

OUT IN THE CRUEL WORLD

Mrs Greenish had been given the job of escorting the two of us into Pinjarra to catch the morning train to Perth where she would buy the tickets for our afternoon train journey to Gnowangerup. Having the companionship of my mate, Bill Tatchell, helped to lessen my feeling of apprehension that surfaced the moment our utility shuddered over the cattle-pit exit from the Farm School. Bill was going to a farm on the opposite side of our strange-sounding new town. Squatting on makeshift seats on the back of the 'ute', my eyes rested on the cheap new case that lay at my feet. Never in my life had I possessed such a volume of wealth. Over the past five years a tiny wooden locker had been more than adequate to hold the few personal items that I had managed to accumulate. Now, with a suitcase full of clothes and looking uniquely smart in my new suit, a sudden feeling of confidence surged to overcome the apprehension. A few moments of reflection had been enough to realise that I had a very good reason to feel this way because every item of clothing that lay in the case had been a gift from the Fairbridge Farm School. Watching the village growing increasingly distant as we chugged along the dirt road, reminded me of the countless times I had marched bare-footed along this straight stretch of track, my trombone shattering the peace of the paddocks with the raucous tones of the one and only march in our repertoire, 'When Jesus Comes'. But the marching practice had taken up only a small part of my musical education. I spent some time reflecting on the Sunday pre-dinner performances outside the main dining hall to the obvious delight of the waiting children; the Christmas-eve tour of the village, pausing at each intersection long enough to play a selection of carols as we huddled close to see our music by the pale light from the overhead solitary globe; and the most rewarding memory of all, the many times we played to audiences in the neighbouring towns of Pinjarra and Mandurah. I smiled smugly at the opportunities that some of us Pommy kids of Fairbridge had over the 'outside' children. But amongst all my positive thoughts, I couldn't help but spend a few moments wondering if I would ever play a trombone again.

At that early stage, there was certainly nothing to indicate that my interest in music would shortly take me on an incredible journey involving deprivation, hardship and life-threatening situations that would reshape and influence the rest of my life.

When we left the two-kilometre bumpy track behind and turned into the main South-West highway for a further three-kilometre run into Pinjarra to catch the train to Perth from where I would venture out into the bowels of this mysterious vast country, a powerful feeling of apprehension gnawed away inside me at the thought of this strange new adventure that was overtaking me. So when our former compassionate cottage mother gave us a rare hug before waving us away on our journey, I somehow knew that it was likely to be the last mothering I could ever expect to receive.

After a long and tedious trip, necessitating a change of trains at Katanning, we arrived at Gnowangerup late on the following morning to be whisked away by a family member of our respective employers. After wishing Bill Tatchell 'all the best' for his future, I was greeted by a swarthy, good-looking young man who introduced himself as Edward House, before stowing my case into the dickie-seat of a nifty-looking Hillman-Minx tourer. Edward drove into the town's main street, parking outside the newsagency to pick up a copy of the *Daily News* that had obviously arrived on the same train as we had. He climbed back into the driving seat and spent a few moments studying the front page of the paper before handing it on to me with a brief comment, 'There's going to be a war, Jack.' The bold headline read 'Munich Crisis.' The date was 25 September 1938.

A couple of kilometres along a gravelled road Edward did a right turn through the entrance gate into his father's property of 'Eugenup'. A further couple of kilometres along a track brought us to the homestead where I was introduced to his parents, Mr Monty House, a small compact person with a greyish moustache and a tallish well-built woman

with a kindly intelligent face. Edward showed me into a nearby small brick cottage which would be my future home, before inviting me to come into the main homestead where I would be given a meal. I was then shown into a small room adjoining the kitchen which was obviously the employees' dining room, and not having eaten a good meal since leaving Perth, I was more than ready to get stuck into the fresh bread with lashings of jam, cream and cheese that was on offer.

Any notions that I may have had about having the rest of the day off to settle into my new living quarters was quickly resolved when, after lunch, Mr House invited me to change into my working clothes and join him in his garden. Then after a couple of hours of digging and weeding, it was time to be shown the workload that was to be my constant routine for the rest of my days at 'Eugenup'.

Collecting the eggs was first on the list, but was no simple matter, simply because the large number of chooks had access to every building and shed that comprises an average farming complex. Of necessity, the fowls had to be securely locked away for the nights, but during the daylight hours they scratched and wandered and laid their eggs in any place they chose. Yet despite this potential problem, Mr House knew precisely where to find the nests. He scrambled into machinery sheds, storerooms, stables and on the roof of the pigpens, collecting clusters of eggs from the most unlikely places, explaining as we went, the necessity to always keep a watchful eye out in every nook and cranny we invaded, for the possibility of his feathered friends deciding to establish a new nesting spot.. This then, was my initiation to the term 'free range.' I was also advised that the dozen or so turkeys were no problem to look after as they avoided the foxes by roosting high in the trees at night.

With the energetic egg-collecting task out of the way, there was still the job of milking the three cows to do before I could knock off for the day. This gave me the opportunity to take it easy, especially as these friendly beasts always turned up on time for their tasty snack while being milked. The routine then was to take the milk up to the homestead where Mrs House would hold the piece of cheesecloth through which the milk was strained into another bucket. Now I could go to my own little cottage to get cleaned up for the evening meal.

By this time, the teamster had finished for the day and welcomed me into the cottage. He introduced himself as Len Hunt and seemed obviously pleased to have some company. The same went for me too because I needed him to 'show me the ropes'. When I had changed my clothes earlier in the day, I had noticed that the accommodation on offer was far from being palatial. With only two small rooms to the cottage, one with a fireplace and the other with two single beds, I took the positive view that I wouldn't be burdened with a lot of housework. Between the beds and against the wall, was the only other item that, with a generous degree of imagination, could be placed in the category of furniture. Two wooden boxes placed five feet apart supported a plank on which rested a small table-wireless and a hurricane lamp. A discoloured slither of newspaper covering the plank was the only evidence of décor in the entire place, and with no sign of wardrobes or cupboards, it seemed the only spot for my case was upon the floor.

Len offered me the use of a small enamel bowl with the advice that I could use it to have a wash from water in the 1000-gallon tank outside. This I did, and after tidying myself, he took me up into the homestead for our evening meal. For the past five years at Fairbridge, my modest main meal had been dinner at midday, so it was a surprise to find that from now on, out in the real world, dinner was taken in the evening. On that very first night at Gnowangerup, I happily tucked in to the best hot meal I had had since arriving in Western Australia. Not only was there a dessert to follow, but there was also home-baked bread with jam and cream to be had if I was still hungry. To a growing 15-year-old lad, this was a delight beyond my wildest expectations and I couldn't help congratulating myself at being sent to such a wonderful place. However, the exhilaration cooled a bit when I

discovered there was a price to pay for it all. I had to help with the washing up.

Further surprises awaited me when I returned to the cottage. The only light available came from the old hurricane lamp, and it seemed that sheets were a luxury of the past. From that night on, I learnt to sleep only with blankets, and scruffy ones at that. And after talking things over with my new companion, Len, I discovered there were further adjustments to be made if I was to survive the rigours of this unpredictable outside world. For starters, daily baths or showers were a thing of the past. A once-weekly bath could be had by heating a four-gallon tin of water in the fireplace of the other room to wallow in an old tin tub thoughtfully provided by our employer. Not so thoughtful, however, was his failure to provide even the most basic of toilet facilities. From now on I was obliged to perform this essential human function in a distant sanctuary adjacent to the pigsty. Just as well, I mused, as the pigs accompanied me in a grunting session, that our Fairbridge Principal had advised us to work hard at whatever situation arose because there still existed a world-wide depression that affected even farmers, which made jobs increasingly difficult to find. However, later that first night clad in my new pyjamas as I shuffled in between an assortment of rough blankets to spend a brief period of reflection before surrendering to a much needed sleep, weighing the pluses and minuses of the Monty House farm, I reached an arguable conclusion that Mrs House's culinary expertise proved to be the close deciding factor in favour of the pluses.

At six o'clock the next morning I was up and dressed and ready to face the challenge of a new chapter in my life. My Fairbridge training had already taught me that cows had to be milked twice a day, so it came as no surprise when my instructions were to start the morning milking at six am. Having been previously accustomed to a five am start, I found the extra hour in bed very acceptable, particularly as the late September days were now lengthening. A further incentive to get through the milking quickly was the anticipation of what surprises awaited me at breakfast. As a senior boy at Fairbridge I had been accustomed to a wheatmeal porridge and a small rissole to supplement the usual bread with dripping and jam. I soon found there could be no grounds for complaint with the fare Mrs. House had to offer. For starters there was the customary porridge, but made vastly more appetizing with lashings of hot milk and sugar. What followed was a feast to be savoured only in dreams. I found myself seated at a table, staring at a sizeable plate filled with bacon, sausages and fried eggs, all steaming hot. Furthermore, I could add to this by toasting as many slices of bread as I wished, to be saturated with unlimited amounts of butter and marmalade. To a growing lad not yet 16 years of age, who had spent his last six years in institutional frugality, this was indeed the ultimate in living.

'Eugenup' was a moderately sized mixed farm which included pedigree merino sheep and a variety of cereal crops such as wheat, oats and barley. In addition Mr House specialized in growing a sizeable acreage of field peas which required special harvesting treatment. Because the peas grew close to the ground, a special adjustable front with metal fingers skimmed the earth while the revolving beaters swept the plants into the machine where the dried peas were directed into the holding bin with the residue being discharged to the rear of the header.

For the next few months my work took on a predictable routine. Apart from the milking and egg collecting, my duties took me all over the 1000-acre property helping Mr House in the various jobs that inevitably occur with the running a successful farm. Rabbits are always a problem for farmers and I spent some days getting more than my share of exercise filling in rabbit holes as Mr House pumped poison into the burrows. As he pumped away from one hole, I had to wield the spade to seal the hole from where the escaping gas emerged. There were days too spent in the saddle of a sturdy pony as we inspected the various mobs of sheep. This task grew more important as the weather warmed with the approaching summer. Fly-blown sheep had to be penned for crutching and treatment to the affected parts. Although certain jobs had to be repeated at varying

intervals, there were numerous other tasks that cropped up from time to time that guaranteed life never became boring. Weather conditions, particularly, could inflict sudden chaos, requiring immediate attention if serious problems were to be avoided.

I well remember my first experience after a lengthy torrential downpour sent minor rivers of flood-water surging down gulleys, gathering piles of driftwood that built up against the fences until sheer force of water swept all before it. Here again, my diminutive resolute boss, in his unhurried patient style, directed me in the skills of fence repairing, so that by the end of the day, safety and security had been restored to the paddocks. On other occasions, correcting the forces of nature didn't always end so pleasantly. All farms have their pet animals in addition to the invaluable working kelpies. Mr House's pet ponies, Honey and Treacle, had long since reached the end of their usefulness, after which they had been given their freedom to roam selected paddocks at will. Every time I happened to be riding in their vicinity, I always rode up close to exchange a friendly word or two. Until one day I noticed that Treacle seemed in deep distress with its head down low. I dismounted to make a closer examination and when I opened its mouth, I was confronted with a terrible smell. The poor animal was obviously in a bad way, so I galloped straight back to the homestead with the bad news. Mr. House listened with his customary patient manner, but I somehow detected an unfamiliar trace of concern as he placed his powerful rifle in the ute and followed me back to the stricken pony. Mr. House took only a few seconds to arrive at a diagnosis. 'It's a snake bite, Jack,' he said solemnly. 'I'll have to put him out of his agony.' With that, he positioned his rifle and shot him in the forehead. Then he drove away leaving me instructions to pile driftwood over the body and cremate it. Of all the numerous tasks I encountered during my years on the farm, that was my most distasteful.

Balancing the emotional ledger though, was the ongoing saga of learning about my recently discovered family, the initial shock having hit me during my last days at Fairbridge. The first letter had come from my grandmother and had left me totally confused by the fact that for nearly 16 years, the closest members of my family, knowing that I had been put into Dr Barnardo's as a baby and subsequently sent out to Australia, had none of them contacted me. My first reaction had been one of sheer delight, but when I had time to digest the situation, my enthusiasm ebbed with the realisation that, in effect, I had been abandoned as a two-year-old. This had left me confused with mixed emotions so I had gone to the Principal for advice, taking the fateful letter with me for him to read. His advice was that although it seemed genuine enough, I should show some reserve in my reply. Then, with my permission, he would read their answering letter in order to advise me further. I agreed to this. Subsequently, events developed in that order with the result that I accepted my new-found family confident in the knowledge that they wanted to atone for their past silence.

In the past, we children at Fairbridge had been shielded from the economic reality of the outside world, so we had no knowledge of the terrible depression years. Jobs were scarce...and we were strongly advised to hold on to them. We were a generation of conformists, and as such, we accepted our living conditions without question. We had also been brought up to respect our elders and to address them politely. To answer back or give cheek to an adult was unthinkable. So despite the fact that we were well-trained farm boys, we accepted as normal that our starting weekly wage was a meagre 12s 6d (one dollar and 25 cents). But it didn't stop there. All employers had to sign an agreement to send half of our wage back to Fairbridge where it was banked and held in trust for us until we reached the age of 21, that being the accepted age of maturity in those times. The idea had merit of course, the reason being that from that age, we were deemed to have reached adulthood, so the money that had been saved would help us survive the foray into a cruel world.

Meanwhile, life at the farm went along with very little to disrupt the routine. Even on

Sundays, when I was entitled to have a day off, I still had the three cows to milk morning and evening. That was until my teamster friend Len, advised me to go into the town on Sundays to get right away from the place. He even lent me his bicycle to save me the long walk. This development led me to meet a group of young people who invited me to join them in attending the local Baptist church. I had been brought up as a Baptist by my foster mother in England so I reasoned that by joining this group, it would take me out of my isolation to meet people with whom I could become friendly, which, in turn, would introduce me to an entirely new experience of a social life.

My timing could not have been better. For a month I had borrowed Len's bike to join my new-found friends in the weekly Sunday evening Baptist service. The measure of this simple enjoyment made the intervening days much more tolerable in the expectation of what the weekend had to bring. Then, without warning, my workmate Len decided to return to his home in Albany, which left me to face life on my own in the bleak cottage with not even a wireless to share my lonely nights. Thankfully, Len left me his old bike which gave me the means to get into town. But now, more than ever, I grew to accept the repetitive nature of farm labouring. However, even this aspect of my life suddenly took a turn for the better.

Shortly after Len's departure, I very nearly choked on my 'bubble and squeak' when Edward joined me at my breakfast table with the proposition. 'How do you feel about taking on the teamster's job, Jack?' My immediate reaction to this surprising offer was a feeling of immense pleasure. Edward thought I was good enough to take on the responsibility of handling ten big horses. All through my years at Barnardo's and Fairbridge, I had fought a constant battle for a feeling of self worth. Naturally enough, my name provided a permanent target for embarrassment, but knowing that, for years, my biological family had virtually rejected me; my self-esteem had been at a very low ebb. To combat this emotional conflict, I had fortunately made up my mind after arriving at Fairbridge, that I would try my best to please every adult member of the staff. This had been no problem with my teachers because, ever since my very first days at Eastcombe, right through my Clapham days, then my years at Fairbridge, I had always enjoyed going to school. I had quickly realized that my efforts were usually rewarded by receiving favourable reports. With this satisfaction behind me, I naturally extended my pattern of behaviour into my post-school activities. By that time of course, I had accrued enough intelligence to identify the pattern as 'attitude'. Now, with the offer of promotion, I had the satisfaction of knowing that my attitude had brought positive rewards.

I was also optimistic enough to think that my new status would relieve me of the tedious milking routine, however, some of my warmth dissipated when that situation failed to eventuate. This turn of events put my attitude to the test when I considered informing my boss that, in my new position as teamster, I should no longer be expected to do the milking. But once again, my past training urged me to reject this line of action, because, thinking things over, I decided that in effect, I was still only an apprentice. The important thing was that I would now have the opportunity to learn new skills. I tackled this new job full of enthusiasm. My love of horses made my initiation pleasurable and immensely satisfying. My first objective of course, was to learn the names of my ten beautiful big new family as I introduced myself to each one in turn, and I still remember with nostalgia calling out to Scotty, Tiger, Daphne, Daisy and Duke. I fell easily into the new morning routine with only a slight variation. My first job gave me the opportunity to exercise my lungs as I called my friends in from the paddock to enjoy a breakfast of oaten hay that I'd prepared for them in their long feed-box. Then, while they ate, I milked the cows and had my own breakfast, after which I returned to my charges to fit them with collar, harness and bridle. Now I was ready to take them out for the day.

Naturally, Edward supervised my every task which began by arranging 'my team' in tandem formation (two rows of five) with each row of horses connected by slim lengths of

leather. I then clipped each end of my lengthy reins to the front near and off (right and left) side horse's bridle, then gathering all the remaining length of the reins in my hands behind the team, and with an order to 'gee up', I drove them to the required paddock where the 16-pronged scarifier had already been taken. Attached to the multi-pronged farm implement was all the harnessing equipment necessary to accommodate the ten horses, which at first glance seemed rather complicated, but under Edward's direction, I led each group of five into position for clipping harness chains into hooks on collars, and .I was all set to go. My first impression when getting under way was a feeling of immense power at my disposal with the combined strength of my ten magnificent beasts. For several minutes I had eyes only for their gleaming bodies as they toiled away, their ears constantly on the alert to interpret my words of command. Most of my attention, naturally, was concentrated on guiding them, but with the comparatively easy task of working around the perimeter of the paddock, I quickly settled down and found enough time to monitor the depth into which the tines penetrated the various types of soil. Adjusting handles on the machine could be manipulated for this operation, by lowering them on clay soil and raising them when moving over lighter ground. The longer the day went, the more comfortable I became. Sitting there all alone with my horses in a 100-acre paddock gave me a feeling of immense accomplishment. The reality of my position intruded into my thoughts. Here I was, barely 16 years of age, revelling in the exhilaration of controlling and being responsible for ten magnificent animals. How fortunate was I in having been selected to go to Fairbridge in the first place and then having been sent to this farm. What would my childhood friends and new-found family in England think of me, if only they could see me now? Oh...what was this strange new overwhelming feeling, I questioned myself. Whatever it was, I had never felt better in all my life. I had been given responsibility; I felt appreciated; I had found self-esteem.

Every now and again, I let my team have a ten-minute rest, and when Edward brought my lunch out at midday, I pulled up at a dam to give my hardworking friends a well-earned drink. I had to unhook them from their chains of course and lead them the few paces to the water's edge, where I let them stay while I put my nose-bag on. Once again, Mrs House had sent me out a pretty substantial 'crib' of three rounds of sandwiches followed by a healthy slice of cake and two pieces of fruit, the whole lot washed down with a full bottle of hot tea. When I felt my team had rested enough, I hooked them up again and away we went for the afternoon. Life was feeling pretty good. I had no watch, so I looked at the sun for the time, and when I felt they had done a fair day's work, I took them home, relieved them of their harness and fed them an entrée of pre-soaked peas, before filling their feeding trough up with uncut hay. Then I left them to their well-earned meal and the freedom of their sizeable home paddock for the night, while I attended to my milking routine that finished my day's work. More recognition came my way after a month, when Mr House calmly notified me that my weekly pay would go up to one pound. 'I was now doing a man's work so he was giving me a man's pay.'

Nov 21/38

I Name to You

A Splendid
 Lad in every way.
 He was a willing &
 conscientious worker;
 Very good with horses
 & was also a good
 sweeper & butcher.
 He did well at every job
 that he tackled &
 would prove an asset
 to any employer.

MONTY HOUSE'S REFERENCE

For several weeks, I relished this extra responsibility, but as the weeks grew into months, I grew progressively unsettled with my living conditions. Even the company of my horses was not enough to quench this emerging restlessness. Being a comparatively small farm, there was no requirement for the horses to be constantly active, so I was still needed to assist with other routine jobs. When Len was there, we had the wireless to keep us company at nights. But even with a pay increase, I couldn't afford to buy one, and although Mrs House lent me books to read, it was a still a lonely existence. If only I had something positive to occupy my spare time. Then one evening, a solution came to me. Make your own music; you were taught at Fairbridge. Why don't you buy yourself a trombone? Before I realized it, the symptoms of a strange new phenomenon consumed me: I started to think. Thoughts tumbled over themselves as they fought for recognition. Aye...wait a minute. How ya going to pay for a trombone when ya can't even afford a wireless? Yeah...I know, but what about the money that's in my trust account? Ya can't touch that till you're 21. Why can't I? Before I started to question my resolve, I found myself penning a letter to the principal of Fairbridge explaining my predicament and pleading my case that it would be a terrible shame if I didn't continue the musical training I had received in the school band. If I could use a small portion of my trust account money as a deposit on a trombone, I would pay the balance off by regular weekly payments. It could be the start of a whole new career for which I would be eternally grateful.

To my amazement, about a fortnight later I received a reply letting me know that a second-hand B flat tenor trombone complete with case was available from Musgroves in Perth for the cost of ten guineas. The Principal said he would permit me to use three pounds from my trust account as a deposit and I could pay the balance off at one pound per month. Would that be satisfactory? I did a quick mental arithmetic. Five shillings a week would take half my weekly cash and I'd be battling to keep myself in clothes and extras with the other half. Still, the offer was just too good to turn down. I'd just have to be careful with my spending. In a state of confused emotion, yet with every good intention to meet my new obligation, I wrote back my acceptance. Little did I realize that this comparatively innocuous decision would be the catalyst that influenced my entire future; a life destined to be filled with an amazing sequence of events that would take me on a

journey far beyond the realms of my most vivid imagination. The day Mr House brought my trombone from the Gnowangerup post office, I performed my duties with an urgency never before accomplished. Abandoning my customary casual routine, I gulped my meal, raced through the washing-up and hurried back to my dingy room to light the lamp before ripping away the packaging to expose my new possession. Opening the hinged lid of the long cylindrical leather case, I carefully, almost reverently, retrieved the slide and bell, the two major components, which, when put together, comprised the bulk of the instrument. Then by removing the mouthpiece from its holder and placing it in position, I was ready for action. Following the customary routine from my Fairbridge band-practice days, I went straight into the C major scale. Naturally enough, the effort produced far more fuzz than substance. In the months since I had last played, my embouchure had collapsed. My lips felt fat and soft. The realization hit me that I'd have to get stuck in to a lot of practice to regain my former standard. While I was in this reflective mood, I examined the instrument to discover that it was a very basic model with an unusually narrow bore, commonly known as a 'pea-shooter'. This discovery was a bit disappointing, until I figured that it would still be adequate enough for the immediate purpose of improving my skills. From that night on, my life took on a new dimension as I launched myself on the rocky road to fame and fortune as a virtuoso trombonist. The first week produced more effort than substance, with the quality of sound leaving a lot to be desired. However, I could live with this shortcoming in the knowledge that, with practice, my performance could only get better. Until the night my aspirations received a severe jolt when I was interrupted by an unexpected visit from Edward who quietly but firmly questioned the need to make 'all that noise'. Trying desperately not to reveal my badly bruised ego, I returned the salvo by explaining the necessity, for any aspiring musician, to routinely practice the playing of scales and arpeggios, not only to strengthen the lip muscles, but to perfect tuning by repetitive placement of slide positions. This response was received with a look of some confusion, so I demonstrated a way to resolve the situation by shoving a sock up the bell of my trombone to good effect. From then on, I was left with no further intrusion to interrupt my musical aspirations. However, I did enjoy a weekly break from the farm by cycling in to town on Saturday evenings to meet a few of the local lads or to watch a movie occasionally. One of the social highlights of those days was to attend an occasional dance which presented the only real opportunity to meet a girl. Fortunately, dancing had been a very popular activity at Fairbridge where we had been taught most of the old-time routines together with the waltz and the quickstep. I remembered those events with great affection as we kids swept around our main dining hall in our bare feet to the music of an old piano pounded out by one of the cottage mothers. Now, out in the real world, sliding around a beautifully prepared dance floor in my new shoes, I realized just how fortunate we Fairbridge kids had been. Another reality that soon reared its ugly head was the brutal discovery that my weekly ten shillings disappeared far too quickly for me to honour my obligation to pay the five shillings a week off my trombone. I tried to justify my breach of contract by telling myself that in effect, if I didn't make my regular payment, there was more than enough money in my trust account to pay for it. For a few weeks I failed to send any money back to the principal at Fairbridge, but it wasn't long before I was brought back to reality when I received a letter reminding me very bluntly of my transgression. But try as I could, I found it just too difficult to save the money. I did feel guilty about it but always tried to justify my inaction by knowing my trust account was increasing week by week. Needless to say the situation did not improve. As time went by, letters from the principal grew less friendly.

But far more serious events were happening throughout the world, and although I learnt of the worsening situation by meeting townspeople at the weekends, I shall never forget the day World War II started. I happened to be in the town's newsagent's when the owner, Mr George Parker, invited me in to his living room to listen to a broadcast by the

Prime Minister. Although we two were the only occupants of the room, I could feel the emotion of the moment. We were both standing when Mr Gordon Menzies came on the air. He spoke with immaculate diction, outlining the events of the days since Germany had invaded Poland. Britain and France had issued an ultimatum that if Germany did not stop its invasion by a certain hour, we would be at war. The drama increased with each word. 'It is my melancholy duty to tell you that this has not happened, therefore Britain is at war with Germany, and, as a consequence, Australia is also at war with her.' I shall never forget the look of pain on George's face as these fateful words hit home. He had served in the 'Great War' so for a few moments, he must have relived the horrific memories of that conflict. On the other hand, I had not yet turned 17, so I had no comprehension of what to expect. This was indeed fortuitous because nothing could have prepared me for the events that lay ahead

Country life continued on as usual for several weeks following the outbreak of war although recruiting for the armed forces had started up in Perth. Inevitably, it wasn't long before country towns started forming their own Volunteer Defence Force, so when Gnowangerup's own force came on line, practically every young male in the district turned out for the Sunday parades. This was when I came into my own. In a very short time, a few of us nondescript musicians got together to form a motley group, and with a minimum of practice we led a sizeable parade of farmers through the main street up to the show-grounds. For the next few weeks, with very little activity on the European front, these weekly parades served as a novel break from the routine of farm work.

Farm life continued on as usual of course, with an occasional minor drama thrown in now and again to interrupt the normal routine. Like the day that Edward was on horseback out in a distant paddock when he disturbed a fox and chased it right back home to an open machine shed. I happened to be in the house at the time, when Larry, the bulldog, sensing some excitement with all the noisy activity, beat me in the race to the shed, to spring himself on to the now exhausted animal. When I caught up with the struggling pair, I immediately tried to wrestle Larry away, but all I achieved was to end up with a hand in the fox's mouth and in my haste to retrieve it, I finished up with a badly sliced forefinger. By that time, Edward had dismounted to deal with the fox, which left me to take Larry home where I could get patched up. My other notable accident happened while Mr House and I were crutching daggy sheep in the shearing shed. His system catered for the sheep to stand normally, and while he controlled the head, I operated on the tail, using a pair of hand-held shears. All went well for a while until the animal we were working on suddenly lashed out with a hind leg, causing me to pierce a vein in my left wrist. This brought everything to an immediate standstill of course, with Mr House having to run me into the local hospital in his old Ford A utility. Although it seemed to me that after a bit of stitching up I'd be capable of returning back to work, the doctor obviously had other ideas, because after undergoing an operation under anaesthetic, I woke up between delightfully smooth white sheets in an unusually comfortable bed in a pleasant hospital room. Never before had I experienced such refinement. Yet there was more to come. When an attractive young nurse presently flitted in to check on me, she not only adjusted my bedding, but instructed me how to operate the wireless reception which I could receive through a set of headphones. This outside world wasn't too bad after all. For two days I enjoyed the luxury of Gnowangerup hospital. When the nurse inspected my dressing to reveal quite a long wound, she explained that it had been necessary in order for the punctured vein to be repaired. But with no pain to endure and only a slight inconvenience to my wrist, I was in a position to exploit this unexpected privilege of a wireless. Not only did I enjoy music during normal working hours, but exciting things were happening on the war-front. In North Africa, the Australians were advancing with astonishing speed westward across Libya, taking thousands of Italian prisoners as they went. Now I had access to both wireless and newspapers, not only did it bring history into my life, but I

found myself enjoying a bonus of learning geography as more countries of the world became embroiled in the war. With my left wrist bandaged, my right hand was free to write to my family. So in between news bulletins I filled several pages describing the new direction my life had taken and hoped they would be proud of my achievements. However, after two days I was well enough to resume farm duties, so reluctantly I had to leave the luxury of clean sheets and a pleasant room to be returned to the squalid conditions of my cottage.

As the months went by in 1940, the war news grew steadily worse. Germany had occupied most of Europe and England's biggest cities were copping it badly from the German Luftwaffe. Edward continued to drive me and my trombone to our Sunday parades where the standing of our Citizens Army increased steadily. But each week several familiar faces went missing as young men left to volunteer their services. The Government strongly encouraged farmers to continue their vital task of providing food for the nation so, in one sense, it was satisfying to know that although we felt isolated from the war front, our efforts were considered to be of vital importance. I drew a great deal of satisfaction from the fact that when seeding time arrived, I was given the responsible job of planting the various cereals which included peas, oats, barley and wheat. The seeder consists of twin compartments spreading the full width of the machine, one for the seed and the other holds the superphosphate. A series of cogs governs the supply of each commodity into numerous separate outlets that take the blended material down to the shallow furrows produced by the forward tines. This proved to be a job of several requirements, because not only did I have the control of ten horses to contend with, I also had to keep monitoring my supply of both seed and super to make sure I didn't run out of either commodity before I reached a refuelling point placed at strategic sites around the perimeter of the paddock. I relished the workload, priding myself that I was in great physical condition that made the job of lifting a lifeless bag of super up on to the machine with some difficulty. By comparison, bags of seed grain had bulk and 'life' which made the lifting far easier. There is no doubt that I put in more than a fair day's work but I consoled myself that although I spent several hours out in the paddock, the bulk of the work was done by the horses and I always fed them in the evening with a great sense of justice and pleasure at the sight of them tucking into their long hay with gusto. By the time I had milked the three cows, daylight was nearly spent, but after a welcome wash in my little enamel bowl, I was more than ready to get stuck into the excellent hot meal that Mrs House always prepared. She also showed me consideration by opening the sliding serving door from the kitchen to her living room, and turned up the volume of her wireless so that I could listen to the ABC's seven o'clock news bulletin. My increased responsibility produced further reward, when my wage increased by five shillings a week to the sum of 25s, which meant that my starting wage had doubled in less than two years. But despite this increase, I still couldn't organize my finances well enough to save my weekly five shillings I had promised to send back to the principal of Fairbridge. Needless to say, it wasn't long before a reminder arrived by mail pointing out the error of my ways, followed at regular intervals by progressively less polite requests for me to honour my obligations. However, despite all my good intentions, I failed to make even one payment for the rest of the year. A character lapse that caused me considerable guilt. Christmas came and went by which time the harvesting was finished, Edward taking charge of operations. Without my team of horse to manage, I found myself relegated to doing the mundane farm jobs, which led me to consider what direction my future should take. A regular weekly workout with my trombone had done wonders for my playing, so I started to think that I might be good enough to play with one of the army bands. Besides, many young chaps in the district had already left to join the forces, but my problem was that I was only 18 and I

31st December, 1940

Mr. J.K. Rambottom,
c/- M. House, Esq.,
"Eugenup",
GNOWANGERUP

Dear Jack,

It is now a year since you got your trombone and you promised to begin to repay in March. I guaranteed the amount you borrowed, and if you do not pay, I shall have to make it good. The School Books close this month and I hope you can send the amount immediately, or else sign the enclosed forms on your wages.

Yours sincerely,

WALTER H. WATSON
Acting Principal

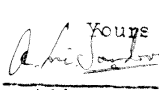
LETTER re PURCHASE OF TROMBONE

needed parental permission to enlist. During my next trip into town I learnt that, in a couple of weeks, a seat was available on a vehicle that would be heading for Perth, so in my present state of mind I decided to give Mr House notice and take my chances when I got to the city. On 19 April 1941, I farewelled my beautiful horses, old Larry the bulldog and the House family, to arrive in Perth with one case, and a second-hand trombone, hoping to find both fame and fortune.

A CHANGE OF OCCUPATION

The moment I climbed from the car, my worldly possessions balanced in each hand, I made straight for the Army Headquarters in Francis Street, know as 'Swan Barracks', where I was escorted to the office of the 'entertainments officer,' Lieutenant Jimmy Edwards. This could be a good omen, I told myself, at being introduced to a person bearing such an illustrious name. Indeed it was, for after a brief interview in which I falsified my age I enquired if there was a vacancy for a trombone player in the Army. After a phone-call or two, I found myself being driven to the headquarters of the 44th Battalion in Melville Camp about four kilometres east of Fremantle. An hour later, I had been fitted out with a complete issue of army clothes which I stowed into a large kit-bag, and shown the way to the unit's Band quarters and introduced to the Bandmaster, Sergeant Stan Castlehow. The quarters comprised three tents which held 20 musicians plus a large band-room in which the instruments were stored and band-practice was held. Being the only trombone player, I was warmly welcomed into the ranks where I was pleasantly surprised to meet another former Fairbridge boy, Angus Jones, a cornet player. Events had happened so quickly over the past few hours that, as I made my blanket bed up for that night, it all seemed like a fairy-tale happening. Here I was, after leaving the Gnowangerup farm in the morning, by nightfall I was a fully-fledged band member receiving five shillings a day plus all meals and a kit-bag full of new clothing. However, amongst all the clothing that comprised my wardrobe, one item in particular commanded my keen interest. These strange garments had been issued as 'Drawers, troops for the use of.' For the first time in my life, I had discovered 'underpants'. Despite all the stories going around of how tough army life was, I had little difficulty in settling in to my new

career. Indeed, after enduring the spartan conditions of my past few years, life in the army was full of exhilarating surprises, not the least of which was the playing of a rousing march through the camp immediately Reveille sounded. Even taking the troops out on route marches was pleasant enough, but most of our time was spent in rehearsals for the many recitals we were required to perform. During these hot summer weeks we particularly enjoyed leading the troops to a popular swimming beach just south of Fremantle. Then, on the way back to camp, by way of a little variation, we positioned the band in a small recess outside the Beaconsfield Hotel to play the entire battalion past, after which we would retire to the saloon bar for a well-earned light refreshment. Then, in order to make good the misspent time, we would board a passing tram-car, where, by way of showing our appreciation to the obliging driver, we entertained his passengers to the terminus by playing a lively tune or two.

Headquarters Western Command } B3147 (4 lines). Ordnance Officer M.J.100. For other Branches and Drill Halls see Dept. of Defence in Telephone Directory.		KINGSEY FAIRBRIDGE FARM SCHOOL, PINJARRA LETTER NO. RECEIVED OPENED BY 2223 REPLY CITED BY DATE FORWARDED
Australian Military Forces—Western Command.		
Please quote this Number when replying.		
1484	41	H.Q.44 Bn., No.1 Camp, MELVILLE. 29 Apl.41.
Canon Watson, Fairbridge Farm School, PINJARRA.		
Dear Sir,		
<p>We are at the present time holding in our store, 1 Trombone which we have taken over from Pte. Ramsbottom. We understand from him that he owes you an amount of £8 on this instrument and that he is prepared to transfer it to us. We are prepared to purchase this instrument at the figure Quoted above and we would be glad to have your confirmation if this is agreeable to you. We will then immediately send you a cheque for this amount.</p>		
Yours faithfully,  Capt. Adj. 44 Bn.		

TROMBONE EPISODE FINALLY RESOLVED

During those early months of the war, my life had taken a decided change of direction, and all of it for the better. Even the ongoing saga of my unpaid trombone suddenly resolved itself when the outstanding sum of £8 was paid by the Battalion's commander. When I pause to reflect on that episode, I sincerely regret the inconvenience I caused the Principal, because, in reality, I have him to thank for giving me the chance to pursue a career in music that opened windows of opportunity throughout the rest of my life. Already, in the short time that I had been in the Band, I had become friendly with a pretty young girl who lived in the neighbouring suburb of Beaconsfield. When she discovered that I had no family in Australia, she introduced me to her parents who immediately accepted me as member of their family. Subsequently, I spent all my leave periods with them; a situation that did wonders for my confidence and happiness. At eighteen years of age, how I savoured my very first female embraces together with the warmth and affection of a foster family. About this time too, another item of good fortune came my way by letter from my new family in England, letting me know that I had a married uncle living in Adelaide. Perhaps I could meet them if ever I went that way. This chapter of my life ended with the return of the troops to their civilian jobs after three

months' military training. However, I was fortunate enough to get a transfer to the Northam Camp Military Band, a posting that ultimately led to an astonishing change of direction.

