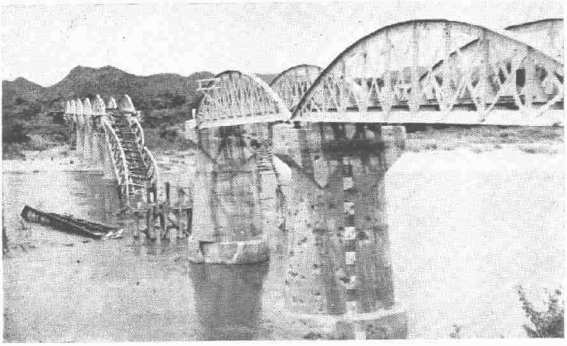
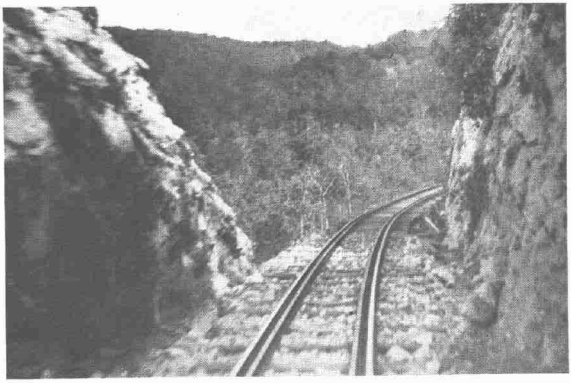
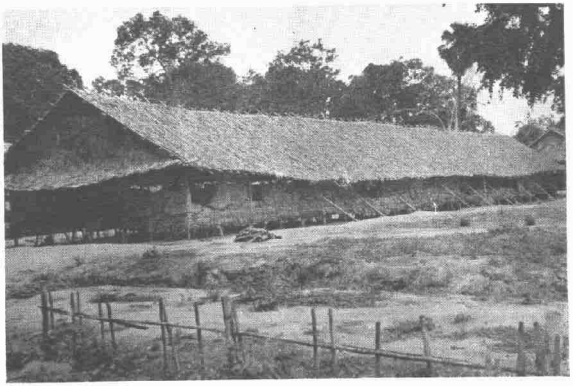
Banpong Express



Tamekam Bridge after one of the R.A.F. Visits.



The Railway near Wanpo.



An Attap Hut for 300 at Tamuang.

Donald Lexon
1949

Banpong Express

Being an account of the Malayan Campaign, with some subsequent experiences as a guest of the Imperial Japanese Army,

by

MAJOR J. H. H. COOMBES, M.A., R.A.E.C.

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Contents

Preface

'Banpong Express' is an attempt to give a picture of the Malayan Campaign and of life as a guest of the I.J.A. from a general, rather than a personal point of view.

Much of Part One, is the story of my own Regiment in action, for, in order to indicate the sort of conditions under which we fought, I must necessarily draw from my own experiences, which cover the operations on the West Coast from the initial encounter to the fall of Singapore. Information on the Campaign was carefully checked with C.O's and Adjutants of units as and when I met them in Siam, and when events were still fresh in the memory.

With regard to Part Two, my thanks are due to Capt. Donald Hilton, for the use of his diary written at Changi. My thanks are also due to Lt. Louis Baume and Major Eddie Gill, for extracts from their diaries on the "speedo" period, and Japan parties respectively.

Most of the book was written in its present form during the early days at Nongpladuk, while supposedly studying Japanese ; the script was hidden, together with short notes on subsequent events, in the lining of a one-gallon thermos container, which being constantly in use in the cookhouse, was never suspect by the Japanese.

J. H. H. COOMBES.

Darlington,
27th March, 1948.

This book is dedicated to Lt.-Col. George Holme, my C.O., and to all those members of my Regiment who went to Malaya, never to return ; also to Messrs. Gairdner & Heath, residents of Bangkok, Nai Boon Pong, and all those helpers in the 'V' organisation, thanks to whose efforts, many thousands of us are still alive.

Part One: Mystery, Malaya

The Trip Out

ZERO hour at last! — Our great adventure had begun. We left Amesbury, three train loads of us, at 6 p.m. on September 27th, for an unknown destination. A few of the luckier ones had been able to see wife or sweetheart that day, and carried with them a parting delicacy carefully wrapped up in grease-proof paper, but every one was laden with a varied assortment of bon-bouches to counter the boredom of a long railway journey —except 350 Officers' Mess; Gunner Burrow had been sent into town to collect an enormous hamper of food, and owing to delay in its preparation, he arrived back on the platform just in time to see the last coach disappear. He caught the second train, commanded by Major Owtram, who requisitioned the hamper, and to this day there is no officer in 350 Battery willing to believe that one man's meat really *is* another man's poison.

It was a tedious journey, with a stop at Derby, more refreshing to the engine than to the troops: in the dim light of dawn, hoots of derision greeted the familiar outline of Liverpudleain suburb, and after what seemed ages of hanging about in a dockside waiting room, during which time each Battery Captain vied with the other to acquire for his own particular Battery at least double the allotted accommodation, the Regiment filed up the gangway of the M.V. Dominion Monarch which was to be its home for the next nine weeks.

The Dominion Monarch, known to us officially as H.M.T. B. 19 and more familiarly as The D.M., was a Shaw Savill liner of 27,000 tons, which in peace time took a refrigerated cargo of some 17,000 tons to and from New Zealand. She was on her second outward journey at the outbreak of war, and normally accommodated 500 passengers on three palatial decks. Now the verandah cafe of the lounge deck and the cinema were troops' quarters, the smoke room and American bar were officers' lounge and dining room. A and B decks were troops' quarters with a W.O's mess in the nursery. The overflow of the troops was in two holds fore and aft, the afterhold being christened " The Altmark " by its occupants.

The ship's kitchens and bakery were marvellous affairs, and the air conditioning and forced ventilation of the lounges and cabins " saved our lives " during the hotter days. A trip round the engines and refrigerating plant was full of interest and gave many of us an absorbing couple of hours: the long walk—it seemed miles—along the propellor shaft to its exit into the sea warmed us up, the engines fairly boiled us, and then we went inside the refrigerator and at once implored our guide to let us out again, and we usually finished by climbing up the inside of the funnel and getting out by means of a door near the top, from which a ladder communicated with the Boat Deck.

With us on the ship was a miscellaneous assortment of units, all under the command of O.C. Troops, Col. W. Anderson, C.B., D.S.O., T.D., A.D.C.: R.A.M.C., A.A., R.C.S., a naval draft, a few odd people of all three Services on their way to take up appointments in the Far East, and last but not least, some twenty-five Nursing Sisters of the Q.A.I.M.N.S.—Captain Griffiths and R.S.M. Verrall performed the duties of Ship's Assistant Adjutant, and R.S.M. respectively.

For a couple of days, we lay at anchor in Mid Mersey presumably to co-ordinate our move with the remainder of our convoy, and we finally weighed anchor at 3 o'clock in the afternoon of September 29th, and steamed slowly towards the Irish Sea, where we were joined by more and more ships

until we mustered the tidy total of 31 including the Aircraft Carrier Argus, the Cruiser Devonshire, and several destroyers. It was fitting that our last sight of England should be the Blackpool Tower and Woolworth Buildings, boldly silhouetted in the sunset against the background of the Regiment's home town: this brought a lump to the throat of many a man, as he wondered just how long it would be before he saw that sight again.

The first two days at sea were spent in organising ourselves for a long voyage, and making preparations to meet all eventualities. It had not occurred to many of us that there could be so much to do on a ship in this respect, and many ambitious training programmes had to go by the board. Necessary duties fell into three classes: routine, protection and entertainment. Routine included a whole host of unsuspected jobs, such as the orderly arrangement of a baggage room, so that unwanted kit could be stacked and yet made readily available for subsequent use, and Mr. Scott, the Baggage Master, was to be congratulated that when, for instance, 1,700 people all wanted Tropical Helmets at the same time, they were each able to obtain same, without being killed in the rush.

Meals required staggering, and relays of orderlies were necessary to serve and wash up, the supervision of which, in addition to cooking arrangements and selection of menus, gave the weekly messing officer a whole time job: in fact the day, apart from a short morning and afternoon period, saw the ship's dining room continually in use.

Protection consisted in defence against sea or air attack, and besides the ship's own personnel, squads of soldiers were on duty daily to man their own light A.A. guns at action stations, and to do look out. Captain Mason our Adjutant was appointed officer in charge of ship's Anti-Aircraft. His command consisted of a 3-inch gun and a twin Marlin manned by the crew, two Lewis guns manned by a detachment of the Maritime A.A. Regt., six Brens manned by 137, and a Hotchkiss, which was the personal perquisite of Majors Gill and Spencer. Moreover if the worst came to the worst, everyone needed to know where to go and how to get there with lifebelt properly adjusted should it become necessary to abandon ship, so that the muster of the entire ship's company at emergency stations, and the checking of personnel was a frequent event the wailing siren for which, interrupted many a pleasant recreation.

The entertainment was sufficiently varied to give everyone who wished, something to do at all times. There was the compulsory type in the shape of P.T., lectures and sports, so that '*mens Sana in corpore Sano*' might continue to be true at the end of the trip, and there also existed an Entertainments Committee which sat secretly in the bar out of hours, probed the ship for hidden talent, and produced at regular intervals concert parties, plays and all manner of marvellous frivolity. The concert party in particular deserves special mention in that it was never at a loss for new and topical items—no idiosyncrasy escaped its diabolical attention and sooner or later everyone came in for his share of chaff from the stage—350 Battery Band provided the nucleus of this—they had many weird and wonderful instruments with them, and their earlier practices in the bowels of the ship, radiated an unfamiliar tone which penetrated to the Chief Engineer's cabin and gave him a sleepless afternoon trying to discover the flaw in his beloved engine.

Our approximate course was N.W. for two or three days, and then S.W., and when we veered 'permanently,' the Highland Princess, accompanied by two destroyers, detached herself from the convoy, presumably bound for Canada. It was impossible for the layman to tell our course, for we turned through 90 degrees every few minutes.

All clocks in the convoy were synchronized, and at the given moment, all ships changed direction with a masterly precision of movement—a wonderful sight to watch.

Soon, everyone settled down to the ship's life, and it seemed at times as if there had never been any other kind of existence. Day succeeded day, and each one brought some new interest. Once two enemy aircraft were sighted, and there was great excitement as a couple of Swordfish aircraft were disgorged

from the Argus, and later returned to attempt the—to us—terrifying job of landing on her again. They were often out on reconnaissance, and always succeeded in landing safely, but they invariably had to make two or three shots at it. The Devonshire carried a Walrus which it catapulted into the sky periodically, and we were astonished at the skill with which it was rehoisted aboard by crane.

Only once was the convoy ever in danger from hostile aircraft, when a Wolfe Condor was seen approaching. A shot from the ship's three inch was followed by further fire from our escorts, and we ran into a sea mist. We saw no more of the enemy machine, but could hear its engines once or twice above the mist, and on one of these attempts to find us in the mist it dropped five bombs, which fell harmlessly in the sea behind the Argus. An occasional submarine alert was sounded and the destroyers went completely mad, performing incredible antics in the sea; lights flashed, strings of flags went up and down the ships' mastheads at a speed which made our signallers green with envy; sometimes we carried out a series of zig-zags, and sometimes a depth charge was dropped. The first time this happened, one R.A.M.C. officer was convinced that we were off the coast of Greenland, because of the whale which he had seen spouting.

The Captain reckoned that we accounted for one U boat by this means. When off the Azores, several depth charges were dropped, a large patch of oil appeared to leeward, and the destroyers' direction finding apparatus ceased to register anything further. For three days in this latitude, there was a sinister suggestion of danger, in that the convoy changed from six lines of ships to double line ahead. Changes of course were more frequent than ever, and the lifeboats were at their davits with the covers off, ready for instant action. We heard later that thirty-one ships had been sunk in a month thereabouts by U boats operating from Dakar.

We missed the peace time joy of a cigarette in the cool of the evening on the boat deck, and the sight of twinkling lights in the distance, as some vessel appeared on the horizon—for the blackout was strict. Yet those evenings will be remembered by many, as occasions when the sense of reality was strangely imminent. An indefinable something exists in the atmosphere of a night at sea; the glistening beam of the moon on the waters, the phosphorescent flickering of unknown shapes on the surface, the vast open-ness of the deep, all seem to combine to produce a tranquility of mind, whereby friends are content to sit together in silent contemplation, out of which emerges a deeper comradeship.

The strictness of the blackout can be realised from the following incident. One night, Majors Owtram and Drought, and Lieutenants Moss and Arroll, having removed the electric light bulbs from their cabins, felt justified in opening the porthole. Next morning, much to the amusement of the troops, these four officers were warned for orderly room, and duly appeared before O.C. Troops, who pointed out that even so, someone might come into the cabin, and a light from elsewhere filter through and that they simply dare not take the risk.

About three weeks after passing through St. George's Channel, we obtained our next glimpse of land, when we saw in the distance a low lying fringe of sand dunes, at the foot of a forest-clad ridge of hills on the terraces of which clustered a few well built houses of European design. This was Freetown, and as the convoy swung from line ahead to line astern and steamed up the estuary of the River Roxelle, the thought of a trip ashore made us forget the sizzling heat of the Doldrums. But we were disappointed: the medical authorities would not take any risks, and we continued to sizzle for five days at anchor.

Freetown was a hive of activity; as far as the eye could see, ships were anchored several deep along the estuary. They came to refuel, or to await the safety of a convoy before proceeding further. Sunderland flying boats and Walrus aircraft roared overhead at frequent intervals, and when they landed it seemed impossible that they could fail to hit something, but apart from scattering a multitude of native canoes in all directions and occasionally upsetting one, nothing untoward happened.

These native craft were flimsily built with their bows high out of the water and the scantily clad occupants propelled them by hand, or with a flat piece of wood. They were a constant source of amusement and amazement to us, for this was the first time that many of us had been 'East.' Throughout the day they came alongside in their scores—a few proffered fruit and whisked on to the deck, thirty feet above, a rope, by means of which, a basketful could be hauled up, but the greater part preferred to drift idly up and down singing an occasional song in English or broad Scotch (and they had no mean repertoire !) or passing some particularly lewd remark to the company above. The song, or the ribaldry, produced a shower of pennies and then the entertainment started. A dozen dusky bodies would plunge into the water, and reappear in an incredibly short space of time, each with three or four pennies in his hand ; he would scramble into his canoe, fling the coins to one end, and we would be greeted with a chorus of remarks: "Any mo ?"—"You muck me up"—referring to the gentleman who threw down a penny wrapped in silver paper. "Ah ! Meester MacPhereson, Ah keen weel ya cum fra the North o' Scotland"—that native had picked up a halfpenny—and many others, alas ! unprintable.

We cannot leave Freetown without mention of the nightly thunderstorms and accompanying lightning, terrifying in their intensity, but fascinating to watch. Everyone came on deck to see the hills lit up for miles around, as well as to obtain a breath of air after the stuffiness of their cabins. Curiously enough, despite the proximity to Dakar, and possible attentions of hostile aircraft, there was no blackout ashore.

Our escort from Freetown consisted of H.M.S. Dorsetshire, five destroyers and six corvettes. Meanwhile the great event of the trip was about to take place: of the ship's company of 1,700, some 1,500 were to cross the line for the first time, and the Captain rightly decided that War or no War, customary homage must be paid to Neptune. Consequently, on the morning of October 20th, a message of greeting was sent out from the ship to Neptune, who replied to it that same evening, and his messenger, accompanied by a herald, toured the ship to announce the visit of Neptune and his court next day.

Next morning after breakfast, various people disappeared mysteriously and there was a hush of expectancy abroad. At 9-30 sharp after a tremendous fanfare of trumpets, there appeared on the bridge, the Clerk of the Court attended by two Heralds: behind was Neptune with his wife Amphitrite, a retinue of mermaids,—gorgeous creatures with coconut matting skirts and hair festooned with flowers,—the remainder of the Court and the chief officers of the ship in full dress. Slowly the procession wended its way around the ship until it reached the Swimming Pool, whose erstwhile calm was now disturbed by the presence of a dozen bears gnashing their teeth, lashing their tails and sending showers of spray high into the air: an enormous barber's chair backed on to the edge of the pool, and beside it a ferocious looking creature was stropping a giant razor on his bare leg, two other oddities, later discovered to be physician and surgeon, were busily dispensing vile vari-coloured viscous liquids into buckets.

By this time nearly all the ship's company had somehow found some coign of vantage overlooking the pool: lifeboats were filled to overflowing, the A.A. gun crews had quadrupled their size, even the rigging found some adherents, and as Neptune and his wife were shown to their seats, there was a gasp of wonder at the contrasting muscular brawn of this bearded Monarch of the Seas, with the magnificient figure of the dainty Amphitrite. The ladies of the court sang odes to them and the Clerk replied on Neptune's behalf. The Clerk of the Court seemed to be a very important personage—he was continually exhorting Neptune in some strange language with words which sounded like "Floreat Fertility," followed by a warning to the ladies, "Caveat Concubinity." Perhaps this was in order to prevent any "funny business" on the part of the troops who were getting very restive at the sight of such rare piscatorial beauty.

Capt. Summers was then summoned to receive the Ancient Order of Sailing Ships Defying Doldrums—a tribute to the fact that he first crossed the line in a sailing ship—how many times he has since crossed we do not know, but the unusual warmth of his salute to Amphitrite suggested something rather more than casual acquaintance.

Next came Col. Anderson, to be invested with the Fertile Order of the Superior Odds and Sods—he was a pre-Great War veteran: Capt. Corsair was awarded the Honourable Order of the Bombay Duck on account of his long experience of Bombay (and ports in general, judging by his nose, and hobble !): Sister Hill, a lady of minute stature, who could scarcely stand in the swimming pool, received the Fertile Order of the Shallow End and Capt. Smith, who always greeted everyone with a broad smile, received the Eternal Order of the Sunny Smile.

The Ceremony itself now began: charges had been preferred by those who knew, accusing various landlubbers of acts out of keeping with the dignity of Neptune's Kingdom and one by one the accused were called for and produced—very often forcibly—by his Oceanic Majesty's Police Force, which had come aboard, to sit in the barber's chair and listen to the tale of their guilt. Summary punishment was decreed by the Clerk of the Court, meted out by the Barber, the Surgeon and their satellites administering a shave, pills and diverse medicines and then the victim was tipped backwards over the chair to the bears who ducked all further resistance out of him.

About twenty-five victims had been disposed of, when suddenly with a mighty roar, a surging mass of soldiery rushed forward—the Police, the Court, some of the Ladies, and Neptune himself were swept bodily into the Pool; even the turning on of the hosepipe was powerless to control the unwieldy mob.

The battle waxed furiously all over the ship, until practically every man on board had been immersed. By this time the first lunch was ready, and the event of the day came to an end to be celebrated, let it be added, by many a mutual toast that evening.

And so, with a remarkably quick passage of time, we reached Cape Town. That morning (October 30th), we awoke to the realisation that the beat of the engines had quickened, and going on deck, we saw that with the Empress of Canada and the Strathaird, we were forging ahead of the rest of the convoy. The sea was rough and a good breeze was blowing, and exhilarated, we paced the deck more briskly than usual. We were told that the rest of the convoy would go on to Durban and we should dock at Cape Town in the afternoon. It was a wonderful sight with Table Mountain towering above it, the peaks of the Twelve Apostles behind, and ranges of hills in the distance: sea and sky vied with each other to produce a more vivid blue: bright sunshine exaggerated the gleam of white sandy beach: a crimson carpet of misembryanthemum covering the dune above, looked the exact replica of a heather covered moor: a cool breeze was blowing; in fact it was paradise.

We found, on landing that the magnanimity of the people of South Africa almost excelled the grandeur of their scenery. No troops could have received a heartier welcome, nor more overwhelming hospitality. We were there four days and every soldier spent at least one day as the guest of someone or other. We were taken to their homes and entertained, we were taken out for drives through magnificient country up to the Veldt, or along a coast road of unsurpassed beauty, where the rose blossomed beside the Canna lily, the silver beech jostled the palm, and Atlantic breakers strove with the Indian Ocean for mastery over the shore.

The story of the Regiment at Cape Town is the story of a multitude of happy soldiers among friends—each has his own individual experience to relate. We were there over the week-end, and held our Church Parade in the Cathedral. It was the first parade of its kind held by a visiting convoy and the Cathedral was packed. The service was mentally stimulating—the C.O. read the lesson, the troops sang lustily and the Padre gave us something to think about. The C.O. took the salute and instructed B.C's to break off in

the town afterwards, so as to save the troops a long walk back from the ship. Unfortunately this was not communicated to the 2nd in Command, who marched on to the docks behind the naval draft, sublimely unconscious that no soldiers were following him.

Members of the Concert Party made a hit while we were there; the band, under the title of "Ace Connolly's Kings of Swing," (and also individuals) broadcast, and gave various turns at the Alhambra Theatre; they obtained a very good 'write up' in the Cape Town Argus.

On the last afternoon, we lay at anchor in the Bay, and there occurred quite a remarkable incident; towards dusk two people (of another unit) were seen to jump overboard and disappear in the twilight. A lifeboat was lowered, and after about an hour's search, the ship's orderly officer came back with two bodies, in a very exhausted condition—they had been carried rapidly out to sea, and had somehow succeeded in evading the sharks. The ship therefore weighed anchor and put to sea. When the men were sufficiently recovered to be questioned, one of them revealed that he and the other man had decided that this was too good a place to leave, moreover they had assignations with two charming young ladies ashore, and they could not 'let them down.' Suddenly he saw the other rescued man and screamed out: "It wasn't he who came with me"—it was then discovered that the other man was an airman, who returning to the docks to see his ship in the Bay, had started swimming to rejoin her. No good could have come from putting back to port—a description of the missing man was telegraphed ashore, with instructions that he should be sent on, if found, by the next convoy; we do not know what eventually became of him.

The anti-climax after Cape Town was terrific—the spell of the ship had been (temporarily) broken, and no one could settle down to routine; even the sight of a cruiser off Cape Agulhas shepherding captured 'Free French privateers' to Simonstown, scarcely aroused curiosity, and when we turned the corner' and positively loitered up the coast, taking a week to reach the latitude of Durban, we all groaned at the thought that we could quite easily have stayed a further couple of days at 'The Cape.'

H.M.S. Repulse and H.M.S. Revenge accompanied us for some days. Off Durban, we were joined by more ships, and the cruiser Glasgow took over escort duties; the danger of interference from the enemy was remote in the Indian Ocean, and the Glasgow's Captain went out of his way to add to our interest. On two occasions at dawn, she made a practice attack on our convoy, shelling us with star shells, and then disappearing under cover of a smoke screen, and we realised how helpless we should have been without an escort, if an armed merchantman had arrived on the scene. Some afternoons, she came to within fifty yards of us, and her band entertained us with an hour's music, and on various occasions, she gave our signallers practice in reading Morse, and towed targets for our Bren gunners to shoot at.

During this time, organised games were very popular. We held unit and inter-unit swimming sports, including among the sterotyped events such as diving and relay racing, competitions in diving for pennies after the style of the Freetown natives; the best effort in a single dive was that of a man who picked seventeen pennies off the bottom of the pool. There were five other men in at the same time and only fifty pennies had been thrown in. It is understood that this man has asked for a transfer to the West African Frontier Force (Coastal Section) at the end of the war. 350 Battery won the inter-unit competition, and there was a roar of applause as the C.O. celebrated the occasion by throwing the B.C.—Major Gill—into the pool it is not known whether the applause was due to this frivolous gesture, regarded as such, or to the fact that Major Gill pulled the C.O. in with him. One of the most remarkable games for resource and initiative was deck hockey. For this, you need ten very strong men each equipped with a big stick, and a rope quoit. The object of the game is to propel the quoit by means of the stick through the opponents' goal.After much research, it was found that this was best achieved by a combination of methods; three men of each side selected one victim of the opposing side; the victim was hit on the head

by one, on the shins by another and charged into the side of the deck by the third. This kept eight men busy, and with any luck, reduced the number of opponents by at least one. Meanwhile, the one of the remaining two men who had the quoit, scored a goal and usually lost the quoit overboard. The supply of quoits and willing victims failed after a week, and the game had to be abandoned for a time.

There was much conjecture and wishful thinking that we might go to Aden, or Bombay—or anywhere—to lengthen the voyage, but after passing through the Madagascar Channel, part of the convoy went ' straight on ' and we turned ' half right ' for Colombo, which we reached a few days later. Unfortunately we were only there for twelve hours, and shore leave was short and sweet; a ride in a jin—riki-sha, a quick but expensive glass of beer, a hastily scribbled telegram home, and it was time to get on the lighter and return to the ship.

From here to Singapore was only four days, and we passed through the Straits of Malacca seeing the Andamans and then the coast of Malaya on our left and Sumatra on our right; whether it was limestone hill feature rising steeply out of the sea, or low lying swamp that we saw, it was all well wooded, and we wondered what lay within the darkness—many of us were soon to know. It was the 28th of November, and in a very short time, we had all disembarked, leaving our home of the past nine weeks, as it were, an empty shell. How grim it must have seemed to the few remaining people going on to New Zealand, for we had been a very happy family. We left a rear party to deal with the unloading of guns and vehicles, and the main body entrained that night for Kajang near Kuala Lumpur, the federal capital of the F.M.S.

The Malayan Campaign - a general sketch

PERHAPS it would be as well if the tragedy of the Malayan Campaign were never completely written; the whole sequence of events was so incomprehensible to the fighting soldier, that he gave up trying to reason why. Certainly, a full explanation of what happened must bring to light many blunders, so that until the official history has been published it is neither wise nor right to attempt to probe the mystery of the jungle. These pages merely attempt to show concisely the course of events, by way of background to the part played by the Regt. in those events; only a minimum of explanation, sufficient to give coherence to the narrative, has been added.

It has been said that Malaya was lost before the first shot was fired; let us therefore analyse the situation as it existed on December 8th, 1941, to see how heavily the scales were weighted against us. The factors having a definite bearing on our ability to hold Malaya were:—the country, its governments, its peoples and the forces at our disposal. By consideration of these we may glean the following significant military facts:—

1. The central mountain range combined with the jungle, made communications by normal methods difficult, so that a mechanized force was practically confined to the roads: possession of these, while allowing easy and rapid movement in certain limited directions, also allowed the enemy to infiltrate by jungle tracks round the flanks unless we were able to push out strong flank patrols into the jungle, moreover the roads were an easy prey to whoever possessed air superiority—or conversely the force which was able and willing to dispense with roads had a tremendous advantage. Visibility was reduced to 300 yards or less, observation was difficult, concealment easy, the field gunner's task a hopeless one.

2. Command of the sea and air was essential in order to prevent an enemy from landing unhindered where he wished—a large force could land anywhere between the ports, and disappear completely in the jungle forthwith.

3. Apart from the British Straits Settlements of Singapore, Penang, Malacca and Province Wellesley, we had no absolute control over the law and keeping it; for instance a Japanese planter in the Straits Settlement could be kept under surveillance and if necessary repatriated, but we had no

right to take any action elsewhere. Moreover, the co-ordination and implementation of a plan of defence needed the sanction and collaboration of various rulers.

4. The peoples—Malays, Chinese, Tamils (and Japanese) were known by Malayans, who lived among them and spoke their languages, but as far as the soldier was concerned, they were all somewhat similar, and during the battle, the Japanese in civilian clothes mingled with the Chinese, obtaining all the information he liked about our dispositions, without being suspect. In addition Japanese activities via their tin miners, rubber planters, dentists, etc., had included not only the passing back of information, but the preparation and marking of tracks through supposedly impenetrable jungle, by means of which landing parties were guided through it; in many cases, their estates had networks of by-roads suitable for vehicles, linking main roads; they even prepared an aerodrome near Singapore in the middle of an estate. The Chinese were regarded with suspicion because of their natural communist leanings, and right up to 1940, more importance appeared to be attached to the breaking up of 'Communist cells' than to keeping an eye on Japanese activities.

From this, it follows that in order to hold Malaya, we must be prepared to deal with landings anywhere on the East coast, simultaneously with a thrust by land from Thailand—for it must be assumed that the quick investment of Thailand would be part of an enemy plan: these landings could be supported by land based aircraft in the North and by aircraft carrier further South. Hence our forces must be dispersed along the peninsula.

The forces at our disposal on December 8th, consisted of:—two capital ships—the Prince of Wales and the Repulse, with a small complement of escorting vessels from the China station: rather less than 200 aircraft—mostly obsolete types, Blenheims, Wildebeestes, Swordfish, Buffaloes—operating from some 17 aerodromes dispersed along 500 miles of country; 9 fighting Brigades, 1 British, 2 Australian, 6 Indian.

Considering these forces in relation to their work we were struck at the time by the following thoughts:—

1. With our aircraft so dispersed, one hundred enemy planes would be ample to achieve complete superiority in support of any given landing.
2. Two capital ships and all their available escort, together with some air support might be useful if they happened to be at the right place at the right time.
3. Brigades scattered, and unable to move speedily in mutual support could be easily mopped up.
4. Malaya with its tin and rubber is a valuable commercial asset to the British war effort.
5. Singapore is a vital part of the defence of the East Indies and ultimately of Australia.
6. No successful defence of Malaya could be conducted with our existing forces against a determined and superior Japanese force.
7. Could our forces delay the Jap, sufficiently to allow reinforcements to come in time?
8. Should we give up Malaya and withdraw to Johore where with everything centralized and three divisions intact, we should be able to hold on and cover Singapore?
9. Would the needs of Russia and the Middle East allow of sufficient reinforcements being sent?
10. Should we forestall the Jap and invest Thailand first?
11. What about raising a Chinese army to deal with the jungle warfare astride the roads?

It is easy to suggest now, that had we withdrawn to Johore sacrificing Malaya and concentrated on the defence of Singapore, the tale might have been vastly different. Those of us who had thought about the problem at the time (apart from the fact that we did not know what reinforcements were likely to arrive and how long they would take), were not by any means

unanimous on any given course of action ; it could not have been easy for the Commanders on the spot to judge. They decided to attempt to fight in North Malaya hoping to hold the enemy long enough for reinforcements to be of use, and once that decision was taken, the die was cast.

In the Autumn of 1941, the Japanese sent representatives to Washington and went through the motions of negotiation ; it was soon obvious that these talks were not proceeding satisfactorily, and it was therefore decided to dispose the available troops at their war stations as follows:—

Kelantan. The 8th Brigade of three Indian Battalions augmented by one Indian Battalion from the 22nd Brigade ; there were also two Battalions of State Forces (Hyderabad and Mysore) on aerodrome defence. From the Kota Bahru aerodrome operated approximately two squadrons (1 Buffalo, 1 Hudson) and the other two aerodromes were not yet in use.

Kuantan. The 22nd Brigade (less one Battalion) was allotted to this area.

Kedah. The 11th (Ind.) Division (28, 15 and 6 Bdes.) held the important Jitra position astride the North end of the Province and there were a few Blenheims and Buffaloes at Alor Star and Sungei Patani areodromes.

Central Malaya. Volunteer Malay Battalions were the only available troops to employ here on aerodrome defence and L of C duties. (III Corps HQ was at Kuala Lumpur).

Endau and Mersing. Two Brigades of 8th Australian Division defended these ports.

Singapore. 12th Brigade was in Command Reserve and two Brigades were allotted to the defence of the Fortress. The Navy and most of the remaining aircraft were also based on the Island.

These troops were in position by the end of November, and early in December, the imminence of a Japanese attack became apparent.

Condensation trails of hostile aircraft began to appear over all our aerodromes as far South as Ipoh, where part of a Japanese camera was picked up. Our fighters did not succeed in intercepting any of these machines.

The first warning of a hostile movement was given by one of our reconnaissance planes, which in the early afternoon of December 6th, sighted a Japanese convoy of some forty transports with a strong naval escort just South of Indo China steaming due West, a course which would have brought them to Singgora in Thailand. Unfortunately weather conditions were bad and this plane lost touch with the enemy. The next day some long range Catalina flying boats were sent out from Singapore to regain touch, but they never returned. Information was next received that another convoy of similar strength was proceeding on approximately the same course 24 hours behind the first.

Had it been known definitely that these convoys were proceeding to Thailand, the Government might have been induced to allow 11 (Ind.) Division to go forward to Singgora and forestall the enemy, but the violation of Thai neutrality might have had a very adverse effect on American opinion, and this course was not adopted. (It had been hoped to find an ally in Thailand, but after the Japanese occupation of Indo China such a hope disappeared—the Thais simply could not afford to be our friends).

In the early hours of 8th December, the first act of aggression took place: hostile bombers flew over Singapore and dropped bombs on Raffles Square and the Chinese quarter, causing many casualties, for at the time of the raid, all the street lights were blazing. At the same time, the Japanese attacked Kota Bahru, and landed in Thailand at Patani and Singgora. All communication between Malaya and Thailand was cut, but it was later learned that after two hours resistance, the ' land of the free ' capitulated.

The Landing at Kota Bahru—

At 3 p.m. on the morning of December 8th, the first Japanese landing craft were guided into a creek between two beaches by a Chinese smuggler.

He was known to the military authorities, but their efforts to have him arrested were frustrated by the Civil Police, owing to insufficient evidence. By dawn, fighting had become fierce—field guns were shooting at landing craft over open sights, and the R.A.F. were also finding their mark; they sank one certain and one probable transport containing guns and tanks, and were responsible for many casualties to personnel landing. However, the Japanese air force was already operating from Singgora—it bombed Kota Bahru aerodrome (which was under shell fire from warships) and the other two aerodromes in Kelantan. Waves of 27 bombers escorted by fighters high above them were continuously in the air, and followed the R.A.F. who, unable to land in Kelantan, made for Sungei Patani. Here they were caught on the ground and 32 destroyed, and that was the end of air support for a long time. Meanwhile the Prince of Wales and the Repulse had gone forward to intercept the invaders and we lost both our capital ships in the Far East at the outset of hostilities.

Fighting continued fiercely throughout the 8th, leaving the enemy in possession of two pillboxes on the beach, which gave him a frontage of 3,000 yards. This he successfully exploited through the night, landing sufficient troops to enable him to obtain control of the aerodrome. With the aerodrome gone, our reason for being in Kelantan disappeared, and 8 Brigade withdrew slightly at noon on the 9th; it is estimated that they had caused the Japanese at least 2,000 killed and the same number wounded (apart from casualities before landing).

The Japanese had fitted a detachable belly tank on their fighters which enabled them to support their bombers at long ranges, and as soon as we vacated the aerodrome, their machines began to operate from it, being able to continue at once, the task of rendering untenable more of our aerodromes.

Eighth Brigade continued to fight stubbornly until December 11th, when it was decided to evacuate the Province of Kelantan completely. They then proceeded by road to Krai, from where they went with their vehicles by rail to the area of Kuala Lipis, destroying bridges en route.

This operation, although dismissed in a line, was no mean feat, and took a week to carry out. Vehicles and guns had to be taken to Krai, where the road ends, and loaded on to a train. The infantry had to withdraw over 50 miles covering the evacuation of the transport, and fighting as they went back. Large numbers of the Indian troops could not swim, and had to be helped over the numerous rivers and streams that barred the way. Brigadier Key was to be congratulated on extricating his Brigade practically intact.

Jitra and Kroh–the withdrawal on the west

Meanwhile, in Kedah, 11 Division was holding the Jitra 'line': here, there was in course of preparation an anti-tank ditch, overlooked by a series of concrete pill boxes, but it was not complete and was of little use. As soon as information was received of the landings in Thailand, a covering force was sent out, and a column consisting of motorized infantry supported by carriers and one troop of anti-tank guns crossed the border to attempt an ambush. By nightfall on December 9th, having penetrated some 25 miles into Thailand without meeting any opposition, it halted for the night leaving the carriers and anti-tank guns to cover the road. During the night, the rumble of tracked vehicles was heard in the distance; they were tanks with head lights full on and the gunners waited for them and destroyed the leading two. This column then withdrew, joined the covering force and with it fought a delaying action in the border area during the 10th. By the 11th, two Japanese Divisions were in action, a bridge in front of the covering force failed to blow up and tanks and motorized infantry were through: the covering force was swamped and the Jitra line engaged. A few tanks guided through rubber estates and over a prepared path across the paddy by 5th columnists, also succeeded in getting in behind the covering force. To prevent further penetration by these tanks, two bridges were blown, sacrificing the guns and

vehicles of one Battery of 22 Mountain Regiment and a section of carriers, who were out in front. The personnel got back successfully across country. The main difficulty at this stage was the confusion caused by lack of communications, for the Japs filtered through the jungle or across the paddy fields in twos and threes and communication with our forward troops was cut. No one knew what was happening in front or on the flanks, and endeavours to obtain information sometimes made confusion worse confounded. A typical instance of this was the occasion when a party of Gurkhas returning from patrol by a different route, in order to avoid being involved with the Japanese, were fired on by our own troops who reported Japanese on their immediate front: the Gurkhas reported the incident and more Japanese were assumed to be in rear.

On the afternoon of the 12th, a general withdrawal may be said to have taken place, rather than to have been ordered: units converged on to the road from all directions and the procession of vehicles stretching unbroken up to Alor Star and beyond made one wonder if we were a bit over-mechanized for this type of warfare. This withdrawal was greatly helped by the efforts of 155 and 137 Field Regts. R.A., who stayed in action long after many infantry units had withdrawn, pounding away at the road so that the enemy M.T. was unable to follow up quickly. During this period too, the R.A.F's misfortune was 11 Division's salvation: the Japanese air force, having dealt with the East Coast aerodromes on the morning of the 9th, devoted its energies to the destruction of our remaining airfields in the North. They bombed heavily Alor Star, Sungei Patani and Butterworth, causing such severe damage to planes and buildings that these aerodromes had to be evacuated on successive days. Had they been free to attack the column on the Jitra road, they might have caused untold havoc. As it was, the general staff sorted out units as they came through Alor Star and a new defensive position was taken up at Gurun, some 35 miles back. All bridges were effectively demolished, and it was hoped that contact having been broken off, the Division would have at least 24 hours for reconnaissance and preparation, but the Japanese engineers here, as in fact at all times throughout the campaign, put up a remarkably fine performance: their forces were crossing the rivers whose bridges we had blown, within four hours of the demolition.

There were many instances of courage and devotion to duty in this phase, of which three may be mentioned.

When the bridge in front of Jitra village failed to blow up, an Indian Subedar with an anit-tank rifle put three tanks out of action and blocked the road for some time; the enemy brought up other tanks and had to drag these vehicles on to the verge before they could proceed.

Further up the road, a Sepoy had been cut off, and he sited himself on a bank with a Bren gun. As the lorries of infantry went by, he took careful aim and firing single rounds into the back of each, accounted for over a dozen individuals, before he was killed.

A Company of Punjabis on the right flank at Jitra were still there on the morning of the 13th, there had been no action on their front, they had received no order to withdraw and they had only discovered their isolation that morning. They proceeded across country and joined the road some two miles north of Alor Star. They marched down in fours, meeting no one, and were shot at by Japanese from the houses in Alor Star. About fifty per cent of them got away and rejoined the Division two days later at Gurun.

Unhappily the Gurun position was not destined to delay appreciably the enemy's advance. Contact was re-established on the 15th and after a day's fierce fighting, in which the whole of 6 Bde HQ, except its Commander was killed, and the Division reduced to forty per cent of its strength, a further withdrawal became necessary to the line of the Krian River.

A tribute should be paid here to Brigadier Selby of 28 Bde, who, being in a good position at Gurun, ignored the order to withdraw ; the bridges had been blown, but he successfully led his Gurkhas (who were unable to swim) over the rivers and rejoined the Division behind the Muda. There is no

doubt that this effort on his part delayed the Jap considerably in his effort to regain contact.

While this was happening in north Kedah, another enemy thrust was developing from Patani: a position had been reconnoitred 30 miles across the frontier from Kroh, on a ledge which commanded the probable line of enemy attack. Only two Battalions could be spared to deal with any threat from this direction. These had moved forward to occupy the ledge. Before the main landing in Thailand, the Jap with characteristic cunning had planted soldiers there in civilian clothes: these disguised soldiers opposed our advancing column so that it arrived at the south end of the ledge at the same time as the spearhead of the enemy's advance arrived at the other end. Here, the enemy was two Brigades strong (a Jap Brigade consists of 6 Bns—as opposed to our 3, with 2 Bdes to a Div.) and despite indifferent roads, supported by tanks. The weak hold on the extremity of the ledge could not be maintained, and the two Battalions fell back on to Kroh, a most important strategic centre, since the road from Kroh, bifurcating at Padang Serai, connects with the network of roads in Province Wellesley; moreover this road links up with the Grik road and the Perak river by jungle path. Accordingly 12 Brigade, less 4/19 Hyderabads at Kota Bahru, were drawn out of Command reserve and placed under 3 Corps, but they arrived too late to deny Kroh to the enemy and were used as a protective force on the Grik road instead.

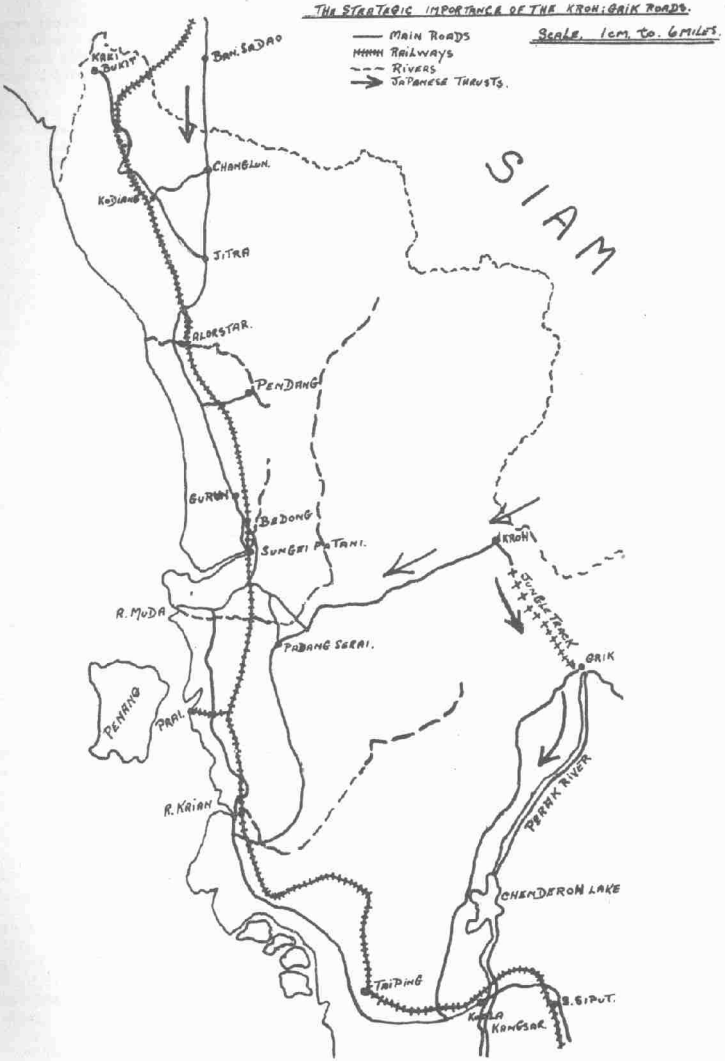
This, together with our reverses at Gurun, meant the abandonment of Penang and Province Wellesley, a very serious loss, for Penang is the Singapore of North Malaya—here we had an Ordnance Depot, and on the island there were numerous vehicles and boats of various kinds. Penang had received its fair share of heavy bombing, with very many civilian casualties, and the local administration had ceased to function. The decision to evacuate (on 16/17) came as the sudden result of our failure to hold the enemy at Gurun and Kroh, and with the Jap hard upon our heels, there was not time to destroy all valuables; he therefore acquired a considerable quantity of stores, vehicles, food, and small boats, which was invaluable to him in subsequent operations.

The situation was clearly serious: the enemy must not be allowed to control the Grik road which (with the Perak river) would open the door to South Perak, therefore 12th Bde, still fresh, augmented by the 4/19 Hyderabads from Kota Bahru, was sent to deal with this theatre.

12 Brigade's Battle

Having arrived at Baling on 13th December, in time to take up a defensive position through which the battered Kroh column could fall back, the Brigade fought a rearguard action back to Titi Karang, then breaking contact, they made a wide detour via Taiping up the Grik road, where they met the enemy at Lenggong on the 18th. For five days, the Jap attacked at dawn frontally in force, and was beaten off with heavy casualties—in the afternoon he started outflanking and our force made a fighting withdrawal to a position in rear, where next day, the same tactics were used. His outflanking included coming down the river and lakes in rafts: at Kota Tampan and again at Kampong Ramban, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders played havoc with the enemy craft by m.g. fire across the lake from hidden positions off the main road. In one of their frontal attacks, the Japs marched a captured Platoon of A. and S.H. in front of them; our men bolted and about one-third of them succeeded in reaching our lines. One memorable incident occurred when a Battalion of Japs succeeded in breaking through our forward company. They were taken on over open sights by a Battery of 122 Fd. Regt., who fired 400 rounds into them, while two Companies of A. and S.H. who had gone round to their flanks, annihilated the remnants at the point of the bayonet.

But, 11 Div. was badly cut up and needed time for rest and reorganisation:


THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE KROH-GRIK ROADS.
SCALE. 1cm. to. 6 MILES.
MAIN ROADS
RAILWAYS
RIVERS
JAPANESE THRUSTS.
KRIL BUKIT
BAN. SADAO
CHANGLUN.
KODIANG
JITRA
ALORSTAR.
PENDANG
GURUN
BADONG
SUNGEI PATANI.
KROH
JUNGLE TRACK
GRIK
R. MUDA
PADANG SERAI.
PENANG
PARI
R. KRIAN
PERAK RIVER
CHENDERON LAKE
TAIPING
KUALA KANGSAR
S. SIPUT.
SIAM

the 6th and 15th Brigades had been decimated at Jitra and Gurun respectively, and the 28th Brigade was dispersed as a result of both. Who was to form a rearguard from the Muda to the Krian? The answer is probably the strangest example of its kind in military history: Lt.-Col. G. D. Holme was given the task, a Regiment of Artillery with an attached Troop of 22 Mountain Regt. assisted by an Independent Company of about 250 Indians and a Troop of 'Cavalry' on foot. For 30 hours they held the Muda—six miles of front crossed by a railway and two main road bridges: Small 'outposts' linked by patrols formed the line, and the guns fired at everything that came in sight. When the main force had crossed the Krian, this rearguard was withdrawn and went back blowing every bridge behind it.

But (December 19th,) the situation was critical: 28 Brigade had been collected and held the Krian, and 12 Bde were engaged in an epic battle down the Grik road: it was vitally necessary to prepare a defensive position and hold it. The position selected was at Kampah, 50 miles South of where the Grik road joins the main road—it was a strong natural position and native labour was engaged in its preparation. At a Corps conference on December 20th, General Heath ordered Brig. Selby (the 28th Brigade) to hold the line of the Krian as long as possible without allowing his troops to become heavily involved and Brig. Paris (12th Brigade) to take up, when forced from the Grik road, a position North of Ipoh, which must be denied to the enemy till December 27th, to give time for the evacuation of stores from the town, the preparation of the Kampah position and the reorganisation of 11 Division.

This task was well carried out: the 12th Brigade put up a magnificient fight on the Grik road, the A. and S.H. covering themselves with glory, and while covering Ipoh, supported by 137 Fd. Regt., they again inflicted such severe casualties on the Japanese that later, during the captivity, the mention of Sungei Siput to a Jap who had participated in the fighting brought forth a torrent of abuse, and the soldier got his face slapped.

Kampah to Johore

For three days, the enemy battered in vain against the Kampah position, and it seemed as if he might be held at last. On the 3rd day however, he commenced outflanking tactics at sea, using Penang as a base, and landed at Teloh Anson. It had been possible to allot only the independent Commando Company for the defence of this area: 12 Brigade was thrown in, but the troops though exhausted were holding on, when a further landing in their rear made their position untenable and with it the position at Kampah, which had to be evacuated.

This incident at Kampah bears telling:—

A subaltern and a C.S.M. remained in a slit trench on a ridge from which their company was forced. For six hours they prevented the Japs from consolidating the ridge, anyone who came near being greeted with a burst from a Tommy gun or a hand grenade: the Leicesters then counter attacked and took the ridge.

The next defensive position selected was at Trolak, north of Slim River, where the main road and railway run together through thick jungle. In many respects this was a strong position held in depth, for there was no road by which the enemy could round the flanks, and infiltration through the jungle, though not impossible, was a hazardous operation for a large force taking ammunition and equipment with it. We therefore had two Brigades (12 and 28) sited in depth supported by a Regiment of anti-tank guns and two Regiments of Field Artillery. Meanwhile two weeks had been spent preparing a strong defensive position at Tah Jong Malim, cutting down jungle to make fields of fire and observation, doing the necessary survey for the gunners, and the detailed reconnaissance of F.D.L's, O.P's, gun areas, etc.; this was a position for the whole Division to take up, when it became necessary to withdraw from Trolak.

There was sporadic activity for the first two days at Trolak:

our twenty-five pounders were kept busy, and the enemy replied with his mortars; skirmishes took place between patrols, and by the night of January 6th, there were signs that an attack was brewing.

The less said about the disaster that followed, the better: there can be no excuse and we must admit that we panicked: the facts are as follows:—

Between 0400 and 0600 hours on the morning of January 7th, about sixteen enemy tanks, unsupported at first by infantry, broke through our front and proceeded down the main road through 12 Brigade and into the area of 28 Bde. before the leading one was knocked out by a 4.5 howitzer, a road block made and the tanks stopped. During the morning, those tanks, together with a further fourteen odd, patrolled the road from the road block back to the front, shooting up anything they met, or saw in the rubber. This patrol covered some sixteen miles of road, from Trolak to the Slim River bridge, along which was a Regiment of anti-tank guns in position, two Batteries of Artillery in hides, and two Infantry Brigades disposed in depth behind the front line. Guns and vehicles were made unserviceable, and the whole force in parties of varying strengths retired through the jungle towards Tah Jong Malim, losing over 50 per cent of its strength in so doing. There remained of 11 Div. one effective Brigade—the 6/15—a composite Brigade made up of the remnants of 6 and 15, and needing rest. It was hopeless to attempt to hold the Tah Jong Malim line with so few troops: the most we could hope to do was to delay the enemy's advance on Kuala Lumpur as long as possible that, denied the use of the aerodrome, his bombers could not be supported by fighters up to Singapore, and the convoy of reinforcements on the way might have more chance of getting in unscathed.

But the Japanese gave little respite—they landed at Kuala Selangor and at Port Swettenham, and the withdrawal on to Kuala Lumpur and its subsequent evacuation had to be hastened, for there were no spare troops to cope effectively with this additional threat to our flank.

Meanwhile, on the East coast, the position had deteriorated: 8th Brigade had collected in the Kuala Lipis area by December 18th, and having reformed were patrolling the Kelantan railway and the many rivers of Pahang: 22 Brigade were holding Kuantan, where the Japanese attacked along the coast on December 27th. This was a feint attack, the last twenty miles from Chukai where the East coast road ends,being done along the sand—this is a recognised bus route, often impassable at high water, and was not ideal for an advancing army. In Trengganu province, however, there were many Japanese tin miners and the supposedly impenetrable jungle had been well explored by them: by the 30th, a large force had penetrated down the Jabor valley and 22 Brigade were taken in the flank. They withdrew, forming a bridgehead round Kuantan, which they were forced to evacuate on January 2nd, when a further thrust through the jungle took them in the rear. There developed a battle on the aerodrome on January 3rd, the 2/12 Frontier Force suffering many casualties. On that day, 5th Field Regt. fired heavy concentrations into the town, causing (according to Japanese sources) about 2,000 casualties.

On the East coast, as on the West, the plan was to deny Kuantan aerodrome to the enemy till the convoy of reinforcements had reached Singapore. Japanese pressure made this impossible and on the afternoon of the 3rd, the Garwalis and 5/11 Sikhs were withdrawn leaving the 2/12 Frontier Force on the aerodrome to cover them. The Japanese attacked at dusk on the left flank of the perimeter and Col. Cummings went over to investigate the firing. A section of seven Japs set upon him and he disposed of four with his revolver before being felled with a blow from a rifle butt. He was twice bayonetted, and then two signallers took him back severely wounded to his Bn. HQ. He insisted on going to the other side of the aerodrome to give instructions to the Company there and on the way, propped up in his carrier, the Japs landed a mortar bomb on it and the driver's thigh was crushed.

For about one and a half hours the driver carried on through fire to this Company and back and on his return the C.O. ' passed ' out !

By this time there were Japanese all over the aerodrome and confused

hand to hand fighting was taking place, throughout the hutted camp. The 2nd in Command decided to get what personnel he could away and the C.O. and his driver were safely taken to Maran. One section of the 5th Field left with the first carriers, but the Company on the far side of the aerodrome was never heard of again.

The 22nd Brigade then withdrew by stages to Jerantut, covered in the South by 8th Brigade which held the road from Termaloh to Kanak, while "Macforce" destroyed all railway bridges. This done, both Brigades gradually withdrew southwards.

On 8th January, General Wavell arrived at Kuala Lumpur and decided that if the enemy were to be held, it was imperative to have more troops on the West at the expense of the East. Consequently West Force was formed of one Australian Brigade, together with 8 Brigade and 22 Brigade, later reinforced by 45 Brigade newly arrived from India. It was decided that the new force should hold a line well to the North of the important string of aerodromes: Batu Pahat, Kluang and Jemaluang, and a position was selected on the general line of the Muar River with its right flank at Gemas; they had 8 and 22 Brigades behind them at Batu Anam and Jemantah and 45 Brigade came up to Malacca. The 11th Divisional remnants had a hard fight from Tah Jong Malim back to Kuala Lumpur—it was fierce and swift and on 10/11th January, they broke off the battle and withdrew one hundred miles behind the new line in one bound, being put into Corps Reserve for a rest which never materialized.

From then on, the Japanese air force never gave our troops a minute's rest: convoys were pounded on the roads, gun positions and Headquarters were dive-bombed remorselessly, and the jungle itself was sprayed with machine-gun bullets, if there was the slightest suspicion of movement from nearby road or clearing. Fifty-one Hurricanes arrived on the 15th, but they were unable to cope with the hordes of hostile aircraft, and lost half their number in less than a week.

The Muar battle opened quite favourably; 45 Brigade withdrew its covering force from Malacca, and the Australians in a cutting North of Gemas, accounted for over 1,000 enemy killed before taking up their prepared positions. The enemy concentrated on our left, putting in a complete fresh Guards Division, and two Battalions of Australians were brought over—the reserves from Gemas and the East coast. The Japanese forced a crossing of the Muar and landed in the rear, north of Batu Pahat: a withdrawal was clearly necessary and the force withdrew on to Bakri. At this juncture (17th January), 53rd Brigade of the 18th Division arrived at Singapore, and one Battalion was sent to Batu Pahat, one to Yong Peng and one to Mersing: 11 Div. were also brought back into the line in the Ayer Hitam area.

Meanwhile 45 Brigade was completely cut off at Bakri, and an attack was planned to relieve it: the Japanese attacked first and forced us back along the Yong Peng road, which we endeavoured to hold while the 45th fought its way back. The Brigade was now without food or ammunition and Brig. Duncan asked the Japanese to allow his wounded to go through to our lines. This was refused unless the whole force surrendered: the wounded insisted on being left, that their comrades might regain the main body and be able to fight on, having destroyed its guns and vehicles. The Brigade took to the jungle under Command of Lt.-Col. Anderson: they had to fight their way through and due to Col. Anderson's personal leadership of attacks on the Japanese, a proportion managed to regain our lines. In one engagement the party was held up by a M.G. nest, and Col. Anderson single-handed crept up with a pocket full of mills bombs and succeeded in wiping out the post. For his bravery in this action he was awarded a well deserved V.C. The Japanese trained field guns on to the wounded and no survivor remains to tell the tale.

To conform to this situation, the remainder of West force was withdrawn from the Gemas region to cover Yong Peng. On the East the enemy landed at Endau, but his further advance was held up by our forces at Mersing.

On the 23rd, the enemy landed more troops South of Batu Pahat, cut the Ayer Hitam road, and barred the way out. These were shrewd tactics: few

of our troops ever saw a Jap, but any convoy large or small found trees across the roads in many places, and as soon as the convoy stopped it would be fired on from both sides. Two thousand men were evacuated to Singapore by the navy on successive nights and our left flank was now " in the air."

It was therefore decided to hold a bridgehead round Johore Bahru until the 31st, and bring all troops back to the island. During this operation 22 Brigade disappeared.

Their transport was sent back by road from Rengam, and they were to make their way down the railway: 8 Brigade was behind them. But when they arrived at Layang Layang they found that 8 Brigade had already withdrawn and the Japanese were there. Finally arriving at Tebrai on February 1st, they were practically surrounded by Japanese: they had had no food for over three days, and a proportion broke en masse and went over to the enemy, there remained a force too small to take on the opposition and Brig. Paynter rather than allow small bodies of native troops to go off on their own into the jungle, decided on surrendering.

Singapore

Of the battle for Singapore, there is little to say—fifteen days of nightmare and chaos. One new Division, the 18th, had arrived, less a ship load of guns and armoured cars, the Empress of Asia, sunk outside the harbour. These unhappy people were to see action for the first time in a tropical climate after three months at sea, with a beleaguered garrison. Can we blame them if they shuddered at the prospect ? The Australians were a little ' Bolshie ' at the absence of all air support. The shattered remnants of 11 Division were ready and eager to fight: they had many scores to settle, and at last there could be no more outflanking, no more infiltration through the jungle, no more withdrawals, and the Japs would learn what it was to come up against the British with their backs to the wall.

We expected to go through pretty good hell, but there were a lot of us (about 65,000) and we had plenty of guns, ammunition and food: there could be no difficulty in reinforcing any threatened point and there was a general feeling of relief that the time had come to do or die. Some of the more far seeing thought about the lack of fortifications on the North and West, the question of water supply, and the possible fate of over a million natives destined to be bombed and shelled for days, weeks—perhaps months, and they wondered just how long it would last. Meanwhile we were all too busy preparing our positions to have time to worry.

We had a week of heavy bombing and indiscriminate machine gunning with some shell fire, which allowed us to separate the ' sheep from the goats.' A few cracked under the strain, but a far larger number decided that they could ' take it ' and didn't give a damn. The casualties were remarkably few and the A.A. put in some magnificent work.

On February 7th and 8th, there was heavy artillery and aerial bombardment of the whole of the Northwest sector and during the night of the 8/9th, the enemy transported a Division and a half across the straits of Johore. They had brought special motor craft from Japan, and taken them down the peninsula by rail and road: these were so constructed that three of them bolted together could take a tank. They certainly suffered heavy casualties, but so did the Australians who were holding this sector. The latter withdrew, and the Japanese landed more men and guns unopposed.

There was only one thing to be done, namely to counter attack with every available man: it was a case of now or never ; we were still two to one, and a determined effort must drive them off. But the expected order never came, instead, we withdrew to a perimeter around the city.

After four days, in which every square yard in Singapore was bombed and shelled, the Gibraltar of the East fell on February 15th.

Tribute must be paid here to the magnificent work of the R.A.M.C., with their attached Nursing Sisters. During that last fortnight, the hospitals were

in the front line: they were shelled and bombed daily and in one case, Japanese troops entered a hospital and bayonetted doctors at their work, and patients in bed.

(It must be admitted in fairness to the Japanese, that in this case, some of our forward troops were forced back, and took cover on the hospital verandah, from which they machine gunned the approaching enemy). These brave men and women worked 18 to 20 hours a day and gave of their best, and we are grateful to them. It was not until the 13th, that the nurses, protesting bitterly against having to leave their patients, were evacuated, to be bombed and shipwrecked on an island some miles from Singapore, only about fifty per cent being saved.

It is not within the scope of this sketch to comment on the capitulation or the reason for it: many a brave man wept when he heard the news. It is certainly a fair statement that the Japanese captured Singapore not because of his air superiority or overwhelming numbers, but rather because he was not afraid to die, and too many of us were. We of 11 Division felt that we had made many blunders, but we had fought, and had sacrificed ourselves down Malaya, all for nothing, and a great emptiness filled our souls.

Action

DECEMBER 8TH, 1941, found the Regiment singularly unprepared for war. We disembarked on November 28th, and Capt. Thorley with his unloading party of three officers and seventy O.R's had to start work forthwith unloading personal kits and getting them to the luggage train which was due to leave at 1900 hours. They put in some strenuous work during the following week—guns and tractors were on the Perseus, vehicles and stores were on the Dominion Monarch, and the Q.A.I.M.N.S. were at Adelphi Hotel—but with the exception of one 5-ton lorry—the L.A.D. recovery vehicle which was dropped from a height of 30 feet, they executed their task without mishap.

Meanwhile the Regiment marched to Singapore station—about two and a half miles—and this unusual exercise with full packs, on our first day ashore in the tropics, added a new significance to the expression " to sweat like a bull." We were given a wonderful reception by ladies of the Salvation Army and other voluntary workers, who brought everyone a cup of tea, biscuits, chocolate, fruit and a packet of Players, and finally produced postcards on which each could scribble a line home.

Shortly after 2100 hours, the whistle blew and we pulled out. The train was of the usual tropical type with gauze windows to keep out insect pests when the ordinary windows were open, and electric fans everywhere. The M.O. had received strict injunctions from ' above ' about anti-malarial precautions, and he dashed up and down the train to see that mosquito ointment was applied, that sleeves were rolled down, shirts buttoned up and trouser ' turn ups ' turned down—for at this stage, a mosquito and malaria conjured up frightful visions in our minds, so that when one lone mosquito appeared in a carriage, it was chased to death by a massed attack of all the occupants, who shouted ' Mosquito Alert ' down the train, and it must have marvelled at the amount of attention it received. We reached Kajang at about 0300 hours, and were marched to our new abode, a hutted camp, about half a mile from the village.

Most of the camps in Malaya were in rubber plantations, and we were exceedingly lucky to find ourselves in the open, moreover there was a recently erected girls school for the overflow of the Regiment, a stone building with large airy rooms where 349 Battery housed themselves in great comfort. The Malayan army hut bears no resemblance to its English counterpart: standing on piles about three feet high, it is made of wood, with a verandah, and shuttered openings for windows: the roof is ' thatched ' with attap—a dried leaf of a species of palm tree and there is a gap of about eighteen inches between the overhanging roof and the sides. In the centre of each hut is invariably a ' bathroom ' *i.e.*, a part of the hut with concrete floor, partitioned off, and containing a couple of showers.

We soon evolved a routine of daily work—each Battery went for a route march in the cool of the early morning (85 degrees !) then came a shower and breakfast, and the rest of the day was spent in unloading and sorting out stores as they arrived, and doing the hundred and one office jobs which are necessary at a new station. In the evenings the local planters allowed the troops to use their Club, for which they were very grateful, and a certain number were allowed into Kuala Lumpur; this, added to the novelty of wandering freely in the camp vicinity, where banana trees, coconut palms, magnificent flowering trees and shrubs were to be found in profusion, where insect and bird life were different from anything we had known at home, made life full of interest.

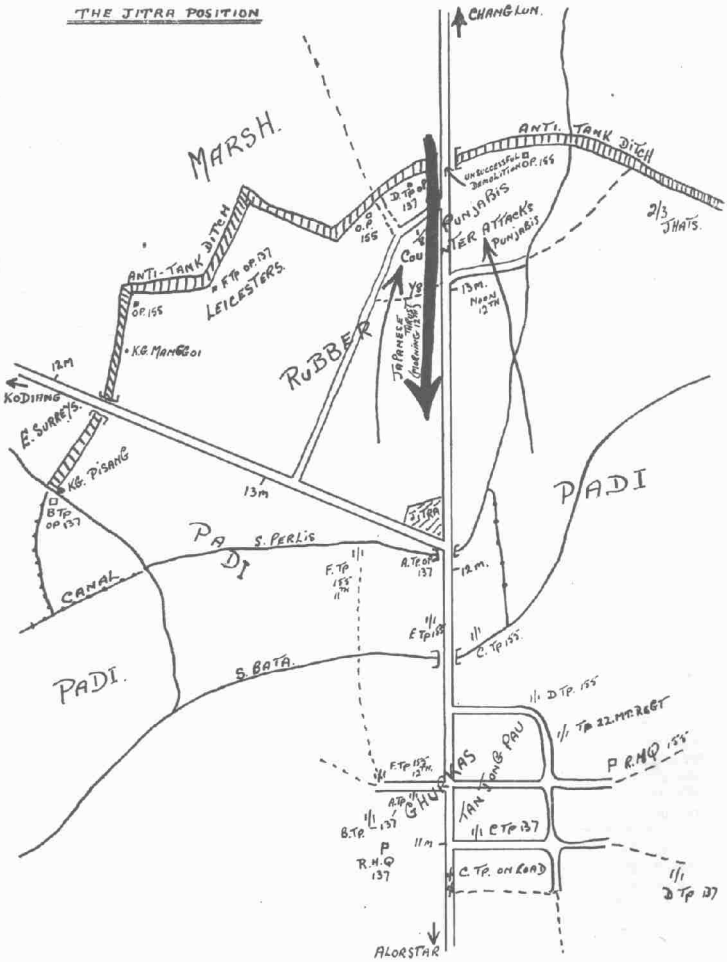
We found that we were to join 11 Division, then on the Siamese border, and it was arranged that small parties of officers should go on a ' Cook's tour ' of the Divisional area, and get some idea of the sort of training and life we should have to lead. The first party, consisting of the C.O. Major Drought, and Captains Coombes and Liston went off on Monday, December 1st, and spent successive days at Sungei Patani, and Jitra. They certainly had an ' eye opener '—nothing could have been more depressing than those camps in the rubber—damp, dark and dismal—and as they saw more of the country they realised that for the gunner, the maximum field of observation was about 300 yards—hills meant nothing, for they were all covered with thick vegetation and merely commanded a view of a forest of tree tops, and rarely could the guns get off the road, so they wondered just how the Field Regiment R.A. was going to deploy.

