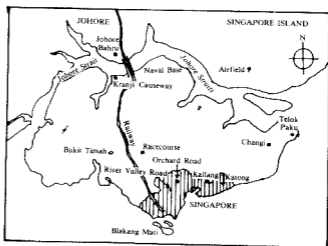






MAP OF S.E. ASIA DURING SECOND WORLD WAR



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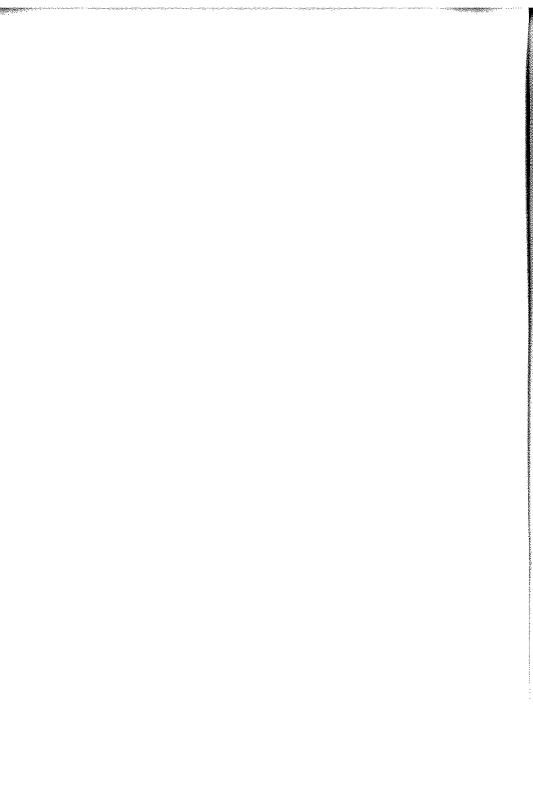
**SOME SHAPE
OF
BEAUTY**

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Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Preface	vii
Under the Yoke	1
Interlude at Changi	3
Last Days at "Changi by the Sea"	5
By Train, Lorry and Foot in the 'Co-prosperity Sphere'	9
Journey Completed on Foot and by Barge	14
Kinseyo Camp	17
Domestic Economy of P.O.W.'s	20
Kanyu River Camp	26
Officer Coolies of a Bamboo Empire	32
Upper Kanyu Camp	38
Kanyu 3 Camp	43
"The Gloomy Days"	48
". . . As It were a Shadow"	56
Banana Grove and Speedo Finale	61
Back to Tarso Camp	67
Marking Time in Tarso	72
Tamuang Camp	78
Halcyon Days	85
". . . Slowly Comes Flooding in the Tide"	92
Kanburi Again	98
". . . From Our Dark Spirits"	107
Finale	113
<i>Inside front cover</i>	Map of South East Asia during the Second World War
<i>Inside back cover</i>	Map of P.O.W. Railway in Thailand

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6. The
7. The

8. The
9. The

Under The Yoke

FEBRUARY, 1942

IN the unusual quietness of the morning after the surrender we sat or stood around and looked out upon our strange surroundings. Down the road on the opposite hill a company of volcanic Japs approached the cross-roads with fixed bayonets. In their midst two British soldiers were being hustled along with their hands tied behind them. Occasional Jap soldiers went by on bicycles, wearing jockey cap, shorts and sand shoes, and looking, to the unaccustomed eye, like dressed-up gorillas in a circus act. From time to time large cars drove past with fanfare of horns. Their coconut-fibre camouflage nets were stuffed with sticks and grass and palm leaves, and in the deserts of their spacious seats were oasis-ed the incongruously midget War Lords of Japan.

For many hours a countless stream of Chinese straggled by on their way to the Police station, where they had been ordered to report.

Some of those who passed us were people whom we knew, and they seemed far more concerned for us than for themselves. One was my house boy who, being a Chinese, knew well the risk he ran if he should get into disfavour with the Japs. Yet he had stuck to his job to the very end, when other mess servants had disappeared.

Another whom I met was an old Tamil named Muthu, a bullock-cart driver who used to supply me with garden manure; a man of the old school. He climbed down from his cart when he saw me, and caught my hand in both of his, and wept over it. He was convinced that our fate was to be torture and death, and it was hard to reassure him. Then, in the goodness of his heart, he drew out from his shirt the few dollars which was all the money he had with him, and urged me to accept it for my future needs.

* * * * *

It was on the previous evening, February 15th 1942, that the British forces in Singapore had surrendered to the Japanese. After a campaign of ten miserable weeks we had at length been denied the further indulgence in strategic victories by finding ourselves with our backs to the waters of the deep green sea.

In spite of the startling speed of our five-hundred-mile retirement down the Malay Peninsula it seems that to the outside world our final surrender came as a stupefying shock.

But to us who were there the surprise was not so much the surrender itself (though we had tried hard to believe that it could be put off much longer), but the realisation that we were about to become Prisoners of War.

We had been far too pre-occupied to give much thought to the future,

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

and when we did consider it we had vague visions of rescue or escape. For Sumatra was only seventy miles away and the sea was calm, and every night, in the centre of the blue-black heavens, Orion's bright sword was an easy compass to the south.

But in the end the vast majority of us found that neither rescue nor escape were possible, and we had no alternative but to remain at our stations and awake to the knowledge that we were to be prisoners of the Japanese. Now we awaited the advent of the New Order in Asia. We numbered, British and Indian, about 90,000 men.

On February 17th, we started our sixteen-mile march out to Changi, an area on the eastern tip of Singapore island in which British Prisoners of War had been instructed to concentrate.

Our march was at first through some of the main thoroughfares of the rubble-strewn town, where many of the inhabitants stood silently staring as we marched by. They showed no exultation; on the contrary they seemed dumbfounded at the calamity which had overtaken us — the humiliation of the white man by the Asian which a few weeks ago would have seemed incredible.

The Japs took movie pictures of us as we marched through the town. On this occasion, at least, their pictures can have revealed no broken, bowed, and humiliated men, for we had not yet experienced the treatment that Japan, self-styled a civilised nation, deemed fit to accord her prisoners of war.

Interlude At Changi

MARCH—JULY, 1942

MOST of us who eventually went up to Thailand did so in the autumn of 1942. Before this we had, therefore, about eight months of life in Changi as our deceptive apprenticeship as prisoners of war. Though there was much that was hard to bear during that time, yet in general the Changi era was one of seeming peace and security. In fact it resembled the Phoney War in Europe in that it was the slow-moving stodgy and unreal prelude to a life that was to be relentlessly stark and earnest.

Changi is the name of a small village, and also of the extensive district around it which had for a long time been a British Military Area. It overlooks the eastern end of the Straits of Johore, and many of the buildings have magnificent views and are surrounded by gardens of flowering shrubs and creepers. In this brightly-coloured semblance of the Earthly Paradise we led a sequestered life far different from the one we would have expected as prisoners of war.

We could walk for miles along pleasant roads, and look across the blue straits, rippling in the sun, to the peaceful green-clothed island, and to the mainland of Johore.

But the pretty picture was a picture only. However far we walked, we could not escape from fellow-prisoners. However far we could look out over green land and blue sea, we were still quite isolated from the affairs of the outside world.

And sometimes, on the far horizon of that sunny ocean, we saw ship after ship, strung out it seemed for ever, across the skyline. They were not our ships, and they were sailing in the wrong direction. The war was still going on, by-passing our world of make-believe, from which we could do nothing but watch and wonder in a bemused and anxious dream.

In due course came barbed wire and sentries. The outer perimeter of the whole area was marked by a triple wire barrier, and a single one formed the several sub-divisions of the camp. All these areas, however, were so extensive that one never had the feeling of being fenced in. The buildings were widely spaced, and in between them were long stretches of green grass, clumps of palm trees, and the bright though overgrown gardens.

Nearly all the work we did was for ourselves, on such fatigues as digging latrines, gardening, cutting firewood, and drawing water. Most people had a good deal of leisure, which was occupied by playing games, attending lectures at our 'University', going to concerts and plays, and reading.

As for our gardens, they were first started from necessity because food (and the lack of it) became and remained our chief pre-occupation for the next three and a half years. In our official rations, rice was our broken

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

reed of life; the meat issue was infinitesimal and infrequent, and the vegetable supply not much better. As this poor diet continued, beri-beri became increasingly common, and so we grew vegetables for vitamins.

For my own part I soon found and I had more than enough to do, and in fact I seldom seemed to have time to spare.

The practice of getting out of bed at crack of dawn, at the moment when all the luxury of idle comfort is most keenly savoured, is, I have always thought, a barbarous one. Yet I found that when I did get up early the irritation caused was quickly smoothed over, and the effort rewarded. In tropical countries particularly, the mornings are beautiful, if only by contrast. The days too soon become hot and sweaty, especially in the absence of unlimited baths, changes of clothes, and fans. The mornings, for an hour or two from the first light of day, are as though in a world apart — cool, dewy, and exceedingly peaceful.

For twenty minutes or so I used to stroll round my garden, looking at the progress of my plants, seeing, perhaps, a stream of soldier-ants that crossed the path, or viewing the surrounding vista. On the right there were graceful palm trees, in front some clumps of bamboos, and to the left a few magnificently proportioned cachou-nut trees; and by my side, epitomising the pearl-cool morning, a flowering creeper with blossoms of the palest lilac.

From the garden I returned to make my 'milk' for breakfast — if I happened to have a coconut. A nut lasted about four days, and kept quite well except for a slight green-mould on the third and fourth days, which, however, was easily scraped off. I took my piece of coconut round to the kitchen and shredded it on their grater, then tied it up a piece of cloth, and took it back to soak in a bowl of water. While it soaked I sometimes wrote up my diary. At breakfast time I squeezed out the soaked coconut until the water was white and milky, and took it to breakfast in my mug.

After breakfast I gardened, in felt hat, shorts and shoes — a hot and sweaty job, but one with compensations. For in laying out the garden and planning the work, I was my own master, and that was a boon which I seldom enjoyed again while a prisoner.

On two mornings a week I went to agricultural lectures at eleven o'clock, and on other days usually stopped gardening at twelve. Then until lunch-time at one-thirty I used to write up my lecture notes. On most afternoons I had other classes at the 'University', and on free afternoons, and in the evenings, I did more gardening.

Any time left over from these activities was spent in reading, visiting or being visited by friends, and doing odd jobs, such as making myself a mattress out of old tentage, and a pair of wooden clogs so as to spare my one and only pair of shoes. We also invited various people to our Mess in the evenings to give us lectures. It was dark soon after supper, and from then until bed-time we usually sat and talked.

Last Days At "Changi By The Sea"

AUGUST – OCTOBER, 1942

CHANGI, of course, was too good to last. After we had been there a few months we began to hear rumours of being moved, and finally we heard in August that two parties were to be made up to go to Japan. My name was included in one of them. Although this move was postponed again and again it seemed certain that it would take place eventually, for all of us were listed, numbered, and medically examined.

The medical examination was confined to a test for stomach diseases such as dysentery and cholera, and was carried out by members of the fortunately rare Japanese medical staff.

Their testing method was new to many of us, except those who were acquainted with the veterinary method of taking temperatures, but it became a commonplace occurrence on our future travels. The instrument used was a glass rod, or, later on, presumably owing to shortages, not breakages happily, a mere length of wire. We knew the process as 'glass-rod-ning', an eminent example, surely, of the silent 'F'.

On this occasion there were, I suppose, a couple of thousand of us to be done, and we marched up one day to a parade ground called Artillery Square. There we formed into a dozen or more queues, according to our names and numbers, and awaited the arrival of the Japanese, of whom there was a separate squad of operators for each queue. At length they arrived, got out their records and their instruments, and gave the signal to start.

One by one we advanced to the table, bent over and received the accolade, and then returned past the queue, pulling up our trousers and trying to look nonchalant in the face of a barrage of ribald accusations.

"Wot was it like, mate?"

"fuckin' 'orrible, chum"

"garn! you liked it", and

"goin' back for mower, mate?"

We underwent a good many of these performances during the next three years, and experience showed that it was of some advantage to be at the end of the queue, by which time the Jap medicos, most of whom were very inexperienced dressing orderlies, had acquired a modicum of dexterity.

Not unexpectedly many people developed a nervous muscle-contraction at these ordeals, and there was one occasion when such a sufferer, being advised, after several unsuccessful attempts, to "hold his cheeks" clasped his hands round his face.

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

It was the fact of being placed on this party for Japan which made me once more consider the possibility of escaping, for I felt that a move to Japan meant complete resignation to being a prisoner until the end of the war.

Before the surrender escape had seemed the natural ending to the Singapore scene, because one failed to see what the realities would turn out to be. In the event it became obvious that a "sauve qui peut" was out of the question, since it involved about 90,000 men within a few miles of waterfront, mostly in the town area.

The confusion that would have resulted can well be imagined, and what is more, such action would undoubtedly have provoked the Japanese to a massacre in which thousands of servicemen and civilians would have lost their lives needlessly. Apart from this, it appears to have been decided that the best duty that officers could now perform was to be a buffer between their troops and the Japanese, of whose treatment of prisoners of war we could hardly be sanguine, having before us the records of their barbarity in China. Thus it was that with the cease-fire orders we had also received instructions to remain at our posts.

On our arrival at Changi the case had altered. There were many more officers than were necessary to do the regimental and administrative work, and if any of the surplus could have got away it would have been no more than their duty to do so.

Practically speaking escape was not, and never became, a reasonable proposition for us, but if it could ever have been considered so it was during the first days of our captivity. Within our large area at Changi we were completely unhampered, and outside there was an inevitable time lag of laxity and confusion before the Japs got all the loose ends tied up. Several attempts were in fact made in those days, and though, I believe, none was successful, several came very near to being so. Moreover there was not then, as later, the certainty of being executed if the attempt failed.

However, favourable as circumstances were for preparation, escape was still by no means easy; for though the Netherlands East Indies (now Indonesia) were near at hand, they were quickly over-run in their turn, and a successful attempt would have had to plan for a journey far beyond them, to Ceylon or India on one side, or to Australia on the other — that is, 1500 or 2000 miles at the very least.

My own inclination was always for India. Australia was too far away, and the seas and lands between it and us were in the forefront of Japan's war drive. India, though distant also, was the obvious base from which the Allies would return to Malaya.

Although I realised the difficulties of escaping I nevertheless became obsessed with the idea that one must actually make the effort before one could know if these difficulties were really what they seemed. I have to confess that the effort I made was so half-baked as to be ludicrous, but at least it convinced me that escape for the time being was impossible.

LAST DAYS AT "CHANGI BY THE SEA"

This knowledge, however, did not banish all hope of escape at some future time. On the contrary, the vision of escape, should the opportunity occur, became an ever-present back-ground to my thoughts, and against this background there was the feeling that either release or the chance of escape would come sooner to us in Malaya or Thailand than in Japan. For that reason I determined to get off the Japan party.

As it happened, an opportune sickness sent me into hospital at this juncture, and although the Japan party was postponed and postponed, so was my discharge from hospital, and I remained there until the Japan party had safely left Changi.

* * * * *

But rumours of another move, this time to Thailand, began to go around the camp in September. We heard faint echoes from some parties we had sent there in June, and the building of a railway was mentioned.

The great exodus of thousands of us began in October, and parties each six hundred strong began to leave Changi regularly for a destination "somewhere near Bangkok".

I decided that I would go. It was nearer to India, whither I thought any attempt to escape must be directed, and it was away from Japan, which was the last place I wanted to go to.

Knowing nothing of Thailand or Burma at this time, and judging only from the map, I thought, wrongly as it turned out, that the new Bangkok - Burma railway would be an extension from Chieng-Mai, which was the railhead four hundred miles north of Bangkok. That would be within reasonable distance of the Chinese province of Yunan, which was allied territory (more or less); and in any case Bangkok itself was a thousand miles nearer the Allies than was Singapore, and if one could make so much of one's journey by courtesy of one's captors, why not do so? Therefore, overcoming my superstitious dislike of volunteering for anything, especially in the army, I presently found myself on the next party to move.

We spent the next few days getting our kit ready.

When I first arrived at Changi my clothes consisted of one pair of shoes, one towel, and two each of shirts, shorts, vests, pants, stockings and handkerchiefs. In addition I had an old shooting bag containing two Pelican books, my private papers, tooth brush, hair brush, nail file, scissors and razor. All this I had managed to salvage from my army quarters two days before the capitulation, when by luck I happened to be near our former camp.

Since then I had made a considerable collection of clothing and other possessions. Chief of these in the clothing line were a waterproof cape, a battle blouse and pair of long trousers, an army side-cap, a pair of pyjamas and a spare shirt. The other items included an army compass, a blanket, a ground sheet and kit-bag, an enamel plate and mug, and a knife, fork

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

and spoon. I also had several bottles and tins containing salt, sugar, pepper, Red Cross cocoa, and two treasures from the canteen — a bottle of vinegar and one of chutney.

I had prepared a bottle of fried 'herrings' for the journey, and we each had several tins of meat, or 'M and V', from the newly arrived shipment of Red Cross stores.

One other thing I had acquired in the early days was a strip of thin but strong khaki material, which I had cut and sewn with strong thread into a sail measuring 7 ft. by 8 ft. by 9 ft. It was not bulky, and I had it in all my future wanderings, tacked loosely together and stuffed with my spare clothes as a pillow.

Our draft was designated 'overland Party U', and we left Changi on October 28th 1942.

By Train, Lorry And Foot In The 'Co-Prosperity Sphere'

OCTOBER—NOVEMBER, 1942

SOON after breakfast we started our journey, and as we sat on the side of the lorry and drove along the excellent road to Singapore Railway Station, a feeling of exhilaration overcame whatever qualms we had for the future. The dull placidity of Changi was left behind for ever, and we felt we were taking an inevitable step forward on the trail which would one day end in our release. Our few trips outside the camp on ration-buying parties had been a pleasant change in their way, but now, in the bright sunshine and with the wind on our faces, we had a brief illusion of freedom.

Our railway carriages turned out to be ten-ton closed trucks of iron, with a four-foot doorway in the middle of each side. We were, in fact, travelling 'covered goods'. Little cards on the truck sides bore the name of our destination, in English characters. It was Ban Pong, of which we knew only that it was somewhere near Bangkok. Presently we sorted ourselves into groups, and I found myself in a truck with thirty others. At 5.30 in the evening the train moved out of the station.

The journey to Ban Pong lasted three and a half days, and took us across the Straits of Johore by the causeway, and on up the Peninsula through many familiar towns, including Kuala Lumpur and the Penang junction, and over the Malaya—Thailand border at Padang Besar.

It was dark when we reached Ban Pong on November 1st., but daylight was just beginning to spread. We shouldered our heavy baggage and dumped it outside the station, and then, in the greying light, formed up in a long line of fours in the roadway.

As we waited there, sleepy-eyed, we heard a sound which seemed incongruous in that outlandish village of Thailand, as would have been the beating of tom-toms in Piccadilly. It was the clear resounding peal of a church bell, bringing the quick picture of the stillness of a Sunday morning at home; from which few Sundays could have been more different for us than this one.

As it grew light we saw a Japanese officer walking up and down the station verandah, a paunchy man with a face of glum disinterest. He was dressed in the habitual Jap army jocky cap, dark green tunic and breeches, field boots, and a trailing sword. After we had been called to attention he inspected us briefly and left us. We hoisted up our packs and bed-rolls and started to march out of the wooden-shacked village to a transit camp about a mile away.

It was here that we slept for the first time in huts made of bamboo and thatched with attap, whose two most conspicuous features were, first,

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

their general filth and delapidation, and secondly their low crossbeams, which were a menace to the heads of anyone except our puny guardians.

Here too we first met the jungle camp latrines, which consisted of trenches, with bamboo cross pieces for squatting on. As the country here was low-lying the trenches were shallow, and moreover the number of them was only sufficient for about fifty people, instead of the hundreds who were now passing through every day, the results may possibly be imagined, though they were almost unbelievable even when astoundedly proclaimed by the ghastrated senses.

At Changi we had a certain amount of privacy, but from now onwards privacy of any kind for any purpose was rare indeed.

We spent two nights at the Ban Pong Camp, and were given a little more information as to our future progress. We were first to have a day's journey by lorry, and this was to be followed by 'three short Marches'.

We were told that we must leave our heavy baggage behind to be sent on to us later, and take with us only what we could carry. We therefore overhauled and redistributed our kit, thinking that what we left behind we would never see again. In our anxiety to take as much as possible with us, we loaded ourselves far more heavily than we should have done if we had known what the marches were going to be like.

* * * * *

Next day our lorries drew up in line ahead on the roadway at nine o'clock in the morning. They were driven by British Prisoners of War, and each one had a Jap guard. Though we were crowded in the lorries it was not nearly so irksome as the train journey, since the weather was fine and we were not enclosed.

The road that we followed led to the village-town of Kanchang Buri, about thirty miles north-west of Bangkok.

In the clear sunlight we again had a feeling of exhilaration as we bowled along. The wind whistling by our heads cut off all other sounds. The speed of the vehicles provided an ever-changing scene, and our minds were dulled by brooding, and enlivened by a succession of pleasing trivialities.

This airy enjoyment was interrupted about halfway to our destination, when our lorry broke down, but indeed the accident rather enhanced the pleasure of our journey. After we had fiddled unavailingly with the engine for some minutes another lorry came along, and our Jap guard, tired of waiting, jumped aboard and left us to come along in our own time.

The Japs were very casual about our attempting to escape, in these days, and understandably so. We were surrounded by hundreds of miles of the worst jungle in Asia, and were white men in the midst of an Asian population. We were physically too conspicuous in size and colour to require any elaborate marking or other precautions.

I had often curiously noted in Malaya that if one stopped one's car

BY TRAIN, LORRY AND FOOT IN THE 'CO-PROSPERITY SPHERE'

in apparently the most abandoned and out-of-the-way piece of country, hardly a few minutes passed before the appearance of dogs and people on the scene. Behind high hedges, or among spreading trees, were small thatched dwellings which were not obvious to the passing glance, and from them would come suspicious dogs and then pleasant cheerful people and staring children. It was the same here in Thailand. There was no lack of houses and inhabitants along this road, and moreover when the people did make their appearance they were laden with baskets of bananas and pomeloes, which they sold to us for practically nothing.

The Thai people were friendly towards us, and this was a continual irritation to the Japs, the self-proclaimed "Protectors and Leaders of Greater East Asia". What a pitiful pretence this was. Deeds speak louder than words, and no amount of glib propaganda by the Japanese ever shook the fundamental distrust and fear in which the other Asian races held them. The Japanese were in Thailand on sufferance, for although they had vast armies in and around the country, they could not afford to antagonise the inhabitants deliberately. Unintentionally, of course, they inevitably did so merely by behaving in their natural way.

After a pleasant social interlude, in which our communication with the Thais was chiefly by smiles and nods and querying eyebrows, we returned to our lorry, which started up as though nothing had ever been wrong with it. Continuing our joy-ride, we arrived shortly after five p.m. at our new camp in Kanburi, a village which was remarkable in at least two respects.

First, it contained an imposing paper-making mill with a towering chimney — a building so modern and suggestive of big business as to be quite startling in this setting, this slow-moving village of pi-dogs and bullock carts, surrounded by jungle-covered hills.

Secondly, this village boasted an aerodrome. It was small, and, having no surfaced run-way, was useless in wet weather — but it was an aerodrome for all that. Rumour said it had been used by the former German manager of the mill, who had owned a private plane. When we drove over it, the aerodrome was dry, and the lorry raised swirls of dust.

Again we had quarters in attap huts, where we rested and prepared everything for the next morning, which was to see the first of our 'three short marches'.

During the night we had a violent rainstorm, so heavy that the dust of the aerodrome became mud, and part of the camp was flooded.

I recorded in my notes that during the night, while in "the trench latrine in the dark, my comb dropped out of my pocket into the bottomless pit". I suppose I had good reason to remember this incident as I had to borrow someone else's comb thenceforth everytime I wanted to comb my hair, and that, even in a prison camp, was not so very infrequently. It was not until about a year later than I acquired another comb.

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SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

Kanburi is at the junction of the rivers Me Nam Kwa Yai and Me Nam Kwa Noi, which unite to form the Me Klawng. These rivers flow parallel to one another, and it was along the course of the westerly one — the Me Nam Kwa Noi, that the Bangkok—Burma railway was to be built.

We were to know this 'aerodrome camp' much better before the end of our sojourn in Thailand, but just now it was merely one of many halting places on our travels. We were up at six the following morning, and had breakfast at six thirty. Then on parade, and at eight o'clock moved off on what we were told was a twenty-kilometre march.

Twenty kilometres is only twelve and a half miles, and the march was in fact a little less — about eleven miles. Yet most of us found it a gruelling task, and took about ten hours to complete the journey. Probably our general state of health was bad, from our having lived on a sub-normal diet for the past nine months. Also, we were far too heavily laden, for most of us carried water-bottle and haversack, slung on opposite shoulders, a large pack, very full and heavy; and a bedding roll made up of ground sheet, blanket and mosquito net.

Added to this we were marching along no fine wide metalled road, but a muddy, slippery, uneven track, where it was impossible to keep formation, and where one had to pick one's individual way. The advantages of marching in a 'formed body' and keeping in step are well known, and when a party begins to straggle, all but a few become unduly exhausted and delayed. We numbered six hundred men, and in a very short while all semblance of order was lost, and we were spread out over several miles, passing and re-passing and stopping and starting in our own time.

We had no food during the day, though at one place some friendly Thais gave us limes. It was evening when the last of us, who included myself, began to approach the new camp; a fact we were made aware of by the arrival of several Japs on bicycles, who began to encourage the stragglers by shouting, hitting them with sticks, and occasionally lining up a party whom they found resting, and slapping their faces.

When one was hobbling with blistered feet, soaked with sweat, breathless, weak-kneed and ready to drop from tiredness, and was then faced with the alternative of continuing the seemingly impossible, or being beaten up instead, one began to realise what it meant to have lost one's freedom. But one can become used to anything, and these unpleasantnesses were, after all, only trivialities.

It was about seven in the evening when the last of us got in, having had no meal since our rice breakfast at six thirty. The camp was in a monastery garden in a little village called Laja. We passed through the main street of the village to the monastery gates, and all the inhabitants were grouped in front of their wooden shops to watch us go by.

A good many of them had never seen a white man before, and I must say that this was not a very auspicious introduction for us, since most of the beings who now passed them were unkempt scarecrows, exhausted and

stumbling. I remember the smiles of surprise and sympathetic encouragement with which I was answered by a group of Chinese, to one of whom I had nodded a greeting as I passed.

The camp was beside the river, and in this we were allowed to bathe. Over and over again in this strange life, we were confronted with bewildering contrasts. Is there anything more soothing and refreshing to a hot, weary, and aching body, than the cool waters of a river? As we bathed ourselves in it, we passed from seeming hell to earthly heaven.

Journey Completed On Foot And By Barge

NOVEMBER, 1942

OUR second march was about fifteen miles, and even more exhausting than the previous one, crossing a long stretch of old padi fields on narrow slippery bunds and then following a vague path through secondary jungle. But after the difficulties of the first march I had decided that on this one I would start off near the head of the column and keep there, and this I managed to do. We ended this second day's march by coming out again at the river bank, and we then crossed to the far side by barge.

Our 'camp' here was merely a large open space, and the Japs in charge of it were a very unpleasant bunch. They had us on roll-call in the evening, a performance which was the prototype of many that were to follow. They counted us over and over again, shouted, glared at people who hadn't the least idea what they were doing wrong, and worked themselves into a fury which they expended by face-slapping and beating with bamboos. It ended at last, and then, with an unexpected change of front, the Japs announced that the next day would be a rest, and that we would not march until the day after. We got a meal of boiled rice at ten-thirty that night.

Our day of rest was much needed, and at the end of it, before turning in for the night, I dressed ready for marching, and packed up all my kit, including bedding, with the exception of my cape. In the latter I wrapped myself, rather martially, and slept in great comfort on a small platform of bamboo.

We were up before six the next morning, and moved off just as dawn was breaking. The march was hard, but not so long as before, and we arrived at the next camp quite early in the afternoon.

The name of this camp was Tarso, and like the aerodrome camp, Kanburi, we knew it much better in days to come. It was on the Me Nam Kwa Noi, our River of Destiny, and was now becoming a sort of advanced base for the smaller camps upriver, to which we and thousands of other prisoners of war were being sent. As this was a permanent and not a transit camp it was comparatively well organised. As at Changi, it had its British Commandant and Staff acting under the Japs, but of course, unlike Changi, the Japs here were right on top of us. There was a reasonably good cook-house, and we had three meals a day of rice, vegetable stew, and tea.

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We had here our first opportunity of studying the Japanese at close quarters, and the most spectacular phenomenon now brought to our notice was their morning Prayer Parade. Perhaps these were sacred occasions, when

JOURNEY COMPLETED ON FOOT AND BY BARGE

a nation's soldiers proclaimed their faith; but to the foreign spectator, viewing them impartially for the first time, they could not be anything but comic.

There were two or three groups of performers, each under an N.C.O., and each group worked independently. After some preliminaries came the Bulshido part, when they began a series of staccato chantings in unison, punctuated with deep bowings.