44th BATTALION BAND, ME WITH MY TROMBONE MIDDLE RIGHT



About 80 kilometres east of Perth, Northam Camp was the main West Australian training establishment for the Australian Imperial Force. It had the capacity to train several units simultaneously, culminating in sending several thousands of troops overseas to help the mother country, England, in its war against the Axis Powers. With training completed, the Camp band ceremoniously accompanied each unit down the two-kilometre stretch to the railway station from where they went on to a war zone. That short stretch of highway soon became quite familiar with the band members.

After only a couple of months with my new band, another quirk of fate intervened to effect a dramatic change in my fortunes. I was given the opportunity to join the 2nd 4th Machine-Gun Battalion, a popular West Australian AIF. Unit. The 'A' Company Commander of that unit paid a surprise visit to our hut one morning, introducing himself as a keen amateur musician who wanted to form a small orchestra in his Company so would any of us like to join him. The opportunity sounded far too exciting for me to pass up, so together with a young cornet player, we readily accepted the major's offer. An added incentive was the fact that the Battalion had been in training longer than most units, which gave it a greater likelihood of an earlier overseas posting, so we saw it as a chance to escape the dreary prospect of spending the entire duration of the war in Northam camp. Indeed, our assumption proved to be spot on, as only a few weeks after pledging our allegiance to 'Faithfully serve His Majesty King George VI, his heirs and successors for the duration of the war and 12 months thereafter', the battalion received its marching orders.



5 PLATOON 'A' COMPANY 2ND 4TH MACHINE GUN BATTALION, 1941

In the first light of dawn on that July morning, I found myself simmering with excitement at the hypnotic crunch of over 1000 boots in a repetitive rhythm, to the tempo of a familiar march from my former band, as the Second Fourth Machine-Gun Battalion left on its awesome journey into the war. As a lad of 18 years whose young life had already been liberally spiced with adventure, my future was destined to relegate my past into pallid insignificance. At Fremantle, we embarked on the coastal steamer Duntroon expecting to be heading for the Middle East, but were disappointed to discover that we were going only as far as Adelaide. After the short uneventful trip through the 'Bite', the battalion settled in and resumed training at Woodside Camp some 50 kilometres north of the city. For the next few weeks we were toughened up by undergoing several long route marches, which took us through the scenic country of the district and into the Adelaide hills. Leave too became equally pleasurable as the city people welcomed us into their homes on many weekends. I was fortunate enough to meet my first living relatives in Uncle Harold, Auntie Gladys and their three children, Richard, Barbara and Elizabeth. It seems that Harold had been a seaman, and during his travels, had decided to settle down in Adelaide. It was he who started me on an entirely new hobby of photography by giving me a Box Brownie Kodak camera.

During our Woodside period, my friend Richie Reed and I were also fortunate to have enjoyed the hospitality of the Marcus family in Adelaide in whose lovely home we spent several pleasant weekends.



ME, PAT, EMMIE AND RICHIE

After three months, we were on the move again; this time, by rail to the central Australian town of Alice Springs. During our one-night stay, I enjoyed my first open-air picture show from the comfortable depths of a deckchair. The following morning our convoy of three-ton trucks set off along Stuart Highway for the Northern Territory's southern rail terminal town of Birdum, camping each night at regular staging posts. Waiting there in a desolate rail siding was a string of old cattle wagons that were to take us the rest of the way to Darwin, as there were not enough passenger coaches to accommodate the military requirements of a nation at war. Eventually we arrived at Winnellie, a half-finished camp on the southern outskirts of Darwin. For the first few weeks, our training was temporarily suspended while we completed the construction of the camp and made beds for ourselves from mangrove saplings and split bamboo poles. In the space of a week we had come from a freezing winter to a tropical climate so it took quite an effort in adjusting to this extreme climatic change. There were some advantages however, when we were permitted to augment the normal army rations by adding wild duck and fresh fish to the menu. The latter we caught in a fish-trap we constructed in the tidal inlet of Rapid Creek on the eastern fringe of Darwin.

We entertained ourselves by holding inter-unit sporting events, and because I had played soccer in England and Fairbridge I gained a regular place in the Battalion's soccer team as well as making the rugby squad. My big opportunity to make a complimentary name for myself came in a rugby match against a Queensland artillery unit, when I



ME AND RICHIE REED AT WINNELLIE CAMP IN DARWIN, 1941

was given a run after half-time. After an unspectacular performance for most of the second half, I succeeded in making a lengthy solo run to score a touchdown just in time to salvage the sporting honour of the unit. In the space of a few seconds, I had emerged from the obscurity of being an insignificant Pommy private to the heights of a battalion hero. How I relished the glory.

Up to that moment, my Australian-born battalion mates tolerated me as a 'Pommy' or a 'Bine', an abbreviation of woodbine. The ultimate term of endearment, of course, was being called a 'Pommy Bastard', because, even though the label was factual, it gave me much satisfaction to know that the title of 'bastard' was a well-earned honorary one.

There was little other entertainment in Darwin apart from a couple of gambling

joints, so the musical major, seizing the opportunity to justify his action in recruiting two musicians, spent a lot of time on this extracurricular activity. At that time, dance-band music was all the rage, and we had almost perfected 'Down Argentina Way' which would have completed a reasonable repertoire for our maiden performance, when Pearl Harbor was attacked. That brought the curtain down on our debut before we had even had a chance to raise it.

Now with Japan on the move southwards, Australia's feeling of remoteness evaporated dramatically as the tempo of the war quickened. The security of the nation was threatened, and the 2nd 4th Machine-Gun Battalion was destined to meet that threat. For the next two weeks all hands went to work on constructing barbed-wire defences along Darwin's beaches until the order came to pack it in. We were on the move again. On the night of 30 December 1941, the battalion boarded the old steamship 'Marella', and steamed out of Darwin Harbour. After a few days sailing through tropical waters, we awoke one morning to see the towering mountains of New Guinea dominating the north-eastern horizon. Near the anchorage at Port Moresby lay the huge four-funnelled liner 'Aquitania' to which we nuzzled alongside. The order had already been given to have our gear ready for a quick transference to the big troop carrier, and even as the last of us scrambled aboard, the anchor had already been stowed and the giant ship vibrated into life, quickly gathering momentum as it sped away. The former luxury liner's days of affluence had long since vanished. It was now a huge floating barrack, depressingly devoid of colour other than battleship grey, and as its powerful engines accelerated southwards, the monster, responding by shuddering violently in protest, only added to our discomfort. As if this wasn't enough, the next morning I came down with dengue fever. For most of the day I lay on a hard deck alternatively sweating, and shivering and feeling totally miserable. Even after being admitted to the Regimental Aid Post, I spent more time out of bed than in it, with diarrhoea and vomiting. With no interest in eating, my stomach soon emptied, resulting in a night spent in violent periods of dry retching that left me exhausted. Fortunately, the worst was over in two days but it took a few more to regain my former strength. By that time, we had arrived in Sydney where we stayed only one day to take on board a thousand more troops. When we resumed our journey to head south, our battalion members grew increasingly excited at the prospect of putting in to our home port of Fremantle and a possible night ashore. However, when we anchored offshore in Gage Roads, our jubilation turned to anger with the announcement that there would be no leave. It had been more than six months since leaving our homes in WA, and to deny us a last short visit to families and friends before sailing overseas into active service was simply unacceptable. In the mood of the moment, nothing was going to stop us getting ashore. As the supply barges and lighters drew alongside to discharge their provisions, we swarmed aboard them and the sympathetic skippers took us back to the quayside. Such was our discipline that there was no indiscriminate dispersal, even though we had gained the freedom of 'home ground'. An enterprising NCO, on his own initiative, formed us into three ranks, marched us through the customs gate, halted, then dismissed us. It was a disciplined manoeuvre which left us all the more exhilarated. From the day I joined 5 platoon, A company, I quickly established a new friendship with Richard Reed. From the very first time he took me home with him on leave from Northam camp, his mother had accepted me as a son, so when I turned up on their doorstep they were delighted to have me for the night. Unfortunately, Richard, who had become the platoon commander's batman, had not managed to get ashore, which naturally put a dampener on the brief reunion. Before I left the following morning, Mrs Reed gave me a small wooden boomerang with the words 'I go to return' on one side. I turned it over and received a sudden emotional injection when I read the inscription in gold lettering, 'To Jack From Mum'. I caught an early train to Fremantle to join a large group of fellow absconders, then boarded one of the launches that were waiting to take the returning troops back out to the

'Aquitania'. For this breach of military conduct, each man was fined two days' pay – for a private soldier, a deprivation of 12s, which, in the course of events about to overwhelm us, turned out to be pettiness almost beyond belief. By the time our crowded boatload had scrambled back on to the huge transport, the ship had already weighed anchor, when a launch pulled alongside with a few more stragglers, then, once they were aboard, the engines exploded into life, and we were on our way to war. It was 15 January 1942.

BACK IN THE PLANE

'Waky, waky. Mr Lane...we'll be landing at Changi airport in a few minutes.' The sweet feminine lyrics penetrated my disturbed mind to bring me back to reality. Thank goodness for that I told myself; this arrival in Singapore should be a little different from the one in 1942. The petite Chinese stewardess was hovering above me now, helping me prepare for the landing. But through all this activity, the words of 'Changi airport' occupied my entire thinking. The months of incarceration spent in Changi camp came flooding back. Sixty-odd years ago, apart from the few acres of Selarang Barracks and the civilian gaol, the peninsula had been practically deserted. It was true that during the final year of the war, when the Japanese had forced Allied prisoners-of-war to work on an airfield in the area, they had no idea that the project they had started would finish up being the monstrous complex it is today.

Now, as an old man of 81, I was about to be propelled into its vast network of terminals, thankfully reclining in the comparative comfort of a wheelchair. Seven years before, I had been diagnosed as suffering from the debilitating motor neurone disease. At that time, my prognosis forecast that I had between three to five years of life left. Somehow, although the strength had gone from my hands and arms, and my breathing was questionable, I had survived that sentence still in a relatively good standard of health. However, I gratefully accepted the offer of a 'lift' as I was pushed the very considerable distance to the business-class lounge. Here of course, not only was abundant food and drink to be had, but several sofas were available in a relatively secluded section. Now, with nightfall having arrived and six hours of waiting to be endured until our ongoing flight to Osaka, the sofas seemed the best bet on which to snatch a few hours' sleep. It took a bit of positioning to get some degree of comfort, but once this was accomplished, I was soon back in the land of Nod reliving my first memorable trip to Singapore and beyond.

DISASTER AND THE AFTERMATH

The Aquitania took us as far as the Sunda Straits, where we saw five small freighters waiting to take us on to Singapore. Escorting our convoy for a part of the way was the Australian cruiser HMAS Canberra, and, as she wheeled about in parting, she signalled 'Goodbye, good luck, hit them hard.' It was not long before we experienced the irony of that message.

Our arrival at Singapore and the short train journey to Woodlands Army Camp near the Naval Base passed without incident, the war could have been 1000 miles away. But, on the following day, we were reminded that it was very much closer as a formation of 27 Japanese bombers swept overhead in the direction of the city. This first awesome sight of potential destruction was my initiation to the war.

With the Japanese forces advancing rapidly through the State of Johore to the north, the battle for Singapore loomed closer. The 2nd 4th was positioned in the western part of the island, with two companies defending a coastal section in the vicinity of Lim Chu Kang road. 'A' company was camped in a rubber plantation, being held in reserve. Japanese spotter planes kept us under constant observation, and I could not understand why they were not being shot down. Our air force seemed nonexistent.



FROM LEFT: JOHN LANE, MR REED, RICHARD REED

With the Japanese landing on Singapore Island came a prolonged artillery pounding, effectively keeping us from moving. When the barrage lifted, we scrambled into our trucks and moved to the defence of Tengah Airfield. Once again, the Jap planes shadowed us, the red blob on each wing staring down at us like monster's eyes. We were on a wooded hill overlooking the airfield, from where we could see a turbaned soldier on the roof of a pillbox, firing his Bren gun at a plane. His aim was far too low, bringing the shots pinging through the scrub about our ears, and it was not surprising when we heard a cry a little further up the hill: 'I'm hit.' Some of us went to help, but, by the time we found him, he was dead. The reality of war lay right there in front of me.

The order came to withdraw from the airfield, and we were led in a succession of confusing movements that took us to a number of temporary positions, without making contact with the enemy at any one of them. Later in the day, the oil storage tanks of the naval base were fired, setting off towering columns of oil-laden smoke. Then came a deluge of warm black rain that saturated us and everything else in a dirty oily mess. To compound the discomfort, the whole night was spent in an open slit trench with only a groundsheet for protection.

The next day brought a new peril. No sooner had we taken up another defensive position than we came under heavy artillery fire from our own guns. Having just occupied the area, we had had no time to dig pits, and there we were, above ground, in company with scores of exploding shells. It was a miracle that no one was killed, and only two or three of our men were wounded. Eventually, when it was discovered that we were occupying 'enemy-held territory,' we were withdrawn.

Another day, another position, and with it came the frustration of still not having seen the enemy. By now, I had become so physically and mentally drained that I fell asleep while lying in the firing position. It was only the noise of the battle that woke me, but, as it was still dark, I couldn't see anything to fire at, and the frustration continued in yet another confusing withdrawal. We spent one whole day driving around trying to locate any

authority who could direct us to the action. Finally, our company occupied a Chinese hillside cemetery that held a commanding view of an important road. At last, we were able to mount our Vickers with a magnificent field of fire. With gun crews placed, the remainder of the company rested under the canopy of a coconut grove, which also sheltered a native *kampong*. As many of the residents had left, we moved into some of the huts, which gave us our first shelter for days and some desperately needed sleep.

We had been on the run for almost a week, so the opportunity to lie up in one location for a full day came as a relief. We were even able to do some overdue washing, using the villagers' facilities. The cooks, too, had time to prepare a meal, but while we were still eating, we were visited by yet another Japanese spotter plane. The peace of the evening was shattered by the sudden explosion of mortar bombs. There were no sighters (exploratory shots fired from a gun to establish if an adjustment in range is required) with this barrage: with devastating accuracy, the bombs fell right amongst us. Fortunately for me, I was sitting on the edge of a shallow spoon drain, into which I quickly flattened out, with my tin hat covering my head and my nose pressed hard into the earth in an effort to get all the protection I could. Two mates lay further along the drain, side by side, their feet touching my head. The sound of the explosions was deafening, but even more terrifying was the waiting, as each bomb rushed earthward, seemingly heading straight for my little patch of ground. Suddenly, a bomb burst practically in my ear, and I felt a heavy thud in the small of my back, involuntarily bringing a groan from inside. I couldn't understand why I was still alive.

The bombing continued for what seemed like an eternity, but was, in fact, only about 20 minutes. During this time, dozens of shells straddled our position. When it stopped, my ears were still ringing and I tried to get the attention of my companions. Receiving no response, I took a closer look. They were both dead, their arms about each other. For a few moments, I wandered around helplessly, until, a little further along the drain, I stumbled across another body. Protruding from the tin hat was a jagged piece of shrapnel. I was stunned at the sight of the familiar face of a member of my section, now drained white beneath the helmet.

As I stood in shock, there came a groan from a figure a few yards away, and I and several others made towards the sound. Lying face down was a soldier in great distress. His torn shirt revealed a gaping wound in his back through which his heart lay exposed, still beating violently. Someone applied a large shell dressing to the wound and I moved away, nauseated. When I joined another group a few minutes later, I stared in horror at the grotesque sight of a body blown apart at the torso, the intestines spilled on the bare earth, still writhing in peristaltic motion. I stood numbed, incapable of movement, until someone mentioned stretchers and I found myself attached to a handle, taking the wounded to the distant road for evacuation to hospital.

After a few paces, I wondered why my back was hurting; then I recalled the hit I had received, and, when we stopped for a rest, I asked one of the others to examine it. Apparently, I had only been hit with a lump of dry earth thrown up by the 'near miss,' but it had left quite a bruise. With the wounded taken care of, we turned to our dead.

It was only then that I became aware of the smell of death. Not the putrid smell of decomposing flesh, but the indescribable odour of freshly spilt blood and warm human bodies that have been torn apart and left lying as mangled corpses. Gently easing our nine dead comrades on to groundsheets, we carried them to the brink of two deep shell holes, where the padre waited to conduct the simple burial service. Then, with all the tenderness we could muster, we attempted to gently ease them to rest but, despite our efforts, each body struck the bottom with a sickening thud.

Thirty minutes later, our second-in-command announced that Singapore had surrendered. With nightfall, I wandered away in search of a sleeping place, too desperately exhausted to think about the implications of the capitulation. Having selected my bed

among the tombs, I wondered at the cause of the unnatural brightness of the night, until I gazed towards the southern horizon, which was being consumed in a wall of fire. The awesome spectacle recalled the vividness of a Sunday School nightmare – my childhood vision of hell.

It was not until the following morning that the immensity of the situation registered. Two rough crosses topped with tin hats on the fresh mounds of earth reminded me that it had not all been a monstrous dream. In just one calendar month since leaving Fremantle, the battalion had been led to the slaughter like a sacrificial lamb, and among the dead lay my 'foster brother,' Richard Reed.

The 15th of February 1942 spelled the end of a short military campaign, and until then, the thought of a future as a prisoner-of-war had never occurred to me. As I gathered my few possessions together, the order came to take all weapons to a nearby road junction. Throwing my rifle dejectedly on to an ever-increasing pile of arms, I caught sight of an unfamiliar khaki-clad figure across the way. For the first time in my life, I saw a Japanese soldier.

Then began the long, humiliating march of the defeated, across Singapore to the eastern tip of the Changi Peninsula. In the centre of the area, a large parade ground surrounded by several three-storeyed concrete barracks had been the peacetime home of the Gordon Highlanders. Into this complex swarmed the 8th Australian Division, occupying the barracks and surrounding buildings. All along the way, the sympathetic Chinese people had provided food and drink to the disconsolate and weary Diggers. It was a kindness that is forever remembered with gratitude.

I also remember the action of a Japanese guard after I had temporarily lagged behind for the purpose of relieving myself. When I caught up with my group, the Jap, with hatred in his face, snatched a round of ammunition from his pouch and, shaking with rage, tried to physically force the bullet through my head with his hand. Despite my limited education, I quickly got the message.

Dr. Barnardo's Homes : National Incorporated Association.

Telegraphic Address—"WAIFDOM, EDO., LONDON."
Telephone No.—STEPNEY GREEN 4232 (5 lines)

MIGRATION DEPARTMENT,

In reply please quote.....H./A.

18 to 26, Stepney Causeway, London, E.1.

18th June, 1942.

Dear Mr.Green,

Jack Kenneth Ramsbottom.(W.A.4/33)
I think you would wish to know that Mrs. Ramsbottom,
Mother of this young man, has had a telegram advising her that
her son is missing. The telegram reads as follows:

"I REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT WX 14836
J K RAMSBOTTOM AIF HAS BEEN REPORTED MISSING
16/2/42 (.) THE MINISTER FOR THE ARMY AND
THE MILITARY BOARD EXTEND SINCERE SYMPATHY (.)
LETTER FOLLOWS (.) AIF ADMINISTRATION
AUSTRALIA HOUSE LONDON."

I thought you would wish to have this information on
record. I also attach copy of my letter to the Mother for your
information. Should you get any news of the young man, I know you
will advise me without delay.

Yours sincerely,

Gordon Green, Esq.
Secretary,
Fairbridge Farm Schools, Inc.
Savoy House,
115, Strand, W.C.2.

P.T. Kirkpatrick
General Superintendent. *184*

LETTER DISCOVERED IN MY FAIRBRIDGE FILE 50 YEARS LATER

WESTERN AUSTRALIA.
TAXATION DEPARTMENT.

Form 18 (m).

Telephones:
B 9083 (8 lines)

96-102 BARRACK STREET,
PERTH (BOX A15, G.P.O.)

IT/A21234

2nd. July 1942

The Manager,
Fairbridge Farm,
PINJARRA.

RECEIVED	OPENED BY
.....
REPLY BY
DATE POSTED

Dear Sir,

INCOME TAX. JOHN KENNETH RAMSBOTTOM.

Information in possession of this office discloses that the above named is in the Military Forces, prior to enlistment he was employed by Mr. M.R. House of Gnowangerup.

In connection with this taxpayer could you supply me with his full regimental number and address, also his date of enlistment.

Yours faithfully,

(A. CRUIKSHANK.)

A/S COMMISSIONER OF TAXATION (STATE)
A/g. DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF TAXATION (FEDERAL)

NOTE.—Please quote your file number when replying,
and show the full initials included in your
last taxation return.

KINGSLEY FAIRBRIDGE FARM SCHOOL, PINJARRA.
July 6th. '42.

Ref. IT/A21234.

Mr. A. Cruikshank,
96-102 Barrack St.,
Box A15 G.P.O.
PERTH.

Dear Sir,

re J.K. Ramsbottom.

I have your letter of the 2nd. July '42.
The address you require is given below.

Yours faithfully,

WALTER H. WATSON.
A/Principal.

WX 14836 Pte. Ramsbottom J.K.
2/4 M.G. Bn.,
A.I.F.

NEVER OUT OF THE TAXMAN'S REACH

The first few months as prisoners-of-war in Changi were deceptively tolerable. Much to our surprise, it was left to our own Command to maintain discipline and administration. During that period we scarcely saw a Jap. Changi Command quickly organised a comprehensive education system, recruiting anyone with skills and experience to teach in a mini university atmosphere. It was all education and entertainment, and a constant diet of rice. We never in all our captivity grew accustomed to it. We had to eat it in order to stay alive because there was very little of anything else. On mess parades, a scrutiniser was appointed to make sure the orderlies favoured no one with an extra big serving. Each man had his 'back-up' number so that there was no scrambling for leftovers.

A new word entered our vocabulary: dysentery. It swept through Changi with frightening speed, and necessitated digging additional deep holes that served as toilets. Our Medical Officer, Dr Claude 'Pills' Anderson, introduced strict fly control measures and ordered mess gear to be dipped in boiling water before and after meals. Despite these precautions, there was a constant pilgrimage to and from the 'boreholes'. It was from these

establishments that we caught up with the latest news, which invariably told of incredible and spectacular Allied advances. We spent so much time squatting on the rough seats covering the boreholes that, in order to relieve the dreary monotony, many chaps would create fantastic stories for the benefit of their fellow sufferers. In any event, such was the impact of these bulletins that, to this day, our battalion newsheet bears the title of Borehole Bulletin.

I came down with dysentery. In the space of a few days, I became so weak that it was an effort to stagger down to the latrines. Furthermore, I lost my appetite for rice; I just couldn't force myself to swallow it. It stuck in my throat as a gluey, soggy lump, and I was fast losing interest in life. Fortunately, I had in my wallet about 35 brand-new Singapore dollars that I had withdrawn on the only pay parade held before the surrender. Some men were sneaking through the perimeter wire at night to purchase, from local traders, our own Army supplies that had been taken from abandoned food stocks. Naturally, the prices had skyrocketed in a thriving unscrupulous blackmarket business. A fellow Old Fairbridgian helped to save me. At 6ft 8in Bob Chipperfield was the tallest soldier in the 8th Division and quite possibly the entire AIF.

Bob offered to go through the wire to buy me some condensed milk. Armed with my money, he set off on his mission, which was not without considerable danger as armed Sikh guards were now patrolling the perimeter on behalf of the Japanese. In the early hours of the morning, Chipper came to my bed strip and quietly slipped half-a-dozen tins of milk into my pack. That was how big Bob lived. He was a quiet giant of a man with a heart to match, who went out of his way to help other people. Later on he was a member of a party that was sent to Borneo. Tragically, he perished on the infamous Sandakan death march. The milk enabled me to get the rice down, and the added nourishment helped to reduce the number of trips to the boreholes. I was on the mend.

When I regained my strength, I took advantage of some of the education that was on offer. I enrolled in courses in the Malay language, wool-classing and bookkeeping, and attended lectures and talks on a variety of subjects, including classical music. There was entertainment everywhere. Nearly every battalion had its concert party, with amateur artists suddenly discovering captive audiences on which to vent their mediocre talents. But whatever the concert's standard, it was always received enthusiastically. In those open-air auditoriums, cooled by tropical breezes, it was difficult to react otherwise. The exception to these amateur productions was the combined British and Australian official concert party, which boasted a huge undercover auditorium and a proper stage (originally built in the Barracks for the Gordon Highlanders, I presume). Here, it was all professionalism. The artists, actors, musicians; the costumes, lighting and production – all were of the highest standard. You just couldn't walk in on this show. You had to book your seat, and it invariably took weeks for your unit's turn to come around. It was escapism, and, in a sense, with very few Japanese to be seen, we enjoyed a certain amount of restricted freedom.

These were the 'phoney' prisoner-of-war days when we thought that it would only be a matter of months before the war was won and we would be going home. But, as the months passed and the news from clandestine radios promised no early release, the scenario soon changed. When the Japanese recovered from the shock of their substantial conquests, they discovered that, with 100,000 prisoners, they had a vast workforce at their disposal. Parties of us were scattered around the island of Singapore, working on the docks in factories, and building roads around MacRitchie Reservoir. But the most ambitious project of all was the landscaping of the entire Bukit Timah Heights to accommodate a huge Shinto shrine. Condescendingly, the Japanese allowed us to erect a small Christian cross well behind their shrine. We had liberally infested their shrine with termites. At the completion of each job, we prisoners were returned to Changi to await the call from the Japanese administration for more distant work parties. One after another,

large groups were sent as labourers to all parts of their newly won Empire.

Eventually, on 15 May 1943, I became a member of J Force, numbering 900 British and Australian prisoners, which left Changi by truck for the Singapore docks. It was late in the afternoon when we climbed up the gangway on to a freighter that was to take us to Japan.

JAPAN BOUND

The official Australian war history records the name of the ship as the Weils Maru. My diary has it as the Wells Maru. We called it the Wales Maru. It was a rusty old cargo ship of about 6000 tons. As we Australians were herded into the forward hold, we were hit with the pungent fumes of citronella, which stung our eyes and irritated our throats with every breath. There was a consignment of it beneath us, so there was no escaping it. To add to our discomfort, we were stacked like tinned sardines in the available space. The hold was divided horizontally by a wooden platform, which produced a two-tiered residence, each with so little headroom that no one could stand up. We soon became masters of the Australian crawl. As the voyage progressed through the tropics, with simmering deck above and the fumes below, we felt like a greasy human filling in some giant sandwich, from which we sought to escape at every opportunity.

The toilets were the obvious solution. These consisted of a row of wooden boxes hanging precariously out over the side of the ship, with the effluent falling into the ocean, providing burley for the waiting sharks. This effectively discouraged any attempt an enterprising prisoner might make in taking a plunge to await the arrival of a passing American submarine. Needless to say, whether from necessity or otherwise, these establishments were well patronised, and there was always a queue enjoying the break from the putrid conditions in the hold. Patrons with the greatest need were ushered to the head of the queue, so, with a bit of luck, one could spend an hour a day on deck.

Meals, of course, were eaten topside, which gave us another hour – an hour and a quarter if you were a slow eater. Apart from the smell of sweating bodies, the food was one thing that never changed. Wooden buckets of rice and watery soup appeared and reappeared with every monotonous meal.

After a few days, we gained another few minutes above, when we were permitted to surface in relays for a quick hose-down. When, astonishingly enough, our respiratory systems adjusted to the citronella fumes, conditions gradually became tolerable. In addition, something strange had begun to happen on deck. A fellow 5 Platoon mate, Johnny Gilmour, was, with brilliant initiative, establishing a thriving business with the guards. During Changi days, John had learned the skills of haircutting from a former professional barber, who had, in fact, given him a complete set of implements as a parting gift. Anxious to get in a bit of practice, Johnny hit on the idea of setting himself up as the official ship's barber. Now, with his slouch hat turned down to protect his face and body from the burning sun, he waited apprehensively beside a procured chair, with tools of trade at the ready. Using a few Japs as starters, he was soon executing the long sweeping strokes of a gun shearer. Starting from a Nip's nape and finishing on the forehead, he left them as well shorn as any merino. Then, before the patient could protest, he had him lathered up and whiskers scraped, wielding his lethal cut-throat razor with consummate authority. This incongruous operation not only kept John on deck for most of the day, but he actually got paid for it. As each Jap emerged squeaky clean from his ordeal, he dropped a few cigarettes into the receptacle that Johnny had so thoughtfully provided. On the odd occasion, a particularly satisfied customer parted with a full pack, but, if the profits took on too robust an appearance, John displayed a maturity of business acumen far in excess of his years by skimming off the cream to the bank, while leaving just sufficient currency to encourage further deposits. Not being a smoker himself, he kept all his mates

in cigarettes for the entire voyage.

When most of the guards had been fleeced and the business firmly established, he freely gave his service to the Aussies, at the same time ensuring his continuity of tenure by promoting to the head of the queue any Jap stragglers who had missed the mob. If John Gilmour had not devoted himself to athletics in later life, he would most certainly have become a successful diplomat.

Three days out from Singapore (now renamed 'Shonan' by the Japanese), we passed through a rain squall. As many of us as could get away with it scrambled up the ladder, stripped off, and revelled in the luxury of a freshwater shower. Practically the whole forward deck became awash with gleeful naked prisoners gambolling in the rain, and it seemed the Japs were much too impressed with the sight of so many Caucasian genitalia for them to realise that their orders were being flagrantly disobeyed. This heaven-sent blessing provided welcome relief from the trying conditions of the voyage, and illustrated our growing appreciation of the simple pleasures of life that had once been taken for granted.

The rest of the time was spent in reading the few books that went the rounds, playing cards or reminiscing over happier days. Four of us - Jimmy Dore, Alf Jones, Wally Hutchinson and I - played bridge for hours on end, a game I had learned during early Changi days. Jimmy, a fellow 5 Platoon member of the 2nd 4th, was the humorist of the group, with the pleasant capacity of coming out with a timely witticism on just the right occasion. Alf was a nuggety, good-looking man, who loved the bush, and looked every bit the typical rugged Aussie battler. Then there was Wally, the only six-footer among us, who had a long, scholarly face and confident, almost arrogant, manner, which gave him the appearance of a headmaster. And he had the voice to match. In his rich authoritative manner, he could speak at length on any subject that cropped up, and most that didn't. Being a naive youngster at the time, with a strictly limited range of topics at my disposal, his apparent worldly knowledge and brash demeanour impressed me immensely. When he talked, I listened.

This, then, was the extent of our daytime activities; the nights were very different indeed. It was then that the comedians and joke-tellers came into their own, each one competing for the favour of this large captive audience. It was not uncommon for the comparative quiet of the darkened ship to be shattered by the sound of raucous laughter at the completion of some well-told joke or the presentation of a well-versed raconteur. But gradually the merriment eased, the talking faded and the hold grew silent. When the deck cooled, we slept. Just how much sleep we got depended on the position of the bed space and the physical condition of the men in the immediate vicinity. When each man occupied his bed space, there was not a square foot of room to spare, and it became a torturous exercise for anyone in need of the toilet to feel his way through the maze of bodies. For the prisoners-of-war on the Wales Maru, tolerance took on a new meaning.

On 20 May, we reached the mouth of the Saigon River, where we lay at anchor for three days, apparently waiting for more ships to join the convoy. Then, in the company of two tankers and five other ships, with a small naval vessel as escort, we resumed our voyage as far as Taikoa on the south-west coast of Formosa (Taiwan). Here, there was an excellent harbour, full of ships, including, significantly enough, several hospital ships. The 2nd of June dawned bright and clear as we left the shelter of Taikoa harbour on the final leg of our journey. Two days later, the weather changed. My diary reads:

4th June has turned suddenly cold and rained gently all day.

5th June, still cold and overcast with a placid sea.

As usual, I was playing bridge with Jim, Alf and Wally, and, for a change, we were wearing shirts, appreciating the drop in temperature.

It was mid-morning, and all was calm. Suddenly, there was a fierce commotion above and the prisoners on deck were unceremoniously herded below to the accompaniment of shouts and yells from the guards. The first to scramble down the ladder panted out that a torpedo had passed across our bow and another had barely missed our stern. For a moment or two, I could do nothing in disbelief. The card game stopped abruptly, the players frozen. Then, when the reality of the situation hit us, every man moved instinctively to his bed space to rummage frantically through his gear, seeking out the few special possessions he could preserve, while not jeopardising his chances for survival if he had to swim for his life. The rustle of 300 men fumbling through their packs was the only sound audible in the hold. It was an uncanny sensation.

As each man finished his selective packing, he sat or squatted; some moved towards the centre of the hold as though to find protection amongst the mass of sweating bodies. Gradually, the movement lessened, the rustling eased, until there was only silence...and the waiting. Up above, it was obviously a different scene. The ships of the convoy were firing their stern-mounted guns, and there were muffled explosions from depth charges as the gun boat entered the fray. And above all, there was the constant excited babble of the Japanese soldiers. Meanwhile, down below, we silently awaited our fate, left with our conjectures, our imaginations and our fears. The older men sat quietly composed, some looking straight ahead, while others disciplined themselves with heads bent in a concentrated effort to preserve their dignity, which was being subjected to the ultimate test. I glanced nervously around, desperately searching for a comforting look, a sympathetic touch or an encouraging word of reassurance that would somehow release some of the fear within me. As the minutes dragged on, the expressions of fear or resignation that had filled our eyes were gradually replaced with a look of hope, and time, which seemed to have hovered on the brink of extinction, resumed its perspective. The firing from the Japanese ships eased and the shouting faded. Then someone laughed - and the tension was gone. The ships of the convoy steamed silently away like actors departing the stage, but the cast of this drama had been predominantly hidden: the crew of an American submarine and several hundred prisoners-of-war sweating it out in the holds of a Japanese freighter. Much to our consternation, we awoke the next morning to find ourselves alone in the ocean and dawdling along at a much reduced speed. The rest of the convoy had disappeared for some reason. While we were still speculating on the reason for our isolation, the Japs suddenly went crazy, running to their positions and firing rifles from the length of the ship at a target off the port beam. They were soon joined by the ship's field gun. Once again, we were herded below to await what we believed to be a certain sinking. This time we were the only target. But as we grabbed our treasured possessions again, the firing suddenly stopped and laughter erupted in its place. We discovered that what was thought to have been the periscope of a submarine had turned out to be quite an innocent object, part of a fishing buoy. We could breathe again. All day long the Wales Maru plodded on, lonely and vulnerable, and we were actually glad to get a visit from a Japanese reconnaissance plane during the afternoon. The next morning brought relief and apprehension as we straggled into the port of Moji on the north-eastern tip of the island of Kyushu. My recollection of Moji is of a densely wooded mountain draped in mist, which, in more favourable circumstances, would have been a very pleasant introduction to the ancient and mystical nation of Japan. Instead, our arrival to the Land of the Rising Sun had us parading on deck with our trousers draped around our ankles in full view of the public, in preparation for a dysentery test. Lined up at one end was a team of masked and gowned Japanese medical orderlies waiting eagerly to show the ingenuity of their latest professional techniques. One by one, we shuffled towards the makeshift altar. When my turn came, I was required to bow very deeply in order to facilitate the supreme blessing. With my eyes closely examining the texture of the iron decking, and my behind pointing to the masthead and under close scrutiny, I had never felt more vulnerable or

humiliated. Being exposed to such flagrant violation, I did what I should not have done, I tensed up. A fellow victim in the pew adjoining mine, sensing my discomfort came out with the old Confucius joke: if rape is inevitable, relax and enjoy it. Quite suddenly, I was raped. The glass tube penetrated my reluctant sphincter and I was unable to follow his advice. Others seemed to find the experience quite funny, and assumed the role of sheep undergoing drenching – only on this occasion, the opposite end of the 'animal' was the recipient of attention. Their frequent bleats of protest were interrupted only by facetious remarks about rejoining the queue for a 'back up'. The bleating resumed with an increased, though somewhat muffled, voice, as we were pushed down the race off the ship, fighting our way through a battery of fogging machines to be deloused before being allowed to tread the sacred soil of Nippon.