The C.O. returned just in time to meet the Corps Commander, General Sir L. M. Heath, who came to inspect the Regiment on December 5th. The General was most anxious to know how soon we should be ready to move after receiving our guns and vehicles, and it was apparent that something was ' in the air.' Sure enough, in the early hours of December 8th, Singapore was bombed, and war declared later that day. Our guns and vehicles arrived at 4-30 that afternoon, and the C.O. was asked when he would be ready to move and fight. He shook every one to the core, by saying that the Regiment would move at one o'clock next day.

So we worked, as we had seldom worked before: the guns were just as they had left England, covered in mineral jelly: the vehicles, we had never seen before—they were new—wireless sets were packed with sawdust and all batteries were flat: the last train load of stores and equipment had just arrived and had to be unloaded, sorted and packed. It was soon realised that the complete Regiment would not be ready at the appointed time, and it was therefore decided that 349 and 350 would go first, followed by 501 by train a day later.

Thanks to the efforts of 501 who set to and gave the rest a ' hand,' the Regiment moved off to time. The march to the North was done in three stages: from Kajang to Ipoh, about 150 miles on December 9th, a similar distance from Ipoh to Sungei Patani on December 10th, and on to Jitra on the night of the 11/12th. 501 Battery joined up at Sungei Patani after a remarkable escape from being scuppered without firing a shot. At Bukit Mertajam, during shunting operations, one train was shunted too hard, and set off down an incline which led to the sea five miles away: the train gathered speed and it was touch and go whether or not a slight rise three miles on would stop it. The situation was sufficiently serious for the station master to telephone for every available ambulance in the district to proceed to Prai.

The most aggravating part of this march was the occupation of ' hides ' during the blackout: advance parties had gone ahead so that there were guides awaiting us and a meal had been prepared, but it rained each night, no lights of any sort were allowed, and in the darkness, the tracks through the rubber were indistinguishable from the spaces between the trees. Some vehicles were found in the most incredible places in the morning, such that the driver would never have attempted to reach in daylight: moreover, many men, having been shown their billet for the night, went to the impromptu


THE JITRA POSITION
CHANG LUN.
MARSH.
ANTI TANK DITCH
UNSUCCESSFUL DEMOLITION OP. 155
PUNJABIS
TER ATTACKS PUNJABIS
2/3 JHATS.
D.TP OP 137
O.P 155
ANTI-TANK DITCH
FTP OP. 137
LEICESTERS.
OP. 155
K.G. MANGGOI
RUBBER
JAPANESE ATTACKS 12TH
13m.
12m
KODIANG
E. SURREYS.
K.G. PISANG
13m
B.TP OP 137
PADI
S. PERLIS
JITRA
CANAL
F.TP 155 11TH
A.TP OP 137
E.TP 155
12m.
C.TP 155.
PADI.
S. BATA.
D.TP. 155
TP 22ND REGT
P R.HQ 155
F.TP 155 12TH
A.TP GHURKAS
TRIN TOMB PAU
B.TP 137
P R.H.Q 137
11m
E TP 137
C. TP. ON ROAD
D TP 137
ALORSTAR

cookhouse to snatch a bite and then got completely lost on the way back, wandering about in small circles for hours. The Regiment suffered its first casualties on the way up, when Sergeant Japp's gun tower, in blinding rain, hit the parapet of a low bridge and overturned: Gunner Oxley died almost immediately and Sgt. Japp had to be taken to hospital.

At Sungei Patani, we were informed that the Regiment would march the fifty-five miles to Jitra and take up positions the following night. Regimental and Battery Advance Parties went forward by day, and the C.O. having obtained his orders from the C.R.A. (Brig. A. E. Rusher), gave them out to B.C's: 349 were to come into action on the West of the Alor Star—Jitra road, 350 were under command of 155 (Lanarkshire Yeomanry) Fd. Regt. R.A., and would occupy positions East of the road, while 501 were to remain in reserve near Alor Star.

Reconnaissance parties went forward to their positions and did what preparation they could while daylight lasted. Already there was a fair amount of fire coming from the right flank, our artillery was answering and small parties of our infantry were filtering back, so it seemed that C.Tp. who had 300 rubber trees to fell would be unlikely to occupy their position. Later, the Japs were reported to have broken through on the extreme right, and the C.O. diverted C.Tp. to an alternative position.

Meanwhile, at Sungei Patani the gunners were busy maintaining their equipment and preparing to meet the enemy for the first time. Second-Lt. Fullerton actually met him there—he went to rear Div. HQ. to arrange details of a parachute patrol, and saw a prisoner brought in, one of the few Japs seen by any of us at close quarters during the whole campaign. The guns set off at 6 p.m. and arrived at the Tan Jong Pau Estate South of Jitra in the early hours of the morning. By 8-30 a.m. four troops were in position, communications were established and the 137 Field Regiment was in action for the first time in its history.

As far as the Regiment is concerned, the battle of Jitra may be said to be 350's ' party,' as the main enemy attack was on the right, and we turn to the Battery Diary to follow the course of events.

At 9 a.m., a concentration of fire was called for from 155 Fd. Regt: the target was a massed Japanese Battalion, and the guns of 350, 155 (and later 349) were instrumental in repelling the attack. So the Regt. fired its first round in anger, from Sgt. Elliott's gun of B sub section, D Troop. The main Jitra road running through the centre of the infantry line had padi fields on either side for 700 yards. At this time of the year the fields were flooded and thought to provide an obstacle to the advancing infantry. But although the padi slowed up their advance, it also provided cover. Observation was extremely difficult, as is borne out by the efforts of O.P. officers during the day. Capt. Shore went forward to establish an O.P. in the Leicester F.D.L's, but he could see nothing and had to come back, 2-Lt. Sutcliffe went as F.O.O. with 1/14 Punjabis, but he could see nothing and did not fire a shot. Finally, when the question of withdrawal became imminent, both troop Commanders went on reconnaissance in their armoured carriers and were unsuccessful in doing anything but drawing fire from the Japanese in the ditches on the main road. Here Sgt. Bhumgada was shot off his motor cycle: he crawled into the ditch and after shooting the odd Jap with his revolver, he got away and rejoined the Battery several days later, after being taken to hospital and treated for burns.

During the day, both troops had fired spasmodically on targets called for by 155, but their positions were too exposed to be pleasant. C. Troop was under rifle and M.G. fire from the front to which it replied, while D. Troop was away on the extreme right, with no exit, except the track through the Tan Jong Pau Estate by which it had entered, and the enemy were beginning to infiltrate into the estate. Unformed bodies of our troops began to trickle back, and the B.C. and Battery Captain did a quick reconnaissance of alternative positions and asked permission to withdraw to them. This being given, Major Gill stayed with D. Troop, and Capt. Coombes went off to deal with C. Troop. He found the route to C. Troops' alternative position

straddled with rifle and M.G. fire, and accordingly he decided to leave it where it was, while he investigated the main road. (The time was about a quarter to six). Here, a general withdrawal appeared to be taking place—there was a continuous stream of traffic in the direction of Alor Star, and Coombes therefore sent B. echelon to a rendezvous near Alor Star and pulled C. Troop out on to the main road in action at 20 yards interval in column of route. Acting on information from an Infantry officer on a motor cycle belonging to the Company holding the iron bridge South of Jitra, No. 1 gun was ordered to fire ten rounds at 100 yards plus of the bridge. The guns were laid along the road and the distance calculated from the map. The infantry officer went back to observe, returning later to report that the result was effective, one round at least had landed in a group of enemy A.F.V's, but they were falling rather close to the bridge. "Add 200" was ordered and a further 90 rounds fired, using No. 2 gun as well. Coombes was then asked to take on (a) enemy infantry to the East of the bridge and (b) Jitra village itself. Task (a) could not be done, as the guns could not clear the rubber—it was passed to a troop of 155, and 150 rounds was then fired into Jitra village.

While this was happening, the Japanese infantry had crossed the Estate road and D. Troop was cut off. Major Gill ordered the troop out of action, and fortunately for them, a counter attack pushed the enemy back sufficiently to allow them to shoot along that track 'hell for leather,' join the main road, and rendezvous in the Alor Star area.

Meanwhile, it was rapidly getting dark, and Coombes rode pillion on an infantry Major's motor bike to contact Brigadier Ley one and a half miles back, and obtain information and orders. The infantry Brigadier would not give orders to the gunner and he had no information, so Coombes told him that he would withdraw the guns to Alor Star and contact the C.R.A. for orders. On the way back, the motor cycle was hit in two places by fire from both sides of the road and C. Troop guns passed going out of action. They arrived at the place where No. 1 gun had been, to find a Gurkha Company answering fire from their left rear: the Battery Captain collected his truck and later regained touch with the Battery at Anak Bukit; 350 had fired 1,128 rounds on its first day in action.

349 Battery saw little of the battle, apart from firing a few rounds at the request of 155 Fd. Regt. During the afternoon, A. Troop came under mortar fire and the Regt. suffered its first battle casualty when Sgt. Smith was wounded. The C.O. ordered the Troop out of action to an alternative position further South, and on the way, a Divisional Staff officer told it to proceed to Sungei Patani: as a general withdrawal was obviously taking place at the time, the Troop carried out these later instructions and was 'lost' for a day. B. Troop were similarly ordered to withdraw by the C.O., but no one interfered with it, and it arrived at the appointed rendezvous, less the Troop Commander, Capt. Griffiths, who was forward with the East Surreys, and had to withdraw with them. He contacted A. Troop on their way to Sungei Patani and went back with them.

501 Battery came into action on Alor Star aerodrome to cover the Jitra withdrawal, but they were not required to shoot. The function of R.H.Q. in this battle, with one Battery detached and one under command 155, was limited to liason with the 6th Brigade, and a general supervision of 349 Battery.

Owing to the unco-ordinated nature of the withdrawal they could obtain no clear picture of events, and it was not until 9 p.m. that a plan was evolved on which to work. The Simpang Ampat Canal was to be held, and the Regiment was to go into action at Pendang about ten miles South of Alor Star. Batteries were contacted and this move carried out.

It will always remain a mystery how 11 Division ever recovered from the disorganisation and chaos of the Jitra withdrawal, being able to reform as a fighting unit. There is no doubt that when we came to grips with 'the dwarf,' our British and Indian troops gave a good account of themselves and it is fairly certain that the Jap had no clear picture of the state of affairs

behind our ' line,' for had he been able to follow up at once with air support, the whole Division must have been obliterated. No one will forget the 36 hours of nightmare from the evening of the 12th till the morning of the 14th. There were many contributory causes: in two cases, bridges were prematurely blown to prevent Jap tanks from penetrating and this sacrificed much of our transport, including some carrier platoons whose personnel had to find their way back on foot. The E. Surreys were withdrawn from the left flank to put in a counter attack on the right, and other units, mistaking this for a general withdrawal, followed them out of action: lack of knowledge of Urdu by the British troops, prevented any exchange of information with scattered parties of Indians who had lost their British officers. Moreover, there appeared to be two plans, and the plan to hold the Simpang Ampat Canal was not known by many Staff Officers who swept whole units and sub units back to Sungei Patani.

We therefore have a picture of a solid phalanx of vehicles moving down the road in the dark: some drivers knew where they were meant to go, some followed the man in front, others tried to pass a moving convoy and meeting an ammunition column or a couple of Staff cars coming the other way caused a traffic jam, which got worse as a whole troop of artillery in a hurry to get to a rendezvous went past the stationary mass, and then found themselves unable to move either way.

There were few turning points and the canals on both sides of the road prevented movement off it: added to this, few of us had had any sleep for 36 hours, and occasional drivers ' passed out ' at the wheel, to propel themselves slowly but surely into the canal.

Hence, it is not surprising that the part of the Regiment which reached Pendang took over eight hours to do the ten miles, and that the infantry never got there at all. Meanwhile, A. Troop and all the B. echelon were swept back to Sungei Patani and suffered a similar ghoulish drive.

501 came into action near Alor Star on three different occasions without firing a shot, before being sent back on the night of the 13th, and the main body of the Regiment, in position at Pendang tried in vain to find the infantry they were supporting. Division seems to have realised our plight at last and we received orders to proceed to Bedong at one o'clock in the morning of the 14th.

When the battle of Gurun was fought, the Division had not yet re-organised: units and scattered parties were still filtering back from Jitra and the ' line ' was held by a scratch force. 88 Field Regt. had come up from the South and were fresh, consequently the main gunner tasks devolved on them with 349 Battery under their command. A. Troop came into action two miles South of Gurun astride the main road, where they remained all day without firing—except for Sgt. Greathurst, whose gun was sent to replace a deficiency in one of 88's forward Troops. B Troop had occupied two different positions by dawn, when they were again moved and split into two sections in an anti-tank role. Lt. Stevenson went with one section to cover the railway and was not required to shoot, while Capt. Griffiths was with the other section at Yen cross roads. Shortly after getting there, the position was bombed, and Capt. Griffiths moved the guns back some 400 yards where there was adequate cover from air, and used one of the bomb craters as an O.P. At about one o'clock in the afternoon, tanks were heard approaching, and the infantry covering a demolition up the road, were told to withdraw slightly while it was blown. They withdrew, but did not return again, and the demolition did not stop the tanks. Capt. Griffiths engaged them with indirect fire which scored no direct hit: he therefore withdrew to the guns when the tanks were about 300 yards away, and awaited them in vain down the road.

Meanwhile, at Bedong the rest of the Regiment was alternately snatching a couple of hours sleep, and maintaining vehicles and guns. In the afternoon, 350 Battery had to push a couple of guns out to the left flank in case the tanks engaged by Capt. Griffiths, having turned right at Yen cross roads, should appear. A patrol to guard against fifth column activities was also called for:

the unhappy Malays suffered here, for any suspicious character seen in the rubber was challenged, and if he happened to be afraid and ran away—he probably didn't know what " Halt or I fire " means anyhow—he was the target for half a dozen delighted gunners who thrilled to the unaccustomed joy of trigger pressing.

At one period in the afternoon, there was a fair amount of miscellaneous shooting at wandering Malays or Tamils, during which a soldier who shall be nameless, suddenly appeared beside one of our officers, flung himself in a ditch and fired five rounds rapid from a rifle at nothing in particular. This astonished officer asked what this was all about and received the answer: " Sir, I am a cook, I may never have another chance to shoot in this war, and now I can say that I've actually participated in the fighting."

The following incident illustrates the very real nature of the difficulties caused by the mixture of races fighting on our side. Sgt. Waterhouse, in command of one of our patrols, was separated from them and while trying to rejoin them, he saw what may have been a Ghurka stalking along behind some trees—he was sure that here was his first sight of a Jap, and he crept up towards him with the intention of being the first man in the Regiment to obtain a prisoner. Suddenly he found himself pinioned and his rifle quietly removed by two burly Indians, also on patrol, who thought his actions suspicious—they had heard that in some cases white officers led the Japanese, and one German had in fact been captured on the East coast in this role. They put Waterhouse in a Malay building with a guard over him, but he, mistrusting their intentions, bolted through the window and successfully rejoined the Battery. 349 were sent back to the Regiment in the late afternoon and all had a fair night's rest.

But it was not to last: early on the morning of the 15th, the Japs put in a surprise attack, overwhelming H.Q. 6 Brigade and advanced H.Q. 88 Field Regt.—only the Brigade Commander and the C.O. of the 88th escaped and Gurun had to be evacuated under heavy pressure. The C.O. and B.C's were sent for and given tasks as follows:—501 were to go into action just South of Gurun, 350 were to take up positions at Bedong, and 349 were to go back to the Muda River and reconnoitre positions for the whole Regiment. 501 were unable to carry out their task, as the bridge in front was blown up just as they were about to cross it: they therefore went back and covered the bridges at Sungei Lalang and Sungei Patani until our troops were through. E Troop was there until 7 o'clock next morning to allow Col. Selby time to collect transport for his Ghurkhas who had come back across country from Gurun.

They were lucky to be able to get back at all, for at 9 o'clock the previous evening, the C.P.O. (Lt. Hartley) happened to go back into Sungei Patani and found the main bridge about to be blown—with great difficulty he persuaded the Indian N.C.O. to ' hold fire ' while he found an officer senior enough to order that the bridge would *not* be blown before 501 guns had passed through. 350 remained at Bedong till mid-day, watching a continuous stream of vehicles pass and then, when the bridge was blown, they too proceeded to the Muda. Very few rounds were fired from these covering positions, our O.P's were close to the guns, and usually near the bridges, and the guns were there rather to prevent a surprise break through by enemy tanks or motorized infantry following up, than to do observed shooting. O.P. officers would go up the road in their armoured carriers for some miles to see if there were any signs of the enemy, or of more of our troops coming back, and when the last of our troops appeared to have passed through, the bridges would be blown. It was, however found necessary to post officers on the bridges behind to prevent the Indian Sappers from blowing them prematurely. I don't know what experience the Indians had had of armoured carriers, but in many cases through the campaign they seem to have mistaken them for enemy tanks and an O.P. officer coming back at the last minute would find himself running the gauntlet of a hail of bullets from our own machine guns.

It was December 16th we had failed to deny Kroh to the enemy, and the Division was completely disorganised as a result of Jitra and Gurun,

hence the vital necessity of breaking off all contact with the Jap long enough to allow us to reorganise, and someone had to ' hold the fort ' while the remnants of the Division got back far enough to do its reforming in peace—so R.H.Q. came into its own, and here follows their story.

Col. Holme was appointed O.C. Rearguard 11 Div.—he had under his command an Independent Company of some 250 mixed Indian Troops, and a Troop of the 3rd Cavalry, with neither horses nor armoured cars to mount: in support were 137 together with a section of 22 Mountain Regt. that had become separated from its unit, and an armoured train. The C.O's orders were to hold the line of the Muda until ordered to withdraw by the Divisional Commander. His front was over six miles of river from the partially demolished railway bridge to the coast on the left. The most that could be done with the available men was to hold small strong points at intervals along the river bank and patrol between them every two hours. The section of mountain guns was put to cover Kota ferry on the left, the armoured train was to watch the railway, and 137 were to cover the centre zone.

During the morning, communications were perfected and Major Drought from A Troop O.P. registered 349 and 350 Batteries (501 was in reserve at Penaga wireless station). Odd stragglers kept coming in all day, and though the concrete bridge was well demolished, they were able to cross the river by the wooden railway bridge, which defied all efforts to blow it up or burn it. The armoured train failed to appear, and Lt. Turner with twelve gunners was sent up the railway line to hold the bridge. At 3 p.m. eleven dive bombers appeared and after circling the gun area they unloaded their cargo of fifty-five bombs and also machine gunned the area. From R.H.Q. the whole incident was clearly visible and as they watched the bombs falling, they feared the worst. But 350 were very lucky, most of the bombs fell wide of the guns and our casualties were two killed, one wounded and an anti-tank rifle destroyed. The B.C. read the burial service and gunners Esdell and Saunders were buried in the rubber near where they fell. Apart from O.P. parties and a relief railway patrol, most of the gunners had an excellent night's rest.

Next morning, the 17th, such movement as was seen on the front was taken on by the guns and Major Drought had great fun chasing odd parties of cyclists across country with well placed 25 pounder shells. The General visited the C.O. and said that he hoped to be able to allow him to move out at noon. B echelon were therefore sent back to the Bagan Serai area, successfully evading the many attentions of dive bombers en route. It is rumoured that the Battery Captain of 349 Battery failing to make contact with his Battery that night, did night manoeuvres with his B echelon in the Taiping area.

During the afternoon, the infantry engaged an enemy patrol on our side of the river and dispersed it. At last, at 4 o'clock in the afternoon came the code word ABU giving permission to withdraw and the last guns were away by quarter to six. Col. Holme stood in the middle of the road at Kepala Batas smoking his pipe and remarking on the peace and quietness of the scene, now that the army had gone. After a few moments, he got into his car and proceeded southwards. His next task was to order the destruction of all road bridges between Kepala Batas and the Krian river (about fifty miles). Arrived at a bridge already mined, he was greeted by the sapper: " Is that Colonel Holme ?" " Yes." " May I blow the bridge, sir ?" " Yes." " Will you go about 250 yards down the road, sir ?" " Yes,"—A couple of minutes pause—Krumph !—a shower of debris, an inspection of results, the collection of his equipment by the sapper, then, back to the next bridge to carry out a similar procedure. By the early hours of December 18th, the C.O. and the Adjutant arrived at the Krian, and with the blowing of the last bridge, R.H.Q. completed a very successful ' party ' and returned for a few hours well earned sleep.

The period 18th—22nd December, while scarcely a rest for the Regiment, was at any rate a time during which it saw no action—much hard work was put in reconnoitring positions and sometimes occupying them, for the general plan was to withdraw gradually to the Perak River in conformity with 12

Brigade which was pushed slowly down the Grik road, so that both forces should arrive at Kuala Kangsar simultaneously, and neither be cut off by a too hasty withdrawal of the other. 28 Brigade was conducting the main road withdrawal supported by 88 Field Regt., moreover it was vital that no more troops should be lost, so the role of the Division as it withdrew was to avoid contact as far as possible. Hence there were many tiresome, and what appeared futile, moves and counter moves. 501 had to come into action in the dark at Bagan Serai only to be moved out next morning as a Battery of 88 became available: all other batteries had also reconnoitred positions in this area. Then the Regiment moved as a unit back to Sungei Siput (some thirty miles) and spent a day in maintaining guns and vehicles; the multiple returns which had accumulated since the ' battle ' started were duly rendered in sex-tuplicate to the necessary authorities and there was even time to find an Army Field Post Office and issue out a bag of mail. The C.O. contacted 12 Brigade to obtain from them orders, as we were to come under their command for the task of holding the Perak River line and denying Ipoh to the enemy till the 27th. We were not required on the Grik road, but the Japs had started to outflank the Argylls by crossing the Chendenok Lake in rafts: from this a river flows to Sungei Siput, and jungle tracks lead there, consequently as a precautionary move, a company of 4/19 Hyderabads were sent to deal with the threat of infiltration and the Regiment made another move (on the 21st) to the area of Chemor, some eight miles further South.

In this series of withdrawals, and subsequently, when time permitted, the abandoned rubber plantation with its manager's bungalow and estate offices was a godsend for tired troops. Sometimes we found the planter still in residence, mystified by the sudden turn of events, and worried as to whether he should stay or move back, but generally the house was open as if the owner had gone out for half an hour, leaving everything as it was and it made one weep to see a beautiful house and garden soon to be looted by the native or the Jap, vacated so hastily that there was no time to take much away. A carefully packed chest of drawers, evidence of a woman's handiwork, children's toys still on the nursery floor, a half completed piece of needlework in a work-basket—these things made us realize that although Malaya was a nightmare of rice, rubber and rain to us, it was home to someone.

Our Regimental column by now was beginning to assume the form of ' Fred Carnot's Army '— as occasional vehicles broke down, others were impressed into service—R.H.Q. boasted one motor bus, 349 had an R.A.F. wireless van, 350 had a dismantled fire engine and a post office car, while 501 had a Chinese pork butchers' lorry—to mention but a few—besides which, nearly every officer had acquired for himself some kind of limousine, coupé or racing car, which served as a runabout more easy to manipulate in traffic blocks than his army vehicle—but the alternative was to smash these cars or to leave them for the Japs, and they served a useful purpose. It was amusing to see a fire engine laying cable up to the O.P., or a lumbering green monstrosity, covered in white Chinese ideographs, delivering ammunition at the gun line.

501 had a certain amount of fun during this time: it was decided that Taiping aerodrome must be guarded against a possible parachute landing and Capt. Hilton went there with F. Troop to take over aerodrome defence. He had allotted to him a Troop of Bofors A.A. guns and 130 Sikhs with no British officer. He made his dispositions putting the guns in behind the aerodrome with his O.P. and infantry posts on it. The previous two days had seen the R.A.F. bombed out of it and Capt. Hilton feared a repetition while he was there, but there were no visitors. They registered the aerodrome on the first morning, otherwise the guns were not required to shoot; it was however rather a remarkable coincidence that two of the gunners who had shot on to the aerodrome, later, as prisoners of war, had to fill in the holes they had made. The time at Taiping was pleasantly spent enjoying a large quantity of food left in the evacuated town. The later arrival of F Troop at the Regimental hide with these new additions to his strength, shook 510 Battery Commander to the core. However next day E Troop proceeded to

Ipoh aerodrome where for two days they performed the same role, taking the Sikhs and A.A. gunners with them—a fair percentage of the Singapore Cold Storage preserves found its way into the soldiers' stomachs, and here again no shooting was required. They destroyed much R.A.F. equipment on the aerodrome before leaving.

These incidents, bring up the general question of looting, the rape of Ipoh being a particularly glaring example. By the morning of Christmas Eve, the Shell oil tanks and an ammunition dump had received direct hits, the police and civil servants had fled and there started the first of those large scale lootings which blotted the British escutcheon in this campaign. Whereas the R.A.S.C. helped by police officers and planters could have commandeered all useful supplies for the army and organised the salvage of other articles, there was no one to take charge, and looting started by the natives, rapidly became general. The decision to evacuate Ipoh, must have been known days before, and suitable measures could and should have been taken.

Curiously enough, among the targets hit in the bombing of Ipoh was a goods van containing a considerable amount of 349's equipment. This had been shunted at Gemas on December 8th, by mistake and had later reached Alor Star, but it was not till Ipoh that we were told of its whereabouts.

From all directions bicycles six deep came ' empty ' in a constant stream into the town and went away laden with every conceivable article. One bicycle in particular was a sight ' for the Gods '—on the carrier was strapped four chairs and a chest of drawers and the native was riding the bicycle thus with six sheets of corrugated iron balanced on his head. The army very soon saw no reason why it shouldn't participate in this free distribution, and three ton lorries hastened into the town and filled up with a super abundance of delectable provender ranging from mincemeat and Christmas pudding to pork sausages and beer on a scale to provide every soldier with a goodly Christmas fare.

On December 22nd, 12 and 28 Brigades, converged on Kuala Kangsar and the stage was set for the next phase of the battle. The C.O. moved his advanced H.Q. to Sungei Siput with 12 Brigade, and 350 reconnoitred positions in the Kanthan area with 349 South of them, 501 being in reserve. The C.O. was given the task of ordering all 28 Bde artillery units into their new positions as they crossed the Eskander Bridge, and Capt. Mason spent a most unpleasant night standing on the bridge in torrential rain, contacting the necessary personnel of 28 Bde out of the vast stream of traffic that was pouring South. Next morning the bridge was blown and the C.O. went forward with Brigadier Paris to inspect our front line. He returned hurriedly to order F Troop (501) into action at Salak North immediately, as an enemy attack was expected and artillery support therefore required forward.

There had been considerable air activity during the morning and 12 and 28 Bdes, both in Salak North, had caught a packet—12 Bde H.Q. in a bungalow on a small hill with no cover, evaded attention, but F Troop was not so lucky. They were dive-bombed coming into action, a petrol lorry and an ammunition squad received direct hits, three men being killed and four wounded. Capt. Mason was sent by the C.O. to investigate and he found the burning vehicles blocking the road ; he tried in vain to deal with the fire by means of water—the heat was so intense that a bucket of water evaporated on the spot in a cloud of steam ; after a consultation with Capt. Liston, they decided to unlimber the trailer and pull it off the road, but the brakes had seized and it would not budge. Lt. Scott and four O.R's then arrived to help, when suddenly with a deafening explosion, some rounds went off from inside the trailer. Gunner Guerdon was killed instantly, and Capt Mason, Lt. Scott and Gunner Graham were wounded. The trailer had now burst into flames and there was nothing to do but to allow the fire to burn itself out. The enemy attack did not materialize—in fact it transpired that the so-called enemy were six unhappy E. Surreys who after ten days wandering in the jungle had at last caught us up, and were crossing the river in a home made raft. Our machine gun fire caused them to swim for it and two were drowned in the attempt.

It was decided that evening to take up a position just North of Kanthan halt and wait for the Japs; accordingly next morning saw 5/2 Punjabs astride the main road forward, with 350 in support, and the A. and S.H. and 4/19 Hyderabads in rear, supported by 349. Registration was carried out by Capt. Shore from what must have been the best viewpoint in Malaya—the top of the shaft of a tin mine, which about 50 feet up, commanded the surrounding country to a depth of some 3,000 yards. It was a hazardous operation climbing up into this ramshackle erection of wooden struts and once there, one felt very unsafe; it oscillated like a pendulum when the wind blew, moreover it was plumb in the front line. To emphasize the fantastic situation, the countryside was dotted with Malays wandering about, not knowing where to go, but their indecision was miraculously modified by the advent of the odd 25-pounder shell.

We were fortunate in having a quiet Christmas, so that even the front line troops were able to participate to some extent in seasonal celebrations. Capt. Coombes had negotiated the purchase of eight pigs and this, added to the stocks obtained from Ipoh, provided adequate fare for all.

Apart from patrol activity there was no incident; one of our patrols consisted of a Punjabi in Malay dress on a bicycle; he went forward into Sungei Siput to see what he could and the Japanese confiscated his bicycle, allowing him to proceed on foot. Having stolen another bicycle, he went on as far as the Eskander Bridge and came back with the valuable information that two Battalions of the enemy were in Sungei Siput and a further one was crossing the bridge, so we awaited Boxing Day ready for what was to come.

Boxing Day, 1941, will long be remembered by 350 Battery as one of its most successful actions in the campaign. Contact with the enemy was made in Sungei Siput in the early hours and at 9-30, the covering company of 5/2 Punjabs was forced out of the village after a brisk engagement. The main infantry position was about 3,000 yards behind and the infantry gradually fell back on to it. At 11 o'clock the Battery put down a 'Chinese' barrage of 24 rounds per gun on to the village. The Indian Lieutenant in command of the rearguard gave a graphic account of this to the Battalion Commander and Major Gill. He was observing from a small hill which gave a good view of the village and he saw shells bursting in the main street and debris of bodies flying through the air; according to his estimate there were over 1,000 Japanese marching down the street in close formation.

Throughout the day, the enemy continued his pressure; Capt. Shore had some grand shoots by direct observation and the B.C. at Battalion H.Q. received reports from platoon commanders over the telephone, shooting on map references. The fall of shot was reported back from the platoon and the necessary corrections made with most satisfactory results. Included in the day's 'bag' was a Battalion of infantry on the main road; they were first caught in their massed formation by Major Gill and then chased all over the countryside when they deployed acting on reports from the forward platoon commanders. A company attack down the railway was likewise repulsed. But the best series of the day was at target 'Queenie' 4,' registered the previous day. This was a small quarry about 1,500 yards from the front line, which was only visible from the tin mine O.P. Its first occupants were forty infantry, who thought to foregather there. "Target Q 4—two rounds gun fire" completely broke up their party; about half an hour later a M.G. was set up in the same place and "Target Q 4 repeat" resulted in the exodus from this world, of the M.G. and its detachment with a direct hit. But the Japanese with their usual disregard for casualties again used the quarry, this time with greater caution, their movements being unobserved from the O.P. When therefore, Battalion H.Q. came under heavy mortar fire, the B.C. deduced from the line of craters, that some further unsuspecting 'dwarf' had considered that the quarry might be a coign of vantage; he 'phoned Capt. Shore, who took the bearing to the flash of the next round and the position of the mortar was then definitely fixed. "Q 4 three rounds fire" was no sooner said than done, and that is how the Japanese lost one perfectly good 3-inch mortar.

Enemy pressure continued however to increase and at dusk our infantry were forced to withdraw; Capt. Shore and his O.P.A. had a perilous slide down a chute from the O.P. with the Japs only 300 yards away and they were lucky to lose no more than the seats of their shorts. It was incredible that the enemy did not realize from the amount of attention he received that a good O.P. existed somewhere and must be in the tin mine shaft, yet, apart from one burst of M.G. fire which pierced the shaft without hitting anyone they left it severely alone.

During the night D Troop fired 288 rounds into Sungei Siput by way of lullaby to Jap slumbers; one round of gun fire went off like a salvo, much to the astonishment of a passing convoy of Indians who, thinking they were being bombed, jammed on all brakes and dived for the rubber, leaving one of their vehicles upside down in the ditch.

Despite much air activity our guns were not discovered; C Troop guns were actually inside the buildings of some rubber estate offices. D Troop having cut down some young rubber to allow its guns to clear the crest, fastened the tree tops to the stumps and in that way avoided detection.

For the only time in the campaign the Survey Section really got going and sent the C.P.O. into ecstasies of delight by slewing the grid.

Meanwhile at Bde H.Q., the Brigadier and Colonel Holme, anticipating a heavy attack, had decided to try and trap the Japs if they followed up our withdrawal down the main road. They planned a Regimental barrage for the following morning to catch the enemy on the road and the A. and S.H. were to be waiting for him on the flanks when he deployed. Major Drought had registered all four troops on the opening line, which was two miles behind the then front line—all traffic had to be stopped for this, and—by the way—this was one of the few times in the campaign that we used W/T to shoot the guns—even at the short range of four miles with a 20 foot aerial, reception was most indifferent, which indicates the extreme difficulty of using wireless in rubber.

During the night the Japs succeeded in mounting a heavy M.G. on a precipitous crag overlooking the main road and commanding it for a mile: this interfered considerably with our use of the road, and the armour piercing bullets used, accounted for several of our armoured carriers—an unpleasant surprise for us. The enemy put in a strong attack before dawn, supported by heavy mortar fire and H.Q. 5/2 Punjabs was practically surrounded: Col. Deakin counter attacked with bearers, cooks and every available odd man, and pushed them back a little but they veered to their right and carried on down the railway, forcing the 5/2 to withdraw further than the start line of the barrage, and Brigadier Stewart cancelled it. 350 therefore went back some four miles and 349 took up the fight: the dual method of direct fire from an O.P. and indirect fire acting on information from the infantry was again successful. Major Drought established a subsidary O.P. on the railway and did some close shooting until the enemy were almost on top of him. By 1600 hours 349 withdrew and the battle then slackened considerably, 350 from their rear position had very little shooting to do before the order was issued to go back to our semi-prepared position at Kampah.

It was the evening of the 27th and 12 Bde had put up a magnificient performance against vastly superior forces and carried out the commander's instruction to deny Ipoh to the enemy until that date. During the operations on the 27th, Capt. Mason was hit by a mortar splinter while motor cycling up the main road, receiving a severe flesh wound in the thigh: he had to be evacuated to the base hospital and Capt. Griffiths took over the appointment of Adjutant. But 12 Bde. had one more job to do before withdrawing into the Kampah defences, namely to hold a covering position while the final preparations were being made. Between Ipoh and Gopeng was a belt of fairly open ground, and the 4/19 Hyderabads held a forward position in front of Gopeng, with the 5/2 Punjabs in rear and the A. and S.H. watching the open left flank. This action in front of Kampah was 501's only 'party' in the Campaign and they acquitted themselves well: at 5-30 in the morning of the 28th, they took up their reconnoitred positions, E. Troop covering the

left flank, and F Troop covering the front. Capt. Hilton was lucky in finding an excellent view point on a small knoll North of Gopeng, with grand command of the open country. From here, he shot his own troop continuously from noon until 6-30 p.m., using R/T and on several occasions he fired E Troop relaying his orders by phone from the Troop Command Post. Most of his targets were enemy mortars in action, and he had the joy once, of seeing a direct hit send bits of mortar in all directions. At dusk the positions in front of Gopeng were evacuated and the town itself was shelled during the night by both Troops. In the afternoon the Japanese had occupied the railway station at Kota Bahru S.W. of Gopeng, and an Argyll patrol consisting of a Captain, a Sergeant Major and a runner attacked the station with two tommy guns and a rifle, killing ten Japanese and driving them out of the station. Next morning Capt. Hilton reached the A. and S.H. H.Q. with difficulty, against enemy mortar fire on the main road: his wireless would not work and he had to return to the Troop to order them to fire on a defile South of Gopeng where the enemy were forming up. Owing to the nearness of the enemy, the Troop then withdrew, but there was no possible position off the road for it to continue shooting from: it therefore came into action in column of route on the road to take on subsequent targets.

The worst enemy in both Troop positions was the ' Karinga,' an enormous red ant ; every time a gun fired, the vibration caused a shower of these insects to descend on the unhappy gunners from the trees, which were infested—the answering shower of expletives was an education in itself.

Later in the morning E. Troop was spotted by an enemy plane and became the target for their artillery, shooting by air observation. Shortly afterwards the Battery withdrew into a hide in the Bidor area, being mortared coming out of action and dive-bombed on the bridge at Dipang: fortunately the only casualties were three men wounded and a burst tyre. 501 had fired just over 400 rounds, and this first effort at shooting in anger, greatly heartened the men.

Kampah is a mountain 4,070 feet high, with thickly wooded and precipitous granite peaks in front and to the flanks ; apart from the main road on the West and a subsidiary one on the East which links up at Tapah, the region is almost impassable except to mountain goats, hence, we had here a naturally strong position which it was hoped to hold for a considerable time. While 501 were engaged in the Gopeng area, 350 took up positions in a valley in front of the mountain in order to give further support to 12 Bde. as it withdrew. During the afternoon of the 28th, they were shot on to map reference targets from Bde. H.Q., firing at angles of sight of as much as 12 degrees elevation ; they had to cover a zone of 90 degrees and no O.P's could be found to cope with the task, Troop Commanders therefore went to Bde. and Bn. H.Q. and fired at the request of the infantry. On the 29th, the range dropped gradually until D Troop could no longer clear the crest and C Troop could only fire on a limited arc. The day ended with Capt. McLeod occupying an O.P. (his carrier) on our side of the Dipang bridge and ordering concentrations on to the bridge itself and the road immediately beyond it. The enemy was now within range of 155 and 88 Fd. Regt's. guns, covering the main position and the Battery withdrew at 10 minutes to 7 to the Bidor area and the rest of the Regiment, after firing 700 rounds.

December 30th and 31st, were days of comparative rest for the Regiment, that is to say rest from action. We were however very busy ; two of 501's guns had gone out of action and needed attention from the fitters ; all guns and vehicles needed maintenance ; gun positions and O.P's had to be reconnoitred in case required, and the survey section did a complete survey of the area for 501 who occupied their positions, covering Bidor Cross Roads. The enemy air force was unpleasantly active, making movement of convoys by day somewhat suicidal, and they were continually searching for the guns. We found that it paid to put our light A.A. in groups at a distance from Battery hides so that they could shoot simultaneously by controlled fire thereby adding to the chance of obtaining a hit, moreover by so doing they did not give away our positions. This procedure was effective in keeping the

enemy at a reasonable height; we did not bring any down but the bullets seemed to go in the right direction and we like to think that many " failed to regain their base."

Much excitement was casued by the discovery of an abandoned F.M.S.V.F. arms dump from which 349 and 350 obtained a welcome addition to their tommy gun and rifle strength and R.H.Q. acquired three armoured cars. Initially they thought to retain these, with a schoolgirl's delight at a new found toy, but whenever the assistant adjutant was required, he had to be forcibly ejected from the bows of one of these cars, for as its driver he felt impelled to make himself fully acquainted with its modus operandi. The 2nd in Command therefore decided that the C.O. would take a poor view of things when he returned from Brigade, and the armoured cars were handed over to Division.

On the evening of December 31st, word was received that Japanese craft were approaching Telok Anson; 12 Bde. were warned to be ready to deal with this threat if it developed, and Capt. Thorley spent the night with the A. and S.H. in case the guns should be wanted suddenly. New Year's morning passed quietly; we had our first Church Parade in the field, taken by the Padre of the British Battalion, (composite Bn. formed from the remnants of the Leicesters and the E. Surreys) and attended by representatives of the Batteries. But the Japanese landed at Teloh Anson in the afternoon, and 349 were ordered to move there during the night.

A Troop were to support the Independent Coy. initially on the beaches, but owing to some misunderstanding, they were not sent to T.A. until after the landing and they arrived to find the Independent Coy. on the outskirts of the town. Capt. Thorley's first targets were therefore unobserved shoots on the piers; later he took on small bodies of Japs crossing some open ground on the left flank, until such time as they filtered round, when the Independent Coy. withdrew behind the A. and S.H. who were in position to their rear. B Troop had come in at dawn, finding a position on the forward slopes of the T.A. reservoir with an O.P. behind on the reservoir, and Capt. Thorley moved A Troop to the same area but further in rear and shared the O.P. Lt. Nicholls was manning a forward O.P., in his truck beside a river bridge and from here during the morning and afternoon he carried out observed shoots which included a close shoot on the bridge in front of him, the destruction of a mortar which was being set up, and the demolition of a footbridge further up the river. The shooting was effective enough to make the Japs keep their heads down, one salvo in particular in the close shoot must have landed right in a party of them behind the bridge, judging from the porcine squeals which accompanied the burst. In the late afternoon, the forward Coys. withdrew according to plan, blowing the bridge, and falling back on to a front line which included the reservoir. B Troop accordingly ' leap frogged ' behind A Troop. From here, Capt. Thorley registered the front, and during the night both Troops fired harassing fire tasks. In case of penetration on the right, a 2nd A Troop O.P. was manned with the 5/2 Punjabs, in front of the bridge across the T.A. Kampah Road.

It was however apparent that an eventual withdrawal would become necessary and positions for 501 were reconnoitred along the Teloh Anson—Bidor road for a series of ' lay-backs,' F Troop 501 coming into action that afternoon behind 349.

Communications were by now a serious problem; it was fifteen and a half miles by road to R.H.Q., wireless was out of range, the signal section only had four and a half miles of wire—the alternative route was direct through the jungle. Lt. Lowden decided to utilize the existing Post Office lines, patching them up with our own cable, where destroyed, and the signal section spent a hazardous day climbing telegraph poles, where they were bitten to death by Karingas, and taking cover from air craft, which machine gunned and bombed the roads, invariably breaking that part of the line which had just been mended.

This telephone circuit was therefore not so successful as we had hoped, especially as whenever they did get through to R.H.Q., a female voice would

interrupt saying " This is Kuala Lumpur 29 " (K.L. was well over 100 miles away). Hence the C.O. ordered a line to be laid direct through the jungle. This was not essential in order to communicate with R.H.Q. who could easily have moved forward, but E Troop from their hide could shoot over the jungle on to the Teloh Anson Road and the real purpose of the jungle line was to communicate with an O.P. on that road, which could shoot E Troop when the others moved back.

Major Owtram and our attached planter, Mr. Stoker, with a party of 501 signallers, having borrowed the extra wire necessary from 350, performed this epic feat ; there was no track, and they cut their way for six miles through jungle, forded two rivers and crossed a swamp. This they achieved in seven hours, arriving at the other end after dark.

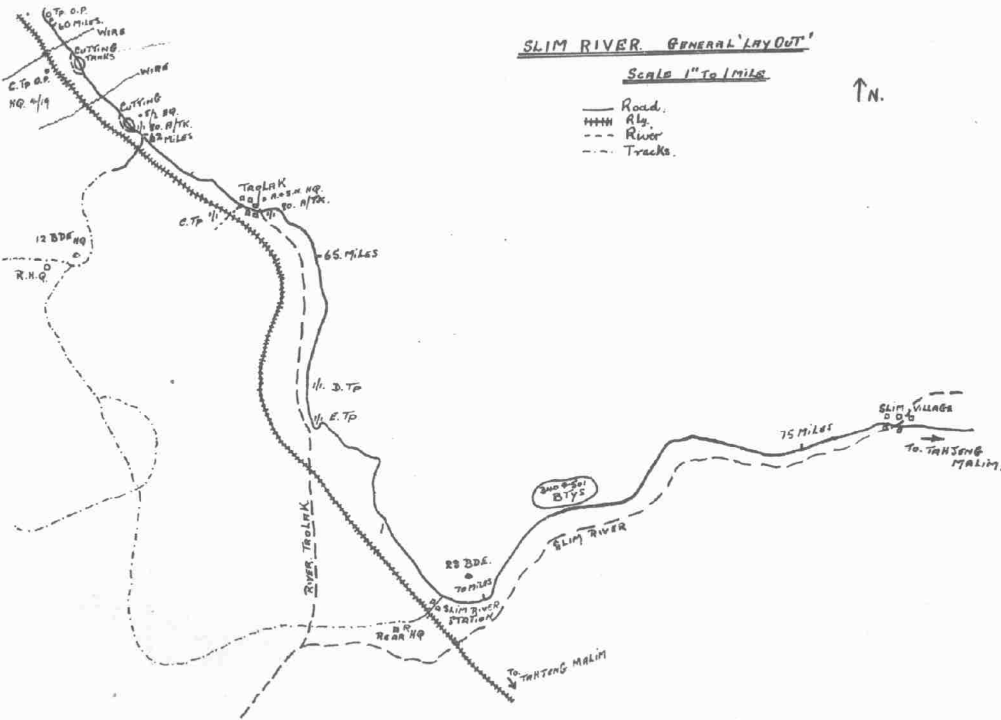
Next day (January 3rd), both troops shot a number of targets, mostly at the request of the infantry, fire being controlled by Lt. Manning or the B.C. on the right flank O.P. Lt. Storey also caught a company of infantry along the road at a point previously registered by Capt. Thorley. In the afternoon the forward Company of the 5/2 Punjabs with Lt. Manning was partially surrounded and decided to come back across the river ; as the bridge was swept by M.G. fire they preferred to swim for it. Lt. Manning succeeded in crossing against a strong current but L./Bdr. Reynolds, his O.P.A., was swept away and never seen again. Gunner Morrison here behaved with conspicious gallantry helping Indian troops across the river under fire ; having crossed the river, he saw three Indians clinging to the side of the bridge unable to swim and he went back three times assisting each one across. As he was crossing the third time, our Sappers blew the bridge ; Morrison went under and as he came up, was knocked unconscious by falling debris ; the party on our side of the bridge pulled him ashore, and for this action he was awarded the Military Medal in the field.

Air activity was again continuous, determined efforts being made to locate the guns, which were doing excellent work whenever the attack was resumed. Towards dusk they found them and bombed A and B Troops, killing three men and wounding a fourth with a direct hit on the slit trench in which they were taking cover.

12 Bde. were holding the enemy satisfactorily, but they made more landings at Kuala Selangor that afternoon, rendering the T.A. position untenable, and also thereby turning the flank of Kampah. The Bde. was therefore ordered to the Trolak area to cover the evacuation of Kampah and the wire laid the previous night was reeled in to prevent the Japs from using it as a guide across country. The Battery withdrew during the night, having fired over 2,000 rounds in its two day action.

Waterloo -- The Tragedy of Slim

THE necessity to abandon Kampah where we were holding on well, was a bitter disappointment to many who thought that at last we had, temporarily at least, called a halt to this weary series of withdrawals, but the general position was by no means hopeless. For two weeks a strong Divisional defence line had been under preparation at Tah Jong Malim ; 3,000 coolies had been at work cutting down rubber and jungle so that O.P's could have good command and the infantry a good field of fire. Major Buchan, the B.M. Penang Fortress reconnoitred the infantry dispositions beforehand, and on January 3rd, the C.R.A. sent for Capt. Coombes as a representative of the Regt., to come down and reconnoitre the O.P. areas to link up with the infantry F.D.L's. Major Booth of the F.M.S. V.R., commanding a survey company attached to 3 Corps, completed the party which on the 4th did a complete reconnaissance of the front line to be. Next day Capt. Coombes dealt with gun areas and wagon lines and took B.C's over the O.P. area with the Battalion Commanders of the 6/15 Bde. which we were to support on this line. On subsequent days in the role of spare Brigade Major, he with Majors Booth and Buchan made a reconnaissance for a series of defensive positions


SLIM RIVER. GENERAL 'LAY OUT'
Scale 1" To 1 Mile
Road.
Rly.
River
Tracks.
N.
Tp. O.P.
60 MILES.
WIRE
CUTTING
TANKS
WIRE
C. Tp O.P.
HQ. 4/19
CUTTING
5/2 SQ.
1/1 80. A/TK.
62 MILES
TROLAK
80. A/TK.
C. Tp 1/1
12 BDE HQ
R.H.Q.
65. MILES
1/1. D. Tp
1/1. E. Tp
RIVER TROLAK
28 BDE.
70 MILES
SLIM RIVER STATION
REAR HQ
To. TANJONG MALIM
BTYS
SLIM RIVER
75 MILES
SLIM VILLAGE
To. TANJONG MALIM.

at Rasa, Serendah and Rawang, so that as we gradually withdrew, it would be each time to a known position ready surveyed in, with likely targets surveyed and the enemy would walk " right into it." Moreover, the Trolak position some thirty-six miles in front of T.J.M. was a good one on which to hold the enemy while final preparations were being made behind.

12 Bde. moved back from Telok Anson on the night of 3/4th January, and took up their positions the following morning; they were to hold a front including the village of Trolak forward to a depth of six miles odd; their lines extended to about half a mile to the East of the main road and a similar distance West of the railway, which ran parallel to the road for some miles here: the actual front line crossed the middle of a position of newly built road which extended in a straight line for three miles with thick jungle on either side at the Northern end, giving way to rubber in the South West: here there was a maze of plantation tracks leading right back to Slim Village. 4/19 Hyderabads were forward with 5/2 Punjabs about 2,000 yards in rear, and the A. and S.H. in reserve at Trolak village: 350 Battery was to support both lines. When 28 Brigade came through, they were to continue the defence in depth from Trolak to Slim River, a further eight or nine miles and 6/15 Bde. was to go direct to T.J.M. A Dannert wire tank obstacle was made across the road in front, a road block was built at the second line, and the bridge at Trolak was mined ready for demolition: all these obstacles were covered by the guns of 80th A/Tk. Tegt., a Battery of which was deployed along this stretch of road. The original plan was for 12 Bde. to withdraw right back to T.J.M. on the night of 6/7th and 28 Bde. to take up the battle, but the position was considered to be so satisfactory that on January 6th, it was decided to withdraw 4/19 Hyderabads only, leaving 5/2 Punjabs to hold on another two days. 350 Battery spent the 4th reconnoitring gun positions and O.P's which they occupied in the afternoon, C Troop North West of Trolak village and D Troop South of it. C Troop were rather far forward to support the second line after the 4/19 had withdrawn, and with a mined bridge behind them, might have had some difficulty in getting out, if speed became necessary. E Troop (501) were later put under command 350 Battery, coming in behind D Troop to give continuous support while C Troop were withdrawing, otherwise 349 and 501 Batteries remained in hides between Slim Village and Slim River Village. C Troop O.P. was a trench in the front line overlooking the railway and D Troop Commander found himself a hole on the embankment of the straight stretch of road, giving a view of about 800 yards forward: rear O.P's were also fixed in the second line: communications from O.P's to guns and Battalion H.Q's were through that night, and by night the O.P. parties vacated their trenches for the greater security of forward Company H.Q.

Owing to the persistent activities of enemy aircraft, Division ordered that there should be a minimum of movement by day, which order, though irksome, proved sound. An Indian driver passing Trolak Police Station, stopped his vehicle on the approach of two dive bombers: they dropped a couple of bombs which killed Gnr. Burns and wounded Gnr. Morland, who were manning C Troop A.A. Bren gun there. Later in the day Capt. Coombes, while visiting the Battery from T.J.M., was driving Major Gill up to Bde. H.Q.: the car was followed by hostile aircraft and the first load of bombs though possibly not meant for them, narrowly missed: but two miles further on, they dived for the car and Capt. Coombes reluctantly stopped to take cover at the request of the B.C. While he was leisurely getting out of the car, a burst of M.G. fire pierced both front seats with bullets, the B.C. meanwhile fired a burst of 32 rounds from his Tommy gun without visible result, at one of the aircraft which was skimming the tree tops, and they proceeded on their way, proudly displaying to all and sundry, a bullet riddled windscreen.

On the 5th, patrols were sent out to effect contact with the enemy and a certain amount of registration was carried out from the O.P. Anti-tank mines were laid and booby traps set up on the far side of the Dannert wire obstacle. Jap reconnaissance machines were most active throughout the

day, and the fire by order procedure was adopted at the guns. Scouts were posted to keep the G.P.O's informed of the approach of enemy aircraft, and when they signalled, " Planes clear " the order to fire was given. Capt. McLeod from C Troop O.P. caught a company of enemy forming up in a cutting on the railway and decimated them with five rounds gun fire. The night passed without any incident.

Next morning, however there were signs of an enemy attack brewing up. Capt. Shore saw on several occasions, figures moving swiftly across the road to disappear in the jungle the other side: then a party of twenty cyclists came into view over the brow of a hill in the background, pedalling furiously towards our lines: he gave five rounds Gun Fire ' Fire by Order ' and when they approached the point he had registered, he ' let them have it.' They obviously heard the report of the guns some six miles away, and flung themselves into the ditch, but the rounds fell into the ditch instead of on the road, and no further movement came from that party.

Another party came along the road on foot and received similar treatment. Meanwhile the enemy had set up mortars at odd places on the edge of the road, and began shelling our front line, Capt. Shore spotted the smoke from one of these mortars and confirmed its presence through his field glasses from the movement of a soldier near by ; this was effectively silenced.

During the afternoon, a Malay boy appeared near C Troop O.P., who, when questioned, reported that he had been kicked by the Japanese and told to get out ; he had seen many soldiers forming up on the railway, and many dead being brought back, and there were many tanks. Unfortunately his report was received with scepticism by Brigade. Shortly afterwards some 150 Japs came down the railway, and advanced as far as our wire which they were allowed to inspect, while suitable arrangements were made for their disposal. They went back into the jungle, and it was feared that we had missed our opportunity, but they soon returned and started removing the wire. Heavy automatic fire from the 4/19 sent them scuttling back into the jungle, from which they were driven out again by the fire of C Troop guns and the remnants hastily retired back up the railway ; Capt. McLeod counted 76 dead in the area. At 5 o'clock, the C.O. received the following message of congratulation from the Corps Commander:

Gen. Heath:—H.Q. III Ind. Corps.

Dear Holme,

I have learnt from several sources of the excellent work done by your Regiment throughout the campaign. I would be pleased if you would pass on my appreciation to all ranks.

L. M. Heath.

5th January, 1942.

To:—Lt.-Col. G. D. Holme, R.A.,
Comdg. 137(A) Fd. Regt. R.A.

This was read out to the men and it put them all in good heart.

That evening, Capt. Coombes came up from T.J.M. to ask the C.O. if 349 and 501 Batteries together with the Regimental B echelon could come back to T.J.M. to get on with the preparation and organisation of their positions there—the C.O. thought that they might be required forward sometime and was reluctant to let them go back.

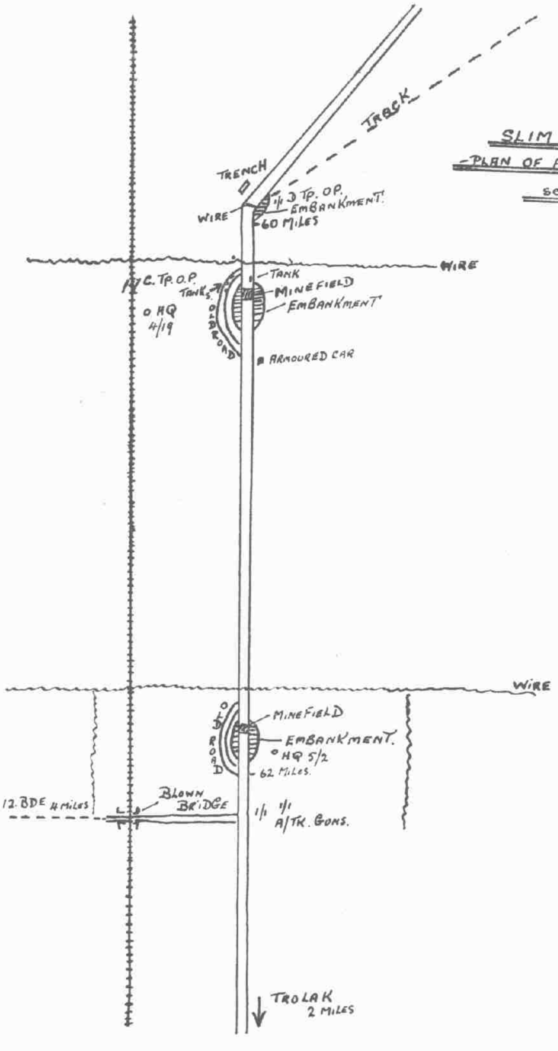
Meanwhile, both Troop Commanders had been out for 48 hours, and they were relieved by Lts. Blane and Moss, arriving back very exhausted at about midnight. Both expressed the opinion that a large scale attack was imminent, probably from the left flank. The B.C. therefore visited advance R.H.Q. to discuss this with the C.O. and to ask if he would be required to support the Argylls on a line at Trolak after the withdrawal that night of the 4/19th, he was told that his task was to support 4/19 and 5/2 only and that once they had both withdrawn, his next position would be T.J.M.

The situation was therefore as follows: 4/19 were to withdraw during the night, 5/2 were to hold the 2nd line for two more days, the A. and S.H. and 28 Bde. were in hides between Trolak and the Slim River and an enemy attack was imminent. A comprehensive programme of harassing fire tasks

SLIM RIVER.

PLAN OF FORWARD DEFENCES

SCALE 2½" to 1 MILE.



was arranged and both Troops fired continuously until 2 a.m. One of these tasks was a native kampong at extreme range where it was thought that the enemy were forming up. Supercharge was used for this, and shortly after the last round had fallen, a loud explosion was heard from advanced R.H.Q.—in the C.O's opinion an ammunition dump had been hit. At 2 a.m. Lt. Moss called for increased fire, reporting large scale activity in the forward areas, the G.P.O. back at the guns could hear the crackle of automatics over the phone. At the same time Blane told the Command Post that his O.P. was closing down, as the forward Coy. of the 4/19 was in danger of encirclement and was withdrawing forthwith. At 3-30 a.m. Moss rang up to say that tanks were approaching the Dannert wire, adding a little later, that one had broken through ; this was passed to the C.O. at R.H.Q. Moss called for more fire and the guns crashed round after round into the night ; then the line became indistinct and went altogether.

At R.H.Q. all communications with 350 Battery ceased at the same time ; it was found that the bridge on the track leading from R.H.Q. to the main road had been blown. Small arms fire appeared to be fairly close and the C.O. decided to withdraw advanced R.H.Q. to Slim while the Adjutant went to 12 Bde. to report. He was worried about C Troop and sent Lt. Banks to tell Major Gill to withdraw it, but to leave a gun in an anti-tank role on Trolak bridge ; he had to go via Slim owing to the blown bridge.

Meanwhile, Lt. Turner had overheard Moss' report on the Battalion line—the Battalion Commander was still sceptical and Turner decided to go and see for himself—some 300 yards away at the entrance to a disused road which looped round the main road, he saw three tanks halted with their engines running as if waiting for others to come up. The Battalion Commander decided to withdraw his H.Q. while he himself went forward to see the situation of his forward Companies who were due to have started their planned withdrawal. Turner passed this information to the Command Post, and said that he would withdraw and tap in on the line further down. He took his party back along the edge of the jungle and joined the main road below ; looking back, he could see one more tank in difficulties on the road itself, its crew at work removing wire from the tracks. Many troops also were coming down both sides of the road. He went on to the next cutting where he met Col. Deakin Commanding 5/2 Punjabs and told him the situation. The Colonel asked him to bring all fire possible to bear North of the 60th milestone, and he passed this on to D Troop who searched up and down the road for some time. Turner rejoined the Battery on the instruction of the B.C. whom he met coming up to 5/2 H.Q. a little later. D Troop Commander then ordered his N.C.O./Sigs., L.Bdr. Smith, to go forward and follow the O.P. line to contact Moss who it was thought would be making his way to the rear O.P., but as he had gone up that night, he did not know its exact location. Gnr. Sutton rode pillion with Bdr. Smith, and they tapped in to the wire at the entrance to the disused road to say that they had not seen Moss and were going on. They rode straight into the tanks and both dived into the ditch as a machine gun opened upon them ; Sutton managed to crawl to the road and get a lift back, but Smith was never seen again.

4/19 were now coming back down the road, and to the gunners and infantry at Trolak, this procession of vehicles and men on foot savoured suspiciously of Jitra. There was no communication with any O.P. or R.H.Q. and at 5-30, Major Gill went forward with Capt. Atkinson (E. Tp. Cmdr.), to ascertain the position. He was unable to find any infantry in the cutting where he thought 5/2 H.Q. was situated and sporadic fire seemed to be coming from all directions both mortar and small arms, so the B.C. on his own responsibility got C Troop out of action and behind Trolak bridge so that if the tanks should come down and ' occupy ' the village, the Troop would not be cut off. He told Capt. Atkinson that he had no further need of E Troop, and sent him back to inform his B.C. of events ; he also ordered D Troop to put a gun on the road in an anti-tank role.

The last C Troop gun to move on to the main road in front of Trolak village was Sgt. Strickland's ; he and one of the gunners were standing up

with their heads through the roof of the Quad. From this position in the dim light they saw a big black object about 200 yards up the road, it was stationary and as they looked a bright flash suddenly came from it. The bush camouflaging the gun shield parted and with a mighty roar something passed between Sgt. Strickland and the gunner, air displacement causing them to reel.

This must have been none other than the first tank, waiting for the others to come up—unfortunately the B.C. knew nothing of this at the time. Arriving at the bridge, he met Major Gardner of the A. and S.H. and offered him the support of the whole Battery to cover his position. He was informed that the bridge was to be blown soon, that he had some anti-tank guns there and already had artillery support from 155 Fd. Regt. (In point of fact 155 had not yet arrived).

The B.C. therefore proceeded to the Command Post, sending C Troop to a hide off the main road opposite to where the other two Batteries were, to await orders. Here, he decided that both 4/19 and 5/2 had withdrawn, and his role over, he would make use of the semi-darkness to get the Battery back to T.J.M. While the Command Post was packing up, the phone rang and Lt. Blane's voice was heard at the other end. He had withdrawn with the 4/19 to the 2nd line and failed to find the 5/2 there, where he wished to set up his rear O.P., moreover, the line was dead and he went on down the railway with the 4/19, being fired on—presumably by our own troops—several times. On arriving at the bridge over the railway on the road leading to 12 Bde., he found that demolished and tapped in to the O.P. line below; luckily Lt. Fullerton had had the foresight to connect the abandoned O.P. line to Battery H.Q. before leaving C Troop position and Blane found himself talking to the Command Post. The B.C. told him that C Troop had just withdrawn, and he had better make his own way to T.J.M.

B.H.Q. and D Troop pulled out at about quarter to seven and met Lt. Banks with his note from the C.O. Major Gill sent a message back to the C.O. that he had already withdrawn, and his offer of a 25-pounder had been declined and that he was now going to T.J.M. and would the C.O. send counter orders at once, if he thought necessary. C Troop followed the rest of the Battery, when they passed its hide, being dive-bombed by several planes on the way back, but they only registered near misses—near enough however for Lt. Fullerton to escape death from falling trees by a sudden swerve off the road.

It was later learnt that the tanks reached the area of 349 and 501 hides about five minutes after 350 had passed, and it appears that the A/Tk. guns at Trolak bridge followed C Troop down the road, under the false impression that a general withdrawal was taking place; some Indian carriers had next crossed the bridge followed closely by the Jap tanks; some remained on both sides of the bridge to hold it against all comers and the remainder headed for Singapore and might well have reached it, if the guns of 155 had not met them coming the other way. Subsequent attempts by the Argylls to blow the bridge failed in face of the fire of the tanks covering it.

Before relating what happened to the rest of the Regiment, it is convenient to pause a moment and consider this remarkable collapse of our defences. Exactly what happened in front we do not know, certainly no large body of infantry followed up the tanks but odd parties percolated down the railway, and having filtered through the jungle, other parties penetrated South through the rubber; some 200 cyclists also came down the road, and it is reasonable to assume that some of the small arms and mortar fire which came out of the darkness, was from these people; moreover, the tanks which ultimately numbered thirty odd, blazed away in all directions with automatics and mortars, chiefly to create panic. But the psychological factor must have been the primary cause of the trouble; the troops had fought continuously for over a month and had already withdrawn over 250 miles; they had had very little sleep and by day had been dive-bombed; of the Indian Regiments, most of the white officers had been killed and the sudden appearance of tanks by night seems to have imposed too great a strain on nerves already frayed,

so that they could stand no more. Some troops went back by a direct route, others retired to the jungle, and those that remained were powerless to form a co-ordinated plan as all communications had gone. 28 Bde. moved forward into position, but it was too late, the tanks had gone through to Slim village and beyond before they were stopped, and in some mysterious way, the bridge there was blown, or damaged by shell fire, closing the door to any evacuation of guns and vehicles.

Capt. Wethers of a Punjab Regt. was captured in the early morning ; he was taken to Ipoh for examination, and there shown a plan of our dispositions which were correct even to the wiring of platoon posts ; this information could only have reached the Japanese in such detail, through some form of fifth column activity.

