

## **Archive FC0159**

A text transcription of a recording made by E W Flack (Bill) ex WO1 RAMC. It is understood that this transcription was undertaken by Mary Button probably in 1999.

## **First Recording Transcript**

### **"As It Was." by E.W. Flack, R.A.M.C. 7262063. Ex W.O.I**

This first recording took place, (according to a foot note in the transcription), on 18<sup>th</sup> August 1997.

The recording was made by Bill Flack' and records his experiences during WW2 including his capture by the Japanese and his time on the notorious 'Burma Railway'. The archive copy of the transcription is 46 (A4) pages long and double spaced.

We have yet to trace the recording tape.

The extra line spacing and transcript line numbers have been removed in this online copy to make the text easier to read.

## **Note**

This online copy of the transcriptions was made by John L Carr on behalf of the Lyminge Historical Society from the Lyminge Parish Archive in June 2016.

Some foot and end notes have been added by me to clarify certain points in the narrative.

There are some transcription uncertainties which are marked with a (?). If you can help in clarifying these points please contact the webmaster from our contact page.

The archive reference & title is:

[FC0159 Bill Flack's interview's transcriptions](#)

# **“As It Was.”**

by

E.W. Flack, R.A.M.C.‡

7262063. Ex W.O.I \*

‡ R.A.M.C. - the initials of the Royal Army Medical Corps – British Army

\*W.O.I - abbreviation for Warrant Officer Class 1. The most senior non-commissioned officer rank in the British Army

Looking back I suppose I was destined for Malaya. I arrived in India in February 1936 and was sent to the Military Hospital in Rawalpindi. Three weeks later when working in the wards I gave an Indian Ward Servant an order, upon which he said something back to me. I had no idea the remark was insulting until the Head Ward Servant hit him. At the subsequent Court Martial I was the only one who needed an interpreter. As India then was a 5 year station I decided to learn the language.

Years later after the Nips invaded Indo-China a military force was sent from India to Northern Malaya. The request from H.Q. to Northern Command where I was serving was for a Sergeant, R.A.M.C., Urdu-speaking. There was only one in the whole of Northern Command. Sergeant Flack.

I enjoyed my years in India. After completing my nursing training, I qualified as an Operating Theatre Technician. During the Fakir of Ipi's<sup>i</sup> uprising (1937-1939) North West Frontier India Campaign, there were 45,000 British troops and 5 times that number of Indian troops engaged in this campaign.

This was when Air Evacuation in India started. Three Dakotas ("City of Delhi", "City of Calcutta" and "City of Bombay") were converted to carry stretchers. As from May to September the hospitals, families, etc. were moved from the plains to the hill stations. The hill station for Rawalpindi was Murree, 7000 feet up the foothills. The casualties were flown from Damdil (North West Territories<sup>ii</sup>) to the RAF station at Chaklala, five miles from Rawalpindi. There the surgeon and I would meet the planes and mark the casualties in priority for operation. Those for immediate operation went to Rawalpindi B.M.H. The remainder were sent by ambulance to Murree. As the Theatre Sister and all the other nursing sisters were at the hill station, the surgeon taught me how to assist him. During this time my experience of all types of injuries and diseases was most extensive and interesting. This was where I had to prepare and also assist at operations for nerve surgery. A very precise and exacting technique, this knowledge and experience played a significant part in my life as a prisoner of war.

When the force for Northern Malaya was mobilised in August 1940 and sailed for Malaya in October 1940 it was code named "Force Abnormal" and it was. Two battalions of Indian Troops, 178th and 2nd/16th Punjab's (both at half strength), an Indian Mountain Gun Pack Battery Company of sappers and miners, and 16th Indian Field Ambulance, of which I was the only regular soldier.

The C.O. was from Indian Medical Service Reserve and had been Civil Surgeon, Bengal. Second-in-command I.M.S. Adjutant I.M.S. 1 Capt. R.A.M.C. myself and later in Malaya joined by three other rank R.A.M.C. The rest all Indians, mostly volunteers, all with no training except 3 month recruit training.

We sailed from Bombay and anchored in the Penang Straits between Penang and Prai. Troops went over the side into sampans and landed at Prai [Perai] on the mainland for the journey northwards. Vehicles and stores went further down the Straights to Port Swettenham to unload. Our drivers, all inexperienced, not knowing first gear from reverse, put two ambulances back through the ship's rail into the sea.

When we had the vehicles and stores unloaded we moved up country to a camp in a rubber plantation four and a half miles from the Thai border. We had about a year to train them before the Japs hit us. I must say they coped very well under conditions that at times were well-nigh impossible. We were bombed, machine-gunned and harassed continually. Staff cars, motor-cycles, and ambulances were, in that order, the Japs' priority for dive-bombing and machine-gunning. After a few days we only moved casualties by night.

During the Malayan Campaign our field ambulance was only out of the front line for 36 hours. That was at Slim river where the Australians relieved us again and finally ended up on the beach opposite Raffles Hotel.

There, having seen to the Indian troops and with nothing further to do, I went to the cricket pavilion at Raffles Hotel, which was the Field Ambulance H.Q., to find my commanding officer as I was sure I could be gainfully employed somewhere with the number of wounded we had.

I was told my C.O. was operating in a theatre in Raffles Hotel. I went there and was told that he was operating and I could not see him. I said I had come to help, and was told they had sufficient staff at Raffles but more theatres were being opened at the Fullerton Building. I went there and was eagerly welcomed to join the staff. I started in the theatre immediately and in the evening returned to our HQ. to inform them where I was. I reported to Capt. Kapoor who was our adjutant who not informing the C.O. I was posted as a deserter. (Evidently at Capitulation<sup>iii</sup> he joined the Indian Freedom Fighters being formed under Chandra Bose. <sup>iv</sup>)

Fortunately for me an Indian Other Rank had heard me tell Capt. Kapoor where I was. So my C.O. found me and I was called out of the theatre to meet him. He said the unit was being disbanded and he was being sent to the dock area in charge of a working party. When he consulted the Senior Surgeon and was told we had all the serious wounded in Fullerton Building he said I better stay and help.

As it happened, we didn't leave Singapore for Changi<sup>v</sup> Barracks till three weeks after everyone else. By this time the first arrivals had settled in nicely in the barrack blocks. So the few of us late arrivals were given tents. At least it was a rest. We washed, washed our clothes, such as we had been able to retain.

Relaxed, yes, for two days. Then the cry went up, where is the Sgt. R.A.M.C. from India. Why - dysentery had broken out and no-one had seen it before or knew how to treat it. I was given a very large open-fronted building, previously a laundry and dry room, adjacent to latrines. Far removed from all other buildings, cookhouse, dispensary, etc., in fact, in isolation.

The cookhouse was too far away to get drinks or any other fluids for the patients, so I rigged up a fireplace in the open and carried on making my own fluids for the patients. At Changi we had many troops and regiments who were holding sick parades so in no time at all I was really fully stretched. No-one bothered to contact me, just sent the patients down to the dysentery centre and that was it. In no time at all I had between 50 and 80 patients. Fortunately the dysentery was the bacillary type and cured within 3 to 5 days with proper care. I started my rounds at about 6 a.m. and after I had been all around the patients I cleaned up and started my fire and made fluids.

As soon as all had drinks I went to the dispensary for dysentery mixture. Called at the cookhouse for breakfast taking it back with me. Sometimes before I even had time to eat it new patients were already arriving. Daily discharges helped to keep it manageable but there was always an increase. I usually finished about 11 p.m. but always had disturbed nights and I was beginning to feel the effects of long hours and missed meals and sleep.

After a month of this a Capt. R.A.M.C. 196 Field Ambulance was admitted. He was pretty sick when he was carried in and didn't take much notice of his surroundings. On his third day he started recovering and asked me for a drink. I told him as soon as I

had been around all the patients and cleaned myself up I could light the fire and prepare fluids for all. He was appalled that I was running a one-man show. He said it was disgraceful as there were 3 Field Ambulances, a General Hospital, Casualty Clearing Station medical staff lying around the barracks doing nothing.

He asked for his discharge the following morning and in the afternoon a barrack block was opened as a dysentery ward. My patients removed with not a word said, only thanks from the patients. So I was on my own again but I made friends with one or two other Sergeants R.A.M.C., especially one who was a dispenser. I was very low at this point probably over tired and felt very alone. All the others belonged to units, had their C.O.'s and officers to look after their well-being where I was absolutely on my own. However, a few days later a message came down the line that a Lt. Col. was looking for the Sgt. R.A.M.C. from India.

When I made contact it was Lt. Col. Houston whom I had met in India. He had been returned home to England and sent out to Malaya with the ill-fated 18th Div. after catching up on what happened to so and so, etc., he asked me if I had experience of nerve surgery. I said yes, on the North West Frontier with Major D. McKelvey. He asked me if it was possible to open up an Aseptic Theatre under P.O.W. conditions. I said, if a suitable building could be found it could be planned. The Australians, who were the first to arrive in Changi, had established an operating theatre in half the ground floor of a barrack block. The other half was cleared and given over to me to plan the theatre. I should explain that an Aseptic Theatre must be free of germs and only Clean surgery, as it is termed, performed there. All other types of surgery carried out in the other theatres. I planned the Theatre, sited the operating table, positioned sinks, sterilisers, etc., but I needed running water. So they sent for the Royal Engineers. A Staff Sgt. and a Sapper arrived and I explained what I needed. They said they could put a tank in the upper floor and supply water by gravity feed if that would do. It would have to do as there was no other means of getting running water. While the tank was being installed I kept popping upstairs to see if it was right. When I went downstairs the Sapper would come down to see if the sinks were in the right place. The Staff Sgt. finally came down and said "Do you know my Sapper?" I said "I think I do." He said, "Would you two get together then we might get on with the job."