A JAPANESE EDUCATION

By 12.30 pm we had disembarked into three groups. I, with 250 other Australians, found myself in 'B' party. Food was then provided, and we were introduced to the Japanese bamboo-leaf box of rice, with its small compartment of treated seaweed and vegetables. All this came with a pair of rough pinewood chopsticks, which were manipulated with some difficulty. Our Japanese education had started. At dusk, we boarded a ferry that took us across the strait to Shimonoseki, on the island of Honshu. Then we were marched several hundred yards through an enormous wooden tunnel that terminated at the railway station. Here, 'B' party parted company from the others, and, at 8.15 pm, we drew out of the station in a specially provided passenger train. After a long night of uncomfortable travelling, snatching a few minutes' sleep whenever we found enough room to stretch our cramped legs, we arrived at our destination at about 8.30 am, on 8 June 1943. It was the city of Kobe. From the station, we marched down a street named Naka Machi Dori, past the German consulate on the right, and then, a little further along, turned left into a sports ground. Here, we were assembled and given a lecture by Colonel Murata, who introduced himself as Commander of all prisoner-of-war camps in the Kobe/Osaka area. We were told that, from now on, we would be subjected to treatment under the Nippon army law, which included being quartered, fed and clothed by the Imperial Japanese Army. Any disobedience or refusal to obey commands given by any Japanese national would result in severe punishment. The interpreter was Corporal Hoblett, an American who had been captured in the Philippines. It was the first of many speeches that he would interpret for us over the next two years. Immediately after the speech, we were ordered to hand in all notebooks, playing cards and valuables. At this stage of our captivity, my diary consisted of just one thin notebook, so I decided to take the risk and hide it on my body while they held a thorough search of our gear. We were then instructed to sign forms, stating that we would undertake to work as required and would not attempt to escape. Our senior officers made an official objection about signing the non-escape form, pointing out that it conflicted with our code of military conduct and duty as soldiers. This same question had first arisen back in September of 1942, and had developed into the famous Changi Square incident, when, as a reprisal for our senior officers' refusal to sign this form, the Japanese had ordered all prisoners-of-war held in the Changi Peninsula to be confined in the Selarang Barracks area, which normally only held 1200 men. Even our Robert Barracks main hospital was compelled to make the move, despite the fact that many patients were still suffering from war wounds. Then the water supply was cut off to the buildings, leaving only one tap to supply the needs of 15,400 men. With the regular toilets having become unusable, the situation quickly became intolerable, so in order to prevent the outbreak of disease, our Commanding Officer gave the order for the document to be signed. As had happened at Changi, we signed under duress, which, in our view, rendered the document worthless. In any case, as we were Caucasians among a nation of Asiatics, any attempt to

escape would almost certainly have been discovered and the escapee shot. We were then formed into three ranks while Hoblett gave us our first lesson in the Jap language. The previous night's train journey had allowed us little sleep and we were in no mood for this nonsense. But the Japanese had other ideas. In a swift decisive action, a senior guard, with sword at the waist, leapt onto the podium and shattered the comparative quiet of the summer morning with an unearthly sound.

'*BANGOOOOOOooo.*' In faltering succession, the front rank made a gallant attempt to execute the Jap's order 'to number'. '*Ichi...ni* (bash)...*san...*(thump) *shi...go...* (bash) *roko...*' We were not in complete ignorance of the numerical progression of the Japanese language. The quarter-of-an-hour's crash course on the subject that we had just completed with Hoblett may have satisfied our teacher, but our hesitant and laboured efforts obviously fell far short of satisfying the sergeant-major. Time and time again, he interrupted our faltering attempts with a renewed chunder to *bango*. Although he was the one who sounded in agony, it wasn't long before we were the ones to feel pain. If the interval between numbers was considered too lengthy, or the quality of the sound too anaemic, the unfortunate offender had his concentration stimulated by a sharp rap of a sword scabbard on the skull. As a class of academics, we were a failure, because there were few of us who escaped the 'cane'. No linguistic students ever had a more effective initiation to their studies than we had on that memorable day. Members of the front rank were not the only recipients of this free lesson, either. With commendable unselfishness, the sergeant-major repeatedly switched ranks so that every man could benefit. This exasperating ritual went on and on until it developed into one of the most miserable days of my captivity. The continual harassment hastened the need to attend to natural bodily functions and, with characteristic initiative, an apparent epidemic of diarrhoea suddenly swept through the ranks. Eventually, the message penetrated the skull of the imperious sergeant-major, who reluctantly called it a day and left us to our visits to the *benjo*, which we very quickly learned meant the 'toilet'.

The *benjo* was across the road from the park on the ground floor of a stark, three-storey, red-brick warehouse. As I made my way through the open gate, I saw several pale human forms inside, dressed in Japanese army uniforms. For a few moments, I was puzzled at the thought of being housed with Jap troops, but as I drew closer, I was shocked to see that they were Europeans. Furthermore, they spoke English. After moving inside and talking with them at greater length, we learned that they were British soldiers who had been captured at the fall of Hong Kong, and that they had survived the sinking of the 'Lisbon Maru,' which had been torpedoed on the way to Japan. For some strange reason, seeing them dressed that way filled me with deep depression and I wondered if that was how we would eventually look. There and then, I vowed that, so long as I retained my slouch hat, I would do my utmost to maintain the appearance of an Australian soldier. Unhappily, though, our slouch hats were the first things the Japs took from us. At the time, I could find no reason for my feelings, but on reflection, I think I was filled with repugnance at the sight of my fellow countrymen existing under such a humiliating environment. Little did I imagine, then, that it would be but a few months before we would join our fellow prisoners in donning the enemy's uniform, complete with army caps, split-toed rubber shoes and greatcoats.

KOBE HOUSE

Our new camp was made up of three buildings, collectively called Kobe House. The building we occupied and an adjoining building that housed the Japanese guards filled one end of a complete block. There was a cobble-stoned alleyway running from the double gate through which we had entered, past a battery of water taps strung over a long wooden trough, and through to another set of double doors that led to a street parallel to

Naka Machi Dori. Just before the doors, on the left, was the guardhouse, which was virtually an opening in the wall of the Japanese quarters, about 10ft wide. A door in the rear of this opening gave the guards access to their quarters. Opposite the guardhouse was the entrance to the other converted brick warehouse. The first and second floors were the home of the Brits, while the officers of all nationalities occupied the third floor. Above them was a built-in loft, which served as a storeroom – the equivalent of our Q-store.

A sheltered passageway led from the top of the first flight of stairs in this building, above the cobblestones, to a large area over the guards' quarters. This was the combination Regimental Aid Post (RAP) and hospital, although only the very sick or badly injured were allowed to occupy the few floor spaces. Our own MO, Captain Boyce, from Queensland, was soon at work tending the sick. The Australians occupied the first two floors of the warehouse overlooking the park. The floor space was almost completely covered by a low platform about 18 inches off the floor, which, in turn, was covered with the traditional Japanese straw matting. Neatly folded piles, each of three blankets, topped with small, husk-filled cylindrical pillows, indicated where the bed spaces lay. Two narrow passageways, cut into the platform, effectively divided the whole area into three sections. Down the centre of the passageways ran the eating tables, which were brought into use by raising hinged planks on either side of a central support and swinging out crosspieces to hold them. When not in use, the tables were dropped to facilitate movement to and from the sleeping area, and, in order to keep the matting clean, we were instructed to conform to the local custom of removing footwear before walking on it.

There were two stairways leading to the first and second floors, but only one central flight to the loft, where about 30 captured merchant seamen of various nationalities and around the same number of Americans lived. These people had a distinct advantage over us as they had only a single approach to police, whereas we had to keep our eyes on two avenues for any marauding sentries. To support the cumulative weight of 300 men and their belongings, four huge square timber pillars, equally spaced, ran the height of the building from the ground floor to the loft. At each floor level, several substantial bearers branched out, linking up to hold the numerous joists to which the floorboards were nailed. Rugged-looking struts bridged the gap between pillar and bearer, creating a pattern of equilateral triangles. The whole structure imparted a feeling of strength and security, yet had the aesthetic beauty of natural timber. The timbers were light-coloured indigenous softwoods, noticeably different from the rich reds and heavily grained jarrah and karri of the Western Australian forests, but providing a pleasing contrast to the dull and uninteresting brick of the walls.

There were times when the timbers spoke to us. When the frequent earth tremors rocked the land, an ominous and, initially, frightening array of noises came from the bowels of the building. It was as though the ancient warlords were on the rampage, and the soul of Kobe House writhed in agony before the sword of the Samurai. Or perhaps the spirits of the stately trees were complaining of the injustice of being sacrificed to provide shelter for the foreigners with the big noses. Whatever the reason, the timbers of Kobe House always warned us of an impending earth tremor. We grew accustomed to their voice. Less appealing were the scattered openings that served as windows. There was no glass in these apertures, and thick, iron bars and heavy shutters were a constant reminder that we were in a prison camp. Apart from the side facing the park, nothing could be seen from the windows, except the unattractive rooftops of nearby buildings.

The amenities, as such, were on the ground floor, with the kitchen occupying half the space. Next to the kitchen was the bathroom, with its large, square communal bath taking up most of the room, leaving only enough space for a few showers. The remainder of the ground floor housed the toilets – a row of wooden cubicles with holes cut into the flooring, over which one straddled, with the excrement dropping into an enormous concrete tank. It was plumbing at its crudest. But, with our meagre rations, it was more

than adequate to cope with our miserable leftovers. Even the undernourished rats squealed their nightly protest at the quality of the service. Later on, when we acquired the skills of looting, this situation changed dramatically. To complete the utilities, a section of about ten feet of wall space was made into a urinal, which emptied into the town drainage system. Meanwhile, the sergeant-major's Japanese lesson had left us Aussies in a state of exhaustion and disarray, and by the time we struggled to find a bed space, I had become separated from my 2nd 4th mates and found myself among a group of strangers. My six-by-three-foot strip of matting was on the second floor against the wall furthest from the park. Or, rather, it was three bed spaces away from the wall; about seven feet from the corner, an open partition cut across the platform, extending from the wall to the table, which allowed ten bodies to occupy the corner space lying head to head, five each side of the partition. A similar layout existed in the central of the three sleeping platforms, except that the partition went the complete length of the platform. These partitions were, in effect, a simple system of shelving, built to accommodate our few possessions, which, after 16 months of captivity, had become sadly depleted. Where necessary, other shelving butted up against the walls.

So started a new phase in our lives as prisoners in the hands of the Japanese. We were the captives of Kobe House.

LEARNING THE ROPES

Kobe House had many shocks in store for us. The first of these was at precisely 5.30 am the following morning, when the blast of a bugle sent us scrambling out of bed. Dressing quickly, we awaited apprehensively for the next directive. We didn't have long to wait. Just a quarter of an hour later, another bugle call sounded, accompanied by shouts of '*tenko, tenko,*' and 'out, out'. I was struck by the incongruity of the situation when I saw it was a British bugler playing Japanese army calls. As I hastened out to the street, adjusting my new-issue Jap cap, I began to wonder just what army I was in.

We spent most of the first few days out in the street getting in more *bango* practice, at the same time quickly learning to salute the guardhouse every time we passed it. This was virtually a sacred site to which we were obliged to pay homage, whether it was occupied or not. After a nightly session of homework, and a little more prompting from the sergeant-major, we overcame our hesitancy of the first day, and were soon *bango*-ing with great gusto and growing confidence. Apart from a few bruised heads and croaky throats, we graduated out of the infants what Grade I had to offer.

It was Japanese army drill. No more would we stand to attention with 'lightly clenched fist with thumbs down the seam of the trousers.' From now on, the order became '*kiotski,*' and, although the feet remained in the position to which we were accustomed, our hands had to be opened out with fingers together and stretched to the limit. 'Stand at ease' was simple enough. On the command '*yasume,*' the left foot was placed smartly to the left at a comfortable distance. Once this was accomplished, the hands and body could be moved, there being no further order to accommodate our own drill movement to 'stand easy'. The word *yasume* literally meant rest, which applied to any period of relaxation, and, in the years that followed, a day off work was always called a '*yasume* day.' The left and right turn came next. Left became '*hidari,*' and right was '*migi*' so the orders were '*hidari-muke-hidari*' or '*migi-muke-migi*', executed by a little shuffle in the direction required. The order to salute was '*kire*', and the action was to smartly bring the right hand obliquely above the right eye, keeping the fingers straight and together, with the palm facing downwards, similar to our own naval salute. The order to '*naure*' returned the arm to the position of attention.

'Right dress' was a masterpiece of simplicity. Our Army manual made this movement sound like a major military exercise: 'On the executive order "dress", you take a

half pace to the front, then move your head smartly to the right, at the same time shooting your right arm out parallel to the ground. You then move quickly into position so that you can just see the chin of the man second from you, and your right fist touches the shoulder of the man next to you.'

Nothing so complicated for the Japanese. On the order '*migi-me-narai*', our heads turned to the right, and the Japs imparted their message with remarkable effectiveness. One guard went the length of the rank, kicking each man's heels into line, while another, with commendable logic, corrected any protruding toes with swift kicks to the offending leg. For the average man, a couple of kicks sufficed to meet the requirements. Not so the poor unfortunate with big feet. His deliberate lack of cooperation resulted in repeated kicks fore and aft, which left him with jellied heels, and shins with more corrugations than the Birdsville track. Many a man on the point of collapse was saved only by the command '*naure*,' which brought us back to attention.

That took care of the static movements; now we had to become mobile. 'Quick march' became '*mae-sumi*' and '*tomare*' halted us. Finally, we were dismissed by the order '*wakare*'.

Not only did we have to memorise these new commands, but there was the added challenge of getting the emphasis, and other idiosyncrasies of the language, correct. For instance, the vowel following the first consonant is silent, effectively abbreviating the first syllable and throwing the accent onto the last part of the word, making them sound as *k'otSKI*, *y'Sme*, *h'DARI*, *m'GI*, *t'MARE* and *w'KARE*. The exception was the 'quick march' – *mae's'MI*. So it was recruit days all over again, only this time, the ample spaces of Northam Camp had been condensed into a couple of streets in Kobe. There were a few other dissimilarities, too.

The good old army breakfast of 'snaggers and eggs' had disappeared from the menu, along with all the other 'disgusting crap' we'd had dished up to us. No longer did the orderly officer interrupt a struggle with a tough chop to ask if there were 'any complaints?' And there was little point in applying for weekend-leave. God alone knew when we would have that privilege again, if ever.

As we pounded the streets outside Kobe House, a line from Kipling's 'Gunga Din' kept running through my head: 'where it's always double drill and no canteen.' I had recited those lines a hundred times without giving them much thought. Now, they haunted me with every jarring step and foreign command. Kipling's description of hell had not been far astray. But there were occasions when the drudgery of our existence was relieved by the completely unexpected. Such an event occurred when one of our officers, struggling with the order to 'right turn', barked, in an immaculate stentorian voice, 'Miggy-piggy-wiggy'. It was this type of humour that kept us going, and it was made all the more satisfying by the knowledge that the joke went unnoticed by the guards. It was tantamount to having gained a victory. After all, we hadn't had too many of those lately.

To complete the transformation from the Australian Imperial Force to the Japanese Imperial Army, we were re-numbered and grouped into new sections. About the only thing we were not required to do was to swear an oath of allegiance to the Emperor, although, on selected occasions, we were later obliged to bow in the direction of his Imperial Palace. I was now no. *nana haku ju yon* (714), and a member of *dai go kumi* (No.5 Section). There were eight sections of Australians in all, four on each floor, with a senior noncommissioned officer as *kumi* leader. Sgt Ian Doherty of the 2nd 18th Battalion was my *kumi* leader. He was tall and dark, with a bushy black moustache that gave him a distinguished appearance even in spite of the Japanese uniform he later had to don. He looked every inch a leader. When the *tenko* parade was held each morning and night, it was Ian's onerous task, when confronted by the duty officer of the day, to announce in a tirade of Japanese that his was No. 5 Section with a total strength of 30 men. If, for example, one man was in hospital, leaving 29 on parade, he would then bellow this

information. He followed this with a shouted order to *bango*, whereupon the man next to him started the roll-call with the cry of *ichi*, setting off a chain reaction down the section until the count of 28 was reached. This left Ian with number 29 to bellow, followed by the report that all was correct – *tenko inju nash*. The final act in the ceremony was the reciprocal salute, with Ian exercising a deep bow if the parade was held inside and he was hatless, or a Japanese-style salute if held outside and wearing a cap.

During the first few days of this introductory ordeal, I learnt a little more about the Eastern States fellows who surrounded me. Next to me on the wall side was Les Cooke of the 2nd 20th Battalion. He was a small, chunky man and a genuine bushman from the back blocks. His weatherbeaten face always seemed to be covered in a perpetual stubble, even after he shaved. And he had a matching hairstyle, with the bristles on his scalp being only marginally longer than his facial fungus. His clothes, too, always were ill fitting: the trousers too long for his short legs, and the shirt or tunic too voluminous. Les was one of those men who, no matter how hard they try, will never make the fashion pages. I have known men who could look elegant wearing a lap-lap. Cookie would have looked daggie in a tuxedo. John Byrnes, on the other hand, was the complete opposite. He, too, was a small man, but neatly put together and scrupulously clean. He was one of several medical orderlies in No. 5 Section, and he occupied the bed space the other side of Les. What I secretly admired about John was his voice: it had the pleasing, well modulated sound of an academic. As a POW, John Byrnes was way out of his environment. As a medic, he was superb. On the other side of me was the cheerful Les Kelly, whose freckled face seemed to be forever creased in a cheeky grin. As an orderly of the 10th AGH, Dr Boyce utilised his services, too. Over the partition against the wall was a quartet of Queenslanders of the 2nd 10th Field Regiment: Mick Davis, Wally Bird, John McIntyre and Fred Sparks. With Ian Doherty on the outside, the remaining occupant of that corner was Gordon Macdonald of the 2nd 18th Battalion.

WORKING FOR THE EMPEROR

On the 15th of June 1943, the Australians were put to work for Japan and the Emperor. A group of senior Allied officers in Kobe House were known as the Camp Staff and it was through them that the Japanese administration worked – advising them of the numbers required for each firm, and leaving them to detail the personnel for each job. The Japanese companies of Mitsui, Takahama, Kobe-go and Sempaku soon became as familiar to us as Coles and Woolworths. All these firms had large warehouses scattered along the huge artificially constructed waterfront, and most of the Aussies were allocated to these places. However, there were three factories situated some ten miles east of Kobe, at which about 70 of us were detailed to work. This group comprised the Showa Denki carbon works, Yoshihara vegetable oil processors and the Toyo steel foundry. I found myself on the Yoshihara list.

At 7.00 am the bugle called us out to the streets, where we fell in against a chalk mark on the road that indicated the name of the firm to which we had been assigned. Two representatives from each company, called *hanchos*, were waiting to conduct another *tenko* before marching their particular group off to work. Most groups marched directly to the dockside; some distant ones had a short march to catch a tram; my group made for the Kobe railway station. In addition to the *hanchos*, we were escorted by one of the camp guards, obviously because we were exposed to a greater contact with the civilian population and the fact that we had to travel by train.

As we marched along Naka Machi Dori to the station, retracing our steps of the day of our arrival, we were amused to see many young girls cover their noses in an apparent gesture of our offensiveness in their presence. I wouldn't go so far as to say the feeling was mutual, but to see so many of them waddling along in their long baggy trousers, however practical, had no effect on my sensuality, despite so lengthy a sojourn in the

sexual wilderness. An item of greater interest to me at that moment was the sighting of an English-language newspaper, the *Mainichi*, on a bookstall at the entrance to the station. I made a mental note that, despite the presence of a guard, one day there would be an opportunity to swipe a copy. The key was to stay alert. Meanwhile, we had assembled on the platform in a clearing that the guard had provided by waving his rifle, like Moses parting the waters. As the modern electric train raced past in rapid deceleration, a kaleidoscope of humanity flashed by, coachload after coachload. When it finally came to rest, an empty coach appeared miraculously before us – clearly, it was Moses with an encore.

We leisurely made our way inside to a comfortable seat, while the mass of bodies outside invaded the already full train. We were amazed by the activities of the porters as they struggled to push aboard the protruding portions of bodies that jammed the doorways of the train. When these disappeared inside, the train proceeded on its journey. It was anything but a scenic tour. To the north, a fairly tall range of hills kept us company for most of the trip. These were a pleasant enough feature, but in between, there was nothing but a mass of drab, grey, slate-tiled roofs, with a myriad of narrow roads and the occasional taller building or factory. This depressing landscape was broken only in three locations by a thin avenue of pines. The one feature that did interest me was the way every arable strip of land was under cultivation: the small plots and road verges producing vegetables, with any sizeable vacancies put to use growing rice.

About three miles past the last outpost of pines, at a station called Koshen, our *hanchos* ushered the Toyo and Yoshihara workers off the train. The guard remained on board with the Showa Denki crowd, who, apparently, had to go a couple of stations further on. From Koshen station, our journey wound through the back streets of a residential district, and it was not long before our presence attracted the inevitable crowd of small children. They obviously took us for Americans, because our appearance incited shrill and lively chant of '*A-meri-ca-no-hor-y-o*,' which sounded remarkably like the opening bars of *La Donna e Mobile*. The term '*horyo*,' the Japanese word for prisoner-of-war, was one with which we were to become all too familiar in the future. As the sound of the juvenile songsters faded behind us, we marched along until we came to quite a sizeable canal. It was here that the Toyo party branched off to their factory, while our party continued along the banks of the canal for a further 500 yards before turning in through the gates of Yoshihara.

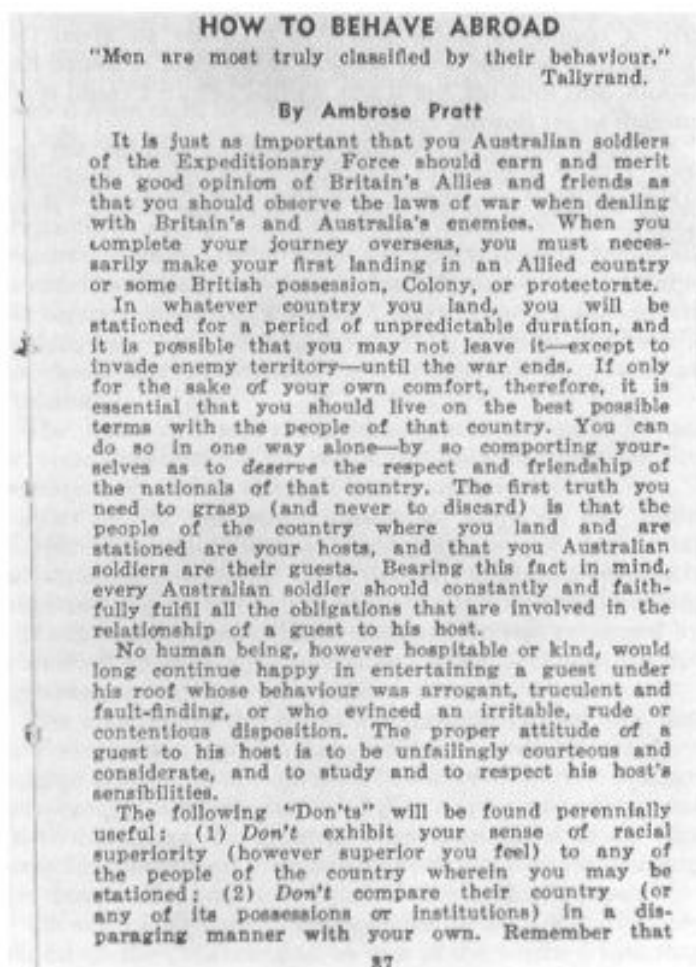
Just inside the gates, we were halted outside a mess hut. Here, we deposited our haversacks, which contained a midday meal of one and a half small rolls of bread that had been issued to us back in Kobe House. We were also required to change into working clothes – a motley assortment of rough-looking, dark-green uniforms of local manufacture, but clearly not catering to the requirements of some of the more lanky Australians. Consequently, when we reformed outside, we presented an appearance that would have made any RSM die of apoplexy.

Yoshihara processed a variety of products including copra, peanuts, cotton and rapeseed, and castor beans, with the oil being siphoned off into four-gallon tins and the residue being bagged. Small groups of us were employed stacking or unstacking an endless supply of tins, either in or out of warehouses, or on to flat-topped trucks. Other groups fed the machines with one or other of the ingredients – a never-ending process of bringing the fodder, bagging the residue, and stacking or loading it. It was constant, repetitive work in an environment so dusty that the machinery was all but hidden from sight by a thick coating of it.

Only lunchtime brought relief. It also brought quite a surprise when we discovered that, in addition to our issue of bread, a meal of cooked rice awaited us. This had been prepared by Ian Doherty, who, as a senior NCO, was not required to work. Like all other work party leaders, Ian acted as chief cook, and arbiter in disputes that arose between the

horyos and civilian workers. I don't know just how much cooking experience Ian had before he enlisted, but there's no doubt that he learned new, if not valuable, skills at Yoshihara. The extra rice was made much more palatable by an occasional '*presento*' of peanut or coconut oil won from the management mainly through Ian's persuasive efforts. After lunch, we would return to more of the same disagreeable conditions, relieved only by the occasional judicious trip to the *benjo*. These concrete establishments each consisted of a narrow platform, from which one stood facing a blank rendered wall. The total structure was protected by a small tiled roof, which provided some shelter from the elements, though very little privacy.

The cleaning of the toilets and general factory area was carried out by a couple of ancient ladies dressed in a most strange assortment of rags: their heads were covered by large scarves tied under the chin, and they wore great voluminous skirts that swept the ground. They spent most of the day scratching away with their little old witches' brooms, keeping the narrow alleyways free from rubbish and spilt produce. On one of my visits to the open-air urinal, I was suddenly joined on the concrete pad by one of the witches. Ignoring me completely, she gathered up her tattered skirts and, backing into a firing position, let fly with a prolific and well-aimed stream that would have done justice to the performance of Goldie, my pet shorthorn cow of Fairbridge days. I was so surprised and shocked by this impressive exhibition that it was some moments before I recovered enough to take a couple of paces sideways in order to avoid the backwash. Then the witch readjusted her rags, mounted her broom, and took off, but it was a while before I could relax enough to get flowing again. Needless to say, the whole indecorous episode left me floundering. It was an experience I could not remember being warned of in my little red Australian Soldiers' Pocket Book.



A page from the *Australian Soldiers' Pocket Book*.

GRABBING THE LOOT

The longer we worked at Yoshihara, the more we realised the potential to augment our inadequate and monotonous diet of rice with vitamin-rich peanuts. We discovered that, by tapping the crushing process at a certain stage, the half-processed nuts mixed quite well with the rice, and that copra, when it had been reduced to a semi-liquid, made quite a satisfactory spread for our bread rolls. In fact, despite the rancid flavour, it was a more than acceptable substitute for butter. But it wasn't just a matter of taking it 'off the shelves'. Nothing was that easy. The Japs were well and truly brainwashed into giving their all for the mighty Nippon war effort, and they responded to the call to the point of fanaticism, so any siphoning off of their produce was interpreted as sabotage. And we were just as fanatical in our efforts to stay alive. This was beginning to look increasingly doubtful on our existing rations, which made it obvious that, if we were to survive the war, we would have to take calculated risks in stealing the essentials we needed to sustain ourselves. With such a conflict of attitudes, it was inevitable that battle would take place.

Our side of the battle involved making use of every opportunity that presented itself, and others of our own making, to snatch, lift, swipe or steal anything of value. We developed unfamiliar skills of deceit and cunning, which improved dramatically after trial and error. The Nips, for their part in the battle, were just as determined to keep Japanese goods in Japanese hands. Whenever they caught our sticky fingers in the till, they registered a definite 'no sale' notice in the form of a piercing cry of '*kura*,' followed by a two-fisted onslaught about the face. This method of punishment, while standing to attention, with no avenue of defence, was not particularly amusing. The whole thing turned into a battle of wits. We won some – we lost some. But, as the weeks went by, the question of loot dominated our every discussion, influenced many a decision, and resulted in some merciless bashings.

We graduated from stealing for our immediate use to stockpiling for return to Kobe House, enabling us to enter the common barter market. But this undertaking added many additional risks and was fraught with danger. Before leaving work each night we were searched by a Yoshihara foreman or *hanchō* and, more often than not, we were searched again when we arrived back at Kobe House. Getting through the first was no guarantee of escaping detection on the second. The waiting guards were much more thorough in their frisking than the *hanchōs*, because they relied on their discoveries to supplement their own rations. Meanwhile, it had been noticed that the *horyōs* from neighbouring Toyo Steel were never searched because of the nature of the work, and were dismissed immediately their *tenko* was over. This led to the introduction of a unique system of cooperation between the two *horyō* groups.

The whole scheme hinged on the waiting period at Koshen station for the return trip home. Just outside the entrance to the station, both parties were assembled; one behind the other, and, in a prearranged plan, the participating teams would be strategically positioned for the action. With lightning-swift movements, haversacks were exchanged with amazing dexterity, the Yoshihara side passing their loot to the Toyo team and accepting an empty bag in return. This operation, of course had to be executed without being observed by the *hanchōs* or the guard, so perfect timing was essential. Once safely back inside Kobe House, the spoils were evenly divided, an arrangement that allowed the Toyo boys to earn their share of badly needed essentials. On rare occasions, through some hypocritical quirk of the oriental mind, the guard would hand his haversack to Ian Doherty, our NCO, in the morning, with instructions that it be filled with goodies by the afternoon. When that happened, we loaded up to the hilt, too, knowing there would be no search that night.

It made life interesting, and exciting. Certainly, no one suffered from constipation. The acquisition of loot became our very existence. The pressure eased when 'Darkie'

escorted us. Of all the guards who came and went, he was the only one we felt confident in trusting. He was seldom demonstrative, going about his duties in a quiet manner, yet quite often displaying a subtle sense of humour. His broad face and high cheekbones, which almost caused his eyes to disappear beneath the peak of his cap, and his swarthy complexion had earned him his nickname. He had seen active service in China, which explained, perhaps, his tolerant attitude towards us. If anyone could get us back inside Kobe House without a search, it was Darkie. Of the others, none could be trusted although on very rare occasions one or other of them would dispense a bewildering degree of justice.

'Horseface' was a typical example. To begin with, of all the guards, he was the most misnamed. I had worked with horses for over two years on the Gnowangerup farm, and had grown to love them. To me, they were responsive, cooperative, appreciative and gentle. I looked upon the horse as one of the most beautiful animals of all. By no stretch of the imagination could Horseface be called beautiful: sad, maybe; doleful, perhaps; simple, certainly, but never beautiful. During a surprise search outside Koshen station one day, he found a bottle of peanut oil in a man's mess tin. Stepping back a pace or two, Horseface rocked the culprit with a couple of blows, and then gave him back his loot. During the train trip back to camp, he explained to Ian Doherty that the punishment was not for having the oil, but for not having hidden it properly. That was one thing we were constantly working on: new and improved places to hide things.

After a few months, when we became more familiar with our Japanese escorts, they relaxed the waiting conditions at Koshen station and permitted both working parties to mix freely. It even reached the stage where one of the more sympathetic guards would tell us that a blitz was planned for that night, so if we were loaded, we'd better get rid of it quickly. We did so by dumping it in the nearby toilet. The workmen who emptied that toilet must have thought that we *horyos* had very peculiar digestive systems. With the onset of winter, and the issue of long underwear, we devised a new method of concealment that greatly increased the quantity of loot we were able to get back to camp. Firstly, we would increase the circumference of our trousers by sewing extra pieces of matching material in the legs. Then, making sure that the bottoms of our long johns were securely tied, we would fill both legs with either whole or crushed peanuts, the bulkiness being concealed by the flared strides. That winter of '43 saw the introduction of 'flares' that took years to reach the rest of the fashion world.

The rewards for a successful haul of loot were many. *Horyos* working for firms along the waterfront brought in cigarettes, sugar, canned sardines, salmon and an occasional can of fruit. The standard trading measure was our rice bowl with one-for-one between peanuts and sugar, and a negotiated deal for the canned goods. Thirty cigarettes usually bought a bowl of sugar or peanuts, or a small roll of bread. Eighty cigarettes would purchase the luxury of an eight-ounce can of salmon. Many other transactions depended on the supply of cigarettes, with prices fluctuating with the demand.

On most jobs, the spoils were there for the taking, but the risks were great and the punishments severe. Most of us were prepared to take the risks, though, and an opportunity for looting scarcely went begging. Besides, it helped to take our minds off the drudgery and fatigue of the work. However, as the months went by, the searches grew more frequent and thorough, and the punishments increased in severity. A small storeroom in the cobble-stoned passageway adjacent to the wash benches was converted to a jail or *aeso*, and the guards saw to it that it didn't stay unoccupied for long.

One of our *hanchos* at Yoshihara was an elderly figure who looked as though he had come straight out of the cast of a Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera. With sparse white foliage sprouting from atop of a semi-deflated football of a face, and eyes all but hidden amongst the cracked creases of leather, Ga-Ga was a real live Japanese character. His voice came wheezing out in a sort of fuzzy tenor falsetto, giving the impression that he

was constantly in need of a neats'-foot-oil throat spray. His drab, olive-green uniform, made from processed peanut shells, hung loosely on his lean frame, and an army-type cap perched precariously on his near bald head. His age could have been anywhere between 50 and 80, and his status as a *horyos' hancho* was the highlight of his long service with the company. Things seldom went right for Ga-Ga, and he let all and sundry know of his whereabouts by an almost constant chorus of 'piggy-piggy' (our pronunciation of a Japanese word meaning bad, inferior). Yet, he was a kind and fair man, and it was through his recommendation that I received my 'little brown ring' on my identification badge, indicating that I was among the good-worker brigade, and entitling me to an extra five sen a day, taking my daily rate up to 15 sen. It was while talking to him that I experienced my first indication of how the Japanese civilian viewed the war. One of the first questions a *horyo* was asked was 'How old are you?' From then on, the conversation would progress in a kind of verbless Nippon-go. In response to his query, I told him that my age was *niju-ichi* (21), and that I'd be *niju-ni* (22) by the time the *sensoo-oware* (war was over). That brought an instant 'piggy-piggy' from him, and he wheezed on that I would most certainly be *hyaku-niju-ni* (122) before the war finished. So that was their thinking. The war would last 100 years, they were in no hurry, and they would never give in. The nation would commit mass *hara-kiri* (a ceremonious emptying of the stomach) before surrendering. I said that 100 years was an awful long time; couldn't I marry a nice Japanese *musume* if I were going to be here that long? There was another asthmatic outpouring of 'piggy-piggy', followed by a definite answer in the negative – that would be *warui* (bad) – so there didn't seem to be much of a future for me in Japan. Thankfully, my prediction was nearer than his.

But to many of us, Ga-Ga was a kind of harmless grandfather figure. Or so we thought, until the day he disclosed to the guard our latest lucrative hiding place – down our legs. When he farewelled us that night with his customary volley of whistle blasts, we withheld our answering cheers, a ceremony that had been a ritual for months. This demonstration of our disapproval of his action must have caused the old fellow a good deal of distress and weighed heavily on his mind overnight, because, the next day, he said that it was OK for us continue loading in the legs so long as he got his cut of whatever we exchanged it for. So Ga-Ga wasn't as silly as the name we had given him. That night, his salvo of whistles was answered with a resounding cheer, which brought an almost imperceptible widening of his facial creases – he was actually smiling.

TOYO STEEL AND SHOWA DENKI

The third party member of the train travellers was the Showa Denki group. They had a few stations further to go, and then they had to march over a mile before reaching the factory. Their route took them past a large airfield still under construction and then through a residential district, where they were also serenaded by the little urchins with the popular *Americano-horyo* ditty. Showa Denki manufactured carbon electrodes in varying degrees of circumference and length. The electrodes were placed in coke-fired kilns of both trough and beehive shapes. Graphite was also used in the process. Most of our chaps were employed in pushing along miniature rails steel trucks full of the coke that supplied the fuel for the kilns. It was a constant, repetitive, boring, physically debilitating job and was made even more difficult by numerous derailments of the heavy trucks, which then had to be manhandled back on the rails. The work would have been enough for men in perfect physical condition; it taxed our boys' strength to the limit.

The worst feature of this depressing place was the ever-present dust, which penetrated every corner of the factory and every exposed part of the body. Even a daily soaking in a hot communal bath after work distinguished a Showa Denki worker from any other by his black-rimmed eyes that would have made many a girl envious.

The *horyos* at Showa Denki were given a quota of truckloads to move. Even the fittest found it difficult to maintain his quota but, because of the Jap's policy of limiting the number of sick men who were allowed to stay in camp to eight, many men who should have been convalescing inside were forced out of work. Their lot was not made any easier, either, by the uncooperative attitude of the Jap *hanchos*. One in particular was notorious for his brutal manner and constant shouts of '*speedo-speedo*', hence his nickname '*Speedo*'. And for all his viciousness, some of our lads gained a great deal of pleasure in outsmarting him.

John Gilmour and his mate Jack Gilding, from South Australia, were two who worked a well-thought-out plan to perfection. Operating as a team, they worked exceptionally hard for the first few weeks, eventually winning the trust and confidence of the unsavoury *Speedo*. In fact, he actually recommended them for their 'little brown rings'. But little did he suspect that, as they clocked in each loaded truck, and disappeared towards the kilns, they switched smartly on to a branch line, which doubled back to the starting point ready for a repeat performance with the same load. So successful was this subterfuge that they eventually talked *Speedo* into letting the sick men rest in the mess hut while they themselves would work twice as hard to fulfil the required quota. Such were the resourcefulness and comradeship that existed among the Aussies, and it continued right through the long winter years of captivity. We knew it was just a case of 'hanging in there' until the day our summer would come again. This single act of unselfishness saved many sick men from the fate of two *horyos* in the early days of Showa Denki. They had incurred the wrath of *Speedo* for being too slow, and, frustrated by the repeated derailment of their wagon, had retaliated in good Australian fashion by calling him a bastard. Unfortunately for them, *Speedo* had learned this expletive from the former British workers, so our boys found themselves very smartly in front of the guard, standing to attention with a house brick in each outstretched hand. This torture went on for almost three hours.

