



South Australians at war - transcript

McLaren, Don, *Mates in hell : the secret diary of Don McLaren, POW of the Japanese 1942-1945*
Henley Beach, S. Aust. : Seaview Press, 1998

EDITORS NOTE

This book contains some very basic and forthright vernacular.

That was the language of the Australian serviceman.

To edit it would diminish the atmosphere of the narrative and dim the personality of the author as it emerges from the story.

The text of the diary has therefore been printed as it was written at the time, with only a number of punctuation insertions and a few added subheadings.

Bill Miller.

PUBLISHERS NOTE

We knew Don McLaren was a Prisoner of War of the Japanese, in Changi, Burma and Japan, 1942 - 1945.

We did not know until 1996 that he had written a descriptive and compelling diary during his internment.

We were deeply moved by his child-like scrawl on the tiny notebook pages, in which this young man penned his frustration, his anger, his grief and suffering; at the same time displaying the humour and the mateship of the Australian servicemen at the hands of a brutal and sadistic enemy.

Not all Japanese soldiers were brutal. Don writes of a Japanese guard in June 1942 who helped him slaughter a goat for food. He again writes in June 1945 that the Japanese children were so different to the adults, showing no malice, and later of a Japanese family who befriended him at the end of the hostilities.

Australia is no longer at war with Japan, and those gentle Japanese children are the senior adults of their country today, with children and grandchildren, like ours, who do not know the horror of a world wide conflict.

They, like us, live in a peaceful world, however frail that peace may be.



Let us pray that it may continue. Janice & Wayne Trembath.

AUTHOR'S COMMENT

This is not a war story. It is about the spirit of Australians.

You will get a few giggles in parts. At time we would roar with laughter at the simple things. How many times we would almost piddle our pants at stupid little incidents, and the tougher it got the more we would stick together and laugh. If you could only see the look on the Jap's faces when we laughed, they were close to tears.

If I went into all details of the terrible times we endured on the railway and in the mines in Japan you would be dreadfully depressed. Indeed, you may even think "oh, cut the bullshit!" Perhaps the on] way you will capture our real story is to be a fly on the wall when a group of POW's meet. The wonderful late Weary Dunlop was one of us. He knew us, we knew him. He trusted us, we trusted him.

Earlier I mentioned the spirit of Australians. I take no credit away from American, British, Dutch, Ghurka and Indonesian POW's. They were as courageous as we were. But Australians were all brothers. Several years after the end of the war, statistics showed the death rate of Australian POW's enormously lower than all other allied prisoners. That speaks for itself.

Don MCLaren

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AFTER THE FALL OF SINGAPORE

FEBRUARY 15, 1942.

FOUR o'clock this afternoon our heavy field guns ceased fire. Rifle and machine guns were still firing in our sector until early morning. Early Monday morning we were told of our surrender.

It was then I decided to start this diary.

FEBRUARY 16, 1942.

We retreated from the front area and moved back for half a mile. We were all terribly tired and hungry, none of us had slept for days. The final days of our battle for Singapore was so intense, the constant shelling and continuous air attack created an enormous din with explosion after explosion. My right ear could not take any more, so as a result it went stone deaf. One of my mates, Bill Parish, was killed and four others were wounded.



Each of us had to toss our weapons onto this large heap. (Not one rifle from my unit would ever be used by the Japs, we completely wrecked them.)

Every man just dropped his gear, all you could see in any direction were men sleeping on the hard ground, some slept for hours and hours.

By mid-day most were awake. We sat around and all you could hear over and over was the same thing, 'Why have we surrendered?' 'Why has Singapore fallen?' 'Oh my God, what will they think of us back home?' I can't explain on paper how disgusted we are. In the late afternoon men were still asking "Why, why, why?" Ray Maskell looked at me, tears pouring down his face, and said, 'Donny, my wife, my wife, what will she think of me?'

We knew we were better than the Japs. Only some weeks ago the magnificent Australian Infantry Battalion and support

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troops stopped the Japs dead, and really gave them a hard time. Had those brave men had armour to back them up, Singapore would have been a different story.

Singapore was a fortress, provided it was attacked from the sea.

We could imagine the top brass at the War Office in London saying, 'By jove, these Japanese are awful bounders, they are coming in the wrong way.'

No matter what happened, it happened, and I personally will always be very pro-British. However, some brains in England are not with it. The tragedy of Singapore in World War 11 was as bad as the British stuff up on Gallipoli in World War 1 it left us so utterly bewildered.

Rumours spread 'The Yanks are coming to get us off.'

FEBRUARY 17, 1942.

Teddy Lock, one of, my pals who was wounded, has just joined us. Teddy was a "walking wounded". When the shells exploded amongst us, killing one of my mates and wounding the others, an ambulance took them to Alexandria Hospital. The Japanese over-ran the place and proceeded to kill patients and doctors. Teddy said, 'I'm off.'

FEBRUARY 18, 1942.

We moved to a prison camp at 2 o'clock. It was the most humiliating experience any one could ask for. Thousands of good, well trained, experienced soldiers, straggling out of step in an enormous line, each with a nebulous idea of what was in store, and thousands of Asians looking at us, some even spitting at us. Nobody spoke, nobody laughed.



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FEBRUARY 19, 1942.

We arrived in Changi at midnight, having trudged from Singapore. Our unit was allocated a grassed area covered in broken bricks and debris, the result of bombed and ruined buildings.

Before we began our tramp to Changi we had known where our unit had some trucks hidden containing tins of food. We shared this equally, and on our arrival, we at least had some tucker to eat.



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A NEW HOME, CHANGI.

FEBRUARY 20, 1942.

Our quarters for who knows how long, is a two storey house in a place called Changi. It used to camp British and Scottish troops before the war. The usual tropical set-up with shuttered wooden windows. We have no beds, no blankets, not even cooking gear. To rub salt in the wound, we have to put up the barbed wire around our camp to keep ourselves in. An awful amount of animosity is the going thing towards our officers. One of my mates was dressed down by a Captain for not saluting. 'Why salute you bastards,' he said, 'You're in this heap just like us.'

FEBRUARY 21, 1942.

Today we all lined up on the stretch of road between Changi Gaol, Changi Army Barracks and Changi village. The Japanese General who captured Singapore drove past in a staff car and so did Japanese movie cameras. We must surely look a prize mob of weak bastards.

(The area is now Changi Airport.)

FEBRUARY 22, 1942.

The Japs are really giving the fall of Singapore a big publicity stunt. A Jap Admiral demanded a view of the prisoners, so more movies were taken.

FEBRUARY 23, 1942.

Three more of my mates who were wounded by shrapnel have joined us. One of them is in



terrible shape, his wounds are bloody awful. Jack Woods is his name, so naturally his nickname is "Chips."

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FEBRUARY 24, 1942.

Some of the Aussies have found a tree loaded with mangoes. We "Southerners" would not have known what they were, but here we are with a tree loaded with them. The only problem, the tree is in a section occupied by "Tommies" (English).

It's bloody cruel. We've convinced the "Tommies" that if they eat these poisoned "monkey killers" they will be dead before they hit the ground. Or if they don't die, they will not know whether their arse was punched out by a sledge hammer, or if it was eaten out by white ants.

God knows where the white coats came from, but six Aussies in white coats and carrying empty kerosene tins, have removed every mango off the tree just to make sure the "Tommies" don't eat them and get crook.

FEBRUARY 25, 1942.

The Japanese had no respect for our enormous number of wounded, some with horrific injuries. Once they were all hospitalised in Changi, our magnificent Medical Officers began the task of mending these men. However, the task wasn't that easy. We all know that once you lose a lot of blood you need vitamins to help your body recoup its vitality, and our Medical Officers had not one single item to help our wounded survive their traumatic injuries.

The Medical Officers suggested each of us allow a portion of our potato and sugar ration be forfeited to allow a brew of yeast be created. This every man agreed to. All ranks allocated a portion of spuds and sugar, hence the 'Yeast Centre.' They had these big wooden barrels, and jingo did it stink! Eventually the spuds and sugar, with added water, started to bubble. An excellent yeast was the end result and it was packed with vitamins. Lo and behold, the yeast party was formed.