E Troop pulled into 501 hide at about 7 o'clock, having left Lt. Smith at the gun position to do what he could to save the armoured O.P. which was ditched on the road side, and Capt. Atkinson reported the situation to Majors Spencer and Drought. As they were eight miles South of Trolak where the bridge was to be blown, and both infantry and A/Tk. guns were in front of them, there seemed to be no pressing need for immediate action ; they therefore warned Lt. Stephenson to put B Troop guns on the road, as soon as he had breakfasted, and decided that after breakfast, they would contact 28 Bde. in front of them and ascertain the real position. Lt. Smith returned as the men were queueing up for breakfast, and reported that he had been unable to get the Toc truck out, and had therefore destroyed it, bringing back with him all salvable equipment ; he added that bodies of Gurkhas were withdrawing down the road past Slim River Village. While this information was being discussed, nine tanks suddenly appeared on the road beside them and opened up with machine guns. H truck (501) was hit in the petrol tank and burnt itself out ; Lt. Hartley who was standing with his back to the road, and his mirror on the mudguard, certainly had a 'close shave.' The tanks continued firing for five minutes and there was general confusion. Most men were away from the guns near the cook's lorry, some, still asleep received a rude awakening, and there was a rush for cover ; efforts were made to get the guns into action, but they could not fire round trees, and as long as the tanks remained there, everyone was powerless. But the tanks passed on down the road, followed immediately after by six more and then B Troop went into action on the road facing both ways ; an aeroplane dropped a couple of bombs into the hide, hitting no one, but adding to the panic.

Major Drought assumed command of both Batteries and issued the following orders:—Major Spencer was to go forward with a few men and contact the infantry, Major Drought with some volunteers would follow up the tanks and endeavour to destroy or damage some ; the remainder under Capt. Mungall would take up a defensive position on a mound a quarter of a mile away, getting the guns there if possible, to shoot over open sights. This plan proved to be impossible owing to the numerous irrigation ditches and many vehicles were bogged before it was abandoned ; the guns were then put into position facing the road, though they were of little use there owing to the trees.

Major Drought went off with his party and that was the last that was seen of them and Major Spencer went to find the infantry. Meanwhile a 3rd group of tanks came down the road. B Troop having no A.P. shot, opened up with capped H.E.;this had little effect on the tanks which came on despite three direct hits, firing forward with armour piercing bullets. The gun crews went on firing till the tanks were on top of them and then dived into the ditch ; one gun had jammed by that time. Capt. Mungall then decided that with no infantry in front of them and fourteen tanks behind them, there was little chance of getting the guns out, and he ordered that they should be dismantled and the parts hidden, so that if the Japs came, they would be useless, but if we counter attacked, they could be recovered.

Col. Harrison, the G.1. arrived on the scene then ; he had been sent off by the General to investigate the situation, when the first report of a tank break through reached Division at T.J.M., somewhere about 8 o'clock, and

driving round a corner near the hide he had collided with a tank, and his car had overturned into the ditch. He heard what the gunners had to say and then went off on foot towards 28 Bde. H.Q.

This done, he and the majority of 349 Battery set off into the jungle to make for T.J.M. and were not seen again. While 501 were dismantling their guns, Major Spencer returned, having been unable to find the infantry. He concurred with the decision and after seeing them off under Capt. Hilton, at about 9-30 he went back to collect his men, to whom he had given some job or other—this party was not seen again.

Capt. Hilton's party crossed Slim River and made their way through the jungle to rejoin the main road lower down. Progress was slow and Capt. Hilton went ahead with Lt. Hartley and eight men to blaze a trail and having found someone, to arrange transport for the remainder when they finally struck the main road. At about 4 p.m., he came out on to the main road and saw nothing; he walked North a hundred yards towards a bridge where he saw a 25-Pounder abandoned with its muzzle pointing vertically upwards; suddenly he observed a tank on the far side of the bridge and came under fire. The heel of his left boot was shot off but otherwise unharmed, he dived into the ditch and made his way cautiously South inside the jungle verge hugging the road. About 200 yards down, he heard the noise of metal on metal and wondered what was going to happen next, when to his intense relief he heard: "'And us that spanner 'Enry," and coming out into the open he found an anti-tank crew at work on their gun. He took the officer up and pointed out the enemy tank, and leaving him to deal with it, he borrowed a vehicle and took his men to T.J.M. No transport was available to pick up the main body, but they found their way back, arriving in a very exhausted condition about midnight.

Back at R.H.Q., the C.O. sent the vehicles and personnel to rear H.Q. and he and the Adjutant went on motor-cycles to 12 Bde. At about 7-30 a Company of Argylls was having a sharp encounter with the Japanese at the blown bridge at the time, 4/19 and 5/2 had both withdrawn and Brigadier Stewart decided to move his H.Q. back.

The C.O. was still worried about 350, and not having heard from Lt. Banks, he decided to go and see for himself; leaving the Adjutant to withdraw with 12 Bde. H.Q., he went off on his M.C. via Slim River Station; he met Lt. Banks on the way and received Major Gill's message, giving no counter orders. He reached rear R.H.Q. and Major Owtram told him that five tanks had been on Slim River Station for some time, and they had gone off into the village. The C.O. decided to go up the main road to investigate and he could not be persuaded otherwise. Major Owtram pointed out that his life was valuable, and asked to be allowed to go instead, but the Colonel refused, and R.A. dress cap on head, pipe in mouth, went on towards the village. That was the last the Regt. saw of our C.O. and to the dismay and sorrow of every single man, it was learnt next day that he had been killed. Having met some tanks and been shot at, he was seen to fall from his motor cycle into a ditch and an officer whose name we do not know, examined the body and covered it with a gas-cape. Thus passed a great C.O. and a grand fellow.

Lt. Blane also arrived at Slim River Station to see the five tanks there and he waited until they left, then made his way to 28 Bde. where he stayed in an exhausted condition till they moved back.

Meanwhile Major Owtram had gone off to see if it were possible to get R.H.Q. out by road; this he found to be impossible, as tanks were patrolling up and down the road in groups of four; he therefore ordered a strong post to be formed where they were, each man with a rifle and fifty rounds and having heard that five Bren Carriers and three Armoured Cars belonging to 5/2 Punjabs were in a hide somewhere in the neighbourhood, he sent Lt. Briggs with a party of men to locate them. They went across the main road to 28 Bde. without meeting any tanks, but while there, they were dive-bombed without ill-effect; they received the location of the 5/2 hide, and there collected two Bren guns and a two-inch mortar, a valuable addition to R.H.Q's fire power, who, joined by a mortar detachment of the Argylls, now mustered a reasonably well armed body of men.

Capt. Griffiths spent the middle day in reconnaissance of the area for the Brigadier. He first went off with L./Cpl. Pearson on motor cycles to find out what had happened to 349 and 501. They arrived at the hide without incident and there discovered the dismantled guns and vehicles, returning to report to Brigadier Selby. While there, this H.Q. received the attention of a group of tanks which opened up with M.G. and mortar fire, making life very unpleasant for some minutes, but they made no attempt to exploit their opportunity and made off down the road. Capt. Griffiths was next sent South down the road to examine the possibility of getting the transport away: before leaving, the Brigadier sent his batman to see if the road were clear, and as he went out more tanks appeared and opened up, a lucky escape for Griffiths. Eventually he and L./Cpl. Pearson set off and approached the Slim River Bridge; proceeding cautiously, Capt. Griffiths saw the tracks of a tank protruding round the corner, and he took to a track through the rubber—just in time, for the tank opened fire as they turned off the main road and narrowly missed them. In order to make sure that this was an enemy tank, Capt. Griffiths walked on through the rubber and exposed himself, drawing a burst of fire, he then went on to look at the bridge and saw that though not properly blown, it was cratered enough to prevent the passage of vehicles across; the tank was on the far side firing South and a machine gun was set up towards the North. Returning to their M.C's they went back, and looked in at the Battery hide on the way—while there, a tank passed and Capt. Griffiths decided that if he proceeded on a M.C. he would not hear these tanks approaching, so he went on to Brigade H.Q. on foot and had to take cover twice when two more groups of tanks passed. Bde. H.Q. was now deserted and they went back on to the road where some Ghurkhas informed them that the Bde. had moved to the other side of the railway. They accompanied the Ghurkhas to a footbridge over the river and found it broken down. Capt. Griffiths swam the river taking across a rope made of creepers, but this would not hold, so they felled a couple of trees and made a temporary structure by means of which the Ghurkhas could help themselves over. A party of enemy then appeared and opened fire on them, the Ghurkha officer stayed behind with some of his men to hold them off while Capt. Griffiths went on to Bde. H.Q. to report. It was then 7 o'clock—he found there R.H.Q., 12 and 28 Bde. H.Q. and various stragglers of many units, about to make their way back to T.J.M.

During this time at R.H.Q. the padre of the Argylls had arrived stating that the railway bridge over the river was destroyed and Major Owtram with Lt. Lowden went off to reconnoitre alternative crossings, while some of those behind made some rope 'bridges'. R.H.Q. were left alone by the enemy, though the neighbourhood resounded continually with the crackle of small arms fire—this came from two companies of Gurkhas who were holding off the Japs to the North of them. At 3 o'clock Brig. Selby gave orders for the destruction of vehicles by means other than fire, so that smoke and noise of explosions would not attract enemy attention. R.H.Q. then split up into two bodies one under Major Owtram to cross the river near the blown railway bridge, and the other under our planter, Jim Stoker, to cross lower down using a rope bridge and rejoin along the railway later. This latter party, as also a Company of Gurkhas which went the same way, were never seen again. Major Owtram's party came under fire while crossing: a small number of Japs would appear to have penetrated to the bridge, preferring to snipe than to take on the largish body of our men. No one was hit and Lt. Lowden held the rope bridge in mid-stream to help non-swimmers over. After crossing they were shelled by the enemy: they 'rendezvoused' in the area until dusk, when the Brigadier gave orders to make their way to T.J.M. As the various bodies of men arrived at T.J.M., they were put on to Australian transport and taken to Batu Caves, where, as far as the Regiment was concerned, the survivors, numbering about 100, were sent to Singapore for re-equipping at the 7 M.R.C.

As a result of this action, the Regiment had lost in killed or missing 273 officers and men.

350 Fights On

At about 8 o'clock in the morning of January 7th, Col. Napier (Cmdg. 80 A/Tk.) arrived on a motor cycle at Divisional H.Q. at Tah Jong Malim with the first news of the tank break through: the extent of the penetration and the consequent serious predicament of 12 and 28 Bdes. were not then apparent. Gen. Paris then sent his G.I. forward to investigate, and the C.R.A. did not think it necessary to cancel the reconnaissance of the Serendah and Rawang areas by Capt. Coombes.

Meanwhile 350 Battery arrived at their pre-arranged positions at T.J.M. and went into temporary hides while G.P.O's examined the gun positions to decide on method of occupation and preliminary preparation: the gravity of the situation was not realised and work was immediately started on laying line up to the O.P's.

During the morning C Troop was dive-bombed, being lucky to escape without damage or casualty; Sgt. Strickland, bathing in a stream was covered in mud and as he scrambled up the bank, he saw a swarm of animals and snakes shooting away, as from a forest fire; Dvr. Newby was under his vehicle emptying the sump, and as he reached for the drainplug, a bomb fell nearby and the whole vehicle was lifted into the air; it returned to its original position, leaving him amazed but unhurt.

Capt. Coombes also did his share of dodging the bombs that morning, being chased from Serendah to Rawang by low flying aircraft, but what 'shook him' far more than enemy aerobatics was the sleuth like precision of a Divisional D.R., who found him looking for a gun position in the middle of the jungle, miles from anywhere, at 2 p.m., and handed him an urgent note from the C.R.A. with instructions to return at once. It was about five when he arrived back and learnt of the Slim disaster and the consequent change of plan. There were no troops left to hold the T.J.M. line; the town was to be evacuated that night, and the 2/16 Punjabs under Col. Larkin were to hold the bridge and delay the enemy without becoming involved—the semi-prepared position at Rasa was to be held by the 6/15 Brigade, and beyond that, we could only hope that sufficient personnel of 12 and 28 Bdes. would get back to snatch a quick rest and reform as a force adequate to fight delaying actions at Serendah and Rawang.

350 Battery was to come under command 155 (L.Y.) Fd. Regt., to go back to Kuala Kubu Bahru, and be prepared to come into action at dawn covering the right flank. Coombes returned to the Battery reported to Major Gill, who gave them "Prepare to move," and while they were packing up, Capt. Hilton and Lt. Hartley arrived with their eight men of 501; after a quick meal, they were co-opted into 350 strength and went with the Battery to Kuala Kubu. The C.P.O. found billets for the night in a Chinese School, where the men, who were dog tired had a fair night's rest. Coombes marked gun positions on the C.P.O's map, and reconnaissance parties were 'laid on' for the early morning; he then went back to T.J.M. to obtain more precise information. The roads were a confused mass of traffic moving both ways; transport coming up to collect stragglers; 6/15 moving back; staff cars trying to squeeze in between, and movement was slow. Arrived at T.J.M at about 11 p.m. he saw the first party of the Regt. limping down the railway; he was then called to a conference with Col. Larkin and the G.2. (Major Parker) to formulate an artillery plan—155 had gone forward during the day to support 28 Bde., and their present location was unknown, but Major Wilson with B Battery was in a hide two miles to the South and they went to see him there. It was decided that 155 being forward should support Col. Larkin back to Rasa, and 350 Battery would take on the battle from Rasa, Southwards. Coombes reached the Battery as dawn was breaking, to inform Major Gill of these details—they moved back behind Rasa, reconnoitred positions at Ulu Yam and occupied them in a tropical rainstorm that afternoon. Meanwhile the Bty. Capt. went on to Batu Caves to report to the C.R.A., who sent him out to find more troop positions between Rawang and Batu Caves

and to report on the condition of the road to Kuala Lumpur from Rawang via Kuang.

Positions were difficult to find, as the road to Batu Caves winds over a range of hills, steep-sided cuttings with jungle covered peaks on both sides, alternating with stretches of road cut out of the side of the hill with a hundred foot drop into the valley on the other side. A position was found in the Tin Mine workings of Kanching sufficient to take one Troop fairly easily. The Kuang road was not suitable for guns or heavy vehicles.

By then more Japanese had landed North of Port Swettenham and a fierce battle developed West of Kuala Lumpur as they made desperate efforts to link up with their troops pushing South. 6/15 Bde. was detached from Rasa to cope with this threat, and the remnants of 12 and 28 Bdes., reinforced by 3/17 Dogras put up a gallant fight from Rasa back to Serendah and Rawang. The Battery fired about 100 rounds from Serendah on map reference targets given by Capt. Shore, using the civilian telephone lines. C Troop and later D Troop were moved back to the Kanching Tin Mines, with O.P's in carriers with the forward infantry. C Troop guns were in the houses of the native village, but D Troop had to occupy an exposed position in the Tin Mine workings and by hard work on the night of 9/10th, they managed to erase all traces of tracks and camouflaged the guns so well that despite frequent searchings by enemy aircraft flying down to 500 feet, they were never spotted. The side road leading into the village was mined at the B.C's request, and two guns of D Troop were put on the main road in an anti-tank role. During the day C Troop fired continuously in the neighbourhood of Rawang, its range dropping from 10,000 to 2,000 yards, as the battle moved ever closer ; 3/17 Dogras attempted a counter attack to re-establish our positions and only about sixty of the Battalion returned. The situation was desperate, and that night (10/11th), it was decided to evacuate Kuala Lumpur, and break contact completely with the enemy.

Capt. Hilton and his party had by now left 350, to join the rest of the Regiment, which it was hoped to reform. They sent up thirty other ranks to bring the Battery up to strength before entraining for Singapore, and we heard on the 12th, the tragic news that Lt. Hartley and ten men had been killed when their train was dive-bombed en route.

At 7 p.m., 350 were ordered to move to Malacca, 107 miles to the South, where they were to come under command of Brig. Duncan (45th Bde.), whose role was to act as covering force to the Australian and attached troops taking up the line of the Muar. Capt. Coombes went on ahead to spy out the land ; it was not at first realized that the whole journey was to be done in one bound, and he stopped at Kajang, proposing to billet the Battery for the night near their " peace-time " Camp. Here he met Mr. W. A. D. Wynch, a planter, who had overwhelmed us with hospitality during our brief stay in early December and " Wad," as he was called, was forthwith enlisted. At the time, he was a Corporal in the Local Defence Volunteers, and they had disbanded that night: the Battery Captain found an Australian Sergeant about to give him orders, so he promptly whipped off his stripes and presented " Wad " with two pips (which were later confirmed).

With this local support, a magnificent hide for the night was soon discovered and an enormous meal was prepared. While awaiting the Battery, a visit to the station godown revealed an astronomical amount of tinned milk, a fair quantity of which was confiscated for subsequent use. Unfortunately the Battery arrived with orders to move straight on, and after a hastily swallowed meal they spent the night on the road, reaching Malacca at dawn.

Breakfast was enjoyed in a hutted camp, where the cooks revelled in proper cooking facilities, but the B.C. thought this too exposed for permanent occupation, went straight off on a reconniassance and moved the Battery at 10 o'clock into a rubber estate about five miles out of Malacca. An hour later the hutted camp was bombed and Major Gill was satisfied that he had forfeited his breakfast in a good cause. The general feeling at Malacca was of relief at being momentarily out of action, mingled with disappointment and disgust at this further withdrawal, but the fantastic again reared its head to

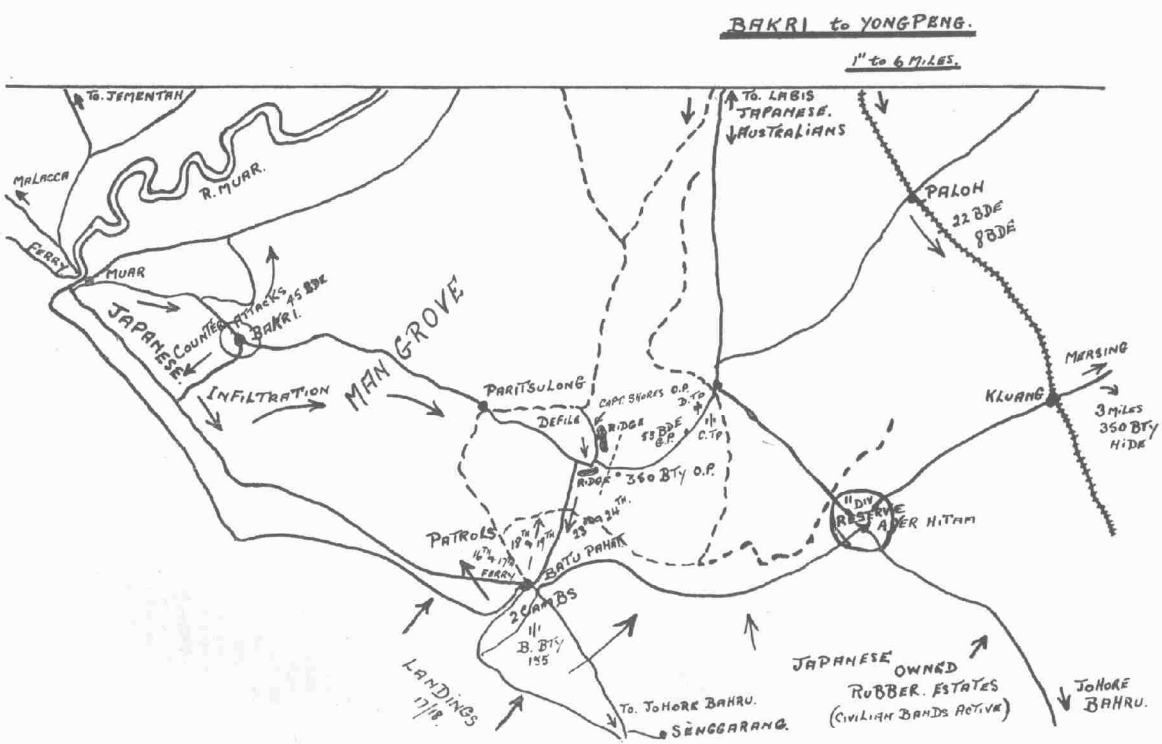
modify the gloom ; we had an officer's mess in a Chinese Temple and a cookhouse in the cemetery. O.P's were reconnoitred at intervals along the coast —D Troop having one in a lighthouse, which swayed visibly every time a bomb fell on Malacca—with no possibility of laying wire to them, the idea being that if ships were sighted, a D.R. would summon the Troop to the spot to take them on over open sights.

Apart from Brigade H.Q. in the town, we could find no infantry to support—the Rajputana Rifles were fifty miles away and the Garwhalis had not yet arrived, and we looked like fighting a glorious action on our own, cheered on by the Brigade Staff. Our suggested withdrawal route was by ferry across the Muar, a thirty hour process, given no interference from the enemy, but we had other ideas on the subject. The town was being evacuated by the civilians and we arrived to see the last of 70,000 cases of beer being smashed at the Singapore Cold Storage. What would we not have given for a hundredth part of it ? However, a party entered the deserted town in the afternoon and between bombings, managed to collect a goodly store of tinned food, which was more than welcome, since the position of Divisional H.Q. was obscure and such things as ration points might have been anywhere.

That evening there was a double scare, a band of Chinese looters ' beat up ' the neighbouring village and created panic among the Malays, holding them up at the point of the revolver, so we were forced to have patrols out during the night ; tanks were also reported somewhere between Kuala Lumpur and Seremban, and two guns were posted on the roads by day and night.

Next morning, the Battery Captain was sent to reconnoitre an alternative way out of Malacca, so that when the time came, we could avoid crossing the Muar Ferry, and he found a way through plantation roads leading to Jasin, and thence to Ayer Hitam ; he also acquired a couple of armoured carriers which replaced those we had lost, and returned to find orders for the move already out ; D Troop were to move in the afternoon and C Troop to stand by in case required, until released by Brig. Duncan that night, the destination being Kluang, over 110 miles away.

This was another nightmare drive in torrential rain, the roads being cluttered up with traffic and the night pitch dark. At last, somewhere about 4-30 a.m., B.H.Q. arrived at Kluang, to be greeted by a nude Battery Captain, who, wet to the skin, had found it warmer to divest, than to wander about with dripping clothes. C Troop arrived the following day, and to the joy of everyone, we were told that we should get a week's rest and if possible a month. It was reported that 18 Division had arrived at Singapore, and we saw three Hurricanes, the first British planes we had seen in the air since the ' battle ' started, so our spirits soared to a high level. This was January 14th, and for two days we ate and slept well, while the Battery Captain visited Singapore and brought back with him most of the Base Ordnance Depot, ranging from new 30-cwt. lorries to refills for electric torches. But it was not to last, on the evening of the 16th, we received instructions to contact the Commander of an Australian Battalion which was moving across to the West from Mersing. We were to go with them to Bakri to support Brigadier Duncan of 45 Bde. in a counter attack against the Japs who had crossed the Muar. The B.C. and Capt. McLeod went off on their fifty mile drive in the early morning and the Battery followed up later to a R.V. at Parit Sulong bridge. The B.C. found Brigadier Duncan very much on the alert, his Australian gunners could find no decent positions owing to the swampy nature of the country and were deployed in the open, already the target for many hostile aircraft. A tank attack had been repulsed and nine tanks knocked out ; our infantry had counter attacked pushing out a prong to each flank, and at the same time, the enemy appeared to be attacking us between the arms of the counter attack ; the situation looked enigmatic. Capt. Coombes arrived soon after, and was instructed to get the Battery into action near Parit Sulong to cover a possible withdrawal. He went back to the R.V. and when the guns arrived, dispersed them along the road verges while he took G.P.O's to look for positions. The area was heavily dive-bombed


BAKRI to YONGPENG.
1" to 6 MILES.
To. JEMENTAH
MALACCA
R. MUAR.
FERRY
MUAR
JAPANESE
COUNTER ATTACKS
AS BDE
BAKRI.
INFILTRATION
MAN GROVE
PARITSULONG
DEFILE
RIDGE
CAPT. SHORES O.P.
D.TP
53 BDE H.Q.
C.TP
RIDGE
360 BTY O.P.
PATROLS
18TH
17TH
16TH & 17TH FERRY
23RD & 24TH.
BATU PAHAT
2 CAMBS
B. BTY 155
LANDINGS 17/18.
To. JOHORE BAHRU.
SENGGARANG.
To. LABIS
JAPANESE.
AUSTRALIANS
PALOH
22 BDE
8 BDE
MARSING
KLUANG
3 MILES
350 BTY
HIDE
11 DIV RESERVE
AYER HITAM
JAPANESE OWNED
RUBBER ESTATES
(CIVILIAN BANDS ACTIVE)
JOHORE BAHRU.

during this reconnaissance but we suffered no casualties. As the Battery was about to occupy these positions, Major Gill appeared, bearing a note to Division from 45 Bde. which reported their imminent encirclement. The guns were not required after all, and they turned back to go to Yong Peng. On the way back, a D.R. came up from Brig. Duncan asking for one Troop to return immediately ; the B.C. went back with C Troop and found that they were to remain in reserve till the morning. He remonstrated with the Brigadier about remaining ' on wheels ' with a force that was in danger of being cut off—in action he would be of use but there was nowhere to come into action and moreover there still remained some Australian guns waiting for somewhere to go ; he therefore requested permission to withdraw to Yong Peng where he would be available when required. Permission was refused at first and granted at 3 a.m. ; the Troop started back at once, a M.C. leading with blazing head lights, followed by two armoured carriers and then a gun to deal with any road blocks—about a mile out of Bakri they met Capt. Coombes bringing up rations, and having turned him round, they went on to join the rest of the Battery, without further incident.

On the way, they passed fifth Norfolks in position in front of a defile East of Parit Sulong—these unhappy people had only landed 36 hours before, and here they were in a strange land, whipped off the boat and ' whopped ' straight into the front line. Like us, they were initially imbued with anti-mosquito zeal, which manifested itself as a plantation of mosquito nets superimposed on the scrub ; it was a weird sight in the brilliant moonlight of early morning. The B.C. stopped to warn their C.O. of the probable encirclement of 45 Bde. and the possible attack on them that morning. This prognostication proved well founded—they were pushed back beyond the defile suffering many casualties.

The situation ' behind ' Bakri was as follows:—155 were supporting a mixed force of Loyals, 3/16 Punjabis and 5th Norfolks, under the Command of Brig. Duke—53rd Brigade ; this was a second line in depth behind 45 Bde. ; it was so far back because the road from Parit Sulong to Bakri was a raised causeway with mangrove swamp on either side and no possible area to defend ; the guns were well forward so as to hit the Jap at a distance, but too far forward when the defile became the front line. 350 were therefore ordered to take over from C Battery, and by the time they did so, C Battery had fired 400 rounds over open sights. We found suitable positions near our hide, and occupied the 155 O.P's. It would appear that the enemy pushed down the coast road and came up the road from Batu Pahat to the defile, only small parties got behind the 45 Bde. at Bakri, and came along the causeway.

Capt. Shore manned 350 O.P. on the 18/19th and there was much confused fighting: it is difficult to tell what really happened ; according to Shore, we retook the ridge on both sides of the defile at nightfall on the 19th, the Battery fired a timed programme to support a counter-attack and Shore went forward with the attack, re-occupying the forward 155 O.P. But, that night, the enemy returned to the ridge, and had pushed us back again by dawn. The O.P. was over-run, and Capt. Shore gave his revolver to his signaller and ordered him back ; he sent one final fire order on a target 200 yards to his front: the signaller left him in the trench with a Tommy gun in his hand and Japanese on all sides ; he reached the Toc truck and regained our lines having been shot in the hand.

The almost certain death of Capt. Shore was a blow to all ranks ; he was very popular, a first class gunner, who was in constant friendly rivalry with Capt. McLeod as to who should take on a difficult job. He was ready for any task at any hour, and thoroughly deserved the recommendation for an M.C. award.

It is probable that having retaken the ridge, the Japanese withdrew on it down the road to Batu Pahat, for the 2nd Cambs moved to Patu Pahat on the 20th, and finding no enemy they put out patrols along the Muar Road. These patrols made no contact: a day or so later, the Cambs were ordered to leave the town which was immediately occupied by Japanese ; they returned, penetrated and were forced to withdraw amid considerable confusion.

Moreover on the 20th, both the Norfolks and the 3/16 Punjabis sent out strong fighting patrols to investigate the ridge from opposite ends: neither C.O. consulted the other and both patrols returned stating that they had been shot at from the other side (by each other ?).

On the 21st, the General gave orders that the ridge must be recaptured that night, so as to relieve 45 Bde. believed to be fighting their way back. He promised air support and, in fact two Wildebeestes and seven Buffalos did appear, but so did fifty-four Jap planes, and far from being able to cope, our aircraft had to beat a hasty retreat.

Major Gill was ill, and Capt. Coombes took over that morning and went forward to contact the infantry. Brig. Duke asked for the corners of a Barrage to be registered for an attack at 4 o'clock when the Loyals were to come through the Norfolks and Punjabis and retake the defile. There had been no sign of the enemy that day, and Capt. Coombes was of the opinion that 600 rounds was a lot to put down on a spot where there might be no enemy: he therefore suggested that a fighting patrol be sent out to make contact, as a preliminary. The Brigadier demurred, and asked instead to register eight points and have timed concentrations on each. This was done ; Col. Gold, the C.O. of 155, arrived during the registration and approved the plan. But the attack did not materialize ; for the enemy aircraft mentioned above, dive-bombed the road from Yong Peng heavily and accurately: the craters made it necessary for the Loyals to debus three miles further back than planned and our communications were completely shattered. The attack was therefore postponed to 8 o'clock the following morning.

Capt. Coombes went back to the guns to make final arrangements for the dawn concentrations, thence to rear Bde. H.Q. to meet the Brigadier. While there, he found two Australian B.C's, who had come down the road from Labis and had been told to get their Batteries into action behind Yongpeng to cover the eventual withdrawal from it. Their task being hopeless in strange country in the dark, the unhappy C.P.O. was pulled out of bed to show them positions reconnoitred by 350 for a similar purpose and put them in the picture.

Yongpeng was burning furiously as he went back with Brigadier Duke, but luckily, the bridge, our only avenue of escape, was still intact: the tyres of one car caught alight from burning timber on the road oil, and it had to be left behind. They had an armoured car escort to go up to the line, as odd snipers were reported to be active on the road ; a couple of shots were fired at them—in the Brig's opinion—by frightened sentries.

Next morning 'testers' were fired at the previously registered points and sixteen rounds fell unobserved—bold corrections were impossible owing to our troops being on their start line, 200 yards only from the position for the initial concentrations. By creeping, the rounds were gradually brought from the far side of the defile ridge into the required areas ; it was eventually found out that the necessary correction for meteor was 500 yards. Everything was now ready and at 10 minutes to 8, 54 Japanese planes came over very low, and machine gunned every bit of cover ; they then dropped their 'eggs' as it were, a shower of hail-stones in the front line area ; 10 fell within 20 yards of the O.P. where Capt. Coombes was conferring with the Brigadier ; the majority fell further forwards, caught the infantry on their start line, causing many casualties ; all communications were severed, the Brigadier therefore decided to call off the attack.

There was still no news of 45 Bde. ; it was afterwards learnt that they held on at Bakri for two days, then did a fighting withdrawal to Parit Sulong, where they found enemy behind them ; they tried in vain to capture the bridge there by bayonet charges, before they were forced to take to the jungle without food or ammunition.

Capt. Grime next occupied the O.P.—he had been posted to the Battery from 155 to take over command D Troop. Very little happened at the O.P. end during the morning and the Brigadier received orders to withdraw through Yongpeng by 7 p.m. without becoming involved in a battle, so he ordered the 3/16 Punjabis and Norfolks to withdraw at noon, leaving a Company of

the Loyals in position forward till 2 p.m. Shortly before noon, there was some mortar fire on our right flank which was seen to come from a mortar mounted in one of our Bren carriers. This was taken on by Capt. Grime with success. A party of thirty odd cyclists were next spotted coming through the defile, and Capt. Grime waited for them to arrive at a previously registered point before letting them have it. Two cyclists plodded on and were allowed to come right through to Company H.Q.; they were then forcibly dismounted for interrogation. The remaining two hours was a dull wait interrupted at intervals by occasional mortar fire on the right: it seemed as if the enemy had placed one or two mortars to be a nuisance to us and were in point of fact slowly coming round our left. One of their shells cut the telephone line at 1-30. The Loyals started packing up; Capt. Grime walked over to the O.P. from his carrier to pick up the phone before going; glancing towards the defile, he saw eight heavy tanks coming slowly along. The phone was dead so he pointed these out to the Loyals, and mounting his carrier, raced back to the first culvert and ordered the sapper there to blow it. The tanks were firing cannon, but they failed to hit the carrier. On the way back to the Battery, Capt. Grime informed successive A/Tk. gun crews on the road of what he had seen.

The Battery, meanwhile had had a tough morning; D Troop was spotted by a reconnaissance plane at 9-30 and shot at with air observation by field guns. After the troop had been bracketed, many shells landing in the area and one shell landing near No. 1 gun, the B.C. rang up at 11-30 and ordered the troop out of action behind Yongpeng to their alternative position. Just as it was pulling out, relays of aircraft arrived: twin-engined bombers in flights of five, and Stukas in flights of three let hell loose with bombs and machine gun bullets. At intervals as the planes wheeled, individual vehicles were got away, and moved slowly down the road. Sgt. Elliot's gun got stuck and it needed three attempts by the crew to get it out, diving for cover when the planes returned or the whine of shells was heard. Lt. Sutcliffe, the G.P.O. was the last to leave the position and he hurried past the guns to the new position to prepare it. No guns arrived, so he went back to investigate and found a quad and gun ablaze in the midd;e of the road with shells exploding in all directions from the burning limber. A bomb had landed just in front, setting the quad and limber alight. An Australian M.T. Company was held up on the far side; helped by some Australians and our own men, Sutcliffe backed a lorry on to the burning gun, which was unhooked from the blazing limber and towed slowly away; a final round went off spitefully as they did so, without injuring anyone. The tyres of this gun were burnt off, and all the instruments destroyed; further up the road a second gun was completely wrecked with shrapnel splinters through the barrel recuperator. Lt. Arrol had a hectic drive towing this gun to the new position; it was the first time he had driven a quad. As a result of the bombing we suffered five casualties Gunners Moore and Martin being killed.

C Troop also came in for their share—they were not bombed but they came under heavy mortar fire, and some shell fire in the afternoon, and were withdrawn at 5 o'clock forming a six gun troop with the two serviceable D Troop guns, South of Yongpeng. Harassing fire was called for during the night until 10 p.m., when they were pulled out and went back to Johore Bahru in Corps Reserve.

At Yongpeng for the first time, we obtained some armour piercing shot and following on the news of tanks in front, a C Troop gun was put on the road in case a tank got through. It was not called upon to fire, and the first round from this gun on the harassing fire task sent an A.P. shell whizzing through the air, to give someone a headache at the other end of its trajectory.

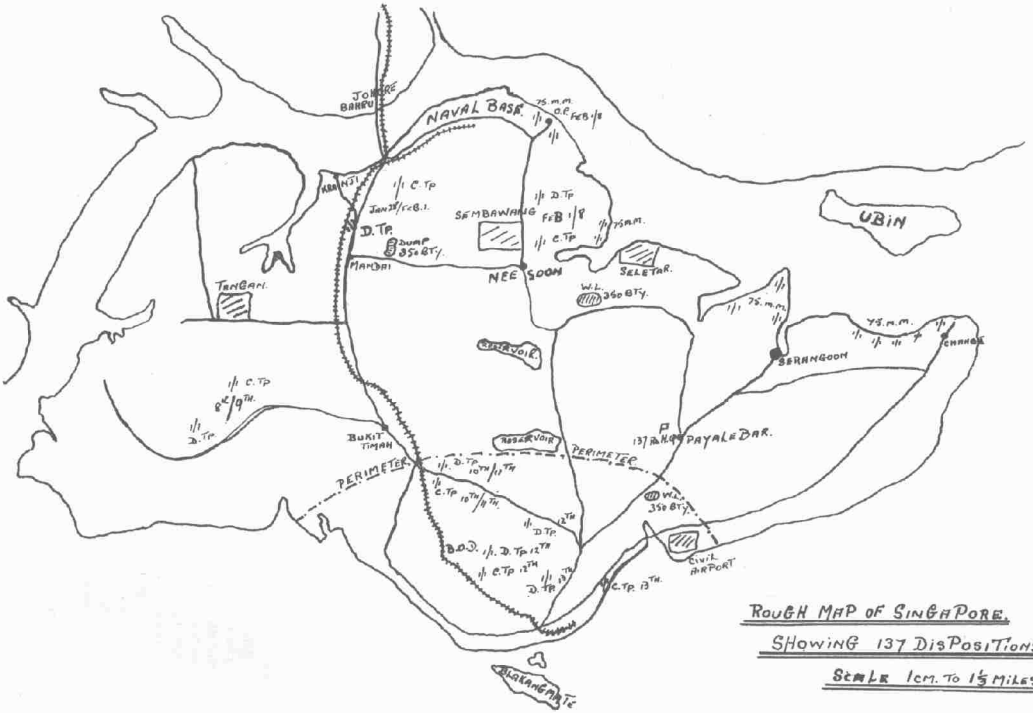
Brigadier Duke thanked the Battery for its excellent support: he himself covered the infantry withdrawal, remaining forward of the bridge at Yongpeng with five carriers till the last of his troops were over. The two ruined guns were towed back and taken to the B.O.D. for salvage purposes, pride preventing us from leaving them for the enemy.

The Battery Captain went straight from the O.P. on the morning of

January 23rd, to reconnoitre a hide near Johore Bahru: Military necessity still bowed to political politeness; this was the Sultan's Province, and he was not allowed to choose a hide, but merely told to go 'there.' 'There' happened to be a Chinese School already occupied by 200 Indians, the 'rest house' to be, of 'C' Bty. 155 and 350, with no possibility of dispersing vehicles, and one small cooking place. Capt. Coombes had no 'change' from Corps H.Q. whom he approached for permission to expand and he went to Col. Gold, the C.O. who agreed that the place was inadequate, stating that he himself would deal with the matter in the morning. When therefore the Battery arrived at about 4 a.m., Coombes dispersed the vehicles at fifty yard intervals along side roads, and the exhausted soldiers 'bedded down' partly in their vehicles, partly in the School. Next morning the C.O. found another place three miles away and moved the Battery to it, but by then Capt. Coombes had decided to forage for himself. He went to the Sultan's legal adviser, Mr. Hughes, told him the situation and suggested that there must be reasonable accommodation somewhere—some, any empty buildings—could he approach the Sultan? Mr. Hughes took him to see the Prime Minister and one of the Sultan's sons was there. The latter was most courteous, phoned his father who agreed to billet the Battery in a Malay High School where there were beds, mattresses, 'pull the plugs," shower baths and up to date kitchens; moreover they could use the Palace gardens as a vehicle park, and if there was anything else they required please let him know. Permission had already been obtained to use the Civil Service Club as an Officer's mess and it was felt that all possible requirements were amply met: the Battery was therefore moved post haste and the C.O. presented with a 'fait accompli.' The Sultan personally telephoned the Club later to ask Coombes if he was satisfied and the latter expressed his sincere thanks on behalf of the Battery.

On the 25th and 26th, the troops revelled in their unaccustomed luxury, being allowed evening leave in the town; one of the Sultan's sons entertained all soldiers who wished to come to dinner at his house on successive nights. But the B.C. and Troop Commanders were given no respite, being engaged throughout the hours of daylight in reconnoitring every possible gun position and O.P. in the area, in case of need, while the Battery Captain spent most of the time in a frantic struggle between Corps and A.B.O.D. at Kota Tinggi on the one hand and Command and B.O.D. at Singapore on the other. He managed to obtain essential items of clothing, gun stores and vehicles and also two new guns; this direct method of approach was the only successful one, many attempts by other units to obtain stores by indent through the 'usual channels' proving abortive.

While in Johore Bahru, we contacted Major Owtram and the remainder of the Regiment and learnt of their doings after walking down the railway to T.J.M. Their story briefly was as follows:—They remained at Batu Caves till the 9th, on the night of which, they left K.L. in a tightly packed train with a soldier driver, who, unfamiliar with the habits of tropical trains, could not get steam up properly so that next morning at 10, they had got no further than Tebong Station. While stationary there, three aircraft swooped low over the train, dropped two salvos of bombs one on each side, and machine gunned it. People scattered into the rubber, but twenty odd were killed and double that number wounded. Capt. Tomlinson, the M.O. here put up a magnificient show; having lost all at Slim, he had managed to acquire a surgical bag in K.L. and this contained some morphia; although the carriage was smashed to pieces, the bag was intact and its contents greatly alleviated the pain of the badly wounded and dying. For four hours he worked non-stop refusing food or drink until each man had been attended to. Passing from the sublime to the ridiculous, Lts. Lowden and Briggs were sleeping in bunks one above the other at the time of the bombing, nude as was natural in the heat, and they awakened in each others arms amid a confused tangle of bunk and netting: as he was, Lt. Lowden ran into the rubber straight into a hornet's nest and aircraft or no aircraft, he scuttled back to the train and donned a modicum of clothing in record time. The front half of the train was disengaged and took the civilians on, but the rear was completely wrecked and



ROUGH MAP OF SINGAPORE,
SHOWING 137 DISPOSITIONS
SCALE 1 CM. TO 1½ MILES.

with it, the line: some coolies made a siding around the debris, allowing a hospital train through, and our party went on at 9 p.m. Arrived at Singapore, they ultimately found themselves at 4 M.R.C., where, formed into three troops, they were used on aerodrome repairs and defences for a fortnight, pending the issue of some 75 mm. guns.

Singapore

On the night of January 26th, we realized how serious the situation was: the decision to evacuate the mainland had been made; we were told it was to begin the next day, to be completed by the 31st. The words " Prepare for a twelve months siege " gave us new courage, we would *have* to fight now and the bloody little Nip would be taught a thing or two. Capt. Coombes spent the 27th visiting various officials of the Sultan and thus obtained the locations of an Asiatic Petroleum Company storehouse, a pineapple factory, sugar, rice, flour and coffee godowns and permission to appropriate what he would. As there was no definite wagon line area allotted by Corps, he picked a temporary ' dump ' off the Mandai Road, well covered and readily accessible and sent ' Wad ' these with every available vehicle to unload. Then started a 72 hour non-stop shuttle service, whereby we collected 1,000 cases of pineapple, six lorry loads each of rice, flour, coffee and sugar, 400 4-gallon tins of paraffin, two 600-gallon water tanks and some baulks for shoring gunpits—all this from the godowns—fifty tents, mattresses, beds, mosquito nets, fire extinguishers, buckets, cooking stoves and many other useful things from the school; and, as a parting gesture from the Sultan, over a million Capstan cigarettes from the Treasury.

Needless to say, the wagon line personnel were a trifle tired by the end of the first 36 hours, when we were allotted a permanent wagon line area for the siege. A site was chosen near Nee Soon Village, which allowed of dispersal and cover and through which ran a small stream; we then re-shuttled. In the middle of this, 1,200 rounds had to be dumped at each troop position and thanks to the magnificient work of B.S.M. Bradstreet and Q Ling, the impossible was achieved, we also contrived to take to pieces an R.A.F. aeroplane crate, fitting it up at Nee Soon as storehouse—it looked a masterly sight coming along the road on the roof of a 3-ton lorry, projecting three feet on either side and ten feet at each end. This move was not completed till February 1st.

Once on the island, we came under the command of 88 Fd. Regt. R.A., in support of 2/26 Australians covering the withdrawal of the main force across the causeway, Capt. McLeod remained in Johore to man an O.P. with 2/26 and a double cable was laid across the Causeway after we had tried in vain to " tap " the submarine line. C. and D. Troops took up their positions on either side of the Causeway about half a mile inland, and having worked all night were ready to shoot at it. But no contact was made with the Japanese despite the fact that our forward troops remained in their advanced positions a day longer than was planned, in case 22 Brigade, making their way down the railway and long overdue, should turn up.

On the 31st, the Causeway was blown and the Battery moved without having shot, to its battle positions near Chang Peng, again under command 155 and supporting 11 Div. Much hard work was put in, digging gunpits, underground command posts, burying cable and wiring ourselves in, for it was anticipated that the gunners would have to provide their own local protection and if the enemy succeeded in landing and pushed inland, we should ' stay put ' and continue to fire on observed targets, as if nothing had happened, being a self-contained strong-point. The B.C. therefore aimed at making both troops and the wagon line self-supporting. Each troop was given a month's reserve of food on the position and troop messing was started; at the wagon line, tents were dug in under cover in the valley, ammo., petrol and paraffin were dispersed and buried; contact was made with B. and C. Battery W.L's (of 155) and a detachment of R.I.A.S.C. nearby for an interlocking system of patrols and guards and a Battery shop was

opened: the natives were encouraged to bring eggs, which were given to each Troop in turn, for breakfast. The general idea was that the gunners would come back to the wagon lines for a change and a partial rest in relays: daily visits to each Troop took them rations and canteen and other requirements. Everyone was full of enthusiasm and we honestly felt that we were ready for anything that was to come. The only visitors in the first few days were enemy aircraft, but guns and W.L's were well hidden and they did not worry us.

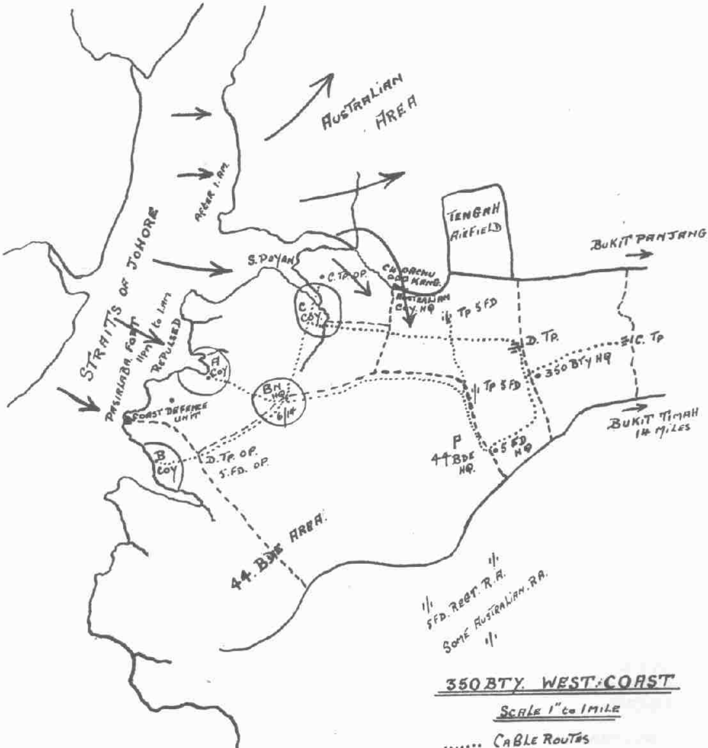
The O.P's were in the Naval Base, the sight of which nearly damped our enthusiasm to the point of extinction. It was evident that the Navy had left at very short notice; half eaten meals now putrid, littered the tables in the bungalows; wardrobes and cupboards had been ransacked and articles of every conceivable kind strewd the floors; looters were already at work—some of them may have been responsible for the ransacking of cupboards, but at this early stage, their interest centred mainly on the enormous stores of food in the godowns. Here, piled thirty feet high were cases of every known brand of tinned food and everyone was helping himself. It was almost impossible to organize the looting into an orderly appropriation of food allotted to units in some degree of equality. For the gunner, too, there was, what might be called a more technical department of loot-worthy commodities in the shape of 180,000 tons of 'ammunition' ranging from 15 inch shells to 303 armour piercing bullets: some hours were spent wandering through the magazines and workshops in search of something useful. The Battery Captain found three 3.7 Howitzers and handed them to 22 Mountain Regiment, but the thing which caught his eye was a twin pompom: we were looking forward to bagging the odd Stuka with it, but unfortunately we were moved from the area on the same day as permission was obtained from Command to add it to the Battery strength and there was no time to go and fetch it.

On the 1st of February, the first oil tank out of a battery of twelve in the Naval Base was fired by low level attack and it burnt for days: sooner or later, the remainder caught or were also fired, producing a remarkable sight; by day, a black pall of smoke rose high in the air, pillaring at the top like a gigantic thunder cloud; after several days, this accumulation of smoke spread over the area, mantling it in darkness and giving the effect of permanent twilight; at night, the flames predominated and lit up the countryside for miles around. Additional fires were caused when the sappers towed two oil barges into the straits and set them alight: that night the wind changed and they drifted into the dock yard: many small craft and some of the buildings caught: the fire spread to Lt. Briggs 75 mm. gun position on Seletar Pier: the post had to be evacuated when the ammunition went off, but the gun was saved, and having rebuilt their gun pit, they re-occupied it.

Lt. Fullerton was at the Bty. O.P. (at Seletar) that night and before the fire started, the Battery Band had decided that a besieged gunner should shoot rhythmically: to his amazement at about 9 p.m., a 3-ton lorry drove up to the O.P.: personnel of the band got out (having received permission from the B.C.) and they entered the Admiral's house and removed the grand piano. The O.P. had to be evacuated for a few hours that night on account of fire.

Both Troop positions were admirably sited for cover and convenience, they were beside native villages, where Command Posts and rest shelters could be dug in the ground floors of the houses—a very literal significance can be attached to the expression 'ground floor' in this case—the guns were in covered pits under trees and the natives gave a hand in preparing trenches and also produced such things as coffee and eggs on occasions. General Key complimented Major Gill on the work at the guns when he visited them, being particularly struck by Sgt. Bhumgara's system of camouflage, whereby a tree was pulled aside with a rope to allow the gun to fire.

During this time, the O.P's were manned continuously and the mainland was kept under close observation: no registration was allowed owing to the possibilities of 22 Brigade filtering back, but we were allowed to fire into the



AUSTRALIAN AREA
AFTER 1. AM
STRAITS OF JOHORE
TENGAH AIRFIELD
BUKIT PANJANG
S. POYAN
C. TP. OP.
C. COY
AUSTRALIAN COY. HQ
1/1 TP 5 FD
D. TP.
C. TP
350 BTY HQ
A COY
BN HQ
6/14
1/1 TP 5 FD
BUKIT TIMAH 14 MILES
PASIRLABA FORT
11pm to 1am
REPULSED
COAST DEFENCE UNIT
B COY
D. TP. OP.
5. FD. OP.
44 BDE HQ
5 FD HQ
44. BDE AREA
1/1 5 FD. REGT. R.A.
SOME AUSTRALIAN. RA.
350 BTY. WEST COAST
SCALE 1" to 1 MILE
.... CABLE ROUTES
----- TRACKS

Straits to calibrate the guns. In point of fact on the nights of the 1st/2nd, lamp flashes were observed and reported, and naval patrols picked up nearly 100 of 22 Bde. Shelling of the island had started and the O.P's sent back flash and sound bearings of enemy guns for our counter-battery work. The enemy were using observation balloons and aircraft as spotters for their fire: they also carried out some air-burst ranging and landed some shells in the Battery area. This was probably intended for Sembawang aerodrome, for the R.A.F. had started to withdraw to Java as the airfields were becoming rapidly unusable. Permission was given to reply to further shelling on the 7th and D Tp. fired 18 rounds at the enemy.

On February 11th, we received a warning order to move, which caused people to ruminate on the futility of doing any hard work anywhere. The Australians on the west of the island had asked for more artillery to cope with suspected attempts by the enemy to land on that side and 350 were to come under command 5th Field Regiment. The Battery Capt. contacted Col. Jephson of 5th Field and was given an area to reconnoitre along the Jurong River: preliminary work was to be completed by the night of the 6th, and the move was to take place as soon as 11 Div. would release us.

The West of the island is well wooded, hilly, and deeply indented by numerous creeks: O.P's could easily be found overlooking the Straits, but if the enemy once landed, visibility overland was nil. Col. Jephson therefore ordered that all O.P. lines should pass through Company headquarters, so that from an O.P., there was communication not only to its own troop, but to companies, battalions and 5th Field H.Q. The fire of the whole group could be controlled from one O.P., or through a liaison officer with any of the infantry: lines had therefore to be laid across country. Gun positions were equally difficult, but for different reasons. The Australians had already occupied all the best positions and as no one could predict just where the enemy would make his attempt, guns had to be sited to cover an arc of 180°, if necessary by having two adjacent positions prepared. The enemy had already started his artillery and air preparation for his attack, hence the reconnaissance and preliminary work on the positions was very much a case of cat and mouse. A shell whined: everyone ducked: crump, crump—300 yards away: we picked up ourselves and our tools; the roar of 27 aircraft caused us to look up—they were coming our way: another dive for cover and then—boom, boom, boom, ba-boom! the ground shook: some poor devils half a mile away had got that: back they came wheeling around, as we gathered ourselves together again and a sudden burr! rat-tat-tat-tat, warned us to go to ground again, machine guns this time—and so it went on. But we soon got used to it, and the work progressed.

During the night of the 7/8th the Battery, taking with it the Admiral's piano, moved across: gunpits and command post were dug to a similar accompaniment of bangs and booms: it took the signallers all that day and most of the night to get the lines complete to both O.P's: luckily 5th Field line was through early, enabling us to fire at the initial landing parties.

The tactical situation was as follows:—44 Brigade (Brig. Ballantyne) had arrived from India with 6/14, 6/1 and 7/8 Punjabis reinforced by the addition of a composite Indian battalion based on 5/11 Sikhs and the British Battalion (Leicester and E. Surreys): this Brigade was under command A.I.F. and held the Southern position on the West Coast: the Australians held from the Bukit Panjang Road round to the Causeway; 5th Field were in direct support of 44 Bde. and also ready to answer calls for fire from the A.I.F. Lt. Blane manned C. Tp. O.P. overlooking the Poyang River and Capt. Grime D. Tp. behind Pasir Laba Fort, which housed a Coast Defence Battery: he was joined at D. Tp. O.P. by a 5th Field officer who was shelled out of his own O.P.

D. Troop sited a section in a harassing fire position while the rest of the Battery got busy on main battle positions: from here this section fired continuously at map reference targets on the mainland, and the whole Battery continued this harassing fire after dark. The enemy was equally active and judging by the extent of his barrage, he must have had a considerable number

of batteries in action. By midnight our range had dropped from 9,000 to 3,200 yards: landings had commenced. (We learned later, that 16 batteries took part in the enemy preparation !)

The enemy was first discovered embarking from the opposite coast, at about 10-30 p.m., when the Coast Defence Battery turned on its searchlights, following up with every gun. At 11 o'clock Lt. Blane reported that he had seen the light signals indicating the approach of enemy landing craft, and soon after, he called for heavy fire from C Troop on the mouth of the Poyang River. All attempts to gain a footing here, failed: in one case over 100 Japs were allowed to land and when they approached our wire, C Coy. of the 6/14 opened up with automatics ; they suffered 50% casualties and then withdrew hastily to be caught off shore by more Punjabis in a sampan. At the same time Capt. Grime shot D Troop at the request of A. Coy. on to the foreshore in front of them and that attempt also failed. At about 1 a.m. the enemy tried further up the coast, and here they succeeded in landing after being initially repulsed. D Troop guns were shooting down to 1,450 yards at dawn, when lorry loads of Australian reinforcements passed through the position towards their sector. A word of praise is due to the gunners, particularly C Troop, for their work that night: they were under shell fire from the enemy, the whole time and short handed through sickness, they carried on without turning a hair.

It would appear that landings had been very successful further north, as both Troops had to alter their zerolines by 90° to shoot due north. This involved C Troop moving to an alternative position. Col. Jephson now ordered us to send a liaison officer to the Australians on our right and Lt. Turner went up. During the morning we had no reliable information as to the situation—we answered calls for fire from the A.I.F. inland and well to the North ; we dug feverishly at our battle positions in between shooting and being bombed, and the O.P's looked in vain for signs of Japanese. Afternoon however, odd parties of Indians and bedraggled Australians filtered back across the position and things looked ominous ; maintenance signallers tapped into the wire reporting that they were being shot at, and asking for instructions, and another party of signallers came back from Lt. Turner's line with a wounded Australian Sergeant, stating that there were small bodies of Japanese between Chua Chu Kang Village and C Coy. H.Q.—C.O.P. line was dead. Lt. Turner rang up at 3-30 to say that the Australians were withdrawing at 4 o'clock and Major Gill immediately went to Bde. H.Q. who knew nothing about this. When confirmed, this meant that we had no right flank. Brig. Ballantyne decided to withdraw also and orders to that effect were issued at 5 o'clock. The guns pulled out and took up preliminary positions in a brick works four miles back along the Jurong Road, Major Gill remained behind with the B.S.M. and a small party of volunteers to act as a rearguard, as small arms fire could be heard near at hand ; this was coming from the 5th Field Troop in front, who lost one gun coming out of action. Just after the Battery left, its position was heavily machine gunned from the air, the only casualty being the grand piano which had been left—very reluctantly—in a hen-run. Driver Johnson arrived as Major Gill was turning on to the main road: he had put up a very good show: his truck had been ditched near Battalion H.Q., and he worked at it alone for several hours, being several times under fire and finally dug it out.

The situation after the orders to withdraw had gone out, can only be described as chaotic, Capt. Coombes put 350 into action in a brick works four miles back, only to find that the infantry were going back further still: he therefore left the Bty. in charge of Capt. McLeod, and tried to contact 5th Field for some definite information and orders. The Jurong road was packed with convoys of vehicles double banked in places, so that it was impossible to overtake and it took him over an hour to reach Bukit Timah (11 miles). Here there was a solid phalanx of vehicles twelve deep moving arbitrarily both ways along the parallel Bukit Timah and Dunearn Roads, and progress was again difficult: he met Major Fennell, 2nd in Command of 5th Field who was also looking for Col. Jephson ; in view of the gathering

darkness, Coombes told Major Fennell that he would get the Battery back into a hide for some sleep, contact 5th Field somehow, during the night and come into action where required in the morning. He then turned to go back towards Jurong against the traffic and deciding that this was not possible, started to walk it.

Meanwhile the B.C. had found the Bty. in the brick works, seen the Brigadier, and been given orders to do what Coombes had already decided: the latter met the leading Bty. vehicle after walking seven miles, and instructed the driver to go to the W.L. at Nee Soon. An idea of the congestion can be gleaned from the fact that Coombes saw the whole column pass, told each individual driver where to go, and walking back, reached his vehicle before the head of the column. He turned off to the left at Bukit Timah, to go back to the W.L. by the northern route, head lights full on, without meeting a soul: passing the Kranji oil tanks which were blazing away furiously was like going through an inferno: the heat fumes were terrific, and he turned on to the Mandai road with a sigh of relief. This was equally deserted, save for a few recumbent figures asleep on the road verge. Coombes reached the W.L. at about 10-30 and having warned the B.Q.M.S. to prepare to receive the Bty., he went South towards Singapore to seek out 5th Field, calling in at 155 H.Q. en route to find out how 11 Div. had fared: Col. Gold told him that there had been no landings on this side of the island, and also informed him that the Jap had taken Mandai village that afternoon and that the recumbent figures were most certainly Japanese resting.

It was 5 a.m. before 5th Field was discovered, after visiting the Ops. Room at Command, A.I.F.H.Q. and 44 Bde. H.Q., and orders were to come into action at dawn astride the Bukit Timah Road, covering the village of that name. The Battery thereupon took up their positions and spent the day very much depressed, in communication with 5th Field by wireless, but receiving neither information nor fire orders. Infantry were coming down the road all day and the enemy aircraft were extremely active to the North and East. Efforts to obtain information from troops in front proved abortive and we waited and waited. In the late afternoon we were told that a perimeter defence was to be formed around Singapore and all units were to retire within this perimeter, which stretched roughly in a semi-circle from Farrer Road to the Civil Airport. Positions were reconnoitred for both Troops near Tanglin, and W.L. was moved during the night to Serangoon Road.

Back at the W.L. there was a moment to pause and think while lorries loaded and unloaded. What did this withdrawal to the perimeter mean?

This is not the place for recriminations but it is nevertheless correct to say that we had steeled ourselves to the idea of staying ' put,' whatever happened each unit its own strong point, leaving Command to mop up penetration as and when it occurred with the Command Reserve, and we were prepared to ' take it,' moreover no plan of withdrawal to any line on the island had been made, so that none knew when to go. The demoralisation that set in, in consequence of this further withdrawal could not be compensated by anything but the most successful counter-attack which would drive the Jap right off the island, and the mass of unformed soldiery going back to—they did not know where—blocked all roads and made prompt counter-measures impossible. In the absence of any pre-arranged plan, formed units each made its own: co-ordination was lacking, and this must be the beginning of the end.

The scene in Singapore and its environs was indescribable and any troops who had not received precise orders went straight into the town: arrived there, they were more ' at sea ' than ever, for the Battery, Company or Troop was officially ' somewhere ' in action but they did not know where, and the people up front had no time to come back and collect their stragglers, nor were they going to send food to them, so the inevitable looting started. The city was under constant shell fire and aerial bombardment—fires raged everywhere: dead natives lay in the side streets where they had been struck down, some of the living joined the looters, others wandered about in a daze, stupefied by the turn of events: the civil hospitals were full to overflowing—the lightly wounded helped the more serious cases and the few remaining

doctors and nurses went round as quickly as they could, attending to all; but not a few died before their turn for attention came. Women and children waited patiently for another ship to come and evacuate them; some of the weaker minded soldiers tried to scramble on board too, and had to be forcibly turned back. Many of these evacuees also suffered a worse fate than if they had been left behind. The whole atmosphere was depressing and heart-rendering beyond measure.

But, to return to the Battle; a word must be said about the remnants of 137 under Major Owtram. On January 27th, the promised 75 mm. guns arrived; the Regiment was divided into three Troops, the guns were distributed along the N.E. coast as part of the island's defences. Capt. Hilton commanded four guns in the Naval Base and Seletar area, Capt. Carslaw had three at Punggol Point, and Capt. Liston five in the region of Changi: R.H.Q. was established at Paya Lebar. Each gun detachment was a small self-contained post, with sundry Naval personnel attached to it, survivors of the Prince of Wales and Repulse, who had a launch for patrol purposes, and a naval searchlight detachment. Central control was impossible, for the guns came under three Commands: 11 Div., 18 Div., and Fortress; moreover it took Major Owtram, the M.O. and Adjutant two days to complete a tour of all posts.

Life was comparatively dull; having dug their gunpits, they'd nothing to do but to wait and watch; the Naval Base detachments had the most exciting time—from the 5th onwards, they were under sporadic shell fire and in fact by the time they left, the Admiral's house, where Capt. Hilton had his small officers Mess, had received ten direct hits and looked a sorry sight. Normal activities were rather Gilbertian; there cannot be many officers who have taken afternoon tea served on a tray with thinly cut bread and butter, and dainty tray cloth, under the nose of the enemy, sitting in a comfortable armchair in an Admiral's house with a grand view of the sea and opposite coastline; or who in the evening have had in the members of their gun-crew, who were off duty, and played to them Beethoven's 'Moonlight Sonata,' as it were a fugue, whose secondary motif was the whine of shells—minor excitements included the arrest of odd natives who swam the straits: these might have been fifth columnists and were handed over to 155 H.Q.; or, a visit to the guns at Seletar—by day the road out of the Naval Base was under observation from the mainland and the daring person who ventured forth would be chased along it by enemy artillery.

On the 12th, all detachments withdrew to the perimeter; the guns were placed on the main arteries leading into Singapore in an anti-tank role—two of them actually joined 350 and were a welcome addition to the Battery strength. On the last day, R.H.Q., now in Mandalay Road, was hit by two 5.9 shells: one entered the cookhouse and failed to explode, but the other killed Sgt. Meikle and Gunner Spens. Later in the day, all guns were destroyed, and the men foregathered at R.H.Q. In 17 days they had not been required to fire a shot.

As a result of the decision to withdraw to the perimeter on February 10th, troop positions were reconnoitred and D. Tp. came out of action at dusk to move to its new position—the Thai Hong Biscuit Factory near the B.O.D. The tactical picture from now on was so confused that it is doubtful if any one on the island had a grasp of it; no attempt is therefore made to do more than record the last doings of the Battery. At 7 o'clock that night orders to move were changed, but in the confusion, D. Tp. was nowhere to be found—it had received the orders not to go South, while on its way, and it waited, parked in a side road for the G.P.O. to arrive. The latter was told that he was under command 63 Bty. of 5th Field and he failed to find this Battery till dawn. The troop was thereupon put into action near Holland village where it fired a few rounds on targets given to it by 63 Bty.

There was some talk of a counter-attack that morning at dawn and the B.C. sent Lt. Fullerton forward at 4 a.m. to take a line to 73 Bty. (5th Fd.) so that C. Tp. could be shot in support of it. He found the Bty. on the road in A/Tk. positions being sniped at from all sides—its B.C. was killed and our

infantry were certainly not preparing to counter attack—in fact M.P's with revolvers were trying to turn stragglers back on the road near D. Tp., and as far as could be ascertained there was no infantry forward of the guns. Sniping of C Troop started and the turning on to the main road from their position was under machine gun fire, hence the B.C. ordered both troops out of action at about 9 a.m. and they withdrew to the Biscuit Factory area, 5th Field joined them and gave C Tp. various targets during the day: A Tp. did not fire, and was pulled out in the afternoon to the Botanical Gardens where it prepared an all night programme of fire in conjunction with C Tp. This had a bracing effect on the men, who laughed with joy as the ranges increased during the night.

The whole of the 12th, both troops fired as fast as they could obtain ammunition (well over 200 rounds per gun)—targets engaged were concentrations called for by 5th Fd. on enemy infantry and guns ; in addition Capt. Grime had established an O.P. on Cluny Hill and he did some grand shooting at mortars in front of him and at an enemy O.P. in the good old Lark Hill style, thoroughly enjoying himself. Our front line troops in this area consisted of a heterogenous collection of R.A.S.C., Australian Divisional Signals with a 3-inch mortar, which Grime showed them how to work, a few Sikhs, and a Company of S.S.V.F. (Malay and Chinese Troops)—these were the men who fought on: those, who should have been there, were presumably swelling the multitude in the city.

During the afternoon Sgt. Hammond's gun was detached in an A/Tk. role, and the crew proceeded to dig in with experienced thoroughness on the ' island ' at the cross roads where Napier Road joins Tanglin Road—later, an 18-pounder manned by the L.D.C. drove up and went into action on the same ' island ' in strict accordance with the Drill Book " Without drag ropes, prepare to advance." " Halt, action left."