It was not until late in January 1944, that, after repeated requests, a total of 20 unfit men, who normally would have had to work with the fit, were given light duties. These jobs included cleaning mortar off kiln-used bricks, making them reusable, and chipping coke that remained on carbon poles after they had been fired in the kilns. Apart from the daily hot bath, the one redeeming feature about Showa was that the firm provided each man with a substantial bowl of stew at lunchtime. This benefit made it possible for them to use a portion of their bread ration to trade for other much-needed food.

To break the monotony of the same routine day after day, we sometimes swapped jobs. Yoshihara was definitely the pick of the three. Toyo was a typical foundry, unsightly heaps of scrap metal everywhere and grime and dust blanketing the whole area. Our boys were generally used as labourers, manhandling small carts from the scrap heap to furnace and from furnace to waste dumps. Some of our chaps did, however, develop certain skills with the sand mouldings, while a chosen few became expert with handling jackhammers. These specialists were greatly sought after by the Japanese civilian workers, who waited to claim their favourite teams as soon as the *horyos* arrived at work. Toyo was one of the least popular places at which to work because there was nothing to loot. However, in later days, the old foundry came into its own by being instrumental in opening warehouse doors throughout the entire length of the Kobe waterfront. To open doors, we needed keys, and to make keys, we needed files. Toyo provided us with access to the produce of the nation, and we were fully committed to diverting as much of that produce as possible through the doors of Kobe House, thus depriving the Japanese, while keeping us alive and bolstering our morale for the years that lay ahead. The file also was very useful in converting hacksaw blades into knives with which we were able to cut our bread rolls. As the bread ration was three rolls between two men, and random searches were carried out to see if each man had his correct ration, we had to have a cutting instrument in order to divide the odd roll. We were banned from having knives, so any that we made had to be very well

hidden. So, Toyo Steel, although not one of the fashionable jobs, enjoyed a reputation for making a significant contribution to our survival.

THE 'MAD DOCTOR' AND THE GUARDS OF KOBE HOUSE

In 1943, Kobe House was commanded by Lieutenant Morimoto whose full, round face had already earned him the nickname of 'Jack Oakie' after the wellknown screen star of the day. His main performance took place on *yasume* days when he would have us paraded out in the streets before mounting his little podium to give us his little pep talk. With Hoblett at his side, and his face seemingly in a perpetual grin, he set forth with what we should or shouldn't do, and that, if we did all the things we should do, we would all live to see our loved ones one day. His speeches always started with *imagoro*, which Hoblett interpreted as 'from now on', and he went on to list a whole string of things we could have to do *imagoro*.

In our experience, there were worse commanders than Jack Oakie. In most armies, the man who does most of the work is the sergeant-major, and the Japanese were no exception. Although we called Morita a sergeant-major, he was only a sergeant, but he was the guard with whom we most associated, and for whom we had no nickname. He was an enigma; perhaps the most unpredictable of all our captors. He could be scrupulously fair and reasonable, and he could be equally brutal and merciless, but above all, he had a sense of humour.

To provide security for Kobe House, and escorts for the working parties, there were about a dozen guards who had been well and truly nicknamed by the Pommies long before our arrival. There were 'Gentleman Jim', immaculate in white gloves; 'Nelson', complete with glass eye'; 'Charlie Chaplin', with splayed feet; 'Happy', 'Chinless Wonder', 'Stores', 'George Formby', 'Smile', 'Betty Boop', 'Jeep', 'Darkie' and 'Horseface'.



Japanese guards, Kobe House, 1944. The Kobe House gates are behind the guards. 1. Unknown medical orderly, 2. Sgt. Morita, 3. Unknown medical sergeant, 4. Lt. Takanaka (The Camp Commandant), 5. Lt. Minetaka (The Mad Doctor), 6. Unknown interpreter, 7. Unknown guard, 8. Gentleman Jim, 9. Nelson, 10. Unknown guard, 11. Happy, 12. Chinless Wonder, 13. Stores, 14. George Formby, 15. Smiler, 16. Betty Boop, 17. Horseface, 18. Jeep, 19. Unknown interpreter, 20. Unknown interpreter, 21. Darkie.

(Photograph courtesy of the Australian War Museum.)

Always at hand, of course, was the pucker-lipped Corporal Hoblett, whose presence gave us tremendous moral support whenever we were involved in a dispute or confrontation. Even though he was probably quite impartial, in that he would translate literally what was said, we felt that he was bound to be sympathetic to our cause. There was also a Japanese medical team, comprising a doctor, a sergeant and an orderly. They also doubled as guards; indeed, there was some confusion as to where their talents did lie, suffice to say that, as medics, they made 'bloody good guards'. We had our own medical

officer, Captain Boyce, who performed minor miracles with the limited resources at his disposal, despite being constantly frustrated by the interfering Nip staff. His opposite number, Dr Minataka, was busy making a place for himself in medical history with his own distinctive consultative techniques, his disturbing diagnostic procedures, his unprecedented revolutionary treatment, and infamous therapeutic services – collectively unique in the annals of medicine.

In appearance, he looked little like a doctor. Rather, his almost round, youthful face bore the resemblance of an overgrown choirboy, belying the existence of a satanic soul. He had, in fact, escorted us on the train from Shimonoseki on the day of our arrival, and I thought, then, how considerate it was of the Japanese to provide a nice doctor to look after us during the train trip. But I was a little surprised and puzzled at his aloofness and apparent indifference towards us, despite our poor physical condition. At the time, I told myself he was possibly a little embarrassed; perhaps a bit shy. But on his first round as duty officer, his shyness appeared to have vanished completely. He conducted *tenko* as it had never been conducted before. He was not satisfied with just a loud shout. Not for him, a bull's roar. We had to yell at the very top of our voices, and anyone who failed to meet his insane requirements was left screaming his number out over and over again while he moved on to the next *kumi*. From that day on, he was known as the 'Mad Doctor'. And there was worse to come! In the dead of night, we were awakened by the sound of the bugle shattering the silence with a call for *tenko*.

It was unbelievable. I thought I must be having a nightmare. Yet it was really happening, people were beginning to stir. Frantically, I tossed aside warm blankets and scrambled into my clothes, wondering at the same time just what crisis had precipitated such a drastic measure. It was two o'clock in the morning when the first shrieks of the *tenko* hit the rafters on the Aussies' quarters, and, by the time the Mad Doctor appeared on our floor, I was well and truly awake. With only two *kumis* counted on our floor, there were already two men engaged in a discordant vocal duet at an astonishing decibel level.

For some strange reason, a snippet from The Geebung Polo Club flashed through my mind: 'The pace was so terrific that 'ere half the match was gone, a spectator's leg was broken just through merely looking on.' This must have brought a smile to my face because, although he was some distance away, the Mad Doctor made straight for me, with Hoblett close by. My smile evaporated instantly. 'Why were you smiling?' he demanded, through Hoblett. 'I was not smiling', I replied, trembling visibly. 'It is the way I naturally look.' Back came the demand, 'Show me how you smile.' Now I know that the old cliché 'a sickening smile' has been done to death, but there could be no other way to describe my feelings at that moment. By this time, my emotional response had done a quick U-turn that had me shivering in my socks, and there was this apparition looming over me asking me to smile. As my face distorted into a counterfeit grin, a satisfied gleam appeared in the Mad Doctor's eyes, and I knew, instinctively, that I was about to receive an invitation I couldn't refuse.

'*Tenko inju nash*' was my warcry, relayed to me through Hoblett. At least it provided the nocturnal concert with some variety. I was still shouting as the Mad Doctor disappeared up the stairs to administer adrenalin to the Yanks in the loft. 'Give me a break, some bastard,' I gasped, in between mouthfuls of *tenko inju nashes*. I was hoping someone would shout a few for me for a while, but my pleas fell upon deaf ears. Later on, when sanity was restored, I received some consolation when my so-called mates voted my effort the star act of the night, even though there were only a couple of hours to go before Reveille. In later such performances, I made sure that there would be no encore from me. I was quite content to vacate centre stage for other up-and-coming artists.

On happier occasions, when more conventional concerts were devised and conducted by *horyos*, our talented Welsh comedian and composer, Norman Colley, wrote a song in the Mad Doctor's honour to the tune of 'The Bloody Tower'. One verse went:

With his sword held upright in his hand, he walked the floor each night--
With his sword held upright in his hand, what a fearsome sight--
The whole camp was his hunting ground, the Aussies he adored --
And more than one poor Bushwhacker, with mighty swipes he floored--
'Is there a Doctor in the House?' some witty bastard roared --
With his sword held upright in his hand.

Such were the fear and trepidation that prevailed during the Mad Doctor's reign that it became imperative for the first person to see him to scream '*Kiotski*,' followed immediately by '*Kire*,' which, if one was not wearing headgear and wished to avoid a dose of his revolutionary therapeutic treatment, meant a long, low bow from the waist. He had the unnerving ability to appear silently in the most unusual and inconvenient places. On one occasion, he unexpectedly entered the bathhouse, which caught me facing away from the door towelling myself when the obligatory commands reverberated through the room. With the occupants frozen in the *kire* position, a casual observer could have been forgiven for thinking that a haemorrhoids inspection was in progress. For some reason, I have always suffered from flatulence, which is not usually a problem, as men pass wind in the presence of other men quite naturally when the urge arises. But for me, the urge did arise while I was doubled up in the *kire* position, with my behind confronting the Mad Doctor. Under normal circumstances a four-bar allegro rendition in two-four time was not beyond my capability. Indeed, on the odd occasion, I had even been able to add an embellishment in the form of a glissando or trill. My forte was a long drop-off. But this most definitely was not a normal circumstance. The *kire* seemed to be lasting for ever, which was putting my sphincter under extreme pressure, and the opening blast appeared imminent. In a moment of panic, similar to the alleged vision of a drowning person, a fleeting past experience appeared before me.

We children were attending a full band practice in the spacious main kitchen at Fairbridge Farm, when a particularly obnoxious odour drifted through the band. This is the clever trick that nasty little boys perpetrate when they know that their fellow musicians have to snatch quick lungfuls of air between phrases. Jim Shugar, our bandmaster and a former Scots Guards sergeant-musician, cut the performance and, in the ensuing silence, remarked, with astonishing control, 'I wish you boys would exercise a little more restraint.'

On this occasion, I was left with no alternative but restraint, and my better judgement and instinct for self-preservation prevailed. In any case, I told myself after I had gained my second wind, so to speak, the playing of a 'General Salute' for an officer of his modest rank was a courtesy to which he was not entitled. Relating my dilemma later in the evening, it was interesting to discover that I had very nearly contravened the 'How to Behave Abroad' chapter of my little red Australian Soldiers' Pocket Book by almost 'farting in his face.'

It was a remarkable coincidence that, on the day of the Mad Doctor's departure from Kobe House, a severe earth tremor rocked the building, causing the massive timbers to creak and groan ominously. Lt John Fuller, the officer-in-charge of our section, hastened to assure us that it was only an earthquake, and not the Mad Doctor returning.

In pursuing the indelicate subject of 'passing wind,' it was a fact that every prisoner-of-war, at some stage of his captivity, suffered from diarrhoea. This debilitating illness resulted in an incontinence of the bowel which kept us constantly on guard against inadvertently breaking wind, because it invariably left an uncomfortable and inconvenient discharge. Consequently, on the odd occasion when a clean one slipped through, it was an achievement of some import. Thereafter, when one farted successfully, one knew one was on the road to recovery. Congratulations were in order.

WEALTH AND HEALTH

While we were still adjusting to conditions of our new environment, we quickly discovered that some jobs held more potential for loot than others – a fact that was the cause of some early friction between the British and Australian officers during the compilation of the various work parties. The arrival of the Australians to Kobe House gave the Brits the opportunity to vacate the worst jobs and load the best with their own men. Who could blame them? It was, after all, only putting the Aussies through a form of apprenticeship, and the distribution of jobs would undoubtedly have favoured the Australians, had they arrived on the scene first. It was simply a case of officers from both sides arbitrating the best possible conditions for their own men. In any event, it wasn't long before personnel were interchanged between most jobs, and many friendships were formed between us. There existed, after all, a common bond for survival, a pooling of mental strength to combat the constant threat of depression, humiliation and degradation, which strove to sap the will to live.

On 6 July 1943 I received my first pay. The magnificent sum of one yen forty sen represented a fortnight's work, and was the first I had received since before the fall of Singapore. However, I didn't have it for long. That same night, we were compelled to hand our pay back to our officers, who advised us that the Japs had permitted them to set up a canteen of sorts, which they would administer on our behalf. This meant that, in future, all pay would go directly to them for accounting. Some of the goods that were made available from time to time through this system turned out to be quite acceptable. Items such as razor blades, tooth powder, curry powder and an occasional supply of fruit were useful, but there were also many supplies of local concoctions so dehydrated or salty that they were inedible and totally useless. But, still, the rubbish had to be paid for. If we knocked it back, it meant that we would miss out on everything. It was shrewd marketing at its Japanese best.

It was just as well, I thought, that we were still on the Australian Army's payroll. Even at the paltry rate of six shillings a day, plus another two shillings deferred, it was accumulating all the time. And there was also the daily rate of 2s 5d the Army paid us whenever we were given leave. This was estimated to be the cost of food that the Army saved whenever the troops were not required to be fed. Unfortunately, we were never to receive the meal allowance.

In due course, we were introduced to the dubious benefits of the infamous 'body scratcher.' This lethal weapon was made locally from short stalks of rice and assembled in such a manner as to resemble a miniature hedgehog. In an unfathomable degree of concern for our health, the Japs insisted that a ten-minute dry scrub each morning with this instrument of torture would greatly increase the circulation of blood to the skin. If we had followed these instructions conscientiously, there wouldn't have been an inch of skin left on any of us within a week. It was compulsory to take this weapon on the morning *tenko* out in the street. Here, on many a freezing autumn dawn, hundreds of white, bare-topped bodies turned quickly into a bright pink under the onslaught of the portable porcupines. The galling feature of this treatment was the fact that we couldn't record it as another atrocity, because the Japanese guards were required to undergo the same operation. To add insult to injury, the Japanese command made these straw weapons available to us through the canteen service at the exorbitant cost of 35 sen each. With such business acumen, is it any wonder that their post-war economy reached such astronomical heights in such a short time? In yet another uncharacteristic show of concern for our health, the bellyband made its debut. This six-inch wide roll of cloth had to be wound around the midriff and, according to Japanese gospel, would keep our kidneys warm in cold weather. Although this was a departure from our regular medicinal habits, there was no denying this was true. In any event, it was only a mild inconvenience, and far less traumatic than the

body scratcher.

This attention to our health was a fair indication of the value the Japanese put on the work we were doing. But we were all too painfully aware of its shortcomings. If only they would ease off on the 'band-aid' treatment and concentrate more on administering adequate preventive medicine; preferably, a more balanced diet: surely, it wouldn't take much imagination to vary the diet we were getting; all it required was a little rational thought, which, at the time, seemed beyond the capability of the Japanese command. As it was, their myopic action was like polishing up the crankcase, while leaving the sump to run dry. And their cooperation with our own doctor left a lot to be desired, too. Captain Boyce had a constant battle to keep really sick men in hospital, and trying to get an X-ray done was like asking for his freedom.

Right throughout our prisoner-of-war years, most of us, at varying times, suffered from some vitamin-related disease, but the early weeks of Kobe House occupancy found us in a comparatively poor state of health. After a few months, the fruits of looting helped to stabilise our health problems, although there was always a number whose health was a constant worry. Beri beri and pellagra were common complaints, as was a partial loss of vision, for many of us, but there were still the few unfortunates who suffered from some form of malnutritional neuritis that racked their bodies with excruciating pain. These were the men for whom Captain Boyce worked wonders of improvisation in restoring most of them to a reasonable state of health.

If there is a lighter side to suffering, it happened during those first few weeks. As a result of the previous 15 months in Singapore on a grossly inadequate diet, most of us were suffering from a dermatitis of the scrotum, with constantly weeping flesh, which proved most uncomfortable and distressing. This unsociable complaint was euphemistically called 'rice-balls'. Most of us suffered from rice-balls, leading to our reluctant appearance in the 'Streets of Kobe Slapstick Comedy/Tragedy'. On centre stage, especially constructed to look like a street in Kobe, the victims cowered in three ranks, with torsos naked, waiting apprehensively for the action. Waiting in the wings were the villains, disguised as medical orderlies, their eager hands clutching large containers of iodine, waiting for their cue. Had there been an audience, they would have witnessed a performance so revolutionary, it was light-years ahead of its time. The curtain was lifted to reveal a mass movement of *horyos'* hands to their private parts raising the superstructure to accommodate access to the undercarriage. That was the signal for the medical orderlies to make their move. Up and down the ranks they swept, wielding pot and pad like surrealist painters operating on a giant mural, lashing orange-coloured elixir on vast expanses of red-raw genital flesh. This brought an instant and spectacular response. The sudden shock induced a momentary, involuntary state of apnoea, followed by the sound of a miraculous speaking in tongues, and tears appeared in the eyes of grown men. We were sent into a frenzied war dance in an attempt to quench the fire that threatened to consume our vitals.

Naturally, the star performers were those who were most generously endowed. As far as I was concerned, it served them right. I had little sympathy for them. This was one of the rare occasions when those of us with the least to offer had the most to gain. Furthermore, I mused, as I gingerly tucked my jaundiced tabernacles into their accustomed resting place, this was only the first rehearsal. There would be several more of these *yasume* morning rituals before the acquisition of vitamin-laden loot would bring the curtain down on this production.

SCHEMING AND DREAMING

Nineteen forty-three dragged on, and life in Kobe House settled down to the same dreary predictable routine, with Reveille at 5.30am, followed by an outside *tenko*. We were soon

so proficient in reeling off the Japanese numbers that I began to wonder if we'd ever numbered any other way. With *tenko* over, we would scramble back inside, making sure we chucked the guards a salute in passing, then would seat ourselves on the edge of the bed platform, down the length of the table, waiting for the duty mess orderlies to return from the cookhouse with our breakfast. The traditional name for the first meal of the day left something to be desired as it never quite lived up to its promise, the 'fast' having been only partially broken for over 18 months. Furthermore, there were no prizes for guessing the menu. The inevitable, unpalatable bowl of glutinous rice, meticulously levelled off at the top, was the main course, a smaller bowl, containing one ladle of a weak vegetable broth, completed the repast. If the liquid was viewed at a certain angle, a film of grease could occasionally be seen. The story went that, more often than not, whenever a rare ration of meat arrived at the cookhouse, the cooks passed it ceremoniously over the pot, giving us the suggestion of a smell, while keeping the substance for themselves.

In fact, that was being a little unkind to the cooks, as invariably they provided the best possible meals with the pitiful rations they were given. After breakfast and the distribution of the luncheon bread rolls, it was just about time for the 7.00am work parade, where each firm held yet another *tenko* before marching off to work. After the day's work, and between tea and *tenko*, we reminisced about happier days, planned elaborate schemes for our post-war careers (which inevitably included a bevy of Japanese girls with whom a potential fortune could be earned), read or re-read the few books in circulation, or played cards. The latter had to be done surreptitiously, because, although several packs of cards had been returned to us after being confiscated on the day of our arrival, they were for playing on *yasume* days only.

These rest days happened once a week, either on a Saturday or Sunday, and gave us the opportunity for a much-needed sleep-in until 7.00am, but all the morning then was taken up with some inspection or other. While that was taking place out in the street, some of the guards went through our gear inside. My own loot, including my diary, was hidden well back under the sleeping platform, which gave me quite a crawl every time I needed to get to it, but it was wise to play safe because the alternative promised more than just a bashing. If there was no fire drill or raid practice, the afternoons were our own. Those were some of the less arduous hours of life in captivity.

Towards the end of the year, the Japs made available a few musical instruments, and several of the Brits who were musicians lost no time in putting them to good use. Following this surprising development, a public-address system embracing the whole camp was installed, with the result that, on *yasume* days, the orchestra could entertain through this medium. Later on, a choir was formed, adding a pleasant variety to the entertainment. Usually, part of the day was set aside for making and mending (soldier's expression for repairing clothing), and, if there was enough coal, a hot bath. As there was only one bath, a roster system was introduced to give each section, in turn, first dip in the fresh hot water. This was just as well, too, because, by the time the last section went through, the water had gained more body than some of our soup. Despite the chilly conditions, many men opted for a cold shower.

The Japanese version of 'lights out' sounded at 8.30pm and, with a 5.30am Reveille, we were more than ready for the blankets and sleep – and with sleep, perhaps a chance to dream of home. My dreams were many and varied. Quite often, I found myself wandering through the Cotswolds of my early childhood, the trees ablaze with autumn tones and the forest floor ankle-deep in leaves. Other times, the countryside was covered in snow, with the secluded Toadsmoor Lake crowded with skaters enjoying a rare treat. Somehow, in the unexplainable fashion of dreams, there was always a stream of running water, where I picked masses of sparkling watercress, then staggered, with hands full, back to my cosy cottage overlooking the Bismore meadow. Another time, I stood alone among the bluebells listening to the gentle rain and the muted song of the wood birds.

But my most frequent dreams were of the farmlands of Western Australia. I'd be sitting upon my farm implement, reins in hand, controlling my ten magnificent horses as they pulled me around the paddock, talking to each of them in turn, and watching for the wiggle of their ears to let me know they understood. Then, in a flash, I'd be walking with my foster mother over the hills towards the Bisley road into Stroud, pausing now and again to gather a large pod of hazelnuts from the roadside trees. For some strange reason, when I rejoined my mother, I'd break into the song of the day: 'In eleven more months and ten more days I'll be out of this Calaboose'. Sometimes, the dreams appeared so real that, upon awakening, it took me several moments to comprehend the reality of my environment. But I loved to dream. It was my only avenue of escape.

A FRIEND INDEED

It was about this time that I met up with Gordon Macdonald of the 2nd 18th Battalion. Although we were both in No. 5 Section (*dai go kumi*), we worked at different jobs, and usually this didn't leave a lot of time to get to know other people. However, at times, there was quite a bit of shuffling of personnel, depending on each firm's work requirements, and, on this particular day, we were both working at Mitsui. About a dozen of us were lumping rough straw sacks from out of a godown (warehouse), up a plank and into a rail wagon. But, being locally made, the bags were very porous, and the crushed powder contents filtered through, smothering us in a fine dust. To make matters worse, the sacks had straw rope tied around the outside to help keep them together, which made them lumpy. The combination of leaking powder, and awkward-shaped, lumpy straw bags made conditions very difficult. It was bad enough for me, and my physical condition, at that stage, was pretty fair under the circumstances. With youth on my side and no family worries, I was in a better position than most to withstand the mental and physical traumas of those uncertain times. On the other hand, Mac was quite a few years older than I, and he was far from being well. He had serious problems with his back, and a troublesome hernia; he should not have been out working, but, in keeping with the Jap policy of permitting only a limited number of sick men to remain in camp, he was one of the many ill men who were compelled to work.

The Jap *hancho* in charge was one of the worst kind, continually harassing us and generally making our lives a misery. We hadn't been working long before it became obvious that Mac was in a great deal of pain, yet he still struggled to hold his place in the chain. As I caught up with him, the *hancho* let fly with a string of oaths, accusing Mac of being lazy. 'What he doesn't know,' Mac explained to me, 'is that I'm just plain buggered.' The wry half-smile that came to his face when he said those few words caused my anger to surface against the Jap, and I protested loudly to him that my friend wasn't lazy, he was *takusan bioki* (very sick). He was, too. His multiple injuries kept him in a stooping position, and it was plain to see that he was in great distress, yet still the *hancho* insisted that he keep going. These were some of the hardest situations to take, the feeling of utter frustration, of helplessness, of not being able to do anything about it. Knowing that, man for man, I could have smashed his face in, yet knowing also the folly of any such move. All I could do was to give Mac a few words of encouragement, to 'disregard the bastard,' and to 'take things easy.' From then on, the rest of us kept jumping ahead of him in an attempt to lessen his workload.

That incident was the start of a close relationship between us, a special kind of bond that developed and strengthened as the months became years. Similar bonds of mateship grew among all the prisoners-of-war, just as, I'm sure, grow among all groups of people who collectively share the same deprivations. Unfortunately, my stint at Mitsui lasted only a couple of days, so I, personally, couldn't keep an eye on him; not that I could do a great deal more than give him moral support. In any case, he was in pretty good

hands with the regular Mitsui gang. However, this particularly heavy type of dockside work brought Mac to a standstill, and it wasn't long before he was put on the permanent staff inside Kobe House. This meant, of course, that he lost the opportunity to bring in loot, but this was more than offset by the fact that he was no longer in danger of complicating his injuries. And so far as his smokes and little extras went, I was more than happy to keep him supplied with those. Indeed, it gave me an added incentive. Mac taught me quite a lot during the next few weeks. Now that I had resumed working at Yoshihara, I replenished our stocks of peanut powder and coconut butter, portions of which were traded for sugar, canned goods and, of course, Mac's cigarettes. Having taken care of that most important requirement, we were in a more receptive mood to spend the evenings talking over old times. It was only through listening to Mac's pre-war experiences that I realised just how little I knew of the 'outside world'.

He was from Hurstville and had driven a taxi around Sydney for several years. He made Sydney sound like an exciting, hedonistic city, with all sorts of 'goings-on', which had me spellbound. It seemed that, if one knew the right places and had the right connections, the city was wide open for all types of entertainment. And, being a taxi driver, Mac knew all the right places. I couldn't wait to join him in Sydney. His pride and joy was his motorcar – it was a black Plymouth that he polished regularly every morning. Then, on the pretext of doing some window shopping, he would park it in front of a large shop window and would admire its reflection. I could well understand that. On a wage of a pound a week, I had battled to pay off a five-pound bike. Having a mate who owned his own car, I felt as though I had joined the big league.

But Mac was not only a driver, he was a mechanic and, apparently, a very good one. Up to that moment, I had never heard of the 'internal combustion engine'. Somehow or other, Mac had managed to hang on to an instruction manual, which he had me studying night after night, with the result that I gained a fairly good idea of how an engine worked. In between studying and reminiscing, we played quite a bit of crib. Joining us, from time to time, were Mick Davis and Wally Bird. Wally, the younger of the two, was fair and easygoing. Nothing seemed to ruffle him. Mick was much older and had seen active service in the Great War. He had put his age down to enlist in this one. Mick's interests were writing and poetry, which had led to his appointment as editor of his unit's newspaper just prior to Japan's attack on Malaya. Every so often, Mick entertained us with a few of his verses. I remember being very impressed at the time with some of his more moving lines. Perhaps he influenced me in my own direction by advising me to be myself in my writing, and to cultivate a readable style. But Mick was not well. His tall, but slight, frame grew steadily more slender, and the grime of Showa Denki accentuated the deep lines in his face. His physical condition caused us great concern. He had dysentery, and, no matter how much extra food he was given, he showed no improvement.

As we progressed deeper into autumn and the nights grew colder, a roster system was introduced, whereby night pickets would patrol each floor and cover anyone whose blankets had become dislodged in his sleep. It was another of the Nip's 'band-aid' operations, and one we could have well done without. The extra hours' sleep would have been far more beneficial. On 4 November 1943, we had the first inkling that Red Cross supplies had arrived in Japan when we were issued with a tin of bully beef each. This humble can of meat has traditionally been the most maligned culinary dish in the history of the Australian army, but to the *horyos* on that bleak autumn day, nothing could have tasted more delicious. We lingered over each juicy mouthful, savouring its flavour until the last morsel had slid down the gullet. Some of the purists elected to go the whole hog, with an extravagance bordering on obscenity, while others mixed their ration with quantities of rice to taste, making it last as long as possible. Mac and I shared one tin on the day, and kept the other to celebrate my 21st birthday on 18 November. On that memorable occasion, we sat down to a sumptuous feast of bully beef and peas, followed by a sugar-topped bowl of

rice. It was sheer luxury.

On the very next day, extra rations and Red Cross parcels were delivered to the camp. However, our excitement was soon dampened by the announcement that the allocation was nine and a half men to a parcel, two officers per parcel, and, most outrageous of all, five Japs to a parcel. This unequal distribution prompted the officers to throw in their parcels with the men, making the ration nine to a parcel. That consignment from the British Red Cross consisted of beef, bacon, biscuits, tomatoes, milk, margarine, plum pudding, cheese, jam, sugar, meat paste, chocolate, candy and soap. Limited though they were, these supplies served to remind us of the many delightful tastes that had been denied us for so long. Further Red Cross supplies were released on the next *yasume* day, when we had two meat and vegetable stews in the one day, plus an individual issue of another whole can of bully beef. This virtual avalanche of 'real' food was so surprising that it had the 'characters' complaining about the monotony of corned beef and the imminent risk of breaking out in boils. But it did wonders for our morale.

Mick Davis's condition grew steadily worse, and he had to go to hospital. Captain Boyce tried hard, but couldn't save him, and, on the morning of 3 December, Mick passed away. That evening after work, the whole camp was paraded in the street in a moving farewell to our departed comrade. As the coffin was placed in an elaborate shrine-shaped hearse, Sgt Morita ordered the parade to *kire*, whereupon the guards presented arms and the rest of us saluted. The ceremony was conducted with great dignity and with the correct military honours, but I couldn't help thinking how regrettable it was that there was no Australian flag with which to drape the coffin. I'm sure Mick would have liked that. A soldier whose love of country had prompted him to fight in two major wars, and who made the supreme sacrifice, should never have been laid to rest without his colours.

LIFE AND DEATH IN KOBE HOUSE

December descended upon us in a furious storm of driving sleet and, although I had experienced similar weather as a child in England, the current circumstances made it all the more unpleasant and depressing. This ill wind, though, did bring about an issue of Japanese army greatcoats, which, although inferior to our own, were none the less appreciated. The notorious back scratching, too, was transferred from the street to the interior, so it was a case of being thankful for small mercies.

So far as I was concerned, the Japs didn't have all the idiosyncratic behaviour on their own. I had just been the recipient of our own brand of justice. I'd been put on the mat by a sergeant of the 4th Motor Transport Company for refusing to obey an order – what the order was, I've long since forgotten – and Johnny Fuller sentenced me to three extra pickets, the shifts to be done between the hours of 1.00 and 2.00am. I was learning the facts of life fast, and it had nothing to do with sex. What infuriated me more than the actual punishment was the fact that I'd been subjected to a judicial system that sentenced me while I was already in gaol. It was as though I'd been given an extra year on top of a life sentence.

But my troubles were nothing compared to Mac's. I returned from work one night to find him sitting on the edge of the bed platform with a piece of paper in his hand. As I stood above him, he handed it to me. I had never seen a cable before, and this one had come through the Geneva Red Cross. Mac's father had died. Not having a father of my own to think of, I was a little confused. As a close friend of his, I felt I should have offered some words of comfort, yet I could find none. But I could sense his feeling of frustration in not being close to his mother in her time of need. These were some of the situations that family lives were fraught with. They would never be for me. Perhaps I was better off for it. It was certainly true that most men were deeply concerned about their families, and it was an anxiety that would do little to help them in their fight for survival. That night, Mac remained

unusually quiet. I would never know how much he suffered.

On Wednesday 8 December, the Japanese held an elaborate parade on the sports ground. Company after company of flag-bearing participants were already assembling as we were marched to the station. As we passed the German Embassy, the swastika fluttered in conspicuous isolation, and almost in relief, above a city saturated with the 'poached egg' emblem of Japan. Month after month, the inescapable sight of the unimaginative round red blob of the national flag on practically every building penetrated my subconscious mind in an unwilling indoctrination. Perhaps it wouldn't have been quite so bad if there had been some variation in the colour of the yolks. After all, I reasoned, among the millions that had been manufactured, surely there must have been a percentage that reflected the nutritional inequalities of the country. And what of the cooking? It was beyond the realms of possibility to expect perfection from every pan. What about the breakages? An occasional irregular splurge of colour would have been some relief. But no, those perfect circles flaunted themselves before us from everywhere.

I fortified myself against this brainwashing by substituting a mental image of the unfurling of our own Australian flag. I little realised, then, that it was an indescribable pleasure that lay ahead, although the waiting would be nearly another two years. Meanwhile, back in Kobe House, the officers were using the public-address system that had been installed to our advantage. They asked, and obtained permission, to give informative and interesting talks over the system in the evenings. This produced a considerable improvement in the morale of the camp, and served to remind us that there was an outside world to which we would have access when we eventually gained our freedom.

With the onset of winter, Captain Boyce became increasingly concerned about the health of his men. His records reveal this: 'Many feeling the cold after long residence in the Tropics. Poor cooperation by Nips in admitting influenza cases, even those with high temperatures. Epidemic influenza prevalent; camp resounds to coughs all night. Older men falling away rapidly and outlook grave.'

Up until now, we had suffered only one death through illness, although an Australian had been killed at work. Once again the fifteenth of the month had featured in a significant event. We had left Fremantle on the fifteenth of January, had fallen on the fifteenth of May, we had started work in Japan on the fifteenth of June and the fatal accident had happened on the fifteenth of August. While unloading coal from a ship in the harbour, one of our men, W E (Legs) Hall, of the 2nd 30th Battalion, accidentally fell from the ship into a barge and was critically injured. As a slingful of coal was hoisted from the hold to the barge, it was Legs' job to remove with his shovel any protruding pieces of coal that appeared in danger of falling on the men in the barge. For this operation, he was stationed at deck level, and it was while reaching for the sling that he overbalanced and fell. The distress was sounded on the ship's siren, and appropriate flags were hoisted, but when a launch from a German ship quickly reached the barge in response, the guard would not let them attend to him, and it was another half an hour before a Japanese launch arrived. Eventually, after a considerable delay, Legs was taken, unconscious, back to Kobe House. Not even our own doctor, Captain Boyce, was allowed to treat him. There was no attempt to take him to a civilian hospital or to the special POW hospital in the foothills, and, tragically, Legs died at about 10.00 o'clock that same night. During the previous night, the Mad Doctor had gone on one of his rampages that had left us all short of sleep, and there is no doubt that that episode contributed largely to the tragedy.

Only a week after the death of Mick Davis, we lost another man – Private Willsdon of the 4th Motor Transport Company, who died of pneumonia. December was a bad month for us, with yet another death on the night of the 17th. Ernie Phillips of the 2nd 30th battalion died from some mysterious type of fever of unknown origin, coupled with a long history of stomach trouble. Despite these sad losses, the officers, together with those of

the sick who were capable of doing light work, set about giving the gloom of the interior a lift in time for Christmas. Working with only paper and cardboard, they made enough light shades to cover every light in the camp, which, when lit, revealed appropriate greetings for the occupants on each floor: 'A MERRY CHRISTMAS DIGGER' or 'TOMMY', or 'YANK'. It was surprising just how much cheer this comparatively simple little decoration made. Our first Christmas in Japan brought little goodwill from the Japanese, but at least we were left to enjoy the day in peace. *Yasume* day was brought forward, and Reveille was put back an hour. A non-denominational church service was held at 11.00am which was very well attended. After breakfast, which comprised a bowl of rice and another of bean soup, an assortment of goods donated by the various firms were distributed by the section leaders. These were mostly cigarettes, but there were a few pairs of socks, some small cotton towels, and a couple of cases of oranges. Canteen supplies were then balloted for, with curry powder going for 40 sen and fish powder for 30 sen. Apart from the normal ration of bread for dinner, the cooks, in a symbolic gesture for the occasion, turned on a small piece of rice duff as a substitute for Christmas pudding. For tea, there were the inevitable bowl of rice, a bowl of stew and, as a special, a whole fried fish, complete with head and entrails. My diary recalls:

This stuff, added to our looted food, quite satisfied us. A typical example of lunch in the kumi is the meal that Wally Bird, Mac and I sat down to. We had bread rolls with margarine, salmon and asparagus, followed by steamed duff with tinned peaches, fruit and nuts. Salmon on rolls came in again for tea and, to finish the day, we repeated it for supper, with tinned mandarins for sweets. The Japs issued us with an additional set of underclothing - I suppose as a sort of present - and Jack Oakie conveyed to us the best wishes of the camp directors. In the afternoon, the concert party and choir entertained with a performance in each building. Dick Noble's skills came to the fore with a talented display on his harmonica. Jack Oakie said that it was his intention to give us Red Cross boxes for Christmas, but they had not yet arrived; the ship is expected within the next few days and it is possible we may get them for the New Year. The evening was spent in 'sing-songs' in various parts of the building, and in one place, the Sergeant-major and Darkie joined in the singing. Smoking was permitted until lights-out, which was at 9.00 p.m. Altogether, a very happy day under the circumstances, the most notable feature being the spirit and morale of the men, which were magnificent. This condition was due entirely to the fact that we all felt comfortable beneath our belts. Let us hope that this will be the last Christmas spent in captivity and that everyone may spend the next with their relatives.