I went to Canada in 1924 from a small village school in Norfolk. I was twelve. This Sapper was in the same school two classes below. What a meeting. I have met him since in his house in Norfolk. So we got on with it and the Theatre was soon ready. The running of it was administered by a Major Webster, R.A.M.C. He received requests for the use of the Theatre and planned the time and date for each operation. This was passed on to me and I was responsible for its readiness, correct instruments, sutures, needles, dressings, etc.

Now, I must digress a little while I explain Operating Theatre Procedure. Normally a theatre is staffed by an Operating Theatre Technician, Theatre Sister, Assisting Surgeon(s) and Surgeon. The O.T.T. must know all the known operations, the instruments required, especially the surgeon's likes and dislikes, etc. The O.T.T. is responsible for the preparation of the patient, obtain tests of urine, heart, and blood for the anaesthetist. Pack and sterilise the drums containing all the linen, swabs, dressings, etc. for the operations. Have the theatre prepared, instruments sterilised and laid out on the instrument trolley. Swabs, dressings, towels, etc. laid out on the dressings trolley and counted. The count of dressings and swabs is carried out before and after each operation (safety check). Gowns, caps, masks, gloves laid out and ready for Sister and Surgeons. Be ready to assist in fastening gowns, etc. Prepare

anaesthetist trolley, making sure oxygen, ether, nitrous oxide cylinders are full. Syringes, heart stimulants and all emergency items for resuscitation available. Then the operation gets under way. (Nowadays the O.T.T. has a much easier time as most of his requirements are supplied by a central sterilising department.) In war time in the general hospitals this procedure is carried out as far as possible.

In Singapore the sisters had been evacuated with terrible and eventful ordeals, so it was all males when I arrived at the Fullerton Building and offered my services. I was assigned to a team where the surgeon was Col. Julian Barratt, most respected and renowned surgeon. I was the O.T.T. and we worked long hours, rested and back into action again. A few days later when the Col. was operating to remove a piece of shrapnel from a patient's skull the bombing by the Japs got too close for comfort and the assisting surgeon dived under the operating table. As he was required to be sterile, he could no longer assist. I was instructed to scrub and take his place and assist, which I did for the rest of the session.

At the end of the day the Col. said to me "When you have eaten and rested, I would like a few words with you." I thought he wasn't pleased with something I had done. When I saw him that evening he enquired about my theatre experience, the surgeons with whom I had worked, and where. He asked my rank, and when I said I was a Sgt. he was amazed. Being a civilian he didn't know the Army. The same position I had in the Indian Field Ambulance is for a Warrant Officer Class I in the British Field Ambulance. He said before the war he had only worked in civilian hospitals and hadn't met male O.T.T.s before as he always had theatre sisters, etc. He said I was as efficient as his civilian hospital staff and in future I would assist him in all his operations which I did all the time we were in Fullerton Buildings.

Return now to Changi where the theatre is equipped to start operating, though without essentials like Air Central System, and Singapore is very humid. The first operating list is published. It is an operation to repair the trapezium nerve in the muscle that raises and lowers the shoulders. I had to assist me Private Alf Sutton R.A.M.C. He was working in the operating theatre in Singapore when the Japs attacked the hospital. They killed the surgeon, the anaesthetist, the patient on the table. They bayoneted Capt. Smylie(?) R.A.M.C. who was assisting. He fell down pulling Sutton with him and laid on him so his blood ran over Sutton, and they were left for dead. Both survived and Capt. Smylie(?) received the M.C. for this.

We prepared the theatre and in came Col. Barrett and about twenty other officers, all ranks and many of them were experienced surgeons who offered to assist him. To their astonishment(?) and my dismay Col. Barrett told me to scrub up and assist him. As nerve surgery was new to these officers Col. Barrett used it as a teaching exercise and so though I made them stand well back from the operating table in the early stages they gradually crept closer till we were really hemmed in. The wound was laid open to show the passage of the bullet across his shoulders, severing the nerve. The Col. explained the technique for the repair and commenced. I noticed a drop of perspiration from the Col's forehead drop into the wound. I asked him to stop operating and told Sutton to mop his forehead. Having covered up the wound while this was going on, we swabbed it with Dettol and carried on. It was to no avail as the wound turned septic and the repair was not successful. I saw Major Webster and asked for a line to be painted on the theatre floor over which onlookers could not pass. This was the first step in my unpopularity. The next operating list had an operation for a cartilage repair by a Major who was from St. Thomas' Hospital, London. I approached him and asked him for any special instructions. He said he wanted the St.

Thomas Technique used. I said "I'm sorry, never heard of it!" Well, prepare the leg as usual from hip to toe. three day preparation then wrap the leg in a sterile sheet. This was done. He had another officer to assist him. I was horrified when I saw the St. Thomas Technique was only cutting through the sheet instead of removing it. I had only twelve sheets to start with, now I was down to eleven. Another complaint to Major Webster about conserving our very limited supplies. Next problem was about an appendectomy(?). A good surgeon takes twelve to twenty minutes for this operation. This one took one hour and fifteen minutes. I was assisting an elderly Australian Major in a straightforward operation with no complications. I told Major Webster that enough anaesthetic had been used for three operations and as we were using the open mask method with the length of the operation the patient would probably die of hypostatic(?) pneumonia due to the lengthy exposure to ether in his lungs. On investigation it turned out to be the first operation that major had done since his college days.

The final incident was during an operation on a medial nerve. Col. Barrett was repairing a damaged medial nerve in the upper arm. He had laid open the site of the damage and was explaining to the assembled officers how he was going to expose the damaged ends of the nerve and repair it. I looked at it and said "The nerve is not damaged." I didn't realise I had spoken out loud. The colonel said "What do you think it is?" I said "I'm sorry for speaking out!" He said "I'm pleased that you take such interest. What do you think?" I said "The bullet appears to have passed between the medial nerve and the medial artery causing an aneurism in the artery which is causing pressure on the nerve and stopping it functioning." He said "I don't think you're right." Which caused a sniggering response from the onlookers. I was so sure I was right that, as he was cutting through the tissues, I held a pair of 15 inch artery forceps ready. As he cut through blood spurted out. The colonel took the outstretched pair of forceps and clamped the ends of the arteries. He then covered the wound and, turning to the assembly said "If an O.T.T. can make a spot diagnosis so correctly we must certainly look to our laurels."

From then on my life was terrible. No officer spoke to me unless he had to, so I got lots of written instructions. Major Webster was my staunch supporter, saying he was right behind me, but if I ever made a mistake I could expect no mercy. It was no surprise and with relief that I found my name on top of the list for the up-country party. We were taken to Singapore railway station and lined up to be addressed by a Jap officer. He most carefully informed us all British were pigs and as such we were going to travel like pigs. How right he was.

Standing room only in metal covered trucks, stifling hot by day, wet and cold at night with condensation. A very horrible three days. It wasn't long before all the rest of the medics and other troops joined us from Singapore. We were all in separate parties on one side of the road at Bampang.(?) Here the Japs did their sorting out. At that time we did not know they had all our records from Fort Canning. (?) Those tradesmen selected were moved across the road to the Japanese camp. The remainder were to form the Railway work party. Here there was the nucleus of the engineering work group. Some weeks later, an interpreter with an armed guard of four Nip soldiers came over to the medics asking for a doctor as British soldiers were ill in the Jap camp. Of all the Lt. Colonels, Majors, Captains, Lieutenants and W.O.I's no one would go. Major De Soldenhof (?) IMS., whom I knew from India, asked me if I was afraid to go and see what the problem was. I said "Someone has to go." I was quickly provided with a medical and surgical haversack and marched over under guard. It was cases of

malaria, Bacillary Dysentery, Dengue (?) and Tinus (?) infections. I treated then men as required and was marched back to camp. It became routine. Two guards came for me in the morning and evening returning back to camp after each visit which lasted one-and-a-half to two hours. When I was seeing to the men, every time I looked up I saw a Jap watching me, who moved off as soon as he saw me looking at him. This became a habit so I no longer took any notice of him. Sometime later I was collected from my camp with the interpreter and guards, ordered to collect my kit (such as it was), and move across the road. Hence my arrival in the Engineering Group. On my arrival I was taken by the interpreter and the Jap who had been watching me to the Jap camp commandant.

It turned out the Jap who had been watching me was their doctor, with the rank of Sergeant-Major. I was informed I would attend no parades or work parties, could use the Japanese medical room and dispensary at certain hours, and I was to keep the men fit for work. The Japanese have no Field Medical Service such as ours. Every soldier, whatever his rank, is a fighting unit. Their casualties are collected after the fighting is over. Any maimed or disfigured casualty is not bothered about as, according to their belief, only whole and perfect bodies are accepted in Heaven.

Any British P.O.W. with a finger missing, tattoo, scar were not accepted for Japanese parties. Also, I was informed that when the Japanese doctor was called for the expected push into Burma, I was to look after both the British P.O.W.'s and the Japanese soldiers as well. I protested I wasn't a doctor, but the Japanese doctor evidently told the camp commandant that I was capable, and that was it. I tried my best but some P.O.W.'s thought I was pro-Jap so got labelled "Jap-happy".

