



The Story of the

13TH AUSTRALIAN GENERAL HOSPITAL

8th Division A.I.F., Malaya

by
Lex Arthurson



THE STORY OF
13th AUSTRALIAN GENERAL HOSPITAL
8th DIVISION
2nd A. I. F.

1941 – 1945

This un-official history of the 13 Australian General Hospital during WW2 was written by A.C. (Lex) Arthurson VX61276 who was a Corporal in the unit. It was prompted by former POW nurse Vivian Bullwinkel asking if the history had ever been written. Lex undertook to do it. With the assistance of others, it was completed over two years. The original document was enhanced by many newspaper cutting, pictures and sketches. It was not possible to reproduce these. Some alternative images have been inserted. (Most of the sketches inserted into the story were done by Corporal Dick Cochran 2/12 Field Company (Engineers) and provided to me by Ken Gray former National President ex POWs Association). I am grateful to Lex for permission to reproduce this history. It is pleasing to note the extensive (and rightful) coverage given to the Nurses in this history.

Lt Col (Ret'd) Peter Winstanley OAM RFD (JP)

May 2009

LIVES OF GREAT MEN ALL REMIND US
WE CAN LIVE A LIFE SUBLIME
AND, DEPARTING, LEAVE BEHIND US
FOOTPRINTS IN THE SANDS OF TIME.

QUATRAIN
OF
LONGFELLOW
FROM
"The Psalm of Life"

Acknowledgements:

Official Army Records

Newspapers of 1945 - Melbourne Herald
 1945 - Melbourne Age
 1942 - Singapore Straits Times

Special thanks to

Mrs. Maureen Chandler for the loan of her father's unique records of the 13th A.G.H. from 1941 – 1945. (Staff/Sgt. Pearce Wells was privy to all hospital records.)

Mrs Connie Cooper who loaned the diary of her husband, Staff/Sgt. Frank Cooper.

Members of the 13th A.G.H. who refreshed my memory with the most suitable material.

Most grateful, too, that Pamela Harley, a friend of many years, was kind enough to type and organise my hand-written pages.

STAFF OF THE 13th AUSTRALIAN GENERAL HOSPITAL

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <u>Commanding Officer</u> | Col. D.C. Pigdon E.D. | | |
| <u>Registrar</u> | Major A. R. Home | | |
| <u>Lt. Colonels</u> | W. A. Bye | C. H. Osborn | |
| <u>Majors</u> | B. A. Hunt B. W. Nairn | T. P. Crankshaw J. O. Rosson G. F. S. Davies NX76351 | R. G. Orr B. L. Clarke |
| <u>Captains</u> | J. L. Frew VX39181 T. G. H. Hogg TX2185 | E. B. Drevermann VX61260G C. R. R. Huxtable M.C. | F. Braby VX60066 QM V. A. Conlon VX39982 |
| <u>Chaplains</u> | C. E. Usher | | L. T. Marsden |

A. A. N. S. ATTACHED TO 13th A. G. H.

| | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <u>Matron</u> | I. M. Drummond | | |
| <u>Sisters</u> | L. M. I. Bates M. E. McGlade D. M. Sheehan | C. J. Ashton J. E. Simons F. A. Cullen J. E. B. Powell | F. R. Casson P. B. Hempstead M. E. Hurley |
| <u>Masseuses</u> | C. M. Sutton | A. C. A. Simpson | M. Hill |
| <u>Staff Nurses</u> | M. M. Wilton H. R. Brewer M. M. Gunton E. M. Wittwer J. Kerr B. R. Sheat V. A. Torney G. M. McDonald V. I. McElnea V. A. Clancy L. F. Fairweather G. L. Hughes A. M. Beard | P. Pugh H. M. Hilyard N. P. Bentley L. I. Seebohm D. M. McSetchell A. S. Muldoon M. I. Anderson S. J. M. Muir E. M. Short N. Harris W. E. F. Oram I. Harper A. J. Bridge S. C. Baldwin-Wiseman | M. C. Sellwood M. E. Rayner B. H. Garrood M. L. Speer T. A. Glover B. C. E. Taylor G. M. McManus V. E. Smith M. M. A. Tait A. M. Trenerry R. J. Wight M. I. Hodgson V. Bullwinkel |
| <u>Lieutenant</u> | K McBoundy | | |
| <u>A.R.C.S</u> | Mr. Wright | | |
| <u>R. S. M.</u> | S. Gabb | | |
| <u>W.O.11</u> | R. D. Horgan | | J. J. Flavin |

Staff Sergeants

| | | |
|----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| W. B. Monteath | P. J. Wells | A. Buck |
| M. R. Street | D. J. Rowe | A. A. Southgate |
| | A. E. Christensen | F. Cooper |

Sergeants

| | | |
|-----------------|----------------|--------------|
| M. F. Brown | B. G. Fell | R. C. Fox |
| J. J. Spencer | J. D. McGuffie | A. G. McGhie |
| F. J. Brown | J. Denton | T. Winters |
| G. A. Blackie | S. A. Lockwood | N. J. Logan |
| H. B. Frankland | P. H. Cutts | |

Corporals

| | | |
|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| W. J. Rossiter | A. E. Ogburn | A. W. Webster |
| G. W. S. Ewins | A. C. Arthurson | G. W. Brown |
| J. Saunders | H. F. Hollioak | L. Byrne |
| A. B. Mouat | A. A. Deans | P. J. Hanaghan |

Lance Corporals

| | |
|---------------|--------------|
| E. Burke | C. E. Youdan |
| G. M. Robbins | |

Privates

| | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| J. A. Foster | F. Davies | R. S. Anderson |
| C. W. Beasland | F. S. Smith | W. A. Wilson |
| R. G. Ford | J. C. Knight | J. Wells |
| R. L. Scull | R. W. Barguss | J. D. O'Leary |
| W. J. Banning | H. L. Barker | B. Barker |
| R. R. Jones | R. B. Cusson | J. B. Moore |
| R. M. B. Wilson | S. W. Ross | G. Munro |
| C. J. McKay | T. F. Nestor | J. C. Ellis |
| G. A. Patterson | E. C. Stephens | P. G. Rice |
| F. J. Sutton | R. P. Coonerty | J. J. Randall |
| G. Letwin | R. White | F. Bragg |
| K. R. Woolf | T. A. Chaplin | R. Aylett |
| K. E. Nicholson | S. F. Boulter | A. W. Thomas |
| D. M. Davies | C. A. Eastwood | L. C. Canterbury |
| R. F. D. Owen | A. A. Schleibs | J. J. Waller |
| J. P. Carmody | J. J. Kirk | W. E. Turrell |
| P. Fraser | J. Falco | A. D. H. Miller |
| J. D. McLerie | R. Young | L. W. Hancock |
| E. J. Taylor | F. X. Quirk | W. J. Gunn |
| M. J. Brennan | P. J. O'Brien | A. N. Syer |
| J. F. Owen | G. E. Gadd | R. W. Goldsmith |
| R. J. Matters | H. W. McKean | E. C. Ward |
| T. H. Nash | C. Carnie | E. L. S. Garth |
| J. Hamment | R. G. Sim | P. A. Boulton |
| R. P. Anderson | E. Waddington | C. R. L. Davies |
| R. G. Small | E. E. R. Miller | W. E. Parker |
| N. F. S. Chandler | C. S. Logan | G. B. W. Skewes |
| A. E. Sweatman | O. E. Vickers-Bush | R. A. Webb |
| K. J. G. Curtis | L. R. Wade | C. G. Baker |
| J. E. Tee | C. R. Garrett | E. D. Coventry |
| E. R. Treloar | R. I. Felsentahl | H. J. Squire |
| T. F. Cully | K. M. Lewis | J. Beretta |
| T. H. Hadden | P. Walsh | C. E. Stewart |
| K. Atkins | S. Butler | C. J. Meredith |
| E. Hancock | L. J. Fox | C. Lowe |
| A. Howes | A. H. Haines | K. Twentyman |
| | A. Simfendorfer | N. R. Seddon |

FORMATION OF THE UNIT

The 2/13th Australian General Hospital was born in Melbourne on the 11th August, 1941, a very immature and undernourished infant.

There appeared to be an urgent need for a second military hospital in Singapore or Malaya. Representations were being made to Southern Command, Victoria Barracks, Melbourne by Colonel A. P. Derham, A.D.M.S., 8th Division, A.I.F. Malaya, for additional medical personnel.

Intelligence sources in Singapore now viewed an attack on the impregnable island was possible and feasible, not from the south but from the north.

The Secret Service intimated that the Thai Government would allow enemy access to North Malaya. At the outbreak of War in 1939 Air Chief Marshall Sir Robert Brook-Popham, the Commander in the Far East, reported he had 180 aeroplanes and 8,000 troops including many with very little service. Many crack British regiments enjoyed the plum postings to Singapore.

Among the swell of new numbers arriving, to aid the dangerous situation envisaged by Intelligence, was the Australian 27th Infantry Brigade which left Sydney on July 29th, 1941.

Victoria's 29th Battalion joined the convoy of ships en route. Already in Malaya was the 10th A. G. H. settled and working in Malacca on the western seaboard, and finding 17,000 Australian troops more than a handful with the high incidence of sickness mainly due to the climate. The 10th A. G. H. was kept very busy with an average of 400 patients during the months April – December 1941.

And so Colonel Derham's plea for assistance was heeded. The administrative Command and Organising O.C., Lt. Col. Smalle, on 11.8.41, directed that the 2/13th A.G.H. be formed in haste and be ready to embark for an overseas destination in three week's time.

Major A. R. Home, appointed as Registrar of the hospital unit, was empowered to recruit staff, sufficient to run a 600 bed hospital. He was instructed to be Acting C.O., take the Unit to Malaya, where he would hand over his command to Col. D. C. Pigdon presently CO. Of 2nd/4th Convalescent Depot at Kajang in Malaya.

Personnel were enticed from all over Victoria to volunteer for overseas service. Especially important was to gain experienced medical staff. The Australian Army Medical Corps training depot supplied many men who maintained their early friendships during later service. Wangaratta, Darley, Queenscliff, Bendigo, were centres busily training men in medical and ordnance skills. One group of men transferred, en masse, from the permanent A.A.M.C. All were interested in the very attractive prospect of an early movement overseas.

On the 26th August, 1941 at R. T. Caulfield (Racecourse) the command of the 13th A.G.H. was handed over to Major A. R. Home. Two days later at 1100 hours the Military Board released details of the strength of the unit to be despatched overseas.

The 2/13th A.G.H. was to comprise :-

| | |
|------------|---------------|
| 20 | officers |
| 51 | A. A. N.S. |
| 3 | Masseuses |
| 21 | W.Os and Sgts |
| <u>130</u> | Rank and File |
| 225 | Total |

On the following day, 27th August, Southern Command issued embarkation orders for 14 officers, 24 A.A.N.S., 3 Masseuses, 21 W.Os and Sgts. (17 actual) and 128 Rank and File (127 actual). Total 190 (185 Actual).

A sense of urgency could now be felt at Caulfield. Following fitful sleep in cold horse stalls on straw palliasses, garbed in cold water shaves, the men marched around the outside streets to the accompaniment of the strident commands of Regimental Sergeant-Major Sesom Gabb. After all, every soldier must know how to march!

All personnel received injections against typhoid fever and were vaccinated to ensure immunity from smallpox. Some took these standing up – some on the way down. Marvellous what the sight of a hypodermic needle does to tough men.

On the 31st August a detachment of the 13th Australian General Hospital, led by Capt. J. L. Frew took part in the customary march past of a newly formed unit before the Governor of Victoria.

About this time Capts. T. G. Hogg and G. M. Crabbe ex 6th Mil. Dist., Major T. P. Crankshaw ex Balcombe and Major R. G. Orr with Captain V. A. Conlon ex 3rd Mil. District were taken on strength. On 1st September Sgt. Ogburn, Cpl. Arthurson and 8 O.R's reported to Station Pier at 0800 hours as a loading party. The wharf labourers just happened to be on strike that day, and our loading of the ex ocean liner Wanganella was the cause of much amusement. Luckily most of the heaviest equipment had already been loaded. The Hospital Ship Wanganella carried 1,488 packages of war equipment of 450 tons weight and 2,536 packages of Reserve Rations of weight 110 tons.

Routine orders of 1st September ordered all men requiring war equipment and Blood Grouping to parade at 0900. No Leave will be granted and strict secrecy of troop movements is to be maintained.

Because an Officer queried his seniority order, Col. Derham A.D.M.S. sent a list of medical officers arranged in order of seniority and a list of members of the A.A.N.S. in their order of seniority. Col Derham pointed out that the two specialists (Physician and Surgeon) "have not been appointed as Lieutenant-Colonels. This promotion is to be left for the recommendation of the C.O. later on." It was also pointed out that only 3 Masseuses have been appointed instead of the 5 allowed. The selection of a staff Masseuse will be left to the discretion of the CO. after he has seen the Masseuses at work. The full quota of 19 M.Os has been appointed.

13th Australian General Hospital - Seniority List of Officers

Major A. R. Home
 Major T. P. Crankshaw
 Major B. W. Nairn
 Major B. L. W. Clarke
 Major R. G. Orr
 Major S. Krantz
 Major G. F. S Davies
 Major B. A. Hunt
 Major H. H. Eddey
 Captain D. C. C. Hinder
 Captain J. L. Frew
 Captain C. R. R. Huxtable
 Captain T. G. H. Hogg
 Captain E. B. Drevermann
 Captain C. P. Juttner
 Captain G. M. Crabbe
 Captain V. A. Conlon
 Captain C. R. Boyce

13th Australian General Hospital Seniority List

| | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| <u>Matron</u> : | Drummond, Irene Melville | |
| <u>Sisters</u> : | Powell, Julia Elizabeth Blanch | Empire Star Evacuee |
| | McGlade, Mary Eleanor | ? |
| | Bales, Eloise Marcia | Empire Star |
| | Bates, Louvinia Mary Isabella | |
| | Hempstead, Pauline Blanche | |
| | Kinsella, Kathleen | |
| | Ashton, Carrie Jean | |
| | Casson, Florence Rebecca | |
| | Cooper, Elvie Elizabeth | ? |
| | Simons, Jessie Elizabeth | |
| | Hurley, Marie 2 I.C. | Empire Star |
| <u>S/Nurses</u> : | Short, Eileen Mary | |
| | McElnea, Violet Irene | |
| | McManus, Gertrude Mary | Empire Star |
| | Muir, Sylvia Jessie Minnie | |
| | Seebohm, Loris Irena | Empire Star |
| | Wittwer, Elvin Minna | Empire Star |
| | Trenergy, Annie Merle | |
| | Pugh, Phyllis | Empire Star |
| | Harper, Iole | |
| | Beard, Alma May | |
| | Baldwin-Wiseman, Sarah Catherine | Empire Star |
| | Hodgson, Minnie Ivy | |
| | Selwood, Margaret Constance | Empire Star |
| | Bentley, Nellie Pearce (Penny) | Empire Star |
| | McDonald, Gladys Myrtle | |
| | Fairweather, Lorna Florence | |
| | Spehr, Maude Lyall | Empire Star |
| | Smith, Valerie Elizabeth | |
| | Hughes, Gladys Laura | |
| | Garrood, Bettie Hampden | Empire Star |
| | Muldoon, Annie Susan | Empire Star |
| | Wight, Rosetta Joan | |
| | Taylor, Bessie Christine Ellen | Empire Star |
| | Sheehan, Dorothy Mary | Empire Star |
| | Skeat, Belinda Rosalind | Empire Star |
| | Wilton, Mona Margaret | |
| | Setchell, Dulcie May McLean | Empire Star |
| | Hildyard, Hilda Mavis | Empire Star |
| | Cullen, Frances Ann | Empire Star |
| | Bullwinkel, Vivian | |
| | Kerr Janet | |
| | Atkinson, Dorothy Mary | Empire Star |
| | Tait, Mona Margaret Anderson | |
| | Clancy, Veronica Ann | |
| | Gunton, Mollie Marie | Empire Star |
| | Rayner, May Eileen | Empire Star |
| | Brewer, Harley Rosalind | Empire Star |
| | Glover, Trixie Alice | Empire Star |
| | Bridge, Ada Joyce | |
| | Harris, Nancy | |

EMBARKATION AND VOYAGE

And so the big day arrived. On 2nd September, 1941, the 13th Australian General Hospital left R & T Camp Racecourse, Caulfield, at 1400 hours sharp for the Caulfield R. S. – No. 1 platform. All men wore battle dress with issue kit-bags and sea-kit bags. Steel helmets had numbers marked on them for the embarkation parade Nos. 1 – 50 front row, 51 – 99 middle, 100 – 149 rear row.

Pay books and pay embarkation cards were carried in the left breast pockets.

At Station Pier, there, at berth, was H.M.A.H.S. Wanganella looking immaculate and displaying the large Red Cross on its hull. This ship of 9,500 tons, previously on the Sydney – New Zealand tourist run was to be our home for awhile – destination unknown – but strong rumours pointed to the tropics. The engine noise, the loud talking, the angling for positions as the ship pulled away at 1700 hours – added to the excitement of most who were on their first journey from the homeland. Settling in, Officers and Sergeants in cabins, others in double-decked bunks, was made easy and comfortable by the attentiveness of the permanent ship's staff. Soon, it was discovered that 5 officers (including Chaplain L. T. Marsden) and 19 A.A.N.S. personnel from Queensland and N.S.W. had embarked on the Wanganella on the 29th and 30th August at Sydney and were on board before us.

So, the strength of the 13th Australian General Hospital became 18 Officers, 1 Chaplain, 44 nurses, 3 Masseuses, 20 W.Os and Sergeants, 126 O.Rs – a total of 212.

After the evening meal, on this our first day, instructions bombarded us – no smoking below deck except in sleeping quarters – N.C.Os and men not allowed on the boat deck nor on the port side of the Promenade deck – noise to be moderated – lights out in quarters of O.Rs is 2230 hours – All must be in bed at that hour (unless on shore leave).

Responsible for Discipline and Law and Order were :

O.C. Major Arthur R Home
 2 I/C Major T. P. Crankshaw
 Adjutant-Captain J. L. Frew
 Quartermaster-Captain G. Braby
 Baggage Officer-Cptain C. Crabb
 Sgt. Major-WO/I.S. Gabb
 Ord. Room Sgt.-Sgt. P. Hanagan
 Provost Sgt.-S/Sgt. D Rowe
 Troop Deck Sgts. & Orderly Officers to be arranged daily.

As the ship prepared to leave Port Phillip Bay Staff Sergeant Frank Cooper reckons he saw lanterns waving from the A.A.M.C. Cottage at Queenscliff farewelling those who trained there.

Melbourne to Fremantle

3rd September, 1941 Life on board – Orders, orders

No written messages to relatives to be placed in bottles and thrown overboard – could be serious consequences – Sick parades 1030 hours and 1530 hours – Morning parade 0900 hours on Port Promenade deck – No smoking in men's mess – light boots or sandshoes to be worn on board – Hairdressing saloon open 0930 to 1200 and 1400 to 1600 hours, barber provided by the 2/2 Hospital Ship; charge will be 9 pence for Officers and Nurses, free for other ranks.

Today – Lifeboat drill at 1600 hours

Please remember there's a limited supply of fresh water – Don't waste – One shower a day only.

Canteen 1 bottle beer per man per day can be obtained for N.C.Os and men on starboard side of Promenade deck, 1100 -13.30, 16.30 -1800, 1900-2100. Most men thought their throats had been cut and envied the Sergeants, Officers and Nurses with their quite generous facilities.

4th September, 1941 A surprise boat drill was held. Lectures for operating room assistants, nursing and ward orderlies were held at 0930 hours and 1430 hours in the Men's Mess.

Meals were tasty and adequate. As the ship rocked and rolled many changed colour and retired to their bunks. Thus, food was plentiful, for those who didn't mind the crockery sliding around and the fork missing the mouth occasionally, as the ship lurched this way and that.

5th September, 1941 Lectures 0930, 1100, 1430, 1515. Inoculations for some.

Library open between 1615 and 1700 hours daily.

Weather on top deck – very cold. Seas very rough. The Captain has taken the ship south of the commercial route for security reasons. So, the Wanganella touched latitude 40degrees where, close to the port side, spouted three huge whales – a magnificent sight, massive bulks gently and slowly diving and reappearing, emitting water sprays skywards.

Saturday night the 6th September, 1941 The seas were very rough with 30 foot waves – presumably, it was a whale which hit and badly damaged the port side paravane. The jolt could be plainly felt throughout the ship.

7th September, 1941 A N-W course now headed the Wanganella to the mainland once more, and, the magic word "Leave" was mentioned. "Yes", the loud speaker informed us. "It was possible the ship may call at an intermediate port at an early date. Troops, except picquet, will be granted shore leave if circumstances permit".

As the seas moderated, following the mountainous waves of the last few days, more and more men were up and about. Joe Knight has recovered from bronchitis after a few days in the ship's hospital. Private E. Stephens, after four days in hospital with cough and influenza, is recuperating on deck.

8th September, 1941 Fremantle – a magnificent sight after a week at sea, and, as we sat at anchor, the appearance of the Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth and the H.M.A.S. Canberra as escort confused our thinking as to our ultimate destination.

Shore leave of 14 hours was given to all except picquet. The Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth, too large to enter the harbour, sat rocking gently in the Roads of Fremantle, their troops denied shore leave.

Our men, on leave, paid one shilling each to cover unrestricted travel on the Perth suburban railways. This "Bob" was collected before troops left the ship. A serious warning was given that misbehaviour could affect future leave to Perth when other transports eventuated. A Citizen's Committee entertained troops in Fremantle, - buses arranged to Perth – most headed to the Post Office to send a final telegram to their loved ones way, way east. The people of Perth were most generous and did their best to make the few hours of shore leave most enjoyable. Back to the Wanganella and to where?

9th September, 1941 Prior to sailing, Staff Nurse, D. M. Atkinson, NX76280, who embarked in Sydney, disembarked 8/9/'41. Private A. C. Adams, VX53506, who embarked at Melbourne on 2/9/'41 and was admitted to ship's hospital on 4/9/'41 with Pharyngitis (later diagnosed Pulmonary Tuberculosis), remained aboard for return to Australia.

The Unit's strength was further improved by the addition of a Western Australian group consisting of Captain F. W. Finch, Sisters Bales and Bates and Staff Nurses McManus, Hodgson, Harper, Beard, Baldwin-Wiseman and Privates Burke, Logan and Vickers-Bush.

Unit number now was 216 comprising 20 Officers, 49 A.A.N.S., 3 Masseuses, 17 W.O Sgts. and 127 O.Rs

Tuesday 9th September, 1941 H.M.A.S. Wanganella left Fremantle, sailed past the Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth and headed in a northerly direction over the very placid Indian Ocean. What a contrast to the turbulent Southern Ocean! Bed linen was changed today at 1430 hours – bottom sheets only if you don't mind!
It became noticeable that more and more first names were being used as personnel came to know each other better.

Wednesday 10th September, 1941 Ship ploughing through the ocean with a gentle up and down and sideways movement disturbing the water and causing dozens of silver flying fish to land on the upper deck. Most enjoyable voyage this – we now think Singapore is our destination. Major Crankshaw is arranging a Sports Programme for tomorrow – deck games – deck quoits – tug-o-wars.

At night the air was filled with the sound of song led by Terry Burke with his repertoire of Irish and popular airs. My word Terry had a fine voice and was “just what the doctor ordered” for the beginning of “togetherness and comradeship”.

The sports were successful but, as we travelled further north, sunburn and windburn began to be troublesome. Care had to be taken to limit exposure to the sun. Sunburn is a self-inflicted wound and merits little sympathy.

13th September, 1941 Personnel set down to work in wards. Attended lectures today.

TOPICS : Captain Frew – Medical Terms
Captain Huxtable – Bowel diseases in the Tropics
Major Davies – Parasites, bacteria etc.

Sunday 14th September, 1941 Church Services were held.

Church of England – Padre Waterman 0645 hours
Other – Padre Miles 1030 hours
Roman Catholic – Padre Marsden 0630 and 0700 hours

This day a private was put on charge for neglect to the prejudice of good order and military discipline. He was admonished for his offence (No names – no pack drill).

Letters were written and handed in for posting before 1200 hours.

This afternoon we crossed the Equator, and so King Neptune arrived on board and, assisted the 2/1 Hospital Ship sisters, who dressed up for the occasion – all land-lubbers were suitably initiated – a lot of fun it proved to be too.

Passed through Sunda Strait and could see volcano smoke from Krakatau.

Tomorrow, Monday 15th September, 1941 we shall arrive at Singapore and then what?

Privates R. Wilson, E. Stephens, E. Ward, J. Tee and R. Felsenthal have all recovered from influenza and sea-sickness and have been discharged from ship's hospital. Privates J. Banning and M. Millions are still unwell and tomorrow will be transferred to the Alexandra Military Hospital.

On the 15th excitement ran high. Disembarkation dress was shirts, shorts and hats – gaiters to cover top of boots. There seemed to be dozens of islands about as we approached Singapore where we berthed at Victoria Dock. First thing noticed was the sickly smell which hit the olfactory nerve in no uncertain manner. So this is the “smell of the East” of which I had heard so much – a cloying humid smell of sweetness never to go away.

SINGAPORE AND ST. PATRICK'S SCHOOL BEFORE HOSTILITIES

At 1500 hours we disembarked into open trucks and in sweltering heat drove to St. Patrick's School, Katong where we were to await the readiness of a hospital to operate as an army medical unit.

St Patrick's School occupies 15 acres on the island's southern coastline. The place looked smart and clean. It consisted of 3 large buildings with many outhouses. Two main buildings were three-storied, built of brick, and containing modern conveniences. Officers, nurses, Sergeants and O.Rs were allocated their areas of living, sleeping and eating.

Blackout conditions were to be in force for 2 nights.

Sleep was difficult the first night under a mosquito net on a charpoy in very humid heat. Perspiration just poured out from us and frequent showering was necessary.

In the morning, some compensation was the beauty of the grounds – the beautiful hibiscus, the many coloured bouvardia and the heady frangipani.

Drains everywhere are 3 to 4 feet deep and care must be taken when moving about during blackouts. There were some with abrasions on their legs after the first night as they misjudged.

Already on the Malayan mainland was the 2/10th Australian General Hospital established at Malacca on the west coast. This General Hospital and the 2/4 Casualty Clearing Station were to be training centres for members of our newly arrived unit.

Thus, on arrival in Singapore and Monday the 15th September the following Staff Nurses were detached for duty to 10th Australian General Hospital, Malacca.

| | | |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|
| V. Bullwinkel | M. Rayner | M. Gunton |
| H. Brewer | J. Kerr | J. Tait |
| V. Clancy | T. Glover | A. Bridge |
| N. Harris | | |

Lt. Cols. C. H. Osborn and W. A. Bye, two senior appointees, commenced duty.

On 16th September VX37648 Div. G. M. Robbins was taken on strength to act as batman to Lt. Col. Pigdon.

17th September, 1941 Acting O/C Major Home handed over to VX39275 Lt. Col. D. C. Pigdon E.D. Commanding Officer of the 13th Australian General Hospital, Malaya

1st Routine order from new C.O. set down

| | |
|------------------|------------|
| Reveille | 0600 hours |
| Roll Call | 0630 |
| Breakfast | 0700 |
| Main Parade | 0900 |
| Midday Meal | 1230 |
| Afternoon Parade | 1600 |
| Evening Meal | 1800 |
| Lights Out | 2215 |

Dress – After 1830 hours knees and arms to be covered.

| | | |
|---------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| <u>Duties</u> | Orderly Officer – | Captain Hinder |
| | Orderly Sgt. – | Sgt. A. Deans |
| | Orderly Cpl. – | Cpl. A. C. Arthurson |

Many with Australian money were able to change to dollars and cents at the rate of \$6.72 to the Australian pound. The Unit was advised to beware of stores overcharging. The art of bartering was demonstrated. The Unit was pleased that Major Home, who took us from Australia, was to remain with us. High praise indeed! Many O.Rs are ultra cautious when dealing with officialdom.

On 18th September leave arrangements were announced.

To Singapore which all wished to see

20% of Unit on Saturdays and Sundays from 1300 – 2359
10% of unit on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday from 1730 – 2359

Local

50% of Unit until 2200 hours.

All personnel to be inspected by Ord. Sgt. before leaving for correctness of dress.
As a precaution, cameras were registered at the Orderly room.

On Friday the 19th September the Unit received amenities from the Australian Comforts Fund. The gifts included 3 rugby balls, 3 Australian rules balls, 1 complete cricket set, 1 basketball outfit and 5 cases of biscuits. So, Capt. F. W. Finch was appointed Amenities Officer and Major T, P. Crankshaw, the Security Officer. A Sports Committee comprising Officers and O.Rs was formed. Smiles appeared everywhere and much serious training commenced.

There was talk of cricket and football teams to play other Units in Singapore and Malaya. Boredom disappeared and fitness of body reappeared.

All were awaiting mail from home with eagerness.

A.A.N.A. personnel met and greeted the Hospital's Matron, SX10594 I. M. Drummond who was taken in on strength today.

20th September Instructions issued re

Fire Orders : A Picquet of I.N.C.O. and 10 men to be appointed daily. The Picquet will be on duty 24 hours and will remain in camp. On the sound of the alarm, the whole unit will fall in on the Parade ground under the command of the Orderly Officer.

Aircraft Attack: Evacuate buildings and take cover in slit trenches – wear steel helmets and Carry respirators.

Because of the heat the canteen was most popular and drinks and amenities could be purchased.

| | |
|-------------|---------------------|
| Dry | - 1200 – 1400 hours |
| Wet and Dry | - 1730 – 2000 hours |

All ranks were warned against signing for gifts etc. in shops using name, rank and unit as this is a frequent method by which enemy agents obtain information.

On Monday 22nd September the training of Nursing, Ward Orderlies and Theatre Assistants commenced. Lectures and demonstrations began at 1100 hours on the top floor of the building facing the sea. The ten demonstration groups progressed from table 1 to 2 to 3 etc. until each group has attended each demonstration once.

Visit by Commander A.I.F. Malaya

At 1030 hours on 23rd September the unit was visited by Major General H. Gordon Bennett C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., V.D. and the inspection was made by Brigadier Stringer D.M.S. All fell in on the centre of the parade ground facing west – Headquarters in front. A.A.N.S. on lawn between the Orderly Room and the western end of the building.

Rumour had it that the C.O. was not impressed with the overall precision shown on parade and possible remedial measures will be taken.

Singapore leave was always looked forward to and taken. This small island 41kms long and 22kms wide just 1 degree north of the Equator, tucked in the foot of the Malay Peninsula was connected to the mainland by a causeway. This island was set up as a naval fortress with the naval base and floating dock sited on the north of the island. Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles in 1819 selected the island as a maritime base. In 1827 the Sultan of Johore had ceded full sovereignty to Britain and so Singa Pura (in Sanskrit "Lion City") became Singapore, the free port, the busiest port in the East.

Singapore was the plum overseas posting. So, many of the crack U.K. and Indian regiments were stationed there. It was said that Singapore was more English than England.

On leave Officers and O.Rs were poles apart. Officers had access to Raffles and most of the exclusive clubs. Other ranks roamed the streets visiting the Lulu Cafe, the New and Happy Worlds.

The largest building was the Cathay in which was the largest picture theatre in Singapore. About this time Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald were starring in "New Moon". Shops were plentiful, goods reasonably priced if bartered for and troops spent hours and hours shopping for silks etc. to send home to mothers, wives and girl friends. After a happy and enjoyable leave a rickshaw race back to camp was in order. Some who used buses were very shy paying fares until it was pointed out that a private company was involved and all must contribute when travelling.

Urgent additions to the Mental Home at Tampoi in southern Johore, granted to us for our future hospital, had not been commenced. And so we waited and drilled. Brigadier Stringer evidently wasn't satisfied with the saluting from the unit's officers and ordered the C.O. to give them squad drill at 0630 hours each morning.

In the meantime the 2/4 C.C.S had taken over part of the mental home, started a small hospital, and immediately took the A.I.F. sick from the British Alexandra Hospital.

On 29th September, 1941 a quantity of cigarettes, tobacco, cigarette papers, shaving and toilet soaps was received from the Australian Comforts Fund. It has been noticed that local folk have been strolling through the camp without authorisation. The paper boy, the Dhobi man and other with passes were O.K. but some strangers were being fed at the cookhouse illegally. Captain Braby, the transport Officer, was instructed to arrange a picquet to stop the odd bods. So, if we want coconuts we'll shin up the tree ourselves in place of the youngsters, who were so adept at obtaining both coconuts and monetary rewards.

About this time swimming at the Tanglin pool was arranged.

Corporal Fell organised seats on the transport on Saturdays 1400 to 1500 hours and on Sundays 0800 to 0945 hours.

The rest period each afternoon during the hottest part of the day was important as after a fortnight on the island we found the heat enervating. Major S. Krantz, in charge of the camp hospital was already getting a few patients with P.U.O., sunburn, skin conditions and breathing problems.

The promotion to A/Sgt. of the newly arrived VX42846 Pte. J. Denton was posted on the notice board.

For training some nurses and officers were sent to the 10th Australian General Hospital in Malacca. Captain Frew has gone to 2/9 Field Ambulance and Captain Hinder to 3 Res. M.T. temporarily.

The tennis court provided a great source of exercise. Times for all were organised as follows :-

| | |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| <u>A.A.N.S.</u> | Daily to 1400 hours |
| <u>Officers</u> | Monday, Wednesday, Friday - 1400 – 1900 hours |
| <u>O.Rs</u> | Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday - 1400 – 1900 hours |

Ten one-hour instructive lectures for Nursing Orderlies have been held. An examination for Nursing Ward Orderlies and Theatre Assistants was held at 1045 hours on 4th October. The ten most promising orderlies are to go to 2/4 C.C.S. at the small Tampoi Hospital. A new course of lectures was arranged for 1100, Monday 6th October.

The Army Postal Service has suggested that Christmas presents be purchased and sent home to Australia as soon as possible. This will be done I'm sure. Mail has been received at long last so it will be great to send some gifts home to maintain that firm bond with here and home.

On Thursday, further amenities were received from the Australian Comforts Fund viz. Tobacco 193 ozs., 193 packets of cigarette papers, 100 packets cigarettes, 586 handkerchiefs, 243 toothbrushes, 729 packets chewing gum, 50lbs cake and 193 packets of razor blades.

Sounds of music can occasionally be heard emanating from the Concert Hall as the piano is now able to be used by Officers Saturday and Sunday, A.A.N.S. Wednesday and O.Rs on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.

On 10th October a Court of Inquiry was held to look into injuries received by Private J. A. Foster and Private W. T. McKean. Presiding was Major B. Nairn with members Major S. Krantz and Captain J. L. Frew.

The following doctors and nurses were seconded to the 10th Australian General Hospital and 2/9 Field Ambulance -

Major Clarke, Captain Drevermann,

Sisters and Staff Nurses - Gunton, Brewer, Tait, Glover, Baldwin-Wiseman, Raynor, Kerr, Clancy, Harris, Muldoon, Bentley, McDonald, Spehr, Seebohm, Taylor, Garrood, Trenerry, McManus, Wittner, Hughes, Muir, Fairweather, Hodgson and Bullwinkel.

Also the following ten privates were detached to the 2/4 C.C.S on 11th October,

L Twentyman, C. Eastwood, F. Quirk, R. Wilson, B. Barker, R. White, A. Sweatman, E. Treloar, G. Lowe, F. Bragg.

A Commanding Officer's Parade was held on 13/10/41 at 1100 hours. The whole Unit paraded except for one N.C.O. in the Orderly room and one N.C.O. in the "Q" store.

C.O. still not happy with precision shown on parade ground.

This day the following nurses went to the C.C.S. – Wilton, Hempstead, Oram, Short, McElnea, Smith, Harper and Beard.

Tinea, which threatened earlier to become a problem, has become just that. Tinea in the feet, groin and armpits is rampant. The term "dhobi itch" was coined. Treatment to relieve the itch was given twice daily and those infected were advised to wear clogs in shower, to wear cotton socks and to boil and wash their own underclothes, socks and towels.

New members to the unit arrived from 2 Con. Depot and were taken on strength.

Sgt. G. A. Blackie, A/Sgt., S. Lockwood, Pte. T. Winters (to be promoted A/Cpl.) and Pte. C. Youdan (to be promoted L/Cpl.)

The strength of the Unit was now above establishment and so the C.O. had to make adjustments. Reversions were made and caused much rumbling and disappointment. Some openly resented the new appointees but, as usual, time was a great healer.

Those who reverted were :

| | |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| A/Cpl. to Pte. R. Scull | A/Sgt. to A/Cpl. A. Webster |
| A/Cpl. to Pte. G. Skewes | A/Sgt. to L/Sgt. F. Brown |
| A/Cpl. to Clerk Gr 111 L/Cpl. A. Arthurson | |
| A/Cpl. to Clerk Gr. 111 Pte. J. D. McLerie | |
| Sgt. Blackie was made General Duties Sgt. | |
| Sgt. Deans was made Nursing Sergeant. | |

The Unit was certainly being turned up-side-down and 14 Privates ceased to be classified as Group 111 Nursing Orderlies – hence less pay.

A Blackout was in force from 1800 hours on 27/10 to 0600 28/10.
No leave of course during this period.

On October 28th, 1941 further amenities were received from the Australian Comfort Fund. 49 tins fruit, 243 face washers, 100 packets cigarettes and 243 cakes of toilet soap.

Joe Spencer on 30/10'41 was reverted from Acting Staff Sergeant to Acting Sergeant.

Next day, 10 A.A.N.S., Sheehan, Simons, Powell, Wight, Skeat, Setchell, Cullen, Tait, Harris and Glover were transported to 10th Australian General Hospital for duty.

Cpl. N. J. Logan ex 2/9 Field Ambulance was appointed to the 13th Australian General Hospital, and promoted to Sergeant.

On the 2nd last day of October, Sgts. Logan and Lockwood, Cpl. Saunders and 12 Privates set off for training to 2/4 C.C.S.

The 1st November was a bad day for Jack Beretta. "Bluey" reported the loss of his gold wristlet watch without band. Jack said his name etc. was on the back. Finder please return to Orderly room.

Another new man, Cpl. P. Cutts arrived from 10th Australian General Hospital and was taken on strength.

The Canteen was now being run by the N.A.A.F.1 Organisation whose non-military civilian staff gave you exactly what you ordered and sometimes the correct change. Everything now seemed very precise for the canteen opened on time and shut most promptly.

On Tuesday 11th November the Unit had its first practice in the reception of patients. All not involved in the exercise assembled near the entrance to the Concert Hall and watched and learnt.

On this Armistice Day, further amenities from Australian Comfort Funds were received and distributed Viz 193 ozs tobacco, 150 packets cigarettes, 193 packets razor blades, 40 bars of laundry soap, tomato soup, 4 badminton racquets, 1 net and 1 dozen shuttlecocks.

Captain Hogg returned from Con. Depot and Major Nairn and Captain Drevermann came back from the 10th Australian General Hospital. Further A.A.N.S. detachments meant that A.A.N.S. Staff Hurley, Casson, Muir, McDonald and Hughes left for 2/4 C.C.S.

Sad day, the 13th November, for A/Sgt. R. Anderson who was reduced to the rank of Private.

Big news arrived on 14th November – increases in Rates of Pay :

A.I.F. Personnel (all ranks except A.A.N.S.) Active pay increased by 1/- per day

A.A.N.S. 8 pence a day increase

Dependant's allowance up 6 pence a day

At last the Gods are smiling on us. Six "bob" a day is better than five.

Meanwhile at Tampoi, Staff Sergeant F. Cooper reported difficulty in organising the growing number of patients, now 257. The time for the Unit to take over appears imminent.

Two additional S/Nurses joined the 13th Australian General Hospital, Sisters Anderson and Torney.

A pleasure it was to ration and quarter for 3 weeks Officers and S/Nurses from the Sea Ambulance Transport Company.

THE HOSPITAL AT TAMPOI – JOHORE BAHRU

At last the Movement Order from Admin. H. Q. of the 13th Australian General Hospital from St. Patrick's School. Geylang to Tampoi arrived.

And so, on 21st November, Majors Home, Nairn, Davies and Clarke with 22 other personnel were sent to Tampoi.