Then, without warning, prayers stopped and physical training exercises began. Arms . . . bend, hands stretching forwards, sideways, upwards and downwards, to the shouting of one, two, three, four, in Japanese — itchi, nee, san, shee.

But some groups got through their prayers quicker than others, so that prayers and P.T. continued side by side. One's general impression was something like this:

Deep chanting: "Tojo got us in the shit" (pause)
"Tojo's got to get us out again" (Bow)
"Tojo got us in the shit" (pause)
"Tojo's got to get us out again" (Bow)

P.T. groups, shouting: "itchi, nee, san, shee,
"forwards, sideways, upwards, downwards"

All together: "Tojo got us in the shit" (pause)
"Forwards, sideways, upwards, downwards" (smartly)
"Tojo's got to get us out again" (Bow)
"up, up, up, up" (Raspberry)

* * * * *

Tarso marked the end of our marching, but not of our journey. The next and last stage was to be by barge, and we were to go by parties of sixty at a time. I had one day's rest at Tarso, being included in the party to leave on the second day after our arrival there.

At eight o'clock, on Roll-call, we were given one hour's warning to be ready to move. So we hurriedly breakfasted, toiletted, packed, and paraded with our kit at nine o'clock ready to go to the barge. Nothing happened, and we sat on our packs on the ground, and waited. At ten-thirty we were ordered to move. We were marched about one hundred and fifty yards towards the river and then halted beside the Japanese quarters. There we waited again.

The hours went by, and presently it was lunchtime. Our lunch was brought to us from the cookhouse, and we ate it where we sat. Then we were moved on again, down to the river bank and actually onto the barge. This was a big heavy craft, but not big enough for sixty men. We were if anything more cramped than we had been in the railway trucks. In the barge we sat, and waited for the motor launch which was to tow us. No launch came. The afternoon was incredibly long, but somehow it passed, and presently it was time for supper. We ate our food, and soon the day

declined.

One of the characteristics of the Jap army is, that once they have made an arrangement, it is as difficult for them to revoke it as for a python to disgorge a half-swallowed rabbit. No matter that unforeseen events have happened since the arrangement was first made, which cause it to be absurd or unnecessary, it must still be carried through.

It nearly always happened when we journeyed with the Japs that their time schedule went hopelessly wrong. But once a party of prisoners had been checked off the strength of one camp and handed over to their guards for delivery to another, nothing would induce the former to have them back again into the camp quarters, even though the party had to wait shelterless at their gates for several days. So it was with us, and we were now forbidden to leave the barge except within a radius of a few feet of rocky ground immediately beside it. About a third of our company decided to sleep on these rocks and the remainder stayed on the barge, where we spent a miserably wakeful night.

In the morning it began to rain. The barge was fitted with a large sliding curved roof, but we were unfamiliar with it, so it was only after we had all got thoroughly soaked that the roof was pulled over us. There was still no sign of our launch, and the Japs made use of us, while we waited, by taking away the men for a fatigue. I, also, managed to make use of the time, by getting permission to go to the camp and have my blisters dressed again.

It rained continuously and everywhere was muddy. About mid-day a launch did arrive, but only to bring a load of attaps. Then we took a large pig aboard in a wicker basket. Lunch time came, and early afternoon, and then, at last, our towing launch arrived.

We left Tarso at a quarter to five, and travelled up-river for three hours, tying up for the night at a small camp where I found some friends. Next morning after some food we continued our journey shortly before ten o'clock. It took us just over six hours to do this day's journey, which was mostly through virgin jungle, and we arrived at the new camp at twenty past four in the afternoon, the date being the 11th of November.

Thus ended our first Grand Tour under the Japs. We had left Changi fourteen days before, and had travelled, not exactly 'de luxe', a distance of one thousand one hundred and fifty miles.

Kinseyo Camp

NOVEMBER, 1942

WE were now in the heart of one of the most mountainous, thickly forested, and thinly populated regions of Thailand, whose only important route of communication was the river. There were indeed some rough tracks through the country, which were perhaps the relics of the ancient trade routes, but as regular highways, even for foot passengers, they were no longer used. During the wet season they were, in any case, impassable, and in the dry were saved from complete obliteration only by the infrequent passage of the hill people, and teak-wood cutters with their elephants.

To the south and east of us lay enemy-occupied areas for thousands of miles -- Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, Indo-China, and the Pacific Ocean. To the north and north-west the whole of Burma lay between us and freedom; and our nearest allied country was the Chinese province of Yunnan, the doubtful safety of whose lawless territory was barred to us by over five hundred miles of jungle-covered mountains, swamps and deep river gorges.

To the east lay the sea, and that was only sixty miles away, but those sixty miles ran through a country of mountains ranging from three to six thousand feet high, country through which one might with luck make good about half a mile in a single day. And if one had reached the coast one would still be eight or nine hundred miles from allied ports, and one's way would lie entirely through Jap-dominated waters.

Remembering these facts it is easy to see why the Japs were not much worried about our attempting to escape. To make doubly sure they had not only put a price on our heads, but made it known that they would show no mercy to any who harboured or helped us.

For over twenty four hours after our arrival at Kinseyo it rained continually, but soon afterwards the weather became very pleasant, for it was the beginning of the dry season. The sun was very hot during the middle of the day, yet the air was dry, in contrast to the humidity of Malaya. At nights and in the early mornings it was quite cold.

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We began to settle down to this latest phase in our existence, which had, like each of these succeeding phases, a strange quality of contrast. On the one hand, our food was so poor that to eke it out by fishing or collecting wild vegetables was a necessity rather than a pastime, and already a small but growing number of us was ill from under-nourishment; yet in the midst of our physical tribulations our senses continually perceived, and

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

recorded perhaps the more deeply, the beauty of the country around us; where the bright stretches of the river mirrored the blue white-clouded sky, and were framed with rocks and green trees and creepers; and we looked across the gold-ripe padi-fields and green jungle, to the dark-blue, crayoned mountains. And again, though we had superficial liberty which allowed us to wander wherever we wished beyond the camp, yet, with our thoughts so often fixed on the attainment of freedom, it was with deep frustration that we looked out upon the beautiful country which was our prison.

It was now that we entered on our worst period of undernourishment. The Red Cross tinned foods that we had brought with us from Changi had been finished at Ban Pong or soon afterwards. Few of us had any extras left, and as yet there was no system of 'local purchase'. Although there were no restrictions here on our talking to the occupants of the Thai huts, and trading with them, few of us could buy their goods as we had no money.

With my own remaining fifty cents I bought two fish-hooks at the exorbitant price of twenty cents a piece, as I thought they might be a wise long-term investment, and spent the remaining ten cents on salt.

Our daily ration of vegetables was supposed to be a pound a head, but in fact was only four ounces, and as this was almost always marrow it was of little food value. A bucketful of marrow stew — that is to say, a bucketful of hot water with a few cubes of marrow occasionally appearing in it — is about the unappetising liquid meal that ever failed to titillate the eye or nose, let alone the palate, and moreover it is nothing like as nourishing as ordinary cabbage-water.

As for our 'meat or fish' ration, which was supposed to be two to three ounces a day, it consisted at first of the solitary pig which we had brought up with us on the barge; and I note in my diary that it amounted to 112 lbs, among 500 men for twelve days, which averages 3/10 of an ounce per day.

At the end of November our supplies of tea ran out, and we drank ersatz 'coffee' instead — a penitential liquid made from burnt rice-grains.

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It was at Kinseyo too that we began to realise the significance of the two words, 'Rice' and 'Bamboo'. These two articles became the most important, the most continuing, and the most hated, in our lives.

We could not do without them. There was hardly any article of use that we did not make of bamboo. Our huts were built of it. Furniture of every kind was made of it — benches and stools, altars for the chapels, tables and beds. The big hollow bamboos made water-containers, mugs, and hospital bed-bottles; smaller ones made pipe-bowls, fishing rods, spoons, and cigarette holders.

In these and a dozen other ways bamboo was indispensable, but it always typified for us the make-shift and slipshod, short term, stop-gap

KINLEYO CAMP

outlook of our captors.

In particular we were later to talk of their Bamboo Railway, for it was the sort of gim-crack creation which we ourselves would never have built so. It was in a way a great achievement for the Japs to have made this railway at all, and the alternative to their rickety method of construction was years of time and millions of money, neither of which they could afford. However, we did not admire them for their achievement, but only despised them for typifying the flimsy rather than the enduring.

Similarly, rice was our symbol for the ersatz in food. From rice we made flour and bread. We prepared rice in a certain way, and it was porridge. We roasted it, and it became our coffee beans. As time went on our cooks invented dozens of different kinds of 'doovers', dried, baked, boiled, or grilled; but though different in colour, texture, and name, and sometimes even in taste, they were practically all, in effect, just rice.

Rice and bamboo were the staples of our lives and we used to say that when we got out we would incorporate these two symbols into our armorial bearings.

Domestic Economy of P.O.W.'s

NOVEMBER—DECEMBER, 1942

THE two officers of my unit who had started out with me from Chan had arrived at Kinseyo by a later barge, and we now went into partnership together. Although I was senior by rank, both of them were my senior in age and worldly wisdom, as well as in our common profession, which was rubber-planting. So I hope I behaved towards them with sufficient modesty.

Robby was a Scot, and what I take to be typical of a good one — a man of few words, simple pleasures, and solid reliability. He was grey-haired and thin on top, and a World War I Captain in Cairo, Palestine and Mesopotamia.

Bill was the enviable perpetual lighthearted youngster. Older than me by twenty years if a day, his curly hair looked brown rather than grey and he had smiling grey eyes in a wellweathered healthy, ruddy-brown face. Bill had fought and been wounded in world war one, and before that incredible though it seemed to me, had fished for pearls in the South Pacific, jackarooed on an Australian sheep farm, and been briefly and riotously the instructor of a roller-skating rink in Sydney — all this at about the year that I was born.

Presumably his subsequent life as a planter was a little less vivid, but Bill was inherently the gay cavalier, and did everything with a flourish. His hobbies were drawing and fishing, and he was lucky in being able to indulge both of them from time to time as a Prisoner of War. In everything he did I could not but envy him his ever-bubbling enthusiasm.

Both Bill and Robby had been managers of estates which were overrun early in the campaign, and they had made their way south and been taken on by our unit, in which they held the heady rank of Second Lieutenants.

Towards the end of November Bill sold his fountain pen for, I think five ticals, so our 'kongsi' was in funds for a change. We bought small stocks of salt, coconut oil, and gula malacca, that sugary product of palm trees.

Every day, one or two little canoes appeared round the bend of the river and paddled in beneath the tree-hung bank. Each was propelled by a woman, usually accompanied by a child or two, and they brought duck eggs fresh and hard-boiled, bananas, coconuts, home-made cakes, and peanut toffee, to sell to us. Their coming was yet another example of how many more inhabitants there really are in these lonely stretches of road or river than one would think.

We generally bought our gula malacca from the Thai huts, where we also got banana fritters. An old woman used to make these, squatting on the ground underneath her hut, which, as is customary, was built up on posts

about six feet high. The fire was a tiny heap of charcoal in a depression in the ground, over which rested the small cooking-kuali, a plain round metal utensil shaped like a deep saucer, measuring a foot across. In this was the boiling pig-fat, and in a bowl beside her she mixed a batter of tapioca flour. The bananas were cut in half lengthways, dipped in the batter, and fried till their covering was brown, and crisp at the edges.

It could not be claimed that throughout the whole process these fritters were 'untouched by human hand', nor that the hand that touched them, as well as the clothes, dwelling, and all the belongings of the old woman were anything but worn and grimy; but as a sop to our hygiene-educated feelings we could reflect that the last act in the process was an undoubted sterilisation in boiling oil.

One of these families of Thais was impressed by the Japs as official slaughterers of our occasional pig. The pigs were kept in a bamboo pen on the river bank, and if one were passing that way when a killing was imminent one knew the fact by the piercing squeals that preceded it. The squealing started when the pig was being manhandled out of the pen and down the path to a spot convenient to the river, but it stopped completely during the few moments when, being held down on its side, it actually awaited the knife. The latter was so sharp that it cut through the pig's gullet with a single dexterous stroke, much more easily and quickly than a butter knife through butter. No squeal, but only a grunt, accompanied the coup de grace.

For this slaughtering service the Thais were given the head, tail, trotters, blood and offal — except that the Japs kept for themselves such delicacies as the liver and kidneys. Most of these by-products of our own precious rations were then sold back to us individually by the Thais; and one occasionally passed a fire outside one of our huts on which some part of a pig simmered delectably in an old kerosene tin.

I remember the first time Bill and Robby and I bought some duck-eggs. We could have boiled them, of course, but decided that to get real satisfaction out of them they must be fried. For by this time we must have had about a hundred consecutive meals consisting of rice and stew, or mushy mixtures of some kind, and a fried egg seemed to us the last word in gastronomic pleasure.

Our pan was an oval sardine tin with a bamboo handle, and when we had got out both it and the coconut oil, and had poked up the fire, there was an enquiring pause as we looked at one another for a lead. We must all have fried eggs before, many or few, but not for a long time, and for all of us this would be for the first time as Prisoners of War — and the first, I'm glad to say, of many — and so I always remember it. It was Robby, the gallant veteran of the Middle East, who broke the first shell — to my recollection his first and last piece of cooking in our kongsi, for thereafter he was content to be chief gatherer of fuel and water.

Cooking was my province, and Bill was chief provider, by his fishing.

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

Our spheres overlapped a little, for I occasionally gathered a little food from the fields, and Bill sometimes did some cooking. One important contribution of his was the method of treating small fish, especially when cooking-oil was scarce.

Thinking back to his pearling days, when the crew of the boat (Japanese, ironically) used to spread-eagle scores of fish and fix them in the rigging to dry, he split open his tiddlers in the same way, and kept them open by means of bamboo skewers. Then he speared them with a bamboo poker and toasted them at the fire. During this grilling the bones became quite brittle, so that one could chew up the whole fish without the least physical or mental perturbation.

Round the edges of the padifields the Thais had at some time planted vegetables, which had now become so neglected and wild-looking that we considered them fair game to pick. There were various kinds of spinach, some chillies, and a few brinjals, and best of all there were some long beans. The latter grew profusely, but were not particularly easy to see unless one looked carefully, so that they were found by comparatively few people. Of these I was one, and I provided a small billy-can of fresh beans between the three of us almost every day of our three and a half weeks at Kinseyo. And to sharpen their flavour what better than a dash of the vinegar I had brought from Changi.

The billy-can was a half-pint salmon tin which I had found chucked out in front of the quarters of the Jap guards, and which I had picked up as unselfconsciously as I could contrive, feeling as I imagined I would feel if I were to step off the pavement of Piccadilly to collect a fag end.

We also supplemented our diet with prawns, which abounded in the streams which flowed through the camp. I heard that there was a much better prawning ground further up the main stream, and one afternoon I went to find it, taking with me a mosquito-netting shrimping net on a bamboo frame.

I followed the new mud road towards the railway, and then turned off by a footpath through the jungle, which was not particularly dense. The big trees were far enough apart to allow occasional flickers of sunlight through their shade, and the ground was rocky, with clumps of shrubs and ferns. The path led slightly uphill, close to the stream but not touching it, until, at about a mile from the camp, it led straight to the water's edge.

The stream opened out into a series of wide shallow pools, with sandy bottoms in which were occasional rocks. The water was about a foot and a half deep, and the pools, giving on to one another by broad low steps, extended for sixty yards or so. Their water was clear, and shaded by trees from the direct sunlight. There were hundreds of prawns in them, and some little fishes.

The noise of the water as it slithered over its many miniature falls, was gentle but persistent. It shut out all other sounds, and within its barrier one was enclosed with silence. The curious prawns moved slowly forward

round one's feet, then quickly backwards — into, quite often, one's skilfully positioned net.

Time became an endless present and one's thoughts hovered unengagedly on that present's gravely-considered trifles. Completely alone, unwatched, beyond reach or knowledge of fellow-prisoners or of captors, in this sanctuary in the tropical forests of Thailand — what a strange, unimaginable situation for a Prisoner of War.

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Towards the end of our stay at Kinseyo the Jap commandant proclaimed a whole holiday and a fishing competition. There were to be prizes for the heaviest five fish; one hundred, fifty, forty, thirty and twenty cigarettes respectively.

Bill, Robby and I decided to try our luck. It was a pleasant way of spending the day, anyhow. Hooks and some rough line we had bought from the Thai boatmen. Rods of bamboo were growing in a hundred assorted sizes around us. We all had knives, and very sharp ones too — especially Bill's, as he had a pocket whetstone, and took a great pride in keeping his knives in good order. Although we were not supposed to have knives, they were indispensable in the camping life we were now leading, and the Japs didn't bother about such things until nearly a year later.

We dug for worms under the bushes by the river bank, and then sauntered off in the sunshine to find an uncrowded spot up-stream. We took towels and soap with us for a bath before coming back.

From the paddifields the path went through the bamboo clumps for half a mile, where it met a stream which marked the boundary between the bamboos and the forest. Here again was a little waterfall — a common ending for this river's tributaries, since the whole of the river bank was high above the water.

We crossed the stream, and beyond it the river took a long wide curve. The bank for a hundred yards was a smooth surface of rock sloping quite steeply into the water, and as regular, almost, as a concrete quay. Here and there along it, bushes grew in the crevices, and there were occasional big rocks as well, and we decided to try it for fish.

Bill established his ascendancy as a fisherman by catching three, and Robby his as the strong silent dark horse by getting two. I caught none; and said I was a fly-fisherman, anyhow. All five fish were small, so we didn't enter them for the competition, but instead had a good supper.

At six in the evening the Jap Commandant judged the entries and presented the prizes, the winning fish being only five pounds weight. Our British Commandant returned thanks and led a suitable handclap from the rather dubiously-amused multitude.

I must admit that my fishing efforts were rather unproductive. The fish in this river were abundant. Many were caught, of great variety, and

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

ranging up to twenty pounds or so in weight. Below the cookhouse, where the swill and the vegetable peelings were thrown in, one could see scores of fish constantly on the lookout; and when a basket of scraps was thrown onto the water it floated down-stream accompanied by a catherine-wheel gymkana of carp-like fishes, twirling and cavorting around it.

I tried floating a baited hook on a long line, but not a fish looked at it, though they were gobbling up exactly similar delicacies all round. Then I attached my mosquito net (torn and useless for its proper purpose) to a huge bamboo frame measuring eight feet across, and carried it down to the river bank amid the derisive looks of fellow-prisoners, Thai bargemen, and Japs, alike. Sinking it in three feet of water I chucked vegetable rind into and over it, and waited with growing concern while fish after fish gave me the cold shoulder.

But as last I found my metier. A little way up-stream, the bank was lined with bushes which extended into the water, and past them and round them we frequently saw shoals of little fish about three or four inches long. Remembering childhood's days, when we sat on the harbour rocks and caught 'cudding' with bent pins and walking sticks, I collaborated with Bill, who, from an invaluable little tin work-box, produced both a pin, which he bent and sharpened, and two yards of blue silk sewing-thread.

With these and a bamboo cane and the tips of some small worms I justified myself at last, and spent a happy morning yanking tiddlers out, with the smiling encouragement of a Thai woman on an anchored barge. Of course I missed a lot too, but I came back with half a dozen on a bamboo twig. Bad luck dogged me still, though, for after we had toasted them we left them to keep warm by our fire during evening roll-call, and when we came back they were gone. Thereafter I stuck to cooking.

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We didn't remain long at Kinseyo, its memory for me is one of melancholy beauty. Against the drab background of our wretched hovels, and the endless mud of rainy days, the dreary diet and the increasing sickness, was contrasted the sunshine and the river, the green forests and the blue mountains, with all their brightness of vivid butterflies and entrancing birds.

There were the black-crested bulbuls high in a tall tree; a bright jungle-cock, flying up with a screech from amongst the beans; and the flocks of hammer-billed crested hoopoes with their trellis-work plumage, running and flopping ahead as one walked through the bamboos. And ever and always the persistent, penetrating, swift-winged parakeets, which came in dense flocks of screaming cacophony to devour the ripening padi, sweeping round the field in streaks of glinting green.

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DOMESTIC ECONOMY OF P.O.W.'s

It was at the end of November that the Japs began moving us to a new camp about ten miles down-river. It seems probable that Kinseyo was a little too far forward for their precarious communications. With the change to dry weather the river was rapidly shallowing, and only the smaller launches and barges could get up the rapids. The Japs were making a mud road through the jungle parallel to the line of the new railway, and along this they could bring motor transport. It seemed that their camps must keep pace with the head of this road, and not outstrip it, if they were to be easily supplied; and the camp we were going to was within a mile's walk of this road-head.

Bill and Robby preceded me down-river by two days, and I followed them on December 8th, reaching the new camp after an expeditious two-hour journey by barge.

Kanyu River Camp

DECEMBER, 1942—JANUARY, 1943

OUR new camp, Kanyu, was ten miles down-stream from Kinseyo. Inland from the river bank there was only about a hundred yards of flat land, and then the ground sloped steeply up to the plateau about half a mile away.

The camp was thus built partly on the level and partly on the slope of the hill, and because of its situation it had rather a gloomy aspect. The steep hill behind it kept out the sun until ten in the morning, and up to that time the mist, which filled the river valley every night, still hung about the camp.

The surrounding jungle too was thicker than at Kinseyo, and there were many huge trees growing in the camp itself. On the opposite bank of the river there was again thick jungle, and we seemed to be shut in in every direction. The only view to be had was from the river bank, whence we could see up or down stream for about half a mile.

There were already some hundreds of Prisoners of War at Kanyu when we arrived, and most of the huts had been completed. It was decided that officers were to have separate huts, and we began building two for ourselves where a convenient area was marked off by a small ravine.

We also built a latrine there after a new and improved design. Hitherto our 'lats' in Thailand had been mere trenches, most of them open, un-screened, and uncovered. Now for the first time since leaving Changi, science was brought to bear. We dug them not less than twelve feet deep, revetted the sides with bamboo, and covered in the open mouth with earth on a bamboo frame. In this covering we cut appropriate oblongs and fitted them with sliding hatches which were to be closed when not in use. The object of all this was an effort to discourage the breeding of flies, the main cause of the spread of dysentery.

As for the Jap guards, we soon found we had made a change for the worse in our new camp. At first we were pleasantly surprised at the way they took roll-call, which was much more expeditious than at Kinseyo. We also found it a relief that they kept out of our huts, for in previous camps there had been a constant stream of them going through, badgering us to sell them our few possessions. But these advantages were more than off-set by the drawbacks.

They took their tone from their Commandant. He was Lieutenant Osuki, a young man with a smooth pointed face, not bad-looking in a puckish way, who had a great conceit of himself and a habit of getting frequently and, from our point of view, rather dangerously drunk. He had some pretensions to being a strict disciplinarian among his own troops as well as the

KANYU RIVER CAMP

prisoners of war, and when on duty was, by Jap army standards, smartly turned out.

He was much too young and inexperienced to be in supreme command of over a thousand men (though of course we prisoners hardly counted as human beings) and was just sufficiently educated to understand his shortcomings in our eyes, and to be a little unsure of himself. His answer to this, apart from drink, was to be all the harsher and more over-bearing in his treatment of us.

He walked with a shoulder swagger; and on parade adopted heroic attitudes, with hand on sword and booted leg forward. He had also the curious trick of pulling in his waistline and exaggeratedly puffing out his chest, and was in consequence referred to, as an alternative to Suki, (a diminutive of his surname) as the Pouter Pigeon.

Under his leadership the guards soon learned that their job was to make life as unpleasant as possible for us. Their chief opportunity for this was when they came on night patrol, for at other times fortunately we saw little of them. It amused them to stand by a tree where we would have to pass them going to and from the latrines, and then, as we sleepily went by without seeing them, to shout us back and curse and slap us for not having saluted them.

Our food at Kanyu though still poor, was yet a slight improvement on Kinseyo. This was chiefly because our Local Purchase organisation gradually grew better and better, until there were times when, for five or six days at a stretch, we fed much better than ever before. This happened when we got large consignments of duck-eggs in the camp.

During these periodic spates of plenty the limiting factor was money. As far as the men were concerned they had to work to get pay, and the pay itself was not good, ranging from twenty-five to thirty-five cents a day according to rank. As time went on there was a large and increasing number of men on the sick list, and though not all of these were hospital cases, nevertheless, they were not working, and therefore not drawing pay.

The officers were better off because they got a monthly amount irrespective of whether they were sick or well. This monthly pay had started in August, when, having completed six months as prisoners, we were deemed to have improved our 'class' of prisonership, and to have become eligible for pay in accordance with the unfathomable precepts of Bushido. This Bushido is the Japanese concept of chivalry, and we pronounced it Buishido, with a hard 'd'.

Our pay was three months overdue at this time, but in January 1943 we were paid up to date, and were therefore quite well off for a while.

To improve the general rations of the camp and to provide special food, if possible, for the hospital, it was decided that officers would make contributions to a central Hospital and Camp messing fund, and in addition to this general fund, which benefitted everybody in the camp, most regiments also organised special funds for their own men.

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

Apart from this, many officers of the rank of Captain, or more senior, pooled their resources with friends who, being Lieutenants or 2/Lieutenants, were badly off. Whatever extra food we were able to buy, whether individually or for the camp messing, did no more than slightly raise the value of our diet to a level which was still wretchedly insufficient by any civilised standards.

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It was now that Bill's fishing successes reached their height, and were most appreciated. He spent practically his whole day, and all his days, down at the river.

Very pleasant it was there, too, sitting on the rocks in the sun, clad in shorts and a wide hat, smoking pipe after pipe of foul but satisfying local tobacco, and watching the greenish river flowing down. Watching the fishes too; the big fish that sent his float gently bobbing, before pulling it right under, and the little fish that came nosing round the water-growing bushes beside him, and then sneaked his bait when he wasn't looking.

And watching the occasional launch or barge or Thai boat go by; seeing the plovers, or an egret, or king-fisher, and hearing the crowing and cackling of a colony of jungle-fowl down-river on the opposite bank. Not to mention the fun of finally catching his fish, judging the bobbing float for the moment to strike, feeling with a thrill the animated jerking which tells that no weed or rock, but a real live fish, is on the end of the line; and at last pulling him safely ashore, (Or sometimes not; as when, on one occasion, a brave fish pulled the rod into the water and towed the whole outfit some eighty yards across to the opposite bank).

Anyhow, Bill provided us with some fresh fish nearly every day for January, February and March of 1943, which was a period when all of us were at a low physical ebb. We used to make fish stew of the heads, tails and bones of the bigger fish, for we found that they contained a great deal of fat, which was one of the greatest deficiencies in our diet.

* * * * *

It was very cold at Kanyu. Thailand's cold season is between November and January, and sometimes there are a few cold nights in February too. We had thought it cold at Kinseyo, but at Kanyu, with its mist and early-morning lack of sun, and its many shadowy trees, we were sometimes too cold at night to be able to sleep. We felt it all the more because the prolonged lack of nourishment had lowered our vitality. I remember that on the coldest nights I wore all the clothes I possessed, and still felt cold. I wore a vest, shirt, shorts and socks; over the shorts my long trousers, and over the shirt my battle blouse. Over that I donned my old pyjama jacket, and then for my bedclothes I had my blanket and my heavy waterproof cape.

KANYU RIVER CAMP

Morning roll-call was at daybreak, and most of us got up in the dark, half an hour earlier, and got fires going to warm ourselves. Fires were a great feature of the camp. There were half a dozen of them dotted along the outside of each of the many huts, most of them shared by four or five people, and there were several communal fires where huge felled tree-trunks smouldered day and night. Bill, Robby and I had our own fire-place, made of flat stones, and Robby usually undertook, as his daily task, to keep us supplied with fire-wood.

On first getting up, one of us (I'm sure it was generally me) would go along to the smouldering tree-trunk outside the end of the hut and collect a few glowing embers; then bring them back to our fireplace, put a few little twigs on them, and start blowing. In ten minutes we would have built up a really good fire, round which we then competed for warmth with those much smarter fellows who invariably turned up once the fire was going.

Then came, the roll-call whistle, and we would troop across to the 'parade ground' where, having 'got fell in' and counted ourselves, we stood shivering, and waited for the 'orderly Jap'.

Of the varied tittle-tattle with which we filled the time of waiting, I remember the argument as to whether one could or could not see both the Big Bear and the Southern Cross in the sky at the same time — one of the few arguments of ours which was settled on the spot because both of those magnificent constellations still shone palely in the sky as we spoke. Though to be sure one could still quibble that both could not be seen at the same time, unless a man had swivel eyes, as they were at opposite sides of the heavens.

After roll-call, while it was still half light, we went down to the cook-house for our 'porridge' (mashed rice), and brought it back to the huts to supplement it, when possible, with boiled eggs.

For a long time after breakfast the hills around us were bathed in mist, and out of it, at a regular hour each morning, a flight of giant hornbills passed over the camp. One could hear them coming long before they were visible, for their regular wing-beats made the same mechanical wheezing sound as in the flight of swans. And presently they would emerge from the mist, an impressively regular formation of seven or eight enormous birds.