Thursday 30 December was Red Letter Day, or rather, Red Cross parcel day. True to his word, Jack Oakie had the promised parcels waiting for us on our return from work. On the train coming home, we had held a sweep as to the number of parcels that would be distributed, so you can imagine the excitement when we discovered that it was one per man. They were from the United States, dated August 1943, so the contents were quite fresh. They contained four tins of meat (bully, pork or luncheon meat), one tin of salmon, one tin of paste, three, four or five tins of butter, one tin of powdered milk, two cans of coffee, one pound of lump sugar, a half-pound tin of cheese, a half-pound of chocolate, one tin of jam, one pound of raisins or prunes, two cakes of soap, and six, seven, eight or ten packets of cigarettes – a mixture of Camels, Old Gold, Chesterfields, Lucky Strikes, and Philip Morris brands. There were slight variations, but that was the least of our problems. We were grateful beyond description. We hardly knew what day it was. The Japs, anticipating this, cancelled the *yasume* day that was due to us, which meant that we had to work on New Year's Day, and for an extra week without a break. The New Year was welcomed in by the Scots and Brits, who awoke in time to sing a rousing 'Auld Lang Syne' without interruption, strangely enough, from the guards. The rest of us waited until

the morning before greeting each other with optimistic handshakes, in the hope that the next one would be celebrated at home. With the new year came a cold snap, which may have influenced the camp authorities to install small charcoal fires on each floor. But with the restricted hours of operation, and the unsuitable times permitted, they were of little benefit in heating the place. The one practical use to which they were put was in helping to provide the luxury of supper by boiling the water for tea or coffee, and for toasting the rolls. The news was good, too, although some of it was a bit too exaggerated for credibility. Items such as a 2000-plane raid on Berlin, during which 16,000 tons of aerial torpedoes were dropped, were gleefully digested, with little thought of accuracy. On the other hand, with the arrival of an English RAF officer, the news that the long-awaited second front was expected in the spring, the Allied landing in Italy had been facilitated by Marshall Badoglio, the Russians were on the offensive, and the Japs were being savaged in Rabaul sounded less spectacular, but much nearer the truth. With the combination of good food and encouraging news, our morale was on a high; we were on the move, but it was just as well that we didn't know there were a further 20 months of captivity ahead of us. It was at this time that the *kumi* leaders, displaying the typical Australian capacity for innovation and love of horse-racing, decided to hold the Kobe Cup. For a nomination fee of two cigarettes, the race was open to anyone, with the final acceptances balloted down to a field of 15. The place-getters were secretly drawn during the week, with the description of the running to be broadcast on the next *yasume* day, 6 January. Prize money would be distributed in the ratio of 60%, 25% and 15% (the 'money', of course, being in the form of cigarettes) and side bets could be placed with anyone willing to accommodate them. As the time for the start of the Kobe Cup drew nearer, the tension mounted, almost paralleling the build-up to the running of the Melbourne Cup. In the ring, there was some very spirited betting, but throughout the concourse, the fashions were rather disappointing, with the ladies being most conspicuous by their absence. At last, they were off to a pretty good start, although the 'Mad Doctor' was quite fractious at the barrier. Then, in a broadcast that created as much excitement as the famous race itself, the topically named 'Parcel' ran out the winner, followed by 'Hercules' and 'Showa'. Due to a pre-race steward's report that 'Parcel' looked a 'bit crook' as a result of the rider, A Prisoner, 'having taken too much out of him', I managed to place a bet of ten cigarettes at 15-1 on it. That more than compensated for not drawing a horse. A few days later, Jack Oakie invited a representative gathering from all nationalities to join him in a fireside discussion, during which they were encouraged to give their frank opinions on a number of war-related subjects. They were then handed questionnaires that stated:

Give your opinions of the following.

1. Write in detail your impressions of the misery caused by war.
2. The Japanese soldier fought bravely and his plans were good.
3. The object of the Allied powers is weak.
4. The Japanese who fight behind the war gun in action are very efficient.
5. At the jobs, the workmen are working very hard for the purpose of the war production.
6. Would you rather become a POW than fight in the battlefield?
7. This war is being fought on a large scale in the East Asia area, but, in Japan, there are still many men and women working in the factories for the cause.
8. In Japan, the transportation of people and commodities is being done on a large scale.
9. Many prisoners wish to return to their homes and are waiting for peace and the time when they will be able to see their loved ones again.

I had not been one of the few who were asked to 'give their opinion', but my own observations were that the working Japanese were fed up with the poor standard of their food, and showed little interest in 'working for the cause'. Their attitude had changed dramatically since our arrival in the country. Both labourers and *hanchos* and even the civil police and officials were into 'looting' and, quite often, openly sought our assistance.

Then, more instructions followed.

This time everyone was required to 'write in detail and concrete' an account of any person we saw killed in action, including the time and place. Needless to say, most 'detailed and concrete' accounts were highly farcical and entirely fictitious. More forms required us to nominate our next-of-kin, relatives, educational standard, medical history, and liking for tobacco and beer, reading and athletics. Goodness knows what they wanted this information for. To me, it seemed to indicate the existence of some nationalistic quirk.

This was no better illustrated than by one of the guards who, upon discovering one of our chaps committing the serious crime of smoking on the beds, politely took him over an ashtray. A similar offence, witnessed by a different guard, brought a week's picket duties for the offender. Yet another example of their unpredictability occurred when Sgt Morita sprang a surprise bread check on the morning work parade. As he systematically went through the ranks, anyone not having his correct one and a half rolls was immediately bashed. Man after man reeled under his blows. I don't know whether he was getting tired, or just running short of time, but when he came to the ranks of Minatea Gawa, he ordered 'all men with the correct amount of bread to fall out.' Not one did. To our amazement, Morita quite suddenly burst out laughing, and then gave up.

On another occasion, during a search, he felt an unfamiliar contour around John Mason's stomach. John was a youngster from the 8th Division Sigs who was fast earning a reputation for his daring and skill as a looter. Unbuttoning his shirt, the sergeant-major had expected to find the usual small bag of sugar. However, John had perfected a unique system of stringing small bags that wound around his body, so after the first foot or so of this contraption emerged from his shirt front, the sergeant-major's surprised face had spread to a smile. By the time a yard of the bags appeared like a string of sausages, he was almost convulsed and, giving John a couple of smart whacks around the face, dismissed him without further punishment, but minus his loot. These rare displays of humour, however, were quite the exception.

There were times when Darkie stepped into our ranks after handing over his rifle to one of our chaps, who sloped arms and took control of the party. Even then, this little charade would take place well away from Kobe House, and he always retained the ammunition pouch. On more than one occasion, too, Darkie warned us that a search was planned for that evening. On the opposite tack was the not-so-gentlemanly 'Gentleman Jim', who, when escorting us to the station, apprehended a young girl breaking through our ranks and gave her a smart couple of cuffs around the ears with his immaculately gloved hand, sending her glasses flying in the process.

February 15th arrived and, with it, the second anniversary of our capture. If anyone had told us we would still be prisoners-of-war after two years, we would have slaughtered them. Now, we were telling ourselves we would surely be home for Christmas.

DOCKERS AND LOOTERS

The honeymoon with the Red Cross parcels was over and a divorce appeared imminent. The food ration had deteriorated below the standard of pre-parcel days by the substitution of barley for a percentage of rice. Then, the coal ration was cut, leaving us bathless for two weeks. Fortunately for us at Yoshihara, there were several steam pipe terminals where we could heat a bucket of water for a good strip wash. But even these amenities were in danger of disappearing, as the Japs were systematically stripping all metal piping and most of the iron and steel fittings from office buildings and departmental stores. Even some of the lesser-used railway crossing barriers had been dismantled in support of the war effort. Perhaps the most significant commitment to their cause was evident by the dismantling of an enormous metal figure of what we took to be the famous American

baseball player Babe Ruth. This giant had dominated the Koshen sports stadium, but the former champion was now decapitated.

At last, I saw an opportunity to raid the Kobe station bookstall. The conditions were as good for go as they'd ever get: I was strategically positioned, the guard was on the opposite flank, and my haversack was at the ready. I'd have to take a risk on the *hancho*. With the boys behind me going into their prearranged diversionary 'kerfuffle', I whisked the top two copies off the Mainichi pile and out of sight in a flash then. I waited for the uproar and when none came, I heaved a sigh of relief and bathed in the warm glory of victory. There was nothing really startling in the news. The Allies were fighting like beasts in Burma, but all place names were censored with an X. A strong American naval force had bombarded the Kurile Islands and the Nips were obviously concerned about the 'ever increasing number of American planes.'

News came in fairly regularly from a couple of the wharf jobs where the boys would trade sugar for the Mainichi. We relied heavily on the news for our morale. Although we never doubted that the allies would win we knew the Japanese would resist fanatically to the end in defending their homeland and we often wondered whether we would survive an invasion. Whenever a convoy arrived in Kobe harbour the firm of Sempaku received priority for labour and our men were taken other jobs to fill the required quota. The numbers varied from day to day, and it was not known until the actual work parade just how many were needed. This arrangement stirred the imagination of many of us as we dreamed of discovering boatloads of loot, and produced the amazing spectacle of dozens of *horyos* crowding the cobblestoned area fronting the guardhouse, all jockeying for a position near the gates. As soon as the gates were opened, the field sprinted away, like hounds on a hunt, to make for the Sempaku assembly area, all inspired by one thing – 'loot'. Down in the holds of the rusty two-hold freighters, which we had christened the 180-day wonders, and the smaller one-hold 90-day wonders, were the hidden spoils. Most of our chaps were prepared to run the risk of handling bone-crushing ingots of pig iron, or filthy coal or lime, in the hope of uncovering a cargo of sugar or some other prize. It was like prospecting; a lot of dirt had to be removed before the spoils were won.

While being ferried out to the ships, the chaps would quiz the *hanchos* on the nature of the cargo, and there were many a groan of despair when they were told it was either coal or cowcake (crushed yellow beans, compressed into big circular cakes). But even those ships turned up unexpected delights on occasions. No matter how uninteresting the cargo, every ship was worth investigating, and it was during the reconnaissance of a coal ship that a veritable treasure-trove of goodies was unearthed – cases of Australian corned beef, meat and veggies, margarine and pineapple. So skilfully had we developed our art of looting that two consecutive days of undetected stealing went by, and, as it was on a coal ship, there was no search back at the Kobe House gates. For this lucky party, it was manna from heaven.

The year in Japan had not only unearthed latent talents, it had also elevated our self-image, sometimes to the point of arrogance. One day, my two fellow 2nd 4th mud gunner friends, Johnny Gilmour and Wally Hutchinson, were working on a bargeload of bagged sugar. Nip kids, civilians and soldiers on the wharf were passing their caps over to them, which they handed back full of sugar in return for a packet of cigarettes. A Jap major came swaggering along the wharf with the inevitable sword on the hip. In a flash the Nips disappeared, Johnny said, 'bang go our heads.' and they prepared for trouble. The major stood on the wharf, watching the two *horyos* working away with great gusto, then, producing a bag, he handed it down to them 'We'll make this bastard pay', the boys murmured to each other. As they handed the full bag back, Johnny held up three fingers and, in his impeccable Nippon-go, demanded, 'san packetto cigaretto'. Whatever shortcomings there may have been in the structure of the sentence, the vocabulary was readily understood. '*Chotto mati*' (wait a moment), replied the major, producing a single

packet, indicating he was a little short, away he went and, in a short time, returned with the other two packets. 'Little did he know,' chuckled Johnny at the departing officer, 'he only had to wave his sword and he could have had the bloody barge full for nothing.'

Most times, it was sheer hard work at Sempaku, scrap metal and pig iron were treacherous to handle, and, even with the provision of gloves, the hands received a battering by the day's end. We often earned ourselves a reprieve, however, by overloading the sling, which would often result in the quite inadequate winch breaking down, to the delightful accompaniment of our derisive comments. With their national pride at stake, the Japs would try to illustrate their technological superiority with determined and noisy advice to their winchman. If the pendulum appeared to be swinging their way, we would throw a few more ingots on the sling, which invariably produced the desired effect. While repairs were undertaken, many hours of welcome rest were gained, but it never dawned on the Japs that they were being conned.

On another occasion, a welcome cache of beer had been found on a ship. After such a long period of abstinence and an inadequate diet, some of us had quite a low level of tolerance to alcohol. So it was no surprise when two of our lads quickly succumbed to its influence. This caused a minor crisis, but the inebriates were skilfully directed by their mates to Kobe House in a semi-conscious state, suffering from a 'recurrence of malaria.'

Without a doubt, though, the pick of the jobs along the Kobe waterfront was Takahama, or 'Takies,' as we called it, which seemed to be the receiving depot for a lot of produce the Japs had plundered from their newly-won Empire. Here, the warehouses were a veritable Aladdin's cave, and to work inside them was an experience guaranteed to make any *horyo's* mouth water and eyes sparkle. Cases of salmon, pilchards, sardines, canned fruits of all description and countless other items lay ripe for the picking. But Takies was virtually a closed shop. The Poms had seen to that. Very occasionally, if the firm required extra labour, the odd Aussie or two would get his chance, which would assure him of, at least, a pretty substantial midday meal. The Takies boys lived well.

Many methods were devised for bringing the loot back into Kobe House. Bags were made to fit in legs, arms, boots and body. A favourite place of concealment was the crotch, and this was generally known as 'crutching'. Small cans of sardines were widely favoured because of their convenient size and shape. 'Flats', as they were called, brought 30 cigarettes inside. When it came to cigarettes, the Australians had the advantage, packing them carefully around the lower legs, where they were hidden in the folds of gaiters that we sometimes wore. The puggarees of our slouch hats, too, were good for at least 30 cigarettes. Thousands were taken back to camp by these methods and traded for the necessities of life. The risks were great and the punishment was heavy, but the rewards were sweeter. It meant survival, and we were determined to survive.

I GO TO GAOL

Monday 28 February was some sort of special day for the Japanese waterside workers, which they celebrated with a holiday, and it coincided with a visit to Kobe House of Colonel Murata, the gentleman who had welcomed us on the day of our arrival. He had come on his biannual inspection, and, in typical grandiose fashion to mark the occasion, brand new American Red Cross socks and underpants were issued, and we were instructed that they must be worn for the inspection. As it was still winter, I hoped that we wouldn't be required to drop our strides to show proof that the order had been complied with. We didn't. The canteen supplies, too, were boosted with cigarettes and tea. For a packet of 20, Rising Suns cost 45 sen, and Cherry Blossom brand 70 sen. The tea was a good quality black rather than the insipid, straw-coloured local product that barely coloured the water. Those of us who worked at the factories had had the previous day off, which meant that, while we went to work as usual, the rest of them remained inside to face the Jap top brass.

John Mason was soon in trouble by merely giving the order to *kiotski*. If he had left it at that, all would have been well. But John, ever the perfectionist, had been momentarily carried away with the dubious self-imposed honour of greeting the Colonel and his entourage, and had added a friendly smile to his salute. Unfortunately, this gesture, offered in all sincerity, was taken as an insult, and so Johnny very smartly found himself with 48 hours in the *aeso* in which to reflect on the perils of attempting to improve Nippon-Australian relations. However, during those unpredictable times, we brash youngsters lived one day at a time, took many unbelievably dangerous risks, and accepted our punishment philosophically.

During the inspection of the quarters, Colonel Murata asked to see the contents of one man's personal box, which, when opened, revealed quantities of sugar, cans of salmon and sardines. To everyone's amazement, 'Charlie', the camp Quartermaster, with great presence of mind, came to the rescue with 'Ah Red Cross – Americano Red Cross'. This timely intervention saved the day for all parties, but I have no record in my diary of what happened to the owner of the loot after the Colonel's departure. It's my guess that Charlie slipped back later that night for his substantial cut. During the inspection, one of the accompanying Japanese interpreters, in an attempt to uncover any possible illegal activities on our part, repeatedly tried to outsmart our chaps by asking, in turn, for a knife with which to sharpen a pencil, and a match. However, our boys were more than equal to the occasion and came out with all the right answers. As a rest day, it was a disaster. The men had to wait outside in the street until 1.30pm, in bitterly cold weather, for the inspection to start. Afterwards, Hoblett was instructed to tell us that the day had gone only 'fairly good', and that on no account must we laugh or snigger when someone made a mistake with the language. Apparently they had started the Pacific war with an inferiority complex. Despite their huge territorial gains. It seemed that they still had it.

The day might not have gone so well for the Colonel, but Charlie must have thought he'd hit the jackpot. The very next night, he was up in the Yanks' quarters, helping himself to a haul of a half-full pillowslip of sugar plus a few cans of fish. In a very happy mood after the raid, he was heard to gloat, 'Americano presento Nakamura'. Little did he suspect that it wouldn't be too long before the Americans returned the compliment to Nakamura and the whole Japanese nation with something rather more substantial than sugar and canned fish. As it happened, Charlie chickened out after that night. He was probably afraid of having his extracurricular activity revealed to a higher authority.

That day, too, saw the last of the charcoal fires. Despite the fact that we had not raised a sweat around them, we were genuinely sorry to see them go. During the Red Cross parcel era, when flour was 'coming in', there was an astonishing variety of dishes cooked on that meagre flame. Most of all, I would miss the nightly cup of tea or coffee. It is surprising how much the 'little things' of life are appreciated when one is deprived of them. Through all the years of captivity, when privileges were few, there was nothing that compared with the feeling of satisfaction of cold hands cradling a steaming mug on a freezing night. A sample entry of my diary records the kind of life we led at that time.

18th March 1944. Morimoto (the Jap camp commander known to us as Jack Oakie) held a parade in the street on our return from work. It was to the effect that as from the 26th, we would work up until 5.00 p.m. each day and in future. Yasume days will be on the 1st and 3rd Sundays of each month. As the 21st was to have been a yasume day, we will miss out on that one and will have to wait until the 1st Sunday in April for the next. Cunning bastards. Searches are still persistent. One man was found with sardines in his box and spent five days in the boob. Another man was caught with three notebooks in his possession - one containing an account of the sinking of the 'Lisbon Maru'. He is also to spend five days in boob.

On Wednesday, 22 March, the law of averages caught up with me. A comparatively new guard with the name of 'Wall-eye' was my downfall. Obviously acting under instructions, he was ready and waiting to pounce on us as soon as we came to a halt outside the gates of Kobe House. He may have had only one good eye, but that one, and his hands, worked overtime on the search that night. He caught three of us.

George (Darby) Munro was found with coconut butter. Joe Mouat had gone the whole hog and was lumbered with coconut butter, peanut powder, soap and a pair of shoes that had been resoled with crêpe rubber. I had both powder and butter on me, but only the powder was found. However, that was of little consequence, as all three of us were quickly smarting under a salvo of left and right hooks to the head. Having been thrashed in the preliminary bouts, we were ushered through the gates to take up a ringside position in front of the guardroom. Unfortunately, the guards had overlooked our seating arrangements, so there was no alternative but to stand up, and to attention. This we did with alacrity, having no further wish to be used as punching bags.

An hour later, we were paraded before Jack Oakie. There we stood, like prisoners apprehensively awaiting the judge's verdict. By now, our numbers had grown to five, having been joined by two English criminals from the firm of Dai-ni-Shenko. Hoblett announced the verdict: seven days in the *aeso* on half rations. Dressed only in our working clothes, we shivered away the night without anything to keep us warm. Upstairs, our mates were wrapped in five blankets.

The March of 1944 was one of the most treacherous months of all, with frequent falls of snow, driving sleet and freezing nights. As we entered the *aeso*, we discovered that it was already occupied by a solitary *horyo*. Now, there were six of us. While we were still discussing how best to fill in the time, we were joined by the new Japanese interpreter, 'Henry', who resolved the immediate problem for us. Henry, a diminutive Jap with a questionable command of the English language, arrived armed with a clipboard and pad. Then followed an intense interrogation, during which we had to relate all the details of our criminal activities – the time, place and reason – all of which was recorded on Henry's slate. He had really hit the big time. With Henry's departure, we settled down as best we could on the bare wooden floor. Six grown men, cold and huddled close to each other.

The following morning, we were again assembled before Jack Oakie and had to write and sign a confession for our misdeeds, stating that we would never repeat them. All through the day, we worked on the guards' air-raid shelter, which was being built just outside the main gate. That night, after work and our half bowl of rice, we were mustered to attention again until after *tenko*, when we were informed that we would be spending the night on the cobblestones in front of the guardhouse. By this time, our numbers had been reduced to the three Yoshihara miscreants (the Poms having been banished to the *aeso*), and we had evolved a plan of action to prepare ourselves against the rigours of the oncoming nights. On my next visit to the *benjo*, I got a message to Mac to collect the butter and to bring down my other set of winter underclothes, including long johns, and my warmest pair of socks. The others did likewise. In the meantime, the Japs had relented somewhat and allowed us the luxury of a blanket each for the remainder of our sentence, so, with that and the extra clothes, we managed to survive. The next day, two of the Englishmen were released.

For the next few days, the rest of us were split into two groups: Darby and I in one, and the remaining Pom in the other. We continued to work on the air-raid shelter during the days, but spent the nights alternating between the *aeso* and the guardhouse. During that long period together, Darby and I must have covered each other's life stories pretty thoroughly, but the only subject I remember discussing was his golf. It was an unfamiliar and unattainable sport for me, but, apparently, Darby had been on a handicap of only four.

Despite the added padding, the cobblestones did not grow any softer, but I

consoled myself with the thought that things could be worse. We could be standing to attention. Better to be lying down and bruised than standing up and stiff. All through those many sleepless hours, I did my best to think back over some of the more humorous incidents of my war service. I couldn't recall too many. There was one occasion during the week-long shambles that was termed the 'Battle for Singapore' when we came across a party of British soldiers who had just completed a 'strategic withdrawal' across the causeway from Johore, before I was blown up. One of them hailed us in an unmistakable north-country accent. 'Hey Aussie', he called, 'First i' were the North Johore Line, then w' had th' south Johore Line, where th' fooks th' Cunard Line?'

I tried to remember some of the crude jokes that rocked the hold of the Wales Maru, but I couldn't. My mind rambled on; what about a poem? But what could I write about? The Yellow Peril? 'I was back in Kobe House again, with 600 other men.' That sounded familiar. The gallant 600? Hardly gallant, but still – 600. So, over the next two nights, with some inspiration from Lord Tennyson, I came up with the following lines:

*We are six hundred
Who through the very jaws of death,
And through the fiery mouth of hell,
Exist in silent hopefulness that all our breath be spared to tell
The world of yellow treachery.*

*We played our part.
Through boastful fort that failed to stand,
Through sickening lack of promised aid,
Heartbreaking humiliation - diminished food, the price we paid
For unheeding yellow treachery.*

*How long the night?
How many years must be the winter of the wait?
Needs slavery be borne till madness does cessate?
And yet still grows the vision of some summer's liberate
From all of yellow treachery.*

*The time will come.
When from this enigmatic land,
We'll leave for home - O wondrous day,
And being there, we shall demand, 'What price they pay
For cruel, yellow treachery?'*

It mightn't have been up to Tennyson's standard, but it helped me to pass many dreary hours. More importantly, it released some of the bitterness inside me. At 5.00pm on the 29th, exactly one week after being sentenced, we were again paraded before Jack Oakie and told that our punishment was over, and not to do it again. To celebrate my return to the fold, Mac had sacrificed 80 of his reserve supply of cigarettes to 'buy' me a tin of salmon. In an all-male world, it was a gesture of love in its purest form.

CONDITIONS OF WAR

With the advent of spring, the nation prepared for war. The latest copy of the Mainichi

strongly advocated more aircraft production and a greater all-out war effort. They even admitted suffering heavy losses, and that 'a strong enemy is attacking the home front. All fashionable restaurants, theatre and geisha have been forbidden to continue; the actors and other employees of these establishments will be found "appropriate" work.' There was no doubt that the people were being conditioned to expect a worsening war situation. Everywhere, now, air-raid shelters and slit trenches were being dug along the pavements and in the streets. Perhaps the most significant sign to us of the Japanese preparation for the defence of their homeland was the installation of a battery of anti-aircraft guns in the park. Where once we could look out of barred windows on games of soccer, rugby or baseball, all that could be seen now was a maze of slit trenches.

There was one occasion when the Japs had permitted a baseball match there between the Yanks and the Aussies. Our own battalion champion, Jimmy Dore, was a member of the team, which, after a keenly fought tussle, lost 13-7 to the Americans. Even though it had obviously been a propaganda exercise, with the Japanese cameras recording it all, the game was played in a spirit of genuine competitiveness, and it was allowed to continue unhindered to its completion. To make up the numbers, and dressed in greatcoats to hide some of the more frail bodies, the entire camp inside staff and walking sick were ordered out as spectators. Smoking was permitted, too, but as soon as the cameras stopped, so did the smokes. I don't know whether it was a part of the propaganda, or just a coincidence, but our slouch hats, which had been in storage since the day of our arrival, had just been returned to us. No doubt the appearance of the distinctive slouch-hatted *horyos* would have added authenticity to the film. I couldn't have cared less. All that mattered was that I had regained my hat. It did wonders for my morale.

But now the turf had gone, and, with it, the sounds and sights of people enjoying themselves. One by one, the monuments of civilised living were being dismantled, illustrating man's irresponsible waste of resources, and his penchant for self-destruction. In the 10 months that we had been in Japan, we had seen prevailing conditions deteriorate. When we first arrived, the civilian workers enjoyed good-quality rice packets, with plenty of fish and vegetables. Now, their lunch packets were made up of a mixture of split-grained rice and corn, and the vegetables had been replaced with a treated seaweed and sliced *daigon*. The *daigon*, a cross between a parsnip and a radish, grew up to 18 inches long, purely as the result of being force-fed on human waste. This method of fertilising home-grown vegetables was a national practice, with each family having its own supply readily available from its own private *benjo*.

I don't know where the contents of the Kobe House cesspits went, but, when they were emptied, it created a monstrous pollution problem. It seemed that there was always some difficulty in getting the services of a contractor, with the result that, by the time one arrived, the pits were usually overflowing. This situation was bad enough in the winter, but during the summer months, with flies and maggots everywhere, the conditions were appalling. When the pits were emptied, ox-carts were backed down the cobblestones to the entrance of the two main buildings, and the contents were ladled with large, wooden scoops into wooden buckets. These were carried past the bathhouse, past the kitchen, and up a plank, where the waste was poured into a trough that ran the length of the cart. This archaic process went on for hours. The stench must have been intolerable for the camp staff. Even when we workers arrived back and the place had been cleaned up, the smell still permeated the whole camp complex, forcing us to hold our breath until we reached the relatively clean air of the upper floors.

The miracle of it all was the fact that there was practically no infectious fever, despite the primitive sanitation. Septic sores and rashes, however, were prevalent, as were relapses of malaria and dengue fever. Our relatively disease-free situation was due almost entirely to the efforts of our MO, Dr Boyce, and his orderlies – Reg Kavanagh, Les Bond, John Byrnes, Les Kelly and H Shannon. The following few lines are from Dr Boyce's records:

We lived, slept and ate in the 40ft by 40 ft hospital with the sick and the dying, and in it too, we held all sick parades. The latter were no mean item. For one day in Nov. 43, we kept check of all treatments for the 24 hours and found that 194 patients passed through our hands.

It is fitting that after the war Capt Boyce was awarded the OBE. No man deserved it more.

A MUSICAL INTERLUDE

On 11 March 1944, I joined the Kobe House choir. Being a musician, I suppose it was inevitable that I join, and I found it to be one of the most rewarding experiences of my prisoner-of-war years. The choirmaster was an English medical corporal by the name of Frank Florence. Flo, as we called him, was an accomplished musician and had the good fortune of being in possession of a guitar. It was one of several musical instruments that the Jap administration had provided for the British. About 20 of us, keen and enthusiastic, practised between 7.00pm and 8.00pm each night, up in the attic of the Brits' building. Flo did all the arranging and wrote four-part harmonies for all the choral work. He chose songs full of sentiment and beauty – old ballads that spoke of home. He was perfectly in tune with the musical appetite of his unique audience and they gorged themselves to obesity on the fruits of his labours. Yes, he always left them begging for more. Without a doubt, everyone's favourite choral number was a song simply called 'Home'. Some of the words were:

*When day is done and trees whisper day is ending,
My thoughts are ever wending HOME.
When love birds call my heart is forever yearning,
Once more to be returning HOME.
When the hills conceal the setting sun
Stars begin a-peeping one by one.
Night covers all, and though fortunes may forsake me,
Sweet dreams will ever take me HOME.*

Whenever we finished this song, the audience remained momentarily silent, as though reluctant to break the magical spell of its message, before everyone burst into spontaneous applause. With a special meaning in every line, there was not one man who remained unaffected by its moving rendition.

To provide variation, several choir members would perform solos and duets, and Flo, himself, sang several of his own compositions, the favourite of which was 'If Winter Comes'. And often, as a finale, we would lead the audience in a good old-fashioned sing-song, which always left everyone in good spirits.

For quite some time, we were simply known as 'the choir', but, in view of our growing popularity, Flo decided it was time for a more professional image, so he named us 'The Variety Harmonists'. Because of the limited area in any one floor space, it was impossible to include everyone in the one concert, so we would spend *yasume* days giving three performances: during the afternoon, we'd perform for the patients in hospital, then, after the evening meal, we would sing to each of the two buildings in turn. These were now known as No.'s 1 and 2 groups – British and Australian quarters, respectively. Quite often, the concerts were attended by some of the Jap guards, which was the closest we ever came to fraternising. Morita, the sergeant-major, was a frequent patron, but he became more of a nuisance when he insisted on singing. He had such an inflated opinion of his singing ability that, once he started, we couldn't shut him up. We were caught in a

dilemma. Self-interest dictated that, after each item, we feign generous applause, but the more we applauded, the longer he performed. Had he possessed a reasonable voice and sung something tuneful, his efforts would have been enduring, but his thin, nasal, quarter-toned melodies offended the ears of even the tone deaf among us. We began to wonder whether it wouldn't be better to forego *yasume* day altogether rather than be subjected to the torture of his dirges. We had enough problems already with the constant battle against diarrhoea without Morita contributing further to its causes. But overall, the existence of the choir was a tremendous psychological boost that helped us to ward off the danger of depression.

WALKING THE PLANK

Despite the fact that I'd signed the pledge after my week in the *aeso* (lock-up), I had no intention of keeping that promise. There was no doubt about it; my confidence had received a setback. I needed to do another 'job' – and successfully. Back working at Yoshihara, I managed to lift a few choice pieces of soap. It was a commercial product, full of caustic, but still an essential commodity that was always in short supply, so with lumps of soap strategically concealed all over my body, I submitted confidently enough to the routine cursory search that Ga-Ga went through before leaving the factory each night. I felt quite relaxed; there was no guard with us, so there was no problem this end. It was the other end that I had to worry about. Who was duty officer, and would he put on a search? I have never worked out whether it was for better or worse, but fate intervened that evening and changed my working future in Kobe.

Ga-Ga was just running his hands around my ribs when a few senior officials of the company appeared on the scene. Whereas, normally, he would have passed on to the next bloke muttering 'piggy-piggy' to himself, as soon as he saw the brass, he put on an act. Pushing me out of the ranks, he had me undo my tunic, revealing my ill-gotten gains to the hierarchy, all the while spitting volumes of condemnation in his native tongue. Fortunately for me, the incident was not reported to Kobe House, but, although I escaped punishment, I felt completely betrayed. Never again would I trust another Jap. As it happened, there was no search that night, which didn't make me feel any happier. So as soon as we were dismissed, I went straight to the camp administration office and terminated my employment with Yoshihara. Then, acting against the fundamental unwritten law of the AIF that a soldier never volunteers for anything, I volunteered for what was, reputedly, the hardest job along the waterfront – Kamagumi. Kamagumi certainly lived up to its reputation. The old cliché 'a change is as good as a rest' is one of the most fallacious ever uttered. Kamagumi was most definitely a change – several changes, in fact. The first day was all change. But it was never a rest.

On the morning of 5 May 1944, I joined the Poms of Kamagumi, who, with a neighbouring crowd of Sumitomo boys, boarded a tram for the interesting half-hour ride through the city to the western part of the waterfront. After alighting from the tram, a short march took us into the dock area, where we halted outside a small, two-storeyed mess hut. This, then, was to be the centre of future operations. My first job was shifting large circular blocks of compressed cowcake, which looked like huge yellow draught pieces, from the quay to a warehouse, using a hand trolley, or *nekkō*, as we quickly adopted the Japanese terms. The morning passed without incident, until a 15-minute tea-break back in the mess provided the first of a daily issue of four cigarettes. This was indeed a change – a small one, true enough – but none the less pleasurable.

After another session wheeling the giant draught pieces, I was more than ready for the 55-minute lunch break. Once again, I was pleasantly surprised when I received a substantial meal of good-quality unpolished rice with boiled yellow beans. The English sergeant had cooked it to perfection. This was particularly appreciated because the

midday bread ration had just been substituted with yet another meal of substandard rice. Having worked on many precious shipments of rice, the British workers at Kamagumi had wisely stashed away their own private supply of the good-quality stuff. There were also many individual supplies of sugar and peanuts hidden behind wall panels and above ceiling joists of the mess hut.

Ross Hann, a fellow Australian, had started work with me, and, being new chums together, our Pommie hosts welcomed us with verbal and practical generosity, from their various reserves, they donated enough loot to tide us over until we became self-sufficient; consequently, our stomachs were usually full. Indeed, they had to be, in order to withstand the prolonged, brutal grind of physical hard labour that lay ahead. However, the first priority, we were advised, was a specially fashioned apron. This essential garment, constructed from a piece of tough tarpaulin, would not only protect our legs when using *nekkos*, but, more importantly, it would shield our necks from the coarse sacks that we would soon be carrying, To cushion the rough tarpaulin, they gave us a white cotton flour-bag each, which had to be sewn to the tarp, taking care to provide a big enough pocket to accommodate any loot. Two ties at one end of the apron completed the outfit, the wearing of which enabled us to remove goods from warehouse to mess hut. Red Cross sewing kits were never put to better use than this all-important project, but, until they were ready, aprons were lent to us by the Poms. Armed with this newly acquired status symbol, and full of apprehension, Ross and I waited to see what would happen next, and we didn't have long to wait for initiation. First thing after lunch, we were introduced to the hard and sorry facts of lumping. It would be some time before we mastered the subtleties. It appeared that the secret of survival in this business was to position the sack lengthways across the shoulders, thereby distributing its weight evenly upon the human frame's strongest feature. At the same time, the bags were carried tilted, so that the leading edge fitted around the neck, with each hand grasping a corner in a steadying influence. There seemed to be no end to that first afternoon as I lumped bags of linseed, copra and peanuts, and my diary records unsympathetically: 'I felt a little sore after my first day's toil.' The next day was an all-day marathon, lumping peanuts. From the ship in the harbour, barge-loads of them were towed to Kamagumi's wharf to be unloaded by small dockside winches. Making a shoulder-high platform on the wharf from the first few slings of bags, the load was winched and deposited there. Two men with bag hooks would place a bag across the shoulders of each lumper as he positioned himself to receive it.

The Stevedore's Swing by Norman Colley

Swing is the thing,
Yes, swing is the thing.
S.W.I.N.G. is the thing.
Now young Miss Blues met Mr Rhythm,
And they got together with this marriage thing,
And to the happy union
One fine morning in Spring
A lovely baby was born called Swing.
In dancing it became the latest craze
The Bands played it in many different ways
It even reached Kobe where it was the latest thing
And the *horyos* named it 'The Stevedore's Swing.'

Chorus It's The Stevedore's Swing, the very latest thing,
Yatse, Dock I Nai I De [pronounced Yat-say-dock-I-Ny-day]
The Stevedore's Swing, makes you want to sing

Hai Diggy Dock Hai Nai

Without that rhythm, you can't work with 'em,
You know – without it you can't do a thing,
It's the Stevedore's Swing, the very latest thing,
Kore Wanchai Piggy Jai Nai I De.

All the boys get in the swing,
With bags of *satoo* [sugar] do the highland fling,
All the Archers [green archers or foremen] begin to sing,
Yoroshi Jai Nai to the Stevedore's Swing,
Jeffers is the Rhythm King
Charlie makes those cymbals ring
Willie whips his whistle out and we all sing,
Yoroshi Jai Nai to the Stevedore's swing.

Down at Takies where the looters go,
Mitsubishi and Kobe Go,
What earns you that small brown ring?
Brother you've guessed it, the Stevedore's Swing.
Even down at Toyo Steel
The Piggy women do the Scottish Reel
At Showa Denki the boys all sing
Those black eyed babies do the Stevedore's swing.

