

ROY BULCOCK

**OF DEATH
BUT ONCE**

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To Every Mother
who waited long years in vain
and in particular

To My Own Mother
who, because of me,
could write these verses in all sincerity

WELCOME HOME

DEAR kinsmen, long in earth's dark places lost.
Where even our love reached not; far, far from home:
Now — glad forerunner of our scattered host.
Incredibly, miraculously you come.

Let memories of the foetid jungle fade!
The sordid camp; each alien sight and sound.
The ghosts of all those haunted years be laid.
And wholesome things and homely wrap you round.

You fought with dragons in those brutal lands.
And weaponless the heathen challenge met!
Yours was the hardest fight with empty hands.
(Ah, may those bare years yield rich harvest yet).

Australia needs your gifts, so hardly bought.
The spirit's strength, grim testing to endure.
The quick, resourceful brain, that daily brought
Some answer to dark problems: patient, sure.

The jacaranda breaks in eager bud.
Our gardens wave gay banners as you come.
Fragrance and light and love's tide at its flood!
The lost is found: the homeless is at home.

—Emily Bulcock.

*"Cowards die many times before their deaths
The Valiant only taste of death but once."*

INTRODUCTION

THIS BOOK GIVES ONE MAN'S SHARE IN AN experience that will become significant in our history, and probably leave its mark on our character and outlook. Many thousands of our countrymen were cut off by the first swift Japanese thrusts, suffering, for over three years, an enslavement that was made more bitter by cruelty and starvation. There were few people who did not have some close friend or relative among these men. Uncertainty about their fate was one of the heaviest burdens we had to carry during the war.

Now that they are back, such of them as survived, it seems important that we should have their stories; important, because we need to know the full truth of what we escaped. Some of the returned prisoners will not want to talk or write; memories hurt. Some who remained at home will not want to read or listen; prison-experiences are depressing. You have heard of the bright young thing who, when asked was she impressed by the account of the Passion, as dramatised for the radio, said reflectively: "M—yes, but it was rather sad in parts, don't you think?" People who skim lightly over life's surface usually find a glimpse into its depths rather sad.

But there are others who find nothing so inspiring as stories of the human will triumphing over adversity, and the camps of Java and Thailand provide these in abundance. There is, for instance, the story of Alan Groom, as recounted in this book. Personally, it has set me wondering how the clear-eyed, upstanding boy of ten, whom I remember wandering in from next door, usually with some forthright question on his tongue, could possibly have laid up such stores of courage and resolution for the future. With the author, I was in closer touch. I had watched him develop from early childhood, and had known from the intense concentration

and skill with which he threw himself into such varied activities as tennis, acting, motor-racing, and business, that he would have resources to meet this unimagined test.

Naturally, the view taken of the Japanese in this book is a savage one. The higher officers were coldly brutal; the guards were instruments of this brutality. But there is one guard, a Korean, who lights up the darkness by saying:

"There are two kinds of prisoners in this gaol—one with arms, the other without."

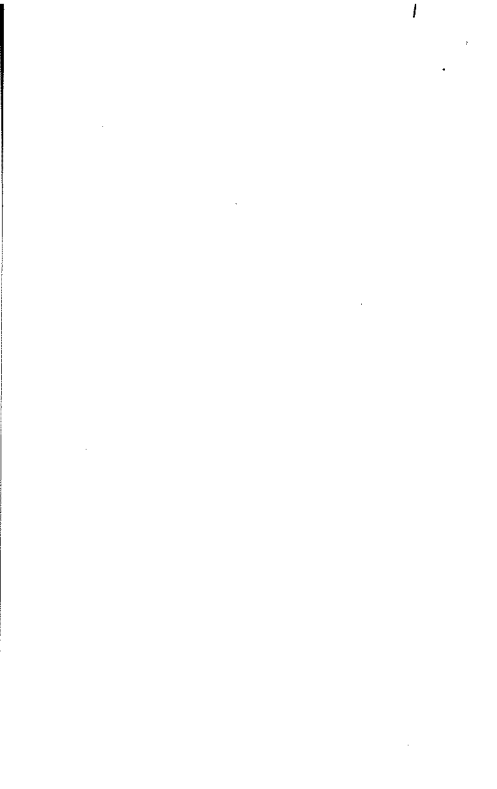
I could have wished, for the sake of our common humanity, that the full story of this Korean had been told in the book, but the author did not hear it till his prison days were over. The Korean had been lured to Java as an agriculturist; he had been conscripted and made a guard. One day he received a serious bashing from his seniors for allowing his working-party to stop and play football on the way home. Next day he coolly stopped in the same place and asked his Australian prisoners would they like another game. In consideration for him, they refused. This Korean, during the last months of the war, was whisked off by the Japanese and tortured for what is called subversive activity.

Such episodes remind us that the conflict was not one of race or colour.

—Vance Palmer.

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Chapter One

MALAYAN MUDDLE

ELEVEN THOUSAND BODIES IN THE BAG!
Eleven thousand bodies of English-speaking men left isolated in the retreat before the Japanese.

Men who remained. Men who had a job to do, who were too busy to pull strings, who had sufficient sense of the fitness of things to prevent them from sneaking on to half-empty ships and so leaving their comrades in the lurch. Men who were not important enough to worry about, undisciplined and untrained — "a disorganised rabble," as the Dutch called them.

Invaluable fighter-pilots who flew their Hurricanes until only two were left. Five thousand fitters and riggers — a whole year's output at that time from British training-schools.

Americans. Australians. New Zealanders. Canadians. South Africans, Malaysians, Indians and British. All these were included in that 11,000, and most of them were to comprise the Black Force, the do-or-die heroes who were supposed to fight in the hills to the last man.

The Black Force! For most of them had never fired a rifle. Many of them were unarmed.

But they were still useful in the tactical scheme, as it was unfolded to us. They were the bait to lure the Nippon dragon, to bring 112 Nippon ships and ten divisions to Java when one-third of that number would have done the job, and thus delay the invasion of Australia.

We were the last bluff.

In Singapore we had bluffed the world with propaganda stories of the impregnable fortress, we had bluffed ourselves and the Dutch into hoping the stories were true, but we hadn't expected the Japs to call our bluff so soon. But this

time the bluff of these British troops scattered all over Java had actually worked. The Japs had fallen for the bait. God help the bait. God help us, we felt, as the Japs encircled us, for no one else can.

During those first weeks of captivity a Dutch intelligence officer cheered us up considerably.

"On 16th February," he said, "the Netherlands East Indies Command signalled to the Dutch Government in London for permission to surrender. The reply was received that every day counted, that we were to hold out as long as possible, at least until the end of the first week in March. We obeyed our orders, but if the Japs had by-passed Java and gone direct to Australia, what could have saved your country? It was the presence of you troops here that made all the difference. You will see, when you get home. Your sacrifice will not be in vain. They will regard you as heroes."

We smiled rather cynically at this, knowing how short memory can be, but feeling that perhaps after all we had had our uses, we men who remained. . . .

"Why didn't you evacuate your women from Java?" we asked the Dutch officers, who seemed so pleased that the pretence of fighting the Japanese was finished.

"But why should we?" they replied. "The Japs can't run this country without us. In a few weeks, perhaps, when things have settled down, we will return to our homes and carry on our jobs under a Japanese Governor. Of course, we are sorry for you. You will have to be locked up while we are free, but we promise to treat you well."

This attitude was general on the part of the Dutch. No wonder their army did not wish to be too unfriendly towards the invaders. No wonder we met with such opposition when Dutch ships were wanted to evacuate the personnel too valuable to be used as bait, for were we not a nice little present to make the Japs more friendly towards them?

For the Japs had not forgotten the high-handed Dutch behaviour at the economic conference in Java in 1940. They had remembered that their duck-legged spokesman

had been sneered down at by a specially selected parade of the tallest men in the Dutch army; that the Dutch representative who had called a meeting for eleven o'clock had refused to wait five minutes for the tardy Nip. Who can say that such small things as these did not influence the subsequent Japanese attitude. It seems more than likely that face-saving has an excellent memory for details.

I make no apology for telling this story in the first person, for it can only be a personal impression of what I have seen and experienced, backed up by the verified accounts of other officers when details are needed which I cannot supply.

"An official record should be kept," suggested the C.O. after we had been captured. "Are you willing to take the risk?"

"Is there likely to be much risk?" I asked in my ignorance, little knowing what the future would have in store for us.

And so I started a diary, which proved an absorbing interest to me and kept my brain from atrophying, but at the same time gave me many of the most terrifying moments of my life. Yet once begun a stubborn determination drove me on, a queer sense of duty towards a job I had been given to do. I would finish it if it were the last thing I did.

It nearly was.

But let us go back to April, 1941, when an advertisement appeared in Australian papers for men between the ages of 32 and 50, with executive experience, to join the R.A.F. for overseas in the Far East Command. It looked a splendid opportunity for men who had made up their minds that Australia's front line was north of the equator, and nearly 6,000 applications poured in from all the States and New Zealand.

To be one of the first thirty-six chosen seemed a great honour at the time, and not one to be lightly refused, even though only a day's notice was given to wind up business affairs. But a promise of three weeks' pre-embarkation leave

decided the issue, and I left my printing company director's job in Brisbane for practically the first time in ten years of hard work. In a few weeks I hoped to return and make the necessary arrangements for carrying on, but red tape administration had other ideas. We arrived in Melbourne on Friday and sailed on the following Tuesday — in civilian clothes — very hush-hush, which was rather pleasing to our sense of importance. The rank of Acting Pilot-Officer on probation with a salary of ten shillings per day was merely the first step on the ladder of fame.

And what a motley crew we were! Anything from a publican and a bankrupt country newspaper editor to a bank manager and company director, a university professor and a salesman. Several veterans had forgotten the horrors of the last war and remembered only the glory, but some of them approached pretty close to the horrors again when the beer supply ran out and they started mixing their drinks.

The dutch ship "Roggeveen" had not been to Australia for 22 years. In addition to the normal stinks of an old and dirty ship, she cloyed our nostrils with the first odours of the East — the body smell of the native crew, the strong, oily aroma of rich Dutch cooking, the spicy tang of the Indies. Added to this was the constant reminder of the lavatories next to my cabin, where I was forced to retire for three days with a heavy fever induced by the vaccination which had gone wrong.

Melbourne had been left in bitterly cold weather, and roughish seas with cloudy skies off the New South Wales coast had not improved our tempers, so I tried to cheer everyone with vivid descriptions of glorious Queensland winter sunshine and the opalescent calm of the Barrier Reef. But Queensland let me down. It was not until we reached the Whitsundays, where I waved goodbye to my good friends on Day Dream Island, that the sun really shone and the sea acquired that lovely sparkling green calmness that makes the Reef a perfect tourists' playground.

From then on the weather was delightful. Not even

the scare of a raider in the Indian Ocean could spoil our appetites once we had become accustomed to the queer mixture served up as a five-course meal, and we steamed into Sourabaya harbour with an average gain of several pounds in weight.

The Dutch were expecting us — with the rough-house created by previous troops fresh in their memory — and double prices flagrantly marked on all the menus in the town. Beer was 75 cents a pot, nearly half-a-crown in Australian money, and a glass of iced coffee two shillings. But the Dutch ladies' reception committee was more than kind. Outings had been arranged to various places of interest, and our hosts suggested we should allow them to pay the bills at the old prices and refund the cost later.

Our third day there was spent at Tretres, a mountain resort about 45 miles from Sourabaya, where rich Dutchmen have built lavish week-end residences among a riot of tropical shrubs and flowers. The run there is still fresh in my memory, a symphony in green, for it was our first sight of the terraced ricefields so typical of the Javanese countryside — ricefields that cling to the mountain slopes like the waves of a shallow sea. The bus sped dangerously along narrow roads crowded with giant-wheeled Zebu bullock carts, with thousands of ducks and ten thousand fat native babies who could scarcely crawl without dragging their pot bellies along the ground. Then we began to climb from the damp heat of the plains into the cool crisp air of the heights, and a new world was born in those few miles.

Terrace after terrace of colour. Waterfalls, swimming pools, country clubs. Tree-ferns forty feet high, yet kept as trim and neat as a pot plant. We dived into a pool cut from the mountain-side and fed by a running stream from a spring a thousand feet higher, but the cold water snatched our breath away like a punch in the solar plexus. We dashed about on the sturdy little Lombok ponies and dined on a terrace overlooking a waterfall and a mountain of the densest jungle. Then back to the bus, and as if sinking into a hot bath we slid down into the humidity of the plains again

and so to the ship a few minutes before she sailed. Tretres was indeed a fairyland which we were to remember in the long months to follow.

Interest in the voyage itself culminated in the southern approach to Singapore, the many islands forming tortuous channels so easily fortified as to make Singapore indeed impregnable — from the South.

"See those islands ahead?" asked an officer who pretended to know the ropes. "That's the only channel between them, and there are torpedo-tubes on each side which cover every square yard of water. There isn't a ship in the world that could get through before a dozen torpedoes hit her."

We were duly impressed with the information.

"And those hills," he went on, "bristling with guns, from 9 inch to 15 inch. The whole British fleet couldn't stand up against them."

But try as we would, we could only see one gun position, and were again impressed with the adequacy of the camouflage.

I must now admit that I expected to see Singapore adopting its role of fortress, with tanks and guns rushing over the roads and soldiers falling over each other in the streets, yet during the two months I was there I did not see a single gun or tank, and only an occasional man in uniform, except for the Air Force. My expectations may have been fantastic, but the reality seemed equally so. I tried to convince myself that Singapore was not open for inspection, that no display of armed might was necessary at the time; but the first cloud of doubt had appeared on the horizon.

Singapore, the fundamental orifice of the East. "Drinks, Chinks and stinks," as Bruce Lockhart so rhythmically puts it, and the Chinks and stinks were certainly obvious as we berthed at Keppel Harbour and waited for the next move. After an hour or so an R.A.F. officer turned up, told us our arrival was premature, and eventually conducted us to the Kallang airport, where we were to live for the next few

weeks while undergoing our first instruction course on administration.

We dined at the Airport Hotel, were made temporary members of the Singapore Swimming Club, and ordered our uniforms. We drilled two hours daily on hot concrete in the blazing sun under the super-efficient instruction of Squadron-Leader Gregson, whose sarcasms at our expense were not always appreciated by the older and fatter members of our squad. Gregson's imitations of "Sand-Shoe Joe," who walked like a cat burglar, and the "tall, dark, handsome man," who could never about-turn in step, would have been amusing if we had been looking on, instead of carrying out his orders, with the perspiration soaking our clothes and our feet swelling into one huge blister. But there is no doubt that after a few weeks of this treatment we were much improved in fitness and capable of drilling a squad ourselves.

In the meantime we were being initiated into the secrets of Air Force administration and the manufacture of red tape in general. We learnt to write letters in the approved manner, to operate the secret codes and cyphers, and in our spare time to find our way around the high spots of Singapore.

It was at Kallang that we heard the story of the photographer who wanted a photo of the opening of the Kallang airport, for an American magazine. He was refused by the authorities, so he went along the street and bought a print from the nearest Japanese photographer, who had the picture prominently displayed in his window.

The "worlds" of Singapore, those heterogeneous collections of humanity and sights and smells, were always worth an evening's visit. Chinese, Malays, Siamese, Burmese, Tamils, Hindus, Sikhs, Bengalis, the various mixtures of them all, the Eurasians and the Whites. Slim, flower-like taxi dancers in the cabaret at twenty-five cents a dance. Chinese open-air theatres with brilliant costumes, traditional decor and a discordant medley of sounds. Stalls and shops that sold almost everything in the world, from precious jade to cardboard shoes. And food! Queer-looking dishes served

in queer ways to queer people. *Sati*, roasted delicacies on sticks; *ng daw jock*, sweet bean pudding; *lup cheung*, sausage; *pasi dan*, salted egg; *harm yee*, salted fish; and dozens of other edibles of doubtful origin. Jugglers, acrobats, contortionists, picture shows. And amidst it all those scores of painted girls, attractive and well-dressed, but with the marks of their profession showing on their faces.

To all this mixture add the tinkling of artificial laughter, the raucous voices of the showmen, the weird cacophony of native instruments, stir well, and flavour with a touch of vice, sprinkle with all the perfumes of Araby and the smells of the East, and bake in the sweat and humidity of a ninety-degree tropical night. There you have the New World, the Happy World, the Great World; but even in my wildest dreams I could not imagine that I was to have sole charge of one of these places before many months had passed.

The first movie I saw there was Somerset Maugham's "The Letter," which opened with a scene on a rubber plantation. Suddenly the whole theatre burst into wild shrieking laughter which continued at hysterical intervals throughout the performance. I did not appreciate fully the reason for this until I saw rubber trees being milked a week or so later and observed the slow welling of the latex when the cut was made. In the picture the native tapped the tree and caught the spurting stream in a bucket. It was too much for the rubber planters present. An intermittent giggle would start the audience all shrieking again.

At the end of a few weeks everyone managed to scrape through his exams with a certain amount of cheating, the worst offender being the man who was later to receive the highest rank of us all. Then we were divided into two groups, one of which was to study Operations, while I went with the other to Seletar to qualify as an Equipment Officer.

Seletar was an R.A.F. Station and Maintenance Unit on the eastern side of Singapore facing Johore Strait. Its immensity was staggering to those of us who were seeing the R.A.F. organisation for the first time, and we wandered

around in a daze inspecting the palatial messes and barracks, the tennis courts, squash court, football fields, swimming pool, golf course, picture show and yacht club, which were all situated within the seven-mile steel boundary fence enclosing the aerodrome. It seemed an ideal place to live, but my first impression was of a vast country club rather than an outpost of Empire — and this impression never changed. The atmosphere suggested that a good time could be had by all, and work was a secondary consideration, for usual working hours were from 9 to 3.30.

We soon settled into a routine of study under an instructor who had been flown from India for the purpose, and began to realise there was a definite method in the madness of red tape. The four thousand odd forms which formed the R.A.F. accounting system had been drawn up, many in quintuplicate, from a pattern used by Selfridges in London, and we had to learn the use of a sufficient percentage of them to make our work fireproof. For weeks I dreamt of an avalanche of forms all leering at me and refusing to go where they were routed, but gradually the tangle sorted itself out and became as clear as mud. For a peacetime system it was undoubtedly a perfect method of preventing loss or pilfering, but how would it work in war?

The answer was that it didn't. The whole scheme was immediately curtailed by about two-thirds of the work involved as soon as operations commenced.

"In 1938," said the instructor, "more money was spent by the R.A.F. on paper than on petrol."

The peacetime pen is mightier than the plane.

Between lectures we learnt about gas and went through a gas-chamber of tear gas with our masks on; we practised pistol shooting and inspected the large underground bomb dumps with satisfaction, and we spent some time in the stores and workshops. Here it was that I first began to realise that something was very much wrong somewhere... either that those quintuplicate forms had lost heart at their neglect, or someone wasn't doing his job. In the work-

shops, for instance, worked marked "Urgent" had been pushed aside for periods up to eighteen months, and not always for lack of material. The Transit Store was piled almost to the roof with three thousand cases of much-needed equipment for up-country aerodromes. "Awaiting transport" was the answer to our query, but when someone unearthed an article marked with all the degrees of urgency that had lain there for ten weeks, and enquired the reason, the only reply was that "they couldn't find a case to fit it!" It seemed incredible that such a state of affairs had been allowed to continue.

Numbers of aircraft were lying in the hangars waiting for spares which took months to arrive. In many cases a perfectly good aircraft, lacking one small part, had been stripped to provide spares for the rest of the squadron. Work was being sent to the Naval Base shops to relieve the position (often with faulty or out-of-date blueprints) and gradually the engineers in Singapore itself were being roped in to speed up the output. Perhaps things were improving with regard to spares, but so very slowly.

The whole spirit of the place was one of slackness. A number of good chaps were working themselves silly while the rest were only out for a good time, which they considered was drinking as much as possible in the Mess. And on the forty dollars a month drinking allowance that was plenty, at duty-free rates.

Our welcome there as Australians had been cold. Scarcely a friendly hand had been extended, and although a few of the boys bought their way in by splashing money around and purchasing motor cars, most of us preferred to stick together and make our own friends. I had chummed up on the ship with a pocket Hercules, a vegetarian who had his trunk full of mincing machines with peanuts and raisins. He smilingly accepted the sarcastic remarks of the other officers, then astonished everyone by chinning the bar twelve times with one hand, and in reply to further sarcasms offered to wrestle a man five stone heavier than he was. The offer

was declined. Now he proceeded to clean everyone up at squash, playing to a standstill three opponents in succession, an amazing performance in that heat.

But although we played tennis or squash together on most evenings, the coming exams were the first consideration, for the normal eight months' course had to be digested in six weeks. Most of us passed with credit, and the few who failed were given an honorary but dishonourable sixty per cent, so that the instructor could hurry back to India.

So now we were fully-fledged Equipment Officers. Air Headquarters were still insisting that we were merely "acting" Pilot Officers, but our letters of appointment were definite enough, and eventually A.H.Q. had to give way and receive us as Pilot Officers at 11/6 per day - "the lowest form of life."

What would happen next? My letters home had difficulty in expressing any optimism at the outlook. That little cloud of doubt that all was well had grown considerably in volume in the last two months. A miracle was needed to change the general chaos into efficiency, to produce the aircraft so badly needed.

We were given the opportunity of choosing our destination. Most of the jobs were in Singapore, but new aerodromes up-country were being opened up and several of them were awaiting personnel. It would be a tough job, but I was one of the youngest and fittest of those available, and it was more with a desire to show a willingness to work than anything else that I offered to go where conditions were worst. I felt a dose of hard work was the best remedy for the lethargic atmosphere at Seletar. I certainly bought it at Kuantan.

The morning before I sailed I was sitting in the Mess awaiting embarkation orders when the C.O. dropped in and flopped into the chair beside me. It was the first time I had seen him.

"You one of these Australians?" he asked shortly, seeing the new braid. "What are you doing?"

"Awaiting posting orders," I told him.

"Oh! Where are you going?"

"Kuantan, Sir."

"Kuantan? Kuantan? Never heard of it. Where is it?"

I thought he was pulling my leg at first. It seemed incredible that a Group Captain in Singapore did not know the names of the airfields in the Command. I gravely explained that it was on the east coast, about half-way to the Thai border, 170 air-miles from Singapore.

"Sounds pretty bloody," he said, and left me.

And with this benediction I embarked on a new experience.

Chapter Two

WHERE TIGERS AND SNAKES PREVAIL

THE "RAUB" STEAMED SLOWLY THROUGH THE placid waters. The gunnery officer was showing some excitement, for he was allowed two shells a month for practise, but he had saved up for two months and now could have a real party with four shells. He was scanning the horizon for a target. The old skipper had known every port from Rangoon to Bangkok for over thirty years and was as good as Conrad with his tales of the sea, but I could scarcely concentrate on what he was saying as I wondered what Kuantan would be like, and had visions of malaria-sodden jungle and wild animals.

I would soon know. We anchored outside the river mouth at dusk waiting for the tide while the skipper explained that, though there were only ten feet of water on the bar and he drew eleven, he would get over somehow. He did, for when I woke in the morning, we were alongside the wharf and a crowd of dock labourers, mostly Tamils, were assembling to unload the ship.

The two streets of the quaint little town were crammed full of little cubby-holes of shops, in the dark recesses of which fat Chinese merchants smiled benignly while waiting for business. The usual ox-carts blocked the streets — even the Shell petrol waggon being drawn by one of the large, hump-backed beasts — while native children dashed between the wheels and even ate their food sitting in the middle of the street.

Apparently my arrival was unexpected, for I had to ring up the Station for transport. But a lorry was on the way to pick up supplies from the "Raub," and shortly afterwards we were bowling along a narrow road lined with

groves of coconuts, then over the Kuantan River by ferry, through rice fields, rubber plantations and jungle, until we turned off at the nine-mile post, and so reached the Station.

Kuantan was a hole in the jungle, or rather a gash in the rubber; for although virgin jungle surrounded the area on all sides, rubber plantations had raped their way into it many years ago, and now about 150,000 rubber trees had been cut down to make room for the aerodrome and buildings — at a cost of £1 per tree compensation, paid to the owners. Nearly all the buildings were completed and stood out like a fire on the ocean, for that excellent camouflage of rubber trees had been ruthlessly shorn away. This may have been to combat the mosquito menace, but the army camp of 2,000 Indians half a mile away was completely hidden by rubber trees which actually grew through the roofs of the huts, making the camp quite invisible from the air, even at 500 ft. The R.A.F. Station was to pay a heavy price for this lack of camouflage.

The C.O. and the Adjutant were the only officers there, together with four O.R.'s. I was certainly beginning at the beginning. More personnel were to arrive shortly, and 36 Squadron of Vildebeestes was flying in to complete a fortnight's course of armament training and bombing practice at a bombing range on the sea coast. There was no equipment at the Station, excepting a certain amount of barrack furniture, and my first job was to requisition all the thousand-and-one items necessary to equip an R.A.F. aerodrome, workshops, bombing-range and marine base.

But I soon found that this was only a small portion of the work that had to be done. I was appointed Transport Officer, a job in itself, and also acted as Engineering Officer, Workshops Officer, Embarkation Officer, Rations and Messing Officer; I supervised the refuelling of aircraft, the building of new petrol-dumps and shelter-sheds, the storage of bombs and torpedoes. Usual working hours were 7 a.m. till any time up to midnight, Saturdays and Sundays included—rather a different routine from the usual Singapore idea of

work, but I was spurred on by the conviction that at last I was doing something worth while.

Gradually other personnel arrived, an Accountant Officer, Welfare Officer, Armament Officer and about eighty O.R.'s., most of them completely untrained except for a couple of weeks in England. Their first job was to move and re-stack 22,000 petrol drums full of aviation spirit — often not so full — for returns to A.H.Q. showed that 52,000 gallons were not accounted for. The petrol had been dumped there months before, much of it in the sun and rain, and losses by leakage and evaporation had been tremendous. Every drum had to be checked, re-sorted into octanes and "vintages," losses measured and new figures compiled. No wonder the boys grumbled, working in that heat and devoured by mosquitoes. No wonder they went down with malaria and dengue. Many of them had only one shirt, which they were ordered to wear to lessen the danger from malaria, but the snakes, scorpions, centipedes and poisonous spiders hidden under the drums could not be kept off by a shirt.

In vain I sent in demand after demand for more tropical kit. In vain I requested A.H.Q. for permission to employ coolies on this work — they fixed a ridiculous wage that coolies scoffed at, since they were getting 50 per cent. more from local firms. But those English rookies stuck to it, and eventually finished the job. Two new dumps were built, perfectly camouflaged and shaded, yet quite accessible. Proudly I submitted new returns to A.H.Q. showing a loss of 528 gallons instead of 52,000, and that was allowable as evaporation.

Then came the anti-climax. The next letter from A.H.Q. declared that we were still wrong, for they had just discovered that "the forty-four gallon drums really contained forty-five gallons, so we were still 900 gallons short." The C.O., W/Cdr. Counsell, was very amusing about this. He demonstrated how they kept a fat Wing Commander like himself who stealthily approached a full drum, poured in an extra gallon, slammed the lid on and sat on it to squeeze it

in. After reams of correspondence my figures were finally accepted on 4th December, and a few days afterwards we ourselves set fire to the lot.

In the meantime 36 Squadron was piling up the flying hours. They were all experienced pilots, but their eight-year-old aircraft were subject to all sorts of troubles, and this caused our first tragedy. The Brigadier had wished to inspect the beaches to the south, and one of the Vildebeestes had been detailed for the job. They were due back at 2 p.m., and after a couple of hours' waiting we knew something was wrong. The other aircraft took off and soon returned. They had seen their missing aircraft overturned on a small beach where it had force-landed, and obviously they could not attempt to land beside it. The only approach was by river and on foot, a long, slow journey, and several hours must elapse before we knew the score.

At eleven o'clock that evening we were still sitting in the Mess awaiting news, trying to pass the time and overcome the growing tension. Richardson, I remember, had shown me his squadron diary, a most amusing affair, delightfully written and illustrated and full of clever little verses: Witney was talking of big game shooting and hoping to have a crack at the tiger that had left its pug marks on the aerodrome: then the Squadron C.O. came in quickly.

"I'm afraid John's gone and killed himself," he said.

Everyone stopped and looked up, but no one spoke for a few seconds. Then, as if nothing had happened, Richardson turned a page of his diary and Witney continued his conversation. But in ten minutes everyone had gone.

The Brigadier and navigator had escaped with a shaking, but the cockpit had crumpled in around the pilot, squeezing his head into the sand, suffocating him. He was the first of those brave lads to go, yet in a few months only two of them were fated to remain alive. The "flying coffins" were to deserve their ill-omened name.

The funeral next day was simple and sincere. We slow-marched behind the coffin to the grave in the little cemetery

on the sea front, then when the Last Post was played each officer stepped up to the grave and saluted his comrade, who lay facing the sea he had flown over so often.

But the flying still went on. Even the night-flying programme was not interrupted by the heavy rain-storms which came up so suddenly, although one pilot actually came in with leaves from the tree tops stuck in the under-carriage. We reckoned he had earned a place in our local alphabet, and gave him the following lines:—

"C stands for Callick, he flies with such ease

He can wipe his behind on the tops of the trees."

A squadron of Blenheims was to follow after the Vildebeestes. Their ground staff came from the nearest railway station 100 miles away, yet there were no seats in the trucks that were to transport them. Demands and signals to Singapore for seats remained unanswered, and the only solution was to use forms from the airmen's mess, but these flimsy structures collapsed under the swaying of the trucks on the winding road and several men were hurt. Letters to A.H.Q. asking whether the men were expected to stand for the five-hour trip? More demands. More letters, and still no seats, which could not be made locally. It went on for three months, and the file was an inch thick when another letter came from A.H.Q. asking why we had put in an urgent demand, and requesting a reply stating full reasons why the seats were required. With my pen dipped in vitriol, I sat down on 10th December to tell that young pup at A.H.Q. exactly what I thought of him, but the first bomb that fell landed right on top of the letter.

One trouble was that I was accepting a Squadron-Leader's responsibilities while still signing myself Pilot-Officer, and although my promotion went through on 1st November, it made very little difference. There were too many chaps in Singapore with nothing to do who thought more of their game of golf in the afternoon than trying to relieve the shocking lack of equipment at up-country stations.

Those thousands of cases in the Transit Store at Seletar had proved that a certain amount of stuff was available, and although many items had to come from overseas, we weren't even receiving the stuff on hand.

The examples of time-wasting I have quoted were only a couple of the dozens of similar affairs that went on for months. We now had tons of bombs, torpedoes and petrol, but there was still talk of Kuantan being used as a fighter drome, and petrol for fighters was already arriving. Should we demand all the necessary spares and equipment for the fighters? No one could say. But we did know the personnel of the Station plus the operating squadron would soon be around 600 men and we had barrack equipment for only 300. More demands, this time the reply being that the Station was already fully equipped. But the Bombing Range and Marine Base were now operating, and we had to equip them from our barracks; and the Station personnel establishment had been doubled! It made no difference. The correspondence went on and on and on.

Repairs were needed to aircraft and engines, but we had no tools. A return was required of all machinery and tools on the Station, the reply being "One screw driver, personal property of the undersigned," with a note to the effect that the demands had been in for months. Engines had to be repaired in Singapore and sent by sea with only one ship weekly, but 153 M.U. at Kuala Lumpur could be reached in a day by road. I determined to run across and see whether something couldn't be arranged by personal contact, for as usual Singapore had vetoed the idea. Luckily I met at Kuala Lumpur W/Cdr. Groom, a very good friend from Brisbane, and poured my troubles into his sympathetic ear.

The next engine went to Kuala Lumpur, and a replacement engine came back next day on the same truck. At least two weeks were saved.

Groom had been very keen on cars before he became

a pilot, and when he heard I had done the 250 miles in our Adjutant's V8 in $7\frac{1}{2}$ hours, he promised to pay Kuantan a visit and see if he could help us in any other ways. He arrived the following week with Flt./Lt. Henschman, who looked rather white about the gills, but Groom was still smiling.

"By golly, you must have travelled," he said. "I went flat out but you beat me by ten minutes. Six hours forty was the best I could do."

"But that's marvellous," I told him. "We took seven and a half."

"Oh, I thought you said six and a half. That's what I was trying to beat."

The previous record was well over eight hours, for the 250 miles are supposed to have over 4,000 curves, and the road climbs a couple of mountains on the way.

Comparing our conditions with those at Kuala Lumpur, it was plain that we were getting the rough end of the stick. At K.L. everything was laid on, the work was easy, with plenty of sport and entertainment, and the food valued at 82 cents a day was excellent. But we had to work like coolies, the only sport was an occasional game of football on a rough ground, and transport was very difficult to the town picture-show nine miles away. Besides this, we were on field service rations, valued at only 42 cents, which must all come from the Indian supply unit. There were tons of cheap fresh fish in Kuantan, but we weren't allowed to buy a cent's worth, in spite of many appeals. Visiting aircraft crews up to 40 in number would drop in unexpectedly for a meal at all hours, but the regulations didn't allow for them at all, for all the rations had to be ordered three days in advance. They generally ate our food while we went short.

Finally, in reply to dozens of letters and suggestions from us, A.H.Q. promised that a Group Captain would be sent to clear the matter up. He arrived one midday, spent most of the afternoon sleeping and the evening drinking.

and when I finally collared him at 10 p.m. he said he was going to bed and would I put all my troubles in writing? He left early next morning, and although I wrote to him personally, I never even received a reply.

No wonder the airmen were fed up and becoming slack. A P.T. parade was held first thing in the morning, but many of them refused to get out of bed and took their punishment with a "so what?" attitude that spoke badly for general discipline. It would have been a full-time job for Squadron-Leader Gregson to hammer most of them into some semblance of what the R.A.F. should be.

Plainly, the monotonous lives of these men had to be made more interesting. A cricket match was arranged with a small tin-mining township at Sungei Lembing, a most difficult place to reach by trucks through the jungle, a motor-boat up the river and a train line to the mine. The match was on a Sunday, and everyone went who possibly could, leaving me the only officer on the Station. That evening the native police sergeant came to me and said he had orders to post guards on all the petrol dumps, bomb stores, W.T. and D.F. Stations, and asked for transport. It was the first I had heard of this, but I brought out the covered truck and drove them myself along the bumpy jungle-tracks to the various posts. Only a hundred yards from the D.F. Station, which was well in the jungle, the headlights caught the gleam of two large yellow eyes, and the next moment a full-grown tiger sprang across the track only a few feet in front of the truck. None of the police could see it, and I knew that if I told them there would be no guard duty that night, but it was unpleasant to think of one of those poor policemen being eaten. I spent the night in fear and trembling, but apparently the roaring of the truck in low gear had scared that tiger as much as he had me, and nothing happened.

A few nights later a female with two cubs was seen near a kampong, and shortly afterwards pug marks showed up clearly between two of the barracks. Fresh spoor was

frequently noticed at a waterhole on the perimeter of the airfield — and we hadn't a single rifle at the Station. Maybe it was just as well, for the Kuantan inhabitants warned us of the danger of using such a light rifle as a .303 on a tiger but then very few of them had even seen a tiger in thirty years' residence. I could count myself lucky in more ways than one.

An occasional tennis match was arranged with the Chinese team in the township: they played a very good game and trounced our fellows unmercifully. Football matches against the Indians on the town padang were the most popular with the spectators, but again the difficulties of transport made it impossible for many of the boys to get into town at a time. They were actually allowed only one trip a week under the regulations, but I could often arrange for a truck to visit the "Raub" at the appropriate time. With only three trucks for all the Station work recreation had to take second place.

The officers did not do so badly. The Adjutant, Harry Wight, was always generous with his car, and when work slackened off a little we could run into town late on Saturday afternoon for a set of tennis, with dinner and dance to follow at the Kuantan Club. Everyone was very friendly and sociable, though with all the fifteen ladies of Kuantan present and at least fifty army officers the chance of a dance was remote. Only one church service was held the whole time we were there, when for the first time I saw all the ladies wearing hats. My friend Mrs. Wear was rather amusing about this. "No matter what her religion, every lady in the district comes to Church," she said. "It's the only chance we have to see each other's hats." Stockings and hats have a very poor sale in Malaya.

Algy Wear was a motor car enthusiast like myself, and as the first mad rush of work slackened into a more normal routine I was able to spend an occasional Sunday afternoon and evening at his very pleasant house near the centre of the township. I first met him at the aerodrome, where he turned up one morning in a beautiful two-litre M.G. drop-head coupe, and no other introduction was required. We

soon became good friends, and as his work in the Public Works Department brought him frequently to the Station I was able to appreciate what a sterling chap he was. I had no means of repaying his hospitality, except by helping with an occasional job on his big Vauxhall and the smaller M.G., which comprised his stable, but this made no difference to his generosity.

Algy was due for long leave early in January, so I immediately began to advertise the advantages of Australia as a holiday resort. I talked endlessly about the Great Barrier Reef, the sun-kissed Queensland beaches, the glories of the Blue Mountains and Kosciusko. I wrote to the Queensland and New South Wales Tourist Bureaux for all the literature available, but although I received a large packet from Sydney within three weeks of writing, nothing turned up from Brisbane in spite of a personal request by my mother. No wonder the Wears decided to go to Sydney, while I apologised profusely for Brisbane's lack of interest in a "Toean Besar" who, as a satisfied visitor, would have been a splendid advertisement for Queensland tourist trade.

I remember so well that last afternoon I spent with them in November when we went bathing on Champedak beach—just a few yards of coarse sand hollowed out of the ever-encroaching jungle. It was a lovely spot, quiet and peaceful, and not even the rusty barbed-wire entanglement could spoil that impression. The monsoon had just commenced and there was enough surf to demonstrate shooting the breakers, much to Algy's interest. I promised him a vastly better performance at Bondi.