On **23rd November, 1941** the hospital at Tampoi was taken over from 2/4 C.C.S. and the 13th Australian General Hospital was alive and about. One hundred tons of equipment was transported between 21/11 and 23/11.

And what was this Mental Home? His Highness, the Sultan of Johore, granted the A.I.F. use of this rambling single story complex of concrete buildings with 8 feet wide connecting paths for \$250,000. Situated 6 and a half miles from Johore it had possibilities but it needed much re-shaping. Sisters and Ward Staff worked tirelessly for days to make wards suitable for casualty patients should that need arise. All were exhausted because of the magnitude of this task, but at last the hospital took shape. All Wards had Asiatic lavatories, water, electric light, telephone.

On **25th November, 1941** the C.O. Col. D. C. Pigdon, expressed his appreciation of the manner in which all ranks co-operated to make the movement to the new hospital a success. All felt very proud and appreciated the accolade from the No. 1.

Regulations now banned A.I.F. troops from entering any Japanese photographers' studios and premises. Now, it seems that a nation is being nominated as a possible aggressor.

It was a difference to be housed in tents. The days were busy, the nights different – glow worms glistening as lighted cigarettes, monkeys raiding our tents – how foolish to hang a hand of bananas on the tent pole! This only encouraged the cunning creatures.

The O.R's Canteen closed at 2200 hours and troops sadly dispersed from the vicinity – the Sgt's mess was allowed more latitude and so closed an hour later – no alcohol was allowed in tents or barrack rooms.

Because of the danger of malaria, sleeves had to be rolled down at 2000 hours.

Church Parades for Sunday 30th November arranged as follows :

| | | |
|-----------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| All Protestant Denomination | – | 0900 hours – Chaplain Usher. |
| Roman Catholic Mass | – | 0630 hours – Padre Marsden. |

A Brown-out practice was organised from 1800 hours to 2100hours.

On 3rd December the Unit was visited by General Sir Thomas A. Blamey K.C.B., C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O. This was quite an honour and General Blamey expressed his congratulations on our current achievement of establishing a General Hospital from "such an impossible or unlikely start".

THE AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY FORCES PARTY put on the "Diggers Show" on the 5th and 6th December at G.B.D. at 1930 hours. Names had to be submitted to the Regimental Sergeant Major. A case of the quick and the dead. If chosen, take ground sheet for ground comfort.

It being wet season, rain teemed down at approximately 1500 hours each day. Luckily, there was a good bitumen road serving the approach to the hospital, but, the road to General Base Depot, where all reinforcements were initially quartered, was unsurfaced.

Prophetically, the Routine Orders, dated **5th December, '41** contained instructions re

Approach of Enemy Aircraft – Siren – rise and fall. All lights out.

Lie on floors or in slit trenches.

Gas. Warning by rattle. Respirators – staff and patients.

Lookouts on duty when air raid alarm is sounded.

All clear is a continuous note on the siren.

Bombs – Report any unexploded to the P.A.D. Officer.

Telephone Exchange will be manned continuously.

P.A.D. Officer and Exchange staff to be in constant touch.

AT WAR WITH THE JAPANESE

Suddenly the bubble burst when all were awakened at 0430 hours on 8/12/41 by the sound of shells being fired at aeroplanes, in formation, silvery looking in the full moon heading south towards Singapore. Search-lights crossed the sky – tracer bullets and ak-ak shells tried their hardest. Then the sound of bombs hitting earth – most likely Singapore's strategic positions, airfields and oil installations.

Immediately slit trenches were dug, and, on the 8th December emergency evacuations were made by rail and motor transport. 103 patients were sent to the 10th Australian General Hospital and 67 to Con. Depot.

Oddly, a few days ago, the Japanese Foreign Minister, Admiral Nomura left America after giving the impression of everlasting peace in the Pacific. No sooner had he arrived back in Japan than bombs rained simultaneously on Pearl Harbour, Singapore and the Phillipines on the 8th December.

So, the announcement at "A state of war exists in Malaya" caused no surprise.

Two orders followed (i) there will be a constant brown-out and (ii) steel helmets to be worn outdoors.

The Unit's first tragic incident happened on the 10th December. Keith Twentyman, a theatre orderly, was severely burned when an autoclave blew up. He was on the dangerously ill list, placed in a bath of oil, given a blood transfusion, but had little hope so badly was he burnt. At 1000 hours on 12th December VX57517 Private L. K. H. Twentyman died of burns and shock.

A Court of Inquiry comprising Lt. Col. Osborn and Majors Orr and Clarke was convened to look into the cause of the tragedy. All of the 13th were very sad indeed.

12/12/41 Special Orders today from Malaya Command call for a determined effort to safeguard Malaya. "The Eyes of the Empire are on us. Let us resolve to stand fast and prove ourselves worthy of the great trust placed in us".

Medical staff are concerned as the first case of Malaria has occurred within the Unit. Two new wards have been opened. This business of opening wards meant much hard labour – iron bars to be removed from windows and equipping the wards to make them habitable for patients. Wires had to be placed on windows and mosquito nets placed on beds as they were made up. Officers, nurses and O.Rs co-operated in this most exhausting work.

News of the landing of Japanese troops in Northern Malaya was sketchy due to Security. In 1 and a half days the Imperial Japanese Army had established itself firmly on the peninsula. The Argylls retreated 25 miles to regroup and rethink. Meanwhile Singapore, Kota Bahru, Alor Star and Butterworth were under frequent bombing attacks even as early as 9th December, 1941. If the British and Indian fail to withstand the Imperial Japanese Army's push, our Australian troops will soon be right in it.

On 12th December a Secret Memo was received from D.A.D.M.S. Lt. Col. Glyn White ordering the 13th General Hospital to expand from 600 to 1200. Number of beds available at midnight was 359. However, following the setting up of 2 more wards, at midnight on the 15th December, the number of available beds had grown to 643.

Red Cross brassards must now be worn by all ranks on the left arm.

Two promotions were announced today, the 15th December.

A/Cpl. B Fell to be A/Sgt. and A/Cpl. P Cutts to A/Sgt.

To compensate or balance these promotions two reversions took place.

A/Sgt. A. Deans to A/Cpl. and A/Sgt. P. Hanaghan to A/Cpl.

Fifteen S/Nurses rejoined the Unit from 10th Australian General Hospital.

17th December, 1941 we were visited by the G.O.C. A.I.F. Major General Gordon Bennett at 1415 hours. A parade was inspected and some wards were visited. It was good news that the bed strength was now 945.

20th December "Christmas in the Air". Wards are being decorated – Fosters lager for patients was unpacked – awaiting Australian Comfort Funds parcels.

The A.A.N.S. won a small victory. From 21st December nurses will be allowed to wear ward uniform with sleeves 2 inches above the elbow with turn backed cuffs.

A cable was received by G.O.C. from St. Kilda R.S.L. "Please inform St. Kilda diggers that their kiddies are being entertained at a huge Christmas party next Saturday at Luna Park. Greetings to all the boys". Signed Burnett Gray.

Some-one may not enjoy Christmas dinner. Looking at the notice board one could read "Found – Part-upper-denture – 6 teeth – Owner may have same on application to orderly room". Some fellow must have had a spare set.

Christmas Day 1941

Our first Christmas away from home. Cooks tried their best to make up for this and were congratulated on the menu provided. Church Services were held for those interested. Greetings filtered down from the C.O. wishing all Officers, Nurses and men of the 13th Australian General Hospital a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. A Christmas Day visit was made by His Highness the Sultan of Johore.

Private O. Vickers-Bush reported the loss of his respirator and steel helmet, but no-one appeared interested except the "Q" store.

Patients were made as cheerful as possible and 99% enjoyed the hospital's efforts on their behalf. The 1% was too ill to care.

Quite a lively party took place on the night of 27th December. The sisters put on a do for all the Unit to attend. It was arranged that half would go in the afternoon and half at night. Eats, drinks and smokes were on hand and everyone had a most enjoyable time.

A patient was up on a charge on the 27th December, the Offence being "A.W.L. at Tampoi on 25th December". "Whilst a patient did absent himself without leave from Ward E from 1400 hours on 25th December to 0630 hours on 26th December". Decision – Fined 10/- and forfeits one day's pay.

Meanwhile the Japanese army was steadily approaching using some 120,000 troops supported by aircraft and tanks. Sadly, we had no tanks at all and just a few fighter planes. From the hospital could be seen 6 or 7 of British planes leave the ground to combat 40 or 50 enemy craft. Once, we were certain the dog-fight went our way – a plane hurtling to the ground – but it proved to be R.A.F.

On New Year's Day 1942 twenty A.A.N.S. from the 10th Australian General Hospital were attached for duty. This wasn't a good sign – seems as though patients are to be moved from Malacca because of the enemy's southern push.

A Medical Board interviewed patients who in the opinion of the doctors would be no further use in combat. As a result 29 men were repatriated from Malaya. One nearly made the number 30 but his mistake came right at the end of his review. Standing with pants to his ankles, and , having a serious back complaint restricting bending to zero, he was told "You are to be repatriated. Dismiss soldier". Without thinking, the unfortunate fellow bent down and retrieved his trousers, viz shorts K. D., hitching them over his posterior. Unfortunately, a member of the board spotted the incident, and so that lad stayed in Malaya. A very good try!!

Next day, Private J Beretta rejoined the Unit from G.B.D.

On Sunday the 4th January, hospital staff were given a warning re breach of Security. The message read "Information from patients admitted from the fighting Zone gained by Hospital personnel must not be passed on by recipients. Any infringement of the law in this respect renders the culprit liable to prosecution under the Security Act".

Actually, at this time the Japanese army were north of the Slim River between Trolak and Bidor. The Imperial Guards, the most formidable of all the Imperial Japanese Army regiments, fresh from Hong-Kong, were now being brought into action.

Major G. Orr and Sgt. Norm Logan provided spectacles for Matron Drummond. Sisters Simons and McGlade, S/Nurses Glover, Miss Simpson, Cpl. McGhie, Pte. Sweatman and Pte. Banning

January 6th 1941

Big news was that the 10th Australian General Hospital and 2 Con Depot had left Malacca and returned to a site on Singapore Island. In view of this we got a lot more patients and our hospital was bursting at the seams. We admitted 76 patients from the 10th Australian General Hospital. Within two days Lt. Col. A. E. Coates, Lt. Col. W. Harvey and 6 Officers, including Majors Farmer and Fagan, plus 15 N.C.Os and 39 O.Rs were attached for duty from the 10th Australian General Hospital. On their heels followed, from the same hospital, 16 Sisters, 5 Masseuses, 4 Officers, 2 Chaplains, 4 N.C.Os including S/Sgt. C. Weir and 28 O.Rs.

Mail started to become less reliable and more sporadic as the Japanese controlled the air well south of Singapore and now were bombing the occasional ship. The R.A.A.F. squadron's remnants were now based in Sumatra leaving Singapore's people unprotected from aerial attack.

The British living in Singapore were slow on the uptake, believing in the impregnability of the Lion City. Wining and dining with the appropriate black-out shade continued. Singapore in danger – **never** they thought. Raffles and the Clubs really whooped it up.

Not so at the 13th Australian General Hospital. The gravity of the situation was evident.

Water needed to be conserved throughout Johore Bahru and a 20% reduction was necessary immediately to avoid a complete cut off for some periods.

Lights. Carelessness – at any time was extremely dangerous – unshaded hurricane lamps must not be used in tents, wards or buildings. Fires under coppers and around cook houses must be out by sundown. Torches must be shaded outdoors. To show the seriousness of the instruction a private from 10th Australian General Hospital was fined 10/- for an unshaded lantern in his tent.

Nobody knows whether Phil Boulton, the bugler, found his webbing belt which he reported lost.

January 13th 1942

The first Australian troops went into combat with the Japanese. The 2/30th Battalion retired fractionally after losses and so the wounded began their journey to a General Hospital by (a) Field ambulance, (b) Casualty Clearing Station, (c) Motor or ambulance transport, (d) arrival at General Hospital. No wonder after such a long haul a comfortable bed in the hospital felt like heaven. The hospital staff was told not to write to relatives of casualties because the Unit censors will delete from letters any reference to cases of death or dangerous illness. All such letters will be sent to the 2nd Echelon A.I.F. and held there until relatives were officially notified.

All tents were camouflaged by occupants using a mixture of clay and water over the fly and verandas.

January 15th, 1942

The 13th Australian General Hospital this day had 1165 beds ready for occupancy with 880 patients, very few of which were battle casualties. The operating theatres were working day and night to be in readiness for the approaching casualties.

On the evening of the 16th January the war hit us right between the eyes. Men, on stretchers with tickets pinned to them showing the most urgent injuries, were delivered in rapid succession from transports of all types. Suddenly the hours and hours of training, the toughness of the C.O. in moulding an efficient Unit, the compassion of the hospital staff all combined to evidence the 13th Australian General Hospital as an outstanding Unit. The admission room quickly established identity, rank, injury of the admitted. Stretcher bearers ran the battle casualty to either ward or theatre. Matron Drummond had her staff fine-tuned and expert attention was provided at all times. Our hospital had most competent surgeons and physicians who certainly proved their worth in these difficult times.

Most of the casualties arrived at night and so little sleep was available to most. Air raid alarms were disturbing both day and night when sleep was sought.

Tokyo Rose, the radio phantom of Japan, began to be received on our radios. Our exact position was pin-pointed by Japanese radio.

The voice from the Japanese controlled radio station told the 13th Australian General Hospital to be out of their buildings by 26th January as they were needed by the Japanese at that time.

As more and more battle casualties arrived, so 200 medical and minor surgical cases were transferred to 10th Australian General Hospital at Oldham Hall in Singapore between 16th and 21st January.

The Japanese at this time were at Muar on the west coast and the situation was looking grim. The Australian 2/29th are now in constant contact with the enemy.

On the 21st January, at 1330 hours the D.A.D.M.S. Lt. Col. White held a medical conference with the C.O.s of the 10th and 13th Australian General Hospitals and instructed the 13th Australian General Hospital to reduce its capacity to 250 beds and to move on to Singapore Island.

At 1530 hours the C.O. of the 13th Australian General Hospital met again with the D.A.D.M.S. for an hour and three quarters to resolve the matter of siting the Hospital in Singapore.

Offered to Lt. Col. Pigdon were:-

- (a) Goodwood Park Hotel
- (b) Mr. Davidson's residence at 18 Massim Rd.

Both were refused as unsuitable, too small, situated in densely populated areas, and no opportunity of expansion to the required capacity. The 13th Australian General Hospital Command requested use of the New Trades School, Balister Road as a hospital. The Colonial Secretary refused as the building was reserved for Public Officers. Eventually, the decision was – return to St. Patrick's School at Katong.

On the 23rd January 31 O.Rs and 40 patients went to the 10th Australian General Hospital.

RETURN TO ISLAND – ST. PATRICK’S AGAIN

On 24th January at 1000 hours the evacuation of patients commenced. The Malaya Volunteer Corps assisted. 198 patients went to No. 2 Con. Depot. At 1400 hours, 14 Officers, 42 A.A.N.S. and 52 O.Rs were returned to the 10th Australian General Hospital.

On 25th January Major Eddy and O.Rs arrived in camp as medical reinforcements who had left Sydney on 10th January on the Acquitania and transhipped to 6 small Dutch vessels in the Sunda Straits.

Accompanying Major H. Eddy were Major Watson, Captains Boyce and Lindon, Staff Nurses G. Forsyth, C. Gordon and M. Mulvihill and Privates L. Coles, W. Goodwin, G. Thomas, G. Lees, C. Lees, B. Richardson, F. Craven, E. Wookey, L. Stone, W. Giblett, J. Stewart, W. Ackland, R. Woods, C. Cox, J. Burns, G. Velacott, T. Lyons, A. Clark, D. Whalley, G. Plumstead, M. Coulton, J. Swann, F. O’Shannessy, R. Underhill, F. Sharpe, R. Hassett, J. Maitland, E. Sharpe and L. Kelly.

These men were most welcome and gave valuable assistance during the move from Tampoi to Singapore.

At 2300 hours the evacuation of patients was completed.

The movement of the hospital equipment was an enormous exercise. Indians and Malays drove the transports to Singapore and convoys of 20-30 trucks would set off. The drivers were a constant headache – couldn’t follow closely enough – didn’t know the way. The fact of the matter was that Singapore was being bombed and trucks had to be re-routed as roads disappeared in front of them. Some trucks were side-roaded and the drivers stepped out of their military uniforms and became automatic civilians.

Dismantling the wards was hard work and the sound of guns and bombs could be plainly heard as the task went on. When, finally, the 13th Australian General Hospital settled back in St. Patrick’s school, all were dog-tired but the work of caring for patients had to be carried on.

It was decided that all available rooms in the school building were to be used as wards and the staff were to sleep in houses to the west. All houses in the Katong area had been evacuated, all furniture being left. The kind and very friendly De Souza family, whom we knew in November/December, had departed their most comfortable home over the road from the school’s entrance. From now on the school must be referred to as the hospital as battle casualties were received night after night. The Office and Admission and Discharge Room were situated on the ground floor of Block ‘D’. Ambulances were diverted via a new roadway past the A.D. room, around the Gymnasium which was divided into ward and “Q” store.

On the 28th January, the number of patients, mainly battle casualties, had risen to nearly 700 and more wards needed to be found and opened. The Chapel had to be used for this purpose and a resuscitation ward next to the Operating Theatre in “A” block was established. All surgical cases were sent to this ward, examined and partially attended to, then transferred to appropriate surgical wards. This was an excellent idea of Col. Pigdon and Matron Drummond for there were always doctors and nurses on duty in the resuscitation ward which had the added advantage of being equipped for black-outs.

On Saturday the 31st January, 1942 the causeway was blown up as soon as the remnants of the gallant 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders had crossed back to Singapore Island. The Japanese army had advanced 600 miles in 6 weeks. The last of the hospital equipment from Tampoi crossed the causeway on the day before the big explosion. No further retreat was possible. How long before the inevitable?

The 13th General Hospital displayed a large Red Cross to alert enemy bombers that this was a non-combatant area. The problem was the proximity to the Civil Airport and oil installation just north of us in Geylang. Japanese bombers were always attacking these spots and also aiming at anti-aircraft batteries. Often, the bombs were too close for comfort and we headed for the slit-trenches hearing that quite frightening whistle as the stick of bombs approached the ground.

Then the worst happened. At approximately 2300 hours on the last day of January a lone bomber flew around us for about 30 minutes. The alarm had sounded at 2230 hours but all seemed quiet once more when, suddenly, a plane was heard approaching from the sea. The pilot dropped a stick of five bombs on the hospital. Luckily only one hit. The first two landed in the sea – one of these just opposite the Officer's Mess – the third hit the top of one of the main buildings and the other two went off on the vacant land next door. The noise of the explosion was terrific and screams could be heard from the patients, particularly from those 113 men in the ward hit. Damage, that became evident in the darkness, was seen to be the blowing out of the end of the building, burst water pipes, flooding occurring rapidly and the kitchen damaged. Fortunately there were no patients under the bombed portion of the ward but many received cuts and bruises. The butcher on night duty received one heck of a fright. Sisters quickly moved about the wards calming and reassuring the patients.

As Battle Casualties arrived steadily, still more space was needed. Nearby, on the shore towards Katong, a small convent was put to use and the hospital's bed strength rose to 760. Again, anxiety arose as shelling commenced on February 4th from the south of Johore. An invasion was close at hand but from which direction? It was plain to see that if the south of the island was attacked the hospital was in the front line. The whole of the sea front was heavily mined, barb wire covered the beach and machine-gun posts were in position. There was even one unmanned in the hospital grounds. From the hospital a grandstand view was available to see the burning of Keppel Harbour and the docks. Then the oil installations on nearby islands were blown up. The fires burnt night and day for weeks. At night the red glow extended over the island making black-outs nearly superfluous. The staff were magnificent during air raids and went about their tasks with a total disregard of self. A few cracked under the strain – one private refused to leave the slit-trench and no-one had time to make him. Our army nurses were really heroines and showed true grit. Everyone winced when the big 15 inch guns at Changi were fired towards the enemy and our hospital buildings were constantly being shaken by the blast. But every shell went with our best wishes for a successful landing.

On the 6th February word came through that all nurses were to be evacuated from the island as soon as possible. This news made all very gloomy – the Sisters wanting to stay – the men anxious that they get out while the going was good.

During the night of the 8th February, 1942 the Japanese landed in the north, crossing the Johore Strait, and rapidly gained a foothold although strongly opposed by the Australian 2/20 Battalion and 2/4 M. Gun Battalion. The battle for survival had commenced. Casualties were very heavy and were simply pouring into hospital – mainly with gunshot and shrapnel wounds. Surgeons were operating non-stop and all were surprised as to how calmly the hospital staff were reacting and performing under battle conditions. British, Australian and Indian troops were under extreme pressure.

On February 9th Major General G. Bennett visited the hospital and confirmed various initiatives planned by the Hospital Command
February 10th – 80 patients were repatriated from Victoria Dock. There, the situation on the wharf was causing concern. Many were endeavouring to board the few ships available at the expenses of women, children and the sick.
Military Police endeavoured to restore some sanity on the wharves. One fit fellow tied a bandage on to his leg, limped on board and was repatriated. Some were cowards and very desperate.

All our Sisters, 57 in number, left to board ships for home. Thirty were able to board the Hospital Ship Wah Sui and the Empire Star and depart. We were surprised when 27 returned and re-started work immediately.

Evidently, there was not enough room on the boats to get all on board. Again, ten to twenty bombers overhead with no opposition at all. And the never ending stream of casualties arriving by ambulance and by trucks.

In the ward, awaiting surgery for the removal of bullets, one young man from 2/4th Machine Gunners asked for a cigarette. This was given him, lit and placed between his lips. "Thanks mate", he gasped and then, as he inhaled, three streams of smoke emitted from his bullet-ridden chest. No wonder the nursing sisters wanted to stay. This was what they enlisted for, were trained for, were mentally attuned for and now sadly must obey orders and leave just when most needed. It's worth recording that on this day, the 11th February, the Singapore Volunteer Force retired from the Changi area leaving no fighting troops between the hospital and the enemy. Things are looking grim.

On February 12th at 1700 hours the remaining 27 nurses reluctantly and sadly bid farewell to their patients and nursing confreres, and were transported to the Singapore docks where they squeezed on the steamship "Vyner Brooke". There they were joined by other nurses from the 10th Australian General Hospital and the 2/4 Casualty Clearing Station. And so the "Vyner Brooke" left a hopeless and crippled Singapore for Australia carrying 65 nursing staff. One day was to make all the difference – the 11th Feb. safer than the 12th Feb. The sea and sky now belonged totally to the Japanese and, from the outset, the Vyner Brooke was doomed. There follows the tragic fate of the 64 nursing staff on board the ill-fated ship.

This saga of the gallant sisters of the 13th Australian General Hospital is heart-rending and will be related later on in this history of the Unit.

13th Australian General Hospital
Nurses evacuated on 11th February, 1942 and returned to Australia were

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <u>From Queensland</u> | J. Powell | P. Pugh | M. Selwood |
| <u>From N.S.W.</u> | M. Hurley T. Glover | D. Setchell M. Mulvihill | F. Cullen C. Gordon |
| <u>From Victoria</u> | D. Sheehan B. Taylor M. Anderson | B. Skeat *C. Sutton G. Forsyth | A. Muldoon V. Torney |
| <u>From Tasmania</u> | H. Brewer M. Gunton | H. Hildyard | N. Rayner |
| <u>From South Australia</u> | N. Bentley *A. Simpson | M. Shehr | *M. Hill |
| <u>From Western Australia</u> | G. McManus | S. Baldwin-Wiseman | |

*Three Masseuses

13th Australian General Hospital
Nurses evacuated the next day, 12th February, 1942

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| <u>From Queensland</u> | P. Hempstead V. Smith | G. McDonald V. McElnea | S. Muir E. Short |
| <u>From N.S.W.</u> | M. McGlade V. Clancy | J. Kerr A. Bridge | M. Tait N. Harris |
| <u>From Victoria</u> | W. Oram V. Bullwinkel | M. Wilton G. Hughes | R. Wright |
| <u>From South Australia</u> | Matron Irene Drummond A. Trennery | F. Casson C. Ashton | |
| <u>From Tasmania</u> | J. Simons | | |
| <u>From Western Australia</u> | L. Bates A. Beard | I. Harper | M. Hodgson |

Of these 27 nurses, only 10 survived the war and returned home.

On 16th February, 1942, 11 were shot and killed, 4 drowned two days before and 2 died whilst P.O.W.

Vivian Bullwinkel was the sole survivor of a barbaric slaughter of 21 nurses off the island of Banka.

At this stage all manner of men were arriving at the hospital looking for food and shelter. 2/4 C.C.S. came to give a hand. Red Cross officials, Y.M.C.A. men, padres, Dental Officers and their staffs and many claiming they had become separated from their own Units. Some of the latter were sent away as there was still time to rejoin their outfits. The only fighting troops near us were the Singapore Volunteer Force which had set up a machine gun post nearby and one even in the hospital area. This created a hazard for the hospital and its 1,300 patients so Col. Pigdon drove to Malaya Command and arranged for an immediate withdrawal of the Volunteers. This was completed and the hospital was then outside the perimeter and therefore unprotected.

The following communications were received and left no doubt as to our fate.

“The Orders of the G.O.C. Malaya Command, given to Brigadier Stringer in the presence of Brigadier Lucas on the evening of the 12th February, were that the 13th Australian General Hospital was to remain in its present position and was not to move when the line shortened. These orders were passed on to Commander 13th Australian General Hospital by Brigadier Stevens the same night”

Signed C. W. Stringer
Brigadier D.D.M.S. Malaya Command

From Captain Geldart, Liaison Officer, A.I.F.

“General Percival and Brigadier Lucas conferred on 13th Australian General Hospital at my instigation.

A tank trap (ditch or canal) runs near Hospital
Not expected enemy will use East Coast road and expected troops will eventually withdraw in conformity with others from your area without fighting.
Put plenty Red Cross signs on buildings
Col. Broadbent accepts the position as inevitable

From Lt. Col. White D.A.D.M.S. A.I.F.

“G.O.C. Malaya Command and G.O.C. A.I.F. Malaya do not want the 13th Australian General Hospital to shift. It is quite possible that before enemy action starts in that area the perimeter will be withdrawn a couple of miles. I am sending as many medical supplies and rations as I can get to you”.

By the 13th February the writing was on the wall – the island was nearly all in the hands of the enemy. The crack Imperial Guards had by-passed us leaving observers and rear-guard troops to keep a discreet eye on the hospital. One corporal, who ventured out the front gate, must have been deemed to be out of bounds and a bullet whistled past his head. One attempt to send some patients back into Singapore proved risky. Some were caught a little way down the road from the hospital by Jap snipers and some were shot – some escaped to the beach and returned to the hospital – all these men had no arms. The convent area was shelled and mortared. Fortunately nobody was hurt although many had lucky escapes. The sound of artillery, mortar and small-arm fire did not allow any sleep. Doctors worked ceaselessly in the operating rooms. L. Col. C. Osborn didn't have time to straighten up. One patient whisked away – another on the table. Operations continued day and night and the hospital staff deserve great credit for their devotion to duty.

Our silent thoughts turned to ourselves often now. Do the Japs take prisoners? If not, how and when will the worst happen? If we had known about the massacre at the Alexandra Military Hospital in Singapore in the afternoon of the 13th February, we would have been more apprehensive.

The Japanese took no notice of a white flag and Lt. Watson holding it was bayoneted to death. Then the Japanese troops ran amok. Patients and staff in the operating theatre died when also bayoneted. Patients and nursing orderlies in wards suffered the same fate. Others, very ill, were marched into rooms 3x3 metres crammed so tightly arms couldn't be raised above heads. The men died during the night from thirst in the suffocating atmosphere.

On February 17th the Imperial Japanese Army G.O.C. called at the hospital and expressed his regret. But the damage was done and the Geneva Convention surely broken.

Our sagacious C.O. made sure that all arms were collected and dumped outside the hospital's boundary – a sure sign of a non-military establishment.

On Sunday 15th February, 1942 in mid-afternoon an uncanny silence was noticed. The sounds of war had ceased. The Allied forces had been defeated on the island which the British Government boasted as being impregnable. The capitulation was complete and, now, our destiny has been taken out of our hands. 15,000 Australian soldiers were now P.O.Ws. Lights were now allowed on at night. This helped the nursing orderlies as they attended 1,273 patients (the maximum intake so far). Staff strength was for the original 600 bed hospital but, less 67 nurses – so work was solid and really tested the spirit of the Unit. Imagine a ward full of men, more or less in a critical condition, with beds inches apart, asking for relief from pain and suffering. One poor fellow, cheerful to the last, enjoyed a cigarette before death and was amused to see smoke coming out from his chest. Another sad case was the Chinese civilian, who dragged himself to the A & D room, his calf shot away by dum-dum bullets. He joined the line-up to the theatre and eventually lost his leg. Blood was two inches deep in the operating theatres and stretcher bearers, all volunteers, stood by waiting to remove the patient from the table to the ward or to the mortuary.

Up to the 12th February, 1942 we buried our dead at Reformatory Road but when this became the front line we made a new cemetery in Martia Road. Twenty-one men were buried there during the last few days of the Japanese push.

The first Japanese soldiers to visit the hospital appeared more curious than hostile. Their appearance showed the effects of a tough campaign. What was most noticeable and different from us was their canvas footwear with an unusual toe arrangement. One fellow indicated very clearly by signs he wished to exchange canvas for leather boots. He got his wish pronto. Another took a watch from one of our men rather arrogantly too – give me or else!

An enterprising member of the Unit had somehow gained possession of a brand new 1942 Hudson of black duco. Next to no time a Japanese Staff car – Officer and driver – drove into the grounds. Very politely, but indicating no option, the Japanese Officer drove out in the new and left the old dirty camouflaged object.

Next day, the 17th February another Japanese Officer entered the grounds sticky-beaking and quite proud of the accomplished victory. If the Jap private looked crummy the Jap Officer was turned out superbly. Sporting clean, new clothing, magnificent soft-leather long boots, he removed his sword from its scabbard and demonstrated his skill on a branch of a large hibiscus tree. Holding the sword in two hands, he raised it high above his head, and, with an almighty yell and downward sweep off came the 2" thick branch and damn near his big toe. The skite cut the tip of his boot only and rapidly made his departure counting his Japanese blessings.

Next day at 1400 hours on the 18th February an Officer of the Japanese Medical Forces visited the hospital and enquired the number of patients and the position of the medical supplies. Certainly a few white lies were told re the medical supplies in the hope of gaining some more...

This Japanese Officer was told, by using signs, that a pair of boots and a wristlet watch had been stolen. To his credit, and as an indication of the strict discipline within the Imperial Guards, next day both items were returned. The new car he said would probably not be needed by the hospital.

It was learnt that the Changi Gaol had been opened and murderers, rapists and thieves had been given freedom. So, it was no surprise to see looting from houses around the hospital. We strengthened our picquets to make sure that our fairly good stock of food wasn't stolen by marauders.

There were many unplanned meetings of inquisitive Japanese Officers and their underlings with our Unit members. We had been advised to give very guarded answers or to crack "silly Willy".

At this time the 2/10 Field Ambulance moved in from Singapore and camped in our grounds and all battle casualties not at 10th Australian General Hospital were transferred to the 13th Australian General Hospital. Most of the surgical cases had received initial treatment but some were in a shocking state especially those from Alexandra and Civil Hospitals.

On the 20th February, 1942 the D.D.M.S. (Lt. Col. G. White) was permitted to visit us to make arrangements to transfer us to Changi and there to form a combined hospital for all Prisoners of War.

From Glyn White we learnt about the incident at Alexandra Hospital and, another shock, the G.O.C. Major General Gordon Bennett clearing out with most of his staff. This latter news left a nasty taste in the mouth so to speak.

Lt. Col. Osborn is still bent over and is using a stick after his long stint in the operating theatre.

PRISONERS-OF-WAR - The First 100 Days.

On 20th February the Imperial Japanese Commander, Lt. General Yameshita, ordered a general move of all captured men to Changi.

At 0900 hours on 22nd February we commenced the movement of 1270 patients and 650 personnel with few trucks and ambulances. The 15,000 A.I.F. were allotted the Selarang Area to be named No. 1 P.O.W. Camp. By much hard work and with the help of the 2/10 Field Ambulance and the 2/4 C.C.S., the move to Changi was completed by midday on the 23rd February. No definite instructions were given as to what could be taken so perhaps more clothing could have been crammed into the trunks. Most of the Unit walked the seven miles to the new camp so the amount taken with the men was limited. On arrival it was evident that the Selarang barracks had suffered badly from the bombing. Many buildings had been bombed and there were craters to be seen everywhere.

All Units placed food reserves in a common pool. Our Unit suffered in this regard as we had brought enough food to last our patients and staff for about a month but now had to pool resources.

One of the barrack blocks became our hospital with 140 patients to a floor. Because of lack of space, as many patients as possible were returned to their units and a lot were transferred to a hospital run by the 2/9 Field Ambulance next door. The men of the unit were quartered in tents in appalling conditions. Soon dysentery broke out and we moved most patients to 10th Australian General Hospital and then took in all the dysentery patients. Camp sanitary arrangements were shocking – the latrines couldn't cope with the needs. The only source of water was from a small tong which was served from a spring. This was originally built for native ablution with two cubicles – one for males and one for females. Water fatigues had to be formed to carry the water up to the wards – a carry of about 600 metres and uphill.

Drinking water was supplied by water carts into canvas tanks which we brought from Katong. It was chlorinated heavily but, never mind the taste, water was water, and everyone rushed the water trucks to fill water bottles.

Food was immediately rationed and a promise was obtained from the Japanese to provide the following issue per man :

Rice (polished) 17ozs, Meat 1 and 1/2ozs., Milk 1/2oz., Sugar 3/5oz., Salt, tea, frying oil 4/25oz.each.

Cigarettes 1 and 1/3. All available flour was taken over by the Field Baker to make bread and we had a little slice each day until this gave out. The size was about 2 inches square and very thin. The meat was not issued daily but twice a week and had to be cooked immediately to avoid it going rotten in the heat. The stew provided flavoured a plate of rice and efforts were made to make the hospital food more interesting and palatable. The Japanese didn't supply all the rations they said they would mainly because the food was not available. They didn't anticipate winning an easy war and then having to provide food etc. for :

15,000 A.I.F.

36,000 British

19,000 Indian troops.

The transition to a rice diet was not easy as rice is 95%+ water and the polished variety lacked fibre. All men were using their bladders frequently but, unless infected with dysentery, bowel motions could be weeks apart. One of our unit, who hadn't had a bowel motion for a month, was reassured by Dr. Hunt that the world record was 364 days.

There were many teething problems e.g. A.I.F. Officers refusing to salute the Imperial Japanese Army or some petty crime resulting in one or two items of our diet being cut out for a week. This was tough on the very ill who needed special diets for survival. In the hospital, nursing orderlies worked twelve hour shifts, often when ill themselves. The stench of the plaster over wounds and the dirty linen was overpowering. The flies were about in the millions – no wonder dysentery flourished. There were plenty of coconut trees but all coconuts became common property – it was an offence to pick up a coconut from the ground and use it for yourself and your friends.

All must be handed in – the flesh to be desiccated – the husks to be used as firewood. Many were the coconuts which disappeared from the trees at night.

Now that the war was over Malaya Command now started a “paper-war” and this return and that return were wanted almost before the message was received. The hospital was supplying information a.m. and p.m. Nominal roll, patients in, patients out, patients S.I. and D.I., deaths, Staff, Officers, N.C.Os, O.Rs, This was a terrible waste of time and most non-productive. Our nursing orderlies had a bad time attending the dysentery cases but did a magnificent job. The nights were the worst – brown-outs till 2115 hours and then black-outs – but the cries for bedpans were incessant. One hurricane lamp was given to each ward with little kerosene.

Requests to write or communicate with home were summarily refused by the Imperial Japanese Army. The Red Cross was the only organisation recognised by the senior Japanese Officers who allowed a preparation of a nominal roll of all personnel for transmission to Australia. This eagerly awaited news of husbands and sons by their wives and mothers did not filter through Geneva to Australia for 18 months. Next-of-kin received the formal notice from the Australian Army – “Missing believed killed in action” – some were – most weren’t.

Even the Officers of all units came under pressure early April 1942. A Senior Malaya Command Officer failed to salute a junior Japanese Officer in the conference room and when asked the reason he replied that it would be infra-dig for a very Senior British Officer to have to salute a junior Nippon Officer. The shrewd Japanese reply was “Is that so? Well, to save embarrassment, all P.O.W. Officers will be reduced to one pip and thus become junior to my junior officers, so there will be no confusion in saluting”. From then on all officers removed their rank insignias, wearing one pip on the right hand shirt-pocket flap.

This hurt the feelings of most A.I.F. Officers – the 13th Australian General Hospital doctors were more unconcerned than most of other units’ Officers. The reason was obvious. Our unit had plenty of work to do and very little time “to moon”. Other units with limited chores had plenty of time to console each other with the thought “We’ll be out of here in a few weeks. When the Australians back home know what’s happened, help will be soon on the way”.

Dysentery was concerning the Imperial Japanese Army more and more each week. An inspection by a group of Japanese medicos resulted in the following decision – Australian General Hospital units in Selarang to move immediately to the Roberts Barracks area, two miles away, and combine with the British General Hospital to form the Roberts Hospital area. Lt. Col. Craven, late of Alexandra Hospital, was in charge over there and would allot areas for both the 2/10th and 2/13th hospitals, the 2/4 C.C.S. and for personnel of the 2/10 Field Ambulance and 2/2 M.A.C. – all Australian units to be under the control of Col. D. C. Pigdon. The Australian hospital was to retain its identity but to become simply an annex of the English Hospital.

Certain medical officers of the two Australian General Hospitals were instructed to remain in the Selarang area to carry out specialist and other medical duties.

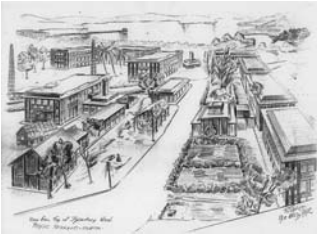
Robert Barracks

On 8th March 1942 the 13th Australian General Hospital moved. To its credit, by 1500 hours, the move of the hospital by trailers, trucks, etc. was completed by the hard working members of the unit. To ensure that the British would control the Australians, Lt. Col. Craven was suddenly promoted to a full Colonel, back-dated to 30/4/41 so that he would be senior to Col. Pigdon, the C.O. of the 13th Australian General Hospital.

So, the Australian General Hospital was set up with 1050 beds available and 956 patients including 283 cases of dysentery and 325 battle casualties. Space was limited and hardships a’plenty. Men slept on concrete floors with bugs as their bed companions. These pests were already in cracks and grooves and this infestation gradually but surely spread to beds and mattresses. All bedding had to be checked daily, mostly in the 4 corners.

The Australian General Hospital Staff will always remember the early days of our sojourn at Roberts Hospital – limited accommodation, shortage of water, shocking sanitary arrangements, swarms of flies, improvised cooking facilities, limited transport and insufficient lamps for night duty.

Our patients were accommodated in N Block which had been hit by a bomb and the habitable part of the top floor was used as staff quarters.



The three floors in O Block and the ground floor in L Block made up the hospital. The small area was wired-in with picquets on the three gateways. At first, before the wire fence was completed, we were able to take short walks, one of the most interesting being to Changi Hill, the site of the 16 inch guns and the huge 100ft. long range-finder, now rendered useless before the surrender. From the high vantage point adjacent small islands to the south of Singapore and the approach to the

Naval base were in clear view.

The whole hospital gradually increased to 2830 beds with 2372 occupied on 1st May, 1942. Deaths in the British section were numerous but, in comparison, we were very happy with our small death rate, again due to much team-work and common sense.

From our entry to Robert Barracks the supply of water rations and wood was the responsibility of the hospital so the Changi trailer was invented. This contraption was a motor chassis, no engine, only wheels, brake and a steering wheel. The trailers went down hills very well but had to be pulled and pushed up hill. This task was no fun and there were many accidents.

Barry Smith, young and bright, a talented artist from the 10th Australian General Hospital was thrown from a trailer on a bend and had his whole chest removed on contact with the road. This young man, with only pencils, decorated concrete walls with complete murals – really beautiful. Sadly, Barry died later in Thailand.