The Yeast Centre to the hospital was quite a step, and to get on the yeast party was like winning Tatts - first prize! Between the yeast centre and the hospital you didn't see any

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of those bloody Japs, and secondly, the yeast tasted magnificent.



Everyday one would notice a group of men just returned from a yeast party. They all seemed as happy as a kid at Christmas, and to be sure our turn came. We were given all the "do's and don'ts." We heard so many different "do's and don'ts" that we decided to do our own.

First of all when we departed our hut we carried pannikins and a container of water. The method was to call on the previous day's carriers and pick up the containers. Before we arrived at the yeast centre we discreetly hid our pannikins and water. Our arrival at the yeast centre was rather embarrassing. We had nothing to drink from and they insisted we try the brew. Very humbly we accepted with borrowed pannikins. It smelt awful but tasted excellent. So all eight of us, with these cannisters on poles, set off for the hospital.

Our first and only stop was with our hidden water and mugs. Eventually we arrived at the hospital. This bloody Sergeant was ripping the tops off the containers before we even had them on the ground. He had a look on his face impossible to describe, his frown was at least an inch thick. He turned to this medical officer and said, 'Sir, the things are full.' The officer said 'What!' Neither could believe this, the containers always arrived half empty. We were treated to even more of this magnificent brew, and as a good story always ends, we slept like little lambs. However, the next morning, we all copped a lot of flak. The others who were not on the yeast party complained how we all snored and they reckon we farted like a Chinese orchestra.

FEBRUARY 27, 1942

We do nothing all day but sit about and play cards. We are eating rice only, three times a day, and we are always hungry

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MARCH 8, 1942.

The Japs came today and took 150 Australians off for a very unpleasant job, so bloody unpleasant as to be almost unreal. They picked on us because we liked the Chinese.

They tied thousands of Chinese together in groups of three or four and executed them. The Chinese were left in heaps. The poor buggers must have gone through hell. This shocking and unnecessary splenetic show of force leaves us terribly concerned about our loved ones in Australia.



I can tell you now if these bastards land in Australia, not one of us will stay a prisoner. We promise to shoot these bastards, even if it's with a bow and arrow. The 150 Aussies returned to camp after the burial of these Chinese, and some are in a state of shock.

MARCH 9, 1942.

Today was a bloody disaster.

A cast iron bath was discovered and the Head MO (Medical Officer) wanted it taken to the hospital. It appears it was just what some of our wounded mates need for healing purposes.

My unit was instructed to take one of the trailers to pick up the bath and deliver it to the hospital. With Johnnie Johnson sitting behind the steering wheel, we hauled this bloody trailer up this winding track. We placed the bath on the back, turned the trailer around and gave it a push. Twelve of us then hopped on for a free ride down the hill. Two even hopped in the bath and carried on, making believe they were soaping up their bodies. It gave us all a laugh for a few moments until this trailer was roaring down this bloody hill. We all started yelling 'Johnno put the brakes on, Johnno, the brakes, Johnno!' Wham!! There were legs and arms flying in every direction. The bath flew off with the two in the tub hanging on like glue. Their eyes as large as bloody organ stops. Bang! It slammed into a coconut tree and broke to smithereens.

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Some of my mates received some terrible cuts. My left knee copped a severe blow. To cap it all off and to show authority, the bloody brass hats held an enquiry. 'Was the driver the holder of a truck license?' Indeed, the entire situation was typical, and we common soldiers could not comprehend why these officers had to enforce their authority. We still show respect, we call them "Sir" and never refuse an order. To hold this enquiry really got to us. We are lucky to have some excellent NCO's amongst us. I go along with them. They emphasise that we must remain loyal to our officers, because if a chance ever comes for us to break out, it has got to be in a disciplined manner.

MARCH 16, 1942

There is talk of a working party for Singapore.

MARCH 17, 1942.

Met up with a chap who lives in my home suburb of Prospect, north of Adelaide. We have



both put ourselves in for a work party in Singapore. His name is Jim MacMillan, everyone calls him "Darky."

I know that by going on this work party I will be leaving my very close mates behind. Ross and Snow both say I should go. They are not very well and they say the food can't be any worse, and you never know, I may be able to shoot through.

MARCH 19, 1942.

We arrived in this camp last night. It's on River Valley Road and consists of old huts and nothing much else. We had half a pint of plain, boiled rice at 12 o'clock, first thing to eat since 5.30am yesterday morning.

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MARCH 20, 1942

I'm a skeleton almost with hunger, and no smokes for over three days.

MARCH 22, 1942.

I just can't believe the Japs. Today was the first time we had any food. None of us had a scrap to eat for three days. It's funny though, we just go past being hungry. We did grab some tufts of grass and chew on them, and equally amazing it tasted nice and sweet. This has also given us something to laugh about. Someone said, 'Where is Donny McLaren?' The answer was 'He's down the back paddock feeding.'

One thing we have discovered, is that each time we all laugh we look at the Japs, and for some unknown reason they shake their heads.

MARCH 24, 1942.

Things are getting a bit better, no not food wise, these people have no idea. We are being drilled by Jap guards. We have to turn left, right, quick march, in Japanese. As well as the drill commands, we get counted every bloody hour, and it's all in Japanese.

MARCH 26, 1942.

I must be very careful from now on with this diary. The Japs did a search of our huts today. No bullshit, they turned the place inside out. I have got this diary shoved in a bamboo pole. They gave no warning, and I was quite worried by it.

MARCH 27, 1942

We went out to work today and pulled down huts that the British Government built to house homeless people during



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the war.

APRIL 3, 1942.

Most of us still have genuine Straits money in our money belts. We know where to buy tins of Australian condensed milk. We can't believe our luck. It would all be from army stores looted after the surrender. Jim and I share a tin and save ourselves one teaspoon of condensed milk for when, yes when, we get a bowl of rice.

APRIL 5, 1942.

Had a very unusual experience today, we were taken out, or indeed marched out, to where we are expected to build some sheds for the Japs. During a break, a Jap captain came up to me and said, 'You're very young to be a soldier.' I replied that I was only 19. His English was excellent, he continued talking to me, he even sang "God save the King."

Somewhere close by a few blokes were having a bit of an argument. One of them said, 'Pigs fucking arse' 'The Jap captain looked at me with a very puzzled look on his face and said in English, 'What does pigs fucking arse mean?' Bloody hell! Well I said, 'A pigs a hog.' He said, 'I know quite well that a pig is a hog, but what does it all mean?' I was flabbergasted trying to explain that it was an expression meaning I don't believe you!' I said, 'It actually means exactly the same as "bull shit".' 'And what is bull shit?' he said. I thought, 'here we go again.' I tried as hard as I could to tell him both expressions meant the same thing, that is, 'What you're saying is not true.' He gave me a look of disgust and walked off. I made a point of it from that day, whenever any English speaking Japs were around, I pissed off. The entries to my diary from now on will be recorded only if it's worth the risk.

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JUNE 4, 1942

One fellow in our hut, a non smoker, sold his smoke issue for 100 Australian pounds, payable on return to Australia.

JUNE 10, 1942.

Next to our camp here at River Valley Road is a fair sized vegetable garden. The garden is not big enough for commercial use. It is regularly tended by two Chinese women. One got a bit close to the fence today and she was singing. She said in her song for just one of us to come a bit closer to her as she had good news. We chose Darky to move closer, and we all nonchalantly stood well away. He came back with a message. She had heard on radio that a



big naval battle had occurred in the Coral Sea above Australia, and that the Americans had finally stopped the Japs. We were all so thrilled, you've no idea how we feel.

JUNE 12, 1942.

Today Jim MacMillan (Darky) and I had a talk to one of our guards. His name is Yamagucho. He does seem to be a pleasant fellow. He is very Japanese but does not hold a deep hatred of Australians. Tomorrow I intend bringing the photos of my family with me to show Yamaguchi that we are civilised people and we also have families back home. On our march back to camp late today I saw three Chinese and one Indian who had been hung. The poor devils had their hands tied behind and were just swinging under this tree. I feel bloody sick.

I suppose one can understand the Japs showing off dead bodies. We know from information that the locals are giving the Japs a hard time. We have heard that the Japs do not move through the back streets in ones or twos like we did, hence the callous reprisals.