Another frequent sound in the morning stillness of opalescing mist was the exotic discord of the racquet-tailed drongo, which inhabited the tall trees at the edge of the camp. Its song was a succession of scarcely-related notes, which seemed like the haphazard twanging of some dusty harp. I suspect the drongo's utterance to have been the inspiration of many of the composers of ancient Chinese music.

As the sun came over the hill it often awakened the wah-wahs to mournful vocality. Some people think that the undulating cry of these gibbons is like laughter, but to me it is a sound of the profoundest melancholy, whose invariable background is the gloom of majestic trees. The hollow

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

wailing cry, rising and falling, rising and falling, swells in volume as it is taken up by one after another of these plaintive creatures, and then gradually subsides to unbroken silence. No other sound but this is the complete epitome of the frightening stillness of the forest.

As the morning progressed and the sun strengthened, we gradually shed our accumulated clothing, first the pyjama jacket and slacks, then the battle blouse, then, as the sun grew hot, the shirt and vest; till finally the blanket was spread across bamboo poles as a sunshade over seat.

In the afternoons I usually did my daily 'baking'. In common with many others I had found that one could make 'bread' or rissoles', or in a word, 'doovers', out of plain boiled rice alone. At Changi, when we had urged our messing staff to make us more bread, or something of the kind, their chief excuse had always been the lack of flour. According to them one could not make the grains of boiled rice adhere, and form a dough, except by adding flour and water (and of course, yeast, just to be quite sure they couldn't do it). Without these ingredients, they said, it remained just grains of rice, do what one would. Well, we now proved this to be complete nonsense. Plain boiled rice, with no additions whatsoever, could be made into dough merely by pounding.

For us, who did it on a small scale, an enamel mug was the usual mixing bowl and the pounder was a bamboo truncheon about half an inch in diameter. After a few minutes pounding the rice began to get sticky, and eventually became a conglomerate mass. One could make delicious rissoles by mixing chopped onions with it, and flavouring it with salt and pepper; or one could make cakes, or scones, or bread, or whatever one liked to call it, by baking or toasting it.

We had no oven, so we made a wire grid on which we toasted flat scones of this rice dough. It was my care to see that they were not burned, and in fact they usually turned out quite brown and crisp and even. Sometimes we spread gula malacca on them, and sometimes we had them as toast with our boiled eggs.

When my baking was finished I usually read or wrote for the remainder of the afternoon, or visited the hospital.

After supper, and a bath at the river bank, there was roll call again in the evening, and when that was over, only a short period of daylight remained to us.

The evening twilight once more aroused birds and animals to activity, just as the morning had done.

The gekko-lizard, brown and wrinkle-skinned as the bark of the tree he lived in, produced his extraordinary noise at intervals throughout the evenings and nights. His name I suppose is onomatopoeic, for he produces a series of hiccoughs sounding 'gek-o', 'geko', 'gek-o', which gradually get slower and slower until the last 'gek-o-o-o-o-o-o' is a long drawn-out croak, rasping and richly lecherous. Many a time in this and other camps we lay on our bamboo slats, 'Kurrah-ed' into silence, perhaps, by a passing sentry,

KANYU RIVER CAMP

and heard the uncouth croaking of the gekko break out on the night with the deliberate repetitiveness of a cuckoo-clock.

Often in the evenings too, we watched the high-dive performance of a flying squirrel, who used to climb up a huge tree beside our hut, running and jumping with leisurely deliberation until he reached its top-most fork, one hundred and fifty feet above the ground. There he paused a little, taking his breath, and probably finding some delicacies to eat, or perhaps glancing, with complete uninterest, at the strange two-legged creatures who dotted the ground so far beneath him.

Then, as though he just remembered he had to go for something, he hoptrotted along the branch and stepped unconcernedly into space, seeming to nod an unutterably blasé 'so long' over his shoulder to a friend in the next tree. Then he spread out his feet and, like a triangular kite, volplaned for a hundred yards in a long switch-back swoop across the camp, to the base of another tree. He alit lightly on it in an upward-ending curve, and soon began climbing to the top again to repeat the spectacle.

Until nearly the end of February we had camp-fire shows on five or six nights a week — talks, general knowledge competitions, debates, and on Saturdays a concert. Then the Japs cut it down to only two nights a week — and on the others we sat in our huts or round our own small fires, and talked.

Those nights were fine, and deeply memorable. Bright in the darkness one could see the many patches of firelight scattered over the camp, low down and ranging up the slope, and around them men's faces, or mere outlines — some shining in the firelight and others black silhouettes.

And in contrast to the glowing warmth of our fires, was the cold resplendence of the stars above us. The stars were our inexorable fate — the cold and stern reality. The fires were our pitiable attempt to cheer not only our bodies, but our souls.

Officer Coolies Of A Bamboo Empire

JANUARY—APRIL, 1943

THE New Year, 1943, started badly for us, when the Japs made the officers into working parties, to do work on their military projects such as the railway. It was a subject on which officers naturally had very strong feelings, and it was a source of perpetual friction between us and the Japanese. We constantly fought to uphold the privileges which are universally given to officer prisoners of war, whereas the Japs generally refused even to treat us as officers at all. They grudgingly admitted a few claims, merely because they had orders from Tokyo to do so, and as time went on they whittled these few away.

It would be stupidly hypocritical to pretend that in pressing on the Japs their claims to certain privileges, the officers were only trying to benefit their men. But it is scarcely necessary to attempt such justification, since the privileges we pressed for were those which were ours by right of international law: privileges which, except in some specific instances, were given to British officers as a matter of course by the Germans and Italians, and of course were given by us to all enemy prisoner officers in our hands.

There was one factor, however, which made our circumstances unusual. This was that officers and men were not separated. It was because we were thus herded together, that we were, from the Japs' point of view, both men and officers, merely so many bodies from which working parties could be formed. And similarly it was just because we were confined with the men and were still theoretically in charge of them and responsible for their discipline, that we should, in our view, have had our status recognised, and not have been treated as only of the rank of soldiers. For the more consequence we could make the Japs attach to us, the better treatment could we hope to win from them for the camps as a whole, and the more influence could we exert when necessary on the men's and our own behalf.

The paradox, indeed, went deeper, for though we had on principle to keep fighting the Japs for our privileges, and although our frail humanity somewhere within us may have meanly coveted any small physical relief which these privileges might give us, yet the very withholding of them by the Japs gave many officers another privilege, which we would otherwise have missed.

This was the privilege, unsought and probably at first unappreciated, of working in exactly the same conditions of misery, slavery, and filth, as did our men, enduring what they did in physical hardship and mental oppression. It was an experience which some of us went through and some did not, and the choice was usually beyond the control of the individual. Although we did our manual labour under protest, and did all we could to

escape it, yet, since we could not save our men too from being worked like coolies, we must feel in our hearts some ultimate satisfaction, that our lot was to work and endure equally as they did.

In Kanyu camp a show-down on the question of officers working became certain, because our Battalion was made up of Volunteer units whose Asian troops had been disbanded during the campaign, leaving only the officers, and we thus had over two hundred officers in a party of six hundred persons. As far as Jap headquarters were concerned we were merely so many bodies. They supplied rations for a certain number of people, and they looked for an equal number on the work returns of the camp. Not finding them they created trouble.

The scarcity of workers was aggravated by the large numbers of men who were sick. Lack of nourishment over many weeks was now plainly mirrored in all of us. Malaria, dysentery, and tropical ulcers were widespread, and beri-beri was increasingly common. Resistance to all forms of disease was low. The only way we could get people excused from work was for our Medical Officers to mark them 'sick' on the daily returns. This was satisfactory until the Japs started putting pressure on our Medical Officers and Camp Staff, threatening, and inflicting, various punishments when the working figures did not improve.

Then came our doctors' dilemma. Either they could pick out the more sick from the less sick, and send the latter out to work, though by any civilised standards they should have been in bed; or continue to mark them all 'sick' in defiance of the Japs' demand for more workers, and risk them turning out all the sick to work, including hospital cases — a thing they did on many subsequent occasions.

Inevitably the Japs decided to better the position by making the officers work, and as a preliminary move the Pouter Pigeon one evening summoned the British camp commandant down to his office to complain about the work figures. He was drunk, as usual, and gave a display of sword waving which certainly made a great impression on Col. Marmalade, judging by his hair-raising description of it later, in an address to the officers.

The Jap Adjutant from Tarso also came up on a disciplinary visit, and pressure was put on us in the form of nuisance orders, restrictions, and threats. Unless the working figures of the camp went up, "measure would be taken". The Adjutant suggested that the rations of the sick should be cut by half, because "....the sick were of no value and only consumed rations without doing any work in return. If their rations were cut a good many would die, and this in itself would automatically raise the percentage of working figures for the camp". This argument was nothing out of the ordinary by Japanese standards, but it was a threat to our sick which we could hardly ignore.

Thus, under protest, the officers' working parties came into existence.

* * * * *

In the intervals of this work crisis, the days came and went with their train of minor mile stones. Robby got dysentery. This was not very minor for him, of course, but then so many other people got it too. He was removed to the 'hospital', for such elementary treatment as was within the means of our Medicos to provide.

It must be said that for us the word hospital implied conditions far different from those usually associated with the word. Cleanliness, efficiency, and the confidence inspired by the knowledge that one can relax in the bosom of an all-providing routine, were seldom to be found. A tiny amount of drugs and the barest collection of instruments and appliances existed, and the Japs cut down the hospital staff to the point where they could give scant attention to the individual patient. Our hospitals were mere wooden hovels, like the rest of our huts, but fouler and smellier, since they housed sick men who could not care for themselves. Robby, however, had a sound constitution, and survived his ordeal.

Local Purchase goods began to arrive in the camp in greater quantity and variety. We occasionally got such things as limes, pig-fat, soya sauce, and cigars. Eggs were spasmodic, and usually when a barge-load did arrive they numbered many thousands. On one such occasion we had a nest of a hundred and forty eggs between the three of us. We made up an egg flip for Robby every morning, which was the only extra nourishment his condition allowed. From time to time a few parties of sick were sent down-river to the base camps, and early in February Robby got away on one of these.

About this time I was working in the wood-cutting party. It was a hard job, and it turned out for me an unpleasant one too. The wood we cut was the dead clumps of giant bamboos, which grew to an immense height. There were about thirty or forty bamboos closely set in each clump and they measured as much as one hundred and fifty feet in height. From ground level to about ten or twelve feet up, these bamboos sent out side shoots of long sharp thorns, and thus each clump was encased in a thorny barrier which had to be cut to get at the main stems. To work among these with safety one needed leather gloves and leggings, and as I had neither, my legs and hands were soon covered with little scratches. Within a week they went septic, and I had to report sick.

At first I was classified 'Attend C'. In British Army routine this means excused duty, but in our new regime even the 'C's' were impressed for work. We were ordered to do two hours' work a day, and so we engaged in various arts and crafts (made from bamboo), under the instructions of one of our own officers. The scene of our labours was the trunk of a huge felled jungle tree, and I must admit we were not an overworked party. It was seldom that any Jap came near us, and as long as an occasional basket was born of us they were satisfied.

Most of the work was done by a few energetic enthusiasts, while the rest sat round, it always seemed to me, like the proverbial (and I expect

mythical) women's gossip party; occasionally paring off a slither of bamboo, and accompanying our inconsequential chatter with the unskilful sharpening of knife blades upon lumps of rock.

I didn't remain long with this light-hearted coterie, as my sores got annoyingly worse and my legs a bit puffy, so that I was marked 'Bed down'. (That is, in Army terms, one whose sickness is sufficient to warrant him making his bed down, and laying himself on it, throughout the whole day). These sores were not bad ones, and never went deep. But they were a nuisance, as there were a great many of them, and they got larger and larger. They made walking extremely painful, but hardly worried me at all if I kept my feet off the ground.

So I became the real invalid, and Bill, my respected senior, had to wait on me hand and foot. Luckily for me, and I suppose annoyingly for him, I retained my enormous appetite, and he had to fetch me all the meals that were going, and second helpings of rice if there were any. However, as our fireplace was just beside us I usually managed to continue my daily cooking.

One morning as I was dressing my scratches we had a surprise order that all prisoners were to parade immediately. We did so, and were marched off at once to the Jap office. This wasn't quite such an expeditious movement as it sounds, for there were a great many of us, and we rather trailed along like a disintegrating centipede. Anyhow, we got down there eventually and lined up on the dusty road outside the Jap quarters, wondering what it was all about, and hoping vaguely that the Japs didn't really go in for the mass shooting of their prisoners of war.

Presently Suki came out, accompanied by his staff, and surveyed us with lowering mien, one gloved hand on sword-hilt and the other fingering his pistol case. Then he collected the British Battalion Commanders and went off to our huts.

It was our first search, and while it proceeded we were made to sit down in the sun on the dusty road. Those of us who had such things as compasses, which we had been forbidden to keep, speculated again on whether their discovery would really mean a firing-squad, or if we were being melodramatic. It was sometimes a little hard to tell.

It was after mid-day when we were allowed to go back to our huts, and we found little to worry about. The Japs had opened up a good many kits and strewn the contents about, but they didn't bother to find out the owners of the articles they confiscated. They merely dumped them all in baskets and carried them away. Most of the kits which they bothered to pry into were those which they found to be locked, or tied up, and I found that my pack and haversack were untouched.

During these weeks some of the heavy baggage which we had left at Ban Pong arrived at the camp in dribs and drabs. In the middle of February mine came. The tentage covering, rope, mattress, and sheet, which I had made at Changi, were intact, but my kit-bag, which I had tied in the centre of the bundle, was gone. In its place was a down pillow. This was very nice, but I

would rather have had my kit bag.

All this heavy baggage was finding its way slowly up-river, and had been dumped at Tarso and other camps en route. Not being properly looked after, much of it had been pillaged by, I'm sorry to say, our own people. Knowing this, I resigned myself to the complete loss of my kit bag and its contents. I was wrong. The incredible happened, and in a later consignment of baggage my kit bag turned up, and its contents were intact.

* * * * *

Men are, on the whole, optimistic creatures, and in the most miserable conditions will avoid dwelling on what is most distressing in their lives. We made our interests in the trivialities of our daily routine, and did not, openly at least, admit the increasing cheapness of life. But during these months at Kanyu the sick became steadily more numerous, and so did the neat mounds of earth in the sombrely impressive graveyard over-looking the river. We became accustomed to the sight of human beings who looked little less than skeletons, hollow-faced, grey, and unshaven, lying weakly on the bamboo platforms in the Hospital or shuffling slowly to and from the latrines. Some of these scarecrows were our personal friends.

The graveyard was impressive. That is to say, its situation was so. It was about eighty feet above the river, at the top of an almost sheer bank. On that side the view was open: on the others it was surrounded by the stillness and shadow of huge trees. On the side above the river there was erected a wooden cross, plainly visible to all the craft that passed up and down, and whose silent significance was seen and understood by Japs and Thais alike.

In February the jungle had its wintering period. The trees lost their leaves, and the hills were brown and parched, and at night glowed with lines of bush fires. This was one of the great climatic differences between Thailand and Malaya, for the latter, being so much nearer the equator, has less noticeable seasons and is green and damp all the year round. March brings the showers in Thailand, and as they increase, so more and more leafless trees come into new bud. Then, almost overnight it seems, the whole of the bamboo belt puts out its new shoots, and there comes a day when one looks out to find the hills no longer brown, but a pale gauze-green.

With us also, change was taking place. A large party of sick were evacuated to the base camps early in March, and Bill went with them. He was over fifty-five and medically 'Permanent C', unable to do heavy work. On the evening before he left, we attempted a parting celebration at 'Smoky Joe's', a canteen just started by the Japs, who had put in a sort Jap-Thai to run it.

It was a pretty drab shack, and the chairs, tables and counter were, of course, 'all our own work', and of bamboo; and it was dirty and expensive. But it was a change to go into a place which one could pretend was a sort

of cafe; and after all, it did have that superficial appearance. There were groups of people sitting at, certainly, tables, under lamps, drinking and eating and talking — but it was rather a caricature. Anyhow, we stood each other several coffees (minute glassful at 10 cents a time, or 5 cents without 'milk'), and kidded ourselves we were at the club having stengahs.

Early in March too a large party of officers had been sent at short notice to the new camp up the hill, so that they would be more convenient for work on the railway. Practically all officers who were fit were sent, and only my sores kept me from going. The hill camp was on the plateau, about a mile and a quarter from the river and seven hundred feet above it. It was on the direct route of the railway and road, and as the latter was now in use the hill camp was gaining in importance over the river camp, since lorries and cars could now reach it direct from the base areas.

At the beginning of April two more big parties of the sick men were evacuated, and the remainder of us were ready to move up to the hill camp. My sores were now practically healed. Only one or two remained, and they were quite small. I was taken off the 'Bed-down' list, and became 'C' again.

We moved to the hill camp on April 4th, and my first outing after 6 weeks 'Bed-down' was the ascent of the very steep mile and a quarter road to it, laden like a snail with my household on my back.

Upper Kanyu Camp

APRIL—MAY, 1943

LOWER Kanyu had been slow-moving, and in a way uneventful. Although our food and living conditions had been wretched, although sickness had become wide-spread and life more chancy than usual, yet we did have some leisure, even after the work programme started; and the huts which we built, with our own fireplaces and benches outside, did give us a slight feeling of permanency. Now, from the moment we trudged up the hill to the new camp, we had no rest. We lived from hand to mouth and from day to day.

One of the few small anchors of our precarious life was to have a place of one's own to dump one's belongings. No matter that it measured only a couple of feet in width, one's bed space was, for the moment, one's home, and the base of operations for the daily routine. On it one slept by night and sat to eat one's meals by day. On it one spread one's sleeping roll, and over it hung pack and haversack. And underneath it was one's pantry, scullery and cloakroom.

At the new camp many of us had no such comfort. The huts were full, and the over-flow were given some Jap army tents to sleep in. They were a little smaller than the Indian Army 180 lb. tent, in which six officers' camp beds are rather a crush; but for the first night there were sixteen of us in each tent. Then, as a further party arrived from Lower Kanyu, we had to take in ten more, making a total of twenty-six men. By pulling out the flaps of the tent at each end we got four people outside the actual tent area, and inside we had two rows of eleven. There was little enough room even to lie down at night to sleep. To move about in it with ease was quite impossible.

We spent our first day putting up the tents and making sleeping platforms. This was the sort of job that looked quite hopeless as we gathered round to size it up. The tents lay there, packed in their neat bundles with section-poles, pegs, and ropes. To put them up would not be very difficult. But to fit them with wooden sleeping platforms? We had two or three rather poor axes and some local parangs (long-bladed choppers). And the wood? Our eyes turned automatically from the tent bundles and axes towards the jungle around us. There, blast it, was our wood. We had only to cut it down.

Bamboo was our universal building material. The bed platform would consist of the thickest bamboo poles we could find, laid on the ground the length of the tent, with body-length pieces laid across them. The latter were also made of large bamboo (measuring as much as 6" in diameter), but they had to be split down the sides and opened out flat. To do this is not very easy, because although the bamboo are hollow they are divided at frequent intervals by notches, which have to be broken through. The tents were

UPPER KANYU CAMP

just wide enough to allow a narrow gangway down the middle between the two platforms.

We worked all day on this job and managed to complete it before night.

On our third day at the hill camp all 'Bed-downers' and 'C' were paraded in front of Suki, who had moved to the new camp with us; and he asked each of us in turn what sickness we suffered from. Then he sorted us into those whom he thought fit to work and those who were unfit. The latter were very few. Luckily he was in a good humour, and though he turned out to work many who were unfit for it, he did so without any display of temper or face-slapping.

Indeed, the scene was quite reminiscent of the Mikado passing sentence on the criminals. "Don't be distressed, my dear fellow; I'm not at all annoyed, I assure you. Let me see, now. Just recovering from malaria? Well, kitchen wood fatigue, perhaps; yes. And deep ulcers, not quite healed? Hut building party, I think. Now cheer up, I'm really not a bit angry."

On the day after that the Japs went to the length of dividing the 'Bed-downs' into those who could work and those who could not. There was now only one thing more they could do to make medical categories a complete farce, and that was to institute a party of 'Fit Hospital Cases'. And on at least one later occasion they actually did that.

In the meantime, they put our works programme forward by half an hour. Reveille became 7 a.m., breakfast 7.30, and Roll-call-cum-works-parade 8.30. One has to remember that the Japs had altered the time standard in the countries they occupied. Our 7.30 breakfast was eaten in the dark, lit only by a few bamboo fires, and dawn came just before 8 o'clock.

The job on which I now found myself was that of getting gravel out of the river at Lower Kanyu. There were about forty of us on the party, some fit men and some 'C'. It was not too unpleasant a job, for though the work was hard the two Japanese in charge were fairly reasonable, and didn't indulge in shouting and face-slapping.

About half a dozen people stood in the river scooping up the gravel — a task I avoided because of my barely healed legs — and the remainder of us formed a long chain, up which the gravel, in flat baskets, was passed from hand to hand to the roadway.

From the time we got up in the morning until the time we got back to camp was about ten hours, and after we had washed, and eaten our supper, the hours of daylight were over. Thus the only spare time we had in which to read, write or do such domestic chores as sewing and darning, was our luncheon break. While working on this gravel party one could be reasonably sure of a quiet undisturbed period of just over an hour, and I made use of it to write up my diary, which I brought out in my haversack along with my lunch.

After a week on the gravel work I had a succession of varied jobs. Soon afterwards my last ulcer healed up and I became officially fit again, and went out on a job (with the 'A' men) which was considerably less tiring than most

of those I did while 'C'. This job was out on the railway trace, felling the large trees which remained after all the undergrowth had been cleared. The only snag about it was that it lay two-and-a-half-miles from the camp, and the long walk back after work was a nuisance.

The stretch of line on which we worked was rather spectacular. It was on the side of a very steep hill where the slope was nearly one in one, and it overlooked a wide valley where the river flowed. The ground was strewn with rocks, which, I confided to my diary, would take a lot of work levelling. Later on, I was personally able to prove this prophecy correct.

We had the usual tree-felling tools; — crosscut saws, axes, wedges and rope; but, like all the Jap implements, they were not very good ones. Still, providing one was reasonably fit, it was not too bad a job. The Jap in charge was called the Gorilla, from his appearance, and was indeed quite an amiable ape. As long as there was a modicum of activity apparent he made little fuss, but sat on a rock reading a bit of newspaper. Sometimes, when he collected a bunch of us to haul a tree trunk out of the way, he did most of the pulling himself, while the rest of us leaned on the rope and energetically shouted, "One, two, three — heave!"

At lunch time one could find, without much trouble, a convenient flat rock beneath the shade of a tree, and look around at a scene whose deep beauty pointed the contrast of our lives. Around and below us sloped the hill, rocky but fertile, whose surface lavished forth grey rocks and green trees. Beyond lay the wide valley, where the river was hidden by the thick forest. From it rose green-grey hills, and behind them, to the horizon, stretched line upon line of rough-grained mountains. Against their blue, a laburnum on our hill-side hung its blossoms of fragile yellow.

We left this job, and spent a day, my diary records:-

"preparing a site for an air-compressor for the drilling gang, and clearly a track to it from the road. The same gang and the same Jap. The work was easy, but the weather made it a very bad day. We have showers most evenings now, and the road is always sticky, and usually in many places a quagmire. Walking 2½ miles along it is tiring. This morning was misty, and half way through lunch it rained. We all got soaked through. Then, the mucky walk back to our very crowded, smelly, damp and muddy tent. Supper was late on account of the rain (our cookhouse was in the open); but we did not know when it would come up, so sat around miserably, waiting for it. Fire was out and wood all damp. Then on the evening roll call parade a party for Lower Kanyu for Local Purchase Stores, was called. I was one. The hill was as slippery as hell, and it rained again while we were out (and it was pitch dark, or course). It was still raining again when we got back, and for once I postponed bathing until the morning.

"Today we are on the same job again. Up to now, lunchtime, it has kept dry, and I have spread out my shoes, socks etc., (I forget now

UPPER KANYU CAMP

what this "etc" means) to dry, till we start work again. The work is again easy, and much cooler than the tree-felling among the scorching rocks. Also, surprisingly, there are more of us than seem necessary for the job, and the Jap in charge is very complacent. Long may it last."

It was while we were coming back to camp from this job one day that we met groups of Malays, Tamils and Chinese on the road, and we had the chance to speak to some of them. They told us there were thousands of them coming from various parts of Malaya, chiefly Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Ipoh. They were already disillusioned with the Japs, who had told them they were going to work in North Malaya or in Thailand, but were now sending them to Burma. Moreover they had to go on foot all the way from the railway at Ban Pong. They told us that food and clothing were scarce and dear in Malaya, and work almost impossible to get. That was why most of them had agreed to leave their homes, as they were now to get \$1 a day over and above their food and lodging.

On the evening of Easter Sunday the Japs had a movie show, and we were all allowed to watch. It included their propaganda film of the taking of Malaya, which was not without its points of interest. Naturally they made great play of the strength of our fortress of Singapore, and there were impressive shots of sandbagged trenches, barbed wire entanglements, and big guns. There was also a close-up of some of our generals, pointing to positions on the map, and looking invincibly towards the horizon.

An interesting reminder of the successful Jap tactics was the picture of a large map of Malaya, with moving arrows to show the Jap attacks. Where these met opposition the fact was indicated by a burst of sparks. One saw an arrow advancing down the land, and then coming to a halt. Sparks showed it had met our forces. Then another arrow was seen making a detour via the sea, and coming in on the rear of our position. More sparks were shown, and then a sort of explosion, and afterwards the Jap arrow advanced again down the Peninsula. That was one piece of propaganda that didn't require to depart from the truth.

* * * * *

At the beginning of May a Jap Colonel made his headquarters at our camp. This seemed to be the same officer who had originally inspected us when we arrived off the train at Ban Pong; and I believe he was also the 'Jap General' who was so continually on our horizon. We fondly hoped that his presence would mean improved conditions for us, but he turned out to be an adept at giving fair words to our complaints and a blind eye to our conditions.

His presence, did, however, start a new regime. For the Jap guards there was now a daily drill parade; and for us a highly re-organised roll-call, which took well over an hour on two successive evenings. The Japs also

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

reduced the numbers of our cookhouse staff and of our camp administration.

We also at this time were given one of our very rare issue of clothing from the Japs. Most of it consisted of green tunics taken from the Dutch Army, and there were also some rubber boots, which were Jap Army stores, and were known as 'Speedo' boots. 'Speedo' was invariably used by the Japs to mean "hurry up" and the "Railway Speedo" was the period when we were driven hard on the railway work. The only thing one did quickly in speedo boots was to slip up and sit down in the mud.

On May the 9th, too, we each got a postcard to send home. We had one before, at Changi. This one bore the following legends:—

I am interned in . . .
My health is excellent . . .
I am in hospital . . .
I am working for pay . . .
I am not working . . .
Please see that . . . is taken care.
My love to you.

Our place of internment was designated No. 4 P.O.W. Camp, Thailand. All Prisoners of War in Thailand had been divided into six groups of which ours was No. 4. There was, of course, no special No. 4 P.O.W. Camp yet, as we were strung out in dozens of small camps up and down the river.

A note in my diary says that on Sunday evening May 9th a party of fifty officers "got orders to pack and be ready to move on Monday morning. We had no transport, so took just as much as we could carry. Fortunately, not far to go. A sub-camp two miles up the road, for convenience for work".

In this casual way I unknowingly recorded our move to a camp on which our lives reached the lowest ebb in all our years of imprisonment.

Kanyu 3 Camp

MAY, 1943

AS on all my travels in Thailand, I was well laden when I went to Kanyu 3, my chief encumbrance being the large bundle made up of my mattress and the piece of tentage, inside which were rolled such oddments of kit as overflowed from my pack and two haversacks. But, since these camp-to-camp moves only occurred at intervals of several months, I thought that the trouble of carrying a heavy load was well justified by the additional comfort I enjoyed in my new quarters.

Our first task on arrival at the camp was to put up our tents, and to make new bamboo sleeping platforms for them. As we had three tents for the fifty of us, we were at least much better off for space than we had been at K 1.

We found that this camp contained about 600 P.O.W.'s, mostly Australians, and our party was the only one of working officers.

One small stream formed our water supply, so tiny that it had to be dammed up to make a washing place and a reservoir for the use of the kitchen. The flow was so small that the water was practically stagnant, and as it was used to wash six hundred sweaty bodies every day, it was rather of the consistency and colour of gravy. The stench, too, was almost palpable. Fortunately no-one minded us going outside the rickety bamboo fence that separated one side of the camp from the road; so we could bath from a tin of clean water drawn from the stream above the camp.

Our first railway job at this camp was on the stretch of line where we had worked before — the steep rocky hillside overlooking the valley, near where we had been felling trees.