This is when and where I met the people involved in the Radio Affair. I was allocated a bed space at the end of a attap (?) hut, close to the Jap medical hut. In the evening I put up my mosquito net which I had brought from India and most carefully retained. I was approached by a WO II who wanted to buy my net but I told him it was not for sale at any price. He then asked me who I was as I was not wearing any identification or stripes. He asked if I was a regular soldier. I said "Yes." "Have you signed the Official Secrets Act?" Again "Yes."

He told me he had been on his way to Australia to work on military communications but had been stranded in Singapore when the Japs sunk his ship. He also said he had a radio which he wished to operate, and under my mosquito net would be perfect. So I was moved to the other end of the hut, next to him. When I enquired about the radio, he showed me his army water bottle. The top half held water. The rest was a built-in radio. He also told me he had a supply of spares farmed out among the P.O.W.'s so at a later date he could build a permanent powerful one. So the radio was operated under my mosquito net at fixed times.

At first, only the headlines of the BBC Overseas News were listened to, as batteries were hard to get and in short supply. In the meantime, certain medics had been moved to Nong Pladuk<sup>vi</sup> (?) and started a hospital there under Major De Soldenhof (?). I was allowed to visit periodically for medical supplies (if any), accompanied by a guard. A precis of the news would be written out and I would deliver it to certain designated officers. I made one trip and the officers had been moved but another officer said he would deliver the news-sheet. Evidently he didn't, but fortunately no harm was done. At this time the Nips started paying us in their printed money. It took a month's pay to buy an egg. The P.O.W.'s decided to give one day's pay a week towards buying medical supplies. A Thai merchant named Boon Pong (?) had a



general store which we started visiting.

At first we obtained potassium permanganate, non-absorbent cotton wool and such odds and ends as he could get. Then a wonderful system developed. When he got to know and trust us we were receiving much more in change than we had given in the first place. This windfall was put to very good use. Negotiations with the natives for batteries for the radio. I obtained a yeast ferment from Nong Pladuk (?) and bought sacks of Gur (?) (unrefined cane sugar) and rice polishings (?) and made a fermented yeast drink to combat Beriberi (Vitamin B deficiency).

This way of life carried on until we were moved from Bampang (?) to the engineering group at Sakamoto Butai (?). There the end of the officers hut was my hospital. There I carried on making the yeast brew with rice polishings and Gur (?). In the bags of rice polishings I had hidden the spares for the radio, valves, condensers, ear-phones etc. In the hollow bamboo shoots were hidden maps of the railway. I was separated from the WO II now I had the hospital in the other building, but I could see him and the other men in their building from the hospital. Meanwhile, Boon Pong had opened a canteen for Japanese soldiers which was managed by one of his daughters. As far as I am aware, he had three of these canteens in different Japanese camps, and used them as a source of collecting information of troop movements, numbers, vehicles, etc. These canteens were closed after the Radio Affair to prevent further mis-treatment and harassment of his daughters. Life went on much the same as usual at this time and the odd bit of sabotage tried. Non-absorbent cotton wool went into diesel intake jets. A little hydrochloric or nitric acid into big ends. The first attempt was disastrous. The Nips were not fault finders so when a diesel broke down it was brought into the workshops and stripped down completely. The first attempt with acid seized up the rear end solid after only 800 miles.

Much more care was taken in the future and so maltreatment or mistreatment was very rare. This was so until the arrival of Dutch troops from Java. A batch of bearded men arrived who looked and acted like old men when, in fact, some were younger than we were. They were acting on the naive idea that age should be respected. Soon, little incidents occurred to upset the harmony of the camp.

Certain little misdemeanours were being reported to the Japs by them to curry favour and an air of mistrust began to spread through the camp which had not been present before their arrival. One day, the Jap camp commandant came into my hospital hut with the biggest and broadest Jap officer I had ever seen. He had a very bad tinus (?) infection of his ear, which I had to treat. I had some Gentian Violet (?) with which I was able to cure him.

About this time the outside parties were bringing back stories of beatings of P.O.W.'s in other camps as they made contact with them. Things were going fairly smoothly in our camp until the fateful morning. About 4 a.m. a surge of Japanese trucks and soldiers entered our camp. We were soon surrounded and ordered out on to the parade ground. Everybody went except me. I watched from my hut as the men paraded in open order and were guarded by Japs and Koreans. Then another batch of Japanese, commanded by an officer and a sergeant went into the huts searching men's belongings, the huts, underneath bed spaces, etc. They had been tipped off and were searching for the radio. Hours of searching were unsuccessful so the Jap officer made them do it all over again. How long the P.O.W.'s stood in the sun I am no longer certain, but it was many hours. Those who fell down were either kicked or beaten with rifle butts until they got up. My observations of the goings on in the huts and on the

parade ground was disrupted when the camp commandant and the officer in charge of the search party came into the hospital out of the sun. They showed too much interest in the rice polishings and brew and were too near the hidden maps for my peace of mind, and I moved to the back of the hut out of their way. After a further considerable length of time, the gonzo(?) (sergeant) in charge of the search party came in and reported the further search had not been any more successful than the first. A discussion between the two Jap officers resulted in the sending for the Jap interpreter, a very nasty Jap with an American accent. He was told to tell the P.O.W.'s that they (the Japs) knew there was a radio in the camp and the P.O.W.'s would stand until the radio was found or given up. It was some time after this I saw the WO II step forward out of the ranks and take the Jap sergeant into his hut and showed him where the radio was. The radio was in a hinged-lid coffee tin, the top third was peanuts, the rest the radio. They then returned him to the ranks but after a period of time they fetched him back into the hut again. They could neither figure out how it worked or where and how he got his electrical supply. This the WO II had to show and explain. After he was led from the hut I never saw him again.

Our officers disappeared as well and gloom and despondency settled over the camp. It was quiet for a few days then batches of P.O.W.'s were taken off for questioning. The routine was to wake a dozen or so P.O.W.'s just after midnight, take them to what we found out later to be the HQ Kempiti H.Q. The message from the few who came back that all were being questioned about the radio and how much news of the war had they heard. The specific area was the Pacific and the battles around the islands. A message was passed back to me that my name was being protected and that I should be kept out of the enquiry.

My luck didn't hold, as someone gave the sleeping positions of the huts in Bampong where I was next to this WO II. Sure enough, a couple of nights later I was woken up and taken with about a dozen others to the Kempiti H.Q. (?) Not a nice experience. While we were waiting for our turn we could hear shouting, beatings, screams of pain and people being moved or dragged about. We could see nothing as we were in a small dark room off a passage. After some time I was taken into a brilliantly lit room where I sat opposite a Jap officer and an interpreter, and the interrogation began. You were first asked your rank, name and number. That part was easy. Then came the questions about the radio. Did I know who it was there who ran it? Who else knew about it? Was I told any news about the war? We had already been tipped off it was the Pacific details they were after, so I stuck to Europe and Africa. Heard that the Allies had taken Tobruk, etc. Each time they veered back to the Pacific, so I thought I'd better say something, so I said I had heard exaggerated claims of ships and planes lost by both sides. I was told that claims by the Americans of ships and planes destroyed was propaganda but the claims by the Japanese were authentic. I suppose I should have accepted that but I replied that I thought propaganda was a ploy used by both sides. The Jap officer shouted something and the two guards standing behind me knocked me around the room. Dazed and sore I was then sat on my seat ( a four-gallon petrol tin) and, through the interpreter, received a long lecture on how honest the Japanese were and never used propaganda. They didn't have to. Couldn't I see they had overrun the East and were going to India through Burma and invasion of Bombay, Calcutta and Karachi? I could have listened to this all night but by this time it was between 3 and 4 a.m. After his lecture the interrogation became more harsh and violent. I thought "This is it" and although I kept denying knowledge of the radio I was sure he thought I had or someone had given me away. However, suddenly there was a disturbance in the room. Everyone stood up, about eight of them, bowed and

said their piece. When I became aware of what was going on and saw it was the very big Japanese whose ear I had treated. (At that time I did not know he was head of the Kempeti.) (?)

He gave the officer and the interpreter a very rough time and I was told I was not to be questioned any more. I was taken out of the room along a dark corridor to another side room where a one-star private (lowest rank in Jap army) was told to look after me. I got tea and cigarettes. The tea was green tea, very sweet and no milk. The cigarettes were Thai, "Wheatsheaf", the best of the Thai cigarettes. When the soldier wasn't looking I pinched my cigarette, hid the butt in my shirt and so on, so I had some butts to share when I got back to camp. While I was in this room there was still a lot of shouting, beating, screaming, etc. There was a small window that as it got light I could just see out of it but not very clearly. I saw bamboo cages so I thought they must keep chickens. Little did I know till after that P.O.W.'s were caged in, not big enough for them to lay down or sit up straight. Later in the morning, I suppose between 9 and 10 a.m., two P.O.W.'s were brought in by a Jap and put into another room across from me. They were told not to speak to me. I noticed one was a corporal of the R.A.M.C., the other a private of the Norfolk Regiment. I also saw they were carrying two arm splints.

Now I know that the splints were for Lt Eric Lomax of the Signals, who has already published his story called "The Railway Man". About 2 p.m. I and a few others were taken back to camp. Everyone was amazed to see me back and said "They will come for you again."