His eyes lit up with enthusiasm. In just a couple of months he would be there, away from this sweltering heat and the ever-present danger of malaria, dysentery, river fever and the numerous skin diseases of the jungle. War seemed so far away in that sequestered place — even in November.

Another evening recalls itself for rather a different reason. I had been playing tennis with Harry Wight at the Kuantan Club where dinner was served at nine, and while we were

waiting a phone call came from an officer whom we both knew well.

"Come out to my house and listen to the news," said the well-known officer. "You can have a drink and get back in plenty of time for dinner."

Now this business of having a drink didn't mean exactly what it said; it meant having all the drink there was.

But this was practically an order, so we went, fully expecting to be back in an hour at the most. Nine o'clock came, and ten, and eleven, yet all our attempts to excuse ourselves were frustrated by the order to have another drink. It was almost midnight before the W.K.O. looked up squiffily and said, "By Jove! you chaps better stay for dinner."

By that time we were nearly starving, having eaten nothing since a light lunch, and we knew we could get nothing anywhere else.

"That's all right, dear, isn't it?" said the W.K.O. to his wife, and in spite of her vigorous but silent headshake, he continued, "Yes, gentlemen, that's all right," and called for the cook boy to prepare for two extra. I'm afraid we ate that W.K.O.'s Sunday dinner, but I don't suppose it worried him, for the drinking continued until nearly five a.m., and the W.K.O. was too indisposed to work on the Monday. He must have had rather a lot that night, for on another occasion I saw him polish off twelve bottles of beer and a bottle and a half of whisky in one sitting, and then drive home afterwards. I never attempted to keep up with these performances, and still find it hard to look a ginger ale in the face.

Kuantan town was en fete. They were going to show Malaya what a small country town could do in raising funds for the war effort, and the result was an all-in wrestle to dig money out of the community, with no holds barred. The Army and Air Force played exhibition tennis at the Club and raised a few dollars, while the rubber planters from miles around turned up with well-filled pockets and went away with car-loads of junk. But it was left to old Hock Bee, the Chinese "mandarin" of the district, to set an example

of the generous spirit. He bought a tin of fifty cigarettes for three hundred dollars, but on opening the tin he discovered that it contained only three cigarettes. This was too much for the Chinese's sense of humour. He almost rolled on the ground with laughter at the thought that for once in his life he had been swindled, then smilingly presented the cigarettes to prominent people—"the most expensive cigarette in the world," he said, and probably he was right.

There were several interesting people in the community, among them a millionaire who had made his fortune in supplying chicle gum from his local plantation to the large American chewing gum factories. The process of preparing the gum for export was so secret that no one was allowed near the factory, and it was stated that his product was world famous for its quality. So the best chewing gums originate in a little jungle town on the east coast of Malaya.

By now the Station hospital was filling up with airmen suffering from all kinds of tropical diseases, including V.D. The M.O. had done wonders towards reducing malaria by turning over the thousands of neglected rubber-catching cups around the aerodrome and attending to all stagnant water, but dengue fever was almost as prevalent as malaria and very severe with its aftermath of hopeless depression. I was bowled over for a few days by an attack while suffering from the most painful form of dhobie itch, and between the two I could scarcely walk, yet I had five jobs to do which could not be neglected for a day. Word had just come through that No. — Australian Squadron of Lockheed Hudsons would operate from Kuantan in the event of hostilities, yet even at the end of November we had little indication that anything was about to happen.

It was very seldom that we saw a paper, and although the resident officers had at last managed to buy a wireless between them, we never seemed to be on the spot when the news came through. Among other jobs, I was producing a Christmas concert, without the slightest thought that anything could happen to upset rehearsals, although the moral

severity of the C.O.'s censorship had certainly upset some of the lads, including myself, who had written hot numbers for the occasion. The third training squadron had almost finished its course; the Indians comprising the ground defence unit had fired 3,000 rounds at the drogue target with their six machine guns (without sights) and had only hit it with three shots; I had received a box of incendiary ammunition for denying petrol dumps to the enemy, but was still without a rifle to fire it; the Asiatic Petroleum Company was still arguing with the R.A.F. as to whether its large installation tanks near the township (painted white and visible ten miles out at sea) should be camouflaged at its own expense or that of the Air Force; half the bulk installation tanks at the Station were completed and we had begun to filter our old stocks through chamois leather to remove the moisture — a tremendous job; the Marine Base now had a boat (which was always breaking down); the Bombing Range was operational but still could only be approached at low tide along an eight-mile beach after ferrying across a river; the dispersal points around the aerodrome were being camouflaged, but the red laterite roads leading up to them could be seen from the air ten miles away.

The wet season had set in. Apart from the landing strips, the aerodrome was a quagmire, and the trucks we had to use for refuelling aircraft would bog down to the axles in a few minutes. The four old five-hundred-gallon tankers towed by tractors could not possibly cope with the three octanes necessary for the various aircraft passing through, and they still had to be refilled from the bulk supply near the town. The impossible position was explained to A.H.Q. and new modern tankers promised, but it was too much to expect that they would arrive immediately. I shuddered to think what would happen if hostilities commenced, but the possibility of this still seemed most remote.

And then, on 6th December, No. — Squadron arrived. The Australians were taking over, and I felt satisfied that the work I had done would be of some advantage to them. I hoped their efficiency would produce some of the equipment

which correspondence had failed to do, and looked forward tremendously to working with them and enjoying the happy-go-lucky *camaraderie* which still got results quicker than red tape methods.

The aircraft were flying in that day. Part of the ground personnel were arriving by sea on the "Larut" and the balance by road. A.H.Q. woke up at last, phoning through to know the exact numbers of pillows, mattresses, beds, blankets, sheets, mosquito nets and crockery on the Station, and I had been through this performance so often that I could tell them on the spot. I was up all Saturday night unloading the ship, getting the personnel settled in, arranging rations and doing the hundred and one jobs which never seemed to lessen, and kept going without a stop until four o'clock on Monday morning. There had been scarcely time to eat, and I flopped completely exhausted into bed, wondering what all the hurry had been about.

Half an hour later the C.O. shook me by the shoulder.

"The Japs have made a landing at Kota Bahru," he told me. "Singapore has been bombed. The Squadron has been ordered to take off at dawn to bomb the landing. Are the aircraft refuelled?"

They were, thank goodness! Thank goodness we had an Armament Officer now to look after the bomb supplies. Thank goodness there was nothing I could do till daybreak. I could get some sleep.

I couldn't. Was everything all right? Had that petrol been filtered properly? It had caused trouble before. Were the Blenheims going on the raid with the Hudsons? The Blenheim Squadron had not yet left after its training course.

I staggered out of bed and looked out on a thick mist. Even the tops of the nearest tall trees were completely obscured and visibility was restricted to a few yards. Surely they could not take off in this? But even as I thought, the drumming throb of radial engines came echoing through the fog, and very soon, dangerously near the tree tops, the first invisible aircraft passed almost overhead, turning in the direction of the sea. The Japanese convoy was the objective.

Chapter Three

WITH OUR PANTS DOWN

THERE COULD BE NO REST THAT DAY. THE planes returned before 10.00 hours—except those three which would never come back. There were wounded to be cared for and hurried repairs to be made. The Blenheims were ordered back to Singapore, but several were unserviceable, and would not leave till the following day. As the afternoon wore on, the first Hudsons began to struggle in from Kota Bahru, with tales of heavy strafing all day and the loss of more than half their air strength. The aerodrome was under enemy fire as they took off, and had to be evacuated in spite of a stern resistance by the Indian forces, but with only two Buffalo fighters to oppose the enemy air-attacks, there had never been any suggestion of holding out for long.

The enemy shipping had not escaped unscathed from the bombing attacks of the Hudsons, although the old *Vildebeestes*, with their torpedoes, had found the ack-ack fire too heavy to allow any hits to be scored. The Hudsons had sunk several landing barges, blown up a 15,000-ton transport, and set fire to another. Yet the cost had been heavy. Of the fourteen Hudsons at K.B., nine were lost.

And with the remaining five came the *Vildebeestes*, one with a wound in its reduction gear and a flat tyre, another landing after dark with its torpedo still in place tipped over on to one wing so that it had to be written off. All aircraft were dispersed around the perimeter of the landing ground that pitch black night, many of them parked in mud so soft that they sank to their hub-caps. The crews left them there and sought beer in the mess. But the aircraft had to be refuelled.

The Station refuelling staff was exhausted. I collected a motley crew of untrained men and started on the job in pouring rain, but within a few minutes the air-raid siren

went, and it seemed an excuse to seek cover in a slit trench under the rubber trees. I sat in the mud at the bottom of the trench and had my first rest for three days, wondering what our first raid would be like, but feeling almost too tired to care. We talked awhile of fishing on the Barrier Reef without knowing why we did, then someone muttered a curse and pointed grimly through the lacy foliage overhead.

A faint light flickered through the leaves, seemingly miles away, but coming quickly in our direction. "Here they are," whispered someone else, crouching deeper in the mud.

We were very inexperienced, and very susceptible to suggestions at that moment, and it seems incredible now that a firefly could possibly be confused with the exhaust-flame of an enemy aircraft. We felt very foolish a few minutes later when the "all clear" went without anything happening; and with another night's work ahead of me, there was no time to waste.

The airfield was absolutely pitch dark, and orders had been issued not to show a light. The rain still fell in heavy showers, and the aircraft, scattered hundreds of yards apart, simply could not be found. Then one of the old tanker-towing tractors broke down and it was necessary to load lorries with drums and use a hand pump, a slow and exhausting business. In a few minutes the lorries were immovably bogged; one tractor had to do the whole job; scouting parties looking for the aircraft couldn't find their way back to the tractor, or didn't want to; I had neither overcoat nor top boots, and had lost both shoes in the mud.

And we were a front line operational Station! What a farce!

And what a night!

We had to fill that tanker again and again from drums, then tow it through the mud and rain to those phantom aircraft. By four o'clock on Tuesday morning all were refuelled except one, and this one so badly bogged that the

pilot said it could wait, as he couldn't take off at dawn in any case. It was the Vildebeeste of my old friend Witney.

I was falling into bed when Witney came to my room.

"I'm sorry, old boy," he said, "but I've just had a signal to take off as soon as possible. I'll need some fuel after all. Can do?"

So off again into the night.

I often wondered afterwards, when I heard Witney had been killed that next night, whether my refusal to work any longer would have made any difference. After three sleepless nights and three overworked days, I felt I had had sufficient excuse.

A dozen trucks had been requisitioned from the town that day, and these were dispersed with our own vehicles among the rubber trees so that a bombing-raid would not catch them all. No duplicate keys were available, so each vehicle was left with its own key, the only solution. A few tommy guns and rifles had arrived at last, but with no fighters or anti-aircraft guns the enemy bombers could do exactly as they pleased. Our listening outposts had proved we would have eight minutes' warning before the arrival of the enemy, and as this left plenty of time to take cover, work went on as usual, and no one seemed very concerned. Our remaining aircraft were parked at the end of the landing strips for servicing, and I was in the store issuing tin hats, which had just arrived when the air-raid siren went, dead on 10 o'clock.

"Eight minutes' grace," I thought, and told the staff to take cover, then locked the building after them and walked out into the brilliant sunshine to find nine Jap bombers in perfect V formation almost overhead at about six thousand feet. They looked like little silver toys, and I could scarcely believe they were Japs, but when I saw the bombs on their way down, I dived into the nearest drain. At least, I was blown into it, for the first bombs scored a direct hit on the building I had just left. In a few minutes it was a raging mass, and most of the work I had done in the past five months was wiped out in as many seconds.

I felt a mad, burning anger, a hatred of the circumstances which could allow an enemy to attack and escape scot-free, but my feelings were premature, for the bombers were returning at only two thousand feet. That long, open drain right next to the transport section didn't feel at all safe, and I made a dash for a slit trench fifty yards away. The bombers seemed right overhead, but they always do, even when a quarter of a mile off. A petrol tanker went up in terrific flames, several aircraft were hit, and some caught fire, and bombs in a temporary store started exploding. I was still in a direct line with the remaining buildings, and foolishly decided, with about twenty others near me, that distance would lend enchantment to the view, so we made for the rubber a few hundred yards away.

A very foolish proceeding. The Japs were coming back at about two hundred feet to do a spot of machine gunning, and most certainly saw us moving, for they gave that patch of rubber a hell of a sprinkling. I sat on the ground with my back against a rubber-tree and listened to the leaden rain getting closer and closer. It seemed to pass, but I had forgotten the rear gunner, who pumped six bullets into that tree trunk, the first a few inches from my head. I would have stopped four of them if I had been standing!

This seemed even worse than the bombing — being shot at and not firing a shot in reply. I didn't even possess a pistol, for these were reserved for the dangers at A.H.Q., but, of course, a pistol would have been a very useless comfort. I still felt too angry to realise that I had been scared, and it was only when I noticed that the chap near me was wearing a sickly green grin that I admitted to myself that the first experience under fire was over, and I was very glad it was.

We waited a while for the "all clear" to sound, not knowing the bombing had destroyed the power-house, then walked quickly back to the Operations Room with gas masks ready for unpleasant smells.

What a bedlam! One hundred and seven officers were

millling round and talking like a mother's meeting. The C.O., who had just gone to bed after thirty-six hours' duty, was on the phone to A.H.Q. He turned and shouted out, "If you don't shut up you won't hear the Japs coming back."

There was an immediate silence, then came the C.O.'s voice into the telephone: "It's absolutely ridiculous, I tell you. Nothing like that has happened at all. The damage is immaterial."

So, A.H.Q. already knew of the raid! It seemed impossible, but it soon appeared that someone had telephoned them before the C.O. turned up, and told a very panicky story, greatly exaggerating the facts. One man alone had started something, the result of which would have tremendous effects.

"There are some aircraft coming up this afternoon," the C.O. said to me. "Can you get them refuelled?" "Of course," I told him. "The petrol supplies haven't been touched. What sort of aircraft?"

"I forgot to ask them. Phone through again."

It was necessary to know the octane petrol required, but it took me half-an-hour to get through.

And in that half-hour that little flame of panic had spread like wildfire.

I looked out on a deserted Station.

No. --- Squadron had rushed to their aircraft, dumped all the bombs and spare equipment on the aerodrome, loaded up with sixteen or seventeen men, and taken off for Singapore, leaving some slightly-damaged machines behind. The balance of the ground staff, left to their own devices, and seeing their officers depart, commandeered the Station transport and drove madly for the railway station at Jerantut, 102 miles away.

Was it any wonder that the Station staff followed the example set them by the Squadron?

Without waiting for kit or money or personal possessions, the whole crowd had vanished. One private car remained, and a truck loaded with nineteen O.R.'s was

waiting for a driver. The C.O. returned from inspecting the remaining aircraft, and seemed absolutely stunned with the rapidity with which events had moved.

"You had better take charge of that last truck and go off with them," he told me.

I had no hesitation in refusing. It seemed incredible that the ground staff, at least, should not be stopped at the railway station and sent back immediately.

I phoned the Transport Officer at Jerantut and explained what had happened.

"Stop those men and send the trucks back," I ordered.

"Two trucks went through here at sixty miles an hour about eleven o'clock," he replied.

"But that's impossible. The raid wasn't over until eleven, and you know it takes at least three and a half hours to do the trip in a car, let alone a truck." Yet the R.T.O. was absolutely positive. He had seen those airmen with his own eyes. We could only conclude they had deserted the Station about seven o'clock in the morning, commandeering the trucks which had been dispersed at the greatest distance from the buildings. The malignant atmosphere of the jungle and the rumours of a pending landing by the enemy had been too much for them.

Except for the power-house, the Station was in full working order. The Equipment store, Armoury and Station workshops had been burnt to the ground and the bomb fusing store blown up, but their limited contents would make little difference to operations. Petrol, oil, bombs and torpedoes were untouched, and sufficient for several weeks' offensive. Only the secret "green" line telephone to A.H.Q. interfered with our communications. Surely in a day or so things would revert to normal?

There were four of us left — the C.O., the Adjutant, the Armament Officer and myself. Slowly we wandered over to the army mess for lunch, myself still too numb to appreciate the sarcasm of the other men's conversation. Then

I realised they were talking of the Australians, that I was an Australian, and that many curious glances were being cast in my direction. An Army Captain was holding forth:

"I saw a bloody Flight-Lieutenant soon after the raid started," he said. "He ran down to the side road with two friends, blew the door-lock off a private car with his pistol, drove the car on to the main road so fast that he skidded into a deep drain and couldn't get out. Then he held up the Post Office bus with his gun, made all the passengers and driver get out, and drove off full speed for Jerantut."

"Yes, I saw him hold up the bus," said the Major. "I was too far away to do anything, and I wondered why he wouldn't take the passengers. By the way, you'll find one of your tractors missing. A chap was driving it off at about five miles an hour, with five other blokes sitting on the tanker. They'll have sore bottoms before they get there."

For the first and last time in my life I felt ashamed of being an Australian.

Chapter Four

R E T R E A T

THE OFFICER'S MESS WAS INDEED A MESS. Three hundred steel trunks and suitcases were dumped out in the open, where they had been unloaded from the transport, and most of them had been searched for valuables by their owners before they retreated. At least £10,000 worth of kit was going to waste, so with the Adjutant I set about re-packing the trunks and storing them under cover.

The next day twenty-three men returned in a couple of trucks, and a party of them was put on to salvaging as much kit as possible from the airmen's barracks. By this time it seemed fairly definite that A.H.Q. had given up all hope of using the Station again, for orders had come through to save what we could and get out as soon as possible. It seemed absolutely incredible to us that such action was necessary. Had the panic-stricken fugitives told exaggerated stories in Singapore to save their own faces?

Normal telephone communication was almost impossible, apart from its lack of secrecy, and we were forced to signal in a round-about way through army channels. That Tuesday night, and indeed every night from then on, we spent with our pistols (taken from the tin trunks) under our pillows, working by the light of a shaded torch, startled at every strange sound. We had no holsters, and walked around like gangsters, pistols in belt. Heavy firing went on during the night; the army camp seemed very active, and we expected to hear at any minute that the Japs had landed and had advanced to the aerodrome. There were at least thirty miles of unguarded beaches where they could come in undetected to take us in the rear, and the four of us sleeping in the officers' quarters were a quarter of a mile both from the army and the small party of airmen. We weren't exactly happy.

Next morning no one could tell us what had happened. About ten o'clock I heard heavy firing and explosions again, which lasted for a couple of hours, and it was not until that night, when we heard the "Prince of Wales" and "Repulse" had been sunk right on our very doorstep, that we realised the ghastly significance.

Did A.H.Q. really believe the aerodrome was completely out of commission? What other reason could there be for failing to send fighter aircraft to be refuelled at Kuantan, and then to put up the fighter cover necessary to protect the "Prince" against the Jap Torpedo bombers? Even a dozen Buffaloes could have broken the enemy formations which caused the damage. They could have reached Kuantan in forty-five minutes from Singapore, and been in battle five minutes after leaving the aerodrome.

A dozen fighters! Surely we could spare a dozen to protect our most valuable asset — the two big ships that could play havoc with the enemy supply lines and practically prevent further landings? Had the panic at Kuantan been responsible indirectly for such a catastrophe?

It was not until I met some of the rescued crews of the "Prince" and the "Repulse" that any conclusions could be formed, and even then the only opinion on which all agreed was that fighter aircraft could have saved them.

It appeared that the two big ships with destroyer escort left Singapore on the Monday night to attack the Jap convoy supplying the landing at Kota Bahru, but on Tuesday evening they were picked up by an enemy plane and shadowed. No contact was made with enemy shipping, and early on Wednesday our battle fleet put about to explore the Malayan coast for other landings, of which there had been rumours. One of these concerned the attempted landing at Kuantan.

While one of the destroyers was investigating the Kuantan beaches, and a scout plane from the "Prince" was also on recce, the balance of the force was steaming southward at fifteen knots. The use of maximum speed would have removed them from the danger zone by this time, but

apparently the Admiral was confident of his strength in anti-aircraft fire and was not in a hurry. Here the first Jap bombers found them, and extremely lucky hits almost immediately from sixteen thousand feet put the electrical control of the guns out of action and damaged the steering gear of the "Prince." Then came the torpedo bombers against a greatly reduced rate of fire, in formation of threes and firing three torpedoes together. It might be possible to avoid two of them, but the third was almost sure to score.

"We counted over three hundred Jap aircraft," one of the gunners told me. "We estimated thirty-seven shot down, but we never had a chance with manual control of the guns. If only we had had a few fighters to break up those perfect formations it might have been a different story. Why, the beggars even knew the depth of our armour plate and set their torpedoes to run below it, but even then the 'Prince' took eleven of them before she gave up the ghost.

"But I will say this for the Japs. They allowed our destroyers to pick up survivors and never fired a shot at them. Otherwise the loss of life would have been appalling."

The Admiral was killed on his bridge. One story says that he had asked for aircover and been told it was impossible; another version is that sixteen Buffaloes were standing by but the signal for help was received too late.

But Kuantan was only five minutes away!

What a grim mess the whole affair had become! Rumours, rumours, rumours. Rumours of a landing at Kuantan. I asked one of the artillery officers what he had been firing at on Tuesday night. "Don't tell anyone," he said, "but I fired seventy-four rounds at a cloud. You see, the 'Larut' was leaving for Singapore with your bombing-range staff on board and she grounded on a bank outside the river. After a while the Indians picked her up and opened fire with a machine gun, wounding one of the O.R.'s, and that started the ball rolling. We all 'saw' things from then

on and everything looked like an enemy ship. I don't believe there was a Jap within a hundred miles."

Yet on Thursday night the fireworks were on again, heavier than ever. "This must be it," we told each other, and sat up with loaded pistols wondering how long it would be.

"Better destroy all our secret documents," the C.O. told the Adjutant, so, to avoid being spotted, the Adjutant lit his fire on the concrete floor of his bare office.

But he forgot the tin of petrol standing near.

In a few seconds the attap roof of the building was alight, and no fire brigade on earth could have put it out. The Operations room adjoining could not possibly be saved, for most of our fire extinguishers had been used up. I wonder how much money was saved by the use of those attap roofs, made from the leaves of the niepa palm? Nothing more inflammable could have been used.

So, after rather a full night, we asked the army next day if they had repelled another landing.

"Oh, that was an extra high tide," we were informed. "Nearly all the land mines in the beaches went up last night. We didn't know they were quite so sensitive."

In the meanwhile we were working on the aircraft and soon found that three of the ones abandoned as useless could be made serviceable without much trouble. After some difficulty another thirty men had been obtained from Kuala Lumpur, and with this increased force we were able to tackle the salvage work in earnest. I managed to requisition a few more trucks and also a car with a badly-slipping clutch, and while endeavouring to get it to bite I heard the sound of aircraft just over the trees. It didn't seem to be the right time to attempt recognition, for I hadn't heard them until they were very close, because the car-engine was revving. I dived for the nearest drain, then looked up to see five Vildebeestes, and doubtless their very amused pilots, heading for Singapore. And fifty yards up the road the car was slowly crawling along

in low gear. I caught it after a short sprint, but the clutch never clutched again.

One unpleasant part of our routine was the fact that the air-raid siren was out of action. The Jap fighters were coming over fairly frequently, and machine-gunning everything in sight, and although we had a Jim Crow lookout he couldn't see very far, with the Japs flying in low over the tree-tops. Some of our aircraft were damaged too badly to move under cover, and these we were stripping of everything of value — engines, airscrews, instruments and guns. It wasn't very pleasant to be caught in one of these aircraft a quarter of a mile from cover, and although we kept a lorry standing by, it frequently wouldn't start, and we had to run for our lives, very literally speaking.

On one occasion we were inside the torpedo store when nine Navy Zeros came over. It didn't seem a very good place to be, with twenty-four torpedoes and five hundred tons of bombs all around us, and just as the Japs started machine-gunning, we jumped in the C.O.'s truck and he drove flat out over half a mile of open road several inches deep in water. The spray shot up twenty feet on each side of the wheels, making us look like some queer kind of amphibian, but although the enemy put a couple of bullets through the truck, no one was hurt. We seemed to bear charmed lives.

Then we saw that one of the Hudsons was on fire. I collected our remaining extinguishers and handed them to the C.O., who insisted on getting inside the aircraft to finish off the fire. That was certainly a brave deed of his, with the petrol tanks likely to go up at any moment, and I remember that I felt mighty uncomfortable, even standing outside. But in those hectic days such things were soon forgotten.

The Armament Officer really had the worst job, for he was on the aerodrome all day preparing the demolition charges: It would have been the simplest thing for the enemy to land troop carriers on the unprotected strips, so we littered them with petrol drums, and broken-down

vehicles, and hoped for the best while awaiting the order for demolition.

But before this came, arrangements were made for those precious torpedoes to be sent to Singapore. Several lorries were now leaving every day, loaded with the most valuable equipment, and we were kept working till all hours, night after night, in preparing the loads. The torpedoes, however, were a different proposition. They were so terribly hard to hoist on to a truck that it was decided that three Vildebeestes should fly up daily about dusk and each should fly a torpedo back.

That sounded easy enough, but the whole thing had to be done under cover if possible, and the torpedo store was nearly a mile from the hangars. The only solution was to push those torpedoes on their trolleys around the rough perimeter road into the hangars, and do it in the hours of darkness. They would be so very obvious from the air in daylight.

It took almost three hours to move each one. They weighed the best part of a ton, and even in the lowest position on the narrow trolley, the front was five feet off the ground. On that rough, muddy road there was great danger of the whole thing capsizing, with the certainty of breaking several legs, but by great good luck nine torpedoes were moved in this manner without accident and reached Singapore safely. Those boys certainly worked light draught horses night after night. I worked all day as well, amazing myself at my capacity to carry on indefinitely when something had to be done.

A Hudson and a Blenheim were also repaired by this time and pilots were flown from Singapore to take them back. Three abandoned aircraft put into the front line again. We patted ourselves on the back and talked about saving everything on the Station, but we knew it would take months with the transport available. The bombs and petrol were to be denied to the enemy. At last the order came, by open telephone.

"We are giving a special party for Xmas," said a big man in Singapore. "The A.O.C. is most anxious for you to be there; in fact, he insists that you come. He is rather annoyed that you have stayed away so long. Don't forget to bring all the family."

"But what about our tennis courts?" asked the C.O. "We've been getting them ready for your team. Aren't they coming up again?"

"No, we've decided not to play there any more. In fact, it's getting a bit hot. With the rainy season coming on we think you should plant vegetables on the courts as soon as possible. Make certain they grow, and then come down as soon as you can."

And from this rigmarole we knew we were to blow up the aerodrome with the bombs and that no more aircraft were coming up for torpedoes. It was a strange method to transmit secret information, but the only one available.

Then began our farewell to Kuantan. I managed to arrange with a civilian in Kuala Lumpur, thanks to Algy Wear, that six trucks would be available on the morrow with native drivers. These would transport the last fifteen torpedoes if we could load them, and the drivers did their part by driving their rickety vehicles all night over that difficult mountain road. But when we started to load at breakfast time the Armament Officer was busy with his demolition charges, and with each explosion the native drivers made a wild dash into the jungle and had to be found and brought back before we had lost them entirely.

We were all rather jittery that morning, absolutely exhausted with the fortnight's unceasing labour, and keyed up for the final effort. A couple of small bombing raids had left the aerodrome severely alone, but had obviously been searching for our petrol and bomb supplies, and that torpedo store seemed the most unpleasant spot on earth. Soaking with perspiration and covered from head to foot with the thick grease on the torpedoes, we finally managed to man-

handle them by brute strength on to the lorries, and tie them as securely as possible.

It had seemed a Herculean effort under extreme difficulties, and we had visions of our labours being rewarded by the sinking of a Jap battleship, or at least a cruiser. But although the "tin fish" reached Singapore safely, they were never used against the enemy. Like so many of our efforts, this last endeavour was to prove abortive.

With all this constant hard labour and perspiration, I had contracted a most painful skin disease, and as our M.O. had fled with the rest of the deserters, no treatment was available. I could scarcely walk by this time, and was longing for an excuse to lie down, when the C.O. appeared.

"Headquarters seem to be getting very annoyed because we've salvaged £100,000 worth of equipment," he said. "I don't know what the hurry is, but orders are definite to leave in the morning. These trucks will be the last loads."

We could never discover why the powers-that-be were so anxious about us. The army had captured eleven Nips who had landed about thirty miles up the coast on a scouting mission and disguised themselves as natives, but these were almost certainly the only enemy in the neighbourhood, and a landing was not made at Kuantan until a month later.

As the last trucks were loaded the bomb stores began to go up. We were a mile and a half away, but for several minutes the air was as full of whizzing splinters as a sieve is of holes. I was caught without my tin hat, and crouched with my head under the front of a truck, hoping for the best, when a rather shaky hand pushed a steel helmet at me and I heard a familiar voice—

"Here you are, sir. Take mine. You're of more value than I am."

Was this the supreme height of sarcasm? I didn't think so, but obviously I couldn't take the hat of an orderly room clerk, who had been doing a fine job quite out of his own sphere.

"Put the bloody thing on and don't be so virtuous."

It wasn't what I wanted to say, but my heart warmed to such an unselfish deed when five hundred tons of bombs were being as unpleasant as they could be.

Even the officers' abandoned luggage had all been loaded by this time, although the Indians had done a bit of looting when we were asleep. The C.O. had fired a shot one night and brought us from our beds trembling with excitement—I hope it was excitement—but the looters had vanished into the darkness. Those jungle nights had been rather a strain, when every faint sound had been magnified into the stealthy footfalls of a jungle-trained enemy, when every movement in a tree merged into the saurian body of a scouting Jap. We longed for the relaxation of a hot bath in K.L.

The small convoy looked like a Ford reliability trial as we started off. The C.O. had dug up a 1920 model for which he had a strange affection, and had camouflaged it with wavy lines of green and white paint, possibly hoping it would be mistaken for a zebra. We cursed his slow progress as he led the way. I followed with the Adjutant in his 1936 tourer, and the Armament Officer came last in a 10 h.p. utility, which had the best tyres.

Yet the utility had the first puncture. He caught us up as we helped the C.O. to change a tyre, and we see-sawed backwards and forwards as troubles beset each of us in turn. The Pahang River was in flood, the half-mile stretch of racing water, full of floating trees and logs, looking a bad place to be caught on the ferry, but the Japs were busy elsewhere at that moment. A family of miniature Sakais, with blow-pipes, looked extremely primitive in their loin cloths, but they seemed more afraid of the swollen river than interested in us.

The C.O. chugged over the mountain range on two cylinders in low gear, and we grew so tired of this pilgrim's progress that we stopped for an hour to give him a long start. Then we got a puncture ourselves, found the jack wouldn't work, and held up three passing lorries on that mountain road. Right in the middle of the proceedings three Navy Zeros came over very low, looking like evil birds of prey

in the evening sunlight. An old Chinese jumped over a twenty foot bank into the only cover available, and we prepared to follow him if necessary, but the Nips were looking for a more important target.

And, so to Kuala Lumpur at last, but how different from our last visit! The blacked-out town looked ghostly and almost afraid, as we found our way to the Majestic Hotel, and anticipated, prematurely, that hot bath. The water was barely warm, and the food scarcely more so. Already the prelude to war was sounding over the doomed city.

Then Alan Groom turned up, and I felt happier immediately. How good it was to meet an old friend again! He insisted I should stay with him and Group Captain Ridgway in a most palatial residence, so different in its comfort and homeliness from our rough quarters at Kuantan. Silent Chinese servants interpreted every nod with an almost uncanny understanding, and spreading lawns and gardens offered repose after our labours.

But it was not to be. I was posted to 153 M.U. the next day, and the day after that was to go to Singapore to take charge of the "Great World."

When I heard the news I gasped. The "Great World"? But it was not the harlot-hiring house of a few months before. The public was now excluded, and the dozens of large buildings were to be used to house four thousand cases of machinery from the Unit at K.L. Orders had already come through that 153 M.U. were to pack up and move to Java, and the "Great World" was to be the transit store while awaiting shipping.

On the one day I was there Kuala Lumpur had its first bombing raid. I began to feel that the Japs had a personal interest in my movements, for we heard that half an hour after we left Kuantan a heavy raid had wiped out what remained of the Station. This time it was the aerodrome alone that they were attacking. The Buffaloes went up to oppose them, but were overwhelmed by numbers and speed and manoeuvrability, and especially by the unknown quality

of those Navy Zeros, which were proving such an unpleasant surprise packet.

The evening's wireless news provided another unpleasant revelation of the march of time. Things were going so badly that actual enemy successes had to be withheld from the public, and, no doubt, that was why we claimed to have shot down four enemy machines with the loss of three of our own. But I had sent eight coffins to the aerodrome that day, seven of them for our own pilots.

The same afternoon a lone Navy Zero appeared over the aerodrome and put on a display, for twenty minutes, of aerobatics and victory rolls, with no one to interrupt him. Such performances obviously tended to flatten the optimism of our men, a result also achieved later by the Jap broadcasts from the Penang radio. "Hullo, Tengah," they would sneer, "we can see you there hiding in your slit trenches. But you needn't worry to-day. We won't be over this morning, but at ten o'clock to-morrow we'll make you hide in your trenches again, trying to save your precious skins."

And they were always dead on time.

Perhaps they also knew that of the 285 aircraft in the Far East Command, only 104 were serviceable on 8th December, and half of those were lost in the first three days.

The train for Singapore left at 22.00 hours. My instructions were to be at the station at 21.30 with ten men to collect some secret documents which I had been trying to discover all day, but when we arrived on time it was to discover a lorry loaded with seven tremendous steel safes and no unloading apparatus. In vain I appealed to the Station Master for assistance; he could not provide even a trolley to move those half-ton weights the fifty yards to the train. Eventually some civilians were commandeered, a rickety three-wheeled hand truck was discovered, and in almost total darkness the work commenced.

But that hand truck had a will of its own. It took an intense dislike to a large plate-glass island showcase in the

middle of the platform, and on the second trip there was a most terrific crash. The passengers all dived for cover, thinking another air-raid was in progress, and very unofficial language flew from an official direction. The train was delayed for twenty minutes before the last safe was loaded. The Station Master had hysterics, the airmen had the giggles, and I had a sore throat from threatening the train crew with what would happen if they went without me.

There might have been some slight satisfaction in holding up a train full of passengers if I hadn't an unpleasant foreboding of official action over that valuable showcase. But I needn't have worried. Within a few weeks the whole railway station had gone.

Eventually I found my sleeping berth and began to undress in the dim light of an oil lamp. It was one of those abominations known as an open sleeping carriage, with a long row of beds running fore and aft, but with no privacy whatever. My trousers were half off when, directly across the aisle, I saw the nude form of a very attractive Chinese girl struggling into the brief lacyness of a black silk nightdress. She managed the operation without assistance and then flung me a most seductive smile before slipping between the sheets.

I hastily clawed my trousers on again and slumped into my own bunk, wondering whose move it was. Soon a slim little hand was flung out, almost unconsciously, across the space between us. I was so terribly tired that I simply couldn't make the effort to reach it, and when I thought of it again I realised it was morning, that we were nearing Singapore, and that I had lost my first opportunity of solving one of the mysteries of the East.

As we were leaving the train she gave me another smile, rather sarcastic this time, as if to say, "You're certainly a funny sort of chap to be in the R.A.F."

Chapter Five

INTERLUDE AT SINGAPORE

THE "GREAT WORLD" WAS DESERTED EXCEPT for an A.R.P. post manned by Chinese and Malays.

There were no facilities for cooking, no living quarters, so we slept on the floor and had innumerable arguments with the commissariat about the amount of rations we would be allowed to feed the drivers of the up-country trucks, whose number was uncertain.

On Xmas morning they began to arrive after driving all night, loaded with cases of heavy machinery and equipment which took a lot of handling. From then on the stream was continuous night and day, and for a week we were destined to have no more than an hour's unbroken sleep.

But I was determined those boys would have their Xmas dinner. I hired a taxi and drove to the Transit Camp where roast turkey and plum pudding were on the menu. For once there was no argument, for the trouble-maker was drunk, and I returned with an excellent meal to find that a truck had run off the road. This took an hour or so to sort out, and finally, when I was ready to eat, I was told apologetically that they had forgotten all about me. There wasn't even a bone left from the turkey. . . .

The bombers still seemed to be chasing me. There had been no raids on Singapore since the first, nineteen days ago, but this night the sirens were wailing their banshee song again, and soon the searchlights picked up that perfect formation of fifteen, flying very high. At least there was some ack-ack this time, but it burst thousands of feet below them and never seemed to be anywhere near.

The white tin roofs of the "Great World" stood out in the moonlight like a pool in the jungle of blackness that

surrounded them, so, lacking any trenches, we crouched in the middle of an adjoining field and watched the fireworks—the "flaming onions," the booming burst of the Naval Base guns, and the sharper crack of the old 3-inch. We certainly weren't short of searchlights, for we could follow the enemy right across the city on his trial run, expecting at any moment to see our fighters speeding to the attack.

Then came the scream of the bombs, louder and louder; surely they were aimed straight for us? A torch shone from the building ahead then flickered on and off towards the sky: the bombs burst miles away — fantastically deceptive, but confirming the cliché — "If you can hear them you're safe." I collected four A.R.P. men, grabbed my pistol and rushed over to that building where the torch had signalled, but could find nothing suspicious. We had delayed too long.

When we returned, a tremendous fire was blazing in the west, well away from the city. A lucky hit had landed on a concealed petrol dump and set fire to an adjacent kampong, killing several natives.

But our fighters had not left the ground.