They were very thrilled at this, their first call to duty; perhaps they will forgive Sgt. Hammond's ' veterans ' for their obvious amusement. Their officer saw the sergeant, and he said: " Hello, you're a Number One, where is your gun ?"

He had to strain his eyes to find the gun, as he followed Hammond who pointed to the Bouganvillia tree, five yards away adding: " There it is, sir, and I advise you conceal yours a bit, too." It was too true: indiscriminate shell fire landed all over the place all day, but the enemy aircraft were also overhead, and they were reasonably accurate, when they saw a target.

That night, the Wagon line was the front line on the other side of the town—400 yards in front, the 1/4 Punjabis had their F.D.L's—the site was an attap encampment and was shared by two Field Ambulances with a large number of wounded. At 11 p.m., a Company of troops who shall be nameless, marched in from somewhere on the East Coast in a state bordering on panic—the cause of which was unknown. They set themselves down 200 yards away and proceeded to open fire at movement in front of them: this was the H.Q. of the 1/4 Punjabis who naturally returned the fire and Capt. Coombes had an unpleasant crawl ending in a wordy argument to persuade them to cease fire. This same nonsense started again the following night, when on receipt of information that enemy were coming down the Serangoon road, the company fired across the W.L. and ambulances into the wood: four bullets hit Capt. Coombes' car, and directing fire from a trench he put some tracer into the huts this company was using as H.Q.: the flames effectively silenced further argument from them. (Unfortunately, the Bty. Capt's language on this occasion is not printable).

On the 13th, C Tp. now in support of 122 Field Regt., moved to a position on the sea front behind Raffles Hotel, and D Tp. moved back to join its rear section in a place called The New World. These were the last positions we occupied and from them both Troops fired day and night throughout the 13th and 14th, letting off over 10,000 rounds in the last three days. The O.P. at Cluny Hill was still manned (by Lt. Sutcliffe and Oughton in turn) and 2/26 Australians together with some Dogras had come up to reinforce the gallant ' odds and sods ' mentioned above. Barrages were fired to support an

attack on the left by the Malay Regiment, and their three mile advance on the 13th, put to shame some of the feebler efforts of supposedly better trained troops. Concentrations were fired at the request of our infantry on enemy infantry, mortars, and artillery in and south of Bukit Timah and the O.P's had some good gallery shooting, they could pick their choice of targets—in return they received their share of attention, being heavily mortared and shelled—communications to Cluny " went " several times and Sig. Price was wounded while maintaining his line, evacuated to the C.C.S. and died as a result. Sig. Cook was luckier in an equally brave performance—he repaired 35 breaks in the line, being out for several hours on his own.

One of the most incredible targets came to D Tp. through the Command Post from a 5th Field O.P.—the C.P. telephone rang:—

" Target O.P.—five rounds Gun fire."

—Mr. Godman (73 C.P.O.) answered:—

" What the hell for ? " and received the reply:—

" For Christ's sake hurry, the bloody Nips are all round us."

Five rounds gun fire pushed the enemy back, the O.P. officer and his assistant shuddered in their slit trench, and then managed to get away before the Japanese returned.

Lt. Fullerton spent these last days as liaison officer with 5th Field: he was out all hours of the day and night passing information and orders to and from R.H.Q., and he received high praise from the C.O. for his efficiency and disregard of danger.

On the afternoon of the 14th, the B.O.D. was placed out of bounds, as one magazine was on fire, and shells were exploding from it in all directions—the exact position of the front line was unknown: more ammunition was needed and Capt. Coombes went up with B.Q.M.S. Ling to see for himself. Passing through the H.Q. Company of the Beds. and Herts., they went in his car to the deserted Depot. Stretcher bearers were coming down the railway cutting behind carrying wounded, and Coombes lent his car, which Q. Ling used to take the wounded to the H.Q. Coy. in rear, while he himself wandered in to see what could be obtained. From reports, it appeared that the Japanese were a quarter of a mile away and pressing the forward Company of the Beds. and Herts., which was about to retire to the front edge of the B.O.D. There was no time to be lost—two lorries were quickly summoned and by dusk they had loaded 500 rounds into them—various items of signal equipment were also put in the car. The men worked wonders, running with a box of ammunition from the magazine next to the burning one, to the gate where the lorries stood, and dodging enemy shells and mortar fire at the same time. Further loading was not possible during the night, for there was no moon, but at dawn, every available lorry was put into service and " rendezvoused " short of the B.O.D. road. With Coombes, B.S.M. Bradstreet went on ahead. There was no sign of the Beds. and Herts., and no one appeared to be in the B.O.D.: occasional bursts of M.G. fire came into the magazine area and shells were landing closer than was pleasant: they decided to risk it and got the lorries up in pairs. The cross roads at the R.V. was also under M.G. fire, and Q. Ling stayed there to shepherd the drivers across and get them back again for another load.

By 2 o'clock 4,000 rounds had been dumped at the guns, and the Japanese were closing in on the B.O.D.—none of our troops was visible, but enemy infantry in twos and threes could be seen 300 yards off, approaching the Western gate: Coombes hurried to Command H.Q. to ask for a Battalion or even a Company as local protection while he carried on. Brigadier Eveleigh curtly told him that he was to stop work at the B.O.D. for the time being, and looking out of the window, he saw the G.O.C's car with a white flag and realized the tragic truth.

' Have a cup of tea, old boy," said the Brig., more kindly this time.

" Thank you," gulped Coombes and drank in silence, too stunned to speak for a moment.

" So that was the reason for our orders not to fire within 1,000 yards of the Bukit Timah Road this morning—they were negotiating ?"

"Yes," said the Brigadier. "The cease fire is at 8-30."

"Any instructions meanwhile ?"

"No, come back at 8-30 and you will know the worst."

With a heavy heart, the Bty. Capt. returned to the Battery bearing the grim news. We had seen it coming for several days, even so it was an appalling shock—like the death of a close friend whose life we had hoped for against hope to the last minute.

Shortly after, the official announcement came through as follows: "Cease fire 20.30 hours 15 FEB. All units collect in unit areas and stand fast. All troops disarmed except force of 1,000 all ranks at disposal of I.J.A. to support police. No further denials."

D Troop had been refused permission to fire throughout the day, although targets were plentiful—they had 2,500 rounds left but C Troop, on hearing the news, fired off their remaining ammunition in one glorious burst of 160 rounds gun fire. This went straight over the top of the Raffles Hotel and shook the few inhabitants considerably.

Capt. Coombes meanwhile, had obtained a plan of the minefield and a route to Java and on the near side of Clarence Pier, he found a 100-ton Diesel motor boat with fuel and water aboard. It was a craft made ready for the escape of some harbour official, and according to information received he had already gone. Coombes went back to see what could be done about making a dash for it with the Battery personnel, only to be informed that orders had been received to the effect that no attempt was to be made to escape, and any one who did so, would be treated as a deserter. This was the most unkindest cut of all, and it was a very dejected party that sat around the officer's mess vehicle that night drinking the last whisky and soda they were to taste for many a day. Everything was to be collected and handed over, and as we did not know the terms of the capitulation, we dare not risk blowing the guns, lest perhaps the women and children might not be allowed to get away. C Troop managed next morning to initiate a mysterious fire in their cookhouse which, spreading to the small arms and 75 mm. ammunition, blazed furiously and destroyed all its guns and vehicles. We hastily summoned them to join the rest of the Battery on the Japanese Golf Course, fearing lest reprisals might be taken against them, and all together again, we stacked our remaining guns and vehicles with those of 5th Field and prepared to hand ourselves over as prisoners of war.

No words can describe the pandemonium that raged on these last few days: 12 Field Regiments were pounding away hard; innumerable Jap Batteries were answering: hordes of twin-engined bombers and Stukas were pattern bombing and dive-bombing the city and from what seemed to be every tree in every garden a hundred and one Bofors guns potted at them simultaneously—the mere rattle of automatics and burst of mortar shells passed unnoticed in this greater symphony of thunder.

The gunners bore up well; their morale was high—they realized that the end was near—as early as the 13th we had received instructions to prepare to destroy the guns—but they remained cheerful and in first class fighting trim. No higher praise can be given to them than to say that Major Gill has every right to be proud of their performance throughout the campaign.

So we come to the end of 137's first experience of action: it was a disastrous nine weeks for the Regiment, all the more unsatisfactory in that we had fought and suffered in a lost cause: out of the original 700 who came to Malaya, three officers and 28 men were killed in action and 184 died as prisoners of war. Those of us who remain have experienced the bitterness of defeat and the humiliation of captivity under conditions as macabre as any in the history of warfare. A unique feature of this later experience is that throughout it, the Regiment has been together and functioned as a Regiment; officers and men have passed through the same ordeals, each appreciating the point of view of the other and discipline has remained noticeably high—a discipline based on mutual goodwill and not on fear of the consequences of failure to obey.

We started life as a new Regiment with no individual tradition behind it, save that of the Royal Regiment of which we are a part—we can lay down our arms when the time comes, knowing that in a short time, we have created a tradition in keeping with that set by our Mother Regiment—a worthy example for future members of 137 to follow.

QUO FAS ET GLORIA DUCUNT.

Part Two

Captivity--Changi (Feb.--June, 1942)

Capitulation

WE were surprisingly cheerful that night, as we sat round the table after dusk, but then the whisky was low in the bottle, and any way, it is doubtful if full realisation of the day's momentous events had, as yet, become appreciated.

There were several of us that night of 15th February, and we were our own hosts in that pleasant house of Professor Johns in Mandalay Road, which had served us as Headquarters and Mess for the last few days, the owner being absent at his work in the Singapore Hospital.

We had just listened to Churchill's broadcast, with its bare reference to Singapore, that day fallen and had accepted his reference to our conquerors as 'those traitorous gangsters,' with a certain amount of misgiving, since we were about to sample their hospitality for an uncertain period. We felt that this remark from the political head of our government, while no doubt in accordance with the sentiments of all Britons, and, indeed of ourselves, was, when addressed to our hosts hardly calculated to promote a feeling of leniency and tolerence!

There was, however, little speculation concerning our immediate future: there was the expected joke, (we hoped it was a joke) no doubt being perpetrated in a hundred other messes in Singapore that night, about pulling rikishas in Tokio, but little else, and we certainly weren't unduly worried, but perhaps that was the whisky: and then, we were very tired.

Later, a walk round the Professor's garden revealed the men sprawling on the lawns in groups of various sizes; the glow from a hundred cigarettes penetrated the dark, and the low murmur of reminiscence and speculation rose on the warm night air, punctuated here and there by the heavy breathing of numerous sleepers. Somewhere close by an ammunition dump was stabbing the quiet with the staccato report of exploding shell, while down in the city, two or three large fires raged, and lit the night with spectacular halos of angry red.

The atmosphere was, however, after days and nights of continuous shelling, comparatively peaceful. No fiendishly directed Japanese projectile screamed overhead, answered by the whine of our own shell travelling outwards from the perimeter round the city: no heavy eyed orderly arrived with unpleasant orders to disturb our rest; we just relaxed.

We remembered the events of the day: the usual round in the morning of gun positions lying within the perimeter in the suburbs, and the speculative dodging of shell and bomb to get there. Before noon, the rumour was abroad of a staff car laden with 'brass hats' moving swiftly up the Bukit Timah Road, with white flag flying from its radiator cap. Sure enough at 3 p.m. came sickening confirmation in the form of a written order from Div. H.Q. to cease fire at 4 p.m.—within one minute, officers were in their small cars, snaking down the cratered road to pass this order to their small commands, accompanied by the thought that it would be rather hard if, with one hour to go, one of the many Japanese shells failed to land thirty yards in front, or behind, and unkindly, split the bracket. The bracket, however, remained unbroken, and the order was delivered to the almost comical consternation of the gun crews.

The capitulation came as a complete shock to most of the Regiment, who were optimistic and full of hope that the perimeter was holding. The

shell and bomb, of the civilian population, with
ded hospitals, and the loss of the city's water
our considerations.
returned immediately like the ball from a well
ived further orders for the destruction of the guns
segregation of all personnel at H.Q. thereafter. These
received by one subaltern with a tear which
be gave what must have been the smartest salute
and which was acknowledged shamefacedly, as
we collected at H.Q. to await zero hour.
order, and as 4 o'clock struck, all was quiet on
ready, and as 4 o'clock struck, all was quiet on
ugh to the westward, there was some intermittent
units fought on for several hours, not having
ally, our outlying crews arrived at H.Q. bringing
ocks of food, and settled down philosophically

like the dead, clad in pyjamas for the first time in
realisation that although we had been prisoners
et to set eyes on our captors. The first of these
the morning in the shape of two officers, who
rave of Gunner Spence (killed the day before by a
moving with grave faces through our men on the
the house, left wordless.
nt lounging in the Professor's study and reading
rom his adequate library. In the afternoon,
or three officers set off with Bill Carslaw in one of
ing idle round the house, with the express intent
the Singapore hospital, but really, to have a look
In a quick tour of the debris strewn streets, we
were on traffic control duty at road junctions
courtesy in their broken English, expressing
foot bandage, the result of a septic blister, but
be a wound inflicted by their fire. We had
ore comfortable head gear and one Jap N.C.O.,
from the car as a souvenir. We returned to
ving penetrated nearer to the hospital than the
Building: this was occupied, apparently from
nce, as a Jap H.Q., and from the roof of it the
ild afternoon breeze. We had seen the shambles
ake of a thickly populated city, and were glad
water in the suburbs.
slight rise, the house commands the city's vast
ri-coloured roofs in the foreground, sprinkled
and the bigger, more densely erected buildings
background by the massive pile of the Cathay,
for the half dozen pillars of the smoke of
what lay in those leafy avenues, in the main
road way, shattered and crumbling buildings,
wires down everywhere, mains and power cables
and the stench of decay rising over empty
that we would move to Changi on foot the
a sigh of relief that we settled down to the
rnainder of our liquor and spent a second night
panese aircraft patrolled the city, flying very low.
day, we had spent a profitable hour ransacking
sadly depleted kit with books, clothes and
larder of its not inconsiderable stock of tinned

to travel on the advance party and after a
ned, set off with a sergeant and three beefy
Japs allowed to carry the heavy stuff of our

unit and two more Regiments, a matter of 1,600 men. The truck was to complete as many journeys as possible before noon next day and its first load was, not unnaturally, all the food it could hold with the small advance party superimposed thereon in varying precarious positions.

The road from Singapore to Changi, that scorching afternoon, bore a stream of one way traffic, consisting of the never ending column of marching men of the fallen army, and the few vehicles carrying its baggage, and still, we scarcely ever saw a Jap. At first our pace was restricted by the tramping column, but soon, we passed the head, and our velocity increased. At Bidadari we ran out of the suburbs of the city and soon forked right at the sizeable village of Sompah, with its shops already beginning tentatively to open: on through patches of systematically planted rubber trees, and the wilder chaos of banana and coconut groves, the road twisted and turned through a multi-shaded side-ground of green, every so often the ramshackle wooden shops and dwellings of a mean, stinking native village, untidily lining our route, at once charmed the eye with its movement and colour, and offended the olfactory sense with its inevitable smell of decaying fruit and fish. By the roadside, infrequent barefooted coolies, in ragged blue jackets and trousers followed us incuriously, with expressionless eyes, and now and again, we caught a glimpse through the trees, of native kampong, to which, already the inhabitants were beginning to return. Eventually turning left where the Sompah Road joins the coast road from Singapore we entered the vast area of Changi Barracks.

Arrived at our rendezvous near Roberts Lines, where we had been ordered to meet a certain Major, who would show us our future quarters, we unloaded the lorry and sent it back. Capt. Hilton spent one unprofitable hour looking for this elusive gentleman, and finally emulated the example of everyone else by selecting his own quarters, a gymnasium, the floor of which was littered with miscellaneous tentage, and odds and ends. Having claimed this building by liberal use of chalk on its double doors, and posted scouts, to intercept the returning lorry, he lit a cigarette and took a stroll around: there were few people about and he fell to contemplating his surroundings.

Changi, on the N.E. corner of Singapore, is a very fine and large military barracks, with clusters of magnificent brick built accommodation for troops, set in pleasant, slightly hilly and well wooded country. A net work of wide, well built roads serves dozens of flat roofed three-storeyed symmetrical stuccofaced barrack blocks, each storey with its wide, tropical verandah. In peace time, these buildings presented a cream coloured surface in a background of vivid foliage, but the coming of war had smeared them with a coating of sketchy black, which struck an absonant note in the unchanging green. The urban effect of its many buildings, parade grounds, and water towers, gives Changi Camp an artificial appearance, after the georgic splendours of the drive from Singapore, but in peace time, must afford a most pleasant home for its garrison. But, Changi now bore a very battered appearance: during the Campaign the Jap air armada (known familiarly to the Troops as the Singapore Express) had paid more than one visit to this area, and the pattern bombing had left a legacy of destruction, which had to be seen to be believed. Hardly a building lay untouched by bomb, none was unmarked by splinter, moreover the blowing of the magazine on the withdrawal to the city's perimeter had wreaked untold havoc. However, it was obvious that the many buildings whether damaged or not, would afford a roof for most of the troops captured, yet nevertheless, we were glad of the tentage lying commandeered in our gymnasium.

About 6 o'clock, the second truck load arrived with Walter Mason, our adjutant, perched like a triumphant elephant on the apex of its contents of food and kit, surrounded by those of our injured men, who could not make the journey on foot. They reported that the Regiment was on the way, but was not expected to arrive until nearly midnight. We unloaded the truck, sent it back to relieve the road party of part of their kit, and busied ourselves with stacking our food and the previous load, (which luckily had been parked nearby) in a flimsy outhouse, before proceeding to make ourselves a brew of

tea. We had learned that two other trucks had been pressed into service, despite the original allocation and were now being used by the other two units, so we had the unexpected luxury of the sole use of one vehicle. By this time, our encampment, for it could scarcely be called anything else, resembled a cross between the Caledonian Market and an alfresco jumble sale. We had built a sort of stockade around our stores, constructed from iron beds taken from the gym., miscellaneous furniture, tent walls, and cases of food, while, inside the shanty, our cook sorted the loose food and kept a vigilant eye on the petrol burner.

Presently darkness came, with a clear starlit sky, and the vanguard of the vast column from Singapore started to pour into the camp. We had put on a brew of tea for our party's arrival and when they eventually appeared after 11 o'clock, it was a very weary queue that formed up for the tea: it had not been a long march—Singapore to Changi is only about fifteen miles—but it had been a very hot day, and most men had carried a kit bag in addition to equipment packed full with belongings. The whole party draped themselves picturesquely round the perimeter of our site on the short grass beside the road, and fell asleep immediately. One of the officers sat up in order to waken the cooks at the appropriate time, so that at least, we should start our first real day of captivity on full stomachs.

Thus did we enter into our thraldom, with hardly a sign of our captors, and with hardly a thought to the future: speculation, disillusionment, boredom, hope, resignation, and a thousand other moods and fancies exercised our imaginations and affected our spirits thereafter, but at the time, feeling was practically non-existent: one simply carried on, and indeed, it was difficult to believe with our comparative freedom that we were really captives who would not be free within a week or two. Realization of the results of the capitulation and the fall of Singapore, with all it implied to the war now waging between the Allies and Japan did not come till later. Vaguely we thought how pleasant it must be to be a member of a victorious force, which had just successfully concluded one part of a campaign, and how different by contrast was our lot as vanquished, but at the time, it was only shadowy regret. It did occur to some what a colossal embarrassment our 60,000 hungry mouths, and active bodies were to the Jap, who was even then, busy with the capture of Java and Sumatra.

The Initial Moves

AS we expected to place our food in a common pool, it was decided that we have one good meal from our stock, and so, at about nine o'clock, the next morning, we queued for and consumed with relish a breakfast consisting of tinned bacon and beans, ration biscuits with tinned butter and hot sweet tea. After this, all miscellaneous food carried by individuals as 'iron' rations was collected into the cookhouse, and a fine array of additional tins (mostly bully beef and packets of biscuits) resulted: the standard of honesty must have been high, judging from the large pile accumulated. Our C.O. had gone off to contact Div. H.Q., and as it was not certain that we should remain in situ, we decided that it would be a waste of time to settle in the gymnasium, so we merely allowed the men to help themselves to the miscellaneous articles therein, and parked ourselves inside our first mess, a rapidly erected tent, which sheltered us from the already unpleasantly hot rays of the sun.

The day before, our one and only truck had per force left behind all officers heavier kit, so Bill Carslaw had departed this dawn for Singapore with what we considered to be the forlorn hope of retrieving part of it: he returned about noon, however, with beaming face, and the story that the Japs were already in occupation of our late H.Q., which was rapidly being converted into a small hospital, and that although the local natives had ransacked the place on our departure, our kit, consisting chiefly of bedding rolls, camp beds and assorted boxes of belongings, had been left more or less intact, although

opened and searched: and he had brought this back with him. We fell upon our respective bundles with joy. It would have been no very serious matter to have started our new life without beds, bedding and extra clothes, but the recovery of these was, to say the least of it, a happy beginning. So when the C.O. returned later, and told us that we were joining forces once again with our recently estranged Battery, who were in residence in a nearby block, it was a reasonably cheerful party that moved lock, stock and barrel into our new quarters. The men were housed on the ground floor of a large barrack block, and we took possession of the inevitable wooden hut, as sleeping quarters and mess, with a similar hut adjoining, as sergeants' mess.

On the morrow, we got down to re-organisation of the Regiment, which as a result of casualties and previous captives, now numbered only sufficient men to form two batteries, which were divided into two Troops each. It was a lazy sort of day for everyone, the only work required being the erection of 27 small tents for additional sleeping accommodation: in the afternoon, there was a Troop bathing party in the Johore Straits off Fairy Point. Rationed to two inadequate meals a day, we spent most of our time reading, which allowed us to forget for a little while our hunger and unhappy position. Major Gill, B.C. of our nomad Battery presented every officer with 400 cigarettes, keeping 60,000 in stock for future issues to the Regiment.

Within 48 hours, the Mess was uprooted, and while the men remained, we transferred our motley collection of goods and chattels to the old Sergeants' Mess on the main Changi Road, next to the gutted cinema. Here we remained but one night, sleeping on the verandah in the delicious breeze. The next day, we were again ejected, when the whole of the Div. artillery was lodged in Changi gaol, emptied of its inmates on capitulation. We had fought the campaign in 11(Ind.) Div., and it was as part of this Div., and in company with the remainder of the Divisional Artillery that we occupied our new quarters.

The Gaol is a large modern structure of unsullied concrete, with severe, but clean cut outline, lying on the Singapore side of the barrack area. Surrounded by the colossal wall about twenty feet high, and studded with many glass covered watch towers, it contains four main flat roofed prison blocks, each of four storeys, which soar high above the wall, in the symmetry of right angles and barred windows: in addition, the walls enclose hospital block, European prisoner's block, cookhouse and a well equipped laundry. The whole was very reminiscent of American prisons as seen in films, and being set on the highest piece of land in the vicinity, presented an imposing sight.

The advance party marched the two miles to the gaol, to make preliminary arrangements. Accommodation was finally allotted, despite the efforts of the senior officers responsible therefore. During a strenuous two hours of pacing up and down long echoing corridors, bare rooms, and noisy iron stair-cases, many solutions to the simple problem were produced, the unsuitability of which was only rivalled by their futility: one staff officer composed a lovely scheme, which might have worked, if the gaol had been of a completely different shape and size, while another spent a perspiring hour, handicapped by the illusion that the accommodation consisted of three main blocks instead of four. By a process of exhaustion, the hard worked committee, one by one, gave up the unequal struggle, until, at last, weak with laughter, we suggested the only possible solution, which was adopted immediately.

Again, we had one truck per Regiment to move our heavy stuff, which was accomplished quickly on this short journey, so that by six o'clock the 2,400 officers and men were all installed. During our fortnight's stay here, the only gate always remained open and we were as free to roam as at Changi. As the electric light worked, and the accommodation was reasonable, the gaol served us well. Each cell in the main Asiatic blocks, with its cement slab, provided room for its two men, and within twenty-four hours, the new occupants of the prison had 'shaken out' and settled down —after some hard work cleaning the place up, for the water system was not working, and had not been for sometime and the accumulation of dirt was therefore indescribable.

It is related that when the captured European civilian population was later interned in the prison, one of their number, a prison inmate released from Penal Servitude on the capitulation, arrived back at the gaol, and in a very autocratic manner, demanded his old cell back.

After two nights in the prison, the officers of our Regt. moved again, this time into the warden's house, a very pleasant European residence 100 yards to the rear of the gaol, and fronting the Singapore Road. Here we stayed until the gaol was vacated and lived a comfortable existence with intermittent electric light and ceiling fans.

Presently we settled down to a routine existence of parades, meals and leisure time ; we were representative of the type which is seldom cowed or seriously inconvenienced by circumstances ; within an incredibly short space of time, everyone settled down as though the prison had been his home for years and this, the existence he had experienced all his life. Our scanty meals popped up at the appointed hours, by virtue of what miracles of resource and initiative the cookhouse staff alone could tell ; leisure hours were occpuied by a variety of sports, occupations, and recreation which would have made a model Y.M.C.A. green with envy, and a community life, laced with humour and mutual consideration, sprang up and functioned like a well run borough. In a hundred resourceful ways, the men made themselves comfortable, and even our work, in addition to the normal fatigue parties, consisting mainly of dewiring the area, was performed with no great amount of the customary grumbling: only one task was to say the least of it, distasteful ; a party was required to bury about 300 Chinese who had been taken down to the beach, and there massacred by machine gun fire. The concrete and steel interior of our abode with its cool and lofty corridors and blocks, rang with incessant activity. Cobblers and tailors shops sprang into being, a watch repairer plied his trade, our Regimental barbers were in great demand, and practised their arts from morn till night ; the constant clang of hammer on metal, bespoke the fitter's speedy and skillful translation of oil-drums into ovens, and the manufacture of hot plates ; lusty gunners dug the soil, and planted therein a wonderful assortment of seeds, the results of which we were, perhaps happily, never destined to see. Ultimately, was launched our scholastic contribution to this community life (conceived by the fruitful imagination of our educational officer), Crippen College, of which, more anon.

These days, (if lack of food and water can be forgotten) we passed comfortably enough in our mess, reading and playing bridge, between working parties and the arranging of recreation. " Who's after you with that Dennis Wheatley," was a common question. " Oh, the hell of a lot of people," came the inevitable answer ; " Better put your name on the list." " O.K.", and another name was added to the lengthy list on the flyleaf. Bridge was our evening pastime, and frequently, the early birds dozed off with " Double three no trumps "—" Content " (a bid in breach of bridge etiquette, so it would appear to a rigid reader of the rules) sounding in their ears, as they lay in their camp beds in the room above.

Thanks to the resource of Gerry the Regimental enigma, we took our spare rations on tables laden with a fine collection of china and cutlery, obtained by him from heaven knows where. In addition to the problem of food, we had a major problem, which affected everyone personally and directly. The destruction of the area at the hands of the enemy and our own troops on withdrawal, had, amongst other things, caused the complete disruption of the normal fresh water supply system, and drinking water was extremely scarce. The few neighbouring wells were suspect ; the only water available to us was collected by a fatigue party, which once per day, pushed our petrol-less water truck to one of the very few water-points allowed for our use by the Japanese authorities. The ration from this meagre supply was one water-bottle per day and be it noted that this supply had to serve for washing and shaving, as well as drinking purposes. This lack of water, although not serious, was a constant source of inconvenience and irritation.

Contact with the Imperial Japanese Army consisted of the daily conference attended by senior officers, who received directions for the regulation of our lives: the lesser breeds seldom saw or spoke to a Jap. Their decrees and instructions except for moves, did not appear to affect us unduly, but there was one order which was exceedingly unpopular with officers—namely that every officer was required to take down the pips from his shoulders, and to wear one pip, irrespective of rank on his left breast: we were also required to salute all Japanese officers, fortunately they were scarce.

On 28th February and 2nd March respectively, the even tenor of our lives was interrupted by an inspection, when all the prisoners of war at Changi paraded, and lined the main road for miles, while a large convoy of American cars, packed with, on the first occasion, high ranking military officers, and on the second occasion, naval officers accompanied in each case by lorry loads of armed guards drove past, and all regarded us with inscrutable faces. It is difficult to say whether or not they enjoyed the tour: doubtless the citizens of Tokio would appreciate the visible evidence of the great victory, from the results of the many motion picture cameras, to a barrage from which we were subjected—we saw the results in a Tokio weekly, many months later: we were rather bored by marching and standing in the hot sun, and relieved only by the antics of the very infrequent sentries, who sprang from pacific immobility on the approach of the convoy, to assume a most aggressive attitude, no doubt for the benefit of the said citizens.

As the naval convoy drove past, one officer murmured: "That white drill is obviously copied from ours "—"They don't look to me as if they could stand up to our Navy," he added, to which we all agreed. The slim, spectacled men looked completely out of place clad in the uniform of the arm we always associated with great efficiency. They didn't look like seamen and the thought was a comforting one. On both these occasions, the marching of the men of 11 Div. artillery was of a high standard, and contained the amount of swagger necessary to show our indifference to such an affair.

On 5th March, and at an hour's notice, all the occupants of the prison were ejected and scattered to make room for the advent of the captured civilians. "Hell and teeth! Why can't the bloody Nips give us more notice," was the general comment as we now had well established cookhouses to dismantle and pack, but we were used to rapid moves and all went well. Our Regt. was to be moved to Loyang, a very pleasant stretch of beach to the West of Changi, facing the Straits of Johore—and the move was to be accompanied with the aid of the customary solitary truck. In the first part of our journey we tramped along the highway, but turning off, after half an hour, to the Northward, we followed a dusty track winding through scattered palm trees, which afforded to our dust-filled eyes, occasional blue vignettes of strait, as we descended towards the beach. By late afternoon, we were settled in a dozen or more of pleasant European bungalows, the gardens of which merged into a yellow ribbon of sand, lapped by the mazarine blue waters. This littoral abode was gently wafted by a refreshing breeze from the North.

On our arrival Captain Hilton had been greeted by Major Gill with: "Carslaw's got some sort of unpleasant job for you." "Hell" was his laconic comment, as he marched off to find that officer allotting sleeping space in our new mess.

"Want you to bury a dead Chink lying on the beach," he said, as he chalked up a figure six on the door of a room, which would normally have served as bedroom to one tiny child.

"Have to do it by sundown—better toss with Geoffrey,"

The two Troop commanders spun a coin for the privilege of side-stepping the unpleasant task, Geoffrey's "tails" aptly called, sent Hilton cursing his luck, in search of a digging party. When he had collected without difficulty a voluntary party, they set to work to bury the mutilated corpse and finished within the hour. As the corpse had been battered about and was very swollen, the lads were inclined to paint a vivid picture of fiendish torture as a cause

rather than the obvious one of sharks, or lesser denizens of the strait ; they worked in silence, and as the sun was setting, the last load of sand was patted down.

" I think we might remove our caps for a few seconds,"—with bared heads, they stood in silence for perhaps a quarter of a minute and forgot the unpleasantness of the job just accomplished as fancy roamed free, then collecting spades they moved off to their eagerly awaited supper.

Our short stay at Loyang was uninterrupted by work or Japanese, and we all led an ironic existence, reading and browsing all day, and at night, sitting in the garden within a foot or two of the Strait, enjoying the ambrosial night breeze and peaceful scene, brilliantly lit by a full moon. If our families at home could have seen us at that particular time, they would have found it difficult to believe that we were prisoners of war. Sitting in a basket chair on the clipped lawn, the eye of the lounger was constantly tempted from book or slumber by the colourful panorama of more than a mile of glistening water, beyond which rose the densely wooded, vividly green crest of the mainland of Johore shod with a strip of yellow beach, decorated by the flash of many a red roof and crowned by the bluey white of the austral sky. Our life was seldom so tranquil and never spent in surroundings as pleasant or picturesque afterwards.

A false picture however would be painted were no mention to be made of a factor, merely hinted at before, which despite our pleasant surroundings tended to dominate the whole of our waking hours, and which assumed ever increasing proportions, operating to neutralize much of the comparative comfort and ease we were enjoying. That factor was Hunger. Hunger that never at any time at Changi amounted to starvation, or assumed serious proportions, but hunger that made our thoughts of food as full as our bellies were empty. Hunger that can no more be left out of these pages of reminiscence than it could be omitted from our calculations then. We awoke hungary, thinking greedily of breakfast, which was served as late as half past ten, to shorten the period between that meal and tiffin—a hollow mockery of a meal, consisting mainly of unsweetened tea, which only increased our unsatisfied and famished appetites. During the long afternoon, we thought only of supper, talked about it, discussed it, enquired about it, anticipated and finally consumed it, only to find that after the last crumb had disappeared from our plates, leaving them as bare as a puppy's dish, we were still capable of doing more than justice to a ten course meal, and so to bed still hungry, we gloated as we fell asleep thinking of breakfast. In inverse proportion, the less we ate, the more we thought. To change abruptly within twenty-four hours from the hearty if irregular feeding of a campaign to a programme of two meals per day, each of which consisted of about one tenth the normal ration of European food, was severe. After several weeks, this Spartan diet left its mark in leaner faces and bodies, and was almost certainly the cause of numerous deaths from a-vitaminosis later on.

One day, the strait was busy with Jap naval shipping and we saw one aircraft carrier, two capital ships, an old cruiser and about five destroyers making their way westward into the naval base. They were all painted black, and each had two thin parallel white lines painted horizontally round the tops of the funnels. We strained our eyes, looking for the evidence of damage we hoped to find, but in this case, unfortunately the only damage seen was in the eye of the imagination.

Our bungalow was small, and the interior was reminiscent of the remark of the Colonel in the antique shop in Bath: " These occasional tables are a damn sight too frequent,"—certainly the place was adequately provided with furniture, most of which we had to leave on the lawn, to make room for ourselves inside: from this, we replenished our own stocks when we moved. We found at Loyang, also, many books, which later formed the backbone of our library. Altogether, it was a delightful place and we were sorry when, on the 8th of March, we moved out to new pastures, again at Changi, but this time opposite the old Gordons barracks, a mile to the South of our first temporary abode.

Bill Carslaw, a regular soldier, posted to us in January, had just served five years at Changi and knew the district well. His knowledge now saved us a longer march to our new quarters and his route was not only a short cut, but was shaded from the fierce noonday sun, and led us, treading almost in single file, through alternate patches of rubber and coconut, and occasional dense wedges of bamboo. The narrow path wandered tortuously, rising and falling, sometimes skirting a patch of cultivation, where mean huts with white clad Malay occupants stood sentinel over sweet potato and soya bean, but always returning into the trees, until eventually we found ourselves passing through that part of the area set aside for the Australians, who were busy settling in and showed no curiosity at this column of laden men which had suddenly debouched from the trees into their midst.

By eleven o'clock, we had reached our destination of Birdwood Camp, on the S.E. side of the main road ; this was destined to be our home, although we did not know it then, for nearly four months.

Up to now Japanese troops of any kind, particularly sentries had been conspicuous by their absence, the surprising amount of freedom we had been permitted had scarcely coincided with our expectations: this, we thought is not a bad sort of life, if the food improves in quantity and we can keep fit ; this, we can stick for a month or so before we are relieved. Hope, laced with, let it be said, a certain amount of wishful thinking, ran high and there was no apostasy.

Birdwood Camp

BY now most of the British and Australian prisoners of war had been collected into the Changi area, and had assumed permanent abodes. This body fell into five groups, namely: Malaya Command, Fortress troops of the island's fixed defences, 18 Div., 11 (Ind.) Div., and the A.I.F. The first three groups were quartered in the northerly part of the camp, Malaya Command living in the houses, clubs and other permanent dwellings on the coastal strip by Fairey Point and the other two groups sharing the barrack and other accommodation further inland. The Australians occupied the buildings further South still, of the old Gordons Barracks on the West side of the main road, and the white troops from our Division took over an area across the road from the Australians consisting mainly of wooden huts. The Indian troops of 11 and 9 Division, were housed in the vicinity of the City.

Our Div. area was roughly rectangular in shape, consisting of two equisized higher pieces of land, divided by a shallow valley running at right angles to the road, and bounded on the other three sides of its perimeter by the line of the railway which served the two fifteen inch gunpits, one at either end of the rectangle, and the thick woods, mostly rubber, which made a dense green wall to our compound. The Northern half of this area was occupied by General Key, his Staff, Div. Signals and a miscellaneous collection of Ordnance and Service Corps personnel, living in the permanent blocks which previously served the crews of the fixed guns, and, by contrast, in a motley collection of wooden huts, tents, home made shelters, we of the Divisional artillery lived in the Southern half of the area, each of the four Regiments occupying its own separate proportion of space and accommodation. While the North part was thickly wooded and rather untidy in appearance, our part lay open to the sun, and boasted a most magnificient padang of close cropped grass: this had been as good as a billiard table, but was now pock-marked by a dozen bomb craters ; it measured upwards of 300 yards by 100 yards ; this ground, the shorter side of which abutted on the road, contained two soccer, one rugger, and one hockey pitch, with goal posts and nets complete and at once gave our new home a free and open appearance and adequate exercise space. The rest of our area was rather broken and lying below the padang, which formed a sort of green tableland rising high out of a sea of thick reddy-brown soil and a few scattered rubber trees ; the huts were, unlike those of the North area, served by a network of paving stone paths, which were a very useful asset in the surrounding mud, after rain.

Our Regiment lived in eight huts, each about 60 feet long and 15 feet broad: six of these were occupied by the men, one by the Sergeants, and one by Officers as sleeping quarters, while we also enjoyed the use of a much smaller hut as Mess. These huts were set on piles, raising the floor two feet from the ground and roofed over with palm leaves, they were at once sanctuary from the fierce heat of the sun, and a refuge from the heavy rainstorms we experienced almost daily. Each hut was well supplied with doors and shuttered, glassless windows; outside Singapore and the bigger towns in Malaya, windows with glass fittings are a rarity; fine mesh netting is more common, while the large majority are simply open spaces, with wooden shutters attached. This type of open window is very handy for the disposal of cigarette ends and other unwanted things; this temptation to bad habits caused amusement in speculating on the amount of damage we should cause at home to glass windows, before the habit of hurling our refuse through the conveniently open space was eradicated. Two smaller cookhouse huts completed our accommodation.

Our sleeping huts, equipped with a verandah, immediately faced the shorter side of the padang, away from the road and though crowded, lay exposed to the faint breeze which normally drifted across the open. The men were packed in, about fifty-five to a hut, and our sleeping hut held all our thirty-three officers: as most of us had camp beds of one type or another, the place was congested, and going to bed particularly in the dark, became quite an adventure; by the time the late bed-goer had finally, with a deep sigh of relief, laid his perspiring body in his own bed, he had already violated the sanctuary of at least one peaceful slumberer, either by tearing down his mosquite net, or in a mistaken attempt to clamber into the wrong bed. When men were summarily awakened from sleep by bursting bladders—a common occurrence, the legacy of excessive consumption of rice, by now our main food—the necessary journey out of the hut was bristling with danger to shins and a trial of mental arithmetic on return. The inside of this hut in the evening when all mosquito nets were down for the night, presented an odd appearance of two walls of slightly stirring white muslin, with narrow gangway, running the length of the hut between the feet of the beds.

Immediately behind this hut was the smaller mess hut set at right angles thereto and also containing a verandah. Here, we took our meals, seated at five separate tables, which fitted into the room with just sufficient space to allow us to move about. In here, we could spend our leisure time, reading, writing or playing cards, while the verandah of the sleeping hut became a popular spot for lounging in the mixed collection of basket chairs acquired during our travels. From here, a wide view unfolded across the green carpet of the padang to the Australian lines beyond the road, while to left and right lay the deeper green of the thickly growing trees. In the background, a giant water tower reared its top heavy lines from amidst the square black buildings, very often showing, faint and small on its flat top, the ant-like silhouettes of some Australians, who had scaled its perpendicular ladder for the view of the Straits which its height commanded. Far away beyond the tower, rose the skyline of thickly wooded higher ground in the centre of the island.

In the opposite direction, and fifty yards behind our encampment lay the railed off enclosure of one of the fifteen inch guns which, during the short siege of the island, had poured into Johore Bahru a rain of destruction, as the scarred walls and massive tower of the palace (seen later) bore mute witness. It is recounted that one salvo from this pair of guns had arrived at Johore Station at the same time as a troop train packed with Jap assault troops, to the complete destruction of the excursion. This colossal engine of destruction, now lay shattered at the hands of its crew, a silent memorial of smashed concrete and twisted steel. Beyond the pit, through rubber and palm sheltering squalid native kampong and four miles to the East, lay the beach.

A graph of our moves during the last three weeks would have shown a series of gradual upward curves, representing improvements made from

scratch at each new place, where we had our being, each followed by a perpendicular drop as we moved to the next unprepared place, to start all over again. It was the same at Birdwood Camp: routine jobs, such as the building of cookhouses, and latrines, the collection of fuel, the erection of extra structures for fitters and tailors shops, the selection of parade grounds, the cleaning of areas of weeds, and the general cleansing of the whole place together with many other similar matters, occupied our energies for the first few days, leaving us little time in which to contemplate our surroundings or brood over our lengthening term of imprisonment.

Even now, we were still free to roam, and the sight of a Jap in a day's travel, was an event. It may seem strange that with our freedom, no attempt to escape was made, (with the exception of the abortive attempt of two unhappy gunners). It would have been quite easy to have wandered off to any part of the island, but what then ? To lay low successfully in the midst of a mixed population of Chinese, Tamils, Malays, Indians, who could not necessarily be trusted, and without money, seemed highly uncertain. To wander about with tell-tale European features among Asiatics was palpably impossible, and in any case, a successful accomplishment of the journey by sea to India or Australia seemed as remote as a trip to the moon. The mainland of the peninsula seemed to offer the best chance of success, but the Strait was patrolled and again, the native population on the mainland was an uncertain and discouraging factor. So we just stayed put, thanking our lucky stars for such comforts as we possessed, and regarding attempted escape with death by shooting—so we had been warned as a penalty for failure—as a bad gamble. For the time being we lived peaceably and with hope among our own kind.

We were told that soon, our area would be wired in, with consequential restriction on movement, so with feverish activity, we set to work to collect from the surrounding woods, fruit and fuel for the Camp before the cordon became a reality. Day after day in small and large parties, we scoured the woods, returning laden with a certain amount of fruit and vegetables and timber suitable both for burning or building. Our pile of coconuts kept in the husks, grew daily, the fruit of many ingenious methods of removal from their lofty homes—prodding with long poles of bamboo ; well directed or lucky shots (a strange sort of coconut shie) by gunners who fancied their aim—even a little perilous climbing in the case of the smaller palms accounted for its own small proportion. Climbing the perpendicular coconut palm looked simple when natives performed the feat, but when we tried to emulate their swift and rhythmic upward progress, many of us failed even to quit the ground and those of us who succeeded in forcing our perspiring and awkward bodies a few feet up the slender trunk, usually fell off looking foolish, from sheer fatigue. By far the simplest method was to go out at sunrise and collect the droppings of the night: this had the dual advantage of obtaining the best nuts, because mature, and of being done in the cool of the day.

These organised scrounging parties were conducted in sweltering heat, but fortunately, most of the time was spent in the deep shade of the leafy woods and they were reasonably popular with the troops. Nothing came amiss to the clutching maw of the column of half naked men, each armed with haversack or bag—coconuts, sweet potato, tapioca roots, bunches of small green bananas, pineapples, paw-paw fruit, delicious rambutans, and on one occasion a sort of wild cherry, which made a passable jam: tin pots, vases, containers of any nature found in the woods, or near deserted native huts, old railway lines, metal bars, any sort of wood for fuel, and once, a most unexpected and incredible pile of coal found by the side of a track. The many poor Chinese and Malays living in the woods, were reluctantly dumb, and inclined to disappear at our approach ; they had been warned by the Jap against speaking to us, but the occasional native, bolder than his fellow, would grin, and pointing brown thumbs upwards, murmur " O.K." and show us where the most easily accessible fruit was to be obtained. N.B. Lest it be thought that we were living in an oriental garden of Eden, where

one had only to stretch out the hand to grasp any one of a myriad of luscious fruit, it should be emphasized that none of these things was obtainable in more than minute quantities.

Many roots were obtained on these parties and planted in a sort of kitchen garden laid out between sleeping quarters and Mess. Despite the expenditure of rough energy on the digging and turning and tending of these plots, as would have made a fair sized farm a paying proposition, the orderly and symmetrical rows of red earth still presented a barren appearance to our expectant eyes when we left Changi. This was a great disappointment to those two or three officers who had spent much time in perusal of a gardening manual and the study of Malayan geoponics.

Soon we started to wire ourselves in, on the express instructions of the Japanese authorities, with wire teken from the many unused dumps hereabouts, and from the dismantled fences erected by us in such haste a bare six weeks before. The fence took the form of a triple pallisade of double apron with coiled Dannert wire in the centre. At the end of a fortnight, our part of the fence bore a solid and finished appearance through which only the builders thereof knew the way. The whole wiring scheme was pretty futile anyway, because very few people needed ever to leave the Camp except via the three official gates at which our own unarmed sentries alone were posted and those whose business took them modestly out of the camp through the wire, had their own pet bolt holes.

We were by now working on a flag system, *i.e.*, when any body of men left the area, for any authorized purpose, such as gathering fuel, or drawing rations they moved under the protection of a flag marked with Jap characters which gave the bearers unquestioned right of way up and down the main road to other areas, and through the woods. Capt. Coombes found a tracing of the flag very useful on occasions when a genuine flag was not available.

For the purpose of traffic control, the Jap. initiated a most unpopular system: some of the captured Sikhs had, by Jap persuasion turned traitor and joined the I.J.A., known as 'Free Sikhs,' they were commanded by one Dillon, himself a Sikh holding a King's Commission, who, during the campaign had been Capt. and Adjutant to his Regiment and whose H.Q. now lay in a small camp between our area and the prison. These Indians were used to patrol outside the various wired in areas along the road and in the woods. Like all Jap sentries, they were entitled to a salute, and, drunk with their new found authority, became a confounded nuisance, and the source of many scenes and incidents. We heard that the Gurkhas, who, like the vast majority of Indian troops, had remained loyal, when they passed a Sikh sentry, gave him the salute all right, but completed the action by drawing the hand across the throat in a most significant motion accompanied by a blood curdling stare. If half the tales we heard of the Gurkha Camp were true, the Japs and Sikhs must have found their guardianship no sinecure. These free Sikhs were hated far more than ever the Japs were.

As there was only a very limited number of flags per camp, a regular flag ferry service was born, and operated up and down the main road, to serve individuals and small parties moving from one area to another or visiting the hospital. This public utility enterprise became very popular; it was punctual and well patronized; all movement was of course on foot.

All this time, the most fantastic rumours were circulating among us and most of them were at first, widely believed—the Russians were fighting on German soil—the German civilian population was rioting, and (three times) the Germans had packed up altogether; the Chinese under Chiang Kai Chek were pressing hard in the north of Malaya and the Americans had landed at Penang, (this was a favourite one, and by constant repetition grew to the venerable proportions of " There are fairies at the bottom of our garden ") and the one or two pieces of genuine news which percolated through were lost in this avalanche of self invention and gross exaggeration. Out of much of this cheering but unfounded news high hope was born, which gradually receded as the falseness of the information became known, leaving in its wake the inevitable reaction of uncertainty. Later, we obtained access to a regular

source of news, which kept us in touch with the war, and allowed us to take a more serious view of our position and its likely duration. Few people were fortunate enough to pay a visit to one of the more efficient hidden ' reservoirs ': one entered an ordinary (native type) lavatory, lifted the box and floor board beneath, and walking down five steps, came to an underground room, containing a wireless set, machine guns, some ammunition, rifles and a still in operation.

At the end of our first week at Birdwood Camp, Bill Carslaw had taken the first of our working parties to Singapore, consisting of twenty drivers, whose task it was to sort out and marshall trucks left lying around at the end of the Campaign. He departed armed with as much money as we could afford to hand him, and commissions ranging from the purchase of razor blades to sweets. His job was to last a week, and actually extended to a month but after the first fortnight, he returned to us for the purpose of collecting some more kit for his men, and brought with him the results of his purchases. He reported that the Japs under whom he was working were fairly reasonable, and had allowed him to visit various shops, and as a result of this he left us with a mixed collection of tins and packets for which he had paid very high prices. As there was insufficient stuff to fulfil our original orders, we received our money back and had a ballot sale for the articles. Held in the Mess, this event was a welcome excitement after our monotonous life. The pièce de résistance of the sale was a lot consisting of three half-pound tins of Cadbury's Chocolates priced at $3 each. Even at this fantastic price, everyone who possessed or could borrow the necessary cash was a willing buyer, and even syndicates were formed to lessen the odds against an unlucky draw. It is impossible to explain our craving voracity for chocolates, a legacy of seven weeks of semi-starvation: chocolates never tasted half as good as those. After this excitement, the remainder of the sale was in the nature of an anti-climax, but some stir among the pipe smokers was raised when the draw for 2-ozs. of rank tobacco at $10 was made. There were plenty of cigarettes (Pirate Brand) at $1 per packet of ten—7/6 for a half pound of chocolate, £1-5-0 for 2-ozs. of tobacco and 2/6 for ten cigarettes, sounds fantastic, but in those early days, we did not know how long our Malayan currency would be of any value, and then, we could not eat and smoke paper. Had we known, we might have kept our money, which could have been put to better use later.

These days were smooth and peaceful and had it not been for the constant feeling of hunger, could have been pleasant enough. We rose at eight o'clock—the Jap had put our time forward two hours to conform to his, so we were in reality rising with the sun at six o'clock—and had bathed—the cup of water poured over the standing body variety—and shaved before breakfast at 9-30. The water situation was now much eased. Meals were eaten in our Mess served by a mess staff of five batmen who shared in our food—we had the same issue rations as the men. Their food was supplemented by purchases made from the P.R.I.'s Fund, (P.R.I. means: President of the Regimental Institutes—he is usually second in command of a Regiment, and is responsible for general supervision of Regimental Funds: these come from subscriptions, gifts and discount from the N.A.A.F.I.)—in captivity we had no normal source of income and Funds were raised (a) by voluntary subscription from officers and men, (b) by sale of Capstan cigarettes in stock and later, (c) by a compulsory contribution from officers' and men's pay—when the time came that we received pay) while ours was supplemented by purchases out of Mess funds to which we all contributed. Food by this time, although still inadequate was better by reason of the fact that we were making the most of our rations: these were delivered every five days by the Jap and the basic food was the inevitable rice of the Orient. With the aid of improved cooking facilities and experience, our cooks were treating rice in various ways, and this, supplemented by a long term policy with our reserves of European food, made possible our three meals per day, adequate, but far from filling. Hunger still stood four-square, and menacing on our horizon: rising from every meal feeling unsatisfied produced a depressing sensation which smoking

did a little to alleviate. We soon learnt that a cigarette over the final mouthful of tea will curb the pangs of remaining emptiness.

First parade was at 10-30 on the padang: this and other parades revealed the poverty of our regimental wardrobe; clothing and head gear were scarce, and foot wear a serious problem. There is one vast advantage in being taken prisoner in the tropics, as opposed to a colder part of the globe and it is that one can spend all day and night in a minimum of clothes and hardly ever feel cold. It was a good thing in our case, because we had no prospect of obtaining replacements for our very sparse possessions. We were considerably shaken one day, to see a man on parade dressed in shirt and boots only. The effect was comical, to say the least of it; he possessed only, one pair of shorts, which had got very wet, and had appeared on parade in his only other garment. Most of the day was spent in shorts and shoes only, and the clothing problem was not so serious as that of foot gear, which wore out so much more quickly. Home made sandals of wood were manufactured, old boots converted into slippers, and our boot repairers worked miracles with the small stocks of leather and nails at their disposal, but we were all very much down at heel at the end of three months. Lack of soap and towels was also a trial, while lack of razor blades at first resulted in a grisly crop of unkempt beards. We adopted a clean shaven policy however, and despite difficulties, managed by a kind of central shaving system to keep every man shaved at least once in two days. Some remarkable beards flourished among the large population of Changi but no one envied their owners in the heat.

On this morning parade, all necessary fatigue parties were collected for clearing the area and other routine jobs. Every third day, we got a flag which allowed us to go beyond the wire into the shaded woods, with parties of between 50 and 100 men armed with axes and two-men saws, and pushing old trucks from which the engines had been removed, there to fell rubber trees for fuel for the ever burning fires of our cookhouses. Those woods of Changi bear to this day the mark of countless wood cutting parties who left behind them arena and avenue of squat tree trunks, whose shorn appearance lay open to the sky, amidst the thick shadow of the less suitable timber. In the absence of work, troops would repair to barrack rooms, there to hear a lecture, or more often than not, to read, sleep, or use their free time in dhobying—no sport was allowed in the morning.

Lunch at 1-30, normally very meagre, was followed by parade at 2-30. Here, cricket and football matches were arranged on the spot and played off by such as had sufficient energy to perform in the scorching afternoon sun. The regular matches did not, as a rule take place until early evening, when the sun had lost some of its fire.

During free mornings and afternoons, we used our mess for reading, writing diaries and similar occupations: the naturally bare interior of this hut was soon decorated with many colour sketches of glamorous females, the work of our poster artist, supplemented by the cartoons of our lightning sketch artist, and on one wall, we boasted a glass fronted book case of two shelves, which housed our 130 books, lending a splendid splash of colour to the dim interior. On another wall was a large map of the world on Mercator's projection, the neat and painstaking work of our survey officer who had ironically shaded all the land except the Malay peninsula, which remained a white exclamation mark in a sea of reds and blues and greens.

From five o'clock onwards became, by common consent, washing time prior to supper at 6-30, the much anticipated event of the day. One dressed for supper, *i.e.*, one put on a shirt and changed from shorts to slacks (if any). This meal was eaten with relish, the most being made of every scrap of its two courses. Every Saturday evening, we held a guest night and the meal, elevated to the status of dinner, consisted of four courses. As if reluctant to leave the table, we usually sat long after our meals smoking the inevitable cigarette. How we talked! Before, during and after meals, during the day, in mess and on verandah, during the still evening, walking round and round the padang, or sitting beneath the stars, even in bed at night, the unending

conversation churned away: we enlarged the art of the deipnosophist to all occasions, and more often than not, we talked of food. Famous meals of long ago were remembered and recounted in luscious detail. Talk of food, of breakfast at home before the war: of lunches in messes throughout the country with special reference to the cold table; of afternoon teas set in the dainty cafés of Salisbury, of glorious dinners taken all over England: talk of the excellent food on the Dominion Monarch coming out, of alfresco meals of strange and wonderful variety snatched in the wild tumult of the Campaign, or more leisurely eaten at rest in some planter's deserted bungalow. Everyone had his favourite meal, and was anxious to disclose its particular virtues, but afternoon tea usually roused the greatest controversy.

"Buttered toast and tea for me," said a voice.

"What about scones," from another, "you must have fresh buttered scones."

"And crumpets," from a third.

"Don't know about crumpets, but I could go for a Scotch pan cake."

"Yes—with jam on—or marmalade."

"Good God! No! Not marmalade for tea," (a scandalised voice this)—"jam, lots and lots of luscious strawberry jam."

"We'll finish with cakes," piped a new voice.

"We must finish with meringues and éclairs."

"No, I'd rather have a decent slab of madeira or cherry cake."

"What about ginger snap like they serve in the 'Lakes'"—and so it went on, until out of sheer internal agony, the meeting broke up in disorder. Happy conversations, not those of a sybarite, but born of a sincere craving for the food to which we were accustomed.

Supper was often followed by a stroll on the padang. A kind of half hearted black out was imposed on the camp, and it was therefore always a delight to see the prison at night, visible from one part of the padang, with lights blazing from its many barred windows like the port holes of some giant liner, which had run high and dry aground. According to taste, evenings were spent in playing bridge or reading in the Mess by the light of hurricane lamps and home made burners made from tobacco tins—burning dieselene, salvaged from the gun pit where half a dozen drums were found—or, more restful to the eyes, in lounging on the sleeping hut verandah, enjoying the vast panorama of star-studded sky, with the Plough to the northward, presenting an upsidedown appearance to our northern eyes. Away, behind the hut was the Southern Cross. Geoffrey Griffiths, versed in uranography, was in much demand indicating constellations to the uninitiated in those glittering heavens.

From this spot, we enjoyed some very exotic sunsets—these were a wonderful sight, but more fascinating was the silhouette of building and palm, gaunt water tower, the tracery of tropical vegetation, clear cut in the fading light like cardboard scenery. This crepuscular hour was one for the expression of hopes and fears, and quiet confidences: it was talk of freedom and home and the life to come, that exercised our murmuring tongues. As the light failed, the constant flickering lightning away to the westward became apparent and on the padang, a never ceasing flow of shadowy figures floated past in the gloom, the glow of cigarette lighting the face for an instant—the nightly promenade of exiled men. Rowdy bridge in the Mess, quiet talk on the verandah, the vapid staccato bark of a dog in the woods, the sound of men singing from a nearby barrack hut, unexpectedly melodious on the night air, the thick strains of a piano accordion in the hands of a beginner, irritating in its cacophony, the faint strain of some gramophone, and the occasional shout of laughter from the men's quarters—of these things were the evenings made. As, towards midnight, the noises gradually died away, one by one, there would generally remain a group of officers alone, reluctant to leave the peaceful scene, gazing at the stars and pondering, as they smoked a final cigarette amid the siderial calm. And so to bed, in the still heat; which prevented sleep unless the body had enjoyed an active day—an unusual event.

Night time in Malaya is not still and quiet like that of an English countryside, but full of the drone and twitter, the constant whistle and whirr of myriads of insects, of which there are said to be more than half a million different types ; many of these come to life as the sun sinks to rest. To the newcomer, this incredible background of shrill unbroken sound is at once intriguing and a sleep-robbing nuisance. By this time, we had grown accustomed to the nightly chorus and were only occasionally conscious of the noise, as a ticking clock will sometimes claim attention. At times, this musical sound is pitched in a low key and set to a slow tempo ; at others, (especially after rain) it is higher pitched, furiously fast, filling the whole world with its exotic and maddening clamour. Even the tock-tocking of the night jar normally failed to rivet our dimming senses, as we curled up for slumber. This infuriating bird, not unlike a small parrot in appearance, spends the night sitting on an inaccessible branch of the highest tree and rips the night air with the continuity of its monotonous but distinct call—" Tock-tock, tock-tock, tock-tock,"—it goes in series of twos, until just as the mind is sinking into the abyss of delicious unconsciousness a sudden triple beat: " tock, tock, tock " breaks the rhythm and rouses the sleeper like a douche of cold water. Unsatisfied with this opening gambit, this abominable bird then introduces a new rhythmic figure, and then suddenly breaks into a run of continuous single tocks which the now thoroughly awakened seeker after sleep invariably finds himself counting: " 94, 95 (that's a record), 96 " says the mind, until the continuous cadence is abandoned for a new series, and so it goes on. The only escape from insanity is found in ignoring the sounds: this is possible in time, and there remains only the sticky heat to annihilate sleep.

To the newcomer, the climate of Singapore is pleasant or otherwise according to his ability to stand the heat. We had among us many of those unfortunate people who find a hot English summer trying, and therefore who probably received an exaggerated idea of the heat and moisture of Singapore. To them, those days were a constant procession of fierce heat, when movement, even in the shade, was always an effort, and the nights a purgatory of sticky breathlessness, relieved about once a day by rain storms of tropical intensity. These normally arrived in the late afternoon, presaged by low black clouds, and a few heavy spots, after which, in an instant, a wall of water fell from the lowering heavens, filling the whole world with a busy swishing and gurgling. In a minute, vast areas of the padang were under water, and dry, sun baked drains, became so many rushing torrents. This was the signal for the whole camp to leap forth stark naked from the shelter of huts, and revel in this natural ' needle ' shower. Two such storms, one in April and the other in May each accompanied by a high wind ripped a gap in our ' attap ' roof and completely swamped the interior and contents of nets, beds, and bedding.

During the latter of these storms, crawling along the hand rail of our verandah was like being on the deck of a tramp in a high sea, without the motion, and it was almost too painful to bathe naked in the driving rain, which treated the shrinking body to a million savage stabs, painful but invigorating. The climate is in fact temperate, in that it is constantly hot and moist, so much so, that despite these refreshing cloud bursts, it made many minds dwell kindly on snow storms, fogs, biting winds, while the very thought of feeling cold seemed a luxury. Night brings no relief, from the heat, for the atmosphere saturated with water vapour from the afternoon downpour is like a blanket of moist, suffocating warmth.

During our months at Changi, we supplied the Jap with working parties. These consisted of two kinds. The one which journeyed to Singapore or some other part of the island, and stayed there indefinitely, working at a variety of jobs, such as salvaging vehicles, building roads, or fetching and carrying in the godowns at the docks, the other which, congregating at the prison, (local Jap H.Q.) in the morning, would visit some spot on the island, work during the day, and return to the camp area at night. By the middle of May, more than 10,000 of the P.O.W. from Changi were living in Singapore or its outskirts. At this time, about half our unit was at Kranji on the main

road to Johore, busy levelling a road to the war memorial the Japs were erecting at Bukit Timah. These exiles had at first a very thin time; they marched into Singapore and out again to Kranji, about 23 miles in very indifferent foot gear, and were required to work the following day. Their food at the beginning consisted almost wholly of rice, and there were hardly any medical supplies for the sick. Gradually conditions improved, they received pay, and by the time they returned to us, they were living a much more comfortable existence.

Very few days or events stand out amid the smooth monotony of time at Birdwood Camp. The odd daily working party was a welcome relief from the camp routine and afforded a first contact with Japanese soldiers: this was full of lively interest and amusement; the occasional satisfying meal, a particular concert, a cricket match against the Australians, that interesting lecture, all stand out against the flat background of our otherwise uneventful ways, and in consequence, are vividly, remembered.

Particularly memorable was Sunday the 1st of May. On this day, our Division held a memorial service on the padang to the memory of those of its men killed during the campaign. Under a blue sky and grilling sun, the men paraded on the smooth green carpet, every man dressed in the best his scanty kit could muster, and the somewhat ragged appearance of the many odd garments and different shades of khaki was recompensed by the bearing of the men. There was a different feeling in the air, and the nature of the event compelled a serious smartness. The low, subdued murmur of talk ceased, as the parade was handed over, inspected and handed over again. Rigid ranks faced the front immobile as on a Church Parade at home.

"Regiment 't shun!—Regiment will move to the left in column of route!—left turn! By the right, quick-march!"

The Regiment on its best behaviour turned and strode off like one man, arms swinging and feet beating a dull tattoo on the short grass. On into our appointed place, among the other units facing the stage erected on one side of the large space used arbitrarily for concerts and services.

"Regiment halt!—Regiment will advance, right turn!—close order, march: right - dress."

Marshalled by similar staccato words of command, the congregation gathered.

The simple service started—familiar tunes to the accompaniment of a hidden piano floated deep and full throated across the open to the road, whence a truck load of passing Japs had paused to stare in wonder.

Towards the close, each C.O. stepped to the front and slowly read out the names of the fallen; our turn came at last, and the clear voice of our C.O. could be heard:—

"Lt.-Col. G. D. Holme, Capt. J. Shore, 2/Lt. R. Hartley."

Minds were wrenched back over intervening months to those wild days of battle: our Colonel killed while following on a motor-cycle, the tanks which had cut two Brigades off at Slim: the irreparable loss of a fine and courageous man and one of the youngest Regimental Commanders in the army;—Jack Shore killed when his O.P. was over-run by Japs, cutting short a professional career which had opened so brilliantly;—Bob Hartley so tragically killed by a bomb, while on his way to Singapore to rest and refit.

"Gunner Bagnall, Gunner Guerden, Gunner Damon, Gunner Donnelly . . . ."

Fine men taken in the prime of life. Many fine men were left but it was with the dead and missing that our thoughts lingered. We speculated on the fate of our 100 and more officers and men lost to our ken in that disaster of Slim, cut off by the rapidly advancing army and never again seen or heard of. How had they fared? Were they, too, dead, or were they, like us, held captive in some prison camp in the peninsula? Many rumours had reached us but no news; we wondered . . . . The voice droned on:—

"B.S.M. Howarth, S/Sgt. Marshall, Gunner Martin, L/Bdr. Mitchell . . ."

We lived again for a few brief moments those mad and memorable days

of quick battle and quicker move, always backwards ; at first with confidence, changing swiftly to wonder and then, with anger in our hearts—always backwards or southwards to Singapore. Those infrequent halts on days of rest in planter's bungalow on a rubber estate, while another Regiment of guns supported the hard pressed infantry, followed and preceded by days of anxiety and exultation, when our guns filled the Malayan air with their sonorous chorus ; days to remember ; days to forget ; days of fierce and unending activity ; days of long deep rest ; —until, with a start, we were awakened from reverie by the sound of unfamiliar names : our unit had been replaced by another on the rostrum.

Finally, the limpid notes of the last post, rising sweet and clear on the still air, beautifully controlled and pure, were a fitting end to one hour of remembrance and still ringing in our ears as we marched out of our day dream into the Changi present.

One other incident the only one of its kind in the Regiment is worthy of note here, in that something similar was experienced by some party or other very frequently. It arose on returning from a working party, when Capt. Hilton had an unpleasant brush with the Sikhs. His story follows :—" Our small party had spent the day on the Loyang side of the A.I.F. lines, laying wire in a leisurely fashion, and were returning to camp on foot about 6 o'clock. At the road junction near the prison, our guards bade us good night, warning us to proceed alone for the last mile. The three officers and fifty men tramped cheerfully along the road, minds filled with the pleasant thoughts of baths, with supper to follow. As the head of the column passed the Indian H.Q., I saluted the Sikh sentry standing outside the gate. We had not progressed more than three or four paces forward, when, to my amazement, the sentry, beside himself with rage, ran in front of the column and brandishing his bayonetted rifle, screamed out at me : " Salut ! Salut ! Eyes right !"