The next three nights I was scared to go to sleep and on the fourth night I thought now I am in the clear I can go to sleep. Just after midnight I was woken up and taken down to the Kampeti H.Q. Same officer, same interpreter. This time it was much different as they knew they should not be questioning me. They asked me my name and number, which I gave. Then they had a nominal roll of P.O.W.'s and from it they read out a name and number and asked me "Is that your name and number?" I said "No." Again they said "What is your name and number?" Again I gave it. Again another name and number read out. Again "Is that your name and number?" "No." So it went on, seemingly for hours. Your head starts to ache, and seems to spin round. You start to lose your concentration and orientation. How long I could have gone on for I do not know as I was getting near to breaking point and would have probably admitted to a name and number which was not mine, which they evidently wanted me to do. I knew suddenly a quiet hush came over the room but couldn't quite realise where I was until I saw that the Head of the Kempeti was talking to the officer. I knew by the way he spoke he was very angry and was asking what I was doing there. He then spoke to the interpreter who literally changed colour, as also the two guards standing behind me.

In the Jap army there is no manual of military law or regulations. They have very few officers who are extremely powerful. The sergeants exercise authority equivalent to our majors and lieutenant-colonels. From lance corporal up they all carry swords. Crimes, large or small demeanours are subject to physical abuse. In cases in a serious offence, the culprit is beaten unconscious and, in extreme cases, end up unfit for full military duties. This I know from actual experience. In the Malayan campaign, the Jap H.Q. was impossible to find and bomb because it was only one officer who moved very frequently. The Head of the Kempeti slowly removed his sword from his belt, leaving it in its scabbard, and proceeded to do a demolition job on the Japs. Too bad there was only four of them. My best day as a P.O.W. (if any).

Then it was a truck.. Speedo Speedo (?) I was whisked back to camp, never to be questioned again. Shortly after this our camp was split and moved to different camps. I and a few others were sent to Kanchanburi (?) camp. The camp commandant for the P.O.W.'s was a captain of the Norfolk Regiment and he placed me under the Corporal R.A.M.C. who I had seen at Kempeti H.Q. I said I had seen him there with a private from the Norfolk's. He said they had gone to splint a P.O.W.'s arms, but didn't know who it was, and the regimental nursing orderly didn't either.

The few of us transferred to this camp were treated shamefully at first and blamed for all the beatings and abuse being handed out by the Japs. This period didn't last for long before the Norfolk's were moved out and a party from Nang Pluduk (?) moved in. How glad I was to see Major De Soldenhof (?) again, and Captain Chester R.A.M.C.

The first thing we did was remove the dark navy blue and green mosquito nets supplied by the Japs from the hospital hut. The mosquitoes loved the dark colours and restricted air flow. The major said why hadn't I removed them before. I said I wanted to, as they were adding to the problem of malaria, but was not allowed to. He was appalled. However, in a couple of days the camp filled up and we were quite busy. The few P.O.W.'s who had been in the camp all the time soon realised we weren't as bad as they had been led to believe. I think it was the Japs way of preventing the knowledge of the radio getting spread about. When they realised they could trust us they told how the officers were beaten up at the bottom end of the camp, heard one of them pleading for mercy and being ridiculed by the interpreter with the American accent.

They were threatened by the Japs not to talk about anything they had seen and heard. As it became known later, this is where two officers were beaten to death, besides Lt. Lomax's broken arms. Now the camp strength was built up, working parties increased and I became responsible for the administration of the hospital under Major De Soldenhof (?) and Captain Chester.

I was responsible to inform the Jap officer of the number of sick too ill to work, number fit for camp duty, etc. I had a Korean as my control. When I was in the engineering camp, Boon Pong's daughter got me a dozen young ducks which I was feeding up for the very sick patients and, after a couple of weeks in Kanchanburi (?) camp, they disappeared from the pen in our camp. Captain Williamson (?) (who was with me in Bampang (?)) who had learnt Japanese and was doing interpreting, was in the camp at Kanchanburi (?). I went to see him and asked him to take me to the Japanese camp commandant as I wanted to see about my ducks. He was very dubious at first but finally agreed to take me, and explained why we were there. I was told as a P.O.W. I was not allowed such luxuries. I told him that he had told me to keep the men fit and well and the ducks were to feed the very sick to make them better and back to work. To Captain Williamson's (?) astonishment, I got my ducks back.

We lost no time in getting them ready for the pot and shared out. All the officers who shared in the meal gave me a day's pay towards medical funds. My Korean control used to accompany me around the hospital and camp to see the men were really sick and count my figures to make sure they tallied. More about him later. A senior Jap sergeant used to come to the hospital about 11 a.m. each morning and bring coffee for me to make him a cup and also brought the Bangkok Chronicle (printed in English) to read. After a while he asked me to join him, then when he left used to leave the newspaper behind. This became quite a routine. His English was quite good but he only spoke to me in English making sure no one else was around, especially any

Japanese. One day he said to me he would place his life in my hands. He then took out service medals of the 1914-18 war out of his pocket to show me. He had been with the British forces in Singapore and said he was sure Japan was fighting on the wrong side. He said if I told his people the way he felt they would kill him.

After the Radio Affair all the Dutch prisoners disappeared which only confirmed that they had been the ones who gave us away to the Japs. There was a P.O.W. camp next to ours separated by a very high fence. After a few months the fence was taken down and the camps joined up. It was totally a Dutch camp. All the Dutch had been collected up and placed in this one camp to avoid retaliation from other prisoners. They had not been out on work parties and had been having a cosy rest. I and my Korean were made responsible for their sick figures too. They had a hospital with their own doctor and medical staff. What trouble we had. There were rows of bearded old men lying on their beds reading, playing Ma Jong or cards. We found they were all medical staff from ??? army hospital and all made sick so they should not go out on working parties.

They also had with them the boxing heavy-weight champion of the East Indies who was also on the sick list so he could carry out his daily exercises. Time and time again I was called to the Jap office to explain why their sick figures were so much higher than ours and their working parties so small. The Japanese were still coming to me for treatment instead of going to their own man. This suited me because if they had dysentery I would tell them I could only treat them if they brought Emetine (?). We then injected them with a small quantity of sterile water and kept the Emetine (?) for our sick. We had a dispenser Sgt R.A.M.C. who was very good and certainly did the best he could.

The Nip medical man came to the hospital to see why his men were coming there instead of to him. He was an oldish Jap, quite wizened, had been in the China Campaign and had (lost?) toes through frostbite. Said his name was "Willy". It became his habit to come over every afternoon and watch the dispenser at work. He appeared quite affable and easy going. When the recce planes came over in their high altitude flights he said they were "Come, see, go back, speak no good planes." One day he admired the work the dispenser was doing and said what a good dispensary he had. The sergeant said "You should see what that sergeant has under his bed space." He made me turn it out. All the drugs bought with Boon Peng's money and the Nips' money and the camp workers' money. He went berserk. Of course, he was the old type Jap. Thought Tito and Japan was invincible. He was going to have me beaten, put in jail and all kinds of horrible things. Rather a tricky situation and the worst episode I had experienced. Explaining that it was hidden for safety's sake etc., we finally got him cooled down. When he finally went the dispensing sergeant was dismayed and regretted what he had done. I said "Haven't you yet realised how unpredictable the Japs can be?"

During this time the recce flights were every three or four days. We in the camp had to dig slit trenches between the huts and when we heard the air-raid siren we were to go into our huts. The system was so bad that we heard the planes long before the siren went. During an alert, a P.O.W. decided while he was in his hut that he would have a shave. He had a Shick (?) razor and as he was honing it a guard rushed in and bayoneted him. He said he was sending messages to the planes in the sky.

During this time a work force was being assembled to go up country. I was nominated to go with them as medical attendant to the 600 men. Kanchanbari (?) had its first precision daylight bombing raid The paper factory was hit and the Jap camp adjoining

ours. A Jap came running up to our hospital shouting "Tonga, tonga!" (?) I laughed because the Urdu word "Tonga" (?) means a horse-drawn vehicle and I didn't (think?) that would do him much good. So I laughed which was prohibited by the Japs. "Tonga" (?) in Japanese means "stretcher".

When the guard saw me laughing he grabbed his rifle by the barrel and swung the butt round and hit me on the ear. As I was falling to the ground he completed the circle and hit me on my other ear, so perforated both my ear drums. I was carried into the hospital. Captain Chester had carefully saved four sulphonamide tablets which he ground up and packed my ears with it. His careful attention saved my hearing and probably my life as in these conditions cerebral meningitis was the threat. I couldn't proceed with the force which went up country and suffered some of the worst conditions on the railway. The force was decimated by malaria, dysentery, both bacillary and amoebic, and cholera, and only about two-thirds of the force survived and they were walking skeletons when they returned to Kanchanburi (?) sometime later.

Then the Japan parties were being selected as the railway was practically finished. This was the time when tattoos, scars or any other bodily blemish was invaluable as the Japs didn't believe you went to heaven unless your body was unblemished and intact. Unpredictable Japs as they used to jump into trenches and dugouts with Mills bombs fastened around their waists and crash their planes on ships and blow themselves up. Naturally, I was top of the list for the Japan party. The trucks arrived at the camp and loading began. Five minutes before departure my Korean turned up and ordered me off the truck and back to my job in the hospital. I was amazed at this because he had come over from his camp more than two hours earlier than his usual time. The significance of this to me will be explained in the following pages.