This raid seemed like the beginning of an offensive, the testing out of our defences, and so it proved. The Japs were back again the next night, but this time the A.R.P. were ready for the torch-bearer, and grabbed him as soon as he commenced operations. He proved to be a frightened young Malay whose story gave an insight into Japanese methods.

"I worked for a Japanese photographer," he said, "and when he left here a few months ago he told me that the Japs were very fond of the Malays and did not wish to hurt us. I was shown how to signal with a torch when their planes came over — three long flashes, two short and two long — so that they would know I was at the 'Great World' and would not drop any bombs near me."

The utter simplicity of the native! Already we had heard of native co-operation up-country, where large arrows had been cut through rice fields pointing to our gun positions: of infiltrating Japs dressing as natives and mixing with them.

indistinguishable except at close quarters. The colour of the inhabitants of Malaya was all in their favour.

Two trucks had come in peppered with bullet-holes from raiding Jap planes as far south as Johore. Penang had fallen, and streams of refugees were flooding into Singapore, blocking the roads. Soon there would be a million bodies to feed and to be supplied with water. Water! That would be the problem if the Jap onrush could not be stopped north of the large Johore reservoirs, for the old catchment area of the island itself could last only a short period with such an increase of population.

But such thoughts were far from my mind at that time. Singapore could not, must not fall. Was it not the impregnable fortress, needing only aircraft to ensure its impregnability? Surely those aircraft would arrive in time?

Air Headquarters were on the telephone.

"Report to the Air Vice-Marshal immediately."

Good God! What had I done wrong? It took some time to raise a taxi, and by the time I arrived at A.H.Q. on my first visit I was the most nervous F.O. in Singapore. Perhaps some of those letters I had written from Kuantan had been a little too direct. Perhaps it was only the report I had sent in of those last days on the Station. I could certainly add plenty to that.

The A.O.C. was in the office of the A.O.A. I stepped in smartly and sprang to attention, flung him my best salute and slipped drunkenly on a mat on the polished floor. It was the most embarrassing moment of a lifetime, but at least it brought smiles to the two serious faces, and relieved the tension.

"You are going on a very secret mission," I was told, "so secret that you may not even transfer your bank account. Not a word of this must be mentioned to anyone, including the eighty troops you are taking with you. Here you are. Come and look at the map."

I walked shakily over to the large map on the wall — a map of Java.

"See this place on the south coast?" said the A.O.A. "Tjilatjap, Laddie. It rhymes with kill a Jap, so you'll easily remember it. You'll disembark your men there and find them accommodation. Take rations with you for 100 men for thirty days. There hasn't been time to make any arrangements, so it's up to you. At Tjilatjap you will wait until a ship arrives — the 'Sussex.' She has fifty-one Hurricanes on board, and since these are the first to arrive in the Far East I needn't stress the terrific importance of absolute secrecy and at the same time maximum celerity."

"There's an aerodrome at Tjilatjap, sir."

"No, there isn't. The Hurricanes are in crates, and you'll have to get them to the airfield at Djockjakarta, in central Java, either by rail or road. There you'll assemble them as fast as possible and fly them to Singapore. The pilots are on the 'Sussex.' Now, look here, Laddie, it's up to you. If we get those Hurricanes in time it might make all the difference. Any questions?"

I could only gasp for a moment. I had never seen a Hurricane, let alone assembled one. I couldn't speak Dutch. There were plenty of Squadron-Leaders and Wing-Commanders in Singapore with little to do, and I was a humble F.O., and a very busy one. I thought of that first, and said a very inane thing under the circumstances: "My job, sir?"

"That will be taken care of. How much stuff have you received from K.L.?"

"About two thousand cases, sir."

"You'll take that with you on the 'Tasman,' and you'll have to load it all in one day. Call on Seletar for any help you need and refer them to me. Those cases will be your alibi for leaving Singapore. When you've finished the Hurricanes, move the cases to Djockjakarta and start assembling the machinery. Give the Dutch up to fifty per cent. of what you have. 153 M.U. are going to operate there."

"But will the Dutch take any notice of me, sir? Do they know all about this?"

"They know about 153 M.U., Laddie, but not about the Hurricanes. You'll have to keep that dark as long as possible, but you'll have a letter of authority which will be better than a couple of stripes. . . . You can put up an extra stripe, though. Your promotion will go through on 1st February."

Again I was too pleased to answer. I seemed to be going places.

"There's a liaison officer at Bandoeng. Telephone him if you get held up," the Big Man continued. "Any other questions?"

"When do I sail, and what about money, sir?"

"You must be on board the 'Tasman' on the 31st. See the Embarkation Officer. See the Chief Accountant Officer and get a letter of credit for an unlimited amount. See the Armament Officer and tell him I said you are to have two tommy guns and a pistol. See the Welfare Officer and get some games and comforts for the troops. I think that's all. Good luck. Ring me up if you think of anything else."

And with these very brief details to work on, I was launched on the most important affair I had ever tackled. "The first modern aircraft to arrive. . . . Terrific importance of absolute secrecy. . . . It's up to you! . . . It might make all the difference!"

I recalled the Big Man's words very frequently in those next two days. Was the fate of Singapore dependent on my inexperienced hands? It seemed like an incredible dream.

But I had no time for dreaming in those two days. Even with the authority of the A.O.C. behind me, it seemed impossible to speed things up. The Armourer sent the guns to the ship without ammunition, and could not provide a pistol holster or a pistol (so I didn't tell him I had scrounged one); I had to pay a second visit to pick up the letters; the Welfare Officer promised a lot but delivered nothing. Yet these things were unimportant compared with the immensity

of loading those 2,000 cases on one day. Twenty lorries and two full trains could scarcely cope with the weight and bulk, but by a miracle nothing went wrong, and I was ready to go aboard before dark.

The Chief Equipment Officer was waiting at the wharf. "There are no guns on the ship," he said. "You'll have to be responsible for the anti-aircraft protection. I'll send you two machine guns, and some sandbags to build a gun post on the bridge."

And then for the first time I discovered that I was O.C. not only of a troopship, but of a passenger-ship as well. Nearly fifty Dutch women evacuees from Penang and Kuala Lumpur, including a dozen babies, were on their way to the comparative safety of Australia, and the thought of an enemy attack on the ship grew even more unpleasant.

And it started at once.

We were still tied up at the wharf when the ship's alarm bells sounded, a sinister, harsh warning in those confined spaces. The troops were sleeping on deck under canvas and hated to go below to the frightful heat 'tween decks where they would be safer from bomb splinters. A few babies were crying, but their mothers displayed that amazing spirit which I ever afterwards associated with Dutch women, an inner bravado which shone through their pale faces with Amazonian intensity.

The bombers passed over the sitting target outlined in the moonlight, and the bombs fell very near, but the raid was soon over and the ship unharmed. I thought it would be an excellent idea to say goodbye to Singapore while the going was good, but the Captain squashed my hopes.

"I can't go through the minefields in the dark," he said. "We sail at dawn."

Bed seemed the best place, and the thought of clean sheets and a mattress again made it all the more attractive, but first the machine guns turned up — without ammunition — and then came the promised sandbags (you're quite correct)

—without sand. Two dozen empty sandbags to make a gun post!

"What the hell do you expect me to do?" I roared at the Embarkation Officer, who had carried out his orders too literally, "pretend these are bullet-proof and get inside them, or scoop up sand from the bottom as we go along?"

It really was the last straw. The inoffensive officer promised to do something about it, but I was too tired to care any longer, and fell into bed with just sufficient intelligence left to remember that this was the eve of opportunity; to swear that failure was impossible if determination to climb the mountains of difficulty ahead were strong enough. I prayed for strength.

We sailed at dawn — without the sandbags.

Chapter Six

JAVA JIGSAW

THE DUTCH CAPTAIN WAS FROWNING AS HE studied the charts.

A few miles back a burning freighter on the horizon had indicated what we could expect, and the ship was now approaching the narrows of Sunda Strait, where lurking enemy submarines were most likely to be on the offensive.

The happy cries of children playing on the boat-deck sounded pathetically inharmonious in the tense atmosphere of the bridge. I thought how clever they were to speak Dutch, to make those harsh, guttural noises I found so difficult.

"Haf you de lookouts posted?" asked the Captain, and once again I visited the six lookouts in various parts of the ship, the two gun positions built up with mattresses, just to make sure. We could do so little with two machine guns, but at least we could make a pretense of trying. It seemed to comfort the women.

The troops were playing with the children and nursing the babies with surprising efficiency, but as usual there were a few unruly spirits who took advantage of two hours' daily use of the bar to get drunk. One of them had even tried unsuccessfully to get into bed with a nursing mother, and seemed quite hurt when he was locked up and the bar was closed, except for an hour at night. I had to point out to these troops that it was possible to be too friendly with our allies, that they were the first British to arrive in Java, that the impression they created would influence the reception of those who followed, and that it was necessary to set an example of discipline, good manners, and so on — an idealistic standard of behaviour which I hope didn't sound too priggish.

But it must have done some good, for there was no more trouble.

"Sir! Sir! The bloomin' ship's on fire."

It was the Flight-Sergeant shaking my shoulder excitedly. In a few seconds we were down in the aft hold, which was so full of acrid smoke that it was almost impossible to see or breathe. I immediately thought of my gas-mask, and when I returned with this the Chief Officer was in command, yelling "Godvers" at the native crew, who had the hose going on our precious machinery. It soon became obvious where the trouble was, and after moving several crates, the source of the smoke was traced to the bottom case of the lot — containing broken five-gallon jars of nitric acid. That rush loading job had allowed no time for careful stacking of cargo, and I was very relieved that our fire alarm had not been more serious. It was scarcely a pleasant sensation, and I could not blame the Chief for heaving the offending case overboard. The passengers slept blissfully through the excitement.

"What time do we berth at Tjilatjap?" I asked the Captain next morning.

The old man was frowning at a signal he had just received. "We don't," he said, waving the message as if it were on fire. "We go direct to Sourabaia."

"But I must disembark at Tjilatjap. We have a special job to do there and the cargo must be unloaded. Doesn't your company understand that?"

Yet I knew it was useless to argue. He had his orders, and I was left without any orders whatever. No one knew of us at Sourabaia, but perhaps that wouldn't make much difference, for I doubted if we were expected at Tjilatjap either.

As the A.O.A. had said, "It's up to you, Laddie."

... And so, we arrived at Java, on 6th January, 1942. The date must be put down, for I was to count the days from it till they numbered 1358.

If I had known that! If I had seen a vision of the future, the total loss of that valuable machinery, the poignant,

tortured deaths of more than half those men, the utter futility of our efforts in Java — what would duty have demanded?

A foolish, rhetorical question, incapable of being answered; yet, like the phoenix rising from its ashes, it was to repeat itself so many times in the grim days to follow. . . .

I landed before dusk and soon found the way to Dutch Army Headquarters.

"I want accommodation for eighty men and two thousand guilders to pay them. I'll need transport for them and eighty railway trucks. Can you help me?"

"Can I help you? But certainly. Call the Transport Officer. Call the Accountant. Phone up the O.I.C. accommodation. Would you like a private car for your own use?"

The Adjutant simply overwhelmed me with his indiscreet generosity and almost childish trust, for I produced neither letter of credit nor authority, and was never asked for them. I could have been a spy in R.A.F. uniform and no one would have minded a bit.

Everything was arranged with amazing efficiency. If this were the usual Dutch method of doing things, I felt, there wouldn't be any time wasted. A few veiled inquiries revealed that the seaplane base at Morecambangan, adjoining the large aerodrome, was full of machinery and short of work, and immediately an idea was born.

Why not assemble the Hurricanes at Sourabaya instead of railing them to Djockja? It seemed such a simple solution that I wondered why it had not been arranged in the first place. I phoned the Air Liaison Officer at Bandoeng and managed to convey the general idea without being indiscreet. A Wing Commander flew down next morning, approved the scheme, and in a few hours everything was arranged. The W.C. left me to it, and once more it was "Up to you, Laddie."

The seaplane base commander was sworn to secrecy, together with his chief engineer, and both agreed that there was no need for anyone else to know about the Hurricanes. My own men still knew nothing, but within two days the

whole base had all the details. The idea of secrecy seemed impossible for the Dutch.

Lieutenant-Commander van L—— was bubbling over with enthusiasm.

"This is a wonderful idea," he exclaimed. "We have plenty of hoists here for handling the crates and fifteen hundred men. You must let them work in with you so that they will know how to assemble our own Hurricanes when we get them."

He was the politest man I have ever known. Though we would meet a dozen times a day he would insist on shaking hands, clicking his heels, saluting and saying "Captain Boolcuck" all in the same second. I was still wearing F.O. rank, as I hadn't had time in Singapore to purchase the extra stripe, so I called him Commander and sometimes Admiral, and let it go at that.

It was obvious that a bombing attack would upset all our plans. A long line of a dozen Catalinas and Dornier flying boats were anchored right in front of the base, and I could not help commenting on the easy target they offered to a stick of bombs or a machine-gunning raid. (This proved only too true when the lot were lost a few weeks later.) Those large hangars at the base were such an easy mark that I determined not to have more aircraft there at one time than we could assemble, and with this in mind the whole scheme was worked out.

As soon as the "Sussex" arrived, twenty-eight low-loading trucks would move the planes immediately they were unloaded, and disperse them along the side-roads. There they would be parked under trees, covered with green mosquito-net for camouflage, and put under guard. Only four would be at the base at one time, and as soon as these were finished they would taxi straight on to the airfield, have a short test, and take off for Singapore. The dispersal line would move forward as one unit, a gigantic mass-production assembly, with intervals of a few hundred yards between each aircraft. The plan offered the maximum of safety.

In the meantime, supplies of 100 octane petrol had to be laid down along the Singapore route, and again the Dutch co-operated with surprising rapidity. But to obtain 51 large-scale maps of the area was a different matter; they simply were not available. Yet when I demanded they should be printed, there was again an instant response. I began to have hopes that the Dutch organisation would be a vast improvement on that of Singapore.

By this time the machinery had all been railed to Djock-jakarta with a ten-men escort, and the balance of the troops were having a gay time sampling the night life of Sourabaia.

One day I received a message from the Commander:

"A ship comes to-night. I think it is the 'Sussex.' Will you be ready?"

You bet I would! All leave was cancelled, the men were told they might have to work all night, and working parties were arranged in shifts. I glued myself to the telephone.

At four o'clock next morning the phone rang. "Sorry, wrong ship!"

I went to bed, thinking the Dutch weren't so efficient after all.

It happened again the next night. Bed at 6 a.m.

The third night the Commander was definite. "At any time, now, I will telephone as soon as I know."

I sat by the telephone until 9 a.m. the following morning. My bed was a hundred yards away, much too far when every minute counted, and Singapore's new air squadrons depended on my efficiency. The Commander's voice sounded grave.

"A signal has just come in. Will you come to my office?"

I ran that half-mile in slightly over two minutes. Surely the ship could not have been sunk? The thought was like a punch in the solar plexus.

"The decoding is not finished," said the Commander.

"Did I ever tell you about my home in Tretres? It is a beautiful place. You must come up for the week-end when your work here is finished."

I never thanked him, for at that moment the signal was brought in. The three simple words were staggering in their unexpectedness.

"Sussex arrived Singapore." . . .

So they would get their Hurricanes after all. What did your disappointment and wasted effort matter so long as the final result was achieved?

But was my every task to end in such abortive finale?

An American pilot lay in the bed above mine. He had been there three days with scarcely a move, and to my enquiries he only replied, "No. Bo, I'm not sick, I'm only dam' tired."

When he recovered he proved to be full of good spirits and information.

"I don't care what Franklin D. announced," he said. "I saw six battle wagons on the bottom at Pearl Harbour, and, believe me, they'll be there for some considerable time."

He went on to tell how the Jap planes were confused with American aircraft that were due to fly in at that very moment from their carrier.

"I don't say the Japs knew that," he said, "But I'm dam' sure they did know that our patrols operated only three hundred miles out to sea. Their fishing boats could easily check on that, and their aircraft carriers anchored just out of sight of our patrols."

This American had piloted a flying boat to the Philippines where he had been shot down in the sea, and after a terrific struggle for life he had been rescued by a Catalina and flown to Java.

No wonder he was tired. . . .

Meanwhile, Dutch pilots of the giant Dornier and Catalina flying boats were doing a marvellous job of reconnaissance over the Java Sea, day after day going out on

16-hour patrols. They were red-eyed with the constant strain from staring at those sparkling sunlit waters, their faces drawn with fatigue, but there were insufficient pilots, and the job had to be done.

On one occasion they returned with three Chinese sailors who were almost demented, the sole survivors of a crew of 44 from a Chinese ship sunk by a Jap submarine. It was a few days before the Chinese had recovered sufficiently to tell their story, a story which gave us our first proof of the barbaric cruelty of the enemy. The submarine had surfaced beside the life-boat full of Chinese from the torpedoed ship, and the Japs had commenced to cut their throats. In the medley that followed the three survivors had slipped overboard and hidden under the life-boat until the carnage was finished.

Two days after this rescue a Dornier brought in 56 survivors from another sinking, being so overloaded that it was impossible to climb higher than 200 feet.

But the most unusual rescue was of the "survivors" of a munitions ship torpedoed in rough water south of Bali Strait. The ship was hit at dusk, the crew immediately took to the life-boats and made all possible haste from the scene, to be picked up several miles away next morning.

I was in the Mess when they were brought in, half-naked and sunburnt and looking the worse for wear. The heroes were feted with true Dutch hospitality, supplied with all they could drink and eat, given new outfits and congratulated on their escape by the Commander himself. Suddenly a Dutch Dornier pilot came in and spoke *sotto voce* to the Commander. I saw them cast amazed looks at the Captain of the freighter, to whom the Commander then addressed himself.

"It would appear, Captain, that your ship is still afloat!"

"But that's ridiculous! She was hit right amidships."

"That is correct," said the pilot. "I've just seen her. Right above the water line. She must have been in a trough

and rolling heavily when she was struck, but I'm afraid you didn't stay to look at the damage. It was mostly on the superstructure. Perhaps the torpedo surfaced?" he finished sarcastically.

The Captain was struck dumb for a few minutes. "If you'll take us back to the ship we'll bring her in," he suggested.

"Oh, no, you don't!" said the Dutchman. "You abandoned the ship and now she's our prize. Full of aircraft and munitions, too. Thank you for the million guilders, Captain."

I could only think of rats leaving a sinking ship as the crew slunk out, and silently stole away.

Although the first mission in Java had proved so disappointing, the job was not yet finished. Those two thousand crates of machinery still had their importance, for 153 M.U. would be arriving shortly to commence operations in Djockjakarta, and the sooner we were ready for them the better. The troops were given a last night's leave, which most of them spent in a cabaret, and next morning a serious-minded corporal asked to speak to me privately, just a few minutes after I had announced for the first time that we were leaving. "Do y' know, sir, there must be fifth columnists in this 'ere place."

"Why is that, Corporal?"

"Well, you see, sir, it's like this. None of us knew that we were leaving to-day, but last night, as we left the cabaret, the band played 'God be with you till we meet again,' and everybody cheered us. It sounds fishy to me, sir."

It was rather difficult to persuade him that there was such a thing as coincidence, and that in any case our movements now were not of great importance. But I often wondered afterwards whether he had been right about fifth columnists at Morekambangan. . . .

The green Java countryside was glistening with a misty rain as the train rumbled its way between terraced ricefields.

This was the less interesting end of the island, but even so the veil lifted at times to reveal tantalising glimpses of stately volcanoes shapely as a young girl's breasts, protruding through the lacy film of cloud. Surely this verdant land was but a vast garden, an island paradise immune from the bestiality of war?

But what a rich prize to satisfy the greed of the invader, should the bulwarks of Singapore prove unequal to their task!

Djockjakarta proved to be a sizeable town tucked in between rich sugar estates and the inevitable paddy fields. To the north the active volcanoes of Merapi and Merbaboe were only a score of miles away, overlooking to the west the world-famous majesty of the Borobodoer monument. The aerodrome was seven miles east of the town, its solid concrete stores typical of Dutch policy in building to last.

Our precious crates had arrived safely, but already the high-handed Dutch methods were making themselves felt. They had ripped open dozens of crates and taken as much stuff as they wanted, entirely disregarding the instructions to take fifty per cent. only. Before the matter could be straightened out, 153 M.U. had arrived and my responsibility ceased. Group Captain Ridgeway immediately got busy and arranged for the officers to live close to the aerodrome at the palatial two-storied residence of M. Moorman.

This gentleman was reputed to be a guilder millionaire and probably could afford to be generous, but his offer to give us free board and lodging seemed to be carrying hospitality too far. Eventually he agreed to accept a nominal sum which could not possibly have covered the free drinks, servants and excellent food provided, and there I lived for two short weeks in unaccustomed comfort. It was a beautiful place. Two giant Banyan trees, hundreds of years old, shaded the front lawns and tennis court, and the sun rose beyond a deep ravine through which a torrent rushed to the sea. On the left, new rice was being planted out; scores of perambulating backsides moved slowly along the ever-increasing

rows, hiding the heads and bodies like the rear-view of a wicket-keeper.

Ahead was the sugar mill with the kampong of the workers adjacent. Past this we drove carefully, for brown little bodies were often playing in the road or dashing unexpectedly from behind low bamboo fences. Miles and miles of sugar cane! Acres of cassava! Dozens of queer native fruit trees — durian, smelling of bad onions and worse eggs, but tasting deliciously fruity; the sawoh, poor imitation of a pear; ramboetan, the hairy one, with juicy, tasteless flesh; mangosteen, the lip-stick substitute, in its red skin; duku, pomelo, papaia, djerook — in addition to the ones we knew so well in Queensland.

I shared an enormous bedroom with another officer whose bed was so far from mine that I could not even hear him snore. But the gecko was a very competent substitute—that large, pretty lizard which lived behind the wardrobe and woke me frequently with his strident, indescribable note. Three nights in succession he "gecked" seven times, the fatal number, the forerunner of doom.

There wasn't much work to do except unpack cases, not a very interesting occupation, and I was glad to be given the job of driving round the district looking for dispersal points for the unwanted machinery. During these trips we saw some of the native industries—the making of genuine batik; the fine filigree silver work and beaten brassware in which these people excel.

But after a few days, orders came through to start packing once more. The powers-that-be had come to a decision. The Americans were to operate in Central Java where we were — Midden Java, the Dutch called it, but it wasn't as bad as that! The Dutch Air Force would operate from the eastern airfields, while the British moved to Tasik Malaya and the west. That seemed to cover everything, so we hoped that at last the decision was final.

In the meanwhile, there was time to spare. British

officers received an invitation from the Sultan of Djock-jakarta to attend a private performance of the palace dancers—quite a different show from that put on for the benefit of the ordinary tourist. Only three of us were interested, but although the other two were bored stiff, I found something in the atmosphere of the Krakan, the traditional mime of this art kept in the one family for generations, and the weird semitones of the gamelan orchestra, that transported my mind to another world.

The graceful though staccato hand-movements of the wajang seemed to combine the typical choreography of Egyptian and Russian Ballets, but the weird Javanese costumes, the explanatory procedure and the pure gold instruments of the gamelan had almost a personality of their own. I watched the story of Virtue triumphant unfold like some rare night-blooming cereus, and listened vaguely to a Dutch captain explaining that these palace dancers were not the youths they seemed, but were men past middle age whose dancing kept them young. I preferred to leave it that way instead of seeking confirmation from the Sultan.

He was a handsome man who spoke perfect English, with an English accent, but the most distinguished thing about him was the long golden kris suspended from his belt. He saw my eyes wandering from the dance, which had already lasted more than an hour, and smiled humorously.

"To-night there are only the male dancers," he said. "but you must come next time when the girls are performing. That will be more exciting, yes?"

I thought that it might, but turned again to the dance at the sound of battle. A stage boy had casually wandered on to the floor, placed the appropriate weapons near the feet of the dancers, who had seized them at the right moment, and the battle was joined between Sin and Virtue. It looked a genuine fight to the death. Every one woke up again and looked a little intelligent at the prospects of real bloodshed, but I lost the spell when everything stopped for a minute while one of the dancers had his head-dress adjusted.

Such an anti-climax brought the atmosphere back to reality in a flash. No longer was the gamelan adorned with pure gold; the diamonds on the costumes were but glass; and Virtue did not triumph over Evil except in fairy stories and hymn books.

The massive splendour of the Borobodoer stood out on the hillside in all its majesty.

At a distance it had seemed like some precious ornament cut in *bas relief*, but as the car sped along narrow winding roads, the film of our approach became enlarged as on a screen, and now as we paid our fee at the entrance gate the monument stood above us "in all its vast immensity."

It was a beautiful Sunday morning of sunshine, the air clear and sparkling from the rain of the previous night. "You must see the Borobodoer by moonlight," we had been told, but this had not been possible and we were content to forego the mystical romance of night for the clearer details of the day. We climbed terrace after terrace, glancing at the four hundred Buddhas, examining with interest the fifteen hundred carvings illustrating the Hindu epic of Mahabharata. The amazing state of preservation of these finely-cut pictures was in itself almost incredible, but why had so many of those topmost Buddhas lost their heads?

The thousand-year-old monument gave no answer. I had to ask a Dutch professor of history who had the story at his tongue-tip:—

"The Borobodoer was built about the year 800 A.D. by Hindus from the western part of India who had moved down to Java through Sumatra. These people were Buddhists, and the Borobodoer is a Buddhist monument — not a temple — for it is solid throughout.

"About the year 1290 A.D. Java was overrun by Mohammedans, except for the stronghold Sultanates of Djockjakarta and Soerakarta. These Sultans called their people together to protect the monument from the desecrations of the Mohammedans, and for several months hundreds

of thousands of natives carried millions of baskets of earth and completely buried the monument under a hill of soil. When the Mohammedans finally overran the Sultanates there was nothing to be seen.

"For more than five hundred years the Borobodoer was forgotten. It was not until your great statesman Raffles rediscovered it in 1812 that the modern world knew of its existence."

He looked at me quizzically. "That is one story," he said, "but I believe that the monument was first built on an island in a lake, painted white to represent the jewel in the lotus. There is proof that a great earthquake many years ago split up the country thereabouts and drained the lake, which was probably filled up by an eruption of the Merapi, and that's how you see it to-day. Yes, that is what I believe," he finished, and looked at me again.

"But your guide books generally print the first story," I suggested.

"Ah, yes, but you see, we feed our tourists on other things beside rijstafel."

The C.O. called me to his office.

"How would you like a few days at the seaside?"

Nothing further had been heard of the move to Tasik Malaya, although packing operations were still under way. The Americans were the only people who seemed to be doing any work, although a team of our fitters was giving them a hand with the servicing. Several Fortresses and Liberators were operating as far north as the Philippines, and one Fortress claimed to have shot down six Navy Zeros, but my offer to give the pilot a hand was not regarded as amusing. The business was becoming too serious for joy flights.

I answered the C.O.'s question with another.

"Do you mean on leave, sir? I'm nearly due for a fortnight."

"No, nothing like that. There's a signal here from A.H.Q. stating that the Singapore embarkation staff will

be available in a few days, but in the meantime they want an Embarkation Officer at Tjilatjap."

Tjilatjap! Another thread in the tapestry of fate? I seemed doomed to get there sooner or later.

"You had better make a report on the position there," went on the C.O. "Take a few men to help you with any office work. I'll arrange with the Dutch Commandant there to meet you and provide accommodation. Can you catch to-morrow's train?"

I seemed destined to be a lone wolf again, if only for a few days. A few shirts in a suitcase, a quick goodbye, and I was ready.

For what?

Chapter Seven

THE LAST SHIP

BEFORE I LEFT DJOCKJA A DUTCH AIR FORCE Captain told me in strictest confidence that the "Normandie" had arrived in Sourabaia with 800 aircraft on board. But an R.A.F. officer had visited Sourabaia and returned with the news that it was not there but at Tjilatjap that the big ship was berthed, and one of my first jobs would be to unload those aircraft.

And now I was at Tjilatjap. This time there would be no disappointments. . . .

The railway station was littered with piles of native produce, but apparently devoid of life. No taxis or even native gharries; no signs of any Dutch reception committee; no natives who could understand my Malay. While the men guarded the luggage I wandered out into the brownout and eventually found a naval officer who said he was looking for his wife, who was an Australian. I never discovered how she was lost, for he immediately took me to his home and arranged transport for the men to the Dutch barracks.

After seeing them to bed, I followed suit, to awake next morning to the dull roll of muffled drums. A long funeral procession was passing the house: dozens of draped coffins; hundreds of American sailors. What tragedy was this?

The Dutchman had gone. I left him a note of thanks and walked to the barracks, where I soon learned what had happened. The "Houston" and "Marblehead" had both been hit in a bombing attack and had entered Tjilatjap for repairs, and to bury their dead. The wounded were disembarked later, a score of them with shockingly-burnt faces and sightless eyes. It seemed almost ghoulish to inquire the details of how it happened or the numbers of dead and wounded — certainly over a hundred.

A thousand sailors thronged the town, and in two days had drunk every spot of liquor and eaten every shop in the town completely bare.

It took me a full day to find the layout of the land. The long, rambling town stretched a couple of miles from the harbour to the barracks, with the only European hotel about half way along the main street. It was crowded with Dutch officers, and with great difficulty I obtained a room at 30/- a day in the worst hotel I had ever been in. Not even an outback pub in the Australian bush would have matched this, with its never-sober proprietor, undrinkable water, filthy sanitation, cheeky servants and poisonous food. The flies were in millions, yet it was the usual thing to leave exposed plates of meat, cut fruit, and butter on the tables for twenty-four hours. Frequently I sat down to dinner at eight o'clock and, after waiting for two hours to be served, was informed there was no food left.

The Dutch officers on one occasion drew their pistols, hammered on the tables for half an hour, then threatened to shoot the place up if the service did not improve. It made no difference.

The bathrooms were built on the Dutch pattern with large, tiled, open tanks four feet high, containing about five hundred gallons. After one experience I realised that the hopeful bather did not attempt to climb into these tanks, but dipped the water out with a scoop, first skimming off about an inch of green slime that grew all around the tiles. One either endured this or went unwashed, but the discovery of dead rats in the water on two occasions encouraged me to make an indignant though futile complaint.

A Dutch officer was sympathetic but casual.

"We have to put up with it. There is nowhere else to live. The proprietor doesn't care any more. He has been here for thirty years."

So, I am sure, had the same bathwater.

When I went to see the navy office Commander he was polite but very vague.

"Here is a pass to the wharf," he said. "See the Harbourmaster and the Transport Officer. Perhaps they can hellup you. Come back again if you have trouble."

"Has the 'Normandie' started unloading yet?" I asked him quietly.

"The 'Normandie'? But she is in Batavia!"

I gave up hope then; but not so the Dutch. They just couldn't "hellup" believing implicitly in every wild rumour, and passing it on with an air of secrecy as if it were quite genuine. A week later, when the wireless reported that the "Normandie" had caught fire and overturned at New York, the incredulous Dutch expressions would have been amusing if they had not been so pathetic.

The Harbourmaster was fat and sleepy. "Why don't you come here sooner?" he demanded. "You are the only British officer I haf seen. Everyting is held up. See the Transport Officer. He will hellup you."

He slid deeper into his chair and went to sleep again.

But the Transport Officer was very much awake. A session with him resulted in the following signal being sent to A.H.Q. by the secret Dutch teletype.

"Twenty-nine ships Tjilatjap Harbour mostly lend-lease cannot be offloaded owing to congestion on wharves stop. Twenty thousand tons war material on wharves must be removed immediately stop. This includes 12,000 x 250 lb. bombs, 1,500 tons explosives, 3,000,000 rounds .303, 25,000 x .75 m.m. shells, 172 crates petrol tankers, 70,000 rolls barbed wire stop. Signal instructions by Dutch navy teletype as R.A.F. codebooks not repeat not available."

Two days later came the reply — in R.A.F. secret code.

Again the teletype was used — "Please repeat your message no. — by Dutch navy teletype stop. R.A.F. codebooks not repeat not available anywhere in this vicinity."

Another two days, another reply — again in the undecipherable code, but a different message from the first. In

the meantime I had been busy. It was obvious that the stores on the wharves had to be dispersed at once, for a bombing raid would certainly set off those 1,500 tons of explosives and blow the whole of Tjilatjap into the sea. But there was not a single godown available in the district.

The Dutch could not or would not provide a car, so finally the British acting-consul lent me his Packard. A search of the surrounding areas revealed that suitable depots were conveniently situated at Poerwokerto, Poerbollingo, Soekaradja and Patikradja, the furthest less than fifty miles away. Could I accept the responsibility of commandeering these places without authority?

There was still no sign of the Singapore embarkation staff, and I was forced into the position of acting for the Army and Navy, as well as the Air Force. Nearly a week had been wasted, but another signal seemed the only solution.

This time the reply came in the person of an equipment-officer, who had authority to investigate my proposals. The Packard soon rushed us round the district, and back the officer went to Bandoeng in a hurry, sped on his way by a plate of bad meat at the Tjilatjap Hotel, for which he paid six shillings. It was necessary to obtain official authority from the Dutch District Officers to requisition the buildings needed. More delay! More and more the red tape of procrastination was binding up the wheels of time. I was fighting for every railway truck when a thousand were needed.

"To-day it is not possible." "To-morrow?" "Maybe!"

Over and over I had the same reply. It seemed a Dutch custom. Was there a reason for this lack of co-operation, this air of ennui, this studied indifference to the urgency of the position? I had politely demanded trucks for the explosives first. If only we could get a trainload of them away from the wharves and park it on some siding if necessary until we knew where they were wanted! I had hoped the first air-raid

warning would have speeded things up, but again the same reply:

"To-day it is not possible." "To-morrow?" "Maybe!"

"But to-morrow may be too damn late. The smallest bomb, one machine-gun bullet even, will blow the whole place to blazes, including you!"

At last the mass of equipment began to move. The Army sent a Captain down to help, but he had one meal at the local hotel then retired in disorder to the hotel at Poerwokerto, forty miles away. The manifests of the ships in harbour revealed a tremendous quantity of lend-lease material, but there were only two cranes on the Tjilatjap wharves capable of handling the weights. Four medium-size ships could tie up at the one time, but the rest had to be unloaded into barges in midstream. Eight hundred motor vehicles, 5,000 tons of rations, naval guns, more bombs, and 700 tommy guns. The last item seemed particularly important.

The Dutch teletype took two full days, probably due to congestion, so I decided to use the telephone to A.H.Q.

"This is Bulcock speaking. Do you know where I am?"

"Oh, yes, of course. I remember. You're down at the seaside, aren't you?"

"Yes, and I have found a lot of toys -"

"Toys? What sort of toys? Christmas is over, old boy."

"Please listen for a moment. This is important. I have 700 toys for gangsters to play with. Do you need them in a hurry?"

"Toys for gangsters? Ah, yes, I get you. My little boy, Tommy, is always asking for one."

"That's the idea. But there's nothing to go up the spout."

"Up the spout? I say, you're not being rude, old boy, are you?"

"Listen. Have you ever heard of Stiffy and Mo, the comedians?"

"Yes, old boy, and which one are you?"

"Well, I'm not Stiffy!"

"You are Mo?"

"Yes. I am Mo. Ammo. Get me?"

"Of course. And you say there isn't any?"

"No. What will I do with the toys?"

"Oh, there's no hurry, old boy. Just park 'em with the rest."

But next day a very impatient officer was there with a truck, demanding thirty tommy guns for the protection of A.H.Q. from parachute attack. The lines of communication were up to standard.

The balance of those valuable weapons was dumped in a shed at Poerbollingo, and most of them were still there when the Dutch capitulated.

An American Navy office had installed itself in the hotel, and seemed very busy, though I never found out what the people in it were doing. Then an Army embarkation staff turned up and helped my overworked boys to check out the tons of stuff going to various depots. Next came a car-load of very Senior Officers, who asked a lot of questions, glanced vaguely at the harbour, promised me a car and an Accountant Officer, gave permission to buy the men proper food instead of the Dutch native troop ration they were grumbling about, made several complimentary remarks, and dashed away, as if the yellow warning had already sounded.

Singapore and Palembang had just fallen. Batavia and Sourabaya were almost closed to shipping. Tjilatjap was the only port left, and the most important point in Java. Surely Java was going to hold out, or we would never be unloading all this valuable equipment. But to hold out we must have more aircraft, more supplies, more men, and they must all come in through Tjilatjap. To unload those ships and send them off for further supplies, to remove the congestion in the small harbour, to clear the wharves of those

thousands of tons, was obviously the most urgent step in the programme of defence.

Yet this was all left to one junior officer who had very little authority! Incredible! The Dutch thought so, too. Their godowns were full of tea, tobacco, and other produce for export, and no ship was to sail unless she was loaded above the Plimsoll line. No arguments I could use regarding the military importance of haste made the slightest difference: the most urgent requests for rail and road transport met the same, sleepy indifferent reply — "To-day it is not possible." "To-morrow?" "Maybe!"

Always this *tid'apa* attitude.

Seven Glen Martin bombers were in crates on the ships. The sizes were checked and the clearances on the road and rail bridges, when it was discovered that the crates couldn't leave town. I thanked heaven fervently that those Hurricanes hadn't come to Tjilatjap.

A strip was being cleared behind the godowns so the bombers could be erected and flown off. They were dumped under the rubber trees and the work put in hand. But those hundreds of cases of tankers and motor vehicles were a problem of which the solution was a very slow one. They were to be assembled at the General Motors works in Central Java, yet G.M. reported that while they had adequate equipment, all their labour was employed on Dutch Government work. I thought of those hundreds of unemployed mechanics at 153 M.U.

We could assemble some of the vehicles locally and use them for our own transport, but there were no facilities, and the work would be very tardy. Why not send men from 153 M.U. to the G.M. plant only twenty-five miles away? The scheme worked splendidly, and more than twenty tankers were completed — before the time came to burn the lot.