Water, being so important for a hospital, was eventually provided by the R.A.E., courtesy of Lt. Col. O'Donnell, who arranged for the hospital to be connected to the Singapore main supply. From then on a good supply of water for cooking, washing and showers was available and this was quite a relief. The sewerage system had not been restored as the mains had been bombed.

The laundry situation was most serious. All dirty linen had to be carted to Selarang, washed and then dragged back via Changi trailers. The hospital was now completely dependent on the Japanese for its food as the A.A.S.C. supply had been exhausted. The hospital's cooks had to use whatever they could get as no supplementary rations could be obtained. Our food was not up to the standard of many other units. The reason was that other units were buying freely from the "Black Market" food with which to flavour the rice. By the time the hospital had a chance to buy, the prices became too steep through having the food passing through so many hands. The units also had more cookhouses and less mouths to feed. A dollar was worth 2/11 and the following prices were being asked -

1 tin condensed milk 8/9; tin marmite 14/7 rising to 2pounds/18/4 when Beri-Beri was first diagnosed. Tin golden syrup 19/-; bully beef, herrings, cheese, jam, meat and vegetables all 8/9 tin; 2oz tobacco 14/7 to 17/6; cigarette papers 2/11 packet.

These goods had been stolen by the natives and they were now selling them back to us. "Black-Market" trading was illegal and was more than frowned on by the Japanese.

Division H.Q. asked us to give up all our dollars so that a canteen could be set up at the hospital. This we did, but we are still waiting for the canteen. Unfortunately, now, our pockets were as empty as our paybooks – we were sure conned.

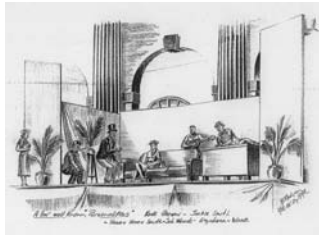
Discipline in the camp was strict – no attempting to escape – guards and sentries had to be saluted on passing. Two 10th Australian General Hospital personnel were caught attempting to escape and were immediately executed. The natives were offered a bag of rice if they turned an escapee over to the Japanese.

It was said that Lt. Col. Percival, G.O.C. was put into solitary confinement because he was late with his office returns.

Anyone caught outside the wire was either shot, bashed, thrashed, goods and money being confiscated. Often, too, rations would be cut to the unit concerned. The Australian Officers also used to impose penalties – really there was a gaol within a gaol.

Indian Sikhs turned traitors and went over to the Japanese side after the capitulation. The Japanese used them as guards and they insisted on a most correct and polite salute. It irked our men to show them the expected respect.

In an endeavour to boost morale, reformed and it used to come over no one was allowed to leave camp armband had to be worn. All a special Imperial Japanese Army Japanese writing on it. All flags prevent us making more.



the 8th Division Concert Party was and entertain the patients. At first unless on duty when a special parties of ten or more had to have flag – white with a red border and armbands were numbered to

Working parties were taken out of the camps to work in Singapore and were accompanied by Medical Staff usually a doctor and a couple to man a R.A.P. The Japanese were emptying the Go-downs of all stored food and loading the lot aboard one of their ships bound for Japan. One of our medical orderlies brought back a case of pineapple juice having convinced the guard, by the use of mime, that the tins contained boot polish. The same trick was tried again later on but this time the Japanese put a bayonet into a tin, realised he had been fooled, and our fellow was whacked with a rifle butt.

Camp Gardens

The Imperial Japanese Army insisted that prisoners had to be self supporting, except for rice, by the 1st May. So, gardens were organised and all available hands were out cultivating every piece of ground in sight. A fowl yard endeavoured to provide eggs for the really ill on special diets in hospital. Many thousands of eggs were produced to assist the well-being of patients.

A portion of the rice flour was ground by hand to make rice-flour. This gave the cooks a further option to just boiled rice. Rice cakes gave some variety to the monotonous diet. Typical meals in the Australian General Hospital were

Breakfast – Rice, no sugar (sometimes salt or milk)

Lunch – Rice with grass spinach, tea

Tea – Rice (with flavouring perhaps) bread, tea.

This diet of polished rice produced beri-beri cases – swollen legs and stomachs. Soon an average of 60 patients in hospital in early May. Many suddenly developed a fullness round the heart and died within a few hours because of cardiac irregularity. Still bacillary and amoebic dysentery were raging. The seriously wounded battle casualties were gradually improving and were keen to be up and about in the fresh air again. The cheerfulness of the amputees had to be seen to be believed. They had been rescued from death and already were proficient on home-made crutches and later on improvised artificial limbs. Amazing, indeed, to view a tennis match played by the “limbies”.

Rumours, popularly called furchies, circulated the camp – our immediate release as the Imperial Japanese Army couldn't afford to keep us – mighty land and sea battles won by our forces – Germany's capitulation (16 times at least since March) – the collapse of Italy – the evacuation of Singapore by the Japanese leaving us, the prisoners, to fend for ourselves – all capital cities of Australia being bombed – Sumatra, Java and the Phillipines recaptured at least half a dozen times.

Then, on parade, especially organised by Major Bruce Hunt, one of the 13th Australian General Hospital's senior physicians, we heard an assessment of our future. This wise and experienced doctor told us “Forget about early release from this camp. Forget about being home for Christmas 1942. Settle down, conserve your strength, maintain discipline, for you will be here for years”. The initial shock was devastating. What does he know? What a pessimist! He's a good doctor; but he wouldn't know a thing about army logistics and the determination of the Australian Government to release us as quickly as possible. How truly prophetic were Major Hunt's words!

On the 14th May 1942, the first of many groups of men left Singapore. Designated “A” force, 2999 A.I.F. personnel, which included 15 Officers and 127 O.Rs Medical staff, embarked by ship for Burma. The rationale submitted by the Japanese Command was to relieve the food pressure on Singapore Island. “Plenty good food up north – relaxation a plenty”. Our A.G.H. was concerned with this movement of A.I.F. forces as the 2/4 C.C.S. was instructed to leave us and join the exit group. Major Krantz was thus lost to us. This man, a brilliant surgeon, could, in the words of some, “Cut my head off and sew it on again”.

Later, it was found out that “A” force was the western starting point of a railway from Rangoon to Bangkok.

31.

The 1st June, 1942 showed on the return to Imperial Japanese Army Headquarters that the number of patients had dropped to below 600. Consequently, it was now possible to give medical orderlies one day per week off duty – this they deserved as most had not had a day off since we took over St. Patrick’s Tampoi in late January this year.

To us medical staff, this P.O.W. camp seemed most unusual to say the least. We rarely saw any Japanese troops. The Japs issued various orders and instructions, re discipline mainly, and indicated the penalties to be imposed should there be non-compliance. So, officers began to assert themselves and to issue the necessary orders to control their men again and to endeavour to run a reasonable gaol within a gaol.

Men were put “on charge” for internal misdemeanours – incorrect dress, late for duty etc. It was forbidden to venture “outside the wire” as interception by patrolling guards could mean that Officers were not competent to control their men and penalties on all may be applied. Hungry men, though, did take the risk of burrowing under the enclosure meeting Chinese traders, Japanese guards even, and bartering with wealth of the camp for chickens, coconuts, tinned fruit or vegetables, sweet potato, sugar, gula Malacca or anything edible. The odd rifle shots gave the extra thrills to the dangerous adventures. Prizes sought by Jap guards were Parker pens and Cyma watches. Many a watch was sold, minus the works, to an unsuspecting guard for 150 dollars. The next night in came the aggrieved – rifles and bayonets at the ready. “Where’s the bounder who diddled us?” A game of hide-and-seek ensued until the patrol eventually gave up. Many a hospital patient owes his life to the courageous members of our unit who risked their lives to supply something to the cookhouse for the very sick. In fact there was the double risk – bashed or shot by the Japs or being charged and imprisoned by our own Officers if caught in the act.

One character, not in our unit, but in near proximity, appeared to live extremely well – fresh eggs, vegetables, cigarettes. These “extras” were shared among his cronies.

Soon the word was about “The cad was selling drugs to Japs”. This, of course, was classified a heinous crime in these times of drug shortage and severe rationing. So, the A.I.F. Security snooped around and unearthed a flourishing business. May and Baker (M&B) tablets were being manufactured on the spot. Chalk – yes plain chalk – was carefully cut, rounded and embossed with the May & Baker (M.B.) distinguishing mark to be sold to the unsuspecting guards as an antibiotic. The guards would then resell them – goodness knows how much they charged, for all drugs were at a premium. The character I/C of illicit drug making was duly arrested by the Australian Military Police and charged with conduct prejudicial to camp safety etc. etc.

Thus ended another Aussie’s attempt to better himself. It must be pointed out that, in the event of the Japanese finding out that they had been duped, the whole hospital, including patients, would have had their rations cut.

The Imperial Japanese Army treated their soldiers very harshly; expecting them to be stoics. Consequently, Japanese soldiers often wandered into the hospital area seeking relief from pain. One was examined by a 13th Australian General Hospital’s surgeon and appendicitis was diagnosed. The soldier was in severe pain and was told “Come back tomorrow for an operation”. This he did and was operated on without anaesthetic successfully. His fellow soldiers removed him after eight hours and he wasn’t seen again. Presumably, one of their own scarce medics took out the stitches.

The onerous work of the hospital continued day by day, monotonous but rewarding. In the evening moments of leisure, under the light of the probing moon, men sat in circles reminiscing – “I wonder what they’re doing at home – The first feed I’ll have will be steak and eggs – I’ll be a poultry farmer – The burgoo in Darwin was lousy – Better than the burgoo in Alice Springs”. An uneducated member of the group would be astonished to learn the comparison of gaol food was being discussed.

At this time, the 30th May, 1942, a summary of the First Hundred Days of Hospitals in the Prisoner of War Camp, Changi seems appropriate. During the last weeks of hostilities amidst the chaos of the island invasion, hospitals were one by one evacuated out of the front line area to a small area along the waterfront, and there, under incredible conditions of improvisation, shelling and bombing had to carry on with the care of the sick and wounded.

After the surrender, British and Australian troops were herded to Changi and arrangements had to be made there for hospitalisation up till such time as the main units still working under great pressure in Singapore could evacuate their patients, their equipment and their personnel.

This work was taken up by :-

| | |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2/9 Australian Field Ambulance | 18 th February, 1942 |
| Southern Area Hospital (an improvised team) | 19 th February, 1942 |
| 198 Field Ambulance | 20 th February, 1942 |

As more personnel arrived in Changi two large hospitals, British and Australian, were opened up, but, under Japanese Orders all units were established by 10th March, 1942, in a small area of seven barrack blocks and became Roberts Hospital with 2,500 patients. The conditions were appalling, gross over-crowding, no running water, no lighting, no proper sterilisation, shortage of drugs and medical equipment, and no existing arrangements for the disposal of hospital and human waste products. From these heart-breaking beginnings great strides have been made, and, although perfection has not been and never can be reached under existing conditions, the Hospital Staff can look back with pride on the results of their labours.

The following figures will give some idea of the work that has been done.

| | <u>British</u> | <u>A.I.F.</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|------------------------------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|
| <u>Total Admissions</u> | 11,963 | 4,080 | 16,043 |
| % of Strength | 35.2 | 27.2 | 31.5 |
| <u>Dysentery Admissions</u> | 6,512 | 2,019 | 8,531 |
| % of Strength | 18.1 | 13.5 | 16.7 |
| <u>Beri-Beri Admissions</u> | 477 | 104 | 581 |
| <u>Deaths – Total</u> | 185 | 38 | 223 |
| Pure Dysentery | 84 | 13 | 97 |
| Associated with Dysentery | 10 | 3 | 13 |
| Associated with Beri-Beri | 48 | 3 | 51 |
| Battle Casualties | 43 | 10 | 53 |
| Other causes | | 9 | 9 |

It should be placed on record that Brigadier C. H. Stringer, D.D.M.S. was loud in his praises of the combined efforts of the British and Australian hospitals. At this point of time, our Unit, the 13th Australian General Hospital should deservedly take a bow.

SETTLING IN TO HARDSHIP

The end of May 1942 saw the number of patients drop to 600. This gave a certain relief to overworked doctors and medical orderlies but the work of the outdoor staff was never-ending. Gigantic tasks were the digging of latrines and the cleaning up after the previous Asian inhabitants. Before the reticulated system was repaired water for cooking and drinking had to be brought by water-carts from a swimming pool that had been used lately by the Japanese Army. This water naturally required chlorination, and was stored in underground tanks before being issued to wards and cook-houses. Water for washing patients was carried in buckets from an anti-malarial drain in an adjacent padang. The Changi wood trailers had to be pulled and pushed further and further as the wood-yards cut out and were shifted to new sites. Rations were often located at Artillery Square necessitating an extra mile of heavy trailer work.

Hospital records revealed the following :

Australian General Hospital Ration Scale and Issue for a week in June 1942

| <u>Item</u> | <u>Advised Japanese</u> <u>Ration Scale</u> Ounces per man per day | <u>Rations actually</u> <u>received 15-21 June</u> |
|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Rice | 17.635 | 17.635 |
| Meat | 1.763 | 1.520 |
| Flour | 1.763 | .705 |
| Sugar | .704 | .559 |
| Salt | .176 | .176 |
| Tea | .176 | .176 |
| Oil-cooking | .176 | .176 |
| Vegetables | 3.527 | 1.547 |
| Cigarettes | 10 weekly | 10 weekly |

Additional Issues :

| | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| Peanut Meal | 9.5 |
| Eggs | .4 |
| Coconuts | 1 between 7 men |

Sgnt. D. C. Pigdon Colonel
Comd. Aust. Gen. Hospital

On 13th June, 1942 the unpredictable Japanese informed us that today all P.O.W. will receive an amenities grant to enable men to purchase a few items to supplement the food ration at prices cheaper than the "Black Market Prices". This grant was for the month of May and gave Officers 25 cents a day, W.Os and N.CO.s 15 cents a day and men 10 cents a day. The payment was made every 10 days or three times a month when the Japanese remembered. Patients as well as men participated in these grants. A central fund was formed to purchase essential foods keeping in mind vitamin and protein values.

Costs of goods commenced to jump, e.g. a tin of condensed milk was 15 cents and a small tin of pineapple set us back 10 cents.

The Japanese Government printed flimsy paper notes of value - 10 cents (green), 50 cents (brown) and 1 dollar (blue) which were used the most commonly. This Japanese currency, which inflated greatly as time passed, was used throughout Malaya and in all Singapore trading centres.

On 19th June, the hospital staff and patients were informed that a 20 word message to next-of-kin would be permitted for transmission home. On the cards given were to be written messages re our health and greetings to those home – anything adverse towards Japanese Army treatment of P.O.W. would negate the message.

One typical message, endeavouring to beat the censors read "Am alive – no war injuries – in captivity with Aussie mates – working in hospital – food nasal – Hope all's well home – Love"

Name
Army No.
Unit

On 8th July, 1942 a second force of Australians "B Force, 1,496 strong" left Changi and were transported to Sandakan on the N.E. coast of British North Borneo. The medical group chosen to accompany this force was the 2/10th Field Ambulance. To compensate for this loss of medical personnel, men from the 2/9th Field Ambulance were transferred from Selarang to the General Hospital.

Sadly, this force in Borneo was butchered with only six surviving the Sandakan death march in 1945.

The rumour, that senior Australian and British Officers of rank Colonel and above were to be sent away from Changi, proved spot on for, on 21st July, 1942, at a special parade, Col. Pigdon, C.O. 13th Aust. General Hospital, and C.O. of the combined Australian General Hospital, officially handed the Unit over to Lt. Col. Hedley F. Summons, (C.O. 2/9th Field Ambulance) who was thus appointed C.O. of the combined Australian General Hospital.

On 16th August the Senior Officers' Party, including General Percival and General Callaghan, embarked from Singapore for Formosa and Japan. That was the last the 13th Australian General Hospital saw of Col. Pigdon who was to die in captivity on the island of Formosa.

From this loss of its commanding officer the 13th Australian General Hospital never recovered. The Unit became fragmented and disjointed and members who were sent away with different working parties lost contact with others of the Unit. Many other units, particularly the 2/9th and 2/10th Field Ambulances, which retained their Commanding Officers appeared, by comparison, to be "looked after".

The Australian General Hospital became very busy during August 1942 as the number of patients grew alarmingly. At the end of June there were 347 patients but 825 admissions during July, due to increases of dysentery, malaria, dengue fever and beri-beri, kept the staff on their toes. Staff Sgt. Frank Cooper was in charge of a ward of 120 patients – quite a contract for him and his ward staff. The restoration of both electric light and fans was significant. Hurricane lamps were set aside. The nights became more cheerful for both patients and staff.

Red Cross supplies from South Africa gave a welcome addition to rice meals. Maize flour and jam were god-sent flavourings for our very uninteresting tasteless food. Rice cooked without salt is very bland and so efforts were made to obtain some. It is interesting to note that following a $\frac{3}{4}$ mile walk back from the beach carrying a 4 gallon tin of salt water and setting a fire under the container to boil the water away, after 2 whole days a small marmite jar of salt was obtained. So this method was most impracticable for a hospital and was carried on only by private individuals for their personal needs.

The entertainment offered to the Hospital by the regrouped A.I.F. Concert Party brought much joy to all. Pantomimes were produced by very professional and experienced people and concerts performed with excellent items and background scenery. Two Japanese Officers wandered into one show and apparently enjoyed it. When the National Anthem was sung at the end the Japs stood to attention also. It was obvious they failed to recognise our "God Save the King."

On Monday 24th August a soldier in our surgical ward died from gangrene of the skin of the scrotum. Rather than a spreading gangrenous dermatitis of the streptococcal type the pathologist, Major Davies, found it was a diphtheric infection. At this time there was an epidemic of throat and nasal diphtheria among the working parties in Singapore. The hospitals, both British and Australian, had no stocks of anti-toxin and only limited supplies were allowed to us by the Japanese. Lately, many cases of scrotal dermatitis and body tropical ulcers had shown the presence of a super-added infection with a diphtheria bacillus.

Patients and hospital personnel had been troubled by this epidemic of scrotal itchiness and soreness without any previous history of tinea and dhobi itch. (Pre-war the native laundry man was the dhobi man. Clothes used following dhobi set up itches and rashes.)

Rice diet got the blame, of course, and the men had a most amusing name for this most distressing condition. (Rice balls.)

Skin irritations were due, in part, to the lack of toilet soap, clean towels and powder for ablutions. Sensible folk refused to use a rough yellow Chinese soap which was sometimes available.

Captain Huxtable, M.O. with the 13th A.G.H., was put in charge of the section of the hospital set aside for nose and throat diphtheria cases. In two concrete rooms at the far south-eastern corner of the area, looking out on to barbed wire, were 52 patients. An atap hut outside the two rooms could take another 25 patients in very dark and uninviting conditions. There was one outside shower, one running tap and one toilet. If the toilet failed it was a long walk to the outside latrines.

Captain Huxtable was able to draw on his experience of last March when he was in charge of 140 dysentery cases in very similar cramped conditions.

Marvellous how adversity was overcome by doctors and medical orderlies who laboured so long and hard in such appalling conditions.

The funeral of a soldier of the crack Scottish Gordon Highlander regiment was most impressive as with bagpipes it slow-marched to the cemetery. Identification flags had to be carried when moving from one compound to another. Following the processions, burials were carried out in the Australian and British cemeteries alongside the Changi Road. Each Australian grave was marked with a small concrete cross mounted with a copper plate – no name, just the army number. The British graves had wooden crosses with names painted on – weather here played havoc with the latter. Soon it was impossible to read the names.



THE SQUARE ATROCITY

On 28th August, 1942, Headquarters received an order by the Imperial Japanese Army, from its Commander, Major General Fukuye, that all troops sign the following "Paper No. 17"

"I, the undersigned, do hereby swear on my honour that I will not attempt to escape". As the duty of every prisoner-of-war is to try to escape, if possible, all men refused to sign.

Immediately, the Japanese Commander decided to use force to compel the prisoners. On September 1st all troops in Changi camp, which covered an area of some square miles, were ordered to move into the Selarang barracks. Its barrack square was normally occupied by one battalion of Gordon Highlanders. By 6 p.m. 19,000 prisoners were in the square.



The Japanese then ordered that the hospitals with all sick patients be prepared to move.

At the hospital on that Tuesday, September 1st, a grand muster parade of staff was ordered for 8.30 a.m. in the space between N and O blocks. Only essential staff remained in wards.

The 30 Officers and the men were counted three times by Japanese soldiers and officers. More sedan cars containing more senior Japanese officers arrived. Having counted the parade, groups of Japanese entered the wards and counted the patients and staff there. The men were totally exhausted when the parade ended at 1.45 p.m. and the Japanese sentries who flanked us indicated "all men go now".

Many of our Unit were not on that parade but were in the square with the bulk of the Changi troops.

Cpl. Arthurson, who found a very small space on the roof of the barrack building gave the following impressions of the incident.

"The crowded square was a shocking sight with prisoners jammed hard against each other. Japanese troops had set up machine-guns around the area. Latrines for troops were being dug at a frenzied pace. Rather oddly, even in this crowded situation, the officers managed to grab an area with hessian surrounds for their private W.C.

The digging of the latrines continued throughout the night with one severe casualty resulting from a pick penetrating the skull of one of the diggers in the half-light of the lanterns.

To reach the roof of the 3 storied barrack building was a journey-and-a-half as all stairways were occupied and nobody would give an inch of space. A final ladder took me to the roof when the stairs ran out.

On the morning of the 2nd September the sun rose hot and unfriendly. It would have been possible to cook eggs on the concrete at 8 a.m. The heat became unbearable on the concrete roof and to get relief down below meant a journey of $\frac{3}{4}$ hour down ladders and down stairways choked with men. Toilet urges had to be satisfied. Some men on the roof relieved themselves up above not wanting to risk their hard-earned spots.

I managed to reach the ground level and saw hundreds in lines for the latrines, so I decided to go to the rear of the barrack building to the quiet of the screened Officers' latrines. My relief was interrupted by a rather senior officer, Lt. Col. Kent Hughes who asked me "What are you doing here soldier?" I answered very politely, "Same as you, Sir". "Fair enough" came his reply. I've admired that commonsense man ever since.

Trying to obtain something to eat was a long four hour wait in never-ending lines of men not knowing to what each line led. The stench was already overpowering and this was only the second day.

On this day, the 2nd September, the Japanese executed four men who were captured in May after attempting to escape. The captors insisted that senior officers witness the execution of the 2 British and 2 Australian soldiers.

Our Sgt. G. Blackie was given the personal effects of one of the Australians, Cpl. Breavington, who had been in hospital suffering from malaria. These four men died courageously, Breavington refusing the blind-fold. Following his example the offer was refused by the others. Sadly I report that the bullets were fired by a renegade Sikh party. (The Sikhs were part of the Indian army forces).

Drinking too was another hardship and meant another long line to the only two water taps. Imagine the present predicament – queues for toilet, food and water taking hours and hours. Food was now cut to 1/3rd of ordinary meagre rations. Sick men had difficulty in finding or reaching a Regimental Aid Post and men were collapsing from heat and exhaustion.

The only happy memory I have of this painful episode in my life was of the spirit of the British troops. At night, the sounds of a guitar and a piano outdoors, under the stars, with men massed around listening to a magnificent voice, belonging to a B.B.C. artist, singing “Do you remember that September afternoon?”

I still remember and hum that tune with affection as I recollect the Square Atrocity.

Meanwhile, back at the Hospital two miles away from the Square, on Wednesday 2nd September each ward made out an “urgent return” of the number of patients who could walk two miles, those who would be able to walk 100 yards, and those who could not walk at all.

Something, surely, was in the air. In desperation the Japanese played their trump card. If the forms were not signed, all hospital patients and staff would be compelled to join those in the Selarang Barracks. There was no alternative left so, under atrocious sanitary conditions, and with 1,000 already ill with dysentery and diphtheria, the Australian C.O. Lt. Col. Galleghan told all to sign, but under duress.

By **5th September** all declarations were completed and troops were allowed to return to their previous quarters.

Unwashed, tired and hungry, they began the procession along the two miles of bitumen road with its three long steep hills back through the hospital area to their own areas.

Once again the Japanese dropped in our estimation – fancy threatening hospital patients to certain death just to obtain a result in their favour.

RESTORATION OF RANKS

Col. D. Pigdon, C.O. 2/13th A.G.H. prior to leaving Singapore in July 1942 rectified two wrongs.

Two who were reverted had their ranks restored

Cpl. A. Deans to Sgt.

L/Cpl. A. Arthurson to Cpl.

The Colonel said he was unaware that the above ranks were made substantive by Army H.Q., Melbourne, in August 1941.

SEEING OUT 1942

On Sunday, 13th September some of the hospital staff went with others to the A.I.F. cemetery. Major Bruce Hunt, 13th A.G.H., took the parade and marched proudly in front of 150 men to the gravesides. A hollow square was formed and hymns were sung after the laying of a red wreath.

Major Hunt made his prophetic statement “You will be P.O.Ws for years so get yourselves in the right frame of mind to endure whatever is heaped upon you”. Most of his listeners just didn’t believe him.

MESS ARRANGEMENTS

The 420 hospital orderlies and outside workers had meals in two sittings at tables and benches. Each man with his mess tin, spoon and mug lined up in mess number order and passed an N.C.O. who ticked his entry to the mess-room.

There, on this **15th September**, the anniversary of the arrival of the 13th A.G.H. in Singapore, our men sat down to 1 ladle of rice, a ladle of sauce over the rice, a thin 3" square of bread and a mug of black tea – no sugar. The rice is being cooked much better now – more like rice and less like mush.

The hospital patients had similar food but served with a little more care by Cpl. Hans Hollioak, a very good cook indeed. Eggs, some green vegetables, a little marmite, some broth here and there, all combined to form some type of special diet for those really sick and in need of additional nutriment.

On **Sunday 27th September** quite a humorous event took place. Two Japanese officers and a private arrived unexpectedly and were taken to see two wards. Lt. Col. Cotter-Harvey, senior physician, went to no end of trouble explaining the difficult cases and the treatment each required and his need for further supplies of drugs. Imagine his feelings and the merriment created when the senior Japanese Officer, when stepping into the car, revealed they were not doctors. Goodness knows what they were doing in a hospital or why they came. Cotter-Harvey came in for some ribbing.

About this time three Japanese did arrive with a purpose – one of their number had severe stomach pains – wished to see an Australian doctor as no treatment was available from his own Japanese doctor. An examination showed a serious appendicitis was the cause of his pain. It was explained to him that no anaesthetic was available as the hospital had little or none left. The upshot was that the Jap had his appendix removed without anaesthetic but with the aid of some saki or spirit. Two hours after, the two friends took their stoical mate away.

By the end of September the wounded still with us were healed. Between March and September 30th 367 deaths were recorded, of whom 57 were battle casualties and 121 dysentery cases. Again, the work load eased somewhat allowing medical officers to work only a couple of hours each daily.

On the evening of the last day of September nominal rolls of staff and patients showing details of age, address, peacetime occupation, parents' addresses were ordered by the I.J.A. No reason was given by the Japanese.

On **Thursday, October 1st**, Japanese troops, probably recruits, moved through the hospital grounds for daily rifle and machine gun practice on the Selarang shooting range. They returned each evening. Two-inch trench mortars damaged our field where the men played football.

Saturday 3rd October

Food! Food!

Hooray! Hooray! Red Cross stores from India have arrived via the South African Red Cross. Hospital trailer parties went to the Fairy Point wharf and pushed and dragged a rail truck loaded with tinned milk to the Red Cross store. Mr. Roberts, a Red Cross officer, announced that the food received was to be shared among all troops including the sick. Besides milk, India had sent us biscuits, bully beef, maize, cocoa, tinned vegetables, cigarettes and some very welcome medical supplies.

So, food throughout October was a little better – rice is easier to swallow with a little bully beef stew on top of it. The cooks, looking ahead to Christmas, kept aside a little of the daily ration of each man so as to provide a special menu for Christmas day.

On October 9th, Captain C. Huxtable, with his batman, A. Thomas and Major R. Orr with his specialist eye apparatus were sent to the 2nd Convalescent Depot at Selarang. The replacement doctor, Captain Boyce worked with Sgt. Stan Lockwood and Ptes. Ern., Ward, Allan Schliebs and J Swann, all from the 13th A.G.H., and all very highly recommended for their efficiency and teamwork.

On Sunday 11th October, England played Australia cricket on the padang of the 11th English Division. Many patients were taken over to have a look at the match. Australia, led by Ben Barnett the Test Match Cricketer, won an interesting game. Barnett with his skills as both wicket-keeper and batsman was the difference between the two sides.

PATIENTS FROM JAVA

On October 11th, 1942, a group of prisoners, containing 362 Australians led by Major Robertson of the 2/6 Field Company, sailed from Java to Singapore.

On arrival many of these men were admitted to hospital. Four Officers, 14 N.C.Os and 85 privates, mainly from 2/3rd Reserve motor transport, 2/2nd Pioneers, 2/6 Field Company, Royal Australian Navy and 2/40th battalion were listed on the nominal roll of No. 3 and No. 4 Java parties presently in hospital. These men needed attention for malnutrition, dysentery, malaria and beri-beri. The whole Java Force left for Burma on 9th January, 1943 in much better shape than when they arrived at Changi.

Major John Rosson, dental surgeon 13th A.G.H., reported officially on an A.A.F.D. 11 form that, on October 25th 1942, he injured himself while helping to lift bags of sand on to a trailer. He was examined by Major Bertram Nairn M.O. who diagnosed an early oblique left injured hernia but an operation was deferred under the present circumstances. The C.O. of the combined A.G.H., Lt. Col. Hedley Summons signed the form advising against any heavy work.

A most baffling case occurred about this time. An Australian soldier, repeatedly being admitted to hospital with general debility, was just as quickly discharged from the medical ward by Major Hunt, strongly suspected of being a malingerer. Then the worst happened – admitted again, reluctantly, by the hospital – and he just died from an undiagnosed cause. An immediate post mortem disclosed that the unfortunate fellow was indeed very ill all the time and had subsequently died from encephalitis as others had earlier on.

This caused consternation among the doctors resulting in Major B. Hunt reading a paper stressing the diagnosis and treatment of this new complaint – encephalitis.

STATISTICS

On 13th October 1942 the following information was supplied from the Combined Hospitals for the periods March to September 19th, 1942.

| | | |
|-----------|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| A. | <u>Total admissions since arrival in P.O.W. Camp</u> | |
| | Officers, British | 1,221 |
| | Other Ranks, British | 18,499 |
| | Officers, Australian | 462 |
| | Other Ranks, Australian | <u>6,146</u> |
| | <u>Grand Total</u> | <u>26,328</u> |
| B. | <u>Battle Casualties remaining in Hospital at 19/9/42</u> | |
| | British | 98 |
| | Australian | <u>57</u> |
| | <u>Total</u> | <u>155</u> |
| C. | <u>Total Dysentery Admissions</u> | |
| | British | 10,843 |
| | Australian | <u>2,050</u> |
| | <u>Total</u> | <u>12,893</u> |
| D. | <u>Beri-Beri Admissions</u> | |
| | British | 853 |
| | Australian | <u>343</u> |
| | <u>Total</u> | <u>1,202</u> |
| E. | <u>Malaria Admissions</u> | |
| | British | 956 |
| | Australian | <u>482</u> |
| | <u>Total</u> | <u>1,438</u> |
| F. | <u>T.B. Admissions</u> | |
| | British | 27 |
| | Australian | <u>-</u> |
| | <u>Total</u> | <u>27</u> |
| G. | <u>Diphtheria Admissions</u> | |
| | British | 408 |
| | Australian | <u>52</u> |
| | <u>Total</u> | <u>460</u> |

DEATHS March – 18th September, 1942

| Cause | Mar | Apr | May | June | July | Aug | Sept | Total |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Battle Casualties | 39 | 12 | 1 | 3 | 2 | - | - | 57 |
| Dysentery | 20 | 35 | 13 | 12 | 13 | 18 | 10 | 121 |
| Dysentery with Avitaminosis | 1 | 12 | 20 | 4 | - | - | - | 37 |
| Dysentery with Malaria | 1 | 5 | 1 | - | - | - | - | 7 |
| Malaria | 6 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | - | 14 |
| Tuberculosis | - | - | 2 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 10 |
| Beri Beri | - | 3 | 3 | - | 7 | - | - | 13 |
| Encephalitis | 2 | 4 | 9 | 3 | 4 | 1 | - | 23 |
| Diphtheria | 1 | - | 9 | 3 | 5 | 9 | 9 | 36 |
| All Others | 7 | 11 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 1 | 49 |
| Total | 77 | 85 | 65 | 37 | 41 | 41 | 21 | 367 |

Deaths out of Hospital 27

Grand Total 394

STAFF**Roberts Hospital**

| | | | |
|----------------------------|------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Number of Medical Officers | 88 | Number of Medical | |
| Padres | 5 | Other Ranks | 725 |
| Quartermasters | 7 | Non Medical | 315 |
| Dental Officers | 4 | | |
| Non Medical Officers | <u>7</u> | | |
| Total | 111 | Total | 1,040 |

Australian General Hospital

| | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------|-------------------|------------|
| Number of Medical Officers | 27 | Number of Medical | |
| Non Medical | 12 | Other Ranks | 410 |
| | <u>—</u> | Non Medical | <u>5</u> |
| Total | 39 | Total | 415 |

Staff Patients in Hospital

| | <u>Officers</u> | <u>N.C.Os</u> | <u>Men</u> |
|------------------|-----------------|---------------|------------|
| Roberts Hospital | 5 | 17 | 50 |
| A.G.H. | 1 | 9 | 34 |
| Totals | 6 | 26 | 84 |

Recapitulation

| | |
|--------------------|------------|
| Total Officers | 150 |
| Total Medical O/Rs | 1,135 |
| Total Non-Med O/Rs | <u>320</u> |

Grand Staff Total **1,605**

| <u>On 5th November 1942</u> | | Officers | W.Os | N.C.Os | O.Rs | Totals |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------|----------|------|--------|------|--------|
| A.G.H. | Staff | 38 | 107 | | 300 | 445 |
| | Patients | 16 | 145 | | 478 | 635 |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|----------|----|-----|-----|-----|
| On 12/11/42 | Patients | 19 | 165 | 540 | 724 |
|--------------------|----------|----|-----|-----|-----|

TOYS FOR CHILDREN INTERNED IN CHANGI GAOL

All units were making toys for Christmas to send to the youngsters of internees in Changi gaol. Members of our Unit got busy and produced quality toys, prams, dolls, rocking horses, train sets etc.

Four night black-outs early in December slowed production up but the men were truly proud of their efforts when, at an exhibition at the hospital, there went on show doll's furniture, carriages, cars, warships, planes, as well as clothing – handkerchiefs, dressing gowns, shirts and small packages of sweets.

The Imperial Japanese Army allowed these toys to be sent to the gaol a week before Christmas Day but refused our request for the children to come to our hospital for a Christmas tree.

“C FORCE”

At the end of November 1942, a third force 2,200 strong, including 563 Australians, embarked from Singapore for Japan on the Kamakura Maru. General Heath and Brigadier Maxwell, too ill to travel with the Officers' party in August, were off-loaded at Formosa. No medical personnel from the Australian General Hospital were included in this group.

December in Singapore with its pleasant north-east breezes is by far the coolest and nicest time of the year. The sun, still hot, seems more bearable.

DEFICIENCY DISEASES

The Committee of Physicians has considered reports from members of the hospital staff on the treatment of various nutritional diseases under their care. All agreed that deficiency diseases are all due to inadequate diet, especially in vitamin B content.

140 cases of retro-bulbar neuritis were reported, of whom 110 had been admitted to hospital since 8th October, 1942. Early diagnosis was important to safeguard the serious impairment of vision. The longer the history the greater the impairment of vision usually, and the longer the response to treatment. All cases of blurred vision must be examined by an Ophthalmic surgeon as soon as possible.

Treatment of retro bulbar neuritis

Marmite – dosage 3 drams daily to check the progress of the condition.

Red palm oil and rice polishings together with nicamide injections improved those cases which had been stationary on marmite alone. Others lately have been treated with nicotinic acid tablets by mouth – too soon to gauge effects.

Beri-Beri : Treatment to be standard vitamin dosage and rest in bed with splints applied to paralysed limbs.

In severe cases Vitamin B1 (Berin) has been given. Cure may take from a few days in mild cases to several months in cases of severe neuritics – in these latter, complete recovery may not occur.

Stomatitis and Glossitis have always responded rapidly to vitamin therapy.

Spastic Paresis is a serious condition and so far there have been no deaths among A.I.F. personnel but several fatal cases in the British Hospital have been recorded. Our cases have been treated by extra nutrition with nicamide injections daily, marmite and rice polishings together with suitable rest and exercises.

Painful Feet have been found in varying degrees of severity, often associated with other conditions. Treatment is rice polishings in conjunction with rest and infra-red heat therapy.

Scrotal Dermatitis was due to lack of B2 complex. Mild cases were cured quickly by vitamin therapy, but some became complicated by sepsis, tinea and even diphtheria. Local irritation, particularly scratching and antiseptics were harmful in the simple cases and rest and freedom from sweating was beneficial.

Major Clarke of the 13th A.G.H. experimented extensively with various foodstuffs etc. in the treatment of this condition and reported that the following had little or no value :- pineapple, bananas coconut, vitamin B tablets, yeast, peanuts if not masticated. He recommended further use of well ground peanuts, rice polishing and increased diet especially protein. Marmite, he said, cannot be equalled for value.

On 13th December, Major Bert Nairn led the A.G.H. Officers' cricket team against the Selarang Medical Officers, captained by Col. Webster. No record can be found of the result, so perhaps the gentlemen played a draw!

Sewerage System, which was damaged by enemy action in Jan/Feb 1942 was finally repaired and became operative on the 15th December, 1942. This did not mean the end of the "bore-holes" which became very offensive after flooding and over-flowing following heavy rain. The sight of those cursed maggots everywhere made one wish for the luxury of a sewerage system. Just imagine the improvement in hospital hygiene now that the water closets were functional. The health of many patients must now improve markedly. So we had three comforts and three important assistants to good patient care

- (a) Running water
- (b) Electric light
- (c) Sewerage system.

Morale in the hospital wards, always very good, improved still further.

SPECIAL ORDER BY LT. COL. F. G. GALLEGHAN D.S.O. E.D.

COMMANDER A.I.F. MALAYA

Changi Received by .A.G.H. on 24th December, 1942

I desire to convey to all ranks of the A.I.F. my good wishes for a Xmas as merry as circumstances permit, and the wish that 1943 brings to you all happiness, prosperity and a successful conclusion of the war. It is at times such as the present that our thoughts go to our loved ones in Australia and elsewhere, and I know that on your return those loved ones will be proud of you because of the A.I.F.'s record in battle and of its high morale in the present circumstances. I give to you in terms of strong recommendation that our future conduct as Ps.O.W. and in any other capacity the future demands will be such that it will not sully our present reputations.

Since assuming my present responsibility I have been more than proud of the A.I.F. morale, and each day brings evidence of it getting higher. May 1943 provide the opportunity to employ usefully that quality by which alone good soldiers are known.

My thanks to you all for your efforts in 1942, which has been a difficult year, but we face the future with confidence in ourselves and our country.

God Bless you all.

Sgnd. F. G. Galleghan,
Lt. Colonel.
Comm. A.I.F. Malaya.

This was the lead-in to our first Christmas as prisoners-of-war. Christmas Eve – thoughts of home – decorations and presents – gaiety and laughter – freedom – but that was Christmas 1940 in Australia. Many a tough “Aussie” shed a silent tear that Christmas Eve, the first as P.O.W.

CHRISTMAS DAY 1942

All men, staff and patients, exchanged the customary "Merry Christmas" one to another. Many a hand was clasped in friendship and goodwill that day. Wards had been decorated as best as possible and many beds were festooned with its occupant's home-made decorations.

The big surprise was to be the Xmas puddings and cakes. Remember, rations had been slightly reduced during November/December to supply the needs for Christmas day. A week ago the cooks, Sgt. Merv Brown, Cpls. Jack Ogburn, Hans Hillioak and his able helpers started making 800 lbs of pudding and cake. The bakers worked in shifts throughout each 24 hours of the week and made their puddings and cakes from ground rice and sago flour.