Evidently there were five ships in Singapore harbour waiting to take the P.O.W.'s and all the metal the Nips had collected in and around Singapore. The railway lines, tram lines, lamp standards, iron fencing, in fact anything metal and quite a quantity of it. The plan (Japs) was to load up the three small ships with the metal and the P.O.W.'s on the two large ships. The P.O.W.'s were required for the mines, coal, salt, etc. The code message was sent out to sink the three small ships but leave the two big ones. The Nips realised they couldn't get all the loot on the three small ships so reversed the plan. Regretfully the amended message didn't get through in time and resulted in terrible loss of life as the P.O.W.'s were battened down in the holds. You will hear later in this narrative how I met some of the survivors from Kanchanburi (?) and got the full story. Back in Kanchanburi (?) the routine was being maintained but my position became more and more difficult because as I didn't attend any parades, was taken off the Japan party, was cleared of the Radio Affair, got my ducks back, treated Japs, so it was thought I was a Jap-happy Quisling. I couldn't explain as it was too dangerous to let anyone know what you were doing (?).

The daylight bombing raids increased and night (?) bombing ceased. Then the bombing switched from Bangkok and other cities and sites to the railway to prevent supplies going to Burma. The bridges were taken out by night bombing and daylight raids attacked the engines and trucks. A bridging party was formed to repair the bridges and trucks, consisting of forty British, twenty Australian and twenty Dutch. There was no doubt who the medical cover would be. Of course it would be me. Our train was made up of eight flat cars and two carriages for the Nips, and engine. We carried ropes, axes, cross-cut saws, fish-plates, dog-bolts, spare rails. We were centred at Wampoh (?) in the camp above the viaduct. The train would go out in the

morning to wherever a repair was required. If wood for shoring-up was required it was cut from trees in the jungle just a few yards away. The plan was to get the damage repaired and back to camp by 4 p.m., hide the train in sidings at Wampoh (?) which were hidden in a rubber plantation where the Nips thought the train couldn't be seen.

At first I didn't go out with the train but stayed in the camp cleaning the washing places, latrines, huts, etc. These huts in this camp and others we stayed in when we couldn't get back to base camp were the ones P.O.W.'s, coolies, etc. lived in while the railway was being built, now vacated, filthy and in disrepair. The Wampoh (?) camp had a Dutch doctor and a skeleton camp staff so the Dutch were not my responsibility and were in separate huts. When the train came in and was hidden, the Nips had their meal and left camp to sleep in the jungle as they were terrified of the bombing. They just left one Nip to guard us. My plight now was worse than ever. I was the one the Nips knew so the guard used to make me stay awake and patrol with him till the early morning till the other Japs returned to camp. If he was a decent Jap I did get a cup of tea and a cigarette. This is the time we met the Viet Cong. All dressed in black, loaded down with belts of ammunition, mess tin and water bottle. They tried to recruit us to their cause and boasted how Ho Che Ming, was going to get Singapore and even gave us names of the places they were going to in Malaya. All this information of numbers, dates and places were recorded but on release no one believed us as it might have made a difference to the Malayan Campaign or at least forewarned something was afoot.

When the daylight bombing of trains started, the Japs lined up the P.O.W.'s on the track by the train and covered them with machine guns. By this time I was going out on the flat cars with the work party in case of casualties. We would watch the bombers circle and then do a dummy run and then when we saw them come in with the bomb doors open we started running as we knew the Nips would be too, but it was a pretty close thing sometimes. One afternoon as we were returning to Wampoh (?) we got caught in an air-raid just as we were running into the sidings where they thought they were invisible, but suddenly found out that they weren't. We got off the flat cars and started running and ended up on the bank of the river and could go no further. We heard the bombs starting to drop as they came nearer and nearer. Four, then five, which was extremely close, then six, the last one came screaming down, then silence. We just got splattered with black, stinking mud as, being so close to the river and the ground so soft, the bomb just went in and didn't explode. The bombing became more frequent and much heavier and as we went out each morning to carry out repairs to track and damage we usually saw an engine as casualty. Finally we were ordered to return to Kamchanburi (?) and were extremely lucky as we were the last train over the viaduct before the R.A.F. succeeded in destroying it. From Thambiziat to Tamacan (?) we counted twelve engines crippled off the track. When we got to Tamacan (?) and limped over the hastily repaired bridge we saw the damaged ack-ack guns. When we got to Kanfchanburi (?) that evening we were refused entry, put on trucks and taken to a fresh camp where I wasn't there long enough to find out where it was or what its name was.

Tension was very high and all officers had been removed, according to rumour, because of some trouble in the Philippines. I fortunately met a R.A.M.C. pal of mine who warned me to be very careful as the Nips were very scared. There were frequent kit searches and everyone was being searched entering and leaving camp. We had arrived in the camp in the dark and had not been searched and I still had medical supplies, tins of food, etc. With his help we carefully hid my very valuable supplies and

in the morning all our kit was thoroughly searched. My stay here was short and sharp. I was in an advance party of about forty taken to Bangkok. There we were put on sampans and sailed down the river for some hours. We were taken off at some godowns - wharf sheds where we stayed for two days. Then a party of Japs arrived with trucks full of supplies and additional Jap guards. The guards reinforced our party of guards and the trucks and other Japs left. We were then lined and then told to march, which we did, cross- country for four days. The Japs who had gone ahead arranged places to stay overnight and food. We finally arrived at a small village called Nakom Nai (?) just on the outskirts of Phnom Penh, Indo-China (Cambodia). A large area of paddy fields had been taken over by the Japs and the local were busy building attap (?) huts. The following parties of P.O.W.'s were not so fortunate as the advance party. The activity at the river wharves attracted the attention of Allied planes and so the following parties were bombed. This made their march difficult as they now had wounded to carry. Our camp was quickly built up with huts and ever increasing numbers of P.O.W.'s.

We were informed they were for building the Japs third line of defence and mostly employed on building gun emplacements. As usual, I was employed in the hospital hut, and soon extremely busy with malaria, dysentery, ulcers, plus casualties from the bombing, including one foot amputation. Then we had a new disease appear unknown to us but later named Tick Typhus which we must have been aware of before the free world. Then we had some cases of black water fever.

You may have read or heard how P.O.W.'s adapted or made splints, artificial limbs, etc. from the most unusual materials and methods. I told my lads I needed some apparatus for administering Rectal Saline. Old petrol tins, thin hollow bamboo and small lengths of rubber for rectal insertion. Coarse block salt and most important of all an engineer rigged up a water distilling plant. The Saline made and in petrol tin and suspended above the bed space with continuous gravity feed and thankfully no cases were lost. I was now going down with frequent attacks of malaria caught while on the flat cars at Wampoh.(?)

We had an influx of R.A.M.C. into the camp from 18th Division Field Ambulances. One R.S.M. had been with me at Millbank in 1934. My position in the Indian Field Ambulance was the same as his in the British Field Ambulance. I said I was at the end of my tether so would he or some other R.S.M., W.O.2, S/Sgt, Sgt, etc. take over and give me a break. He said "Hang on. You are being recommended for the Meritorious (?) Service Medal." So I carried on. Fortunately it was not for long but we had a very sticky period to contend with. The camp was now completed and the area where the P.O.W.'s were was surrounded by a trench 8 feet deep and 12 feet wide and the only access was over a wooden bridge guarded by Nip soldiers. Further we now surrounded by over two thousand Japs who had come overland from China. They were in a bad state and so were their pack horses. They were very badly equipped, single barrel rifles, no motor transport, etc., and had never been engaged in conflict with any modern equipped troops. These Japs were subjected to many morale boosting parades and lengthy exhortations from Tito (Hirohito?) read out. We notice the situation was getting tense and wondered why. The locals used to bring truck- loads of vegetables into the camp each morning but were allowed no contact. They started shouting as they passed our huts "Churchill Number One, Tito Number Two." This didn't mean much to us at first, but each day Churchill was still Number One and Tito still going down. The working party had gone out and when they came back the natives were excited and noisier than ever and trying to tell them something. I said



"Any French speaking in your party?", as the French were here for years. Next morning the party went out and returned before lunch and some were quite ill and shaken. They had seen a Jap officer encouraging his men to commit Hari Kari, and showed them by example. They didn't follow his example and brought the working parties back to camp. Next day there were no working parties sent out but a lot of P.O.W.'s were set the task of cutting strips of baling wire into about 8 to 10 inch strips while others had to punch holes in either end of the cut strips. In the meantime, the Japs who had come overland now surrounded our camp in a tight square just outside our deep trench. The night, somewhere about midnight, I heard a movement in the hospital hut so went to investigate and was completely dumbfounded to find three complete strangers looking for someone in authority. He wanted to know how many prisoners there were in the camp, had we any arms and plans for escape, etc. I gave him all the details which I knew was sufficient. Then they asked for a safe place where they could operate the radio in safety. I had a space at the end of the hut where we kept the medical supplies, etc. I took them there while they called up Rangoon. My blood ran cold after all the dots and dashes were finished and the officer explained the position to me. The war was definitely over three days ago but some Japs were still resisting. Our camp was one of them. He told me that the strips of metal were for handcuffing us behind our backs and we were to be placed in our deep trench and machine guns in each corner and dispatched.