At last the Singapore staff arrived in charge of Flight-Lieutenant Burton. He had done a splendid job in Singapore, loading ships right up to the very last, amid constant bombing raids, and with the wharves on fire. But he was

completely exhausted and his nerves were a bit shaky, and although my orders were to hand over and return to Djock-jakarta, Burton begged for a few days' respite in which to look around and get the hang of things.

I had caught dysentery a few days before, and felt as if I had been sleeping with a stomach pump. That fly-blown food at the hotel had caught up with me with a vengeance, but Burton needed a rest more than I and the only thing to do was to carry on. Then two days after Burton, Squadron-Leader Briggs turned up, and with him a signals unit, sea-transport officer, and a Colonel to watch the Army interests. Surely such an array of talent could obtain some amazing results?

They did, but not in the expected manner. The whole staff was switched around from a disembarkation to an evacuation unit. A transit camp would be formed at Poerwokerto, it was reported, for the thousands of British on Java. Ships would be available. We were getting out.

But we still went on unloading that valuable equipment. A present for the Japs!

Briggs was rudely efficient but inefficiently rude.

His demands from the Dutch were invariably couched in a manner that got their backs up, and I followed behind pouring the oil of politeness on the troubled waters of negotiation. But his authority was sufficient to get things moving. The Dutch had a new theme song now — "There are no ships," and to this we replied that there were still twenty-nine ships in the harbour. "But these are Dutch ships," they replied. "Only two or three are British."

Unfortunately for us this was only too true, but our arguments were weighty enough to finally obtain the use of a few small vessels.

"We need the other ships ourselves," we were told, and to our obvious inquiry, "What for?" the answer was a veiled reference to women and children.

But the first ship that left contained Japs — 700 Jap civilians who arrived comfortably on buses, embarked and

sailed immediately. Was there a sarcastic sneer on their faces as they quietly went on board? They seemed quite content to go.

Briggs had eaten one meal at the hotel and then immediately demanded a house which we could also use as an office. Better to live on tinned rations than risk a dose of promaine! A small place was obtained temporarily in the centre of the town adjoining the railway crossing, and I went to the hotel proprietor to pay my bill.

"How much do you owe me?" he asked. He hadn't the slightest idea how long I had been there or what tariff he had quoted, and only grumbled about officers who had come and gone without paying anything. I didn't wonder.

Then we lost one of our staff. A supercilious young English flight-lieutenant, who had very influential friends, had telephoned A.H.Q. excitedly, then announced that he was leaving us at once on a secret mission. But it wasn't secret next day. A string of cars went dashing through the town without calling at the Embarkation Office; the occupants had boarded the "Kedah" from a small wharf near the mouth of the harbour, and sailed before we knew they had gone.

A.H.Q. had left us to it. We were keeping strict nominal rolls of everyone embarking, and sending copies by the following ship, but we were never given a roll of these important people who had sufficient knowledge to get out while the going was good. Most of them would sleep on their backsides for the rest of the war. Why should they worry that valuable pilots, radio experts and technicians were being left behind?

Next we heard that General Wavell had left Djock-jakarta aerodrome about 11 p.m. on the night of 25th February, first drinking a glass of wine with officers from 153 M.U. before he climbed aboard the Liberator for Australia. A Wing-Commander in the party watched the flash-looking luggage being loaded, then, as he climbed the steps,

he turned and announced, "First class baggage, fifth class passengers!"

Perhaps he felt bad at leaving in a half-filled aircraft, but not nearly as bad as six pilots felt who were left behind in Singapore. Eight of them stood by while a Senior Air Force Officer loaded his private plane with baggage, golf sticks and furniture, then graciously informed them he had only room for two.

A Catalina squadron was now operating from Tjilatjap, and Qantas Airways had just left. Civilians were offering motor-cars and large sums of money to get away, but they had left it too late. Cars could be picked up at the wharves for the trouble of driving them away.

On 27th February the American aircraft carrier "Langley" had been sunk 100 miles south of Tjilatjap by a squadron of Jap bombers. This was the first bombing attack south of the Island, and it seemed certain that our turn was coming quickly. At four o'clock the same afternoon orders were received that every ship was to leave harbour at dusk, but some of them were under repair and others could not raise steam in time.

Seventeen ships left. Not one of them returned.

The "City of Manchester," the largest of them all, was loaded full of rations which were to be transferred to other ships in sufficient quantities for the troops they would carry. Her loss meant a desperate shortage of food, quite apart from the fact that she was taking 2,700 out in a day or so. But seven shiploads had gone, over 4,000 airmen and army. We prayed for time and ships to finish the job.

If only the Dutch would co-operate! There were 7,000 coolies employed on the wharves, and we knew from experience they would panic and disappear at the first raid. But in the meantime they could re-fuel, water, and ration those ships that remained. What was the meaning of this stultifying policy which promised ships to Headquarters, and pleaded ignorance locally? Surely the Dutch wanted us to escape?

The eve of 1st March was exciting enough for a movie thriller. At 10 p.m. the sea transport officer arrived at the office in a hurry.

"A Jap squadron with three battleships, seven cruisers and God knows what, has been sighted 80 miles away. They will be here at two o'clock. The Dutch are going to blow the bridges, so you can't use the roads, and orders are to get out."

"How?" we asked excitedly, thinking of those Catalinas. In the morning we could be home.

"There's a corvette leaving at 11.30. Better be there by eleven o'clock."

"We will," we promised, and commenced packing feverishly, collecting the men from their billets, wrapping up the secret documents. By a miracle the eighteen of us were on the wharf with time to spare.

"By goom, sir," said the corporal, "this is going to be exciting. What say we run into the Jap force outside the harbour?"

"There's still plenty of time," I told him. "They'll never find us in the dark."

But when the corvette was half an hour overdue we began to get worried.

Burton found a motor boat and began to search the harbour. The rest of us peered hopefully through the darkness, wandering along the wharves, hoping against hope. Then Burton returned to report that there was nothing that looked like a corvette on the move. The ships that remained were all as lifeless as dead fish.

"Perhaps she's coming in from outside," suggested the corporal.

We waited. It was nearly two o'clock. At any moment those Jap ships might open up a barrage to cover the landing. We were in a bad spot, but we weren't game to leave it in case we missed our ship.

Still we waited. A senior officer I knew well staggered up to the car. I had seen him drinking solidly for eight

hours on end on one occasion, but I had never seen him drunk before. He patted me on the shoulder.

"Never mind, ol' boy. You come wif me. I got a nisch lil' tommy gun at my quartesh. When they lan' we'll do a lil' spot of housh to housh fightin'." He swayed in the breeze then lurched off into the darkness. I never saw him again.

At four o'clock Briggs made up his mind. "I'm going up to the Dutch navy office," he said. "Better wait till I return."

In an hour he was back with the news. "The British Consul, the Americans, and our navy staff have got away," he told us, "and that sea-transport officer is with them. The corvette sailed at 10.30."

We had missed her by less than half an hour. We could easily have been on board if someone hadn't blundered. But we were getting used to that.

"There's only one thing to do," Briggs said. "I'm going to Poerwokerto to see the Air Commodore. You come with me."

We left immediately in the big Buick and arrived as the Air Commodore was sitting down to breakfast. The position was explained. Hundreds of stragglers were milling round Tjilatjap brandishing chits authorising them to embark. It was obvious by now that we could not all get away, so it was necessary to compile a list of the men left, in order of importance. This took all the morning.

The Japs had landed the night before from 112 ships. That Jap squadron off Tjilatjap must have sailed up through Sunda Strait to cover the landing at Bantam Bay. Tjilatjap was still the only port left open, but it was not likely to remain so for long.

Back we went to find that the old "Tung Song" was almost ready to sail. The bearded Captain looked quite happy for the first time in two weeks, for some difficult engine trouble had at first seemed impossible to repair.

"To-morrow at sundown," smiled the Captain. "One hundred and sixty men is the limit. I'll need some rations, too."

Everything was ready for him on time. An Air Officer who had authorised himself to embark was removed under direct instructions from the Air Vice-Marshal.

Just before sailing the Captain sent a message to the Embarkation Office — "I have room for ten more men if they embark immediately."

There was no time to bring men from the transit camp. Our own staff was the only possibility. Quickly we ran through the roll. Only nine men could possibly be spared. One vacant space.

"Well, I can't go, obviously," Briggs said to me. "It's between you and Burton."

We looked at each other, quite dumb for once.

Burton was senior to me, and knew the job better than I did. He was the more valuable man on the spot. But he had been through a bad time in Singapore, while I was still fairly fit. It was impossible to think clearly.

"You go!" We looked at each other again. We had both said the same thing.

"Hurry up!" Briggs exclaimed. "The ship's waiting. You'd better toss for it."

We did.

Burton won.

But then I had no idea this was to be the last ship.

Chapter Eight

CORNERED

DOZENS OF SERVICEMEN WERE WANDERING IN from all over Java to find out the shipping position, among them Flying-Officer Morris. He was a quiet, likeable sort of chap, full of energy and anxious to give us a hand.

"Can't you use me?" he asked. "No one seems to want me. There were thousands of letters at Headquarters and only three chaps censoring them. They'll take weeks to do it, and hundreds of officers are milling round doing nothing. Yet my offer of help was refused."

"So that's why we aren't getting any mail. Things seem to be rather mucked up."

"I'll say they are. What's the chance of getting away?"

"It looks to be every man for himself. We're still fighting the Dutch for those ships in the harbour, but they won't play. If only I had a compass and some maps. . . ."

"I've got a compass, and maps, too," he said, digging them out of his kit. "Here you are. Eight hundred and forty miles to the nearest point in Australia, I make it. What about a boat?"

"There's a pretty good lifeboat near the north end of the harbour," I told him. "She's seaworthy enough, but I haven't had a chance to dig up any sails."

"Leave that to me. What about grub?"

"I've got six cases of rations we haven't opened yet. Water's the trouble. We've only got fifty bottles, but the boys have collected two hundred coconuts."

"Good show. I'm going out scouting right now."

He went off cheerfully, but returned that night looking serious. "I've been through every blessed shop in town," he said. "There's not a yard of stuff strong enough for a sail in the whole place."

"I've been making inquiries from the Dutch Navy office," I told him. "For another month yet the south-east monsoon will be blowing dead against us if we tackle Australia. They say there's a much better chance if we go the other way."

"What! Calcutta? That's over two thousands miles!"

We sat back and thought for a few minutes. The idea was definitely thrilling and by no means hopeless. Recollections of the difficulties of Bligh's amazing voyage in an open boat were no deterrent, for we would be well fed and clothed. We only needed more water and a sail.

"I'll poke around the godowns to-morrow," Morris said. "Sure to be something there. . . ."

At ten o'clock next morning, 4th March, the telephone rang and at the same moment the air-raid siren wailed. A Group Captain from Headquarters was on the phone.

"Some time to-night a ship will be in. I'm sending 250 men by road. You must have 1,100 from the Transit Camp there before midnight. The ship will sail well before dawn. O.K.?"

"How about rations?" I asked. "We're down to six cases."

"Oh, I forgot about rations. I'll fix that. And I'm sending a letter from the Dutch Admiral which instructs their Navy Commander at Tjilatjap to give you every possible assistance and make every ship available. You shouldn't have any more trouble."

"I hope not, sir, but there's a raid on now."

"Oh, Lord. Well, good luck!"

There was no doubt about the raid this time, after several false alarms. Already the Bofors were spouting and the bombs falling on the dock area, and the twenty-odd Jap planes were returning on their second run. I looked into the big air-raid shelter up the street, but it was so crowded with frightened, sobbing natives, reeking of hot sweat and smells, that I stayed outside and watched the flames spring up from burning godowns.

The ships were the second target. The dive-bombers screeched their crescendo of hate, the Bofors barked like excited terriers, and the heavy ack-ack bayed from the background. In half an hour it was over. Three coolies killed, three ships sunk, but the damage to the wharf area was very heavy and our difficulties in embarking that night would be greatly increased.

Morris turned up again before dark. "I've been along the coast for miles," he reported. "There's not a possible boat anywhere, but I found a heavy outboard motor. Now for some petrol."

I told him about the ship that was expected. "Won't do me any good," he said. "I'm not on the list and I'm not going to sneak on board. I know lots of fellows did from Singapore and Batavia, and I also know that a list of names was signalled for courts-martial for desertion. An Embarkation Officer is like the captain of a ship—he's the last to leave, and I'm sticking with you. If things pack up here it's our duty to escape. We must be ready to grab the chance."

We talked it over and decided on Australia, if the motor worked, but we must still have a sail.

"There must be plenty of canvas on the ships in the harbour," I suggested. "We'll beg, borrow or steal some, and make a sail."

He winked at me knowingly and disappeared into the darkness.

It was nearly midnight, but there was no sign of a ship. The two trains would be due at any moment now, so I drove to the station and promptly fell asleep in the car. The first train had my old friend, Henchman, on board.

"Gosh! I'm thirsty," he said. "Where can I get a drink of water?"

"You can't drink the water in this place."

"Hell! What about a drink of beer?"

"There hasn't been any beer here for a week."

"Well, where can we get a meal?"

"There isn't a single place open. Haven't you brought any rations?"

"Yes, there's a truck-load of rations. Is the ship in yet?"

"There isn't a sign of her. Orders are to stay on the train till daylight unless the ship comes in before then. If nothing happens, everyone must leave the station by seven o'clock. We're expecting another bombing raid and this is a bad place to have it." . . .

It was nearly two o'clock when I returned to the office, to find that the most important letter had arrived. Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to deliver it — this order from the Admiral that every ship was to be placed at our disposal. At last we were in a position to end this shilly-shally about the ships available.

The Buick plunged madly into a small bomb-crater and smashed into torn-up railway lines. There were bomb-holes everywhere, and the glow from burnt-out godowns blinded me to their presence. It was not surprising that the navy office was deserted, but I found the new office after an hour's search, in the centre of the town. The Commander was still on duty.

He glanced through the letter quickly. "Thank you. Goodnight," he said.

The dismissal was obvious enough, but I wasn't being put off this time.

"I understand this letter instructs you to give us every possible assistance."

"No, no — nothing —"

"To place every ship at our disposal."

"There are no ships." Again this parrot-like repetition of the disputed point.

"There's a ship coming in to-night," I announced exultantly.

"She's not coming. She has been stopped because of the bombing." *Niet voor Engels.*

"But what about the ships in the harbour? There are three good ships still undamaged."

"You can't have them. They're not fuelled. Besides, they're needed for another purpose."

"They're needed for the 1,350 men that came here to-day. That's the most important purpose."

"You can't have them. They're to be sunk to block the entrance to the harbour."

I made one more despairing attempt.

"But that letter instructs you to place every ship at our disposal."

"Oh, no, it doesn't!" He handed me the duplicate. "Take this with you. Goodnight."

The copy was in Dutch, of course. I hurried back to the office feeling that something was wrong, knowing I had failed again. I wasn't sure if we had an interpreter, but I couldn't bear to give the Dutchman the satisfaction of telling me how we had been fooled.

Someone read it easily enough. There wasn't much to read, just a polite note requesting the Dutch Commander to assist the R.A.F. . . . at his convenience.

Dutch diplomacy had won again. *Niet voor Engels*—except the doubtful pleasure of being told later that their "sacrifice would not be in vain."

What was behind all this?

For the third night that week I did not sleep . . . wondering . . . wondering.

I'm still wondering.

We fed the men next morning at the Dutch barracks. They cursed the ship that hadn't come, they cursed the greasy food, little knowing it was their last meal worthy of the name for forty-one months. For some it was their last meal—those who disobeyed the order to keep away from the railway station.

At ten o'clock the Japs came—as they always did—with a disdainful regularity that showed their contempt for our defences. I was trying to refuel the Buick, arguing with

the native attendant of the pump, who declared the petrol was reserved for the Dutch unless I had a special order. Then came the distant buzzing of bees, steadily rising above the gabble of native voices, and the squeaking wheels of bullock carts.

For a second that noise above was the only sound. Then frightened cries broke forth to accompany the pattering of running feet: the colourful sarongs were like a cloud of confetti blown by the wind; the zebu cattle were tied to the trees, the ponies snatched from their gharries in a twinkling and hitched inescapably in accordance with orders. There was no panic, but the seven thousand coolies rushing from the unsheltered wharves are probably still running. The natives in the big shelter produced cuds of crude rubber and bit on them frantically; someone had recommended the idea against bomb-blast. I walked back to the office.

There they were, buzzing louder than ever. I counted sixty-four as they went over on a trial run with bombers in formation, dive-bombers, and a few Zeros scattered on the flanks. They were higher than yesterday; our ack-ack must have been pretty accurate. The big guns opened up as I went into the office and flopped into a chair in one corner.

It is hard to describe that next hour without being accused of "shooting a line." My mind seemed a thing apart from body, a mental activity taunting a physical exhaustion. "You're too tired to care any more," it sneered. "but I believe that fate has decreed we shall come through. Why do you sit in a chair when everyone else is lying under the beds? Are you trying to prove you're not scared, that you're used to bombing? See the sweat of fear pouring out of you!"

I picked up a book and determined to read, but in a few minutes the leaves were soaking with the sweat dropping from my face. Yet my hands were perfectly steady! I held one up and looked at it, a curious, involuntary action, yet I

felt less nervous then than in the waiting period between the siren and the bombs. But the sweat dripped in pints.

Big bombs that time — the biggest I had heard. The stone building rocked, and plaster showered from the ceiling. A four-inch splinter smashed a jar on the window-sill, missed my face by an inch, and smacked on the wall behind me. It burnt my fingers when I picked it up. Those bombs were close, right in the centre of the town, but there was nothing to do but wait.

A tremendous bluish cloud billowed up from the harbour area. Oil smoke, like a giant poisonous toadstool. Must be those storage tanks this time. The dive bombers screamed down almost vertically against the anti-aircraft gun-posts before the big bombers came in on their next run. I went outside to have a better look, and there was an officer calmly taking photographs.

"This is a hell of a raid," he said. "It's worse than any I struck in the London blitz."

I thought he was pulling my leg. "No fear! I mean it," he went on. "There are more aircraft concentrated on a small area than ever were in London." I didn't wait to argue. The bombers were returning, and there was a spurious safety about four walls.

The town was getting it again; then the fighters followed. The tiles flew off the house next door as the machine-gun bullets sprayed across the town like the path of a tornado. It was now developing into a terror raid, the sort of thing the Japs did in Singapore when 3,000 Chinese were wiped out in a few minutes. They should have been satisfied without this — this final kick in the stomach of a defeated enemy. The bombing itself had achieved their object.

Tjilatjap was finished. The wharves were a blazing mass from end to end. Everything was destroyed, except that equipment we had worked so hard to place in safety — for the Japs! The office we had just vacated received a direct hit, which killed four people next door; the hand of fate again. Fires were still burning in the railway station, but

it wasn't worthwhile putting them out: the line was cut. Even the harbour seemed on fire, for the surface was covered with blazing oil which raced along with the tide. But two ships still floated.

The Dutch later tried to tow them into position for sinking — with a motor-boat. The ships got out of control and grounded on a mudbank, and there they were left, mocking the men who remained.

Later that afternoon the burial party returned looking very sick. Those three tremendous bombs at the station had made craters sixty feet across and thirty feet deep in the soft soil, and one of them had landed on an air-raid shelter. The torn and blackened bodies were scarcely recognizable, but I knew that the name of one of my friends had been on that bomb. I had driven him to breakfast only three hours before and repeated the orders to keep away from the station, but something had made him return. No wonder I was becoming a fatalist.

Next morning the staff was assembled and thanked for the good work they had done. Squadron-Leader Briggs read out the general order to troops; the rubber-stamp words which sounded almost insincere in the still morning air. We felt they could have spared us the trite phrases which even in their very triteness brought a lump to the throat, but left no doubt that it was now every man for himself.

We dashed down to the end of the harbour. The out-board motor and petrol were there undamaged, but the life-boat was lying on the bottom full of water, with planks stove in from the pressure of a bomb which had overturned a nearby ship. Our last hope was as dead as all the others.

"You are to come with me and report to Air Vice-Marshal Maltby," Briggs told me, "but first we'll have to see these troops out of town." The shortage of transport made it necessary for most of them to walk towards Poerwokerto, but the available trucks would be used on a shuttle system to pick them up as soon as possible. Our job was to see

they took the right road, and that they all left the town before the 10 o'clock zero hour, in case of another raid. But the raid didn't come. We returned at midday to a deserted Tjilatjap, through miles of native refugees along the roads; then satisfied that our job was finished, we set off for Bandoeng.

Within a few miles a car full of R.A.F. officers signalled us to stop.

"Is this the road for Tjilatjap?" they asked.

"Yes, but you can't go there. The place is evacuated. Is this the road to Bandoeng?"

"Yes, but you can't go there. It has been declared an open city. All the R.A.F. are ordered out."

We kept going, hoping to find out something on the way, and after running through an air-raid, discovered a Headquarters at Tjamis.

"The Air Vice-Marshal is at Pengalengan, in the mountains south of Bandoeng," we were told. "It's a devil of a place to find. Better report to Tasik Malaya first."

There they were quite definite. "Yes, the Air Vice-Marshal wants a report on Tjilatjap. It will take you five hours to get there. Turn off after you pass through Garoet."

Briggs had driven for five hours, so I took over before dusk. Long convoys lined the roads, some crawling around the narrow curves, others waiting for orders to proceed. Then, crossing a wide open plain, seven Jap bombers passed overhead and one of them peeled off the formation. My foot sank to the floor like lead. One hundred and twenty . . . thirty . . . thirty-five! The Buick was flat out at 135 kilometres per hour, but I wished they were miles instead of kilometres, in spite of the narrow, bumpy road, as that protective line of trees ahead grew slowly nearer. Perhaps that bomber wasn't interested in us, but neither were we interested enough to find out.

The next six hours were an effort of painful concentration. The headlights, blacked out, were useless, the screen dusty, while showers of rain made visibility almost nil. Six

hours of climbing that strip of road cut out of the mountain side across slim bridges angled over mountain torrents, around sharp curves and devil's elbows, with a sheer drop on either side. My eyes became red-hot balls of fire from staring into the darkness, my limbs ached from the piercing cold, but Saint Christopher guided us up that six thousand feet without a mishap.

When we eventually found the A.V.M. it was half past eleven.

"From Tjilatjap?" said the A.O.C. "Ah, yes! Well. I'm just going to bed. Leaving at dawn for Tasik Malaya. Report to me there to-morrow."

That eleven-hour drive had been for nothing. I couldn't refrain from asking if he had news of the "Tung Song."

"You're lucky you didn't get away," he said. "Four of the last five ships were sunk."

But even A.V.M.'s can be mistaken. That report, like so many others, proved to be a rumour.

Briggs found room to sleep in the building, but I spent the coldest night of my life on the back seat of the car. Shirt and shorts were scarcely appropriate at such an altitude. Next morning we drove through glorious scenery over that road of the night before, and I marvelled again at the luck that had brought us through safely in the darkness. I gazed into the depths where a fraction of a second last night would have meant death, and decided I was meant to live for some as yet unknown purpose; the close escapes at Kuantan and Tjilatjap were not easily forgotten.

Tasik Malaya was a merry-go-round without the merriment. Tired troops were limping in with strange stories of trains being ambushed and a bridge covered with our troops being blown up by the Dutch. The bridge near Maos, they said. Another blunder!

The verandah at Headquarters was crowded with officers waiting . . . waiting for they knew not what. After five

hours Briggs saw the A.O.C., then instructed me to report to 153 M.U., who were now at Tjamis. Back to the day before. Another wasted effort.

Next morning I was back at Tasik Malaya again, this time by train. The iron sides of the goods truck we were packed in were too hot to touch. No food, no water. The train went on, stopped, then returned. No one knew what was happening. We stayed in the station for hours.

Two Hurricanes flew over — the first I had seen, and the last. The last two that were left, but we didn't know that. Then orders came to unload the rations and have a meal.

We still waited at the station. Rumours. More rumours. What was this about the Black Force? Were we going to fight at last, instead of this continual running away? Well, we had to stop running sometime. It was better to give than to receive — and so far we had been only on the receiving end.

The Dutch had capitulated! Impossible! After only a week! Every day meant so much and they had held out for only a week! We couldn't believe it. Why, more than half of Java was still in their hands.

"We've had it, boys," said a Wing-Commander. "It's all over. This unit goes into camp at the Tasik Malaya racecourse. It's only a mile or so. Carry what you can and leave the rest."

And that was the first of fifteen moves from one camp to another in Java.

That night we argued cynically about what the Japs would do to us, but a Wing-Commander took us seriously.

"Why should they do anything to us?" he asked. "We've never done anything to them."

From now on we lose our liberty. We lose everything we possess, we lose our hair, we even lose our name.

But maybe we will gain another name that will be remembered. . . .

Chapter Nine

SLAVES OF NIPPON

THE LONG FILES OF WEARY MEN WHISTLED "Tipperary" as they marched into the Racecourse Camp at Tasik Malaya. It sounded almost as if they were glad that the months of running away were over, that they had lived to fight another day. How were they to know that the fight would be against starvation, bestiality and death? Against the myth of the Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, the Bushido spirit, and all the inhumanity for which they stood?

How were they to foresee that the risks of death in warfare were far less than those in Japanese prison camps?

So they laughed and joked and cursed the discomfort as they settled down for the night, bedded down in stables with dirt floors and grandstands with leaking roofs.

I slept on the weighbridge, and next morning moved with the other officers to the small grandstand of the saddling paddock. The rain blew in from every angle, there were no cooking, bathing or sanitary facilities, and the place was filthy. Hundreds of anti-aircraft gun shells were strewn in all the drains, piles of refuse littered the area, which was inches deep in mud, and a more unsuitable camping-place could scarcely be imagined. The aerodrome where the other British were housed was almost as bad, but as usual the Dutch had got there first and picked the three best camps for themselves.

While we were cleaning up, twenty-seven Jap bombers headed straight for the camp. We watched them for a few seconds, remembering the stories that the Japs didn't take prisoners, and held our breaths as the bombers turned and headed for the camp again.

"Take cover!" The order was echoed with the speed

of sound. Now we were herded together in the open, it would be so easy to wipe us out with a few dozen bombs! But it was only the bully threatening the defenceless, an indication of what could happen unless we behaved.

Group-Captain Ridgeway was in charge of his unit, with Wing-Commander Groom 2 i/c. Ridgeway always reminded me of Stanhope in "Journey's End." He was the finest type of English officer and gentleman, tall, good-looking, with neat, iron-grey moustache, a pleasant, quiet voice, and an air of authority that spoke louder than words. The fact that he was a grandfather at forty-two with two sons in the Air Force was the least of his achievements. Groom, whom I had known since he was a boy in Brisbane, was a contrasting type, wiry, dynamic, with boundless energy and an amazing capacity for quick decision in one so young. He was tremendously popular, and almost carried to extremes the tradition of never ordering a man to do what he wouldn't do himself. When he took off his shirt we knew that someone would soon be tired, but it would not be Alan Groom.

He started in now on the water supply, the latrines, the kitchens and the roofs. As an engineer he knew just what to do and the quickest way of doing it, and his hard-working staff were inspired to put forth every effort to keep up with him. I was appointed Messing Officer, but as our food was mostly the rations we had saved, my difficulties had not yet begun.

We didn't see a Jap for nine days. The Dutch were acting as their stooges and giving us orders, but when a couple of Jap officers drove up in a car and gave us a quick once-over, the camp was clean and in running order.

A story was growing stronger and stronger. A Dutch Captain stated he had heard it on the radio himself. The Group-Captain visited the aerodrome camp to confer with the Air Officers, and on returning called a special parade.

"I understand I am to remain in charge of this unit," he informed us. The men let out a hearty cheer. "But I

have much more important news than that," he continued. "I am informed that a large British force has landed in France, that Paris has fallen, and that our troops are sweeping on towards Marseilles. Rommel has been defeated in Africa."

So the story was true. What wonderful news to cheer us on! The Dutch had heard it on the radio, the Air-Commodore believed it, so who were we to doubt? The attack on Russia must have used up the German forces and left the West too weak to resist. Soon it would be the Japs' turn. We argued fiercely about when our offensive would begin.

Yet by 25th March we were back to Djockjakarta, not as the conquering heroes we had hoped to be, but under Japanese armed guards, who pushed the men about and rudely yelled unintelligible orders. Surely there was no need for them to be so impolite: our troops were quite willing to meet them half-way. Through the main street in Djockja the airmen marched briskly, while girls screamed at them from the footpath and clung to the arms of old friends. A tall Flight-Sergeant blushed shyly as a pretty Eurasian embraced him lovingly.

"Cor! Look at Nobby," yelled an airman. "Is it going to be a boy or a girl?" For once the Flight-Sergeant had nothing to say.

I had missed the long train journey, and the excitement of ferrying past that fatal bridge near Maos, for Groom had motored on ahead to check on accommodation, and as Messing Officer I had gone with him to arrange a meal for the men's arrival. The Japs had provided some sort of a passport which was merely Japanese to us, but certainly proved effective when yelling guards pointed bayonets and tommy-guns at us from the various posts along the route.

Perhaps the Dutch hadn't done much fighting on Java, but they certainly made a mess of the bridges which had been chosen for destruction. The main road bridges would all need to be rebuilt, yet there were plenty of side-roads with

the bridges all intact. Why hadn't they made a proper job of it and blown the lot?

Luckily, the third officer with us spoke Dutch and Malay, so we had no trouble in finding the detours—pleasant country roads which wound through rich cultivation on the mountain sides, incredibly stepped centuries ago to use every inch of the rich earth; through remote kampongs which appeared never to have seen English-speaking people and smilingly sold us fifteen bananas for five cents. An officious Jap officer stopped the car, looked at it covetously, made us get out, and waved us away; it took much waving of the passport before he changed his mind.

We dined on the wayside near a rippling stream, surrounded by birds and flowers. Then on again through **Wonosobo**, between two perfectly-shaped volcanoes side by side, south past Magelang and the Borobodoer and into Djockja.

Our last taste of freedom had been a memorable day.

Of the three camps in Djockja two were in the main streets and one in the Mulo school where Headquarters was established. The Jap guards were posted only at the gates, and as each camp had to make its own cooking arrangements I was given an armband and allowed to move between the camps. It was still possible to buy almost anything, including liquor, and one officer with plenty of money and a taste for whisky succeeded in making himself disgustingly drunk, almost to the D.T. stage. That beano had to last him for a long time.

In a few days we found out that prisoners were expected to work for their food. Seven hundred men were to go by train each day to the aerodrome, to fill in the bomb-holes and lay an all-weather strip. Work on an enemy airfield! This was absolutely contrary to the Geneva Convention. They couldn't, we felt, do this to us!

Letters of protest followed. I believe that the Japs

replied to the effect that although they hadn't signed the Geneva Convention, they were quite willing to abide by it—when it suited them. So we went to work.

At each camp food had to be prepared by midday and sent to the working party by truck. This worked well enough until the guards were changed, when I found myself allowed into the second camp, but not allowed out. I pointed to the food, the aerodrome, my armband and badges of rank, but it made no impression on the guard, so I pushed past him and started to open the gate. The idea may have been a good one, but I didn't carry it out, for the bayonet struck like a snake. It only went in a quarter of an inch, but that was far enough to convince me that it was sharp and could easily go further. I retreated in disorder, wondering if I could claim the doubtful honour of being the first prisoner bayoneted by a Jap.

How little we knew then of what the position was! . . .

The working party returned buzzing with excitement and indignation. An officer, a British officer, had had his face slapped, and all because he waved to a girl from the train. What a shocking insult! Really, these Japs behaved like fishwives. Didn't they know they could be court-martialled for striking an officer?

To our protests, the reply came that officers who did not behave like gentlemen would be punished, that gentlemen did not wave to strange ladies, and that the first degree of punishment was face-slapping.

There seemed to be no answer to that.

At the same time an order was issued that anyone attempting to escape would be shot.

It was nice of them to warn us, but, of course, we knew it was only bluff. We had read those books of escapes in the last war. We knew that prisoners, if recaptured, were sentenced to thirty days in the cells, and then they tried again. In any case there was no possibility of escape from Java unless we could steal an aircraft.

It was at this time that Group-Captain Ridgeway was

taken away and Groom became C.O. All officers of the equivalent rank of Colonel and above were being collected in Batavia, so we regretfully waved Ridgeway goodbye, wondering how long it would be before we saw him again.

Groom was immediately faced with his first problem. Six Australians sneaked into camp one night and informed him they had not yet been taken prisoner, and that they didn't intend to be. They had scrounged a car and driven half-way across Java, even being supplied with petrol by the Japs themselves. Their idea was to find a boat on the south coast, and they were determined to make an attempt to reach Australia.

For a few days the roll call was faked, luckily without the Japs making a check during this period. It was the Aussies' duty to escape, and our duty to help them if we could, so one dark night Groom supplied them with rations and everything useful we had, and himself drove them out into the country. He already knew that Wing-Commander S—— had been shot for refusing to instruct his pilots to give information regarding the use of oxygen. He knew the Japs hadn't bluffed that time. Perhaps this threat of shooting escapees wasn't a bluff either. The Australians knowingly took that risk. Groom took an even greater risk in returning to camp and being caught at an early hour in the morning.

We were never able to find any trace of those Aussies, although we made numerous inquiries in other camps. . . .

The food was definitely inadequate and of poor quality, the rice magotty and sour with mould. Once a week trucks went out to various places and brought in supplies, but often they were caught in heavy rain and the food was soaked. I had compiled an estimate before capitulation, showing the field service ration scale was valued in Java at seventy-eight cents, and this was submitted to the Japs. Eventually they agreed to allow us 20 cents, and in addition, to supply rice and sugar. This wasn't so bad. With careful buying in the market by the Rations Officer this twenty

cents could go a long way if the cheapest vegetables and meat were purchased.

But it didn't work out like that. A Jap sergeant took control of the money and the buying, and we were forced to accept what he cared to give us. Protests were of no avail. I worked out the total value of all rations supplied at that time to be eleven cents — one-seventh of the British scale. No wonder the men grumbled and still went hungry.

And this was only the beginning!

In April the whole unit was moved to the aerodrome. Here there were no cooking facilities whatever, or even a cookhouse, and frequently meals were cooked and served in pouring rain. No wonder the cooks went on strike! Most of the men slept in two hangars which had been partly destroyed. Repairs were impossible with materials available, and for days and nights on end the men were soaking wet. Pneumonia, dengue, malaria, dysentery, prickly heat, tinea and dhobie itch, and very little medical supplies.

On 10th May the driver of a ration lorry reported that two British officers and two N.C.O.'s were shot near Malang for being found outside the camp. The execution had taken place on 5th May.

The details seemed definite enough, but we were sure it was only a story spread by the Japs to discourage us from crawling through the wire. Naturally they couldn't guard the whole boundary fence, and it would have been quite easy to escape — if there had been any sense in it.

The Jap Naval Unit here didn't worry us much and were not too hard on the working party. A Jap General flew in when the workers were resting. "Work, work, *lekas!*" yelled a guard, and pointed to the approaching aircraft. "Him got glass eyes. Him see long way. You no work, *tida bagoes*. Me get slappy!" When the General was out of sight the guard allowed a longer *yasume* because the men had worked so well.

Although Jap Navy personnel were generally less in-

human than the Army, this incident was so unusual that it is recorded for that reason.

In those early days Wing-Commander Groom handled the Japs by a combination of tact and firmness. They had given him a motor-bike on which he went tearing round the camp like a speedway rider, anticipating trouble before it occurred, and keeping the Japs in a good humour. He was the only man in camp who could drag a 250-lb. bomb out of the mud and lift it into the back of a truck. And he had diplomatic guile. He showed the men how to make petrol drums leak and how to damage aircraft engines, while the guards looked on stupidly and wondered that an Australian officer could be so friendly. I wished there were a few more officers with his initiative.

The dhobie itch which I had caught in Malaya had been getting worse and worse during the last few months until I found it impossible to walk without agony. A square foot of skin was missing down to the third layer, and I began to worry about losing my manhood, when the M.O. made a decision.

"There's only one thing for this," he said. "Iodine. You'll have to stand it."

With tears pouring down my face, I chewed the bed-clothes while he made the application.

Next day he returned rather sheepishly. "I'm sorry, old boy," he grinned. "That iodine yesterday was five times too strong. I think we should try fungicide paint."

It was even worse than the iodine. I lay on my back for a week with my legs apart, and was then ordered to try exposure in the sunshine.

At the end of May we were dragged out of bed at 3 a.m. and ordered to move. No lights, no water, no idea of where we were going. We stumbled around in the darkness, packing our few belongings, and staggered over to the railway station. I managed to get a truck for the kitchen utensils and the few cases of bully and biscuits that had been saved

for such an occasion, but as we were loading these on the train the guards got tough with rifle-butts and bayonets. We worked like fury, for it seemed the train was starting, but the guards wouldn't let us finish, and a lot of kit was left behind, including a wireless set that an officer had just completed.

Sourabaya proved to be the destination, and the weary journey was only enlivened by the train-loads of scrap iron already collected, and the evidence of Dutch destructive methods on the road bridges. But why hadn't they destroyed the railway bridges as well? We couldn't answer that, but we derived some comfort from the thought that Japan must be short of iron.

We knew from the radio we had lost that the story of the landing in France was merely Dutch gen, a name which glued itself to future Dutch rumours and compared them unfavourably with the usual duff gen in the camp, but we still hoped for something good to happen soon.

At dusk we crawl into the town, to be hurtled like sheep into the roadway by those evil-faced guards. There was only one truck for the sick, and those who couldn't get on had to walk and carry their kit.