The Japanese-style hooks, or *kagi*, were used in pairs: a short stubby one was held in the hand closest to the lumper, and a long-handled *kagi* grasped in the other hand reached the far edge of the bag. Initially, this peculiar type of operation appeared clumsy and complicated, but, with a little practice, it became comparatively simple and proved astonishingly effective. But it was some time before we new chums were permitted to be *kagi* men. That was a position to which one graduated, after progressively learning the skills of 'catching,' 'planking' and 'stacking'. Needless to say, these finer techniques would provide a future shock to my senses. For that first full day of lumping, however, it was my body that bent with shock. All day long, one 180lb bag of peanuts after another was lowered across my shoulders, and, with faltering steps, I would make my way into the warehouse towards the growing stack, where I would dump my load. A Japanese worker on the stack then manipulated it into a precise pattern, rather similar to constructing a brick building. For the first few trips, my main concern was to shed this monstrous burden in the shortest time and in the most convenient way possible, but the Jap stacker quickly indicated just where and in what position he expected the bag to be dumped. I soon learned that, with indiscriminate dumping, it was possible to antagonise the stacker, particularly if he was an unpleasant type, but it was generally in our own interest to cooperate with the Jap workers.

After mastering the intricacies of stacking, the next free lesson was in climbing the plank. With the warehouse stack occupying its allotted floor space to a height of approximately six feet, the only way it could go was up. And the way one went up was by walking a very springy, very narrow plank. The theory behind the spring in the plank was that the bouncing motion would help to propel one up the incline. For a start, I had great difficulty in synchronising this bounce with my step, my foot invariably coming down when the plank was going up, with the result that most of my bags were fast becoming a disorderly heap on the floor with me following in spectacular flight. To compound my problem, the 180lb bags of the morning had become immeasurably heavier by the afternoon, and it was a very sore boy who crawled back to Kobe House that day. Then, in the cool of the evening, when my body had developed aches upon the aches, the Japs

executed the *coup de grâce* by herding us back out in the street to administer an anti-typhoid injection to everyone. With *yasume* day on the morrow, their timing was perfect.

With the exception of the morning and evening *tenkos*, *yasume* day turned out to be an unprecedented parade-free day. This surprising display of consideration from the Japs, although warming the depths of my soul, stirred no corresponding response in my body. The sad fact was that, in addition to my aches and pains, I had developed a nagging headache overnight, and I had never been so happy to spend a day wrapped in my blankets. After a few days, my recovery was complete, with the exception of the comparatively slight discomfort of a stiff neck. Then, on the following Sunday, we received a booster dose of the antibody, but, as it was in between *yasume* days, there was no alternative but to work it off.

As the weeks dragged on, I continually questioned my sanity in volunteering for the job, but, eventually, I became blooded to the drudgery of the lumping business, and became an expert in no time. During this time, our fortunes fluctuated with the deterioration in the quality of rice, the effect of which was partially offset by the delivery of hundreds of letters from home. Mac received two letters, which gave him a tremendous lift, as he was having a very bad time with diarrhoea. I was pleasantly surprised to get one from the mother of my best mate, who had been killed at Singapore. The letter was dated 3 March 1943, which meant that it had taken 15 months to reach me, and there was nothing in it to indicate that she knew of her son's death.

GUYS AND DOLLS

Symptomatic of the Japanese war effort, the tram system was continually breaking down. Not that we minded getting to work an hour late, but it was a different matter if the breakdown occurred on the way home. If the tram was on time, we would drool over the sight of a pretty, blonde German girl who seemed to finish work at the same time as we did; if we were late, we missed out on that delightful treat. With summer approaching, Reveille was put forward to 5.00am, but, thankfully, it remained at 7.00am on *yasume* days. With the lengthening days, there was more evidence of the approaching tide of war in the hovering anti-aircraft balloons rising far above the mass of 'poached eggs' that flew perpetually on most buildings. This perfectly natural nationalistic fervour was obviously not shared by us and, in fact, was partially blamed for the proliferation of diarrhoea that seemed always to be with us. Subsequently, we had to undergo a treatment of anti-dysentery toxin, but even this did not detract from the news that next rocked the rafters of Kobe House.

Johnny Gilmour had just started cutting my hair on the evening of Wednesday 7 June when the news hit the camp that the Allies had invaded France. This long-awaited opening of the second front set us simmering with excitement and, for a week or so, had the civilians staring in astonishment at the noise coming from our train as we drove through the streets of Kobe, lustily singing all the old familiar wartime songs, including 'We'll Meet Again', 'White Cliffs of Dover' and 'Roll Out the Barrel.'

Then, on Friday 16 June, we heard the first wail of sirens – sounds that, from now on, would be heard more and more, signalling the start of the aerial campaign that culminated in the disintegration of the Japanese empire. In the days that followed, we saw ARP (Air Raid Precaution) warders take up permanent postings and the people of Kobe gather in increasing numbers around the public news posters. In Kobe House, the lights had to be shaded and the shutters drawn until after lights out.

On the 21 June, our perennially smiling Camp Commandant, Jack Oakie, was recalled to Osaka, and his place was taken by Lieutenant Takanaka. We hoped that he would turn out to be as reasonable as his predecessor. The summer was hot, and despite orders to the contrary, some of us went swimming during our lunch break. Lumping all day

long in the oppressive heat was almost unbearable, and we introduced many diversionary practices in an attempt to break the drudgery. Whenever we found ourselves unloading a comparatively light load such as sunflower seeds, the *kagi* men would hurl the sacks out as far as they could, while we lumpers took the flying bags on the run. Then, continuing on in a kind of slow jog, we did our utmost to dislodge the man ahead of us on the plank. It was crazy and highly dangerous, but, in those unpredictable days, there was danger in almost everything we did, and God alone knew just what dangers lay ahead. It was accepted without question, without fear. It was our constant companion. During those hot summer weeks of 1944, we dared to flirt with the pretty little sweepers. In particular, there were two who we named simply by their ages – Ju-roko (16) and Ju-kyu (19). Their job was to mend the *kagi* tears in the bags and to keep the ground free of spilt seeds, as these could be quite hazardous, particularly the rounded varieties such as beans and peanuts. Dressed in their long baggy trousers and often a scarf to protect their hair from the dust, they were still a tremendous improvement on the Yoshihara witches.

Working together over the months, we *horyos* had established a certain degree of familiarity with the Japanese lumpers and the few female workers. The combination of sweltering weather and the ever-present dust of the working conditions soon had us labouring like coolies, with the minimum of clothing draped our bodies. Most of us worked in our shorts, but a few of the boys stripped down to their *fandoshis*. This garment was a narrow strip of cloth that passed under the crotch and folded over a tie that encircled the waist. Thus, the essentials were covered, but the rest of anatomy was exposed. One particular Englishman wore his *fandoshi* to perfection. He was a swarthy character with a neat Clarke Cable moustache that enhanced his handsome features. His long, lean body was tanned to a rich brown, showing off the contrasting whiteness and the obvious brevity of the loin cloth. As he toiled away above our heads on the platform, a *kagi* in each hand and rivulets of perspiration trickling down his body, he looked every inch the classic slave. Had he paused long enough to display his attributes, there would have been some spirited bidding at the auction before he was snapped up by some wealthy heiress. In reality, he sought only to engage in a frivolous sexual encounter with the co-operative Ju-roko. With a deliberate, yet unobtrusive, lowering of the frontal fronds of the *fandoshi* so that it barely concealed his pubic hair, the towering Adonis called the young girl over to stand at his feet. Lowering his head, he bade her to wipe away the sweat from his brow. When she had done this, he stood tall in classic pose and instructed her to wipe away the streams of sweat that were running down his loins. After a moment of embarrassed hesitation, Ju-roko summoned up enough courage to slowly dab away the offending rivulets, with a concerned, innocent tenderness. Yet, all the time, the Englishman savoured the treatment with exaggerated fervour and expounded a whole gamut of sexual fantasies that had lain dormant for so long. In truth, we all shared his experience with envious appeal, accepting the fact that he deserved his brief moment of sexual gratification by displaying both the necessary courage to initiate the encounter and the ability to limit the adventure to an acceptable standard of behaviour. We had learned from practical experience that the instincts of self-preservation and hunger took precedence over the human sexual drive. In any event, these episodes with the Japanese *musumes* (girls) were a welcome diversion that helped us all to survive the rigours of the day.

With so much of our time spent working with the Japanese wharf labourers, it was inevitable that we *horyos* used much of their jargon and adopted some of their customs. We found that whatever task they were doing, it was invariably accompanied by one of a series of chants that were used to coordinate their collective efforts in order to achieve the maximum result. Whether it was manhandling an empty rail wagon or doing one of the many other wharfside jobs, they would set up a constant chant that basically went like '*hi-di-da-doc-I-shaw*'. Variations on this theme went in the abbreviated form of '*doc-I-shaw*' or '*doc-I-nai*.' The accent always occurred on the last syllable, with a pronounced whiplash.

Once a chant started, it lasted for the duration of the job. Whatever particular form of chant was the hit number of the day, we *horyos* would join in with vigour. This Japanese custom influenced our lives at that time to such an extent that one of our boys with the surname of Shaw very quickly earned himself the nickname of 'Doc'.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO TAKANAKA

Lieutenant Takanaka wasted no time in making his influence felt. From the start of his term as Camp Commander, the intensity of the searches increased, with the offenders receiving far greater penalties in the form of extra picket duties or foregoing two issues of cigarettes. In addition, they would have to stand to attention in front of the guardroom for several hours, with many well aimed punches thrown in for good measure. We were also given a further warning not to bring loot back into Kobe House.

The day after Takanaka's appointment was the anniversary of the American Day of Independence, and we expected a visit from our American friends. True to expectations, the sirens sounded at 9.00am and although no planes came our way, we enjoyed a two-hour break from work. Our information was that Moji and Tokyo had been bombed during the morning, with Yokohama and Nagasaki joining in the celebrations that night. Because of the increased air activity, we were warned once again not to have any lights visible.

One of Takanaka's idiosyncrasies was that we had to sleep with a blanket wrapped around the midriff, which, in the height of summer, was extremely trying. Even in the most stifling conditions, there was no chance of relief, because, if our duty picket was lax in supervising this order, and a prowling Jap guard discovered it, he left himself wide open for punishment. It was astonishing that the Japanese could be so fanatical over trivial matters, yet be so negligent in providing the necessities for reasonable health.

In a shock posting, we lost our most humane guard, Darkie. Acting in his capacity as canteen manager, he made us all a parting issue of two packets of cigarettes, one cake of toilet soap and a half a bar of washing soap. Darkie was also instrumental in sponsoring the entertainment broadcasts that had recently been permitted. In all our long years of captivity, he was the one guard who showed a consistent empathy with our circumstances. We were genuinely sorry to see him go.

Another Takanaka change to our established routine was the advancement of the work parade by ten minutes to 6.50am with the extra time added on to the lunch break. Fortunately, this arrangement suited us down to the ground, because we needed all the rest we could get after a long hard morning's toil.

On 4 August, Lt Takanaka invited the works leaders to tea in his quarters, after which he held a conference. Among the subjects discussed were the provision of working clothes, including boots, on dirty jobs; improved washing facilities and more soap; permission for *bioki* (sick) men to remain in mess huts, instead of being forced out to work; early inspections on *yasume* days so we could have the maximum rest; and operations, when necessary, in a civilian hospital. Ironically, the subject of air-raid discipline had just come under discussion when the 'alert' warning sirens sounded, causing the immediate termination of the meeting. But we were to feel the effects of the meeting the next *yasume* day, when Reveille was held an hour earlier at 6.00am, *tenko* at 6.15am, and the usual clothing inspection at 8.00am. With these things out of the way, we settled down to enjoy the rest of the day undisturbed.

On Tuesday 8 August 1944, I missed my first day's work through illness. A recurrence of dengue fever had me resting up all day, but I had improved enough by the next morning to take my place on the work party armed with a light work C/D. As it turned out, it rained most of the day, so very little work was done anyway. It was the ideal situation to go hunting for loot, but, unknown to us, the *Kempei Tai* (Japanese Secret Police) were active in our area, and caught two of our chaps pinching sugar. Besides being on the receiving end of a severe bashing, they were reported to the Kobe House guards. As soon

as they arrived back, they were given the 'stand to attention' treatment for several hours, before being allowed to sleep on the cobblestones. They then had to spend a further day in the *aeso*. My fever was not getting any better, but I tried to sweat it out by lumping all day, with the result that my condition worsened. That night, I was again on sick parade. I was too ill to work. During the night, the 'alert' sirens sounded. All lights were extinguished and the two *aeso* men were sent back to their sections, even the on-duty cooks had to return to their beds. Then, to our dismay, the doors of the main buildings were locked, with armed sentries posted outside. 'So this is it then,' I thought. Apparently, we were expendable, and, if Kobe House was to go up, we were set to go up with it. Fortunately, there was no attack that night. So my conjecture was not put to the test. My illness must have been worse than I first thought, because I was in hospital six days before I was well enough to get about again. Even when I resumed work, my legs were decidedly shaky.

After his meeting with the works' leaders, Takanaka took some steps to improve our conditions. He allowed us to wear shirts on morning tenko, and hastened proceedings by personally taking the parade, forming us up in just two groups of four ranks, with only the front rank of each group numbering. This was in place of the old method of numbering each *kumi* individually, a practice that took three times as long. Stripped to the waist on a freezing morning, that was quite an ordeal. Other improvements included the increased use of the public-address system, which resulted in the introduction of regular quiz sessions and a long-running thriller. We were given additional musical instruments – a cornet, piccolo and violin – which gave the orchestra a greater capability. The POW hospital in the foothills was allowed more frequent concerts, much to the benefit of the patients. The standard of the concerts was steadily improving and becoming more versatile, featuring a swing band, violin and clarinet solos, mouth-organ and ukulele duets, and a number of vocal items. The degree of professionalism in our presentations was due largely to the expertise and musical knowledge of the British bandleader, Jeff Jeffries, who had learnt his skills in the band of a British regiment. The goatee-bearded Norman Colley (or *Yagi-san* [Mr Goat], as the Nips called him) had added to his repertoire of original songs, the latest being 'The Stevedore's Swing' and 'Takanaka's Little Car'. Add to this line-up the 'Harmony Three', the 'Mad Gang' and the Choir and our concert party would have held its own in any amateur theatre.

1. **Takanaka's Little Car** by Norman Colley

Now, what's the thing that got the whole camp talking?
What's the latest topic of the day?
It seems that Takanaka won't be walking
When he goes around the jobs each day.
He had a small 'presento' from a guy he used to know.
And it seems this fellow must have had a ton of dough.
He's also got a geisha-girl that he calls a Lucille
Now he can take her riding in his Chesi automobile.

Its not too big, there's room for two –
Fourteen 'flats' and a bag of 'goo'
In Takanaka's Little Car.

It's so cosy and quite small
The cost of it was nowt at all
That's Takanaka's Little car.

The engine is so very good – the best you've ever seen.

It doesn't run on charcoal – no, it uses gasoline.
And when they want to oil it they use Red-Cross shaving cream
On Takanaka's Little Car.

It's about the size of a Nescafe tin.
You need an opener to get in
To Takanaka's Little Car.

The chauffeur's got a big red ring.
The driving seat's got just one spring
In Takanaka's Little Car.

It says upon the dashboard in letters large and clear,
If you weigh more than a couple of stone.
You've got no right in here.
And when you take your lady out, you can't do that there 'ere
In Takanaka's Little Car.

The horn sounds like a scalded cat,
All four tyres are nearly flat
On Takanaka's Little Car.

What's the pride of Kobe House?
Why, it's that little mobile mouse
Called Takanaka's Little Car.

Now every week a guy comes round to empty out the bins:
He collects the fag-ends and all those other things.
They searched his bag on leaving and found among the tins
Takanaka's Little Car.

LETTERS AND REFLECTIONS

In the middle of September, we were allowed to write a 100-word letter home, but, a few days later, Henry, the Jap interpreter-cum-censor, informed us that many letters would arrive at their destination with little more than the address intact. Henry was quite disappointed, particularly with the Australians. Writing things such as 'existing on rice and beans' and 'working like slaves on the docks' were definitely wrong. Since arriving in Kobe, we had been permitted to write home on two occasions. My letters had been to my relations in Adelaide and to my adopted mother in Perth. This time, I wrote to my English penfriend from Fairbridge days, to whom I had not written since being in Darwin. At that time, she was driving an ambulance in Swindon. My faded pencilled copy goes:

Dear Joan, This is my first letter to you during my P.O.W days. Have grown accustomed to this mode of living, drawing satisfaction on the knowledge of happier days to come. At present am in good health. Hope everything is going well with you. Our birthdays next month, over 6 years since our first letters. Hope our correspondence may soon resume former regularity. Christmas draws near, may it be a true festive season followed by a fortuitous and illuminated New Year. Our lives centre upon hope. Next year is my hope, so until then Goodbye with Love from Jack.

On 2 October, Lt Takanaka, in support of the strict but fair image he seemed intent on

cultivating, allowed the British boys to hold a memorial service for those fellow servicemen who had perished with the sinking of the Lisbon Maru. Our regular fortnightly *yasume* day was thrown out of kilter when the second anniversary of the opening of Kobe House fell on Thursday 5 October 1944. The day was declared a holiday, with the guards putting on a special parade decked out in their decorations. The 'celebrations' started with everyone bowing to the Emperor, then presentations were made to the most consistent workers on each job. These parcels were later found to contain two bottles of turtle soup (like salt water), two tins of sentum ointment (made in Germany), three bars of banana candy and a small bottle of mystery pills. Then, in recognition of his saving a Japanese woman from drowning in the harbour, an Australian was presented with 250 cigarettes and a book entitled 'Japanese Methods of Lifesaving.' My diary doesn't record what language this book was written in, but I suspect that, his having made one practical rescue in Japan, it couldn't have contributed anything more to the man's skills. An Englishman then received a present of 300 cigarettes for stopping a runaway horse. Before the parade ended, Takanaka said that the remainder of the day would be spent quietly in memory of the Lisbon Maru tragedy, whereupon the Jap guards proceeded to get drunk. Our orchestra played appropriate tunes.

October was remembered chiefly for the deterioration in the food ration and for a diary being found in the officers' quarters. That news caused a bit of consternation among us, as we were aware that the Japs knew we were receiving war news, but, until then, they hadn't known how we were getting it. With the discovery of the diary, there was a risk that the owner might have inadvertently revealed the source. I made a mental note to be selective in my writings, and to arrange for an extra lookout whenever I made an entry.

Lt Takanaka paid us a visit at Kamagumi, and very nearly caught us wheeling in a couple of *kamasu* bags (rough straw) to our mess hut. They were filled with a good quality rice, the supply of which was fast drying up, so we were making sure that we weren't missing out on our share. There was never any problem with Emai San (our Jap *hancho*). We were always in his charge and he occupied the mess hut with us, even eating there! Emai was a big man for a Jap, which earned him his nickname of the 'Beast'. This was prompted purely by his size, and did not in any way reflect his nature. He knew he had a first-rate team of workers in the *horyos*, and, so long as he was getting the results, he could afford to turn a blind eye to our looting. If he was sitting at his customary place just inside the door of the mess hut when we returned late for our smoko or lunch break and wearing bulky aprons, he usually greeted us with a knowing grin and an enquiring '*Nani*' (what?). He knew we all had secret caches of loot; indeed, he always got his share, but he did it in the smart way, letting us take the risks while he sat back and waited for his cut. On one particular consignment of 2600 bags of beans, I estimated that 18 lumpers had each carried 12 tons of beans in one day. At the same time, each man had jogged three miles, 110 yards into the warehouse with 180lb sacks on his back, then walked the same distance back to the loading point. As I sat working out these figures in the mess hut, it suddenly occurred to me just how much work we were doing for the Japs. Our days on the battlefield may have been few in numbers, but we were certainly making up for it now. My thoughts drifted on 'What did you do in the war, Daddy?' 'I was only a lumper, son.' 'But that was an important job, wasn't it, Daddy?' 'I was lumping for the Japs, son. You see...'. '*Saa egoo*' (let's go), bellowed the Beast. The call back to work interrupted this embarrassing reverie and thankfully brought me back to reality.

Meanwhile, back in Kobe House, conditions had tightened up. All *bioki* men and men on light work chits who remained inside were forbidden to smoke, read or amuse themselves in any way. To keep these men occupied, a new job was created – making envelopes out of scrap paper that was salvaged from Mitsui's warehouse. The Japs had a phobia about sick men. To them, anyone unable to work was useless and, as such, didn't warrant the attention, food or consideration of men who were able to work. This was yet

another example of the gulf that existed between our two cultures, which resulted in untold suffering for our sick.

Just when everything was looking grim, the days shortening and skies darkening with the onset of winter, the Hakusan Maru docked at the Toshin wharf with Red Cross supplies. The Sempaku boys never had a more pleasant job, or a more welcome cargo. Eighty of them worked for four days, unloading British, American, South African and Canadian food parcels, besides other bulk supplies. The Japs kept a watchful eye on the proceedings, but they needn't have worried. That was one consignment of goods that was given the VIP treatment. Nobody was going to pilfer that cargo. Expectations were fulfilled a few days later when supplies of parcels, boots and clothing arrived at Kobe House.

Something had gone very wrong at Mitsubishi. There was a terrible row over a considerable quantity of missing Army heel-less white socks, and one of our boys was seen on the stack. The Kempei Tai were brought into the investigation, with the result that they went through Kobe House like a dose of salts. Unbeknown to me, my number (714) had been given as working at Mitsubishi, which brought my gear under special scrutiny during the Kempei's search. My position grew more serious when they found a similar pair of socks in my gear, which had been in my possession for some time. I was interrogated and asked where I had got them. The only excuse I could think of at the time was that I had found them in the shower-room. This explanation didn't impress the Kempei, however, and it was not until I was able to prove my presence at Kamagumi on the day in question that the pressure came off me. For a time, things had looked a bit sticky, and I'd had visions of being carted off to some horrendous military prison.

December 1944 made a promising start with a Red Cross parcel shared between two men, but, five minutes later, the order came from Osaka that no parcels were to be issued before Christmas. But it was too late – the parcels had already been opened. However, as Colonel Murata would be inspecting the camp the next day, all the parcels were recalled to the Q-store. Dejectedly, we put our names on the inside and handed them back. It was worse than taking candy from a baby, and we weren't supposed to cry. Then, much to our surprise, we were given our candy back the day after the inspection.

We received several more shocks during December. Some severe earth tremors rocked the city, causing chimneystacks to tumble and minor waves in the harbour. It was the start of the sirens, too. We had previously had the odd wail or two, but now they were becoming more frequent. Out of the blue, we were issued with a pair of the white socks that had caused all the trouble a few days earlier. It was really inconsiderate of them to give us these cheap cotton things, which, after all, were there for the taking whenever we felt like lifting them. Still, they came in handy as bed socks.

Yasume day dawned on the 10th, and we soon wished it hadn't. For the 9.00am inspection, everything had to be laid out on our bed space, then, while we were parading out in the street, the Japs put on a thorough search. Quite a lot of our loot was found, particularly in No. 2 group (the Aussies), so we had to be collectively punished by the withholding of the next canteen issue. As this would probably be useless crockery or something similar, the punishment was more in the form of a blessing. During lunch, the sirens sounded, so the Japs decided to hold a full-scale evacuation practice. Out to the oval we reluctantly staggered, furious at having our *yasume* day disrupted. But all was not over yet. After returning inside, the Japs told us they couldn't guarantee our lives if we took so long to get out to safety, so we had to do it all over again. It was 3.00pm before we were able to settle down to our once-a-fortnight rest. Some *yasume* day that turned out to be! Sirens were practically an everyday occurrence now, and, if the short blasts of the alert sounded while we were at work, we were locked into a warehouse. With this sort of treatment, our chances of surviving the American bombing onslaught yet to come looked pretty slim.

CHRISTMAS DAY IN THE WORKHOUSE

Despite the frequency of the sirens, we were determined to enjoy our Christmas. With the issue of Red Cross parcels, many of us at Kamagumi set about making Christmas cakes. Then, with Christmas only a few days off, a miracle happened. On opening a rail wagon one morning, there on the floor lay one solitary bottle of Asahi beer. In a flash, I stashed it away in the pocket of my apron, and took it back to the mess hut, where it awaited its final journey back into Kobe House. On the same day, another Christmas present arrived, and, like the very first Christmas, it shone from above. Suddenly, the sunlight caught something in the sky, and we heard the faint sound of engines far above. It was our first glimpse of an American bomber. We were filled with excitement, with awe, and with hope, for, up there, just a few miles away, were free men who would be going home to a real meal and a proper bed. At last, the Yanks were on the way. All the Japanese could do was mutter something about a B *niju-kyu* (B29).

On Christmas Eve, I made a barley cake, consisting of soaked bulk barley, sugar, nutmeg, curry powder, oil and salt. The curry powder, we found, was a very passable substitute for ginger and, in fact, the finished product, baked in an earthen oven alongside the mess hut, smelt just like a ginger cake. That evening, it went into Kobe House hidden under the apron that was folded over my arm. There was no other way to conceal it. Christmas Day 1944 was one of the most memorable days of my life. It was certainly the happiest day of my POW years.

The day started early for Mac and me, as we warmed ourselves up with a pre-Reveille drink of coffee. Officially, Reveille was at 6.30am, with *tenko* half an hour later. Then, anxious to get our teeth stuck into something solid for a change, we operated on the barley cake, spreading thick slices with butter and jam. It might not have been the traditional Aussie breakfast, but it was certainly one of my most satisfying. It was a strange feeling, mouth full of solid tasty food, jaws chomping away with unfamiliar activity. We washed this masticatory onslaught down with a chocolate drink. At 10.00am it was time to give our stomachs another shock, so I experimented with a concoction of goo flour, (a heavy flour which did not seem to be made with any grain we knew), milk and sugar, with chocolate flavouring. This, we christened our 'blancmange'. It was surprisingly palatable, so we decided to have it again at lunch in lieu of Christmas pudding. For lunch, we spread the special ration of the steamed rolls with butter and cheese, and followed it with our miracle bottle of beer, the sight of which brought many a wry comment. That afternoon., we slept the sleep of the replete.

In the evening, the cooks excelled themselves with a genuine meat stew, after which we all made for the second floor, where the British were putting on, of all things, their traditional pantomime. It was entitled Charlie's Ring. The show opened with a bedtime scene inside Kobe House, where two *horyos*, Charlie and Shorty, were preparing for bed. Shorty worked at Showa Denki and Charlie at Sempaku. While discussing their day's activities, Charlie produced a ring that he had found on a ship, and, as he cleaned it, there suddenly appeared before them two genies awaiting to grant them any wish they chose to make. Naturally, first on their list of priorities was dining out in style at a first-class restaurant, with the orchestra playing softly in the background while they were being waited on by a bevy of waiters. After having satisfied their most urgent cravings, they were informed by the genies that Charlie had only to rub the ring again and his wish would be granted. Charlie decided they would like to visit a nightclub in New York, and the scene quickly changed, featuring a fabulous swing band with several talented acts including a 'Western Trio', a 'Professor of Violin' and a 'famous pair of dancers'. The audience was ecstatic.

After a wonderful evening Charlie and Shorty decided to have a change of pace and wished to be back at school. Being normal boys, they got into plenty of trouble, but the

most amusing episode was when 'Rosie Jefford', a classmate, arrived late for school one morning and presented her teacher with a huge *daigon*. As this vegetable had been practically our staple diet for months, this act brought the house down. From there, the boys wished to go to Baghdad, so the stage was set with a backdrop of stars and crescent moon, and a sultan flowing with luxurious robes, dripping with 'expensive jewellery,' lounging in a harem surrounded by a bevy of his favourite, scantily-clad wives. With the clap of the sultan's hands, the 'wives' went into an elaborate 'snake dance,' which had the audience in stitches, but evoked no response from the sultan. The climax was reached, with the orchestra breaking into appropriate music while 'Desdemona' danced the erotic 'Dance of the Seven Veils'. Veil after veil was shed, but, just as she was preparing to cast off the last remaining veil, the wives of Charlie and Shorty interrupted the performance and started giving the boys a terrible time. In an endeavour to escape their wives' onslaught, the boys wished that they were back in Kobe House and gave the genies back the ring. The pantomime ended with the boys back in bed at Kobe House, unable to make any further wishes. Reveille sounded, and, as the boys recalled their identical dreams, they discovered that the genies, as a substitute for their wives, had left them a Red Cross parcel. The perfect ending.

Almost the entire population of Kobe House, including a few guards, had crowded into just one floor space and had sat enchanted through three hours of entertainment. Under normal circumstances, the show would have had the critics raving, but these were decidedly not normal circumstances. This had been a performance in a prisoner-of-war camp, presented in hostile environment deep in the enemy's territory by men who had marched through its grim gates barely two years before, owning only the clothes they wore. Not only that, they had spent the intervening years deprived of their freedom, working long hours under sometimes hazardous and harassed conditions and existing on a monotonous, unappetising and substandard diet. Yet they had entertained almost 600 men for three hours with a show resplendent in colour, rich in imagination and faultless in presentation. For weeks on end prior to Christmas, these men had gathered together in the attic discussing, preparing, making and rehearsing for the show of their lifetime. Yards of silks, cottons and leather clothing, bracelets, bangles, rings and trinkets not only had to be looted, but also had to survive at least one, and possibly two, searches. For week after week, the self-styled tailors had spent most of their free time making and mending, altering and improvising everything that was worn in the show. The organisation was faultless. Sheets were borrowed from those Australians who still had them and were sewn together to make the curtain, and more sheets, coupled with blankets, formed the dressing-rooms. Make-up was procured or manufactured, and an engineer even rigged up a spotlight.

The members of the orchestra spent long hours writing manuscripts, practising and rehearsing until they reached their own required standard of perfection. All the planning, preparation and rehearsals had to take place in the evenings after a long day's work, demonstrating their dedication and enthusiasm, which had, justifiably, resulted in a brilliant success. It was an inspiring example of ingenuity, resourcefulness and discipline that lifted the morale of every *horyo* in Kobe House. After the show, Mac and I polished off the last of the barley cake and downed it with a drink of hot milk. It tasted terrific, but the taste of good food was not the only culinary dish of the day. More than anything else, our appetites had been whetted by a taste of freedom, that indescribable feeling of appreciation and gratitude, of pride in our fight, of confidence in our cause and certainty of the victory that would restore our freedom.

Boxing Day dawned and it was back to the realities of prisoner-of-war existence, but, in the train that morning, our enthusiasm was still riding high as we sang our favourite tunes with renewed energy and even more feeling and emotion. On arrival at Kamagumi, our first job was to return to the barge all the pig iron that we had so laboriously taken from it on Christmas Eve, an operation I took to be symptomatic of the Japanese war effort.

Someone had made a mistake.

Quite a few small 90-day wonders lay at anchor with their holds full of compressed bean cake from Manchuria. We certainly received our share, working for three days, unloading barge after barge, *nekk*-ing it straight into railway trucks. With the chill of a raw midwinter freezing our unprotected hands, our fingers absorbed many a painful pinch as we manhandled the solid slabs on and off our *nekkos*. An Englishman writhed in agony as one of the giant draught pieces slipped from a stack, crushing his toes, one of which had to be amputated.

A few days before Christmas, I had been fortunate enough to get my hands on a few pounds of wheat. Now, with the timely arrival of Red Cross parcels influencing many of us to bake cakes, I was determined to improve on my barley cake by using genuine wheat flour for my next effort. So, every spare minute during smokos and lunch breaks, I pounded away at my wheat grains, straining the crushings through a fine sieve until I had enough flour for my purposes. The big moment came on 29 December. First of all, the fire had to be left burning long enough to produce heat for the baking process. I then mixed the ingredients, which consisted of two and a half bowls of flour, three-quarters of a bowl of sugar, one coffee tin of raisins, one three-and-three-quarter ounce tin of butter, three spoonfuls of dried milk, one grated nutmeg, one spoonful of curry powder, half a coffee tin of egg powder, salt to taste and a guess measure of bicarbonate of soda – the whole baked in a prepared Aldershot oven for 50 minutes. The result was a complete success and I took the still-warm cake back into Kobe House tucked under my arm, wrapped in my apron. Once again, I was lucky enough to get away with it.

PERIL FROM ABOVE

With the New Year, the Japs decided to give us all a new number, which would be arrived at alphabetically. The most astonishing result of this operation was that, of all the 600-odd *horyos* involved at Kobe, I managed to finish up with the same number as before. The odds against that happening must have been astronomical. The Australians' numbers went from 582 to 820. For some reason, officers were not numbered.

We were given New Year's Day as *yasume* day, which was something of a luxury, making it two weeks running that we had been allowed to sleep in until 6.30am. As the month of January slipped by, hardly a day passed without the sirens sounding, and Kobe itself received its first bombing on the 19th. With the short blasts on the sirens indicating imminent danger, all *horyos* were locked in warehouses or sent to their mess huts, and on one job were even locked in a railway wagon. With strong protests coming from our officers, Takanaka instructed all firms to allow their *horyos* to dig their own slit trenches. He also warned us to be extremely careful and discreet in any future contact with Japanese civilians, as, with the continual bombing of their homeland, they could be provoked into killing us. It was very comforting to hear him say that we would be safe inside Kobe House, and he went on to forecast that spring would be here in two months and all would be well. That statement, I felt, held some ambiguity.

A few days later, the war caught up with Kobe in earnest, when it received a heavy incendiary raid, but I was a little disappointed in not being able to see any damage. With the temperature of the war hotting up, the weather, unable to keep pace, slipped into zero, creating a picture postcard scene, but doing nothing to ease the dismal conditions of working in freezing temperatures. Amidst the cold and confusion of those days, Takanaka, out of the blue, released a total of 168 Red Cross parcels, with instructions that the milk, butter and jam should go to the hospital, and the meat and coffee to the cookhouse. As there was no mention of where the cigarettes were going, we assumed that he must have developed a taste for Lucky Strikes and Chesterfields himself. With the parcels came the order that, if the short blasts of sirens sounded, we must get dressed, put our boots on –

and wait. Somehow, the order had a familiar ring to it, as our own army jargon went, 'Hurry up and wait'. The wail of sirens was almost daily now, and the friction between guards and *horyos* grew worse. The searches became more thorough, with the notoriously vicious 'Pay Sergeant' insisting on the removal of greatcoats and boots. Anyone caught with loot was certain to get a prolonged and painful bashing.

February the 15th came and went, which reminded us that, somehow, we had survived three bitter years as prisoners, and we wondered just how much longer the Japanese nation could last. The Nips we worked with had said constantly that they were prepared to fight for 100 years in defence of their homeland. With evidence of the American advance being demonstrated nearly every day, I hoped we wouldn't have to wait quite that long. But the war continued with increasing uncertainty, and the arrival of an English doctor to the camp brought calamitous news. He had come from the Burma – Siam region, where thousands of Allied prisoners had lived in the most appalling conditions, constructing a railway of strategic importance to the Japanese. With grossly inadequate food and medical supplies, these men had been compelled to work incredibly long hours through the worst of the monsoon season, with the result that the overall death rate had reached a staggering 58 per cent. We received this news with shock and sorrow, and it caused us to reflect on the fortunes of war or, rather, the luck of the draw, which had begun in early Changi days with the selection of men to fill the Japs' working parties.

Meanwhile, our own conditions were becoming steadily worse, and even our officers were incurring the wrath of the Jap guards. John Fuller was forced to occupy the spotlight in front of the guardhouse for having peanut oil in his possession and for refusing to reveal the name of the supplier. Evidently, the Japs had not heard of the Aussies' code of ethics. That same night, the night of 13-14 March, Osaka was raided by 91 of the big new American bombers which had been kept us awake from 11.00pm to 3.00am. The information we got from our usual source (the Mainichi) was that these bombers were indeed known as B29s and carried enormous loads of incendiary bombs that could devastate huge areas of flimsily built Japanese cities. This knowledge was thankfully received, as we figured our chances of survival would be far greater with an incendiary raid than they would be if we were subjected to high-explosive bombing.

On the 17th, we were again awakened by the short blasts at 2.00am, and for three hours the fire bombs wreaked havoc along the entire Kobe waterfront. The night was filled with the sound of aircraft, fire engines, anti-aircraft guns and falling bombs. We were dressed and standing-by as previously ordered, waiting for our own building to be hit, but it was not until 4.30am that we were told to evacuate Kobe House. By that time, the worst was over and our building remained intact, but, as a legacy of the raid, we were left without electricity and without jobs. Furthermore, until such time as work was possible, our meals were reduced to two a day: a morning meal at 8.30am and another at 4.30pm. With no lights in the building, the Pay Sergeant revealed his vindictiveness by going on the prowl. Sneaking through the camp in the enforced darkness, he caught one of our boys at a partly opened shutter, watching the searchlights as they sought out a passing formation of bombers. With an enraged '*kura*' (a harsh Jap cry to gain attention), he took the offender down to the bath house and flayed him mercilessly with a stick until the prisoner lost consciousness. Then, with a frustrated vengeance, the Pay Sergeant revived his prey with buckets of cold water before renewing the bashing with added vigour. It was a very sick man who was carried by his mates upstairs after the Jap maniac had stormed out of the building, threatening to kill the next person he caught.