Christmas Day started with carols until 0200 hours sung by two choirs – one from the A.G.H. and one from the B.G.H.

Church services were well attended and a sports meeting was arranged for the afternoon – athletics, baseball, Australian rules, rugby – take your pick.

We had very good meals on this Christmas Day – the Mess hut was decorated and tables were lined up in a square. We were grateful to the cooks who provided

Breakfast:

Ground rice and mabella, milk, sugar, biscuit and cocoa with milk and sugar.

Lunch:

European dinner (i.e. no rice) Bully beef, beans, baked sweet potatoes, pumpkin, beetroot, asparagus. Christmas pudding with white sauce. Cocoa with milk and sugar.

Tea:

More bully beef, beans, potatoes
Christmas cake and cocoa.

Supper:

Christmas cake and cocoa.

Grumbles about scanty meals were forgotten this day.

REPORT ON THE DIPHTHERIA EPIDEMIC OCCURRING AMONST THE A.I.F. FROM JULY TO DECEMBER 1942

A.G.H. – 28th DECEMBER, 1942

The first case of diphtheria amongst the A.I.F. occurred in the dysentery ward. This patient developed a faucial diphtheria and was sent to the British diphtheria ward where he later succumbed to the combined toxæmia of his two infections. His death occurred on July 24th, 1942.

Towards the end of August two cases were admitted from Singapore working parties suffering from scrotal dermatitis. Their scrota were indurated, weeping profusely, and so swollen as to almost give the appearance of an elephantiasis. One of these cases, in time, became moribund from toxæmia and myocarditis with a terminal heart failure and died, in spite of 30,000 units of anti-toxin, within two weeks of admission.

The companion case to this had his scrotum incised in hospital and it was from the fluid so obtained that diphtheroid bacilli were cultured. This awakened us to the presence of skin diphtheria. This case was given 30,000 units of anti-toxin and, after a further stormy week, gradually recovered. Some two weeks after his original infection he was returned to hospital from the Convalescent Depot suffering from ulnar and lower limb paresis accompanied by loss of reflexes. He has now almost completely recovered from this complication.

The third fatality in our records was a very interesting case. He was admitted to the skin ward suffering from a septic impetigo, swabbings from which were negative to K.L.B. Five days before death he became seriously ill from toxæmia. At this stage diphtheroid bacilli were cultured from his sputum but this fact was disregarded in the absence of an Upper Respiratory Tract lesion. No anti-toxin was given. Then nephritis developed which went on to death. The Post Mortem found toxic spoiling of the kidneys, toxic myocarditis and bronchi filled with a fibrinous exudate which gave a positive culture of K.L.B. There were no other signs of diphtheria throughout the U.R.T. in spite of a very thorough search. From late August to mid December, 93 cases were admitted but only 64 of these were proved diphtheritics.

They were classified as follows :-

| | | | | | | | |
|-------------|----|-----|---------|----|--|------|---|
| Faucial | 34 | | Nasal | 14 | | Lip | 6 |
| Oral | 1 | | Scrotal | 9 | | Skin | 4 |
| Conjunctive | 1 | and | Wound | 1 | | | |

Six of the above cases were of mixed skin or scrotal diphtheria associated with faucial or nasal infection.

The wound case was following the removal of a toe-nail, the bed of which refused to heal and ulcerated.

It was in the last week of August that the British Hospital kindly granted us a wing of "S" block to treat A.I.F. diphtheritics. Capt. Huxtable of the 13th A.G.H. was designated to assist in the Management of the skin patients.

THE YEAR OF THE WORKING PARTIES – 1943

On New Year's Day the Japanese made a present of a bottle of local wine to each 10 men. Those who sampled the "grappa" said it tasted like "metho" but it certainly served as a token New Year drink. The more adventurous men made their own toddy from fermentation of pineapple, coconut milk and sugar. Many tried a taste and many failed the challenge of the potent liquid.

After our Christmas and New Year splurge the food rations seemed to slip back to the usual uninteresting rice plus a small piece of dried fish or plus a green stew – again no salt and no sweetening.

The prize food was the burnt hard rice on the bottom of the cooking woks – easy to eat but hard to come by – perhaps if you knew a cook – many knew cooks but were disappointed – the cooks maybe ate too!

January '43 saw the hospital back to work. Bone grafts were becoming a new venture. Major Phillips made a new thumb for one fellow from a rib-piece.

Lt. Col. Osborn and Major Nairn attended to a head cavity caused by shrapnel and repaired the gap by a rib-bone canopy with the scalp sewn over.

There was a lack of post-operative drugs – luminal and phenobarb tablets were needed as often fits followed operations to the head.

Football was discouraged because of the increasing number of injuries, sprained ankles etc. Volley ball was encouraged and became quite popular as a means of relaxation and letting off tensions.

The Sergeants seem to dislike the men's company as they now have permission to form their own mess with their own cooks. The reason given and approved was that close contact with the men meant senior N.C.O.s (i.e. Sgts. and above) were unable to get maximum amount of work from the orderlies.

Another rumour has started that a **radio message home** to Australia is being organised – but sadly rumour only it was for all of us.

A.I.F. Concert Party was reformed during 1942 and became a truly competent and entertaining troupe capable of producing concerts, drama and pantomime to entertain our A.I.F. troops. Often, the concert party visited the hospital and all who could possibly make it enjoyed its performance.

In mid-December 1942 the pantomime "Cinderella" was presented. The scenery and costuming were first class and the artists of excellent quality – Slim de Gray and others. Early in 1943 the Palladium theatre in the hospital area was done up to allow the Concert Party to come over every Wednesday and entertain us.

In a group of P.O.W. embracing British and Australian personnel those with the necessary talents emerged e.g. a singer with the B.B.C., a first violinist with the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

A.G.H. STRENGTH – CHANGI – 1930 HOURS – 10.1.43

| | <u>Officers</u> | <u>W.O.s</u> | <u>N.C.O.s</u> | <u>Ptes.</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|------------------------|-----------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| <u>Staff</u> | 42 | 7 | 110 | 359 | 518 |
| <u>Patients</u> | 20 | 11 | 158 | 539 | 728 |

At this date the total number of A.I.F. in the Changi area totalled 9,505

OPERATION LISTS – JANUARY 1943

The situation in the hospital in January 1943 was that physicians were kept busy and on their toes while the hospital's surgeons were stagnating. Most of the major reconstruction work with amputees had been finished and so operations carried out at this time were mainly simple procedures without complications.

The following official list of operations from January 14th to January 26th, 1943 is typical of those carried out at that time.

Thursday January 14th

| | | | |
|----------------|------------|------|--------------------------|
| Major Phillips | 1030 hours | O.T. | Dislocation of finger |
| Major Phillips | 1100 hours | O.T. | Variceocle |
| Major Phillips | 1145 hours | O.T. | Haemorrhoids and fissure |
| Major Phillips | 1230 hours | O.T. | Fissure-in-ano |

Friday January 15th

| | | | |
|-----------------|------------|------|----------------------------|
| Major Phillips | 1000 hours | O.T. | Appendicectomy |
| Major Nairn | 1045 hours | O.T. | Foreign body – leg |
| Major Nairn | 1100 hours | O.T. | Fissure |
| Lt. Col. Osborn | 0945 hours | N.T. | Excision of knee cartilage |
| Lt. Col. Osborn | 1030 hours | N.T. | Excision of knee cartilage |
| Major Phillips | 1130 hours | N.T. | Excision of knee cartilage |

Saturday January 16th

| | | | |
|----------------|------------|------|----------------------------|
| Major Phillips | 1030 hours | O.T. | Curellage of rib cartilage |
| Major Phillips | 1100 hours | O.T. | Haemorrhoids |
| Major Nairn | 1100 hours | O.T. | Injection of piles |

Monday January 18th

| | | | |
|----------------|------------|------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Major Phillips | 1000 hours | O.T. | Removal of bullet F.B. |
| Major Phillips | 1030 hours | O.T. | Bone curetting and freeing of tendon-wrist (G.A.) |
| Major Phillips | 1115 hours | O.T. | Haemorrhoids (G.A.) |
| Major Phillips | 1145 hours | O.T. | Haemorrhoids (G.A.) |
| Major Nairn | 1200 hours | O.T. | Injection piles |
| Major Nairn | 1215 hours | O.T. | Injection piles |
| Major Farmer | 1400 hours | O.T. | Lung wash-out (Local) |
| Major Farmer | 1530 hours | O.T. | S.M.R. (Local) |

(Other minor operations by Majors Nairn, Eddy and Lt. Col. Osborn –
Hernia Elbow Wrist)

Tuesday January 19th

| | | | |
|-----------------|------------|------|-------------------------------------|
| Lt. Col. Osborn | 1000 hours | N.T. | Plastic to nose (Cartilage graft) |
| Lt. Col. Osborn | 1130 hours | N.T. | Stricture of membranous urethra |
| Capt. Vincent | 1000 hours | O.T. | Circumcision (S.A.) |
| Major Nairn | 1000 hours | O.T. | Manipulation (P.S.) |
| Major Nairn | 1030 hours | O.T. | Injection of haemorrhoids |
| Major Phillips | 1045 hours | O.T. | Manipulation of Spine (P.S.) |
| Major Eddy | 1130 hours | O.T. | Bi-lateral saphenous vein (L.A. 1%) |
| Major Eddy | 1230 hours | O.T. | Hammer toe (L.A. 1%) |
| Major Farmer | 1630 hours | O.T. | D.R.A. |

Wednesday January 20th

| | | | |
|--------------|------------|------|-----------------------|
| Major Nairn | 1000 hours | O.T. | Appendicectomy (G.A.) |
| Capt. Duncan | 1030 hours | O.T. | Circumcision G.A.) |
| Major Farmer | 1200 hours | O.T. | S.M.R. (Local) |
| Major Farmer | 1530 hours | O.T. | Tonsillectomy (G.A.) |
| Major Eddy | 1100 hours | O.T. | Haemorrhoids G.A.) |

Thursday 21st January

| | | | |
|----------------|------------|------|-------------------------|
| Major Phillips | 1000 hours | O.T. | Lipoma of Axilla (G.A.) |
| Major Phillips | 1100 hours | O.T. | Appendicectomy (G.A.) |
| Major Phillips | 1130 hours | O.T. | Haemorrhoids (G.A.) |

January 22nd – January 26th

Above
Surgeons

6 Circumcisions
3 Tonsilectomies
2 Anal Fissures
3 Haemorrhoids
4 Appendicectomies
10 Miscellaneous ops.

AUSTRALIAN RULES FOOTBALL

It says something for the above game when, men thousands of miles from the action which enthral players and spectators alike in Southern Australia, would form teams for competition in Malaya.

Before Japan entered the war and our unit was establishing itself at Tampoi in Johore Bahru in November 1941 a game of football was organised among the nearby units. Members of the medical team included Jock Frew, Laurie Byrne, Bob Small, Hans Hollioak, Lex Arthurson, Noel Chandler and Len Hancock.

The game was played on the palace padang of the Sultan of Johore who organised transport for the teams. As a football match it was a memorable joke. The rain came down ceaselessly that afternoon and the game was played to the accompaniment of the Sultan's band. Refreshments were available from white-coated stewards all afternoon by a nod or a gesture from the players. The Sultan was not present at the game but evidently left orders not to spare the expense. Far more whiskies and gin squashes were served than was good for the game. The score didn't matter and the game was played in good spirits!

During early P.O.W. Days, though, Chicken Smallhorn, Brownlow Medal winner with Fitzroy in 1933, organised teams in both the Selarang and Hospital areas. Matches were played seriously in the extreme heat and quite a few injuries resulted, much to the annoyance of the medical hierarchy. Laurie Byrne was probably our Unit's most successful member of the combined medical team and he was given valuable support from Bob Small. "A Richmond" team list included Webb, O'Leary, Webster, Lees, Hollioak, Ewins and Parker.

In early 1943 a firm stopper was placed on the inter-unit games because of the number of injuries being sustained.

MESSAGES FOR BROADCAST

27th January, 1943

The Imperial Japanese Army are allowing each member of the A.I.F. in Changi to write a message which they say will be broadcast to Australia. Not all will be transmitted but a certain number chosen at random will be broadcast each day.

Efforts were to be made to have nominal rolls of A.I.F. prisoners broadcast also.

No person may write more than one message which is due in by 1000 hours, 29th January.

Specimen message

29th January, 1943

To Mrs. James Public, 3 King Street, Newtown, N.S.W.
From NX98754 Sergeant J. N. Public – A.I.F. Malaya.

Text "Dearest Wife – am prisoner, Singapore. Fit but thin on rice diet. Bill Smith well. Send food Red Cross.
Love Jim.

Messages were submitted in hope.

Much later it was made known to us that some folks home in Melbourne received radio messages about October 1943. More will be written about mail to and from Changi later in this history.

During February 1943 there were further hospital admissions of patients suffering from eye troubles and scrotal dermatitis due to vitamin deficiencies.

Bugs in bedding and in cracks and crevices in concrete walls and flooring were most annoying and much time was spent in debugging personal items. Patients, of course, had to be protected from this problem as any additional skin scratch could result in serious infections. So, a common sight was the shaking out of bedding and stamping on the stinking vermin.

Salt water parties still filled up drums on the trailers and, if the Japanese guards were in a good mood, the working party was allowed a quick dip if the tide was in far enough.

The wood parties took their trailers into the nearby rubber plantation where the forestry men cut the fuel. Having obtained their loads, the trailers were pushed and pulled back to camp. The hospital cooks were able to use the rubber wood immediately – a quite unique feature of this commodity.

About this time the **A.I.F. Education Centre** was commenced by Brigadier Taylor and Captain Adrian Curlewis. A listing of suitable courses was made. It appeared that over half the men wanted to be poultry farmers after the war. Among the A.I.F there seemed to be instructors available for most subjects. Early courses commenced included Elementary English, Public Speaking, Mathematics, Malay, Horticulture and Poultry Farming. Further mention of the above Education scheme will be made later on in this story.

27 Inf Bde
L of C Bde
Medical Bde
Camp H.Q.

A.D.M.S. (for A.G.H.)
A/Staff Paymaster
File

H.Q. A.I.F.
23 Mar 43

Q3754

FINANCE – NON-COMBATANT PAY

1. It is anticipated that pay as set out hereunder will be received monthly from the IJA commencing in Apr in respect of non-combatants holding original Red Cross certificates only :-

| | | |
|--------|---------|-----------|
| W.O.1 | \$80 | per month |
| W.O.11 | \$32 | per month |
| Sgt | \$20 | per month |
| Cpl | \$20 | per month |
| L/Cpl | \$10.50 | per month |
| Pte | \$9 | per month |

2. In view of the policy already adopted regarding the pooling of Officers' pay and heavy duty pay to enable the purchase of extra rations for all ranks and of drugs and other essentials for the Hospital and the payment of 'No Duty' personnel, all non-combatant pay will be pooled.

3. Heavy duty rates as follows :-

| | | |
|--------|----------|---------|
| W.Os | 30cents | per day |
| N.C.Os | 20 cents | per day |
| Ptes | 15 cents | per day |

will be paid to the following in addition to the personnel mentioned at the end of para 4 of Finance memo Q3577 of 3 Mar 43 as from 1 Apr 43 and until reviewed :-

- (a) All personnel holding original Red Cross certificates, irrespective of duties on which engaged.
- (b) Personnel engaged in medical or nursing duties who do not come under para (a).
- (c) Personnel in A.G.H. area who are engaged exclusively in wood-cutting.
- (d) Payment to 'No Duty' personnel will be increased to 30 cents per pay (i.e. for ten days).

4. This adjustment will enable the deduction from of two pay per month to be discontinued for the month of Apr.

5. The following only will then be contributing to the pool :-

- (a) Officers
- (b) Non-combatants
- (c) Detainees
- (d) Canteen profits

Lt-Col

CO A.G.H.

Q.3728

HQ A.I.F.
19 Mar 43

NON COMBATANT PAY

1. The general policy decided upon regarding non-combatant pay by Comd A.I.F. is:-

- (a) That all such pay be pooled
- (b) All personnel holding original Red Cross Certificates will be paid at heavy duty rates (i.e. 5 cents per day extra).
- (c) All personnel in A.G.H. engaged in medical duties will be paid at heavy duty rates.
- (d) Personnel engaged in wood cutting in A.G.H. area will also be paid at heavy duty rates.

2. Please promulgate this policy immediately to all personnel affected.

Lt-Col
A.A. & QMG A.I.F.

“D” Force Working Party comprised 2,780 British and 2,220 Australian troops. The Aussie group had been captured in Java after being diverted there while returning to Australia from the Middle East.

Ten hospital doctors medically examined all the troops for transit, doing 1,000 an afternoon at 10 tables, with 100 men lined up for each medical officer.

This force left for Thailand on the 14th March 1943 as a working party. Many of the 2/2 Pioneers, who proudly paraded down Swanston Street, Melbourne, early in 1940, led by a bulldog mascot, were included in this force along with a medical team led by Col. E. Dunlop. No 13th A.G.H. personnel were selected for this party. The work of “D” Force and its now famous railway-doctor, Sir Edward Dunlop, has been recorded for the world to read in book and on television.

“E” Force left Singapore for Borneo on Saturday, 27th March comprising 500 A.I.F. This party included Major Howard Eddy, a medical officer from Melbourne, a member of the 13th A.G.H. His medical companion was another doctor, Capt. J. Oakshott. Three medical orderlies from our unit were members of “E” force and all three died in Borneo in 1945.

Their army details are set down as:-

| | |
|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| VX 57176 | R. Colombine (enlisted in 13 th A.G.H. as Reg. Aylett) deceased 7/2/45 |
| VX 57641 | Leslie Charles Canterbury, deceased Borneo, 7/5/45 |
| VX 58565 | Jack Falco, died Borneo 26/2/45 |

These three Melbourne members of the 13th A.G.H. were unlucky indeed to die in 1945, the year of our release from captivity. It is presumed these men succumbed while being force-marched from Sandakan to Ranau in January, 1945 – a distance of 160 miles – only six men survived from “B” and “E” Forces.

On Wednesday the 14th April it became known officially from the Japanese that “D” Force is in Thailand and “E” Force is in Borneo.

THE TRAGEDY OF “F” FORCE

It is necessary to look into the reasons for the sending of the ill-fated “F” Force to Thailand to construct a railroad.

Five working parties had already left Singapore for Burma, Borneo, Japan and Thailand. These comprised the fittest of the prisoners of war. So, in April 1943 any further working party would need to include many unfit men.

The Japanese Command had received orders from the War Office that it was imperative a railway line was constructed between Bangkok in Thailand and Moulmein in Burma. The Japanese now considered their “back-door” in Burma vulnerable and a rapid supply line for food and military equipment was the urgent consideration.

This meant that a railway line had to be constructed from Bampong across 275 miles (420 kms) of mountain and jungle to Thanbyuzayat. This overland supply route would need to be built quickly – already “A” Force was working from the Burma end and “D” Force had commenced from the Thailand extremity. The middle section was to be hurriedly built by “F” Force.

It must be remembered, too, that at this time the Japanese were finding it very hard to keep up the supply of rice to the Singapore and Changi people.

So, the propaganda and lies commenced. The Hospital was told that any men sent away to Thailand would be leaving the bad for the good – “plenty of food and medicine in Thailand – don’t hesitate to send any convalescent patients”.

Other enticements given to the Hospital and other P.O.W. by the Japanese were:

- (a) The new area will have a healthier climate than Singapore.
- (b) Bands will be allowed – one to each 1,000 men.
- (c) Gramophones will be provided on arrival.
- (d) Canteens will be set up within a month.
- (e) There will be no restrictions placed on the type or amount of equipment which may be taken.
- (f) Transport will be provided for the movement of heavy personal equipment, camp and medical stores.
- (g) Men unfit to march will be given transport.
- (h) There will be no long marches.
- (i) Medicines and drugs will be available on arrival.
- (j) 30% of unfit men may be included in the force.

Consequently, about 125 unfit Australians were included while the British had nearly 1,000 unfit sent away with “F” Force.

On the 15th April, 1943 “F” Force personnel (3,662 Australian, 3,400 British) had glass rod tests for bowel disorders and inoculations against cholera plague. It was arranged that the Australians would leave in batches of 500 early each morning. Following them would be the British.

A large hospital party of 200 Australian and 200 British was to be added.

Major Bruce Hunt and a **large number of our 13th A.G.H.** were to be members of the medical party to look after the health of the men of the 2/26th, 2/29th and 2/30th Australian Infantry Battalions, 2/15th Field Regiment and attached Corps troops.

Preparations included nominal rolls, packing of precious medicines, party members organising personal gear and the fare-welling of friends.

A “grand” concert was organised for 2000 hours on Sunday 18th April, 1943 by the combined A.G.H. as a Farewell to “F” Force.

The program contained Community Singing and the following items:

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 1. | Chairman’s Remarks | K. Kemple. |
| 2. | The King | Proposed by the Chairman. |
| 3. | Overture | Jack Greenwood and his Nitwits. |
| 4. | Community | Pack Up Your Troubles etc. |
| 5. | Song | Paul Calderwood |
| 6. | Jack Greenwood | Selected |
| 7. | Happy Harry | Selected |
| 8. | “F” Force (Toast) | Proposed by Lt. Col. H. Summons. |
| 9. | Response | Major B. Hunt Pte R. F. D. Owen |
| 10. | Jack Greenwood and his Nitwits | Selected |
| 11. | Band | Leader Lou Brady |
| 12. | Capt. Bush, Judy Garland and Team | Musical Sketch |
| 13. | Absent Friends (Toast) | Padre Pain |
| 14. | Song | George L. Thomas |
| 15. | Jack Greenwood | Selected |
| 16. | Community | “Wish Me Luck” |
| 17. | Our Visitors (Toast) | Padre Marsden |
| 18. | Artists and Orchestra | Thanks – Major Home |
| 19. | Organisers (Toast) | Major Dick |
| | Finale | Land of Hope and Glory Auld Lang Syne |

One of the organisers was Fred Sutton of the 13th A.G.H.

At 2 a.m. on Sunday, 18th April 1943 those men from the hospital selected for the first trainload to travel north assembled on the Barrack square in heavy rain under floodlights. Names were called – groups of 25 men assembled at numbered posts. Most had groundsheets covering themselves and their few possessions. Some had none and were drenched in the deluge. Water rose inches deep over the bitumen. Captain Huxtable came down and said good-bye to Sgt. G. Blackie, Cpl. L. Arthurson, Ptes. Tiny Parker, Curly Haines, Joe Knight and several others. He found them sheltering in a porch all fairly cheery in spite of having walked the mile or so in the rain from the hospital to the square in the middle of the night.

At 4 a.m. Japanese trucks drove into the square with glaring lights, blaring of horns and much loud shouting.

Men were loaded 25 to a truck and, amid shouts of farewell from the barracks' balconies, the long convoy of trucks disappeared into the elements. The flood lights were extinguished and the square again became black and silent except for the distant sound of "Waltzing Matilda" from the Diggers aboard the 2 dozen lorries.

The road ran under the huge wooden boomerang mounted above the Changi gate. The inscription on the boomerang read "Cum Gaudio Haec Omnia Recordabimus" ("We will remember all these things with joy").

The convoy headed for Singapore about fourteen miles away, and was soon passing through the silent city where Chinese watched from darkened doorways. Upon arrival at the railway station at Tanjong Pagar – with its ridiculous advertising poster – "Come to Australia – Land of Sunshine" – troops were ordered into small steel rice trucks (6 metres by 2 ½ metres by 2 metres high) 27 men to each.

Movement was impossible – men sat on their gear. The trucks were greasy and rusty. It was still hard to get comfortable as the train rattled along the narrow gauge toward the causeway linking the Island with Johore Bahru.

Once over the causeway, the Aussies were back in Malaya again for the first time in 14 months. Men soon became cramped, uncomfortably hot and thirsty. As the sun sank, the town of Gemas was reached. Here we were ordered on to the platform for a small ration of rice and a weak vegetable stew – quickly swallowed as most had not eaten since 3 a.m. that day. After an hour the journey recommenced. Sleep was impossible and the night dragged on. Many men fouled themselves during the night and the air became putrid.

At Kuala Lumpur at 4 a.m. the men received another meal of rice and soup and a fifty minute leg-stretch.

At 9 a.m. the 19th April, the train stopped at a small station where buckets of tea were made. Surprisingly, the guards permitted Chinese to sell us paw-paws and bananas. As we moved off, the Chinese gave us what they had not sold.

Up through the hill country to Ipoh, the largest city in the State of Perak, where the Aussies used the railway watering points beside the station as instant showers. Following another weak meal of rice we were herded back into the trucks.

At Alor Star, at night, eggs were on sale for five cents each at the native railway refreshment room. These were rushed as a real bargain which truly they were. Before most had purchased, the Japanese appeared swinging rifles and bashing prisoners back to the trucks. Thought of Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith who, with Tom Pettybridge, went missing on November 9th, 1935. The plane was last heard of 2 a.m. 25 miles from Alor Star.

At 10.30 a.m. on the third day the train crossed the border into Thailand and pulled up at a tiny station Padang Besar which was hard to read on the platform signboard because the Japanese had painted over it – probably to obliterate the English letters. Ten minutes of physical exercises did wonders for cramped muscles.

Again, no food was provided at this stop.

One prisoner had died in one of the trucks and was dead nearly twenty-four hours before removal. The men in that truck must have endured extra misery.

At Champon, 150 miles north of the Malay border, in a large paddock, the troops received their first meal for 36 hours – rice and thin soup. This was the last meal for yet another 36 hours.

The hot steel trucks were vile with dust, rust and soot. About noon, at Bara-Thon, eggs were again for sale (14 a dollar). The sellers were rushed - some men paid, many did not. Guards rushed to restore order and again bashings took place to force the men back to their trucks. They were just plain hungry for the Japanese had provided no meal for the second successive day.

The fourth day was the most trying of the journey. As the train rattled up the Isthmus of Kra, the heat was almost unbearable. The sides of the truck could not be touched they were so hot and water bottles again were empty.

Towards nightfall, the train really began to climb, slowly and tortuously. For hours the engine laboured through the storm and the cold rain which began to fall. The sliding doors couldn't be closed and rain pelted in on the cold, hungry, unfortunate prisoners.

Next morning, just before dawn, the train left the mountains and entered the flat country again. An hour later the nightmare journey was over, we had arrived at Bampong, a large town 30 miles north-west of Bangkok.

"All men out" was the Japanese cry. Thankfully possessions were thrown to the ground and "all men" climbed down to the platform.

"All men" were physically exhausted, had not slept for five days and had only four miserable meals. All were covered in filth from the dirty trucks.

A two mile march through the town to the Japanese camp revealed a number of atap-roofed huts where all were searched and told to be prepared to march out in a few hours. Many Australians were to be left here being too sick to march – no 13th A.G.H. personnel stayed to tend the sick.

Most had showers and traded some items of clothing for food – hard boiled duck eggs 14 for a ticol and tomatoes and bananas, great big beauties, for a shirt or a pair of shorts. Hungry men often make poor traders. Food bought was dealt with summarily – a dozen hard boiled eggs down the hatch – hard to swallow but solace for the stomach.

Where were the promised trucks to transport men, gear, sick and medical supplies?

The awful truth now dawned on all. We were not going to a rest camp but were heading for a march into the jungle to build a railway to Burma. The Japanese ordered the prisoners-of-war to take only what they could carry. Some quick decisions had to be made. Surplus gear was sold to the Thais while the heavy kit and stores, including medical stores and tools, were dumped unguarded on the side of the road. Three-quarters of the medical stores needed for the welfare of the Australians were left behind. Even a piano and band instruments to be used by the Concert Party had to be off-loaded.

This was in direct contradiction of the permission given in Changi for unlimited goods to be taken north and for which transport would be provided. This cruel act would seem intended to humiliate the prisoners even further.

THE MARCH TO DEATH

The forced march started on Easter Sunday, the 25th April, 1943. All were pleased to leave the Bampong bamboo huts with their disgusting filth of human excreta left by an earlier party of coolie labourers.

The first party to march was formed from the first two train-loads and was led by Lt. Col. Pond supported by some mentally strong officers, Capt. A. Curlewis and Capt. B. Barnett, the Adjutant. The Medical Officer to this group of 720 men was Capt. R. Mills of the 2/10th Australian Field Ambulance. Other parties were formed as successive train-loads arrived. The normal pattern was to walk the 15 – 28 kilometres at night to the next staging camp. There would be a ten minute rest every hour. Each man carried his own gear and that of a sick mate.

The first party marched 275 kilometres towards the Burma border through all kinds of weather and terrain. The planned track lay through some of the densest virgin jungle in the world, swarming with mosquitoes and every form of insect life. Already Asiatic labour forces of Malay, Tamil and Burmese coolies had been decimated by cruelty, hunger and disease. It is estimated that at least 100,000, and probably quarter of a million, lay dead along the railway. The Australians were the replacement labour. To build a railway the Japanese way appeared laughable. The enormity of the task ahead surely warranted mechanical equipment. The bridging of scores of streams, the steep ravines to be conquered, the precipitous mountains to be blasted, demanded the latest in modern clearing, engineering and bridge-building equipment.

The only addition to manual labour was the assistance of a few elephants. This long march lasted 17 days of absolute misery, trudging wearily from one staging camp to the next. One guard led the line with another at the rear. No hope of escape – jungle surrounding – roar of tigers nearby at night. Food consisted of rice, often sour, onion soup, dried horse flesh and weak tea. Footwear rotted and wore away – many men were now barefoot with shocking blisters.

Now, walking in thigh deep mud with the occasional foot crushing the skeleton of a coolie – now, taking a turn in the stretcher party helping the sick. That poor unfortunate being carried is dying. To leave him would mean death from a rifle-butt or from the parang of the nearby Thai bandits always on the alert for a straggler from whom to steal a shirt, blanket or shorts.

The medical staff moved up and down the line treating scratches and ulcers mainly. Nothing could be done about Beri-beri, malaria or dysentery. The name of the game at this moment is survival by keeping up with the others, ignoring the constant hallucinations resultant from thirst.

At one point of the march, no food and water were supplied for 36 hours. Sometimes the Japanese lost their way, couldn't read the lousy little maps they carried. This meant retracing our way and starting out again.

The same flock of vultures followed us throughout. When we moved on so did they. When we stopped they just sat up there watching and waiting as they had done as the Asians died.

Fierce tropical rain beat down making the jungle path slippery and men slithered about and slid to their knees, all the time trying to support the stretchers they were shouldering. Hanging branches and vines tore at the skin of arms and faces. Then, walking across swamps in waist-deep water, much gear became lost in the muddy bottom.

Troops were threatened with rifle butts if they halted and, so, on again in the dark and through the black mud.

At dawn, the prisoners saw across their path a railway line they had heard so much about. By now, all knew they were to work at railway construction but they didn't know they still had 150 miles more to march.

Daylight disclosed Tarsau, the base camp of "D" Force which had left Singapore a month earlier. The impression formed was that here is a very organised staging camp, clean and neat with orderly huts in line, but exuding a certain coolness. The camp spoke, "We are pleased to see you, but for God's sake don't request any of our meagre rations. You can use our cook-house but use your own rations. Best of Australian luck to you all. Please keep moving".

This summation may appear harsh to the reader but, at the time in our desperate position, the comments from our marching party supported the above opinion. "D" Force had been lucky for it had been transported from Bampong to Tansau by trucks. The hospital established here under the leadership of Lt. Col. Dunlop had been able to maintain all gear and medical supplies brought with them from Singapore. Good luck to "D" Force.

Off the troops went on their lacerated feet to endure another 25 kilometre march through the darkness.

The rest of the journey meant the negotiation of particularly bad terrain – the track winding uphill over sharp rocks – in desperation some crawled over the more difficult places.

The descent was worse than the climb – the rain persisted. Once through malarial swamps in the valleys the jungle became thicker and great clumps of prickly bamboo confronted us. A bamboo scratch became infected in a few hours and many a tropical ulcer owes its beginnings to this hazard.

This is surely the Land of Bamboo, much of which reached 50 metres towards the sky. Bamboo provided the prisoners-of-war with slats for beds, drinking mugs, surgical needles for transfusions, huts, brooms, brushes, baskets and other things useful. Cooked bamboo shoots improved the staple diet of rice.

The march followed roughly alongside the Menam Kwa Hat River through Takanoon to Kon Koita, Shimo Nieke and finally to Shimo Songkurai. Work commenced at once – the 1st party on the 12th May 1943, and the 5th and last party on the 16th May. The men were fairly feeble after the 275 kilometres and so it was absolute cruelty by the Japanese to expect so much from so many near death. Many members of the 13th Australian General Hospital were sent to Thailand on "F" Force and worked in the various camps. As far as can be ascertained the list included :

Major B. Hunt, Medical Officer

Sgt. T. Winters

S/Sgt. A. Southgate

Cpl. A. Arthurson

Privates: R. Small

E. E. R. Miller

R. F. D. Owen

R. Baguss

L. Waller

N. Chandler

O. Vickers-Bush

E. Parker

R. Sim

G. Vellacott

A.D.H. Miller

H. R. Hassett

Sgt. A. Deans

Sgt. G. Blackie

Cpl. W. Rossiter

J. Beretta

C. McKay

J. Carmody

T. Nestor

W. Turrell

A. Sweatman

A. Simpendorfer

N. Seddon

L. Coles

G. Gadd

H. Ansell

S/Sgt. W. Monteath

Cpl. A. Ogburn

Cpl. H. Hollioak

A. Haines

G. Letwin

J. Knight

A. Schliebs

T. Nash

E. Waddington

P. Boulton

K. Curtis

J. Swann

E. Wookey

W. A. Wilson

- a total of 44. There may possibly have been others but no records or lists are available for absolute verification.

Before the work of the medical personnel is placed on record it may interest all to know what the railway work entailed. All work was on a task-work basis. Each man had to dig out and carry to the embankment anything from two to 3.2 cubic metres of soil a day. This meant that the man digging often had to excavate seven or eight cubic metres while two team mates used the coolie "basket and pole" system to trundle the earth up to the embankment often 100 metres away. The poorest of spades, picks, axes and chunkels were the only tools available for this work which was of a heart-breaking monotony.

Even worse than embankment work was the bridge-building. Piles were driven in with great weights which were hauled up and then dropped on the pile by men toiling on ropes.

The monsoonal weather commenced on May 22nd so thousands of men worked day after day, months on end, often up to the waist in swift torrents, virtually naked. They received a diet of rice and stew consisting of radish or bamboo roots in boiling water. At the end of a 14, 16 or 20 hour day, immeasurably weary, they trudged back to their huts and after sick parade fell asleep exhausted only to be driven out once more before dawn to front up to another day's misery. All work along the line was carried out under a barrage of screaming and yelling from Japanese engineers and Korean guards. Brutal beatings by sadistic bullies using fists, bamboos, tools handles and rifle-butts were everyday occurrences.

At the end of May "F" Force was distributed among five camps :

| | | |
|--------------------------------|---|-------------------|
| No. 1. Camp at Lower Songkurai | - | 1,800 Australians |
| No. 2. Camp at Songkurai | - | 1,600 British |
| No. 3. Camp Upper Songkurai | - | 393 Australians |
| No. 4. Camp at Konkoita | - | 700 Australians |
| No. 5. Camp at Changaraya | - | 700 British |

There were still 500 Australians and 800 British prisoners still to reach the others.

A hospital was set up at Lower Nieke at first, then moved 10 kilometres to Nieke, considered more centrally placed. Colonel Banno, the senior Japanese officer established his headquarters at Nieke and it was soon evident that there was less sickness and better rations at Nieke than in all other camps.

Each camp had its hospital staffed by Australian or British medical personnel. Most of the 13th Australian General Hospital members of the "F" Force worked under the control of their medical officer, Major Bruce Hunt. This courageous man stood up to the senior Japanese officers and received many a beating for not allowing sick men to be forced out of hospital to join the working parties. Moving from camp to camp, checking on the sick and instructing his staff, Major Hunt constantly appealed to all Australians to grit their teeth and show the necessary determination to win through this crisis in their lives. To the credit of all, the men responded magnificently and endured their hardships with renewed spirit. In contrast, there was a feeling of despair evident in British camps and British hospitals. This resulted in many more deaths frequently hurried on by "giving up the ghost".

The blitzing of camp "hospitals" was perhaps the most revolting feature of this period. Ignorant Japanese officers, N.C.O.s and even privates, overrode or ignored the Allied Medical Officers and forced sick men out to work. One Japanese field officer said "We will build this railway if necessary over the bones of the P.O.Ws". Another stated, "Any sick man who staggers to the line to lay even one sleeper will not have died in vain". More categorical still was the statement of the engineer – commander of the Tarsau area in Thailand, "You will never see your homes again. You will work for the Japanese until you die". With this Japanese attitude it is not surprising that men died like flies despite the gallant efforts of overworked doctors who put up with an utter lack of all instruments, containers, drugs, materials and hospital requisites.

Another two doctors who were outstanding were Lt. Col. Albert Coates in Burma and Lt. Col. E. Dunlop in Thailand. These senior medical men toiled day and night against heartbreaking difficulties with a devotion which will never be forgotten by the men they tended. Although the above doctors were not in "F" Force, it seems appropriate to mention them at this stage.

From camps all along the road came disturbing reports of Cholera. "F" Force was being cut down daily.

At Shimo Songkurai camp, in the north-west of the Thailand jungle, only 37 kilometres from the Burmese border, the workers were housed in a dozen roofless native huts made of atap and split bamboo. The only water was a tiny stream running between this camp and another occupied by a Japanese engineering unit. The sick were made as comfortable as possible while negotiations with the Japanese commander, Lieutenant Fuduka, for repairs to the huts were carried out. Three hundred men were put to work on the day of arrival. The rest spent the day endeavouring to make the camp habitable. First, because one man went down with cholera, an isolation section was set up using badly perished tents pitched on a hillside. It became known as "Cholera Hill".

Two doctors, travelling overnight, brought from Neike camp all the available anti-cholera serum and during the morning about 1,400 men were inoculated. Soon there were seven in isolation. When the local commander of prisoners in North Thailand, a Japanese medical officer, Col. Banno, visited the camp, Major Hunt, our senior medical officer, asked for anti-cholera serum to complete inoculations, more atap for roofing, medical stores and cooking facilities.

Col. Banno, unfairly, maintained the responsibility for checking cholera and the general health in the camp rested with our medical officers.

On the third day in camp news came from "Cholera Hill" that one patient had died. An hour later another passed away. Cholera and dysentery were spreading. A red glow at night on "Cholera Hill" indicated that a funeral pyre had been lit to burn the dead cholera victims. This fire and those that burned regularly for months will burn forever in the memories of those who survived those dreadful months in Shimo Songkurai camp.

During this period, Stg. Alex Deans of the 13th Australian General Hospital and others of the unit showed the highest courage and self-sacrifice in their dangerous work. Volunteers to nurse the dying and stricken men were speedily obtained, despite the grave risk.

On May 27th, 19 more got cholera and on the next three days 26, 20 and 17 men went into isolation. A dozen or so men were dying daily.

More anti-cholera serum arrived and the men's inoculations were completed. This serum was not effective for ten days and was not 100 percent effective.

Dysentery continued to spread and was now causing deaths.

On June 1st about 80 men went down with a virulent malaria – the next day 200. The Japanese accused the sick men of malingering, and demanded 500 workers. They were informed there weren't that many fit men in camp. A stormy scene followed and the A.I.F. Commanders were repeatedly bashed.

However, so desperate was the cholera position, 25 having died in the previous 24 hours, that Major Hunt emphatically protested and the order was cancelled.

Soon 1,400 of the camp's 1,900 men were in hospital. Of more than 200 cholera cases, nearly half had died.

On June 5th optimism rose when the medical officers said that only three new cholera cases had been diagnosed in the previous 24 hours. About 30 more cases followed but there were fewer each day.

Private Thomas Nash contracted cholera and died in No. 1 camp Shimo Songkurai. He was a medical orderly who worked cheerfully and willingly among the sick.

In camps up and down the railway our unit lost 20 men through malnutrition and disease. Japanese had the crazy idea of supplying rations only to workers. They took a lot of convincing that sick men needed food to become well enough to work once again.