As the 960 men entered the gates of Jaar Markt Camp it began to rain, but, of course, that made no difference. We were paraded and counted, then counted again, ordered to open our kits for inspection, ordered to leave them there and go to the huts allotted. We slept on bamboo beds in wet clothes, or tried to sleep naked while the mosquitoes feasted on us in clouds. Our scanty possessions remained in the pouring rain all night. The introduction to Jaar Markt Camp was scarcely propitious.

Chapter Ten

J A A R M A R K T

THE CAMP HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN A SHOW-ground, a "Yearly Market," but there were only two permanent buildings in which the Dutch had already installed themselves. The rest of the huts were of split bamboo, mostly with atap roofs and mud floors. The British, being the latest arrivals, naturally were given the worst accommodation, with four taps for nearly 1,000 men.

Seventeen officers were crowded on to the stage of an open-air theatre which had crumbled under the hand of time, so that the slightest movement brought showers of dust upon our heads. It was impossible, in spite of all our efforts, to clean away the ever-increasing dirt. Bats and rats lived among the rafters and bombarded us nightly with their filthy missiles. The practice of sleeping with the mouth open was not to be recommended.

The five thousand Dutch already in the camp represented the result of generations of indiscriminate copulation, the litters produced by Hollanders sowing their wild oats with Sumatrans, Bantamese, Sundanese, Javanese, Madoerese, Buginese, Chinese, Malays, Balinese, Timorese, Ambonese and the breeds thereof. Providing the father were white, then the black, brown, grey, yellow or copper-coloured offspring could claim Dutch nationality. The difficulty was to distinguish the so-called Dutch from the native.

"Oh, that's easy enough," said a Malayan officer. "If they sit down to pass water, then they're natives. If they stand up they're Dutch." There was never any trouble in checking up on the validity of this well-worn definition; the complete lack of privacy in those indescribably filthy latrines still haunts my most evil dreams.

Once again the Dutch were in first. That didn't matter so much, except in the kitchen staff, which was run on the basis that if they weren't given enough to eat they would take it anyway. The fact that they supplied their friends as well wasn't taken into consideration, and soon led to open revolt by the British, who claimed they were getting smaller than average rations.

By this time a Dutch doctor had almost cured my skin disease, so I was again appointed Messing Officer, a most thankless job. The Japs refused to supply sufficient containers to distribute the food to companies, and the six thousand men had to be served in one queue. For three and a half hours they straggled past the servers, growling and cursing the rice full of weevils, maggots and stones, the dust which covered everything in clouds, the variation in the quantity received, and especially the Messing Officer.

Meat was the main bone of contention, if one may call it that. By the time the thirty cooks had helped themselves the rest of the camp might average one quarter-inch cube twice a week, and this had to be served from a twenty-gallon drum of soup with a half-pint scoop. An equal division was hopeless. The unlucky men would get no meat for a month or more: there were no mincing machines, and insufficient labour allowed by the Japs.

At this time the total issue per man was five hundred grammes of rice, one hundred grammes of vegetables, and whatever meat came in. The rice was graded as "third-class cattle sweepings," the vegetables were a horrible purple gourd which even the natives would not eat but grew for the cattle. A very extensive salt-evaporation plant was only a few miles from the camp, yet we had no salt for months. Boiled rice for breakfast and lunch, steamed rice and "jungle soup" for supper — nothing else.

This was obviously a policy of starvation, probably to make us so weak that we would not have the energy to cause any trouble. The general health of the camp began to show an alarming deterioration.

Requests were made to the Japs to supply us with vegetable seeds so that we could grow something on the small vacant plots between the huts. Yes, the Quartermaster thought that was a good idea, and if we gave him twenty-seven guilders he would buy the seeds. He did — flower seeds. "It is more important that you make the camp beautiful so that our Colonel will be pleased," the Jap sneered at us. . . .

All this time the guards were becoming more and more unpleasant.

A list of orders had been issued for the humiliation of prisoners, and punishment for not carrying them out was severe and sudden: yet the orders were such that it was quite impossible to observe them. We were forced to salute every Jap soldier on all occasions, and this included guards two hundred yards away. If they saw us first we might stop anything from a punch on the jaw, a crack with a rifle butt, or a kick where it would do most harm. Blundering past a hidden sentry at night was regarded as just as much a crime as if we had seen him. A guard was placed near the lavatory: we bowed going in and bowed coming out — having two bows-worth we called the inane but necessary performance.

We could not use the term Japanese: Nipponese was their correct name, and from then on Nips they became: we could not smoke out of doors, we could not whistle, laugh or sing, or even smile when talking to a Nip; we could scarcely breathe without being punished for it. Life was very grim!

One morning a guard came with an order:

"The Nippon Commandant wants to see all Australian officers at once."

That didn't sound promising, but the seven of us managed to look unconcerned as we paraded before the little fat man with the thick glasses.

"Sit down, gentlemen, please. I hope you understand me. I teach English at University Tokyo." An orderly brought in some glasses of hot coffee and placed them in the refrigerator.

"And how do you stand this weather?" he went on. "I find it very bad indeed. It makes me sick in the stomach. Tell me, Sydney is not like this, is it?"

We assured him that Sydney was just perfect.

"That is very good," he squeaked. "I'm sure I shall like Sydney."

Was there a veiled suggestion in that remark? He seemed so simple and almost apologetic that we did not know.

"And now, gentlemen, I have good news for you. By the kind benevolence of the Nippon Government you are allowed to write letters home. Are any of you celebrated in your country? In sport or politics? Are you Lords or have you any titles?"

We denied all claims to notoriety.

"Well, it doesn't matter. You must know some important people. Write to them and to your wives and friends. If you come back at four o'clock this afternoon I will give you the details. And now some refreshment."

He opened the frigidaire and produced warm coffee. We swallowed it hastily and departed.

"It's a set-up," said Jim. "He was much too soapy. How can they get letters to Australia?"

"Fly them over," suggested Alan. "It won't do any harm to write. Just be careful what we say."

But at four o'clock the atmosphere had changed. A sheet of typed instructions was handed to each of us, and we were ordered to write of:—

- (1) The grace and strength of the Nippon Army.
- (2) Tell your friends why the Nipponese are the best soldiers in the world.
- (3) Explain how the English bully the Australians.
- (4) Express your opinion of the weakness and inefficiency of your Commanding Officer.

We were on the spot, without a doubt. The other officers overcame the difficulty by writing without making any mention of the points enumerated, much to the Commandant's annoyance. But he complimented me on my

letter, written more in ignorance of what discovery might mean than from any attempt at bravado. I wrote as follows:

My dear Nedkelly,

The Nipponese have given us the works to tell an important person in Australia of our experiences, and the following points are suggestive—

1. I must tell you of the strength of the Nipponese, how they are so suitable for the jungle, flitting gracefully from tree to tree.

2. You should know that the best Nippon soldiers are in the earth. I want you to tell this to all my friends. Tell the Weston Brothers, Dad and Dave, Laurel and Hardy, Meta Knight, Hugh Luvme, and don't forget our next door neighbours, the Marines.

3. I must also explain how the big burly English Pommies bully the timid little Australian navvies and wharf-lumpers. You would die — if you could see it.

4. You know that Alan Groom is my C.O. You know my opinion of his ability. I cannot find words to tell you of his weakness and inefficiency.

Yours insincerely,

Roy Bulsh.

"Your letters will be flown to Darwin and dropped by parachute," said the Commandant.

But they never arrived. The whole scheme was the first of many attempts to use the letters of prisoners for propaganda purposes. Knowing this, our motto was couched in the words of the skeleton to the pill: "You won't get anything out of me."

How ignorant we were then of the Nip methods of extracting information when they were determined to have it! Yet this ignorance did not prevent me from spending a few unpleasant weeks in case the foolhardy letter was read between the lines.

Working parties had commenced within a few days of our entering the camp. The work was very heavy in that terrific heat, and every man available was sent out to repair and enlarge the aerodromes, build gun posts, fill in air-raided trenches, clean up the burnt-out oil refinery and other similar work. The guards drove them on with bashings and kicks, the slightest laziness or misunderstanding being met with inhuman physical punishment.

Our officers were not required to work at that period, but they had to take charge of the parties and accept responsibility if anything went wrong; their punishment was often more severe than that of the men.

In the middle of June twenty-eight Australians were reported to have been captured from guerilla forces still operating in the mountains. That these guerillas existed was probably true, for we knew that supplies had been laid down for the Black Force on which they could exist; what we could not credit was that these twenty-eight Aussies had been tied up in pig-baskets and left on the docks to die of thirst. And yet why not believe it? Every day we looked at the bestial faces of these guards and realised that their enjoyment of cruelty might lead them to any extremes. Which of us might be the next victim?

The Commandant seemed to have no control whatever over the guards. We understood they belonged to a different unit from the camp staff, and did just what they pleased. Each working party had its own guards who belonged to the area where the work was done, and some of them were almost human. They allowed the prisoners to buy fruit if the work was considered satisfactory, and were prepared to disregard the camp order that no money be taken from the camp.

Some of the fit men were even anxious to risk the dangers of these parties for the chance of buying something to eat, and at great risk to themselves they sometimes tried to smuggle food back for their sick friends. If it had not been for the black market these sick men would have been in a sorry state, as their stomachs could not retain the revolting

camp food. Natives were allowed inside to carry away rubbish and refuse, and in their bamboo carrying poles they smuggled eggs, chocolate, marmite and anything else available.

Groom had already spent nearly seven hundred guilders of his own money in looking after the sick. He superintended the distribution of the food personally so that there could be no rackets, and accepted the M.O.'s advice as to the requirements of each patient. There was no doubt that this necessary work saved many lives.

One day the whole camp was called on parade at 9.30 p.m. Something was wrong, and as usual rumours were soon buzzing like flies in the kitchen. The Nip Orderly Sergeant strutted round with an abacus, counting and re-counting each section, but when he had nearly finished, someone apparently bumped his arm and he had to start all over again. Result, after five hours' standing at attention, thirty men short.

The story broke then. A spy had reported to the Nips that he saw two Dutchmen climbing the fence. One of them heard the parade bugle and scrambled back in a hurry, but the other went further afield to visit his wife, and heard nothing.

So there actually was a man short. The Nip Sergeant was as tired as we were and hustled us back to the huts until there was sufficient light at dawn to have a recount, when he found that thirty-three births had occurred during the night! There were three men over. The spy was given a good bashing for making a false report, and for once we enjoyed seeing a man get hurt. Then the Nip checked his section figures and realised that there was a Dutch section with a man missing the previous night.

Habeas corpus: If they didn't the whole section would be severely punished.

A Dutchman was produced. He admitted he had missed the parade of the night before: it had been so hot in his crowded hut that he had slept in the long grass on a high

earth mound where he could get some air, and did not hear the bugle.

The Nip hissed and grunted as he was led to the spot flattened out in the grass (hastily prepared when the Dutchman returned to camp at four a.m.). No, it wasn't good enough. The matter would be reported to the Commandant, and the Dutchman would be shot in any case. It was touch and go for several hours.

We found out later that the Commandant had disobeyed orders by having a night out himself. He had been away from the camp during the excitement, and to save his own skin he decided to accept the Dutchman's alibi and hush the matter up. The prisoner ate a hearty breakfast — of rice pap.

All English-speaking officers and N.C.O.'s parade in the main building at 2 p.m.! What was it this time? These special parades were always rather nerve-racking, though we grinned at each other feebly and pretended we could take it.

The score of guards with fixed bayonets looked particularly hostile. They hustled us into seats while a slim Japanese dandy sneered superciliously as he sat like a dummy with hand on sword.

Questionnaire papers were issued, three pages of them. "Use your imaginations," said the officer, when it was pointed out that there were only seven Australians present.

We were ordered to answer each question accurately, to write for an hour and a half without stopping, without speaking, without looking up. Any disobedience would meet severe punishment. Go!

I glanced quickly through the list. It was obvious that English and Americans would have to use their imaginations extensively, for the questions were all about Australia.

1. What do you know of the defences near the place in Australia you come from?
2. What is the water supply there in the towns, in the country?

3. What do you regard as Australia's best defence against invasion?
4. What is the size and details of the Army? Where are they dispersed?
5. How does Australia defend herself in the desert?

There were other questions of less importance which could be answered by yes or no, but the difficulty was to keep going for ninety minutes. A sergeant who came up for air was slammed savagely on the head with the back of a bayonet, and with this encouragement the rest of us scribbled furiously.

Perhaps the Nip interpreter who went through those hundred and fifty replies gave it up as an impossible job, for some of the imaginations were very vivid.

For instance, there was the reply about Australia's best defence. Prickly pear was the answer, for it surrounded the coast in an impenetrable belt, and when cut down grew so quickly again that the pear-cutters were hemmed in and starved to death.

A bright description of a sand-blasting tank for desert warfare was worthy of a war-office patent. This tank sucked up the sand and blew it for miles at the enemy. The last experiment on an aboriginal had skinned the poor devil in .075 seconds.

The water supply was easy. One merely turned on a tap in the towns, but in the country the only water was in bore-drains, and this was so poisonous that the inhabitants had to drink large quantities of Australian whisky to neutralise its effect.

The different figures given for the Army in coastal towns would have averaged out at about 3,000,000,000.

A few months later not one of us would have dared to be amusing at the expense of the Japanese.

This parade ended when Groom announced that the smirking Nippon officer "would now give us the duff gen about the war situation." The interpreter declared that India and Madagascar were already in their hands, and they

had landed in Africa and Australia, and "thundersunk" fifteen British battleships. As we left the room the only grin was on that effeminate dandy's face, but we soon made up for lost time.

The next Jap demand was for a list of our civil occupations. The best of these was undoubtedly from an airman who stated he was a sesqui-centenary programme-seller.

8th July was set aside by the Nips "in commemoration of the capitulation and the foundation of the Greater East-Asian Nation for the emancipation of the population of the co-prosperity sphere." They announced that in future the eighth of each month would be a visiting holiday to show the benevolent generosity of Dai Nippon — more lying propaganda, as it happened, for this was the only holiday allowed in forty-two months.

Every white woman in Sourabaia and most of the Eurasians turned up in their thousands, and at two o'clock the party began. They came in gharries and ox-carts, on bicycles, carrying litters, even pushing perambulators full of food or followed by a line of overloaded coolies. That so much food was still available after four months of Japanese looting was little short of amazing, and we could only conclude that these generous women must have half-starved themselves to provide for nearly six thousand men. All the English-speaking men were remembered, for Dutch women without relatives in Jaar Markt brought in community supplies for distribution to those prisoners who did not receive private parcels.

It was a magnificent gesture of unselfishness, and one that will long be remembered by the starving men. The Japanese refusal to allow the incoming supplies to be properly organised and rationed, resulted in the selfish getting many times their share, and the weaker men going short, but already the law of the survival of the fittest was beginning to influence our lives. Groom again looked after the sick as well as the circumstances would permit.

There was nothing very amusing in the pathetic scenes of reunion between husbands and wives and children, or when at five o'clock came the tragedy of parting from those they never were to see again: the amusement came at the Lyceum camp after the gates had been closed.

The visitors had been "ushed" out with much "lekas" and prodding rifle butts, herded like so many sheep; the Nippon benevolence had turned to impatience. Ten minutes later there was a noisy banging on the prison gates, and an unmistakably English call of despair:

"Oi! Lemme in!" For once the guards took no notice. More gate banging.

"Oi, Nippon! I'm locked out. Do somethin' abaht it, carn't you?"

Even when the guards finally investigated and opened the gates, the prisoner who had been caught in the crowd had great difficulty in getting himself captured again.

Chapter Eleven

DUTCH AMAZONS

"A WOMAN ON A BICYCLE."

A legend. A living monument to valour. Evidence of a debt that can never be paid.

I have called her a legend, but she was more, much more real than that. She was the embodiment of courage and hope and help to the thousands of P.O.W.'s in Java.

For the first twelve months of Japanese occupation the Dutch women in Java were not restricted to any great extent. Then they were moved to specified areas for their own safety, and after that locked up in the numerous internment camps which were to become the burial grounds for so many of them. These camps varied from bad to very bad, according to the sadistic nature of the Japs in charge, but obviously the policy of starvation and ill-treatment was dictated from a higher source.

What was the cause of this startling change from freedom to brutality?

In spite of his gullibility the Jap had a suspicious nature. He had spies everywhere, natives and Eurasians, whose only loyalty was to their stomachs, and it was inevitable that these spies would eventually discover the amazing organisation of passive resistance that these brave women had undertaken.

Not that it was really passive or even pacifist. It was Amazonian in its contemptuous disregard for Japanese threats and punishment. It might be called a conspiracy in its efforts to help prisoners in various ways contrary to Jap orders, and as a conspiracy it was to be punished later by all the humiliation that filthy-minded beasts could invent.

Soon after our arrival in Jaar Markt unexpected little luxuries made their appearance very secretly and mysteriously.

for we could never discover how they were obtained by the camp. Wireless parts, medicines, toilet-goods and many little necessities were smuggled past the guards in spite of severe searches, but the Nips never thought to look in those bamboo poles or underneath the rubbish carts.

Then one afternoon I found a Dutchman perched in the rafters of his hut and looking out through the eaves. Suddenly he produced a rubber band and, making a catapult with his fingers, shot a wad of paper through the opening, then smiled with satisfaction.

"My wife rides past on her bicycle every afternoon at four o'clock," he whispered. "I have just sent her a little *billet doux*. She will reply by an advertisement in the newspaper."

We were still receiving the local papers, so these unsuspected advertisements were a valuable means of communication between camps. From them we learned that the Japs claimed 92,000 Dutch, 11,000 British and 828 American prisoners in Java, figures which did not appear to be exaggerated. The paragraph that two Dutch civilians had been executed and their wives sentenced to ten years' imprisonment for being in possession of a short wave wireless set rather discouraged our ideas in that direction.

But still news came through. "A woman on a bicycle" was invariably the source, an amazingly prolific one, and sometimes inaccurate, but always giving a lift to our morale, always giving us the good news and never the bad. We did hear from her of the attack on Sydney Harbour, but when the Japs produced an excellent photograph showing the "centre pylon" of this single-span bridge almost completely destroyed, we were able to laugh heartily at such childish propaganda.

The bicycle patrols started as soon as the morning working parties left camp. With as many as eighty-five men crammed into a three-ton truck, we were driven dangerously through the streets, with relays of women taking up the chase, peddling like champions to keep the trucks in sight. As soon as they discovered our destination they would report

to their organisation, and soon wives and sweethearts would come cycling slowly past the working area, loaded with cigarettes, chocolate, buns, cookies and fruit. Sometimes, if they kept moving, the Nips would not molest them, and the women could throw their parcels over the fence, but if they stopped the guards would rush out with fixed bayonets and bombard them with stones.

Woe betide the prisoner who touched a parcel before the guard had searched it and taken his cut! Heaven help the woman who called out to her husband and was caught! So they wrote messages on their clothes and rode back and forth until we had read them, or else they held up printed words on handkerchiefs. It was a great day when three women some distance apart displayed a word each—"Americans . . . landed . . . Solomons."

In the end they became too venturesome. The guards grew more ill-tempered at their failure to handle the women, and refused us all parcels. Stones would be thrown as soon as a woman approached, so the women came along in a body, and while one of them dropped the parcels over the fence the others covered her with such a barrage of stones that the guards ran grunting for shelter. It was a magnificent display of courage — and accuracy. Those girls must have practised for days beforehand.

This time the Nip inferiority complex had been ridiculed and face must be saved. Next day, when the women tried to repeat their success, they were surrounded by a crowd of armed guards, who pushed them off their bicycles, slapped them, and forced them to keel on the hot asphalt road for five hours without hats. They endured this agony like the Amazons they were, yet still refused to give up their attempts to outwit the Nips.

A woman was caught looking through the prison gate. She was tied up for several hours to a tree in front of the guardhouse; then, not satisfied with this, a guard shaved her head as further punishment before she was released. A few days later another woman tried to smuggle in a note to her husband. The Nip Commandant took her into his office,

stripped and and searched her brutally. During the same week I was in charge of a working party at the main railway yards unloading those very same bombs with the lease-lend markings that I had handled at Tjilatjap, and that the Dutch had guaranteed to destroy. It was a filthy day of heavy rain squalls, and we worked, wet through, in inches of mud, goaded by guards who were in an even worse temper than usual. In the distance a Dutch woman approached with a coolie, both laden with baskets and parcels. She went up to a guard and apparently asked permission to give the gifts to the prisoners, for the guard immediately slapped her, knocked the parcels into the mud, then ripped them open and took all the cigarettes. I hurried up hoping that a request from an officer, if sufficiently humble, might change the Nip's attitude, but when a few yards away I recognised the lady who had worked in the Chartered Bank.

She had been very kind to the Australians when we first arrived in Java, and I knew that if she recognised me and called out it would be regarded as "conspiracy" by those suspicious Nips and her punishment would be severe. The only thing to do was to keep away while the guards tore the parcels to shreds, tramped them into the mud, then slapped the brave woman down on to her knees and forced her to collect every scrap and carry it away. It was a typical display of hate on the part of the Nips, but never have I returned their hate so much as at that moment.

In spite of these and many other punishments the women continued their heroic efforts. From one end of Java to the other, they had organised a grapevine system of communication, a system that again depended on a woman on a bicycle.

A pleasant ride into the country caused no suspicion, for even if she were searched by a lewd-fingered Nip the woman would have nothing incriminating on her. At a pre-arranged spot she would ride into the bush and reappear a moment later to start her return journey, again a very natural performance after a long ride. But she would not be riding the same bicycle. The hollow frames would be stuffed with letters, messages, money and news for interchange between

towns, and the system of switching bicycles proved to be more reliable than the Nip-controlled post office.

The main railway to Batavia ran along one boundary of the Jaar Markt camp, and from the hospital steps it was possible to see into the carriages. One incident I remember will illustrate the accuracy of the grapevine system, for similar things were happening every day.

A Dutch cookhouse officer was very excited. "I will see my wife to-day," he told me.

"How on earth will you manage that?" I asked. "You don't go out on working parties."

"Come with me. I will show you. She is on the train from Djockja, wearing a blue dress with white spots. She will wave to me from the front platform of the third carriage."

A few minutes later the train passed, and from the hospital he waved madly to a pretty blonde lady only fifty yards away. It was the last time he saw his wife.

A guard from the corner sentry post had seen him wave, and for that alone he was bashed over the head and received a broken eardrum. "It was worth it," the officer told me later, and invited me to visit his home at Pasoeran. "We will laugh about this when we are free again," he said. "My wife loves mountain climbing. We will go on a hike together and she will show you the volcanoes around Malang."

He was never free again. He died from dysentery and starvation on that terrible draft to the Moluccas in April, 1943.

An American Captain who posed as a war correspondent and remained free for twelve months after the capitulation had an amazing story to tell when he was finally brought into camp.

When it became evident that civilians were eventually to be locked up in internment camps, he went to the Nips and volunteered to organise the women's camps. His offer was accepted and he remained free to travel about when arranging the transfer of women into the areas selected.

In some out-of-the-way places women had already been interned, and conditions were so disgusting that the American laid a complaint to the Commandant of the district — and lived to tell me about it. There was little food, almost no water, and sanitary arrangements were drains alongside the main road with no privacy whatever. Grinning natives would stand and watch the white women who were forced to answer the call of nature in this degrading manner, while Nip guards who were responsible laughed and joked at their embarrassment. This went on for months before the American was able to effect an improvement, and during those months he discovered an organisation which none of us had ever suspected.

This was no less than a German-operated scheme for spreading false propaganda and rumours to fool civilians and prisoners. (That first story about the landing in France had undoubtedly come from them.) Their headquarters were in the mountains south of Bandoeng, but in spite of their precautions the Dutch women gradually traced them as the source of these rumours. Then a Mrs. D.C. thought out a plan which was almost as mad as it was heroic. These Nazis had to be stopped. She would collect twenty civilians who still had firearms, and together they would attack the Germans and wipe them out, burn down their buildings and destroy all their equipment and radios.

The American was let into the secret. He might be useful when the time came, it was thought, and at least he could help by his very mobility.

But by some unknown means the barbarous Kan Pei Tai heard that something was in the wind, and obtained the names of the people concerned. They were all brought in for questioning, the American with them. The Nips started on Mrs. D.C.

She stoutly maintained there was no plot, that she knew nothing. The Kan Pei tortured her by their usual methods of burning cigarette butts, beatings, and filling with water, but still she would not talk. They knocked her on the floor

and kicked her so hard in the stomach that she slid right across the polished floor, then they turned on the men. At the first application of the heat a Dutchman squealed. He swore he would tell everything if the Kan Pei would let him go. On their promise he declared that Mrs. D.C. was the ringleader, that she told nothing but lies and knew all the details. They turned on her again.

What finally happened the American did not know. He was locked up and tortured for fifty-four days, senseless questioning which did not seem to lead anywhere. In the Kan Pei headquarters there were men and women in cages side by side, wire-netting cages only three feet high from which they were not removed for weeks on end. He saw a native brought in for riding a bicycle a foot over the white traffic line: the Kan Pei filled the native with water and jumped on his bloated stomach, killing him instantly. He himself was tortured by being tied inside two right-angle boards which forced him to bend for hours while a Nip on either side booted him backwards and forwards.

After nearly two months of living in this hell of torture, the American was able to enjoy the comparative freedom of a prison camp.

The treatment of these women as internees is described in a later chapter. These few facts are a brief tribute to the gallant spirit and unquenchable courage they displayed when we were able to benefit from their generosity. The heroines of history are remembered for no greater deeds of valour than these Dutch women performed for prisoners of war, and their courage is all the more remarkable when we recollect that many of them had lived lives of luxury, with half a dozen servants at their beck and call.

When discussing the Java campaign one would often hear the remark that if the Dutch men had revealed the courage of their women then the fight would still be on, but it was left to a Jap officer to pay "a woman on a bicycle" a generous though unwilling tribute. "If these terrible women had been armed," he is reported to have stated, "then we would never have captured Java."

Chapter Twelve

HOME FOR CHRISTMAS?

On 5th August we received an order: "All prisoners of war will sign the following declaration:—

"(1) I hereby solemnly declare that I will not take up arms against Dai Nippon.

"(2) I hereby solemnly declare that I will obey all Nippon orders without question.

"Anyone refusing to sign will be severely punished unto death."

So now we knew what the frequent threat of severe punishment meant.

But still we argued about the ethics of signing such a document. A few officers refused to sign until a legal-minded fellow pointed out that this was a clear case of duress, and our signatures could not be held against us. Groom went to see the Jap Commandant, and later reported that this was a general order to all prisoners of war; he had been able to persuade the Jap to add the words "as a prisoner of war," and with this amendment we had to be content.

By five o'clock everyone had signed. A few minutes later Groom disappeared. . . .

The first death had occurred the previous day, and the Japs made the funeral an occasion to demonstrate their love for dead prisoners. We lined the main road in the camp as the two black-draped horses drew the hearse, decorated with skull and crossbones, into position for the funeral march. The rat-faced Colonel Kawabe, sword and top-boots shining, was followed by the senior officers of the camp, then came the Ambonese pipe-band, making a dirge of "Home Sweet Home" on their wooden instruments. Kawabe bared his head and bowed deeply at the coffin as the movie cameras clicked, then walked a few yards in the procession, for the benefit of the photographers.

I watched the scene with a feeling of unreality. Who was this man whose identity we did not know, a nonentity who had become important? He whom we came to honour was to us the first shadow of coming events, but to our enemies he represented a means of lying propaganda, and so they made a mockery of his death.

The cameras stopped, and Kawabe stepped aside. Slowly the procession moved on: the mournfully-piped notes of "Home Sweet Home" pierced the dusty air with a feeling of utter hopelessness, yet recalled memories that were bitter sweet.

The prison gates clanged shut. The Waringen tree shivered in the hot breeze. The pall-bearers were not allowed to leave the camp.

Groom had been promised that he could visit the cemetery on the following day. When he was called to the office at five o'clock we naturally thought that this was the promised visit, but when he did not return that night we began to worry. I had seen him in the back of a lorry with two Dutch officers as they drove through the gateway, and that was all we knew. Surely his argument with the Nip Commandant about signing that document could not be regarded as refusal to obey a Nippon order?

At this time we knew that a Wing-Commander had been shot for refusing to order his pilots to disclose secret information; we knew that a number of executions had taken place throughout Java, that many prisoners had been tortured to extract information from them. No wonder we were worried. Two days later an armed guard marched up to where Henschman and I were having supper. He sat down, cocked his rifle, and grinned evilly.

"*Chew-so soedah kluar*" (Wing-Commander gone away), he announced, and prodded with his bayonet. We listened hopefully for news.

"*Chew-so soedah mati*" (Wing-Commander dead), he sneered, pointing his rifle at Henschman's stomach.

Was this indeed the truth, or just another bluff by these vicious beasts? There seemed no means of finding out, but finally we asked permission to pack up Groom's kit and send it to him. The request was abruptly refused, with the remark that he did not need it.

We believed the worst then. Was this fine young officer another victim of the ruthless cruelty of Nippon? It was thirty-seven months before we knew his fate. . . .

Yet even when things were very grim the prisoners could raise a laugh at the inane antics of the Nips, their lack of a sense of humour, the inferiority complex displayed when they forced us to kneel for a beating and as punishment, and the queer orders issued for our annoyance.

At this time church services could be held, but the Padre must not preach a sermon, although he could read the lesson. The English chief padre was beaten up because the guards caught him with his eyes looking upwards, a proof to them that he was not reading.

Prisoners must not congregate in crowds greater than one person. Yet we were huddled like sardines in our huts.

Music might be played but not heard: interpreted as meaning that a man could play a musical instrument softly, but if anyone listened, it would constitute a crowd. Soon after this order the Nips forced us to attend a two-hour performance by a Jew who was a master of the piano-accordeon. The applause was organised to coincide with the cameraman's requirements. This wandering Jew had a strange history, starting with the time in Paris when he was a famous dance-band leader. He had escaped on the fall of France and eventually reached Java, where he was imprisoned on suspicion for several months. On being released he formed another band and again became famous before his second imprisonment in Java.

The full moon was hidden by the glare of the arc lights as we sat on the ground and listened to the melodies which flowed from his fingers. The Jew, despised and rejected of

men, carried us by his music through his wanderings from the bright lights of Paris through Gypsy Europe to "Mijn Sarie Marys" of the Indies. The appreciation of his talent was the only thing we had in common with the Nips, and even when they insisted that he should conclude with their National Anthem we had to admit that the melody of it was at least one decent thing they had given us.

Such performances were very rare. That they were forbidden is just another proof of the policy of mental as well as physical starvation, for to many of us the craving for music was almost as real as hunger. . . .

Bashings at night were becoming as nerve-racking as a reign of terror, and men with bad stomach trouble were suffering at both ends. The Nips were told that the men would be too sick to work if this continued (the only approach to them which brought results) and the following Nippon order resulted: "Prisoners visiting latrines at night must cry 'Banjo' in their loudest voice."

And so the days crawled by as slowly and nauseatingly as the maggots in the rice. Collective punishments for a slight infringement of impossible rules by one man were a form of blitz imposed so frequently that we forgot what they were for. I was laid up with dengue when one of these blitzes was on, and for want of something better to do I counted the number of visits from the guards that day. One hundred and two times I had to stand up and yell "Kirei" at the top of my aching voice, at the same time executing a bow which was exactly correct.

Yet we did not know the correct attitude. A prisoner would bow and be slapped, so he would bow deeper and be slapped harder and harder until the guard was tired. It was months later before we discovered that the angle was no more nor less than fifteen degrees.

Another officer took over the cookhouse until I recovered. He was a phlegmatic Englishman with an exuberant sense of humour, and a very quick tongue. The complaints about the food, which were couched in a manner little short of

insubordination, were no worry to him. One of the worst offenders (who was booked for a court-martial) slouched up to the Englishman and, shoving the dixie of soup under the officer's nose, bawled out, "No muckin' meat!"

Like a flash came the reply, "No mucking hotel! . . . Mucking prison camp! Muck off!" The airman did so without another word. Many of them were taking advantage of the inability of their officers to inflict punishment except by reporting them to the Japs, and as this was, of course, out of the question, we had to tell them off in their own language.

"In eleven more months and ten more days we'll be out of the calaboose.

In eleven more months and ten more days they're going to turn us loose."

The sentiments expressed were an excellent boost to our morale, and this became our favourite whispering song. But when the British were moved on 5th September to the Lyceum Camp we were in the calaboose with a vengeance.

This time I shared a carrying pole with another officer, but as his suitcase was full of books, I didn't attempt this method of progress again. We staggered in as our last atom of strength ebbed away, too dazed to see the welcome faces of old friends or even to notice for a moment that their heads were shaved. Parade, search, parade; then fifty-four officers were huddled into a room twenty-four feet square.

The camp was a school designed to house six hundred, with cooking and sanitary arrangements for this number. The buildings were good, but with twenty-four hundred prisoners sleeping in the passages and under every scrap of roof available, it was impossible to move from one part of the camp to another without being cursed for leaving mud on someone's bedspace. The rainy season was doing its worst to make things as unpleasant as possible; the mud was inches deep on every open space, and in our wooden clogs we slipped and wallowed and swore.

At dawn the working parties assembled, swallowed a

plate of pap and perhaps a mug of lukewarm, sugarless tea made the night before, and off we went to the docks, the aerodrome, the oil refinery, petrol and bomb dumps, and the numerous other slave-gangs, where we sweated and suffered and bled. "Bled" is no exaggeration, for men worked bare-footed on bomb-scarred ground covered with broken glass, handled jagged metal plates and had their scalps split open because they didn't "lekas" sufficiently to please the bad temper of the guards.

In spite of the danger of discovery, prisoners became adept at bending the lugs on bombs, making petrol drums leak, and loading railway trucks so that the doors would jamb shut and couldn't be opened. Perhaps the most strenuous job was moving forty-foot lengths of fifteen-inch steel piping from a destroyed oil refinery, for the Nips would never allow sufficient men for the weight involved, and frequently the pipe would be dropped on someone's foot. A task would be set for the day and had to be completed, no matter how long we went without food.

Dysentery in the crowded, filthy camp became very prevalent, and fifteen deaths occurred in a few days. New latrines were dug in the very centre of the camp, and although this reduced the queues, it made matters much worse otherwise. The psychological effect of the crowding and filth and lack of privacy affected men physically, and those without dysentery were often constipated for a fortnight without obtaining relief. No wonder the general health suffered and disease spread rapidly.

When things were at their worst Colonel Kawabe visited the camp and called a special parade. We stood waiting in the sun for two hours, but when he came on parade he moved us into the shade and gave us permission to remove our hats. Such consideration suggested that anything might happen, but the Colonel's speech, delivered from a table-top in sing-song Nippongo, was just as hypocritical as usual. The Japanese interpreter translated into Malay, but such was his accent that when Kawabe finally asked who had understood

him, only half a dozen men put up their hands. All his flowery eloquence had been wasted.

Then we were given a translation in English. Kawabe had stated this was the harvest festival day of Dai Nippon. He ordered us to pray for the success of the harvest so that we all would have plenty to eat. He was sorry our men were dying because of overcrowding, and advised us to look after our health — how, he did not say. Then he apologised for our living conditions and stated these could not be avoided as no other accommodation was available. And so it went on, this insincerity and bluff, for we knew that the Darmo camp two miles away had been vacated weeks before.

Our own doctors, handicapped by lack of all but the barest necessities, were forced to attempt faith healing, and the laying on of hands, in their efforts to stem the tide of disease, and their quiet confidence helped many a man to clutch feverishly at a renewed hope of survival. Yet even this example of self-abnegation was marred by an exception of cowardly selfishness, when a certain doctor quite frankly put himself in the dysentery ward and made no bones about his reasons. "I've heard there's a hospital ship coming to evacuate the sick," he declared brazenly. "Just in case it does come, I'm going to be on it."

An airman with very bad malaria begged him for some quinine. "No, I can't spare you any," he was told. "I can hardly get enough for a valuable man like myself."

Another order came through: "All prisoners must henceforth keep their hair cut short in the manner of Nippon soldiers." It was an order with the penalty "punishable unto death," and most of us were not inclined to make a test case, and so lose our heads as well as our hair. Yet again there were exceptions.

Pete and Butch were buddies, case-hardened Texans, the toughest bits of human meat in camp. They were effervescent with cheerfulness, rivals only in wisecracks, and when a Nip slapped their rugged pussies, "he felt like his hand had been sat on by a tank." Pete got his hair shaved first, and

wandered round the camp lifting his hat and bowing Nip fashion — with a long Indian scalp lock down the centre of his skull. Then Butch disappeared for a few hours, his entrance being signalled by a roar of laughter which was louder than a Dutchman's "Kirei"! Butch's barber may have been a pre-war signwriter, for the large U.S. carved out of Butch's hair was very neatly lettered indeed, and the background of scalp most carefully shaved.

We laughed and laughed and laughed — and felt better for the best tonic we had. It was still easy to grin when a man fell in the mud, and giggle sympathetically when he had to be pulled out of the latrine, but these things were not really funny any more; they were too pathetic when caused by weakness or giddy fits from which many of us were suffering. But Butch's haircut rang the bell, won the cigar, and started the ball rolling, and we were the ball. The laughter was more infectious than dysentery, beginning likewise with a low rumble, a few gurgles, and then the belly-shakers which made us hug ourselves with a pain turned strangely sweet. We slapped each other on the back while the laughing tears ran from our eyes and our hearts felt friendly again; we didn't hate the nearness of each other any more.

Even when the first Nip came, we almost liked him because he laughed, too, and bared his ugly fangs from ear to ear — a most unusual Nip with a sense of humour. Butch played his part and bowed and sucked in his breath with a salivary hiss, while Pete backed him up with an Indian war dance.