So as to get a level track along the slope we had to cut a terrace in the rocky hillside, and build up the outside edge with some of the surplus rocks. Our party's job was to remove the rocks after they had been dynamited by the drillers. The debris of the blasting ranged from rocks measuring five feet across, down to small pebbles. For the big ones we used crowbars, four or five of us combining to shift one rock. Others, about two and a half feet across, we moved by rolling, laboriously heaving up one corner and pushing it forward until it over-balanced.

When we got them to the edge of the track we either built them into the edging parapet or, if they were more than were needed, sent them over the edge and hurtling down the slope. It was a tremendous satisfaction to heave a huge rock over the side, and watch it bouncing down the hill and through the undergrowth. Sometimes we heard them still crashing down long after they were lost to sight.

To get through a set job quickly we used the chain system. We used

it for clearing the intermediate stones and boulders, from the size of a coconut, say, up to just what a man could lift. We stood in a line, a couple of feet between us, and chained the stones from one to the other. We had some difficulty at first in persuading the Japs to allow us to do this, but in the end it became as popular with them as its favourite trick with a monkey.

Our 'No. 1,' which is to say, the Officer in charge of our party, was Prester-Culip, a Regular Army Gunner Officer. He was one of those quiet individuals with a devastating show of indifference to everybody and everything — but especially to the Japanese. He made absolutely no effort to disguise his contempt for them. He stared at them coldly while they gave their orders, and was completely and obviously unimpressed by their ranting, merely passing on to us in a bored voice the essential orders.

This attitude did not make him popular with the Japs, who, like all people conscious of being thought inferior, were over-ready to take offence. However, no-one had less wish than Prester to be the Jap's favourite. If the price of his aloofness was a few extra knocks, well, that was as it had to be.

In spite of his unavoidable antagonising of the Japs, Prester was still an excellent No. 1 for us to have. If a Jap started beating up any of us on the job, Prester invariably interposed and argued the point with him; and as invariably drew the beating upon himself. This was as high-principled an interpretation of his duties and responsibilities as was possible. Prester represented all that was best in the much and unjustly abused British regular officer. He would, I fear, blush with embarrassment if ever he were to read this small but well-deserved eulogy of himself.

The Jap in charge of us was an excrescence whom we called 'Little Arthur', or, more understandably, 'Toothy', from an obvious dental extravagance. He stormed and shouted at us almost the whole time, working himself into a fine frenzy. He frequently slapped Prester in the face, and beat him and others over the head with a piece of bamboo.

This little squirt had acquired some scraps of school knowledge, and could speak a kind of English. In the midst of his tirades he used to shout out to us that the English in India spent their time hunting the Indians in motor cars, and shooting them down with rifles; and that the Americans had lined up their sick Jap Prisoners of War and driven tanks over them.

It is not easy to make a fair judgement of a creature like this. He had had the beginnings of school-teaching, and had got to the stage where he could read, write, do sums, and speak a little English. In fact he was approaching the stage where one might have begun to educate him. From his own tiny world of set ideas and inherited custom he was suddenly thrust into contact with a modern war, and then with a Western race, of whose way of life, and of whose outlook, he could not begin to have the least conception. Those stories of British and American barbarity were part of the propaganda which their Government pumped into the unsophisticated Jap masses, many of whom were probably sufficiently ignorant of the world to believe them.

If Toothy did believe these stories, his behaviour to us, a group of

KANYU 3 CAMP

fiendish western devils whom a just fate had delivered into his hands, was quite understandable. In fact his attitude mellowed considerably afterwards, for I met him some time later when I was temporarily 'C' again after a bout of fever, and was in charge of a party of 'C' men working near the camp. It was raining hard and the men were not fit for much work, but there was a Jap Warrant Officer about, and until he had seen the work Toothy could not let us go. He went as far as to explain this to me, and as soon as the Warrant Officer had finished his inspection, he sent us back to our tents. Still, when we first met him Little Arthur was a little bastard.

After about a week with Toothy we were sent to a new job, where the rocky stretch we were working on turned the corner of the hill. Just beyond the corner a little knoll stood out from the main slope, to which it was joined by a small saddle of land. Through this saddle the line was to pass, and in doing so required a cutting sixteen metres deep. That is quite a deep cutting, about the height of a house. Where the line went round the curve, the hill was so steep that it had to be sloped back to a height of about two hundred feet above the track. The whole scheme was an ambitious one, which aroused the Japs to a furore of energy.

It was the show-piece of this part of the line, and was frequently visited by senior Jap Officers. As a result, all the Japs working there were at a high pitch of endeavour the whole time, and I imagine were, in any case, specially selected for their toughness and drive. Needless to say, "drive" was the appropriate word, and they drove us prisoners ceaselessly from morning till night. The number of prisoners working there was very large — some using drills and hammers for dynamiting, and others starting the cutting with picks and shovels from the far end, where it consisted of earth and gravel.

This was one of the few places on the line where mechanical devices were used. They consisted of a light trolley on rails for taking away earth and stones, and four pneumatic drills. The noise of these drills was in itself enough to work the Japs into an explosive state of excitement, for noise always seemed to intoxicate them. Borrowing from a more renowned locality in North Africa, we soon knew this spot as Hell Fire Corner.

We had thought "Little Arthur" was a "Little Bastard", but we soon found that he was mildness itself compared with our new taskmaster, who was a superlative example of that sadistic trait in the human character, and which was particularly common in the Japanese army at that time. His name was Ishi Nooi, though he was better known as Four Eyes, because of his spectacles, and he was said to have been reduced for a breach of discipline from Warrant Officer to his present rank of Corporal. That in itself would be enough to make him bitter against all the world, and he worked off his spleen on his inferiors in rank.

And then to find himself in charge of over thirty officers — that indeed was heaven. Thirty-five officers of the British Army, on whom to work his will. That was bliss. Thirty-five British Officers, to be the slaves of Ishi

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

Nooi, corporal of the I.J.A.; waiting to do his every bidding, and do it quickly. He nearly burst with delighted, malicious energy, and leapt from rock to rock like a spring-heeled chamois.

Throughout the whole day he seldom ceased shouting at us, either en masse or individually. He hit everybody within reach with a strong bamboo stick and threw rocks at those beyond its radius. He cut down our rest periods to ten minutes when the other gangs had half an hour, and during their two hour lunch-intervals, gave us barely an hour.

His terrific energy was a startling contrast to our almost complete lack of it. We trudged slowly from place to place, and moved slowly at our work. But we had to keep on working, or moving as though we were working, the whole time, for if we paused only for a second to wipe the sweat out of our eyes, and Ishi Nooi was nearby, it meant a bash over the head from his bamboo stick. With him any excuse was enough for a beating up. If there were no reason he would make one.

With an unpleasant sinking feeling one would hear his increasing outburst of shouting and find, sure enough, that it was directed at oneself. Up he would stride still shouting; and then whatever one did was wrong. If one started to work harder one was wrong for not standing still and listening to what he had to say. If one stopped and looked at him to try and understand what he wanted, one's mere glance, unless subservient, was a spark to his over-sensitive inferiority. One was being insolent and defiant. Either way, the result was a bashing.

He made us work in two rows on the slope, in spite of Prester's remonstrances. The huge rocks rolled down by the top row often passed within inches of the people below, and it was by the merest chance that no-one was killed by them.

As for Prester-Culip, he was stormed at, beaten, and punched in the stomach. "You no officer, You soldier", Ishi Nooi shouted over and over again, and made Prester work with the others. But as soon as he wanted anything done, such as to have the numbers of the tools checked, or to pass on an instruction to us, it was "Captain, Captain", Captain do this, and Captain do that,

Ishi Nooi thought that the official work programme was much too good for us. Our fifteen minute breaks were cut to five minutes only. He gave us only one hour for lunch, and in that time we had to walk to the camp and back again for our tea and stew, since he had forbidden us our two tea-men who normally fetched the lunch out. In the evening he kept us working for half an hour after all the others had gone.

It may be wondered how a mere corporal could treat us so, and even disregard the hours of work laid down by his superiors. In that respect the Japanese Army is very different from ours; for when once a man, even if only a private, is put in sole charge of a particular job, he is a little king, and within a very broad limit his superiors encourage him to be so. In any case the Japs were determined that this railway should go through, and

KANYU 3 CAMP

quickly; and toughness in dealing with the prisoners working on it was never discouraged.

We were with Ishi Nooi for barely a week, but at the time those days seemed really interminable. On the last day, when we were coming up the path to have our lunch, Ishi Nooi waited at the top to meet us. He must have known, though we did not, that this was our last day with him; and he made us a parting gift. As each of us reached him he made us stand still, while he gave us two clouts on the side of the face, one with each hand, as hard as he could swing.

It was surprising how well we stood this continual manual labour, for hours at a stretch, in a tropical climate. For a good many years it had been the fashion to think that the European in the tropics was in danger of sun-stroke and collapse if he engaged in strenuous physical work out of doors, especially in the heat of the afternoon. I am afraid we had too soon forgotten that up to a little more than a hundred years ago many of our fellow countrymen had slaved just thus in tropical countries for trifling offences, and had endured such slavery not for months or years only, but for a lifetime. It was at least of some advantage to us that we could now readjust our sense of values.

We found that the next day was to be a holiday. It was our first break for two weeks and it seemed like a reprieve for us, because we had begun to feel that our days of endless labouring would go on and on without stop.

"The Gloomy Days"

MAY—JUNE, 1943

OUR working strength fell steadily day by day. From an original fifty it was now only thirty-two, and it went on falling. One of our party had died — an elderly man whose exhausted and undernourishment body had succumbed to an attack of illness. Others developed ulcers which prevented them from walking, and some suffered from dysentery and malaria. A few did anything to get off work and remain safely hidden in camp, and became adept at spinning a yarn to the M.O. in order to be marked sick.

We consisted almost equally of W and J Battalions. J were mostly Malayan Volunteers, with a few officers from regular army units. Many of W Battalion were regular Gunners, with a few Air Force, Marines and Royal Navy.

Prester was W Battalion, and his stalwart supporter was Joliffe de Hulton, a man of the most unshakable calmness of mind in all possible conditions — and courteous, philosophical, tactful, and gently cheerful. He was, come sun come rain, Reliability Personified.

Jolli had a good wrist watch, which was the envy of all Japs who saw it. He did anything but flaunt it in their faces, but unfortunately one of them happened to see it, and for days on end badgered Jolli to sell it to him. Jolli cheerfully but firmly refused. As a result he was singled out for all the petty annoyances that the Jap could find, and they were many.

If there was a heavy box of dynamite to be carried out to the work, Jolli was given it. If there were anything to take back to the engineers' huts after work, which would keep someone out longer, that someone would be Jolli. These things on top of long hours of daily drudgery might well have been the last straw for many a man; but whatever were the hidden reserves of Jolli's spirit, he drew upon them successfully, and never for a moment wavered.

On one side of me in our tent my neighbour was Hurricane Hutch, whom I had met at Changi when the Party was getting ready to leave. Hutch and I had many common interests, but as for working together, we were a bad pair. Hutch's incessant energy could never let him rest, even when working for the Japs. To have 'gone slow' on his work would have been a torture to him, in fact I think an impossibility.

My outlook was quite different. In my garden at Changi I worked hard, and got great satisfaction from it, but on these Jap-ordered works I would not let myself be interested. There were times, of course, when one did work hard, as for instance, if one were cold in the morning and wanted to get warmed up; or if one had been set a particular task and knew that only as soon as one finished it would one get away; or finally, if one happen-

"THE GLOOMY DAYS"

ed to be directly under the eye of a Jap, and one just had to work hard. But on all other occasions I tried to cultivate a purely mechanical action, doing the least amount of work that would pass muster.

Naturally, a certain amount of work was essential, and if everybody in a gang did nothing when the Jap's back was turned it was just asking for trouble; and the trouble usually came to one's officer in charge. It was therefore a question of finding the middle way.

My neighbour on the other side was Dormouse. He wasn't actually called that, but I often thought that he closely resembled that comfortably oblivious creature. I saw him first on the journey up to Thailand from Singapore. He was one of the thirty-one in my goods truck, and, as far as I can remember, he lay sleeping in the middle of the floor for the whole journey, regardless of being pushed, kicked, and sat upon. A person less capable of keeping himself tidy never existed, and as he always seemed just two days unshaven, this and his unbrushable hair made him Dormouse in appearance as well as in habit.

I got to know him at Upper Kariyu, when I discovered by chance that he shared my interest in the problem of escape. Dormouse was an engineer, of, I think, a professorial as well as practical kind, and the key to his apparently complete oblivion to himself and his surroundings was his faculty of mental abstraction. Sleeping or waking, I'm sure Dormouse spent nine tenths of his life in an interesting and comfortable dream.

My lasting picture of him at work on the railway is one of intense inactivity. He stands there, in boots, shorts, and a felt hat worn porkpie fashion; one hand on hip, and the other purposefully grasping pick-helve, shovel, or crowbar.

How he got away with it I never could tell. Perhaps it was that he always gave the impression of being on the point of using that pick, shovel, or crowbar. Perhaps, from the puzzled frown with which he fixed a rock or pile of stones beside him, or the occasional slight interrogating tilt of the head towards them, he seemed to be bending all his brain to the problem of their imminent removal. Whether intentional or merely constitutional, his technique was an enormous success.

* * * * *

Towards the end of May came the start of the southwest monsoon, which is Thailand's wet season. In the plains this means daily showers, and sometimes whole days of rain; but in the hills, where we were, it means continual rain without stopping for two or three weeks on end; and thereafter, rain in varying degree every day, with some brief intervals of sunshine. The monsoon was upon us now, and our holiday the day after leaving Hell Fire Corner was a wet one. We spent it digging a new latrine.

The following day we started thankfully on a new job under different Japs, who were remarkably reasonable, and did not drive us hard as long as

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

we did a fair amount of work. The site was about five hundred yards up the line from Hell Fire Corner, which we could look at with feelings of relief across a bay in the hill contours which lay between us.

This new piece of line was almost as spectacular as that we had left. The hill-side was precipitous, and broken up with crags and crevices. There was a drill and hammer gang of Australians beside us doing the blasting, and we cleared away the debris with crowbars, shovels, or our hands.

* * * * *

Life never seemed so wet and grey as now. It rained without stopping, sometimes hard and sometimes like a heavy mist. We never saw the sun, and the sky was dark and close around us. The camp became an expanse of mud and water. The spaces between the tents were six inches deep in mud, and the path to the latrines was even worse. It was impossible for sick people to get to the lats in less than about ten minutes, especially at night, when they had to plod through the swamp, step by step, and try to avoid falling into the pools of mud. Dysentery patients, particularly, just could not get to the lats in time, and so each night they added their own contribution to the camp's filth.

Every morning at reveille it rained. In the darkness we put on our rags of clothes, still wet from the previous day, and sloshed through the mud to collect our breakfast of rice porridge and tea. We ate it sitting on the edge of the sleeping platform under the raised tent flap, half in and half out of the rain.

Then we collected our pint of rice and cubes of dried fish for lunch, and, with our capes or groundsheets around us, went out to the parade ground. By now it was just about light. Prester had to check us (Dormouse always kept him waiting), and, when the Jap came round, called us to attention, saluted, and gave our numbers. This was the ordered routine, and it had to be done in Japanese. Prester's superbly English pronunciation of the Japanese can be imagined.

While we waited for the Japanese Engineer to take us over, Prester detailed our two tea-men, one from W Battalion and one from J. We did this job in turn, and it was a welcome break from the work routine. We had subscribed a few cents a piece, and had managed to buy a packet of tea-dust. This made a not unpleasant beverage, especially when compared with the 'coffee' made of roasted rice-grains, which was the best the cookhouse could provide in the absence of a tea issue from the Japs.

On our way to work we usually called at the engineers' huts to collect tools, and poor Jolli, of course, got his box of dynamite. Then on we trudged, through the mud and under the dripping trees. Occasionally we passed Thai elephant drivers, whose beasts were dragging immense hewn timbers down to the railway line for making bridges.

The path went up and down hill, across two streams on felled tree-

trunks, and eventually down some stepping stones through the mud to a bamboo hut we had built at the top of the cliff. Here we hung up our capes and haversacks, and waited in shelter for the call to start work. The dynamite, of course, had to be taken down the steps to the Jap hut — so that Jolli had no time for a rest.

Presently the Japanese shouted to us, and we trooped out and down the steps, picking up crowbars, picks and shovels, as directed, while passing the Japs' hut. Then down again, and across rocks and crevices to where our work was to be.

As there was rain or mist the whole time, it was always cold to begin with. In this rainy weather we usually took off our shirts, in spite of the chill, to try and keep them dry for the night-time, and so a little exertion at the start of the day did not come amiss. In some of our work, too, it was impossible not to take a slight interest, such as when levering rocks down a slope. There was a primitive thrill, which one could not help feeling, in starting an avalanche of rocks moving down a hill, or in working on a single rock with a lever until it overbalanced and went crashing down.

But when one has to do this for eight and a half hours a day, for days on end — and in the rain — interest will flag. And of course our jobs were often more prosaic, shovelling gravel or moving small stones by hand. It was a question of filling in time, plodding on mechanically until the end of the day.

All our movements were slow and deliberate and without buoyancy. We never ran, or made sudden movements from place to place, except Hurricane Hutch, of course. Whether it was tramping through the mud to work, or climbing down the steps from our hut to the track, or balancing gingerly over the rocks down on the line, we seemed to do everything heavily.

The tea-men's job was to collect sticks and make a fire at one end of our shack, where they boiled the liquid refreshment for lunch and for the two short breaks. For the latter they brought the tea down to us, as it would take us too long to climb arduously up to the hut and down again. The signal for the break was the Jap shouting to Prester, "Oi! Yas 'me. Yas 'me", which Prester would magnificently pass on to us as, "Rest, Officers"; where upon we would get our mug of tea and sit on the damp rocks to drink it. The smokers got out their tins of papers and 'Sikh's beard', and rolled themselves a cigarette — or cadged a roll from their neighbours.

When the work was at last finished, at about 7.15 p.m., we filed slowly up the steps again, dumped our tools at the Jap hut in passing, and collected our capes and haversacks at the top. Sometimes we had to take tools for repair back to the engineers' huts. We arrived back at the camp at about 8 o'clock. Then we had to find a bucket of clean water, have a wash, and get our suppers. Next, if we had an egg or some whitebait, this was our only time for cooking it ready for the next day's lunch; and the attempt to get a fire going in the constant drizzle was prolonged and sometimes unsuccessful.

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

After evening roll-call parade it soon became dark, and, after a last visit to the lats to ensure, if possible, that we should not have to traverse that via dolorosa during the darkness, we crawled under our tents. Even those wretched tents were not the haven they should have been, for they leaked dismally upon us. The best we could do was to arrange ourselves so that the drips came on our feet instead of on our heads.

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Meanwhile, sickness in our camp was steadily increasing. The direct causes were chiefly malaria and dysentery, but behind these were malnutrition and exhaustion. Moreover, as men became sicker they could eat less, and the less they ate the weaker and sicker they became. That was always the trouble. If one could keep fairly fit and go on eating all one was able to, even though it was only pig-food, one could struggle on. But once brought low through sickness, it was hard to recover, for our food was not a diet for invalids.

Occasionally, some of the worst sick men from ours and the other sub-camps were sent back to the main Kanyu camp, which consequently became a centre for the very sick and had a rapidly rising death rate. In the month of June, alone, there were over one hundred deaths at this comparatively small camp. If any deaths were culpable these certainly were, for the Japs had at this time neglected to supply us with even the commonest medical necessities. As we heard of the appalling death roll at Kanyu main camp we thought that perhaps our life at Kanyu 3, even with Hell Fire Corner, was the lesser evil.

I have mentioned before the terrible decisions with which our doctors we often faced. When the number of sick men became very large, the Japs took ruthless steps to reduce them. Usually they laid down a particular figure for the camp, above which no other sick were allowed. If the M.O., in spite of this, marked a greater number sick, since they were sick, the Japs threatened to, and actually did, turn out 'bed-downs' and even Hospital cases to make up the numbers.

The only way to prevent this was for the Medical Officer himself to decide which of the sick men could be sent to work with least danger to their lives. It was a question of either our own doctor making this decision, or of the Japs doing so. Since the Japs were quite indiscriminating in turning out the sick to work, it can hardly be doubted that for our own M.O. to do so was the lesser of two evils. Yet inevitably too, this meant that on the face of it, men unfit for work were being sent out to do it, and perhaps subsequently to their deaths, by their own Medical Officer.

I have heard a Medical Officer, in deliberate and cold ferocity, labelled a murderer for this, by his own men. Such a judgement was inevitable, but it was superficial. The alternative which would have followed the M.O.'s refusal to send men out, was the indiscriminate working of Hospital patients, whose deaths would have been many times more numerous.

We had only one Medical Officer in K 3, and one Medical Sergeant,

"THE GLOOMY DAYS"

to whom, inevitably, much of a doctor's work was delegated. It was not only the non-working sick they had to attend to, but the workers also, who came to have dressings for cuts and bruises, and for all sorts of minor treatments. As the workers did not arrive back in the evening until eight o'clock, or later, and had then to bath, have their food, and attend roll call, it was not until about nine that their sick parades could begin. Since more and more people went sick, and the M.O. was a painstaking man, who tried to make up for lack of medicines and equipment by thoroughness and attention to each individual, these medical parades frequently lasted through the night until the early hours of the morning.

But when I considered our ceaseless labour and our wretched food, I thought again and again how adaptable the human body is. None of us had ever been used to conditions such as these, and yet so many of us survived them. It was amazing, not that so many of us became sick, and died, but that so many did not become sick, and managed to continue living and working.

To complete the picture of Kanyu 3 it should be added that the men were in several respects worse off than the officers. Their food, accommodation, and conditions of work were exactly the same as ours, but they had at least two disadvantages. First, they had less money than we, and although there were now very few local Purchase Goods available, even for those with money, yet there were some, and even little things made a lot of difference.

Secondly, they were not so well provided with kit as we were. Generally speaking, officers started off with more kit than the men; and the latter, having less money to spend, often sold what kit they possessed in order to buy food and tobacco. The officers had just enough extra money to avoid this necessity. Thus it was that many men were now going about barefooted in the rain and the mud, and the fouled latrines; and often they had neither hat, shirt, nor shorts, but only a wisp of cloth held up by a string tied round their waists.

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After the first few weeks of the monsoon, the weather improved slightly. The clouds occasionally lifted, and there were short intervals of sunshine. Sometimes in such an interval the dense curtain of approaching rain could be seen moving down the valley below us, until it eventually crept up the hill to where we worked.

For some weeks now there had been many people passing up the road. First, there were parties of Jap troops. To me it was thrilling to see them, for I could not agree with the sentiments of some of my companions who were depressed that the Japs should be reinforcing the Burma front — the one war-front in the world in which we had most hope. To me, reinforcements meant the necessity for reinforcements. It meant movement. It meant that things were happening in Burma and I had sufficient confidence to interpret

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

'movement' as being 'favourable movement' — if not immediately then at least very soon.

The possibility of escape, and the realisation of its present impossibility, was constantly in my mind at this period. The reasons which made it virtually an impossible feat, I have already described. Yet to continue planning for a potential escape gave one an object to strive for apart from one's drudgery, an object one degree more tangible than the distant prospect of eventual release at the end of the war. There was also the hope of relief by Allied forces, either from a rapid movement of the Burma front or even from an attack by sea somewhere in our vicinity. If such a thing occurred, it might be possible to escape to our forces. There was certainly no harm in making what preparations one could to meet such a contingency.

While plodding wearily to work, and while mechanically performing the work itself, shovelling, picking or chaining stones, my thoughts often took me miles away on a journey through the jungle. I visualised the nightly making of a rough bivouac, the lighting of a fire, the collecting and boiling of water. I imagined myself progressing perhaps only a few miles each day along unfrequented tracks, wondered how I could avoid meeting people round the bend in the road; thought how I might come across some isolated dwelling and watch it carefully from concealment during the day, and perhaps approach it by night, and steal or buy a fresh supply of food.

And I need hardly say that my flights of fancy sometimes took me beyond the jungle; and I saw myself finding a boat, collecting water or coconuts, setting the sail which I had so determinedly made at Changi, and finally being spotted by one of our 'planes or ships and carried at last to triumphant freedom.

Meanwhile, I made the only concrete provisions in my power towards this longed-for conclusion, by collecting the essential articles of an escape kit.

So, when I saw the Jap soldiers squelching by, driving their bullock-limbers, or themselves heaving on the traces when the wheels had sunk up to the axles, I felt myself pervaded by a thrill of exciting possibilities.

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Also moving up the road were many new parties of prisoners of war. The great drive to get the railway through was now on, and two parties of 6,000 each had been sent up from Changi as reinforcements. These were the ill-fated 'H' and 'F' forces, who in their six or seven months in Thailand, lost about one half of their number, 6,000 men, through death. Though working in Thailand they were still attached to the 'Malaya Command', and none of the Japs in Thailand would take the least trouble to see that they got sufficient food and medical attention.

Finally came the Asians, mostly Tamils, but also some Chinese and Malays. They passed by in a seemingly endless stream, and presently a camp of them was formed just beside us. Two gangs of them came out and worked

"THE GLOOMY DAYS"

beside us on the rocks. I spoke to several of them, and found them understandably disillusioned with the promoters of the 'Co-prosperity Sphere of Greater East Asia': their fellow-Asians, their over-lords, their taskmasters — the Japs.

Most of these Tamils were the labour forces from Malayan rubber estates, and many had been press-ganged for the work on this railway by threats and promises. There was no work for them in Malaya, and they had little alternative but to accept the Japs' conditions in order to earn a living. They were being paid a dollar and a half a day, over and above their keep; which was more than three times their normal wage in pre-war days. But of course there were practically no goods to be bought with their "banana" money, and what foods there were cost much more than three times their normal price.

Our life at Kanyu 3 dragged on endlessly, and it seemed to us that little worse could befall us. But how wrong we were. We had not yet reached the bottom of the trough.

“ . . . As It Were A Shadow ”

JUNE, 1943

IN the midst of our stark life of endurance there now came upon us a new and vastly more horrifying threat. All the beatings and insults, the weariness, discomforts and hunger, were insignificant compared with this, which was just coldly terrifying. There was nothing, during all those years, which confronted us so suddenly with the prospect of death as did those first rumours of the outbreak of cholera in the camps.

In our minds we thought of cholera in the same terms as the Plague or the Black Death of medieval times, pestilences which had no cure and which decimated whole populations. These diseases bring with them a feeling of inescapable doom, and now that this epidemic of cholera was coming upon us how could any one of us hope to be singled out among thousands to survive it? I for one, when I heard of the outbreak, felt in my heart, and understood for the first time, “the icy clutch of death”.

Nevertheless, we in Kanyu 3 suffered less from the cholera itself than from the suspense of waiting for it to strike us. It started in other camps, and its long shadow fell blightingly over those in its certain path.

The Japs now ordered wholesale anti-cholera inoculations, for which they had apparently laid in a large stock of serum. They knew that if they allowed their cheap labour to be wiped out, they would not get their railway through; and they were in any case always panic-stricken in the face of contagious disease. Instead of far-sightedly ensuring our health by giving us good living conditions and sufficient food, they housed, worked, and fed us like beasts, and then tried to save our precious carcasses by last-minute and little-availing exertions.

Most of the injections were far too late, since, to be really effective, they should be given over a period of several weeks. Perhaps we were lucky in our camp that the outbreaks started elsewhere, for we were able to have two injections before the epidemic hit us.

In Thailand, cholera was then endemic, and the yearly outbreaks occurred soon after the beginning of the rainy season. But, of course, the disease had not usually such an ideal target as the thousands of poor-conditioned and closely-crowded beings who now lay open to its ravages. It is a water-borne germ, and to drink unboiled or unsterilised water, especially from wells and small streams which have less chance of dilution than large lakes or rivers, was to take the greatest risk of catching the disease. The other chief source of infection is uncooked vegetables and fruit, especially when they are overripe and have bruised or broken skins.

With these facts in mind our Medical Officer issued strict orders for the whole of the camp, such as the boiling of drinking water, the cooking

of fruit and vegetables, and the sterilising of our eating utensils in boiling water.

Having put these and a few other sensible precautions into force, there was nothing else we could do. We plodded through our dreary routine of work, and saw the cholera coming daily closer.

When it came to the larger camps of the Asian labourers, it struck them down in their hundreds. In huge communal graves their bodies were piled up, and in the scrub on the outskirts of their camps they lay scattered where they had crawled in agony.

Poor people. Their own ignorance of the importance of hygiene, and their lack of any help and guidance from the Japs, played a large part in spreading the infection, both amongst themselves and us. It was always difficult to make them use proper latrines, and their defecations were entirely hap-hazard. If a cholera-infected faeces came in contact with a stream or other water supply, the infection could too easily pass, by rain-wash or seepage, into the stream itself, and there multiply. Afterwards this infected water might be drawn by others for drinking. At Kanyu 3, the Asian labourers' camp was on the same stream as ours, but further up. The water which our kitchen used, had first flowed through their camp, and there was every likelihood of its being contaminated.

Presently we heard that the contagion had taken hold of the Australian camp just across the road. The number of victims mounted with the dreadful rapidity for which the disease is notorious. Out of their six hundred men, two hundred were soon in the throes of cholera.