THE TENSION MOUNTS

As the power was progressively restored to the charred city, the various firms called once again for our labour. One by one, they trickled back to work, with Yoshihara, Toyo Steel

and Dai Ichi Mitsubishi resuming on 20 March, followed by Mitsui Soko the next day. Sumitomo-Shenko recommenced work on the 22nd, and Kobe-go started on the 23rd. It was rumoured that, because of the distances involved, the other firms could not have men unless they could guarantee their immediate return to Kobe House in the event of the 'storts' sounding. Eventually, however, all the firms got their workers back and normality was restored to Kobe House, along with the electricity supply on 26 March. The next day, we were given a Red Cross parcel each. My own view of this unexpected windfall was that, with the increased frequency of air raids, the supply of rations might present a future problem, so the Japs were unloading them before the crisis. One of our officers pointed out to us the wisdom of creating a reserve ration, in the event that Kobe House was demolished. This seemed to me pure common sense and I immediately set aside a tin of cheese and two tins of Spam as my emergency rations. We were now in a constant state of emergency, our gear packed and ready to vacate the premises at short notice. The only item I had to keep hidden until the last possible minute was my diary, but this I could retrieve with a quick crawl under the platform.

On the last day of March, we were thrown temporarily into a state of apprehension when all our officers, with the exception of our medico, Captain Boyce, were whisked away with fewer than 24 hours' notice. The camp buzzed with conjecture that night, but I suspected the decision to move them was taken as a precautionary measure. After all, we lived close enough to the docks to be a prime target for the American bombers.

The Emperor's Birthday, on 29 April, saw us out in the street at 4.30am bowing towards the Imperial Palace, then, after *tenko*, we were put through a pre-breakfast constitutional in the shape of salvaging anything useful from bomb-damaged buildings. After that, the day was our own. During the concert that night, Norman Colley was at his brilliant best with questions like: 'If two crotchets make a minim, how many flats can you crutch without quavering?' Another scene had us laughing at two Jap officials with an ever-increasing number of armbands. Each pointed authoritatively to his own impressive display until the arms of both men were plastered. It was a ludicrous situation that only a *horyo* could appreciate. The next scene brought disaster when several of our boys were giving a demonstration of how a Japanese *hancho* went about stealing sugar. In the front row of the audience sat the Pay Sergeant, ready to pounce. Seizing his opportunity, he stopped the show with hysterical screams of '*kura*'. He then lined up the whole cast and took to them with everything he had, including boots. Our self-control was strained to its limits as the brutal beating went on and on, until he fell back exhausted. So severe was the punishment that two of our chaps were put into hospital. The others still had to go out to work as usual, but had to spend the nights in the *aeso*.

The following day, as though to atone for the cruelty of man, nature produced a perfect spring morning which we fully exploited during the lunch break by lazing around the mess hut, soaking up the sun. The vapour trail of a solitary B29 (a 'grey ghost', as we now called them) appeared out of the blue far above, but its presence had become so frequent in recent weeks that we paid scant attention to it. Then, quite suddenly, we were aroused from our solar reveries by the unmistakable whistling of falling bombs. There was a unified frenzy of action as bare-topped bodies sprang up off the earth and scrambled for the shelter. With only two openings available, time ran out for the last in the queue (which happened to be me), and it was a dead heat between the bomb and my disappearing legs as I dived, wind-assisted from the exploding bomb, through the opening. By a remarkable stroke of luck, the bomb landed square in the centre of the single-track rail line that led to our *sokos* (warehouses), effectively curtailing the movement of wagons for 24 hours. The damage looked most impressive. The fractured ends of the track almost met about ten feet in the air, forming quite a novel avenue of honour for the daughter of any railwayman on her wedding day.

Takanaka used the incident to brush up his administrative procedures by instructing

anyone with wounds and an additional select few to record their impressions of the raid. This opportunity presented itself only very rarely, so I made full use of the occasion by giving free rein to my vivid imagination, which resulted in a report that had me narrowly escaping a certain death.

The advent of spring brought a welcome splash of colour to the burnt and rusty ruins that littered much of the city. I saw it as nature's example of new life, renewed hope and the infancy of a summer that would come again.

THE END OF KOBE HOUSE

When the factory workers returned to Kobe House on the evening of 9 May, they brought news of momentous significance. The swastika on the German Embassy was flying at half mast. Surely that was proof enough to substantiate the rumours that Germany was finished. The surge of optimism that swept through the camp would have it no other way. Kobe House simmered with excitement as we realised that the Allies would now concentrate their total combined resources in finishing off the Nips.

Those resources were already making their presence felt, literally, as Kobe House shivered frequently under the impact of huge explosions coming from the direction of the harbour. Probably mines, we thought, with delayed fuses. Again, at 10.00am on 11 May, we were welcome witnesses to the Allies' power in the exhilarating form of 74 B29s, in five formations, pounding an area just beyond the eastern fringe of Kobe with hundreds of high-explosive bombs. The month of May, too, brought a considerable movement of Australians away from Kobe House to apparently less dangerous camps. In a surprise movement, with less than 24 hours' notice, a party of 52 left for a place called Notogawa. Mac was on the list. On occasions such as this, when mates were split up, the names and addresses of next-of-kin were always exchanged. No one could tell what the future had in store. As I left for work, Mac and I said our quiet farewells, not knowing where or if we would ever meet again. It was a bastard of a war.

By the end of the month, although there was a considerable number of Englishmen still in camp, 'J Force' had been reduced to only 70 men. Meanwhile, the air raids continued, and the damage mounted. Toyo Steel and Yoshihara no longer took *horyos*. 1 June dawned bright and clear, and we had been at work scarcely an hour when we were treated to an almost indescribable display of might, as 400 massive B29s sailed overhead, wave after wave, to the city of Osaka. It was the 'heavy gang' at its most impressive best. But our days of being spectators were numbered. Early on the morning of 5 June, while we were still scraping the last few grains of rice from our breakfast bowls, the short blasts wailed. With my gear already packed from past experience, all that remained for me to do was to scramble under the platform to retrieve my reserve rations and diary then, together with 400 other men, sit down and wait. The waiting had lasted scarcely half an hour before we heard the first faint sound of planes: first a low drone, gradually increasing to an intense rumble that grew louder and louder until it filled the air. Then came the bombs.

Fortunately, most were incendiaries, but, every now and again, huge explosions shook the building. We later discovered that these were 500lb oil-bombs that the Americans used to keep the fires stoked up, so to speak. They were certainly doing a good job as far as Kobe House was concerned. Despite the efforts of the fire-fighting gangs, it was soon obvious that it was a hopeless battle. The old building was well alight. As the flames took hold of the upper floor, we made our way with our gear down to the ground and first floors. Although the Japanese guards had opened the iron doors of each building, they had, in their haste to get to the safety of the shelter that I had helped to build, forgotten to unlock the side gate. Consequently most of the Australians were trapped inside a burning building. Once again, I felt the return of that old helpless feeling. When we had been caught in a mortar barrage on Singapore Island, I had been petrified. Waiting for

the torpedo to slice through the thin hull of the Wales Maru had left me terrified. Now, with a little more maturity, I was merely shit-scared.

But help was soon to come in the shape of a timely bomb blast from one of our American friends, and we lost no time in scrambling out through the breach to the comparative safety of the slit trenches in the sports ground. Once I'd found a place to dump my gear, I gazed up through the gathering clouds of smoke to see still more formations of planes pressing relentlessly on. The heat from a million fires created a furious wind that swept across the city. I had seen huge fires before – leaping oil fires had illuminated half of Singapore Island – but to suddenly find myself in the centre of a flaming furnace was an awesome experience. There was fire in every direction. Although I felt the heat and my eyes were witness to the spectacle, I couldn't believe it was happening. I think it is called shock. But there still were rations to be saved from the stricken building, so I joined the salvage operation, dodging the slim hexagonal tubes of incendiaries that protruded from the earth in a surprisingly neat pattern. Every bag of rice was rescued, along with some of the contents of the Q-store, but, before the job could be completed, the heat drove us back, making further attempts impossible. Ravenously now the fire engulfed the wood and straw interiors until, with a final roar, the blazing roofs devoured themselves, disintegrating into rubble and taking much of the walls with them. It is interesting to read an account of the evacuation of Kobe House from the records of Captain Boyce, our MO.

'At this time excellent work in firefighting and salvaging was done by WO2 H Rogerson, Sgt R T Noble, and Dvt W P Cummings. My medical staff, among whom there was now only one Australian, Pte R Kavanagh, did a fine job in evacuating the sick and in saving valuable medicines. Huddled in machine-gun and searchlight trenches on the sports ground, we watched several waves of bombers 'do over' our camp and the line of buildings in the street, less than 50 yards away. Casualties were brought to me in the centre of the field. All cases received morphia, tannic ointment, dressings and bandages; and one dislocated shoulder was reduced. We all huddled close to mother earth when bombers were directly overhead, but luckily the sports ground was not struck again. '

Departure of the bombers left us somewhat stunned by the quietness of the roar of blazing buildings on all sides, the crashes of roofs and walls, and the explosions of combustible materials in nearby storehouses. The worst sufferers of Kobe House were the Nip guards, whose beautiful shelter received a large splash of incendiary material. They screamed their way out, in flames from head to feet; received no help from their own medical orderlies who exhibited the blue funk, and were treated in an air raid shelter on the sports ground by Dr Longbottom, an English doctor. Three of them died. Many British were badly burned, but all survived. The AIF escaped with very few casualties. Late in the day when most of the fires had died down, rice was cooked on the *padang*, and after sunset the camp was mustered and a march began to Kawasaki camp about eight miles away. Each man carried what he had saved, and Kobe House was no more.



MY FIRST PICTURE WITH MY NEW CAMERA, THE REMAINS OF KOBE HOUSE

The death of Kobe House had more than a touch of sadness for me. The final violent plunge had taken with it the sounds of many happy concerts, the melodies of a host of nostalgic songs, and a whole repertoire of original performances. Yet, too, the dying flames still consumed the silent cries of the battered bodies and tortured minds of its former occupants, the reluctant 'Guests of Nippon.'

THE BATTLE FOR SURVIVAL

Our new camp was called Maruyama, which means a circle of mountains, and, as it nestled among the hills, I thought that it had been well named. It had previously housed a section of 'C Force' who had arrived in Japan in December 1942, and had been forced to help build an aircraft-carrier at the Kawasaki shipyards. They had named it the Kawasaki camp, and had occupied it to the middle of May 1945 when they were distributed amongst other camps throughout Japan.

In contrast to the brick warehouses of Kobe House, Maruyama consisted of a cluster of long, low huts, which we quickly discovered were infested with fleas. In addition, as a legacy of the bombing, there was a shortage of water, the use of taps being rationed to one hour a day. From a well below the camp, a hundred men were put to work carrying extra water in buckets. Meals were cut to two per day. After enduring a couple of days of this spartan existence, I allowed myself the luxury of the Red Cross tin of cheese I had saved for such an occasion. That still left me with my Spam.

After a few days of comparative peace in the sanctuary of the hills, trouble suddenly erupted from an unexpected quarter. The guards discovered two men taking rice from the camp cookhouse, where it had been left in the coppers overnight, ready for breakfast. The offenders said that they were getting it for a sick friend, who, having to stay in camp, could not get enough food to make him well again.

In the morning, the punishment started. The two men were strung up by their thumbs to the branches of trees that skirted the parade ground, their toes barely touching the ground. Then, gathering stout sticks and tearing pickets off the fence, several of the guards set about their savage beating. The whole camp was lined up in two ranks and forced to witness the brutal scene as each guard took his turn in the bashing. While this was going on, we spoke softly out of the corner of our mouths, urging each other to remain calm, to control our horror and anger, so as not to provoke the Japs into prolonging the torture that they were handing out to our two comrades. Only when they were both

knocked unconscious did the punishment stop, and they were left for their mates to retrieve and carry back to their huts. The experience left me shattered.

It wasn't long before the dock jobs recommenced work, and Kamagumi was the first back. However, with the long march to from the work site there wasn't a lot of time left for working. On the 19th of June, a large party of volunteers, made up of all those who felt that they would be unable to survive a prolonged march if it were found necessary, were marched to the Yoke Eki railway station and entrained for the north. This left fewer than 90 *horyos* in the city of Kobe.

I decided to stay where I was, having come to the conclusion that, after volunteering for Kamagumi, I would never volunteer for anything else again. Besides, from what I'd seen of Kobe over the past few days, there didn't appear to be enough of the city left standing to warrant another air raid. So I stayed. However, just two days later, the rest of us were marched out of the safety of Maruyama, back through the shambles of the city, to a lesser-damaged area a couple of miles to the other side of the ruins of Kobe House. Our new camp was called Wakinohama.

The building we occupied was on the main Kobe-Osaka highway, practically alongside a rail track that spanned the road and ran towards the docks. In the opposite direction, it was disconcerting to see a number of tall chimneys of a large industrial area that had somehow escaped the earlier bombings. Wakinohama was a former school of fairly modern concrete construction, with one wing of its L-shape having been partly damaged by fire. We were crammed into two floors of the three-storeyed wing that ran at right angles to the highway. All the windows were boarded up, which made the place dark and dank. Once again, we were back in prison. The day after moving to Wakinohama, another batch of letters was distributed, but there were none for me.

Then, Lt Takanaka decided to hold another of his written quizzes, and a selected number of *horyos* were asked to write their impressions of the following: (1) Food situation; (2) Treatment by the staff; (3) War outlook for the future; (4) Feelings during air raids; (5) Suggestions regarding mail, and reasons. This sudden epidemic of consideration, I felt, was a shrewd move on Takanaka's part. Being an intelligent man, he must have seen the writing on the wall for the Japanese nation, and, no doubt, was putting out feelers as to how he could place himself in the most favourable position for the impending post-war investigations.

The same day, he told Warrant Officer Challis (now, our most senior NCO) that, in the event of an air raid, he could use his discretion as to whether to evacuate to the hills or not. The only condition was that, if he decided to evacuate, he must organise a fire-fighting party to stand by in readiness to return if needed. This news placed us in a far happier frame of mind. We had survived two major bombings, and, with a big foundry practically on our doorstep, we weren't keen to sit out a third. Respite from the raids came a few days later, when the rain pelted down all day long, effectively curtailing both work and aerial activity. We took the opportunity to catch up on a lot of lost sleep.

For the next few weeks, hardly a day or night passed without the sirens sounding. To add to the chaos, the cities of Japan were now being attacked by carrier-borne planes from an American task force. The submarine blockade, too, was a total success, as there was hardly a ship to be seen in the harbour. We were put to work salvaging anything useful from the damaged iron-roofed *sokos* and storing it into the large multi-storeyed concrete warehouses.

With the Japanese economy fast grinding to a halt, there was a corresponding drop in the demand for our labour. Kamagumi were now taking fewer men, with the result that I was transferred to Dai Ichi (No. 1) Mitsubishi. This huge complex, still undamaged, was the receiving depot for produce arriving in by truck and train. In the aftermath of the last raid on Kobe, there was still a certain amount of confusion along the waterfront, a situation we *horyos* exploited to the full. The firms of Utsumi Gumi and Kobe-go had premises

widely scattered along the docks, which gave the boys working on those jobs a fair amount of freedom of. Consequently, they acted as couriers between the remaining jobs. This delivery service worked very efficiently, with Kamagumi doing excellent business with Mitsu Orinahama, exchanging sugar and egg powder for fat and oranges.

Over the previous few weeks, the *hanchos* had found it more of a struggle to exist than we had, with our old hands possessing the keys to most of the important doors, they soon succumbed to the temptation of participating in our illegal transactions. Cigarettes were still the basic currency, though, and they were always at a premium. Since my arrival at Mitsubishi, I had teamed up with some old hands there and we planned a raid on the large stocks of service cigarettes that were stored in a section on the second floor. The operation had to be carried out during the lunch break, when the Japs were out of the way in their mess hut. Our chaps had long introduced the habit of spending most of their lunch break resting up in the stairways. Lookouts were posted above and below the second floor to give the prearranged signal to warn of approaching Japs, with one man locking and unlocking the door when required, two of us went into the storeroom, each of us hoisting a wooden container of cigarettes on our shoulders and carrying it our the door to a pre-selected hiding place, there, we were joined by an assistant with a home-made jemmy, which was used to prise the box open. After quickly distributing the contents, the empty box was reassembled and taken back to its original place in the stack. The whole thing went off with the precision of military planning, with the question of it being a criminal act never entering our heads.

With 40,000 cigarettes stashed away in various nooks and crannies, it was inevitable that some would be found. When the Japs found the first packets and later discovered the enormity of the theft, they closed the job to us while they continued their investigations. They knew we had done the job but couldn't work out just how we had done it, and, as none of us had been caught in the act, there was little they could do, other than to keep us under close scrutiny from then on. In a way, the job backfired on us. Yet it gave me a certain sense of satisfaction that we had completed it without being detected, and, as long as I live, I shall never forget the look of amazement on the face of a resting *horyo* as I stepped through the door with a crate of 20,000 cigarettes on my shoulder. Meanwhile, the bombing continued. Day and night the sirens sounded. Although we were now able to make shelter in the hills during a night raid, which brought us some relief from the constant danger it left us with little sleep.

August followed July with no let-up by the American air armada. On the 13th, single planes dropped leaflets on the well defined streets of Kobe, and the civilians rushed to pick them up, police and soldiers scoured the city in an attempt to gather them all up, but not before one was retrieved and brought back to camp. Unfortunately, it had only Japanese characters written on both sides, and its message went undiscovered.

A leaflet dropped before the fall of Germany had shown a picture of Hitler suspended by a rope over a steep cliff, the end tied to a Japanese, who was precariously supporting his house and possessions on his back.

Another large formation of B29s flew over the bay towards Osaka again on the 14th, and we were thankful that they didn't come our way.

The Mainichi newspaper was still coming into camp and we knew that Russia had declared war on the Japs. We had also read of a new bomb the Americans had used on Hiroshima: the single 'atom' bomb, as they had called it, that had obliterated half the city and decimated the population. This information gave us added cause for concern when rumours were heard that the recent leaflet drop was to the effect that Kobe would be next on the atom bomb list of Japan did not capitulate. Had we been capable of rational thinking, we would have realised that there was little left of Kobe to bomb, much less to claim the attention of an atom bomb, but, when things get desperate, one believes something of everything one hears.

SENSOO-OWARI

As we rattled off our Japanese numbering on the following morning's *tenko*, then went our separate ways to work, there was nothing to suggest that the day would be any different from the hundreds of others we had spent in recent months. That particular day, I was with a party that was sent to a railway siding to unload wagons of coal. It was a dirty job, dusty and tiring, and we were glad of a rest when the lunch break arrived somewhat earlier than usual. After another meal of the endless rice, I found a comparatively comfortable spot in which to enjoy the short midday siesta. It was a beautiful summer's day, warm and sunny, and I was just musing on the fact that the whole morning had been siren-free, when the silence was shattered by the sound of a long wail.

But the sequence of blasts that now sounded was different from the precautionary or immediate danger warning we were used to, this was a long blast, followed immediately by a short one, and the pattern was repeated several times. By the time the sirens had stopped, all the Japanese in the immediate vicinity had assembled outside a central building, completely ignoring us. Then, as though acting on a given order, they removed their hats and bowed towards the Imperial Palace. Soldiers with rifles presented arms, while others saluted. Left to ourselves, we just stared in silent apprehension at the unfolding drama.

Suddenly, the sound of a faintly familiar tune, which I recognised as their National Anthem, drifted across the arena from a speaker on the exterior of the building. When the music faded, there was a brief pause. Then, in an unnerving atmosphere of tension, a strangely thin, high-pitched voice came crackling from the speaker. As it laboured on and on, we were totally absorbed in our own thoughts, interpretations and conjectures. Surely, the voice must be that of the Emperor; was it history in the making? After several minutes, our thoughts were interrupted by the abrupt termination of the broadcast, followed by more bowing and saluting.

Slowly, the gathering dispersed, and we could see the expressions of utter despair that wracked their face, many with tears streaming down their cheeks. It was a moving experience, and yet, at the same time, I felt the first pangs of excitement gnawing at my stomach - that something big was happening. Quite unexpectedly, one of our *hanchos* approached us and stood to attention. Then, with admirable self-control, he saluted and said, simply, '*sensoo-owari*' (war finished). I stood there, stunned, incapable of reaction. I wanted to shout, to scream, and, above all, to cry. But nothing came. It was though my emotions were frozen. I could not, dared not, believe it just in case something went wrong. After three and a half years of dreaming for this very day to arrive, I was afraid of being disappointed. But how I longed for it to be true.

As we discussed the extraordinary events of the day on the way back to the camp, the tension mounted, and it was not until the other workers arrived in, without searches, and with similar stories to tell, that I dared to believe it might be true. Even when Warrant Officer Challis told us that indeed the war was over, there were still some who doubted. Then, at the usual *tenko* that evening, a series of orders put the question beyond doubt. Challis himself took the parade.

'Attention', he commanded with a new-found authority. The unfamiliar order sounded strange. It took us by surprise. 'Right dress.' Hesitantly, we shuffled into line. The sound of the orders in English was almost embarrassing. 'Eyes front', then – 'Number'. In stark contrast to our disjointed attempts to execute this order on our first day in Kobe more than two years before, our voices now rang out sharp and clear. 'One - two - three - four - five - six'.

There was no doubt about it now - the war was over. That night, contrary to what we had talked about for so long, there were no hysterical demonstrations, no noisy cries

for vengeance against our former captors, no retribution. Instead, we went the rounds congratulating each other, with quiet, yet sincere, handshakes that we had managed to 'see it through'. No one slept. We sat in groups talking over the past experiences we had shared together. We talked of our families and loved ones, and the joy they would be feeling with the news of our survival. We talked about our mates who hadn't made it; those who had died horrible lingering deaths; others who, though starved and frequently beaten, had triumphed over enormous odds. We speculated about the thousands of our 8th Division cobbles scattered about the Far East. We know something of the horrors of the Burma railway, and we talked of the sorrow and grief to be borne by the relatives of thousands of brave lads who had succumbed to relentless inhumane treatment perpetrated by the invading Japanese forces. That thought sobered us. The war was over, but the camp remained strangely calm throughout the night. It was the 15th of August, 1945. I shall never forget it.

THE ATTITUDE OF A NATION

The next morning at *tenko*, the former camp Commandant, Lt Takanaka, made a speech. He said that, from that day, there would be no more work, but our normal food ration and pay would be continued. This sounded magnanimous, but the rations had deteriorated in the closing weeks of the war to such an extent that we were existing on a mixture of barley and millet, with a weak eggfruit broth as the only additive. The mention of pay was a joke, Japanese currency being practically worthless. Takanaka went on to say that the gods had favoured us and that his instructions were to remain at the camp until the arrival of the American forces. As he was still responsible for our safety, the guards would remain on duty for our protection.

After *tenko*, we lost no time in improving our living conditions, tearing down boarded-up windows, thus letting in badly needed light and fresh air. The Jap staff brought to light vital Red Cross medical supplies, which, had they been released earlier, would have eased the suffering and healed many of our sick men long ago. That night, we roamed all over the building. Although it had been partly damaged by fire, there were still many usable rooms, which we occupied. With the weather being so warm, I decided that the flat roof would be as comfortable as anywhere, so I gathered my bedroll and selected a spot under the stars. But, before going to bed, the concert party decided to give a special impromptu victory performance in the third-floor auditorium. I then retired to the rooftop, there to enjoy my first real sleep for many months, free from bugs and fleas and Japs.

Early the next morning, I awoke feeling totally refreshed in the knowledge of the authenticity of our freedom. It was another warm day and I revelled in the pleasure of a cold shower, then awaited for the morning roll call. Most of us attended that parade stripped to the waist, ready to indulge in a voluntary session of physical exercise afterwards. The very fact that we were given the choice of participating in the PT was a practical example of our freedom and we showed our appreciation with a near 100 per cent turnout. We were hooked on the euphoria of living.

Later in the morning, I had the opportunity to read the 14 August publication of the *Mainichi*. On reading the editorial, I had a feeling that it could prove to be of historical interest, so I copied it down. It ran as follows.

'Viewing the National situation in reality, one must admit that Nippon is now in a crisis. The Government is making its utmost efforts to preserve national polity and the pride of the race. The people on their part are expected to do their best calmly to face all kinds of possible developments. It is not certain how accurately the masses understand the Government's declaration of the National crisis. Man has the instinctive faculty to perceive danger. His wisdom consists in sensing danger in advance and in taking steps to meet it.

People know the danger which confronts their country without much explanation. The Government frankly states that the country is in the worst state of affairs. That is enough for the masses to understand the real circumstances. They will not fail to give their hearty support to the Government which is making the last efforts to preserve National policy and the honour of the race.

'It has often been said that we must not be too susceptible to the changing tide of warfare. Ups and downs are the rules of life. In the career of an individual as in that of a nation, there are events that are rejoiceable and those that are lamentable. It is no use to cry over spilt milk. It is much better to try to make up for the losses by fresh efforts in the course of life to come.

'Periods of suffering may not be so brief, but even if such a period of adversity lasts some length of time, it is but a trifle when compared with the perennial existence of the race and the nation.

'The Nipponese people must learn to stand aloof to the changing tide of the national fortune, for dark days are bound to be followed by bright ones. What is required of us in this critical state is the dauntless courage to accept any kind of difficulties. That is the essential quality of a Great Nation.

'We possess in our country the Throne to which we attach infinite affection and respect. The secret of preserving the race and national polity consists of all the Nippon people being united as one around the Throne and joining efforts to preserve national existence. The thing of utmost importance at this juncture is National Unity. If we cannot maintain order and harmony among us at this period, we may have to abandon the right to perpetuate ourselves as a nation.

'We have shown our strength and ability to be the leader of the Oriental races. Such a' great people shall not lose its pride under any circumstances.

The Nippon people were united closely even in times of prosperity; surely they will not lose their unity in adversity. In the life of an individual, as in the life of a nation, there must be the periods of quiet retrospection; the periods when we pass in careful review our own doings in the past.

'There were among us those who pointed out earlier, the need of prudence in the conduct of affairs before and after the outbreak of the present war. If by reflection on our own national conduct we learn to be wiser, that must be taken as the will of our great national ancestors whom we still worship. We must be solemn and serious in reconsidering our past conducts as a nation. We must not, at the same time, lose our hope and courage; under no circumstances shall we permit ourselves to become desperate.

'Let us remember that we are a great nation, possessing the Imperial household, around which we are tightly united. We must attach great hope in the life that will come after we are cleansed by our own repentance.'

IN SEARCH OF FOOD

Our work over the past 27 months had been handling supplies of various foodstuffs along the waterfront, so we had a fair idea where the goodies were. Little wonder then, that, after a couple of days, some men disappeared through the back gate and made their way to the big storehouses. First a trickle, then a steady stream of hungry ex-prisoners converged on the docks and returned with an assortment of goods. No longer did we regard these supplies as 'loot', but rather as a form of reparation. We were the victors and as such, we were entitled to partake of the spoils of war. In any case, the big guns of Japanese business like Mitsui and Mitsubishi had had their fill of slave labour over the past two and a half years. Now, we felt fully justified in taking whatever we needed.

Consequently, the following Sunday, many groups spent the afternoon planning sorties to these big warehouses in order to supplement our rations until the arrival of the

relief force. We were still uncertain of how the civilian population would react if they saw large numbers of us returning to camp, laden with foodstuffs, so it was decided to undertake the operation with minimum exposure and maximum discretion.

That night, a party of 18 of us set out for the docks, following the branch railway line that took us right to our destination. However, the entrance to a big six-storey warehouse was blocked by a group of Japs sitting in the broad roadway. After satisfying ourselves that they had no intention of dispersing, we decided to make for the entrance anyway, by keeping close to the building. This was accomplished without any apparent detection, which opened the way for the climb to the fourth floor where we knew the sugar was stored, only to find another party loading up. Rather than overcrowd the premises, our party went up to the fifth floor and helped ourselves to 26 one-pound cartons of cigarette tobacco. Just as we were preparing to walk back down, lights suddenly appeared on that floor and we saw a Jap letting down the roller door. To avoid detection, we then clambered back up the steps, over the flat roof to the opposite end of the building, and down to the fourth floor. With the wind-up door handle we were carrying, we quietly gained entry and stocked up with as much sugar as we could comfortably carry the one and a half miles back to camp.

Not wishing to walk past the party of Japs in the roadway again, we decided to vacate the area by climbing over a steep wall. This was done with the help of a heap of large machinery crates that were conveniently stacked up against the wall. Then, just as the last of us were scrambling over, there was a shout of the dread '*kural!*' almost at our feet and in the gloom, I recognised the uniform of a *kempei*.

With a whispered 'keep going' we staggered on as fast as possible under our heavy loads towards the nearest exit, expecting at any moment to hear a pistol shot. Luckily, we heard no more from the *kempei*, but, just as we thought we were out of trouble, we ran slap bang into a group of Jap Custom Officials at the main gate. It was too late to take evasive action then, so we had no alternative but to keep going straight out through the gate. I think they were much too surprised at the sight we presented to take any action, because we were able to continue on our way, unmolested. At a safe distance and in a dark spot, we paused for a short rest before making our way back along the railway line.

We had not gone far before a party of signalmen spotted us. They shouted at us persistently for some time, but, carrying out our prearranged plan to 'keep going whatever happens.' we managed to evade them in the darkness. A few hundred yards further on, we came across what looked like real trouble. A mob of Japs had apparently seen other parties returning to camp with acquired fortunes, and were armed with sticks, waiting for us. After getting this far with our supplies, we weren't going to part with them lightly now, so we tried bluffing them in our best Nippon language. It was a difficult job, keeping those half-starved people at bay, and a dangerous situation seemed to be developing.

Suddenly, another outgoing party of our chaps emerged, which enabled us to disappear up the track and out of trouble. There remained only the task of getting back into camp. This was accomplished comparatively easily by climbing over the wall. And there was no sign of the Japanese guards. After depositing the spoils in a collective heap, we set about cleaning ourselves up. The first thing I did was to wring out my sweat-drenched shirt.

Other foraging parties had not been so lucky. One person had had a frightening experience after being caught by a *kempei*. With a sword held in readiness for a death blow, and a revolver thrust into his mouth, he was asked which manner of death he preferred. Only the timely intervention of other military policemen saved this man's life, and he was allowed to return to camp, unharmed.

On the fifth day of freedom, the Japanese area officer for the defence of Kobe visited the camp for the purpose of protesting against the activities of our men. In relating the incident to us later, Warrant Officer Challis informed us that he had taken no nonsense

from this officer. Replying to the Jap commander's request that all ex-prisoners be kept out of the dock area, Challis said that he could not guarantee to control his men in their search for food so long as the Japanese authorities failed to supply his camp with civilised food, which the men knew existed in the warehouses. Challis went on to say that it was absolutely essential for his men to exercise, and ordered the officer to withdraw all his forces from the region of the foothills to eliminate the possibility of incidents that might occur between soldiers and ex-prisoners while the latter were exercising in the area. Only by immediate and complete fulfillment of these orders could there be any satisfactory settlement. There were cries of joy and laughter from hundreds of freedom-drunk men as Challis concluded his account of the meeting by relating that, 'with elaborate bowing and saluting,' the former high-ranking Japanese commander had submitted to the commands of an Allied non-commissioned-officer.

There were further scenes of jubilation on the following morning, when we witnessed the arrival of several truckloads of canned foods, including Australian beef sausages. So ended the food problem that had, over the past three and a half years, occupied most of our time awake and more than a little time asleep. At times, the pangs of hunger had transformed us into prowling, starving animals, and we'd had to use all our guile and cunning to survive. We had developed, without shame, the skills of stealing and deception. No longer would we be compelled to stand to attention while some little rifle-bearing Jap would thrash us, without fear of fear of retaliation. No longer would we have to endure the ordeal of an all-night vigil in front of the guardroom. And no longer would we have to bow and scrape at the very sight of a Japanese soldier.

SIX-BOB-A-DAY TOURISTS

As we had received no word from any of the other POW camps we knew existed within a hundred miles of Kobe, a few of us decided to try to locate one of them in the region of Kyoto. Early on the morning of 22 August, John Gilmour, Jim Dore and I, with a day's ration in our packs, swaggered through the ticket barrier at Kobe station and on to the platform. With our collective knowledge of the language that had been so demonstrably forced upon us, we had little difficulty in boarding the correct train to Kyoto. Although most of the people looked at us rather curiously, they readily volunteered the information we sought whenever we made enquiries, and generally treated us with politeness. After all, they hadn't been used to seeing Europeans wandering around the country for a few years, which made us feel rather as though we were part of a freak exhibition. After a journey of about an hour and a half, during which time we saw plenty of evidence of the American bombing, we arrived in Kyoto. From there, we decided to make for Lake Biwa, where we had reason to believe that one of our Kobe House parties had been sent.

While we were still on the platform, an English-speaking civilian told us where to catch the right train and that, after a few kilometres, we would need to change trains. If we asked the conductor, he would set us down at the right place for our connection. After thanking him for his help, we soon found ourselves caught up in the typically overcrowded conditions of the Japanese public transport system and wondered if we could ever find our conductor. Eventually, however, he appeared before us out of the mass of humanity, and we were able to make him understand our requirements. I apologised for not being able to pay the fare, but, as *horyos*, we hadn't been paid for a couple of years. His reciprocal apologies made mine sound feeble. Once the change of trains was made, we were agreeably surprised to find vacant seats. This enabled us to relax for the remainder of the trip and enjoy the spectacular rugged scenery in comparative comfort. The route wound its way to the summit of the range before descending to the valley, in which lay Lake Biwa. It didn't take us long to realise that the task of finding another POW camp in the area was pretty hopeless. The civil police to whom we had gone for assistance explained that the

camps were scattered over a large region and that, with transport facilities so disrupted, it would probably take a day or two to reach the nearest of them. Disappointed, but convinced that further attempts would be fruitless, we retraced our journey and arrived back Wakinohama that evening, completely exhausted.

A few days later we were overjoyed to see the men we had been searching for. They had deserted their camp and had caught the train to Kobe. Strolling through the foothills a few nights later, John, Jim and I, together with Jim Donnelly, an Englishman with whom I had worked at Kamagumi, met a family of White Russians and Turks. They were as jubilant as we at the war being finished, as they had been living on a greatly reduced diet. That prompted us to give them all the food we had brought with us. They, in turn, entertained us on their old gramophone, which churned out a giddy variety of tunes, to which we sang and danced until midnight. Most of the men had similar experiences, meeting up with many Europeans and some American internees from the island of Guam.

The following morning, while the four of us were enjoying another of our freedom walks through the undamaged district along the foothills, we met a delightful Danish family of two sisters and a brother. From then on, we spent most of our time with them, taking up food and living more or less as a family, but reluctantly returning each night to the camp. They, of course, spoke perfect English, and it was a wonderful new experience to be lazing about in the sun, free to discuss any subject we chose, and sipping endless cups of tea. Life was assuming degree of normality, at last.

At the request of our senior NCOs, our officers were brought back to the camp and immediately interviewed Lt Takanaka. He was informed that he was no longer camp commandant, and that our own officers would immediately assume command of all ex-prisoners-of-war. He would still be held responsible for seeing that all available food, clothing and toiletry articles were brought to the camp. Furthermore, he was instructed to enlist the services of Japanese workmen to clean the latrines each day. The last of our shackles were severed. Moses, it seemed, was out of a job. Now I know how the Israelites must have felt.

HERE ENDETH THE LESSON

Now that our lives were no longer in danger, and our stomachs were full, another long-lost natural instinct resurfaced. The feeling of companionship and the comparative closeness of female company that I had experienced with the Danish sisters had stirred the dormant sexual drive within me, but, not wishing to offend them in any way, I decided to look elsewhere. (I discovered later that the Danish girls would in no way have been offended. Their predicament had been the same as ours but I had been too inexperienced to realise it.) It took some time to find other adventurous types, but, eventually, two uncommitted lads decided to accompany me to sample the delights of Kobe's nightlife. Armed with haversacks full of sugar, we small band of hopefuls set out through the ruins of the city, in search of civilisation. I don't know whether it was the result of some uncanny instinct of the American bombers, or if it was the responsibility of some higher authority to preserve the utilities of mankind in some order of priority. But it appeared that a number of the local brothels had miraculously survived.