It was too good to last. The second guard came running up, screamed with rage, slapped the first guard, who was a class lower than he, then turned on the main actors his fists, rifle butt and feet. Just another example of animal passion turned loose for no apparent reason. Because we had laughed? Because we had insulted Dai Nippon? Or because the second guard couldn't see our point of view? We wouldn't know the answers, but we went away more than

ever convinced that a brace of Nips were about as dependable as rattlesnakes, and much more unpleasant.

It took some time to become accustomed to a shaved scalp, for the gauntness of our faces looked so much worse, so much harder and aquiline, that it was temporarily embarrassing. Later the M.O.'s decided that the lack of hair in the hot sun was responsible for most of the eye troubles which developed from that time onwards, the theory being that hair acted as an insulator and kept the head from getting too hot. Whatever the cause, I can never forget those few hours when I went completely blind after several strenuous working days in the sun. Gradually the sight returned, but while it lasted the terrific depression of that blackout, the utter hopelessness of that desperate isolation, were things that still recur in my worst dreams.

We dreamt of many things, pleasant and unpleasant, and often remembered them in the morning. They were something to talk about beside the sordid happenings of the day and the inevitable discussion of the rumours, and strangely enough many of our dreams were very similar. There was that disgusting performance of wallowing in a cesspool of filth, sinking deeper and deeper until the foul mess entered the mouth and nostrils and woke us, often with a severe bilious attack. There was always the dream of delicious food served in the finest china with spotless linen, from which I would awake with saliva trickling from my mouth. And there was Blondie.

"Gosh, I'm tired!" yawned the Humorist. "I chased that dame last night until I couldn't run a step further."

"Why don't you get a bicycle?" asked the American Commander. "You might catch up with her then."

"Hell!" said the Humorist, "*she* had the bicycle. I'll never catch her until I get some oysters."

Even in our dreams the woman on the bicycle was very real, but she wasn't always white. Some of those Eurasian girls were stunning.

"Every time I see Roesmini when I'm out working I

think she's purtier than ever," says Butch. "An' do you know what? She gets whiter an' whiter every day!"

And then there was another dream which, in the intensity of its reality, had almost a stereoscopic clarity. For it was the dream of what actually happened in September, 1942, the events which I was afraid to write at the time, but which are included now to maintain the sequence.

Twenty years ago I saw a fox terrier run over by a railway engine. I can never forget the horror of that dreadful moment when the juggernaut raced down on the helpless puppy cowering with terror, or the inevitable feeling that I must dive unreasonably, impulsively, to the rescue. And for the next twenty years my dreams will be made hideous and my hatred revived by the memory of one piece of brutality.

Two Dutch native troops, a Sumatran and a Madorese, broke camp to visit their girl friends. They had done so before, and no doubt hoped to repeat the performance, but this time they were caught returning to camp, about midnight. The Nips across the road had been having a noisy, drunken party, throwing bottles about and making it impossible for us to sleep, but as their roistering died down the sound of heavy blows reached us from only thirty yards away, followed by a series of agonising screams. We lay awake all night listening to these echoes of torture, not knowing at the time what had happened, fearing that no man could live through such blows as we had heard. We expected to see two mutilated corpses in the morning, but the Nips were too scientific to curtail their pleasure so soon.

At dawn on the way to the kitchen I had to pass within a few feet of the courtyard where the prisoners were tied to a coconut palm, their wrists behind their backs wired, with barbed wire. Already the flies were settling in clouds on the blood which flowed from their split scalps, broken faces, and abrasions on the shins and backs, but when I returned from the kitchen the worst wounds were bandaged. The offenders were then standing with their toes on a bamboo pole three inches thick, and every couple of hours, when

cramp had begun to torture them, the pole was suddenly switched under their heels. The excruciating agony of this other extreme can be imagined, yet if they moved or fell off, a murderous beating with a split bamboo was administered. A bowl of water was placed before them, out of reach.

For three days the barbed wire was not removed, neither were they allowed food — or drink. At every change of the guard, another terrific bashing was dispensed, and day and night this went on for over a week, with by far the worst beatings at night. What horrors these natives experienced at night will perhaps never be fully known, for their memories were dulled by concussion. Every hour their screams rang through the camp, and although it seems odious to compare the mental tension of the other prisoners with the sufferings of the offenders, the fact remains that our nerves were at breaking point and we could not possibly sleep.

But during daylight hours we knew what their torture comprised. Much as we tried to avoid watching the brutality, it was impossible to do so at meal times, and it was then that the commander of the guard took a particular delight in displaying his Caligula-like ideas. I saw him force wire up his victims' nostrils and down their throats until they retched; I saw him place lighted cigarette butts in their noses and beat them with wire when they blew the butts out; I saw several guards stand round and gloat while the lighted cigarettes placed in the prisoners' ears slowly burnt into the flesh. I believe that for a week every cigarette smoked in the guard-room was dumped out on the victims' foreheads or arms. Is it any wonder we were tempted to rush suicidally upon these swine and vent our hatred of them?

At the end of three days the barbed-wire was replaced by plain, which was twisted tightly into the bleeding wrists, then pulled so high into the tree behind them that the tortured men were forced to bend over for hours at a time. They were given water and rice pap, and had to be fed by an English sergeant who lived nearest to them. They were

forced to balance on a bamboo pole and beaten when they fell off from exhaustion. Bamboo splinters were pushed down their finger nails. . . .

After a week, the hourly beatings were stopped and the victims untied to use the lavatory for the first time, but only once a day. For two weeks longer they were tied by wire round the wrists as before, left all day and night in sun and rain without hats or covering, forced to stand for long periods, and kept disgustingly filthy. Then a barbed wire bird cage was built out on the padang, and every morning a guard with a whip, holding the wire reins, would drive the two natives around the camp and into the pen, like animals. Every night they were tied to the tree again.

We lost count of the weeks during which this treatment was continued. How it was endured so long remains a miracle, but I remember that we speculated on how it would end, and whether a white man could have lived through it. Then one morning the natives had gone. Rumours that they had been shot soon spread like a bushfire, and it was not until we moved back to Jaar Markt that we knew a bad dose of dysentery had scared the Nips into moving them from that overcrowded Lyceum camp. There they were at Jaar Markt, each in a small, dark cell, where they were kept on a minimum of food and water for three months until the camp was closed.

At Bandoeng they turned up again, and were free of the camp, but now one of them was quite harmlessly mad. Some of us had smuggled a few cigarettes and scraps of food into the cells when the guard's back was turned, and if the poor half-wit recognised anyone he would come running up with his hands crossed as if they were still tied, showing those terrible scars. "*Nippon tida bagoes!*" (Japan no good) he would say, and then rush off to return in a few minutes dressed in different clothes.

"*Nippon tida bagoes!*" He would repeat the process over and over until he had exhausted the complete wardrobe of his friends, always appearing in spotlessly-clean clothes.

Those months of living in unutterable filth had turned his brain, quite childishly, but how infinitely pathetic!

In October came still another order: "Officers will in future receive the equivalent rate of pay to that of similar ranks in the Nippon Army. Prisoners who work will receive fifteen cents a day for senior N.C.O.'s and ten cents for other ranks."

Christmas was coming. After ten months as slaves there would be a reward for our blood and sweat and tears, yet it wouldn't do us any good unless we could spend it. Where was the catch?

The officers soon found out. The following figures varied from time to time, but the average deductions from our equivalent rates of pay were about seventy guilders a month for junior officers, leaving us fifteen guilders pocket money. The deductions included fifteen guilders for clothing, twenty-seven for food and accommodation, and another item for light, with the balance to be banked to a savings account. The Accountant Officer did a bit of figuring.

"The thieving monkeys!" he said. "They're charging us £3,200 a year for the rent of a room 20-ft. square."

The officers were obviously paying for the food and accommodation of the whole camp, for the men were paid their ten cents only when they worked. A canteen was to be opened, but the men in hospital and those unable to work could not benefit unless the officers subscribed to a camp fund, and this we did from then onwards at a rate of eight or nine guilders a month.

All the Americans were leaving on a draft, and we bid them goodbye with the feeling that wherever they went the food and accommodation couldn't be much worse. (How little we knew then!) Before he left, the American Major told the senior Australian officers that he had advanced four hundred guilders to the Australian O.R.'s, who were in the camp before we arrived. Naturally he wanted the money back, so we went to the English C.O., who still had a few

thousand guilders in an imprest — and received a cold refusal. The Australian officers were so mad about this that they subscribed the four hundred guilders out of their first pay, but few of them had a good word to say for the English for a very long time. Such little things as these grew out of all proportion when men had little to talk about except each other.

The guards continued to bash their evil way around the camp, handing out punishment in proportion to the state of their livers. No matter what we were doing, there was always the chance of being seriously injured for some unpredictable reason. A senior M.O. was set on by a guard when hanging out his washing, then hauled off to the guardroom and kicked into hospital by three guards who attacked him at once. His only crime was that he hadn't seen the guard. Nerves were constantly on edge from this everlasting tension, and it took a lot of willpower to extract a few shreds of humour from the situations which arose.

There was the Gentleman Erk, for instance, a pale, weedy chap with a decided superiority complex. How he ever came to be an A.C. I never discovered, for he was a typical comedy-curate type with a lah-de-dah voice and pansy mannerisms which were aped effectively by his mates. The fact that his father was a wealthy manufacturer in the Midlands made him feel so much above the other men that he thrust himself on the officers, to their embarrassment, and swung the lead whenever he got a chance. The C.O. had occasion to talk very straight to this Gentleman Erk for not pulling his weight, and the G.E. afterwards expressed himself in his haughtiest voice.

"The uttah blightah!" he said. "If evah I meet him in the Ritz I'll cut him dead!"

Yet even though the work was slavery and the food nauseating, there were still men fit enough to turn out for a game of soccer on the weekly half-holiday. The game kept their spirits up, and they played with such zest that the Nips were convinced every man in camp was fitter than he pre-

tended to be, and worked us all the harder. We all enjoyed those games tremendously, especially when one of the Nips horned in, tried to head the ball, and stopped a hard punt on the end of his nose. Not even in our rare recreation could the Nips leave us alone, for the match had to stop every time the guard passed, while the players bowed in the approved fashion—or got bashed if they didn't.

So our first Christmas approached, and in spite of all the unwarranted optimism, we realised that our slogan "Home for Christmas" would have to go into retirement until the New Year. At last Darmo camp was to be used again by a thousand men from Lyceum, including most of the British, and when they left us the extra space available made all the difference in the world. It was possible to have the corridors cleared of bedding, to move about rather more freely, to eat our meals while they were still warm. When the Nips gave permission to buy two hundred and fifty chickens for Christmas and to hold a concert, it seemed too good to be true.

The concert was undoubtedly a success (I say this although I did produce it). Every word spoken or sung had to be typed and submitted to the Nip Commandant, and I'm sure I don't know what he thought of a one-act play I re-wrote with suitable rude additions for an entirely male audience. No applause was allowed; music must be played softly, and so on; but in spite of the restrictions and the presence of most of the Nip staff, there were tears as well as smiles on the faces that looked up at us.

Thank God we did not know that this was to be the last Christmas for almost half those men.

Chapter Thirteen

THE BASHER

EARLY IN JANUARY OF THE NEW YEAR WE were back at Jaar Markt, where we soon found that our previous treatment by the Nips must have been tempered by the sweets of victory.

Now that the Americans were hitting back, the blitz against us was unrelenting, waged by a tremendous Nip who thoroughly earned his name of The Basher. Never have I seen a face so cruel on any living animal; it was a face with eyes like an angry cobra's and a mouth that drained the spittle of madness from its down-curved corners. The Basher was nearly six feet, and two hundred pounds of muscle, and although only a private soldier, he held the power of life and death in his iron fist.

The working parties suffered first, with long parades before and after a strenuous day's work and punishment for the slightest breach of Nippon procedure. Our officers had to learn overnight the Jap words of command, the men must number in Nippongo, and woe betide him who hesitated. He was bashed first, and then the whole parade must double ten times round the padang; over and over again until the Nip in charge was satisfied with both the speed and volume of the numbering.

We screamed the strange words at the top of tired voices, rasping our throats as the guards dealt out punches for lack of *fortissimo*, then endured their indecent fingers as they searched every part of our bodies. Two guards generally operated, one from the front rank and one from the rear, and it was often possible to persuade each of them that the middle rank had been searched by the other. Any prisoner with money or other contraband to smuggle stood in the middle

rank and generally got away with it. If he didn't, he took a bashing with the same philosophy as he had taken the risk.

This howling of numbers led to an incident which brought me a bashing for laughing.

"Bango!" yelled the guard.

"*Ich! ni! san! shi!*" yelled the prisoners, and so on up to *hachi-du-nana* — eighty-seven.

So far so good, but the next man was a tough little English airman with a husky voice.

"*Hachi-du-hachi*," he croaked, and stopped a punch in the face.

"Louder, Louder!" demanded the guard.

"Oi can't yell any louder," explained the Pommy. "Oi've got false teeth."

A kick in the shins this time, and the whole business started again. As eighty-eight approached the Nip thrust his face into the Englishman's and clenched his fist.

"*Hachi-du-hachi*," bellowed the prisoner, and a shower of spray and false teeth hit that Nip right on the nose.

Perhaps my laugh saved the prisoner from being murdered, for it certainly distracted the guard's attention at a critical moment. I suffered in a good cause.

Those early mornings were the worst. Before dawn the men crawled from the mud-floored atap huts which also crawled with bugs, cockroaches and rats, and the fug of the foetid air clung to them on the parade ground three hundred yards away. Unwashed and foul-mouthed (both ways) we stood in long straight files awaiting, sometimes for hours, the pleasure of the *Tenko* Nip, although the idea was for him to arrive at sunrise.

The files were counted and checked for alignment, the officer in charge of each company getting a bashing if a man were an inch out of place; then a Dutch Captain took charge.

"Topidopi!" he yelled, or words to that effect, and we all removed our hats.

"Kirei!" The idea was to bow to the rising sun and the

Emperor's palace, and bow we must. But at the same time there would be a strange noise of sickly splashes and then a gentle murmur. Luckily the Nip never discovered our interpretation of this queer religious ceremony — to first spit on the ground for the Emperor, then to express our hope of deliverance with a polite whisper:

"Good morning, Mr. Roosevelt."

I hope the great man knows — some day.

The distant mountains to the east are tinged with a crawling caterpillar of palest pink. Overhead the sun's first rays turn puffs of cloud into little cockle shells, floating in a light blue sea. The faintest breeze stirs the dust for a moment, then far behind us a high cloud mirrors those first colours strangely before they have faded into grey.

With startling suddenness every head is turned skywards. Seven perfect searchlight beams of colour spring from that focal point on the mountains, carving the sky into clear-cut sections — an amazing replica of the rising sun flag. An awesome murmur spreads like an echo through the ranks.

Is this an omen, a harbinger of doom? Has the Son of Heaven controlled the sun of heaven? But even as we wonder, the beams go dull and fade, the sky assumes the leaden hue of a sunless sea. Favourable is the omen which represents the ascendancy of Nippon as a brief, bright flash.

"It's only a matter of time," said the Humorist.
"That's the way they'll go, like a flush in the pan."

But there was no indication then that someone was pulling the chain. Working parties were harder than ever. We were dragged out of bed at two o'clock in the morning, rushed to the docks and dispersal points in old sugar mills, worked till midday before we were allowed a moment's pause for even a drink of water. Thousands of two hundred and fifty pound bombs were unloaded from ships on to lorries, thence to the storage depots where we had to carry them hundreds of yards and stack them under cover.

Each bomb was in a wooden case full of splinters and crooked nails. Each case was branded with the blood of a

prisoner. Men fell exhausted and were kicked to their feet without respite; we worked till the job was finished, sometimes for twenty hours without a drink, for the Nips had taken all our water bottles.

A few days later the whole process was reversed, and the bombs were re-loaded on to smaller ships, together with guns and tanks. The ships were flagrantly marked with Red Cross flags and painted on their sides with the insignia.

The Nip sergeant had learnt a little English and cursed us on with a baseball bat until the boys were past endurance and cursed him back. The sergeant called everyone to attention.

"Australian bastards," he screamed. "You tink I know dam not'ing." He waved the bat at us, slobbering with hate.

"You are wrong, wrong! . . . I know BUGGER ALL!"

Large quantities of petrol were being dispersed in a paddyfield next to the enlarged aerodrome, and roads had to be built through the deep slush which seemed to have no bottom. We worked up to our knees in mud laying the foundations, then gangs of men were forced to drag the steam-roller over the morass. The roller sank to its hubs, the guards went mad because we could not move it; prisoners were beaten unmercifully, pitilessly. A drunken bullock-driver would not treat his animals like that.

Corvées to the docks became a reign of terror, administered by a stumpy little Nip well under five feet in height. A New Zealand officer returned with a bruise on his back ten inches wide by eight deep. He had been forced to kneel while this Nip bashed him until he could bash no longer, and all because the slaves of Nippon had not stacked old battered drums of bitumén in perfect alignment, an impossible task. The New Zealander was laid up for a month.

Next day I went on the same party, forewarned against trouble and determined to take every precaution. But it was not the slightest use. The large sliding doors of the godown were open twenty feet wide and led on to the harbour, yet we were not allowed to glance through these doors. In spite

of the act I put on, yelling "Kireis" and shouting "Lekas" at the men, one of them was accused of facing the doorway.

The guard punched him a few times, then got a better idea. He grabbed a piece of hardwood five feet long and two inches square, climbed upon a drum, then ordered me to slap the airman. I protested politely and the pole crashed on to the back of my neck, almost knocking me out. An inch or so higher and I would have been out for ever.

"For Gawd's sake, 'it me. I can tike it," said the airman, and this seemed the only thing to do.

I pretended to make a tremendous swing at him, bending my hand back to give a glancing blow, and made a clean miss.

Crash! My knees gave way this time, and through the haze I swung again at the airman's face. Every time I didn't hit hard enough the pole landed once more with a sickening jar, but I managed to pull most of the slaps to some extent.

"I'm O.K.," said the airman, after a dozen slaps. "You hardly hurt a bit. I'm dam' sorry I let you in fer this, but that bloke's a ruddy madman."

I didn't doubt it for a moment.

This sort of thing was a daily occurrence, and certainly put the wind up the poor devils who had to go on these *corvées*. At this time only twenty-nine British officers reported fit for duty out of the hundred and thirty in the camp, but this does not suggest that they were all swinging the lead. The percentage of sick men in March, 1943, was very high from various causes.

A week later I was the scapegoat again. Two parties were working in the same area, and at the end of the day the guard issued a couple of cigarettes, then a minute afterwards ordered everyone into a lorry. My party was last, but a man from the first party entered the lorry with his cigarette still alight. There was no rule against this, so the guard suddenly made one, and because I was nearest he decided to use me for a workout. He first slashed me over the face with my topee, drawing blood with the rough brim, then cupped his hand

and attacked my left ear, forcing in the air with tremendous swings.

A bomb burst in my face! I was a mile under the ocean, hearing the noise of the sea, then thirty thousand feet above the clouds. Joan of Arc could teach me nothing about hearing things.

At least that guard instilled in me a degree of sympathy for my fellows hitherto unattained, for I ever afterwards felt mighty sorry for the other prisoners who won broken eardrums.

After a year in prison the profit and loss account may be of interest to statisticians. Careful calculations revealed that I had eaten three hundred and eighty pounds of rice, sixty-seven ounces of stones, ninety inches of weevils, and one hundred and eighty-two feet of maggots, yet my weight had dropped from one hundred and forty-six pounds to eighty-nine pounds! Somehow it didn't seem to balance out, for the sinking fund was also in the red, sinking deeper every day. Reserves were nil, taxation a hundred per cent., and the only profit a deeper understanding of my fellow-men.

To each man came a different reaction to the pangs of hunger and the mental strain. The Humorist was irrepressible; sometimes crudely, sometimes inanely, but always cheerfully recording the funny side of prison life, scraping in the cesspool of degradation for the gems of wit. Perhaps we applauded his efforts because the gems were so rare, but undoubtedly he had the right idea, for he was one of the fittest men among us.

Some men had already abandoned hope. They lay on their beds and died as surely as the aboriginal victim of a bone-pointing medicine man. Nothing could be done for them. Physically they were not ill, but their mental disgust at life was beyond the healing powers of our own medicine men.

There was a young Squadron-Leader who, just before capitulation, heard from his wife that she had been out to parties with some Canadians. He had been married only a

week when he left England, and he worried unceasingly in case some Canadian was completing his interrupted honeymoon. For hours on end he looked at his young wife's photo and read her last letter over and over again. Perhaps he had cause to worry. The photo showed a very beautiful girl, but her mouth was rather too sensual for safety.

Luckily the gourmand was comparatively rare, for our prize pig sickened even our hardened stomachs. One specimen bolted his food like a boa-constrictor so that he could be first in the "lagi" queue for a second helping. (The practice of serving six thousand men from one point necessitated having something left.) Then he sneaked up to the kitchen, poked through the rubbish bins, collected all the old bones and brought them back to the hut, where he sat crunching and sucking the marrow from them with the juice running down his chin.

We had our confirmed pessimists — and incurable optimists. "It won't be long now," they whispered, and repeated the most ridiculous rumour with apparent sincerity.

The average man carried on with his chin up, taking his bashings without a murmur, swearing a little, grumbling a little, but always determined that the filth and starvation and humiliation would not get him down.

"There is a better land, far, far away,

Where an American leads my girl astray"

sang the Humorist, and our American friends present showed their infallible sense of humour by making a series of drawings of compromised black-gins.

Thank the Lord we could still laugh — when the guards were far enough away.

Chapter Fourteen

DESIRE AND PROPAGANDA

*Delectable brown shape that lieth prone,
What mysteries concealed beneath thy skin!
Vainly I wish to claim thee as mine own,
Surely to covet thee would be no sin.
Longing, my aching heart doth contemplate
The satisfaction of my soul's desire,
Come to me now, or else 'twill be too late,
Give me the peace I cannot else acquire.*

*My tortured body looks upon the scene
Where I have lived for years in agony—
Torture and bash!
But gone are memories of sights I've seen
When I survey in all serenity
Sausage and Mash!*

DESIRE FOR FOOD OVERWHELMED ALL OUR other sensations. One man had a colour photograph from the "Saturday Evening Post" displaying a table loaded with dainties. He religiously propped this up before his plate of pap and stared at it unblinkingly while he shovelled the maggotty mess into his face, the idea being to stimulate the gastric juices.

Before he left us, Wing-Commander Groom had made a bet with Flight-Lieutenant Henchman that we knew would take a lot of winning. On the day of our release he guaranteed to devour six boiled, six fried, six poached, six scrambled, six devilled and six raw eggs in seventy-two minutes, the poached and scrambled eggs to be on toast.

"What a glorious death!" exclaimed the Humorist, and we argued for days about the possibility of the bet being won.

In spite of our respect for Groom's capacity to get things done, most of us felt that this time he had bitten off more than he could chew, let alone swallow.

"Who cares about losing the bet?" Groom laughed. "It gives the boys something to laugh about, and that's the most important thing."

Having by great good luck smuggled my notes and diary through all the searches which were part of our various moves from camp to camp, I suddenly lost confidence in my luck and decided to bury them in Jaar Markt.

Merciless beatings for the slightest offence, such as not saluting a guard whom you couldn't possibly see in pitch darkness made me wonder whether the risk of keeping notes was worthwhile, but I felt that I owed it to Wing-Commander Groom, who encouraged me to begin them.

"He must be all right," we told each other unconvincingly, yet sure that his courage would be equal to any test.

It soon became obvious that the camp was to be evacuated, and about time, too, for there was scarcely a square foot of ground left to put down another latrine. Conditions in this regard could not possibly have been more disgusting, and there are no words in the dictionary to describe them. Not that I want to!

Kitchen utensils were taken away and loaded on ships in the harbour. Rumours of a destination called Lahat were mentioned, and someone discovered a Lahat in Sumatra and another in Ambon. The Basher went roaring round the camp like a mad ape, swinging his great fists at every opportunity. No one was safe from his cruelty.

An old Dutchman was turned out of his billet in the main building where he had been since capitulation, and fell dead on reaching the open air. The nervous strain became terrific as the Nips got more mad and more touchy and bad-tempered and bestial. I went down to a bad attack of dengue fever.

In a few days the first draft of 700 had gone — a full train-load. A Dutchman, who was known to be a bit half-witted and was definitely pro-Nip, put up his hands in a mock fighting attitude on being shoved around. The guards, who had always treated him as a curiosity, suddenly turned on him like mad beasts. He was punched unconscious and beaten with bayonets, then, while lying on the ground, was kicked, jumped on and beaten with rifle butts until he was a bloody mass of broken flesh. He went to hospital, but I didn't hear of him again, for I was dragged out of bed, stood for seven hours on parade in the sun without a chance of a drink, then marched a mile and a half to the station at full speed and without a stop.

The guards kicked everyone on who faltered, but after five days in bed I was as weak as a chicken, and gradually shed my kit, then swayed all over the road in half a trance and got belted back with a rifle butt. The last quarter-mile was a nightmare, but someone gave me an arm, and a strong man unselfishly picked up my suitcase.

I flopped into the train more dead than alive, crammed so tight that it was impossible to move, and after fourteen hours of this, arrived at Tjimahi, near Bandoeng. The next train took 32 hours for the same journey. Two men died on the trip.

Another train-load entered Sourabaia as we left. The guards bashed a few men for trying to talk to them, but we discovered they were from Batavia and were apparently due for a sea trip, joining up with the remaining prisoners from Jaar Markt. This made Ambon the probable destination for a working party of several thousand men. It sounded pretty sticky, and we had missed it by the skin of our teeth because neither Americans nor Australians were included.

Tjimahi camp at one time contained 16,000 men, but the numbers were now reduced to about 7,000. We arrived there on 14th April, received the usual bumptious and threatening address by Commandant Yamaguchi, and then were not troubled by him again.

It was in some respects a model camp. The guards were not allowed inside; there was a reasonable amount of room and facilities for buying a little fruit and extra food. Already our nerves were easier after that intolerable strain of Jaar Markt.

But the claws of Nippon had been felt here, too, leaving their marks in the six graves inside the camp, and two in the camp adjoining. These six men had been lined up against one of the buildings and shot, with other prisoners looking on. The wall was still pock-marked with the bullet holes. Apparently the victims had been murdered because they were captured returning to camp after a night out. They were first paraded through the streets with boards round their necks announcing their execution, then shot as slowly and painfully as possible, several volleys being required.

Yet this was by far the best camp we had been in, from every point of view. The food was still quite inadequate, but a vast improvement over the filthy mess we were served in Sourabaia. Every night a splendid band concert was given, and once we witnessed a pot pourri of grand opera which was up to professional standards for the quality of its music and decor. Indeed, the lead was played by a professional opera singer from Paris. The "girls" were most seductive in excellent wigs and beautiful costumes belonging to the Battalion Dramatic Company which had been quartered in this camp before capitulation. Music from "Carmen," "Rigoletto," "Faust" and "La Boheme" was selected, and dialogue written to fit a plot originated by the producer. Altogether an amazing effort.

The interlude in this camp brought back a glimpse of a normal world again, where music and laughter were part of the design for living, where order was kept by organisation and not by cruelty. But it lasted for us only a month, for, on 12th May, we Australians were, with the usual suddenness, rushed by lorry over to the large camp at Bandoeng.

Here we join up with other British from Jaar Markt, some of whom had left later than we did. One of them

was on the Ambon draft, and actually had embarked. His story indicated the shape of things to come:

"We were hustled down to the harbour at Perak and on board a small transport, one of six in the convoy. While still on deck a transport which had entered the harbour on fire blew up with a tremendous flash, and two of the chaps on our ship were wounded and taken to hospital. About a thousand prisoners were packed into the hold, which was divided into two decks four feet apart, and here we were so crowded that it was absolutely impossible either to lie down or stand. The bare iron sides of the ship were so hot that they raised a blister where they touched, and the heat so terrific that we gasped for breath. After a few hours of this I passed out and woke up to find myself in hospital suffering from a severe heat stroke. The ships had sailed before I recovered, so I was sent on here, but I hate to think how those poor devils will get on during that voyage. Conditions could not possibly be worse."

So this was what we had missed? For what? A pleasant month's vacation in a cool climate must have some strings tied to it, so I asked someone I knew in the Nip office.

"It is absolutely confidential," he told me, "but your cards are marked No. 2 Camp, Thailand. There's some talk of a railway line being built, and all the Australians are going. Good luck. You'll need it."

It sounded pretty bloody. The railway journey up Malaya in a Japanese-run train would, we knew from experience, be an agonising endurance test, but what was to follow? We would know soon enough, for we spent only one night in the comparative luxury of this Bandoeng camp, which raised its own pigs and ducks and had extensive vegetable gardens, where almost anything could be purchased through the canteen, and lectures and amusements were allowed.

The variations allowed by Jap administration were about as sensible as the methods employed by "Donald Duck," the appropriately-named, short-legged guard in charge of 1,000 ducks. Gradually the egg production had dropped

from hundreds until it was less than a dozen — as the prisoners found safe methods of collecting the eggs. But "Donald" didn't think of this. He wore a puzzled look for a few days, then made up his mind. He would teach those ducks to lay eggs. With a large bamboo pole he got in amongst them and belted the devil out of them, kicking them and killing quite a few in the process. These were the tactics used with prisoners — surely they should work with ducks!

When the duck farm had been started the Nips had asked the Dutch director of ducks whether he could use an incubator.

"Yes," said the D.D.D., "incubator very good. Hellups to save eggs."

So an incubator was supplied and filled with eggs.

Day after day the Nip came around looking for ducklings.

"Where are they?" he asked, after a week.

"Too soon, yet," said the D.D.D. "It takes twenty-one days."

"Too slow," shouted the Nip. "Hurry up! *Lekas!* More heat."

For a Nip he was comparatively intelligent.

On 13th May the Australians arrived at Batavia and went straight to Cycle Camp, the transit camp for all the overseas drafts. All the senior officers had been collected here before they were sent to Formosa and Japan, and a draft had just left for Thailand a few days ago.

Thailand? Did that mean we had missed the trip? For a week I was on tenterhooks, but then volunteers were called to work on a farming camp about twelve miles out of Batavia.

"Don't go," suggested some of the men who had been there, "it's a filthy place." But it made no difference. The Australian C.O. put down our names without further reference to us, and on 20th May several hundred English, Australian and Dutch, with a few Americans, became un-

willing farmers and unknowingly were saved from the very depths of purgatory.

But before we leave, let me introduce you to Soné. You'll hear a lot more of him from now on, for, like a skunk, he made his presence felt.

Soné, Lieutenant, Commandant of Cycle Camp, formerly a petty customs clerk. Perhaps that's where he learned his manners!

Soné! Despot of a barbed-wire kingdom! A bantam cock crowing on his dung-hill! A tin god of a sadist religion! But he's more than that. He's a dictator with the power of life and death over his subjects, a megalomaniac to whom cruelty is a drug and a tonic.

There is something feminine about his appearance, but it is the feline treachery of a tigress about to strike.

I'd rather trust a tigress any time. He has that cruel look about his eyes and mouth that indicates a love of causing pain, so much so that he won't let his guards beat up a prisoner—he always does the job himself. Whenever he appears, everyone must stand strictly to attention, no matter what work they are doing, salute, and wait for him to pass.

He searched our kit himself when we arrived, throwing our clothes around like a whirlwind, smashing mirrors and combs purposely and tramping around in the mess like a mad elephant. I was very thankful that I had buried my diary.

There was a cat in that camp with its lips cut off, an eye gouged out, and a leg broken. There was another with its tail hacked off, and a dog with a broken leg. The guards, denied the prisoners by Soné's monopoly, took it out on the animals. . . .

And so we arrived at Macassar Camp, or Makasura, as the Nips had it. Twenty-five acres of fertile-looking land, with a large, two-storey mansion set back from the main road to Buitenzorg, between a grove of coconuts and another of shady nutmeg trees. The first glimpse looked quite attractive, even though it was raining, and we were wet and sticky, but we had not yet noticed the atap huts wired off on one boun-

dary, with dirt floors and surrounded by seas of mud. After a very perfunctory search by Commandant Tanaka we inspected the huts and tried to reconcile ourselves to living there for goodness knew how long. The palm-leaf roofs leaked like sieves, the rough bali-bali beds of split bamboo were teeming with bugs, but at least they were a change from sleeping on a stone floor as we'd done for months.

In the morning the effect was not quite so depressing. The huts were worse than a black's camp, but there was a refreshing dewiness in the air and the smell of growing things was a change from that over-crowded human fug to which one can never become accustomed. After a day's grace to arrange camp services, the working parties started, 700 of us, with broken-handled *chunkuls* and mattocks to assault the hard ground. The reddish-brown soil looked fertile, but a Dutchman who knew the property told us it had been worked for a hundred years without proper fertilising. A tremendous amount of work was necessary if we were to feed ourselves.

It was proposed to plant tomatoes, cucumbers, peanuts, pig weed, Chinese cabbage, *katjang idjoe*, *katjang pandjang* (long beans) and 10,000 papaya trees. We laughed at the idea of the Nips ever hoping to get fruit from those, for they take over nine months to bear, even in that climate. Surely the war would be over before then!

The work proved very hard to those of us from Sourabaya who had already been weakened by starvation, but the men from the other end of Java had been much better fed, and were still fairly strong. I often thought of my many friends who had gone to Ambon when they were only fit to go to hospital, and wondered what sort of treatment they were getting. For work in such heat we needed much better food than we were given, and we hoped for an improvement when the results of our labours were available.

Tanaka, Nip Commandant, displayed a callous indifference towards the welfare of prisoners, and let his guards do as they liked; consequently, there was a fair amount of spas-

modic bashing for reasons we never understood. Tanaka himself was harmless, useless, and far from ornamental, looking more like a half-witted schoolboy than anything else. His sergeant-major, "Charlie Chan," seemed to have a fair amount of intelligence and treated us reasonably — though the conduct of any Nip cannot be reasonable for long.

For instance, on one wet night the old brood sow gave birth to a litter of five on a wet, stone floor, and in the morning the piglets were dead. Charlie Chan looked into the sty for a few minutes, shaking his head and hissing in disgust, then suddenly jumped over the rails and kicked the sow with his heavy boots until he was tired. Could a man capable of such a performance be considered a rational being?

In addition to the goats and about 100 pigs, a large fish pond was to be dug and stocked with carp. Not that it would do us much good, for we didn't average a goat per week and a pig per month for the whole camp. The goats were fed on leaves collected by the "Goat Party," which went out of camp twice daily and was able to contact two women who had a secret radio. The items of news we could get in this way were very unreliable, and gave rise to all sorts of rumours, but even though untrue, the cheering effect was more beneficial while it lasted than the subsequent denial was depressing. We lived on hope, and spurious hope was better than none.

After several weeks of cutting grass with a reaping hook I cracked up, and was diagnosed as severe vitaminosis with beri-beri, anaemia and a few other names I can't remember. Calcium was the only possible remedy available, but after twelve attempts at intravenous injections, the doctor gave it up. My veins had become so small that he couldn't find them with the needle, and made a horrible mess of my arms in the attempt. The sickness was really my own fault, for I had begun to feel more cheerful in the country atmosphere and started to put more energy into the job, badly misjudging my reserve of strength.

Frequent heavy rains had made the surroundings of our huts into a quagmire. We plodded around in our wooden

clogs, slipping and sliding, stood in a few inches of mud to take a shower, and we frequently fell over on our return to the hut.

Dozens of snakes were killed on this farm. I was bitten by a scorpion and had visions of a speedy end, but after a few hours of excruciating pain I was glad I hadn't chopped my finger off.

A Japanese propaganda film unit arrived and began paying us attention. First they filmed us working among the flowers, playing with the lawnmower, and marching happily to work (while guards threatened us for not smiling enough); then they demanded fifty officers for an afternoon in Batavia. We were taken to a magnificent building full of splendid furniture where a large refrigerated canteen was set up full of the most luxurious foods. Having been filmed in these surroundings and given a cigarette each, a "pay parade" was taken, each of us being given an envelope clearly marked eighty-five guilders, although we were actually given fifteen. This farce being over, three officers were again taken to Batavia where they joined up with several others from Cycle Camp and went to a private house for a week. Only a civilian Nip who spoke American like a film-star villain was with them, and they were given a fairly good time, although they wouldn't say much about it. Apparently they were forced to have a tea party and talk a lot of lies about their treatment while a talkie was made of it.

They reported that another party had gone on a "holiday" tour, been filmed swimming and golfing:

("By jove, that was a splendid drive, George!" "Yes, Dick. I've been getting plenty of practice since I've been a prisoner of Nippon.")

Sporting clothes were given them, soap and toothbrushes, but as soon as the film was finished even the toothbrushes were taken away.

In the hospital a pretty Jap nurse was brought in and the cameras set up. A perfectly fit "patient" was given a glass of milk, which he promptly drank and was even more

promptly slapped. The nurse was filmed giving him a second glass, which was quickly removed before he had time to drink that, too. The prisoner was forced to tell her how well he was treated.

Other nurses were filmed taking bed-ridden patients for constitutionals through the streets, the bed being hoisted into the back of a truck and the patient being treated with tender care.

After these displays of Nippon propaganda we were rather suspicious when Tanaka invited twenty-five officers to a day's outing at Buitenzorg to see the world-famous gardens.

"No more propaganda," Tanaka promised. "You have been working hard and deserve a holiday."

So we drew for places, and I was one of the lucky ones.

It was very pleasant to see the country again, even from the back of a truck. Yet the changing greens of the paddy-fields, the amazing variety of tropical fruits and trees that bordered the road, and scarecrow arms of kapok trees pointing the way to the foothills of the 9,000-foot volcanoes, Pangrango and Salak, were of that type of Javanese scenery we had come to hate, in spite of its beauty. Its associations were too unpleasant.