So, on June 10th working men received 500 grams daily and 200 grams (about 6 ozs) were allowed for men in hospital to be supplemented by stews of rice water and a little meat, but no vegetables.

This new ration meant starvation for the sick. Immediately, the fit men gave the sick an extra ounce daily from their rations. The Japanese were challenged to bring one of their own medical officers to examine the sick. The challenge was ignored.

Late in June, nearly every man had beri-beri in some form. You could press fingers into the swollen and pulpy flesh and find deep holes still there ten minutes later. Many men with cuts and bruises developed ugly tropical ulcers. Soon nearly 150 men were suffering from them. The ulcers spread rapidly, were very painful, and no medical supplies were available for proper treatment. Medical orderlies used to scrape out the pus with a spoon and cover the pungent smelling wound with a banana leaf to keep the flies away. Often maggots were allowed to cleanse the ulcers which were becoming larger and deeper. Many an amputation became necessary as bones became exposed and serious infections resulted. Imagine sawing off a leg under the most unhygienic conditions – imagine the agony endured by the patient – imagine the stoicism of the weakened medical orderlies and the surgeons.

When malaria broke out afresh, the Japanese provided one quinine tablet a day as a preventive but none extra to cure patients, each of whom needed at least seven tablets a day for seven days.

About this time several men died of black-water fever; others of pneumonia from continual work in the rain-drenched jungle. Conditions on the railroad now were barbarous. Cruel floggings were given, and men slaved on inadequate rations. Those with beri-beri and swollen water-logged feet were considered fit by the Japanese. Most were now without footwear. Major Hunt suggested the removal of all sick men to a place where food was more plentiful.

Subsequently, the Japanese decided to open a hospital in Burma and appointed the senior medical officer at Shimo Songkurai (Major Hunt) to command it.

Lt. Fukuda declared one day that many men were malingering, and ordered to work all who had recovered from cholera. When these sick, gaunt men were paraded before him, he cancelled the order, but said they could not have been eating their rice to have become so thin. However, their ration was only seven ounces a day.

Next day, Lt. Fukuda increased the rice ration to 600 grams a day for 150 convalescents so that they would quickly become strong enough to walk.

Although the decision to evacuate 2,000 sick men from “F” Force to Burma was made on June 19th, the move was not made for almost two months.

On July 15th only 28 patients remained on “Cholera Hill”, most of them recovering, but there were 1,493 sick men in hospital, nearly 700 with malaria and about 350 with dysentery from which some died daily. At the end of July doctors selected the 500 worst cases to be sent to Burma, and the Japanese announced that in August Shimo Songkurai camp would be evacuated.

On August 7th 1943 the rains eased and the movement was completed, leaving 500 Australians behind. Next day, 4,000 natives moved in and cholera became their worry almost immediately.

There is no doubt in the world the reason why most men died was because they were starved. No Australian soldier was afraid of hard work but when suffering from enervating amoebic or bacillary dysentery, plus the fortnightly bout of malaria, plus tropical ulcers and some beri-beri, even the simplest of tasks proved difficult. Pity the doctors and the medical orderlies who, at times, had only crushed charcoal in water to offer to their dying patients.

It became a constant fight to maintain some hygiene in the hospital huts. Latrines were just long trenches swarming with flies and maggots. Sanitary paper consisted of leaves from bushes. Constant monsoonal rain made the whole camp muddy and slushy.

Dressings for ulcers and wounds were not available and sores attracted flies. Patients had to be held down while their ulcers were scraped out with spoons. The loud penetrating screams they emitted had a chilling effect on other patients. Some even pleaded with doctors to amputate rather than scrape.

Some diarrhoea and dysentery patients received a little relief from drinking rice water from the kitchen. Even the scorched rice, which adhered to the inside of the kwali and scraped out when the cooked rice was removed, proved some sort of palliative.

Major Bruce Hunt's hospital at Tanbaya in Burma was a disappointment. It consisted of the usual bamboo and atap huts and no good water supply. Food was always poor and Dr. Hunt was given very few medical supplies. The death rate was high. Three hundred died in the first month. Bed pans were made of hollow bamboo sections and because the men were so sick there were many fouled bed areas. Most men were covered with shocking sores all over their bodies. The itch drove them ratty and, following the inevitable scratching, many sores developed into gangrenous leg ulcers.

Most men were skin and bone and body weights of four and five stones were commonplace.

Our men, who looked after the sick, all deserved commendation.

Addendum to the "F" Force Story**VX 57871 Pte Robert Owen, 13th A.G.H. tells a story of courage and devotion to duty.**

After a great deal of consideration I feel I should tell my experiences as a member of the "F" Force which left Singapore in April 1943.

The medical personnel were selected from combined units commanded by Lt. Col. Hedley Summons (2/9th Field Ambulance) at Roberts Barracks. Our C.O., Col. Pigdon had, with other senior officers, already been sent away from Singapore. It was noticeable the "F" Force medical team was mostly composed of 13th and 10th A.G.H.'s, the Con Depot and the 2/4 C.C.S.

Trucked to Singapore, the troops were jammed into metal cattle trucks with sliding doors. Major Bruce Hunt of the 13th A.G.H. was the medical officer in charge of the train No. 4 headed for Thailand. Medical personnel were distributed along the trucks and reported casualties whenever the train stopped. Men had to urinate hanging on to open doors because of lack of stops. Often Japanese guards would not allow men to leave the trucks, but, by wearing my Red Cross brassard and carrying a medical bag, I was allowed to move along to report to Major Hunt.

After four days of terrible conditions we arrived at Bampong in lower Thailand for a night's stop before setting out the next night on the long march.

Many men with malaria, dysentery and already weak to the point of collapse, needed much assistance even on this first section of the journey. At the first staging camp, Major Hunt and Captain Frank Cahill with their medical orderlies, worked non-stop with the sick. The next night Phil Boulton and I were posted to the rear of the column. Sick and exhausted men kept falling back on us. When dawn broke there was the amazing sight of men on stretchers, others carrying and supporting their mates. As the monsoon season had started each night's march became increasingly harder. Men would collapse in the mud or fall down gullies. We kept calling to each other endeavouring to move the injured and sick to the centre of the column of the march.

At one of the camps Major Hunt approached the Japanese requesting permission to leave the very sick behind. One guard hit the Major with a solid lump of timber so hard and often that he collapsed to the ground. I was terribly upset at this brutality and assisted him to the river where he bathed and examined a badly swollen hand. When he returned to camp he was told a small number only could remain.

One of the Padres was extremely ill and I was concerned about his ability to march on. My clothes were in tatters and my boots had gone. Capt. Reg Swartz loaned me a pair of fur-lined Air-Force boots. Marching with the rear party I heard an urgent call for medical help. Major Hunt had been left behind exhausted and ill and Capt. Cahill was being carried on a stretcher. So, when Phil Boulton brought up a fellow with a broken leg, I called to one of our N.C.Os for assistance but he must have been out of ear-shot. I told a 2/26th Bn. Sergeant we required splints and bandages. He barked out orders for branches of trees and torn-up shirts. After I set the leg he organised a stretcher and some men to stay with me. This fine example of comradeship gave me great strength.

I arrived at Nicke (approx 14th May) where I worked with Capt. John Taylor, M.O. 2/30th Bn. and Lt. Patrick Wolfe, M.O., Indian Army. I returned the boots loaned to me by Capt. Swartz as he was moving out that night. This was a sad parting for me.

Late in the evening of the 17th May I was giving transfusions when the newly arrived Major Hunt told us that Capt. Lloyd Cahill at Shimo Songkurai was seriously ill. Immediately the two M.Os, Hunt and Taylor with four medical orderlies, including myself, undertook a nightmare truck ride to the No. 1 camp.

On the 19th May 1943 I had my 21st birthday and spent it working among cholera patients with torrential rain pelting down. Conditions were pathetic as dysentery, malaria and tropical ulcers badly affected the working parties. Their problems were treated at the sick parades held after the men returned to camp, well into darkness. Injuries from bashings were frequent and I admired their morale and spirit as they collected their evening meal of $\frac{3}{4}$ of a cup of cooked rice.

Cpl. Jack Ogburn led other 13th A.G.H. fellows carrying rations back from Nicke. They returned exhausted and too weak to unload the bags from their backs. Attempts to force feed the seriously ill were unsuccessful – clenched teeth and a turn of the head indicated a definite lack of interest in the unappetising food. Nightly dashes to the latrines were made with shared foot-wear. Bill Turrell shared his boots with Phil Boulton, Leo Waller and myself for the trips to the filthy bore-holes. Often I'd hear, "Bobby, hurry, hurry". The boots would change hands as in a baton change.

I had a lucky escape from drowning when out cutting timber and carrying it back to the cook-house. On my third trip across the creek, I slipped backwards, the logs pinning me down. A group ahead noticed my plight and hurriedly pulled me out, shivering and gasping. Later Major Hunt lectured me "Stay with the party – stragglers in the dark could be lost forever". A malarial attack followed. That night the camp was in uproar as Norm Seddon and Tom Nestor, believing the Japanese were attacking, went into hiding up the hill at the back of the camp.

Early in August Major Hunt advised me that he was moving to a hospital camp in Burma. I would follow him shortly in charge of men too sick for work parties and supported by a party of semi-fit. Under supervision of Japanese guards we moved by truck or foot, carrying patients on stretchers and on our backs, resting at night under trees and receiving some rations and help as we passed No. 1 and No. 2 camps.

Having passed through the Three-Pagoda-Pass into Burma, most of the semi-fit men were casualties. Four dead were denied burial as the guards required exact numbers when handing us over at Tambaya. At the rail-head we grouped together in the rain – no cover or food – while Japanese troops lined up waiting to entrain for Burma. I approached them indicating the Red Cross brassard and received recognition from a Japanese officer who organised two buckets of rice and fish and containers of water. These we shared with a group of British spreadeagled over the ground. When our train arrived we tried to include the hapless British but again the "numbers game" proved an obstacle. The guards hit us with steel rails as we shoved the British on to the train carrying the Australian ill and the dead bodies.

By the time the train arrived at Tambaya I had reached the end of my tether and just collapsed from malaria, swollen face and feet and was put into hospital for a few days. Phil Boulton, who accompanied me throughout, was seriously ill with dysentery and he, too, was admitted.

The railroad passed through the centre of the Tambaya camp. Major Hunt, a strong character, cleaned up the place. Toilet squads and a cremation centre, similar to Lower Songkurai, were set up and he would brook no opposition. On one occasion I saw him rolling and struggling on the ground with a Britisher. Both disliked each other intensely.

The food was poor, mainly rice and beans, and the death rate increased, especially amongst the British troops. Many of our 13th A.G.H. were seriously ill. I would carry Phil Boulton on my back to the creek where small fish would clean out his ulcers.

Dr. Pat Wolfe arrived from Nicke with sufficient emmotine for the dysentery patients. Alex Deans had now left for Upper Songkurai.

Amputations were carried out in a small hut on a bamboo operating table using a saw from the Japanese cook-house. Survival rate of the amputees was low – the poor devils had nothing to allay their pain.

Padre Duckworth conducted the 1943 Christmas Day services. Many of our 13th A.G.H. personnel died at Tambaya and I was with most at their last.

In March 1944 all who could travel moved back with Major Hunt to Kanburi. I stayed back with about 20 expected to die, among them being Phil Boulton. Later, with a dozen survivors, I jumped a train and got them down to Kanburi after a five day trip. All were put into hospital and helped by our Hans Hollioak from the cookhouse. My cardiac beri-beri needed complete rest. I arrived back at Changi on the 29th April 1944 after twelve months with "F" Force.

Phil Boulton, in a letter to Lex Arthurson, said Bob Owen saved his life and that of many others and regretted that no recognition of Bob Owen's accurate story was made.

A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Corporal A. C. Arthurson of the 13th Australian General Hospital was a member of Lt. Col. Pond's party, "F" Force – April–November 1943. The Medical Officer with this party of 720 men was Capt. R. M. Mills of the 2/10th Field Ambulance. Cpl. Lex Arthurson takes up the story.

"I was reasonably fit on arrival at Bampong after the five days in the steel trucks which railed our party from Singapore. The sight of Thai traders offering a hatful of cooked duck eggs or a hatful of tomatoes for an army shirt was too much of a temptation for me. I was that hungry I wolfed down the dry duck eggs almost non-stop. It was Good Friday and I was thinking Easter 1943 wasn't going to be so great. Looking around, all was filthy – excreta dry and unpleasant in the staging huts where we spent Friday and Saturday nights. No one seemed to be organising transport for our gear and supplies.

Then came the order to line up ready to march – permission to take only what can be carried. So, on Easter Sunday, which also happened to be Anzac Day, I, with the others of the 1st party set off.

Dr. Mills, with Lt. Col. Pond and Capt. Barnett, organised stretcher bearers. All fit men took their turn up front and were relieved every half kilometre. At first the walking was bearable for I was interested, until it became dark, in the water buffalo wallowing in the mud of the paddy fields or admiring the deftness of the Thais controlling their hundreds of ducks with the flick of a 30 foot bamboo cane.

Rumours abounded that we had to walk a very long way to our place of work.

I was trying to put up with an excruciating stomach pain during this part of the journey. At the Bampong staging camp I was unable to bear the pain and asked Dr. Mills for morphia but none was available to me.

During successive nights I was falling further behind, and at one time had to humour the rear Japanese guard and even carried his rifle for him. The pain left my stomach and thankfully I began to keep up with the others once more and re-commence assisting the very sick. (The lower stomach pain set in again a month or so later and then again abated. In late July, after another severe bout of renal colic – that was what I put up with for months and continued working – two kidney stones were removed by forceps from my penis. Dr. Mills had four men hold me down, for there was no anaesthetic).

After seventeen nights of marching, Lt. Col. Pond's party arrived at Upper Konkoita where men were put to work immediately.

Our camps were commanded by Lieutenant Murayama, a very cruel Japanese. I can remember how he practised high jumping night and morning and how I wished he would take a tumble. On one occasion the hut in which I lived appeared listless and without cheerfulness. So, in all innocence, I began to sing some popular ditty. In a flash, a Japanese guard had me fronting Lt. Murayama whose words I'll never forget. "Wherefore you sing. Japanese soldier no sing". And he followed this with two hefty cracks from a thick piece of bamboo across my shoulders. The deathly silence in the huts was bad for morale but nothing could be done about it.

Before "F" Force was formed, part of a medical pamphlet came into my possession. The title intrigued me – "Scourge of the East". So I read that cholera could be spread in unhygienic conditions. Symptoms included a rice stool which followed severe stomach cramps.

So, when a man was brought in from a walking party at Upper Konkoita, Dr. Mills and I had a look at him. Immediately, I noticed the rice-water stool and cholera came to mean something. Capt. Mills instructed me to keep a wise counsel and not to panic anyone. He asked for a volunteer to look after this first cholera case. Why I took the job on I'll never know for what was to follow was the worst portion of my life.

The soldier was carried to a small hut on the outskirts of the camp. There, I looked after him as best I could for I had not any medical training. Through the night the unfortunate fellow lost his body's fluid by mouth and bowel emissions.

I had lit a fire to provide some light and all I could do was to try to encourage the drinking of boiled water, and endeavour to keep him as clean as possible. An elephant ambled through the hut during the night adding to the unreality of my position.

Soon, the patient lapsed into a coma and breathing became laboured. I noticed that the body frame had shrunk and that he was perhaps only one-third of his weight of six hours before.

In the morning, I shouted to Capt. Mills that the patient was dead and was informed that I was now in isolation, and would I be prepared to look after others with cholera symptoms.

So, another "Cholera Hill" was established. I received the sick and was given directions from Capt. Mills standing 30 or 40 yards away. Within two days there were fifteen men lying under a small marquee with their feet protruding.

Using a scalpel for the first time was not easy for I had to cut the skin and lay bare a large vein on the inside of the ankle. Then I inserted a bamboo cannula into the vein and administered a saline transfusion. This work was carried out day and night. I cursed the constant rain which kept the wounds on the men's feet at risk from infection. I constructed a small lean-to for myself using bamboo sticks supporting large banana leaves.

Looking at the unfortunate men lying heads pointed to the centre of the marquee, their feet protruding outside the tent-line, I considered what to do to improve their lot. It was heartbreaking to observe the progression of this dreaded cholera – the agonising cramps, the constant thirst, the cold bluish skin, the sunken eyeballs, the weakening pulse and the hoarse whispers.

Sadly, many died not so much from cholera but from septicaemia for, in a lot of cases, I had noted a gradual improvement in their condition – less vomiting and subsidence in the number of bowel motions.

Septicaemia was unavoidable under the circumstances – no drugs or dressings. Most men hanging on to life had had both ankles cut and infection set in so rapidly. One young army lieutenant with cholera symptoms on the wane had developed a lump as large as a dessert plate on his back, obviously a deep seated abscess.

The instructions shouted to me next morning from Capt. Mills, after hearing all details of the case, were for me to sterilise the scalpel then plunge it into this patient. There were some sulphuranilamide 693 tablets to help him. Unfortunately, although I did what was told me, the officer died a few days later.

As happened in other camps, the dead were burnt. I felt lousy having to build a funeral pyre and after loading the bodies on the top, setting fire to the heap of combustible bamboo. I offered a silent prayer for each and every one of them.

One fellow, dying of cholera, offered me his Australian farm if I could cure him. Another, who in life had no time at all for religion of any kind, asked for help from above as he breathed his last.

The Japanese ordered me to go through the jungle a little way and attend to one of their soldiers dumped in a small hut. I presumed this fellow had cholera. One look at him showed he was too far gone for any transfusions so next day he was dead. I just set fire to the hut and told the Japanese what was done. The Japanese officer seemed quite relieved that the unpleasant episode was concluded.

The half dozen or so who recovered from the cholera epidemic stayed with me and were a tremendous help in caring for the very sick.

Looking back on this most horrible episode of my life I wonder why I didn't contract his dreaded "Scourge of the East".

The Menam Kwa Noi river flowed nearby all the railway camps in Thailand and I'm sure the water was full of cholera germs. Upstream the Japanese washed their clothing and bathed, a little lower down elephants were washed by the Burmese Mahout, and then down stream the workers were permitted to wash. If you put your head under water you were crazy and just asking to be ill.

Roadwork had ceased because of so much sickness at Upper Konkoita and, by 6th June 1943, less than half the 694 men of Lt. Col. Pond's party were fit enough for even light work.

As cholera waned it was decided by the Imperial Japanese Army to move all to Nieke. So on 10th June 316 of the fittest were moved to a filthy spot near Nieke. The rest marched 60 kilometres south to Takanun. A shuttle system was instituted up and down from Nieke to Takanun using fit men to carry stretcher cases, camp gear and the sick. Some men made three trips walking beside the newly constructed line until 4 a.m. After four hours rest, urged on by Korean guards, they would set out again at 0800 hours. Medical staff were used this way too – the red cross brassard meant nothing to ranting guards. The party settled down at Takanun and worked there for two months 8 a.m. until 10.15 p.m. daily.

Two sick parades were conducted by Dr. Mills each day, one at 7.30 a.m. and the other at 10.30 p.m. If a man could walk he could work according to the Japanese. The conditions at the camp were pathetic – all mud and flies – the food a cup of cooked rice with weak soup made of whitebait.

The railway was finished on the 18th September 1943 and was marked by a Japanese ceremony of the meeting of the north and south sections of the line. Some of the last pieces of railway laid were rails stamped B.H.P. This bit of irony was certainly noted by our fellows.

The holiday given us that day, the 18th of September, was the first non-working day since leaving Singapore in April.

In October, Pond's party, now at Taimonta, had to carry railway gear from Nieke back to Taimonta and then 24 kilometres to Konkoita.

Early in November this unfortunate party moved to Nieke carrying their sick, including 26 stretcher cases.

In mid November 'F' Force returned to Singapore having lost 3.100 of its 7,000 men.

The medical personnel of this force gave splendid and unselfish service to their Australian mates.

The 13th Australian General Hospital lost the following members of its 44 strong medical team which accompanied 'F' Force.

| | | |
|----------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| VX 56712 | Pte. Gerald Letwin | Thailand |
| VX 59785 | Pte. Thomas Henry Nash | No. 1 Camp Shimo Sonkuri |
| VX 59176 | Pte. Alfred Otto Simpendorfer | Tanbaya, Burma |
| VX 61236 | Pte. Albert Edward Sweatmen | Tanbaya, Burma |
| VX 39334 | Sgt. Thomas Augustus Winters | Tanbaya, Burma – Grave 43 |
| VX 53554 | Pte. Robert William Barguss | Tanbaya, Burma |
| NX 43665 | Padre Pte. Geoffrey William Vellacott | Kanburi – December 1943 |
| VX 60324 | Pte. Robert Gordon Small | Thailand |
| VX 58771 | Pte. W. A. L. Stone | Thailand |
| NX 42604 | Pte. L. J. Swann | Thailand |
| VX 60177 | Pte. Edmund Waddington | Thailand |
| VX 55628 | Pte. Edwin Wookey | Thailand |
| VX 58160 | S/Sgt. Arthur Arnold Southgate | Thailand |
| VX 39273 | Cpl. William James Rossiter | Thailand |

“At the going down of the sun

And in the morning

We will remember them”

WITH "F" FORCE IN 1943

Sgt. Alexander Rattray DEANS, VX 61259 and Pte. Robert Frank Davis OWEN VX 57871 were two members of "F" Force who left Singapore in Train 4. Other members of the 13th Australian General Hospital who travelled with them were Bill Turrell, Leo Waller, Jack Ogburn, Tom Nash, Tom Winters, Tom Nestor, Norm Seddon and Albie Sweatman.

Train 4 carried 600 men, 25 to each steel rice truck (21 feet x 7 feet). The Commanding Officer of this party was Captain Reg. Swartz and the senior medical officer was Major Bruce Hunt of the 13th A.G.H. Only 6 meals were provided by the Japanese in the four days it took to reach Bampong. Drinking water was difficult to obtain and no stop for sleep was made. Men could only lie down in relay in the trucks and toilet stops were few and far between.

By the time the men detrained and marched with all their gear to a nearby staging camp for a night's rest, fatigue had already set in. Conditions were deplorable in this unhygienic camp. No transport was available even for the medically unfit personnel and very reluctantly the seriously ill men were allowed to remain behind when the march from Bampong commenced. At this point many sold articles of clothing for food to sustain them on the march and also to lighten their carrying loads.

Alex Deans takes up the story:

"The medical equipment was divided up into six panniers so that the carrying of this most essential material would be spread equitably over the party.

We left Bampong at 2100 hours on Tuesday 27th April, 1943 on a very long and unpleasant trek of 200 miles. After Kanburi and Wampoh the medical teams had to monitor the rear of the party to assist the sick stragglers. Some men were so exhausted they had to be carried mile after mile on stretchers.

Next day, at Tarsau we met men from "D" Force on their way to the day's work on the railway construction. We were given a dirty area with a few tents as shelter from the sun.

Major Hunt, the senior doctor, paraded all the sick men to the Japanese medical officer who agreed with our doctor's assessments. The Japanese N.C.O. in charge of the march became abusive and attacked Major Hunt and Major Wild, the interpreter, breaking a bone in Major Hunt's hand."

Bob Owen took Chaplain Ross Dean to the river and helped him to wash. This patient was most distressed and died from physical exhaustion at a later staging camp.

After Tarsau any stragglers who fell behind in the now continual soaking rain ran the risk of attack from Thai bandits. Warnings were also issued against tigers. Food during the march practically consisted of rice and onion water.

Brigadier C. H. Kappe, a senior officer of "F" Force reported that on the night 14/15 May, 1,000 A.I.F. from Trains 3 and 4, under Major Tracey, marched out from Lower Nieke to their permanent camp at Lower Songkurai, a distance of 7 ½ miles. This party was to be joined by a further 800 A.I.F. in two days' time. One of the sick men was diagnosed by Captain Taylor A.A.M.C. as a cholera case. Three more went down with cholera next day.

Sgt. Alex Deans opened a cholera hospital to cope with the expected epidemic.

Because there was only one medical officer at Lower Nieke, Major Stevens, senior A.I.F., M.O., sent Major Hunt from Konkoita and Captain Hendry from Upper Konkoita to that camp. On their arrival they learnt that cholera had broken out at Lower Songkurai so a decision was taken that Major Hunt and Captain Taylor should move on to there that night.

Pte. Robert Owen, with six other A.A.M.C personnel, accompanied these doctors arriving at the No. 1 camp (Lower Songkurai) at 2.10 a.m. on the 18th May. There were plenty of diarrhoea and dysentery cases to keep the medical team busy.

Bob Owen remembers the next day only too well because the 19th May, 1943 was his 21st birthday. He recalls asking quite a few people if they knew the exact date and finally was convinced that his "big day" had come.

This Lower Songkurai camp was a dump – poor accommodation for working men, woeful latrines, a shortage of water and no kitchen facilities.

Immediately, Major Hunt and Captain Cahill inoculated 1,400 men with ½ c.c. of vaccine against cholera which had been brought up from Changi. By the evening of the 19th May the inoculation of all ranks had been completed. Cholera flared up eight days later because the Japanese failed to produce the so necessary back-up second inoculation.

Major Hunt moved up and down the line visiting camps between Lower Nieke and Upper Songkurai, a distance of 30 kilometres approximately. Sgt. Alex Deans was doing sterling work at Nieke during Major Hunt's absences and on 1/7/43 was promoted to Warrant Officer 11. He was in charge of a convalescent depot until sent to Lower Songkurai early in August and finally to Upper Songkurai. There he was responsible for running a hospital of 1,000 patients.

Both Alex Deans and Bob Owen saw the weakening of the workers through the monsoonal rains and because of cholera, ulcers, fevers and constant bashings.

On the 4th June 996 of 1,924 men were in hospital but in August there were 1,300 sick and only 400 men available for work on the railway.

Following the completion of the rail, the men and the medical team, including Alex Deans, returned to Changi. Major Hunt recommended recognition of Warrant Officer Deans's work.

Bob Owen, who was sent to Tanbaya in Burma and worked in the hospital there with Major Hunt, contracted malaria and became a patient himself. With other survivors he eventually was returned to Changi.

Both Alex Deans and Bob Owen survived the ordeal of 3 ½ years as P.O.W. and returned to Australia on the Largs Bay leaving Singapore on the 23rd September, 1945.

The rank of W.O. 11 for Alexander Rattray Deans, B.E.M. was confirmed on his return to Australia.

P.O.W. CHANGI CAMP HOSPITAL APRIL – DECEMBER, 1943

The last party of A.I.F. "F" Force left Changi at 4 a.m. by the light of a large Easter moon. On Easter Sunday, coincidentally Anzac Day, 200 A.I.F. – "G" Force – left for Borneo with no medical personnel attached. Col. Galleghan conducted the Anzac Service, the second since the surrender.

On Monday 26th April, the remainder of the 2/9th Field Ambulance merged with the personnel of the convalescent depot to form one medical group.

"H" Force, comprising 3,000 men (600 A.I.F.), was ready to leave for Thailand on Saturday 8th May. The only 13th Australian General Hospital member in this party was our popular Catholic padre, Lionel Marsden. This young priest, then aged 32, did sterling work at Konyu 2 (later known as Malayan Hamlet) in Thailand and comforted 179 Australians who died whilst working as Slaves of Nippon. Another working party named "J" Force left at 3 p.m. on Saturday 15th May, 1943 with Captain Clive R. Boyce of the 13th Australian General Hospital as one of the doctors. After being issued with woollen pullovers and balaclavas it became obvious Japan was the destination. Three hundred of the 900 who left Keppel Harbour on board the "Wales Maru" were Australians. Chosen to assist Dr. Boyce were 13th Australian General Hospital orderlies NX 41787 Pte. John H. Byrnes, NX 42788 Pte. Leslie G. Kelly, VX 55331 Pte. George (Darby) Munro, while VX 11933 Cpl. A. B. (Joe) Mouat worked in the coal mines in Kobe, Japan. Joe Mouat was a terrific worker and set a fine example of maintaining the morale so necessary for survival. "J" Force remained in Japan until the end of the war in 1945.

Late in May 1943 Staff Sgt. Frank Cooper, 13th Australian General Hospital, was appointed wardmaster of a new surgical ward of 60 beds. As 490 patients comprised the whole hospital, ward orderlies were now able to have one week off in four.

As the vegetable garden was flourishing, the hospital rations were supplemented with tapioca and taro roots, spinach, sweet potatoes and snake beans.

Doctors now estimated that one in three had eye trouble which first became noticeable in August 1942 after six months of captivity. This keratitis was due to a deficiency of vitamin B2. Some who developed corneal ulcers became blind. Many others displayed strong symptoms of retro-bulbar-neuritis and Coptic nerve inflammation.

Those men with the more serious eye problems were fed extra rice polishings, yeast and marmite when available. Any small supply of the last two items soon cut out and rice polishings were difficult to swallow. Extra Vitamin B was provided by a soup made from couch grass and wild passion fruit.

What a pity the beauty of nature was not appreciated during P.O.W. days! This time of the year the perfumes from the frangipani and the male papaya were quite heady. Then there were those magnificent sunsets full of a blood-red glow. What about the movement of the soldier ants prior to a violent thunderstorm! Thousands and thousands of these giants travelled in regulated lines flanked by others audibly snapping their warnings to keep going, regardless of what may be in their path.

On June 19th, 1943 another party – "K" Force – comprising all medical personnel was organised. The party of 230 consisted of 30 medical officers and 200 orderlies. The Australian component was led by Major Geoffrey Davies, the unit's pathologist, who generously volunteered for the job. Three other doctors of the 13th Australian General Hospital were chosen to assist him viz Capt. John (Jock) Frew, Capt. Ernest Drevermann and Capt. Tim Hogg, a top surgeon. All were loaded 25 men to the truck, as usual, and departed from the Square at 9.30 a.m. in drizzling rain.

The Force was informed before leaving Changi that they would be going to well-equipped hospitals and so it was unnecessary to take medical equipment. But when the medical party reached Kanchanaburi in Thailand they found themselves treating coolies. A lot of time was spent digging graves, for the poor coolies died like flies. This Force stayed in Thailand until 1945 and again proved that there were none better than the trained Australian medical staff.

Back in Changi hospital a hundred men with skin complaints were allowed to swim in salt water each day. The food for the hospital patients seemed to be somewhat improved during June. The staff quarters for sergeants of the hospital now had beds, mattresses, sheets, blankets, pillows and mosquito nets.

General Tojo, the Japanese Prime Minister who was also Japan's War Minister, visited Singapore on the 5th July, 1943. He didn't visit the hospital; probably afraid of what he may be asked to do for the sick.

Every second day or so, the hospital patients and staff received an issue of fish from the Imperial Japanese Army. This 40 kilogram load comprised fish too small to clean. Sometimes, a small shark, skate or catfish would be included. The cooks wasted nothing and cooked everything. Even the rice smelt fishy.

Early August saw a delivery of mail. There were about 2,000 letters for the A.I.F., most of which were dated July and August 1942. The men up in Thailand will have to wait for theirs until they return. Many a man shed the odd tear or two as they became reunited with wives and children, albeit by letter.

On Tuesday, 10th August, the water from the town supply to the hospital was suddenly chlorinated. Whoever added the first chlorine was very heavy-handed for the water was undrinkable. It was later discovered that there had been a cholera scare in Singapore.

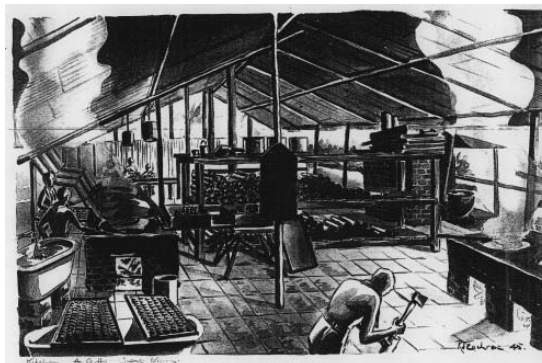
All men were given needles as a preventative. Fortunately, the men of Changi were spared a cholera epidemic which says a lot for the medical personnel who set high standards of personal and camp hygiene.

Entertainment of the top quality was still being organised. The A.I.F. theatre had Harry Smith singing old but still popular melodies, while Sid Piddington confused everyone with his conjuring and sleight-of-hand. Piddington had a slight stammer which he adapted to suit his presentation.

An album of Dvorjak's "New World Symphony" did the rounds of the hospital and was most popular.

Before "F" Force departed, each night at lights out, from an 8-man tent, a gramophone played both sides of a Parlaphone record. Richard Tauber's rich tenor voice singing "In My Little Grey Home in the West" and "When Day is Done" could be heard emanating from the tent of Fred Sutton, Col. Logan, Bill Turrell, Leo Waller, Phil Boulton, Keith Nicholson, Paul O'Brien and Lex Arthurson.

"When Day is Done and Shadows fall I think of you". What memories for all who could hear and enjoy!



AGH Kitchen - see following paragraph 1

HOSPITAL MOVED TO SELARANG

Midway through August 1943, and, about the time of the cholera scare, the Australian General Hospital was instructed to move from Roberts to Selarang Barracks into which we first moved in February 1942.

The move was completed on the 26th August and the hospital was allotted two of the seven buildings of the barracks. The only hospital in-patients were medical cases for the last wounded man was discharged some time ago. Many of the latter surgical cases were readmitted for further operations from time to time. Captain Huxtable, the medical officer in charge of Ward 3A, on the ground floor of building 173, with 70 convalescing patients, agreed there was little to do and the hospital was running along comfortably.

Staff Sergeant Frank Cooper at this period of P.O.W. days thought the quarters of the senior N.C.Os very comfortable, even comparable with the peace-time billets he knew and remembered.

On Wednesday 25th August the final up-country force left just after midnight in fine conditions for Thailand. The "L" Force was a small party of 115 men – all medical – 73 were Australians. Members of the 13th Australian General Hospital in this group were Major Tom Crankshaw, and Privates Ron Felsenthal, Bob White, Frank Bragg, Ern Treloar, Jack O'Leary and Reg. Young.

This party worked as medical staff tending the sick Tamils who were dying like flies. One grave alone at Nieke contained 500 coolies.

The medical personnel had to dig graves, work in the kitchens, attend to all camp duties and try to stem the tide of deaths from cholera and dysentery. Without medical equipment poor hygiene could not be overcome – food and treatment of coolies and medical staff were disgusting.

This was another working party which "did it hard" but as well as humanly possible.

The biggest operation yet done in this camp was performed by Col. Osborn with Major Nairn assisting on the 30th August 1943. During the 3 ½ hour operation, the patient had 2/3rds of his stomach removed during this partial gastroectomy procedure. Both the above doctors were brilliant surgeons, and had the complete confidence of all troops.

In early September one of the wood trailers was involved in a smash. Eleven of the workers were admitted to hospital – one fellow had two fractured legs to add to his woes.

Albie Webster of the 13th Australian General Hospital had his appendix removed by Major Nairn on 6th November, 1943.

On Armistice Day, 11/11/43, 2 minutes silence was observed by the hospital staff and its 336 patients.

Canteen prices are again on the up.

- 3 ½ days work to buy 1 egg
- 8 days work to buy 1 box matches

Generally the food provided by the Imperial Japanese Army for the hospital was sufficient for survival but insufficient for the speedy and healthy recovery of patients.

OPERATIONS PERFORMED

The 13th Australian General Hospital undertook 674 operations between 25/11/41 and 6/3/42.

The combined A.G.Hs did 2,003 operations between 15/2/42, the date of capture, and 12/4/43.

The total number of patients treated by the combined A.G.Hs reached 13,031 to November 1st 1943.

OUTRAM ROAD GAOL

This gaol in Singapore was run by the Kempeitai, the Japanese Military Police, and its inmates were men caught attempting to escape, carrying, making or in possession of a wireless. Sentences were years in gaol or death. In this gaol men were systematically tortured, kept in solitary confinement and interrogated constantly. When, near death's door, it was possible to be sent to the Changi hospital where every endeavour was made to keep the patient as long as possible against his return to the gaol.

On Sunday 14th November 1943, a man from Outram Road hospitalised because of illness, disappeared from the hospital area. As a result, others from Outram Road, now in our hospital, were segregated from the other patients. Three patients were returned forthwith to Singapore to continue their isolation, starvation and torture.

Last month two doctors were called to Outram Road gaol by the Japanese and found a soldier thin, emaciated and quite dead in a cell.

This caused Colonel Holmes of the Manchester Regiment, the C.O. of British and Australian troops in Changi, to write a strong letter of protest to the Japanese Commander at Changi. Colonel Holmes asked that a representative of the International Red Cross be allowed to visit the Outram Road gaol.

Eventually Colonel Holmes and Colonel Galleghan were summoned to the Head Quarters of General Arimura who had taken over from General Fukuye.

Colonel Holmes was taken in on his own and told bluntly that prisoners-of-war were being treated according to Japanese Law and not International Law, and that all men must obey their captors at all times.

For his so-called impertinence the Colonel lost his privileges of rank and was made to join the aerodrome working party for the next 14 days.

With less than 2,500 Australians now in Changi there were few problems at the hospital. The gardens of the camp were still providing sweet potato, green spinach, beans, chillies, tapioca, egg-plant and taro. These vegetables gave a little flavouring to the rice.

When a few American Red Cross parcels arrived on 1st December 1943 the situation looked good. Alas, one parcel among 20 men was only giving us a taste of what we were really missing.

George Thomas of Bendigo and one of our 13th A.G.H. was operated on for appendicitis on the first day of December.

Electric lighting in every building at Selarang made movement and contact rather simple. The beautiful full moon of the 10th December almost made the electric light unnecessary.

“F” FORCE RETURNS – DECEMBER 1943

The hospital was jolted into activity as the men of “F” Force returned from Thailand. The 16th December 1943 was a sad day indeed when the first 500 men arrived back in shocking condition and these were supposed to be the fittest! Each night 500 were delivered back by truck – a count showed that over a thousand of the Force’s 3 ½ thousand had died on the railway.

Men who survived a 200 mile march looked pitiful – just skin and bone – their frames affected by ulcers, tinea and scabies – all thoroughly exhausted.

A large number was hurried into hospital and little hope could be held for the survival of those others left at Tanabaya and Kanburi in Thailand.

Prisoners at Changi were shocked when they heard the grim story of the north. The 14 members of the 13th A.G.H. who did not return are remembered with affection. R.I.P.

All men who returned from the railway, besides being physically poor, had no material goods – just tattered clothing and no personal possessions. They looked with astonishment at those who did not leave Changi, noted their calmness, their clothing, their cleanliness and wondered why they were chosen to endure such hardships.

Major Bruce Hunt, a senior physician of the 13th A.G.H., was spoken of with admiration and gratitude for his stimulating work at Lower Songkurai in Thailand.

So the hospital came to life again with the influx of patients, one ward alone increased in numbers from 29 to 123. One patient was isolated with smallpox. Now the doctors and orderlies were really working hard. Our own Les Coles, really weak after Thailand, had an intestinal obstruction and was on the operating table for 5 ½ hours as Major Phillips worked hard to keep him alive. Sadly, after a wonderful fight, Les died at 0520 hours on the 14th January, 1944.

In the hospital it seemed like old times again – no medicine for the sick who needed it – stoppages of the water supply, often lasting days – shortage of materials and nights of complete darkness because of blackouts ordered by the Japanese.

Men were very ill with dysentery, recurrent malaria, beri-beri, suppurating tropical ulcers and malnutrition.

Christmas Day wasn’t as happy as it should have been although some patients were fit enough to enjoy “Aladdin” and “Dick Whittington” produced by the A.I.F. Concert Party.

The New Year, 1944, saw 660 “F” Force patients in hospital, many seriously or dangerously ill and in need of spiritual, medical or surgical treatment. The first three weeks after the return saw seven die from malaria relapses and diarrhoea, and the senior doctors became more than anxious as poor eyesight, due to malnutrition, was most prevalent among the railway workers.

As many eggs as possible were sent to the hospital’s cookhouse for those on special diets.

On the 21st January, 1944, the Japanese brought in an 18th Battalion Australian soldier from a Blakang Mati working party. The diagnosis was a fractured skull but most interesting was the report of Staff Sergeant Frank Cooper who recorded the patient’s temperature at 109.6 degrees.

The A.I.F. and British concert parties combined to produce Noel Coward’s “Hay Fever” and performed for the hospital on 1st February, 1944.