They made a 'cholera hospital' just behind their camp, and it happened to embrace a strip of the path which we followed to our work. So, as we passed by next morning we found ourselves in the very midst of the thing we had almost feared even to speak about. So short-handed were the medical staff, and so continuous was the vomiting and defecating of the sick men, that many of the worst of them had to be laid outside on the ground, to prevent the bed-platforms from being incessantly fouled.

To see them lying there, already wasted, twisted and crying with pain, spewing their lives away, and with no hope of succour, created a more intolerable turmoil within us than any mere physical sufferings of our own. It was a turmoil of compassion, and of fear. As we continued on our way, and mechanically performed our work, we had little to say to one another. Our thoughts were too intense to be thrust aside, and too rending to be spoken of.

The Japs, too, were more subdued than usual. Undoubtedly the proximity of cholera scared them greatly; but I think also the sight of it made them treat us a little more like human beings. They made us cut a new loop-path round the cholera compound to the road. But even then we could not escape the daily signs of the pestilence, for where we now met the road we found the smouldering remains of enormous bamboo fires, whose crematory significance was all too obvious.

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

Then one day, when we came back from work, we found ourselves confronted with the thing we had known must happen. There was cholera in our camp. Not only was it in our camp, it was amongst the officers. It was in our own tent.

The victim was Madden. He had been back and forwards to the latrines all morning, and by midday the well known and frightening signs were unmistakable. So quickly does cholera act, that in a few hours the flesh seems to turn to water, and the body becomes wasted as though from weeks of starvation.

In the afternoon of that day Madden was carried to Hospital. On the following morning, at Roll call, we were detailed for his funeral. It was to be by cremation, so we spent the morning digging a fire trench and preparing a large pile of bamboo and hard-wood.

At lunch time we found that two others from our tent had got it, Johnson and Tyler. They were moved to the new cholera compound, about eighty yards from the camp. There were also three or four patients from the mens' tents.

It was now apparent that somehow the infection had become seated in our tent, and the prospect was, that one after another of us would go down with it. Fortunately, if there was one thing the Japs feared it was infectious disease, and especially cholera, and to prevent it spreading they would do almost anything our Medical Officers suggested. The eleven of us who now remained in the tent were allotted an isolation area some hundred yards from the camp. Each of us was to build his own individual bivouac, and these were to be separated from each other by a ten foot interval.

We cleared out of the tent at once. The canvas was taken down, and it and we were sprayed with disinfectant by a Jap done up in goggles, respirator, gloves and rubber boots. The sleeping platform and all the bits and pieces which we had left behind were soaked in oil and burned on the site.

In the afternoon we completed Madden's cremation.

It was a good thing we had no time to brood. It was now mid-afternoon, and before dark we had to provide ourselves with a bed and shelter. The materials at our disposal were, as usual, what grew around us. To start off with we had to cut down the scrub which covered the ground. While some did this, others cut bamboos for the beds, which we made as simply as possible. Three thick pieces of bamboo about two and a half feet wide were laid on the ground as the head, middle and bottom of the bed frame; and long pieces, flattened out, were laid on top of them. These were the standard pieces which we supplied by joint labour. Over them we each built the best shelter we could devise, most of us using our groundsheets. We had also to dig ourselves a latrine.

Tyler did not survive the night. On the following morning we again had the melancholy job of preparing a funeral pyre. Johnson still held on.

At one's first meeting with him out at work, Johnny had seemed a

cantankerous sort of person, always nagging and complaining about something. But as we knew him better we found this was only on the surface. Moreover, it was his protective armour, assumed in order to hide one scarcely knew what, unless it were indifferent health, and a too-much-felt sensitivity to his unpalatable surroundings.

We found that the real Johnny had an unconquerable spirit. However much his body might fail him, his spirit never did. Now, stricken with a deadly sickness, and alone in a small tent in the muddy compound, he remained doggedly cheerful and lightly sarcastic. As one day and then a second passed and Johnny still struggled against the disease, we almost allowed ourselves to hope he might survive.

To justify our existence, and because we were the most suitable people for the job, being already cholera contacts, we were made responsible for supplying firewood to the cholera compound. They had two fires there. One, of huge tree trunk and branches of hard-wood, was used as an incinerator. The other was of quick-burning bamboos, whose flame at night was the only illumination that the orderlies had to work by. These orderlies were Australians, and they undertook their morbid, revolting, and dangerous job, with courage, efficiency, and inspiring cheerfulness.

We cut up the wood and pulled down the bamboos, and stacked them near their respective fires. In doing so, we passed close to the tents, and could see through the mosquito curtain Johnny's figure lying there, and Johnny's face, thin but cheerfully defiant.

A new party of 1,500 prisoners had just made a camp beside us, their job being to put the final touches to our piece of the railway line. With them they had an M.O. who had already dealt with many cholera cases before coming up here. He helped rig up an apparatus for making distilled water for saline injections, and we had high hopes that Johnny might benefit from it. These injections are one of the few positive aids that can be given to cholera patients, and without them recovery is seldom made.

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The saline injections came too late for Johnny; and courage alone was not enough to retain the spark of life. After three and a half days of pitiful brave struggle, his poor body was finished.

Johnny was not cremated, as the Japs now allowed our cholera victim to be buried in deep graves. The sun was shining on the muddy paths and sodden scrub of our clearing when we brought him round to the graveside. On the edges of the clearing was the drab jungle. Earthy and sweaty from our digging, clad in our tattered shorts, we stood there — impassively — while the burial service was read.

"Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower; he flieth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay".

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

From under the rice-sack that covered him, a stray lock of Johnny's hair blew gently in the wind. Impassively we saw it. Could we then feel no sorrow? No fear? No deep emotion? We saw only that the sun was shining; felt only that it was warm on our shoulders. We saw the jungle around us; we comprehended the Japs, our being prisoners, the epidemic of cholera. And we saw the frail form, outlined in the sacking, that was Johnny; and a stray lock of his hair which was blowing in the wind.

"The days of man are but as grass; for he flourisheth as a flower of the field".

"For as soon as the wind goeth over it, it is gone, and the place therefore shall know it no more".

Banana Grove And Speedo Finale

JULY, 1943

I think it unlikely that any nation's outlook can be less compatible with ours than that of the Japanese. It was at about this time that a letter was sent round to all of us from the new Jap Commander of the P.O.W. camps in Thailand; and its utter disregard for actualities was quite dumb-founding.

The Japanese possessed the dangerous accomplishment of being able to deceive, not others, but themselves; and their ability to do so allowed them to commit murder, atrocities, and treachery, without the least compunction, as long as they gave themselves some verbose excuse for it. At a time when thousands of our men were dying from sheer slavery and the lack of the commonest bodily necessities, the new commander addressed to us the following mixture of hypocrisy and farce:—

"Instructions given to P.O.W. on my assuming the Command.

"I have the pleasure to lead you on the charge of last stretch of Railway Construction Warden with the appointment of present post.

"In examination of various reports, as well as to the result of my partial camp inspection of the present conditions am pleased to find that you in general keeping discipline and working diligently. At the same time regret to find seriousness in health matter. It is evident that there are various causes to this end, but in my opinion mainly to the fact for absence of firm belief as Japanese 'Health follows Will', and 'Cease only when Enemy is completely annihilated'. Those who fail to reach objective in charge, by lack of health or spirit, is considered in Japanese Army as most shameful deed. "Devotion to Death' is good. Yet still we have 'Devotion to Imperial Cause even to the seventh turn of life in incarnation, the spirit which cannot become void by death'.

"You are in the act of charge in colleague with the I.J.A.

"You are expected to charge to the last stage of this work with good spirit by taking care your own health.

"Besides, you are to remember that your welfare is guaranteed only by obedience to the order of the I.J.A.

"I.J.A. will not be unfair to those who are honest and obey them, but protect such.

"You are to understand this fundamental Japanese spirit and carry out the task given you, with perfect ease of mind under protection of I.J.A.

Given in Kanchana Buri, June, 16th, 1943.

Col. Sijuo Nakamura.

Commander of P.O.W. Camps in Thailand."

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SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

Presently we settled down to a rather more rational pitch of feeling than we had known for some time. The incubation period for the cholera germ is only three days, so that after several additional days had passed without any fresh cases appearing amongst us, we began to feel a little easier in mind. True, the cholera compound was still beside us, and we went there daily with the wood supply, but new cases were not excessive and there were few further deaths. Whatever the causes, we were not badly hit by the epidemic, having in all less than thirty cases in the camp, of which about eleven were fatal.

Conditions for our small party improved in other ways. Food was better, because we cooked it ourselves and had the time and took the trouble to turn out some very enterprising meals. Being a small party we probably got a better ration per head than the standard, since it is difficult to cut up such things as meat too minutely, and we were generally given the benefit of the doubt.

Our spirits rose a little, and we took the trouble to improve our bivouacs. We christened our camp Banana Grove, since it sported several trees of that pleasant fruit, at least two of which bore bunches of hard green fingers which might one day turn soft and yellow. We appointed ourselves to regular tasks, most of which were either chopping wood for our own fires, and those of the cholera compound, or peeling vegetables for the cook.

Biffer Green seemed to be the senior of us (though *perhaps* I was), so was put in command. A bit of an old soldier, Biffer. He had been stationed at Hong Kong and at Singapore while in the ranks, and afterwards had become the efficient Adjutant of his Battalion. He now appointed himself chief doover-maker to the cook. The latter was at first Tom, who, being a planter with a comprehensive knowledge of local fruit, vegetables, and ways of life, was an ideal cook in these conditions. However, he presently got fever, and his job was taken over by Hutch.

I don't think this job improved Hutch's temper much. Our stew-pot was an old paraffin tin, and with a quick-flaring fuel like bamboo its contents too easily got burned. The only way to avoid this was to keep stirring. To keep stirring meant to keep standing over the fire. Soon Hutch's features displayed the conflict between the blackness of smoke and the redness of suppressed anger. Our remarks to the effect that the stew was burnt were not well received.

The morning porridge was just rice, boiled and boiled until it became mushy. It was particularly flavourless stuff, and some connoisseur (probably me) suggested the addition of a little salt. Hutch apparently had not his Table of Domestic Measures about him, for the porridge next morning was practically pickled in brine.

Perhaps we were all a little touchy and nervy at this time. I remember, one showery afternoon, we were lying austere but serenely, each in his own little piece of shelter. During an interval when the rain had stopped, the silence was disturbed by the dull thump of a parang on soft wood. In a

BANANA GROVE AND SPEEDO FINALE

few moments more, the peace was quite sundered by angry voices — comment and retort following in quick succession. Someone had been and gorn and cut down a tree of ripening bananas. Biffer Green was the first to notice it, as he looked up from our 'cook house'.

"What the hell did you do that for?" he growled.

It was one of the three trees in the clearing with a bunch of bananas that might possibly ripen before we left. The offender was Joe Gormless, who, with a few blithe strokes of his parang, had severed the pulpy stem. Truculent and shortsighted, he turned to face his questioner.

"Because I want to stop the drip from the bloody thing, splashing up the black mud on to my bed".

"Well, bugger me", says Biffer, "that's one with a bunch of bananas on it".

"And what about the shade?" says Hutch. "We want some fuckin' shade in the camp, don't we?"

"Well, blimey, I'm only cutting one of the bloody things, I'll cut *all* the buggers down if I want to".

"Anyhow, that won't stop the splashes," contributes Marmaduke Fotheringill, "the rain itself splashes the mud just as badly as the drips off trees".

"No it bloody doesn't", says Joe, "I've already stopped the splashes on one side".

Dick Northcountry, Joe's neighbour, removed his pipe.

"That's the daftest thing I've seen," he said, "and that tree affects my bivvy as much as yours, you know".

"Another week", basso-profundo-ed Biffer, "and those would have been ripe".

Joe kept fighting back. "Well, that type of banana is no fuckin' good to eat, anyhow".

"Well, now you've done it, let's have the leaves in the kitchen," said Hutch, the practical, and, though one mightn't think it, the diplomatic. (Banana leaves made good dishes and food covers). The battle became less general. Biffer said morosely, to his immediate neighbours, "I never heard of anyone cutting down bloody fruit-trees, before", and added in a lower and exceeding pregnant tone, "Bloody criminal I reckon". Then came a squib from Tom, sour at being disturbed in his sick bed. "Take the fucking parang away from the bastard", said he, "before he does any more damage".

Followed a short lull. Then Dick, coming up to his bivvy and noticing Joe had left the stump of the tree sticking up four feet from the ground says "Hells bells", or words to that effect, "Why don't you make a job of it, since you *are* cutting it down".

Up flares Joe again. "If you're so fuckin' interested," says he, "cut the bugger down yourself".

Another lull; and presently Biffer and Dick, sitting side by side at the

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

fire, continue a quiet vendetta-cum-mutual commiseration. Biffer, sadly looking at the scarce-formed bunch, says "Look at 'em. Another week and those would have been bloody near ripe".

"It wouldn't be so bad", says Dick, "If he'd finished the job off, and not left half the stump sticking up. F.U.J. I'm all right.

Then sweet silence, and the episode is finished.

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We had at least two reasons for optimism at this time, one of which was the news of the Allied successes in North Africa. Although we had no wireless in K 3, there were sets in other camps, and the news trickled slowly along to all us.

The other hopeful news was local, and was to the effect that a general move down-river of all the Kanyu camps was shortly to begin.

We knew that as soon as this happened, the turning point in our fortunes would have been reached. From the time that we left Changi things had got steadily worse for us, and as they did so we kept saying, "Things can't get worse than this". But they always did. Now, for the first time in months, it seemed that the black tide was receding from us. As yet, however, the ebb had not quite set in, for there were rumours that a few parties from the Kanyu camps would still be required to go up-river again to finish a particular job; and it was still possible that we might be amongst those to go.

The Japs were now making a furious drive to complete the line. Out on the work, both the Tamils and the P.O.W.'s were being beaten up as never before, and thousands more Tamils went streaming up the road every day. At K 1 the fit men were being worked till nine in the evening, and the 'Bed-downs' until seven. We were fortunate now to be in our cholera isolation area, for nothing but the fear of contagion could have kept the Japs from making use of us.

When the eleven of us had left the officers' working party, it was reduced to about eight officers. They still had their two tea-men. Others of the party went sick, and the numbers fell to five, then three, (still, it was said, with two tea-men) until finally only Prester and Jolli were left. Whether they made tea for each other, I don't know. I believe on the last day or so Prester went sick too, leaving Jolli unchallenged as the one officer of our original fifty who never missed a day's work.

In the second week of July the railway in our section was finished. The party of 1,500 who had come up to help do it had now departed. The Japs had no interest in our little bivvy camp, and the British camp staff had considerately placed us on the 'Bed-down' list, so that we should not be disturbed.

With the prospect of going down river to comparative civilisation, I decided I could start using my meagre supply of razor blades again, so I shaved off my gold-brown silky beard for the first time since March. Then I

undertook the rebuilding of my bivouac on a grand scale. This, we all thought, was bound to bring our move to a head; for it had always seemed that any much-laboured improvement of our quarters was immediately followed by a move to new ones.

I opened out my 10'x6' piece of canvas to its full size to form a sloping roof towards the prevailing wind, the front edge being high enough to stand under. Then I raised my bed-platform on to logs one-and-a-half feet high, so that when not reclining I could sit in comfort under my shady awning. But sure enough, the work was scarcely half-completed when we were told to be ready to move the next day — down to Lower Kanyu to await barges.

Still, I completed my fine house, and spent my last night at Banana Grove in regal comfort.

On July the 20th we packed our bundles and filed over to the camp to parade with the others, and soon we were following the path down to the Kanyu River Camp.

Lower Kanyu, which we had first seen seven months ago, was now, from disuse and neglect, a very unpleasant spot. It was crowded with Asian labourers and European P.O.W.'s alike. All of us had been working on the railway and were awaiting our move down river. Many of the Tamils, Malays and Chinese were in a pitiable state of filth, raggedness and disease — almost worse than we were, if that were possible.

The swarms of labourers made every path and thicket within a wide area of the camp filthy to walk in, and our own P.O.W.'s suffering likewise from uncontrollable diarrhoea, did the same for the latrines, and the paths leading to them. The weather was bad, and everywhere was wet and muddy.

Our continued progress down-stream was held up by lack of barges. Most of us from Banana Grove got away in eight days' time. My party was called out during lunch one day, and we went straight on board, and started our journey with surprisingly little delay. Moving down stream we took only a few hours to reach our destination, which turned out to be Tarso, the camp where we had ended our march and begun our barge journey on the way up.

The river at Tarso at this time of year, the height of the floods, presented a scene so changed from the one we had known that we scarcely recognised it. It was now a swiftly-flowing expanse two hundred yards in breadth, and so thick with craft that it looked like a harbour front. To the opposite bank was moored a long succession of ocean-going barges, and by the camp landing-places were innumerable smaller barges and river launches. Besides these, several quite large steam tugs and ferry boats chugged up and down, giving an incongruous air of importance to this remote spot in the jungle.

There were many other barge-loads of returning Prisoners of War, and all seemed to feel the excitement of marooned men unexpectedly brought to safety. Yet hundreds, even thousands, of the men who were new arriving in daily barge-loads at the various base camps, were emaciated creatures, sick, dirty, sunken-eyed, and grey-faced, who were too feeble to walk ashore without help. Apart from these there were many on stretchers who couldn't

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

walk at all.

We landed, and eventually assembled at the top of the bank. There we gave up our nominal roll and were counted, and after some hours wait were led off to huts in the Hospital area.

Back To Tarso Camp

AUGUST—DECEMBER, 1943

NOW that we had really started on the long trail back, we hoped it would be as long a one as possible, ending at one of the big base camps such as Chungkai. Even the cherished dream of escape was for the time being thrust into the background, for, on top of the geographical difficulties, we simply were not fit to make the effort. We had for long heard about Chungkai, as a sort of Earthly Paradise for Prisoners of War. Not only was it a non-working camp, but the Prisoners there were very little bothered by the Japs and sugar, spice, and many quite nice things, were cheap and plentiful.

But at Tarso our parties were broken up, and new parties were made up and sent on to Chungkai, and in the end I never went there. In fact the wish to go there was, after some weeks, forgotten.

For a few days we led an indolent life in the Hospital area, in roomy, newly-built, and clean huts, whence we heard, for the first time, the hooting of railway-engines from the line half a mile away, an exotic sound to echo in this wild country. After a medical examination those of us who were not in need of immediate hospital treatment were sent off to the camp proper, two hundred yards from the river bank.

A short while after arriving here I developed ulcers. During the railway 'speedo' there was hardly one of us who had not septic scratches on hands and legs, and their only attention, apart from picking and squeezing, was to be well plastered with mud every day and then to be incidentally washed in the daily bath. Under this treatment, each scratch first grew steadily a little larger, then remained static for a while, and afterwards grew slowly smaller until at last it disappeared.

Now that we had returned to "Civilisation" we thought we might as well get our cuts dressed at the M.I. Room. The results were not always what we had hoped for. There were such crowds at sick parade that the Medical Orderlies could hardly cope with the work, and besides that, medical supplies were short. One kidney-basin of anti-septic fluid was used for washing out ulcer after ulcer, and must at last have got so thick that it passed on the infection from virulent ulcers to milder cuts. For the first time, one of my sores got bad enough to require my going to hospital.

There I suffered a further set-back, for the assiduous orderlies clapped on my leg a fomentation so hot that it blistered an area larger than the the ulcer itself. I bore the unbearable without protest, because I innocently thought it was good for me, and that the hospital staff must know best — an opinion which, from further experience of military hospitals both in and out of prison camps, I was later able to modify.

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

The blister, of course, caught the infection from the ulcer. After about a week, however, the wound responded to sulphaminide (I was lucky that there were a few such drugs in this camp) and, as I was still feeling healthy and eating immense quantities of food, the flesh soon became immaculately pink, and grew up towards the surface of the crater.

I said my ulcer was bad; yet compared with hundreds of others in the camp it was quite trifling. In the surgical wards one could see dozens of ulcers which had eaten right down to the bone, and exposed it for several inches. Many of them became so bad that the limbs had to be amputated. Now and for months afterwards, it required a strong mind and stomach in a victory to remain for long in the ulcer wards, for they reeked of rotting flesh.

In the middle of October, I joined the party of 'not so sick' officers in the newly named Convalescent Depot, a part of the Hospital area. There we led a life completely restful, which slipped along uneventfully; eating, sleeping, reading and bathing sores.

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The only sustained feature of life at this time was its uneventfulness. It was composed of a succession of little ripples, which had no relation to one another except that, in retrospect, they composed the placid surface which at the time they seemed to break.

One of the pleasanter ripples was caused by the arrival of letters from home. A few of the very first consignment had arrived while we were at Kanyu 3, and at no place in our travels could their evocations of home have been more incongruous. However, that was just a small and isolated consignment. Now, a year and nine months after we had become prisoners, I and many others got our first letters. They were about a year old.

Yet it can be imagined what deep feelings and what long thoughts those letters aroused, old as they were; and with what intensity of retrospection we looked at the familiar writing, in an effort to realise the momentous facts of its association; trying to realise that this actual sheet of paper and envelope, which had somehow been delivered to us in this unknown spot in Thailand's jungles, was the very same that had been written, blotted, folded and sealed by our dearest relations or friends at home.

Alas, the paradox of human affection. At home, our people were worrying about us. Not that they stressed that in their letters, but of course they did worry, knowing our dangers yet having no definite or recent news of us. But when we thought of our people at home, we worried on their account. We worried that they should be unhappy about us. We thought "If only I could tell them not to worry about me. If only I could comfort them".

We never did have regular communication with our homes. Nor, for that matter, did the Japs with theirs. It was quite impossible that we should have,

BACK TO TARSO CAMP

for Japan's communications with her widely-scattered conquests were haphazard from the beginning, and became increasingly precarious.

As with letters, so was it also with food and medical supplies. The Japs could not themselves easily provide us with what we needed and they would not allow the Allies to do so either.

The Allies tried to arrange bulk shipment of necessities for us but all such suggestions were refused by the Japanese. Partly they felt they would have lost face by seeming to be unable to look after us; partly they were really afraid of being made fools of, fearing that any liaison between the prisoners and the outside world would be cleverly used, in secret and diabolical ways which they might not understand, as an intelligence service between us; and partly they prided themselves before the world, and before other Asians particularly, on being superior to the white races, of having white prisoners in their power, and of not being afraid to treat them rigorously.

Yet, as far as food was concerned, there was no reason why we should have been undernourished, even without help from home. Thailand is a food-exporting country, which, even during the Jap occupation, had ample supplies of rice, cattle, goats, pigs, fish, duck-eggs, fruit and vegetables. The food which we got at all camps after our return from the railway, was not unreasonable from the Jap point of view. Had we never fared worse than this while we were up-river (and had we had more medical supplies — and less work), we would have escaped thousands of deaths; and the Japs would have escaped the stigma of criminal barbarity. Little more than a hundred miles separated us from the plains, where food abounded, but no real effort was made to get it to us.

* * * * *

It was just before Christmas that I left hospital and returned to the lines, and was soon out working again. This was quite a different thing, though, from our work on the railway. There was no driving and the hours were easy. Moreover there were other attractions in the camp, not least the canteen run by the Dutch.

Here in Tarso we met the Dutch for the first time. There had been many thousands of them on the railway, but we had seen little of them on our sector. Some of their officers were European and some Eurasian, and nearly all their troops were Eurasian. The Dutch were experts on 'rackets', and Napoleon must have known little of their temperament when he stuck his 'shopkeeping' label instead upon the English.

"In matters of commerce the fault of the Dutch
Is giving too little and asking too much".

was a couplet we often recalled with some heat during our associations with our Dutch Allies. However, they were certainly clever cooks, and had got permission to run a 'cooked food' canteen, where we could buy peanut

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

toffee, coconut cakes, and savoury whitebait.

In private cooking also, the Dutch had the reputation of being advanced individualists, and one often saw groups of them clustering devotedly round kerosene tins of mysterious brews, whose ingredients were rumoured, with what truth I do not know, to range from vultures to flying foxes.

Most of us had good friends among the Dutch, though it must be confessed that en masse we had always a certain amount of friction with them. We had not, however, always so good an excuse as one of our men, who beat up a 'Boong' (as the Dutch Asian soldiers were called), for allegedly insulting Queen Victoria. As the British soldier put it, he "wasn't going to stand there and hear a Buckingham Boong taking the phizz out of Queen Vic-tucking-tooria".

But the laugh was not always on the Dutchmen. Once, in another camp, the 'Works Officer' was going his rounds. He was Major Ell, a British regular army officer, of the 'no nonsense, dammit' type. Seeing a fatigue party rather too conspicuously idling, he went up to remonstrate. They happened to be a party of Dutch officers. He approached the nearest man and asked, "What are you doing?"

"I um lee-ning on my show-full".

"Well, I say, you've got to get on with a bit of work, you know. If the Japs find you doing nothing you'll get every one into trouble", and so on, and so on. Then finally, as the other seemed quite un-impressed, "Do you know who I am? I am Major Ell, and I am in charge of all the work in this camp".

The Dutchman, smiling amiably, replied, "Unt do you know who I um? I um Coll-o-nell Van Tromp. I um lee-ning on my show-full, unt I um in charge of fockle".

With the coming of Christmas-tide we were allowed some celebrations, and in many ways it was a far more cheerful Christmas than our last one. For one thing, we knew that our hardest physical trials were over, and we had come back to conditions of comparative ease and plenty. Then, the war in Africa and Europe had at last turned in our favour, and to crown all, we had ourselves seen and heard Allied planes for the first time in two long years, for our bombers had passed directly over the camp a few nights before Christmas. Moreover, we had collected sufficient extra quantities and varieties of food to make all our meals on Christmas day outstanding. We also had a pantomime, Cinderella, which was so well done as to be astonishing in this out-landish spot.

On Christmas Eve we had had a show of a different sort — a memorial service to those who had died during the past year. It had been originally our own idea, but the Japs had taken it up and turned it into an official parade. All the Jap officers attended, and the Jap Camp Commandant opened the proceedings with a condolatory address.

The service lasted well over an hour, and included three separate addresses, one by the Japs, and one each by the British Camp Commandant and the Senior Dutch Officer, hymns by the Church of England and the

BACK TO TARBO CAMP

Dutch Protestants, and prayers by the Padres of the Church of England, Dutch Protestants, Dutch Catholics and Jews. We also had the last post, two minutes silence, reveille, and the laying of two wreaths, one from us and one from the I.J.A., laid at the foot of a huge wooden cross which had been put up on the parade ground.

From the hypocrisy of this service one could yet detach one's mind from the Jap association and think of the thousands of men who had died most miserably on this wretched river and railway, often with no friend, even, to comfort them at the end.

Marking Time In Tarso

FEBRUARY—APRIL, 1944

LIFE at this time became more leisurely than it had ever been since we left Changi, and subjects less grim than labour, starvation and sickness occupied our thoughts.

We again had the hiccupping geko's repetitive cacophony, but here at Tarso the intermittent noise which he produced was barely noticeable above the wearisome buzz of innumerable cicadas, which lived in a tall tree near our hut.

No intermittent noise was theirs. Usually one didn't actually hear them start, but suddenly became aware that the noise was going on. It was not only one sound. It was like a hundred and fifty thousand sounds, all sounding separately, a piercing, throbbing vibration, that went round and round, and on and on, like a hand-turned air-raid siren; but shriller, and sharper, and on-and-on-er, until one's whole head and ear drums were throbbing in and out as well, and were finally so deadened that it came as a surprise to find that for some reason or other the damn creatures had actually become silent again.

The frogs were fun too, while they lasted. There were some big pits in the camp, which had filled with water. For weeks and months at Tarso, frogs were not part of our lives. There were no frogs. We never saw a frog. Then one day, or night, after showery weather, the whole air was patterned with frog-bleating. "Ca, ca-a-a", "Ca, ca-a-a", "Ca, ca-a-a". Or perhaps it was "Wa, wa-a-a". There were certainly thousands of frogs all barking (or bleating) and all day long, where none had been before. They kept it up for about three days on end, and every pond, pool and pit around the camp was full of frogs doggedly (or froggedly) perpetuating their species. After that they disappeared again.

Our working days also were not only leisurely but often amusing as well. As soon as morning roll call was finished, we 'fell-out' of our battalion formations, and 'fell-in', to our work parties. The work at this time for the inside party of officers was called the river party, and one day we marched over, thirty strong, and reported, my diary says, to:—

"Mr. Saki-armo or some such name. He turned out to be a good example of the harmless and *almost* pleasant Jap. After a little thought, he detached ten of us to fill a forty-gallon tank with water from the river. Then, as he looked around, scratching his head, for a job for us, his eyes lit on a pile of sacks containing cow-hides, and a stack of empty kerosene tins and wooden boxes. He smiled all over, and told us to carry the tins and boxes to a store-room. This occupied scarcely ten minutes, despite our best efforts. "Shall I give you a hand with that one?" asked

MARKING TIME IN TARSO

Jock of Harry Gee, who had sighed deeply on taking up his one empty tin.