So we passed that lovely shady park in Buitenzorg full of hundreds of deer, turned into the gardens, and drew up before the Governor-General's residence. From the steps we looked out over the Victoria Regia water-lily pond into the deep gloom of a tropical forest of magnificent trees, while away to the right brilliant beds of flowers and shrubs led to a deep swathe cut through flowering trees, revealing the cultivated slopes of the volcano beyond. It was an idyllic prospect, and our first instinct was for exploration, but the harsh "Kuras" of the guards and their flashing bayonets kept us penned up in a few square yards.

For two hours we looked at the view, then were bundled into the truck and rushed off again — we hoped for lunch. No such luck. At a cactus farm we wandered around for

an hour inspecting the world's largest collection of cacti, thousands of shapes and colours and sizes, then we were "ushd" through to a garden of cannas beyond. The whole proceedings seemed to be meaningless. But soon we discovered their meaning.

"Officers will dig up plants from over there and plant them here. Large ones with flowers on."

It was the American-speaking Nip with his talkie outfit. Tanaka had put it over on us.

Dressed in our best, with bare fingers we dragged out the cannas and planted the rootless stalks while the cameras were set up. Under orders, our ridiculous conversation about the joys of gardening and the desire to be back in our sweet homes was recorded. I picked six violets and planted the buds just above the surface in a ring of pebbles while the microphone recorded the following:—

"Oh, Willie, do look at my dear 'ittle garden. I p'anted it all by myself. Is it not bootiful?"

"My bloody oath! You ought to get a job in a conservatorium. How are you with a pansy?"

"Oh, Willie, you are awful! Before all these gentlemen?"

I hoped the International Red Cross, for whom these films were intended, could appreciate our attempts to let them know that the whole show was a fake—especially our rendering of "Show me the way to go home."

A cricket match offered perhaps the most amusing instance of Jap attempts at propaganda, and prisoners' efforts to make them look silly.

On a delightful club ground in Batavia the match proceeded for just ten minutes and the prisoners had begun to really enjoy themselves—then the film unit arrived.

"Come on, we'll fake this so that a baby could see through it," whispered Bert.

"O.K. I'll be the umpire," said Tommy, and stood between the wicket and the 'keeper. His decisions nearly gave the prisoners hysterics.

The whole field was placed behind the wicket for a "googly" bowler, but when the umpire stood in the middle of the pitch and the bowler tossed them over his head, even the Nips looked surprised. They ended up by recording a statement that "cricket was one of the many pastimes indulged in by prisoners when under the benevolent care of the Nipponese."

Spasmodically, copies of the "Nippon Times" were circulated to provide us with the "news." The mentality of a nation that can seriously print the following "acts of valour" and believe them is beyond our comprehension. Unfortunately, an unexpected search deprived me of the actual cuttings from the papers, but these are the correct details as printed.

"Some small Nippon transports were attacked by American battleships. One transport was torpedoed, but a brave sailor on another transport, seeing a torpedo coming at his ship, jumped overboard, seized the torpedo, turned it, and aimed it at an enemy battleship. He was last seen headed for the enemy with the torpedo under his arm. He gave his life for Nippon."

"At Milne Bay a Nippon bombing attack unit sank ten enemy destroyers. It had left X base at XX hundred hours and was flying XXX feet when it was attacked at XXXX hours by fifty Lockheed Lightnings. In spite of great enemy superiority in numbers, the Nippon squadron commander immediately shot down three Lightnings and a Flying Fortress. Then the whole enemy force set on him. A wing was shot off his aircraft and it was set on fire, but the brave commander took avoiding action and sought refuge in a storm. He was almost out of petrol, so his comrades returned to X base at XXXXX hours and mourned the loss of their valiant leader. Several hours later the commander returned to X base, having flown around in the storm until the enemy had gone. He was awarded a citation by the Emperor for foiling his foe."

"Lieutenant Gamaruchi, of the X attack unit, has been awarded the order of the Chrysanthemum for his display of the Bushido spirit at Bougainville Island. Single-handed he

thundersank an enemy battleship, but in the explosion his aircraft was badly hit. Displaying great will-power, the Lieutenant piloted his machine back to XX base, made his report and fell dead. When examined it was found that *rigor mortis* had already set in. He had been killed two hours before, and it was the Bushido spirit that carried him on."

But perhaps the best of the whole lot is this one:—"The pilot of the Nippon fighter aircraft had shot down several of the enemy and run out of ammunition. Then he was attacked by a Spitfire and, having some important information to report, he did not wish to crash into the enemy. Suddenly he remembered a rice cake he had in his aircraft, and manoeuvring carefully, he threw the rice cake at his hated enemy, hitting the pilot on the head and causing him to crash. For this brilliant piece of strategy the Nippon pilot was awarded a citation."

I know it's hard to believe. I know Mr. Ripley has been completely outdone, but I also know that several thousand prisoners saw these papers and are aware that they were published in all seriousness.

One day, at the end of November, we were rushed back to camp at midday and suspected the worst; it proved to be another draft. At 5.30 p.m. the chosen ones were warned, at 6.30, when the rain was pouring down into a sea of mud, we were ready to leave for Cycle Camp in open trucks. I barely had time to bury my notes in the container I had prepared, and only managed to cover them with six inches of earth. Several months later I learned that when prisoners were renewing some posts eaten by white ants the notes were discovered. They were taken to the British C.O. who, on discovering their contents, ordered them to be destroyed. He was afraid the Nips would discover them and hold him responsible! And so I risked my life for nothing and lost the result of twelve months' work, including the manuscript of a novel which was almost completed.

This record from April, 1943, has been re-written from a brief duplicate diary which I kept sewn into the back of my shirt. The Nips never thought of looking there.

Chapter Fifteen

SONE, THE SADIST

"THERE ARE TWO LOTS OF PRISONERS IN THIS camp," said a Korean guard. "Ones with rifles and ones without."

Like a doomed man entering the condemned cell, we heard the gate of Cycle Camp clang shut for the second time.

The camp itself was a vast improvement on Jaar Markt and Makasura, but the whole atmosphere of the place was depressing, the nervous tension mounting as we realised that it was the jumping-off place to the unknown.

At any moment of the day and night a special parade might be held, a thousand men selected without the slightest regard for their physical condition, a thousand victims damned to suffer the tortures of a Nippon hell-ship with less than a fifty-fifty chance of survival. Soné held our lives in his cruel hands.

He searched us on arrival, throwing our kit in all directions and tramping on the mess in his muddy boots, commandeering all pencils, paper, brushes, combs, blade razors, trinkets and any scraps of food we had saved. Wearily we tried to collect our possessions when he had gone, but he returned screaming that some gunny sacks had been stolen, and that he would take all our kit unless they were found. Again he searched everything with that same mad display of hate. We stood stiffly at attention for hours and watched him as if he were a Frankenstein monster.

He was, and at full moon he became much worse than usual.

A few days before he had paraded three hundred Ambonese and bashed the lot himself. Then he had grabbed a little old man and tried to drown him in a large barrel of water, shoving him in head first. If the Ambon's struggles

had not upset the barrel there would have been another murder on the Cycle Camp roll.

In the cells there were two American merchant officers, condemned to fifty-seven days on pap and water because American aircraft were reported to have sunk a Jap hospital ship. An Australian Captain was in solitary for two months for failing to send home a "rubber stamp" letter containing such phrases as "The Nipponese treat us well and we have plenty of food, so do not worry"; "I am very happy here, but I long to be back in my sweet home."

Although Soné was always looking for blood, his most callous crime was allowing two men, who had been shot, to die unnecessarily. These men worked on an early shift in the cookhouse, and one night in January, 1943, they were called over to the fence by a guard.

"You want buy cigarettes?" asked the guard, and on being told that they did, he ordered them to wait and went off to his barracks. A few minutes later a second guard patrolled past, and seeing the two cooks near the fence, he immediately shot them each in the stomach.

A Dutch doctor rushed out, but was chased away. The men eventually were carried to Soné's office, where they were left for three hours without attention, in spite of the doctor's pleas to attend to them. At last he was given permission, and reported that they had a very good chance of recovery. The injured men were then moved to the outside hospital, and there they were left in a room without attention until they died two days later.

Our first personal experience of Soné's methods was not long in coming. On evening parade, at 7.30 p.m., the bare announcement was made that a picture-show would be held at 8 o'clock. We had previously seen a bad fake of the attack on Pearl Harbour and the sinking of the "Prince of Wales," and knowing what to expect, most of the camp of four thousand men made no attempt to crowd into a theatre which held a tightly-packed thousand.

The capacity made no difference to Soné. Soon after 8 o'clock he placed a ring of guards round the theatre, and everyone in camp who was not inside was ordered on parade. Sick men were dragged from their beds, and anyone leaving the theatre before the picture was finished was seized by the guards and paraded with the rest.

Those of us who comprised the audience sat on the floor for three and a half hours and witnessed the most boring performance I have ever seen. It was a movie of Nippon physical training methods, which, if curtailed to twenty minutes, might have been a passable educational film, but when dragged out to ten times that length was just a pain in the eyes. An exercise comprising fifty knee-bends would be photographed showing every one of the fifty without an instant's variation, and so it went on. Ennui unending.

When we finally came up for air it was to find the camp deserted. At two o'clock in the morning the delinquents returned, having been stood at attention for six hours, and harangued and bashed by Soné. Now they had to write an essay on "Why I didn't go to the Pictures," the three thousand essays to be typed (on three typewriters) by ten o'clock the next morning.

As a punishment for the failure of this impossible condition the canteen was closed for three months, and the cigarette-factory closed for a fortnight, after which the price was increased four hundred per cent. Soné made about fifteen thousand guilders a month out of these cigarettes from then on, but in spite of his profiteering the Australian Captain in charge had put over a bluff which went on for years. The Australian had persuaded the Nips that the vile native tobacco was unsmokeable unless treated with coffee and sugar, so large quantities of these luxuries were delivered to the factory. The tobacco was steamed and made reasonably mild, and Soné unknowingly supplied sugared coffee to the Captain and his friends.

It was easy to bluff these suspicious Nips, although sometimes a prisoner became too daring and paid the penalty.

Dutch doctors would inject venereal Nips with water, charge them high prices, and guarantee a permanent cure in several years' time. One Nip who was very badly diseased demanded some M. & B. tablets from an orderly. These were unprocurable, but the orderly rose to the occasion by selling a few aspirin tablets at about £8 each, blaming the high price on the fact that they had to be stolen from the hospital. There were stories that the Jap army punishment was death for an unlawful disease, the only treatment they supplied, and their soldiers would pay any price (in un-numbered notes) for a "cure." The woman in the case, if discovered, was "cured" with a red hot poker applied internally.

Just before Christmas the first draft of sick slaves returned from Haroekoe. These were some of the men who had left Jaar Markt in April, six thousand one hundred and twenty men, of whom over a thousand were already dead. On the little island of Haroekoe, to the east of Ambon, two thousand and seventy British prisoners were dumped without shelter, and when this sick draft of six hundred and fifty men left there on 22nd November, three hundred and sixty-seven of them were dead. Fourteen more died on the return voyage.

From Ambon, another ship with four hundred and seventy-four sick on board disappeared without a single survivor. We were appalled by this massacre of men we knew so well.

There was no need to hear their story, for their prematurely aged faces spoke pathetically for them. More than half of them were moved at once into the outside hospital, lying on the floor of open trucks, covered with sores, filth and lice; we caught only a glimpse of them as we were chased into our compounds, but that was more than enough to freeze us with horror.

The men who could stand were isolated at the far end of the camp and we were forbidden to speak to them. It seemed incredible that such skeletons could still retain a spark of life: staring eyes, beak-like noses, retracted lips, a green-

grey skin, shoulder blades like knife edges cutting through the skin, knee-joints twice as thick as thighs, biceps thinner than wrists, and ribs almost devoid of covering. Yet their ankles and stomachs were bloated horribly.

And these were the men not ill enough to go to hospital. Many completely blind men had gone; many of those who remained could see only a few feet!

I was on cookhouse duty a week later when a tall young Englishman dragged his swollen feet over to the fence. There was something slightly familiar about his gaunt face, but I couldn't be sure I had seen it before, so I glanced away, rather embarrassed at displaying curiosity. He stared at me with watery eyes, less than a yard away, then croaked hoarsely: "It is you, sir, isn't it? Don't you remember me at Jaar Markt?"

"Yes, of course I do, old chap," I said hurriedly. "You're not looking too bad."

"Oh, I'm getting along nicely, sir. I can't see too well, but I can walk a bit, and I've gained a bit of weight. I'm over fifty pounds now."

"Suddenly I remembered him, in spite of that old man's voice. Age twenty-three, height six feet two, weight over one hundred and seventy. But that was nine months ago, when he could still lift a bag of rice. Now he stood about five feet eight — and weighed fifty pounds!

"Most of the blokes you knew are gone, sir. The old Flight-Sergeant, and Taffy. . . ." He called over a score of names. "Dysentery first, then beri-beri. We hadn't a hope. About forty chaps were left behind who were too ill to travel. They haven't a ghost of a chance."

An approaching Nip guard interrupted the conversation.

But even the callous Nip doctor was moved by the sight of those prisoners in hospital.

"I would not have believed that Nippon officers could treat their prisoners like this," he said.

Gradually we pieced together their story. The six ships in Sourabaya harbour were fully loaded by 18th March, yet

for five hellish days the prisoners remained there, stewing in that terrific heat. Those in the bottom of the holds slept on petrol drums and bombs, packed so tight that they could not lie down, living on one small cup of water and two plates of pap daily. There were no washing or hygiene facilities, and almost at once dysentery broke out with all its corresponding filthiness under such conditions.

The ships sailed at last in convoy, and after a few days three ships turned south to Flores with two thousand men on board. The others went on to Ambon, where they arrived about the 1st of May.

At once the half-starved men were put on to unloading the ships, working day and night, with scarcely a break, getting one plate of pap in twenty-four hours. When the ships were unloaded the draft was split up into parties, a thousand of them going to Amahai in Ceram, one thousand and fifty to Liang on the heights of Ambon, and two thousand and seventy to Haroeckoe, where they camped near the coast about thirty feet above sea level.

It was the middle of the wet season, but there was no shelter, no hospital or drugs, and very little food. For the first three days the men got one meal daily of rice and seaweed while they worked furiously to erect huts of bamboo and atap. Dysentery was spreading like wildfire, but the sick men must lie in the mud and pouring rain.

Then the Nips demanded twelve hundred men to work on an aerodrome three miles away in the hills. From dawn till dark they toiled at levelling a coral outcrop, chopping away at the hard rock with light, useless *chunkuls*, carrying their loads of soil in baskets, cutting and scratching themselves on the sharp coral. In pitch darkness they staggered back to camp and tried to find a meal in pouring rain, while more and more men fell sick each day.

In two weeks the M.O. reported that over a hundred men had no chance of recovery. The others were appalled at the swift hand of death, and looked tragically at their comrades, wondering who would be the next to go.

By the end of May twelve hundred and fifty men were suffering the agonies of dysentery, and deaths were mounting daily. The doctors begged the Nips for drugs, but nothing was done until a Nip doctor turned up and injected eight men with a serum which killed them in a few days. The first hut completed was used as a hospital, yet it could hold only a small percentage of the sick, who must still lie on the mud floor over which the heavy rain rushed in torrents.

Even in their weakness men were bashed out of the hospital and forced to work. All the sick were put on half rations to discourage malingering, and Kasiana went strutting through the hut, screeching, "English swine! You're no good. Hurry up and die!" The condition of the patients was almost indescribable. Those who were too weak to move lay in their excreta, with maggots crawling from their nostrils and openings of the body, while they were still alive. So tightly packed were they that stronger men must drag their bodies over their comrades, showering them with filth as another spasm racked stomachs too weak to resist.

The stench blended with the odour of death, for it was not unusual to find, in the morning, a dozen dead bodies among the living, a dozen murdered men who had passed on while one flickering candle lighted the ghastly scene.

At last the Nips realised that something must be done, or their aerodrome would never be built. Working parties were stopped. The few hundred men still fit to work were put to cleaning up the camp, making drains and roads, building huts and digging latrines. Each hut as it was completed became a hospital, and gradually bamboo platforms were built for beds.

A Nip officer inspected the camp and made the suggestion that these huts, six inches deep in mud, should have a door-mat! Permission to bathe in the sea was refused on the basis that the sea was polluted by natives, so prisoners could bathe only in the river some distance away.

Working parties began again and were treated more severely than ever. Terrific beatings were administered for

the slightest sign of laziness, and sick men were bashed with bamboo poles just because they were sick and could not work. Hospital patients were fed nothing but pap.

More than three hundred men died, and it became increasingly difficult to get funeral parties to bury them, for men working all day on the aerodrome were tired out when they returned, to find a dozen or more emaciated corpses which must be buried at once. Only bamboo coffins were supplied, leaking the foul excrements of the dead on to the pall-bearers as they were carried through the darkness of the jungle for a quarter of a mile to their last resting place. Nip guards frolicked and laughed while a British officer said a few words of farewell, then sometimes they raced each other in filling the shallow grave.

After seven months of hell the first sick draft was sent back, and from them we learnt these details.

A few days after their arrival in Cycle, twenty-seven prisoners were put in solitary for speaking to the men from Harockoe. Soon afterwards, fourteen officers were jailed because they hired a man to do their dhobie. Soné took every possible opportunity of making prisoners more miserable; his unending blitz brought nerves to breaking point; his humiliation of officers, whom he forced to work in the kitchen and bakery, cooking for native troops, being part of his policy to belittle the authority of officers senior in rank to his own.

One morning there was a sudden parade of the whole camp without the slightest warning — obviously another search. I had hidden my notes among the three thousand books in the library, so the odds were about three thousand to one against discovery. A search of my kit would reveal nothing incriminating.

After three hours on parade there was a terrific commotion as a guard came running up to Soné with some pistol bullets he had found in the kit of an Australian Sergeant-Major. The Sergeant-Major was hauled off, and a tremor

went through the Australian ranks with the whisper that the S.M. had a pistol sewn into the false back of his pack.

For an hour the tension was acute. The punishment was death. There would be no mercy.

Then the S.M. was marched off to solitary, and a few minutes later the whisper spread that the S.M.'s pack was searched again, shaken upside down, but the pistol was not discovered by these unimaginative Nips. What an escape!

But not for me. A few minutes later every book in the camp was carted off to the Nip office, including the copy of "Famous Trials" in which my notes were hidden — damning notes with details of the Haroekoe draft and a list of Soné's crimes.

I lay awake that night choosing between the sword, the bayonet, or a nice quick bullet. Not that I would have any choice. At least, I thought, it would be a relief to get it over, a relief from the nervous strain of this intolerable waiting for an unknown finish. Still I hoped that Fate, which had been kind so far, would see me through.

Next day volunteers were called for to sort the books into various categories. We were given a list of books to be banned — a fantastic list apparently compiled by a Nip who knew a number of English words — including "Ariel," a romantic biography of Shelley by André Maurois, but apparently associated in the Nip mind with wireless sets.

Soné was searching through a huge pile of papers in the middle of the office, for every scrap of paper — toilet, cigarette and writing — had been removed from the camp. Drawings and paintings which prisoners had spent months in completing were to be ruthlessly destroyed, together with hundreds of photographs of wives and children. We hated Soné more than ever for such vandalism.

He turned his attention to a pile of books I had started sorting. I knew I must find "Famous Trials" before he did. It was a rickety pile four feet high by eight feet long, and I searched desperately with an eye on Soné.

Oh, God! There it was, right in front of him. He

couldn't fail to pick it up. I gathered an armful of books piled above my head, staggered with them blindly, and fell over the pile in front of Soné, knocking it crashing. He yelled at me like a wild beast, kicked me in the shins, and ordered me to tidy up the mess while he moved back to the pile of papers.

A few minutes later the notes were inside my shirt, but the sorters were being searched as they went off for lunch. I searched desperately for a hiding place.

There was nothing else for it. I was sweating with fright and heat, so I tucked those notes under my armpit and rubbed them with my arm until they were a soggy mess. When I looked at them again they were quite indecipherable, so they joined the pile of rubbish.

That habit of pouring with sweat when I have the wind up had possibly saved my life!

Chapter Sixteen

TO-MORROW AND TO-MORROW AND TO-MORROW

IN A FEW MONTHS THE NIPS REQUIRED SOME books to be bound, and I took on the job, scrounging some materials in the process. When the books were finally returned, I took charge of the bindery, and from then on I had an excuse to be in possession of paper, and manuscripts could be safely hidden by binding into the book-covers.

So passed some of the worst months of 1943, when Time seemed to move as slowly as a glacier, with our wasting bodies the moraine it was overwhelming — useless debris returning to dust. We had no private lives, no privacy, no privy even where man could be alone with nature, for the reflections in the drain-water were sordidly revealing. We shared our pay, our food, our dreams, our hopes. We gossiped about each other's sexual development and mental aberrations in a casual, atrophied sort of way, then suddenly became interested in a padre who had not had a bath for ten days. We bet excitedly on the date of his next wash, and wondered whether he had rabies or scabies.

A Dutch officer I had known in Jaar Markt went round with such a look of frozen horror on his face that I was afraid he was going insane.

"Come and let me teach you bookbinding," I suggested. "It will keep your mind occupied."

He wasn't interested.

"All my friends are dead," he repeated over and over.

"Yes, but you must forget that. Life has to go on."

"*Meminisse quam oblivisci facilius*," he declared sadly.

It is easier to remember than to forget.

"I've just been reading Dante's 'Inferno,' I told him. 'In Canto V' he says:

'There is no greater pang than to recall in our misery
The time when we were happy.'

"But it's a pang that helps by its very sweetness to wipe out these bitter thoughts of the present. Come and sit down and I'll tell you about the best holiday in the world."

For two hours I talked myself hoarse about the wonders of the Great Barrier Reef and the plans I had for making Point Lookout into a tourists' paradise. I was carried away by happy memories, and that night I slept better than I had done for months.

The next evening the Dutchman brought five of his friends and wanted me to repeat the performance, and so it went on. In a few months I had the satisfaction of feeling that hundreds of Dutch and Englishmen had a better impression of Queensland than before I set up in business as a spruiker.

The nightly talks became an institution in spite of Japanese prohibition, and did a tremendous lot towards alleviating our boredom. It was amazing how varied was the range of subjects that were covered — The Cocos Islands; Spanish Civil War; Life on a Cattle Station; Irrigation; Windjamming Round the Horn; Singapore; Burma; The Philippines; Naval Tactics; Gold Mining in South Africa; Big Game Hunting; American National Parks; New Zealand; Wimbledon; Sugar, Coffee and Quinine Growing in Java; The American Constitution; Modern Oil Boring Methods and many technical subjects — all personal experiences of men from all over the world.

In the darkness we sat under the spreading tamarind and mahogany trees in the compound, and forgot the sordid surroundings as pictures were painted of a different world. Even the threat of severe punishment, if discovered in a group, could not distract our attention or spoil the soothing effect of this mental anaesthesia.

Another thing that kept our minds occupied was the invention of prison-camp industries, which almost need a story to themselves. For, with practically no assistance from

the Nips in the way of machinery and raw materials, experiments proved it possible to make soap, lead pencils, carbon and writing paper, yeast, medicine, and alcohol; to unravel cotton puttees and run a tailor's shop and bookbindery. A blacksmith's shop and a garage were set up, workshop machinery constructed. We manufactured cigarettes and cigars, toothbrushes and sets of duralumin false teeth, spectacle frames and glasses, artificial limbs, crutches, and a hand that worked.

The sabotage we managed to carry out when forced to work on Nippon war-materials varied from damaging aircraft engines to bending the lugs on bombs, putting sand in lubricating oil, water and dirt in petrol, and making petrol-drums leak. The cleverest thing I saw was the making of a time-ignition bomb to blow up a petrol-dump near Priok, but unfortunately the inventor, Sub-Lieutenant Sharples, was moved to another camp before it could be used. All these little ideas helped to keep up our morale, and helped to allay any disappointment we felt when early attempts proved the impossibility of escaping from Java by boat.

But our happiest achievement was the way in which, through all those years of entombment, we managed to keep in touch with the living world and heard of events that might ultimately bring freedom to us and to mankind as a whole — the Battle of the Coral Sea, Stalingrad, the invasion of North Africa.

For, O Nippon! we endured the starvation methods of Kawabe, the callous cruelties of Anami, the indifference of Tanaka, the bashings of Kasiyama, and the ruthless searches of Soné, and all the time, like little Audrey, we laughed and laughed and laughed at your ape-like efforts.

For you never found one of our secret wireless sets! There was at least one set in every camp I was in. . . .

Some of my fellow-prisoners have protested against giving the details of the hiding places of these sets, in view of their use by future prisoners of war! For a while I was almost persuaded they were right, but if the atomic bomb

is as powerful as we have heard, then surely there can be no more wars and no more prisoners. So here is the history of one wireless set, and the officer who risked his life night after night to supply us with a hearty raspberry against Nippon propaganda.

Among the many things he missed in prison, Pilot-Officer H. C. found the lack of music to be the most disappointing. In Australia, Jim Davidson's band were frequent visitors to his home, where he had built his own recording apparatus to reproduce not only their gay renderings but also their unprintable wisecracks. Ever since wireless had become practical he had made dozens of sets of all shapes and sizes, and later, when sound movies claimed his fancy, several films with synchronised sound recording had been successfully attempted. It would scarcely be exaggerating to say that Marconi could have taught him very little about wireless.

For a few weeks he wandered around the prison camp with an idea simmering at the back of his brain. Then he was accused by a Nip guard of not saluting quickly enough, and hauled before an officer who liked to demonstrate his ju-jitsu. When H.— woke up he found himself in a stone cell and covered with blood.

At that moment he swore to get even with his temporary victor, whose method of making the punishment fit the crime was so out of proportion. His idea developed into a secret wireless set, an ideal method of satisfying his desire for revenge, and he decided to accept the risks involved. The Nip papers had reported two civilians shot and two women sentenced to ten years for listening to overseas broadcasts. He knew that discovery would mean a firing party for him in quick time. The first thing was to provide an efficient hiding place against search. A tin trunk was buried in a large box in the garden and a removable flower bed built on top. The next thing was to manufacture an efficient set.

Scouts were arranged among the various working parties and reported the discovery of any electrical apparatus. He

would go out next day, select the parts he could use and bring them in strapped to the small of his back. The guard never seemed to search there. Gradually he collected valves and parts for transformers and earphones, never once being discovered in his smuggling act. It was very satisfying to outwit these lecherous searchers.

The set was a complete success. San Francisco and the B.B.C. were invariably clear enough to hear the news, but the position of the set in the open would not allow of listening for long periods. A miniature set was required if H.— were to indulge his passion for music. Then came a move to another camp. The whole collecting process had to be repeated, but this time a smaller set was built into the false bottom of a kerosene tin which was kept full of water. It was quite a satisfactory blind, but possibly subject to accident. With plenty of spares now available, H.— set his brain to work on something safer.

Furniture was almost unknown, but a number of stools had been knocked together out of odds and ends. A sliding top was made for a hollowed-out board used for the seat, and the whole set was neatly fitted into the space. The stool was parked under a tree during the day, a harmless looking piece of wood unsuspected by any one except a few prisoners in the know. Then one day a special parade was called in front of the hut where the stool was used. The Nip sergeant in charge looked around for a seat, picked up the stool and carried it several yards. H.— watched with his heart in his mouth, fearing the extra weight would give him away, then endured agonies for the next hour while the sergeant sat on his death sentence.

That night H.— started work on a new idea. He hollowed out the centre of a book and, by using miniature acorn valves, was able to fit the whole set inside. It was a wonderful piece of ingenuity and painstaking work, and the book seldom left his hand, except when it was hidden.

He now felt fairly safe against a special search, for the Nips were obviously looking for something large, but there

was still the possibility that an inquisitive guard would wander in looking for anything he could scrounge. The library had previously been closed, and all books inspected at the Nip office. It might occur again. An absolutely fool-proof hideout was needed.

H.— had now reduced the actual set to $3\frac{1}{2} \times 2 \times 1\frac{1}{2}$, and still obtained perfect reception. A one-legged American was carrying a set about inside his artificial leg, but H.— scarcely thought it worthwhile to have his leg cut off. He considered legs for a while, suddenly remembered the thick wooden clogs that all prisoners wore in place of shoes, and the idea was born.

In a few days his years of mental strain were over, for he felt absolutely confident that danger of discovery was past. In the toe of one clog was the set itself covered with a removable rubber sole, and in the heel, the earphones; the other clog contained the transformer and bits and pieces. It would take more brains than a Nip coolie possessed to discover his walking wireless.

But after 1943 only for very brief periods were the officers in various prison camps given news bulletins, and often these were passed on from mouth to mouth as being translations of smuggled Nip newspapers. This naturally allowed a tremendous crop of rumours to spring up, and many a severe disappointment we have experienced when these rumours were disproved. At least two cases are known where gullible officers paid unscrupulous O.R.'s for news which was guaranteed to come from a secret set which did not exist, and it is certain that the Dutch often spread false rumours to cover up and confuse the real news which they were spreading. None of this was H.—'s fault. His news service was strictly controlled by senior officers, and for the last six months he was working as military intelligence, and subject to court martial if he opened his mouth to the wrong person or even his best friend.

I sincerely hope that his valiant services have been remembered.

Chapter Seventeen

BATAVIA

THAT YEAR OF 1944, AT BATAVIA, WAS ONE of unrest and despair, shot with gleams of hope. Consumption was rapidly increasing. Of the three thousand men in camp, five hundred were suffering badly from lack of vitamins—debility, anaemia, neuritis, burning pains, beri beri, night blindness, skin diseases and pellagra. But the frightful tales brought back by the remnants of those who had been drafted off to work in other places—such as Liang, in Ambon—made us cling to the ills we knew and dread being taken away.

Drafts of men, including doctors, were being sent to Nippon, crowded into small, slow transports like sheep in a pen. For days we stood on parade while men all around us were chosen at the whim of a Jap coolie. He was our sword of Damocles, ready to fall on any prisoner who was not sufficiently servile. Meanwhile, from the outside world came whispers of great things afoot—whispers that made us refer feverishly to the maps and well-worn tracings we had hidden in odd places. We had no illusion as to what would happen to us if such things were discovered, but they were so important to our mental welfare that we cheerfully took the risk of secreting them.

Perhaps the atmosphere of those months is best conveyed by extracts from my diary.

June 9th, 1944. Terrific excitement and a new high in morale when a working-party hears from "a woman on a bicycle" that Europe has been invaded. We don't dare to believe it at first, after so many disappointments, but an officer returned from the outside hospital has all the details from overhearing a Nip broadcast. "It won't be long, now," we whisper, and try to hide our grins whenever a guard is in the offing.

"Do Americans bashy-bashy?" one of them asks next day.

"No, of course not," he is told. "It wouldn't be democratic."

"But they shoot all prisoners," the guard insists. "Our officers tell us that."

"Well, they never used to. But naturally they'll treat their prisoners the same as we're treated."

The guard looks very worried and slouches off.

June 24th. When the Nip paymaster came in yesterday to pay the officers, he left on his seat a copy of the "Java Shimbun," printed in Hirogana. In a flash the paper disappeared, and before long our translators were at work. It is true; the invasion has really happened. Some of the names, like Caen and St. Lo, don't mean much to us, but there doesn't seem any doubt that we've got a footing in France. We try to keep our mind fixed on the news and forget the latest Nip ration, which is offal. Intestines and stomachs of the cattle that feed the Nip army, dripping with blood and excreta, and none too fresh. The cooks clean the guts as well as possible and chop them up to flavour the jungle soup. By now all dogs, cats and sparrows have disappeared from the camp.

June 30th. Alteration of records cards in the Nip office reveals that the last draft disembarked at Singapore. They seem destined to add another slave-gang to that terrible Thailand railway; we have heard stories of heavy losses there from cholera and typhus.

Nip papers are being smuggled into camp fairly frequently, but we must be careful in spreading the news, for it is known that there are at least ten spies in camp, including a German, who swears he will cut his throat if Germany capitulates. There are rumours that Russia has declared war on Japan.

July 4th. During twenty-eight months as prisoners, the Nips have issued us with only two hand towels, a pair of drawers, and a straw hat. We are very short of clothes, and

the sight of the torn, discoloured singlets, the ragged shorts of many patches, the filthy mosquito nets in our hut, would shame a blacks' camp. Yet there is one thing some of the officers take pride in — their towels! Though their edges are tasselled, their centres still exhibit the famous names of Raffles Hotel, Singapore Swimming Club, Straits Steamship Company, Hotel des Indes, and Koningklijke Paketvaart Matschappij. Our present situation may be a low one, but these names guarantee our past!

July 29th. Five hundred civilians, with a yelling, screaming, slobbering madman, are brought into camp. It is terrible to see this poor shell of a human being, his hands tied behind his back and a noose round his neck, being driven along with a whip by a leering guard. As the draft left the station, apparently, this man saw his wife waving in the distance and called out to her. At once the guards pounced upon him and bashed him horribly, and at this brutal assault the last remnants of his reason fled. How shocking for the wife who watched it all!

The new guards who accompanied this draft have started with the usual blitz, hiding in out-of-the-way places and catching men who do not salute soon enough. Their first victims were two Dutchmen who have been forced to stand in the sun without hats and bow one thousand times. The only amusing thing about this is that the guards return the salutes — in relays. Usually they don't bother to return salutes at all.

August 8th. Again rumours of German capitulation. So many rumours have come true lately that we dare to hope once more, but the smuggled "Java Shimbun" is full of a new German secret weapon, the V2, which has caused the evacuation of London. Hope dies hard, and the English who have families in London naturally show the strain more than the rest of us.

From Bandoeng another five hundred comes in, and sixteen hundred are reprieved by the cancellation of a draft to Sumatra. But there is definite news that the draft that

left on June 23rd has been sunk off Nagasaki, and only two hundred and twelve saved out of seven hundred. The clerks smuggle in the list of names from the office, and we anxiously check up on the names of friends whose fate might have been our own.

Colonel Kawabe is the ape we hold directly responsible. A Dutch officer has just told me that Kawabe was wanted by the Dutch police before the war for embezzling the funds of his firm at Djockja. I am surprised he had sufficient intelligence to get away from them; his appearance suggests that he got away from a zoo.

August 10th. Is there any significance in the way these guards are suddenly wanting to learn English? This morning one slouched up to me with a grin, saying: "Tinkle, tinkle ittle star . . . More, More!"

So I was forced to spend half an hour teaching him to say:

*Tinkle, tinkle, ittle star,
What a noise you make up thar!
Thirty thousand feet you fly
Like a Fortress in the sky.*

He went away, very pleased with himself.

August 19th. All the Chinese in camp have been released at half an hour's notice — just hustled out of camp to fend for themselves. But they are not worried. "Our friends have plenty money," they tell us. "We Chinese look after one another."

To-day our first genuine siren-warning ended in another disappointment. We were hustled into the barracks while the guards covered the whole camp with tommy-guns: but nothing happened. There are rumours of a great Russian advance, and Germany suing for peace. The Russians have crossed the frontier.

September 2nd. A few more letters released to-day, most of them at least sixteen months old. They talk of sending parcels, but we all agree that we prefer to go without, rather than see these thieving guards help themselves first.

A Dutch engineer was killed last night by a guard who was hiding among the castor-oil bushes along the edge of the main road. The engineer, who was talking to his brother, had his back to the road when the guard sprang out. The brother saluted at once, upon which the engineer also turned and saluted, but the guard accused him of being too slow.

"Take off your spectacles," he ordered.

The engineer did so, and stood at attention. Measuring him off, the guard swung-hit him a terrific blow on the jaw. The engineer fell like a log splitting his head on the asphalt, and died during the night.

I was only a few yards away, and was depressed by the thought that this sort of thing can happen to any of us at any time.

September 7th. Soné, now a captain in charge of the women's camps, is reported to have his hands full. When he took over one camp he paraded all the women and started to make his usual blustering, bullying speech. The brave Dutchwomen showed what they thought of this by immediately howling him down, and the louder he yelled the harder they howled back, until he was forced to retire with his tail between his legs.

Then the women remembered Soné's reputation and realised they had gone too far, for they dressed two pretty little girls in their best and gave them each a large bunch of flowers from the garden to present to Soné as a peace-offering. Rumour says he received the flowers with tears in his evil eyes, but I'm afraid his loss of face will goad him on to reprisals.

September 9th. A Dutch M.O. was told by a Nip (with whom he is much too friendly) that we will all leave for Nippon within a month. There is every reason to believe him, and the news hangs over us like a cloud of poison gas. How many of us would survive a month's voyage in one of those horror-ships, packed like sardines, with American submarines waiting for their prey? We are given permission to write a letter home, always a bad sign.

There is a report that Alan Groom is working in the garden of the Soekamiskin prison at Bandoeng. We hope fervently that the news is true.

September 15th. Another fifteen hundred leave, half of them old or unfit men. It can't be a working-party; it doesn't conform with the usual regulations for a draft to Japan. Soon rumours spread that they are going to be wiped out. We don't feel happy.

This morning the Nip doctor called a parade for the rest of the camp. We lined up ten abreast without shirts while he gave us a quick glance.

"Ush!" he yelled, and glanced at the next ten. Again, "Ush!" Ten men per second. The Nip idea of a medical examination.

"He might be able to tell if we were in the family way; he couldn't tell anything else," said the Humorist.

September 20th. Still here. Having been passed as fit by the casual glance of the Nip "quack" we resign ourselves to our fate. Now the uncertainty is over the waiting doesn't seem so bad, for there is nothing we can do but accept the destiny for which thirty months in prison has prepared us.

