALLANTLY MADE HISTORY
IN THEIR SUPREME SACRIFICE.
ERECTED BY
THE 2/19TH BATTALION A.I.F. ASSOCIATION.

Several pilgrimages have been made to the bridge in the intervening years. (The tablet is soon to be replaced when a new road and bridge is made through Parit Sulong.)

A more general AIF Malaya Memorial was presented to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra in 1990 to commemorate soldiers of the AIF who fought in Malaya from 14 January to 15 February 1942. It took the form of a sculpture by Australian artist John Dowie and it stands in the Pacific War Gallery of the AWM near the Murray Griffin painting of the anti-tank guns at Bakri. The sculptor based his work on the concepts of courage, brotherhood and protection. A wounded soldier is helped to safety by a comrade while another protects them from behind. The sculpture was commissioned by an AIF Malaya Memorial

Committee from public donations, many coming from the widows of the men who fell at Muar and elsewhere.

There was a memorial of a different sort not far from Parit Sulong. It was an honour board erected by the Japanese to commemorate the Imperial citation which the Japanese division received for its part in the Muar road battle. According to the Japanese story, the division completely wiped out a force of well over 2 000 men. The board was erected at the place where Lieutenant W.P. Carr, of the 2/29th Battalion and his men defied death in their last frenzied assault on an impregnable machine-gun post.

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