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JUNE 13, 1942.

Today I took out the photos and Yamaguchi was very impressed. Darky and I talk to him as much as possible. We have found out that the Japs are just as hungry as we are. Darky and I intend to make our move. There are a few goats tethered to a peg where we are building sheds. All we need is Yamaguchi's permission to knock off a goat.

Every morning before we leave camp our tools are placed on a hand cart. The wheels are wooden spoked, about the size of a push bike. The cart is about four foot long with sideboards. If our guard goes along with our request, it won't be difficult.

Yamaguchi is a carpenter, so during the day he shows us what to do, even though he carries a rifle. We've schooled up some of the others and told them of our plans. Alan Harris has offered to use a wooden mallet to start the process, I spend as much time as possible this afternoon convincing the guard that tonight he will have a big feed. He's very interested. Alan Harris is fixed. (fixed means organised.) Darky is fixed, Jim Worby is fixed, and I'm fixed now with Yamaguchi San.

We always return to camp just on dusk. If the owners have not retrieved the goats before we head for camp, we're in for the meal of the year. Alan Harris showed the guard how he was going to whack the goat, he went "Bahhh" then slammed the mallet into his open



hand. The smile on our provider's face says 'It's on.' Alan belted this bloody goat and it dropped like a brick.

Within seconds the cart was heading for camp. Our trouble started about two hundred yards from the gate. The gate had at least six Japs on it and our hopes fell. For a few seconds we thought 'that's fucked that.' To our surprise Yamaguchi started going "bahhh" because the goat was only stunned, so as we walked through the entrance everyone was going "bahhh, bahhh." Yagamuchi quickened the pace as we went through. All the Japs thought us mad, but we had our goat. We killed our goat in relays because every half hour a Jap

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patrol does the camp. Because my Dad was a butcher, I had the job of supervising. We had very crude tools, but at least we carved it up. I think if Dad could have seen me he would have begged mercy on behalf of the goat. We took exactly half the carcass to Yamaguchi and his other hungry people. They thought it was Christmas. To this day I doubt if they expected half the goat. That was the last goat we ever saw. The locals would hardly dob us in, but they kept their goats out of sight after that.

June 19, one fellow
in our hut, a non
smoker sold his smoke
issue for the duration
for £100 Australian
money, payable on
return to Aust,

Excerpts
from
diary

August 10 it's raining
heavy today, the boys
are not going to work,
I have been issued with
a pair of Indian army
boots, Jesus their heavy.
August 14, it has been
almost 7 months since
I had a shave, and I
have been offered one after
tea in the canteen.

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Our predicament, apart from being short of food is finding a way to light our cigarettes. Tonight we are full of hope that this concern will be behind us.

Within view of our camp are two very old British Army cars. The cars have been totally wrecked, and we know they will finish up in Japan as scrap metal.

Two of our chaps, Bob Haskell and Chas Bourke, know these old Rolls Royce powered vehicles have magnetos to spark the power to the engine. If the "maggies" are not smashed we are set. Tonight they intend going through the wire between Jap patrols.



We have borrowed some ring spanners from the Imperial Japanese Army. Darky and I know every inch of our enclosure. We have shown Bob and Chas a spot that will offer no problems.

Only a short while ago, Darky and I did our usual exercise around the wire, the Japs see us doing this almost every night, so they take no notice of us. We all worried about Bob and Chas the whole time they were out, but were all thrilled when they crept back to the hut with a magneto. Both Bob and Chas agreed it was a bit scary. The nuts were so tight they had to hammer the ring spanners to help loosen them. They said it sounded like a bloody bomb going off. The other magneto is intact, so it is in our minds if we should need it.

Bob is the type of bloke anyone can talk to. He's as tough as nails yet terribly kind hearted. His brother Arthur, (Snow), is in my unit.

The magneto stands about six inches high, three inches wide and four inches long. The whole thing is very heavy for its size, but is packed with power. On the drive end we've made a little handle. On the spark end is an oil bottle from the butt of a Lee Enfield rifle. The bottle is standing upright in a frame, it has a small hole drilled in it with a wick poking out. All you do is turn the handle and a huge spark emits from the magneto and lights the wick. The entire camp uses the maggie. The Japs have seen it, but little do they know how we came to possess this contraption.

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I have kept this diary out of sight for a long stretch, but now things are a little brighter.

JULY 8, 1942

Bob Johnson, Clarry Kelly and I have smuggled in a radio. It is well hidden inside an empty coffee tin. Colonel Jackson, our British CO, knows we have it, but that's all. Even our closest mates have no idea. Colonel Jackson has requested we keep it that way. Being half deaf, I have been told not to try and use it. Clarry tunes in late at night and my job is to pass on the news. Our way of passing news is always in the toilets.

The toilets consist of a long line of holes bored into the ground. You squat over the hole and do your job. In front of you is a mound of dirt and an empty jam tin in easy reach. Immediately you've done what you're doing, you fill the tin with dirt and down it goes. This prevents flies. However, Number 2 bore hole is where news is passed.

I said to Bob Haskell, 'Come over to Number two bore hole Bob, I've some excellent news.' So down we squat, (no Japs come here). 'What's news, Donny?'



I said, 'The Yanks have retaken the Solomon Islands.' Bob said, 'How do you know?' 'Bob,' I said, 'You're one of my best mates, just trust me.' And that's how it went. Naturally our morale was getting better, we laughed more and we could tell the Japs were looking very glum.

JULY 15,1942

Two years today since I joined up.

JULY 22,1942.

The English language newspaper, printed here in Singapore, has banner headlines of Australia being in a state of panic. If these bastards land in Australia, everyone of us will break out. But we all know to get home would be impossible.

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JULY 24,1942

Have got tinea at present so am not out working.

JULY 28,1942.

Two Aussies have escaped from the camp next to this one. The Japs are really on the alert.

AUGUST 3,1942.

I have tinea so bad on my feet, I can't bear to stand. We have no medical treatment available, not even a first aid kit.

AUGUST 7,1942.

Three Chinese were captured in Kapal Harbour trying to sabotage a Jap tanker. The poor devils really copped it.

AUGUST 10, 1942

It's raining heavy today, the boys are not going to work. I have been issued with a pair of Indian Army boots, they are heavy.

AUGUST 14,1942

It has been almost seven months since I had a shave and I have been offered one after tea in exchange for a heap of (little Audry) yarns.

AUGUST 16,1942.

At times we only like to hear good news, but we picked up on our radio that the 'HMAS Canberra' has been sunk. We all feel very sad about this. We hope the Japs have not had it all their way and that the survivors have been rescued by our boys.



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AUGUST 17, 1942.

My tinea is so bad I can only crawl on my hands and knees. You've no idea how helpless I feel. The Japs can see how bad my feet look and tomorrow I am going back to Changi.

AUGUST 18, 1942.

Arrived back at Changi late and it was great to be back with some of my unit mates. We carried on like little school boys. The boys here at Changi are George Swan, Wally Kelly, Ray Maskell, Colin Milnes, Jim Johnson, and in hospital badly wounded, Chips (Jack) Woods. I am also in hospital hoping to fix this tinea.

AUGUST 19, 1942.

I shall be able to enter more into my diary here because we don't see Japs all over the place.

AUGUST 20, 1942.

My tinea is not getting any worse, as a matter of fact I can't believe how the stinging has eased already

AUGUST 25, 1942.

The doctors have done wonders with my feet, they are almost fixed.

All the Australian units in this area have a turn at doing a coconut raid at night. We know the movement of Jap bicycle patrols, they make more noise than kids at a Christmas party. Tonight it's our turn to go out through the wire and get coconuts. Ray Maskell, Ross Bushell, Ted Lock and myself are going on the raid. Ross climbs the tree and we catch the nuts as they fall. He puts a piece of webbing strap around his feet and goes up like a bloody monkey. We returned with 8 nice coconuts.

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AUGUST 30, 1942.

The Japs have given us a piece of paper to sign promising not to escape. It reads:

"I the undersigned, solemnly swear, on my word of honour, that under no circumstance will I attempt to escape."

Not a single man will put his name to this bloody rubbish. This means the Japs know they have got to keep a large number of troops on Singapore to watch us, and we know the more Japs here means less to have a go at our boys down south.