Changi now looked at its worst. There hadn’t been any rain for 17 days and everything is scorched by the burning sun. Amazingly the trees and shrubs survived. The end of February’s first week saw the end of the drought. There was rain and water everywhere and much flooding resulted.

Hospital records at this time showed that 14,000 inpatients had been treated since March 1942. This number rose rapidly to 15,000 by 6th March.

Maize replaced rice during March and no fish was supplied but sometimes a little yak meat and bean soup were “on the menu”.

Hard to fathom the thinking of the A.I.F. Officers who fined a few diggers \$1 each for selling snails – probably for disobeying orders. One could get killed in the rush for snails after a shower of rain.

Snails were soaked in salt water overnight to remove the slime. After removing the shells the little things would be fried in red palm oil for a few minutes, emerging like a mini-sheep's tongue. The taste was nothing to write home about – a bit tough too and dozens would be needed to make any impact on one's appetite.

In mid-March 1944, General Saito replaced Arimura as commander of the prisoners in Malaya and Sumatra. His new policy was to recognise us as Prisoners-of-War and not just captives.

A parade was called when Saito visited the camp. The medical staff were not supposed to look down from the wards. From a platform on the square Saito spoke, short and to the point, through a Japanese interpreter who stood by his side.

“I am Saito. I have taken over command of the P.O.W. camp. I will make no change. You will obey orders and regulations of the Imperial Nipponese Army. If I see the necessity for changes, I will make them”.

In the middle of March a new disease appeared – raw and ulcerated lips, mouth and throat. Three men with this condition died and were found to have lung lesions. Pathology testing indicated an infection due to pellagra of the mucous membranes of the mouth and throat. Deaths occurred from acute inflammation of the kidneys, another with lung cancer and another from a bowel obstruction.

Many of the orderlies from “F” Force still had scabies and others were still too ill to perform any normal ward duties.

Lt. Col. Bill Bye, the senior physician of the 13th A.G.H., gave lectures on neurology twice weekly to fellow doctors during March and April. These were very well received.

During a morning round in a medical ward “Billy Bye”, considered rather deaf my most, paused and inspected a patient's chest. He then outlined the necessary treatment to the ward Sergeant. The patient remarked as Colonel Bye was moving to the next bed, “The silly old bugger wouldn't know “b” from a bull's foot”. Bill Bye quietly turned and retorted, “I heard that soldier”.

Word soon spread that the deafness appeared to be on the mend and the whole hospital became more circumspect within earshot of the very gentle Colonel.

The rest of “F” Force arrived back from Thailand on Easter Sunday, the 9th April, 1944, and occupied the Chapel in the Square as sleeping quarters.

Some survivors of the rear parties were in reasonable condition as a result of their long stay at Kanburi on good rations. Others with limbs amputated and shocking ulcers were quite sick. The prisoners were now receiving nine ounces of rice a man daily and small amounts of soya beans and vegetables. The camp was short-weighted in March receiving 33,000 lbs less vegetables than the amount which the Japanese said we received. The duck farm was now at risk. The 700-800 patients and staff in the A.I.F. wing of the hospital had barely enough refuse to feed a hundred ducks. The Officers and N.C.Os who weren't sent away organised the duck co-op (70 belonged to Sergeants and 30 to the Officers). So, now, these ducks, which supplied so many valuable eggs, had to be killed off for their food value.

On 17th April 1944 the hospital passed the 16,000 patient mark.

Still the hospital cases were medical – malaria, swollen legs, beri-beri, emaciation and severe anaemia.

An Australian lad died from acute nephritis (kidney inflammation) and it was touch and go with another patient suffering from an ulcerated mouth, high fever and a blood condition of abnormal white cell count.

Early in May the Japanese said all prisoners would be moved into the Changi convict prison by the end of the month. This could mean only one thing – the Japanese now considered it unsafe to leave the P.O.Ws where they might prove troublesome in the event of Allied action in the vicinity. This move to the gaol was a major feat in itself and accomplished in a few weeks.

There were to be two small hospitals in and around the gaol, while the main hospital of 1,500 beds was to be established at Kranji, 20 miles away near the Straits of Johore, and near the main road from Singapore to Johore Bahru. The Kranji hospital was to be controlled by British and staffed by British and Australian medical personnel.

S/Sgt. Frank Cooper was appointed in charge of the A.I.F. surgical wards. Frank left for Kranji on 1st May to organise the move which was completed on the 31st May.

Next, in mid May the big move to Changi gaol commenced.

The present inmates of the gaol, viz civilian internees including women and children, were moved to Sime Road, Singapore,. The P.O.Ws (“H” Force) at Sime Road joined the party going to the gaol.

Seven thousand men were crowded into Changi gaol built to house 650 convicted prisoners. Small one man cells, 14ft x 8ft, now took three and four men. Corridors and prison yards were enclosed with 30 foot walls, most depressing to say the least. Lucky indeed those who lived in the fresh air outside the grim walls. Huts and out-buildings were erected outside the gaol after being dismantled at Selarang and Roberts barracks and dragged over on trailers. The hard-working men were in rags and wore loin cloths and vees. Even Colonel Julian Taylor, the 4th surgeon to the King, was getting around without shoes.

13th A.G.H. men were split up once again – some to Kranji – some inside the gaol to look after the Outram Road unfortunates – the rest to help in the hospital outside the gaol.

The large tower clock recorded and recognised each hour of the day and night. The massive gaol kitchens gave some joy to the unit cooks and certainly gave them easier conditions. On the cell walls were scribbled messages left by the civilian internees who must still be rather bright and cheerful. One read “Good Luck, Safe Home”

Another

“Be kind to Oscar, our spider, whom we have looked after for two years”.

And

“This was Lady Shenton’s cell” (the Governor’s wife).

Outside, the whole area was surrounded by a barbed wire fence with guard houses for Japanese and Sikhs. There was movement daily in and out of the main gaol gates as prisoners went forth on daily working parties to the drome or in to Singapore loading ships from the godowns.

1,600 men worked on the aerodrome, mostly unloading railway skips bringing earth and rock to swampland being reclaimed as part of the airfield. Three or four men tipped each skip containing a ton of earth and rock. Then the spreading and levelling was done in extreme heat during a 12 hour shift.

The daily diet of an aerodrome worker was :-

Breakfast Half a pint of thin gruel made from rice and water and a thin biscuit made of rice weighing about ½ oz.

Lunch Half a pint of mixed rice and green vegetable.

Dinner or Tea Half a pint of soup made from greens (known as jungle soup).
Half a pint of boiled rice and a rice pastie of weight 1 ½ ozs
(the pastie had a filling of vegetable or the faint flavour of fish).

A small mug of tea was issued with each meal.

Light duty workers got less and the sick in hospital less still.

KRANJI – THE MAIN HOSPITAL

In contrast, Woodlands Kranji Camp was established on 28th May 1944 with its hospital under the command of Lt. Col. Collins, R.A.M.C. Among the medical officers were the 13th A.G.H.'s Lt. Col. Osborn, Major B. Hunt, Captain V. Conlon and Captain Huxtable. Our Quartermaster, Captain George Braby, came as a patient.

The new site was previously a hospital for sick Indian P.O.W. and was at the 13 ½ mile stone on the main road and 2 ½ miles south of the causeway.

Johore Bahru, across the Straits, was plainly visible as were parts of the Sultan's palace and the square tower of the municipal buildings. Looking southerly in the direction of Singapore the view was of hills and trees. Kranji hospital was surrounded by rubber plantations which provided the necessary shade and shelter to the hospital huts.

Again, now, it is important to record that, at the end of May 1944, more than 17,000 patients had been admitted to hospital in fractionally over two years. The first patient to die at this newly established hospital had cardiac beri-beri. He had been riddled with this deficiency disease – swelling in the legs followed by a huge bloated stomach and his sudden collapse on the 5th June.

Conditions at the hospital were not as good as they were at settled Selarang. There was no camp garden to supply greens to the kitchens so consideration was given to the establishment of such as a matter of urgency.

The month of June '44 noted the following :-

Rumour that Britain had landed in France. True facts were always smothered with nonsense, furbies. It became difficult to know what to really believe.

Patients were exchanged regularly with Changi – e.g. one was returned to a working party while four were admitted for treatment. Mosquitoes were very much a nuisance and a danger. Sgt. Frank Brown was one of many who contracted B.T. Malaria. Medical supplies were limited, there being no absorbent wool. Old rags were used and rewashed after soiling, autoclaved and put back in the wards.

Twenty-three survivors from a torpedoed ship in the Malacca Straits were admitted to hospital. They were mostly Dutch and only three or four were Australian or British.

The Japanese guards stepped up their brutality towards patients and staff during July and many were beaten for no reason. Perhaps the tide of war is at last turning our way! Now the wet season has set in and, because of the coldness of the night, a blanket, if owned, came in very handy. Flying lizards by the thousands were proving a nuisance, some even landing on you.

Lou Garth wrote to his pal, Tiny Parker, so his letter is quoted word for word.

KRANJI
Tuesday 11/7/44

Dear Tiny,

Just a line to say we received your letters also the cigars and very thankful we were for them. Well longfellow I am quite O.K. again and out of hospital. I'm working in Ward 20 Staff Monteath is wardmaster. We get along very well together.

Dick, Bert, Norm myself and Allan Mull are very well – all wish to be remembered to you I hope you have recovered from your bout of dysentery and are yourself again once more. Chris is out of hospital and working in the Officers Ward as Wardmaster. I hope George, Thomas, Mick Coultan, Noel and the rest of the boys are OK also Bob Mull, Jack Hussy and the rest of the 29th. Dick is working in the Orderly Room. Norm is still in the Officers ward. Chris has just walked in here and told me to go to Buggery. Well old chap you will find enclosed five dollars re the cigars. Sgt. Philgate died out here about three days ago.

Well Tiny will have to close now with kind regards to yourself and all the boys.

Lou

Footnote:- Both VX 59856 Edwin Louis GARTH and VX 60696 William Ernest PARKER of the 13th Australian General Hospital returned to Australia but have since died, the former in Victoria, the latter in Queensland.

Again the main topic of conversation was food. Men cursed the rice and dried prawns, and because canteen prices were so high spoke of steak and eggs aplenty when they get home. The canteen prices actually were affordable by only the officers.

| | |
|--------------|------------|
| Gula Malacca | \$6.00 lb |
| Whitebait | \$11.00 lb |

The gardens are now flourishing following sun and rain and the greens are used to stem the flow of a host of deficiency diseases.

Many of the "F" Force men are as thin as ever and probably will never improve while prisoners.

Albie Webster was admitted to hospital early in September with fever. He hasn't put on any weight since his operation twelve months ago. The cause of his fever remained unknown and Albie spent four weeks in bed before returning to work.

Late in September Col. Osborn, our senior surgeon, performed two major operations:

- (i) A peg graft in a sacro-iliac joint;
- (ii) A Laperotomy.

S/Sgt. Cooper reported that both patients recovered following the appropriate nursing. Five T.B. patients died in Kranji camp during the last two weeks. All were British army whose troops, unlike the Australians, were unchecked for lung complaints on enlistment.

November 1944 set the tongues wagging and hopes rising, for, on the 5th at 1000 hours, heavy bombers raided Singapore Island for two hours. The Japanese fighters were unable to reach them so high were the Allied planes. Three days later, a lone bomber was overhead – in and away – probably taking photographs. On the 27th in the afternoon there was another two hour raid. Again the planes were too high for interception. Just in case, slit trenches were dug throughout the camp. The huts were already concealed from the air by rubber trees – this may or may not be such a good thing.

Frank Quirk collapsed while working in a hospital ward and was put to bed with primary malaria. Bob Coonerty, Leigh Fox, Lou Garth and Bill Goodwin were fast improving their technique at cribbage and bridge. These card games, along with euchre and bridge, were most popular and whiled away hours of leisure time.

The Blackwood and Culbertson conventions were most used by the keenest and most knowledgeable contract bridge players.

Many, with no yen for cards, just waited for word from home. Some lucky enough to receive letters in the first delivery of March 1943, also scored in August of that year.

Most though, heard nothing from Australia until 1944 when deliveries were made in January, May, July and September. All letters or lettercards were in envelopes as under:-

Sister Marie Gunton, who left Singapore with the first group of nurses, reached home and sent the following message in her letter dated 3rd November 1943 and received at Changi 24/9/'44

VX 61276
Corporal
A.C. Arthurson
13th Australian General Hospital
SINGAPORE

TX 6025
Sister M. Gunton
Rossarden
Tasmania

Dear Arthurson,

We are thinking of and praying for you. Long for news. Love to Padre Marsden and the boys.

Marie Gunton

In reverse, cards, written in June 1942 and February 1943, and sent from Changi through the Japanese Red Cross, were received by relatives in Australia in October 1943 and April 1944 respectively. It was noted that patients who received mail immediately showed an improvement in their physical condition, and there emerged a greater resolve to see it through and get home.

Again, the hospital saw another Christmas Day, the third as prisoners-of-war. Once again, Sgt. Jack Ogburn and his cooks did the very best possible food preparation to make the day a happy occasion for both patients and staff.

Will we endure another Christmas here?

THE CHANGI GAOL AREA JUNE-DECEMBER 1944

Rations of rice had now been cut to 300 grams for men on heavy-duty work, 270 grams for light-duty work and 120 grams for those sick in hospital. Strong protests were of no avail. The Japanese refused to concede that sick men needed as much food as other prisoners if they were to get well.

In the hospital outside the gaol walls deaths were frequent from beri-beri, pneumonia, tuberculosis, dysentery and cerebral malaria. Hardly a day went past without two or three unostentatious funerals.

The small hospital within the gaol cared only for men sent from the Japanese military prison at Outram Road, Singapore. These soldiers – Australians, British and Dutch – were in Outram Road gaol for various offences, mostly for trying to escape or for having concealed radios. Japanese treatment there was barbarous. The prisoners lived in tiny dank cells, each white man sharing one with a native. Bashings and torture were frequent. No medical treatment was given and only sufficient food to maintain life was supplied.

So, when a transfer was made to the Changi gaol hospital, the patients were in a terrible physical state. Many could not straighten up, many had fractured limbs and fingers. All were covered with lice and sores, and were riddled with dysentery and beri-beri. A few were blind or near enough to it, and so the medical orderlies had plenty of complaints to work on. The ten or a dozen patients were subject to strict supervision. No unauthorised person was allowed entry to the small ward. The utmost care and attention were showered on these men and as much extra food was “scrounged” as humanly possible.

The Japanese stormed in every second day or so and demanded their return to Outram Road at once. Often sheets were tugged off beds, faces smacked and orderlies shouted at as the battle of wits took place. Not one man was able to walk at all when the Japs arrived – a desperate ruse this and risky.

One prisoner treated was Sgt. A. M. Blain, M.H.R. for the Northern Territory. He and others came over under guard from Borneo. Fortunately he slowly regained health at Changi.

THE CHANGI UNIVERSITY

In an endeavour to both instruct and maintain morale a Vocational Guidance Educational Scheme was devised and commenced. Classes began during the week 28th August 1944 – 3rd September 1944.

Subjects provided were :-

| | <u>Area</u> | <u>Day</u> | <u>Time</u> | <u>Place</u> | <u>Instructor</u> |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Bookkeeping | Camp 1 2) Med) | Frid Thurs | 2000 2000 | Pay Office Med Area | S.S.M. Blinch R.A.S.C. Lt. Cotterell R.A.S.C. |
| Shorthand | Camp 1 2) Med) | Frid Frid | 2100 2000 | Pay Office Med Area | Cpl. Hollinshead Lt. Pantling |
| Salesmanship And Advertising | Camp 1 2) Med) | Thurs Tues | 2000 2000 | G.D.N. Coy Mess Med Area | Lt. Hogg-Ferguson Lt. Hogg-Ferguson |
| Business Management | Camp 1 2) Med) | Sat Details later | 2000 | Pay Office St. George's | Lt. Hogg-Ferguson Lt. Hogg-Ferguson |
| Agriculture | General | Wed | 2000 | Pay Office Camp 1 | Pte. Scott F.M.S.V.F. |
| Theory of Music | General | Thurs | 1530 | Med. Theatre | Mr. McNeilly Y.M.C.A. |
| Music Appreciation | General | Wed | 1900 | Med. Theatre | Mr. McNeilly Y.M.C.A. |
| Horticulture And Market Gardening | General | Tues | 2000 to 2150 | G.D.N. Coy Mess Camp 1 | S/Sgt. Goodliffe R.E. |
| Poultry Farming | General | Thurs | 2015 | "E" Yard Camp 1 | W.O. Pocock R.A.O.C. |
| Building | General | Tues and Thurs | 2000 | Pay Office Camp 1 | Lt. Brindley A.I.F. |
| Motor Engineering | Camp 1 Camp 2) Med) | Mon Thurs | 2000 2000 | Pay Office Camp 1 Med. Area | A.S.M. Miller A.S.M. Miller |
| First Aid | General | Wed | 2000 | Med. Area | Maj. Gunther A.A.M.C. |
| Elementary English | Camp 1 | Sat | 2000 | Jewish Synagogue | Dr. Heine |
| English | Camp 2 | Mon Med) | 2000 | Med. Area | Chaplain Barrett |
| Public Speaking | General | Mon | 2000 | Med. Area | Mr. Ivor Hanger YMCA |

| <u>Subject</u> | <u>Area</u> | <u>Day</u> | <u>Time</u> | <u>Place</u> | <u>Instructor</u> |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Mathematics | Camp 1 Camp 2) | Thurs Wed Med) | 2000 2000 | Jewish Synagogue Med. Area | Dr. Heine Dr. Heine |
| Malay | Camp 1 Camp 1B Camp 2 Med) | (Sgt. Holt's class has no vacancies) Frid Sat | 2000 2000 | E. Passage Med. Area | Cpl. Riley Major Grant |
| Hindustani | Camp 1 Camp 2 Med) | Mon Frid | 2000 to 2150 2000 | Jewish Synagogue Med. Area | Maj. Avery I.A.O.C. Lt. Col. Rose I.M.S. |
| NOTES: | 1. | R.V. for visit classes in Medical Area will be under Red Cross Flag to meet Guide to classroom. | | | |
| | 2. | Bring your own seats. | | | |
| | | s24 th August 1944 | | | |

These lectures were well attended and copious notes were taken by those fortunate to possess pencil and paper. Both the latter commodities were at a premium. The hospital orderly room was using old prison paper, some carrying dates as far back as 1927.

It wasn't long, though, before the Japanese imposed severe restrictions on camp entertainment and lectures. Numbers of people attending lectures were restricted to 25 each session, and all theatres outside the gaol were closed.

The gaol theatre put on two shows a week organised by the very clever A.I.F. Concert Party. Following a month of instruction, if a poll was held asking for the most popular future occupation after release 60-70% would be poultry farmers. Eggs are sure going to be cheap in Australia soon!

To save for Christmas 1944, the hospital kitchen pared the men's already light rations for some weeks. The cooks did a good job and the Christmas dinner – although mostly rice and vegetable and a little corn and fresh fish – was a treat to men so long semi-starved.

Each Christmas, too, the staff decorated the wards and gave the patients a wonderful time under the circumstances that prevailed. The idea was to maintain and even improve morale if possible. Some patients still had the P.O.W. blues thinking and often saying

“We'll never get off the Island”

Let's see what 1945 has in store for all.

KRANJI – 1945

The Australian part of the main hospital, run by the British, was still performing most useful work, but, in early 1945 particularly, staff and patients became most conscious of activity in the skies. At 1300 hours on 8th January there was a quick-fire allied bomb attack on the naval base. Three days later the biggest yet air raid lasted 3 hrs. (1000 hrs – 1300 hrs) and this time the Nip fighters had success when they managed to shoot down a super fortress. Guards were proving very shirty and began bashing anyone caught watching the planes. At 1155 hrs. on 14th January a few planes raided the island and met a strong barrage from the ground.

Hospital staff were selling unwanted possessions to the ever receptive natives on the fence lines. Shirts, watches – in fact anything had its price, which meant money to purchase coconuts, peanut oil, eggs and sometimes a pullet.

The hospital huts were infested with large hungry-looking rats. Following a complaint to the Japanese that a plague may break out if the rats were not got rid of, seventy-five cats were released to do the job. A short time later the P.O.Ws had eaten the cats and the camp had to put up with the rats.

The air raid of the 1st February saw bombers coming over in waves as follows:

4, 4, 12, 6, 10, 20, 3, 3, 6, 19, 3
Total 90.

Their bombs were released overhead the hospital, and appeared to land on the naval base. Shrapnel was falling – one fall-out piece weighed 30lbs. Six miles away, an ammunition ship had been hit. Some bombs didn't explode and Japanese shell-fire came perilously close to the hospital; but, luckily, no-one was hurt.

Two days later on the 3rd February, 1945 seventeen super fortresses bombed the civil aerodrome at Katong.

The supply of food to the camp became more spasmodic and rations were cut dramatically.

| | | |
|---------|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 11/2/45 | Rice | 600 to 500 grams for heavy duties 500 to 400 grams for light duties 250 grams for patients. |
| 10/3/45 | Rice | 400 to 290 |
| 17/3/45 | | 290 to 285 |
| 18/3/45 | | 285 to 270 grams. |

However, daily rain was helping the gardens although the torrential rain of 22/3/45 nearly wrecked the hospital garden crops.

After a March raid of 53 bombers, which attacked the naval base and the causeway, the hospital water supply ceased.

Even to this day Singapore's water supply is piped from Malaysia across the causeway. So any air attack on the connecting roadway between Singapore and the mainland could damage the water piping.

So desperate did conditions become – no water and constant danger from the skies – that on the 30th March, 500 patients were sent back to the Changi hospital. This left the wards nearly empty.

Those patients who remained had no medical supplies for their comfort. There was only eusol left to dress wounds and ulcers. The issue, each 6 weeks, of ½ lb cottonwool, 6 bandages and 12 yards of gauze was most inadequate.

The average A.I.F. patients weighed 108lbs.

In April a truck load of Red Cross parcels arrived; probably about 600 in number. The Japanese gave the hospital 15 parcels. The skill of Sgt. Ogburn was again evident as he manoeuvred his menus to now include small rations of biscuits, cheese, meat, tinned bacon, tomatoes and margarine. The tastier and more beneficial food lifted morale no end. And when Red Cross medical supplies arrived in the 2nd week of May the standard of hospital care improved forthwith. Late in May more food arrived as well as Red Cross clothing – boots, shirts, slacks and some books.

S/Sgt. Frank Cooper noted that after twelve months in operation at Kranji, 1,381 patients had been through the A.I.F. wing. There had been 290 operations of which 29 were considered major.

The Japanese were now working feverishly to get the island's defences ready against any Allied attack. Fox holes and trenches were being dug by P.O.W. working parties.

Late in June three A.I.F. men from a working party at Keppel Harbour were brought to hospital dead. They had stolen wood alcohol (used by the Japanese to boost aviation spirit) mixed it with their cha (tea) and after drinking, died in agony from alcoholic poisoning.

Further food cuts were made in July – rice to only 230 grams daily with the addition of potato tops and a little dried fish.

The Chinese beyond the wire were becoming more obvious and more intent on risking the resultant dangers which any communication with P.O.Ws may cause. Perhaps! After 3 ½ years is it possible that the end is close by?

THE CHANGI GAOL – AREA 1945

Early in 1945 excitement was high when the first B29 bomber appeared high over Singapore Island. Weeks later the hospital staff were thrilled to see nearly 100 "Fortresses" mass raiding Singapore and the harbour docks.

In March the A.I.F. Concert Party had been disbanded and the men returned to their original units.

Also in March the food ration was cut to less than 8 ounces of rice daily per man. The hospital had 800 patients and it was becoming most difficult to feed all in the hospital area.

Then come April and the Gods smiled on all for the Japanese Camp Commandant announced that a Red Cross ship had arrived carrying bulk food, clothing and 90,000 parcels for prisoners. Each man would receive a parcel.

We had been waiting for Red Cross relief for nearly 3 ½ years.

A work party was taken to Singapore to sort the supplies and reported that Japanese troops, Indian troops (who had switched their allegiance to the Japanese) and many natives were looting them.

The next Japanese announcement was that no bulk food would be issued. Some weeks later 8,000 patients parcels were issued to the camp of 9,000 men. At a parcel to 20 men the contents were to go to the cookhouse, and distributed as part of the rations. This would be done twice weekly until the 8,000 parcels had been issued.

The meats were spread through the rice on "Red Cross Days:" (Wednesdays and Sundays).

On the first such day the hospital cookhouse gave the prisoners their first taste of bully-beef, salmon, butter, jam, milk and dried fruit for more than three years. All these were mixed with rice but the taste was there – and it was delicious.

After about 20 "Red Cross Days" the supply of comforts finished although the Japanese still held large supplies in Singapore.

Each month a roll of deaths was prepared by the hospital Orderly room and certified by Hedley F. Summons – Officer commanding the A.I.F. hospital. That of the 21st July 1945 – 20th August 1945 showed the last Australian to die at the time of release.

The official record is set down as under:-

| Nationality | Name | Personal Number | Identity Number | Rank | Unit | Age | Date of Illness Progress Time of Death | Place of Death | Place of Burial | Next of Kin |
|-------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------|-------------|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Australian | Levingstone Walter Harold | NX 40789 | 15755 | Pte | 2/18 Bn. | 35 | 13.8.45 Malaria 14.8.45 Benign 16.8.45 Tertian 2.00 a.m. Heart Failure | Attached Hospital No.1 Camp Malaya P.O.W. Camp | Buried Changi Cemetery | Mother Mrs Mary Levingstone Fitzroy St. Walcha NSW Australia |

During 1945 the following total deaths occurred in the Combined P.O.W. Camp Hospital

| | |
|---------|----------|
| British | 33 |
| A.I.F. | 26 |
| Dutch | 29 |
| Others | <u>1</u> |
| Total | 89 |

A secret wireless on 21st July 1945 informed H.Q. that the Australian 9th Division was doing well at Brunei Bay, North Borneo, and the 7th Division equally well at Balikpapan. The Japanese have been defeated in Burma. Soon the "bush" wireless spread the "hush-hush" news and hope arose everywhere.

Another message revealed that, on 24th July, allied planes attacked the Japanese navy in the inland sea.

Then, on 27th July, Attlee replaced Churchill as Prime Minister and Labour had a big majority.

In hospital hut No. 23 were 12 beri-beri cases, bloated, anaemic and waterlogged. The diet couldn't help, being – rice 8 ½ oz, ½ oz whitebait, spinach and potato tops per man.

Vitamin tablets given us from the American Red Cross three months ago have had no beneficial effects at all. Good food is needed urgently. The vitamin tablets are old and the humidity has caused them to lose their potency.

PTE. KEITH ERNEST NICHOLSON VX 57455 RECALLS

I was an original member of the 13th Australian General Hospital and was captured on February 13th 1942 with the others at St. Patrick's College, Katong. The "Selarang Square" incident will always remain in my memory. The "no-escape" form was signed under duress and all who were cooped up in their thousands were allowed to return to their quarters.

In April 1943 large numbers of P.O.Ws were moved up north to build a railway line. A number of my friends were caught up in the draft. My closest friend Col. Logan and I volunteered for "F" Force but we were both pulled off the list on the eve of its departure.

A request came from Selarang for a small party from the combined hospital to help in the mental ward. So this was where I had my first taste of nursing under Dr. John Cade (Major), Psychiatrist. This was a complete change of pace for me. These mental patients needed special supervision in an area with plenty of working space for both patients and staff.

After a few months on this job, I volunteered to go into Singapore on a working party. So, in August 1943, from the Havelock road camp, I worked on the waterfront either in the hold of a ship or on the wharf handling a wide range of cargoes – rice, sugar, scrap metal and clothing. At the end of the day there was the usual head count and body check before the return to camp.

The Havelock Road camp was connected to the much larger River Valley Road camp by a wooden bridge.

Our working party was also sent out to make roads or roll 44 gal. drums from a fuel dump onto rail trucks. Two months of hard work on a poor food ration was considered a fair thing and back I went to Selarang.

The last eighteen months of P.O.W. days were spent at the British-Australian hospital at Kranji. There, the only substantial building was used as the Operating Theatre with the rear used to house the very bad surgical cases. I did general duties at first, digging refuse pits and working in a market garden adjoining the camp.

The Japanese, of course, had first pick of the produce, then the hospital patients and finally the camp.

Again, I tried my hand at nursing, this time in the Officers' ward and finally in the mental ward. At Kranji conditions were not as good as Selarang. Here the staff and patients were housed together in one hut.

Atap huts are not strong and tight security measures had to be enforced. Mental ward staff even had to mount a picquet from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m.

News of the outside world was being received each day. This nourishment helped a lot to get home. The American B29s scattered us to slit-trenches very often but somehow we didn't mind.

Eventually, in August 1945 the Japs informed us that Lord Louis Mountbatten and his forces had obtained a surrender.

Kranji camp and hospital were honoured by a visit from Lord Louis and Lady Mountbatten. This was a great thrill.

Arrangements were made to move the very sick to points where they would be comfortable prior to embarking for Australia.

We were given generous leave. My friends and I hitch-hiked our way to the waterfront where all the action was taking place. I noticed Fred Sutton and Leigh Fox from my unit and we headed for a submarine where we were feted in right royal fashion. From Changi I moved on to the Largs Bay which brought a large number of us back home.

KEITH ERNEST NICHOLSON

RELEASED AT LAST – AUGUST, 1945

For the prisoners in Changi camp, the biggest prisoner-of-war establishment in the South-West Pacific, the war ended on a note of quiet restraint.

About 4 a.m. on Saturday August 11th, the prisoners in their cells knew via their extraordinary grapevine – direct from Daventry, England – that Japan's capitulation was at hand. In the gloom of the gaol cells and in the hospital corridors the men quietly told each other.

There was no demonstration. All accepted this as they had accepted everything else during 3 ½ years of hardships – quietly, with no show of emotion. The educated word was that the Nips accepted terms of surrender and we'll be free in 2 weeks.

The official announcement at 7 a.m. (Singapore time) on August 15th that Japan had capitulated gave a new lease of life to the hundreds of sick in the big hospital.

It was then that men began to talk of home.

The Liberator which flew over Changi on 20th August dropped pamphlets with the following message in English, Malay and Japanese.

“In accordance with the terms of the surrender of all Japanese forces signed by His Majesty the Emperor, the war has now come to an end. Allied prisoners of war and internees have been told to remain quiet where they are. Japanese guards are to ensure that prisoners get these leaflets and that they are treated with every care and attention”.

By the end of the week most of the medical orderlies attached to working parties on the island had returned to the camp hospital.

All Outram Road prisoners were expected to arrive at the hospital by 1800 hours on 19th August, 1945.

Great excitement as planes dropped little parcels by parachute. Lo and behold, some of the first articles to arrive were round tins of 50 Camels and Chesterfield cigarettes.

The lone British Major who parachuted into the camp displayed great courage for the Japanese and Sikhs still were the only ones with arms. Cheerfully, he said he was to take over until Lord Louis Mountbatten arrived which wouldn't be long.

A mobile bakehouse arrived from an Allied cruiser which had just arrived. Fresh bread was soon distributed to the hospital and with butter and frozen lamb which had been in the Singapore Cold Storage since 1941. Men thought they could devour huge amounts, but what a disappointment! Shrunken stomachs could endure very small amounts of good food.

Singapore took on an immediate change. The Japanese flags displayed from private homes and shops since 1942 suddenly disappeared and were replaced by the Union Jack.

Trenches in the parks were being filled in. The Kempetai men were rounded up and marched through the city to gaol.

Shops trotted out their black market goods, stored away for years, but nobody had any money with which to buy them.

Japanese “banana money” was discarded and now cluttered gutters and sewers. The water supply had been fouled, the filters had been left in a deplorable condition. The reservoirs were filthy and the pumping stations run down.

Red Cross supplies were received and distributed.

Early in September Lord Louis and Lady Mountbatten visited the Changi area and walked through the hospital. One could see Lord Louis bristle and he openly vowed vengeance and retribution. And so it was all over at last – just a little more patience and then “Home Sweet Home”.

HOSPITAL SUMMARY OF DEATHS BY DISEASES
1942 – 1945 (Aug.)
CHANGI

| Disease | 1942 | 1943 | 1944 | 1945 | Total |
|----------------------------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Dysentery – Bacillary | 28 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 36 |
| Battle Casualties | 9 | - | 5 | - | 14 |
| Accidents | 5 | 1 | 2 | - | 8 |
| Beri-Beri | 4 | 1 | 7 | 23 | 35 |
| Malaria | 4 | 1 | 13 | 4 | 22 |
| Encephalitis | 4 | 1 | 2 | - | 7 |
| Diphtheria | 3 | - | - | - | 3 |
| Dysentery – Amoebic | 2 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 11 |
| Myocardial failure | 1 | - | 1 | - | 2 |
| Septic Pneumonia | 1 | - | - | - | 1 |
| Blackwater Fever | 1 | - | 3 | - | 4 |
| Meningitis – Pneumo Coccal | 1 | - | - | - | 1 |
| Osteomyelitis | 1 | - | - | - | 1 |
| Appendicitis | 1 | - | - | - | 1 |
| Death under Anaesthesia | 1 | - | - | - | 1 |
| Pancreatitis | 1 | - | - | - | 1 |
| Mania Pachy Meningitis | 1 | - | - | - | 1 |
| Meningitis Sphenic | 1 | - | 1 | - | 2 |
| Pulmonary T.B. | - | 1 | - | 5 | 6 |
| Carcinoma | - | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Hodgkins Disease | - | 3 | - | - | 3 |
| Pulmonary Abscess | - | 1 | 1 | - | 2 |
| Gastric Ulcer | - | 1 | - | - | 1 |
| Sarcoma | - | 1 | - | - | 1 |
| Bronco-Pneumonia | - | 1 | 6 | 2 | 9 |
| Nephritis | - | 1 | 5 | 1 | 7 |

| <u>Disease</u> | <u>1942</u> | <u>1943</u> | <u>1944</u> | <u>1945</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| Lobar – Pneumonia | - | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| Duodenal Ulcer | - | - | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Angina | - | - | 2 | - | 2 |
| Coronary Thrombosis | - | - | 2 | - | 2 |
| Pericarditis | - | - | 2 | - | 2 |
| Variola | - | - | 1 | - | 1 |
| Intestinal Obstruction | - | - | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Gangrene Bowel | - | - | 1 | - | 1 |
| Tumour Mediastinal | - | - | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Gangrene Lung | - | - | 1 | - | 1 |
| Thrombosis Venous | - | - | 1 | - | 1 |
| Hepatitis | - | - | 1 | - | 1 |
| Avitaminosis | - | - | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Paralyticias | - | - | 1 | - | 1 |
| Pyæmia | - | - | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Septicæmia | - | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| S.I.W. | - | - | - | 3 | 3 |
| Ruptured Aneurism | - | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| Endocarditis | - | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| Pulmonary Oedema | - | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| Drowning (Blakang Mati) | - | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| Septic Thrombosis | - | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| <hr/> | | | | | |
| | 69 | 22 | 72 | 59 | 222 |
| <hr/> | | | | | |

Subject : **Outline of present situation**

AC/10/9

To: 1 2 3 4 Gps: Adm Offrs' Coy :
 Offrs' Area : Med Area :

-
1. **STATEMENT.** The following statement was made by the Camp Commandant to the representative Officer on 19th Aug, 45 :-
 The Camp Commandant stated that the position is that the war is very nearly over, that in the meantime he remains in charge of this Camp with his guards until he informs the Representative Officer to the contrary.
 2. **DISCIPLINE.** In view of para. 1 above, the Representative Officer has ordered that the following will be brought to the notice of all ranks:-
 - (a) Anyone going outside the Camp boundaries is liable to be shot by the I.J.A.
 - (b) All ranks are urged to be patient and maintain their magnificent record of the past week, and to avoid doing anything which may create incidents with the I.J.A.
 - (c) Compliments to I.J.A. personnel will continue to be as hitherto.
 - (d) Unless notified to the contrary, present Camp orders and routine will remain in force.
 3. **INTERVIEW.** The following points were discussed at an interview between the Representative Officer and the Camp Commandant on 19 Aug 45:
 - (a) All Outram Road prisoners are expected to arrive in this Camp by 1800 hrs 19 Aug 45.
 - (b) The Representative Officer requested permission to contact all British and Indian P.O.W. Camps in Singapore by telephone, letter or visit. The Camp Commandant stated that this was NOT possible at present.
 - (c) Permission was given for Ps.O.W. to send postcards to relatives and fiancées in Sime Road under existing regulations. Details separately.
 - (d) The Camp Commandant ordered that the present A.R.P. orders would remain in force for the time being.
 - (e) Permission for music in the Camp was sought but has been refused for the present.
 - (f) Permission to send eggs to Kranji was sought. The Camp Commandant is to take this up with the General.
 - (g) A request was made for an issue of wireless sets. The Camp Commandant said that it was not possible at present.
 - (h) The Representative Officer said that he was proceeding with tentative arrangements for the disposal of Ps.O.W. after the cessation of hostilities. This was approved.
 4. **HOLIDAY.** The Camp Commandant has granted a whole holiday except for essential services and Garden cropping parties for 20 Aug 45.
 5. **RE-ORGANISATION.** No.12 Camp will come under command of this Camp 21 hrs
 19 Aug 45 and will be designated No. 4 Group.

The following appointments will come into effect from same time and date :-

| | | |
|------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Comd No. 1 Group | - | Lt.-Col. W. D. Jeater, A.I.F. |
| Comd No. 2 Group | - | Major G. D. McK Sutherland, RE |
| Comd No. 3 Group | - | Major T. E. J. De Bie, R.N.F. |
| Comd No. 4 Group | - | Lt.-Col. S. A. F. Pond, A.I.F. |

6. **OFFICERS VISITING GAOL.**
 - (I) W.E.F. 20 Aug 45 officers NOT on Camp and Group staffs may visit the Gaol daily between 2000 and 2145 hours.
 - (II) Officers are requested to keep their visits to the minimum so as not to cause congestion as the gaol will be very crowded.

SPECIAL ORDER
BY
COLONEL E. B. HOLMES M.C.

Changi,
9 Sep 45

1. At long last Changi and other Prisoner of War Camps will, very shortly, be no more.
2. We have passed through stirring and anxious times together, and I now wish to take this opportunity of thanking you all for your splendid spirit, your behaviour, your constant cheerfulness, and the way in which you have kept up your morale and a united front against the Japanese, in spite of all the dangers and difficulties.
3. I find it difficult to express adequately my feelings at your magnificent response to all that I have asked. Your discretion, patience and sound common sense, especially during the last four weeks, have filled me with admiration.
4. I shall, in due course, represent to Higher Authority (for transmission where necessary to our respective Governments) my appreciation of your services.
5. I wish to pay special tribute to the cordiality and good relations that have existed between troops of the various parts of the Empire and between the many nationalities and the various services that we represent.
6. We will not forget those of our comrades that we shall leave behind here and up country for ever.
7. I wish you all a safe, happy and speedy journey back to your dear ones wherever they may be.

COLONEL,
COMMANDING, PRISONERS OF WAR, MALAYA.

MESSAGE TO PRISONERS OF WAR
From
GENERAL SIR THOMAS BLAMEY GBE KCB CMG DSO ED
Commander-in-Chief, Australian Military Forces

I extend to you on behalf of all ranks of the Australian Military Forces our congratulations on your final release from captivity.

Everything possible has been and will be done to ensure you rejoin your families with a minimum of delay and that in the interim your comfort and your needs are thoroughly cared for.

Many of you have suffered severely at the hands of the enemy while others, due to variations in conditions, localities and the quality of your captors have been more fortunate. But now you are free to resume the peaceful lives of which you must have thought so often in your captivity and we rejoice with you in your freedom.

You will find Australia is mindful of and grateful for the sacrifices you have made on her behalf and I trust that you will find great happiness and full compensation for the difficult times you have endured.

Good luck and God speed to all of you.

General
Commander in Chief
Australian Military Forces

HOSPITAL ORDERS NO. 237

by

Lieutenant-Colonel Hedley F. Summons O.C. Camp Hospital

7th Sept., 1945

Special Message to all ranks :

“As the time of our splitting up and returning to our homes is rapidly approaching, I would like to take this opportunity of passing on to you my feelings about the Combined Hospital attached to the No. 1 P.O.W. Camp, Malaya.