"Then, after another pause, the Jap reappeared and said the full sacks of hides were to be taken to the slaughter yard, about a quarter of a mile down the road. He added with a grin: "You go there, no speedo come back". That suited us fine. When we reached the killing yard and stacked the hides on a store tent, we learned from the P.O.W. in charge that they had only been taken *from* there a few days previously.

"We retired among the bushes just off the road, and sat down to a long 'yasume' We found quite a number of strangers amongst us. There was W; who up till now had found a berth helping in the canteen; J, hitherto considered an infallible 'bed-downer'; and there were even one or two 'pit-ponies'. (These were members of the H.Q. troop, who got their name from the belief that they blinked in the light on the rare occasions when they came out of their huts.) All this new blood was the result of a Jap threat which coincided with a Jap General's visit a short time previously. We were told that more officers must work, otherwise their pay would be cut. So we had made these few additions to our numbers.

"Typical of these bloody Japs", someone remarked. "They say we must have more officers working, they send us down here and then this Jap says F.O., he doesn't want us".

"Do you remember how they used to turn us out at K 70? That was for the railway speedo, of course, 'C'S', bed-downers even hospital cases, used to be sent out".

"Old Missouri was the boy for that; but you know, in spite of everything, he did have an eye for the genuinely sick. There were very few people he sent out who were afterwards confirmed 'bed-down' by the M.O."

"Do you remember the occasion of the Bishopric?" asked Harry Gee.

"Yes, it got a good many of us off work that day".

"What was that, Harry? Tell us about it".

"Well, old Bish got a bee sting in a particular place and things swelled up to a hell of size. And the colours. Red, blue, purple and yellow. A real nasty-looking piece of work. We put Bish at the head of the sick parade. When Missouri saw it, he fairly goggled, and then nearly exploded with laughter, and waved the rest of us away".

"Old Bish put it up for show after that, didn't he?"

"Yes, two eggs a peep".

"Go on!"

"Yes, it's quite true, I paid my two eggs. And odd Japs were coming in all day to see it".

"I saw it for nothing, being in the same tent".

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

So the hour drifted on. We eventually returned to the yard, and were told to 'yasume' till the arrival of a vegetable lorry. We reclined on heaped-up bundles of bark tying-strips, very luxurious, and the nearest thing imaginable to lying in a hayloft. Harry Gee sank into the ready-made "long chair", put his feet up, and filled his pipe. "Now take it easy Harry. Don't strain yourself in any way". "That's all right old boy, I'm doing my best to relax". And he lit his pipe, and let his head sink gently back on his bark cushion.

The lorries came at twenty-minute intervals, and after dealing with each one we resumed our reclining positions until the next. After the third one, we went back to camp for lunch.

In the afternoon, we went over again and presented the Jap with the job of finding us work. He took us round to the side of the hut where we would not be seen, and showed us how he wanted us to sit, feet in a shallow drain. "Yasume very good," he said, and left us.

So we sat down to wear away the afternoon. In about half an hour, he came out again. "Very long yasume no good", he said "Orru men get bamboo, chase rats".

So we searched round for bits of stick, and began to beat the tins and boxes in the store, without much fear that any rats would come out. We made such a row that the Jap came and told us to stop. After a little conversation of an inconclusive nature, he gave it up, and smiled, and said "yasume". So we sat down and chatted, and played noughts and crosses on the dusty floor.

Two of us went to the cookhouse to fetch a can of tea, and some of us went to another store to be weighed. The Jap performed the weighing with great good honour.

At five o'clock, he bade us finish for the day, laughing like a drain. It was as big a farce to him as it was to us".

* * * * *

Our education on the intricacies of the Jap character went quietly forward. Not that one could ever understand *why* they did what they did, or were what they were; but one could learn *that* they did it, or were it.

We came to realise that the Japanese were morally a medieval race at this time, whose cheap valuation of individual life, and whose indifference to suffering in other people, were similar to what ours must have been six hundred years ago.

Our guards were a very mixed lot, ranging in mentality from the Korean soldier who made us push on the sides of the barge we were sitting in to help it up the rapids, to the tortuous intelligence of the former Tarso adjutant, who had visited us at Lower Kanyu to produce better 'paper' figures for our ratio of sick men to workers.

MARKING TIME IN TARBO

As to the other qualities of the Japanese, they have been both over- and under-estimated at different times. Before the Pacific war begun, we under-estimated them. We knew how un-thorough they often were in things which we considered important; but we forgot that they had an innate cleverness, and that this was sharpened by their need, and matched by their fanatical determination and conviction of right.

Their ships and planes, and equipment generally, were indeed shoddy compared with ours, but they did possess a few big weapons, and they used them for their few big jobs. When they sank our battleships 'Prince of Wales' and 'Repulse', their weapons were precisely adequate, and the men who manned them were competent, fearless, and very determined. And it had been the same with their attack on Pearl Harbour.

Then, during the campaign we began to over-estimate them. Because the Japs had the advantage of us in so many ways, and made vigorous and always successful use of it, they began to have almost the same kind of reputation as the Nazis once had, as supermen.

In the end we found that the truth was somewhere between these two extremes. When the Japs met troops of ours, whether European, Asian or African, whose equipment was at all on a plane with their own, they did not come off best. They were certainly clever and resourceful, in ways which were strange to us at first, and which gave them the usual advantage of novelty until we adapted ourselves to them.

And their simpler standard of living, and their being accustomed to Asian climate and food, made it easier for them to live on the country which they fought over. But in the end, our soldiers who were trained in jungle warfare beat them at their own game; and, once we had the measure of their cleverness and their limitations, our own staying-power, resourcefulness, and cheerful adaptability, gave us the advantage.

We prisoners had the opportunity of noticing these capabilities and limitations of the Japs. But we also found that whereas their front-line troops, whom we occasionally met, had at least the quality of bravery that could be admired, yet those who guarded us in the prison camps were, with a few exceptions, a bunch of mean-spirited and despicable creatures.

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By early April the weather had become rather pleasant, for though the nights were stuffy and the afternoons burning hot, yet the mornings were like spring days at home — or what the exile imagines them to be — cool breeze, bright sunshine, and greenly bursting trees.

At this time, during a longish spell of 'bed-down' owing to fever, I met a young poet named Peter Pilkington. He had written many poems which he now recollected for me, and of which I was able to understand and enjoy at least one or two. We spent hours talking, arguing, discussing, criticising, encouraging and recriminating.

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

Peter could argue convincingly on any subject under the sun, had a fund of invention for story-telling, and an unusual style of vivid imagery. In the midst of his other pre-occupations he started to write a novel on prisoner of war life. He turned out 2,000 words a day closely written in a school exercise book which months later, in the face of a rigorous Japanese search, he threw it down the latrine, with what regrets, if any, I do not know.

We played chess. I was a beginner, Peter quite a student of the game. It was forbidden for 'bed-downers' to play games during working hours, and to overcome this restriction I invented the 'Recumbent Players' Chess Set'. Each player had his own board, with a complete set of black and white pieces. All were made out of cardboard, and the pieces fitted into slots in the board. The players might be lying quite a long way from each other, perhaps on opposite sides of the hut. It didn't matter how far apart they were so long as they could hear each other. They called out their moves, which each of them registered on his own board. The whole thing could easily be shoved out of sight if a Jap came along.

Sometimes, we walked in the 'wood'. Tarso camp was fenced with a double bamboo paliissade, which enclosed quite a lot of spare ground beyond the huts. Along the nearer edge of it were our latrines, but beyond them was a strip of ground about fifty yards wide and several hundred yards long — an area of trees, low creepers, and grass, in which were situated our several open-air chapels of the various sects.

As it was spacious, and, in working hours, uncrowded, it made a quiet and pleasant retreat from the herd of one's fellows. Here, both Peter and I on some occasions paced up and down in the throes of composition; or occasionally strolled together, and found in the new buds and flowering trees of Thailand's spring, the echoes of some lyric of home.

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Allied air activity was now greatly increasing. Night bombers frequently passed over the camp, and there were occasional planes by day. Things were warming up on the Burma front and this, coupled with the fact that most of our railway work was finished, was probably the reason why the Japs now suddenly started to move us all south.

We had only a few days warning that the whole of Tarso camp was to be cleared with the exception of one thousand six hundred prisoners, who were to remain for firewood cutting and other work. The rest of us were sent off in parties of six hundred or more a day.

My diary records that on our Journey to the new camp:—

"I was, as usual, pretty well loaded, the piece de resistance being my Changi-made mattress wrapped up in my valise. Someone said I looked like Atlas under it. (I carry it on my shoulders on top of my pack, two short hand-ropes on either side to maintain the balance). Another remark was (in admiration? awe?) "Cor! 'ee won't get for with that".

MARKING TIME IN TARSO

"This was my first ride on the railway I had sweated and shivered and laboured to build. This lower stretch is as smooth and settled as one could wish. The embankments, which were to have been washed away by the monsoons (as were our attap huts); (this is what our wishful thinkers had said in the spring of '43) are already thick with creepers. On either side of the track, where the trace had been cleared back to the jungle, young saplings were sprouting up with any amount of big leaves. 'What a wonderful bump country' somebody said, thinking of the denuded areas round the Tarso latrines.

"At Chungkai we had a long wait. Someone with a good vantage point at the door spotted a pretty young Thai girl, dressed in blue silk and very conscious of her good looks and wavy hair. His remark brought an immediate eyes right and craning of necks. Exclamations ranged from the admiring, to the obscenely admiring. A young officer, whose hobby was photography, said "I'd like to take her photo". A young private soldier, whose hobby was probably fish and chips, said 'I'd like to take her . . ."

There was a company of Japs hanging around, with a massive chubby young W.O., with specs, wrist-watch, field boots, sword-chain, and his shirt hanging out behind. A Jap railway clerk sat in an office and reciprocated the copious bows of all who approached him. Thai women in tight skirts, coatees, and coloured scarves, squatted behind fruit baskets and scratched themselves in awkward places. A diesel car occupied by Jap officer and staff drove by. Later, the train for which we waited passed through; a string of open trucks loaded with I don't know what, but with half a dozen Thais, men and women, sitting on top of each, with branches of trees stuck on here and there for camouflage.

"After crossing the river, one sees the Kanchangburi mill on the right, and the railway swerves round it and comes in behind. The mill chimney and water-tower have been camouflaged with palm leaves, etc., which of course have long since shrivelled to a scorched brown, and are most outstanding.

"Arrived at Tamuang (the name of our new camp) just after 4 p.m. Then had to fall in for counting — a frightful mess up — the Jap private in charge working himself into a frenzy, and everybody doing everything wrong. We at last started off on what was said to be a march of one kilometre. Of course, it turned out to be at least three. We passed through Tamuang village, quite a fair size, with big shops. The road tarmac — the same one we drove up from Ban Pong in October '42. A small car passed us. In it Suki (the Pouter Pigeon) looking as pleased as a dog with two tails.

"We had, of course, to wait ages on the parade ground after arriving, before being checked and allotted accommodation".

Tamuang Camp

MAY—JUNE, 1944

OUR first impression of Tamuang was of its flatness. For the last year and a half we had lived in camps closed in by hills and jungle, and even the views which we occasionally got were views of more hills, and more jungle. Here, we realised once again how immense the horizon was. It stretched round and round us, low and unending, and only two little bumps of hills were faintly visible towards the west.

Then there was the cleanness, newness and spaciousness of the camp itself. It must have measured about a mile in each direction, and as yet there was no fence. The huts were longer than ever, and were built high and airy. Moreover, they were spaced out at distances of about thirty or forty yards apart. In fact, compared with the physical conditions of all our previous camps, this one's layout was remarkably liberal.

Except for a few clumps of bamboos down near the river, we were in a cultivated district. Much of the central part of the camp was now green grass, some of which had formerly been fields of tobacco, and some padi-fields, now uncultivated. Beyond grew bananas, papayas, castor-oil bushes, and kapok and jack-fruit trees, and some giant mangos, tamarinds, and durians.

The tarmac road passed by the front of the camp, and the hum of its occasional cars, and the frish of their tyre-treads on it, emphasised our sense of having returned to civilisation; and the sound of a dog barking in a nearby kampong was yet another surprising and homely reminder of how far and how long we had been away from the normal habitations of men.

Several Thai families were still living in the camp area, and from them and others we could buy plenty of local produce, chiefly fruit and eggs. For only ten cents we got a bunch of twelve or fifteen golden bananas. That was not much above the pre-war price. Papayas, limes, mangoes and eggs were quite cheap, too. Is there a more delicious fruit than a ripe mango? One doesn't think so while eating it, as, with whiffling lips, one tries to capture each drop of nectar which gushes from its palely odontodemic flesh.

In many ways there was a holiday feeling in this new camp; partly, perhaps, because our move to it was one more inevitable step on our way to freedom; partly because the physical outlook from the camp, its large, airy, clean, new huts, and general spaciousness, gave us a sense of freedom already.

On the morning after our arrival we had to get up before dawn, to trek down to the kitchens for breakfast. From different directions over the flat wide camp, groups of people could be heard and half seen, converging

TAMUANG CAMP

on the path that led to the river. We drew our breakfast of rice porridge and took it back to the hut to eat.

It was half-light as we returned, and we could see a little of our surroundings. Down by the kitchen were big bamboo clumps, and then an area in which a couple of Thai huts were secluded among huge fruit trees. Then came a long grove of bananas, and after that the corrugated remnants of a tobacco field.

Dawn was just breaking, and as we came out from the banana grove, we beheld a jewelled picture that must have been the ephemeral perfection which all man's arts of pigments, metals, and precious stones, have striven to perpetuate. All the sky was dark — a dark background to one bright space of lemon-amber. The edge of the dark cloud above it was barred with wine and violet, and laid on the amber-coloured centre were long brooches of shining gold. Sparkling in the midst of them, meltingly beautiful in its pure fresh radiance, shone the morning star.

The days were hot, but often there was a breeze. The nights were cool, and unusually clear. The stars seemed more brilliant than they had ever been; the sky behind them a more lustrous, living, blue-black; and the huge white rounded clouds, with the moon upon them, softer and moon-whiter and more billowingly immense, than one had ever known.

* * * * *

Yuki was an example of the unpleasant Jap. He was one of the guards, and therefore, I suppose, a Korean, Japanese or Koreans — the difference meant little to us prisoners of war. Yuki was a Jap — of whatever sort I neither knew nor cared. He was young and semi-educated. They said he had been to a university in Tokyo. His smooth, seraph-like face masked a deep hatred of us prisoners — possibly a hatred of all mankind as well; but it was on the prisoners that he could satisfy it.

Whatever Yuki's background was it was clear that he had a sincere and over-weening conceit of himself. It was clear, too, that the unconsciously assumed superiority of the Europeans in their behaviour towards him, prisoners though they were, maddened him with tortured pride. When he, a private soldier of the Japanese army, made a British Field Officer stand to attention before him to be slapped in the face, the cold contempt which continued to look down on him, after each blow, shook him to the depths of, first, self-doubting, and then self-assertion in blind anger.

Yuki had learned a little English and made himself useful in the office, securing for himself a position of some power as unofficial interpreter and orderly run-about on roll call.

Yuki's big chance came on evening roll call three days after our arrival at Tamuang. There was an error in the numbers of two of the Battalions. The total of all the parade was correct, but one Battalion had a man too many and one a man too few. The correct distribution was, of course, found

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

on the actual check. But the error was sufficient excuse for Yuki to make a scene.

Circumstances favoured him, for it was a Jap holiday, and he was taking the parade alone. At last he had his opportunity to taking the salute of some thousands of British officers and men. Private Yuki made our Colonel give the whole parade the 'Salute to the Front'. How glad I was to see that his self-confidence was insufficient to carry him through, for he broke off his return salute a little prematurely, and even blushed — oh, how angrily. But he got his own back when the muddle in the figures was discovered.

He was, I think, slightly drunk. After shouting and cursing for a while, he left us standing to attention, and went back to his quarters. Then he came back and started the argument again. In the middle of it he broke off, and went up to an officer who he said was not standing properly to attention.

Then followed the familiar scene. Yuki asking rhetorical questions to which either a reply or silence was wrong, and resulted only in another crack on the jaw or punch in the stomach. It ended with the officer, who happened to be one of our Padres, being knocked out and falling down, Yuki finishing the scene with a few kicks in the ribs. The Colonel, who had been sorting out the figures with the Sergeant-Major, now came up and told four people to take the unconscious Padre back to the lines. Here ended the lesson.

There were so many lessons. Members of another group from ours, many of whom had missed the railway work and spent most of their time at secluded Chungkai, were always scornfully superior on the subject of what we in No. 4 Group had allowed ourselves to put up with. They thought us mean-spirited fellows, who had been cowed by the Japs, when a bit of firmness and guts would have set our relations on the right footing from the start. They told us how, at Chungkai, any Jap who wantonly beat up a prisoner of war would have got the hell of a beating himself, from his own people; and they implied that if things weren't the same with us, it was our own fault.

Indeed our knowledge of No. 4 Group Japs made us think twice before thwarting them, and experience had shown us that no amount of protesting was of the slightest use, and in fact was more likely to make things worse. Now however, times were changing, and we were slow in adjusting ourselves to different conditions. Two months after this episode, I referred to it in my notes, and thought that a similar one could not then occur without some practical and immediate protest from those on the spot.

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During our first weeks at Tamuang we had the usual repeated moves from one hut to another before we finally settled down. Some of these moves were ordered by the Japs, and others by the British camp staff. For, as my diary records, ". . . if it's not the Japs bugging us about it's our own

TAMUANG CAMP

people. Two moves since yesterday. But we have now got moving down to a fine art. For myself, I fill my pack and haversack with whatever will fit, and the remainder is rolled up in my bedding bundle. Voila.

'Well, today, off we went to work again. The procedure on morning parade is, that after the check roll, H.Q. staff and 'special' jobs fall out. The remainder are the mere coolies, the stooges, the saps. We stand there waiting to meet our doom, to see what the day brings forth in the way of Japs and work. And as we wait, we cast jeering glances and remarks at those who are hastening away to merge themselves in the general background of inconspicuousness. 'There they go, the pit ponies'. There's old Thingummy, a constitutional bed-downer'. 'Trust what-not to get on the police racket' etc., etc.; and soon, 'all, all, are gone, the old familiar faces.' We have seen them thus escaping the works parade at Kinseyo, Kanyu, Tarso, and now here, and they will continue to fight for their rights as long as they have breath in body''.

This settling-in period of Tamuang was also a time of several quite unusual occurrences. First of all the end of May brought a truly momentous occasion. This was the arrival in camp of three hundred cartons of American Red Cross goods, each carton containing four parcels. This was the first time since we had left Changi that we had received Red Cross parcels from the outside world. It was also the last, for we never received another. The parcels were intended, of course, to be one to one man; but our portion was just over one sixth of a parcel each — that is, two parcels between thirteen of us. Even so, the share-out was good, and the festive feeding of the next week was equalled by our festive spirits.

Then also at this time, came the first rumours of a move to Japan. Names of 1500 prisoners of war were handed in, and it was said that all of us who were fit would eventually go.

In the meantime, however, plans for the improvement of the camp went ahead as though no move were contemplated. Gardens were started, plans were called for by the Jap for theatre, barber's shop, and other communal buildings, and the cookhouses were moved from the river bank up to the camp.

June 5th was another red-letter day, though not so noticeable at the time. On that afternoon there was a big Allied air-raid on Bangkok, which confirmed for us the growing strength of Allied arms. None of us at Tamuang, Japs or prisoners, were quite sure at the time what was going on. We were fifty miles from Bangkok, and all we were aware of was a recurrent zooming and droning throughout the afternoon, with an occasional sight of fast-moving planes emerging from the clouds and quickly being hidden again. Because of this raid the Japs issued A.R.P. rules for the camp.

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I think from this period onwards, we felt that events were moving

more quickly for us, both in our camps and in the outside world. The increasing Allied air activity was a cheering fact which we could see for ourselves, and we knew it meant that things were moving, or about to move, in Burma. Then came this rumour of our being moved to Japan, which we took to be another sign, as my diary says "that something big, and of course in our favour, had happened in the outside world".

And of course it had. From our hidden wireless set we presently heard of the Allied invasion of the Continent, and it can be imagined in what a state of repressed excitement we lived and waited for each next bulletin. Fortunately, the Japs themselves told us, towards the end of June, of the Allied landings, which relieved us from pretending to know nothing about it. Of course, their version was that we were being annihilated — though I don't think they really imagined we would believe that.

The Japs' treatment of us as the Allied arms began to be successful, was a mixture of greater humanity and greater strictness. As the end approached, the strictness predominated, but just now they seemed somewhat concessive. One evening at roll call we had a speech by the Jap orderly officer which could never have happened a year ago. It was partly on the subject of air raids, and partly on beatings-up. The latter subject was occasioned by one of our men having been knocked unconscious by a Jap guard.

The orderly officer called the British Camp Commandant to stand beside him on the rostrum. Below them on the ground, a corporal of my unit, who spoke some Japanese, acted as unofficial interpreter, repeating the Jap's sentences (and gestures) to Colonel Blank, who repeated them to us. I thus recorded what I remembered of it:—

"There are several points which I am required to bring to your notice by the Imperial Japanese Army. First, a piece of information. In Assam is a place called Manipore. Here, air raids are being made by British and American planes. Heavy casualties are being suffered by both sides". (Each sentence is interspersed with a long pause, in which both the Jap and Colonel Blank look down at the interpreter.)

"Secondly, there have been at least three raids by British and American planes passing over this camp to Bangkok. As regards these planes, the I.J.A. is not concerned. But if bombs are dropped on this camp, although only one Japanese soldier may be killed, a hundred Prisoners of War would be killed. The I.J.A. believes that the Allies are aware that there is a large camp here of about 10,000 prisoners, and also some Japanese in the vicinity. When planes are overhead, a bell will be rung (Here a demonstration of the bell-ringing). On hearing this, all Prisoners of War will take cover, in their huts if near them, or wherever possible.

"The next point is this. There have been occasions lately when Prisoners of War have been badly beaten by Japanese soldiers. The I.J.A. very much regret these incidents. (Shades of Sukey! Shades of Kanyu! This time last year?) The reason these incidents occurred is partly because P.O.W's have

TAMUANG CAMP

done things which have made Japanese soldiers angry, and also because the Japanese soldiers have short tempers. In future, all these incidents will be reported direct to Mr. Hooshiyama, the officer i/c works, who will personally decide on the matter.

"Although you are Prisoners of War, Mr. Hooshiyama will treat you impartially and not allow that to interfere with his judgement. These incidents are often caused by the fault of the P.O.W's themselves not working properly. Although the work in the camp is light, and there is not much of it, it must be done properly. Mr. Hooshiyama knows that most prisoners do work conscientiously (hoarse laughs, subdued), but some do not. It is up to those who do work well to see that others do the same". (And so on, and so on, over and over again, until we were all shuffling with impatience.)"

There were other signs of the times. On June 12th we were ordered to prepare lists of all valuables we possessed. There was no explanation, and those who had any valuables were in a sad state of indecision as to whether they should risk losing their valuables by declaring them, or risk losing their lives if they didn't.

Meanwhile, arrangements for the Japan Party's move had been completed, and towards the end of June they began moving off from the camp in groups of several hundred each day, at 1 p.m. All the mens' clothes, if they had any, were taken from them, and the Japs gave them each one white gym vest, one pair of cotton gym shorts, one pair of white socks, one pair of speedo boots, and one green Dutch army tunic. Also blankets. The shorts were in wonderfully assorted colours — public-lavatory green, pale heliotrope, ultramarine, pink, and various small check stripes. An exotic sight.

Rather with the idea of sugaring the pill of departure, the Japs made much of these parties, and more or less gave them 'military honours' as they marched out of the camp. On the day the first party went off, the Japs suddenly demanded the attendance of our camp band. Only two cornets could be found at such short notice, and they played the party out to patriotic tunes, such as Roll Out the Barrel and Boys of the Bulldog Breed. To crown all, the Jap guard turned out, and the Jap N.C.O.'s in charge of each section of prisoners drew their swords and did a bandy-legged goose-step through the gates.

One of our Lieutenant-Colonels in the crowd of us watching this comic-opera sight remarked, twirling his moustaches and spreading his chins, "It's not military. And what's more it's not even funny". Well, I dunno. It was NOT military, but it was exasperatingly, Japanesely, absurd.

But of course apart from the foolery of it there was a sombre side as well. We all knew that Allied strength in the Pacific, as elsewhere, had grown enormously, and that much Japanese shipping was being sunk. Jap-occupied docks and harbours, and Jap ships in the Pacific, would not be very safe places now. And the men who were now marching away were well aware of this. Indeed it was just one more chance of fate. Some ships were sunk

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

by Allied submarines and hundreds of our men were drowned. But then again some of them were rescued, and for them this reluctant departure from Tamuang brought liberty, many months sooner than it came to us who remained.

Halcyon Days

JULY—NOVEMBER, 1944

WHEN we had finished all our moves our final hut was rather pleasantly situated. We were, happily, about half a mile from the Jap quarters, and on the edge of a long strip of gardens which lay between us and the main tarmac road, which was just outside the camp fence. Our surroundings could be appreciated lazily when the weekly holiday came round.

There were many mynah birds in this locality, and it was amusing to watch them courting on the fence — pompous lemon-headed creatures — bowing and billing, puffing and chortling. The long flat stretch of gardens was blue-green with shallots and grass-green with fresh young maize. Low blue hills showed on the horizon (where I'm sure no hills had been when we first came here), and a cool breeze blew.

When evening came, the rosy-salmon clouds lay mid-way between a sky of blue above and luminous green below. "Above the clouds, like silver tinkets, a sliver of new moon, and the bright evening star."

At the beginning of July a slight bout of fever landed me in hospital. Conditions there were extraordinarily good, and all sorts of extra luxuries were available for those who could buy them.

After breakfast, a convalescent patient came round collecting our orders for the canteen, both 'dry goods', and also fried eggs or omelettes for lunch. Tea, coffee, lime juice and tamarind juice, were on sale all day long at the hospital canteen, and were brought through the huts three times a day. Free drinking-water was brought round. The hospital library was just over the way, and books were brought round to those who couldn't walk.

I was well enough to enjoy these things, and spent most of my time eating, sleeping, and reading, and making copious notes of the latter to exercise the brain. The weather, too, was fine, and the mornings, as always, were beautiful.

"I always used to extol the early mornings, anywhere", I wrote in my diary, "but especially in Malaya, because they are such a contrast to the rest of the day. Not since Changi have I known their delight, when I used to stroll round my garden before breakfast. This morning I got up from necessity at sunrise, and had time to look me on my way back to the hut. Few people were about. There was a cool breeze among the many wide-spread fruit trees which are so numerous here. The sunrise was exceptional, and spread far overhead and round to the edges of the horizon — where, indeed, it displayed its most delicate contrasts of salmon, gold and green.

"As I passed a deserted Thai hut, I noticed a rose bush which bore a single blossom. Plain pale pink, full blown. A poor, washed-out specimen. But when I smelled it, I found the true nostalgic one-and-only scent, and

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

knew 'that joy which deep as sadness lies'."

* * * * *

I think the next four months were the most pleasant of all we spent as prisoners. I do not say we were happy, for how could any man of feeling be so, without his liberty? For most of us, our conditions of restricted physical liberty, our perforce, restrained ambitions, and our repressed inclinations, were a sufficient bar to happiness. But at least we now became less positively unhappy.

Our greater leisure, and our being less harried, gave us more time for the arts and graces. Once more we organised classes and lectures in a great variety of subjects, and again our dramatic and musical shows improved and expanded. Our weekly holidays, on Thursday, became regular instead of haphazard, and were the occasion of football, baseball, and basket ball matches. Indoors, bridge and chess flourished, and many people made or acquired little open-wick lamps to enliven the evenings.

The library was well-run and had a wide selection of books. It was formed almost entirely of volumes which we had acquired individually either at Changi or from houses in Singapore town, and which we had carried with us in our haversacks all over Thailand. Now, when we gathered together in large camps, we pooled our books in the common library.

Sometimes, though, books were used for other purposes, especially if the owner were suffering from dysentery; and the thin fine paper of bibles sometimes made good fag-papers. Added to our easier conditions, there was a distinct 'end of term' feeling in the camp, due to our knowledge of the Allied progress on the continent.

Upon this season of felicity, congenial work now set the seal for me. I was gardening again, not as my own boss, as in Changi, but at least, also, not under the Japs.

There were several different gardens scattered throughout the camp, and the one we worked in had great advantages. To get to it we went through the hospital area, past a clump of bamboos in which a colony of weaver birds were building their stockinged nests, and right on to the farthest corner of the camp, away from the main roads and from any of the places which the Japs frequented. It was a small garden, and usually there were no more than eight of us working there. The chief gardening officer spent most of his time in the larger garden, and only visited us for a short time each day.

Our procedure was to take half as many shovels or picks as our total numbers, and then divide ourselves into two shifts, working turn about for half-hour stretches. While off duty, we sat under a guava tree which grew beside our plot, and talked. We always had our mugs with us, and two tea-men brought round a drink mid-morning and mid-afternoon. One of these tea-men was Robby, who, after his evacuation from Kanyu in the early days, had rejoined us at Tarso. As an additional luxury, we gave ourselves

the afternoon off in rotation.