He had asked Rangoon for an air-drop of weapons but they said they had not the time to arrange it but said leave it to them, they would sort something out. Early next morning we heard the planes. Six fighter bombers arrived, circling around, then one at a time came diving down, never firing a shot. They performed to perfection, the Nips going down like corn before a combine harvester. Then they scattered, putting a few miles between themselves and our camp. Rangoon was informed the immediate danger was over. We were told to stay in our huts next day as there was going to be an air-drop. Bright and early next morning, six planes arrived and again put on a dive-bombing display to discourage the Nips from trying anything, then climbed up and into formation and circling around one at a time peeled off and dropped their cargo.

At the finish of the drop they formed up again and one plane peeled off and dropped three parachutes. The three officers, one British and two Americans, said it was the worst drop they had ever had as they never touched the ground as there was a solid mass of P.O.W.'s under them. The officer in charge, Major Artillery from Texas, a very big man, well over six feet. When he finally got to the ground, having been passed over everybody's head like at a football match, went to the raised platform from where Tito's exhortations were read from each morning, and sent for the Jap commandant, who refused to come.

The officer said "Boys, I know I have only just arrived, but could you get the Jap camp commandant for me?" The lads were only too pleased to do so and placed him on the platform in front of the Major, who asked the Nip to surrender his sword. The Nip refused. We didn't see him hit him, but suddenly he popped right up in the air and when he came down he surrendered his sword. In the meantime the bales were collected up and opened up. Clothes, food, medical supplies, etc. No time was lost by the three officers. One officer came with me around the sick to see how many vehicles would be required to evacuate them. The other officer asked the Nips for a truck and was refused. Again, I never saw what happened but he got his truck and off he went to Phnom Penh (?). Later that afternoon he returned to camp with a very good vehicle

and told the Major he had arranged a fleet of trucks to evacuate the P.O.W.'s the next day.

I was told to have a meal then pack my kit and be ready to move. After all that had happened that day I wasn't surprised by anything. About four o'clock I was told to get on the truck with my kit and found I had the whole of the truck to myself. The officer and driver got into the front and off we went, where to I hadn't the slightest notion. We really travelled hard and fast and about 11 p.m. stopped by a roadside cafe. We were given a smashing meal. The driver and the officer sat talking and smoking at another table, joined by quite a few natives. I thought they had forgotten me and where we were going. The talking seemed to go on for hours and I was tired after such a long and exciting day. However, the officer rose and said "bedtime." They moved the stove and lifted part of the cafe floor and revealed steps leading down into a very large underground room. We were with the underground movement and this was their control H.Q. beds, guns, tin hats, medical supplies, etc., ready for an uprising to support Mountbatten's invasion which now was not required.

Spent a very comfortable night there and in the morning, after a very good breakfast, we were on our way and I still wasn't aware of our destination. Late that evening we arrived in Bangkok and I was taken to the Pasteur Institute which was adjacent to the Bangkok General Hospital. The Nips had closed it down and my detail was to open it up and use it as the centre for the evacuation of sick P.O.W.'s to Rangoon from Thailand and elsewhere. The following morning, to my delight I found the officer in charge to be Major De Soldenhof. Conditions here were marvellous to what we had been used to for the last 3½ years. Electric light, hot water, clean linen, dressings, medicine straight from the dispensary, good food and diets as required.

This must have been about 22 August 1945. A large paddy field near the hospital as possible was cleared as a landing ground for the Dakotas flying in from Rangoon. They flew two sorties a day if the weather permitted as this was monsoon time. Evacuation went steadily ahead and the numbers decreased till we had only two or three plane loads of minor sick and seven stretcher cases. I was told they were to be flown out next day to Rangoon in specially adapted aircraft and I was to escort them. The plane came and the stretchers loaded and off we went.

The R.A.F. lads were marvellous during this time. During the evacuation when we were short of stretchers and the planes were too far away for the walking wounded they just joined hands and carried them out. They had an R.A.F. medical orderly on the plane with me, and when we had settled the stretchers he asked had I been on the Railway. I said yes. He disappeared into the cockpit and when he returned said "Go up front. They will show you the Railway from the air." We picked it up at Bampong (?) - Tamacan (?), Kinsiok (?) - Wampoh (?). I said I came over the viaduct the day before it was blown up. He said "Our squadron did it." They had tried aerial bombing but couldn't get on target. Special aerial torpedoes were made with 16-foot steel probes on the nose and fired horizontally and that was how it was done.

Further up came Thambigiat (?) and other camps. Then the navigator said we were coming up to Three Pagoda Pass. I said I had not been up that far because so much damage had been done to tracks below this point. We did not have any rails left and it was repaired from Moulmein. He said "Do you want to have a look at it?" I said "Yes, please." As you are probably aware, the Dakotas have Perspex cowling and seconds I was nose diving towards Three Pagoda Pass and I was terrified. The crew realised this and straightened out the plane then gave me some brandy out of the medical pannier.

The rest of the journey was uneventful and we arrived in Rangoon. The stretchers were taken off the plane and I was handed over to the Red Cross. After all my details were taken we were handed all the luxuries we had been missing: soap, mirror, razor and blades, face cloth, tooth brush and tooth paste, comb, writing paper, pen, etc.

I was then taken to a transit camp, kitted up in uniform and T.A.B. and other injections brought up to date. Declared fit from infectious diseases and told there was a boat to India in three or four days' time. Great excitement as four days later 7 a.m. we were taken to the docks for embarkation. There were about two to three hundred Indian soldiers on the docks and I moved forward to speak to them to see if any of my unit was there amongst them. I was abruptly stopped and suddenly realised they were under guard. We were told these were deserters who had gone over to the Japs just before the fall of Singapore and formed under Chandra Bhowe (?) a unit called Chandra Bhowe Indian Freedom Fighters.

There was a conference between naval and army personnel and we were told they were going back to India to face Courts Martial. They would not let us travel on the same boat as they had not enough guards to keep us apart and as there were only twenty of us we had to wait. So back on the trucks to the transit camp very despondent. We had to wait three weeks for a boat and it seemed ages.

Finally we embarked and I was asked to run the ship's hospital, which I gladly did. We arrived at Madras and I saw the sick off to hospital. I was the only R.A.M.C. on board and was taken straight to a transit camp. More medicals, jabs, etc., and army kit brought up to standard. Then after four days was put in charge of a party of 28 R.A.M.C. who had enrolled in India and put in a train for R.A.M.C. H.Q. Deolali (?).

Now, I thought my trouble will soon be over. After a 36 hour train journey we arrived at the depot, were paraded, nominal roll call called and inspected by a Major R.A.M.C. We looked at each other and he said "Where have we met before?" and I said "Military Hospital, Shorncliffe in 1935" where he was then R.S.M. He asked me where I had been and I told him and he said "You'll be on leave in twenty- four hours." How wrong he was. We were told to parade outside the Orderly Room at 10 a.m. the following morning. This we did and took our places in front of a tier of clerks, about a dozen in three tiers with the chief clerk sitting elevated at the back. I had the misfortune to pick a young lance corporal. He asked me if I had been in the depot before. I said "Yes, in 1936." He said "You are a liar. The depot wasn't open then." He then started abusing me saying "I suppose you are not even a sergeant! Have you deserted and said you are a medical to get out of the fighting?", etc., etc. I was so flabbergasted I couldn't get a word out. I had never experienced anything like this before, especially in my own H.Q. and my own people. He took my silence as proof he was right and carried on being extremely rude and abusive. He carried on such a tirade that the chief clerk came down from the back to see what the trouble was. The lance corporal repeated his ideas to the chief clerk who said to me "When were you in the depot before?" I said "February 1936." He then said to the lance corporal "I told you before that there are senior soldiers who were unaccounted for, and all their details are in that special box over there." Off went the lance corporal and returned with my record card. He then went off the deep end again, saying how right he was, I was only a lance corporal. He was so belligerent that the chief clerk had to come down again. He examined the card and said "This only goes up to 1938." There are some more cards which were finally found and I was at last legitimate. More medical and kit checks, informed to parade at 10 a.m. each morning outside the Orderly Room for orders. We kept parading each morning, the numbers getting less and less till I was on my own, being told my leave

pass and documents weren't ready. I kept looking for the Major I had seen when I first arrived but couldn't find him anywhere. I kept parading each morning being told documents and passes not ready. The I read on Part I Orders that I was to parade at 2 p.m. at the Educational Hut to sit an Operating theatre Technician Examination. Army Instructions (?) state that all prisoners who had been in captivity for more than six months must be trade tested to see if they are fit to receive their specialist pay. I reported at the given time and the examiner sent the bearer for tea and cakes. I thought "This is going to be a long session!" When the tea and cakes arrived the examiner locked the door and said "Having read your records, it is ridiculous for me to trade list you, especially having read your frontier record. You tell me about the Railway." And that is how I passed my Trade Test.

A note in passing: the syllabus was changed in 1952 to appease the trade unions, so I took the exam again although I was now a W.O.I and didn't have to, but to satisfy myself, and I'm glad to say I passed. I still paraded each morning and the parade got less and less till finally one morning I was the only one left. Then, parading on my own, the Major walked by and passing me went into the Orderly Room, stopped and came out to see me saying "You still here?" He called the chief clerk to find out why. The chief clerk said my leave pass for 56 days leave was ready and so was my rail warrant. "What's the hold up?" Evidently, pay. They drew money once a week from the bank in Nasik (?) City Bank of India about twelve miles and there was not enough money left in the safe to pay me. The Major said if I wasn't on Deccan Queen that day heads would roll. A truck hastily set off for the bank. I quickly packed my kit. The chief clerk rang the railway transport officer to hold the train till I got there. I arrived at Kalyan (?) Junction and the train was at the platform. I ran and went to get in the last carriage but was stopped by a military policeman who said I couldn't travel on the Express but had to wait for the slow train. Then an officer came up, the R.T.O. and said "Are you the R.A.P.W.I.?" I said I didn't know what it stood for. He said "Let me see your pass."