AUGUST 31, 1942.

Tomorrow all Australian and British prisoners are to remove their total belongings to Barrack Square and will remain until they sign this non-escape form.

This means 22,000 men will be housed in an area usually occupied by 3000. There are 7 buildings in the whole area, including the floor space and parade ground. It covers 7 acres. In this space we have to dig latrines and make room for other essentials, such as cooking, and bury any casualties.

SEPTEMBER 3, 1942.

We are all determined not to sign this form. You have no idea how high how morale is.

To make us feel worse, or to try, should I add, we have former allies, such as Indian Sikhs, posted all round the place ready to shoot us with our own weapons.

If I live to be a million, I will try and accept a Jap, but I will never ever accept a Sikh.

No further food is to be issued and all water has been turned off with the exception of just one tap. Dysentery has really gone wild. We are very concerned about our badly wounded

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mates who are still recovering from bullet and shrapnel wounds. Some are blind.

The Australian Commander, Lt Col Galleghan, and I am not sure how many other officers were taken to Changi Beach to witness the execution of some POW's who had attempted to escape. One of those executed was Corporal Brevrington. He laughed at the Japs and abused them, (they wouldn't have known.) On their return, Col Galleghan and the British Commander said they had just witnessed a disgusting ordeal, both agreed the Corporal was very brave.

These Sikhs, (we called them "Sicks"), had Vickers machine guns lined up on us and things were not too smart.

Some men had died from dysentery and were buried amongst us.

Col Galleghan and the medical officers asked us to consider signing the form. Our own CO, Lt Pool, said that if we sign the form it won't hold water with our side because we were forced to sign under duress, and on our return to Australia, we would not face any discipline charges.

Col Galleghan was now more or less pleading us to sign, his view is that within 24 hours the situation could be so serious it would be a catastrophe, so we've asked the bastards to send in the forms.



let's be honest, we had no alternative. What good would a great heap of dead bodies be to anyone. The bastards set up this bloody table and the queue was enormous. The wording, as I mentioned before, read "I, the undersigned," so you put your name in that blank space. Well it was a complete farce. My name is Don McLaren, and I signed "Donald Duck", no bull shit. The Japs must have had some idea that not every sixth or seventh man was either "Ned Kelly" or "Mickey Mouse.'

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After all the smoke cleared and we settled down again, it was the "going thing" to ask each other 'What name did you sign?' We all knew about the false names, however we were a bit apprehensive in case some smart arse Jap went through all the forms and woke up to our ruse.

SEPTEMBER 5,1942

We are all back in our usual quarters, and the usual boredom is returning, however, a concert party has been formed and they are excellent. Happy Harry comes on stage saying "You'll never get orf' the island." The show is magnificent. It's a good laugh and the time spent watching is well spent.

SEPTEMBER 10, 1942

Working in cook house now and getting plenty to eat. I weigh 7 stone 9lb.

SEPTEMBER 18,1942

Had a good tea tonight, but sorry to say I can't get food to my pals every day.

SEPTEMBER 22,1942

Japanese troops having machine gun practice over on the water front. Reminds us of lying behind the lines during the war.

SEPTEMBER 24,1942

Had a fight with the skinny, long cook. He's about 60 and tries to use his age to get things done for him. It ended up with me sitting him on his bony arse.

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OCTOBER 4,1942

We have had it announced that there are 40,000 Red Cross cases at Singapore waiting for transport out to Changi. We are all terribly excited about this. To cap off this news, one of our unit mates, Clyde (Ted) Lock, has returned to Changi. Ted informed us that Ross



Bushell, Snow Haskell (brother of Bob the magneto snatcher), Bert Sutherland and Stan Livingstone are standing up to it. These men are the greatest guys in the world.

OCTOBER 10, 1942.

Today we received some Red Cross food. Each man got 50 cigarettes, cocoa, sugar, biscuits.

A nasty situation has arisen again. We are of the opinion that not all the food has gone direct to us. We feel very strongly that the 24 officers are getting a better deal than us. We threw handfuls of mud through the windows of the "pips" mess. The major cried tears of blood. He called a parade, but no one went to it.

OCTOBER 19, 1942

My tinea has broken out again, and Ted Lock's wound is giving him some pain.

Stan Livingstone and Bert Sutherland have returned to Changi. They were working on the waterfront. They tell an interesting story about two German submarines tied up.

The story goes that a Jap was giving this skinny, starved Aussie a real belting, and a big German sailor walked over and flattened the Jap. Now each day when the submarine crew attend the Singapore swimming pool, they are escorted by armed Japs.

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DECEMBER 1942

It's now December, my birthday month, and I am not looking forward to it. We are now being joined by heaps of Dutch soldiers, captured in Java and Sumatra. There are also Americans and even more Aussies.

The Australians coming into Changi were captured in Java. We listened to their story in profound disbelief. They were men of the 213rd Machine Gunners, plus other troops. All these men had been in action in Syria. They were battle-tested troops, and capably led by Colonel Arthur Blackburn VC. The idiots who decided to send these men to Java bungled things even more by sending the ships carrying their guns to Australia.

So here we have one troop ship, chock full of good fighting troops, in a country hostile to European rule, with no firepower to fight with. If one looks at the map and peruses Sumatra and Java, how on God's Earth could one troop ship even put a dent in the Japanese drive south?



When I say the locals had no time for Europeans, they hated the Dutch, and after all Sumatra and Java was Dutch territory. These people would not know the difference between an Aussie and an Eskimo. To the locals, they looked the same as the Dutch. (I had no idea how these people really detested each other until I was in Japan. That is in my diary, you will read more later. Indeed, in 1945-46, British officers in command of Japanese troops, were used to keep the peace between the returning Dutch and the Indonesians.)

DECEMBER 20, 1942

Well I'm as happy as hell, more of my unit has returned to Changi. Ross Bushell, Snow Haskell, Jim Motley, Jock Marshall, Max Sterne and Jim Worby. They brought some tobacco and sugar with them and a lot of new yarns.

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FEBRUARY 10, 1943

More Japs come about doing patrols now and threatening to shoot any one seen outside after 10 o'clock.

FEBRUARY 15, 1943

One year today since our capitulation of Singapore. A service was held in the AIF cemetery.

MARCH 2, 1943

Nothing going on these past few weeks. Each day we have to push our trailers about three miles for our supply of wood in the afternoon. The heat is so terrific we must take it easy

MARCH 10, 1943

It is over a year now since we were taken prisoners. Apart from feeling terrible about not being in a position to help our country, I can notice how all the married men are becoming terribly strained.

Not a day passes and some of my close mates confide in me how they miss and worry about home. I had a most unusual favour put to me today, Ray Haskell, one of my very close mates, told me he writes to his wife every day, and would I be kind enough to read the letters. He just wanted someone to know how much he missed and cherished his wife, so I sat down and perused his letters. They were really gut-tearing, however, not once in his imaginary correspondence did he mention sex. The poor chap must be going through a dreadful time. Each day is a lifetime to him.



Another working party is being formed. Ross, Snow Haskell, Bert, Stan, Ted, Colin Milnes; and I are going on it.

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BY TRAIN TO THAILAND AND THE BURMA RAILWAY

MARCH 16, 1943

Both Ross Bushell and Snow Haskell have taken ill and can't come on the work party. Stan Livingstone has joined us and we've been told we're going by rail to Thailand.

A convoy of Jap trucks drove into Changi camp, and the 500 of us who are going up north were piled into these vehicles. We were pushed in so tight most of us had our few belongings perched on our heads to make room.

Once we arrived at the Singapore Railway Station we noticed the only things in the place was a line of tiny steel freight trucks. To our disbelief, 25 men were transported in each of these tiny steel boxes. I said to a Jap, 'You'll need a bloody shoe-horn to get 25 men into that thing.' The bastard just grunted and started to use his rifle butt, pushing us in these contraptions. You could see Japs pushing and shoving along the entire train.

We decided amongst ourselves, once we got underway, that to share our discomfort would mean a few sacrifices. Five men stretched out and slept for three hours whilst the other 20 sat hunched up.

Our first day was almost unbearable. For the first 20 hours the train did not stop once for any purpose. We had not had any food or drink, let alone those wanting to relieve themselves, and to stand in an open door on a moving train and urinate is impossible.