Firstly let me speak to the nursing orderlies – you have done a magnificent job – working for long periods under difficult conditions both night and day – you have saved many lives of your comrades and your work will never be forgotten. You have carried out your duties in the realm of nursing sisters in a way that I did not think possible for mere men to perform.

Next we come to the General Duties, cooks and the associated Technical Services – Your duties have been admirably performed and you have made a very big contribution to the smooth running of the Hospital.

The Medical Officer Staff has been of a standard closely approaching that of a Leading Teaching Hospital. On behalf of the patients I thank you for the way in which you have used your technical skill and experience. The patients have been indeed fortunate in being cared for by so many Officers so well trained in tropical medicine.

The Unit as a whole has blended in together in the most remarkable way, consisting as it does of different nationalities and parts of many different Medical Units.

I am indeed proud to have been your Commanding Officer and I wish you all the best of luck in the years ahead, years which will be difficult in this war torn world – Remember the Spirit of Changi and “Keep Your Chin Up”.

- - - - -

EVACUATIONS OF STAFF/PATIENTS FROM COMBINED HOSPITAL**CHANGI****AUSTRALIANS**

| | | | | |
|---------------|---------------------------|-----------------|--------|-----|
| C Group | Dakota Planes for Labuan. | Planes 1 – 6 | | 102 |
| B Group | Manunda | | | 235 |
| D & E Group | Oranje | | | 722 |
| Dakota Planes | | Plane No. 8 | | 16 |
| | | Plane to Oranje | | 15 |
| Dakota Planes | | Planes 9 and 10 | | 32 |
| Dakota Plane | | Plane No. 11 | | 14 |
| Team No. 1 | Duntroon | 6 Officers | 15 Ors | 21 |
| Team No. 2 | | 6 Officers | 15 | 21 |
| Team No. 3 | | 6 Officers | 18 | 24 |
| Team No. 4 | | 5 | 15 | 20 |
| Team No. 5 | | 10 | 16 | 26 |
| Team No. 6 | | 13 | 255 | 268 |

BRITISH

| <u>By Air</u> | | | | <u>By Sea</u> | | | |
|---------------|-------|-------|----|---------------|---------|--------|-----|
| 8.9.'45 | 2 Off | 7 ORs | 9 | 9.9.'45 | 14 Off. | 34 ORs | 48 |
| 10.9.'45 | 3 | 17 | 20 | 10.9.'45 | 36 | 355 | 391 |
| 11.9.'45 | | 12 | 12 | 10.9.'45 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| 11.9.'45 | | 20 | 20 | 11.9.'45 | 18 | 70 | 88 |
| | | | | 12.9.'45 | 10 | 55 | 65 |
| | | | | 12.9.'45 | 4 | 6 | 10 |

Evacuated to Hospital – Singapore :-

| | | |
|--------------|--------|----|
| 10 September | 46 ORs | 46 |
| 11 September | 3 | 3 |
| 13 September | 2 | 2 |

DUTCH

Evacuated to 47 British General Hospital Singapore 17ORs

Patients remaining at Changi**Total 601****Staff remaining****22 Officers 210 ORs****232**

As at 18th September, 1945

PERSONNEL ON PLANE NO. 2**TO LABUAN**

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Cpl. Arthurson A. C. | I/C 13 th A.G.H. |
| Cpl. Brown R. G. QX 25501 | |
| Pte. Chaplin T. | 13 th A.G.H. |
| Pte. Owen W. G. | |
| Cpl. McGuigan J. | |
| Pte. Boulter A. | |
| Pte. Allen J. | |
| Pte. Jones A. S. | |
| Pte. Speilvogel | |
| Pte. Morton (Instruct Sgt. Morton he will march out as Pte.) | |
| Pte. Hearne | |
| Pte. Huthnance | |
| Pte. Clarke R. G. QX 25512 | |
| Pte. Brent E. | 2/10 Field Ambulance |
| Pte. Brown A. E. | “ “ |
| Pte. Law D. J. | “ “ |

Same Instructions

C. R. Weir S/Sgt.

NURSES OF THE 13th AUSTRALIAN GENERAL HOSPITAL

As has been mentioned earlier in the history of the Unit, the nursing sisters for service in Malaya were recruited from all Australian States.

The Hospital Ship Wanganella left Sydney on August 30th 1941 with 10 nurses from New South Wales and 9 from Queensland. Twelve Victorians, 5 Tasmanians and 11 from South Australia embarked in Melbourne on September 2nd. Seven other nursing sisters were taken on board in Perth and all sailed for Malaya on September 9th. The party of 54 included three masseuses, two from South Australia and one from Victoria.

All were fit and full of enthusiasm for the task ahead of staffing and looking after Australian servicemen in a 600 bed hospital.

The Wanganella berthed in Singapore on the 15th September and was met by Col. Wilfred Kent-Hughes, the Deputy-Assistant Quarter Master General who had organised motor buses to transport the nurses the seven miles to their billets in a three-storied building, St. Patrick's School on the East Coast Road.

There appeared to be plenty of room although a walk to the south revealed that barb wire, land mines and notices reading "Danger – Keep Away" separated the school from the ocean.

Within a few days the sisters met their Matron. SX 10595, Irene Melville Drummond, aged 36, from the inner Adelaide suburb of Millswood, came from the 2/4 Casualty Clearing Station which unit embarked from Australia in the "Queen Mary" arriving in Malaya in February 1941.

Wearing spectacles and most often a smile, Matron Drummond very soon won the respect and good-will of the newly arrived nursing staff.

Dispersed to the already established medical units in Malaya, the nurses soon got back into the swing of things, and learned the art of Tropical Nursing with the bias on skin complaints.

Then, back to St. Patrick's school to instruct the nursing orderlies and stretcher bearers exactly what to do and how to do it when an emergency occurred. Their work was made easier because most ward orderlies had previous bandaging and nursing experience in Camp Hospitals back in Australia.

The nurses' quarters were in the south wing of the building with views over the beach.

There being a scarcity of unmarried ladies among the island's population of 9,000 Europeans, and, also because of their charm, the nurses were entertained like royalty.

At first all were introduced to the sightseeing tours of Singapore – truly a beautiful tropical jewel. Next came the invitations to tennis at the many lovely private homes. The entertainment at both the houses of Dr. John and Mr. Howl, the Attorney-General, was memorable. The beauty of their green grass courts surrounded by albrizzia trees, bougainvillea, hibiscus, orchids and frangipani was really something.

Then, there were the dinners and the dances at the Airport Hotel with its extensive menus.

Of course, the most popular spot in Singapore for our nurses was the renowned Swimming Club where each was made an Honorary member.

But it wasn't all play and entertainment – visits were arranged to the Alexandra Military Hospital to view the malarial films and, then, at Tan Tock Sang hospital, on Friday afternoons, there were clinics conducted by Professor Ransom and Dr. Wallace.

Others visited Singapore General Hospital and were acquainted with beri-beri and typhoid patients, mostly Chinese.

In November 1941, the 13th Australian General Hospital was allowed, by the good grace of the Sultan of Johore, to occupy the mental hospital at Tampoi, seven miles from Johore Bahru. The work involved, in order to make the building anything like a military hospital, was truly daunting. Nurses bashed out iron bars from windows and physically man-handled beds and equipment to make functional medical and surgical wards.

Wilma Oram, Elizabeth Simons and Jenny Kerr, the Operating Theatre team had great difficulty in organising their area of work because of the shortage of medical equipment available to them.

However, when the Japanese attacked Malaya on 8th December, 1941 the 13th Australian General Hospital was ready and waiting and very well prepared for what did follow.

CIVILIAN PROPERTY HELD BY 13th A.G.H.

| <u>Item</u> | <u>Loaned by</u> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| <u>BINOCULAR MICROSCOPE</u> made by Ernst Leitz, Wetzlar No. 339316 with Monocular attachment movable stage. Substage condenser Eyepieces 2 of 6" and 2 of 8". | Mr. W. Dobb East Coast Road, Singapore |
| <u>ZEISS FIELD GLASSES NO. 6 and TRIPOD.</u> | Mr. W. Dobb East Coast Road, Singapore |
| <u>PORTABLE SUNIC X RAY</u> with Screen, Screening Box and Exposure Time Switch | H.H. The Sultan of Johore |
| <u>SANATOS X RAY COOLNAXOS "B"</u> With Tube, Radiscopy screen switch box and exposure time switch. | H.H. The Sultan of Johore |
| <u>DIATHERMY SHORT WAVE</u> | H.H. The Sultan of Johore |
| <u>DIATHERMY SURGICAL OUTFIT</u> | " |
| <u>X RAY ACCESSORIES</u> Films, Screens, Cassettes, Lead Rubber gloves And lead rubber apron. | " |
| <u>PROMETHEUS INFRA RED OUTFIT</u> | Dr. C. J. Paglar 40 Branksome Road, Singapore |

The war with Japan never seemed in doubt – rumours abounded that a “fifth column” had been in Singapore and Malaya for years – and Japan was short on territory and oil.

Oddly enough little Abdul, the Tampoi paper boy, produced the banner of the Singapore Free Press of November 14th, 1941 reading “Nomura’s Optimism over U.S. Parleys”. In December Nomura had hardly left America when Japan’s perfidious attacks began. Relying on the element of surprise, Pearl Harbour and Malaya were simultaneous targets.

Thus, the military hospital geared itself for its first patients. The sisters’ atap huts were a far cry from the comforts of St. Patrick’s School – probably just needed getting used to.

Gas drills with respirators and tin hats were conducted regularly. Sisters Vera Torney, Phyl Pugh and Margaret Sellwood even appeared to enjoy themselves at such time and were photographed showing “how it should be done”.

Matron Irene Drummond made a point of visiting each hospital ward in rotation to enjoy a tea break with her “girls”, and what’s more she generally poured the tea.

A very important part of any hospital is its operating theatre. Good surgeons need an equally good theatre team of nurses. There was no trio better than the experienced Staff Nurses Wilma Oram, Jenny Kerr and Elizabeth Simons.

Two new wards were opened on the 15th December 1941 and fifteen of our nurses returned from Malacca to staff them. A total of 643 beds were now available for occupancy. Further expansion had 1,165 beds ready and 880 occupied on January 15th, 1942.

Battle casualties galore arrived on the 16th January and the whole hospital became one efficient organisation. Every nurse, every doctor, every orderly knew his or her job and that job was performed with extreme skill and devotion.

With the rapid advance of the Japanese southwards towards Johore, the position of the 13th Australian General Hospital became most vulnerable.

The decision to move back to St. Patrick’s school meant another tremendous effort from the Sisters to empty their wards of patients and equipment.

A world record of 38 hours is being claimed for the gigantic move.

As the hospital was settling down in its new surroundings, nurses were working frantically to assist the many dangerously ill Australian soldiers with serious abdominal wounds. These men, though racked with pain, were all polite and most courteous to sisters, orderlies and doctors.

When the bomb hit the South-East corner of the hospital building at 2300 hours, 31st January, 1942, there could have been one great panic. The 75 men in Dr. Huxtable’s ward looked in alarm at the large hole through which water was cascading down.

Sister G. Forsyth, newly arrived as one of the three re-inforcement nurses, was quick to sum up the situation and comforted the most agitated man who, having lost one eye in the front line fighting, was heavily bandaged about the head.

When twenty casualties were unloaded from ambulances on February 1st very late at night, diagnosed as suffering from a variety of fevers caught in the swamps and jungles, S/N Hempsted immediately took them under her wing and administered not only prescribed medicines but much home-spun common sense. Patients were there to be made fit and well as soon as possible and Nurse Hempsted endeavoured to gain patient co-operation to make this a reality.

The nurses now left their quarters for duty carrying gas masks, tin hats and a few personal items.

Four tables were spread out in the new improvised operating theatre which was a large room in the basement formerly the First Officers’ Mess. Wilma Oram and her team quickly had all medical equipment in position and ready for the next patient.

This was February 3rd and only a week or so since the 13th Australian General Hospital returned to St. Patrick's School finding itself with 760 patients and awaiting the approach of the enemy. This situation began a very serious topic of conversation concerning the nursing sisters. If the worst happened and we were over-run would our sisters be subjected to the same brutalities as recorded in Nanking?

The men's attitude was to repatriate the nurses as soon as possible.

A.I.F. Command took until 9th February to really grasp the situation and its consequences. Major General G. Bennett approved the evacuation but the nurses didn't want to leave. This was understandable because on February 8th ambulances in convoy arrived bearing hundreds of wounded soldiers. No-one sought rest or sleep at this time. The surgeons, Charles Osborn, Tim Hogg, Major Eddy and Bert Nairn, supported by the theatre sisters, carried out 65 operations in 24 hours. The sisters blacked out the Resuscitation ward at night using blankets. The air became humid and smelt of sweat, antiseptic and fresh blood.

By day, the open doors of the operating theatre admitted the welcome sea breezes. The team work of the hospital staff had to be seen to be believed.

Because of the determination of the nurses to tough it out – the call for volunteers to go was ignored – lists had to be drawn up and orders given.

Many nurses wept openly as they went about their work during the 9th, 10th and 11th of February, 1942. The girls worked tirelessly among their patients arriving in the wards after a long wait for a vacant operating table. They understood the pain and suffering being endured by these heroic Australian and British fighting men.

Farewells were exchanged and some messages for home were stored away among the sisters' personal gear. The parting was the saddest day in the history of the 13th Australian General Hospital.

The first batch of six nurses left Singapore on the 10th February on the hospital ship Wah Sui which was loaded with wounded. No nurses from the 13th General Hospital were in the first group which eventually made it to Australia.

Next day, February 11th, approximately half of the remaining number of nurses left the hospital to board the Empire Star for home.

Members of the Australian General Hospital in this second batch were :

S/N Anderson Margaret Irene
 S/N Brewer Harley Rosiland
 S/N Baldwin-Wiseman Sara Catherine
 S/N Bentley Nellie Pearce
 S/N Cullen Frances Ann
 S/N Gunton Mollie Marie
 S/N Garrod Bettie Hampden
 S/N Glover Trixie Alice
 S/N Hildyard Hilda Mavis
 Sister Hurley Marie Evelyn
 S/N Muldoon Ann Susan
 S/N McManus Gertrude Mary
 S/N Pugh Phyllis
 S/N Powell Julia Elizabeth Blanche
 S/N Raynor May Eileen
 S/N Sellwood Margaret Constance
 S/N Setchell Duxie May McLean
 S/N Seebohm Loris Irene
 Sister Sheehan Dorothy May
 S/N Skeat Belinda Rosalina
 S/N Spehr Maud
 S/N Taylor Bessie Christina Ellen

S/N Torney Vera Alexandria
 S/N Wittwer Elvie Minna
 3 Reinforcement nurses
 S/N Forsyth G.
 S/N Gordon C.
 S/N Mulvihill M.
 and 3 Masseuses
 Hill Marjorie
 Simpson Audrey Katherine
 Sutton Cynthia Myra

- - - - -

The Empire Star was filled to capacity and left Singapore on the 11th February, 1942. The ship's captain used the night hours cunningly to edge the vessel along the coastlines of the host of islands which gave a measure of protection.

Daylight, however was danger time, and Japanese bombers attacked many times. The nurses did a sterling job calming the women and children during the bombings and machine-gun attacks. The Empire Star was hit a few times and three fires were quickly extinguished. Those patients on the open decks were at great risk, and, realising this, during machine-gunning two 13th Australian General Hospital nurses, Margaret Anderson and Veronica Torney, stretched themselves across the endangered bodies as human shields. None was injured luckily.

The Empire Star eventually reached Australia where the nurses later resumed Army Nursing duties, many with the 105th Australian General Hospital.

For their bravery under fire, Margaret Anderson received the George Medal and Vera Torney an M.B.E. – deservedly so.

THE PLIGHT OF THE REMAINING NURSES

The remaining nurses, comprising 27 of 13th Australian General Hospital and 38 of 10th Australian General Hospital and 2/4 C.C.S. continued their hospital work until the afternoon of the 12th February 1942. They met and were taken together to the docks. Their last memories of Singapore were to be of desolation – buildings flattened and still burning – people scampering about carrying their children and their few possessions. When the latest air-raid was over, the nurses were farewelled by Col. Derham and Lt. Col. Glyn White. The wharf was a state of confusion with people galore milling about the entrance gates hoping to obtain a place on a ship. Military police with drawn revolvers kept some of the very insistent ones away from the “in” gates.

**THE FOLLOWING 27 NURSES OF THE 13th A.G.H.
WERE AMONG THOSE ABOARD THE "VYNER BROOKE"**

| | | |
|--------|-------------|-------------------------|
| Matron | Drummond | Irene Melville |
| Sister | Ashton | Carrie Jean |
| Sister | Bates | May Isabella |
| Sister | McGlade | Mary Eleanor |
| S/N | Bridge | Ada Joyce |
| S/N | Beard | Alma May |
| S/N | Bullwinkel | Vivian |
| S/N | Casson | Florence Rebecca |
| S/N | Clancy | Veronica Ann |
| S/N | Fairweather | Lorna Florence |
| S/N | Harris | Nancy |
| S/N | Harper | Iole |
| S/N | Hempsted | Pauline Blanche |
| S/N | Hodgson | M. Ivy |
| S/N | Hughes | Gladys Laura |
| S/N | Kerr | Janet |
| S/N | Muir | Sylvia Minnie |
| S/N | McDonald | Gladys Myrtle |
| S/N | McElnea | Violet Irene |
| S/N | Oram | Wilma Elizabeth Forster |
| S/N | Simons | Jessie Elizabeth |
| S/N | Short | Eileen Mary |
| S/N | Smith | Valerie Elizabeth |
| S/N | Trenerry | Annie Mente |
| S/N | Tait | Mona Margaret Anderson |
| S/N | Wilton | Mona Margaret |
| S/N | Wight | Rosetta Joan |

Olive D. Paschke, aged 37, a trained nurse from Dimboola, Victoria was Matron of the 2/10th Australian General Hospital and was in charge of the other 38 nurses aboard the "Vyner Brooke".

The 65 nurses boarded the former luxury steamer "Vyner Brooke" already chock-a-block with three hundred men, women and children.

Late in the evening of the 12th February the "Vyner Brooke" left Singapore harbour. Most of the nurses stayed on deck where the air was certainly cleaner than down below.

Friday, the 13th, was spent moving among the islands and using them as cover from Japanese aircraft. That night a search-light pin-pointed the ship and a low level attack from a fighter plane resulted.

The worst happened about 2 p.m. on Saturday 14th February when the Vyner Brooke was attacked seriously. Bombs fell but just missed as the Captain zig-zagged frantically trying to reach Banka Straits between Sumatra and Banka Island.

Then the bombs landed on the ship starting fires and killing and wounding. Cries of misery could be heard all over the ship. One bomb travelled down the funnel before exploding and spraying shrapnel about. Sylvia Muir said an old fellow beside her had his stomach ripped open. He just sang "Britons never never will be slaves". Sylvia also saw a young girl with her buttocks badly slashed.

Wilma Oram remembered being ordered below when the bombs landed. She saw the side of the steamer blown away very close to where she herself was lying. "We had only 15 minutes to scramble up the ladders with the injured, dress their wounds and get into the lifeboats", S/N Oram said.

The Vyner Brooke sank quickly, within twenty minutes. The children and the elderly were got off into two life boats first. The scene in the water showed nurses and passengers supported by life jackets and by the debris floating about. Some had only sticks to which to cling.

Land could be seen on the horizon, maybe a dozen or so miles away, but very hard to tell.

Matron Drummond, with the medical equipment, and some nurses helping the wounded were in a rear life-boat. Some non-swimmers were hanging on to the sides while others organised themselves into swimming groups lending support as tiredness set in.

The reaching of land was most difficult as those in the water were washed back and forth by the tide. Most nurses were 16 or more hours in the tropical seas before being finally washed ashore, others drowned as they drifted away in their sleep.

Iole Harper said she was 70 hours in the water and enjoyed the company of Betty Jeffrey of the 10th Australian General Hospital. They kept together and were beached almost alongside one another.

Jessie Simons came in on a raft weighed down with civilians and sailors.

Sylvia Muir and Veronica Clancy said they improvised sails using clothing to catch the gentle breezes.

All the Vyner Brooke's passengers were widely scattered during the night and parties landed at various places along the beach of Banka Island.

One party, including the nurses, reached shore 10 miles north-west of Muntok.

The Japanese machine-gunned nurses and other survivors struggling on rafts, flotsam and in life-boats. It is thought that three nurses drowned without making it ashore, among them Matron Paschke.

Most of the main party, including about thirty Australian nurses, once ashore, struggled along the road to Muntok and walked into the Customs House, thinking they had found safety. They were promptly captured by Japanese.

The rest of the nurses, numbering twenty-two, landed further along Banka Island at Radji beach, and with naval ratings and other passengers, including children, were about to turn inland when a Japanese patrol returned and separated the service personnel. This patrol had previously passed without taking any notice of the ship-wrecked people. Matron Irene Drummond had already persuaded the women and children to head for Muntok and give themselves up. This proved to be a very wise and life-saving move.

The Japanese patrol surveyed the scene on Radji beach – twenty-two nurses still in their uniforms, twenty British soldiers, survivors from another ship sunk by the Japanese and some wounded stretched out on the shore-line.

The decision was made to bandage the eyes of the service men, take them around the bend behind the bluff and just tommy-gun them. To make sure the job was done properly, all were bayoneted. One sailor, Ernest Lloyd, a stoker from H.M.S. Prince of Wales, rushed into the water and escaped, although he was wounded.

After the killing of Lloyd's companions, the Japanese patrol returned from round the cape wiping their bayonets.

Next, the Japanese set up a machine gun and ordered the 22 Australian castaway nurses back into the sea. It was here that Sister Vivian Bullwinkel had the escape that matched Lloyd's.

She continues the story of the tragedy, "They then opened fire. We all believed that we were going to die. We stood still waiting. There were no protests. The sisters died bravely.

Their marvellous courage prevented me from calling out when I was hit. I couldn't let them down". Sister Bullwinkel said that she saw friends sink beneath the waves. Then she was struck herself by a bullet in the side and became partially unconscious, although she was aware of being washed by the surf back to the beach. She lay still knowing that she would be shot if she gave a sign of life. Then she lapsed into unconsciousness.

When Vivian Bullwinkel revived, she found herself alone except for the bodies of men and women. Dragging herself up the beach, she reached some fresh water – a spring in the jungle – where she again fainted.

She lived in a daze for two or three days until she recovered enough strength to return to the beach going from body to body of her nursing friends, seeking signs of life and noting names.

Unexpectedly, Sister Bullwinkel found a young Englishman named Kingsley on the beach, still alive but with only one arm. Vivian continues, "I nursed him for nearly a fortnight, keeping him alive with food from friendly villagers. But the food was insufficient and we decided to surrender rather than starve. We met 31 of our companions who had escaped the slaughter because after nearly 14 hours in the water, they were washed ashore further along the beach than we.

I saw Kingsley a fortnight later, just before he died, and promised to write his wife an account of his death. It was one of the most difficult tasks of my experience".

Ernest Lloyd, the lone survivor of the shooting of male servicemen, revisited the scene and found the bayoneted bodies of his comrades and of some nurses. Some bodies were in the sea and some out of it. Lloyd was recaptured afterwards and later retold the above facts in an official report.

THE SURVIVING NURSES AS P.O.W. 1942 – 1945

The 13th Australian General Hospital lost 15 of the 27 nurses on the Vyner Brooke, while the 10th Australian General Hospital and the 2/4 C.C.S. lost 18 of their 38 sisters.

So 33 of 65 were either drowned trying to make land or shot having succeeded in reaching the shore.

Our casualties were :

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------|-----------------|------------------|
| <u>Drowned:</u> | WX 11169 | Sister Bates | L. May Isabella |
| | QX 22815 | S/N McDonald | Gladys Myrtle |
| | SX 13419 | S/N Trenerry | Annie Mente |
| | VX 61225 | S/N Wilton | Mona Margaret |
| <u>Shot and Killed:</u> | SX 10594 | Matron Drummond | Irene Melville |
| | WX 11175 | S/N Beard | Alma May |
| | NX 76284 | S/N Bridge | Ada Joyce |
| | SX 13418 | S/N Casson | Florence Rebecca |
| | SX 13431 | S/N Fairweather | Lorna Florence |
| | NX 76285 | S/N Harris | Nancy |
| | WX 11174 | S/N Hodgson | M. Ivy |
| | NX 76279 | S/N Kerr | Janet |
| | NX 76275 | Sister McGlade | Mary Eleanor |
| | NX 76281 | S/N Tait | Mona Margaret |
| | VX 61329 | S/N Wight | Rosetta Joan |

**“At the going down of the sun
And in the morning
We will remember them.”**

February 28th, 1942

The fortunate, courageous Vivian Bullwinkel, aged 27 of Blyth Street, Fullarton, South Australia, with a Victorian army number VX 61330 and supporting the weakening Kingsley, joined her fellow nurses at the Custom House in Muntok. There, 32 nurses commenced more than three years of suffering, ill-treatment and indignities.

Vivian met her friends who wanted to know the fate of the 33 Australian nurses, Sisters Carrie Ashton and Veronica Clancy, having heard of the terrible massacre from Vivian, suggested to all and impressed on all **that no mention was to be made of the happenings on Radji beach.**

News of the above act of Japanese barbarism filtered through to A.I.F. H.Q. Changi during 1942 and a similar decision of maintaining secrecy was agreed to and adhered to.

The matter of great delicacy could have cost the lives of P.O.W. and our nurses.

Muntok – Banka Island was the spot where our twelve 13th Australian General Hospital nurses were introduced to P.O.W. life, Asiatic style. Gone were the simple comforts of plain ordinary living – water, sewerage, electricity and nourishing food. These amenities were now non-existent. Privacy was replaced by the leering of Japanese guards. Toilets were ground level canals which did not flow well and which stank to high heaven. For these two weeks the girls slept on concrete, ate the miserable ration of rice with a ladle of watery stew on top and, despite their own medical problems, helped to look after the many servicemen and civilians in the dormitory-hospital.

Early in March 1942 the P.O.W. in Muntok were dispersed to more permanent camp sites.

MARCH 1942 – PALEMBANG – SUMATRA

The Australian nurses were transferred by ship across the Banka Strait and up the Musi River to Palembang situated in south-east Sumatra. Palembang was one of the largest towns on the island – perhaps Medan on the north-east coastline was larger because of its proximity to Malaya. Before the war, the Dutch owned the estates and ran the plantations.

Conditions were a big improvement on Muntok, even the food was more filling.

The camp consisted of houses and bungalows occupied by Malay, Dutch and our Australian women. Now began another learning experience, that of mingling and mixing with other races, being helpful, cheerful and more or less tolerant.

Suddenly, like a bomb-shell it dawned on the nurses preparing and cleaning out a couple of houses that the Japanese mind was up to no good. Nurses, who were expected to say “Yes” to “I am willing to entertain Japanese officers,” immediately thought of Geisha girls and what that meant.

To put it bluntly, the Japanese officers had their eyes on the Australian nurses and a most serious situation was about to happen. Team work won the day or rather the night, when all turned up looking decidedly unattractive – dirty in body and filthy in clothing. The ruse worked for the Japanese were not impressed, thinking they could do much better in a camp of hundreds of women. So the nurses did not end up in brothels; but other women did offer and were accepted. They were often those who could now afford to buy the important “extras” and who now had light duties in the camp.

Two 13th Australian General Hospital nurses, Queenslanders E. Short and B. Hempsted showed a remarkable lot of common sense in their dealings with the amorous Japanese.

Five weeks had passed and once more the Japanese moved the nurses – this time to the other side of Palembang and not for the better either. Housed in bungalows, thirty women and children to a room with no water or electricity, it became difficult to maintain any semblance of good nature.

There were other women to assist with camp hygiene and the carting of water.

Nurses who, after their ordeal, had little or no personal effects, looked at the Dutch women in wonderment. They had been able to bring with them expensive clothing, jewellery and plenty of Dutch guilders.

Many Dutch women appeared to put on weight while the Australian girls had to struggle to provide sweetening or flavouring for the rice ration.

After three months of captivity, skin problems were the major concern. Antiseptics were secreted from the Palembang hospital but major drugs and medicines were scarce.

As in other P.O.W. camps throughout Asia, educational classes were formed utilizing the available talent. The rest of 1942 was made up of dressmaking, learning languages, acquiring the skills of contract bridge, singing and preparing concerts.

As it became obvious that Christmas 1942 would be spent as prisoners, thoughts turned to presents and Christmas dinner.

The men’s camp made toys for the children and sent over a donation of vegetables and meat. Cards and presents were exchanged among the nurses and the camp “house-keepers” produced a really nice dinner for Christmas Day. Bully-beef, beef broth, vegetables, fruit and a tasty Christmas pudding made from rice, gula and nuts, washed down with coffee combined to fill all hungry stomachs for just this once.

1943 saw hope that news of the nurses’ plight might reach Australia because a Japanese officer collected a full list of the names of all 32 and said, “Will send to Australia”. Who could believe him?

He also promised to provide soap, toilet paper and mosquito nets, but none of these articles eventuated.

During March nurses were permitted to send a letter-card home.

After a year and a half in the outer suburb of Palembang the nurses were moved in September 1943 to the now vacant men's camp. Conditions there were shocking. When the men moved they determined to make the camp un-inhabitable for the Japanese who may need it in the future. The water well was choked with rubbish, piping was ripped out, rubbish dumped everywhere and atap huts badly vandalised. The men never dreamt for one minute that the nurses would be following them into that camp.

But the damage had to be fixed. Vermin abounded – rats everywhere and the huts were bug infested. The Japanese stole watches and any valuables the nurses had.

Then started the dysentery, the malaria, dengue fever and more serious tropical ulcers. It took ages to restore the camp to anything reasonable and the girls were hampered by the wet season – rain came down in torrents and the surrounds were horrid mud.

The work “TENKO” was a pain in the neck for at that command all had to line up and be check-counted. This could happen at any time of the day or night.

During the heat of the midday sun was the worst time of all, standing to attention for long periods waiting for a correct count to be achieved by Japanese who really couldn't count. Sister Jean Ashton was given the task of telling the guards how many were on parade. This improvement was a real blessing and shortened Tenko times.

Bowing to the Japanese was insisted on and all nurses registered their inward protest as they were so humbled. Japanese traitors assisted the Japanese as guards and could not be trusted – all nurses were told to watch their “p's” and “q's” at all times when in their proximity.

Although there was a camp hospital run by an order of Catholic Dutch nuns, the work of the Australian nurses was to provide a visiting service for those not sick enough to be admitted as patients. Vivian Bullwinkel and Wilma Oram were assigned the cleaning of drains and the septic tank after two nurses became seriously ill with typhoid fever.

Towards the end of 1943 most internees and nurses were near the end of their tethers and once more music came to the fore to soothe heartaches. The camp possessed a very skilful writer of music, a Mrs. Chambers and a Miss Dryburgh who translated classical themes into music for various musical instruments of the orchestra. A choir was formed to hum the different sounds of the instruments. As was the case in Changi among the 13th Australian General Hospital men, the most popular musical item was the haunting theme from Dvorjak's “New World Symphony”, “La Lala, La Lala, La La La La La”. “Going home Going home”.

The camp concert took place on Boxing Day 1943 and the choir received high praise for its excellent performance.

After two years as prisoners, and all that time living in each others' pockets, it was understandable that much unfriendly behaviour took place. Various nationalities appeared opposed to each other; Dutch and English women snapped at each other and lacked the co-operation so necessary when living for survival in tough conditions. It followed then that thieving and greed showed their ugly heads for hungry people did act out of character. The nurses tried to remain outside such unpleasantness and tended to form small groups to share any “extras” that came their way.

Work still went on, nurses using chungkals to turn the soil over for the cultivation of sweet potatoes and tapioca. As food supplied by the Japanese diminished in quantity work in the market gardens was stepped up. Most work was done in the early mornings and in the fore-noon.

Unloading supplies from the trucks was very heavy work for women getting weaker day by day and was always accompanied by Japanese screams of “Speedo”. Water had to be carted from a low-pressure tap some hundreds of metres outside the camp perimeter.

Rationing of water was introduced, but sufficient had to be carried in for Japanese needs, which appeared most extravagant compared to the few litres per person allowed each prisoner.

A good "tong" was a real luxury and was available only occasionally. To "tong" oneself as should be done, there needed to be the first water-splash over the head and body, followed by a generous lathering of soap and finally the refreshing removal of the soap by a double rinse.

Many internees and nurses smoked and went to no end of trouble to secure cigarettes from traders, the men's camp, the hospital and the Japanese guards. Some "rolled their own" from a horrid locally grown coarse tobacco sold in long strands.

This local product needed washing at least twice to rid it of 50% of its nicotine. Then came the difficulty of obtaining paper in which to encase the tobacco. But, foul and all as the cigarettes were, the habit persisted in the camp.

There was great excitement when the first load of mail was delivered and eventually distributed around. Most letters were written in Australia in late 1942 and up to November 1943 and this was August 1944. Letters were read again and again by those lucky ones. Some of our nurses missed out on mail completely – Western Australia and Queensland were a bit slow because Iole Harper and Val Smith were two of the unfortunates.

Red Cross parcels arrived in October 1944 and were distributed one to each nurse.

The contents were welcome – cigarettes, sugar, jam, meat, fish and coffee. The Japanese ratted the parcels and kept dairy foods their own use. Milk and butter would have made some contribution to better health. Also, the important medical supplies – bandages, antiseptics, quinine, ointments, surgical equipment and pharmaceutical articles were kept by the Japanese for their own use or for the "black market".

The girls barely had time to enjoy their parcels when another move was announced. The whole camp, nurses, internees, hospital and patients, many very sick, were returned to where they started in 1942, Muntok on Banka Island.

MUNTOK – 2nd TIME AROUND

Once more into filthy boats and across the Banka Strait back to Muntok where the seven hundred women and children were settled into a different camp from that of 1942. The huts were less crowded than before and the surrounds were clean. But not for long, and soon the lavatories, too close to the kitchens, were a decided health hazard. So the ever faithful self-appointed hygiene team consisting of 13th Australian General Hospital nurses Vivian Bullwinkel, Iole Harper, Wilma Oram and Jean Ashton went to work once more to improve things. Unfortunately, a creek at the bottom of the hill became another health hazard. Malaria broke out and all nurses became reinfected and were extremely weakened. Mothers of the internee children were going without food in order to give the little ones extra nourishment.

The number of deaths was growing alarmingly among the internees, mainly complications from malaria, beri-beri and dysentery. This caused concern among the nurses because quite a few of themselves were very thin, emaciated and weak.

Some payment was made by the Japanese late in 1944 emanating from the Red Cross. The guilders received were truly Godsent when food was so poor and bodies were so low in spirit that many now lacked the will to live. The fruit and eggs which could now be purchased with the money provided did help a little.

Our sisters worked in the camp hospital alongside the nuns and British nurses – actually Sister Jean Ashton of the 13th A.G.H. was matron, and sadly had to roster her fellow unit members even when they were ill.

“Banka Fever” they called the illness which caused high temperatures and sweating followed by nausea, vomiting and serious discomfort. Very few quinine tablets were available to allay the ravages of the malarial fever.

The final stage before death was the unintelligible ravings of the mind, and the irregular body spasms which weakened the patient into the final coma.

This time of P.O.W. life, late 1944, was the most critical period of all. If decent food and some medicines had been available most would have recovered eventually, but, as this didn't happen, the greatest number of deaths occurred.

Working parties were flat out digging graves and making simple coffins. Each burial patch was designated by a simple wooden cross.

Christmas 1944 was somewhat low-key with so many nurses ill and rather despondent about the future. It must be remembered that no news of the outside world was available to the camp personnel. The Japanese sometimes let small items of news leak out because of their gloating. “Darwin finish – boom boom”. “Sydney boom boom”.

After the New Year 1945 it became apparent that, unless there was a quick resolution of the war, some nurses were not going to survive. Malaria, beri-beri and malnutrition were wearing bodies out.

The first nurse to die was Wilhelmina Raymont of the 2/4 Casualty Clearing Station who contracted cerebral malaria following continuing attacks of B.T. malaria. She lapsed into a coma on the 8th February, 1945.

Twelve days later S/N Irene Singleton of the 10th Australian General Hospital died from beri-beri and starvation. She was buried on the 21st February.

S/N QFX 22714 Pauline Blanche Hempsted, aged 36, of our own 13th Australian General Hospital passed away on the 19th March, 1945. Puffed-up with Beri-beri which eventually reached the heart, this hard working nurse could survive no longer.

The funerals of the above three nurses were carried out with full military honours. The sisters, wearing their tattered uniforms, slow-marched behind the coffins. Even the Japanese realised that the occasions were of great significance and often stood to attention as their mark of respect.

Just prior to the final movement of the camp back to Sumatra, S/N Dorothy Shirley Gardam, 2/4th C.C.S., died from malaria after a very long illness.

It was noticeable how very thin all nurses had become – some had lost two and three stone and had bony frames. Work in the hospital wards went on regardless of whether the staff felt like it or not. Acting sister-in-charge, Jean Ashton, received magnificent assistance from the youngest nurse, Wilma Oram.

SUMATRA – FINAL MONTHS OF CAPTIVITY

Reasons for the Japanese moving the whole camp from Muntok back to Sumatra were never stated, but, as the net began to close in about the Japanese Army, it appeared they were trying to hide the evidence of their barbaric behaviour.

In April 1945, all were loaded on board a ship and travelled across the Banka Strait. The nurses and patients stretched out on the deck while all others endured the stifling heat down below in the holds. Once in Sumatra all were transported by train and then truck to Lubuklinggau in the west of the island approximately 3 degrees south of the equator. Again, atap huts provided the accommodation on a rubber plantation and once more a camp hospital had to be set up.

Food had to be obtained from vegetable gardens in increasing quantities as the rice ration shrank considerably.

Workers received more food than the non-workers lying in hospital. Nurses were classified as non-workers despite their maintaining the wards and tending the sick.

It was no surprise that on 31st May 1945 S/N Gladys Laura Hughes, VFX 61331, aged 37, who had suffered for ages with malaria and debilitating malnutrition, slipped gently from this life and, like the others, was buried with full military honours.

Gladys Hughes (ex New Zealand) had left Melbourne for Singapore on Sept. 2nd, 1941 as a member of the 13th Australian General Hospital.

Within the next three months three more nurses died, all being from 2/10th Australian General Hospital. Sister Winifred May Davis (19/7/45), S/N Robina Dorothy Freeman (8/8/45) and Sister Pearl Beatrice Mittelheuser (18/8/45).

It was sad to record that the last death occurred three days after the war with Japan had ended.

HOPEFUL SIGNS: Mid-August 1945

Letters from Australia arrived and were distributed.

Japanese guards appeared to have a different attitude towards P.O.W.

Capt. Seki, who had been Japanese camp commander from day one, called a general parade on 24th August and announced that the war was over. But, he failed to tell the stunned nurses and internees who was the victor.

The quality of food improved forthwith with extra meat being provided.

From out of thin air the Japanese produced Red Cross parcels, medical supplies, clothing and a variety of vegetables.

Javanese approached the camp far more boldly and confirmed that the allies had defeated the Japanese some weeks before.

RESCUE AND REPATRIATION

This camp at Lubuklinggau took a bit of finding. The authorities knew that some nurses had survived and sent search planes out to locate the well-concealed camp. Three weeks passed before para-troopers landed and organised the removal of the survivors.

The 24 Australian nurses were entrained 100 miles to the aerodrome at Lahat and flown into Singapore in a R.A.A.F. Dakota on Sunday the 16th September, 1945.

S.E.A.C., the all-Services Newspaper of South East Asia Command in its Singapore Edition of Wednesday 19th September 1945 carried this report by Noel Monks, Daily Mail Reporter.

Singapore Tues. "Twenty four Australian nurses, so thin that the combined weight equalled only that of six normal passengers, were flown to Singapore on Sunday from Sumatra and rushed to an Australian army hospital for immediate attention. They are the survivors of a party of 65 Australian nurses whose ship was sunk off Banka Point, E. Sumatra as they were escaping from Singapore in 1942, and the sight of them and the story they told of inhuman Japanese treatment is as bad as anything I saw or heard in Nazi horror camps.