Now this was rather surprising, as in the morning, on passing the self same gate, my single salute had been accepted by the sentry then on duty and so I kept on marching followed by my solid phalanx of men. This was rather foolish, as it only increased that Indian's fury, and I found his bayonet uncomfortably near my abdomen ; in consequence, the column came to a ragged sort of full stop. Then ensued the usual futile argument, where neither protagonist understood the tongue of the other. Useless to point out that we had escaped in the morning with a single salute that in any case, the command : " Eyes right " would have carried our heads away from the sentry. He kept on bawling : " Salut ! Salut ! " in a most aggressive manner, indicating at the same time by waving his rifle, that we were to return beyond the gate and come forward again this time paying a full compliment.

Although extremely annoyed, I could not help noticing what a magnificent looking creature he was ; tall, and well built, his khaki slacks and shirt failed to hide a slim, but wiry and powerful body, with its muscular column of neck and throat rising into a fierce dark face framed in the uncut hair of his race, and crowned by khaki puggari. This traitor was a young man, with full red lip, perfect white teeth, and the arrogant expression of his new found authority.

Attracted by the fierce cries of the sentry, several of his comrades, all armed, came running through the gate on to the road, led by a large subedar. Bowing to circumstances and with the best grace I could muster, I turned the column about, and formed up just on the other side of the gate. The sentry still seething with arrogant wrath, returned to his original position and again we moved forward. As I came abreast, I ordered : " Eyes left," and then did a rather foolish thing ; hardly had the last command left my lips, when I barked : " Eyes front." This was too much for the Indians, the whole party rushing into the road, and again the column halted in confusion. The large looking subedar snatched from me the flag which I was carrying in my left hand, and stalked off through the gate into the compound, motioning me to follow, and shouting : " You come and see the commander."

With my vanishing flag, went the passport for the whole of our column

on that road, so with sinking heart, I followed him, thinking: "Now you've done it, my lad." Only the week before a story had reached us of a British officer, who had been badly beaten up by the Sikhs in this place, and released only after three days unpleasant confinement. I remembered suddenly with thankfulness, the 100 Chinese cigarettes and a packet of biscuits I was carrying on my person, the result of purchase from a native shop in the woods that day. The subedar had halted before a bungalow raised high off the ground, and was talking in rapid dialect to a large Indian sitting at a table on the verandah. I recognised Dillon, and saw with surprise the three pips on either shoulder of his khaki tunic. Remembering the axiom that attack is the best form of defence, I halted, and said in a very distinct voice: "May I be permitted to give my version of this misunderstanding?"

Dillon turned his bearded face and looked at me: "Yes, officer," he said. "What is your explanation?"

From a range of ten yards, I told him my story, pitching it pretty strong and emphasising that we had already saluted twice. I could hear the heavy breathing of the subedar, standing a foot or two away, still clutching my flag, our passport to supper and safety.

Dillon heard me out in silence and then made a most surprising speech: "I am aware," he said, "that you do not want to salute us. We are despised by the Japanese, we are despised by you, we are despised by everyone. But the Japanese authorities have said that we are to be saluted and you must obey. I do not want to take you before the Japanese up at the prison, so will you now go and make the correct salute?" This was not the Dillon I had heard about: the man sounded almost apologetic: this was better than I expected, and replying suitably, I collected my flag and departed. I found my party waiting a hundred yards up the road on the prison side of the gate, eyes agog with excitement, and the two officers peering anxiously towards the infamous H.Q. which had become bastille-like in its reputation. I do not blame them, they wanted their supper and could not get back to camp without that torn and dirty bit of rag covered with Japanese characters. This time, I made no mistake and not the most arrogant or critical Sikh could have found cause for complaint in the orders and their execution.

As we covered the short distance to our own gate, I pondered on my lucky escape from humiliation and possibly worse. The stories concerning Dillon and the barbarity of his men were not without foundation, and I can only suppose that I was uncommonly lucky to find the ex-King's commissioned officer in so pacific and ashamed a mood. This was my only contact with one, who was possibly the most hated man on the island."

The cigarettes brought back from this trip were representative of one source of our rapidly dwindling supply. Everyone still smoked, but smoked intermittently now, either rationing a week's supply to so many per day, or indulging in a grand orgy, followed by several days of enforced temperance. The Japs issued to us every week, a packet of ten cigarettes per man, usually of an inferior English brand and to supplement this modest allowance, we issued a further ten Capstan per man about every ten days. Most private stocks of cigarettes had run out towards the end of April, but certain limited amounts were obtained by purchase on working parties and sometimes in clandestine fashion. Most of these purchases were of an extraordinary brand of Chinese cigarettes in packets of twenty for 25 cents. Some of us grew to like these, stronger and cruder though they were, and soon, could not taste or appreciate ordinary Virginia tobacco. We were constantly down to our last 'gasper' and often went days at a time without a smoke, but during the whole time at Changi, we never suffered for long.

On through April and May, the days sped on at a surprising pace. In May, we were receiving a regular diet of authentic news from some mysterious wireless set. This news, after the flood of wild rumours, was at first discouraging but when considered soberly, sounded reasonable enough, despite Allied reverses. The most optimistic of us said: "Twelve months will see a big change," and settled down with some show of fortitude; depression reared its ugly head but rarely. This regular news service was a great comfort to us, severed from the outside world in all other respects as we were.

In addition to the many thousands of troops now engaged in Singapore on working parties, further large parties of men had, during the last two weeks of May, left the camp for unknown destinations overseas. Rumour said: Formosa, Korea, China, Bangkok and even Japan. We had not been uneffected by these moves. Twice were we on the shipping list, and twice, amid mounting excitement and speculation, had the orders been cancelled. But as June came in with its even hotter days and more breathless nights, the even tenor of our ways became infected with a restlessness born of the rumour that all prisoners of war at Changi were to be moved in the near future. Coupled with this were stories of increased Allied naval activity and success in the Pacific, which our news source confirmed and this tended to increase our speculation as to the reasons for our move and our probable destination.

No longer did we regard our huts, our cookhouse, our padang as a home in which we should spend the rest of the year; nor even did we make appointments for a week ahead, but we lived rather from day to day and thought unduly of the problems of packing and what to leave behind, if kit was to be limited. Suddenly, we knew that we were to be moved from Changi by rail for an unknown destination on June 20th. Our restlessness was immediately crystallised, and busy preparations for the impending move swept the camp like a wind.

And then, on June 12th, the Jap paid us for work done in wiring the camp. This pay was tendered in the newly printed Japanese dollar with which the Imperial authorities were flooding the country, Singapore working parties were being paid at the rate of 10 cents per man per day, but we received a lump sum of 2 dollars per man. This money was quickly expended on cigarettes and food for the journey and a further sum of $2 each, paid to us the day before we left, came in very useful on the journey.

Preparation went on apace and on a rising tide of expectation; innumerable lists of names were prepared, the sick vetted and re-vetted, boots inspected, kit checked, and arrangements made concerning the apportionment of food and utensils between those going and those remaining behind. Eventually we learnt that our party would consist of 600 officers and men, including 330 from our unit. This meant leaving behind over 100 men, and the M.O. had a pretty busy time weeding out the unfit. About a week before we were due to go, we got our exiled Kranji party back into the Regimental fold enabling us to take the pick of our fit men, leaving all our sick behind.

Soon, the eve of departure arrived, and that day was memorable for many things. By far the most outstanding event was the sudden decision of our captors to allow us to write home. Ever since the end of the campaign, we had wondered with anxiety, whether a list of P.O.W. had been sent from Malaya and reached the War Office. We were still in doubt, and the post card handed to each man was received with real thankfulness and a silent prayer that it would reach home soon. We were required to print on the card a message of uniform type to facilitate easy censoring by the Jap. The message ran as follows:—

> Dear——, I am a p.w. conditions good. I am in good health, or I have been in hospital but am now out and well. Do not worry. Give my love to all. Love———.

To this rather inadequate message, many of us added the date, a piece of information which would be of great value and comfort, if and when the card reached its destination.

On the last afternoon, General Heath (3rd Indian Corp Commander) gave a lecture on the Malayan Campaign, which cleared up many points that had remained obscure. It was natural that we who had fought in the war should be hypercritical of much that he said, but on the whole, it was a fair picture of the war, and undoubtedly most interesting. Then we all said goodbye to General Key who wished us God speed, after which we returned to our packing. Paradoxically, there was a holiday feeling in the air: we were perfectly well aware that any change was practically certain to be for the worse, at least, for some time to come; yet we were leaving the

comparative freedom and quiet and proved facilities of Birdwood Camp for the unknown with a high feeling of expectation and keen interest.

Steadily crates and boxes were filled, fastened and roped; kit bags packed, packs and valises stuffed with clothing and personal belongings; tables, chairs, and utensils were stacked ready for the move. By ten o'clock the camp was quiet, while everyone snatched a few hours sleep, preparatory to the morrow's early start. The glow from the cookhouse alone, was evidence of activity, where the cooks worked throughout the night, (the final burst of three days continual baking) to prepare portable food for twenty-four hours for the large party.

Birdwood camp had been our home for three months which had passed surprisingly quickly under conditions of quiet and a fair amount of home made comfort. Inevitably, the main memory of those days is the constant and irritating feeling of hunger. Never starved and seldom ravenous, we nevertheless seldom felt full and satisfied. Bodily strength did not seem to have suffered from this constant half empty feeling, as witness the energy displayed by everyone in the pursuit of violent games in the sun, and the hunger was merely a physical inconvenience ever present, like the poor.

No account of our life at Changi would be complete without reference to the well known figure of an officer clad only in shorts—hatless, shirtless, shoeless !—carrying a shopping basket in one hand, and a couple of sacks in the other, and usually accompanied by another officer, with sometimes a few men as well. By day, they went openly, under the protection of a home-made replica of the Japanese flag; by night, they crept cautiously through the wire. No one knew where they went, but they never returned empty-handed. We turn to a page of Gerry Coombes diary for an account of one of his more exciting days:—

"April 17th.

Burrow called me as usual at 6-30, and I was leisurely sipping my 'gun fire' and cogitating over a programme for the day, when the sonorous snores of Wad from his perch on three Dieselene drums the other side of our den, interrupted my reverie.

"Wake up Wad, you crab !—The suns are scorching your eyeballs out."

Wad reluctantly roused himself and ten minutes later, we were crawling under the wire beside the fifteen-inch gunpit into a derelict rubber estate, now overgrown with 'lalang.' This gave on to a track leading to the Tana Merah Besar village road, and after following it for 200 yards, we turned off through the scrub and entered the village from the rear. The Imam (priest) met us, and, inviting us in, produced coffee and cigarettes, while we chatted. Although I was beginning to know a little Malay by now, yet I could follow the conversation but vaguely. There was talk of how the Japanese were making the natives work in Singapore, but that no pay was forthcoming: Chiang Kai Shek was reported in Northern Malaya, and there had been food riots in Ipoh. The Imam asked us to restrict our visits to the early morning, owing to the presence of gestapo in the village, dressed as Chinese. Soon, there came in the man I was waiting for, an Egyptian, with whom I carried on a conversation in a garble of Arabic, Malay and English. He had brought very little this morning, and after beating down the price of a 2-gallon tin of curry powder from thirty to twenty dollars, and buying 400 Players at twenty dollars, we went over the road and on to the beach. The sun was just up. A little way along we came to an empty bungalow, where a Javanese and his wife lived; from them, we bought some fresh limes, and four 5-lb. tins of jam.

It was a grand sight on the beach in the early morning: a grove of coconut palms came down to the water's edge: unfortunately its picturesqueness was somewhat marred, where cuttings had been made for a field of fire for the Changi defences. Looking northwards, we saw a glorious view of the mainland, with the island of Tekong in the foreground: eastwards lay the open sea, across which the rising sun was sending out broad rays of gold, and away to the south, were more islands. Many

fishing boats were to be seen bound for the ' pagas,' which stood up out of the sea a few miles away, like the sunken skeletons of roofless buildings. (These fishing ' pagas ' consist of a series of piles driven into sandbanks, and inter-connected with nets which trap the fish over night). We also saw—if only they had been British !—four warships steaming out of the Straits.

Passing through the coconut grove, we paused only to pick up the fallen ones, our ' bag ' being fourteen, then, hurrying back, we regained camp in time for breakfast.

Wad did not feel energetic after breakfast, so I took two batmen out with me. We joined the 10-30 fatigue party going down to the beach to collect firewood and brine, and once out of the gate, I produced my ' private ' flag, and we broke away towards the 18 Division area, safe from interruption by patrols, under the protection of the flag. We made for an unfrequented part of the coast, near where there grew wild mint, and where too, there were a few guava trees. Having collected enough mint to produce sauce for the Regiment, together with some thirty ripe guavas, we revelled in the joy of a bathe. (Bathing was forbidden by the Jap, but it was safe enough, if you knew where to go). We strolled along the beach gathering garlic, which had been washed up from some wreck, and thence on to a metal road, along which was a Chinese Temple. This was not inside the area ' covered ' by the flag. Leaving my men outside, I popped in to have a word with the ' caretaker ': he used to put by for me such things as eggs, pawpaws, tapioca and sweet potatoes. I had just got inside his house, when a Sikh patrol came up to the door and feeling skittish, I said to them: " Get out ! You have no right in here." The Chinaman was very frightened and indicated that he would prefer me to return later. As I was about to leave, a Japanese sergeant and two soldiers arrived, and started jabbering excitedly at me: the Sikhs, who had not yet made up their minds what to do, now advanced threateningly.—I knew no Japanese, but two days previously, while on a working party at Fort Canning, I had picked up a piece of paper with Japanese characters on it, and what looked like a signature with a ' chop ' at the bottom. This, I produced from my pocket, and waved it at the N.C.O.—he saluted smartly. I don't believe he could read, but the paper looked like a pass. He then went round the back of the Temple, beckoning me to follow. I did so, and in the bushes behind, he produced a sack containing twenty-four tins of jam which he apparently wished to sell. I produced twenty dollars, and went off with the sack on my back, to the incredulous amazement of the Sikhs.

In the afternoon, Wad and I went out, having borrowed the Divisional hand-cart, and calling at the Chinese Temple, we were regally entertained with coffee and cigarettes: we brought back a load of tapioca and sweet potato for the men's mess, together with some gula malacca, and four dozen eggs for the officers. We were just in time to join in a strenuous game of hockey, after which, pleasantly tired, we washed, had supper, and settled down to a quiet rubber of bridge by the light of Dieselene lamps in the den."

Another vivid recollection which still remains clear, when other things are becoming dimmed by time, is the almost complete absence of Japs. The only times we ever spoke to a Nippon Soldier were on working parties and with the odd exception of the occasional visit of a small party of these little men inside our wire, we never even saw any. Sometimes they would drive through our lines to the gunpit and there, solemnly have their photographs taken, sitting amid the twisted remains of the destroyed monster. If it had not been for the occasional working party we should have been as ignorant of their characteristics, as we were during the war.

Discipline among our own troops in the p.w. area was, with a few exceptions good, and there were no fractious elements. Morale was initially low but steadily improved. The men were cheerful and reasonably happy and appeared to appreciate what little we could do in the way of

entertainment and recreation to give their empty lives a bit more interest. We still lived under British military law, and dealt faithfully with offenders: there were even a few cases which were dealt with by Court Martial. Japan is not a signatory to the Hague Convention consequently our rights as p.w. were obscure, and in effect, non-existent; but we functioned satisfactorily under our own organisation controlled remotely by the Japanese. It must be the first time in the history of warfare that officers and men have not been separated: although, no doubt, it suited the Jap to leave it that way, it was also far better from our point of view, as we were able to look after the men, and help to keep up their discipline and self-respect. We in our turn, gained immensely from contact with our fellows, and were heartened by their unfailing cheerfulness. We never heard of a successful escape from the island; it is reasonable to suppose that such a thing came as near to being a physical impossibility as anything ever can.

60,000 men lived peaceably and quietly on Singapore island; they could have made a certain amount of trouble and unrest by breaking out in parties all over the island, causing the enemy to increase his guards, to multiply his picquets to tie up a few more men in repression and supervision. But the Jap had control of our meagre food and medical supply, and had unlimited resources at his disposal. He could have crushed any rising small or large, with celerity and ease and at no cost to himself. Our relations during that three months, were of the variety 'live and let live,' without contumacy, while we concentrated on curing our sick and wounded, keeping our health. We watched and waited with assiduous care—this life was inevitable under the circumstances.

Working Parties

FROM our collective point of view, working parties were welcome, as affording opportunities for buying food, cigarettes and miscellaneous requirements. Other chances of buying were very precarious and, with the exceptions hereinafter mentioned, unproductive. From the individual point of view, these parties were a relief from the monotony of camp life, taking us abroad as they did and more often than not incorporating gifts from a frequently benevolent Jap.

It became customary for a large part of the mess to gather and welcome the return of the officer in charge of the party with innumerable questions, while eager eyes and hands pried into his usually well filled pack and kit bag, until that weary labourer came nigh to being overwhelmed with this boisterous attention. "Any luck?"—"Had a good day?"—"Where've you been?"—"Get any bread?"—"What did you pay for this milk?" These and a hundred other enquiries were flying at the head of the unhappy man, until in self-defence, he retired rapidly to fling off sodden clothes, and enjoy the soothing effect of cold water on sweat-caked body.

The men also carried their own purchases to their barrack rooms, but the main bulk was always with the officer, because, in addition to buying for our own mess, he purchased for the men's mess out of P.R.I's fund and not infrequently needed the services of two or three stout fellows to help to carry the stuff back to camp.

The permanent working parties were of course quite different from these daily trips. The former often entailed weeks at a time away from camp, under living conditions hastily improvised often with inadequate rations. The single day party on the other hand ensured nine hours or so of interest with a return in the evening to an adequate meal and the established facilities of a more or less permanent camp. Capt. Hilton describes one such working party:—

"On May 1st, I was detailed for my first party and in company with Dennys Scott and twenty men, joined the remainder of the party at No. 1 gate of our area. We were about sixty-five strong and marched off under the command of a Major, our immediate destination being the gaol, where we were due to meet our escort at half past nine.

In the side road facing the houses which lined the gaol road, a small party of Jap soldiers had fallen in and were numbering off in high staccato shouts, while four large open lorries were standing nearby—our escort and transport, we thought. The soldiers were dressed in the usual Jap tropical kit: collarless shirts varying from deep green to light khaki, shorts not so brief as ours, but hanging below the knee, sometimes loose, but more often tucked into the tops of puttees rolled knee high with crossing tapes wound diagonally round the calf, like the leg tapes of a Viking: rubber soled canvas topped boots, with their curious separate big toe space, like the thumb of a gauntlet; small tight fitting, slightly domed khaki cap with narrow peak and single yellow star badge (varied here and there by tropical helmet, pale grey in colour, circular in shape, and about four times lighter than our pattern, as I later discovered) completed the appearance. Each was armed with a bayonet, secured to the person by a wide leather belt and frog.—All Japanese are black haired and all soldiers keep their heads close cropped.

Our Major returned, accompanied by a senior Jap N.C.O., from whose hip the inevitable two-handed slightly curved sword swung drunkenly. The Japs regard their swords as sacred, are very proud of them and use them in battle. Those I have inspected have been untouched by the engraver's needle, unornamented on blade or handle, and as keen as a razor: very nasty little weapons in hand to hand fighting and a picturesque decoration worn by officers and all N.C.O.'s above the rank of L/Cpl. in the I.J.A.

This N.C.O. motioned us to move towards the lorries, where we were split into four parties by much excited pushing and shoving on his part assisted by the small group of soldiers, who had now broken up and divided themselves between the four parties now standing beside the lorries. We appeared to have one L/Cpl. and four soldiers. As a result of this wild division we had lost one of our own party and gained two strangers, but before we could do anything about it, the L/Cpl. motioned us to mount the lorry. By sheer force of habit, I walked round to the driving seat and was just preparing to mount, when I was tugged violently backwards—I turned to find a broad shouldered Jap soldier with a particularly ugly and truculent face cursing me in furious Jap. and pointing savagely towards the rear of the lorry, whither I retired looking extremely foolish. Off we set with a jerk and violent revving of engine and did not see the remainder of the group or their lorries for the rest of the day.

That drive after more than two months of Changi, despite the furious pace and unsteady behaviour of the lorry, was extremely pleasant. We took the South road to Singapore—a new road to me—and I enjoyed the constantly changing scenery revealed by its continual twists and turns. Avenues of rubber, groves of lofty palms, open spaces with vignettes of distant green hills, the occasional village heralded by its unlovely smell, wayside temples with glittering golds and blues and reds, flashed past in a kinetic panorama dominated by the glorious greens of the woods. On now we sped, the truck lurching drunkenly on the sharp bends, until just as we were beginning to think we were bound for Singapore, we pulled up by the side of a shady patch of rubber about 400 yards short of a large village on the outskirts and only a mile or two from the city.

Our escort alighted, waving us to follow suit and the lorry drove off. I was about to form our party up in threes when the N.C.O. prodded me and indicated by alternately pointing to the ground, and making puffing signs at an imaginary cigarette, that we were to sit down and smoke. The first part was easily complied with, not so the second: however, the Japs handed cigarettes round, and we lit up, looking interestedly at each other. A pleasant looking youth, wearing the three stars of the first class soldier on his left breast, patted the ground at his side, in invitation to me and I settled down beside him, while Dennys started conversation with the soldier who had hauled me from the lorry. "Me," said my Jap, tapping his nose, the comical equivalent of our tap on the chest, "Me, Tokio," and beamed at me through his horn-rimmed glasses.

Not to be out done, I beamed back, tapped my chest and replied: "Me, Blackpool !"—This sounded so inadequate that I started to laugh, and he joined in, as though it were a colossal joke. Suddenly, his face became solemn again and he said: "Me University," with a dignified air.

In answer to his enquiring glance, and on the strength of a few compulsory law lectures at Manchester University, which I thought might for this occasion raise me to that status, I complied: "Me University too."

He fairly beamed again and patted my arm approvingly. We continued in this strain for about ten minutes, exchanging ages by writing figures in the dry dust, names and exact spots of our homes, through the medium of cartography on this natural blackboard. The dry dusty ground of the country served us well, as an ever present aid to conversation: a good deal can be said by a look, a gesture and a diagram on the ground. Our conversation was helped by the Jap's knowledge of the odd English word. Most of them know a few words of English and can usually count in English ; we soon learnt to count in Japanese.

Hearing an excited gobbling sound behind me, I turned, to find Scott's opposite number sitting in the dust, making a few diagrams with his fingers, and interrupting his drawings by furious and most realistic imitation by sound and action of bombing, machine gun, rifle and mortar fire. It seemed that he was describing the battle of Gurun in which he took part. We also were at Gurun and listened with interest ; he was most graphic. It is extraordinary how much the Jap can portray by dumb show and design ; since we are not too bad at that sort of thing—the average gunner is extremely quick in grasping these rapidly gestured meanings,—exchanging information becomes interesting and comparatively easy.

Peter Fleming has said that the Japs though lacking in a sense of humour, are people very easily amused. I can fully corroborate that description. They take themselves very seriously, are solemn and gay by turns ; normally they are grinning, laughing and chattering away like a parcel of monkeys. Their moods are mercurial and change in the twinkling of an eye from gaiety to quick violent rages, which are forgotten and return again as quickly as the sun alternately shines and hides behind fleeting clouds in an April sky. It occurred to me as I sat listening to their chatter among themselves and saw their quick revealing actions in talking to our lads, how highly volatile and easily explosive are these argus-eyed little men, with their lightning actions, uncouth tongue, and grinning savage good will and gaiety. They seem to pack into their small but broad shouldered sturdy frames—we rarely saw a Jap who did not possess a muscular, symmetrical and well proportioned body—an unlimited amount of dynamic energy which is almost frightening in its intensity. Their natural manner aided and abetted by an explosive tongue, is highly aggressive and relieved only by frequent grins, and gales of gay laughter. After about half an hour of this 'convivial' the L/Cpl., who had been a silent but interested spectator, addressed me: "Oh ! Captain soldier ! " (all British officers are captains to the Japs, not infrequently called, " Master ") " Starto !"

We scrambled to our feet and after a few briefly waved instructions, commenced to dismantle a double apron barbed wire fence, which was separating the roadway from the rubber. After I had supervised this for about half an hour, I remembered our instructions to buy what we could, for which purpose, Dennys and I were carrying about $30, being partly P.R.I.'s and partly Mess funds. Thinking a direct attack would be more productive than more subtle methods, I approached the L/Cpl., and by showing him our money, and pointing towards the village, indicated that we wanted permission to buy. He looked at me steadily for about 10 seconds and just as I was expecting a flat refusal, he turned on his jack booted heel, and started to walk towards the village. Dennys and I followed hopefully and took our places on either side of our escort. He shuffled slowly down that hot, dusty road, dragging his boots at every step and we, armed with packs and a kitbag, accompanied him, looking about us with interest.

How badly these Japs walk ! Every single one of them shuffles with dragging, slithering feet in a most ungainly fashion all the more slovenly looking because of their small stature. And yet they can move incredibly fast when circumstances call for speed.

We reached the village, distinctly of better class than the poor affairs passed earlier on ; this contained several brick built plaster faced shops, interlaced with houses, the outriders of the city's suburbs. We were allowed to stop where we pleased to buy what we liked and the goodwill of our escort seemed unending. He looked on with interest while we wrangled with the robbers who call themselves shopkeepers, sometimes protesting with us, when a ridiculously high price was asked, and occasionally intervening on our behalf to compel a sly Tamil to part with an article at not more than four times its normal value. We had no compunction in accepting his help, as the native vendors were asking fantastic prices for their food stuffs, most of which were British and Australian tinned goods, looted from houses, hotel, godown and warehouse, ration dump and barracks, after the capitulation. Singapore had contained colossal stocks of these tins and the natives had a field day before the Jap authorities seized and impounded what was left.

Buying food from a native stall or shopkeeper under these conditions was as lengthy and exhausting a business as buying a house at home. One did not buy, one negotiated for the sale. Fantastic prices were asked, and no one in his right mind ever thought of paying more than half the initial price.

" Got any cheese Joe ?" the negotiations would open—the grinning native would produce, as if by magic, a tin of British ration cheese and croak : " Two dollar fiftee."

" Not Pygmalion likely," came the answer, and sweeping the cheese into a pile, with a tin of butter, two tins of jam, and a pot of marmalade, the optimistic customer would start again with : " Four dollar, fifty, the lot, Joe."

" Na ! Na !" from the outraged shopkeeper as he folded his arms round the precious tins in protection. Fresh combinations of tins would then be tried, until the cheese was obtained at $1 or $1.25, together with other required stuff at more reasonable but still exorbitant prices. Shopping was difficult in company with an impatient Jap, who would not leave the customer alone, but rushed him from shop to shop, leaving no time to argue and bargain. Yet, the escort could be very helpful on occasions by frightening the natives, sometimes with drawn bayonet, into selling at reasonable prices. Curiously enough, cigarettes and cheroots were standard in price and seldom varied.

Our receptacles steadily increased in weight, as our modest collection of tins of butter, fish, bully beef, milk, cheese, soup, camp pie and jam was amassed : cheap Chinese cigarettes were added to the stock, and at one small shop Dennys bought a dollar's worth of Gula Malacca, a delicious sweetmeat, obtained by tapping coconut palms and distilling the juice. I was anxious to buy some bread and hearing that there was a bakery further up the road, persuaded our L/Cpl. to accompany me, leaving Dennys busily and happily engaged in another fierce wrangle. We found the bakery a few yards further on and I bought thirty cigar-shaped loaves of delicious warm white bread at 7 cents each.

I had now, with the bulk of the bread and the solid weight of the fewer tins, just about as much as I could carry, so looked round for my escort to suggest collecting Scott and returning to the working party, but Johnny Jap had disappeared. I found him almost immediately in another part of the bakery idly watching a Chinese man and woman spreading thick luscious looking yellow cream on biscuits from a large pile fresh from the oven. The Jap helped himself to a handful and presented some to me. They were absolutely delicious. The Chinese, working with nimble fingers were smiling on us, so I set to in the glow of their goodwill and consumed about one and a half pounds of these delectable morsels. Here Scott presently found us, tried the biscuits himself, and promptly bought a hundred for $2 for the benefit of the Mess. Satisfied with our shopping and creaking under our heavy burdens, we returned to the woods.

Now that we had bought what we could for the men's mess, and our own, I felt free to supply individual requirements. Most of our party produced a few cents for bread and cigarettes, I approached the N.C.O. armed with this money and indicated to him that I wanted bread for the men, whereupon he took the collection of coins and dirty bills, and walking into the road, commandeered the bicycle of a Malay child who happened to be passing: on this he set off towards the village. Ten minutes later, he returned to the unconcealed delight of the infant, who, despite our assurances, thought he had seen the last of his machine, bearing on his shoulder a sack full of piping hot bread. All through the morning, work progressed slowly, interrupted every half hour or so by a generous unnecessary rest, when cigarettes were distributed by the guards and more inarticulate conversation ensued.

At half past one we knocked off for lunch, which consisted of three chaupatties brought from our own cookhouse and the new bread. One of the Jap soldiers stopped a couple of passing natives and sent them shinning up palms growing on the other side of the road to collect coconuts for us. When the natives asked for payment for their climbing activities the Japs drove them away with wild grunts and cries. The milk from these nuts was most refreshing and the nuts found their way into our ever ready bellies.

At three o'clock, the Japs' lunch arrived by truck ; about half of this was given to our men, it consisted of snow white flaky rice, so different from the sulphur rice (yellow and stinking) supplied to us, and so differently cooked ; also cooked vegetables ; a bucket of thin Japanese made tea, the nearest approach to water I have ever drunk as tea, was placed at our disposal and at half past three we started to work again.

At four o'clock the voice of our N.C.O. interrupted me as I was talking to Dennys: " Oh Captain !"—pointing to the village—" We go buy cigarettos."

" Splendid," I thought and off we tramped again for cigarettes for the men. We soon returned and after another hour's work interrupted by the customary break, the lorry arrived and we packed up for the day.

I had been wondering how the devil I was to get my party back to camp from the gaol without the flag, retained by the Major who was heaven knows where on the island, but this problem was solved for me as our lorry sped swiftly past the Jap H.Q. and sweeping disdainfully by the Sikh gate, dropped us outside our own wire. With a saluted: " Sank you," the N.C.O. took his leave, and turned the lorry about. " Thank you," I replied, and meant it, as he had been very decent. We tramped cheerfully into our own lines, to be met by the usual barrage of enquiry. That evening two cream biscuits appeared on the side plate of every officer at supper and in our mess food store lay various tins of food, which would further supplement our local rations.

The next day I was again detailed for a working party and half past nine found my twenty men and myself tramping towards the gaol in a party a hundred strong commanded by a Major. We were met by a different set of guards, loaded into trucks as before, but this time moved off together, taking the Sompah road towards Singapore. Our driver was shocking, all but turning the truck over twice and we were glad when, having passed through Sompah village—its streets teeming with natives making a kaleidescope of brilliant colour, we pulled up a few hundred yards beyond, outside a large unoccupied Chinese house standing in its own grounds. Here the main road is wider, lined with the private residences of the richer Chinese and Malays. This road continues straight as a series of slightly displaced rulers to the city about four miles away.

We dismounted and were marshalled on the lawn by a Jap, who, even for one of his race was small of stature and bore all the characteristics of the proverbial ' little fat man,' including the merry eyes and ugly pug-like face so often found in his type. He wore no badge of rank, and appeared to be some sort of interpreter, since he spoke to us in a comical broken English, which was just understandable. He divided our men into several groups varying from five to twenty, and set them about their various tasks in charge of the dozen N.C.O.'s and soldiers who had accompanied us. One party was

engaged in levelling a thick bamboo hedge dividing one property from the next house, a task made difficult by the attention of swarms of large red ants which very often infest bamboo: another, on erecting a sort of gateway and sentry box at the entrance to the road, from timber carted thither from a nearby saw mill in lorries by a third party. Five of my own men were engaged all day in repairing the tiled roof of the house, which appeared to have been damaged by shell fire, while the remainder were occupied in clearing up the interior of the house and garden. It looked as if some form of H.Q. was being prepared.

Three officers had been detailed to supervise these various parties, leaving the Major and myself alone on the lawn with the interpreter; he turned to us and said: "You are not smoking." This rhetorical question was accompanied by the flash of his cigarette case, and we lit up with enjoyment, fat Virginia cigarettes, an unaccustomed luxury.

"You are English?" he asked.

As a matter of fact, the Major was a Scotsman and we spent an amusing five minutes explaining the difference. The Major, like myself was armed with money and had received commissions for the purchase of food; this was too good an opportunity to miss so we asked the Jap if he would take us into the village.

"You wish to go now?"

We nodded: "Yes—if convenient to you," we said. He grinned broadly. "You wish to buy bullee for your soldier," and pleased with this colloquialism, he fairly slapped himself with glee.

Off we set, the Major with his enormous leather grip, and myself with the trusty pack and kitbag. All the way to the village, the Jap chattered away.

To us everything about Sompah except the smell, was refreshing. The latter, as always, lay everywhere in its pungent persistency, but the gay colourful bustle and shrill chatter was a tonic. The two main streets formed by the road fork were packed with Chinese, Tamils, Malays, Indians, old and young, large and small, rich and poor, vendors and purchasers clad (except for many of the countless children, who ran about naked, screaming) in whites, reds, blues, yellows and greens, a brave flashing picture after so much drab khaki. The shops both large and small were packed with all kinds of merchandise and these together with the poorer stall on pavement and roadway, were besieged by crowds of shoppers. Each street vendor (whose wares, mostly food, are carried in twin baskets attached to a pole slung horizontally across the shoulder) was surrounded by a clamouring circle of natives, arguing and shouting in the process of buying dried fish, fruit, sweet rice, cakes, bananas fried in coconut oil and other similar morsels there displayed.

We were eyed curiously by the seething mob as we shouldered our way down the crowded roadway followed by our panting protector for whom we were making a clear channel in our wake. First, we bought up the entire stock of crisp loaves carried by a grinning, toothless Malay and these safely tucked away, moved from shop to shop on the side-walk buying rapidly, because our guide would not linger; marmalade, sardines, tinned sausages, cocoa, cheese, tinned beans, butter and milk in ones and twos found their way into our gaping carriers. We worked our way along until we reached the edge of the village and then exhausted, but triumphant, fastened up our bulging bags for the last time and followed our interpreter back to the working party.

Here we made arrangements with him to take the other officers on a similar expedition later in the morning and asked him if he would permit a representative from the men of each of the parties to visit the village at the lunch break. Not only did he grant this request, but half an hour before we knocked off for tiffin, he collected two men from each party sent them off under escort in one of the lorries and as if the village were not large enough for their needs, actually sent them into Singapore.

For the remainder of the morning we wandered about the house and grounds, watching the various parties. I noticed for the first time the extraordinary mixture of drive and inefficiency displayed by the Nip, when working with our fellows on any job, since confirmed by innumerable hours of work under their erratic supervision. They waste an enormous amount of time in trying to organize the party at their disposal, and usually succeed only in getting too many men on one part of the job and too few on another. This was not a result of the language difficulty because our men were very quick in picking up instructions from the rapid, lucid signs of their Jap guardians, but once the job was started, no matter how unwieldy the party, the work was carried out at furious pace and the push and drive was undoubted. Moreover, the Jap himself, is extremely industrious at his work and worked as hard as the best gunner. I have smiled more than once at the spectacle of a Jap sergeant, a very superior and important person in the I.J.A., slaving away at some menial task, surrounded by a group of grinning gunners who should have been working themselves, but who, with his tacit consent, were merely handing him tools, and offering futile advice in the accents of Whitechapel, Wigan or Wrexham.

The men usually got on particularly well with their ' gaffers ' who nearly always gave them cigarettes, fruit and good rest periods and it was only occasionally that we met an awkward or truculent soldier or N.C.O., who, very naturally received a minimum amount of co-operation, and a maximum of feigned stupidity—we became experts in Fabian tactics, when necessary.

It is here convenient to note our attitude towards working for the enemy. We encouraged reasonably hard work on the part of the men on simple jobs of a non-military nature, in order to pass the time more quickly, and to keep bodies fit and healthy. We also accomplished a certain amount of quiet sabotage by otiose tacties and mishandling of machinery and other vulnerable equipment. Most of this came later, as sabotage, except on vehicles, was not possible on the island to any great extent. Officers were not allowed to work, but were present only to take charge of the men and to supervise generally. This resulted in many hours of complete boredom on jobs that only required a superficial supervision.

As I strolled round that morning, many remarks and snatches of conversation from the busy groups fell on my half attentive ears: " Eh ! ye daft sod ! You'll noan do it that road,"—this without heat to a grinning Nip, who fortunately did not understand the implication of the critical north countryman: and,

" Now then Johnny," (Johnnie was a sobriquet affixed by our lads to all Japs) " Give us that bloody 'ammer, and I'll show thee a bit of British workmanship," or:

" O.K., O.K. ! Resto ! " from a perspiring Jap, followed by the production of a packet of cigarettes passed round the squatting group, accompanied by much solemn leg pulling and bawdy suggestion concerning the Japs recreation in his spare time in Singapore, which always seemed to be understood by him, and greeted with gales of laughter.

These little soldiers had an insatiate curiosity for a married man, and the number, sex and age of his family. Our recognised and fashionable gambit, always a great success with the questioner, was, in answer to his enquiries:—

" Him," pointing to the largest and most sheepish man in the group, probably of unimpeachable moral character, " Him—no wife—eight babee !"

We ate our lunch at half past one, the usual chaupatties, supplemented by a bunch of bananas, presented to us by the interpreter, and work proceeded throughout the afternoon. I managed another trip to the village, this time, unescorted but accompanied by one of our soldiers, in search of a slate-cutting tool for our roof party; we returned minus the required tool, but with our shirt fronts and trouser pockets stuffed with tins of bully beef. At half past five, we knocked off work for the day and piled into the lorries, again to be deposited at the camp entrance and left there; it had been a good day for everyone.

A few days later, rather to my surprise for I had enjoyed my fair share, I was again detailed for working party duty, with the usual twenty men, part of a body eighty strong, including four officers. The lorries, as on the first occasion, took the Southern road from the gaol, and excitement mounted as we drew nearer and nearer to Singapore. I smiled with pleasant recollection as we passed the bakery where I had eaten sweet biscuits not many days before, and a few minutes later, we were entering into the city. Evidence of damage was surprisingly slight in this quarter, and except for the occasional skeleton of a gutted block of buildings and the damaged civil airport, the streets looked quite normal with thousands of pedestrians, crowded tram cars, and shops which appeared to be well stocked and functioning busily. There were very few Jap soldiers about.

We joined the Serangoon Road, sped dangerously down this traffic crowded artery, and turning left and then right handed, caught a glimpse of Raffles Hotel opposite S.S.V.F. depot, where all our heavy baggage had been stored during the war, and was now, we feared lost to us. We passed the cricket ground on our right, with the stately law courts as background, facing the sea, busy with native craft, and a couple of Japanese freighters lying lazily at anchor in the still water. Our convoy nosed its way over the canal bridge, past the P.O. and finally drew up outside the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank on the front. Here we dismounted forming up on the pavement under the colonnades of the Union Buildings.

We had two Jap officers, an interpreter and several N.C.O.'s and soldiers in charge of us and, at their direction, divided our men into two parties, the smaller of which under one British officer set off by lorry for the docks, the remainder of us were then instructed in our task for the day. This consisted in handling hundreds of boxes of bullion from the vaults of the bank, access to which was obtained via a narrow alley, which adjoined the side of the huge building, and loading these on to relays of lorries which transported them to the docks, where our smaller party stacked them in readiness for shipment presumably to Japan. It was heavy work, and particularly hot in the musty vaults so that the men well earned their fairly generous rest periods.

Our particular officer seemed a reasonable kind of fellow, producing many packets of cigarettes for the men. It was amusing to see the deep reverence in which he was held by his soldiers, (this is general throughout the I.J.A.) and it is easy to see that the average Jap is far more afraid of his own officer than of any enemy—a great asset in battle; the fact that he spent a lot of time in trying his few words of Englieh on us, and continually handed us cigarettes, gave us a more elevated standing in the eyes of his men, who actually saluted us when we spoke to them; at other times, British officers were very rarely saluted by Jap soldiers. The cigarettes produced were King's Head Teofani, from flat fifty tins, looted—I suspect, from the godowns on the docks, where there were large stocks. I tried to sound the officer on news, but though pleasantly affable, he was not inclined to produce any information beyond the suggestion that the Japs were winning the war.

The officer stated that we should be allowed to buy what we wanted at the lunch break, and for the duration of the morning, I made the best of the boring job of standing about while the men worked, spending a long time watching the constant flow of foot and wheeled traffic. The men sweated and toiled with the heavy bullion and down in the bank vaults, I had a quick word with one of the English bank officials, who was still working, but at a greatly reduced salary. This man told me that these boxes contained small denomination coin, the gold having been shipped to Australia before the Nip arrived. One pile of boxes bore a rusty and corroded appearance, due, he told me ruefully, to a long immersion in the waters of the harbour. The Japs had eventually found the hiding place and salvaged the lot.

Tiffin time arrived, and to our surprise we were all (officers and men) allowed to wander off into the city for an hour unescorted. I seized my sacks and departed hot foot for the shops: having traversed Battery Road, Raffles Square, with a quick look at Changi Alley, and the shops immediately to the westward, I quickly discovered that they were not so well stocked as those I had already seen further out in the city. I wandered further westward among the Chinese shops near the market, which itself was an almost empty shell, and at last found a corner shop on the market square which could supply part of my needs. Tomato sauce (for flavouring rice) was the star item on my list, and here, I bought thirty bottles at 55 cents each, a dozen tins of fish, and some tinned cream. If anyone doubts the weight of thirty bottles of sauce with a ballast of a score of 1-lb. tins, let him carry this load on his back for a few hundred yards. Groaning, with bent back, I staggered towards the bank alley. On my way back along the front, I noticed a tobacconist's shop seemingly better stocked than most, so when I had, with a sigh of relief, deposited my burden in the alley and left a gunner sitting guard there. I returned to this shop, and picked up 1,200 Chinese cigarettes and four 4-oz. tins of English tobacco (a private purchase for one of our officers, this) at $4.50 per tin. As good tobacco was selling in the camp for as much as $3 per oz., this price, although ridiculous by normal standards, was surprisingly cheap. Here I was joined by the interpreter who took me into a café next door and there stood me a pint of iced beer. How good it tasted ! From a dirty old native who sat in the gutter, I bought for one dollar, a sort of sponge cake, later consumed in camp by Geoffrey, Alan, Tommy and myself and it was delicious. Wearying of shopping by this time, I was glad to park myself on a crate in the alley and eat my frugal camp prepared lunch.

We slaved away at the bullion in the afternoon and about half past four, our Japs produced two large tins of ration biscuits and four tins of butter, telling us to line up the men there and then and dish this stuff out. This surprise meal ran to a packet of biscuits and a teaspoonful of butter each. After this was digested, we fell with renewed vigour on the remaining boxes and by six o'clock we had shifted over 700 boxes to the docks ; we knocked off then, and sat down to await our vehicle home. We watched the city's workers, (mostly well dressed Malay youths) walking along the pavement or waiting for tram car, a scene made more reminiscent of similar scenes going on in many a town or city in England, by the evening paper which most of them carried tucked nonchalantly under one arm. This paper was the Jap controlled Syonan (Singapore) Times, published in English. I bought a copy and scanned its four sheets. Except for the stack of notices published by the Jap authorities ordering the citizens of Singapore to do this and refrain from doing that, the contents were pages of obvious propaganda, almost amusing in their puerility.

While we waited, a large party of Jap sailors ambled past looking very comical and strangely unreal in their uniform, so obviously a copy of ours. One or two of these men were quite drunk, and there was the usual good natured badinage between our men and the reeling seamen.

Our dock party eventually arrived, and we were dropped at our area gate at eight o'clock ; a long, but interesting day.

Most officers and men in our area went on at least one working party and the majority of them had the luck to bring back into camp purchases made during the day. The extraordinary thing about these parties was their apparent lack of cohesion, for seldom did one job seem ever to be completed ; seldom did a party go to the same place or do the same work two days running and a good deal of the work performed was either futile or unnecessary. But they were very popular with us for obvious reasons."

Rice

There's an article of diet
That's enough to cause a riot
You'd agree if you'd just try it,
It is rice.

* * *

It's a culinary winner,
Breakfast, Lunch and Tea and Dinner !
—And your tummy won't get thinner !
On this rice.

* * *

You can boil it, you can bake it,
You can grind it, mould it, cake it,
But no matter how you fake it,
Still it's rice.

* * *

You can fry it up with a gammon,
You can mix it with tinned salmon,
Even lots of strawberry jam on
Won't change rice.

* * *

When you wake up in the morning
You won't do the usual yawning,
As another day is dawning
On this rice.

* * *

Even if you're diabetic
It will make you quite athletic.
It's a perfect diuretic,
Is this rice.

* * *

Ladies, when this war is over,
Bells will ring from York to Dover:
If you want to be in clover,
Don't serve rice.

* * *

All your days can be quite palmy,
When your man comes from the army,
But three words will send him balmy
" Have some rice !"

* * *

(A doggerel musing by an anonymous O.R.)

THIS chapter is correctly titled, notwithstanding its purport, namely, food. The heart of every man of that vast throng taken in captivity in Malaya should be forever inscribed with the word ' rice,' since that mainspring of the existence of all the peoples of the Orient became immediately our ' daily bread.' Boiled rice was served up to us at every single meal of the day during our captivity and at least 80% of the remainder of our food consisted of rice in one form or another:—rice ' pudding,' rice ' pastry ' and doughs made from rice flour, rice porridge, rice rissoles, rice this, rice that and rice the other. In the Orient, rice takes the place of our bread and potatoes, but is to the East, a far more important basic food than anything of ours. It is therefore with little or no surprise that the Westerner eventually learns that to the Oriental, rice means food. This explains an odd but true conversation which took place sometime, while we were at Changi—a Jap N.C.O. was talking to a British officer and giving him the latest (Jap) news:—

" You would like to hear the news ?"

" Yes."

" The British Fleet is all sunk."
" Really ?"
" The Americans have been cleared out of the Pacific,"
" Go on."
" The Germans have captured Moscow."
" You don't say."
" Yes—and this is very serious—there is no rice in London."

Shaken to the core by this alarming news, the recipient of these tidings was quite incapable of reply.

And so if this chapter were to bear towards this book the same proportion that food bore towards our lives at Changi, it would of necessity be written in block capitals two feet high, printed on paper the size of the Times and be as full of pictures and photographs as a Fortnum and Mason's catalogue. These things being impracticable, this bare reference to them must suffice, by way of introduction, in the hope that the true atmosphere has been created—and so to the saga of our sobriquet—rice.

In February, 1942, Singapore was splendidly stocked with food, both native and tinned European. There was, it was said, enough food to last the population of the Island, swollen as it was by army and refugees, for at least twelve months. In addition to the large stocks of tinned stuff lying in godown and warehouse, shop and hotel, barracks and ration dump, each unit large or small, indeed each individual soldier was carrying as much as could be carried without embarrassing fighting capacity.

When the large army moved to Changi, it took with it all the food it possessed, but this, although enough in most cases to supply normal meals for a week or two, was only an infinitesimal part of the whole. After the army had been lodged at Changi, the natives on the island got busy, and looted large stocks of tins until the Jap authorities became organised and impounded the remainder. Most of the liquor on the island had been destroyed by order.

The food which we had with us was checked as soon as possible and it was decided that, used extremely sparingly to supplement the rations supplied by the Japanese, it would last a period of eighty days, so we commenced to work on this basis.

The Jap issued us every fifteen days: rice, flour, tea, sugar, and milk, meat, salt, fat, and occasionally, wheat, but the actual amount issued per head was little enough, the meat and salt being sufficient only for one meal. There was an occasional allowance of tinned food, which we added to our reserve, thus extending our eighty days period. Sometimes a few fresh vegetables were included, but unfortunately were more conspicious by their absence and twice, we received a small consignment of fresh fish.

In the opening weeks, judged by later standards, we lived very badly, due chiefly to the inexperience of our cooks as to how to prepare boiled rice, and to lack of facilities. As our cook's ingenuity, skill and experience increased, our diet improved out of all knowledge, and rice was served up in a variety of wonderful ways, but during those early days, more tins of bacon, bully, and ration biscuits were used than we could properly afford. Very soon our constant cry was for something to chew, something to get our teeth into, amid this sea of sloppy food occasioned by the eternal meal of rice and thin stew. This cry was eventually answered by chauppatis, biscuits, cakes, pastry and doughs, scones, meat rolls, and we got our first rice biscuits at the gaol, and there realized for the first time, that ration biscuits are not the hardest tack under the sun—not by a long way.

Fortune provided more than one source from which we could supplement our meagre stocks of tinned food. When working parties started they afforded an excellent means of increasing the contents of our frugal larder and it was rarely that a party returned to camp, without bringing back a mixed collection of odds and ends. Again, purchase from the native kampongs in the Changi woods was always possible for the adventurous and resourceful soul who had his bolt hole through the wire, and sufficient skill to play a successful game of hide and " Sikh " with the Indian patrols, as witness the

efforts of Capt. Coombes earlier related. By this means, Gerry obtained a constant supply of coconut oil, (invaluable for making one tin of fish or bully do the work of thirty, by frying) having some extremely close shaves ; and on one occasion being caught by the Jap gestapo, he only argued himself out of the fix by a natural ability to tell the tale. He actually brought in through the wire during the months of April and May, 300 tins of sardines, 200 tins of bully, 200 tins of jam, some curry powder, about half a ton of fresh vegetables or green pawpaw, and some 400 coconuts. Later, when the camp canteen, opened it became possible to lay orders for a case of tinned meat, fish or milk, but this source was most unreliable. All this time there was the ' black market ' source of supply available in the camp at fantastic prices, and this we never used. The fruit and vegetables gathered before the wire enclosed us, was a mere drop in our modest ocean.

Food bought from these sources had to be paid for, and money was raised in the main, by means of a unit loan carrying the generous repayment bonus of 25%, to be made at the end of captivity. This fund raised from officers and men about $1,000, and gave us a working capital.

The Jap ration and our own reserves would have been totally inadequate to keep us even partially satisfied, had it not been that our cooks had many ingenious ways of dealing with the rations to make the utmost of them. When we settled in, the fitters built several rice and water boilers, two hot plates and three ovens. These were manufactured out of bits and pieces of iron of all sorts gathered in our travels. The fitters did a good job of work in converting diesel oil drums into ovens, which they roofed over and chimneyed with assorted strips of ancient corrugated iron, while the hot plate was taken from some part of the heavy gun in our back garden.

There we were able to boil, stew, bake, fry and cook generally in a variety of ways. Japanese rations were dealt with and served up to the troops in this manner ; rice was boiled three times a day, and served up to everyone, forming the basis of each meal. This ration rice was in most cases, limed or parboiled or even cargo rice, of a very inferior quality and often of a bilious yellow colour ; the finished article was consequently very far removed from the snow white flaky rice eaten by the Jap. Meat was of a poor quality, usually containing an over generous proportion of fat and gristle, this was often treated by a mincing process which had the twin advantages of making it all edible and easier to divide out fairly. If not minced, meat was served up in stews. Part of each day's issue of rice was ground into rice flour, by a special rice grinding squad of men who did nothing else. To this was added our very inadequate ration of flour in proportions varying from 50% of each, to 90% rice flour with 10% wheat flour, and pastry was made from the mixture, extra fat being obtained from the meat. This pastry varied according to the proportion of ingredients, being at its best a fair imitation and at its worst extremely hard and a trial to the dentured and toothless. Rice flour mixed with boiled rice, without resource to flour or fat, made adequate slabs of rice cake, or, with the addition of coconut gratings and sugar, (if possible) excellent coconut cakes. All these sideplate delicacies answered our call for something to chew, and were very popular. A pancake-like affair inspired by the Indian chaupatti became a regular daily issue ; it was made from a batter of rice flour, boiled rice and water fried on the hot plate, and went down well especially with a touch of butter or jam. This frying on the hot plate was done with a smear of grease (ghee was the name of the Indian product with which we were issued) but it was possible by keeping the plate scrupulously clean, to produce a good chauppatti without the use of grease at all. We never attempted to bake bread, although many other units tried it, as it was much too heavy on our flour ration and would have cut out the making of pastry. Sweet rice pudding, made with sugar, tinned milk and sometimes raisins, was always a great favourite with the men, and doughs were very popular. Tea varied—it contained milk about once a day, and sugar hardly ever. So much for the basic rations.

This food was supplemented from our reserve stocks in various ways ; bully, m. and v., beans and tinned veg., went to thicken stews, which were sometimes curried: tinned fish mixed with boiled rice, made palatable fish cake when baked, and fish in between two layers of chauppatti also formed a very savoury dish. Tinned soup and beans were utilized for pouring over boiled rice in the form of a sauce, and tinned fruit constituted the fillings for sweet pastries and turnovers, as did jam.

This was manufactured from pumpkins, pineapples and tamarind, a date like substance obtained locally, revolting in appearance, but surprisingly tasty.

Lest it be thought that we fared not too badly, let it be said that one small tin of bully had to serve, when available, to put in a stew for forty odd men, or one tin of sardines flavoured ' fish-cakes ' in like proportion.

As a result of these ramifications, the men's menu read something like this :—

BREAKFAST:	Boiled rice, fish cake, chauppatti ; tea with milk.
TIFFIN:	Boiled rice, soup or sauce (or rissole made from beans or fish) sweet rice pudding, chauppatti, tea.
SUPPER:	Boiled rice, stew, or meat roll in pastry, or meat ball, sweet pastry (biscuit, or turnover, or boiled dough with sauce) tea, with or without milk.

We had a messing officer, a veritable high priest of sitology, in charge of the cookhouse, whose job was a full time matter, a cookhouse staff of forty, who worked in shifts, and each troop had a representative on a messing committee which was empowered to make suggestions. We had the inevitable grumbles, but then, we had them in England.

The Sergeants had their own cookhouse staff, and appeared to live and feed quite happily. They boasted their chief cook's prowess in two directions: coconut ' towers ' and pastry which they claimed were the best in the camp. The coconut buns certainly were very good indeed, and it became customary for the camp Field officer to call at this cookhouse, about one o'clock during his rounds, just as these delicacies were coming out of the oven.

Our mess, with its separate cookhouse being considerably smaller than the men's mess, was able to provide a large variety of dishes and to deal rather more elaborately with its food. For breakfast, we had porridge made from wheat when issued, and from burnt rice otherwise: this was followed invariably by boiled rice, and a fish cake, which was satisfying, but extremely economical, since enough cakes for forty-two officers (and mess staff) were produced out of one 12-oz. tin mixed with boiled rice, and fried in coconut oil. A chauppatti (comparatively speaking) concluded a very satisfactory meal. Eggs on the rota, governed by the whim of our small collection of hens, came to the individual about once every month. Lunch consisted of soup, on which our cook was an expert ; it is no mean feat to supply a very satisfactory soup for forty-two plus, out of one small tin of Heinz tomato soup, one tin of M. and V., one tin of milk, and plenty of resource. Soup was followed by a coconut cake or a biscuit, with a chauppatti thrown in to fill up the corners. Supper consisted of curried stew, or meat rissole produced on the same principle as the fish cake, with the inevitable rice, followed by a pastry or dough with tamarind or pumpkin filling, and a cup of ' citronella ' tea, this latter being tea flavoured with citronella grass, which gave it a lemonish taste. Every Saturday, we held a guest night and at the expense of our stomachs on the preceding and subsequent days, prefaced our usual meal with soup and closed it with a savoury. Two of these meals have lived on record by reason of typewritten menus used thereat. The first was given for General Key, the Divisional Commander and reads :—

OFFICER'S MESS. LE 21 MARS 1942.
Dîner Général de Changi.
Apéritif: " Bon Mot "—On dit " Qui Vive "
—Nous disons " Vive Key."

MENU.
Crême de noix de coco au naturel.
Riz Bif a la Maconique.
Tarte de chef de Mosère.
" Rarebit " popotier de Coomb.

And the second was the event of our farewell dinner at Changi, attended by our C.R.A. who sat down to this menu:—

137 (A) FD. REGT. R.A. — OFFICER'S MESS —
SATURDAY, 13TH JUNE, 1942.

MENU.
Soup crême de tomate à la bullie.
Curry Coq d'or: Boiled sweet potatoes.
Changi rissotto.
Tourte Rusher.
Savorie à la Birdwood.
Café Triste.

The ' savories ' were a mixture of cheese and tapioca-root with boiled rice, fried in coconut oil and were certainly the most tasty ever placed before us.

Occasionally, we detected a faint onion flavour in our rissoles ; this was due to the addition of garlic, which was gathered from the shore, washed up there by some unknown shipwreck. Condiments were in evidence at most meals: issue salt, pepper, bought outside, and vinegar made ingeniously from tamarind. Tea was served with most meals, varied on Saturday by coffee and occasionally on other nights by cocoa.

Archie, a skilled brewer by trade, produced weekly a weird and wonderful brew of fermented rice beer, which was served as a compulsory drink to the whole Regiment, to counteract, if only in a small degree, our great lack of vitamin B. This brew was tart, but quite palatable. Gerry's fertile imagination produced what was called a ' pub ' lunch as a surprise one day ; the idea was to have bread, cheese and beer. This we had in the form of Archie's brew, cream crackers (substituted at the last minute for bread, which was unobtainable), with butter and fresh cheese bought in Singapore at $8 the 7-lb. cheese. A fine lunch, enjoyed by a mess which afterward retired to sleep practically to a man, in the correct state of flatulence.

Afternoon tea was provided at half past four—a farce of tasteless tea, with neither sugar nor milk, but which helped to bridge the hiatus between tiffin and supper—and towards the end of our stay at Changi, two or three of us determined to make this normally happy and typical English custom a success. Every afternoon, we collected the boiled rice left over from lunch, added rice grindings (partly ground rice flour) in the proportion of one part to two parts of boiled rice, mixed this with a grated coconut, a tin of pineapple, and with water, made a nice sticky sort of thick batter. When this was of the correct density, we made enough cakes, varying in the shape according to the whim of the mixer on duty, to provide everyone with two cakes apiece, to accompany the unexciting tea. The cakes we baked in the ovens of the men's cookhouse, which were always going. At first our cakes bore the consistency of paving stones, but gradually, we became more skilled and eventually produced a fairly reasonable offering, piping hot at tea time ; thus without using any of our precious flour, at once we ensured our cooks a free afternoon, ourselves a welcome occupation, and translated the usually dull 4-30 tea into a well patronized and popular gathering.

Experiments with food were not always successful: the officers mess of one of the R.A. units in our area got hold of some pods which they took to be tamarind ; this was served up in some form or other, and not until the dish had been well and truly masticated and digested with diabolical and disastrous results, was it discovered that the supposed tamarind was really cascara.

This catalogue of our meals in those days is representative of the p.w. area as a whole. Some units had better fare than others, a state which will always exist under any conditions, and then again, cash and the lack of it

were factors in this constant search for food and better cooking. A very few people, not of our set, lived on tinned food without recourse to rice, but they were rare. Certainly the man with plenty of money need never to have gone hungry as large stocks of tinned food were available in the black market, but there were not many rich men among us. There was one incredible place called the Changi Café or Changi Hotel, or something like that, which was run, so rumour had it, by some of the Gordons, which supplied a breakfast of porridge, bacon and eggs, toast and marmalade, and coffee for the price of $10. This was not for us: $10 would have supplemented the diet of the whole of our unit, in the manner herein before disclosed, for a day.

Lest the picture painted in these pages take on too rosy a hue, let it be dimmed by the more sombre light emanating from a consideration of our diet balance sheet. This can be regarded in the light of the triple factors: quantity, quality and variety. Quantitatively, we went pretty short, and although we collected a good amount of tinned food, we had nevertheless over 400 hungry mouths to feed and since each tin was used merely to flavour and did not add to the body of a dish, it did not affect the quantity to any appreciable extent. Qualitatively, we fared little better, for, to say the rice was indifferent, is to say that the bulk of the food was indifferent also, flavour it, conceal it, camouflage it, disguise it as we would. On the other side of the sheet, we had variety and all it implied: it was variety born of ingenuity and enterprise, and resource and the result of its exercise revealed in these pages, did a lot to balance the two sinister debits.

The tale of those months at Changi is, in part, a tale of constantly striving against difficulties to provide food and to make the most of it by cooking skill and ingenuity. Where rice (and poor rice at that) forms the greater proportion of a diet, the two aims are to disguise part of this food, and to produce as many vehicles as possible for its easy consumption, in the form of stews and dishes which will absorb and flavour a large amount of rice. The results of our strivings are here set forth, and he would be a harsh critic who should say that we were entirely unsuccessful in the struggle of our imposed ascetic lives.

Sport and Recreation

THERE are twenty-four hours in each day, even in Malaya and at times the days seemed to contain thirty-six hours, so long were they. Part of each day was spent in sleeping and eating, undoubtedly our two most popular activities: it was fine to slumber while the hours slipped by: so much time less towards our release, and each meal was an exciting adventure. Others of the lagging hours were occupied in daily fatigues and routine work essential to our comfort, health and very existence: the daily cleaning of the whole area, sanitary upkeep of cookhouses and latrines, fuel gathering, wood chopping, fly catching, rice grinding, water carrying, barrack room inspections. Of training and other normal military activities there was none, except for a spot of futile marching drill every other morning before breakfast; the two daily parades were merely used for marshalling our personnel and directing them into their appointed channels of activity (if any) for the day. The rest of the day—too many long hours—was our own, to do with what we would. Once upon a time, these hours would have been welcomed with great joy, but at Changi, surrounded by wire, restricted in every way, they were a problem.

The average man, when left to his own devices, gravitates automatically towards the local pub, cinema, music or dance hall, football ground, beach, or what you will. Here at Changi, we had no such artificial time-killer or luxury play ground, we had perforce to make our own and here lay the solution to our problems. It was found that on the whole officers had to produce ideas, organize, initiate, but once the ball of recreation was set rolling the men more or less enthusiastically dribbled it along.

These hours were filled in by recreation both outdoor and indoor, which served the dual purpose of passing time, and helping to keep bodies fit and

minds active. Also in our estimation, Callisthenics was an excellent method of maintaining discipline under difficult conditions. There was a great tendency for everyone to become apathetic, the not unnatural result of confinement and soul-killing, time-wasting inactivity. Games, indoor and outdoor, helped to reduce this danger of universal apathy.

The outdoor, physical side was comparatively easy to organize and run, aided by magnificent sports ground already propped for soccer, rugger and hockey. Soccer, naturally was the most popular game; we soon had a league running between units in the Div. area, which provided some excellent games and not a little class football. These scratch games arranged between rival oddments kept the two grounds occupied until the light failed, and afforded an amusing, interesting or exciting spectacle to hundreds of noisy, boisterous, advice-giving spectators, according to their keenness and the nature of the sporting fare offered. People have been pleasurably thrilled by a first class league match, followed immediately afterwards by a game between officers and sergeants which left them weak with laughter.

Hockey was not so popular either as game or spectacle, but had its devotees including the General, who suffered bruised shins at the shrine of their deity. Rugby was played twice only when two robust games held immediately before we left, caused great excitement and amusement.

Cricket, a game more fitted to the climate, was played almost daily, usually tucked away in some quarter of the padang remote from the soccer pitches, but on a few occasions the whole ground was cleared for a first class show, to wit, a match against the Australians, who, captained by Barnett, the test match player, crossed the road, to return on both occasions with the laurels of overwhelming victory.

The padang saw a little baseball played by a small group of enthusiasts, whose occasional appearances were accompanied by the howls and blood-curdling vocabulary apparently so necessary to the game, but after several home-made ' bats ' had been reduced to splinters, and the ball (a hockey one) at last, neatly bisected by a prodigious drive from a herculean striker, the padang saw these men no more, and their wild cries were but an unmourned memory.

Indoor amusements were much more extensive in their ramifications, but did not prove quite so popular as the outdoor type. There was always a small block of men who preferred to sleep rather than participate in such activities, and these, except for a certain amount of compulsory attendance at something mentally stimulating, to keep their brains from going completely to seed, were allowed to slumber uninterrupted in their misguided attitude.

We held frequent " housey " and whist drives, general knowledge bees, discussions and lectures, gaining a colossal amount of enjoyment from their preparation and from sharing in their performance, enriched by the priceless, unfailing humour of the men. " Housey " was run on the basis of a cigarette currency, until cigarettes petered out, when it died a sudden death: whist drives were well patronized, cigarettes and sometimes relief from fatigues forming the prizes: the chief difficulty was found in raising a dozen or so packs of cards and many greasy, sorry-looking packs were pressed into service. General knowledge bees with a sporting or topical flavour were a source of much interesting preparation, and some terrific howlers in their execution. Discussions, debates and talks were difficult to run, because of the almost universal embarrassment of the average gunner, who amongst his pals may be a big talker and arguer, but coram publico, is not such a big shot: however, we usually managed to persuade somebody to describe his favourite meal, wireless programme, or choice of occupations, state a case for married life or even perform some story telling or sleight of hand to an individually mute, but collectively boisterous and appreciative audience. Thus in small groups in our own unit, we endeavoured to stimulate the men to while away many, many weary hours.