As we sat beneath the guava tree we saw each day a lark performing his ritual song and dance from the bamboo fence. Taking off from his perch there, he would ascend singing, much like our larks at home; but he never went higher than ten or twelve feet, at which dizzy altitude he switched off his mechanism and dropped to a position on the fence a few yards from where he had started. He repeated this throughout the morning with untiring monotony.

Once, a fine white hawk came circling over, a virginal bird with the spotless luminance that a seagull has in a pale winter sunlight at home. As it completed its circle and came up into the breeze, which was steady and light, it remained for a few seconds completely motionless. Then, as its momentum ceased to carry it, it maintained its position by the merest flicker of its wings.

Out in the swamp egrets abounded, and later, when it became flooded, the fish-eagles used to sweep down, and fly off to a neighbouring tree with their catch in their claws. The black-and-white checked kingfishers also came there, and amazed us when we saw them first, because they hovered, hawk-like, before dropping like shot bodies into the water.

In due course, the guava tree bore fruit, and ripened. For a couple of weeks we spent much of our spare time shaking down the fruit with long poles. We found them pleasant enough to the taste — little corrugated spheroids, sweet and yellow-skinned, like apples, but with pink flesh.

We were not the only ones who liked them, for sometimes as we sat there a group of parrakeets would alight on the tree and remain there feeding, plain to see in their brilliant green bodies, salmon and grey unders, blue beaks and red eye-washers. Sometimes a whole flock of them would come hurtling over towards us, and seeing we were there, would change direction all together in an instant, as though operated by a single mind. They were startlingly swift birds, and would whistle away in a wide area as quickly as they had come, bullet-nosed and dagger-winged in silhouette.

One day as we were digging over a bit of ground beside the fence, a Thai was passing on the path immediately outside. He stopped beside us, grinned, and began to speak. We all leaned on our shovels and looked hopefully at him, wondering it at last we were meeting in person the 'English-speaking Thai with gold teeth' who seemed to have been the originator of so many hot rumours on this river. Was he now going to tell us something big? Had Germany, perhaps, capitulated again? properly this time? We waited all-expectant for what he had to say. Then he spoke, pointing and grinning: "How much your shorts? I buy your shorts, yes?"

It was at this period that I took up contract bridge again, for the first time as a prisoner. One has to be so careful about confessing one's self a player, that I had hitherto firmly resisted it. Bridge fiends are more fiendish than most sorts, and I could never endure having a game turned into a religious ceremony. However, with carefully chosen companions I found

bridge a pleasant and even exciting pastime and I generally played with Hutch, Joe Gormless (of Banana Grove), and 'Fibrositis' Black, a perspicacious stock-broker.

We couldn't play bridge every evening, as our lights were restricted. The Japs had forbidden more than three lamps of any kind to be used in each hut, and as these were a couple of hundred feet long, and the lamps mere open wicks in pig fat, we had precious little illumination. Fortunately not everyone wanted to play bridge, so those who did usually had the lights in rotation. On non-lamp nights, we often got up quizzes, spelling games, and such like childishnesses.

One of the diversions of the times was to watch the Japs at bayonet drill. In the midst of this extensive camp there was an old rice-field, flat and low-lying so as to be easily flooded, and surrounded by a little bank to keep in the water. It was about the size of a football field, and being disused for a season or two was now covered with grass.

The Japs had been taking the war a little more personally for several months now, and they found this field a good place for their bayonet drill and fencing. It always amused us to see and hear them at these exercises, during which they unwittingly emphasised in themselves all that was ludicrous in our eyes.

For one thing, they are taught to utter what they suppose to be a terrifying cry each time they make a point with their bayonets. In a way this does not seem very different from us, for in our army too we are encouraged to utter blood-curdling yells when making a charge. But the Japs do it not only in the charge but every time they make a lunge at their adversary. What's more, the sounds which they imagine horrific, seem to our ears not so much terrifying as terrified. In fact, to hear them at this drilling, with their continual, long-drawn-out, and plaintive "Wa-a-ah", "Wa-a-ah", uttered in "fifty different sharps and flats", was to be reminded inevitably of the chorus of frogs at Tarso.

And then they looked rather like frogs too. In the bayonet fencing, the two protagonists wore the usual helmets with wire-mesh visors, and also thick ribbed black and white pads of rubber over the vulnerable parts of the body. I think they rather resembled great land crabs; but the frog motif was strongly re-introduced by their last exercise, in which they sat down on their haunches, and in that position leaped about in lunges and parries like squat amphibian monsters.

Later on this padi-field was excavated to form a huge duck pond, where thousands of ducks besported themselves with as great an agility as the Japs before them, but with considerably more gracefulness.

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We were not without some trials and interruptions in this elysian interlude. At the end of August we had our first visit from the new Japanese

Superintendent of Prisoner of War Camps in Thailand, Colonel Sukasower. There was the usual flap during the preceding week. Special cleaning-up parties traipsed through the camp, and the 'unessential' gangs, such as the gardeners, were reduced in number. The Jap orderly sergeant detained all officers after roll call one evening, and lectured them on the duties of hut commanders and officers in charge of the mens' working parties.

Seeing that the hut commanders were not present (they were always excused parade as they had to remain in their huts)—, and that the party officers were a tiny fraction of the hundred of us receiving this harangue, we were not particularly interested — let alone amused. He continued his lesson by telling us the correct way to give orders to our men, and informing us that we should always praise them when their work was good.

What extraordinary people these Japs were, to assume that we admitted ourselves to be part of their jim-crack I.J.A. now that we were their prisoners; to imagine that our relations with our own troops could be conditioned by them, complete outsiders; and that we were all disposed to be good little Japanese.

When the Jap sergeant had finished, the warrant officer got up on the rostrum and completed the farce. He told us, through the interpreter and Col. Blank, of the importance of first appearances for Col. Sukasower's visit, and reminded us of what he called "the British tradition of unstinted hospitality and welcome to a guest". This to prisoners of war awaiting the representative of everything they loathed most in their existence. What a wonderland we lived in.

On the day of his visit an address from Col. Sukasower was read out to us, and was an inescapable contrast to that of his predecessor, Nakamura, a year ago at Kanyu, for it spoke, amongst other things, of "the day of our repatriation". It was still in bad English, though, for the Japs never bothered to have even their most serious documents or manifestos checked over by a competent English speaker, not realising, I suppose, how ludicrous we found them.

Few of the camp interpreters had more than a bad text-book knowledge of English, and most of them not even that. At Lower Kanyu, where a manuscript of each talk or lecture had first to be submitted for checking, one had been put in on the subject of the battleship 'Prince of Wales'. Anything relating to warfare was forbidden in lectures, but the document was returned unscathed by the interpreter, who had merely blue-pencilled the title 'Prince of Wales', and, in all gravity, substituted "The Duke of Windsor".

We also had a few days trouble in early September in the form of a blitz on all officers' working parties. This blitz, like most others, subsided in a few days. One irritating result of it, though, was that our dozens of surplus Lieut-Colonels started to turn out to work. As there were insufficient jobs suitable to their rank and station, they had inevitably to poach on the

preserves of their juniors.

I expect the irritation was mutual. Several of them were distributed amongst the gardeners and, of course, one was put in charge of our little party. It was just a damned nuisance, to say the least of it. Our system of half-hourly alternate shifts didn't go down well, for his first act was to chivy the resting shift back to work with the infuriating remark that, "If I can work, you can."

However, though we still remained on our little garden party, things were changing, and the old times did not come back. From time to time we were taken off for other jobs, and though the change was often pleasant, it was a pointer to the time when our garden party would be finally dissolved.

It was certainly refreshing to go out for a day with the wood party. The mere sight of water and boats is heart-stirring, I think, even if the water were of the murkiest and the boats of the dingiest. But this water was green, a cloudy green not in itself particularly entrancing, but at least superficially bright and cheerful with the sun upon it and with its edging of foliage.

Motor launches drew us up-river in big barges, whose owners, with wife and family, lived their lives in the high flat sterns under the curved roofs. These Thai barge people were kind to us when the Japs were not around, and their bright-eyed children played with us. The wood was stacked by Thai contractors at various sites on the river bank, and we had to get it down the bank and out to the barges. The Thais we met on these trips often gave us presents of fruit. I hope they understood our gratitude, for not many of us could thank them except in English, and by signs.

On another day, I was detailed for a party "filling in slit trenches round huts we had pulled down. Very boring. And at the break a Dutchman threw his tea dregs carelessly over my foot. Altogether I was feeling very bloody-minded. Then came a pleasant diversion. Air raid warning. Koreans changing guard were bawled out by Sergeant, and sent doubling to guard house. Met Lt. Osuki (Pouter Pigeon) en route. Messed up salute. Re-bawled by Sergeant. Good pantomime.

"On the following day, we had another air raid warning and another pantomime. One guard was seen, and doubled to the guard room. Those behind hid under a tree, then thought they were seen by Suki (Pouter Pigeon again), and came out by stops and starts. Then deployed, and "advanced using cover". After 50 yards decided otherwise, joined up and doubled home unchallenged by Suki, who throughout the performance had reduced them to jellified stupidity simply by standing with his arms folded and treating them to a continuous terrifying scowl".

A job for which we were detailed in rotation was that of stand-by officer for night-unloading of trucks at the station. It came round very seldom and I only got it once. I "was called about 1 a.m. Found party assembling quietly, no shouting by Japs. Lamps. Guards. Party some Dutch some Aussies. Start off. Singing and whistling old favourites. Self taking long strides out of step. Stink of refuse-piles in village. Dogs barking. No lights. Five

HALCYON DAYS

trucks to unload. Twenty men to a truck and one lamp. Aussies organised themselves into shifts, finished an easy first. Dutch tied for second with one British truck. One British truck very far behind-hand. Heavy logs, bad unloading site; not too well organised. Finished unloading about 4 a.m. Fall in . . . by battalions or all together? One feels one may be thought weak and inefficient for not making quick decisions, but a certain hesitancy in unknown circumstances is inevitable, and if not unduly prolonged, wise. March back. Stinks and dogs. Then a sudden fragrance of night-scented flowers. No singing. Talk. Jap says "Bugero, karnero, etc., etc.," not meaning anything very insulting, but I find it irritating. Guard house. Collect lamps. One lamp late coming up — Bugero. Dismiss".

On another occasion, in the middle of November, we had an 'emergency check roll-call'. Everyone hurried to the parade ground, and odd bodies of men kept arriving at the double. Some of the Japs doubled off to the far end of the camp, and others drove away in a lorry. Captain 'I.Z.' marched off round the camp with his bodyguard. The British camp staff checked up on our numbers. After about forty minutes. I.Z. returned, and through the Jap interpreter told Col. Blank all about it.

The interpreter was a wrinkled, scraggy-necked old reptile whom we called the tortoise. On this occasion he was ridiculous to watch. Sentence by sentence he translated I.Z.'s speech, and concluded each period with a prim little bow and a smirk to Col. Blank, holding his hands up like a mittened old maid. "Captain Suzuki velly much satisfied", he said, smirking and bridling. "Velly, velly much satisfied — yes". And I.Z. stood by, grinning like a plausible gorilla.

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The death-knell for us gardeners came towards the end of November. After a great deal of arguing it was decided that all officers should be detailed for the various jobs in the camp in rotation, because some jobs were considered better than others, and this was, I suppose, the fairest way of doing it. Seeing that I was a loser by the new regime, I naturally looked upon it with considerable gloom. However, I managed to be philosophical too, noting in my diary, after deploring the change, ". . . so ends my first period in a semi-privileged party on this river. It was good while it lasted".

“ . . . Slowly Comes Flooding In The Tide ”

NOVEMBER, 1944—JANUARY, 1945

IT happened on November 29th, 1944. That was the date which began a new era. At last, and at last, we knew without the shadow of a doubt that the Allies were taking the offensive in Burma. Our companions and fellow-countrymen on the other side of the Jap barrier, who in beating the Japs were bringing us the gift of freedom, were mustering towards us. And we *knew* that once an Allied offensive began, the Japs would never stand against it.

Even from the earliest days after Singapore's fall, victory, to me at least, had never been anything but a matter of time. And now we had visible proof that that time was near. In spite of the cheering news that we got of Europe, and in spite of the continual night-bombing over Thailand since Christmas last, and the frequent tiny specks by day which we knew were our recon planes, we had not until now a tangible demonstration of Allied resurgence. But today all our past hopes were justified, and we were filled with a surge of confidence and exhilaration.

"Just after roll-call I heard a couple of crumps. Out in front of the huts everyone was staring upwards. I walked up there, and saw puffs of ack-ack in the sky, through which twenty-one planes in group of three were flying quite low, and it seemed, slowly. They turned northwards, glinting in the evening sun. A cloud of smoke rose from where they had bombed. A glorious sight — recalling, but far out-topping, that night when one gigantic black plane zoomed over our heads like a symbol of another world.

"But the reaction now was laughter. It was so cocky, and so comic. In daylight, without sound or warning, they were suddenly there before our incredulous eyes; and as we watched, not a Jap 'kurra-ed' us, or was even in sight — except the unfortunate in charge of the digging party, who tried frantically and unsuccessfully to untie the string of his helmet. We all stood watching, unhindered, and burst out laughing.

"Then to crown all, when everything was over, the camp alarm sounded, and we were herded to our huts — no smoking allowed".

From now onwards there was no looking back. Peaceful interludes we still occasionally had, but the tempo of life had been stepped up, and did not decline. Three days after this first daylight Allied raid there was another one, also in the evening. When they had finished it, the planes turned for home and passed almost directly over our camp — twenty-one huge and magnificent machines, flying comparatively low and in effortless synchronisation. Inevitably they were fearful, too, but then they were, at last, on our side. No single plane went up to challenge them. The Japs' 'charcoal burner', as their seemingly solitary plane in Thailand was known as, kept its wheels

safely to ground until it was all over. Now the Japs were experiencing the conditions which we had endured in Malaya. The tables were turned with a vengeance.

From this time onwards, day and night raids were common. To meet the new conditions all the old restrictions and nuisance rules were re-introduced, and some new ones added. On two days running we had kit inspections, and again we were reminded that we must not retain any valuable possessions.

All available men were put to digging the big ditch. This was about twelve feet deep and nine feet wide at the top, and was to surround the entire camp. Its purpose was variously guessed at, as being partly to help the Allied identification of the camp, and partly as a defence measure against our getting out, and anyone else getting in. It was also suggested that in the event of an Allied parachute landing, or a local rising of the Thais, we would all be herded into this ditch and shot.

Further signs of the times were seen in the stopping of all parties which used to work at various places outside the camp; and in the ordering into camp of a few men who looked after the herd of cattle, and used to sleep in a shed outside the camp fence.

Then it was announced that "December 7th, 8th and 9th will be devoted to intensive war drills by all I.J.A. in Thailand. All I.J.A. will be fully armed, and various exercises will be carried out. These will include Air alarms, and on three G's being sounded, everybody will take cover". Also, all tools and implements such as spades, rakes, axes and saws, which we used on gardening and woodcutting jobs, had to be handed in, "as there is a tool check on".

A sixty-foot wooden tower which the Japs had built as an air raid look-out post, was now tenanted throughout the day by an armed sentry. It was clear that the Japs envisaged the possibility of an Allied invasion of Thailand, or the adjacent coast of Burma, and thought that December 8th, the anniversary of their attack on Malaya, might be chosen by us as an appropriate date.

On the evening of the 8th there was a raid over Kanburi which lasted until dark, and we had to sit all that time in our slit trenches. Roll call by the ineffectual light of hurricane lamps, "was a comic procedure enlivened by spasmodic glows in the sky from the fire at Kanburi", after which we went back to our hut and had a short game of bridge until lights out.

More regulations were issued for the daily lay-out of our kit, and a new system of tallies was introduced which was supposed to record how many inmates of the hut were out at the latrine at any particular time during the night. This system had to be operated by the members of the hut, who were detailed for it in rotation. It became known, of course, as the P picket.

On the 14th we again had long raids, morning, lunch time, and evening; and again roll call was held by lamp light. In explanation of the huge glow in the sky after the last raid at Kanburi, the Jap interpreter had said that "one soldier's hut had been set on fire". Could he surpass this effort today,

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

we wondered? Yes, he could and he did. He actually apologised to us for today's raid by our own planes, saying: "These raids cause *you* more inconvenience than they do us". Oh yeah?

On the 15th, there was a surprise search, and I was unable to get back to the hut in time to make sure that everything was hidden. As we waited outside and watched the searchers going through our kit I think the sense of doom which I felt was caused almost equally by fear of the consequences to myself if my forbidden articles were discovered, and fear that I should lose all the notes I had collected, and be unable to write what I wished to afterwards. Apart from my diary, maps, other documents and compass, I still had my parang, sheath-knife, clasp knife, twelve boxes of matches, six tins of meat, my sail, rope, and other useful small items. However, they were not found.

Life still had its pleasant interludes all the same. For a while I was working with a party roofing our huts with attap thatch. We sat in a row up on the bamboo rafters, each with a handful of small ties, while others on the ground passed up the attaps on long poles. This was the cold season, and in the early morning it really felt chilly up there in the breeze before the sun was on us.

Yet it was delightful up there, surrounded by huge shady mango trees, which were covered with flowers whose scent was faintly akin to violets. And the mere fact of our being perched up there fifteen feet above the solid ground and all that dwelt thereon, gave us a sense of detachment from those objects, and from all our confining environment. Presently the sun warmed up, but still the air was sharp and dry. At the morning break we had tea, and peanut toffee from the canteen. And we talked and laughed and argued through the day.

Occasionally we had work outside the fence, shifting oil drums which were stored in dug-outs in the fields around the camp. It was nice to get out for a change, but irksome to have a Jap to deal with — though in fact this particular little blighter tried to be pleasant.

In the same area was the slaughtering pen, where vultures and crows collected every day. When they were disturbed, the vultures could be seen circling continuously over the camp. There were seldom less than fifty of them, great heavy birds with red heads and an immense wing span.

Nothing could be more majestically graceful than these birds when in the air. Once they gain a fair altitude they travel entirely by making use of air currents. Their wings never flap, but remain rigidly outspread, merely tilting a little now and then, the better to catch the breeze. Their fan-tails bend slightly as rudders, but otherwise only their heads conspicuously move, peering rapaciously from side to side. Round and round they go in circles or figures of eight, zooming down the wind or slowing into it, getting higher and higher until at last they are mere specks in the blue, and often disappear from sight above the highest clouds.

How different they are on the ground. We saw a flock of them walking near the slaughter pen, reluctant to move away at our approach for fear of missing a meal. They looked a mouldy grey-brown colour, and hunch-backed as though diseased, the perfect exemplars of 'the loathly bird', in whose foul diet carcase-offal is by far the most cleanly item.

Soon came Christmas once more. On Christmas day we awoke to hear the sound of carols flowing sublimely on the morning stillness. Few kinds of music arouse such probing memories as carols do, and for prisoners of war their sound is bitter-sweet indeed. But the bitterness was gentle, and the sweetness was new hope. For us, it was the Herald Angels who sang.

In the evening we had a pantomime, the Sleeping Beauty. All the Japs attended, including Colonel Sukasower. He had our British Camp Commandant, Colonel Blank, sitting beside him, an unusual compliment which we thought was a certain sign of our changed conditions.

That pantomime was exceptionally good. I think most of us felt, too, that it really would be our last one as prisoners. Certainly not one of us will ever chance to hear again that wistful, lilting, theme-song of the Sleeping Beauty, without deep memories of those days.

At the end of the show Col. Blank made a speech, ostensibly to thank Sukasower and company for permitting the show and coming to see it. But he also managed to work in a neat allegory on the wicked fairy being vanquished by the good fairy, and dispelling the black clouds under which we all lived. Whether or not any of the Japs saw the point, I do not know. Probably not. It was a good touch, and Col. Blank got away with it.

An unintended pantomime was provided by the Japs themselves at the end of December, when the ditch-digging was completed. In order to encourage the diggers, and I imagine in emulation of what they thought was the Western manner (they kept copying the West, though affecting to despise it), they had made a competition out of it, and now they organised a big prize-giving ceremony for the winning teams.

It took place immediately after roll call. 'I.Z.' presided, and all Jap officers attended. The prizes were led up to the rostrum. Two cows, whom excitement caused to forget themselves; pigs in baskets (and two of them roped down on a hand-cart); a big basket of ducks and geese. "Proceedings were hilarious. Those of us in the front row could not keep straight faces. 'I.Z.' on the rostrum, looking severe. Geese honking, pigs squealing, cattle making messes. The Jap officers lined up facing us, not sure whether *they* were being laughed at or not. Interpreter, like a prim old maid, read out a message after 'I.Z.' had shot it at us in Jap. 'Congratulations to the men for their work. Cow to this party, pig to that, etc., etc., and a goose for Col. Blank. This tickled us, but the Japs still saw nothing funny. Then the basket was opened, and Col. Blank (a very small man) was given two enormous geese, and had to take one under each arm. At last the Japs smiled – even 'I.Z.'"

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

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On January 18th we got short notice from the Japs that all officers except the M.O.'s were to be moved to Kanburi aerodrome camp. This, surely, was another sign of the times. Like it or like it not, it had all the looks of being one more of the inevitable steps which we must take before we could achieve our freedom.

If we had ever thought of what conditions would be like at the end, we had known that sooner or later the Japs would separate the officers from the men. Certainly we could not have doubted they would do so as soon as they were threatened in Thailand by the Allied armies. Well, now it was happening. It was assuredly a pointer, but how close did it point? Was the end really so very near?

This separation of officers and men brought the close of a period when relations between us had been unusual, and very difficult.

It was hard both on the officers and on the men that they should have been kept together as prisoners. In theory the officers were still responsible to the Japs for the mens' discipline, but in practice they seldom had the means of enforcing it except by the mens' own good-will and good sense. To make things more difficult the Japs with their usual inconsistency, though holding the officers responsible for discipline, went out of their way to belittle them in the men's eyes — though usually their efforts had quite the opposite effect.

We learned afterwards, however, that General Percival had stipulated in the terms of surrender that the officers should not be separated from the men, since more of us know how the Japs would behave to their prisoners, and it was thought that the presence of the officers might secure more considerate treatment for us all.

There is no doubt that this was so. The dealings between the Japs and us in the first few months did set a certain standard of reasonableness, and our commanding officers constantly fought for our rights as prisoners of war, under international law; and although that standard was often broken afterwards, it remained to a considerable extent the pattern for our future treatment.

I used to think that the fortunate officers were those who were on the camp staff, or who were in charge of men's working parties, because they at least could still exercise the responsibility of their rank. They were in a position where their best qualities as officers could be of the utmost use — could even be the difference between life and death to those in their charge.

But we surplus officers, we who were the mere herd, were like emasculated creatures. We were a mere gang of workers, responsible only to and for ourselves. We lived and worked as the men did, and alongside them, and were driven and bullied as they were. We were with them, yet

not of them; the same in physical conditions, yet with a different label; we were still called officers, yet were mere bodies.

I can remember times enough when I had felt disgruntled at some short-comings of the men — times when I felt that they had let me down, or were ungrateful, or merely 'bolshie'. But in retrospect I always changed my mind. On all the occasions that mattered the men were truly admirable, and invariably backed up the officers. The more the Japs tried to humiliate us, the more the men showed their regard for us.

Some bolshieness, of course, arose through mere misunderstanding. Once, for instance, a British officer was driving a ration lorry up the track during the railway speedo. His cargo was a load of onions. He stopped on the way to give a lift to a party of sick prisoners of war. One of these died on the lorry. His illness was dysentery, and the officer got a spade and shovelled off the soiled onions. He was driving away again when he noticed that some British prisoners, half-starved as usual, had appeared on the road and were collecting the onions; so he stopped and shouted to warn them about the dysentery. The men looked up and scowled, and then remarks began to fly.

"Cor! can't we 'ave a few onions?"

"Garn! Phizz off!"

"Firkin officers!" etc. etc. And the poor lorry driver drove off frustrated.

Well, all these aggravations were now ended, and we were leaving the men to their own devices. Some of the medical officers, of course, were still with them, and could be of help in other ways than as doctors. For the rest, the camp staff duties were taken over by the warrant officers and non-commissioned officers. It seemed unlikely that the Japs would treat the men badly on our departure, for as I say, the pattern of treatment was by now pretty well defined. But our separation did mean that we could no longer be of help to those men whom we knew personally, and whom we had been able to help before.

When we said good-bye to them it was with sincere regret, for we had known each other with mutual regard both in times of peace before the Jap invasion, and in the times of such varied tribulations which had followed.

Kanburi Again

JANUARY—JUNE, 1945

WE were going to a camp with a bad reputation, and we knew that a recent addition to its staff was Lieutenant Tagasaki. He was notorious, better known as the Frog, who was said to be very harsh in his treatment of prisoners of war. We also heard that there was a very strict search on entering the camp.

We moved on January 22nd, and travelled by river in barges. The distance was short, and the journey expeditious, lasting from ten in the morning until shortly after 2 p.m. We landed at a sand-and-pebble beach, where we waited about for half an hour before marching to the camp; through the village, past the big grey-white paper mill, and across the aerodrome. The camp had changed greatly since we had spent one night there in 1942, on our journey up-country. There were now more huts, and a fence of sorts, whose gateway was flanked by the Jap guard house. Here we halted, and, if we had 'anything to declare', awaited our doom.

I was fairly confident that my compass and documents would be safe, and that my parang and sheath knife were unlikely to be found. The sail, done up as a pillow, was quite inconspicuous; but the matches and the tins of meat I could not effectively hide. The former were in an empty coffee tin, with a top layer of soap, and the tins of meat were merely stuffed into a pair of khaki stockings among the odds and ends in my pack. As neither of these items was particularly insidious, though technically forbidden, I judged that if they were found I would get away with nothing worse than a minor 'episode'.

My apprehension grew when we arrived at the gates. The officer who came over to inspect us could be no other than the Frog himself— a skinny, miserable fellow, with a long miserable face — yellower than most Japs, and with deep lines of bleak moroseness running from nose to mouth.

We were ordered to lay down all our baggage on the ground, including our packs, haversacks, and water bottles; and then to stand clear away from it. Then the roll was called, and as we were checked off we had to go and stand by our kit. All this seemed frighteningly thorough.

And yet the inevitable did not happen. For some reason, or for no reason, the system was changed after we had got about a third of the way through the list of names. We were ordered to put on our kits again, and were marched into the camp, where we once more dumped our kit, on the parade ground, and were told to open it out for inspection and stand clear.

Six Jap soldiers started the search, each taking one row. As there were only five rows, the odd Jap started at the opposite end of one of them, which happened to be mine. After searching the kit next to mine, the Jap

KANBURI AGAIN

was called over the another row to give his advice on some object or other. When he returned, the Jap who had started at the other end had nearly reached my kit also, and each of them assumed the other had done it. Confirming with each other that their row was completed, they went off to help finish the others.

Presently they were all called off, and we were told we could take up our kits and find our quarters. My kit had not been so much as looked at.

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Our new camp was very small and its smallness was the more noticeable because, except on rare occasions, we were strictly confined within it. Moreover, the barriers and boundaries with which it was eventually surrounded included a barbed wire fence. It was, indeed, our first real prison.

Parties continued to arrive from all over Thailand, and eventually we stabilised our numbers at about 3,500, of whom all except a few hundred were officers.

The camp was not only too small for us, but had far too few huts. The buildings we went into first were old, dirty, and dilapidated — and the sleeping platforms were too short for civilised man. As in all our journeys in the Co-Prosperity Sphere, our accommodation had to be made after we arrived at our destination. So we started at once here with the building of huts, which were made even longer than those at Temuang had been — housing a couple of hundred men each. They had also to be built too close together, because of the cramped space. New latrines, too, were started, and were built with great difficulty because the camp was so low-lying, and the water table so high. As they couldn't be dug very deep without striking water, the earth was built up round them instead.

By good fortune, we didn't have to make the big ditch round the camp, as it had been finished before we arrived. But a lot of earth out of it had been left on the inside of the camp, and it was decided to level it off. It was to be spread over the whole camp area, so as to increase its very mean average height above sea level. This job absorbed the majority of the workers in camp; and it was thus that the Levelling Party was formed.

This gang was henceforth the unskilled labour corps — the coolie, sap, or stooge gang. All the 'unprivileged' were there, all the odds and flotsam, the jetsam and the sods, the dregs, lees and leaving — the mere drudges. Even after all the levelling had been finished, the Levelling Party retained its name, and became synonymous with General Fatigue Party. If ever there were something particularly unpleasant to do, the cry would come round, "Fall in the Levellers". If there were an emergency job after working hours, always it was "Levellers turn out". The levellers got the heavy end of the bamboo every time.

But I shouldn't really worry much about the Levelling Party, for as a matter of fact I wasn't on it most of the time. Fate once more determined

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

that I should be a skilled worker. My new trade was to do with bricks. The bricks which we made were not fired, but merely baked in the sun. To save labour in handling, we made them larger than the standard size. The bricks were made in wooden moulds, for which a gang of people prepared the puddled clay.