I had put it in my pocket in a hurry and hadn't looked at it. He took it from me and unfolded it and, sure enough, on top of the pass in large red letters was "R.A.P.W.I." He said "That stands for 'Released Allied Prisoner of War and Internees'." The situation changed dramatically. A railway coolie was called to carry my kit and the R.T.O. escorted me right up to the train to a First Class compartment.

He then instructed the conductor to look after me and see that I got safely out at Poona. Arriving at Poona I was soon in a taxi proceeding to Lower Hospital Road where I had left my wife in 1940, who now had a daughter I had not seen. About sixty yards from the house I saw two little boys and a little girl playing, and swings hung from the branches of a large Banyan tree. I stopped the taxi and went over to them and said to the little girl "Is your name Jennifer?" She said "Yes." And I said "I am your Daddy." I was dressed in tropical green uniform, Australian slouch hat, and yellow from malaria. She started at my feet and slowly looked at me all the way up, and in a very disappointed voice said "Oh!" I said "Where is your mummy?" and she said "In home." So off we went, the two boys as well, went inside and sat on the settee, my daughter in the middle, my wife and I at either end.

The ayah came and offered her salaams and said "Char, is it?" While we were waiting for the tea with restrained conversation the little boys hopped on each end of the settee, one with his arm around my neck, the other with his arm around my wife's neck. I ascertained their names were Christopher and Anthony. While we were waiting for a boat to India in the Rangoon Transit Camp, letters were arriving from England

telling us of the first arrivals home coming (?) and news. Many had found their marriages broken up, wives who had remarried when their husbands had been reported 'missing, presumably dead'. Others had had children by other men So my thoughts were quite disturbing hearing my wife saying to the boys "Christopher, dear," and "Anthony, dear". However, before I had time to worry about it, I heard an ayah calling out in Hindustani to Anja Bhai (?), our ayah "Are my two baba's there?" What a relief!

I arrive home on 31st October 1945 and V.J. Day was 15th August 1945, which was exactly eleven days before my daughter's 5th birthday. Freedom had been something we had looked forward to and imagined for three and a half years. What we would do, what we would eat, where we would go, etc. It wasn't at all like that. Here were now cigarettes in the boxes on the table but you caught yourself pinching one when no-one was about and hiding while you smoked. It was difficult to laugh or sing or even whistle as the punishment meted out for such lapses as a P.O.W. was still present in your mind. Little things sent you shaking from head to foot. Planes overhead. Is it one of ours? Where's the nearest cover? Etc. One of the biggest and heart twisting problems was the queue of British fathers and mothers arriving and asking if I had any news of their sons who were still missing. Certainly I had, but you couldn't tell a grieving father you saw a tank deliberately driven over his son in fox-hole, or fire point-blank into a Regimental Aid Post. Fortunately, there were instances when I could give good news. One mother came and asked saying she was Mrs So- and-so. Sorry, the name didn't mean a thing. When my wife said "I wished you could have helped Dorothy Stewart," I said "That wasn't the name she gave me." My wife said "No, she remarried." I said "Yes, if her son was in the Argyles, he is in the Military Hospital in Madras, suffering from malaria." He was in the hospital in the boat I came from Rangoon on and I sent him there. Happy reunion had (?) at Christmas. He piped for the guests.

So the daily life carried on, but having been conditioned over three and a half years to a rigorous deprivation, it was very difficult to adjust. There was no counselling or advice centres at that time, and some ex-P.O.W.'s suffered from excesses of food and drink not realising the body had to adjust as well as the mind, with serious results, some tragic, especially having gone through so much to end their lives like this. Slowly rehabilitating, my leave period ebbed away and I returned to R.A.M.C. Deolali (?) for instructions. Having been overseas for 9 years and 10 months, everyone assured me I was on my way home as soon as possible. My interview with a Lt. Colonel wasn't at all pleasant. I was informed I could be back in England in 48 hours but my services were required in India. The choice was mine, but with a proviso. If I chose England, I should be shirking my responsibility as a regular soldier and would be given an adverse Confidential Report. I was marched out and given time to make my mind up. The chief clerk was a pillar of strength to me at this time, as I was pretty well shattered and very upset at this turn of events. However, he explained to me the plan was to join Military Hospital, Poona and No. 3 British General Hospital together to become the evacuation hospital for all the military patients from India. Therefore I was needed because of my experience, knowledge of the language and conditions of India. So, I stayed, and took over this most challenging task. Having been with an Indian Unit since 1940 I was five years behind in Army Rules and Regulations which became a night-time study for me. I now had, as a W.O.I, the responsibility of 1250 general beds (medical and surgical), a 300 bed Psychiatry Unit, a 150 bed Isolation Unit, and a 90 bed Family Hospital.

The Units were spread far and wide and a 15-cwt truck was used to do Commanding Officer's Inspection, 11 a.m. to 1.30 p.m., Monday to Friday, to cover all wards and units. After I had been there a month, the chief clerk from Deolah (?) H.Q. came to see how I was coping. Evidently, he was pleased with what he saw. Then he told me the officer who interviewed me had been moved. Evidently, there was a shortage of R.A.M.C. officers and had recruited officers from non-medical units for administrative posts, an experiment that hadn't been very satisfactory. During the latter months of 1946, a series of incidents occurred which, when connected together, proved to be very significant. First, the Matron informed me that one of the nursing orderlies from the last batch of reinforcements from England was absolutely useless to her, and would I change him. This I did after questioning him about his attitude on the wards. Said he didn't like inside work, had worked on the Council in Liverpool. I took him to my Staff and put him charge of a 20-strong Indian Sanitation Squad. He paraded at 7.30 each morning and I gave him details of blocked drains, oil spraying as malaria prevention, testing fire hydrants, etc. Then again the Matron sent for me and complained about the state of the hospital linen as it came back from the Dhobi Ghats (?). The procedure was that so much soap was issued for so many pounds of dirty linen. When I saw the state of the returned linen I was horrified. It was still blood stained and filthy. I hot-footed through the grounds to sort out the head Dhobi, and I saw my sanitary man talking to an Indian who I knew was not English-speaking. As I passed behind them, I heard my man use a colloquial phrase of Hindustani he could not have picked up in the short time he had been in India. I didn't stop but hurried to the Dhobi Ghat [laundry]. It slipped from my mind to ask him where he had learnt the native language. Also, very few people were aware that I had knowledge of it. The next occurrence was the arrival of a big, black saloon car with shaded windows, and three officers disappeared quickly into the C.O.'s office. A few minutes later my buzzer went, which was the signal that the C O. wanted me. I went into the C.O.'s office and he told me the officers were from G.S.O.3. They were enquiring if there were any signs of subversive activities in the area or in the hospital itself. The Colonel said if anybody would know it would be me. I said I hadn't noticed anything unusual and we still had visits from the Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah Witnesses. When they left the regimental police went around removing their propaganda and pacifist leaflets they used to leave in the latrines and wash houses. I was told they were aware that something was going on in the area of a serious nature. If anything of significance occurred, the C O. had a special number to ring. I went back to my office and put my mind to work. Suddenly I thought of the phrase of Hindustani used by my Sanitation Squad man. How was I to find out without putting him on his guard where he had learnt it. Still puzzling what to do, I went home and, after the evening meal, I sat reading when my wife came to me and said Ansah Bhai (?), our ayah, wanted me to have a talk with her son Bikin (?).

He was an apprentice with the Military Engineering Service. He had been attending night school ready to take his exams, but now refused to go. I saw Bikin (?) as a little boy in 1940 before I went to Malaya, and he trusted me. He told me he was afraid to go back to night school as men were taking the students by force some way out of Poona and teaching them rifle and machine-gun drill. They were getting ready for the day when the British left. Mountbatten was rumoured to be arriving for the hand-over. Next morning I carried on as usual, still pondering what to do. In the afternoon I sent for my sergeant of the Regimental Police and asked him if he had an intelligent member of his staff who could be trusted to be very discreet. He said "Yes." I arranged for the chosen soldier to be in my office 7.45 next morning. The Orderly Sergeant's

Office was just behind mine with a sliding glass window in between. I placed the soldier behind the window so he could look in my office but not be seen. I instructed him when I called for the Sanitation Unit he was to memorize the man. When I had finished all interviews I called him into my office and said "Will you recognise him anywhere?" He replied in the affirmative. I then said "You are relieved of all regimental duties. Responsible only to me. You may wear civilian clothes. What you have been told you are not to disclose to anyone or what in due course you may see or hear. Remember, you are bound to silence. Do you understand what I have said?" He replied "Yes, sir." "Then, this is your brief. The man you have just seen. I want to know what he does, where he goes, who he sees, etc. Twenty-four hours a day. When you feel you have something important, report to me in the hospital during working hours, or at my bungalow at any other time."

In a short time a pattern developed. Having received his instructions from me at 8 a.m. the soldier gave his detail out to his Indian squad and about 10 a.m. took his bicycle and rode into Poona. His destination was the Poona Coffee House, notorious for the clientele who used it. Here he would converse with the Indians, two certain men in particular. The policeman reported back daily at the hospital till early one evening he arrived at my quarters to tell me my Sanitary man had gone into Poona City with these two men and should he follow? I said "No. Poona City, you know, is out of bounds to British soldiers. You are to continue your usual routine but don't ever go out of bounds."