Our first stop was an enormous relief. We were given a small amount of rice and some weak tea. That was repeated the next day.

Once the train passed from Malaya into Thailand, things became so different. Thailand is so far behind Malaya as far as roads and villages are concerned, and to add to our disbelief the locomotives were changed.

The Japs had control of both Malaya and Thailand, yet here we are just over the border, squashed in these same freight

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boxes only to be hauled along by a different locomotive burning blocks of wood (not coal) to create steam. We could not believe the huge showers of sparks the engine emitted. These



enormous bursts of sparks gave us something to laugh about, and to add to our relief, the loco had to stop every few hours to fill up his wood heap. We were better organised by now and each time they stopped we would send a few men up front to the loco and receive a squirt of boiling water in a small bucket. We had tea with us, so even though we were starving hungry, we at least had a pannikin of tea.

The five days and nights can be described as not only appalling, but barbaric. Our train was slowly approaching Banpong. It was Piccaninny dawn. We could see people inside their homes moving around, some cooking, others you could see getting dressed. How we envied them. They were free.

Eventually we were stationary. We could hear these morons yelling, "All men off, all men off"

we needed little prodding to get away from these disgusting steel boxes.

Bert Sutherland, Stan Livingstone, Ted Lock, Colin Milnes, Keith Kendell and myself took it in turns to carry our faithful magneto with us. I mentioned earlier it was heavy, but now it was bloody heavy.

The train behind us has caused a stir. Two Australians escaped near the border.

This is what happened:

Sergeant Les Gray and Private George Day decided they would escape. This was not pre-planned. The conditions on the train were so bad, that at a rice stop near Penang they said, 'Let's make a break.' George Day and Les Gray were in separate trucks. George and Les both took up positions by the door, on a hand signal they would roll off the train, both at the same time. The train pulled out of Penang then headed north not long after crossing into Thailand. It was a moonlight night and the train entered a cutting. George gave the

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signal and they both roiled off.

The train carried on, no shots were fired. Both men hugged and shook hands. Les said later that it felt bloody eerie.

The poor buggers did not last long. They expected full cooperation from the locals because of the terrible way the Japs were carrying on. Alas, it just did not happen that way. The bloody Thais could not get to the Japs quick enough.

Les was a police officer in Adelaide at the time of joining up. His story to the Japs was that his mate was suffering from the runs. He said, 'My mate had his bum out of the train,



doing a job, and he fell off.' Les claimed he had jumped off to look after him. Because of Les being in the Police, he stuck by this story. Even after some cruel bashings he never let up. When they rejoined us, Les and George were in tiny cages, it was so unreal.

We trudged for miles with our few belongings. The thing that gets us down most, is that we are well trained soldiers. The loss of Singapore is still terribly stained on our minds, and here we are all trudging along, not in line abreast, but heads down and each as silent as a church mouse, and each with his own thoughts, and at the mercy of these bastards. Why they can't even make a reliable bloody wristlet watch, yet they belted the bejesus out of us. We eventually pulled into this camp. We found a spot where we could all lie down at the same time. We were only 100 yards from a river. We were told we could go into the river and swim, but only in a restricted area. In we went.

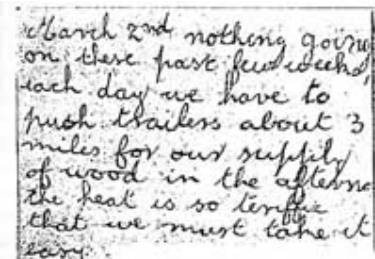
Keith Kendell and Bert Sutherland took off their watches before going for a dip. When they came out the watches had gone. We were warned that the Thais were a thieving mob of bastards. Among our men it does not matter what you leave lying around, nothing is ever stolen.

We got talking to a Thai who spoke excellent English. He was the interpreter at a bank in Bangkok. He has told us our mission is to build a railway from Kanbury to Burma. He said,

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'And I'm sorry to say, only a superman will come out of the jungle.'

We asked if he could help get back the two watches that had been stolen. He shook his head and said, 'They will be a long way away by now, my people thrive on stealing.'



March 2nd nothing going on there past few weeks, each day we have to push trailers about 3 miles for our supply of wood in the afternoon the heat is so terrible that we must take it easy.

Diary
excerpt

We were told that within a day or two we would be heading into the jungle.

Bert, Stan, Colin, Ted, Keith and myself had a chat about our maggie. We decided it was far too heavy for us to keep carrying. We asked the Thai-bank bloke if he would like to buy the maggie for some boiled eggs. He offered us 10 eggs. We told him that six of us owned it and could he raise his offer to 12 eggs. Yes, he would give us 12 eggs. We waited, and to his word, he came up with a dozen eggs. So away went our trusted magneto.

(Today, had we saved that magneto, it would be a prized entry at the Canberra War Memorial.)



We asked for boiled eggs because we did not have a single thing for cooking. We felt we could sell the magneto because our unit had carried the bloody thing. Keith Kendall had helped too, he was a Victorian, but Keith always stuck with us. We nicknamed him 'The Count' because he was always dressed in a tidy manner.

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BURMA RAILWAY

APRIL 1, 1943

We arrived at a camp deep in Thailand. Twenty of us in each Jap truck. We had bumped and bumped since first light this morning. It's now 11.00pm. The bastard driving has got bogged so many times, we've lost count. It has been 17 hours since any of us have had any food. Even if they had food for us, no one could eat, because we have excruciating pains in our stomachs from the horrendous journey

A Jap beat the hell out of four of us for no reason at all. I can't lie on my back.

I've always been a strong believer in my Bible. Not many days pass that I don't grab my New Testament and read for quite some time. But Bible or no Bible, I am beginning to really hate the Japanese.

After meeting Yamaguchi I thought there were some good Japs. All my mates have been hating them for over a year now. I had just let them have their thought, that's their privilege. But not now, I'm really fed up with these inhuman mongrels.

It was still dark when the guard was yelling. "All men out, all men out."

Here we faced an enormous natural gully. A timber framed bridge would eventually span this gully, we called it "The Pack of Cards"

We hauled these teak logs in from the jungle. First we had to drive the logs, sharpened at one end, into the ground. Next we shaved off one side with crude axes to make it possible to keep going up and up. The Jap engineers rigged up this pile-driving apparatus. We had long ropes. Hundreds of Australians would walk back until the rope was taut, then we'd sing, Ichy, nee. Nisio, nisio, nisio." (One, two. Pull, pull, pull.) As we sang these numbers, we'd pull on the rope. This huge great lump of steel would rise up. On the last "nisio" we

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would all let go. Down would come the pile-driver and the pole would sink another inch. All day, seven days a week, for weeks on end, with not a single day off, we drove these bloody things into the ground.

Quite a few Japs had sore heads. Every time a chance came along, some items would fall from the bridge and hit a Nip on the cranium.

The stupidity of the Jap guards was their continuous screaming of "More sing, more sing!" We would all be yelling "Icy, nee, nisio!", but it took more out of our emasculated bodies to sing and tug at the same time.

The bridge is equal to a four storey building. While we were still hauling timbers up to complete it, every Australian saw this bloody Jap fall off the top. Next thing, an arm comes out and grabs the failing object. So here's this Aussie holding this Jap by the neck of his shirt. We were all yelling, "Drop the bastard, drop the bastard!" The Aussie yelled back, "I can't, the bastards are on to me!"

We did an enormous amount of sabotage to this structure. Over half the timbers that were cased out with another piece shaped to fit into the cased area were broken. Often the cased out section was filled with sand and small stones. It was the crudest bridge one could ever wish to see. I hope I never have to go over it in a train.

The bridge did bring a lot of us closer together. We had the 2nd/3rd Machine Gunners with us. These unfortunate men were captured in Java. They had seen action in the Middle East with Brig Blackburn VC. Then the smart brass sent them to help defend Java, but they sent the gunners to Java and their guns back to Australia.

(I eventually became very close to Bob Lee and Milton Fairclough and several of the 2/3rd MG.)

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It is not difficult to describe this country. It is vastly different from the beautiful Australian bush. Here it is frightfully bland, no colour, no birds, just bamboo, more bamboo, and teak. Some bamboo is as thick as a man's thigh. The only thing going for it is there are several running creeks with good clean water.