To cater for the more serious side, we had our Crippen College. Why our seat of learning was named after the famous murderer has never been related. True, it was the favourite ejaculation of the mess secretary and used

abundantly and he had been a schoolmaster, but this seems inadequate reason for the sobriquet. However, a home-made regimental staff offered instruction on various subjects to any members who cared to attend, and the "College" flourished in spite of difficulties, until multiple moves broke up all static activities. It did a power of good, both as a cure for ennui, and as a means of thorough, if elementary learning. The subjects included Mathematics, Geography, German, French, Law, Accountancy, Book-keeping, Shorthand, Music and Art, with an everage attendance of twenty-five per subject.

Writing was a universal pastime: nearly everyone wrote diaries, notes with and without the assistance of books: encyclopaedias and almanacs were made on every conceivable subject: mnemonics were cultivated, and brains creaked under the unaccustomed strain of considering unusual things: some mild and amateur research was made into dendrology, entomology and germane subjects, the specimens for which were readily available: indeed there was no barrier to our latitudinarian fancies.

We had our own small talks group which met in cosy intimacy in a corner of the padang, where we descended into a coalmine, climbed to the top of the Matterhorn, visited a mill in Lancashire or an oil field in Rumania, lived with the army of occupation in Iceland, brewed lager beer in Denmark, sold wireless sets in the West End, and enjoyed many other experiences, as occupations or holidays were recounted for our mutual enthrallment. A small but enthusiastic body studied sketching under the gentle guidance of our poster artist and diaries became well decorated with drawings, the only means of pictorial record in these cameraless days.

Every Sunday afternoon, some thirty odd gathered in the mess for a talk on musical appreciation by Donald Hilton, illustrated by a fairly wide collection of records, which somehow had found their way into the camp. Those black discs were for some, a gateway to a happy land of pure sound, where amidst the noble harmonies of Beethoven, the delicate traceries of Mozart, or the passionate emotionalism of Tschaikovsky, they could relax and forget for a moment unpleasant reality.

John Lowden, our Signals officer, a master of satire and that part of the American tongue which finds its greatest scope in the tabloids, with a diabolical mind, which could pour forth biting defamation to order, produced for many weeks a daily paper called: "Borehole Gossip—with malice to all and goodwill to none—price no cent.", the one copy of which was in great demand. This daily edition contained lurid libels couched in euphemistic terms concerning our activities, and was enlarged each Sunday into a magnificent edition of several sheets, decorated with cuttings of glamorous beauties taken from old American periodicals, and usually associated in bawdy detail with individual members of the Regiment—an engaging and provocative periodical!

In addition to this, Division ran weekly concerts, debates and lectures on such things as farming, rubber planting, Malay, etc., to which went our quota of seekers after knowledge.

Such were our activities and by choice, any man could have engaged every day in recreation, physical or mental; most, sensible of these facilities and the reason for them, took advantage, playing and working hard and turning a bold front to boredom, which, looming large and menacing, was thus reduced to a speck on the horizon.

Health and Hygiene

IN order fully to understand conditions in Changi Camp, it is necessary to consider the position on that fatal hour of February 15th, 1942, when some 60,000 troops laid down their arms. Of this army, the personnel of 9 and 11 Indian Divisions had been fighting continuously from the Siamese Border to Singapore, a distance of some 700 miles over a period of nine weeks. The Australians had been engaged since January 14th, while 53 Brigade

of 18 Division entered the war the day they landed in Singapore, being flung from disembarkation quay to battle zone at Yong Peng within a few hours.

Up country, the troops had from the starting gun, been steadily moving back, constantly harassed by a numerically superior foe, bombed ceaselessly and remorselessly by an air force which had complete mastery of the air, always living in the open, often in swamp and jungle, sleeping without mosquito nets, when they could snatch an hour, in the heavy rain which swept Malaya throughout the Campaign. Many of the units started the war after only a few days of acclimatization and all carefully drilled instructions concerning mosquitos, and the preparation of food and water, had, in the rush of battle, to be partially neglected. The army fell back with surprisingly little sickness—this was to come later.

At the end, bodily resistance was low, and the grim spectre of disease, the inevitable legacy of those two months of severe battering and crude living, loomed menacingly. Singapore was set for an annihilating epidemic. The reason why it was kept within reasonable bounds can be attributed to the care and skill of our medical staff.

But that was not the whole story: this army, already ripe for the ravages of disease was dumped into the comparatively small area of Changi Camp without water (at first), sanitation, medical equipment or stores, and placed immediately on a greatly reduced and unfamiliar diet. Then we had our wounded: casualties had been comparatively few, nevertheless, the hospitals were full of cases of wounds, burns, shock, etc. These men were our first care, and provided the first candidates for the diseases which invaded us—a new foe to fight, just as we had capitulated to the other.

The story of the hospitals is worth telling: subject at first to the chance hit from the load of the daily Jap air armada, the whistle of whose bombs could be heard in every ward, these asylums later came under fire from artillery on the mainland, and when the island defences were penetrated, they became bastions in the fighting line. Crowded at first, they became packed as casualties increased, and it became impossible for the harassed authorities to attend to these thousands of unhappy patients, many of whom fended for themselves as best they could. As the battle of Singapore spent its last few days, many strange and incredible sights were to be seen round the hospitals. At the Alexandra, a group of convalescent officers watched from the gallery of their ward, the deployment of the enemy infantry, and noted with interest how these men changed the camouflage of their head dress as they moved from wooded country into the open. Many of these front line troops swarmed through the wards full of helpless men, and drunk with impending victory, still in the growing impetus of their final drive, committed untold brutalities.

In chasing a party of Sikhs who had fired on them from the environs of the hospital, a detachment of Japs stormed in pursuit into the operating theatre, where they bayonnetted the unconscious patient together with the attendant surgeons and staff. One doctor only who lay doggo on the floor, after receiving two bayonet wounds in the initial rush, is alive to tell the story. They also bayonetted arbitrarily patients and orderlies on the ground floor. Later they returned and took away a large number of orderlies and walking wounded only two of whom are believed to be alive now. They fled successfully from a machine gun execution, one of them hiding immersed in a tank of Diesel oil for over twelve hours. This outrage accounted for some 200 victims.

After the capitulation, the hospitals were visited by the Jap and the overcrowded inmates received a strange mixture of kindness and courtesy with sheer barbaric cruelty: while some were given cigarettes by officers who apologized for the crudity of their front line troops, others were marshalled in yards and threatened with machine gun massacre. The conditions were such, that many, who could stagger along under their own steam, preferred to join the Changi-bound marching column and attempt a nightmare tramp of 17 miles rather than remain in naked chaos.

Very soon at Changi, Roberts Barracks was converted into a hospital and quickly filled up to overflowing. The Jap rapidly evacuated the Town

hospitals and for about a fortnight after our arrival, constant streams of sick men struggled in to Changi on foot, ' all in ' from the journey, which normally they would have undertaken by ambulance. A very limited ferry service of lorries removed those cases, which even the Jap could not convert into " walking wounded."

Here in Roberts Barracks was gathered a most adequate staff of R.A.M.C. surgeons, physicians and assistants, who worked miracles and transformed chaos into some semblance of order, but who were greatly handicapped by an almost complete lack of equipment and medical stores, for the Jap took over for his own use our very considerable supplies, sufficient for about two years for the Malayan forces, and re-issued practically nil for our use. In the coming months, these men worked as they must seldom have worked before, and despite these grave handicaps, operated, treated, nursed, and eventually cured the greater proportion of patients passing through their wards, keeping the death rate down to two or three per day—a remarkable achievement, especially in view of the fact that this hospital became the largest in the world with over 3,000 beds. (Chicago General used to have 2,000).

(Be it noted that the above figures only refer to the first six months of captivity—even the doctors could not cope with subsequent conditions. It was a blessing that Malaya happened to have an unusually large proportion of R.A.M.C. personnel—at a conservative estimate, they numbered 6,000 odd, and though all were not allowed by our hosts to practise their art, when we were split up and distributed throughout South East Asia, there were always people with medical experience to be found even in the smallest working party).

The enemies of health at Changi were five-fold, and with their causes, preventions and cures, they can conveniently be set out as follows:—

DYSENTERY:

CAUSE.	PREVENTION.
Infection caused by flies alighting on human excreta (infected) and then alighting on food.	(1) Destruction of flies. (2) Care in preparation and keeping of food. (3) Keep latrines covered.
CURE.	STATISTICS—Six Months.
Starvation. (Emetine and the Sulphur drugs were not available).	Treated . . . 15,000 Died . . . 200 Normal Admissions . 800

BERI-BERI.

CAUSE.	PREVENTION.
Lack of vitamin B contained in meat, eggs, vegetables, cereals.	Proper food. (No. of international units necessary to avoid, 300. Our diet contained 100).
CURE.	STATISTICS, Six months.
Small number of vitamin B tablets available. Special food in hospital.	Treated . . . 1,000 Died . . About 50

DENGUE, MALARIA.

CAUSE.	PREVENTION.
Mosquito bites.	(1) Destroy breeding grounds by drainage and oil. (2) Use mosquito nets. (We had none).
CURE.	STATISTICS, Six months.
Quinine.	Universal, normally treated out of hospital. Few deaths until later, in recurring cases.

SKIN DISEASES (Dhobie Itch, Ringworm, Septic Ulcers, Singapore Ear and Foot).

CAUSE.
Moist climate, excessive perspiration.

CURE.
Saline and Flavine dressings (when available).

PREVENTION.
Use of anti-septic powder, if subject to this.

STATISTICS, Six months.
Over 200 hospital cases. Fatalities later.

DIPHTHERIA.

CAUSE.
Contact with carrier or infected person.

CURE.
Anti - diphtheritic serum (Not available).

PREVENTION.
Isolation of initial cases.

STATISTICS, Six months.

Treated . .	. 400 plus
Died . .	. 60 plus

The hospital was provided with a small supply of extra food to cater for special diets, but this was scarcely adequate. Meanwhile unit M.O.'s were the most worried men in the camp, diagnosing so frequently these foul diseases and being able to send only the serious ones to hospital. Our own M.O., "Tommy," had a marvellous collection of equipment: a pair of scissors and an old knife, together with an ear syringe and stethoscope, reinforced with a few aspirins, a little ointment and two bottles of vitamin B tablets, simply had to cope with the daily requirements of our 400 odd men.

At one time dysentery reached alarming proportions: this receded and beri-beri took the ascendant, while fever and skin diseases continued to take a regular toll of all ranks, but by the time we left Changi, it could be said that sickness was under control, the result of skill, hard work and scrupulous cleanliness.

The result of our living conditions on the men who managed to steer clear of serious illness was a tendency to lose weight and become extremely lean: this continued for about two months, until systems became more accustomed to austerity, when bodies began to build up again and by June, the healthier people were looking very fit, well covered with flesh, especially the "rice-tummy," and bronzed by the daily sun. But, any man who had a dose of dysentery was a pitiable sight on his return from hospital, being a veritable walking skeleton, with a long, long road to travel before he could return to normal, so that the apparent fitness was but a superficial deception.

Hygiene was a fairly straight forward problem, consisting in keeping the area clean, and free from flies, and making suitable sanitary latrines. A daily fatigue party removed litter, kept drains clear, left nothing upturned to the sky, which could collect water and breed mosquitos. The appointment of a "fly-officer," who recruited a body of assistants and invented, manufactured and established innumerable and ingenious fly traps, aided by an overall fly-consciousness and the universal use of swatters, curtailed this menace to reasonable proportions.

Adequate latrines well protected from flies were essential, nay vital to survival. The solution was found in the 'borehole'—a narrow 18-foot deep auger-driven hole. The auger was manned by eight or ten men, and bored its way into the earth like a corkscrew, packing the soil thereby displaced into a container which could be emptied periodically. It took twenty men three hours to complete one hole. As we eventually made fifty for the use of the Regiment, using the only auger available for the whole Division, the labour was a lengthy one and necessitated working a 24-hour day in shifts. The result was eminently satisfactory, for although the water sometimes rose within four feet of the top, the septic tank principle of these holes was effective.

A death roll of about 400 out of all the P.W. at Changi in these first six months was remarkably low under these conditions: the Regiment contributed five deaths to this total and left behind about one hundred sick, when we moved out. This was possible only because we had time and manpower to carry out the work required: lack of this in Siam, had the most disastrous consequences.

Part Three:

Slavery, Siam---Banpong Express

THE morning of Saturday the 20th of June dawned fine, as usual, but by the time the sun had tipped our immediate horizon, and bathed the camp in its brilliant morning rays, we had been astir for three hours. Reveille was about four thirty: the troops crawled out of their huts rubbing bleary eyes, stretching stiff limbs, to find the most magnificent breakfast of large fish rissoles, chauppatties, jam, and hot sweet tea awaiting them. It is well, if possible to start a journey of unknown duration to an indeterminate destination on a full stomach, and this parting meal surpassed any we had seen since the war. It was eaten by the light of flickering dieselene lamps, and afterwards, the bustle of last minute packing occupied us: as the cluster of smoky lights gave place to the pale rays of dawn, a feverish activity was revealed.

Everything that had not been required for last minute use had been packed and stacked the previous evening, and now remained the collection and packing of cooking utensils, trestle-tables, forms, chairs, buckets, ovens, hot plates, rice boilers and what have you. The padang became alive with an endless human chain moving everything to a dump near the gate, ready for loading on to the lorries which were due at 9 a.m. We had optimistically accumulated a maximum of material in the hope that part, at least, would be allowed to accompany us. In addition, each man was carrying his own scanty wardrobe, and few personal 'treasures' in kitbag or pack, and also six tins of food from the Regimental stock; these latter had been handed over the day before, not as gifts, but upon solemn trust to return same to store at journey's end, with a message delivered in no uncertain terms to each trustee that, if so much as a single label had disappeared from off a tin at the other end, the individual concerned would regret that he had not been scuppered in the Campaign. Finally, the day's rations, which the cooks had produced by herculean labour, were doled out: these consisted of twelve plain biscuits (very hard), four coconut 'towers,' three peanut 'scones,' one meat turnover; ten cigarettes, a packet of dates and a tin of pineapple were also issued per man.

And so nine o'clock found us 600 strong formed up near the gate and ready to load up. 137 provided 331, 80th Anti-Tank Regiment 209, and 60 R.A.M.C. completed the party, which included 50 officers. In a sort of organised confusion, the lorries were loaded, hindered, rather than helped, (as usual) by the fussing, jabbering Jap guards, and under the eye of the serene, sneering Sikh sentries. Eddie Gill, now promoted Local Lt.-Col. was in Command, and, saying farewell to our convalescents who were remaining behind, and to the General and his staff, we perched precariously on top of what kit and stores we had been allowed to load, and watched our padang recede for the last time, as the convoy moved off.

There was among us the most extraordinary feeling of excitement and anticipation comparable to the feeling experienced at home on setting out for a holiday. We knew that we had a long and probably uncomfortable journey in front of us, with, at the other end, almost certain discomfort and lack of civilized facilities for some time to come: (this was an underestimate, as we soon found out) yet our spirits were soaring and few would have accepted the offer to remain at Changi: it was presumably the expectation of a change of scene, after three months behind wire. We were exactly like a parcel of schoolboys released for the summer holidays.

We passed by the gaol to the flicker of a handkerchief from its topmost cell window, where some vigilant or bored civilian was watching the road, and sped southwards in close formation, causing no little stir in the city: having threaded our way along the water front we drew to a halt, nose to tail, outside the station, where six and a half months before, we had congregated to travel up country.

Memories ! The column of sturdy men, already bronzed by the voyage across the Indian Ocean was striding down that road, where the lorries now stood, on its way from the docks, gazing excitedly round as it moved through the Singapore dusk to entrain under the glaring arc lamps of the station: there, delightful creatures in flimsy frocks pressed cigarettes, chocolate and mugs of steaming tea into our willing hands to fortify us against the night journey. Well ! Here we were, about to entrain for another journey, but what a difference ! The bubble of memory was quickly exploded by the grim reality of the present. Jap organisation, such as it is, flew through the window, as the flood of confusion burst through the door. In the absence of any instructions, we eventually formed ourselves up on one of the platforms and jockeyed the lorries, one by one, into the unloading yard, so as to off-load our heavy stuff. If we had not used our initiative here, there is no reason to suppose we should ever have seen any of it again. As it was, we were forced to leave a large part behind.

Very soon, we were approached by a mixed party of natives who deployed in the roadway, chattering shrilly and offering wares for sale. Immediately there was a seething mass of soldiery buying through the railings—a miniature imitation of Waterloo on a Bank Holiday. We looked round for the angry guards to appear and break up this clamouring chaos, but none appeared, and after unloading their stocks at exorbitant prices, the vendors went their way leaving most people in possession of at least one tin of a wide variety of foodstuffs, a loaf of bread and a bottle of some mineral.

At last a Jap officer arrived and issued instructions which set us moving through the barrier-gate twenty-five at a time, counted and checked by a dumb-looking Jap soldier. We were herded into place on a long empty platform, where with a clanking and grinding a train of box-like metal vans was shunted and came to a noisy standstill, as if to say: " Well, here we are, we're not much to look at, but at least we have got roofs."

As we stood regarding these uninviting vehicles with disfavour, the C.O. shot past in the wake of the Jap officer ; both looked preoccupied and worried. We started loading, but were prevented from putting on board our tables, chairs, ovens and rice boilers—a bitter blow, and seemingly, quite unnecessary.

The rumour came stealing down the platform and passed from group to group: " Four days in this train.—We're going to Bangkok—Christ !"

Two or three brooms made their appearance, taken from our stores, and were passed from truck to truck. They were needed: the floors of the vans were covered in straw, tar, and other general unpleasantness.

A sudden cry from the C.O. attracted our attention: " All Officers !" We doubled up and listened to our train orders, while the Jap stood beside the C.O. tapping an impatient foot.

" No man will leave the train without permission of the guards. No man will sit with his legs dangling out of doorways."

" Two men per truck will be detailed to stand by at Kuala Lumpur with dixies to collect breakfast tomorrow morning—and at subsequent stations for meals."

" Kuala Lumpur tomorrow morning: Ipoh in the evening: Butterworth the following morning—beyond that no details. Each officer in charge of a truck will be responsible for discipline—if there is any trouble, doors will be closed.—And, you will fall in for roll call by trucks when indicated. Any questions ?"

In answer to our questions, we discovered that the guard consisted of a sergeant and five men, who travelled together in the front coach, and that the journey would take upwards of four days. But the Jap officer was fairly dancing with impatience, and we were bustled back into our trucks, where packed like sardines in a tin, we could just manage all to sit on our haunches at the same time.

With a shriek from the engine and a jolt, we were off on our thirteen-hundred mile journey: the time was just half past twelve.

The harrowing thought of spending 100 hours in such conditions was

tempered and gradually forgotten in the interest of the scene and the change and novelty of the trip after three months at Changi. The great discomfort was indeed offset all the time by the passing countryside seen clearly through the open doors, and, on balance, the interest outweighed it.

We clattered noisily northward across the Island, obtaining constant vignettes of familiar scenes through the steel frames of our open doorways, punctuated by excited chatter, as one or other of us recognized some spot where we had fought in the last desperate days of the war, and sought to draw the attention of his neighbours thereto. We passed another train moving slowly in the other direction, and while gazing idly at the natives packed in their 3rd class carriages, were startled by a wild yell, accompanied by the flash of something golden describing a graceful arc in the sunshine—a colossal ripe pineapple landed plumb in Gerry's lap. We never saw the benevolent pitcher, but to carve that fruit into appropriate slices was the work of a moment: as we slowed down to walking pace to negotiate the Causeway, we were happily chewing luscious slices of juiciness. The train nosed its way cautiously on to the Causeway, and the brilliant scene of the blue strait to left and right, with the vivid green banks and yellow sand of the mainland where Johore Bahru nestles, dominated by the stupendous pile of the Royal Palace, which towers over the multicoloured roofs of the town, was forgotten, as we moved tentatively over the huge gap blown in the Causeway by our sappers when we withdrew to the Island. A solid seventy yards that gap continued, now temporarily bridged by heavy wooden baulks. The chaotic tracery of the wreckage of the drawbridge at the northern end was still visible as we pulled on to the mainland and came to a halt in Johore Bahru station. We had noticed with interest the gaping holes in the masonry of the palace's colossal square tower, tribute to the accuracy and destructive effect of the heavy guns now lying twisted and silent in our old home.

The minutes sped by, and still the train remained standing in the deserted platform: gradually the figures of our men began to appear, ostensibly to visit the lavatory which still displayed its English sign, and soon, the platform was thronged as half the train took a stretch and a breather. The guards did not seem to mind, and quick to take advantage, a group gathered round the station fence, where a few Malays with an eye to business had arrived with foodstuffs for sale. This busy market was interrupted by two shrill blasts from the engine (a sound we were to hear many, many times before we left that train) and the cry " all aboard " sent the crowd of scantily clad gunners flying to their trucks. Pat Kenny clambered on as we started to move, clutching to his bosom a bag of sweet biscuits and we nibbled contentedly as we pulled out of the station. This freedom of movement and buying from the Malays was a foretaste of the latitude allowed us by our amiable guards at practically every stop, and it was a never ending source of surprise and amusement to see hundreds of gunners swarming freely all over the stations and to see the wild rush back to the train occasioned by the warning blasts; many of the men scrambling aboard as the train gathered speed.

We pushed on at a modest speed during the afternoon, at first through the pineapple groves of Southern Johore, and later through the interminable rubber estates through which the track bores its way throughout Malaya. Sometimes we accompanied the excellent main road or one of the infrequent side roads, and every now and then, we crossed a bridge, slowing down to walking pace on each occasion: twice we rumbled over wide, fast-flowing rivers. All the larger bridges and most of the smaller ones had been blown by our sappers during the battle, and all these had been repaired by the Jap invariably in a very simple manner. Hundreds of baulks of timber had been built up in solid towers on the old foundations—sometimes even on the fallen spans—to support the rails. More than once, where a bridge had been well and truly annihilated, the railway veered out of its original course, to cross the river or ravine, where the Nips had built a new bridge alongside the wreckage of the old: where the railway ran side by side with the road, we had an excellent view of the trestle substitutes carrying the road.

Rengam, Kluang, Bekok, Labis, Segamat came and were left behind and

at each station where we stopped, this wholesale buying continued:—pineapples, coconuts, bananas, cigars, cigarettes, biscuits, bread and hard boiled eggs, for ridiculously cheap prices.

By now, the interior of the trucks had risen to a temperature of just over 100 degrees, and only periodical visits to the doorways and the frequent halts with 'breathers,' prevented those of us in the forward ends from melting and joining the partly liquid tar on the floors. Most of us had stripped to the waist, and among the boxes and valises lay a miscellany of hats, pieces of web equipment, cups, plates, shirts, boots and other odds and ends, while the juice of crushed pineapples percolated in every direction.

The train dragged its way along the single track through the afternoon at funereal pace, slowing for bridges, often stopping between stations, as though exhausted, and spending many long stops at wayside halts. At each of these halts, swarms of men leapt from the train to relieve themselves: it was a matter of luck—sometimes the train would stop in some deserted cutting and start again within a few seconds, at others, it would stop five minutes or more. Some of the men, ill judging their time, had perforce to postpone or curtail their natural functions as the train began to move: these unhappy warriors were hauled aboard cursing their luck, by laughing comrades, who fairly plucked them from the permanent way five feet below, as the train was gathering speed. They surely understood the precise connotation of the phrase: "To be caught with your trousers down."

We entered Gemas at nightfall, and rolled on slowly into the darkness of what promised to be a cool, overcast night, munching our supper as we went. For the last hour or two, we had been playing a sort of musical chairs to relieve aching bodies, by changing one uncomfortable position for another. Someone lit a storm lantern and by the light of its dancing rays, four of us settled down to a rubber of bridge on the top of a canvas covered wash basin wedged between our cramped knees, while the occasional snore penetrating the mechanical rattle of the train, bespoke those who slumbered, lying in grotesque attitudes—a scene of deep flickering shadows and grim humour, fit for the pen of a Zola or the brush of a Rembrandt. Presently we all settled down to sleep—that is, we just relaxed as we were, kicked each others ankles as we tried to stretch our feet out and closed our eyes.

Clickety-click, clickety-click, clickety-click: click-click, click-click, click: clickety-clickety-click—the train, moving faster now, rattled and jolted through the darkness—we dozed.

Yes, we were ripping through the black night at a clinking pace and soon realized that these trucks had no springs, so that the constant sharp jogging was throwing heads and limbs up, down and sideways to the rhythm of the flying wheels.—Came the flash of light from a station as we blustered through with a derisive shriek from the engine. We dozed!—'nother station—stopped now—miss the motion of rattling vans—long pause with lights, bustle, uncouth cries—blast them! (yawn) why can't they keep quiet? Off again—what time is it? Too damned lazy to look at watch—anyway, can't see. Donald Hilton is sprawling on a valise slap against the open doorway, asleep and dreaming.

Beautiful shapes and colours, delicious abstract dream. He feels his body floating gently through space—lovely!—but what's this? "Hey! I'm falling," we hear him shout. Fully awake now, he finds himself half out of the doorway, gazing stupidly at the black bulk of the embankment, his two hands frantically grasping the steel edge of the truck, and we pull him in. It is raining in now, and having tried without success to shift the sliding door, those of us in the opening, sit with ground sheet across our shoulders and try to keep awake till dawn.

So that interminable night passed its weary way and with the coming of dawn, a blousy collection of individuals rose, stretched aching limbs in the confined space, rubbed bleary eyes, and regarded the passing landscape with early morning disfavour—three more days and nights of this—ye gods!

We clanked into Kajang—paused—clanked out again and after a long and irritating wait in the southern suburbs of Kuala Lumpur, pulled, far

behind schedule, into the station, which was well known to many of us. It was about 11-30. Here each truck despatched two men to the top of the platform and after a lot of typical disorder and confusion, they returned, bearing dixies of snow white rice, and a very small quantity of boiled fish, off which we breakfasted hungrily.

So far, we had seen very few Japs: the occasional soldier here and there, and sometimes a railway official on the larger stations. There seemed to be none here at Kuala Lumpur, everything appeared normal, except for the absence of Europeans.

Suddenly, a ragged cheer broke out from the rear of the train. Some of our men had spotted a lorry mounting the road to the bridge over the railway and on the lorry, a wildly waving and well known figure. We knew that some of us were in Kuala Lumpur gaol, and rejoiced that they would have news of our passing.

About an hour after our arrival, the whistle shrieked and we were off again. We had managed to effect a quick spring clean inside the truck and also contrived to obtain a quick swill, under the platform tap, so we settled down for the long pull to Ipoh, feeling a little fresher.

The country through which we were passing was monotonous enough, being a replica of that to the South—rubber trees on either side of the track, with the occasional sight of the main road. But now, away to the East, the Malayan backbone of mountain chain, densely covered in jungle, reared its bulky spine against the blue of the sky. With the glittering sun, and a cool breeze blowing through the open doorways, the trials of the night were forgotten, and we prepared to enjoy another day of novelty, whatever the hardships. We hoped during this day to obtain a glimpse of some of our old battle grounds, inspired by a keen curiosity to see again the scenes of our triumphs and the setting of our tragedy.

We dawdled in Rawang and passed on to Serendah, rattled with many long unaccountable pauses through Rasa and pulled into Tah Jong Malim in mid afternoon. At all these places as before, we flooded the stations to buy up anything on sale under the benevolent eyes of the grinning guards, recalled always in a wild rush to the train by the persistent whistle of impending departure. Sometimes we pulled into a siding to allow a south bound passenger train to pass, and we gazed with envy into the fan cooled lounge-cars where prosperous looking Malays and dapper Japanese officers sat drinking iced beer, and dusky complexioned women, smartly dressed in European style, lolled in leather padded armchairs.

The day was passing quickly in spite of the discomfort of travel. There is something fascinating in sitting unconventionally in an open doorway as the train rattles along the top of an embankment, grinds noisily through a cutting, rumbles over a bridge, or snakes round a curve, revealing the sinuous series of trucks winding in precise procession along the permanent way. Fortunately except in the mountains North of Ipoh, there are no tunnels on this line. Nearly every van had its complement of dangling legs, swinging idly, despite the standing orders—all the orders seemed to have been observed in their breach, with the tacit acquiescence of our escort. They, presumably, were working on the principle of live and let live, a convenient doctrine, when you are six in charge of six hundred on a four-day journey.

350 Battery had been on its toes since leaving Kuala Lumpur, excitedly recognising this bit of road, that piece of rubber, or those hill features, where they had rested, fought or taken up position not so very long ago. At Tah Jong Malim, the rest of the Regiment joined them in quick struggles across the trucks, endeavouring to see both sides of the line at once. The excitement became intense as we reached Slim River station and one or two members of R.H.Q. almost jumped out of the train in the climax of their fever, as we passed over the wreckage of the bridge where they swam the river after being cut off. Some of the vehicles were still as we left them, overgrown with long grass a few hundred yards in the rubber. In the pale light of late afternoon, we paused at Bikam, Bidor, Kampah, in turn and as light was failing, 501 members gazed towards the East and Gopeng, remembering where they had

turned and fought their isolated action. This resurrection of bitter-sweet memories made us a company tired as much mentally as physically that stepped on to Ipoh station that evening to draw dixies of rice and strangely seasoned stew for supper. We tarried there an hour, raiding the refreshment rooms, and wallowing in the luxury of hot, sweet coffee.

And so, for the second night, we settled our weary bodies to rest in attitudes which would not have disgraced a contortionist—but we did manage a few hours much needed sleep. During the night we passed over the wide Perak river and climbed through the passes of the mountains which here send a huge paw spreading to the westward. Descending to Taiping, we ran along the coastal plain to Bukit Mertajam. This part of Malaya is the most spectacular to view from a train and was familiar to all of us, but as we rattled through villages and towns, everyone of which would have recalled some incident in the retreat, we were encircled by thick darkness and bound in exhausted slumber. At eight o'clock, we ran into the fresh breeze at Prai station with the Isle of Penang greeting us a mile away across the sparkling blue water, which lapped within twenty feet of the train.

Here, every man was issued with two loaves of bread and we shared a tin of salmon between six: we made an excellent breakfast and roamed free within the station precincts. Most of us managed to shave our two days growth of beard, and a wash, and a change of shirt, enabled us to face the immediate future with less jaundiced outlook. This done, we took a stroll along the water front, and drank in the inviting scene.

A fresh sea breeze was blowing from the West, flicking the surface of the water with tiny lines of creamy foam, and away across the strait, the hilly slopes of the island reared up to a blue sky busy with speeding white clouds. The water was dotted with native craft, and a hundred yards away, the steam ferry was taking on its complement of gaily coloured native passengers for the short journey to Georgetown. All was colourful bustle in the diamond air of early morning. It seemed so free and fresh, that the thought of our journey north into a closer incarceration brought a sigh almost of despair, as we turned back to the train.

After an hour's stay and a rapid roll call, we set off on our further journey through more familiar country, spending another morning of recollection, reminiscence and recognition. From Sungei Patani, we jolted slowly through Bedong, pausing at each station. The hill flanking Gurun appeared to the northwest, drifted slowly by, and in the fulness of time, which seemed to stand still that afternoon, became a dim mound to the southwest, as we approached Alor Star. The character of the country was changing. Flat as a board where the single track pierced its way ever northward, the tracts of rubber trees were now often interrupted by vast areas of padi, where throughout, the massive water buffalo could be seen wallowing in a huge hole of mud that he had made for himself: now and again, rude native kampong or single hut showed dark against the watery green of the flats: these huts stand on poles to keep the poor interiors clear of the water-logged ground through which the railway embankment runs perfectly straight for miles on end. We passed many small parties of natives moving up and down this useful causeway of the embankment; these people, for the main part, improvident folk, and poorly dressed, gazed with curious eyes at our half-naked gunners hanging and dangling from the trucks.

Away to the northwest, we caught a glimpse of those huge limestone teeth which rise so unexpectedly from the plain, and on the east, the jungle clad slopes of the main mountain range still accompanied us parallel to the track across the intervening flats. We groaned our ponderous way north of Alor Star through Anah Bukit and over the bridge whose original we had watched go skyward in smoke on December 12th, until we crossed the so-called Jitra line, without noticing more than a narrow ditch filled with stagnant water. The day was terribly hot and the inside of our van became ovenlike in the shimmering heat.

By the middle of the afternoon, we were changing our positions frequently in the attempt to relieve the dragging weariness of sitting, sitting, sitting in cramped positions: the frequent stops were our only reliefs.

At one of the stations, there was the mother and father of a row. The mass of men, bearing more and more the characteristics of a marauding mob after loot, descended upon the shop, and getting out of control, they filtered through the rear entrance: in the confusion of the clamouring crowd of heaving humanity all wishing to be served at once, much of the shop's stock disappeared, and the frantic owner complained to the guards, who, armed with bayonetted rifles, and now, far from benevolent, bustled us summarily back into the train. The C.O. had to find sixty-five dollars to cover the alleged loss and we moved off under threat of closed doors if anything further happened, so we adopted a system of officers only buying for the whole of each truck. This lasted about two stations.

With some excitement we jolted across the border into Siam or Thailand, and changing our dollars for ticals, the Siamese equivalent, continued the process of buying tit-bits everywhere. At sundown, we stopped beside a small lake—with its rolling hills and grassy uplands beyond, it was forcibly reminiscent of the English Lake District and looked most tempting. Still under the cloud of the guards' displeasure, we regarded it speculatively. Suddenly, a figure, stepping like Agag dropped from the train and, approaching the edge, flung off boots and shorts and plunged into the glistening waters. We held our collective breath—nothing happened—two more figures followed this courageous lead. The engine was taking in water in a leisurely manner, and soon, fifty heads were bobbing in the lake. Eventually, a shriek from the engine sent the swimmers racing for the shore: some of them were hoisted aboard naked and dripping as we moved off. It was a lovely spot: peaceful and still in the blood red last hour of daylight and might well have been Grasmere.

As if to destroy all thoughts of England was its intention, the country changed immediately: peering into the rapidly failing light, it was just possible to see that the track was enclosed by odd shaped hills and teeth of rotten rock in the gullies, chimneys and cracks of which creepers clung in sinuous drapery. At times we ran through a dense green wall of jungle which marched with the line in a threatening way, so that it would have been no surprise, if this aggressive growth had gobbled up train, and track altogether: such open spaces as there were did not appear to be cultivated, but flourished in a wild disorder of thorns, undergrowth and swamp.

After night had closed in and blotted out this turbulent greenery, we clattered into the arclights of Haadyai, the important junction for Singgora and the Malayan East coast line. Here we saw more Japs than ever before, and a party of these with fixed bayonets lined the train and kept us in our cars, while our orderlies moved off in a formed body to collect rice and stew.

So, after another roll call, we settled down, deciding to sleep in relays, half stretched out full length, while the other half crowded together at the other end of the coach. We were given breakfast—more rice and stew—at 4-30 a.m., and after a brief halt went on again. Dawn revealed a wild countryside of jungle, occasionally giving place to open tracts, where rocky outcrops of fantastic design reared their bizarre heads. Honeycombed with caves and festooned with hanging creepers, these spires were a picturesque relief from monotony: there was not a sign of rubber. Ever and anon we sped with metallic hum across a steel girder bridge spanning a wild river swirling fast between banks covered with overhanging branches and creepers, and occasionally we spotted a small native encampment of rude huts, whose half naked inhabitants peered at us as they paused in their daily labours. With the exception of an odd mud track, we saw no roads: in all, a wild and desolate scene for hours on end. Every few hours we passed a huge pile of faggots stacked alongside the track: these are the fuel for engines on the Thailand run.

Stations were fewer than in Malaya, since the country is much less developed, and many of these presented but a flash of platform and waiting room as we bundled through, stopping at perhaps one in five only. These wayside halts seemed to serve but a small collection of native dwellings and all that day we saw nothing larger than a village.

By this time, despite the fascination of the journey, our discomfort had reached a high degree. One man would stand in the open doorway, grasping the sliding door flange overhead, to steady his jolting body, until weary with standing, he slipped into a berth vacated by another, weary of sitting: weary, himself of sitting, after an hour or so, raw from the hard contact of box or lumpy kitbag, he would negotiate for a change of position with someone else sprawling on the shambles of baggage in the middle of the van and arrange his position to conform with other bodies similarly strewn on the floor: finally, too weary to sleep, he would rise restlessly, work his way back to the doorway, to start the cycle all over again. Dirt and dust were, of course, phenomenal and in spite of about two washes a day, we were a red-eyed, sweat-caked, filthy-looking crowd by now.

As the day wore on, we examined with curiosity the inhabitants of this wild looking country. The coolie class were a stocky lot with squarish heads, high cheekbones, semi-mongolian features, dark and uncouth: they wore drab cotton shorts and rough tunic-like blouses. The women were mostly shapeless and ugly, displaying a mouth of dark brown teeth chewing betel-nut: the lingo was a shrill cacophony, harsh to our ears. All went barefooted and wore battered straw hats, those of the women (like a squat upturned vase secured to the head by a cage-like framework) being very picturesque. Once during the day, when we stood stationery beside a passenger train, we saw a different class of Thai. The maroon-coloured well appointed coaches were filled with well dressed Siamese subjects: silk stockinged, high-heeled women, very handsome, in flimsy, bright-coloured frocks, with western models on their coiffured heads: the men wore suits of European cut and bright unconventional hues; vivid shirts, ties and socks and soft trilby hats.

Every station had its staff of uniformed officials, station master to the boy manipulating the solitary points being resplendent in khaki slacks, tunic, and peaked cap ornamented by bright red and gold facings, bands and epaulettes. Soldiers of the Thailand army, of whom we saw a few on stations and in occasional barracks beside the tracks, presented a bewildering collection of uniforms with colourful and complicated appurtenances. Thailand is undoubtedly a land of uniforms—even the school children in the towns wear an attractive blue and white and many of the boys are dressed as scouts.

Except for the train guards and the few Japs at Haadyai, we seldom saw a Jap; every fighting man must have been thrust into the battle zones of Burma and the East Indian Islands, leaving a minimum on the l. of c. The Thais seemed friendly enough, and there appeared to be no love lost between them and their so-called allies.

At nightfall, we arrived at Chumporn for more rice, stew and roll calls, and soon set off again into the dark. We awoke damp, but refreshed, with rain beating through the doorway to a countryside which showed more signs of civilisation: much of the land now lay open, revealing thickly wooded hills to the west and north west, and these open patches were a vivid green with young padi: occasional clumps of palm trees provided a lofty interruption to the scrub jungle which separated the cultivated areas. We caught an occasional glimpse of the Gulf of Siam in a flash of blue and argent less than half a mile away, shimmering in the sun.

At about ten o'clock, we stopped for breakfast at Wang Pong. An unforgettable sight was that of about fifty men crouching under an open attap roofed shed, performing their natural functions, while several Thai women waddled past in complete unconcern less than ten yards away.

This we knew to be our last day and our destination must be Bangkok or some place fairly near. Speculation increased as the train rattled on: shortly after noon we passed through Petchaburi, by Siamese standards a large town: we saw arterial roads busy with traffic, where motor-cars jostled bullock carts and tricycle rickshaws wound in and out of the gaily coloured pedestrians—and then, a lovely sight broke on the eye:—to the north, a low ridge of hills reared its undulating outline out of the greenery of the plain: this ridge was studded with buildings which showed colourful and pleasing against the wooded slopes: crowning the highest point was a large and exotic temple

glittering white and gold, shaped like a wedding cake of many circular tiers of decreasing circumference; the temple made a conical silhouette against the horizon. Many smaller temples of Buddhist architecture clustered round the dominant building, like lesser gems around a large jewel in a setting of deep green, the whole of which was rapidly enlarging, as we raced towards—Ratburi.

This was an even larger town than the last, and our hopes ran high as we clattered through the southern suburbs. But it was not to be—a few more jogging miles brought us into a station serving a town of fairish size called Banpong, some forty miles west of Bangkok. This was journey's end —it was just four o'clock.

Here we dismounted, spent some time unloading, and formed up in the road, the centre of a swirling crowd of curious Thais and Chinese: we left a small body of sick behind to be collected by lorry, and presently, having been taken over by a fresh lot of guards, we marched down the main street.

A passing British soldier driving a truck poked his head out and shouted: "Only a mile to go, chums."

That cheered us as we swung, heavily laden between rows of shops and staring crowds on the sidewalk. These shops, built mainly of wood and corrugated iron, revealed through their open fronts many well stocked interiors: there was too, a lack of that evil smell usually associated with Oriental towns and altogether, this looked quite promising. After a quarter of a mile, we turned right, and marched the further distance to our new home. It was a shattering experience.

Six hundred other P.W. mostly R.A.S.C. had arrived two days before us, and together we formed the first camp in Siam. We were allowed five huts to live in just vacated by 200 Nips—that meant 240 men to a hut! These huts were made of bamboo and thatched with attap. They were about 60 yards long and 6 yards wide: inside, on each side, was a raised bamboo platform, some 18 inches off the ground, with a wide earth corridor in between: the V-shaped roof came down to and overhung the platforms: there were no openings for windows. The outside area and inside the huts, was a sea of vile smelling viscous mud six inches deep, through which we had to wade to reach our bed space—18 inches per man on the bamboo platforms—and down one side of the camp, was situated a long open trench, full to the brim, which had done duty as a Japanese latrine and now had to serve us, till we could find a place and time to dig some more. There were no ablutions: but, by the grace of God, the site for a cookhouse was across the road, and although there was, as yet, nothing there on, or, with which to cook, it was at any rate a little removed from the filth, stench and flies of the camp. Words cannot convey the atmosphere of depression and gloom that night; luckily we were all so dead beat that by the time we'd found a bed space and hastily gulped down a spot of stew which the R.A.S.C. cooks produced, we just fell asleep as and where we were, too weary to worry about anything. The few senior officers reckoned (without the Japanese) to get all hands down to the business of clearing up and organising the camp in the morning, but we were on parade first thing, and straight off to a working site three and a half miles away, R.A.M.C. detachment included. Six sick, one doctor and one orderly only, were allowed to remain behind. After the comparative freedom of Changi, where we scarcely ever saw a Nip and were left much to our own devices, this was indeed a rude awakening.

Banpong to Nongpladuk

LIFE at Banpong was pretty good hell; every morning after the first day we arrived, we were marshalled at 8-30, and after a quick roll call, we had to march three and a half miles to our work for the day. This consisted in clearing a banana grove, levelling the ground, and then building huts to make a Japanese barracks, with a Prisoner of War camp beside it. The whole area of operations was about two miles square in and around Nongpladuk Station. This place, on our arrival, was merely a wayside halt, with a few squalid

native houses in the vicinity. Before we left, we had helped to put up barracks, and workshops, and to lay many miles of sidings, turning the area into a fair-sized depot and railhead.

Our daily programme ran somewhat as follows:—reveille, 7-15; breakfast, 7-45; parade, 8-25; march to Nongpladuk, 8-50; start work 9-45; lunch break, 2—3-30; work, 3-30 to 6-30 or 7; march back; supper, 8; lights out (for those who had any!) 10. The rainy season was on, and apart from getting wet through each day, the interior of our huts was inches deep in mud: we were given no holiday for over a month,—clothes could not be washed, huts could not be kept clean, and the filth was indescribable. Moreover the open, stinking latrines not five yards from the line of huts, permeated the whole area with their nauseating aroma, and were a breeding ground for millions of flies: the latter, having passed the maggot stage spent the remainder of their existence in the cookhouse.

Here, our cooks performed prodigies of valour against insuperable difficulties: our 'doss-house' contained 1,200 men, and, 200 yards up the road, a further 1,800, who followed us up to Siam a week later, existed in similar squalor—we shared a communal cookhouse across the road, adequate for ourselves alone, but, for 3,000, hopeless. Given the facilities of Changi and the personnel to use them, we could have fed very well by comparison, for we had sufficient rice (of a kind!) and an excellent daily issue of fresh meat and vegetables, but, we had not the containers in which to cook two courses, nor did we have any sort of ovens, (permission to acquire oildrums to make ovens was refused) consequently our food, for every meal from now on, was rice and stew. The rice, at first, was usually limed, uneatable, by virtue of its foul smell and fouler taste, except as a duty. Later we were issued with an inferior quality broken rice, for which the natives had one use only—to feed the pigs—and it took our cooks months of hard trying to provide edible cooked rice from this. Incidentally, there was only one water point worked by the Japanese from a pump, driven by a lorry engine: sufficient water to wash the rice, and for cooking, generally, was certainly available, but we had nowhere to store it, and they only ran the engine twice a day. On the evening occasions, troops could have their only bath, beneath the hose-pipe, held by a grinning dwarf, and standing naked in the main road under the curious gaze of the natives.

As time progressed, we were allowed to set up our hot plates, the only cooking appliances which we had managed to bring from Singapore and we began to produce fish or meat rissoles on these. The Nips also allowed a few cooks to remain off work, and helped by the convalescents, they managed to cope more readily with the preparation of food.

This change of diet, particularly the great increase of fresh vegetables, completely upset our digestive systems, so that hundreds at a time, we had continuous diarrhoea for days on end, which rapidly developed into an epidemic of dysentery, laying low many strong men, even unto death. (After a week, we had 160 cases of dysentery in our 600 alone, and 268 out of the 1,200 were unfit for work). Two typhoid cases arose and gave us our first deaths, and conditions became so bad, that even the Nips began to get frightened, but their continual cry was: "When you finish new Camp, everything O.K." and we could obtain no improvements at Banpong.

For a hospital, we were allowed to build—during our holiday!—an attap and bamboo erection about 15 feet by 40, which immediately filled up, the overflow having to be treated in their huts. An appendix operation became necessary soon after our arrival, and the unfortunate victim was operated on by the light of a hurricane lamp on the 'counter' of a local shop. The doctor's few instruments included a jack-knife, some pairs of scissors and a couple of tyre levers. The Jap M.O. who was present, kept interrupting the proceedings and snatching the knife from Major Smyth's hands, but despite these hazards, the operation proved completely successful.

Apart from two doctors who remained in 'camp' with four medical orderlies, the R.A.M.C. had to go to work with the rest. We had no leisure time here:—in fact, we were just coolies to be cuffed, officer and soldier alike,

at the whim of the Japanese overseers. They were a strange mixture of kindness and brutality, one moment offering cigarettes around, the next, hitting some unfortunate for smoking at work. It was a humiliating contrast, after the comparative freedom of action inside our wire at Changi, and it took us a long and painful time to realize that Nip guards and personnel must be saluted (or bowed to) on all occasions. They were continually wandering in and out of the huts and failure to stand up and bow or salute meant at least a slap on the face, and might mean standing to attention outside the guard room for hours on end. On one occasion, Colonel Gill failed to notice the arrival of a Nip officer, who came through a banana grove on to the working site, and consequently, omitted to bellow a stentorian: " Ti-oh-Tski " (Attention)—As a punishment, we had to work an extra two hours.

It is appropriate here to mention a much later and more amusing incident o a similar nature. In time, the Japanese insisted that when any officer approached a working party, the senior member of the party should call it to attention and report what they were doing. No one knew enough Japanese to do so in the language, but if he saluted smartly, and waffled a garbling of both languages, the result usually delighted the visitor. On this occasion, a party of 26 (ni-ju-roko) officers (shio-ko), was engaged in filling up an old latrine, when a Jap colonel arrived. The senior British officer was a carefree stalwart, who didn't ' give a damn ' about Nips or anyone else. His " Ti-oh-Tski " startled the whole camp, and was followed by the report: " Ni-ju-roko-skioko manoeuvering manure."—The Jap colonel beamed, and replied: " You ?—Very good officer—No ?"

By dint of persistent doggedness on the part of our C.O. we gradually obtained slight concessions, of which, perhaps the most useful was permission to buy in Banpong, when they had changed our Malay currency. (We did not receive any pay for over two months). We ourselves were not at first allowed in the town, but the interpreter went for us, and in this way, we were able to obtain, biscuits, limes, pineapples, eggs, corn-cobs, pepper and curry-powder, to subsidize our rations. After a while, there was appointed an ' official ' buying officer, who went in with a guard about once a week, bringing his ' buy ' back on the ration lorry. Strangely enough, the guard seldom worried him, and in those early days, he wandered freely about the town. The Siamese were universally friendly, handing round cigarettes, giving him a free meal, and selling their wares cheaply.

It may be asked: " Why did not the ' buying officer ' utilize this ' freedom ' to effect an escape ?" The answer is two-fold: his function was a camp duty and as such, he was tacitly on parole ; moreover, some people did make the attempt from working parties, but they could not disguise their appearance, the Japanese put a price on their heads, and after the first two or three groups were recaptured, only to disappear,—in one case, we had proof that they were bayonnetted to death, after having been made to dig their own graves—this habit ceased.

Out of this concession, however, was born our contact with the outside world, and tribute must here be paid to Mr. Gairdner of Bangkok who initiated it. His Chinese boy slipped a note one day into our officer's hand: it was signed ' V,' gave us a few items of news, and asked for information as to our well being. Paddy Sykes the C.O. of the other 600 in our Camp drafted the first answer, under the name of ' V/V ' and from that time until February, 1945, when the P.W. Camp at Nongpladuk was disbanded, we had a continuous monthly liaison. Mr. Gairdner was operating from within the Civilian Internment Camp, and through his activities, we were able to obtain money and drugs at a time when men were dying by the thousand for lack of food and medicine. His good work was taken up by Mr. Peter Heath and a small circle of friends both within and without the Internment Camp, and developed through Siamese and Chinese helpers on a scale which ran into thousands of pounds sterling and operated the length of the river from Banpong to Kanyu, 180 miles away. It is impossible to estimate how many lives were saved by the steady effort of this little group, and it is unfortunate that as yet, it would be unwise to divulge non-British names. They operated

at the risk of their lives, knowing full well, that, to be caught, meant torture and death, and they have the undying gratitude and admiration of all survivors. But, let it be blazoned abroad, to the shame of some reprehensibly responsible department in our Government, that the money put up by Siamese helpers on our behalf was ' frozen ' for 18 months after the war ended, so that, at a time when the possession of sterling in Siam meant the ability to trade, they were denied the opportunity to benefit as a result of their long term investment. Finally, despite numerous recommendations, there have been no awards made.

The Siamese were friendly and well disposed to us. They were always giving away bunches of bananas and such like, and wherever our men were working, native sellers would arrive with sundry tit-bits at reasonable prices. To buy these was forbidden by Jap order, yet the vendors were always allowed to approach us and in many cases, our immediate guard would encourage the practice, then, having connived at nine purchases, he would suddenly punish the tenth offender. This illogical behaviour, was characteristic of the Jap in all our dealings with him, and is completely inexplicable.

Selling to the Siamese was a fruitful source of income to the impecunious—watches fetched anything up to one hundred ticals, and there was practically nothing that they wouldn't buy—even a pair of ladies knickers produced by one soldier from goodness knows where, provided him with five ticals. Later, there was a wholesale trade in articles stolen from the Nip workshops: axe-heads, nails, paraffin, petrol,—were sold in large quantities at excellent prices, and brought in more than double the pay received by the whole Camp. Thus arose the inevitable black market, for the ability to sell, became the prerogative of someone, whose work was situated somewhere favourable to contacting buyers away from the scrutiny of the work guard. Stolen articles were sold on the work site, and personal trinkets belonging to personnel, who were not in such a favoured position, were smuggled out of camp, and disposed of by some ' agent,' who had a contact, and who often pocketed a large proportion of the proceeds. This same type of person would then sell money for cheques on an English bank, payable after the war, the rate going down to as little as 50 cents for £1 at the worst period. (50 cents (or setangs) Siamese, was worth 11 pence at par). On top of that, this same person, with plenty of money, paid vast sums for trifling ' creature comforts ' and the Siamese money he had sold so exorbitantly to his fellow prisoners, became devalued more and more. (Singapore, however, was very much worse than Siam. A case is known of an officer going through the wire, pinching 200 gallons of petrol, selling it to the Chinese for £200—(in Straits dollars—1,800 of them) and then, being hungry, buying one egg for £25, and a tin of bully-beef for £50).

Selling to the Siamese, was, of course, forbidden, but often, Nip troops would ask if we had any trinkets to sell, and would offer to dispose of them themselves, usually taking a very high commission. One day, on the working site, a guard caught one of our men selling his watch and hauled him forthwith in front of the same officer who had issued the order forbidding us to sell. The officer started beating up the man, and then suddenly stopped, gave him a cigarette and thirty ticals for the watch, which he promptly transferred to his own wrist.

Time passed very quickly at Banpong, but it was a frightful existence for everyone, and we were all very pleased, when on July 19th, we received orders to pack up and move forthwith to the unfinished quarters at Nongpladuk. The 1,800 in the other camp remained there, among them being Col. Owtram who had remained behind at Changi with fever, and on following us up, was not allowed by the Japanese to rejoin his Regiment.

While at Banpong, we were ordered to sign a document to the effect that we would obey all Japanese orders, and would on no account endeavour to escape on pain of death. This we refused to do.

July 20th was a hectic day: we had a 4 a.m. reveille and got down to the business of packing, then, having breakfasted, we had to march to work as usual, carrying our kit, which was dumped on our working site, to be collected

in the evening. We left a small rear party to load the heavy camp gear and organize a shuttle service with the one available lorry. Our new camp was in theory, a considerable improvement on the old—an area about 200 yards by 500, enclosed by a bamboo fence, it had six huts around three sides, leaving a large open space in front. At one end of this ' padang ' were a few trees which at one time sheltered a native house, and where now, the Jap H.Q. pitched their huts, making the two C.O's, Colonel Gill and Major Sykes, join them with their unit offices: this, we christened " Dwarf Grotto."

But, when we arrived, only three out of the six huts had so far been erected: there were no latrines, no ablution places, no cookhouses, no drains, and one foul well, the water from which was not drinkable. A few officers and men were detached from the working party to sort things out, and attempts on their part to get busy on make shift facilities were immediately frustrated by the Japanese: we therefore had to cook in the open, and wash where we could, if we could get water: permission was eventually given to dig some shallow trenches in the banana grove outside the camp as temporary latrines. We managed to get hold of a few tents from a Nip quarter-master on the working site, and by dint of much hard work on the part of everyone, after the day's work was done, midnight found us accommodated as follows: three built huts housed 350 men each, the remainder slept in a half built one and the officers dossed down on the floor of the hospital which was only a quarter built: the tents were used for the seriously sick men, and to put our stores under cover. It rained hard that night and the personnel and kits in the unfinished huts were completely drenched.

These huts were one hundred feet long by twenty-four feet broad, being meant to accommodate two hundred men each, a space of twelve square feet per person: in point of fact, never at any time did we have less than three hundred men in a hut, which was eight square feet per man, and on this occasion we were even more crowded. Built on piles some three feet off the ground, they had wooden floors and attap sides with a V-shaped attap roof, twenty feet high. The piles were driven into a platform well above the surrounding level, and the earth to make it had been obtained by digging arbitrarily anywhere, so that all round our huts we had a series of pits varying from three to five feet in depth, which for some months were full of water, a breeding ground for mosquitoes and a snare and delusion to the unwary wanderer by night. Nothing could be done about filling them in during the rainy season, and before we had time to dig drains, three or four days of tropical rain left us with a lake which surrounded some huts and extended over a considerable part of the padang, necessitating wading up to our knees to attend roll call or go out to work. This was rather an adventure because the person who did not know the exact location of the holes, would suddenly find himself immersed waist high: we can laugh now, but it was a tragedy, if, as sometimes happened, he was carrying the meal for his hut. This same factor prevented proper latrines from being dug, since the water level on the higher ground rose rapidly to within two feet of the surface. The unfortunate people who remained in Banpong during this period were in far worse plight, the water there lapping the bamboo shelves on which they were sleeping. This situation remained for several weeks, and as an immediate corollary, we had an epidemic of malaria, mild enough in form, but sufficient to cause a number of deaths among troops whose resistance was already low, and recurring individually as many as twenty times in the course of the next year or so.

Despite these handicaps, however, we were soon much better off: in an incredibly short space of time, all six huts, the hospital, cookhouse and stores were up and although the Nips promptly took over two huts for themselves, the extra space, after so much overcrowding, was a welcome relief. It was here that we obtained permission for one officer to go shopping in Banpong, and also for the local Siamese to bring in things like bananas and eggs.

Our working hours at Nongpladuk were as before: 9-30 till 2, and 3-30 till 7, but the absence of the long march allowed us considerably more spare

time, and we were also given one day in ten holiday. Having finished the Jap barracks, we started the job which had brought us to Siam—building a railway to Moulmein. Innumerable sidings were laid down at Nongpladuk, meanwhile Siamese coolies were at work in hundreds building a railway embankment to Kanburi, a sizeable town about seventy miles North. The first stage,—workshops and a foundry were built, and we saw that we were to become a vast railhead and depot, which ultimately would serve as a link between the Japanese in Siam and Burma. It was apparent—so we thought—that this railway would take at least two years to build, if it were ever completed, so that we were not unduly worried about helping the enemy war effort—we thought rather that we should be building a way in for our own troops, when the time came. Little did we realize that in a bare six months, when remonstrating with the Nips against sending sick men out to work, Col. Gill should receive the answer: " We have been instructed by Tokio that this railway will be completed by August, 1943, irrespective of the loss in life of Prisoners of War. That order will be obeyed." It *was*, with some of the results set forth in the following pages.

This period was marked by a serious effort on the part of the Japanese to separate the officers from the men, together with a display of unnecessary aggressiveness on their part; which things indicated both their complete failure to understand the British mentality, and their own pusillanimity. On every possible occasion they attempted to undermine our authority as officers, by telling us that we had no disciplinary powers, and publishing that statement to the men with an invitation to all soldiers to come to them and air their grievances. Two glaring examples typify their conduct: an O.R. had struck his B.Q.M.S. after roundly abusing him, on the grounds that his ration of stew was insufficient. He refused to accept his B.C's award, asking to be brought before the Japs: the latter harangued the B.C. against unfair treatment of his men with regard to distribution of food: they commended the soldier on his behaviour and punished the officer by making him attend the preparation and distribution of food for five days at all meals. This meant staying in Camp, and therefore receiving no pay, for only those officers and men nominated by the Japs to remain in Camp for work, received any pay. The officer attempted to remonstrate, saying that in England, whatever justifiable anger a man might have against an N.C.O., to hit him was a serious crime—he was thereupon abruptly shut up, by having his face slapped by the Jap N.C.O.

On another occasion, a soldier, at his own request, was brought up before the Japanese for stealing someone else's shirt and selling it to the Siamese. Be it noted that theft is a serious crime in the I.J.A., and selling to the Siamese was strictly forbidden by them—The soldier pleaded that he had taken the shirt for his sergeant, who was ill, and therefore unable to work and receive pay therefrom. He was praised for his action on behalf of an N.C.O., the case was dismissed and Col. Gill was castigated for not looking after his sick men properly. Similar instances could be cited by the score.

On the whole, our men played up well, and although one or two went to the Nips to complain about officers and to act generally as " Yes-men," their conduct was so frowned upon by the others, that they did not continue the practice.

From all accounts of conditions at other P.W. camps, we fared fairly well in that we were able to obtain extras locally. Yet we were continually irritated by petty-fogging restrictions, which appeared to have no purpose other than to annoy. Rules about smoking were never published, and changed daily at the whim of a guard: one day we could only smoke inside huts; another day, outside huts; another day, outside huts, if a hole had been dug for the cigarette ends, etc.; no singing except on Sundays; all Japanese of whatever rank must be saluted at all times by all officers and men. At night, frequently, some bloody-minded little dwarf guard would stand beside the latrine, and the first intimation a soldier would have of his presence there, was a slap on the face, followed by a gabble of incoherent

Japanese, punctuated by further slaps, till the guard tired, having no audience, or the soldier, terrified out of his life and understanding nothing, performed the function which had brought him out, on the spot. Any infringement of rules was followed by stopping the Siamese canteen; this reacted on health and, somewhat reluctantly, we had to obey.

We had our fair share of discomforts due to causes outside direct Japanese control—bugs, scorpions, centipedes, occasional snakes, flies galore, rats, bats and ants infested everything. No tin was immune from penetration by ants, if it contained anything sweet,—rats managed to bite through a towel in a closed basket suspended from the roof on a wire and eat biscuits and eggs within ; bats swooped inside the hut by night and devoured bananas, wherever they were put ; bed bugs kept us awake by night and flies prevented sleep by day ; scorpions, snakes and centipedes were rare and were killed at sight. One of the more incredible irritants was the howling of the local dogs: this produced a continuous noise, similar to, but definitely louder than an air-raid siren, which went on for hours throughout the night.

At work, in these early days, officers and W.O's had merely to watch—they could not organize, for the Jap immediately gave his own instructions whenever an officer tried to marshall his men, and was not slow to strike anyone who did not obey, even though we did not understand the language. To cope with the language difficulty, a Japanese class was started consisting of three officers and twenty men ; they were to learn the language in three months and then act as interpreters. But for tutor, they had a sergeant who must have learnt a dictionary by heart, for there was seldom a word of English that he did not know, but he could no more put his words into coherent sentences than fly. His method of teaching was to give us pages of words to learn by heart, and later, phrases, without any explanation as to grammar or idiom and consequently, progress towards understanding Japanese was next to impossible. A few of the class, after much hard work, managed to make themselves intelligible in simple Japanese, until it was realized that nearly every soldier had his own dialect and understood but imperfectly, any other—even our tutor could not always understand his officers who spoke 'high' Japanese. Consequently, serious efforts to learn were discontinued except by Capt. Exritt, who achieved the remarkable distinction of teaching himself to read and write sufficiently to translate the odd stolen newspaper, with no tuition of the written language from our taskmasters.

Buying and selling from the Siamese went on at furious pace, the 'market' being the latrines in the banana groves on the working site. It was no unusual thing for a Siamese woman to waddle up to a soldier, while he was actually attending to the needs of nature and unconcernedly proffer her wares, or put a price on his watch. These women are amazing in their capacity for carrying heavy loads—men and women alike worked beside our men on construction of sidings and it was fantastic to watch two British soldiers arduously struggling to lift one sleeper and carry it into position, while from the next stack, a single Siamese women, six months 'gone,' unaided, dealt with a couple.

Whenever an officer of high rank visited us, all work was stopped and we fell in to listen to a speech: this was interpreted after a fashion by our Japanese tutor: perhaps the most astonishing of the many speeches we received reached us as follows:—

"You must all be good soldiers, so that a great nation can treat you well if possible. You will get this printed and see that it gets to the bottom of your soldiers."

To see a stupid little puffed up pompous dwarf officer, unable to bring himself to address us in English, which he generally knew, have a table set, which he solemnly mounted so that he could overlook the tallest of us, deliver such an oration, so translated, taxed the self control of all, to prevent a roar of laughter. We had the laugh later and it did us a power of good.

The Stand

Life went on grim and monotonous, with bizarre touches of humour to lighten the gloom from time to time ; we resented more and more the insults and conceit of our captors ; life became daily more unbearable, as striking incidents became more frequent and nothing was done about our protests. Finally, we decided to take suitable measures to cope with any further incidents and matters came to a head on September 7th, when Sergeant Bhumgara was struck unconscious with a stick for no apparent reason.

That same afternoon, the two C.O's went to Major Cheedah, the newly appointed Japanese Camp Commandant, and demanded (a) that the Jap N.C.O. should apologize to Bhumgara in the presence of his Battery Commander ; (b) that the N.C.O. should be punished ; (c) that a guarantee should be given to ensure no repetition of such incidents : they stated that we could not be satisfied with a mere promise that the offender would be punished and that striking would cease—we had been given similar assurances before, and incidents continued to occur daily—unless our conditions were satisfied we would not work next day. The evening arrived, and the C.O's were put off with a statement that the matter was in hand, and would be dealt with first thing in the morning : but when Col. Gill was sent for next morning, it was to receive an order to go out to work as usual, coupled with a promise that everything would be settled that day. We had already discussed this eventuality and decided against any withdrawal or compromise and the C.O. accordingly told Major Cheedah so. The Major drew himself up haughtily : " So you refuse to obey Japanese order ?"—he snapped.

" We do not wish to disobey Japanese order, but we feel that it would be dishonourable to our soldiers to take no action in this matter," Col. Gill replied.

" Why ?" demanded the Major.

" We are not coolies to be struck at the whim of a Japanese soldier, and we think it is our duty to act thus to safeguard our soldiers," said the C.O. bluntly.

" Order all men to parade now."

" Why ?"

" I wish to address them."

" But they will not go out—"

" Obey my order," interrupted the Major, now very angry, and drawing his sword, as if to cut short any further argument. So the whistle was blown, and we paraded as for roll call. As we fell in, so did a double guard of about thirty Jap soldiers ; loading their rifles ominously, they faced us. Col. Gill and Major Sykes were detached and put under another guard. Major Cheedah then approached R.H.Q. section commanded by Pat Kenny and ordered him to take his men out to work : this order was refused and Pat was summarily pushed in front of the guard. The interpreter then approached Gerry Coombes and told him to march his Battery out : the latter told the interpreter in no uncertain terms that one of his men had been struck for no reason, and that until our demands were satisfied his men would not go out to work. With ashen face, and trembling like a leaf, the interpreter joined Major Cheedah and his subaltern, Lieut. Tanaka, who were ordering various men of R.H.Q. one at a time to go out : All refused, whereupon two N.C.O's pulled Gleave out of the front rank, and Tanaka drew his sword. The situation was tense ; several of us gathered round, vowing silently that if Gleave were struck, it would be Tanaka's last act.

At that moment, Gowers (also in the front rank) fainted, Tanaka dropped his sword, two men picked Gowers up, the M.O. came up to render first aid and someone else gave back the sword to Tanaka, who returned it to its scabbard. This anti-climax undoubtedly saved a fracas which might have had far-reaching results. The Nip officers consulted together for a moment and then ordered all officers to fall in by the guard, where they were addressed by Major Cheedah : the interpreter, looking more ghoulish than ever, and terrified out of his wits, stuttered incoherently :—

" I, Major Cheedah, commanding war prisoners Nongpladuk, order you to lead your men and engage outside work. Do you not obey ?"