The following morning I reported to the C O. and said I could go no further if the suspect was going to frequent the City area. The C.O. rang G.H.S.O.3 and reported the incident. That afternoon I received a request from the West African Rifles for two sergeants to have a crash course of Medical Inspection Room Duties. Also, could I adjust their hours of duty so that they were not both on duty at the same time and make their duties as lenient as I could as they were standing by to proceed to Malaya. Next morning, two sergeants, dressed as West African Rifles, arrived and were given their details. I knew I had seen them before.

However, I gave the Orderly Sergeant to take them to the M.I.R. and sort out their duties. Three days later the sergeants came to me and asked permission to return to their unit as the course wasn't really what they wanted. They returned to their unit that afternoon. The following a.m., while I was detailing the usual duties, and before I got to the Sanitation Squad, the large, black limousine drove up and slowly circulating while two officers jumped out, up the steps and my man was whisked into the car and away before anyone realised what had happened. They weren't dressed as sergeants this time. For a few days we recorded a soldier absent without leave. From Embarkations (?) Bombay we received instructions to pack this man's kit and send it to them. One morning, nearly two months later, while I was giving my daily report to the C.O., he said "Now you have finished, would you like to hear the story of the man we had sent away?" I, of course, said "Yes please, Sir!"

It was revealed he was a card-carrying member of the Communist Party, recruited and taught Urdu in Liverpool and his passage to India and contacts made for him from there. It was known he was serving a prison sentence but what the charges were we were never informed. Meanwhile, evacuation of the patients continued apace. Mountbatten out in India with his instructions and tension between the Muslims and Hindus increased dramatically. In the hospital grounds we had the medical stores for the whole of the Southern Command, which was under 24-hour armed guard. As the situation developed into clashes and riots, the guard was withdrawn to re-join their

regiment. My instructions now if any threatened trouble occurred in the hospital area all families to be marshalled into a block and protected. As far as possible safeguard operating theatre, X-ray and all other medical, dental and Eye Departments. Guard the medical stores as well. As we were deemed non-combatant, we were issued with twenty pick handles. Fortunately, no harm came to us and when it threatened a few quiet words usually diffused the situation.

On Indian Independence Day we were told to be quiet and stay in our quarters but as far as I was concerned the Indian would have it otherwise. My wife, daughter and I were invited to celebrations in what, a few days before, had been my warrant officers and sergeants mess. Now an Indian establishment. We were wined and dined sumptuously. I had now completed my task. 3 B.G.H. now disbanded, the hospital in Poona reduced to its pre-war strength of 250 beds.

In November 1947 I sailed home to England, arriving in Southampton. We had been instructed to carefully make lists of the contents of our suitcases and boxes which I carefully had done. When I was called in my turn to the trestle table where the Customs officer was sitting, he invited me to sit down. He said "When did you go overseas, soldier?" I said "1936." He said "Don't you mean 1946?" I said "No. 1936. February. It is written in my Part One Pay Book." He immediately rose from his chair, came round the table and put his mark on all my boxes, just saying "On your way." The fastest I've ever been through Customs. Quickly on a train and off to Folkestone in Kent to an army transit centre. Identity card, ration books, clothing coupons, etc. All things we were not very aware of and found difficult to work out at first as also indeed was the money.

We soon settled back into life in England. My daughter, excited by everything she saw, especially so many English people. Postings and railway warrants arrived, destination Glasgow. Night train from Euston on 5th November 1947 to see an unfolding scene of bonfires and fireworks all the way up England, arriving early morning and taken to an army hostel. Here, my daughter said "Daddy, what is this white stuff?" Having gone abroad 27th February 1936 and officially posted back to England on 10th November 1947, having served 11 years and 9 months in areas of excessive heat, with typical army efficiency I was home surrounded by a foot of snow.

Those of you who have had the time and patience to read through these pages may think the P.O.W. life didn't sound too bad. You arrived back safely, so what is all the fuss about? It cannot be understood by anyone who has not lost his complete freedom. Herded like animals at gun point by unpredictable Japs. What you did or said one day was permissible. Another day the same thing resulted in a beating, probably death. Deprived of identity, not allowed to sing, whistle or laugh, factors which could have kept your spirits up. Not only underfed, you were also half starved, overworked which resulted in lowering physical conditions which allowed tropical diseases to rampage. The Japs were terrified of cholera and amoebic dysentery. Any cholera cases in several camps were made to be carried out of camp to die. When we went out to attend to them, they thought we were mad and ugly scenes developed as they tried to stop the caring ones coming back into camp. Malaria continuously debilitating, ulcers eating away flesh ever enlarging. Beriberi, wet and dry. Wet beriberi the sufferers drowned in their own fluid. Having served with a lot of regiments in India now P.O.W.'s. Knowing them as footballing, hockey, tennis playing pals on Christian names. When you told them to put their arms around your neck so you could lift them up to a sitting position to ease their breathing and they said to you "Bill, isn't there anything you can do?" The hate used to well up. Any sign of dissension or anger was



a sign for a brutal onslaught by the guards resulting in terrific results in pain, bruises, and sometimes broken limbs. One poor P.O.W. was so badly beaten up, I couldn't recognise him till he spoke. Those who had the courage and will to survive fared best. Whether it was courage, faith or just determination not to let the Japs get them down, I'll never be sure. It might have been the hope to see England, or whatever their home country was, and their loved ones again that kept them going. Whenever they lost that spark they faded and literally gave up and died. However you try to describe the horrific nature of P.O.W. life you'll never succeed in getting it on paper, try as you might.

In my own case, it has taken me nearly 50 years to attempt it, although I was one of the most fortunate of individuals. My training in India, the refusal (?) of others higher ranked and better qualified resulted in me having a protection (?) against any harsh treatment. Removal from the fated Japan Party. Shielded by the Radio personnel (?), running the right way at the bombing raid at Wampoh, and many other instances kept my hope and faith alive. You must realise that in 3½ years of P.O.W. life I have only recorded the highlights, but there is much more besides that will never be told or probably not believed. After all the brutality of the Japs to meet callous and despicable treatment by ex-P.O.W.'s by our own people was the last straw, completely disturbing and shattering.

While in the Pasteur Institute in Bangkok, collecting and evacuating sick P.O.W.'s, four individuals, dressed in khaki suits, but with no insignia, came into the wards and questioning the sick about atrocities by the Japs. They said that the P.O.W.'s must give at least three incidents, with dates, names of Japs, and the camp they were in at the time. When they were told they couldn't remember dates and certainly didn't know the names of the Japanese guards, their attitude became very offensive and threatening. I stepped in to intervene but was soon brushed aside with contempt. How, on earth, they expected dates, or even Jap names, was beyond me. I told them so and said the Japs had our Nominal Roll but we did not have theirs, but we had names for certain guards, so go out and look for the "Undertaker", so called as everyone he beat up died. There was the "Silver Bullet" who lost his temper so quickly that he hit you and knocked you out before you even knew the reason. There was also "Christian Charlie", a name he gave himself. The Japs were issued with two pairs of boots, one leather and one rubber, so he changed his leather boots for his rubber ones, proclaiming as he kicked a man to death it didn't hurt as much which showed he was a real Christian. When a Red Cross member came in later, I asked him who these men were. He replied "Legal Branch, just out from England, trying to get famous by arranging another Nuremburg", which at that time didn't mean a thing to me. The Red Cross man summed it up when he said "Pity them, they have never heard a shot fired in anger, and they will never grow up till they do."

I fear I have rambled on too long but at last, having got it down, a weight seems to be lifted off my mind although it vividly brought back painful memories and disturbed, sleepless nights. Whatever may be said about time healing and forgetting, it may be so, but there are some things, although temporarily forgotten, will never, never be forgiven.

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- <sup>i</sup> Mirza Ali Khan (Urdu/Pashto: خان علی مرزا; born 1897, died 1960), known as the Faqir of Ipi, was a Pashtun from today's North-Waziristan Pakistan, Federally Administrated Tribal Areas. His followers addressed him as 'Haji Sahib' (or Respected Pilgrim). The village of Ipi is located near Mirali Camp in North Waziristan Agency, Waziristan, from where the Faqir of Ipi started his guerrilla warfare against the British Empire throughout the 1930s and 1940s until the British departure in 1947.
- <sup>ii</sup> Now a region of Pakistan. Also known as the North-West Frontier Province
- <sup>iii</sup> The fall of Singapore February 1942.
- <sup>iv</sup> Subhas Chandra Bose (Bengali: [Subhas Chandra Bose] ( listen); 23 January 1897 – 18 August 1945[1][a]), was an Indian nationalist whose defiant patriotism made him a hero in India, but whose attempt during World War II to rid India of British rule with the help of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan left a troubled legacy.
- <sup>v</sup> Changi Prison. It became infamous as a Japanese prisoner of war camp during the occupation of Singapore in World War II.
- <sup>vi</sup> During the Second World War, Nong Pladuk Junction became the start of the Death Railway, which ended Thanbyuzayat in Burma. The construction of the railway was coordinated by the Imperial Japanese Army, whom of which was permitted to build due to an armistice signed with Thailand. The construction was started in Thailand in November 1942.