Among the trees we fell is one covered in big, red ants. The ants suck the sap from the leaves. We found out the hard way. No one wears a shirt, most of us don't even own one. The first time we whacked this tree with an axe, every red ant fell off the leaves and landed



on our bare torso. These ants then stood on their front legs and bit into our bodies. I have never known such pain, they must have buck teeth. Could they sink them in!

From now on with this type of tree, we attach a rope as high as possible on either side of the trunk. Then we shake and shake and keep going till all the ants have fallen. They scurry off, and we don't care where, as long as they go.

Today I buried an Asiatic man. I knew tonight the Japs will make me bury this poor human, sure enough they did.

He was laying on the dirt track near our camp. I could see by his shivering, he was suffering from malaria. I gave him a quinine tablet and a drink of water from a bamboo water carrier.

A Jap guard bellowed at me and hit me with his rifle butt. I spoke to the Jap in Japanese, saying "This man is dying." The Jap kicked me and yelled "Baageero" (You fool, move). That evening, and it was late on our return to camp after a solid day's work, this poor soul was lying curled up in a foetal position. The Jap guard, who earlier belted me for assisting this human, screamed at me in Japanese my prison number, and I have a big job to do right now.

Dead bodies don't worry me, you get used to seeing them, but to have to bury one is a different situation, also I had been

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slaving on the railway all day, I was buggered. But I did it..

I dug this hole about two feet deep. The jungle is very thick, all the roots of the trees were not far below the surface, I just couldn't dig any deeper. I dragged this body to his grave, rolled it in and said prayers. I was never taught how to conduct a burial, however, I did my best.

Late that night I crawled into my tent. I was sleeping next to Colin Milnes. He put his hand on my shoulder and said, "How did it go Donny?" I just said, "Colin, ghastly."

Before I slept I thanked God the vultures don't come this deep into this terrible country. It would have made my job a lot harder.

As most people know, the marking on a Jap aircraft is a big red dot. Each time any aircraft fly over we all look up. For quite some time now all we've seen is this red dot. We call them 'Monkey's Arse' aircraft.



We started off from Singapore 500 strong, and we were known as "D" Force. We've lost a lot of men already, and we are concerned about our next move, which is tomorrow. Luckily the Japs have allocated to us a Dutch doctor, Captain Van D Mewere, and an interpreter, another Dutchman, Lt Kan Kampa.

One of our main concerns is the vile temper of one guard. We call him the "Tattooed Lady" as he is covered in tattoos. According to our interpreter he speaks a well-educated Japanese, but he's a vicious swine. The dead Asiatics are so numerous.

We've moved closer to Burma and started clearing again. We'll clear this area, then start building an embankment. You've no idea how crude our tools are. They are like wide garden hoes. You dig them in the ground, fill up a wicker basket and carry it to build a mound.

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APRIL 10, 1943

Our toilets here are similar to those at Changi, a bore hole with a lid on top. It's by far the best way to beat any disease caused by flies. The most important thing is that you must put the lid on as soon as you've done your job.

My purpose in explaining the toilets was because today Syd Carrison received a terrible beating from the tattooed lady. Syd comes from the south east of South Australia, and is one of my closest mates. He is in such shocking condition that he did not have the strength to put the lid on the toilet. I went over and put the toilet lid on for Syd, but the "Tattoo" got into him like an animal. I went over and tried to cover Syd. I kept saying to the "tattoo".

"Tucksarn byoky mai" (very sick man). I finished up with some enormous bruises.

Syd is a big, tall chap, tough as nails, but enormously gentle.

APRIL 11, 1943

Syd died this afternoon, and a lot of us are upset. Syd promised us a big feed of crayfish when we got home, and knowing this man, if 500 turned up, Syd would feed us.

APRIL 20, 1943

Today is a rest day, we've lost count since we had one. No one has hardly moved.

MAY 10, 1943

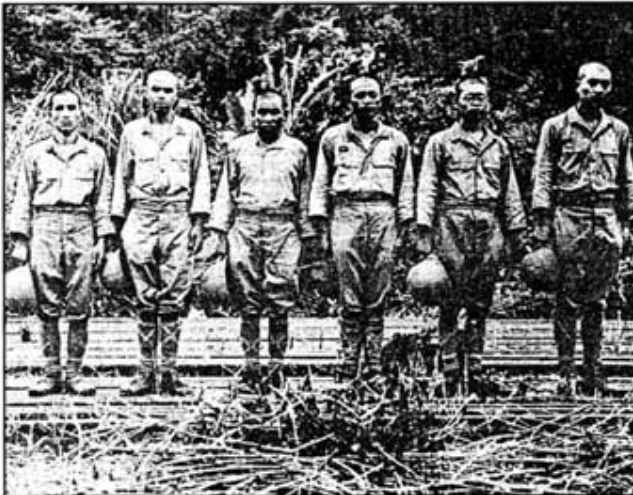
We move on in two days to a camp that was occupied by Dutch troops.



We have come up with a way of letting our allies know we are building a railway. The jungle we cut down, we now pile in the middle of the cleared area. As we move on we pile this stuff behind us. Each night before we return to camp we set fire

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to it so any allied aircraft flying past will see a line of fires. Our top brass must know this part of Thailand is all jungle, so the Japs must be doing something here. The Japs have not woken up to why we light the fires. We have convinced them it's much quicker to leave it in the middle than push it aside. We moved to this camp today and were all stunned to see the enormous number of graves. There are 402 buried here. The camp is called Rin Tin, and thank heavens we are not staying long.



Newspaper photo reproduction

Former Nip guards on the Thailand railway lined up humbly enough in 1945. Second and third on the left were held responsible for murdering an Australian soldier with hammer blows to the head

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I am not putting any dates on my diary now simply because none of us has a clue what day or date it is.

Each day is another agonising one. The entire situation I find difficult to describe. The country itself is so terribly bland, you very rarely see any wild flowers, you don't hear or see birds chirping in the tree. Prisoners of War love to see nature, the only moving objects we saw were huge snakes and vultures perched high up in the teak.



The railway is being constructed in very hilly terrain, however, as we trudge from camp to camp, and you have a view of the scenery from an elevated area, it has no beauty to it. From Rin Tin we are moving to Chung Kai. We stopped for a rest and had our rice to eat. The Japs are so unbelievable. As we move from camp to camp they give us bigger than normal breakfast. You don't get any food whilst you move camp and we have enough brains to know you must keep food for a long walk, so we all keep enough rice in our "binto" (food tin) for later in the day.

I ate my binto and laid flat on my back under this tree. I have very little luggage to carry, just the rags I am wearing, my pay book, a very worn spare shirt and blanket, a towel, my rice dixie (binto) and chopsticks. In my pocket is my New Testament, a photo of my brother, Ray, and his lovely wife Janet, taken on their wedding day. Also a photo of a girl who went to my school at Prospect. Her name was Betty Meadows, she was an attractive blonde.

However, the Japs were impressed with my brother Ray in a neat, well pressed suit, and his wife in a long gown.

Anyway, I'm flat on my back - suddenly this lizard dropped out of the tree and landed on my chest. I was quite startled, immediately I thought "You bloody beauty, a feed!" Being brought up in the Mallee in Australia as a small boy, I had no fear of lizards. The lizard looked at me, blinking, just the

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same as an Aussie lizard. I tickled it under its neck. The little fellow loved me tickling it. He just sort of relaxed as I talked to it very quietly. I told him, "In a few seconds your days are over." He just looked at me, simply adoring the scratching, he was blinking away. Suddenly Ted Lock saw the lizard and said, "Where did that come from?" I told him, "It just dropped on me." He said, "Well wring its fucking neck." I know Ted, he is as tough as nails, can fight like a champion, but the same man is as gentle as a lamb. I said, "Ted, this little fellow is possibly doing it as hard as we are." So I carried the little lizard about six or seven yards and let him, or her, go into that terrible jungle.

We are about seven miles closer to Burma, and this place is Chung Kai. We're still lighting huge fires. To make things a little easier, we now have four elephants with Burmese masters, to move the huge teak logs.