Gerry Coombes stepped forward, and acting as spokesman answered:—

" We have put our case in the hands of Colonel Gill, and until he is satisfied that justice has been done, we will not work."

The Jap was absolutely flabbergasted at this blank refusal to obey his order,—it was beyond his comprehension that prisoners of war should dream of acting in a manner punishable by death in the Japanese army, and he was at a complete loss for words.

Loading his revolver, he said:—

" Come forward who obey Gill and disobey Imperial Japanese Army."

As one man we all stepped forward, nearly knocking him down. Astonished beyond measure, he spat out a series of staccato shrieks, which were interpreted as:—" You have no food—you are punished—until you change your mind," and turning to the guard, now increased by a platoon or so from outside the camp, he motioned them to march us off.

We were made to stand rigidly to attention in the sun outside one of the Japanese huts: two machine guns had been brought into action by the gate, and fifty Jap soldiers had posted themselves in readiness in Dwarf Grotto. No one was allowed to talk or smoke, nor could anyone visit the latrines: we had to take a pace forward or back and perform as best we could where we stood. Later, a spade was brought, and we were allowed to dig a small hole to our rear.

The men were questioned by sections and individually, and ordered to go out: they were told that they had seen the last of their officers, that if they didn't go out, they would get no food, and that if they did go out, they would be well treated: the incident was over, the Japanese N.C.O. had been punished, and they guaranteed no more striking. For over an hour the men held out, until C. Troop (Sergeant Bhumgara's), acting under the impression that, as the Troop most concerned, if they went out, the others would follow suit, and the officers be released, decided to accede to the Japanese order, and two thirds of the Troop marched out. Several other parties followed C Troop's lead, but still over 500 men refused to budge without direct orders from their own officers. These latter were made to stand to attention some distance from us, and subjected to the same rigorous treatment—the great " Stand " had begun.

Major Cheedah next took a rifle from one of his men, loaded it, and had the two C.O's brought before him in an empty shelter near the guard tent. He said he was sorry to have to shoot them, and asked what they had to say. Colonel Gill repeated that we had no desire to disobey the Japanese order as such, and that if he were allowed to speak to the officers and men, he thought that they would consider that the matter had gone far enough, particularly if the Japanese understood the reason for our attitude. Cheedah considered this for a moment, and without further word, went out and left them to themselves standing to attention with a guard.

During the morning the Japs found the padré (who did not normally go out on work parade) wandering around the hospital, and they brought him in before Tanaka, who said to him: " Do you obey Gill or the Japanese ?" His answer shook them to the core: " I do not obey Gill, and I do not obey the Japanese, I obey my Master, the Senior Chaplain."

" Where is he, bring him in."

Pointing upwards, the padré said: " He is in Heaven."

Whether Tanaka thought that here was another mad Englishman, or whether he sensed a glimmer of Reality behind the padré's serious mien, who knows ? The padré was dismissed with a shrug of the shoulders.

Lunch time arrived, and the men who had gone out came back: they had done very little work, they had been showered with cigarettes and bananas by the Japs and given an additional meal during the morning. We and our ' Loyal ' men, were marched over to the vicinity of the cookhouse, where we continued in rigid immobility within sight and smell of food being dished up. Many men fainted and after a time, were allowed to recover in

the shade: the sun got hotter and hotter, and Walter Mason's legs, already puffed with septic ulcer, swelled out like balloons, necessitating his removal to hospital (after a prolonged argument with the guard). At about this time, the two C.O's were produced in the open outside their hut, and large numbers of the men who had gone out, showed their feelings by deliberately walking past them, in order to salute.

Our guard, four soldiers and an N.C.O., was as obnoxious as possible; they marched up and down, tapping with rifle butts the ankles of anyone who was not standing strictly to attention, jabbing people in the back with a bayonet, who did not hold themselves erect. Later in the afternoon, a new guard did allow a mug of 'tea' to be passed round, a sip each to about seventy-five per cent of us.

After the men had gone out for afternoon work, Burt Briggs, who had been to Banpong shopping, and knew nothing of all this, came in with a lorry load of bananas, biscuits and miscellaneous 'buys.' He went over to the Nip H.Q. with the Messing Officer, to say that they agreed with us, and wished to join us at attention. They were told that they were good officers who had done no wrong,—they would henceforth live apart from us, and be given better food and plenty of port. At intervals during the afternoon, they returned to the Nips and asked that the C.O's be brought over to negotiate and conclude the incident—this was refused.

Supper time came and Briggs was taken over to the troops who were standing behind us. They were told that their officers had no legal control over them, that the Japanese retained the officers, because it was convenient to have someone who knew the men to pass on orders and get them carried out, but that all ranks were equal in the eyes of the Japanese, and they were bound as war prisoners to obey all orders. The affair had been disposed of that morning; the N.C.O. had been punished and an apology had been given (this was not true), there would be no more striking of prisoners. Were they prepared in future to obey Japanese orders, and would they work on the morrow? They asked what would happen to their officers, and were told that they would be punished, but would come to no harm, they therefore signified their assent and were released. The men went to their huts, where those who had gone out had brought them food and water for washing, and had made their 'beds' for them, but that did not prevent the 'workers' from being told more about their ancestors than can be put into print.

We stood. Some of the Nips told our men that we should be kept there for a month, others that it would be three days, and the men made plans for action in the morning if we had not yet been released. At 9-30 p.m. Tanaka came over with the interpreter who babbled at us that we were being punished for refusing to obey Imperial Japanese order—he went on.

"You stand up to ruminate and repent, if possible,—You are sorry—Do you heartily understand?"

We did not 'heartily understand' and said so,—with a jingling of swords, the cortège went away. Briggs continued to go over at half hourly intervals and was finally told that nothing could be decided till next day, he therefore told them that he would return next day—at one minute after midnight—and await their decision—he did. The two C.O's had now been removed to the guard tent. By 11-30, Gerry Coombes began to get restive—he wanted a drink and a smoke, and also to find out what was happening, so as soon as the guard had passed him on their continuous tour of our ranks, he walked away. Torches were flashed in his direction, but he continued on his way unheeding, and was taken for a passing soldier walking across the padang. Arrived at 'Dwarf Grotto,' he sat down to a well enjoyed cigarette and a cup of tea, while discussing things with Burt Briggs. Suddenly, there was a terrific commotion and bustle,—guards turned out all over the Camp and ran hither and thither—he had been missed. This was bad luck, for in point of fact, the interpreter had come over to ask for him personally, as the spokesman of the morning.

He strolled boldly back, and indignantly stated that he had to attend urgently to the very pressing demands of nature: these 'idiot-boy' tactics

worked, and apart from getting his face well and truly slapped, and being dragged struggling to stand between two guards, for resisting the face-slapping, the affair passed over.

At midnight, Briggs reappeared at the Japanese H.Q., and they were so astonished at his persistency that Cheedah went over and visited the two C.O's and spoke for some time to them in Japanese. This was interpreted in the usual incoherent manner, but a few intelligible phrases were gleaned: "It is witching hour midnight: you ruminated and are sorry: We deeply moved by Briggsee diligent measures in your cause: we understand you do not disobey Japanese order, you try protect your men: if all men heartily understand, Briggsee promise they obey Japanese order, and they go back to house. We leave you to be sorry."

At 2-30, they sent for the two C.O's and with Briggs they approached our position. We listened to a ten minute dissertation in Japanese, followed by a completely unintelligible interpretation thereof. Briggs then broke in with: "Major Cheedah means that if you 'heartily understand' what he has said, you will be released." We had been standing for over seventeen hours, and we unanimously agreed 'heartily' to understand, being escorted back to our hut by the smiling Nip officers, triumphant and very relieved that we had given in.

Much good came out of the 'Stand,' as it was henceforth called; it had drawn officers and men closer together: it certainly increased our prestige in the eyes of the Japanese, who for a long time subsequently refused no reasonable demands: the officers twice jokingly said: "Yes, you can have this, as long as you don't stand again." As far as we could ascertain, had there been bloodshed, Major Cheedah would have suffered a terrific loss of face, and although they would doubtless not have hesitated to shoot, had there been a fracas, they were willing to go to almost any length to avoid this. The order from Tokio to the effect that the local authorities must force us to sign that we would not attempt to escape, was held up for over three months in our case—long after it had been signed by all other prisoners,—because when first produced at Banpong, we refused to sign, and after the 'Stand,' they were afraid of what we might do if they brought the matter up again, so they referred it back to Tokio.

We cannot end the story of the 'Stand' without giving high praise to Eddie Gill and Paddy Sykes; they had to make decisions and would undoubtedly have been the first victims if anything had gone wrong; never for a moment did they flinch.

Mostly--Nongaladuk

Somewhere about October, we had news of prisoners from K.L. coming up to Siam, and one morning early, a train drew up alongside the camp, and a party of weary travellers formed up to march in. Those of us who were lucky enough to be still asleep were awakened to a medley of:—

"Hullo George—its good to see you again."

"Bob!—I hardly recognised you."

"Poor old Jim's dead————" as the remainder, who had been cut off at Slim came in and were recognised.

That night we talked in little groups and swopped stories—in a few cases, as if by magic, a tin of Players was produced,—and a drink!—and we heard of what had befallen them.

Very soon on the 8th of January, it had become clear that a large body of men could not exist together in the jungle. Their size made concealment impossible, and whereas a small group might obtain food or help from a friendly Malay or Chinese, no-one, however, well wishing, could cope with as many as a score for any length of time. The question of going into the interior was considered, but no one knew the language or whether or not there were friendly Malay tribes or where they were. Moreover, there was always the chance of catching up with the battle on its way South. Hence, they broke up into small groups with the object of getting back to our lines, or making for the coast and trying to reach Sumatra.

These small parties, sooner or later ran into a Nip patrol, and were captured or fled successfully. But those who escaped were without medicines, and very soon, malaria and dysentery began to take their toll. Malays and Chinese helped, but the penalty for harbouring the British was death, and no group could stay in one place for any length of time. So those that weren't lucky enough to get captured, wandered about getting weaker and weaker; some died on the way, and many, who felt it their duty to remain at large as long as possible, finally came in, in order to die. This went on from January until August, when three men gave themselves up, after having reached Johore only to find that Singapore had fallen, and then having made their way up country again. A few, including John Stevenson and B.S.M. Parkinson made good their escape to Sumatra only to be caught there, except for John Stevenson who was evacuated sick before it fell.

Their home, until they joined us was Pudu Gaol in K.L., where they had a far worse time than we did. Overcrowded, underfed, without medical supplies, they just died. Working parties provided relief from prison life for those strong enough, but they were strictly guarded and the possibility of selling to Malays and so obtaining money to buy more food, was remote. Their best chance of making such a contact was on the occasion of a funeral, and such is the cussed grimness of fate, that the death of a comrade came to be almost eagerly awaited, in that it gave his surviving pals an opportunity to obtain the wherewithal to continue surviving.

As the weeks passed by into 1943, more and more parties came up from Malaya and later from Java and Sumatra and in contacting them, we obtained odd bits of news about missing members of the Regiment and endeavoured to compile an accurate roll.

Nongpladuk Camp had now become the Nip base depot and we were lucky in that, having started it and got into the routine, the Nips, to a large extent, kept us there. In late 1942, they detached two parties, one to go to TARSAO and build the camp, which later became the H.Q. of Group Four, and acted as an advanced base for a further section of the line, and one to TAMEKAM, to construct a momumental bridge over the river.

The majority of parties to Siam detrained at Banpong, and had to march forty-five miles to Kanburi or beyond. The march was scheduled to take two days and the road Banpong—Kanburi was a sorry sight to those of us who occasionally made the trip by lorry to fetch our Camp's pay. After a few miles, articles of kit too heavy to carry any further would be dumped, to be snatched eagerly by some Siamese coolie, who followed the column like a vulture. Further on, large numbers would sink down, unable to march more: some died that way, but the majority rested and went on a bit at a time, to arrive three or four days after the main party. Later, the Japanese realised that they themselves were the losers by insisting on this march, since work was impossible for most for a couple of days after: they therefore sent them by train on this first stretch of the line we had built, but by then, the advanced working sites had moved a further forty miles and consequently parties still had to march—along a mud track through the jungle.

Despite these difficulties, it was incredible the amount of 'junk' that found its way to Siam: early on, searching of kit was a mere formality, and somehow, some people managed to smuggle up wireless sets, mattresses, petrol stoves and even machine guns. Quite a number of camps ran their secret radio and the news so obtained would be passed up the line from camp to camp—a grand uplifter of morale.

Then came the blow. Suddenly, without warning, the Nips started the first of their periodic searches. People had become careless over hiding things, having done so systematically and unnecessarily for months: many had gone out to work leaving their 'valuables' about, and although the search was purely perfunctory, even the Nips couldn't fail to find something. Diaries were confiscated, odd trinkets which appealed to the individual searcher were just taken, and some wireless sets were found. In most cases, the Nips took no punitive measures, save to order that in future, all diaries must be handed in for their perusal—if considered 'harmless' they would be

chopped and given back. Any person subsequently found in possession of a diary which had not previously been handed in, would be subject to serious disciplinary action—death, if necessary. A list of things which prisoners were not allowed to possess, *e.g.*, knives, torches, was also published.

At this time Kanburi Camp was under the executive command of Major Cheedah, with Capt. Komai as his 2nd in Command,—the Camp was actually 'run' by a particularly obnoxious sergeant called Eizima. Here, from a small neighbouring camp, were brought four officers and a sergeant major, found in possession of a wireless set. Set on by Eizima, with Komai and other Nips participating, these men were beaten unmercifully while standing outside the guardroom. It was night time and though they could not see, some of the prisoners, whose hut was fairly near, could hear the blows, and they overheard at one stage: "For God's sake, kill me and have done with it." By morning two of the officers had died under the ordeal—the remainder were unconscious: it was sometime before they came out of hospital, and then they were court-marshalled and sent to Owtram Road Gaol, Singapore, for indefinite imprisonment.

This was our first experience of just how far the Nips would go, if anything upset them, and it was therefore decided that great as was the value to morale of receiving news it was not worth the lives of those who were operating a set, hence any sets still in existence were to be scrapped. Here, let us salute the Webber brothers Max and Donald, who forthwith proceeded to construct a set out of bits and pieces, and fit it in the bottom of a service water bottle, which they then filled with water. For batteries they used eighty torch cells hidden in the bamboo framework of their hut. From camp to camp for more than two years, they trekked with their treasure, carrying their few possessions on an improvised bamboo stretcher in the 'poles' of which were the batteries. In March, 1945, long after there was the faintest possibility of buying new cells, they produced their 750th 'broadcast.' By that time, only a few people dare be told the news, until it was 'stale,' for the Nips were arresting people right, left, and centre and torturing them to try and find out how we knew what we knew, and the fewer that knew, the better—The story of how the set came to life again in August, 1945, must be left till later. The two brothers have since been awarded a well merited M.B.E.

From that time on, news in most camps was obtained from newspapers,—there being little intercamp liaison, the Webber news service did not filter far. In Nongpladuk Camp, we had a Chinese scholar 'Pop' Grice, a Japanese scholar Ian Escritt, and two Siamese scholars—Bob Laming and Gerry Coombes. Japanese papers were occasionally stolen from the Nip office, and there were one or two people working outside, who managed to obtain the odd Chinese or Siamese paper. The translators then got to work, pooled results and concocted a not too remote version of the truth, which was let out by degrees at suitable moments, as having come from a "well dressed Thai."

The Nips themselves sometimes helped unwittingly: we were allowed occasional concerts, at which we could neither applaud nor laugh and the Nip Commandant, Capt. Noguchi of the Officer's camp at Kanburi, liked to advertise his 'good' treatment of his charges. When therefore, he went to Bangkok on July 12th, 1945, Col. Toosey asked if he would be good enough to buy for the band some violin E strings, since we could not produce these from the camp cats, and he had promised us a concert the next week. Noguchi returned on the 13th, with a packet of E strings, for which he charged 300 ticals (nearly £30 at par). The inner wrapping was a Siamese paper torn in two of 12th July, which Col. Toosey brought to Gerry Coombes, to investigate. What a wonderful moment! (The wireless set had broken down in March, and we had heard nothing definite since). There appeared the story of the battle of Berlin, the union of the Russian and British forces, the capitulation of Germany, and the fall of Rangoon. It was very difficult to keep such tidings bottled up for long.

Taken by and large, Nongpladuk Camp was probably the least unpleasant of them all in Siam: it was a static camp, and as time passed, we were able to

organise the Hospital, and with the establishment of a Chinese canteen, to improve our outside contacts, and outwit the Japanese by secretly providing facilities, which were impossible ' up the line.' Consideration of a few statistics will, however, show to what a low ebb this ' least unpleasant ' camp was reduced. In general, the following ration scale was authorised at Nongpladuk:—(daily per man).

Food.	Grammes Weight.	Calories.
Rice	608	2,027
Rice flour	17	55
Tapioca flour	16	18
Beef	35	60
Egg	11	20
Fish	9	10
Soya Beans	6	24
Peanuts	3	10
Sweet Potatoes	54	70
Pumpkin	36	4
Waxgourd	17	2
Cucumber	8	1
Eggplant	20	5
Greens	70	7
Onions	80	32
Chinese Radish	18	4
Coconut Oil	20	172
Sugar	16	64
Bean Shoots	80	16
		2,601

In terms of English weights this totals rather less than two pounds of food including waste, of all kinds—the potato ration, for instance was less than two ounces.

On ' paper ' this looks most impressive, but the following points should be borne in mind: the authorized amount was always short, for the Japanese ration N.C.O. made a fair profit in liaison with the merchants, and repeated complaints by our cookhouse staff only resulted in repeated beatings up: the sick too, were only authorized half-rations, and even in Nongpladuk we had a very high proportion of sick; they also received no pay, so could not supplement from the canteen: moreover, the Japanese always took for themselves the best parts of any rations without regard to any ration scale, leaving us—in the case of meat,—the bone and stewing part. As an illustration of amounts ' pilfered ' by the Nips: on 13th October, 1943, our messing officer complained of a shortage of three tons in the issue of vegetables over the previous ten days. He was soundly beaten.

Let us further analyse a few statistics—the average camp strength from July, 1942 to January, 1945, was 2,500, varying from 1,200 at the start, to over 7,000 at one short peak period: these consisted of a majority of British, with up to 50% Dutch and some Australians and Americans, sleeping shoulder to shoulder on the bamboo platforms from five to seven men per four yards. At the peak, the surplus—about 2,000—slept underneath the huts on the bare ground.

Over this period (125 weeks), the admissions to hospitals by diseases was as follows:—

Malaria	9,605	Purpura	1	Weil's disease	2
Blackwater fever	25	Neuro retinitis	52	Appendicitis	63
Other fevers	139	Other eye conditions	146	Gastritis, Peptic ulcers	292
Clinical dysentery	255	Bomb casualties	124	Worms	25
Amoebic dysentery	387	Fractures	53	Tonsillitis and Vincent's Angina	307
Bacillary dysentery	278	Amputations (for ulcers)	8	Jaundice	162
Colitis	772				
A-vitaminosis	96				

Beri-beri	360	Minor injuries	176	Amœbic Lepatitis	2
Pellagra	80	Tropical ulcers	637	Heart beri-beri	171
Scrotal dermatitis	51	Scabies and Erysipelas	362	Typhoid	1
Angular stomatitis	25	Abcesses and cellulitis	383	Renal cholic and cystitis	118
Scurvy	2	Pulmonary T.B.	18	Debility and anaemia	89
Fibrositis and arthritis	40	Epilepsy	8	Mental	3
Ear conditions	25	Diphtheria	15		
Pneumonia, Pleurisy, etc.	151	Cholera	2		

This totals 15,559, British and Australian; taking the Dutch figure as approximately proportionate, the total must be some 25,000 which, allowing each patient two weeks in hospital gives an overall average of 400 patients. The highest figure was over 900. In addition to this, owing to accommodation difficulties and shortage of staff, mild cases of most diseases were housed in a sick hut, given extra food, and kept under observation: if fit enough, they did light camp duties, such as helping in the cookhouse. The number of these varied from 150 to 300.

The monthly Japanese issue of drugs for a hospital of this size is most illuminating:—

Quinine—adequate (except for prophylactic use).
Bandages—about 30.
Mercurochrome (or iodine) half a litre.
Cellophane—a few sheets.
Japanese stomach tablets—a few hundred.
Creosote tablets—a few thousand.
Hydrogen perchloride—50 to 100 tablets.
Potassium permanganate—about 50 grammes.
Emetine: in three years—11 grains.

From time to time the Nip medical N.C.O. or one of the Nip Camp Staff, would inspect the sick, and during the 'Speedo' period, malarias, beri-beris, bronchial cases, and those with colitis or pellagra had to go out to work: though in Nongpladuk, the M.O. was never beaten up for having too many sick.

From 1943 onwards, officers received $20 a month pay (£1 16s. 8d.) and extra food was acquired for the sick from subscriptions compulsorily levied up to $10 per officer: canteen profits supplied some more, and the V. organisation the rest. This food and drugs were obtained unbeknown to the Japanese, the following being the prices:—.

Eggs 5 cents each in 1942—20 cents in 1944 (5 cts. = 1d).
Milk $1 per tin to $7 per tin ($1 = 1/10).
Bananas 5 cents per hand (15) to 3 cents a banana.
Kachang hijau (a type of lentil), 5 cents per 50 grammes to 20 cents.
Sugar 50 cents per kilo to $3.
Coconut Oil $10 per 4 gallons to $60 per 4 gallons.
Peanuts 50 cents per Kilo to $3.50 per Kilo.

This does not mean that everyone, who had cash, could purchase unlimited quantities of all this. The amount was limited by the ability of the Chinese canteen manager to bring it in, and of the 'boys' who went through the wire or smuggled stuff back from working parties in the tea tin, etc. The fact that the Nips allowed some food to be sold, gave a loophole to enable the canteen to sell much more, but there was a time when the M.O. had to think. "This poor devil will die, we can't spare him an egg,—that man may recover, he must have two."

The number of deaths at Nongpladuk was only 200, of which 50% were bomb casualties, but hundreds went on elsewhere, never to return.

A "V" Letter

(This is a copy of one of many such letters sent out by ' Paddy ' Sykes, to the Civil Internment Camp. In that it is an exact commentary of the situation at that time, it reflects the atmosphere of the camp).

28th August, 1943.

Dear V,

Your 16/8 and P.S. to hand have already given great pleasure and renewed hope to all. Insects (=P.W. wireless sets) in Banpong have almost died out now, and the air is very much clearer, but, generally, the vigil continues unabated,—searches being the order of the day, and many direct questions are put to test how up to date the information of the unwary may be: these remarks apply generally to all ranks. Your gift (= 72,000 ticals, Siamese money) has proved invaluable, and already four of the 72 have been converted into valuable stocks, which we fully realize are bound to run short. Some 200 (including 40 officers) convalescent sick have reached this camp from CHUNKAI, and thank God we've been able to do something really worth while for them. Their state is appalling and their stories are worse: if they are convalescent, then God help the sick. They had even reached the stage of carrying men out to work on stretchers, and when they (mostly dysentery cases) proved too weak to lift a hammer, they were either stoned or knocked cold with a crowbar or bamboo pole.

Approximately 800 to 1,000 coolies (Chinese, Tamils, Sikhs) are passing up jungle daily for rail maintenance. All are forced to come and a proportion of wives and children accompany them: they receive $10 for expenses in Malaya, with a promise of a further $10 on arrival, which is only paid after 6 months work. P.O.W. and coolies all work together: Tamils, B.O.R's Officers, Chinese, Malays, Australians, Sikhs and Dutch P.O.W. As a number of the Tamils invariably have cholera, and handle the same baskets and tools, its spread is almost inevitable. The mere idea of white men working at that speed in the Tropics is mad, but, in mixed gangs, it is ludicrous, and is, of course, all calculated brutality on the part of the Nips. Coolies' medical conditions are appalling: nothing at all, until M.O's and orderlies, recently arrived from CHANGI, were distributed in ones and twos among their camps, by which time cholera and dysentery had a real hold—mortality rate was averaging 30 a day in a camp of 6,000. One headman, who brought 160 from Malaya two months ago, has only 14 left. Many run away, and are shot if caught by the Nips, who mount L.M.G's on all coolie camps. It is estimated that 40,000 were working on the railway by mid-August, (excluding casualties). In a coolie camp near HINDATO, there is one Dutch M.O. and one orderly—no drugs or medicines of any sort, merely an issue of one half-litre bottle of creosote per week. Literally thousands are dying in the embankment construction area, and their bodies are thrown into the embankment—no burials allowed.

In all camps North of TARSAO, approximately 75% of all P.O.W. are sick: camps containing two to three thousand turn out 50 to 100 men for work daily. The general condition of all men is very bad indeed and the number of deaths is frightful. The worst camp (10th July), opened approximately 20th May with 3,000 from CHANGI and had 600 deaths in six weeks from cholera and dysentery. In KANYU Camp, 500 patients out of 1,400 in the camp passed through hospital in three weeks and 90 died from dysentery. All camps from TARSAO to KANYU are for sick only. Small parties of men passed fit by Nips are sent up the line from these camps to rejoin their parties, but seldom reach there, as they are grabbed for work wherever needed along the railway. In the rail-laying party P.O.W. have been working 30 hours out of the 48, with no man getting more than 4 hours in bed in 24 for the last 3 weeks (10th July). In HINDATO Camp (Dutch), the Nip M.O. inspects the sick himself: temperatures do not matter, they can rest on the embankment: men with dysentery

can work in between visits to the latrines (30 plus per day !) There is no dysentery: it is called chronic colitis, and cholera is acute colitis. All men not in hospital are forced out to work by Nip guards, who do not hesitate to use rifle butts.

KINSAIOK is probably one of the worst camps, and the same remarks apply, except that the work (end of July), was cutting through rock, and the sick who couldn't do their work were knocked out with bamboos, stones or crowbars, and left till the party moved back to camp in the dark. Cholera, generally, is now under control, but during the outbreaks in July, one Australian Camp at TONCHAN had 200 cases out of 1,000 in 24 hours, of which 85 died. THAKENUN had 200 deaths from cholera (June). WANPO has now opened as a hospital camp. Shifts at KINSAIOK are now 07.00 to midnight with the possibility of more next day. One bridge upstream broke adrift and had to be pulled straight by elephants: it is now held in position by wires. At WANYAI camp, the mud is 12 to 18 inches deep. TARSAO is now saving over 50% of cholera cases.

All parties in front of the line laying party are particularly badly treated. Working parties must be kept to a maximum and no convalescence is allowed. Long hours, short rations (eight oz. rice and one dried fish—similar to white bait) are responsible for the shocking beri-beri, dysentery and ulcer cases. Treatment during "Speedo" is beyond description, and as the men will not stand the appalling conditions, they slip away and hide, and the officers are beaten with bamboos for being short of numbers. Cholera cases are left on the embankment till the evening and medical orderlies sent to collect them, are made to work on the embankment. Quote: "In KANYU Camp during June/July in SPEEDO drive, conditions were hell, the Jap attitude was that the line came first, and deaths of P.O.W. were a minor trouble." Never have Britons been subjected to such treatment.

There arrived at CHUNKAI (19th August), four barge loads of sick, nearly all living skeletons, one already dead, and another died on way to hospital: one has only to see the "CONVALESCENT" cases arriving here, to appreciate what the others must be like. Thank God and OTHERS that we are able to do something for them here, now that they have found a temporary haven. KINSAIOK (5th August), rain, bottomless mud, leaking tents made of cotton (35 in tents made for 10), cholera, and dead Tamils. Chinese, and Malays alongside the railway. A and B vitamin deficiencies mounting alarmingly: no rations for some days, owing to landslide blocking the railway track. Qoute: "Salt, sugar, and coconut oil gave out some days ago; and rice gives out to-morrow: meat on hoof still O.K., no vegetables. Now doing two shifts of 24 hours each, out of 48 hours: men dead beat whole time and now, bad feet owing to mud. Men carried to work by pals. Japs adamant in demands for fantastic numbers. Several dozen sick men doing 24 hour shifts in miserable conditions." Compared with all this (which is first hand) our own camp is heaven. Two deaths since my last, and both from the 'convalescent' parties arriving. We are doing everything in our power to help those unfortunates who have just joined us, but spending in Banpong is becoming increasingly difficult, as the Nips are forcing us to buy everything through the Thai canteen, so as to be absolutely certain of their 3% 'rake off' on all purchases. We are however still permitted to buy for the hospital, but have to be very careful, as the guard consists of an interpreter (who incidentally can only speak Jap and Malay). We have made a further rise in our officers 'contributions to hospital, and are now giving one third of our pay, which, all considered, is very small, and leaves ample reserve for the officer to call on.

The camp had a cursory inspection by a Jap Colonel to-day. He actually entered the officer's hut, one of the troop's huts, and three wards in the hospital—quite an unknown procedure. There is very little work left to do here, practically no rails or sleepers left, and more troops arriving every day,—we cannot make it out. But two roads (past the P.O.W. cemetery) running N.S. each side of the camp have been cleared, and

opened to very considerable traffic lately, and many huts and buildings of strong timber appear to be contemplated. The roads are about a mile apart, and join behind the camp, where the hinterland is fairly clear and flat. Oh ! Icarus, I wonder. The Japs say that when No. 1 group moves from here, we are going about 200 miles West of Bangkok and some 50 drivers and 30 carpenters left here a few days ago, ostensibly for Bangkok. But there are many such stories, all equally unreliable, I fear.

The Nips made a very useful gesture last pay day (20th August), paying all officers the same amount (*i.e.*, 30 ticals per month) and thus enabling 2/Lts. and Lts. to contribute to the hospital the same amount as Majors and Lt.-Cols., but of course they get correspondingly less in their accounts with the Yokohama Specie Bank. Still, a bird in the hand—etc.,—and we have long endeavoured to obtain permission to devote these accounts to the hospital without success.

Clothing is very bad, and issues are scarce. We are still feeling the draught of being a backwater camp, but the spirit of the Camp is good, the M.O's are absolute gems, and the padré, the best ever. He is everybody's friend, and I think that the change in atmosphere, from the depressing effects of hospitals up country, is having a beneficial effect on the new arrivals already, and the working figures are going up daily: the change is remarkable and very heartening. Well again, our very best thanks for this and past kindness, and we eagerly await the next with tails up, up, up !

Yours Aye,
V/V.

Speedo

" The railway will be completed by August, 1943, irrespective of the loss in life of Prisoners of War." As 1943 began to pass, Nongpladuk slowly developed into a semi-hospital camp. There were hospitals at Kanburi and Chunkai too, of ever-growing dimensions and large overflow parties came on to us. The sight was appalling: walking skeletons by the score,—dysentery cases ; swollen balloons of humanity, apparently about to burst—beri-beri ; people with skinless legs, one large festering tropical ulcer, soon to suffer an amputation. Even the Nip interpreter turned to Eddie Gill as one party came in, and murmured: " The men from Hell !"

We were, by now, fairly well organised and in regular receipt of " V " money, so that very soon, unknown to the Nips, these unhappy mortals were able to have emetine (procurred through " V ") and eggs. The only remedy we had for the ulcer was to soak it in hot water with ' pot permang,' clean it, and then apply raw carbolic, hoping that with a better diet, and improved bodily resistance, nature would heal. Sometimes nature did ; sometimes the leg had to come off, and sometimes the patient died. By and large, the medical staff were magnificient and many a man alive to-day owes his existence to the untiring efforts of Erny Smyth the S.M.O., and his able collaborators. All camps could tell the same tale.

Meanwhile the Jap was screaming for more parties to go up country and lay the line. They nominated some 400 personnel they called ' specialists,' who were untouchable, and for the rest, Eddie Gill evolved a policy that no one should return to hell, while there remained at Nongpladuk any one who had not yet been there, so that gradually, most of the original 1,200 went up, many, never to return.

There was never more than 12 hours notice: in the afternoon, the order would come: " Four hundred men, to-morrow, 5 o'clock—go jungle camp," and the wretched Camp Commander would be up till 2 a.m. deciding who was to go, in consultation with the M.O. It was a case of: " Who is least ill ?"—not, " Who is fit enough?" Many hard words have been said on the question of sending people up country, while a certain selected few remained behind,—it was no easy task, and Eddie Gill is to be congratulated on carrying it out in his own way, despite criticism.

The Nip appeared to appreciate that he did some work, for one midnight, the Nip Commander appeared in the office where our C.O. was still working, and said: " For many nights, you very diligent officer,—I make presento."— and he solemnly handed over six sheets of BROMO.

Up country they were being driven out to work, sick included, and forced with blows to work on, even as much as eighteen and twenty hours per day, with little food, and no medical supplies. If a working party of 300 were demanded, and the Camp could only muster 200 ' fit,' the Nip N.C.O. would parade the hospital and arbitrarily order a further 100 on to the work party, often beating up the M.O. for classifying too many men as sick.

One of the most frightful cases on record, which happened on more than one occasion, was of a working party, which included several dysentery cases, marching some miles to its job. Some fell out for obvious reasons. The Nip N.C.O. halted the party, made them dig pits, and buried the defaulters up to their necks. There they were left in the sun, with ants to bite them above, and goodness knows what irritation and torture below, for twelve hours or more, till the party returned and they were allowed to haul out the survivors.

No figment of the imagination could hope to compete in horror with the truth of what happened in innumerable instances. A combination of stupidity, rigid discipline, and an innate love of sadism produced this unparalleled human tragedy.

Two more instances will suffice to indicate in some small measure what is meant. A Japanese Corporal was put in charge of a train load of 500 sick from Brenkassi to Kanburi (150 odd miles). They had to be very sick for the Nips to authorize their evacuation to the base ' hospital ' and this load included two amputations of the leg carried out the same morning, together with numerous serious dysentery and beri-beri cases. The first day, there were two deaths, but 500 bodies had to be delivered at Kanburi, and the dead men had to remain for four more days in the wagons with thirty-nine others.

Sometimes, riverside camps evacuated their sick by barge to Chunkai. Chunkai was never warned of the arrival of a party, which would be dumped at the landing stage often at night, and have to make its way as best it could to the camp. The nearest point on the river was only three or four hundred yards from the Camp, but they were sometimes deposited as far as three miles from this. When the fitter sick straggled into the Camp, a stretcher party would be organized to go and collect the remainder. On one occasion, a barge, heavily overladen with chronic dysentery cases arrived, and two of the occupants, too sick to move, had been drowned as they lay in the bottom, in human excrement.

The situation brought out the best and the worst in human nature. It is regrettable to record that we had among us, people who awaited the arrival of such a party, and a few ' sharks ' would speed out of the camp ahead of the stretcher bearers, to see if there were any dead or dying en route, who might have the odd blanket or money, which could be ' lifted ' before it was officially taken over by the camp staff for use in the hospital.

During this time, many cholera epidemics did not help to diminish the steadily growing death rate.

Such events as the foregoing, were not, of course, everyday occurrences, and here follows an extract from Louis Baume's diary, giving an overall picture of life in an up country camp during the ' Speedo ' period.

" The following is taken from that part of my diary, which deals with the ' Speedo ' period. I re-wrote my diary from my original notes kept throughout my imprisonment. I intentionally tried to keep a just and unprejudiced balance between the brighter and grimmer moments we went through. It was not every hour of the day that brutal and savage treatment was being meted out, nor was it every week that vast numbers were being massacred. I have therefore tried to give a picture of that hopeless feeling of despair, of a drab and dull life unrelieved by any colour, kindness or ray of hope ; an ever present feeling of inevitable doom ; that hopelessness and helplessness at seeing the conditions becoming worse each day, at seeing your friends and your

men suffering and dying and realising that one day, it would be your turn too and that until then, you had just to plod on hour after hour, day after weary day. It was this feeling of bitter despair, this background of mud and rain, this prospect of slow starvation, the daily contact with disease and death, the brutality, indifference of the Nips, this wholly depressing atmosphere of the camp that I have endeavoured to present."

" The nations not so blest as thee
Must in their turns to tyrants fall,
While thou shalt flourish great and free,
The dread and envy of them all.
Rule, Britannia ! rule the waves !
Britons never will be slaves."

MAY 27TH, 1943. Charles Huntriss, Henry Salisbury, Bob Turner and myself have veen detailed to go ' up country '———the dreaded day has arrived ; we do not know where we are bound for but the Nips say that there will be transport all the way and that we can take our light-sick with us. We packed our kit, and said goodbye to our friends, wondering when and if we would see them again.

We left Nong Pladuk at ten in the morning with a party of about 200 headed by Major George Clegg, R.A., and travelled on the familiar flat-topped bogies of the Nip Railway ; as the train gathered speed, the old landmarks which had become parts of our lives slipped past—the tamarind tree in Hashimoto under which we used to sit during ' yasume ' time, the huts with the men waving to us from behind the bamboo fence, the little coffee-stall under the mango tree by Cemetery Road, the Chinese farm so beautifully tended, the flame-of-the-forest——when would we see them all again ? After passing behind the old Ban Pong camp situated in the temple grounds, the Jungle Line drew away from the Thai State Railway and, curving north, passed through the town, over the main road and, leaving behind the town slaughter-house with the hundreds of stinking vultures clustered on the dead trees around it, headed straight on for Ban Pong North, scene of many a sweated hour. We stopped there for about an hour, cramped and sweating but forbidden to get off the trucks, and then set off again in a north-westerly direction for Kanchanabouri. The country became more wooded, the lower branches of the trees heavy with the nests of the weaver birds ; the distant hills came nearer and enveloped us ; rain began to fall.

It was 2-30 when we reached Kanchanabouri, the City of Gold, situated at the junction of the Khwa Noi and Me Khlong rivers, 50 kiles from Nong Pladuk. We were ordered off the train and told to eat our rice " Oru men meshi, ichi-ji yasume !" (All men feed, one hour's rest). We found a dry spot under a tree and unpacked our haversack rations, those of us who had time took off our boots and webbing equipment and eased our belts or pieces of string,—we started our " meshi." Suddenly there was a bellow followed by a torrent of Japanese—it meant that we were to get back onto the train again, it was leaving in three minutes ; we gathered up our things and ran. Nibbling our rice and bananas, we tried to sort ourselves out again as the train continued its way past Tamekam and over the wooden bridge built next to the unfinished steel and concrete one, well defended by A.A. guns ; after crossing the river we went south-west, following the Khwa Noi to Chunkai and Wun Lung then turned the second bend and headed west again to pass Bankau, Takilin and Arrow Hill. At the 144 Kilo mark we came to the Wanpo Viaduct, an impressive construction three-quarters of a mile long, hewn out of solid rock and clinging hundreds of feet above the river to the sheer face of a mighty cliff ; could we appreciate the hours of suffering and slavery this represented, the number of lives this cost ? Darkness fell and under cover of night the shadowy trees closed in on us as though to stifle the unwelcome intruders to their virginal fastness.

It was after nine that we finally arrived at Wan Yai (120 kilos), wet, tired and stiff, and were ordered off the train, we fell in to be counted but it was pitch dark and the Nip guard with one weak hurricane lamp was unable to see us all ; we were counted once, twice, three times, I forget how often,

until at last we arrived at a number which was approximately correct. We picked up our bundles and, following the guard, marched down a muddy track which leads to one of the camps near Tarsao. It was only then that we learnt that the line went no further and from there onwards, fit or sick, we should have to go on foot.

We were fallen in to be counted again and then informed that as no arrangements had been made for us, we would have to spend the night in the open. Fortunately for us the night remained dry, though very cold; lying on the damp ground and looking up into the dark night sky, I could see an occasional star glimmering hopefully through the trees, winking encouragement at me——perhaps, I thought, some lonely watcher on the English coast was also at this very moment looking at this same star, dreaming of his next leave home . . . .

Next morning, in the semi-gloom of a cheerless dawn, we sorted out our kit—what to carry with us and what to leave behind—and then shouldering our bundles (about 50 to 60 lbs.) set off on our four days march 'up-country' through the jungle-clad hills to Kinsayok. Some of H and F force were marching up with us too. It was pouring with rain—the first of the wet season—and soon the track was churned into thick, glutinous black mud which quickly pulled the soles off our old and worn boots; I tried tying mine on with a piece of string but it was worse than useless, I became resigned to walking with my boots full of liquid mud; others, throwing their useless boots aside, walked bare-footed. We pushed on, up the long steep hill to Tonchan, then still further through streams and lakes of oozing mud until, at long last, soaked and solid filth up to our knees, we reached Spring Camp where we were to spend our first night.

We were shown our crowded and leaky tents and then the four of us went to enjoy, despite the hungry mosquitoes, a delicious and refreshing bathe in the stream which flowed through the camp. We then drew our rice from the cookhouse and opened one of our last tins of bully-beef; we have one each, kept for such an emergency, and we have pooled them—one for each day of the march. The jungle stew (boiled dried vegetables) was greatly improved by adding a little of my precious Marmite, also put aside for a rainy day. We then laid out our bedding-rolls and, having removed our muddy boots, crawled under our damp blankets and passed a cold, wet and comfortless night.

* * * *

Next morning, having forced our blistered feet into our wet and clammy boots and having managed to swallow a little rice and water, we were marched out of the camp and again fallen in to be counted. We had again the usual performance before being ordered on our way; those who were too sick to continue were beaten and kicked until finally they submitted and agreed to march on; there were no sick men here, "Bioki-nai!" So we set off under a shower of blows, curses and "kurrahs" and marched all that sweltering, steaming day until finally, as the long afternoon was drawing to a close, we reached ill-famed Kanyu where we were once again herded into small and leaky tents, pitched in the middle of what appeared to be a swamp.

Innumerable "tenkos," to which I was by now becoming resigned, inevitable orders and counter-orders, confusion, shouts, screams of uncontrolled rage, beatings and bashings soon made us feel quite at home; finally we were ordered to dig latrines and go and collect fire-wood from the jungle with which to cook our rice. This was done, but not without some justified cursing by the prisoners. Once finished, Henry and I ventured to find a stream to wash in; we waded knee-deep through the slimy bog in which floundered abandoned lorries, sunk up to the tops of their wheels, before we found a trickle of water sufficient for our needs. We stripped and started cleaning off the worst of the accumulated mud. On getting back to the tent we were just as muddy again and the sympathy we received from the others was negative. Later that evening when the rain had stopped for a while, we wandered about the place and saw one of those large black scorpions (about the size of a small lobster but with immense nippers), a terapim and

several large snakes of unknown make. Then the rain started again and beat down mercilessly throughout the long night ; we were able to fill our water-bottles from the trickles pouring in steadily through the thin and torn canvas of our small tent. The tent was designed for two but we were about twelve in it and sleep was naturally impossible.

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" Does the road wind up-hill all the way ?" we might have asked. " Yes, to the very end." " Will the day's journey take the whole long day ?" and we would have been told " From morn to night, my friend."

Yes, that is how it might have been, but not here ; for the misty morn was made horrible by the frenzied shouts of the Nips, by the slapping and beating of the sick. A tin spade was missing—oh, monstrous crime ! Had it been a mere prisoner or two that had dropped down dead, who would have cared ? But a spade belonging to His Imperial Majesty—" Kurrah !" Oru haitei will look for this spade ; no one will leave this spot until it is found and if it is not found, someone will pay for it—but not in cash. The spade was found and we still paid for it.

Late that morning we left that God forsaken spot, that slough of despondency whose stagnant air reeked of disease and despair and, having negotiated the treacherous Kanyu Hill, pushed on and marched non-stop all that day. The rain poured down and Charles and I, each at one end of a bamboo pole along which was strung some of our kit, waded on through the mud, slipping, cursing, each trying to cheer the other one up. The kilometres stretched, endlessly before us, the hours dragged slowly by, but in the end we reached our goal—Hintock, an Australian camp.

The Japanese showed us to our rooms : a bamboo framework with a few pieces of torn canvas for a roof and the wet mud as a floor ; these ' huts ' were erected on the slope of a hill, at the foot of a rocky cliff, and the rain flowed down through the ' huts ' forming coffee-coloured rivulets and pools in the chocolate-brown mud of the floor. We went into the jungle to gather branches and leaves and then brought them back to the ' hut ' and placed them down on the spot where we had decided to sleep. We tried to wash, then, after some rice and jungle stew, we made a fire and, taking off our clothes, tried to warm ourselves and dry our clothes. But the rain began again, the flames died down and we took shelter in our ' huts.' We passed a miserable and almost sleepless night huddled in our wet blankets, listening to the steady downpour outside and the continuous trickle of water through the holes in the roof onto those who were inside.

I lay shivering, curled up in a ball, trying to visualize this immense mountainous region covered with a mantle of thick inhospitable jungle—jungle uninhabited except by a few wild animals and ourselves, jungle through which, from Three Pagoda Pass on the Burma border, winds and twists the Khwa Noi on its journey south to Kanchanabouri from where, mingling with the muddy waters of the Mee Khlong, it continues its more leisurely course through Ban Pong and Ratbouri to the Gulf of Siam. For it is up this river valley that the Jungle Railway is being built to meet the line creeping forward from Thanbyuzayat, south of Moulmein in Burma ; it is up this same valley too that we are slowly plodding.

* * * *

We left in the early morning, almost glad to get moving again so as to bring warmth back into our cold and shivering bodies ; but the clouds were low over the jungle-girt hills and heavy mists strayed like an army of lost ghosts through the tops of the dripping trees ; rain was beating down without cease, soaking our still wet clothes and making our already water-logged kit heavier with every drop. Bit by bit we had been forced to throw away our precious belongings along the route through the sheer physical impossibility of carrying them any further ; a blanket was torn in half, a spare pair of shorts was discarded, a precious novel was dumped, that small kapok pillow—last luxury of a forgotten world—was ruthlessly thrown aside, but now we were reduced to the barest minimum of essentials and we had to get through or bust.

The hills grew steeper and at the bottom of the ravines lay a thick grey soup through which we had to wade. The mud seemed to become thicker and more slippery the further we went and when one slipped over, which was frequent, particularly for those who were bare-footed, it was not possible to get up again unaided—and always behind us, better fed, better housed at night and carrying nothing except a rifle, were the Korean guards beating and kurrahing us on ; even the sick were beaten up and kicked when they collapsed by the wayside, no one was spared.

The men are not being paid during these days spent on the march (for probably our Nips pocket the money) and we have been given only the scantiest of rations. Between breakfast and supper we have a handful of rice, both cold and sour, and a tiny scrap of dried fish (often uncooked) ; sometimes we are not even allowed to stop and eat our food but have to nibble it as we go along. Breakfast consists of a little rice and a small piece of dried fish ; supper, also rice and some unpalatable jungle stew.

Charles and I, still poles apart, continued our weary way along the track ; the sun had come out during the morning and the going was easier. But we were hot and weary and our feet were burning ; our backs were crying out for a rest but we could not stop for long—the Koreans were not far behind us, and journey's-end not far in front. On, on: we did not bother to skirt the bogs and puddles any longer, it was quicker to go straight through and we could not get any wetter or dirtier than we already were. The last kilometre, would it never end ? But at long last, as the afternoon was drawing to an end, we saw some attap roofs through the trees and blue smoke rising up from a camp—it was Kinsayok. Even though it was only another prison camp, we thanked God we were there at last.

* * * *

JUNE, 1943. So this is Kinsayok ! We are crowded into rat-infested huts, built in a small jungle clearing on the banks of the Khwar Noi ; but we thank our lucky stars that we have huts of sorts to protect us from the weather, filthy, lousy and leaky though they are. It has rained solidly for six days and we have not yet been able to dry our soaked clothes and blankets ; colds and malaria are starting already and most people's blisters have turned septic. A sub-camp has been established about 11 kilos down river, and a large number of our party, have been sent down there.

We have a twelve hour day which starts with breakfast in the dark ; this delightful meal which we eat while still half asleep (mercifully), shivering with cold and watching the grey mists creep up from the rain-swollen river, consists of a half pint of rice ' porridge ' and a mug of luke-warm river water. Afterwards we fall in for working parade for which we have to supply a fixed number of bodies irrespective of the number of sick in camp. The drill has to be done in Japanese ; we wait in the rain for the little bastards to come. Our clothing consists of a pair of very ragged shorts or just a ' jap-happy,' most are bare footed, few have hats, but all of us have a tin or mug containing the mid-day ' meshi.' Ikey slouches up, " Trotski ! Kashira-naga !" and we come to attention and look towards him while he answers the salute. " Nore ! Bango !" and we number down the line——" ichi, ni, san, shi, go, roku, . . ." with a slap in the face often if a mistake is made. Lt. Sasuki, the camp commandant, hovers about the place, fat and futile, daintily picking his way through the mud and filth ; Monkey-face, Dillinger and others stand in the background and jeer. Ikey (he is not such a bad fellow really) goes down the ranks counting for himself and then, scribbling on his bit of paper or squatting down and doing his sums on the ground, begins to detail us for our day's work. Sometimes we are lucky and fall on one of the less killing jobs but usually we are not.

One or two Officers are at the head of each party, not so much to take charge as to take the blame and bashes if anything goes wrong. The party straggles out of camp through the mud and rain, collects the shovels and wicker baskets and goes on for two or three more kilometres to its place of work. We place our tins of rice and water bottles under a clump of bamboo then set to work. We labour all morning with an occasional five minutes

yasume (break) if the guards are not feeling too bloody minded, and with luck knock off between one and two for lunch:—half a pint of cold, sour rice (the rice is cooked at about 4 a.m. and has invariably turned by noon), a tiny piece of dried fish and a drink of cold water. Then we start work again and carry on until evening when we fall in to be counted and marched back to camp, halting on the way to deposit the tools and to collect wood or bamboo for our cookhouse.

Arrived in camp, we are again counted and if there are no other fatigues to be done (such as unloading barges or digging graves) we return to our huts; after a quick wash—time permitting—we eat our supper, the principal meal of the day:—half a pint of wet rice, a little dried vegetable with sometimes a 'doover'* and a mug of warm water. In an attempt to find a more palatable drink than boiled water, we are experimenting with a coffee made out of burnt rice; at present it is difficult to know which is the least vile, but we are persevering.

* 'Doover'—from horsd'oeuvre was the name given to any kind of solid concoction, rice-cake, 'pastry' or 'bun' produced by the cooks.

* * * *

There are about 1,300 in the camp out of which about 200 are down with dysentery. Our part of the line—through some of the most difficult country—consists of a long earth cutting, a long cutting through rock, miles of earth embankment up to thirty or forty feet high, two large bridges and several smaller ones. In the earth cutting, the earth, after being dug out, has to be carted away in small wicker baskets and thrown to either side of the cutting; in the stone cutting the rock has to be blasted, broken up and carted off all by hand; for the embankments, earth has to be dug and carted by hand in the small baskets to the lane marked out with bamboos and as the embankments grows higher, so one has to climb up with one's load to throw the earth on the top. For the bridges, trees have to be cut in the jungle and carried or dragged out to the site of the bridge where they must then be hewn and cut to the correct size before being erected in position, sometimes in concrete foundations. Even the sick are being made to work—those with beri-beri, malaria, dysentery or tropical ulcers (of which most of us have already several). Quite a few in the adjoining camp have died as a result of this: Lt. Tanaka, the camp commander, ordered the dysentery patients to go out to work one day; protests were ignored and out they had to go; the inevitable happened.

In our camp only the crudest forms of sanitation exist and flies and bluebottles are breeding by the million; they pester us all the time and come and settle on our food and mouths when we are eating. Charles and I have already a touch of dysentery and we are trying to cure it by eating ground-up burnt bamboo.

JUNE 12TH, 1943. Out on the earth cutting again; the daily task set for each man is one cubic metre—this includes removal of tree-stumps, roots, rocks, etc.—and as about three men are required to remove the earth dug out by one man, it means that the digger has to remove four cubic metres in one day, no mean task when one is fit, and one which is even worse when the earth is wet and heavy and sticks to the shovel. But even so, some teams were able to get through their task fairly quickly and used to be able to return to camp twenty or thirty minutes before the others and get a bathe in before supper. But now the Nips are giving extra work to do to those who finish early and so there is no advantage in working flat-out. I have also been out on the big No. 4 bridge; this bridge, which will be about sixty feet high and constructed of timber with a concrete foundation, will carry the line across a deep gully; at present we are clearing the undergrowth and trees from the bottom of the gully and cutting away at the earth and rock which are in the way. The hours on this job are the longest of any at present for the work is well behind schedule. However, on two consecutive days I have been on the light railway job with the Dutch troops; this is not too bad and consists of carting tree trunks out of the jungle and stacking them next to the

working site of the No. 4 bridge ; the Nip in charge—a fairly good tempered beast—allows us to go back to camp as soon as we have done our allotted task and yesterday evening we finished at 6-30—incredibly early—and were able to get back in time for a wash and shave in the bathing stream before supper.

This stream runs from the jungle and throws itself into the main river a little down stream from our camp. It is small but, when not crowded with prisoners, delightful. The Nips wash in the upper part of the stream where the water is not contaminated, whilst we have to be content with their dirty water lower down ; there are small fish swimming about and they love to come and nibble at our ulcers—it is painful but does no harm for they chew away at the rotten flesh and thereby clean the sores.

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We run a small officer's Mess here, and we all pay in a few dollars according to what we earn and whoever is in Camp tries to get some tit-bit for our supper ; once we had a bullock's tongue, thrown away by the Nips ; occasionally we can buy a few whitebait from a barge bringing up the rations (we always look forward to meeting our old Chinese contact, Pong—he is up to all sorts of tricks for us and runs many risks). This evening we had a boiled pig's head ; the pig was killed yesterday morning and we had it hanging outside our hut all night ; the head was pretty high when we ate it but like that it flavoured the rice better. The barges which come up with the rations also bring in a meagre supply of canteen goods—too little to go round and at very high prices. It is difficult to make it go round and everybody is sure that the other person has had more than his fair share ; food seems to occupy a top priority in everybody's mind and seems to be a matter of life and death—which it undoubtedly is.

Cholera (that dreaded word) is in the area and we have just had a warning about it—but what can we do but wait for it to come and hope that when it does come it will not hit us too hard ? It is grim and depressing news coming on top of all our other misfortunes ; the camp is hushed, only the rain falling steadily and unremittingly on the attap roofs can be heard and the water trickling off the pointed leaves and splashing into the already full gutters.

JUNE 14TH, 1943. The cholera is with us and we have five cases now in camp of which two have already died. Doctor Butterfield is looking after the cases. The Nips are rushing up cholera inoculation and we have all received our first jab ; we do not believe for one moment that it is sympathy for us that is urging them to take these precautions (the only ones they take), rather it is fear for themselves. They are scared stiff of it and we have already discovered that in case of trouble one has only to whisper the word ' cholera ' and the Nips are off in a cloud of dust. We are treated like lepers and are not allowed to approach their camps.

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Recently I have been working on the stone cutting—by far the worst job now, an absolute hell under swinish Nips. The tasks on the earth cutting as well as the stone cutting have been doubled to two cubic metres per man ! Anybody would think that we are a lot of bloody supermen. The working conditions are almost unbearable—hacking away at the rock in the full blaze of the mid-day sun or digging up the thick red clay and mud in teeming rain—bare-footed, with feet cut and bleeding from the broken rock or sharp bamboo thorns, hatless and naked except for a brief ' jap-happy ' for most of our clothes are worn out and rotten and only a few of us have hats, shorts or footwear ; and all the time the blasted, bloody Nips screaming and shouting, bellowing, beating, bashing, kurrahing, kicking and hurling stones, sticks and insults, forever urging, forcing and bullying us to work faster, faster and faster. And at the end of the long day's work we stumble back to camp in the dark, along a rutted road knee-deep in thick black jungle mud and after a poor and insufficient supper eaten in the pitch dark or, at the most, by the dim light of a flickering coconut-oil lamp filling the foul air with its thick black smoke, we lie down to sleep on the bamboo slats of our filthy hut,

crawling with bed-bugs, lice and maggots. It is a restless sleep for even then we are carried back to the green and dripping jungle to carry fantastic loads of eternal bamboo or baskets of earth while all the yellow devils of Hell stand around with sticks in their hands, shouting and kurrahing us on to work faster, faster, faster. And in the morning it all starts over again ; there is no end to all this—except one—it just seems to go on, and on . . . .

JUNE 16TH, 1943. There is now nearly a 100% sickness in the camp yet we still have to produce an increasing quota of workers. If we do not produce the required numbers, the sick are turned out and paraded ; if a prisoner has an ulcer he is generally safe, but not always, for sometimes the sight of an ugly, gaping wound incites the Nip to kick it for he knows that the mere threat of a second kick is sufficient to urge the prisoner out to work. The ones with beri-beri heart or dysentery, who have no outward signs of sickness, are slapped and beaten for their insolence in pretending to be ill ; if they still insist that they are too ill to go out and do a day's work, they are slapped and beaten again, until finally, just to escape, they agree to go out. According to the Nips there are no sick (that eternal cry of " Bioki-nai !")—prisoners are either dead or fit, even if they have to be carried out to work on stretchers. Sasuki says he cannot do anything about it as he has to take his orders from the Railway Engineer ; this we believe, but nevertheless he is spineless. Up to now only one of our cholera cases has survived. Sometimes one or two of us manage to stay in camp sick and we put in a hard day's work tidying up, digging graves as fast as we can, digging latrines or drains, chopping wood for the cookhouse, or trying unsuccessfully to patch up the tumble-down hut used as a hospital ; for this job we are given no materials, for the Nips are not the least interested in the sick ; the centre portion of the hut has collapsed and to pass from one end of the hut one has almost to crawl under the fallen bamboos ; the attap has come off the top of the roof and there is just one big hole through which the rain pours in, wetting all the sick huddled on the broken bamboo slats.

The other afternoon we had to clean out the Nip stores where the baskets of dried fish are kept ; the place was alive with rats and we had to chase them away before sorting out the good fish from the badly chewed up pieces ; the former went back into store, the latter to our cookhouse. We had our first real meat to-day ! But the camp strength is about 1,300 and we were issued with one scraggy young bullock, a quarter of which was taken away by the few Nips and Koreans in the camp ; we were left with hardly more than the bones, the skin and the smell.

JUNE 18TH, 1943. Out until 8-30 at night felling timber in the jungle (we were up at 6-30 this morning as usual). After cutting down the trees we trim them and haul the logs out on to the track where either we or the elephants drag them to one of the bridges. To give an idea of the size of the trees, one that I cut down this morning measured 56 metres to its first branches ! Round these parts, the jungle is about half timber and half bamboo, the cracks being filled in with small bushes and plants or creepy-crawly things ; it is not nearly as thick as the jungle in Malaya, however. Teak, pipul, lucifer bushes, plantains, small brilliant orchids and many other plants abound. Monkeys, wild deer, snakes and other game are occasionally seen. The trees we choose are tall, straight and slender but there are others which are immense in height as well as girth. They stand as solid as lighthouses, supported by flying buttresses, gripped by snake-like creepers and festooned with hanging lianas, aerial roots, parasitical ferns and orchids, all struggling silently and unceasingly in a relentless fight for light and life. In the tangled undergrowth at the feet of the giants crawl a million kinds of insects, some sparkling like jewels, others grotesque and horrific in their infinite variety of sizes, shapes, and colours. In the clearings, playing among the sunbeams, are clouds of gaily coloured butterflies—a living rainbow of brilliant hues against a sombre background of greys and greens. In the dark and humid corners, unseen but not unheard, hover myriads of hungry mosquitos eager for the taste of warm blood. And over all the jungle, in the trees, in the undergrowth, in the ground, swarm and bustle innumerable

communities of ants, white, red, brown and black, each one unreasoningly intent on its allotted task. It is only gradually that one realizes that the apparently lifeless jungle does, in fact, throb with a life far more complex, far more vital and far more ruthless than any we may at first imagine ; and we are part of this life. Now the deathly stillness of the jungle is broken only by the sound of chopping, the occasional crashing of timber and the distant trumpeting of elephants.

JUNE 21ST, 1943. The dreaded " Speedo " has started and we now have to begin work an hour earlier in the morning and finish an hour later at night. This is about the last straw and is enough to make us give up all hope of ever getting out of the bloody place alive—we always think we have sunk as low as it is humanly possible for we can never imagine anything worse ; yet there is, for we are slowly sinking deeper ; soon despair turns to indifference and we pray for the final release . . . .

" What then remains, but that we still should cry
Not to be born, or, being born, to die ?"

All the sick, even the ' bed-downs,' have to go out to work ; we never see the inside of our huts by daylight nor do we have time to wash ourselves or our clothes. Everything in the camp is of the same drab colour ; the bamboo and attap huts, grey with age and decay ; the mud, a uniform dirty brown ; even the sky and the trees are grey and dripping for the sun rarely breaks through. And in the camp, grey skeletons clothed in filthy rags with dirty matted hair and eyes, dull and lifeless, staring out of cadaverous faces ; rarely a smile, never the sound of laughter or song ; and the air, heavy with gloom and hopelessness. The Nips on the working parties, especially those on the stone cutting where Edward G. Robinson is in charge, are becoming even more savage and beatings-up and stoning are daily more frequent. We are averaging four deaths a day in the camp, but Sasuki, admitting the loss of the Aleutians by the Nips, says " You are only prisoners and the Railway must go on even if it costs you all your lives." There have been eight cholera deaths so far, and when we report the daily death roll to Sasuki, he just laughs till his fat belly quivers with mirth—its all so very funny.

JUNE 24TH, 1943. To-day we have had seven funerals ; we try to give a decent burial to each of our men but it is not always possible. Sometimes the Australian Padré attends, othertimes we do it alone. The dead are buried as they are or just wrapped up in a bit of bamboo matting, for blankets and clothing are too precious and are needed for those who are still alive. If they died of cholera, the bodies are first burnt on a bamboo pyre and later the ashes and bones are scraped together and placed in an empty tin or an old handkerchief. We try to dig a small hole for each one but now that we are unable to keep up with the dead, we have to put several in one grave ; the others, however, still require one grave each.

An officer and two or three men, dressed up in borrowed clothes, approach the cemetery and on reaching the graveside, lower the flag-draped body onto the ground ; as the ropes are passed underneath, the officer reads a few words from the Burial Service " I am the resurrection of the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." And as the body is lowered into the grave, or the biscuit tin placed in the hole, the officer reads " Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of his great mercy to take unto himself the soul of our dear brother here departed, we therefore commit his body to the ground ; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust . . . ." and the handful of earth thrown in, rattles to the bottom of the grave. After the Lord's Prayer, spoken by all, someone might recite a few remembered lines of Laurence Binyon:—

" They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old,
Age shall not weary them nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them."

or else a verse of Rupert Brooke's poem, The Soldier:—

" If I should die, think only this of me:

That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed ;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home."

Each one salutes and leaves ; there is another burial to do in five minutes time. The grave-diggers approach and shovel in the earth ; it is wet and heavy with rain and has to be trampled down or else it will sink later and the grave will fill with water. " Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust . ." But each grave remains unknown, for crosses are not permitted.

JUNE 25TH, 1943. Another terrible day on the stone cutting. We have to bore holes one metre deep into the rock with a cold chisel and a sledge hammer and then, after the blasting, lift out the enormous blocks of rock anything from 20 to 30 feet and carry them into the jungle clear of the track ; those blocks which even the Nips consider are too heavy to move have first to be smashed up with sledge hammers and picks. A favourite punishment of the Nips whenever they see a prisoner who has stopped working, is to make him balance on top of a boulder and hold a heavy piece of rock at arms length above his head for an hour or two.

We have had more cholera deaths. They occur with terrifying speed—a man appears to be fit enough in the morning and that same evening he is dead, so horribly changed by the dehydration of the body as to be almost unrecognisable ; the more unfortunate ones drag on with their horrifying agonies for days. The cholera tent is a terrible sight—we have nothing to give them except boiled-up river water and crushed salt. We are trying to make injection needles out of bamboo thorns.

Three hundred Tamils, conscripted slave-labour, have arrived from Malaya and are camped just next to us—they are a pitiable sight. In an attempt to fill our empty bellies we have been eating the bullocks' lungs and feet also bamboo shoots ; we do not feel exactly thrilled by any of them though. We would like to try a nice juicy monkey steak but these creatures are too quick for us.

JUNE 28TH, 1943. The Cholera cases are increasing and we had another six go down with it yesterday. At half past ten last night we had to turn out to enlarge the cholera compound and erect other tents for the new victims ; needless to say, the Nips provided us with no materials and it took us until the early hours of the morning to produce anything reasonable in the way of sleeping quarters ; a leaky piece of canvas for a roof and some split bamboo raised a few inches off the wet and muddy ground for beds, and that was all. Then we had to carry the poor wretches into these new ' hospital wards ' and leave them, vomiting and moaning in the dark, damp and cheerless half-light of early morn, while we hurried off to grab an hour or two's sleep before going out again to work on the railway. This evening we have had a further shock, for Doctor Butterfield who has been looking after the cholera patients has fallen sick with it himself. Our hut clerk has also gone down with it to-day ; one of the Dutch doctors is already dead. But four have been in complete isolation for some days now, and every evening one or two fresh cases are carried out ; the remainder just sit and wait, wondering who will be the next. In keeping with the usual inconsistency of the Japanese mind, our hut, which is also infected, is not in isolation ; if all the prisoners were isolated, there would be no one left to work on the line ; but to save face, I suppose, one hut is kept strictly out of contact with the remainder of the camp.

Our only Padré, an Australian of H and F Force, has died of dysentery. Almost every day he would leave his sick-bed to bury those who had died the previous day and now he has joined the others in our rough jungle cemetery. Most of the graves are sinking in with the heavy rain and the whole place is rapidly becoming overgrown ; it is untidy, uninviting and swarming with fat and busy ants.