Sick Australian P.O.Ws in hospital when the nurses were brought in wept at the sight of them and demanded guns to go out to Japanese concentration area here".

Noel Monks then set down a summary of the nurses' ordeal which has already been described in full earlier in this story.

Allan Dawes, Herald war correspondent, says that the story of the massacre on Banka Island had been well-known but was kept out of print to save the life of Sister Bullwinkel. War correspondents were told the story officially but refused to use it.

By a strange coincidence the 24 nurses were met at Kallang airport by ambulances and were rushed to St. Patrick's School, the former home of the 13th Australian General Hospital, and put into wards, decorated for the occasion, under the nursing care of the newly formed 2/14th Australian General Hospital.

Some of the 13th Girls who had reached Australia in February 1942 came back to St. Pat's., Katong, to nurse their friends.

Sisters Gunton and Brewer hardly recognised the tired, skinny, sick and emotionally drained nurses with whom they had worked while the war raged.

The following is a list of the 24 survivors whose extraordinary stories were being flashed around the world.

13th Australian General Hospital

- 57 Original nurses (includes 3 masseuses)
 30 To Aust. Feb. 1942 (includes 3 masseuses)
 —
- 27 (11 shot and killed, 4 drowned Banka Island February 1942)
 12 (2 died P.O.W. 1945)
 —
- 10 Survivors
 C. J. Ashton
 V. Bullwinkel
 V.A. Clancy
 I. Harper
 V. I. McElnea
 S. M. Muir
 W. E. Oram
 E. M. Short
 J. E. Simons
 V. E. Smith

2/10th Australian General Hospital and 2/4 C.C.S.

- 68 Original nurses (includes 4 masseuses)
 30 To Aust. February 1942 (includes 4 masseuses)
 —
- 38 (18 shot and killed or drowned) Banka Island 1942
 20 (6 died P.O.W.)
 —
- 14 Survivors
 E. M. Hannah (Sole survivor of 2/4 C.C.S.)
 J. J. Blanch 10th A.G.H.
 K. C. Blake “
 C. M. Delforce “
 J. C. Doyle “
 J. K. Greer “
 J. P. Gunther “
 N. G. James “
 B. A. Jeffrey “
 C. S. M. Oxley “
 A. C. Syer “
 F. E. Trotter “
 J. Twedell “
 B. Woodbridge “

At St. Patrick's all received a great reception by doctors and nursing staff. The bright ward had been decorated with bowls of flowers. Lights were shining through the hospital and warm baths, food and delicacies were waiting. Gentle and willing hands were ready to put the tired and bewildered girls to bed. All the nurses had lost much weight but none of them was on the serious list. Their spirit was unbroken and they were able to laugh and joke that night of the 16th September 1945.

The Matron-in-Chief, Colonel A. M. Sage, A.A.N.S., who had handled the recruitment of nurses in Australia met her girls at Lahat and stayed with them at the 2/14th A.G.H. for a week. Col. Sage was visibly upset as she heard the stories of cruelty and the circumstances of the deaths of "her nurses".

The nurses were told to expect a treat next week. Gracie Fields, with a company of seven others, was to arrive in Singapore from the Cocos Islands on 26th September. She was to play in town at the Garrison Theatre for a week, from 27th September to 3rd October. The title of the performances was billed as "Keep Moving".

Following an improvement in their physical conditions the 24 nurses left Singapore on 5th October and sailed to Perth on the Hospital ship Manunda. A leisurely cruise to Melbourne and Sydney aided the general health of all and, so, dressed in new uniforms, the sisters appeared nearly back to normal.

But most were admitted to hospitals at the earliest opportunity to be treated for the ravages of malaria, amoebic dysentery, beri-beri, skin complaints and anxiety neurosis.

Demobilisation took place during 1946 except for Vivian Bullwinkel who was one of three nurses who gave evidence at the Australian War Crimes Inquiry and at the Tokyo War Trials in 1946.

She was discharged from the army in 1947 and received a decoration, the Associate Royal Red Cross and later other honours, the Florence Nightingale Medal, an M.B.E. and E.D.

Since their return to Australia all surviving P.O.W. nurses have maintained the closest of contact. "Same family so to speak", some-one said.

At reunions, positive things are remembered about their time in P.O.W. camps – the family-like relationship that developed with the other women, the card games with make-shift cards, birthdays with cakes made from ground rice, the English lady who was a Melbourne Cup fan and dressed up every first Tuesday in November, and the camp choir.

One final comment to end this remarkable story of the nurses of the 2/13th Australian General Hospital. Matron A. M. Sage, who alighted from the rescue plane in Sumatra, looked at each and every one before she said, "I'm the mother of you all. But, where are the rest of you?"

She was hoping to see 65. And there were 24 only.

THE EVACUATION OF NURSES FROM SINGAPORE ON THE EMPIRE STAR 11/2/42

This portion of the Nurses' story has so far been left out by historians and writers of books telling the facts relating to the Malayan campaign and the fall of Singapore.

Not all nursing sisters who did duty in Malaya became prisoners-of-war or were killed on Banka Island.

Half their number did return to Australia in March 1942 and were able to continue their nursing duties.

But, their voyage on the Empire Star was a dangerous and never-to-be-forgotten experience.

Three Staff nurses of the 13th Australian General Hospital, Nell Dollman (Bentley), Bettie Forwood (Garrod) and Maudie Westerman (Spehr) now tell of that voyage of the Empire Star. Their stories have not been high-lighted until today.

SX 12140 Staff Nurse Nellie Pearce BENTLEY (now Dollman of Adelaide) recalls

The 13th Australian General Hospital was set up at St. Patrick's School after we evacuated our hospital from Johore Bahru.

On February 11th 1942 the Japanese were infiltrating on to Singapore Island. Bombing and shelling were almost continuous. We were summoned to assemble in the grounds of the hospital by our C.O. and Matron Drummond. We were then told that we were to be evacuated that afternoon. The entire staff was there when the ambulances arrived to transport us. Matron then read, from a list, the names of the 30 nurses who were to leave in that convoy.

We had no option of either staying with our patients or waiting until all of the staff could leave together.

The drive from St. Pat's school to St. Andrew's Cathedral where we were joined by 30 nurses from the 10th Australian General Hospital was anything but enjoyable. From there we were driven to the docks where, at the time, an air raid was on. We then embarked on the Empire Star which, in peacetime, carried frozen meat from Fremantle to Singapore. As well as 60 Australian Nurses there were nurses from the British Hospital, also some R.A.A.F. and Army personnel as well as a large number of civilians. Normally the ship accommodated 16 passengers but we had 2,000 on board. The nurses were down in the "hold" to which the only ventilation came from the hatch when opened.

The night of the 11th February we pulled away from the wharf and anchored in our own mine-field. Next morning we set sail for Batavia. Not long after we were "at sea" wave after wave of Japanese planes were over us dropping their bombs and machine-gunning the decks.

During these attacks 17 men were killed and 32 injured. Eventually the raids ceased, the Japs thinking that we were sinking as there were flames and smoke billowing from the ship. One large bomb scored a direct hit to a cabin next to the engine room. The ordeal lasted for just over 4 hours. All credit must be given to the Captain who, miraculously, dodged many more bombs.

The Empire Star limped into Batavia on 14th February. The Australian nurses were transferred to a Dutch ship. Meanwhile, temporary repairs were made to the Empire Star. The Captain announced that he was continuing on to Fremantle and would take the nurses home. We were then transferred back to the Empire Star and sailed from Batavia on the 16th February arriving in Fremantle on 23rd February.

During the bombing two nurses from the 13th Australian General Hospital from Victoria were on deck and, because of their acts of bravery, one, Margaret Anderson was later awarded the George Medal, the other, Veronica Torney the M.B.E.

After the bombing we were kept very busy attending the injured and those who lost their lives were given a burial service at sea.

We were all most anxious to know how the remaining staff of the C.C.S., the 10th and 13th A.G.H. were, and, if they had been evacuated.

It was a dreadful feeling having to leave our patients who were all so very brave.

Our Physiotherapists, three in all, were with us on the Empire Star.

We were to hear later that all nursing staff who were left waving to us when we were driven away were evacuated less than 24 hours after we sailed. They embarked on the Vyner Brooke late afternoon of the 12th February 1942. So, the entire staff of the C.C.S. and both hospitals were off the island before Singapore fell and we all know what horrific times they all had.

Six South Australian nurses and two Physiotherapists arrived back in Adelaide on 11th March 1942.

N. Dollman
13th A.G.H.

SX 12740 Staff Nurse Bettie Hampden GARROOD (now Forwood of Adelaide) adds

I won't forget any of those factual details written by Nell Dollman but I remember some other interesting points.

Did you know that Nell Bentley's mother and my mother both got cables from us sent from Java? Officials talked to Maudie Spehr's mother and to Mrs. Drummond so there were several civilians who knew that some of the nurses "were about".

Mother was ahead of the news coming through in 1942 because of this cable and some telegrams from Perth and my letter written on the ship. I also spoke to her on the phone. I enclose a copy of the cable from Tandjongpriok which mother took down to Keswick asking where "that place" was. This cable, the wires from Perth and my phone call evidently caused a stir as there was no official communication and they were puzzled too. The official communication as you see came to mother by telegram on 11th March, 1942.

I have the letter to mother started on 14th February. To quote a part –
"We were lucky this morning as we met Capt. Gardner who was looking for his sister-in-law and tumbled over us. So we asked him if he would send cables, one to you and another to Mrs. Bentley – which he has since told us he did satisfactorily. He has been absolutely marvellous to us – located us again this afternoon and took us over to his ship (Edendale of 1,700 tons), gave us tea, but what we enjoyed more than anything else was the use of his bathroom".

I finished this letter on 21st February in pencil on the ship with a postscript that we arrived Fremantle "10 a.m. ish" 23.2.'42.

We knew we were going to Northam "to be officially found" and were then taken to Hollywood, 110 Military Hospital. Mother received this letter on February 26th.

I have another quite interesting letter (to me) written from Northam dated 28th February. It gives a detailed list of what I possessed at this stage – evidently in answer to mother's questions. She received this on 3rd March.

Another personal memory is waving to the ship carrying the 2/3 Machine Gun Battalion who were coming into Tandjongpriok as we were leaving on the Empire Star for Australia. They were lining the decks and waving back – all were captured I think. It's a sad memory.

SFX 12740
Bettie Forwood
13th A.G.H.

SFX 13420 Staff-Nurse Maud SPEHR (now Westerman of Adelaide) remembers

We were each given “Iron rations” – a tin of bully beef and dog biscuits.

I remember climbing up a rope ladder hanging from the Empire Star and my haversack falling into the sea. The hold smelt of stale meat as there wasn't even any time to clean it out.

I remember, too, some of our army boys throwing cartons of cigarettes and toys to us in the hold. I caught a Teddy Bear that my grand-daughter still has – we called it “Blitzer”.

On the night of February 11th Capt. Capon moved the Empire Star away from the wharf and anchored a short distance away. At first light of day on the 12th we went back to the wharf to see if any stores or luggage were left there.

The Empire Star, during the day, was bombed by formations of up to 62 Japanese planes. At the time she was in convoy escorted by a cruiser and one other auxiliary vessel. As bombs struck the ship she heaved and gave a big shudder – just sounded as if wood was being splintered.

As the attacks went on the girls started singing “There will always be an England”.

We limped into Batavia on the 14th February as one bomb destroyed one of the engines. There had been deaths and casualties, among them the second officer of the ship who had to have his arm amputated. This officer directed the anti-aircraft guns which had brought down one raider, and probably one other, last seen with smoke pouring from its tail.

Approaching Batavia, I remember going up on deck with a friend from our 13th A.G.H., Trixie Glover, a New South Wales girl, to have a wash in what appeared to be tea water. When the Japs came over again we were pulled out of the bathroom and given a drink by an English lady – it was neat gin.

When we arrived in Batavia many of the civilian passengers were taken off – one lady had 12 trunks on the wharf and was calling out for the 13th. We were disgusted, as only a short time before some of our boys were taken off as deserters and it wasn't true as their officers gave them permission to go. The poor boys were marched out to some camp.

Here, in Batavia, the Dutch people were very kind and gave the nurses welcome food.

While the Captain had repairs done to the Empire Star we were taken off and placed in the hold of a Dutch ship “Planthus”. I'm sure of the sound but not the spelling of the ship's name.

At first we were told we would be sent to Colombo to help the nurses at the 12th Australian General Hospital. This didn't eventuate as we had only a minimum of clothing etc.

Capt. Capon volunteered to take us to Fremantle so once more we were on the Empire Star.

Our senior sisters arranged to go into Batavia and buy a few supplies, food etc. So we gave them our Malayan dollars which they turned into guilders. Unfortunately the nurses didn't have much money as they hadn't been paid for six weeks.

The buying party came back with what was available, mainly tinned food. As the quantity purchased was insufficient, a meeting was held on deck and the decision was to have one meal a day at 11 a.m.

Soon after leaving Batavia we noticed a ship approaching over the horizon. It proved to be the very fast Orcades carrying 7th Div. Troops which included the 2/2 Pioneer and the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalions. We knew they were “Aussies” because they were waving frantically and calling out “Coo-ee Coo-ee”.

After that we were left alone except for our share of spotting for mine-fields.

The ship's westerly course was suddenly changed to the south. We thought we were going to the South Pole as we were so cold with no blankets or bedding to keep us warm.

The "Empire Star", usually considered a fast cargo ship taking 4 ½ days to travel from Fremantle to Singapore, this time, took until 23rd February – 10 days.

We anchored out of Fremantle until Headquarters was notified of our arrival. Then some officers came aboard, took our pay-books, checking up that we were really Australian nurses.

Once ashore we had a good lunch at the Hollywood Hospital in Perth and were taken to 118 A.G.H. at Northam to be re-equipped with uniforms and gear.

While at Northam some army lads came to see us and told us the sad news of the "Vyner Brooke". We were told not to listen as they were "front happy".

We often thought about the other girls but were told very little. Leave to see our parents and friends followed our stay at Northam.

SX13420
M.L. Spehr
13th A.G.H.

REMINISCENCES OF S/N PHYL PUGH (MRS. CAMPBELL)

Doctors, with the exception of Drs. Frew and Dreverman, were all W.W.1 veterans who had served in the ranks as N.C.Os. Col. Pigdon was a Sergeant. All these doctors were Senior Consultants in their fields of medicine and came from every capital city in Australia including Tasmania.

Disciplined soldiers and highly qualified doctors proved to be main reasons for our Unit to be so special and such a happy one. The nursing sisters, like the doctors, came from every State including Tasmania. In August 1941 from South Brisbane Station the Queensland contingent departed for Sydney. We were led by the popular Major Bernard (Bernie) Clarke, a consultant Radiologist from Brisbane – a Clive Brook lookalike for sure – unflappable – a twinkle in his brown eyes. Our nursing group composed Sister Julie Powell (Matron of Blackall Hospital) in charge of Queenslanders, Sister Short (Shortie), Matron of Isisford Hospital, S/N Val Smith from Cairns, S/N Sylvia Muir from Longreach, S/N Gladys McDonald, the bush nurse from Adavale (salt of the earth she reckoned). S/N Blanche Hempsted from Brisbane, S/N Violet McElnea from St. Luke's District Nursing Service (came from a family of nurses), S/N Margaret Selwood, Brisbane General Hospital, and S/N Phyllis Pugh from Brisbane.

In Sydney we boarded the "Wanganella", a merchant navy ship, which carried meat from New Zealand to England and now converted to a Hospital Ship. Here we were joined by the N.S.W. nurses with Sister Marie Hurley in charge. Marie became second-in-charge to Matron Drummond after arrival in Singapore. Left Melbourne with Victorian, South Australian and Tasmanian nurses. Severe storm in Australian Bight – many nurses sea-sick.

Favourite spot on ship was the glassed-in bow where we could watch the gigantic white waves breaking over the front of the Wanganella.

One sister, very weak and dehydrated, was trans-shipped back to the Eastern States. While in Fremantle we telephoned our families. I spoke to my mother who sounded just in the room next door. Margaret spoke to her father, Major Selwood at Redbank, not knowing it would be the last time she would speak to him. (Major Selwood died at Redbank camp three days later with acute virus pneumonia).

Approaching Singapore, at Church Parade, compulsory those days, we were addressed by the two Padres on board. One warned us at great length of the wickedness of Singapore in the drowsy heat of the ship's saloon, the other brief and to the point – Yes, Singapore was the most wicked city in the world. My advice to you is "Live your life to the full, but above all have the courage of your convictions".

I was most impressed as we docked in Singapore harbour with the appearance on the wharf of the most handsome and finest soldier in the world. I saw this Sikh in all his magnificence – six feet tall, turbaned, with the classical features of his race, standing with the proud bearing of his famous Indian regiment.

The 13th A.G.H. was quartered at St. Patrick's College, a R.C. Boys' school in the village of Katong between Singapore and Changi.

The Queensland 2/26th Infantry Battalion were in the building down the road from us. It was one of our pleasures to walk down the road a little to watch the "Changing of the Guard" at sunset. Nowhere have I ever seen such sunsets and sunrises. We made very good friends with the Officers of the 26th and were somewhat lonely when they moved up to Malacca on the Peninsula to train in jungle warfare.

I shall never forget the first week in Singapore mainly because I had lost my appetite. The canals of Singapore's streets smelt dreadful as did most of the markets. As Singapore sat almost on the equator, the heat was at first unbearable and any worthwhile sleep was impossible. Then for breakfast the army served us herrings-in-tomato sauce (gold fish) morning after morning. Things were very organised during the second week and some "skilled" cooks were produced from among our unit.

Now, mornings were spent lecturing the orderlies. My classes were taught correct bandaging and how to test urine. Between 11 a.m. and noon Major Bruce Hunt, our senior physician from Perth, gave us lectures on Tropical diseases.

After lunch we rested until 3 p.m. and following afternoon tea we were free to go to the Swimming Club or to play tennis or squash.

We were only allowed out three nights a week and had to be in by 23.59. Our C.O. did not confine any culprit only to barracks for a fortnight but the whole nursing staff. This was most effective and we didn't break the rules. The upshot was besides being well-trained we were physically very fit.

For the next six weeks our nurses lived the lives of debutantes moving about in pairs as per orders. Margaret and I paired up and became firm friends. On our visits to Singapore we met many locals who had some connection with Queensland. Through Bill Low, Secretary to Sir Earl Page, we received invitations to most of the Government dinners held at Raffles Hotel – all very formal and with the most beautiful women of all nationalities, magnificent decor, an abundance of tropical flowers and playing back-ground music was the kilted 2/Argyll and Sutherland Highlander Regiment band.

On one occasion, at Raffles for a "real English morning tea" with Bill Low, we were awaiting him when we were approached by a tall fair man with an American accent asking some rather leading questions (one of our first lectures was on security). As Bill Low approached us our "suspect friend" disappeared. Margaret and I wondered whether we were making too much of it but she was certain his accent was assumed. Bill, when told, didn't seem to take any notice of it but, a fortnight later, said that our friend had been picked up as a German spy.

Shortly after this we moved to Johore Bahru, not far from the Sultan's palace, but plumb in the local lunatic asylum. Instead of windows there were iron bars which were removed by the doctors and men. Wards were separated by long covered concrete paths and so bicycles were needed to transport from one area to another. Later, during blackouts, pedestrians needed to take care.

Our quarters, surrounded by a high brick wall, were a short distance down the road and a bus, driven by Driver Nimbs was supplied for transport. We were taking patients from nearby units mainly with fevers and the odd surgical complaint.

I recall, even at this time of peaceful existence, Major Hunt, at tea, shook us out of our lethargic state with these words.

“There will be war with the Japanese. The Japanese will come in through the back door and advance down the Peninsula. Our troops most likely would retreat to Singapore Island, trapped like rats. The Japanese, then, could control our Singapore reservoirs and we then would be under extreme stress. At the worst, none would go home to Australia”.

One sister remarked straightaway “That’s what I like about Bruce – he is so cheerful and so good for morale”.

Major Bruce Hunt was to be proven right on all scores. A pity he wasn’t on the 8th Division Headquarters in Malaya which later needed officers with vision.

The night of December 7th, 1941 when the Japanese bombed Singapore was a lovely moon – light night so calm and peaceful and all our patients sleeping.

Having heard the bombs in the distance, ‘Lofty’, my orderly (Allan Schliebs), and I decided it must be a practice raid. Then we saw the tracer bullets followed by the Ack-Ack guns firing skyward at the Japanese planes overhead.

All the patients were now awake, in fact, very awake to the realisation that we were at war with Japan.

Major Bruce Hunt every evening visited our ward and, after attending to the sick patients, stood on a chair in the centre of the ward and gave us news reviews “Our troops are retreating rapidly down the peninsula and the casualty list is high – not good news so far”.

On leaving he would say “If any of the patients need a sedative, Sister, give it to them”.

The war was getting hotter and closer and once more we attended lectures, this time in the Black-outs. Some of us were formed into a decontamination squad and Margaret Selwood, Margaret Anderson, Veronica Torney and myself found ourselves made into the Signals Squad because the telephone was in our bedroom. The Army Signals Corps rang us and, when the message was “Air Raid Red”, we had to ring a large brass bell and the nurses and amahs headed for the cover of the jungle. Most of our nights were interrupted by Japanese bombers and, staff trying to catch a few hours sleep did it with extreme difficulty.

British and Indian troops were retreating rapidly following attacks from the Japanese Imperial Guards, crack troops six feet tall and very well trained in jungle warfare.

On a shopping visit to Johore Bahru we encountered trucks of Indian Sikh and Gurka wounded being taken to their own hospital.

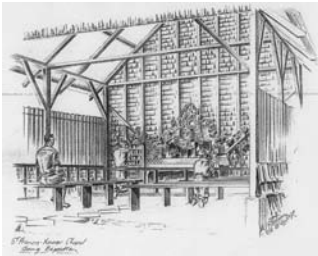
Colonel Pigdon, our C.O., summoned all nurses to our mess and stressed the dangers ahead. He asked us not to underestimate the strength of the Japanese. He was concerned that paratroops could be employed to isolate the hospital. Should we be at risk we must take our “iron rations”, head into the jungle and make our way to the coast. We had to familiarise ourselves with our locality by studying maps and Col. Pigdon also put a curfew on nurses – not allowed outside our compound after dark, nor were we allowed visitors. The Japanese troops were just seventy two miles away to the north. This I found out from the guard when I overheard him say to the Postal Corporal, “Keep your rifle at the ready – the Japanese are only 72 miles away and advancing”.

Christmas 1941 came and the wards were decorated and the Red Cross and Salvation Army were prevailed upon to boost the patients’ rations for the festive event. Our Officers were splendid on Christmas Day. They helped to carve up the poultry and ham and helped serve the bed patients. They also made the nurses sit down with the up patients while they waited on us.

In return the nurses had arranged an excellent party in our mess for the Officers and on Boxing Day a Christmas party for all men of our unit. The Officers returned our party and additionally the Sultan of Johore invited Matron Drummond and our C.O., Col. Pigdon, and the Officers and Sisters who could be spared, to a festive dinner at his palace. I was on duty but I believe they ate off gold plates.

Events speeded up after this as the 2/10th A.G.H. had to evacuate their patients to us from Malacca while they moved back to Singapore Island to set up their hospital. With the help of some sisters of the 2/10th A.G.H. and the 2/4th C.C.S. we managed to cope with an increase in hospital patient numbers from 500 to 1200.

The unit was very busy now as we coped with surgical wounded. The theatre staff were working long hours. Captain Dreverman was in charge of the Blood Bank and he was so quick and efficient at taking and giving blood the boys named him "Dracula". Penny Bentley (South Australia) was his assistant and they worked together in perfect harmony. They snatched their sleep when they could get it. The Surgical team and the Physiotherapists were now encasing all possible wounds in plaster-of-paris as had been first done in the Spanish Civil War. Firstly, sulphonamide powder was dusted into the wound which was then packed with "Tulle Gins" (gauze bandages soaked in a solution of Vaseline and Balsalm of Peru). Then, the plaster cast was applied and stayed in situ until the patients eventually reached the 2/12th A.G.H. in Colombo. The sisters of the 2/12th told us the casts were dirty and smelly but, when removed, the wounds were clean and healed perfectly. Fortunately, our Matron had the forethought to prepare the plaster bandages and Tulle Gins long before they were needed and supplies did not run out.



The first indication we were to move came when the C.O., putting Padre Marsden in charge, sent Margaret Selwood and I and a handful of orderlies back to Singapore to St. Patrick's School which was to be cleaned and prepared for the hospital. Margaret and I had to clean up the civilian houses adjoining the college to house the members of our unit. These houses had been evacuated by the civilians.

Near the end of January 1942 the 2/13th A.G.H. evacuated during bombing raids in the record time of 72 hours from Tampoi to Katong, Singapore. Medical history was surely made with not even the loss of an ambulance.

With the help of Bill Goodwin, a newly arrived member of the reinforcements landed about the 28th January 1942, the assembly hall of the school was made ready for the last of the convoy (all medical patients) to arrive. Beds were made, pyjamas placed at the ready with towels, cold drinks on lockers and heaps of sandwiches made and tea-pots just awaiting boiling water. I might add we had only kerosene refrigerators and primuses to sterilise our instruments and to make our tea. Two orderlies serviced these daily. Being used to western Queensland I knew this was a wise move. Kerosene appliances can be very temperamental unless handled by the same person. Major Bruce Hunt and Sgt. Lockwood, both looking very exhausted, waited with us. The ambulance convoy, driven by Indian drivers, had got lost in the black-out and it wasn't till near midnight that all patients were bedded down.

I took T.P.R. and their medical cards, whilst Major Hunt attended to their medical needs. Sgt. Lockwood fetched the necessary medicines and sedatives as ordered. Bill followed up with the sandwiches and tea. In a very short time every patient was asleep and Bill and I stayed on night duty for the duration of the Malayan campaign.

Major Hunt insisted that every bath tub, every bucket and receptacle be filled with water. He predicted the Japanese would cut off our water supply.

By now, the 31st January, all troops were on Singapore Island. The civilian women and children were being evacuated on every available ship. Our first boat load of wounded left for Colombo with three nursing sisters, none of whom were from the 13th A.G.H.

I believe that Colonel Pigdon, the C.O., sent three cables to the Prime Minister asking for ships to evacuate our wounded. These cables were not answered. Did they get through to Australia in all the confusion?

We were all working 12 hour shifts except for the theatre staff, blood bank, X-Ray and our Physiotherapists who, all of necessity, were on duty much longer than half-a-day. I, fortunately, had the ability to sleep during the daytime air-raids, bombings and the constant artillery barrages having found a quiet room in a deserted house where I rested undisturbed.

So, Matron decided to put me in charge of the Resuscitation ward where the wounded were admitted. Because of the first war experience and organising ability of our Medical Officers our hospital at St. Patrick's school was excellently arranged for both patients and staff.

In the large Assembly Room on the lower ground floor, now used as the Resuscitation Ward, my job as Sister-in-Charge was to arrange the setting up of all surgical trolleys, the duties of orderlies and the placement of beds. The first row was to be for the very seriously wounded and an intravenous drip was attached to each bed. The second row would contain the seriously wounded and so on until the back row consisted of walking wounded.

As the convoys arrived I examined each stretcher and allocated the bed accordingly. Capt. Huxtable, the surgeon in charge of the ward, ordered treatment and dressings. Capt. Dreverman and Sister Penny Bentley attended to blood transfusions and intravenous drips. In their free time they took blood from the walking wounded and sometimes seriously ill patients were transfused direct from donor to recipient.

We sadly missed Drev. and Penny on the odd night when they slept. Their good-humoured efficiency was appreciated by the wounded. The first row soldiers received the help and solace from our Padres and I thanked God they were there to sit beside a dying soldier who would know that he was not alone in his last dying moments. How I wish their parents and wives could have know this.

First row patients on admittance were treated – no-one was bathed. Their wounds were cleaned and dressed and followed by blood transfusions and intravenous saline. As each bed was on wheels patients were wheeled into the next room for X-Ray where Major Clarke and his staff attended to them and attached their X-Rays (sometimes still wet) to the posts of the beds which were then wheeled into the adjoining operating theatre. Following their surgery the soldiers were wheeled to the next room to wait until they were fit enough to be moved to a ward. This exercise was more beneficial for our patients as they were not moved out of their beds except on to the operating table.

The Resuscitation Ward was a most interesting one and I saw only bravery and courage amongst the wounded. They of course, didn't stay long but I remember remarking to Cpt. Huxtable that no matter how badly wounded they were they remained conscious whereas accident cases coming into casualty in Civvy St. were unconscious and suffering from shock. Capt. Huxtable explained that a soldier went into action knowing he could be killed and when he found himself on a stretcher in a hospital unit the old adrenalin pumped away and his spirits rose accordingly. So we can see them conscious, co-operative and cheerful with the most appalling wounds, whereas a civilian did not expect to be knocked down by a car or whatever and shock took over.

One night the top floor of the hospital was bombed and a direct hit caused much damage – many patients had lucky escapes.

Early in February 1942, Col. Pigdon summoned all nurses into the Mess and told us we were to be evacuated when there were ships available. Two lists of thirty names of Nursing Sisters on each were made and when the time came he asked that we go quietly with no good-byes. Also, we were to pack just our small suitcase and take respirators and iron rations with us.

I shall always remember my last night. That night our patients were walking wounded, some so serious I wondered how they had managed it. One soldier had a very severe chest wound and, as Penny Bentley and dressed his wound, he looked up at us and said "God, you are beautiful". Penny and I laughed because, owing to black-out conditions, no air-conditioning or fans we wore just theatre gowns and gauze caps over our hair.

His attitude reminded me of the night I knelt beside a stretcher on which lay a soldier whose face was deathly white and not appearing to be breathing. I lifted the blanket to take his pulse and the stretcher was full of blood. Yes, he did have a pulse, but very feeble. I looked at his face and he opened his eyes and winked at me. I nearly died of shock. This brave man did recover.

Most of our wounded were mainly chest and facial wounds patients who were hit by snipers in the rubber trees.

THE JOURNEY BACK HOME

I was dragged out of the shower on the morning of February 11th by Margaret Selwood (now Meg Harold Forbes) and told to hurry as we were leaving and the ambulance was waiting. Only Matron saw us off and I shall always remember Matron Drummond cuddling Margaret and I in her arms and saying "Good-luck Kids". Then we were taken to St. Andrew's Cathedral to await transport to a ship. We waited quietly knowing we must do exactly as we were told. The bombing and artillery fire had intensified and fires had broken out all over Singapore. Late in the afternoon we were taken by ambulance to the wharf where we waited in an air-raid shelter until the order came to board the ship.

We were assisted from the swaying gang-plank by two merchant seamen on to the "Empire Star" which had previously been used in evacuating troops from Dunkirk, Greece and Crete. With the 2/10th A.G.H. Sisters we numbered sixty and were sent down into the hold where we saw English and Indian nurses. The English nurses were the Territorial Nurses and still wore the uniforms worn by Florence Nightingale nurses. The English and Indian girls were very nervous, having been through a very bad time recently.

We stayed in the harbour overnight waiting to join a convoy of 28 ships – the last convoy to leave Singapore. Only three of the 28 were to reach Java. At dawn we moved away from the island and at 9 a.m. precisely the bombing commenced. The convoy was also machine-gunned and even suicide pilots crashed into the decks of some of the ships.

We quickly made dressing stations down in the hold and very soon wounded were brought down to us. There were three direct hits on our ship and one incendiary bomb which fired the crew's quarters. A last effort resulted in the Japanese dropping two one-thousand pound bombs one on each side of the ship. The Empire Star literally was lifted out of the water and when it righted itself we heard only one of the two engines working. I stood beside my friend, Margaret, when this happened. Looking at her I noticed a trickle of blood from her ear which had had its drum ruptured.

In the meantime Margaret Anderson and Veronica Torney had gone up on deck and attended the men as they fell wounded. These sisters of the 13th A.G.H. were noticed by the Captain on the bridge working without regard to their own safety and later recommended both for decorations. From this time on, the Captain took a great interest in Australians. The use of his bathroom was much appreciated by the Aussie nurses and the Empire Star became the only ship in the British Navy with smalls waving gaily from the bridge.

It was from here Margaret and I saw the burial at sea with full military honours for thirteen men. Throughout the raids the troops on deck sang hymns and at this burial service they sang "Abide With Me". If I hear it today I still get a lump in my throat.

Just before arriving in Java, the Captain held a Thanksgiving Service and all attended. We had had a miraculous escape – one of the three ships to survive in a convoy of 28 which included three oil tankers. We also shot down a Japanese plane during a six-hour bombing attack.

All felt our survival was due to the efficiency of the Captain and his crew of the "Empire Star" as they worked together calmly, cheerfully and with a wonderful "esprit de corps". The Captain in his address said many had thanked him for saving their lives but he gave all credit to the Supreme Being who had guided our ship into safe waters. He asked all when ashore to go to church and thank God for our safety.

I feel this experience had a profound effect on all of us. I know I felt very close to God and experienced that feeling of "Peace that Passeth all Understanding". This was to remain with me for the duration of the war.

While the Empire Star was being repaired we were taken on board a Dutch merchant ship bound for India. We were made comfortable on straw mattresses on the very clean lower deck and given nice fresh sandwiches and tea and cold water.

As the Empire Star now had orders to sail south to Australia, the Captain was persuaded to take the Australian nurses with him. No sooner were we on our way than Java capitulated to the Japanese. Near Bali a troop ship containing our men from the Middle East passed nearby. We established their Australian content when we coo-eeed and they replied.

When we arrived in Fremantle we found out that Darwin, Wyndham and Broome had been bombed and a Japanese invasion was imminent. The average Australian seemed unaware of this. They could not understand why the 8th Division had not held Singapore and the men who found their way home from there in 1942 were arrested as deserters and imprisoned in Fremantle. General Gordon Bennett the leader of the 8th Division was the subject of an exhaustive inquiry.

After a period of leave Margaret Selwood joined the 106 C.C.S. which unit later went to New Guinea (it was her father's old unit) from Redbank. I eventually joined the 2/2 A.G.H. which was disbanded at the end of hostilities and the 2/14 A.G.H. was formed to return to Singapore to rehabilitate the prisoners-of-war. We knew, too, that our girls who left Singapore after us on the Vyner Brooke had been taken prisoners.

The 2/14 A.G.H. was formed in Melbourne with a new C.O., the Matron ex 2/2 A.G.H., new N.C.Os and orderlies. We sailed from Melbourne on the "Duntroon", a troop ship during the war. On arrival at Darwin I was amazed to see the amount of devastation – the newspapers had made light of the air-raids on that town.

The "Duntroon" was escorted by a corvette through possible mine-fields. At an appropriate time the Captain got rid of his ammunitions. Another Sister and I were invited above decks to witness the firing of tracer bullets illuminating the sky and, with our ears plugged, watched in awe as the big guns were manned and fired into the distance.

We arrived in Singapore where many other ships were anchored. Our impatient nurses hitched rides in trucks bound for Changi Jail. The local people cheered us and gave us the thumbs-up sign but, Oh! How Singapore had changed! The influence of the British rule was gone and with it all that was dignified and lawful. The people were not the happy people we had known.

On arrival at Changi we were escorted through the jail by some men of the 13th A.G.H. Its C.O. Col. Pigdon had died in Formosa, Capts Frew and Dreverman were still in Thailand. Our other Doctors and Padres were there. With amazement we witnessed P.O.W. ingenuity – seawater had produced their salt – boiled grass their Vitamin B – oil from coconut trees their kitchen fuel – concealed radios in a broom head and in the seat of a R.A.P. stool supplied their news. The men were very emaciated and their clothes in tatters but they and their surroundings were clean.

As a unit we had been one big happy family and it was great to meet friends once more.

Then the 2/14 A.G.H. established itself at St. Patrick's College – seemed like going home. Very soon the hospital was fully functional and all beds were full. Planes were bringing P.O.Ws from Burma and Thailand. A ward two floors up was prepared for our nursing sisters but no-one knew yet where they were. Then came the good news, the girls were found in Sumatra. Sixty had left on the "Vyner Brooke" but we didn't know how many to expect.

It was our custom to visit as many P.O.Ws in hospital each day as possible. As Driver Nimbs and I walked past the hospital's entrance an ambulance pulled up and its passengers alighted. I remarked to Driver Nimbs, "They are coolies and should go to the European hospital". Looking closer, I saw, under the coolie hats, the old grey uniforms worn by our nurses, thongs on their feet and carrying small bundles of their belongings. It's them – thank God. Sadly instead of 60 nurses there were only 24. I took them up to the C.O. and introduced them. The Queenslanders were Vy McElnea (died later of heart attack in 1950s), Val Smith, Eileen Short, Flo Trotter, Sylvia Muir and Joyce Twedell. Joyce was a stretcher case and it would have been only a matter of hours for her. The only sister I didn't recognise was Jenny Greer who had been a buxom 12 stone and was reduced to 4 stone.

I arranged baths for them all and the Chinese boys had to run backwards and forwards with the required hot water. There was great excitement but I felt a terrible numbness.

It had been bad enough to see the state of the men but the girls were walking skeletons – hip joints, elbows etc. were protruding through their skin. They were happy and delighted to get a sponge bag each, and joy of joys, their very own tooth brush. Once they were fed and bedded down I went off duty. Vivian Bullwinkel asked me later how I reacted to the reunion. I told her after I went off duty I vomited with the stress of it all.

During the fortnight the girls talked incessantly of their life in prison camp. There was only sadness for their lost friends. They had accepted their lot for 3 ½ long years and made the best of it. They told of their capture and imprisonment and Viv's miraculous survival of the Banka Strait massacre, how they cleaned out several houses to be used as Japanese brothels, of the dreadful days that followed when, two by two, they were coaxed, bribed with cigarettes, food and drink. The nurses fronted up looking as unattractive as possible – big girls wearing the smaller girl's uniforms and vice versa – hair dishevelled and a really stupid look. The Japanese officers desisted and turned their attention to others.

For the duration of the war they had to scrounge and to work for the European women for money to buy food. A small cake of soap was a luxury and one tooth brush had to be shared. Many of our girls died.

So the surviving nurses talked non-stop of their life in P.O.W. camps. Now they do not mention it. I remember them squatting on the floor like "boongs" – their habits of 3 ½ years still with them as they became stronger. The men brought them gifts of bunches of bananas, baskets of eggs and nuts. These were placed on the floor where they squatted. Into their cups of tea they broke 1 or 2 raw eggs. Their craving for protein was profound with the result their bodies became bloated and the Physicians had to control their diets. During their stay in hospital, and since, they were always cheerful and happy.

I have just heard the cassette of the "Song of Survival" which will be produced as a documentary. This to me was an inspiration and should be shown to the world as a tribute to the magnificent spirit of our surviving sisters.

QX 22716
S/N Phyllis Pugh
(Mrs. P. B. Campbell)

DECORATIONS

Nurses

| | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Margaret Anderson | George Medal |
| Vera Torney | M.B.E. |
| Vivian Bullwinkel (P.O.W.) | (a) A.R.R.C. |
| | (b) Florence Nightingale |
| | (c) M.B.E. |
| | (d) E.D. |

Officers

| | |
|------------------|--------|
| Major Bruce Hunt | M.B.E. |
|------------------|--------|

O,Rs

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Sgt. Alex Deans | B.E.M. |
| Additionally, Sgt. Deans was promoted to Acting rank of Warrant Officer Class 2 as from 1 st July 1943 | |
| Lt. Col. Kappe C.O. "F" Force recognised the work of Sgt. Deans when in charge of the nursing staff at Nieke during a cholera epidemic | |

Editorial comment.

- There is comment of "F" Force having contact with "D" Force at a POW camp Tarsau. "D" Force was certainly in that area at that time. However "Dunlop" Force, whilst generally in the area, was located about 30 km further north in the Hintok area.
- There is also mention of the Commanding Officer of 13 AGH Colonel Pigden dying in captivity in Formosa. Although he passed through Formosa in 1942, he actually died in Mukden, Manchuria on 9 July 1945.
- Gratitude must be expressed to Mrs Marie Wilson who has re-typed this history to enable it to be placed on the website. It will be realised this was a huge task. The quality of her typing, accuracy and the adjustment of layout is much appreciated.

Lt Col Peter Winstanley (Ret'd) OAM RFD (JP)

May 2009