Another sadistic bastard has joined the tattooed lady. This one we call "The Frog" because as he belts us he croaks, he looks like a bloody chimpanzee.

(The Tattooed Lady and The Frog were executed in Singapore at the close of hostilities because of their involvement with prisoners' deaths during the building of the Burma Railway."

I am not going to enter any more details of bashings etc. It's so terribly depressing.

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I met up with Vic, (Larry the Bat) Day. He saw Snow Haskell, Jim Motley and Robby Robinson, all from my unit.

My malaria relapses are recurring very regular now, and it leaves me feeling so weak.

I can start recording dates again.

DECEMBER 12, 1943

I have just got through my ninth relapse of malaria. Tomorrow I move to another camp half a mile away. I have been given a job in the kitchen. All I do all day is make tea, it's an easy job. Thais run the kitchen, and I know they are nothing but a lot of thieving bastards. Little do they know, I'm knocking off lots of sugar and giving it to our blokes.

DECEMBER 17, 1943

I'm back in hospital, with another bout of malaria.

DECEMBER 20, 1943

Tomorrow I go further down the river to another camp.

DECEMBER 23, 1943

Met Ted Norman. He was on his way back to Changi. He told me that Wally Kelly, one of our unit boys, had died.

DECEMBER 24, 1943

Bert Sutherland is here, and surprise of surprises, Ted Lock, Colin Milnes and Stan Livingstone have all turned up. We are acting like little children, we're all together again. We've all got away from the railway, however Ted has some shocking ulcers on his legs. Christmas Day tomorrow. I have sold my only shirt to get some toffee.

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MY 21ST BIRTHDAY.

DECEMBER 25, 1943



1943 would be the worst year of my twenties. I am thinking of my twin sister Betty. Last night our aircraft came over and blew the shit out of an area six miles away. For Christmas dinner today, I had a plate of plain boiled rice and a spoon of sugar. Ted Lock brightened up the day, he's the most fantastic man you'd ever meet. I did forget to put in my diary that back on the railway, Ted and I were sitting together and he was fishing about in his army kit bag for a singlet he thought he had. He kept fishing about and eventually did his block and said "fuck it." He turned his kit bag up side down and all his possessions fell on the floor. We both stared in stunned silence at a packet of cigarettes! They were the ones we received in the Red Cross hand out. Ted opened the packet and it was full, ten cigarettes. He gave me half the packet, yes, half the packet! I would take out a fag, have three or four puffs and put it out. I only smoked three of those cigarettes. I knew Ted had finished his, so I gave two back to him.

(One of the greatest pleasures I ever achieved in holding a pilot's license was in flying over to Port Lincoln and Cummins to see Ted Lock. Ted ended his days in hospital at Cummins. This is a beautiful little town, inland from South Australia's west coast. On the edge of Cummins is an excellent air strip. Ted would be so excited when I would call him up and tell him I'm on my way over to say hello. I have some excellent friends who own a Piper aircraft, VH-CPM, Dennis and Deanna Blomfield, Don Wilkie and Barry Norville. To drive to Cummins from Adelaide is a seven hour event, in the Piper it takes 70-75 minutes. Our last three flyover's turned into feasts. Ted's son in law, Brian Mahoney, Ted's daughter June, and one of his best mates, Syd Meyers, always came along.

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APRIL 14, 1944

Met Carl Rutter, he also has been in Burma.

APRIL 15, 1944

Met Eric Ball, he looks well.

The air raids keep our spirits up. Each day we hope to see our own forces appear in person.

MAY 10, 1944

Every Australian has been examined by Japanese doctors. Those deemed fit enough are being sent to Japan. It's not what we want, because we all feel that going to Japan will give us little chance of survival. We expect this part of the world to be free of Japs at any time now.



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Colin Milnes is not well and can't join us. I hate leaving Colin, he's been very close to me.

MAY 20, 1944

We have been issued with new clothes and expect to move in a few days.



MAY 26, 1944

The party ready for Japan numbers 150, including seven British soldiers.

Here we are going back to Singapore, a party of 143 Australians. To think, not more than 13 months ago, 500 Aussies left Singapore for this bastard of a country. Our losses on the railway in 'V' Force were in excess of 300 deaths. Is it any wonder, should I ever become a wealthy man and have money to travel, I will never set foot in this country

JUNE 2, 1944

We travelled back to Singapore exactly the same way as we came up. One meal a day and crammed into these bloody steel boxes. We were so pleased to get out of them.

On the train, poor old Ted Lock was having his turn to stretch out. He had his few belongings in his kit bag and he moved a little to try and stretch out. Next thing his kit bag went from under his head and fell out the door. He sat stunned for a few seconds and said, "Oh well, I hope a Chow (Chinese) finds it, not a bloody Indian."

Ted's preference for a Chinese rather than an Indian was because, on the railway, the Indians would knock off their best mate's belongings to survive.

We are being held in my old camp where we knocked off the goat. We expect to be here for two days. Singapore is in a real mess. Eggs cost 25 cents each, bananas are 20 cents each, and it is impossible to purchase cigarettes.



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The currency in Singapore is now all occupied money. The old currency issued by the British is strictly forbidden. The penalty of death hangs on your head if you are found dealing in the original money. As the tides of the war turned against the Japanese an enormous amount of original currency began to surface, and you could exchange one original dollar for three or even four occupied dollars. Those who thought Japan still had a hope of winning the war finished up with a pile of paper, not good enough even to wipe your arse with.

JUNE 49 1944

We leave for Japan tomorrow, so this diary is to be hidden near my skin. The Japs never search our bodies.

A.I.F. PRISONERS WRITE HOME

First Cards From Japanese Camps

Postmen yesterday finished delivering into 387 South Australian homes letter cards from AIF men interned in Japanese prison camps. They were the first such written messages received by the men's relatives, and in many cases broke a silence of over 18 months.

They came from Singapore, Borneo, Formosa (Taiwan) to the Japanese, and other parts, and each bore a few simple sentences and a signature on one side and the address on the other.

"Imperial Japanese Army" was stamped across the top of the cards. Some also carried an inscription in French and Japanese. Some bore a date in June or July of last year, some were undated, and others were written in February of this year.

One of the happiest recipients was Mrs. A. S. Blackburn, of Salisbury terrace, Collinswood, wife of Brig. A. S. Blackburn, VC, who, with a unit which includes two South Australian companies, is a prisoner in Japanese hands. Until she received the card yesterday Mrs. Blackburn had heard no word from her husband, and was only recently advised that he was a prisoner. The card was dated February 20.

Mrs. Blackburn, who is president of the 2/3rd Machine Gun FCOP unit, said last night that only four or five of the 60 or so members who had been taken to the camps were still alive. This State because of natural resources, industries already established, and geographical considerations. Those he suggested for further development or initiation in the post-war period were the motor body building industry, sulphide chemical pulp manufacture, the

Reproduction of the letter card from Brig. A. S. Blackburn, VC, received yesterday by his wife from a prisoner of war camp in Taiwan (Formosa).

MANY PRISONERS IN SWITZERLAND

Plans Reported Made Months Ago

AAP And Our Special Representative LONDON, September 13.

The "Evening News" says that the British prisoners who have escaped to Switzerland, numbering several thousands, will not be interned.

The legal position is that they can be returned immediately to their country of origin, but because there is no channel of communication, respectively, to be used in replying to her question when he was going to New Guinea.

Another person wrote stating when a new ship, which was named, would be ready for service, and giving the name of the port which it would leave.

A.I.F. PRISONERS IN BURMA

New Railway Line From Siam

From Our Special Representative CHUNGKING, Sept. 13.

Thousands of British and Australian prisoners who were captured in Malaya are reported to be working in south-eastern Burma building a railway under Japanese supervision to link the Siamese and Burmese railway systems. Although accurate estimates are impossible, some reports place the number of these prisoners at nearly 20,000.

Through this are said to be fought strenuous primitive conditions they heard, on a Japanese plane was the sergeant. Some are said to "On dots, fire starla and mal mountainsides road were strewn, these-occupied that they had had to must natu."