The Tamils, living under appalling conditions, some with their wives and children, are dying like flies and we find their emaciated bodies lying all over the place every morning—outside a hut, under a bamboo bush or in a shallow grave scratched in the ground, their feet sticking out at the end ; and still they arrive in their thousands like sheep to the slaughter, with their bundles and bags, their pots and pans, the children clutching a bed-roll tightly to their round and naked bellies, the women dressed in bright clothes, all of them dark and rather lost, none of them realizing yet the fate which awaits them. Slaves of the Nippon samurai.

JUNE—JULY, 1943. One week ago I came back from the cutting with my head bursting ; the pressure was terrible and every step, every movement, was an agony. I was shivering with cold, yet had a temperature of about 104 ; I could not eat but just lay on my hard, bug-ridden bamboo bed alternatively wrapped in all the blankets I could seize, shivering like a jelly in the wind, and, a few moments later, throwing off these blankets in an attempt to escape from the stifling heat. It was the first rigor of yet another bout of malaria. That night I had another nightmare of Japs and jungle, bamboo and baskets of earth ; in the early hours of the morning I awoke again with a need to go to the lats—outside the rain was pouring down. I put on my cold and wet gym-shoes and placing a piece of torn towel across my shoulders, set offi on the hundred yard journey to " The Club." The night was inky black and underfoot the mud was as slippery as ice ; above the roar of the river and the splashing of the storm, the mournful croak of a bull-frog could be occasionally heard. I stumbled over another prisoner sprawling in the mud ; I stopped, then went on up the hill, occasionally losing my shoes in the thick and sticky mud, my head bursting as though there were ten thousand devils hammering at my brain. Why couldn't I see where I was going, would I never get to the end ? God damn this blasted country with its dysentery and disease . . . Christ help us . . .

. . . In the " Club " the rain was streaming through the broken attap roof and Joey, the rat, was running round the bamboo trying to dodge the rain . . .

. . . Back in the hut once again, I groped my way back to my place and wiped off the mud and rain with a piece of rag ; then I crawled under my blanket, still damp and smelling of sweat, and lay back exhausted and shivering with cold, hoping that I would not have to go out again. But it was not to be so.

JULY, 1943. The Fuji-tai Nips have arrived and have taken over the stone cutting and their ill-treatment is surpassing even that of our late task-masters. We are up at 6 in the morning and get to ' bed ' again at about 11 or 12 at night completely worn out after a full day's work. One of the men arrived back in camp in the early hours of this morning ; his feet were swollen and bleeding from working bare-footed in the stone-cutting and he was unable to walk. It had taken him all night to crawl on hands and knees through the mud and pouring rain from the cutting to the camp and no one had been permitted to go out and assist him in—bioki no goodenna. During the day a prisoner, suffering from dysentery and beri-beri, collapsed in the cutting ; the Nip guards kicked him and beat him but he did not move, he was finished. When the Nip Officer was asked for permission to carry the man back to camp, he just pointed to the jungle and said: " Leave him there to die." In the evening he was assisted back to camp ; no doubt he will die.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 7TH, 1943. These last few days I have been working for the cookhouse, peeling onions, or digging more latrines, carrying water to the cholera hospital, and working in the cemetery ; in the British Cemetery there are now 104 graves where there were but 48 when we arrived, and we have been chopping down more trees in order to make more room. Yesterday was Henry's birthday and we decided to celebrate in a big way for some barges had just been up with the rations and a bit of canteen stuff ; I had purchased a tin of milk and Henry one of tangerines (both at exorbitant prices) and we ate this for lunch with some peanuts ! It is still raining.

JULY 9TH, 1943. Out cutting trees until nearly eight; though a pleasanter job than the cuttings, it is very tiring work and at the end of a day our bodies are one mass of bites for the jungle is swarming with mosquitoes, mostly of the black and white 'tiger' variety. I cannot understand why no one has ever got lost for it would be the easiest thing on earth in this bamboo jungle; its funny to think that there are hundreds of miles of this, all exactly the same, just mountains and valleys,bamboo and teak, in whatever direction one goes.

The evacuation of one of our sick parties was cancelled at the very moment of parade and the sick were marched off to work instead—in the stone cutting! God, the bastard Nips!

At night we are being pestered with rats in our beds; they fetch old garbage from the swill dumps and then have a midnight feed in our packs or on our blankets. They even come into our beds to gnaw at the filthy rags tied round our ulcers or to chew the dirty bits of cloth we use as handkerchiefs—but we do not bother any more now as long as they keep fairly quiet and do not disturb our sleep; we just live and let live.

JULY 11TH, 1943. Another murderous day on the hammer and tap in Dante's Inferno until 9 p.m. By the time we had collected all the tools, had them counted, been counted ourselves, marched to the Nip camp, handed in the tools, had them checked two or three times, been recounted to see that we were still there, marched to our own camp, been counted yet once again and been finally dismissed, it was 10-30. We still had to have a wash and then eat our cold supper before being able to go to bed; in the morning we would have to be up at 6 again.

I was not feeling my best for "hammer and tap" as my malaria is still troubling me and I find even walking an effort; but that was not worrying the Nips. The morning started badly when a Nip came and stood by Bob Turner and me and shouted "Kurrah!" and "Speedo!" at us every few minutes as we cut a hole through the rock for blasting purposes. After I had been wielding the heavy sledge hammer for nearly half the morning, he suddenly grabbed one too, came over to where we were working and began to race me, tap for tap, ever faster and faster, shouting "SPEEDO! SPEEDO!" all the time like a madman. I was determined not to give in and answered tap for tap as fast as the Nip; Bob squatted down, holding the chisel as we hit it and whispering encouragement to me to keep going, for we were determined not to be beaten. We went on hitting the chisel with our hammers for what seemed like hours; we were panting for breath and the sweat was pouring off our bodies. Suddenly the Nip stopped, threw down his hammer, and walked off to rest in the cool shade of a tree. I suppose that when he was rested, he went off to find some other poor devil to race and show how tough he was. Anyway, we were not bothered any more after that but I was just about finished; I found that I was unable to let go of the hammer and Bob had to undo my fingers for me and slip the handle from my hands. After that I held the chisel for most of the time while Bob wielded the hammer in his own time.

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The early morning was quite cold and a thin white mist lay over the camp and drifted through the trees as we paraded for the days work. Later, as the day grew older, the mist departed and the sun beat down from a cloudless sky onto the hundreds of slaves toiling on the railway, hatless and practically naked. In the afternoon, enormous monsoon clouds drifted across the sky; the sun disappeared and the air became cooler; soon the cold rain began to fall and settled down to a steady downpour which lasted for the rest of the afternoon, all the evening and most of the night. The camp, the road, the railway track, everything is one vile stretch of filthy, stinking black mud again and everything is wet and dirty.

JULY 16TH, 1943. Have been in camp to-day doing the usual jobs. In the afternoon Geoff Burton arrived from the base camp to fetch some medicines and bandages for their sick, but as we have nothing for ourselves we could give him nothing except a few crystals of pot. permang. Geoff tells us that

one of their cholera cases was ordered to be shot by the Nip officer in charge of the camp ; two scared Nip privates, detailed for the job, approached the isolated tent in the jungle and started taking pot-shots at the wretched victim lying on the ground. Finally the two British officers in the camp having tried in vain to have the order changed, decided that since the fellow was doomed to be shot, it would be better to do the job themselves quickly and properly than leave it to the two blundering little Nips. The result of this murder threatens to be disastrous for none of the men will now report sick for fear of being shot too.

Otherwise it has been a lucky day for us, for when one of the prisoners working in the Nip cookhouse opened up the meat ration, he found an un-born calf inside ; he quickly hid it away and later brought a part of it to us, letting us have it for a few dollars and a share of the meat. There was only a small piece for each, but, my God, it was good. On top of that I had a few bananas with some rice, the first bunch I have been able to buy since leaving Nong Pladuk.

The only way we have of killing our occasional bullock is to tie it to a tree and hit it over the head with a sledge hammer until it is dead. Sometimes the bullock breaks away after the first blow and rushes off into the jungle ; if we fail to catch it—which once took us two days—we go without our meat ration. Lately we have had a new type of dried fish issued (on an even smaller scale) which is very tasty. It has a strong flavour of cheese and is rather oily with the result that many prisoners have fallen sick and are unable to stomach it—but this means all the more for the others. Otherwise our rations have been cut down. The other day we were able to buy some Chinese preserved eggs, we found that the yolks were as hard as golf balls and could not be properly cooked, unless the egg was hard boiled in which case you did not notice the difference. These eggs are coated with a mixture of tar and sawdust to preserve them and are probably of an incredible age ; they are also very expensive.

JULY 17TH, 1943. Williams was badly beaten up this morning with a sledge hammer shaft ; it was the Fuji-tai again and it was because they did not like the way that the tools had been arranged during the lunch hour ; they were not in a perfect straight line. Williams and I had to carry the baby but I escaped a bashing ; I had already had one that morning for daring to ask one of the Nips if I could take one of my very sick men back to camp ; naturally he said "No", and hit me across the head with a bamboo but I took the sick man back just the same and two others as well. A lot of Gunners (mostly ex-Changi) have arrived from Saigon where they were under the Japanese Navy ; they are appalled at the conditions here and are suffering badly as the result of having had a fairly easy time of it in Indo-China. I suppose that we, or those of us that still remain, have become hardened to the conditions with time.

On our way back from work in the evening we are supposed to cut down and carry back some wood for the cookhouse but lately we have been coming back so late, and so fagged out that to carry a heavy load of wood through three kilos of knee-deep mud and in pouring rain when one cannot even see where one is going has been beyond us. Last night no wood was brought in and so to-day we have had to go without food.

JULY 18TH, 1943. The stone cutting is about 30 feet deep now and nearly 600 yards long and it is nearing completion ; but work is pushed on by day and night shifts, whatever the weather, in a last mad rush to have it finished in time. We have also been ordered to start work on a new viaduct which will be more than 150 yards long and over 30 feet high ; all the timber has to be felled in the jungle, man-carried to the site, stripped, out and erected in four days—it is a super-speedo job and the Nips are just like madmen, blows are raining down all day long on whoever happens to be nearest. The natives—Tamils, Chinese, Malays, Javanese, etc.—who are working with us are sweating their guts out on the embankments and on some days they have to do the work at the double. A Nip stands at the bottom of the embankment with a stout bamboo in his hand and hits the

natives on the back each time they pass, men and women alike. When one of them drops dead, his body is thrown onto the earth embankment to help build it up quickly. "Cholera Lane," along which we have to pass to get to the viaduct, is where a lot of the native families live ; in consists of a row of old tents—just one canvas, no sides—and in these the Tamils with their wives and children live, suffer and die. Behind, buried a few inches below the soil, are the bodies of all those who have already perished. The place is reeking with filth and disease and the air smells of excrement and rotting flesh ; the whole area near here is contaminated with dirt and vomit yet it is here that we have to work, often bare-footed, and eat our mid-day rice with our unwashed fingers. It is hardly surprising that to-day we have had another fifteen cases of cholera.

JULY 20TH, 1943. The work is nearly completed on this section and another week should see it finished. Some of the sick are now being evacuated and the first parties have already left. The huts are collapsing and disintergrating in the continual downpour of rain which is increasing in intensity ; this does save the firewood problem for the moment, however. The river is rising fast and threatening the cookhouse ; our small bathing stream has already disappeared under the flood waters.

THURSDAY ? JULY 22nd, 1943. Now that the work is almost done, the Nips have decided to give us a " Tojo Presento " of a different sort from the usual—tinned fish, cigarettes and soap ; actually it is probably locally bought Red Cross stores which they have been holding back on us for months or else part of our rations that they have never issued. They have ordered that none of these presentos must be given to the sick, only the workers ; as it is, the sick have never been issued with full rations up to date, as though they had to be punished for being ill, and the remainder have had to feed them out of their rations ; we have continued the practice of giving those in hospital or sick in the huts every priority for such things as meat, blood, tinned milk (bought with a central fund from the barges) or other oddments which would help them to live ; it was hard on those who had to go out and work, but what else could we do, when the Nips would do nothing else to keep them alive.

There are now 1,029 men in the camp and the total issue has been as follows:—

12,000 cigarettes.
33 tins of milk.
30 tins of margarine.
1,698 pieces of soap.
15 tins of oil.
Curry.
Pepper.
316 tins of tomato sardines.
192 tins of Poppy sardines.
731 tins of sardines.
300 tins of mackerel.
96 tins of red salmon.
96 tins of Silex salmon.

The milk and margarine have gone to the hospital, the oils, curry and pepper to the cookhouse. The issue per man will be about ten cigarettes, one piece of soap, one tin of sardines, and half a tin of salmon or mackerel.

JULY 26TH, 1943. The cutting is at last finished but unlucky Dames was hit over the head with a spanner and had it split open in the last orgy of Fuji-tai brutality. Now that we have finished our stretch we are all wondering what comes next. Sasuki thinks we may stay here on railway work for the rail-head is to be moved up from Wan Yai to Kinsayok. That may not be too bad. More likely is the story that all the sick are to be evacuated down country—probably the Nips have at last realized that we have been flogged to the utmost limit of human endurance and no more useful work can be got out of us for the present. Henry was evacuated this morning together with one hundred and fifty others ; I expect to be evacuated too as I am suffering from chronic diarrhoea, malaria, ulcers and tinia, but Charles and Bob are not considered to be ill enough by the Nips (who held a medical inspection in true Nip style although this time there was no beating up) and they may have to make another march up country to work further up the line. I do not know what to do ; I would like to go with Charles as we have always stuck together up to now but probably I shall seize my opportunity to escape from this bloody hole while I have still got the chance.

Our hut roof has collapsed right down but there is still room enough for us to creep in between the bamboo rafters and slats to sleep. We hope that it will not come down any further though and crush us during the night! So far we have had 115 cases of cholera of whom a fair proportion have fortunately survived; the Tamils and other native coolies, however, are continuing to die by the thousand and will probably go on doing so until there are none left. It is pitiful to see them crawling about with a look in their eyes like animals who sense that they are doomed to die.

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Charles has recently taken over the job of looking after the cholera 'hospital' which has been built some way from the camp and which caters for white as well as native coolies. This is another daily labour we have to perform—carrying heavy buckets of water about two kilometres along a filthy, slippery track to the clearing in the jungle where the huts have been erected for there is no water there except for the rain. Charles' worst job is burning the corpses for as soon as the flames reach the bodies, the muscles contract and the corpses sit bolt upright, unless they are quickly pushed back again and weighted down with more branches. To see these dead by night rising up from the flames with a nasty grin on their faces is enough to unnerve even the strongest. A few days ago some high-ranking Nip officers came to inspect the cholera hospital. Early in the morning our local Nips went along to prepare the stage. They filled about two dozen bottles with pot. permang and arranged them neatly on a shelf, each with a different label; they issued new buckets and handbowls, towels and white overalls for the orderlies; the hut was tidied up and disinfected, a bucket and stirrup-pump being provided. The stage was set. In due course the Nip brass-hats arrived and were issued with white gowns and face-masks, they were sprayed and then conducted round. Everything was lovely in the garden, no doubt they were impressed by the cleanliness and efficiency of the place; they congratulated our Nips on their foresight and organization; after much bowing, saluting and mutual admiration, the visitors withdrew. Five minutes later, the bottles, the buckets and bowls, the masks, gowns and disinfectant were also withdrawn; the Nips went off chuckling, highly delighted with their piece of duplicity.

JULY 30TH, 1943. We have moved into hut 4 now as our own has completely collapsed. The rail-laying party under Flossy Flower has arrived at last—the line is through. The food is a little better as lots of sick have already been taken away and certain quantities of rations have to be consumed before we abandon this camp. The rain continues to fall and the river to rise.

AUGUST, 1943. Still more rain, where does it all come from? I have taken over the running of the cookhouse from Bobby Green who is going further up with his little dachshund Ludwig. It is quite the wrong time to take it over for we have limited stores (nothing more is coming up) having lost a certain amount when the river rose rapidly one night and flooded out our store; on top of that we have hardly any wood, few cooks and a threatened cookhouse. The only blessing is that I am ably assisted by Sgt. Burdon and Sgt. Raven, an Aussie; it is all we can do to turn out three meals a day.

AUGUST 4TH, 1943. What a blasted night—it was pouring with rain, as usual, when I went to bed to try and snatch a little sleep; a few hours larer I was awakened to be told that the river was rising so quickly that the cookhouse was being flooded out; I raced outside and slithered down the wet and muddy embankment to where the kitchen huts were. Yes, the water was in the cookhouse and lapping round the kualis, already several fires were out; I gave hurried instructions for walls to be built round the fires and the breakfast rice to be cooked as quickly as possible.

That morning the cookhouse was gone. The last I saw of it was one of the roofs floating down the river. With the huts went a few more bags of precious rice and dried vegetables; we found an alternative site further up the hill, next to the Nip Office, and moved all the gear up there. Despite all this upset, we have not missed turning out a single meal, though they have sometimes been rather badly cooked and nearly always very late.

Apart from the few living dead left in this camp, there are a total of 335 in the cemetery (there were 80 when we arrived); figures are as follows:—

	Ten weeks ago.	Now.
British - - - -	48	180
Dutch - - - - -	32	155
Totals - -	80	335

Of those that are to be evacuated, a large proportion will die as a result of the conditions undergone up here. Most will be permanently affected.

But good news—Charles and Bob are to be sent down after all! We expect to go any day now and are packing our few belongings in readiness. One of the few things I shall take with me from this camp, is a battered copy of Selected English Essays; it has no cover and the first 13 pages are missing but it has helped pass many a weary hour.

EVACUATION—AUGUST, 1943. It is our last evening in Kinsayok camp. The day's duties are done and our bundles are packed. The fit have gone up, the sick are going down; soon, only the dead will remain here. To-morrow we who are alive will return to the land of plenty, the Omelette Belt, where the sun shines, where there are good things to eat and where there is laughter. But those in the cemetery will remain, alone except for the rats and the ants; and in years to come they will still be here, still listening to the rain pouring down and splashing in the puddles, to the swollen river roaring and rushing in its wild eagerness to escape from this valley of sorrow. They will never leave Kinsayok; God, what a thought!-

* * * *

We fell in for the last time on that muddy parade-ground and after being counted several times, marched off to where the barges were waiting for us. We were searched by the Nips and old wind-bag Sasuki for anything which they thought might be of use to them, before being herded into the barges for the journey down the river.

We are squashed in like sardines and huddled tightly at the bottom of the boat, waiting for the rope to be cast off. We are impatient to be off; already it seems that we have stepped out of one world where there was only despair into another one where there is hope. It is 10-30 and the ropes are being untied. We drift into mid-stream and then, caught in the swift current of the river, are whisked away like a matchbox in a stream. We are incapable of appreciating the wild and magnificient scenery—we are in a sort of daze, unable fully to realize that we are away from the plague-spot Kinsayok and that we are on our way to Chunkai, that Paradise on earth; that anyway for the moment we can forget about cholera, stone cutting, death and the jungle; that the Hell to which we could see no end is, in fact, ended; that we can say for the first time in how many weeks and with almost complete certainity " To-morrow I shall be alive." Finished are the bestial screams of the mad Nips, the weary early morning marches through mist and mud and rain, the interminable burning of corpses and burying of friends . . . and as we drift down the swiftly flowing river, we can throw off our intolerable burden of despair which has been with us for so long and enjoy once again the novelty of being alive. The river is in full flood and more than once we nearly come to grief in the swirling waters. Further down-stream we pass towering cliffs of red rock festooned with creepers and glowing hotly in the pitiless afternoon sun; on the other bank of the river, green jungle and feathery bamboo, sombre mountains and distant peaks of a misty blue.

* * * *

Soon the first signs of life appear—a bamboo raft moored to the bank, smoke rising from the trees, a vulture circling lazily in the sky; it is three in the afternoon and we have been five hours in the barges—it took us four days to do the journey on foot. This is Tarsao and so we disembark and carry our kit and our sick up the slippery river bank; then after several tenkos (the numbers never tallied so we took the average) we marched about three

kilometres to Wan Yai, our point of departure some ten weeks ago—ten weeks that feel like ten years. There were plenty of old friends there to meet us, and all helped us with our sick and generously gave us some (if not all) of their food. We clambered into some empty coal-trucks—52 per truck including three stretcher cases—and waited hungrily and impatiently to be off on the next lap of our journey. At long last, after six hours wait, we set off ; it was dark and cold, we were tired and hungry but glad to be moving at last. We did not go very far, though, and at Wanpo the train stopped again, this time for good. We would be staying there for the night ; standing alongside us were a few more empty coal trucks and so Charles, Bob and I decided to clamber out of our crowded train and lie down in the other one hoping, but not really caring, that our own train would not leave in the middle of the night without us. The night was cool and clear and above us, as we lay at the bottom of the trucks, the trees stood out black and forbidding against a brilliant starlit sky.

* * * *

We awoke next morning, stiff, damp and cold ; our train was still there and we strolled up and down the track before climbing back into our truck. At about 8 we set off again and travelled all that morning and part of the afternoon until we came to another unexpected halt. We got off the train and lay down in the grass, waiting ; we were just about starving as we still had had no proper food and even the many fried bananas that we bought from the local Thais were not enough to satisfy our hunger. However, we were able to obtain a little hot water from the engine for our seriously sick because the engine-driver was an old Thai friend of ours from Nong Pladuk—it was he who used to come into the camp in the old days to collect the rice-swill.

The afternoon dragged lazily on and the sun disappeared behind the line of palmyras. As dusk fell, we were once again ordered onto the train and soon, after much shouting and jerking, we started again on our way home. But is was not to be, for a few hours later we came to another stop ; this time there was no going on because we discovered that a part of the line had been washed away by the floods and we would have to proceed for some of the way on foot, carrying our bundles and sick.

Two of us waited until the last before crossing the gap. We sat on the warm red earth of the embankment quietly smoking a cigarette ; we were completely alone in all this jungle—only the insects chirping in the undergrowth and the moon " wandering companionless among the stars." As the last clouds of smoke drifted away with the fresh night breezs, the mosquitoes came to remind us that we must be going. We approached the break in the line and the tall trees, closing in above our heads, formed a dark tunnel through which we had to pass. We waded through the mud and water, stumbling over the displaced stones and sleepers, and reached after a while the other side. A roaring fire had been lit and we sat next to it, sipping a brew of tea and waiting patiently for another train to come along. We piled more bamboo onto the flames and soon we were once again dry but the maggots in some of the prisoners ulcers, roused by the warmth of the fire, started crawling about inside and caused such intense agony that we had to undo the filthy, ragged bandages and after wiping away the foul mess of putrid flesh and stinking puss, pick out the wriggling maggots from the wounds.

* * * *

Finally, at about two in the morning, a ballast train arrived and after the ballast had been discharged, we clambered aboard with all possible haste for fear of being left behind. The engine picked up speed and we were off heading south, enjoying the cool night air and the stars and the friendly moon overhead. After a few hours the train jerked to a stop, the guards screamed, and we bundled out. It was "Chunkai."

The Approach of War

1944 came, and with it a change of British Camp Commanders: Eddie Gill had held the fort for 18 months—continuous hard work facing up to the Nips, fighting for every little concession, and wearing himself out in the interests of the Camp. He was one among a comparatively few senior officers who lived up to their responsibilities and did their job. (Incidentally, the Regiment provided another in Cary Owtram who did a fine job of work as Commandant at Chunkai). Phil Toosey, our new Commandant, had already done excellent work at Tamekam, and it is probable that the Nip camp staff of Tamekam, who had come down to Nongpladuk and were used to working with him, initiated the change over.

We all thought that the railway completed, work would be very soon easier, but it was not to be. The " Speedo " period was over, but the line required constant maintenance; sidings or hidings for trains had to be constructed all over the place in the jungle, and later in the year, the sending of parties to Japan, the construction of the Mergui Road from Prachuab Kirikan to Mergui, and the necessity for constant repairs to bombed bridges on the Burma/Siam line, the Northern line, and the main line South to Malaya, made ever increasing demands on our dwindling manpower. There was to be no 'let up.'

The Nips still thought that they were winning the war, and displayed characteristic magnanimity. They struck a medal to be issued in the fulness of time to all P.W. who had worked on the line. This was really a masterpiece of nonsense: it was a circular disc rather bigger than a five-shilling piece, and made of a lead alloy—it must have weighed four or five ounces,—there was embossed on the front a map of Malaya—Siam—Burma, with a railway running across it and a palm tree in the corner. Some people managed to obtain a specimen: there they were, ready to be issued, but the great day never dawned.

They also held a parade at Nongpladuk to give awards to dilligent workers. The table with the white cloth was set, and Cheedah, back again with us, mounted the dais, to waffle his incoherent garblings. Various 'diligent' officers and men were called out and solemnly presented with an envelope containing one tical—one whole section of diligent workers, actually received a tin of milk between them.

But they knew that all was not well with them, and their efforts to advertise their good treatment must have raised a smile, if anyone read of it at home. Very early on Cheedah had given birth to quite a good idea: he demanded us to produce a band,—the members would be excused work, and would parade instead to march troops out of the gate and back into Camp. They would also be on call to play to the Nips when required. In point, of fact, the Band was a great success—it was quite cheerful to march out to a martial strain, and as they were now officially part of the Camp Staff, they were allowed to practise, so that, if a concert was permitted, they were in form for it. They exploited their position rather well—for some reason best known to himself, Cheedah wished to be heralded by the Band on his inspection of the Camp one day. He was! He and his cortége shuffled on to the parade ground to the accompaniment of 'Colonel Bogey.' They beamed all over: little did they guess that our answering 'beam' was all but a roar of laughter.

Then came the propaganda part—an official press photographer arrived: for the occasion, the band and one section of workers were issued with new clothes. The section was ordered to smile, and there was taken a picture of " Cheerful prisoners of war, marching out to work at Nongpladuk." Five minutes later, the workers had to hand back their clothes. But the band was taken on to Kanburi and Chunkai—here they were photographed playing to officers and men playing a rubber of bridge. All had been dressed for the event—bunches of bananas and cigarettes were put on the table, but if anyone took one, he had to pay for it. Hundreds of local ducks were also

borrowed and ' taken ' with the Camp ' gardeners ' to illustrate how we were encouraged to keep our own poultry and grow vegetables. The Band retained its new clothing for two days. Men might be dying by the hundreds, but as long as we had the ability to laugh at this sort of thing, we could keep going.

Meanwhile, the year dragged on: optimism, sober enough, but steadily growing, as we gleaned glimmerings of mighty battles in Europe and the Far East, coloured our outlook and cheered our spirits. We had long since ceased to know the feeling of satisfaction after a good meal, an after breakfast pipe, or a whisky and soda at sundown, but the will to live was strong: life had its amusing moments, and we had no time to mope.

By the middle of the year, the drone of an aeroplane engine became a regular feature of our night noises. Occasionally they came low overhead and could be seen by the curious in the moonlight; passing on, a distant rumble announced a raid on Bangkok. On September the 4th, six train loads of petrol and ammunition had been shunted in the morning into the jungle sidings at Nongpladuk, 500 yards from us. At about 3 a.m. next morning, the familiar sound recurred: no one bothered very much. Bangkok was being visited again. Then came almost immediately the increased droning indicative of their return. Five or six deafening explosions followed and sheets of flame shot up from the sidings accompanied by the staccato burst of exploding ammunition. The Nips had four A.A. guns on the perimeter of our Camp, and they opened up. By this time, quite a number of people had got up, and were watching the fun. The planes could be seen quite clearly as they circled in front of the waning moon about thirty degrees up in the sky. Suddenly, there was a whistling, four dull thuds, and the camp was completely shrouded in dust and debris. The next two hours were indescribable confusion and chaos. People had been caught in ' bed,' or where they stood. The Nips screamed out orders: it was too dark to see anything clearly, and our lighting arrangements were confined to a very small number of hurricane lamps. While endeavouring to collect wounded, a working party was called for and at the point of the machine gun marched to the sidings and made to uncouple the odd untouched wagon from the exploding wreckage of the train. When dawn broke, we had found ninety dead, and over three hundred wounded. For some five days, all medical personnel were working ' flat out,' amputating, extracting splinters, and doing what they could, with few instruments and fewer drugs. Our death roll finally mounted to 107 and after the day's work, volunteers went to the cemetery (near the sidings), dug a large communal grave, and four hundred odd stretcher bearers filed sadly to take their comrades to their last resting place.

Three or four days later, we received a crumb of comfort in picking up a pamphlet which had been dropped. Headed: " Its in the bag, Chums !" it gave a map of Europe with the whole situation up to date and on the reverse, a short resumé of a year's fighting in Burma and the Far East.

Actual raids near P.W. camps occurred more and more frequently, so that by the end of the year, we seldom had a day without seeing our aircraft at least once. Up the line, they destroyed bridge after bridge, and then, we were out working non-stop day and night till the bridge was repaired. At Tamekam, they made our men service the A.A. guns during raids, at the point of a machine gun. Casualties were inevitable, but the Nips now allowed us to have slit trenches and some days, for hours on end, all work was suspended, while we sat, fascinated to watch them pass over and plaster nearby objectives. Occasionally, the Nip, in a fit of bizarre humour, would make us remain in our huts, a very unpleasant experience,—at its worst, when some stupid pilot amused himself by spraying the camp with machine gun bullets.

The third raid on Nongpladuk Camp bears retelling. One evening at 6 p.m., twelve four-engined bombers suddenly appeared making for us from the direction of Bangkok. We looked up, and saw bombs coming out, and made for the trenches. It was a masterly bit of bombing: the railway sidings and workshops ten yards from the Camp were completely demolished,

but unfortunately six bombs landed in the Camp, including one on the Hospital, one on the cookhouse, and one in a slit trench. So died nine more, including Paddy Sykes, one of the finest characters in the Camp, and loved by all, officers and men alike. Out of cussedness, a direct hit on the Nip shelter full of dwarfs, exploded on impact and killed no one.

We breathed a sigh of relief and began digging for bodies, when eleven more machines were observed coming from another direction. They flew low over us, and again we saw the bombs come out. This time, nothing fell on the Camp, but of the forty-three huts of the Hashimoto Machine Works, which extended for two miles from the camp gates, only three remained standing. Five minutes later, a third wave of ten appeared and dropped incendiaries—hundreds of 'overs' fell into the camp and about half of our huts and possessions went up in flames.

After the first batch, there was a wild stampede for the jungle, led by the Nip guards, who used their rifles to bash down the fence. One working party had just come in and still carried its tools. Afterwards, fearing punishment or a return of the raiders, nothing would induce the Nips to come back, and they took the tools off the working party, sold them to the Siamese and with the proceeds provided cigarettes and local 'gin' all round.

At 8 p.m. the Nips ordered a roll call and for six hours they had us all on parade while they counted and recounted. There were over 150 short, and we could only find nine bodies. Finally, they authorised Col. Toosey and three others to go into the jungle and summon back those who were still out. All but two were thus accounted for, and they were assumed to have been hit by a bomb, and to be somewhere in the jungle. In point of fact, these two decided to make good their escape on the spur of the moment. Allah was kind, for they ran into some Force 136 men who had parachuted into Siam and were reconnoitring the Banpong area. These people passed them back via the underground to our own Troops in Burma.

What a Funny Thing —
Essays and other "Ruderies"

THE Japanese are a strange race: whether it was in order to pick our brains for ideas, to find out what we were thinking, if we dared to express it, or to take passages out of their context and publish in the Press that Major X or Gunner Y states as follows . . . . we shall never know, but they certainly ordered us to write some incredible essays. Here are some of the titles submitted, usually to named officers or O.R's, who were told to 'get on with it.'

"What Freedom, Light and Progress do the peoples of the vanquished territories expect from the I.J.A. for their future happiness ?"—Padré Ross nominated.

"There are 25,000 Roman Catholics in this area: what are the requirements for their guardianship ?"—Padré Cowan nominated.

"A Year of Captivity—Impressions "—All officers.

"April, 1942—Thoughts of April "—All ranks.

"How does International Law regard Japanese activities ?"—Capt. Escritt nominated.

"The Moral and the Humanity side views of the application by the so-called A.B.C.D. allied government of the encirclement of Japan in the early part of the year 1941. 100 millions of our nationals were on the border of starvation and economic chaos."—Padré Ross nominated.

"Give an account of the Battle of Malaya, the impressions you receive as a Prisoner of War, and suggest measures for improving your condition."—Six named officers.

"Outline the conditions of amicable understanding between Japanese spiritual character versus Occidental material civilisation."—Capt. Scully nominated.

Some extremely good essays were written, some terse and to the point, and some fatuous; often the author was called up and interrogated for hours as to what he meant. The three essays reproduced below are chosen not for any outstanding merit, but merely because they are typical and it was only found possible to copy and secrete, pending liberation, a very limited number.

A Year of Captivity

It is axiomatic that, whatever objectives there may be, the object of a nation at war is to defeat its enemy in such a manner, that the enemy knows himself to be decisively beaten, yet nevertheless, that the winner is not so exhausted economically so to lose the peace.

The aim of the soldier in war is to give of his best, if necessary to die, for his country: his ambition is to fight well when he is fighting, and, above all, to participate in the eventual winning battle.

And since, *ipso facto*, neither side can be certain that it will win ultimately, both sides endeavour—*ca va sans dire*—to treat their prisoners adequately, so that should Mars desert their cause in a fickle moment of arbitrary waywardness, no one will have reason to clamour against maltreatment with pusillanimous demands for retribution: should Mars favour them, they will have earned the deserving respect of their charges. This tends to promote bonhomie and camaraderie afterwards.

But, however well a prisoner of war may be treated, there can be no more unpleasant existence, than to live isolated, while the rest of the nation fights on. Unpleasantness is the mother and father of acrimony, so that the inevitable concomitant of a year in captivity is a bitterness towards Fate for one's unhappy plight. This can only be sublimated by thoughts of home, and a year of captivity is a year thinking of England, and wishing her Godspeed in an effort which I am debarred from sharing.

April, 1942

'Twas brillig and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gymbal in the wabe:
All mimsey were the borogroves:
And the momeraths outgrabe."

"Brillig" is the Anglo-Saxon for April, and thus did Carroll panegyrize the vacuous valpourings of Nature's whimsical vacillations. For me, this too is April. I was nearly born in April, I nearly died in April; during my youth, I had nightmares in April, till came marriage to transform nightmares into a life's dream.

In captivity, April was the first month, and my supreme memory of April, 1942, is of dreams of home, I dreamt that my wife was safe and well and knew that I was likewise. This was confirmed by letter in April, 1943, so now, I know that my dreams will come true.

Malaya and after - Multum in Parvo

For hundreds of years, the British have lost the first battle in any war in which they have participated, but they have always won the last. When, therefore, we were ordered overseas in September, 1941, we mobilized with mixed feelings: no one thought at that time, that war would spread to the Far East, and our chances of taking an active part in the fighting seemed remote: our one consolation was that if Malaya became a theatre of war, we

honour of being chosen to lose the first battle. For, the was critical: a successful outcome to the battle for North essential in order to enable Britain to maintain a second front with Russia, and all but a bare minimum of men and to reinforce the Libyan front. If we were lucky, we might, we the army in the Near East, after a tour of 'garrison' duty in

had a very enjoyable trip out, almost as good as a peace time cruise: submarines or aircraft to worry us, and our escorting able to engage in training exercises for their benefit and our The outstanding feature of the voyage was the overwhelming of the South Africans, who could not do too much to welcome during our short stay at Cape Town. After a week in lighter side of life was overshadowed by the grim spectre of war. the outset, it was obvious that the Japanese had sea and air outnumbered us in men by at least three to one: we could only delaying action, hoping to hold the enemy long enough to allow of arriving in time. Unfortunately, only one Division arrived, too late materially to affect the issue, consequently our efforts had vain. Undoubtedly we could have held Singapore for another month continuing the struggle to the end with characteristic bulldog but there was on the island a considerable Chinese and Malay who would have suffered, with us, complete annihilation: both sales, and in view of the unlikelihood of help being forthcoming for owing to the situation in Europe, we capitulated.

feelings were bitter at the time: we had fought all the way from Singapore to no apparent purpose. We now know that we fought enough to save Australia, and to kill some 87,000 Japanese: it may be that had we then known what fate had in store for us, few, but would preferred to fight on to the end.

take as my hypothesis that no one, under any circumstances can be a prisoner of war, whatever treatment he receives. Therefore, any on the author's part to narrate his experiences, is inevitably biased against his captors. He is deprived of up to date news of his home affairs, and if he sets himself to think, his opinion is clouded by an inevitable morbidity, which permeates his mind, and obscures clear, unbiased judgment. Moreover, as nations, the British and the Japanese have never understood, so that neither race understands the customs and traditions of the other. This has led to continual misunderstandings during our life as and considerably aggravated mutual relations.

instance, the Japanese do not value human life in the same way as we think; if the economic, political or military situation demanded some course of action (in peace or war) the Japanese would carry out such regardless of the sacrifice to themselves involved: such a policy over the building of a railway, entailing the loss of life of thousands comrades, shatters completely our faith in their good intentions. In our attitude towards sickness and suffering is fundamentally that of the Japanese: (we showed it by our response to an help at the time of the 1923 earthquake) and the compulsion country' on sick men to work on the railway, horrified us. We Japanese did not sign the Geneva convention, we therefore did expect to receive treatment parallel to that meted out to our comrades in Germany, but we did expect consideration for the sick and adequate medical supplies and reasonable facilities for treatment.

permissible to presume that the intention of the Japanese is to prisoners at the end of the war. We therefore have a twofold ourselves to keep fit mentally and physically, so as to be able in our parts in the life of the country as normal citizens: and to war and its accompanying iniquities are to disappear in the survive and bear witness that the Japanese are a fitting race of participate with the great nations in world affairs. We could not

make such a statement as a result of our treatment up to the present. What's done cannot be undone: the Japanese cannot bring back our dead from the grave, but if our conditions improve and we see a genuine effort to understand our point of view, our whole attitude may change and our mutual relations become more amicable. Not until the two peoples understand and respect each other's customs and traditions, can war between them be ruled out in the future.

The most important single consideration for our welfare is that the sick should receive adequate attention: of the seriously ill, some will only get better with a change of climate: repatriation may not be possible, but could they not be moved to a hill station preferably near the sea? Others need special diet and medicines which we cannot give them. There are many other considerations from our point of view, which would enhance considerably our position as prisoners, but it is not for me to put forward my own views: rather would I suggest that the Japanese call together Camp Commandants and Senior Medical Officers, so that what they consider best for all may be attempted, and a better understanding between prisoners and captors result.

We had to laugh, for only thus could we retain our sanity and the stupid little dwarf provided us with food for laughter in almost everything he did: like a superior type of monkey, playing with things he didn't understand. A few incidents at Nongpladuk will illustrate the point:—

A party of about 150 men was detached to a small camp a few miles away to work on the dispersal of a Nip petrol dump to minimise risk from air-raids. After a few nights there, they awoke one morning to find some 100 yards of the camp fence uprooted: it had then been used as a 'road' along which the Siamese looters had rolled many drums of petrol out of the camp. The Nip officer took a 'poor view' and he sent for the British officer, and instructed him to post twenty British guards on the Camp to prevent a recurrence. If the Siamese stole any more, the British would be shot. Two armed Japanese guards, guarded the British guards. Very soon, the Nip guards came nightly to our N.C.O's in charge of guards, and said: "You take gun—me go village, jig-a-jig,—Thai bad man come, you go bang bang, O.K. ?"

A new Nip Commandant arrives at Nongpladuk,—he must address the prisoners—so he waddles on parade with Nip service dress and breeches, and a jangling sword, and to show them that he understands their culture, he does not wear field boots, but slippers and socks, and some British suspenders over his breeches—he is the boss, he is above us, and mounting the dais he barks out a torrent of staccato bursts. The translation is posted on the notice board next morning. Here it is:—

REGULATIONS RE PUNISHMENT OF PRISONERS OF WAR

Art. 1—This regulation applies to the Prisoners of War who are coupable.

Art. 2—The leader or leaders of the gangster or rioter, which commit outrageous acts or threaten, will be condemned to death, or penal servitude or imprisonment for life and others who participate in such, penal servitude or imprisonment for life or one year or more thereof.

Art. 3—That who kill the supervisor, watchman or guard on the Prisoner of War, will be condemned to death. Project or preparation thereof will be condemned to penal servitude or imprisonment for two years or more.

Art. 4—That who injures or commit outrageous act or threatens the supervisor, watchman or guard, will be condemned to death; penal servitude or imprisonment for life or two years or more. In case above be carried out in gang, the leader or leaders will be condemned to death or penal servitude or imprisonment for life; others who

participate in such will be condemned to death or penal servitude or imprisonment for more than three years.

That those who commit above mentioned two items and cause death to the attacked will be condemned to death.

Art. 5—That who desist or disobey the order of the supervisor, watchmen or guards on Prisoners of War, will be condemned to death, or penal servitude or imprisonment for life or for more than one year. That those who commit above in gang the leader or leaders will be condemned to death or penal servitude or imprisonment for life ; others who participate in above will be condemned to death or penal servitude or imprisonment for life or two years or more thereof.

Art. 6—That those who insult supervisor, watchman or guard in face or in publicity will be condemned to penal servitude or imprisonment for life or less.

Art. 7—That those who run away in gang, the leader or leaders will be condemned to death or penal servitude or imprisonment for life or over one year thereof ; others who participate with penal servitude or imprisonment for life or more than one year thereof.

Art. 8—Item 1 of Art. 2, Item 1 of Art. 3, Item 1 of Art. 4, as well as attempt thereof on previous Article will be condemned.

Art. 9—That those who liberated on parol and violating said parol will be condemned to death or penal servitude or imprisonment for life or for more than ten years. In case above mentioned participate in war with arms, will be condemned to death.

Art. 10—That those who violate the oath or declaration not to escape or run away will be condemned with penal servitude or imprisonment for more than one year ; violation of other oath or declaration will be condemned with penal servitude or imprisonment for under ten years.

Art. 11—That those who organise gang with project of unobedience the leader or leaders will be condemned with penal servitude or imprisonment for more than one year and less than ten ; those who participate in such for more than six months and less than five years.

Art. 12—The Art. 7, is not to be applied to those who are recaptured for what had been done during previous term of imprisonment.

Most of our fitters and technicians were employed in the engineering workshops, and one sergeant was on car repairs. A Nip officer sent his Vauxhall 12 to be overhauled, and the Nip N.C.O. in charge of our sergeant pointed out that this Vauxhall had no front springs, and he must transfer those from a derelict Morris they had. Our sergeant laughed and said that this type of car didn't have front springs but independent suspension. He got his face soundly slapped for suggesting that the Jap was wrong, and was ordered to ' get cracking.' He did, and the resulting masterpiece was still ' in action ' when the war ended, appearing to be going uphill as it went along the level.

It was impossible ever to predict the Nips reaction to events: we had an old soldier who invariably managed to get some local gin while on a working party, he'd then get tight, and the whole party would be punished. When therefore the Nips demanded some British troops as batmen, this old soldier was given the job, to keep him out of mischief. The first thing he did was to demand of the Nip N.C.O. to see the Commandant, whom he told that he couldn't sleep without whisky ; the Nip officer therefore ordered that he should be issued it the same as the Nips. Very soon, he was being used by the Nip guard to go out of Camp by night and obtain spirits for them from the Siamese, and it was a fairly common sight to see a Nip guard opening up a part of the fence to help " Jimmy " through, on returning from such an errand rather the worse for wear.

Then there was the amazing incident when that very loveable rogue, Addison of the Argylls, an ex-lag, turned solider, pinched the Nip Colonel's bed for the use of one of his officers who had none. Next morning all hell was let loose, the canteen would be shut, rations cut, pay stopped, unless the

culprit owned up. Addison was out at work, and when he came in and heard about it, he went alone to the Nip office with the bed, asked the interpreter to take him to the adjutant, then told him, he didn't know it was the Colonel's bed, he had seen it outside the Japanese hut, and thought it was being discarded and his own officer had none. The Nip officer looked at him and dismissed him with the remark in English: " You are a brave man ; go away."

Take too, their newspapers, printed in English and circulated throughout the Greater East Asia " No-Prosperity " Sphere : the prowess of the Japanese as depicted therein for our delectation put Bull-dog Drummond to shame. Unfortunately it was not possible to secrete and retain copies of these papers, but two of the many items, which delighted our hearts, come to mind: " A brave Japanese Navy—O pilot was on reconnaissance in mid-Pacific, when he spotted a British Cruiser. He had run out of ammunition, but that did not deter him from coming low down to investigate. The British were terrified, and kept looking up apprehensively. Our brave pilot came lower, flew upside down, and did the only possible thing under the circumstances. He drew his sword, traversed the ship at deck level and cut the Captain's head off. For this deed, he has been given a citation."

The Americans had landed on Seipan and a heading ran. " Inhuman American submarine torpedoes Japanese survivors in open boat, but the spirit of Bushido wins through." An article went on to show that no less than five Japanese who had been drowned by this barbarious deed, had been imbued to the end, and afterwards, with the eternal Japanese spirit of Bushido, so that for twelve hours after they were dead, they went on swimming and managed to reach a neighbouring island, whose defenders had thus been warned of the approach of the American invaders in time to repel them.

Whatever the authors of these episodes believed, there is no doubt that the Nip rank and file firmly believed all these stories, but it is difficult to expect that the educated Jap regarded it as more than propaganda. The following was posted up in most Camps in Siam, when Nakamura took over command of P.O.W. ; inasmuch as it means anything, it indicates the dominance of the Japanese nationalism over the ego of the citizen.

INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN TO PRISONERS OF WAR ON MY ASSUMING COMMAND

I have the pleasure to lead you on the charge of last stretch of railway construction works with the appointment of Present Post.

In examination of various reports, as well as to the result of my Martial Camp Inspection of the present conditions, am pleased to find that you are 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 inevitably for this end, but to to my opinion, due mainly to the fact for absence of firm belief as Japanese " Health follows Will " and " Cease only when enemy is completely annihilated." Those who fails to reach objective in charge by lack of health or spirit, is considered in Japanese Army as most shameful deed. " Devotion till Death " is good, yet still we have the spirit " Devotion to Imperial Cause " even to the 7th Turn of Life Incarnation, the spirit which cannot become void by death.

You are in the act of charge in colleague with Imperial Japanese Army. You are expected to charge to the last stage of this work with good spirits, by taking good care of your own health.

Besides you are to remember that your welfare is guaranteed only by obedience to the order of Imperial Japanese Army.

Imperial Japanese Army 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 the protection of Imperial Japanese Army.

Given in Kanchanaburi, June 26th, 1943.

Col. Sijou Nakamura,
Commander of P.O.W. Camps,
Thailand.

For us, it was just another laugh, to help another weary day along. Life could have been much worse,—thank God the Japanese are ridiculous !

Japan Parties

The main thing about our Japan parties is that we didn't go there. There is no doubt that the Nip intention was to withdraw the bulk of the P.W. from South East Asia for industrial work in Japan, and in mid-1944, we received instructions to organize two parties of 500 who were to leave in August and September.

They were fitted out with a wonderful assortment of pink, green and blue cotton shorts and some kind of upper garment and footwear and in the fulness of time, Lawrence Seekings set out with the first group, followed a month later by Eddie Gill. They joined forces at River Valley Camp, Singapore, with two other parties, one from Burma and one from Kanburi, and there, they were put to work unloading ships, making roads and runways.

In the same camp, and separated only by a wire fence, were several hundred Indian P.W., guarded within by I.N.A. troops, many of whom had ' gone over ' to the Japanese, in order to obtain greater freedom, which they could use to everybody's advantage.

But let us turn to Eddie Gill's diary for a brief glimpse at these ' Japan ' parties.

" Soon after my arrival I was interviewed after blackout by an Indian Officer who had been sent by the senior Indian Army Officer to contact me. On behalf of the Indian troops he extended a formal welcome to me and requested that I attend in the centre of the camp on the following night to be presented to all the Indian Army Officers. The scene was rather an amazing one, as an outpost of sentries was arranged, most of whom consisted of troops who had officially joined the Free Indian Army under compulsion, but who still retained their loyalty. The senior Indian Army Officer presented himself and subsequently in turn introduced each Indian Army Officer including those who had yielded to compulsion, and who all re-iterated to me their loyalty and explained their reasons for simulating pro-Japanese tendencies. They were immaculately dressed and obviously treated the matter as a very important occasion.

During the subsequent days they continually brought over to us money, clothing and food which they were able to obtain from the civilian Indian community. For this, we were most grateful, since eggs, if you could get them, cost $5 and other items were equally expensive, so that the soldier's fifteen cents a day didn't go very far. I obtained some idea of the type of treatment these Indians had received, by the Japanese action over Subedar Akbar Khan, who was arrested and questioned after being seen talking to one of my officers: he was beaten unconscious on three occasions, made to stand to attention at the Japanese Guard Room for over twenty-four hours, then placed in a filthy latrine as a prison, and finally taken out to a rubber plantation to be shot. He still refused to name the officer, to whom he had been speaking or to repeat the conversation, even after the firing party had loaded. The ultimate order to fire was not given and he was then taken back and beaten unconscious, and subsequently again placed before a firing squad. This type of pressure continued for three days but he remained adamant, despite being shown the scene of a mass execution where over thirty Indian Army Officers and troops had been mown down by machine gun fire for showing similar defiance. He was released.

The Gurkhas appeared to be even more untameable: I could not trace

a single instance of a Gurkha joining the Free Indian Army. When marching through our camp to a nearby football field they were always well turned out with creased shorts, and their drill was of the highest order. They formed up on the football ground and were then properly dismissed to change into their football kit: the reverse procedure took place at the end of the match.

They received a fair measure of persuasion from the Nips and the following incident is typical of their spirit. A Gurkha soldier refused to join the I.N.A. after a preliminary beating: his arms and legs were strapped and he was then taken to a window on the second or third storey of a building overlooking a concrete parade ground, being suspended by his elbows on the window ledge and told that he would remain there until he undertook to join the Free Indian Army. In the blazing sunshine, without food or water he maintained this position for twelve hours then finding it unbearable he let go crying " Long life the British Raj," and fell to his death on the concrete below.

Gifts from the Indians and thefts from the Japanese enabled us to fare not too badly, but stealing had reached a high level and the constant loss of supplies was a source of great annoyance to the Japanese, who threatened the severest punishment, yet failed to stop the thefts or to trace the culprits.

Eventually a Japanese Officer was detailed to take what steps he could and his idea was to prove to the British troops that the Japanese were fully aware of the methods adopted by us and to ridicule our efforts. So the British P.W's were collected on the dockside and formed up in a circle, leaving a clear space of some twenty or thirty yards for the demonstration. The Japanese Officer appeared on the scene carrying a wooden box of tinned milk and in the course of his demonstration deliberately dropped the box so that it burst open. Before picking it up again, he removed three tins of milk which he put under his hat on one side. He pointed out that this was a very foolish thing for the British to do, since the Japanese knew all about it, and the next man caught would be severely punished. When he turned to take up his hat, he found that the three tins of milk had disappeared from underneath it. This infuriated him so that he ordered a squad of Japanese to line up all the prisoners in three ranks. There had obviously been no way whereby the prisoners could have disposed of the milk, yet despite five searches, it was nowhere to be found. The Japanese Officer then announced his intention of shooting the prisoner concerned unless he surrendered the milk but this was of no avail. Eventually in a rage he ordered the prisoners back to camp, and stood glowering by the gate as they marched through. Imagine his feelings when one of the prisoners as he passed, rolled towards the Japanese Officer three tins of milk exclaiming " Here Buddy is your milk !" Before he could recover from his surprise the prisoner had disappeared from view.

I may say that I was very frightened at the possibility of a mass reprisal, but no further reference was made that day, and we never saw that particular officer again.

After some six months at this Camp, with conditions becoming progressively worse, as the supply situation deteriorated, and air raids started in a big way, we embarked in two parties for Indo-China officially en route for Japan. Lawrence Seekings went ahead with the first, and I was in charge of the second at the beginning of March.

We numbered some 2,700 allied P.W. plus 700 Javanese coolies on an old Dutch steamer of 3,000 tons already fully laden with cargo, and the living conditions defy description. We were driven with rifle butts onto this ship and crammed into the hold on top of the cargo. When this was full-up, the remainder packed the decks, and only when 50% stood up, was it possible to move in single file along the deck to queue up at the galleys in batches for our food. Dozens spent the four days on the ship clinging to the rigging. There was no room for anyone to lie down and officers and men were treated alike. Food was bad and protests to Capt. Suzuki were simply ignored.

The latrines were a masterpiece ; four boxes were slung by ropes over the side, and for an hour each evening, we were allowed to use them for ablutions.

The convoy consisted of three destroyers, our tramp and two other ships of about 1,500 — 2,000 tons. We were evidently spotted by reconnaissance planes who flew over during the first two days.

On the third the convoy was attacked by submarines, and the other two merchant ships were sunk by torpedo attack, each time some two hundred yards from our own ship ; it was obvious that should we have to take to the water little hope of survival could be expected. Our only life saving equipment was some eight or nine hundred lumps of crude rubber, each of which was supposed to support a man, but their general small size and slipperiness would ensure that they would be virtually useless for the purpose. I accordingly made the necessary plans that in the event of the ship being torpedoed the Japanese should be massacred by the P.W's so that the slight additional life saving equipment allotted to the Japanese could be utilised for the P.W's. In addition to providing themselves with small boats each Nip had proper life saving jackets and most of them had life belts too. For the last two days, they wore their jackets continuously and remained in close proximity to their other equipment.

On the fourth day a destroyer which had remained behind to pick up any survivors from the two sunken merchant ships, was also torpedoed ; the Nip was very panicky but our men were markedly calm, as if they sensed that the Navy knew we were there and was taking no hostile action against our ship.

By the time we reached Saigon a dozen or so of the prisoners had died and hundreds more were seriously ill.

Our first camp in Saigon consisted of some four " godowns " which were within thirty yards of the quay side where our ship berthed, and the evidence presented by sunken ships in the river itself afforded ample proof of the efficiency of the Allied Air Force. (Lawrence's party had arrived in time to see one attack by 300 Mustangs).

Cooking facilities, latrines and other necessities had not even been thought of by the Japanese, and provision had to be hastily made for them. In fact, with the tin roofs, the fine dusty soil and the extremely closely packed sleeping accommodation (all the men could not sleep at one time) conditions were very bad, and the move up-country after two weeks was very welcome, even though it entailed a twenty-five mile march.

Our new camp was a barbed wire enclosure within a rubber plantation and we lived in the open whilst we built our huts and other accommodation. By now, the Japs had decided that Japan was 'off' ; the O.R's were to remain in Indo-China and the officers were to return to Siam. I was therefore detailed to take forty-eight officers by the overland route back to Kanburi. This was accomplished by river steamer and rail, with all the usual inconveniences. The troops remained behind in the charge of R.S.M. Bradstreet, and fared fairly well by comparison with previous standards. Their one unhappy misfortune was to lose ninety men in a raid shortly before the end.

On the night Indo-China was taken over by the Japanese, I was en route with my party of officers and had reached the capital of Cambodia where we were accommodated in premises which were being used as a Japanese barracks. We noticed on arrival great signs of military activity— parties of French troops with their native levies were being marched to various strategic points and the Japanese were bringing in re-inforcements, particularly artillery and tanks, from Siam. Our Japanese Sergeant blandly informed us that he had instructions to execute all my party, in the event of trouble with the French, and when, in the middle of the night, we were wakened and marched off under guard, the sounds of battle from various vicinities around the barracks conveyed the worst to us.

We were guided into a court yard along one side of which were three lines of Japanese troops and it was obviously intended that we should line up on the opposite side of the court yard. I pretended however to misunderstand the directions and placed the officers under an archway leading to the court yard. There we huddled together for several hours and eventually, when action drew nearer to the barracks, we were ordered into nearby slit trenches.

Fighting continued all night, the odd mortar shell dropping uncomfortably near, but by dawn it had slackened off and on climbing out of our holes, we saw batches of French troops being led off under guard.

As usual in the Far East the native population accepted the change of masters without any signs of apparent objection, but our previous short survey of the country had convinced us that in everything but name, occupation had taken place many months before.

Next day, we continued our journey and finally rejoined the fold again after an absence of some seven months, and a Cook's tour of some 3,000 miles."

The Officers' Camp, Kanburi

At the beginning of 1945, came the information that all officers less a few M.O's and padrés, were to be concentrated in the ' aerodrome ' Camp at Kanburi. The time had come when the Japanese saw the writing on the wall: we were to be given no chance of planning any ' nonsense ' when our forces came near. Some of the senior officers from among our hosts have since admitted that they had decided to liquidate in one, both the evidence on their treatment of prisoners in Siam, and their nuisance value when Siam became a theatre of operations. Before the end, most camps had dug the pits which were to have been their communal graves.

By February we had said, " Au Revoir " to our men, and by March, all officers had foregathered at Kanburi—even dangerously ill must conform to plan !

Our existence there has been ably described in other books—briefly, it was one long humbug: the twin ogres Noguchi and Shimojo, ably backed by the Korean ' Undertaker,' enjoyed an orgasm of unfrustrated sadism, culminating in the cold-blooded attempt to murder Bill Drower the camp interpreter, for daring to suggest to Noguchi that the Nips had no right to strike us. He was severely beaten up and confined to a Jap air-raid shelter in front of the guardroom for 86 days, being fed on one bowl of rice and one mug of water daily. He was not allowed to wash, shave or speak to anyone, and for the greater part of the time the shelter was half full of water. We cannot conceive what he suffered: luckily he was too ill with blackwater fever the last part of the time to be more than comatose, and the end of the war came just in time to save him.

Daily air raids with some casualties were a constant strain to nerves already frayed: the absence of regular outside working parties deprived us of contact with friendly Siamese, though on several occasions after a severe air-raid on Tamekam, we had to supply labour to help rebuild the bridge: there was no lack of volunteers, for they usually met up with an O.R's party on the same errand from Chunkai, and some interchange of news was possible. Frequent searches gradually brought to light what few remaining treasures we possessed,—paper, pencils, table-knives, mirrors,—every conceivable object of normal necessity: even the cut-throat razors of the barber's shop had to be handed over to the Japanese for custody after use. For those not occupied in camp jobs, life was a lingering affair—the end of the war seemed probable that year, and all we had to do was to wait for it: we no longer had the spur of duty to the men to keep us going and we tended to become more and more self-centred, mopish, and introspective. The pessimists noted the influx of Japanese fighting troops into camps all round us, and in some cases, morale was at a very low ebb.

Yet this Camp was a remarkable combination of ingenuity and efficiency ; many people did work hard, and the products of the cookhouse, the canteen, the concert party and the ' chemists ' suggested as our version of the well-worn phrase: " Necessity knows no limit." The only limit was the small amount of everything available, resulting in interminable queues. One could and did spend many hours of each day queueing: for water to wash, for a shave or haircut, for meals, for canteen purchases, for a place in the latrines, for medical attention . . . .

Noguchi may have been a sadist, but he was mad enough to produce one

or two constructive ideas, which the camp chemists could exploit. Paper was almost unobtainable and long before we came to Kanburi, a sheet of semi-absorbent paper two feet square cost one tical, so that people in possession of Bibles or any other book printed on rice paper, were able to raise quite a few ticals on the sale thereof to smokers. It was Noguchi who propounded that we might manufacture our own paper, and after experiments with various fibrous weeds, a paper was produced in the camp of quite reasonable texture. The next demand on the chemists was to produce chloroform for use in the hospital, and this was duly done electrolitically. Thus were batteries obtained (in excess of requirements) and the Webber brothers were in a position to run the wireless set again.

The Camp had a ' Mint ' too. Somewhere about that time, the Siamese Government called in and cancelled the Thomas Dela Rue 1,000 tical notes. Collaborators in particular had many of these and rather than run the risk of being found with too much money, they sold out in a panic at half price—to the Japanese. Many Siamese, however, regarded the Dela Rue notes as certain to be honoured after the war, and were prepared to invest their inflated Jap-printed currency in these notes. Meanwhile, the Jap knew that with our money we were buying newspapers, if we could get them, and that by sale of stolen goods or cashing cheques, we were obtaining additional money,—(more money passed through the Camp Canteen in a month than double the amount of our pay !) If then, Siamese money was made illegal in the Camp, we could have no excuse for having any,—we could not buy papers, and if anyone escaped he would be without funds. Hence the Nip paid us in 1,000 tical notes,—we could not sub-divide them, and had to accept his idea that he retained this money and paid the canteen bills to the contractor, and that we should issue camp currency to the authorized amount. So a small group of designers was set up, and they produced 2½ cent, 5 cent, 10 cent, 25 cent, and 50 cent, cardboard discs, and 1 tical and 5 tical notes on ordinary paper and signed by two senior officers.

Concerts were few and far between, but a source of great pleasure to artistes and audience. One ' concert incident ' gave all but the victim a good laugh:—a Dutch officer who could ventriloquize, made a doll, and gave an excellent ' turn ' which impressed even the Nip. Three days later, there was one of the periodic searches, and the Nip, searching the Dutch hut found and recognized the doll. He picked it up and said: " Speako !" but the doll never said a word. Angrily, he slapped its face and ordered: " Speako !"—still no response, more face slapping of the doll, a crescendo of staccato abuse, and a bellowed: " Speako !"

The doll never said a word.

He threw it through the window, and sent for the owner off a working party, slapped his face, and made him stand to attention outside the guard room for twelve hours as a punishment because his doll wouldn't speak.

In May came the trek to Nakorn Nayok—a jungle camp consisting of a piece of virgin jungle 17 kilometres from the nearest village and approached from the ' road ' by a jungle track 3 kilometres in length, and just wide enough to allow movement in single file. The ' trek ' was a 43 kilometre march through the jungle after a two day train journey from Kanburi and on arrival, the first party had to start preparing a road to the Camp, clearing the area for building the camp and then carrying all the building material, stores, etc., on their backs to the camp site and erecting it. The outer covers of 3½ old tents was their only shelter, till they had built some more,—for 300 men in the monsoon season ! They were the fittest of the officers, and at the end of four weeks, a road in had been built, the area cleared, and two huts put up. They worked magnificently and the older officers and sick who followed on, had good reason to be grateful that there was a camp ready made and some organised facilities, for to the unfit, this trek was a night-mare,—to fall out through fatigue, was to be prodded with rifle butt or bayonet, or kicked in the face by the Korean guards, one of whom actually urinated in an officer's face while he was lying down, all-in, unable to move any further.

On August 15th, the sixth party was due to go to Nakorn Nayok—this was the entire hospital, including the D.I. cases. On the 13th evening, a 'tame' Korean wandered into one of the huts and said the Siamese had told him, "Nippon want peace." The following evening, the same creature came in, this time in tears, and said: "Russia bom-bom Korea: kill all my country," We took this with a certain amount of scepticism, but on the afternoon of the 15th, there were many volunteers to carry the stretcher cases the 500 yards out of the Camp to the train. As the party proceeded along the road, Nai Boon Pong, was noticed among the many Siamese going past on bicycles. As Boon Pong passed, he said in Siamese: "Songkram lurk leow" (The War is over). He came back again and murmured: "Wan Knee, Yippon yawm pear" (To-day, the Japanese have surrendered).

There could be no possible doubt now,—the magnificent news was passed to Col. Pargeter, O.C. train, who was urged to refuse to proceed beyond Bangkok, and the rest of us went back to Nip guards and anti-climax: When would they know? When would they tell us? What would they do? What could we do?

Luckily, Noguchi was away, and his subaltern Mashushita, a more reasonable type of creature, summoned Col. Swinton at 5 "o'clockish" and informed him that the war was over, but that we must still regard ourselves as his prisoners, until relieved by our own people. The Imperial Japanese Emperor, to save more loss of life to the Allies, had humanely decided to stop fighting. He (Mashushita) did not know whether or not the fighting troops in the vicinity had been informed, he implored us not to go out of the Camp, he could not say what they would do. This was fair enough.

As if by magic, a Union Jack, a Stars and Stripes and a Dutch flag appeared above three huts in the camp within a few minutes. The Japanese kept away, and for the night, we stayed inside the wire, brewing tea the while. Next day, the Siamese scholars were allowed out to negotiate with the Siamese for immediate supplies of food—they called at an official looking house and to their absolute astonishment found there a British Officer and Sergeant who had been there for sometime, resplendent with war ribbons. Free Siamese troops were being trained secretly in the jungle ten miles away, they had wireless contact with Calcutta, and their job was to facilitate our escape when possible or if conditions became a bit tricky. A Player's cigarette, a drop of 'Scotch'—was it a dream?

The Nips gave no more trouble, they allowed themselves to be disarmed, and we took over the camp till a few days later, our own troops of the E Group/RAPWI organisation arrived to organize our move home.

Meanwhile at Nakorn Nayok, the wireless set and batteries had been assembled, having travelled there secreted in Noguchi's personal kit. The Webbers listened, and heard the wonderful news—Col. Toosey went to Noguchi and demanded immediate supplies, and got them!

At most Camps, we raided the Nip godowns and there found supplies of food, clothing and medical supplies mostly Red Cross, sufficient to last for many months, and we had been without for three years!

Some unfortunates had to wait even weeks before they knew that the War was over. On the 19th one party of 300 had received orders from up the line near Kinsayok to report back at Kanburi. No one knew why, and then, as the train arrived within sight of our Camp, they saw the Union Jack. They nearly went mad. They kicked the Nip guards off the train, and stopped it outside the Camp. Those who could stagger, struggled in—fifteen died in two days,—they had been living on grass and roots and insects up there in the jungle, and the one officer, an M.O., said that another month would have seen the last of them. There are many such stories—we were indeed lucky that the end came when it did. Now we can live again and hope that out of our experiences we may fashion a philosophy of life dynamic enough to be effective in a war-weary world—It must not happen again.