To-day we could laugh at the experience of an Australian, who is a champion scrounger, in the Nip cookhouse. He was just knocking off work when a large basket of fresh liver was brought in, and as soon as the Nip's back was turned he grabbed the best piece of liver, stuck it on the top of his head, and pulled his straw hat over it. A few minutes later he was hurrying back to his billet when he almost collided with one of the guards he knew quite well.

"Why you no kirei?" grunted the guard, and gave him quite a light slap on the side of the head.

But by this time the liver had leaked considerably, and when the slap dislodged the Aussie's hat a thick stream of blood suddenly flowed down his face.

"Apa?" grunted the amazed Nip. "Me sorry. No mean hurt you. Don't tell officer. Come my hut, I fix."

"No: I'm O.K.," muttered the Aussie. "I'll call at the hospital and get a bit of plaster. It'll be jake."

"No, no. Bleed very much. Me very sorry. You let me stop blood."

That Aussie had a difficult five minutes before he could persuade the Nip to let him go, dripping with blood, but with the liver still saved for his supper."

September 24th. This morning a Mitchell aircraft with Dutch markings flew straight over the camp at about two hundred feet, but the leaflets it dropped all missed the mark. It is the first Allied aircraft we have seen, and for a while we speculated hopefully as to whether it was the beginning of the Allied offensive. Twenty minutes after it passed the air-raid siren blew, and we crowded cheerfully into the barracks, grinning silently at the Nip warning system. By the time the "all clear" went, though, the grins had worn off: it was just another disappointment.

Early this evening a Dutch officer, returning with a working-party, announced that Churchill was dead. It was like a personal loss to the English-speaking prisoners, and we felt very subdued till the Dutch officer was interrogated.

"Where did you get this information?"

"Oh, I don't know, exactly. It might have been on the leaflets."

"Then you don't know for certain it's true?"

"No; some of the men on the working-party said they heard it. But it might be just wishful thinking."

No wonder we have disagreements with the Dutch.

Somehow the number of rumours, supposed to originate in those leaflets, made us more confused than ever, and sharpened the nervous tension throughout the camp. Stories of everything from the landing in Europe (which the "Voice of Nippon" had not yet disclosed) to the capitulation of Germany and an invasion of the Philippines! There was nothing to relieve the strain. No books, no amusements: only work and talk; and the talk led inevitably to specula-

tions as to whether the reported bombing of Japanese cities would lead to reprisals against prisoners.

On October 27th there was a special parade at 20.00 hours and a list of names was read out, comprising nearly every officer in the camp. For months we had heard rumours of an officer's draft, and apparently this was it. It won't be long now, we felt. Rumours flitted about like the fireflies of that dark night. We were to be packed on one of the hell-ships and freighted to Japan.

After rising at four a.m. to pack and be searched and pack again, we joined a party from Makasura and marched to the station, bundling into fourth-class carriages that were so crowded we could hardly breathe. Even at that hour the heat was terrific.

Dame Rumour flew down the train, clad in black. One of the guards had stated that the southern regions were cut off from Japan, but that our hulk would try to get through, escorted by a destroyer. I remember feeling slightly sick.

"My stomach is a swirling pool of burning hot acid," grinned the Humorist.

The train moved at last, slowly jerking and clattering along, with frequent stops. It seemed reluctant to act the part of a hearse. Dame Rumour appeared again, this time dressed in a golden robe of hope.

"We're all going to an officers' camp at Bandoeng," the word was passed along.

Some were sceptical, but a Dutch officer considered the matter judicially:

"We'll soon know. There's a junction a few miles further on at Manggarai. If we turn right there, it means the docks and the death-ship; if we turn left, we're on the way inland."

Alas, we turned right.

"Fifty to one on Bandoeng still," called the Humorist generously, and bets were bandied back and forth.

"They always told me I wasn't born to be hanged,"

said someone. "Drowning's a nice, clean death, and I don't reckon there are many sharks off Nippon."

"If there are, they'll all have yellow fever by now from eating Nips," came the reply.

The train stopped after a few miles. Through a broken shutter a crowd of Dutch officers, who had gone to Strijswijk camp several months before, could be seen coming aboard. We felt that the ship would certainly be crowded.

Then came a grinding jerk — from the other end. We cheered lustily (for the carriage was too crowded to allow the guards to get at us) as the train moved back to the main line. We were on the way to Bandoeng.

The country air tasted mighty sweet.

Chapter Eighteen

REPRIEVE

IT WAS CERTAINLY A REPRIEVE, FOR MOST OF us were convinced that the chance of survival on one of the oversea drafts was small. We passed mile after mile of dead, untended paddy-fields that showed no signs of life. Even the ubiquitous white egrets had deserted the once-rich plains near Krawang that had fed millions of natives. Thousands of acres of teak afforestation were ringbarked and dead, the Japs using the timber as fuel for the railway-engines.

At the stations hundreds of natives were milling around, their rags and patches but a travesty of their former brightness. They would sell an egg for a silver ten-cent piece, yet demand two guilders in Nippon currency. On all sides the results of enemy occupation were just what we expected.

"We told them they couldn't run the country without us," said a Dutch engineer complacently. "The intricate system of canals regulating the water-supply has been their greatest difficulty, for the natives didn't know the least thing about it. That's why the rice-crop has failed in some districts."

"Yet these natives don't look starved."

"They're not; not in the country. They can always grow their ubi and tapioca and vegetables. It's in the cities that they suffer. There's plenty of food in Java, but distribution is the problem now."

The hundred-mile trip to Bandoeng took eleven hours, and from the station we were marched, flat-out as usual, to the camp. Most of us arrived completely exhausted, staggering all over the road like a flock of drunken ducks. The Humorist stopped to stare at the dozens of pretty Eurasian girls standing in the distance to see us pass.

"I'd rather have a good feed," he decided with a grin.

The camp had been last used by natives a long while before, and was filthy and insanitary, but at least it was a camp. We would be able to make ourselves fairly secure for a while, throwing up the protective coverings with which wary animals defend themselves against a hostile world.

Over us all lorded Kasiama, a bash-happy civilian and arch-racketeer, who was well known to the men from Ambon. He immediately started to show the fourteen hundred officers that the war was not over and that he was our master. His blitz was relentless and unceasing. "The higher they come, the harder they fall," seemed to be his motto, for old senior officers were his favourite target.

For a while the conflict between hate and greed must have worried him, but greed won in the end, as we knew it would, and a canteen was opened. His cut must have been considerable, for the camp spent twenty-two thousand guilders a month; but in spite of the offal and grass of the Jap ration, we were better fed than ever before.

Before Christmas there was an inspection by Colonel Anami, the hyaena of Haroekoe. His long, straggling beard of twenty hairs reached almost to his waist; his small eyes were sunk in fatty folds. The whole camp had been put to cutting every blade of grass with their table knives, and nine buffaloes were tethered outside the gate for the Colonel's inspection and our Christmas dinner; but both were quite phony, for he walked through the camp without stopping. Then the buffaloes were removed.

Yet perhaps the Colonel did get a true impression of the camp, for the next Nippon order ran: "Prisoners who do not look humble and remove the look of pride from their eyes will be severely punished."

We were proud that our attitude was getting beneath the skin of our hosts.

Some of the younger officers decided that they needed more food while the canteen remained open, and started a dhobie service, thus relieving me of one of the jobs I hated most. With extra time to spare, I determined to write a

play, and spent all my available cash on paper instead of food; then tried to sell my watch. But I had previously scraped the plating off so that the Nips wouldn't think it worth stealing; so they didn't think it worth buying. I was tempted to re-sell the paper at seven cents a sheet, but having started the first act I decided that the play must go on.

The next few months of writing passed more rapidly than any other period in prison, though the hopes raised by the invasion of France had been damped down. Our prison-camp seemed a backwater, infinitely remote from the world, with release as far off as ever.

One morning a sudden call to parade sounded like a search, so I hung my precious and damning notes on a clothes-line and covered them with a towel, then sweltered in fear for three hours till the search was over. We soon discovered that this was no ordinary search; something had been found. Was it the music-box, we wondered apprehensively? Several Dutchmen were taken to the guard-rooms where they received a terrific beating with iron bars, and at night they were carried back to their billets on stretchers, quite unable to walk, covered with blood and looking ghastly, the grey pallor of death on their faces. In the morning they were again removed to the guard-room, and the sound of the blows could be heard two hundred yards away.

A beating every hour of the day and no food — this was no ordinary punishment. There were seven Dutchmen now in the cells, and the whole camp was under a blitz. Unmerciful beatings were handed out for the slightest infringement of regulations; hut-commanders were dragged to the guard-room at all hours of the night and beaten up on principle; a whole hutful of men were lined up and ordered to slap one another's faces for several minutes, one man who didn't slap hard enough being taken to the guard-room and punched unconscious by the guards. On the way back to his billet he was stopped by a guard who handed him a biscuit, a piece of bread, and a few lumps of sugar.

"When you do this," said the guard, putting his finger to his head and 'pulling the trigger.' "not me!"

So they were growing uneasy about the future, after all!

At last the story sorted itself out. The crazy Dutchmen had discovered two new motor-cars in the shed behind the Nip office and, purely for personal gain, had decided to strip them and sell the result to other prisoners. They had actually crawled down the latrine drain night after night, till the cars were as bare as new-born Fords. The tyres were cut up and sold for shoes, the hub-caps for plates, the upholstery for seats, and the loose covers for shorts. Even the clocks and generators had been removed, and the starter motors taken to the workshops to be used for goodness knew what. But, worst of all, a pistol and ammunition had been removed from the pocket of one of the cars, the final insult to the hospitality of our unfriendly enemies.

We could almost appreciate their panic. A prisoner who was mad enough to steal and destroy the property of Dai Nippon would, in all probability, take a pot-shot at one of the guards. Latrines were searched and some packets of cartridges unearthed, the Nips refusing for some time to believe that they had been there for years. The Dutch C.O. was informed in no uncertain manner that he was expected to commit hara kiri. And thrice daily, for three weeks, those terrific bashings of the prisoners continued.

At last the Nips became satisfied that they could not extract any more confessions. The whole camp was sentenced to two days' starvation as the final act of the drama — which was then to be forgotten.

Still, we puzzled over the question of why the dreaded Kan Pei had not been called in, with their persuasive treatment of burning cigarette-butts, bamboo-splinters, and stomach-pipes. It was only gradually that we learnt the truth. The cars had been smuggled into camp and hidden by that arch-racketeer, Kasiyama, who had hoped to sell them through the canteen contractor, either in working order or

as spare parts. No wonder he did not desire the Kan Pei to poke its official finger into his very unofficial pie.

But the period of comparative peace had ended, and after that conditions became worse.

April 27th, 1945. We add another couple of kit-carrying miles to our odyssey, to end up at the L.O.G. camp. The man who wrote that stuff about stone walls and iron bars had never been in this place, for it is a real prison-cage, if ever there were one. Built to accommodate 360 native boys, it is now packed with over 1,800 prisoners, and in our ward of 20 by 56 feet, 101 slept last night — $11\frac{1}{2}$ square feet per man. The Black Hole of Calcutta was possibly worse.

All night long we were kicked and bumped as the cold stone floors sent men to the latrines, accompanied by a chorus of despairing snores searching for air. This morning the latrine-queue was sixty yards long, necessitating an hour's wait, and almost as long to get near a tap. The adjutants take the two parades daily in bare feet, squelching around in seas of mud which make the wearing of clogs impossible.

May 4th. To-day working-parties started with 800 officers going to an adjoining car-park to dig up 3,600 cubic yards of stones, which the Dutch had dumped into a swamp at the beginning of the war. The stones are a yard in depth, but no tools are provided for the job — we use our fingers and a pointed stick, if we can find one. The stones are carried into camp and laid over inches of mud to form a parade-ground, but it is probable that before the job is half-done the rainy season will be completely finished, so that the rough stones will be nothing but a curse to our clog-shod feet.

Carpenters have been called for — bush or any other kind will do — to erect three-decker beds, for 2,000 men are due in from Cycle Camp in a few days. Two thousand! Where can they sleep? How can they wash or be fed? The three-decker beds are an answer to the first question, the only one with which the Nips are concerned. The

English-speaking officers have been removed to a room 20 by 100 feet, in which 296 of us try to sleep. Six and a half feet of floor-space per man. Even on Nippon hell-ships they are hardly more crowded than this.

June 2nd. The Nip ration is getting worse and worse, and is now down to 167 grammes of rice, a few filthy turnip-tops, and a lump of rubber-bread daily. They supply insufficient firewood to cook even this amount, and to cook anything we can buy we must purchase our own. It's all grist to the mill of Kasiyama.

To-day spies in camp put Kasiyama on to some Americans who were running a gambling school. He walked straight in on them and confiscated all the money, then hauled them off. For five hours they were tortured before he let them go. They were forced to kneel on stones with their hands above their heads while they were beaten full-strength with a baseball-bat. Afterwards they were punched off their feet and kicked when they fell. We had to stand on parade and watch the sickening sight, full of a burning anger against this inhuman beast. There have been a lot of other bashings for the most trivial misunderstandings, and several broken eardrums.

Our only food for a week was tree-fern fronds, which boiled down into a slimy, bilious mess. Only the Humorist can smile as this filth is served up, for it is more nauseating than the offal. He clasps his hands in prayer—

"Give us this day our daily guts.

For tree-fern fronds will drive me nuts."

June 18th. This evening on parade the Nips called for experienced engineers, but there wasn't a single volunteer. All registered engineers have been sent away on drafts, and our Geneva record-cards are the only proof the Nips have of our qualifications, so we felt perfectly safe. Then Kasiyama came on the scene. "Dam silly," he yelled, and marched us all over to his office, where he proceeded to go through our records individually, blazing with passion the while. An Air Force officer not sufficiently servile had his scalp split with

a sword-scabbar, and staggered out with his face covered with blood. After an hour of this, Sergeant-Major Mori made his entrance, slightly drunk. "What, no makan?" he asked, then bawled to Kasiyama, who crawled out, full of explanations. "Get out, get out!" yelled Mori, and we broke off, hiding our grins at Kasiyama's loss of face, and thinking Mori wasn't such a bad chap, after all, in spite of his reputation as "Bamboo Mori."

But we were much too previous in our jubilations. In a few minutes all senior officers were called back and lined up, and now Mori appeared in a singlet and hard leather gloves, while Kasiyama backed him up with a heavy hardwood pole, three inches thick, which he tried to force into Mori's hands. Murder would have been done if Mori had taken it: he had just broken the English Camp-Commandant's jaw, and was feeling in fighting trim. Age or rank did not matter to him. An old squadron-leader of sixty, wing-commanders and lieutenant-colonels, all received a left and right to the jaw as hard as he could swing, while Kasiyama looked on with a sadistic grin of satisfaction.

Our battered seniors staggered back to our parade, while we waited nervously for the next act.

The two main actors appear again. Kasiyama, in the role of interpreter, is shaking with fear, but Mori is absolutely slobbering with rage. He leaps to a table, his slit eyes like a snake ready to spring, his short, powerful arms waving like windmills; from his throat comes an angry scream of sound.

"Hands up those who will obey Nippon orders," translates Kasiyama.

We reach for the sky.

"We are crueller than you," roars Mori. "We can do what we like and no one can stop us. Ask the men from Ambon."

The order for engineers is given again in a different form, and still there is no response. Mori, looking like a mad bull-ape, springs from the table, grabs a chair, and

smashes it in pieces over the company-commander's head. As the latter sways on his feet, Mori swings a powerful left and knocks him in a heap on the rough stones. Still there are no volunteers.

June 25th. I have received a cable from Brisbane, dated April 2nd, saying that all is well at home. Nothing else matters, I feel. I can stick this a while longer, even though my bedmate loses his temper and yells, "Get off my bed space," if I as much as lean over his twenty-two inches. One cannot expect to keep full control of the nerves, living in such conditions. Our rations are bare, very bare. The only meat we have seen for weeks has been offal.

July 5th. We're back at Cycle Camp, Batavia. How many more moves are we likely to experience! Weak as we were, that transfer was an ordeal. On parade from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., then straight out into the heat of the day for a four and a half mile march, even though the nearest station was only half a mile away. The Nips set the pace without giving us a rest, and we arrived at a filthy railway-siding, utterly exhausted and with terrific blisters on our feet, to crowd 82 men plus one guard into a fourth-class carriage built for 30 natives. The 100-mile journey took 16½ hours — hours of bumping, shaking, rolling, banging — till the thin skin on our seat-bones was almost worn through. Still it was worth it to arrive at the comparative spaciousness of Cycle Camp for the third time.

In spite of rumours we heard back there, there has only been one bombing-raid on Batavia, although recco planes were over on three days early in May. The sight of them cheered up the prisoners here considerably, and we find them in a much better frame of mind than we are ourselves. "It won't be long now," they assure us. "It's only a matter of time." And for a while the old expressions take on meaning again.

July 12th. Twelve Australians, air-crew forced down over Soemba, are in isolation here, and one of them is in solitary. They have been having a terrible time, with daily

bashings as part of the Nip interrogation methods. When, as orderly officer, I took round their midday meal, one of the crew whispered to me:

"We thought back home in Aussie that the Japs were reasonable people."

Did we? What grounds had we for such an illusion after what we had heard of their treatment of the Chinese? Perhaps the profits to be made from scrap-iron affected our judgment. At any rate, we know better now.

July 23rd. News of the world outside these four walls comes to us from a merchant navy chap who was sunk 600 miles south of Sumatra on March 9th, 1944. Not news of the war's progress, but little bits of information about Australia that help us to understand what has been going on while we have been buried here in Java. This sailor was in a new ship, travelling at seventeen knots, but three Nip cruisers bailed them up and sank them because they refused to heave-to and thus become a prize. The survivors were tied up and belted for seven hours, threatened with swords and bayonets, and so badly treated that they thought their last hour had come. The radio-operator, in particular, would have sold out for a Java cent, for he had seen a particularly lurid propaganda film in Melbourne about Jap treatment of prisoners. So they do know our situation at home! Two women survivors were also tied up, although they weren't beaten. For ten months the crew was kept in isolation, interrogated continually, and half-starved on filthy food.

August 2nd. Vitaminosis has bowled me over again, causing agonising, burning, neuritis pains, from which, sleeping or waking, there is no relief. The M.O. grudgingly doles me out some vitamin tablets, and tells me severely that there are a hundred people in camp worse than I am. It is only too true. A walk through the hospital reveals sights at which one gazes horror-stricken, only to look hastily away for fear of causing unnecessary embarrassment. Men who can only stagger on tip-toe learning to walk again, suffering agony as the masseur bends their feet about. Others who flap their

twisted feet as if slapping paste on a billboard. Bodies so thin that it seems amazing that they can still retain the spark of life. At the women's camps we hear that there have been twenty-one deaths in one day.

August 6th. Two hundred new arrivals are put in strict isolation. Our only source of information, the Nippon office-clerks, report 50 from Ambon and 150 from Macassar, the latter mostly survivors from the Java Sea battle. Only 16 out of 167 survivors of an American destroyer who were left at Macassar two years ago are now alive. None of the sailors from the "Jupiter," whom I knew at Sourabaia, is still living. What hell they must have endured!

In the face of so much death and misery it is difficult to keep from reverting to that hopeless feeling that we are forgotten men — merely the ciphers on the end of the millions of dead whose lives Hitler has claimed. We look at one another and wonder if we seem as much like shadows as they do. "Time, like a wounded snake, drags his slow length along."

Chapter Nineteen

GIVE ME LIBERTY

ON THE 14th AUGUST A RECCO PLANE PASSED over the camp, flying very high and moving like a flash of light. Happily we watched it doing several runs across the city, the bright sun flashing on its wings. Could it possibly be one of ours?

Boom! Boom! Several rounds of ack-ack burst a mile or two behind it. This was our answer.

"It's a Mosquito bomber," someone decided, a fact later verified by the Aussies in isolation.

We laughed disdainfully at the Nip ack-ack fire, and half an hour after the recco had gone the air-raid siren was sounded. We laughed again and crowded into billets, hoping to see our own bombs crashing down at last. Alas, it was a false alarm.

But early next morning there was a black-out, with guards yelling around the camp. The Priok party was not called at five o'clock, and a little later we found that other working-parties weren't being called either, not even the outside bakery that supplied the women's camps. Something was evidently afoot. In the middle of the afternoon the Honsho office was seen to be packing up and burying its records in a slit trench. The camp guards, also, were packing.

At once strong rumours of a finish began to spread everywhere. We laughed as we moved around, yet hardly dared to give voice to our hopes after so many disappointments.

But next day the rumours persisted and grew stronger. The Russians had declared war on Japan and were tearing across Manchukuo; Mountbatten had landed on Kra Peninsula! Dared we believe it? Since luck was always against me in betting, I bet it wasn't true, and shortly afterwards

paid up because someone "in the know" swore it was all over. There was no official announcement, but report said our ships would be in Singapore on Sunday.

You would imagine that our pent-up feelings would have found release in a wild outburst. But the news filtered in too gradually and uncertainly; there was no dramatic moment to lift us above ourselves. I still felt too numb to realise that those 1256 days of starvation were over — days of ill-treatment and cruelty, of hatred and humiliation. My first response was a sense of thankfulness that I had not gone into liquidation. Soberly I took stock. My balance-sheet showed as assets my life, less considerable depreciation, with stock on hand almost nil; liabilities were 28% loss in weight, a broken eardrum, vitaminosis, neuritis, anaemia, dizziness, and bad eyes.

And I was one of the lucky ones. How many thousands had lost their lives? How many had been left alive with health past recovery? How many had turned insane under their suffering? Of the 11,000 English-speaking prisoners taken on Java, 1,500 still remained. The others would take a lot of tracing, but we already knew that of the 6,120 who were sent to the Eastern Islands in April, 1943, 1,931 had died before the survivors returned to Java. In addition to these deaths there were those who died in hospital later, plus those who were sent on further drafts and were sunk, or died in Sumatran camps. A total death-roll of 50% seemed very probable.

Soon we realised that we were not free yet. The C.O. received a warning from the only decent Nip we met that the guards were strung up to a high pitch of tensity, and were likely to shoot if the slightest excuse were given. Bashings still continued. Two padres, telling each other a joke, saluted a guard with the smile still on their faces, and paid the penalty. Dutch troops fishing in the carp pond were egged on by a guard who handed out a cigarette for every fish caught; the next guard found them at their fishing and beat them up, knocking one man over so violently that he received

a fractured skull. At night the guards were getting drunk and raging round the camp, out of control. It took all our tact to prevent trouble.

But cartloads of necessities began to arrive, most of which had been taken from prisoners during various searches—service greatcoats, uniforms, shirts, shorts, shoes, and puttees; in addition, there were mosquito-nets, sheeting, blankets, straw hats, Jap underclothing and rubber boots. While many of us had been half-naked, and sleepless from mosquito-bites, all this stuff had been lying in the store a few yards away. Kawabe also sent in quantities of much-needed medical supplies, vitamin tablets and disinfectants.

"Now we are all equal," he said, as he handed the stuff into the hospital.

Were we? I hoped his court-martial would be short, and to the point.

Still no official announcement about the ending of the war was made, and we waited impatiently, unable to savour fully the prospect of freedom. It was not till August 25th that Colonel Kawabe summoned the senior officers at midnight, keeping them waiting an hour before he appeared.

"To all prisoners and internees:" the statement ran. "I have been ordered to inform you that there has been a cessation of arms. The hardships of a prisoner-of-war life during more than three and a half years must have been strenuous, and I must express my respects to you on account of that. After three years I have administered to you in the best way possible, and with my best staff, and during war it is not always possible to give all that is necessary. I understand that you have had hardships and had to live in small camps and with limited food. I have tried to look after your health. Until my administration ceases and you take charge, I want you to carry on as before. I want you to look after your health. Let the behaviour as it has been up to now remain until our administration has

ceased. I hope there will be no mistakes. I pray for your health and happiness in the future."

Signed . . . Takado.

(Chief of Java P.O.W. and Internee Camps)

This was read to us on parade. A stunned silence, and then a large Australian, unable to contain himself, growled out: "The lying, double-crossing, sanctimonious hypocritical bastard." That was how we all felt, even though the C.O., in replying to his speech, had implied that the events of the past were forgiven and forgotten. Undoubtedly, his job was to get us out of the camp without unpleasant incidents occurring, and anything said to smooth down our relations with the Japs was justifiable; but we felt that courtesies exchanged in the old-school-tie tradition did not quite fit the situation.

It was inspiring, just then, to see Wing-Commander Groom again, for here was one man who, in spite of having suffered for 37 months under the merciless Kan Pei, that bastard offspring of the Gestapo, left no doubt around him as to who had won the war. As soon as news of the capitulation flashed through, he asserted himself, taking charge of the civilian prison at Semarang, which was in a terrible condition. At once he had the Nips running round him in circles, supplying him with everything he needed, including servants and a private house, from which he directed operations for the welfare of civilians. They even flew him to Batavia when he wished to interview our Headquarters there and find out what the score was.

Several months before I had heard the first part of his story from a Dutch Colonel, who was also involved. It went back to June, 1942. Rumours of an American landing on the south coast at that time had been verified by a sergeant, who claimed to be operating a secret wireless set and was selling "news bulletins" to officers at a guilder a time. The latest "B.B.C." claimed that the Americans were advancing through the mountains 26 miles from Malang, and less than sixty miles from Sourabaya. (It was subsequently proved

by an American captain who remained free for twelve months that a German-controlled organisation existed for the dissemination of false rumours.) But who could have guessed that? The pressing question was what would happen to the women and children, if the news proved true, in the period when the Nips lost control.

Groom had several conferences with his officers on this matter, and also with a Dutch colonel who had previously been Commandant of the Camp. It was finally arranged that parties of 30 troops, armed with poles, should patrol the streets to maintain law and order — a very sensible precaution. But the Dutch colonel let his sensibility run away with his sense. He put the whole plan into writing and smuggled it to the Dutch Commandants of the Lyceum and Darmo camps. The Nips, who had suspected intercourse between the camps, intercepted the note to Darmo.

The scheme in itself was harmless enough, but in Darmo things had gone a lot further than that. A plan was nearing completion for a large-scale camp break. Weapons had been buried before capitulation, inside the camp (as was the case in most camps where the Dutch had imprisoned themselves), tear gas was smuggled in, pistols and sub-machine guns ready. But the Japs had their spies among the Eurasian prisoners and soon suspected that something was in the air. The discovery of the other plan spurred them to action: all the C.O.'s of the various camps were grabbed by the Kan Pei, including fourteen of the suspected Dutch officers from Darmo, and the wives of all the Dutch officers concerned.

But the Kan Pei had not struck indiscriminately. They knew that Colonel S—— from Jaar Markt had written the revealing note, and was therefore a suspect. They knew undoubtedly that Groom took a walk every evening with Colonel S——, but that was all the evidence they had against the Wing-Commander. Others were rounded up on equally slim evidence.

The next six weeks were a nightmare of torture for all concerned. Every conceivable inhuman method of extracting information was tried, including the threat of violation of the imprisoned wives. A Dutch captain received 100 lashes with a heavy belt buckle which almost cut him to pieces; a dozen lashes were a daily occurrence, and burning cigarette butts were applied at every questioning. The favourite treatment was to fill the prisoners up with water from a hose, then kick them in the stomach until they retched. As they regained consciousness the first thing they heard was the dreaded questioning going on and on and on without respite, except for further torture.

Colonel H—, who told me this part of the story, was a broken man. He showed me the scars on his body from the belt buckle and cigarette burns, but he had refused to participate in the scheme of Colonel S—, and no charge was preferred against him.

"Groom was the bravest man I have ever seen," he said. "His exceptional strength no doubt helped him to hold out against every punishment inflicted, and he never showed a sign of cracking or giving anything away. But others were not so strong. We will never know just what the Japs did discover, or how much they knew, for men talked without knowing what they said. After six weeks' agony every one was moved to Batavia for a court martial." . . .

During the few minutes when I saw Wing-Commander Groom again, he was too happy receiving congratulations to say much about his experiences, being more inclined to tell us of those victims of Nippon who had paid the supreme penalty. "The worst thing that happened was the capture of 150 Australians who had been hiding in the hills after the Dutch capitulated. When they were rounded up by the Nips they were put into baskets and thrown into the sea still alive."

This linked up with the story we had found it hard to believe — that 28 Australians had been tied up in these baskets, and left on the docks at Priok to die of thirst.

"The court martial was a farce," Groom said. "For seven months I knelt facing a wall while the Japs tried to sift out the evidence. There was no defence, of course. Talking was strictly forbidden. An officer who talked in his sleep was dragged out by the guard, murdered, and thrown back in his cell. At the end of that time I saw several chaps beheaded, and I was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. Ten years? I felt a bit insulted — some of us got fifteen! Captain W— died from the treatment he had received, and at the second-last prison the Nip condemned us to slow starvation. In five months more than 150 died out of 300, and I was employed digging the graves. Whenever we moved from one prison to another we were chained in fives so closely that we had to lie on the floor on top of one another. Pretty grim, but the last prison at Amberaja wasn't so bad. I've picked up from 120 to 165 lbs. since then."

Scarcely a word of complaint. He was too glad to be alive! Who could grumble, then, if we were still condemned to weeks of captivity, with our hopes of repatriation raised one day and dashed to earth the next?

Chapter Twenty

FINALE

THE LONG SUSPENSE WAS ENDED. THE WEEKS of waiting while others — New Zealanders and Americans — were flown out of camp. The exasperation of feeling immured in what was still, in fact, enemy-held territory; of feeling that something might still go wrong that would prolong our captivity. Finally, the flight to Singapore. And hadn't it been a satisfying experience to see Jap prisoners on the roadsides, pulling up grass, sweating in the hot sun! A lieutenant-colonel who had gone to retrieve some valuables buried near Changi gaol had found a batch of Japs there with Indian guards in charge of them, and had the pleasure of ordering them to do the digging while he waved his cane and shouted, "Lekas, kura," and a few of the epithets that had been hurled at us.

Now we were on a boat moving south toward Fremantle, and memories of the home country were coming out to meet us. But still, as we lay about the decks, the talk was all of prison life. It was the funny incidents that came to the surface. For instance, there was the small compound at Glodok camp where the wireless set was buried in the garden. To increase the value of the camouflage, the whole area was planted with flowers and vegetables, including a bed of spinach which the birds were always attacking; a very lifelike scarecrow was built to keep them away. One night a Nip guard entered the compound just as dusk, and as usual everyone stood up and yelled "Kirei." But the guard was on the bash. He looked round, saw the scarecrow, and shouted "Kirei" with a voice like a seasick foghorn. But, of course, the scarecrow didn't "Kirei," and the guard didn't wait. Rushing over with bayonet fixed he was just about to stab the dummy when he saw what was. The loss of "face"

was more than he could stand. He beat up the scarecrow till it almost crowed for mercy, then slunk off into the gathering darkness.

Such episodes were amusing to recall and savour, but there were things we could not laugh away. They lay buried deep in our separate selves, twitching our nerves now and then, clouding our minds, raising questions, in the moments before sleep, about the nature of life. We had seen courage, cruelty unimagined, steadfastness, bestiality, the slow decay of the will. We were not the men who had gone away.

But there was the grey line of our own coast, and there were our own people waiting to welcome us with generous words and well-organised hospitality. If it had been possible to be alone for a moment I would have knelt and kissed the first sod of Australian soil on which I stepped — a soil I had not trodden for 1,624 days.

And on looking back over those years, from the first bad show of the squadron at Kuantan to the magnificent work of later days, it was satisfying to remember the courage and initiative of the Australians. Before the heat was really on, they had grumbled whenever conditions were disorganised and their comfort was not all it might be; but in prison the hardest-working and most cheerful prisoner was the Australian. His adaptability was amazing, his fund of humour inexhaustible, his determination to see it through not the least of the reasons why his morale was always good. He simply would not let his spirit be broken. The precious jewel of adversity appeared at its brightest when things were really tough.

And so we say farewell to Java; the land of plenty where we starved, the land of riches where we lived in poverty, the country of happy, care-free natives where we were humiliated and enslaved, the "last paradise," which we found a hell; in short, the green land where we were browned off.

This book serves its purpose in telling the story of P.O.W. life in Java. There is no necessity to turn it into a volume of horror-stories by adding a list of the atrocities

committed by the Japanese in camps in other countries, for these will surely be recorded by the living who experienced them personally and by the graves of those who paid the last penalty.

May every peace-loving citizen of the world be resolute in remembering these unnecessary victims. May the mutilated corpses, the bamboo coffins, the sacrilegious burials of bodies tortured to death, be the flaming sword to keep the Japanese animal in the pit where it grew and bred and became dangerous. May we who were fated to live through the reign of the beast regard our lives as a sacred trust, to be devoted not to a futile vengeance, however righteous, but to an oath that the brutal power of militarism shall not rise again.

For only thus shall we earn the right to bring children into a world which we pray they shall find a little less cruel and inhuman than we did.

EPILOGUE

The following extract from the Brisbane "Telegraph" pays a small tribute to the strength and courage of a man who could spend thirty-seven months in a Kan Pei Tai prison, and then volunteer to remain and assist in the evacuation of those Dutch Amazons who had done so much for us.

BRISBANE MAN HERO IN INDIES

Sourabaya, November 2: A chance meeting between an Australian R.A.F. officer and a Javanese Communist stopped the fighting in one area of Sourabaya.

The Australian, Wing-Commander A. D. Groom, of Auchenflower, Brisbane, and the Communist were in the same Jap prison in Sourabaya during the war.

After a truce was arranged between the British and Indonesian leaders, Groom, who speaks Malay, visited the areas where fighting was still proceeding, and endeavoured to stop it. Groom risked his life time and time again and was frequently under fire.

After persuading the Indonesians to cease firing, he had to approach British and Indian troops, whose fingers were light on the trigger, and inform them of the arrangement.

At one point, 2,000 Indonesians were attacking a small body of our troops who were almost out of ammunition. Groom, when he approached the Indonesians, was greeted warmly by his Communist fellow-prisoner, who then told the others they must trust Groom and cease fire, which they did.

The Communist then accompanied Groom to other areas, assisting him in his mission.

His assistance in a very sticky situation in Sourabaya has been invaluable.

Groom also played a big part in negotiations with

the Indonesian leaders, and was largely responsible in securing the co-operation of the Indonesian Republic Police in the evacuation of brigade headquarters."

For ten weeks after English-speaking prisoners had been released, Groom remained in Java, and by his efforts saved the lives of many internees. He was, during that period, a prisoner of the Indonesians for thirteen days, and when Fate released him again, the authorities decided he had had more than his share of trouble, and flew him home.

Surely no man has a better right to claim, with the ghost in Hamlet—

*"To tell the secrets of my prison house
I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul."*

PRISONER OF WAR VOCABULARY

BAGOES

(pr. Bargoose). The best of everything. A collection of superlatives in one. With *Makan* means enough food to delay hunger for an hour (in bastard Malay).

CHOKO

An officer but not a gentleman. The Nippon equivalent of accepting the King's commission. Nothing to do with the vegetable we lived on for months.

CHRISTMAS

A time of hope but not of plenty. A definite date in an indefinite year that we hope to be home by.

CORRUPTIE

An old Dutch custom. A camp official's perquisite. A means to an end. Something you get and the other chap doesn't. Reciprocity.

GEN

Of four types in descending order of reliability, viz.—dinkum, pukka, duff, and Dutch. "Dinkum" is straight from the secret wireless set. "Pukka" is what some gullible officers paid a guilder to hear. "Duff" is from Nip newspapers. "Dutch" is any rumour from a "Godver."

GODVERS

(pr. Hot fuss.) Dutchmen. An appellation derived from excessive use of the Dutch national curse.

HONCHO

The Nip office or prisoners' depreciation bureau, where we are written off with the flick of a pencil. The main branch of the rumour factory.

KAN PEI

(pr. Camp Pie) sama sama Gestapo. The home of the hounds of hell, who combine the methods of the Inquisition with subtleties of a Chinese torturer. In their less imaginative moods they delight in filling a victim with water through a hose, then jumping on his stomach.

KIOTSKE

(pr. Skay!) The same as attention, only different. A nerve-shattering yell. The call of the bull-ape hunting for trouble.

KIREI

Morituri te salutant. The loudest noise possible for a Dutchman to make. An unintended warning to prisoners to switch off the wireless and stop smoking.

KORA

A guttural exclamation of anger, dismay or surprise by a Japanese, meaning come here and be bashed, assaulted, maimed, or half-killed. One "kora" is a slapped face, two "koras" are a split scalp, three "koras" are a month in hospital.

NIET VOOR ENGELS

The Dutch as usual have got in first.

LAGI

(pr. Leggy). A little more, and how much it isn't. A second helping. The queue where we stand hopefully waiting for what Oliver Twist asked.

PAN KOB

The rubber factory. A place where a sticky, dirty-looking glutinous mess is produced from stones, coconut shells, weevils and bean flour. The bakery.

TIDA

A negative proposition. A Malay girl's cold shoulder. The same as Nee in Dutch or Nee Nee in double Dutch.

USH

Very common expression of a Nip guard meaning "Get to hell out of here before I kick your teeth in."

WOG

A Wily Oriental Gentleman, black, brown or brindle, who knows the price a prisoner will pay for a banana. A synonym for Boong.

YASUME

A time of rest for the good, but not for the wicked.

YELLOW WARNING

A cautionary expression indicating that a yellow fever is likely to strike someone suddenly. Often given by humming a few bars of a song, "a tisket, a tasket — little yellow basket."

OUR HOSTS

Japs; Nips; yellow bastards. A host is defined in New Oxford Dictionary as "an animal having a parasite." We must be "it."

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