Reproduction from newspaper clipping

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JAPAN



JUNE 19, 1944

We are in Japan. When we got to the wharf in Singapore we stood looking at this large ship. It's a passenger ship with a Japanese name painted over words welded to the forward section. The words read ARAMIS. We learnt it was a French ship, a prize of the war, we all thought, 'You beauty, a real bed at last.' We were all terribly mistaken, we were all herded down the hold in the bow section of the ship, fed once a day, and each section of levels was allowed five minutes exercise per day.

Ted Lock and I were both alongside each other at the bottom level. We decided that should the ship be torpedoed and was badly holed, we'd butt our heads against a steel pole near us. We were at sea for 8 days.

On the fourth day an extra Jap cruiser joined us on escort. Not long after the cruiser attached itself, the men up top on exercise saw one of the tankers in our convoy fleet hit with a torpedo. it caught on fire. Our ship immediately burst into full throttle, and with a small destroyer, left the remainder behind. The 'Aramis" could really move through the water, and a submarine would find it most difficult to hit such a fast vessel. The convoy was essentially made up of tankers. We noticed on our turn at exercise, some tankers were so old and slow, we thought we would be at sea for weeks.

We're on the southern island called Kyushu, and this camp is a coal mining set up. The very first day we all had to attend this big room to learn the terms used down in the mine, every word is Japanese.

After about half an hour I put my hand up and asked for banjo (toilet). The Jap teaching speaks good English with an American accent. 'Yes, OK, he said, so out I go.

The toilet is about 12 feet long, and on one side is a row of bowls sticking out of the wall. You can tell by the height and

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DECEMBER 5, 1944

One of the Australians died just a few hours after we arrived here, and in the morning we're to take his remains somewhere not far from here.

DECEMBER 6, 1944

We put our fellow Australian's body, wrapped in canvas, on a long hand cart, obviously supplied by a local undertaker. We pushed this cart for what seemed miles and miles, and left it at this building. The hand cart remained and we trudged back to camp. For us men,



it's our first glimpse of Japan, and as much as I detest these people, Japan is a beautiful country. The flowers are magnificent and the scenery is a sight to behold.

We're building brand new huts for ourselves so we know at least there are no fleas etc. The huts are the normal thing, about 60-80 yards long, but the walls are very tiny, only three feet high. We've got a gable roof so you can walk down the middle of the hut, and the top of the gable is about 8 feet from the ground. On each side of the hut, as you walk through the door, is the usual raised platform each side of the hut for sleeping. You can sit on the platform at the end of your bed and your feet touch the ground, so you can all actually sit opposite each other and have a conversation.

DECEMBER 8,1944

Winter is setting in fast and hell it's cold.

DECEMBER 24,1944

Took another Australian to the undertakers today. It's so sad. The snow is failing. Most of us Aussies have never seen snow and are all so thrilled to see it. Nearly all the prisoners here are Tommies, and they can't believe we've never seen

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snow. They keep telling us, 'Don't worry, you'll be glad to see the last of the fucking stuff.' A Tommie sergeant major is our senior man and I've confided in him that I am keeping a diary. He was not very pleased about it. He said to me, 'You're foocking mad.'

DECEMBER 25,1944

This would have to be the best Christmas I've had for three years. We each received some bits out of an American Red Cross parcel, and I'm 22 years of age.

DECEMBER 27,1944

Snow is still failing but they send us out to work. We are building an aerodrome. Our tools are so stupid. We can't understand these people. The air raids are so frequent, and they most surely need aerodromes for aircraft to land on and take off on the southern part of Japan because we have had news from children that the Americans are getting closer to Japan. An enormous number of children from schools are used to fill sand bags and do all types of work and it is easy to ask them questions, they just talk and talk.

JANUARY 6,1945

Snow still failing very heavy. 10 men died in two days from cold and hunger.



JANUARY 8, 1945

Jap doctor has succeeded in having this camp demolished. Tomorrow we move to a better camp about three miles away.

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JANUARY 17, 1945

We are burying up to four men a day, mostly with pneumonia, and we can't believe to see the huge number of people walking along side the railway line picking up grains of rice that spill from rail trucks. We can't understand how they can keep going. We've also found out a beauty - When a Jap hits you, drop like a sack of shit, get up and look him straight in the face, his face turns away, so does his fists.

FEBRUARY 1, 1945

Another Aussie died last night, that leaves only 30 Australians remaining in this camp. It has been snowing non stop now for 20 days. Most men share blankets and sleep together. It's the only way to keep warm. Thank goodness we are not bloody poofters.

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craft, similar to tiger moths, are operating above us, and it is magnificent to see the collisions. They seem just hopeless.

The training appears to have moved further north. I asked some children what's happening to the training. They explained, "Too many Americans."

Everyday now, and all day, you can either see our aircraft or hear bombs exploding. The Japanese children seem so different to the adults, it is hard to comprehend they are the same race. They do not appear to show us the slightest malice, however it does help when they ask me "Americano Ka?" I don't even try and tell them I'm Australian, which is "Gorshu Mai." I just say "Ingrish" which means English, that seems to satisfy them.

We often see some type of ceremony going on at the airstrip. It is a bit too far way for us to understand what all the fuss is about.

The aeroplane being used is a single engined machine. No bombers use this strip now, they have all disappeared. When these single engine planes start up, dozens of Japs line up and wave flags and other objects, they look like bunches of flowers, at the departing aeroplane. They don't form a line too long because nearly every take off is erratic. I am not sure if these were the actual kamikaze missions going on their final sortie, or if it was indeed a



departure point for a move to the south to complete their deadly act. I do repeat the take offs were so horribly amateurish, we could tell they had very little training.

JULY 6, 1945

I have felt off colour for the last three days, have lost a lot of weight.

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is gone. We are camped by a huge railway bridge. We do feel the Americans know we are by the bridge and would love to flatten it, but are reluctant to do so.

JUNE 21, 1945

The docks, and what is left standing, copped it for seven hours continuous bombing.

JUNE 23, 1945

Today was a ripper. I watched eight American fighter bombers do some fantastic antics today. They just followed each other, bombing and shooting up the place. They sank four ships, it was bloody great to see.

It's beyond our imagination to try and understand how the Japs have been so successful in getting as far as they have in this war. What with the old fashioned gear we used on the Burma railway, and indeed some of the tools they used in the coal mine I was in, it's not even funny.

Here in this area is a sight for sore eyes. Every morning at 7.30am, this long skinny Jap, wearing a blue robe and with split toe sand shoes, passes us leading a horse. It's pulling a very ancient wagon. It must be 30 years old or more. The wheels have iron rims. However, perched on this wagon is a brand spanking new zero fighter. The wings are detached and stacked up right alongside the fuselage. He delivers this to the workshop, or assembly plant on the airstrip, across the river from our compound. The same method is used by the same man, cart and beast, with another zero fighter at 4.30pm.

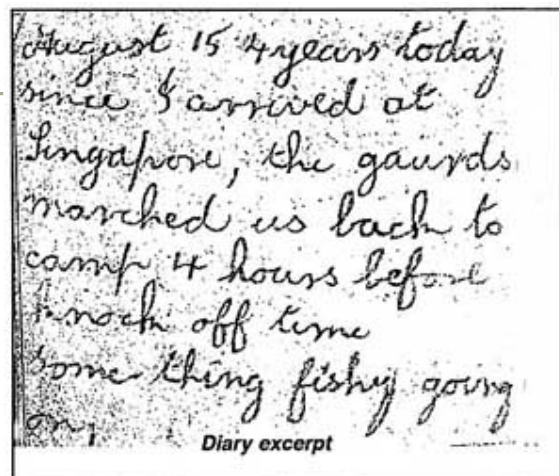
We do see zero's in the air every day, but not a lot use this airstrip, mainly bombers.

However, they have an enormous pilot training operation here. Every day huge gaggles of air

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AUGUST 17, 1945

The Japs have told us that tomorrow we may have to go back to work for a while. Most





thought the war was over. I told them it was, because I heard a Jap say "senso shimie" - war finish.

AUGUST 18, 1945

The Jap Commander called a parade half hour ago and told us the war was over. Oh hell, you should be here. Everyone is singing and dancing. We're all so excited and happy. It's been three and a half years of hell. At times we would go for days without even a smile.

AUGUST 22, 1945

Received a letter from home today, dated April 15 of this year.