My job was much sedater. We shaped bricks. That is to say, we cut special slopes on them to fit them for use in arches, ovens, fireplaces and so on. When we first started we had to use bricks which were already hard. It was surprising how rock-like they became merely by sun-baking. They were rather like cement, both in looks and consistency, and we had to cut them with parangs. Then, as we caught up on the work, we used, 'green' bricks, which we could slice like cheese.

Brick-cutting had the usual advantages of the 'privileged' job. We had no Jap with us, ever. As long as we did our quota of work, we could do it in our own time. We could have reasonable breaks, and occasionally give ourselves the half-day off. It meant a lot, moreover, to be able to stop work just a few minutes before the crowd, as it enabled one to have one's bath without waiting in a long queue to draw water from the well.

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The new policy of conduct towards us by the Japs seemed to be the outcome of the equal and opposite desires of making our lives as irksome as possible, and yet seeming to abide by the international code for Prisoners of War.

To forward the latter objectives they one day made a propaganda film in the camp to show that their prisoners of war were leading healthy and happy lives under the benign guidance of Nippon.

First of all they sent us back off works parade, saying, without any explanation, that the morning would be a 'yasme'. Later on there came another announcement from our hut commander, passed on as received from the Jap interpreter. "Everyone is to wear shirts and footwear, and to look happy. Coffee can be bought in the canteen, and the band will play". Ten minutes later, we got "Put on your boots and attend the concert immediately". So out we all went, half amusedly and half frostily, and stood around the camp stage.

Presently the Jap officers arrived, and we were all called to attention. Then the band started playing again and one of the Japs took photographs of the happy gathering. After ten minutes the Japs departed, and the band aptly struck up the tune of Colonel Bogey, which was loudly clapped. The Japs then generously gave permission for the band to continue playing for a further twenty minutes. We went back and resumed our bridge.

In early February, we had the first of several daylight air-raids on Tamakand Bridge, which was only three-quarters of a mile away from us. This attempt lasted three hours one afternoon, and sorely disappointed us because

KANBURI AGAIN

it failed to touch the bridge. But it was merely the fore-runner of a more serious attempt five days later, when our planes smashed up the bridge thoroughly. They were Flying Fortresses of some kind, and were a thrilling sight when they flew low.

They did both high and low level attacks and for the latter they came up the river precisely over the place where we had landed coming from Tamuang, barely half a mile away. They were so gigantic that they seemed even nearer than that. They came in behind the factory chimney and below the level of the casuarina trees which lined the road between the river and us.

The Japs had some ack-ack guns, but we never saw a plane touched by them here. There were also some small-arms nests nearby, and it was probably at one of these that a Fortress once loosed off its machine guns, turning aside from its run to do so, and flying low over the camp. It was then that we saw for the first time the Allied markings on a plane — the star in a circle, which we had heard described in one of our wireless bulletins, and which, ironically enough, was so very similar to the cap badge of the I.J.A..

Towards the end of February the Japs began a security blitz. Prisoners were forbidden once more to have any personal possessions of value, such as watches, rings, pens, propelling pencils, and cigarette cases, and now the ban also included any diaries, note books, records, or in fact written documents of any description whatsoever. They had either to be handed in for 'safe' keeping, or destroyed. There were repeated searches, and when some of these items were found the owners were beaten up and made to stand outside the guard house for a day or two on end. Finally we were given an ultimatum that if any of this contraband were found in the next search the offender would be shot.

By every touchstone that we knew, this was a serious threat. Thereafter, everybody got rid of his forbidden articles. Thousands of sheets of paper which had been laboriously covered with notes from reading or lectures, were thrown down the lats — that is to say, eventually; for to prevent the wicked waste of such a quantity of toilet paper, they were first stuck onto the bamboos which formed the compartments of our sheep-pens, where they remained until used up—which was surprisingly quickly.

If people had documents which they wanted to keep, they found hiding places for them. Many rolled-up records were hidden in the hollows of bamboo rafters, and many were buried in tins all over the camp — some under the floor of the huts and some outside, according to the individual's fancy.

I decided to bury my papers too, and chose a place beside where I cut bricks. Although this was in the open it was well drained, and I put some pieces of metal over the container to keep it dry. I buried it about a foot deep. I buried the parang and sheath knife and the tins of meat under the mud floor of the hut. I put the matches in the hollow ends of the bamboo

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

roof-rafters over my head, and stuffed handfuls of grass in after them, to represent the nests of sparrows.

These little birds did in fact have nests in some of the rafters, and in days to come often went house hunting in mine, and sometimes chucked out the grass, and a box or two of matches, on top of me or my neighbours. I left my sail as a pillow-case, and used my rope, which presently was also declared a contraband item, as a pretended support from which to hang my mosquito net.

The last entry in my diary for February was on the 15th, and there followed a most unusual gap of almost three months before my next note, which was on May 13th. One of my last entries in February was that I was feeling very "fed up" and "impatient", and that "time was dragging". I suppose that state of mind continued during March and April. Even in my first entry in May I could recall only two subjects of note during the preceding three months — the weather and Tamakand Bridge.

March was the height of the dry season, and both the grass of the aerodrome, and the trees on the low hills around us, were scorched brown. In mid-April the showers began, and by early May the hills were again pale green with the first flush of the bamboo leaves.

Our Camp Commandant was Captain Nagouchi. He was physically insignificant, and balanced this failing by a tremendous self-conceit, which his position enabled him to indulge. He made a fetish of being saluted. Whenever he walked about this little camp, which contained thirty five hundred men, he had to be saluted by everyone in sight. Few of us knew him or were able to recognise him, for he was just about as unnoticeable as possible, and would have been well cast as one of a crowd scene on the stage.

He was neither very tall nor very short; not unusually fat and not particularly thin. No-one really remembered what he looked like, because his face was a "perfect and absolute blank". He must have had a nose, but it certainly had no shape. On the other hand, there was no gaping void where the nose should have been. The same might be said of his chin. The only possible outstanding feature of his face was his horn-rimmed glasses, which merely served to thrust still further into the background whatever he had behind them. He was just a vaguely putty-coloured blob, oozing round on two legs.

It is possible that he was secretly mortified at his insignificance, and at being so obviously unrecognised by us, his slaves. So he turned his defect into an asset by creeping round the camp alone, and afterwards complaining of our lack of respect, for which he punished both the individuals and the camp in general.

One of our gaggle of Lt. Colonels was appointed Policeman, or 'Public Morality Officer' — an unenviable job whose holder was bound to be unpopular. The Japs demanded such an appointment, and someone had to do it. He was supposed to keep order in the camp, regulate the traffic queues

KANBURI AGAIN

for the canteen in the evenings, and attend functions at which the Jap officers were likely to be present, so as to call us to respectful attention on their approach.

We thought he had been chosen for the job because he was the tallest man in the camp, and happened to wear a khaki topi with a red regimental pugaree, and was thus a suitable landmark, warning, and portent for miles around. His most useful contribution to our welfare was to keep a sharp watch on Nagouchi's movements, and tag onto him when he went round the camp, uttering loud and frequent cries of 'Kiotsky' to exact our deference due. Thus was the cat somewhat belled.

Sergeant Smojo, if his name may be mentioned in the same breath with that of the exalted Nagouchi, was a nasty bit of work too. For some reason he seemed to have a section almost of supporters among some prisoners who had known him in other camps. We were told of how good he had been then, and were even invited to consider his great efficiency as an N.C.O.

Perhaps he was efficient, and how indeed could he not have been? All Jap N.C.O.'s were efficient in their jobs, or they didn't hold them. He was certainly an efficient blight on the prisoners of war. He carried out his duties with the most scrupulous rigour, and his qualities of intelligence and thoroughness, which he undoubtedly possessed, were concentrated upon making our lives as unbearable as possible.

It may be that he was sufficiently intelligent to foresee the sticky end that awaited Japan, and perhaps that drove him on in hatred, since having already committed crimes against Prisoners of War, he thought he might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb. Or possibly some malignant disease had him in thrall – for his face always had a pallid look, and was beaded with perspiration. Whatever the cause of his temperament, life was always worse than usual for us when the efficient Smojo was orderly sergeant.

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All this time our wireless set was still keeping us in touch with the world. Our feelings of exhilaration as we followed the closing in of the Allied armies on Germany can easily be imagined, for they must have been shared by the Allied people, whether free or prisoners, all the world over. But our joy was fraught with further question. We knew that Germany's defeat would affect the war against Japan, but we wondered just how – and how soon.

Germany's surrender must have been suggestive to many Japs of their own impending doom, for several of them had substitute swords made in the camp forge from old lorry-springs, hoping, I suppose, to be able to save their real ones if the worst came to pass. A popular 'bore-hole' rumour went the rounds at this time concerning our Tamuang Commandant, 'I.Z.' who was said to be "shaving his stomach and sharpening his sword".

When Germany surrendered there was not, as far as I recollect, an immediate admission of the fact by our Japs. But they admitted it to us

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

after a while, by implication. As for the Thais, they had always told us that there would be a great beating of drums when Germany was defeated. They beat them now, in Kanburi village, for hours on end, night after night.

Not long after this, at the end of May, it seems probable that the Japs feared a rising of the Thais in conjunction with air landings by the Allies, and they thought the prisoners of war might try to take part in it, as they had done recently in the Philippines. There was, in fact, a group of U.S.A. troops in the jungle, whose head-quarters were within 50 kilometres of Kanburi, though we didn't know it until after the surrender. They had been dropped by parachute, and were regularly provisioned by air; and they were in touch with the Thais. The Japs suspected that they were there, and all these circumstances together produced a curious incident whose causes and whose dangers we only half understood.

It started in a comparatively small way, when a working party of officers got into trouble with the Jap orderly officer, and two of them were brought up in front of Nagouchi. With them went Captain Dee, who acted as interpreter.

Captain Dee's efforts on behalf of his fellow prisoners resulted in an extraordinary scene. First he received the usual face-slapping, and then Nagouchi himself seized a stick and joined in, and there was a free for all on the office floor. Then Dee was taken off to the guard room.

On the next day we were given a Jap style apology. Nagouchi said, "We were wrong to beat up this officer, but we had to do it in the course of our duty". Then they asked for lists of all the jobs which we thought officers should not be forced to do.

We scented a trap here, and tried to avoid it by saying we were satisfied to continue the jobs we were doing now. But the Japs, having failed to make us walk into the trap of our own accord, abandoned the pretence and pushed us in. They announced that henceforward officers would do no more work except in the gardens, and in the soap, paper, and dye works. At the same time they closed the canteen and the barber's shop, and replaced all the officers in the cookhouse by other ranks.

On the following day came an announcement: "Nagouchi was not saluted by a certain British Lieut-Colonel" and "Tagasaki complains of cigarette ends in the huts. As a punishment, all officers are confined to their huts until further notice, except for bathing, latrine, roll call, emptying swill, and fetching food".

This confinement to our huts continued for ten days. It was a strange thing, and perhaps we were in more danger than we knew. The Japs repeated that they were treating us as "Japanese soldiers, under Japanese Army discipline". Smojo invented a new smoking rule, by which smoking might only be indulged in either standing up, or else sitting on the end of the bed-platform with the feet on the ground. It was forbidden to smoke lying down, or when sitting on the bed-platform back from the edge. One officer,

KANBURI AGAIN

caught conducting a quiz competition, was made to sign an apology, and to note that he was liable to the death penalty for a similar offence in the future.

After ten days the ban was lifted, and in our work, the running of canteen, barber's shop and so on, we returned to normal, but with a difference. The restriction on reading and smoking remained, and no one who was in the huts during working hours, owing to sickness or any other cause, was allowed to lie down.

But although our period of restriction was ended Captain Dee was still kept in solitary confinement.

* * * * *

During May we were told that we were to move again, and that Kanburi camp would be completely cleared of us by the end of July. That seemed a long way ahead, and with the cheering news from Europe we thought it might never happen. But the move-rumours became more persistent, and as I could not risk my bundle of notes being left behind if I had to move at short notice, I decided to dig it up.

One buries a thing; one digs it up again. It sounds so simple. I tried it first at night, thinking that by cover of darkness I could within a few minutes work retrieve my treasure. What a hope. The night was not quite dark, and after the eyes became accustomed to it one felt one could not only see, but be seen, for miles around—certainly by the sentry who patrolled outside the fence, just five yards away. Why did he pause in his beat just opposite to where I was?

I forget what implement I used as a digging tool, but the first touch of it upon the earth seemed like the sound of clarions. In the stillness of the night it was quite impossible that it should fail to bring the whole Jap staff running to apprehend me. I decided that after all it would be easier in daylight.

I co-opted Hutch and Sydney to keep a look-out for me, and boldly started to dig for my property in the middle of the morning. I dug hurriedly and self-consciously for a few minutes, and found not a trace of what I had buried. In the middle of it, a mystery-thriller tooth-whistle from Syd attracted my attention, and he told me that a Jap was prowling round the kitchen, which was just a few yards from my pitch. So I had to give it up for the second time.

My third effort was also in daylight, but in non-working hours. The advantage of doing it at that time of day cut about equally for the Japs and me. As there was nobody else about it was easy for Hutch and me to see if there was a Jap coming. But equally, as there was no one else around, it was easy for a Jap to see us. The only likely direction of trouble was from the sentry on the bund outside the fence, and Hutch would keep an eye on him — he said.

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

All was set, and I began digging. I felt as though I was performing on a dais in the middle of the parade ground; that every Jap in the place was watching me, and that Nagouchi, Tagasaki and Smojo had ringside seats. I widened the hole until it was a yard in diameter, and deepened it until I felt that the mountain of earth I threw up must resemble a flaming red question mark to any who should see it. And in the middle of my work I glanced up at the bund, and saw — yes, the very sentry. He was standing on the bund, five yards away, looking through the bamboo fence at me and my activities. . . .

There happened to be a bamboo riddle some distance away which the building party used for sieving earth. Without another glance at the sentry I continued my digging, and flung each shovelful of earth at the riddle. That riddle was almost out of range; but though the sentry may have thought I was mad to stand so far away from it, he evidently didn't think I was being treacherous. He stood there a while, forming what conclusion I know not — and presently walked on along the bund.

Hutch, whom I regret to say only saw the sentry at the same time as I did, always swore afterwards that he had been standing there the whole time, but had kept so still that neither of us had seen him. Anyhow, I resumed my digging, and at last struck iron. Since I had buried my papers the Levelling Party had been at work, and my one foot below the surface had become more than two feet. A little while more and I uncovered the container and got it out. Then I filled in the hole, and took my treasure trove back to my hut by a circuitous route, trying by sheer will-power to blend completely with my surroundings.

The only harm to my papers proved to be a few rust spots on the outside pages.

* * * * *

Preparations for the move to the new camp went slowly but steadily forward. The whole camp was divided into eight parties, which would move off at regular intervals. Hoping I might yet be saved another move, by an Allied offensive here, I managed to get listed on the last party but one.

In the meantime our interpreter Dee had now been nearly two months in solitary confinement.

“ . . . From Our Dark Spirits ”

JULY—AUGUST, 1945

ONLY rarely now did we have the chance of going outside the camp, on those few occasions when we were sent down through the village to the river, to bring up bamboo poles which had been rafted down from the upper reaches. Pleasant indeed it was to get out, even so briefly; to feel the space and the distance; to be beneath huge shady trees and watch the river before us; to see men and women and boys and girls, no matter how poor, yet smiling and free and uninhibited. There was sunshine and a gusty wind and slow white clouds, and hills around us mottled with olive and green. If we were free — this country would be heaven.

But usually we saw all this from the other side of the fence, looking over the aerodrome to the village, whose roof-tops alone were visible amongst the trees. It was often an impressive view, in spite of being seen through strands of barbed wire. The paper-mill was incongruously modern — clean, clear-cut and symmetrical, its slim chimney twice as high as the tallest tree beside it. A line of casuarina trees bordered the road, and when a storm blew in contrary eddies from the hills around us, the pointed casuarinas were bent in every direction at once.

All this scene lay to the west, and so was often made memorable by the evening skies, when the hills changed from olive to blue, and from purple to black. And if the sky were dull, it might become suddenly glowing before the light faded, and a silver-primrose channel of light appear between the lead-blue clouds, crossing behind the chimney to the horizon of hills.

It was hard to escape from the press of one's fellows in this camp. Never before had we been so herded together for so many months. There was but one small piece of no-man's-land, on the south-eastern side beyond the bathplace. There only, could we almost be alone, and, as the light faded, sit and look out to the hills, and talk a little. Or just sit in silence, and see, perhaps, a sky to dream of. The moon a glistening orb of silver in the pale blue heavens; the hills rose-lavender in the setting sun.

And presently, over the grass-grown ricefields, eight white egrets flying in unity towards us. The perfection of movement; the epitome of grace, of restfulness, of serene, unhurried purpose. Flying low, they wheel slightly as they approach us, their whiteness washed milk-blue in the last light of day.

* * * * *

The time between evening roll call and lights out was short in this camp, and we no longer played bridge as we had done before. Instead, we talked. Every night in fine weather the small parade ground was dotted with groups

of people sitting on groundsheets or sacks in the starlight, talking, sipping mugs of tea from the canteen, and smoking. Other groups sat under their hut-eaves, with their feet in the drain, and still others gathered in the huts themselves. Often we just sat or reclined on our beds in the semi-darkness, and talked and talked of all sorts of things.

More and more now-a-days our thoughts turned towards home. We argued caravans versus hotels for holidays. We discussed ways of making a pleasant living at home, and never coming east again — apple-growing, hens, dairying. We talked of politics, of social welfare, or building-costs, and what was the ideal design for 'workmens' houses. We argued with some temper for or against tax on bachelors and a bonus for children. Then back again to our house and our bit of land. *Après la guerre . . . Après la guerre.*

And then the concerts. If anything was bitter-sweet, those evenings of music were so. They pointed back to years of spaciousness, dignity, and ease.

Music that we knew reminded us of other evenings, of other places, and of other people. That was the sweetness. And bitter was the inevitable contrast with the present. The desire for life's warmth and freedom and vigour was beginning to consume us, for most of us were young; "but beauty vanishes . . ." and youth passes, and already we had spent over three years in withering captivity.

Sometimes at night we heard explosions away over in the west. In that direction, only ninety miles of country separated us from the sea; and on that sea there now were British ships. The sounds we heard must have been much nearer than that, and the ninety miles which separated us from Tavoy held a serried range of mountains rising to five thousand feet in height, and blanketed with the densest jungle. It was unlikely that the sound of a bombardment could reach us here, but still it was to the sea that our minds turned as we sat up on the bamboo-slatted bed and stared, listening, into the night — as though our eyes could traverse those dark miles of jungled mountains as easily as our fancy assuredly did, searching across them to our own people there, who were fighting towards us.

At regular intervals one's turn came round to do night picket for one hour at the end of the hut, and then, too, one's thoughts ranged far. If the night were moon-lit, the village dogs howled an incessant accompaniment to one's slow paces up and down, and sometimes the Jap patrol brought one's thoughts back to the present: sometimes the drone of one of our bombers, returning from a raid, set one speculating on the future. And at times one merely dreamed, and sought vain epithets for the glittering stars.

So the days passed, and since the collapse of Germany we seemed to have sunk again into a sort of timelessness. We felt, I wrote:—

"Quite isolated from the moil of outside events. Particularly the other afternoon when we were at the old camp over the way, the world and the war seemed, not miles away, but in a different existence. Sunshine, blue sky, white clouds and green hills around; and beside one, grass and trees and lazy

twitters of birds. The Jap sentry, though with bayonet fixed, sauntered uninterestedly, and was anyhow familiar to us as an indigenous object. Calves scabbled lazily out of refuse baskets. A Jap galloping a pony up and down seemed only to emphasise our isolated rusticity. In these placid waters one is drifted from day to day, Each morning's reveille comes with surprising rapidity. Each weekly concert or half-day reminds one with a shock that a week has gone. Each signing for pay, and each pencilled new moon, becomes a sudden and scarcely believable record of another month".

And then, perhaps, in the midst of this insentient vacuous existence we would hear some exhilarating piece of news from our wireless set, and would be "carried in a moment to a world of movement, strife, and momentous events, when everything is 'just around the corner'."

* * * * *

During July more parties left for the new camp, and on August 10th the fifth party went off. On that day I wrote:—

"Do we think today as we thought yesterday? No. At the end of January I thought 'Two months, or six, for Siam'. That may still be right. But in May, when we were told we were to move by the end of July, I thought 'Then we won't move at all'. Now it is the 10th of August, and half the camp gone".

"After so long of this life, one sometimes gets a flash glimpse from outside, and sees oneself practically taking this life for granted. This seeming the real life — the other a thing of dreams, books and memories. All ones former life seems insubstantial, and when one does get out, one's life will start a completely new part. Meanwhile this existence goes on; as though it always had gone on, and always will. The Allies have success after success, and we think 'Hal now these little bastards will start singing a different tune. They'll soon get their deserts'. But it is months since we thought so, and they still hold the whip over us".

But one did not forget the other side of the picture, for I continued, "When weeks and months go by without anything happening (we must) remember the gigantic movements going forward, the staggering superiority of Britain, America, and Russia, the pitiful and *absolute* nothingness of materials of Japan. Her only reserve her man-power, and that rapidly becoming at a discount, man-power squandered in a bravery that is useless, because even then it can only make a difference of months. It is indeed incredible that Japan elects to await and endure the terrific blow that is due to hit her everywhere at once before many weeks are out, and must surely crumple her up quickly and completely".

This judgement was true, though the blow I envisaged knew nothing of the atomic bomb.

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SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

Nagouchi had left us and gone to the new camp with an earlier party, unknowingly taking with him, in his own kit, the parts of our wireless set. This had at last petered out because we could get no more batteries, and most of our news now came from the Allied pamphlets, written in Japanese and dropped with ever-increasing frequency for the Jap troops. We were, of course, forbidden to have these pamphlets, but, with the help of the Thais, always managed to get them.

On Nagouchi's departure the camp was taken over not by the Frog but by a little man called Mashusta. I never heard anything but good of this officer, who did whatever he could to alleviate our conditions. However, as he was only a junior officer, and still answerable to Nagouchi, he had to maintain the appearance of strict discipline. He was not allowed to authorise Dee's release from solitary confinement, but he did arrange for him to have proper food and medicines.

August came, and life still produced its monotonous trivialities. On August 11th we had a job designated 'sorting vegetables'.

"So we wander down to the office with the prospect of picking over Kangkong spinach, and sorting out stalks from leaves. But at the office we are handed hammers, pincer's, and spanners. Hello! funny things to sort veg. with. Then we move store-wards — and light dawns. It is *dried* veg. — one hundred cases which we had previously carefully packed, roped, and stencilled for the new camp, and carried from the rice store to the other end of the camp. So we start opening up. It is *all* so rotten and stinking, it is ridiculous to pretend that some is good and some bad; but it's the same old game of make-believe. We make some sort of a division. After an hour the Jap Q.M. arrives — and of course we have been doing it all wrong. Stop everything. Eventually we carry the whole shooting match, empty boxes, full boxes, rope, labels, sacking, good and bad veg, and lay it out in Hut 14, a few yards from where we carried it a week ago. And in the afternoon we sort it again, and weigh the 'good'. Well, it passes another day. . . And now (we hear) we are to eat it".

But were we to eat it? Although the war had been quickening its pace for us since last November, and although there was at least the possibility of its early finish, yet we could not, in fact, from day to day, imagine that the end was near. We had heard rumours of victory — or imminent victory — again and again, until they had become recurring commonplaces, with no least significance. And so we were at first little moved when yet another of these stories, that the war was over, began its rounds of the camp on August the 14th. From fear of disappointment we would not allow ourselves to think of it except as 'just another rumour'.

As the day wore on, however, it became clear that there was something different about this rumour. There seemed no reason why it should be different, but somehow it was so, and it persisted, and spread. It soon became the only topic of the camp, and everyone wanted to know its origin. All we

could find out for certain was that a Korean guard had said to one of our liaison officers that the war was over.

That was all, and by itself was nothing. But still there was that air of truth about it, and although no one knew why or how, we just felt that there was something in the wind. People said half jokingly when they met, “Well, are we free now?” to which the stock reply was “Yes. We’re free men, but we don’t know it.” Yet underneath the banter was the unspoken thought that, perhaps *could* it possibly be true?

On the 15th of August the rumour was unabated. Indeed it had become intensified. The Japs still told us nothing, but it seemed obvious now that some great event had happened, for we had new confirmation of it. Several Thais passing along the road at different times during the day had spoken to our working parties just outside the gates. Some had said that the war was over — or would be in a few days — and others had given the victory sign. We thought that, at the very least, Russia had declared war on Japan, and had entered Manchuria, or even perhaps, that Japan had asked for an armistice. If either of these were the truth we could understand why the sixth party for the new camp still had to go off on this day, according to programme, which we thought it would not have done if the war were really over.

The 16th of August came, and there was no abatement to rumour and speculation. Whatever the truth of the matter, it was certain now that some great blow had been struck against Japan.

Yet if anything were needed to suppress our fluttering hopes, to persuade us even now that the whole thing was just another story, it was the fact that the Japs pushed ahead with the arrangements for number 7 party’s departure, and paraded and inspected them on this morning. In the afternoon, too, the routine work went on. Our job was dismantling the Japs air raid shelters and removing the heavy timbers to their store, whence they would accompany us on our journey to the new camp.

The day followed its accustomed course. Evening roll-call was as usual, and after it we sat again in our scores of little groups, and talked through the darkness. But tonight there was one difference. Tonight every group was discussing an identical subject — “Was it possible that the war was really over? and if it was, why hadn’t the Japs told us?”

I was still outside, talking, when Lights Out sounded, and it was some minutes afterwards when I started to walk back to my hut. With the sounding of Lights Out our day was ended, and one more long night must pass before our hopes could revive, and look for fulfilment on another day.

I was so lost in thought, thoughts of hope and disappointment, that it was some moments before I noticed an unusual circumstance. Coming from the huts which I passed by, was subdued hum of excited voices, and odd little bursts of laughter.

I went on and reached my bed. Hutch told me that a Jap Head-Quarters Officer was in the camp, and that all the hut Commanders had been summon-

SOME SHAPE OF BEAUTY

ed to the office. "Then surely . . .?" "What *could* it be for, except to tell us . . .?" We hardly dared to say what we hoped. Were we being fools, to think that this could really be the end?

In a few minutes the hut commanders came back. And then, before ours had reached us, there rolled out through the camp long bursts of cheering from the other huts; and in those great waves of freed emotion we knew that it was true; that at last this dreadful fantasy of frustration was indeed ended. We looked at one another, and then turned away, speechless and overwhelmed between tears and laughter.

Finale

WE were on a Dakota leaving Bangkok for Rangoon. The door of the plane was open and we looked down first on the city, then on padi-fields and palm trees, and finally on the jungle.

Fresh from our experiences of the railway that jungle looked so different now, so innocuous.

Its mountains were no more than faint undulations. Its rocks and its quagmires, its thorny bamboos, its trees and its scrub, were a mere blurred uniformity, like dull green moss. We tried in vain to identify the pieces we had known.

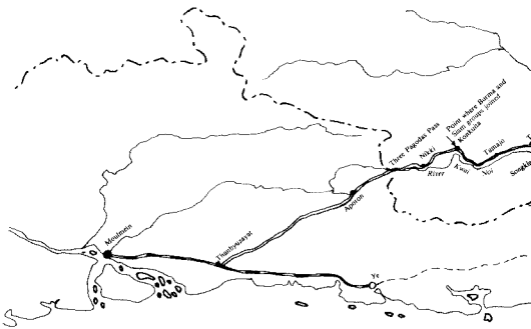
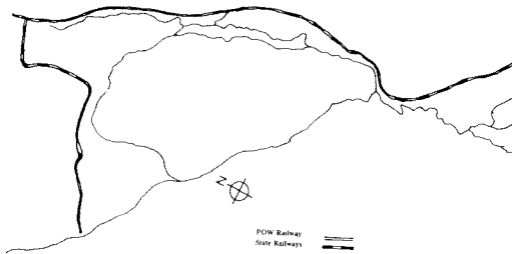
And it was so small, just like a model on a sand-table. Had an army of human beings really slaved for the past three years in that small colourless piece of country? Was that really the breeding ground of malaria, dysentery and cholera? And did there, even now, lie in that strip of drab greenness more than a hundred thousand corpses whose fate we ourselves had by chance escaped?

It was like a dream to us, as we flew off to resume a new, a normal, life again.

I remembered with rueful amusement the epitaph of a more valorous army, and, being a soldier, wished that we ourselves had deserved it by hardships of a more military kind than those which we endured:—

"What need for the living to count the number of the slain? What need to repine at fortune's frown? I hold it fitting that our misfortunes bid us a long farewell. For us, the remnant of the Argive host, the gain hath the advantage, and the loss does not bear down the scale".

MAP OF P.O.W. RAILWAY





Naskhah Pemeliharaan
Perhubungan M...