For the first time in my life, I discovered that an education, no matter how difficult the learning, is no burden to bear. There will always be an occasion in life when the most unlikely knowledge comes into its own. This night, the little knowledge of the Japanese language that I possessed led me into the Garden of Eden. To start with, it was responsible for the discovery, in a very short time, of the establishments we sought. And having found them, we were very pleasantly surprised at the friendly attitude and obvious welcome, especially when the girls saw the colour of our currency. However, our taste in Oriental ladies seemed to be highly discriminatory as, after visiting several premises, we

had not been tempted to dally in any one of them. Eventually, in procrastinating over a selection of three girls in an upstairs suite, I discovered that my companions had departed by some minutes, and decided to follow suit. As I descended the stairs, my attention was suddenly focused on a display that stopped me abruptly in my tracks. There below me, in an open straw-matted room, a naked Japanese couple were engaged in a most enthralling ritual. For one fleeting moment, I thought that I was witnessing some sort of ju-jitsu contest, but that thought was soon dispelled by the apparent lack of competition from the lady. She lay in a particularly vulnerable position from which I could see clearly that the widely held belief that a certain part of the oriental woman's anatomy lies horizontally was most definitely a myth. Now the gentleman stood above her, with one foot travelling the length of her supine body, his toes engaged in a rapid, yet skillful, pinching of the skin – an operation that brought obvious delight and an audible response from his companion.

By this time, I had settled myself more comfortably on the stairs and continued to stare wide-eyed in astonishment. After all, my own sexual experience had been negligible. Here I was, three months short of my twenty-third birthday, and I was still practically a virgin. Apart from a 'very short time' in a wartime brothel in Bannister Street, Fremantle, where the experience of the woman had prompted her to ask if it was my first time, my experience was nil. No, I had bragged, 'I've had plenty of sheilas.' But I knew that I hadn't fooled her. That had been my first lesson, a lot of bombs had fallen on a lot of bridges since that experience, and now it was time for my second lesson. But there seemed to be no end to the second lesson. It went on and on through the sermon and then into chapter and verse as well. Then, just they embarked on the chorus together, a feeling of intrusion swept through me – that I had no right to be present at such a delicate, private moment – so, as silently as possible, I crept down the remaining steps and through the house into the night. In a house a little further along the street, I caught up with the other boys who, by this time, had made satisfactory arrangements for the night.

As there was not a lot of choice left for me, I invited the remaining girl to accept the contents of my haversack. Determined that this time was definitely not going to be a 'short time', I made it understood that that amount of sugar qualified me to share her pillow all night. Having taken care of that requirement, there remained only one other, which I resolved by drawing my hand flat across my throat, indicating that that would be her fate if she was '*bioki*' (the closest I could come to translating VD).

It was hardly the preliminaries with which to embark on a sexual experience, and, with all that had happened earlier in the evening, what could have been a rewarding encounter turned out to be a brief skirmish. But the girl showed me a remarkable amount of sympathy, kindness and consideration. To me, this was an astonishing revelation. A few weeks ago, the enemy, to which I belonged, had burned her city to the ground and were now the conquerors of her nation, yet she showed no malice and no fear. Quite the contrary. As we lay together trying to hold a conversation with a combination of my limited knowledge of the language, and signs, I sensed that a certain mutual feeling had developed between us. When I asked her to remove her kimono, she responded immediately with a deft flurry of movement, which left her naked beside me.

For the first time in my life, I felt the softness and warmth of a woman. How strange that it had to happen this way. For the past three and a half years, I had lived through fear, hunger, humiliation and deprivations, in a male world full of coarseness, spite and even hate; now, as I embraced a female body, all those bitter thoughts dissipated into a feeling of tenderness. Here was another human being who didn't want to swear at me, abuse me, or tear me apart. Here was a human being who shared my embrace and caresses, who shared the beauty of the closeness of human bodily contact. The ability of the human animal to display such compassionate qualities swamped me, flooding my parched emotional reservoir like the first deluge after a drought. Mioko lay still in my arms as I tried to express, as much to myself as to her, the sheer ecstasy of the experience for which she

was responsible. When I finished talking, she turned her face to mine and enquired softly, '*nani-a?*' meaning, 'what's all that about?' I told her she was good for me: '*Anata wa yoroshii desu*'. Smiling, she still queried, 'OK *ka?*' '*Takusan* OK', I emphasised. But words were hopelessly inadequate. I had been so desperately in need of affection. For the last few minutes, this diminutive young girl had been mother, sweetheart and lover to me. As I wrapped her still closer to me while drifting off to sleep, my last conscious sensation was how delightfully comforting it felt to hold, in my cupped hand, the soft breast of a woman.

Surfacing early the next morning, I silently cursed the discipline that compelled me to leave the embrace of so brief a paradise. Mioko arose with me and, displaying immaculate courtesy, drifted out of the room, to return a few minutes later with a cup of tea. As I thanked her, while sipping the weak straw-coloured beverage, I discovered that she had laced it with a generous serving of 'my' sugar, and it occurred to me how characteristically polite it was of her to give me back a little 'change'. As my two companions and I wound our way through the debris of the city, back to reality, I felt as though I had stepped from the Garden of Eden into the shadow of Death.

OCCUPATIONAL TROOPS

On 24 August 1945, every man in Wakinoama camp gathered on the road verge, dressed in his very best remnants of uniform. This was to be a special day – our day of nationalistic fervour. Somehow or other, probably from our new friends in the foothills, the flags of the United States, Britain and Australia had been procured. In a ceremony befitting the occasion, we prepared to savour the long-awaited fruits of victory by hoisting them on the flagpoles that so fortuitously adorned the building. At precisely 9.00am our former guards were posted on the main highway, holding up traffic from both directions leaving us the intervening strip of road on which to hold our parade. With the command 'On parade', the units marched on in a prearranged order. Conscious of parading before a sizeable Japanese audience, we gave it our all. First came the Royal Navy, then the Royal Artillery, the Middlesex Regiment, the Royal Scots, the Australian Imperial Force, followed by the Americans, Dutch and miscellaneous nationalities. As a gesture to the United States for their unquestionable major role in regaining our freedom, their flag was given the honours. With the parade standing rigidly to attention, the thin sound of a solitary clarinet playing the 'Star Spangled Banner' drifted skyward with the flight of the 'Stars and Stripes' as it was slowly hoisted to the masthead. For me, it was an indescribably moving experience. How sweet it must have been for the Yanks. Could this be really happening in the heart of Japan?

The ceremony continued. In disciplined silence, the British and Australian colours began their simultaneous ascent. With every breath, I choked back my unashamed emotional resurgence, and, as I struggled to control my quivering lips, I was never more proud of my heritage than at that moment. When the first unmistakable, strains of 'God Save the King' floated over the parade, dozens of voices erupted spontaneously into a rousing rendition of the National Anthem, as we gave vent to our long pent-up feelings of frustration. Looking at the fluttering flags with full heart and misty eyes, I felt secure in the knowledge that, far above, waved the symbolic strength of a combination of nations that would go a long way to ensure the future peace of the world.

Within a few days, the flags of China, Holland, France and Greece joined the others above our former prison, now appropriately named 'Occupational Headquarters!' The flying of Allied flags over Japan before the impending arrival of the relief force seemed to me to be of sufficient historical value to warrant a pictorial record, so I decided that, if it were at all possible, I would do my best to provide one. That same night, with my haversack bulging with the last of my sugar, I set off in search of a camera. When I arrived at a

suburban residential district, I started canvassing every house in the street, asking if anyone could tell me where I could 'buy' a good *syasinki*, until, eventually, someone produced a new 35-millimetre camera, together with a few rolls of film. I was well satisfied with my night's shopping. Unfortunately, in my inexperience, I used practically a full roll photographing the bomb-damaged city before I discovered that the camera had a telescopic lens, which I had failed to extend. This error wasted valuable film that I couldn't replace, and I had to retrace my steps to get another shot of Kobe House. That was one photo that I didn't want to miss. When I did eventually get films developed, I was disappointed with the poor quality of some of the shots, but I reckoned I had been lucky to find a camera, let alone film as well.

From some vague source, the news spread around the camp that on Saturday 25 August, American planes would be over to drop supplies to us. Consequently we were up at the crack of dawn waiting for them. On the ground we painted PW in large letters to help the planes to locate us, but, as the morning passed with no sign of the cavalry, and with deteriorating weather, we gave up our vigil, to wait for another day. Sunday came and still no aircraft, but the camp was visited by a priest who undoubtedly administered a spiritual solace to some. For my part, I had long since given up hope of any assistance from above.

The cooks were more practical in helping us to forget the disappointment of the planes' non-arrival, by turning on a magnificent lunch of beef, sardines and pilchards, with two rolls of bread each. At last, these chaps were getting a little job satisfaction with the extra food that had been made available.

With the return of Allied officers to Wakinoama, the discipline tightened up. Not that there was any curtailment in movement, so long as we were present for the morning and evening roll call. The discipline focused mainly on dress, with civilian clothes no longer permissible and uniforms to be worn as clean and as neatly as possible.

To show our appreciation for the kindness shown to us by all our foreign friends since victory in Japan Day, we decided to put on a concert for them on Monday 27 August. As a member of the choir, I went along to the only theatre left standing in Kobe, together with all the other concert party members, for a morning rehearsal. Regrettably, most of the musical instruments had been lost in the Kobe House blaze, and many of the musicians had been transferred just before the end of war. But the piano still remained in the theatre, which turned out to be of great help in presenting our show. The rehearsal went reasonably well, and we had just returned to camp for lunch and siesta when, suddenly, several single-engined sawn-offs winged out of the blue.

In an instant, pandemonium broke loose as everyone raced madly outside, frantically waving and shouting. Then, with the assistance of a signaller on the roof, operating a small searchlight, the pilots spotted us and spent the next half-hour zooming around the camp from all angles. Everyone was bursting with excitement in the knowledge that, at last, we had been located. The pilot of No.4 plane dropped a message written on photographic wrapping. 'It won't be long now.' it read, with the crew's names written on the reverse side. Eventually, the planes returned to their 'carrier,' leaving us well satisfied.

That evening, at 6 o'clock, the curtain raised on our 'Benefit Show'. In view of the day's events, we were ready to give it our best. We performed all the old songs and skits that had been done in our shows in Kobe House. We sang the 'Kobe House Blues', 'The Stevedore's Swing', 'A Bit of the Other' and 'That Will be the Day', plus many choral numbers. The crazy gang were as crazy as ever, and there was a fair sprinkling of humour. After the concert, the Danish people invited a few of us back to their place for dinner. What a day it had been. There was the exhilaration of the buzzing planes, the delightful atmosphere of a social engagement and, to finish off, a satisfying meal with pleasant company. I slept well that night. Next morning, the Grumman fighter planes were back on the attack, and one of the pilots scored a direct hit in the backyard with a packet of Lucky Strikes. Other pilots dropped books, magazines and hundreds of newsheets with the aid of

small 'chutes. More messages from the pilots read 'See You in New York.' 'Texas is Proud of you' and the inevitable 'Never a Dull Moment.' These boys were from the aircraft carrier USS Randolph and they kept us well in the picture. And the picture was fast developing into a momentous historical event. The newsheets told us of a massive build-up of planes and troops at Okinawa, where '300 giant transport planes were lined up awaiting to fly 7500 battle-trained troops to Japan. The United States third fleet had already steamed into Tokyo Bay in preparation for the landing of 10,000 sailors and marines at Yokosuku Naval Base tomorrow. General MacArthur himself will be flying to Japan tomorrow before joining the third fleet where the Japs will sign the terms of surrender on Sunday.'

One of my most treasured possessions today is a very fragile and well repaired copy of the Sea V News USS Randolph (CV-15), Wednesday 29 August 1945.

An event that might not have been so historical, but was certainly of tremendous significance to the ex-prisoners of Wakinohama, was the arrival, at 1.00pm, of the first huge, four-engined transport planes. As the parachutes tumbled out of the planes, we raced around like excited school children greeting Father Christmas, but some parachutes failed to open and many of the 'presents' of food and clothing in the shape of big drums, were badly damaged. We collected everything that fell in close proximity to the camp, while the supplies that had drifted some distance away were brought back by the Japanese civil police. In the days that followed, the sun shone on dozens of multi-coloured parachutes floating gently to earth with long-awaited food and clothing – another pleasant memory of those unforgettable days.

It has been written that the deeper the trough of despair, the greater is the wave of ecstasy that follows. We had been in the trough for three and a half years. Now that we had caught the crest of our wave at last, we abandoned ourselves to the exhilarating ride of a lifetime. Already, the bliss of freedom had started to erase the misery of captivity. We waited now, in anticipation, for the return to our homelands. With the arrival of American supplies of food and clothing, we were soon decked out in new khaki drill summer dress and new shoes. The cooks, too, had a birthday. Using a blackboard from the former school, they proudly displayed their artistically produced menu and propped it up against the cookhouse wall. It read:

WAKINOHAMA CAMP MENU 4.9.45

0630 COCOA

0800 BOILED EGGS

DAILY U.S.A. PLANE SERVICE

SUPPLIES SHOT BY 'CHUTE

FROM B.29'S AND NAVY

GRUMMANS U.S.S. RANDOLF

1000 COCOA TILL 1030

1200 SOUP CHICKEN

1600 MIXED FRUIT SALAD WITH CREAM?

HOT WATER AVAILABLE NIGHT AND DAY

TRAGEDY

The arrival of the first Americans came almost as an anticlimax. They pulled up quietly in a coach about 8.00am early in September. In a flash, I grabbed my camera and raced downstairs to greet them and film their arrival. Lt Trevor Shaw and Sgt Brian Wilson introduced themselves as part of the 'American and Australian PS Contact and Inquiry Unit.' With them were their staff, which included several nurses, who quickly set to work

interviewing everyone in turn and sorting us into medical categories. Those who needed medical treatment were earmarked for return on a hospital ship, while the rest would be flown home. But we would all be travelling by train to Yokohama, where ships and planes would be waiting.

During our last day at Wakinohama, I had my photograph taken on the steps of a small shrine at the rear of the building, all labelled up and wearing my brand new uniform. I wanted to bring home a sword as a souvenir, and I had asked Sgt Morita for his. When he refused, somehow, I just couldn't use force to take it. Instead, I opted for some souvenir money, so I sold a blanket to a civilian for 40 yen. No doubt he had plenty of pickings after we left. The scene on Kobe railway station on the night of 6 September 1945 was reminiscent of a troop train departing for the front. Most of the Europeans were at the station saying their last farewells, some in tears at losing, so quickly, their newly made friends. Even though the war was over, the pattern of human relationships still



ME ALL DRESSED UP TO COME HOME

persisted; so many friendships were interrupted or terminated by the massive movement of military personnel. I stood quietly on the platform with my Danish friends until the last possible moment. Then, exactly at 8.15pm, the train shuddered silently into movement and gradually gathered momentum, the crowd was lost in the dusk, and Kobe was gone.

We pulled in at Yokohama station at 9 o'clock the next morning, and, as we made our way out of the station, we were guarded by an avenue of American troops, who looked most impressive in their combat gear. From there, we were taken by coaches to the wharf area and were given air transport tickets. Tied to the wharf, two hospital ships were already waiting to meet the needs of those ex-prisoners-of-war still to come in from all the Japanese islands. From there, we were taken to the Atsugi airbase, where we were looked after by the American Red Cross. Later that night, 30 of us boarded Skymaster No. 272596, before taking off for the Kadena strip on Okinawa.

It was my first experience of air travel, and, when the plane hurtled down the runway with a tremendous roar from the four powerful engines, I was filled with excitement at the thought that, at last, I was leaving Japan and was headed for home! The fact that we had to sit on the hard floor in no way dampened our spirits, but it was an uneventful five-hour flight, and I was happy to touch down at Kadena. Here, we were met

by another Red Cross team, waiting to give us a distinctive flavoured drink called Coca Cola. We had reached civilisation. We were then taken by truck to a hastily prepared clearing camp, where we bedded down in between the luxury of clean, white sheets. No one will ever know the significance of that first taste of comfort. Then followed two days of waiting, with little to do except play cards. The skies were still filled with American fighter aircraft flying in formation above branchless trees and splintered trunks that told of the ferocity of the battle for Okinawa.

On the second of our two nights there, we attended a recently built open-air theatre. For the 2nd 4th boys, it was our first film night since Darwin days, nearly four years ago. It was pouring with rain, but nothing could dampen our enthusiasm as we sat through the film, which, appropriately enough, bore the title of 'Where Do We Go From Here.' While waiting for the show to start, a close-harmony female group entertained us over the sound system. All my life, I shall associate the Andrews Sisters singing of 'Rum and Coca Cola' with a rain-drenched night in a little clearing, ringed with mutilated trees, on the island of Okinawa.

We didn't have long to wait to find out where we were going, for, in the morning, we found ourselves clambering into more Army trucks, which took us back to Kadena for the flight to Manila. During the war years, it was accepted that, wherever possible, friends remained together, no matter how many moves were made. However, there were exceptions, and, on this particular morning, circumstances intervened to change the destiny of two men. John Gilmour and Jack Gilding, who had been close friends from Showa Denki days, were together in the same truck, when there was a shout from another truck further along the queue. As the convoy was still stationary, Jack quickly climbed down from his truck and discovered that the caller was a friend he had enlisted with, but subsequently had been separated from. Faced with this sudden choice of companions, Jack returned to ask John if he would mind him travelling with an old mate. John handed Jack's gear down to him and watched him climb aboard the other truck. It was a fateful decision. Lined up on the airfield at Kadena were a number of B24 'Liberator' bombers. For me, all the old excitement returned at the thought of a flight in one of these famous aircraft, so I arranged to have a photograph taken with our crew and their plane, which was named th' Duchess.'



THE FIVE MEMBE CREW SEATED FRONT RIGHT, KADENA STRIP, OKINAWA,
WITH 20 OF US POWS JUST BEFORE TAKE OFF

Precisely at 9.00am on 10 September 1945, the Duchess lifted her skirts and headed for

the Philippines. After a couple of hours, we discovered that big bombers were not designed as troop carriers. Twenty of us were perched in the bomb-bay in varying degrees of discomfort, which, for a time, was tolerated with good humour, but the novelty soon wore off. Then, when we flew into a typhoon, the situation changed dramatically. With increasing turbulence, the pilot took us higher in an attempt to find calmer weather, but this action turned the bomb-bay into an ice-chest. To ease our discomfort, two of us at a time were allowed into the cabin, where we were given time to thaw out. When my turn came, I looked out of the window, but there was nothing to see but cloud. It was just like being in a London pea-souper. Then, the radio operator announced the news of a tragedy. One of our group of planes was down. It had gone into a mountain somewhere in Formosa. For some time, the news stunned us. It was unbelievable. An immediate mantle of gloom surrounded us, and, for the remainder of the flight, we remained silent, absorbed by the monstrous injustice of it all.

At 2.30pm we landed at Clarke Field, where we waited anxiously to see who came in with the remaining planes, but it was not until we transferred to C47 twin-engined transports for the short haul to Nielson airfield, and gathered there, that a check could be made. Among the missing was Jack Gilding. Later, we found the other missing Australians were WO2 Harry Rogerson, Sgt Bert James, Sgt Dick Noble, Gnr Ron Cooper. War records show that there were 20 passengers in all on that tragic flight: 12 Americans, three Dutch and five Australian soldiers. And, of course, there was the unfortunate crew. Just when peace had begun to erase the atrocities of war from my memory, I was again subjected to a conflicting maze of emotions. What source of power had decreed that one of our planes should crash? What infinite intelligence would inflict this ultimate tragedy on our mates after all they had endured over the past three and a half years? The relatives of the victims would have just been notified of their survival from prisoner-of-war camps. Now, they would have their dreams and preparations for joyful reunions shattered. Just how cruel could fate get? After so lengthy a period of anguish and suffering, how could it deny the reunion of husband and wife, of sweethearts and loved ones, and of fathers and children? Undeniably, now, the sorrow and grief of those left behind would be compounded beyond measure.

Harry Rogerson was the most senior Australian NCO in Kobe but I did not get to know him. Of the others, I knew Dick Noble the best because he had been *kumi* leader of the adjoining NO. 6 section, and had spoken *nippon-go* with a rapidity that surprised even the Japs. He was a good harmonica player, and was known for his skilful handling of 'Whistling Rufus'. I knew Jack Gilding pretty well, because he had spent quite a bit of time in our *kumi*, visiting. Bert James lived on the floor below me in Kobe House, so I didn't get to know him well. I remember him as a dark, good-looking man with a neat moustache. His young widow was left to rear a small six-year-old boy, Clive, who has since grown to be one of Australia's best-known television personalities and writers, even though he has made England his home. Those of us who are left, who shared the last few years of their lives, endured the same hardships, held the same hopes, dreamed the same dreams, can but pledge: 'At the going down of the sun, and in the morning, we will remember them'.

RECOVERY

A few miles from Manila, a huge recovery camp had been hurriedly established to receive the thousands of ex-prisoners-of-war from all over the Far East. It seemed we were among the first party to arrive, because there were still plenty of empty tents. After the first few days, the routine of camp life became tiresome, even though the only parades ever welcome were mess parades. We were chafing at the bit, anxious to get back home as quickly as possible. But it was here in the recovery camp that we met up with old mates. Most of the old Kobe House gang were together again, and they all had similar stories to

tell. By comparison, Kobe House, it seemed, hadn't been such a bad place after all. It was great to see Mac again. He looked better than I had anticipated – a bit thinner, but he had survived and that was the main thing. Jim Dore, Johnny Gilmour and I had been correct in our choice of locations when we had gone to Lake Biwa to search for them. The Notogawa party that he had been with had been working on reclaiming part of the lake, but some distance from where we had looked.

Mac's story was typical of the shocking conditions that existed in the other camps throughout Japan. With the ex-Kobe House crowd, there had been Americans, British and Dutch. Food, which was continually in short supply, had started with rice, then had rapidly given way to an ever-increasing proportion of barley, until the rice had been cut out altogether and a grain called *kibi* (sorghum) was substituted. The camp had had only one American doctor and two orderlies who had to alternate daily in going out to work. There was no hospital, and medicines were practically non-existent. There were many brutalities, especially by Henry, the interpreter who had grilled me in Kobe House. The men had been granted a *yasume* day only when it rained and, being summer, they were few and far between. It was plainly evident that the end of the war had arrived none too early. Now that we were in the recovery camp and putting away plenty of good food, we quickly regained weight and a more normal appearance. After we had been kitted out with a complete new issue of Australian army clothes from a hastily established Q-store, we looked like soldiers again. I felt far more at ease in jungle greens than in a Jap tunic. Furthermore, when it was arranged for us to receive a limited amount of pay, we did what soldiers normally do on a pay day. We visited the canteen. After sampling a few small bottles of beer, it wasn't long before the inevitable game of 'two-up' was under way. Nothing had changed.

When Mac found a few of his 2nd 18th mates, he naturally bunked in with them. He hadn't seen them for years. I was back with the old Wales Maru gang: Jim, Johnny, Alf and Wally. Above our tent, we proudly flew our flag, which had been somewhat inaccurately constructed, but lost nothing in its meaning. I filled a few days of the waiting period in putting together a couple of stories about life in Japan for my local morning newspaper, the *West Australian*. An American officer, Lt Robert D White, helped me considerably by permitting his secretary to type my stories. Meanwhile, members of the Australian Recovery Team, in an effort to make our enforced stay as pleasant as possible, organised several interesting sightseeing trips. The most memorable of these was a visit to the old battlefield of Corregador off the Bataan Peninsula, where the American forces had fought gallantly against the Japanese in their initial thrust towards Australia. When I visited Manila, I saw a city in ruins. I had seen the aftermath of an incendiary raid on a Japanese city, where most of the flimsy buildings had been burnt to charred ashes, but Manila was vastly different. It had been a city of some substance. Now, twice a battlefield, constant aerial pounding and deliberate destruction by the retreating Japanese forces had reduced this historical city to a pile of rubble. That evening, I discovered a nightclub operating on the first floor of a badly damaged building. A fairly presentable orchestra played unfamiliar melodies, while American servicemen put the local girls through an amazing assortment of acrobatics that they called 'jitterbugging'.

Since the choir days in Kobe House, I had fancied myself as a bit of a singer, so I talked myself into a job as the band vocalist. The problem was that having been out of circulation for so long, my repertoire of songs had become sadly depleted. After all, there is a limit to the tolerance of night-club patrons when they are asked to dance repeatedly to the tune of 'Blueberry Hill.' Graciously resigning my position with the band before the polite Filipino leader was forced to fire me, I bought a few dance tickets and exchanged a couple for the company of a pretty local girl. She told me she was a school teacher, but, as her school had been bombed, she was earning a living as a 'taxi' dancer. While it lasted, the music and dancing of the nightclub were a refreshing escape from the stark reality of a

slaughtered city, but as I emerged from the semi-ruin into the brilliance of a full moon, I wandered, entranced, through the desolation. It was as though I had discovered the ruins of an ancient and forgotten city – a city that had been known in its day as the 'Pearl of the East.' This was the tragedy of Manila.

In the isolation of the countryside, a huge natural amphitheatre provided the setting for presenting concerts. A visiting celebrity at that time was Gracie Fields, who, with her husband Monty Banks as accompanist, entertained an enormous audience of service men and women. After the performance, I raced around backstage just in time to get Gracie's autograph on a Victory-issue peso note. As the days grew into weeks and there was still no word of transport back to Australia, I decided to make my own arrangements for returning home. Hitching a lift to Nielson airfield, I waited for the arrival of an Australian aircraft. After several hours, a RAAF transport touched down, and as soon as practicable I approached the pilot with a request for a trip home. He was most sympathetic and only too willing to help me if his manifest would accommodate my extra weight, and if I was satisfied with a lift only as far as Darwin. If I liked to return to the base at 5.00pm the next day, he would let me know one way or the other. I fully intended to do this, but for the fact that, upon returning to camp, I was greeted with the news that the Royal Navy aircraft carrier HMS Formidable was in Manila Bay and we would board her tomorrow for the trip to Sydney. Naturally, with the sailing date so close, there was no question of leaving without my mates now.

In the morning, everyone was as happy as schoolboys going on a picnic, packing gear and chatting away good humouredly. As I tidied up the bulk of my souvenir parachute, I was still a bit annoyed with myself for not getting Morita's sword. But there had been a compensatory moment when in a stroll through the camp, I came across a group of Japanese prisoners digging a trench, guarded by a CI complete with rifle. For a brief moment I had been tempted to let fly with a few ear-splitting *kuras*, but, somehow, I just couldn't bring myself to do it. It was a strange revelation. In some deep unaccountable way, I even felt a tinge of sympathy for them as they toiled away. I knew the feeling only too well. The difference was that I was going home to a grateful country and the start of a new life. What reception would await them when they returned home to a defeated nation. What future had they?

With packing finished and trucks boarded, we headed for the docks, and, as we emerged from the rubble of the city, there was the Formidable, rising impressively from the choppy waters of Manila Bay. The sight of this magnificent ship triggered a feeling of tremendous excitement in us all. As the quayside was still a shambles, small lighters were used to ferry us out to the carrier, but, as we left the sheltered harbour for the unprotected waters of the bay, the lighters were tossed about in the turbulence of the rising waves, and we were more than happy to transfer to something larger. With the wind increasing, it became obvious that the exercise would be extremely tricky, and, after circling the Formidable a couple of times a discussion was held through megaphones. The decision to postpone the operation was announced. On hearing this, our hearts sank from the peak of expectancy to the depths of despair. To be so close to the final leg of our homecoming, only to be turned back at the last possible moment, was the ultimate frustration. The seemingly endless trip back to camp was spent in gloomy silence. The friendly Filipinos did not even receive the customary wave. Happily, the boarding was attempted again the following day, and, although the wind had dropped considerably, we approached the carrier with much more mental caution than we had on the previous day. But all went smoothly this time, and, with the successful completion of the transshipment, the Formidable weighed anchor, pulsed into life and quickly left the shattered city of Manila. At last, we were on our way home from the war.

A VETERAN'S HOMECOMING

The Royal Navy did everything possible to make life pleasant, and the days were spent in eating, swimming and exercising. We had nourishment several times a day, starting with breakfast at 7.00am through to coffee at 9.00pm. Twice a day, the ship's pool was available. This was a makeshift affair with a 12ft-square tarpaulin lashed to a quadrangle of supporting timbers about three feet off the deck. It wasn't quite up to Olympic standards, but considering the fact that the Formidable had received two direct hits on her flight deck from kamikaze planes a few weeks earlier, the service was greatly appreciated. We played cricket on the flight deck, complete with nets; we walked up and down its length for exercise, and the less energetic just lolled about on deckchairs, soaking up the sun. The only departure from this idyllic routine was a voluntary Church Parade, which was very well attended. It gave everyone present a chance to say a private prayer of thanks to his God, for his deliverance. It was a time, too, for a period of silence in which to remember the men who had so recently perished.

I had a stroke of luck when a padre gave me two rolls of film that fitted my camera, which gave me the opportunity to finish my photographic record. There was a sprinkling of nurses and a Red Cross representative on board who couldn't do enough for us, and it was a pleasure to snap them together on a gun turret, particularly as the Red Cross lass was from my home town of Perth. Her name was Joan Richardson and she gave me an invitation to call on her parents when I returned.

One morning, we awoke to catch the sight of the hills of Hinchinbrook Island; it wouldn't be long now. It was just as well, too, because the relative inactivity of the past week had me growing restless. Somehow, I felt that I should be down in the bowels of the ship to see what I could scrounge. It just didn't seem right to let all that unexplored territory go to waste.



FORMER KOBE HOUSE BOYS RELAXING ON THE GUN TURRET

In a moment of reflection, I wondered how I would handle the pace of normal living. Had the constant pressure and tension of the last few years taken their toll? How could I expect

people to understand the unexplainable? At least I had something going for me – my hair had reached an acceptable length for my re-entry into society. Because of a dearth of soap during the last weeks of the war, I had asked Johnny Gilmour to scalp me the day the atom bomb saved us.

As the hour approached for our return to civilisation, I couldn't help thinking that the day was all wrong. Everything of importance during my army life had happened on the 15th of the month. Yet, here it was, 13 October 1945, and we would be home in a couple of hours. Perhaps it meant the break of a cycle of events associated with the past, and symbolised a promise of hope for the future.

And what of the past? At the time of my enlistment, I knew that we had a way of life to preserve, a measure of freedom that was denied to many people; that that was the way we wanted it to stay, and that meant we had to fight to keep it, but I had never expected to have the principles of democracy demonstrated so indelibly as they had been. I had experienced enough to realise that, had the Allies lost the war, democracy as we knew it would have been finished. The world would have been saturated in a flood of totalitarianism. I shudder to think of the consequences if Japan had been the victors. The one thing I learned above everything else during my incarceration was that nothing is really appreciated until one has been deprived of it. Without question, freedom is the most precious of all commodities. Without freedom, a person is reduced to a servant, a slave, a pawn at the mercy of a master. Life is a meaningless existence, filled with despair and despondency, with little hope of happiness. The thing that kept us going was our unquestionable faith and confidence in the outcome of the war. We knew we had to win; the thought of defeat never entered our heads.

But the thought of the cost of the victory often had. Even though we were within minutes of celebrating the victors' hour of glory, I thought of the men missing from our ranks. Thousands of service men and women would not be coming home. Not for them the bands and the cheering crowds of a veterans' welcome. We had left so many of our mates in some distant foreign country, hoping that their sacrifice would not have been in vain. As the Formidable passed through the Sydney Heads and steamed slowly up the harbour, a flotilla of small boats, ferries and launches sailed out to meet her, while a press plane circled overhead. The ship's complement was assembled around the bow of the flight deck, and we ex-prisoners-of-war took up positions down the port flank.

Slowly, we edged nearer to Circular Quay, and I was finding it increasingly difficult to control my excitement. There were still a few shots left in my camera, and the energy I expended in using them up had a temporary stabilising effect on my emotions. With my last exposure, I took a shot of the ship's band practically under the Bridge, as it played 'Waltzing Matilda' in our honour. I had started my military career as a bandsman, which gave me a certain affinity with them. It was the act of a fellow muso. Time lost its measure, and there was an aura of unreality as we docked, tied up and descended the gangway. As our feet touched the ground, many men dropped to their knees to kiss the earth in a gesture of gratitude and love for their country. It occurred to me that my quest for adventure, which had prompted my enlistment almost five years before, had been more than adequately satiated. Buses draped with huge signs identifying us as the '8th DIVISION AIF' waited to take us to our public, and, as we emerged into the streets of Sydney, there were crowds everywhere to welcome us home.

The words of Flo Florence's song were prophetically accurate: the winter of war had been a long one; now, at last, our Summer had Come Again.



Australian 8th Division return on H.M.S. FORMIDABLE- 13. 10. 45

THE FORMIDABLE.
REACHES SYDNEY HARBOUR



THE FORMIDABLE DOCKED
IN SYDNEY HARBOUR.

Quite suddenly, the cumulative experiences of the past three and a half years caught up with me and I was overwhelmed by the thrill of being home. I could no longer restrain the tears. Resting my head in my arms against the back of the seat in front of me, I sobbed uncontrollably.

Kobe House Blues by Norman Colley (Tune 'Down and Out Blues')

A long time ago - before this war began
We'd never been away from home; we'd never seen Japan.
We didn't work so very hard and we got lots of pay,
But now we slave from week to week for 15 sen a day.
We've tried to be like great big stevedores
Until the day when we can even scores.
There's one song we render – sing it and remember.

When you're tired and lonesome, working down on the docks,
And the bottom's are falling out of your shoes,
What are you going to say? What are you going to do?
Sing the Kobe House Blues.

We've carried satoo, bricks and stones and bran,
And to cap it all we haven't heard any news.
Your back is nearly broke; you're working like a moke,
Sing the Kobe House Blues.

When your dreams of loot have gone astray,
And all the cans you've found are badly blown.
Loot – and the boys loot with you;
Get caught – and you stand all alone.
You've emptied barges, trucks and barakis,
And you feel you'd like to have a little snooze.
But instead of 'yasume', they shout out 'go ahei',
Oh! those Kobe House Blues.

All you possess in this great big world
Is an appetite you're trying your best to lose.

Your neko's broken, your kagis are blunt and bent;
Sing the Kobe House Blues.

But that distant day will come along,
When Uncle Sam is going to set us free:
Oh! What a time we all will have;
Oh! What a Jamboree!

When we're dressed again in civvies,
Bags of grub and cash,
A decent fag to smoke and beer to booze,
And when we have our fling
There's a song we'll never sing –
That's the KOBE HOUSE BLUES.

Our coaches dropped us off at Ingleburn army camp just 30 miles out of Sydney where comfort and convenience, superlatives not usually associated with army camps, whisked us almost into the realms of luxury. The following morning, about 70 of us West Aussies, most of us from the Second Fourth Machine-Gun Battalion, were invited to spread ourselves throughout a waiting hospital train. Oh my God – what a difference a victory makes! In less than three months, since 15 August, we'd done a full 360 degrees. For three and a half years we were nothing more than slaves. Sure – there was other terminology for us: prisoners; captives; 'horyos' and just plain scum. But the reality of it all had been that we had no option but to do as we were told. The alternative would have been at the best – a bashing with a rifle butt; at the worst – a bullet.

Now, looking immaculate in our new issue uniforms, we are acutely conscious of draping ourselves in a mantle of respectability; suitably attired to once again rejoin the civilized real world. And with respectability came the urge for reflection and self-analysis. Surprisingly, I feel myself getting increasingly excited as I realise just what I've done over the past four years. It's history – that's what it's been. I've not only lived through it - but I've bloody well recorded some of it. Not only had I salvaged my diary – but I'd scrounged myself a camera that gave me pictures as well.

The more I thought about it, somehow the term 'respectability' didn't seem adequate enough. I search my brain and it tells me something wonderful and important has happened. I feel excited now as my instinct tells me that my diaries and pictures are crammed full of history. How the hell did that happen? How the hell did a little 'baggy-arsed' private – and a Pommy kid at that, manage to think of these things? Oh, pardon me – I forgot; I'd just been promoted. It was Johnny Gilmour who did the honours. 'Well Jack,' he joked, 'After what we've been through together, you can call yourself a Dinkie-Die Pommy Bastard now.' I smiled my gratitude to my best mate, at the same time I couldn't help thinking what our little red Australian Soldiers' Pocket Book told us in the chapter 'Australia's People'. It reads: 'In 1940, 86 per cent of the people living in the Commonwealth are Australian-born, and 97 per-cent of the total population of over six and three-quarter millions are of British stock. They are rapidly developing into a distinctive race – tall, strong and athletic, proud of the freedom and progress of their own country, yet loyal to the land of their forefathers, speaking its language, and living up to its best traditions of justice, humanity and hospitality.'

Now there's emotion in the air as truth overwhelms me. Oh what a spirit there is among us. What a great bunch of mates are all around me! There's Jimmy Dore and Johnny Gilmour and Alf Jones. There's lanky Lance Park, shrewd Arthur Draper and wise old Wally Hutchinson and dozens of others. All of them have been whipped and beaten and starved like animals, but with their great big hearts they've gone the full distance –

done the marathon. No gold medals for them though. No bloody fear. There's no category for them, or – for that matter – for anyone who survived.

What we have is something special – something unique – something unfathomable – something unattainable for ordinary people. Just what we do have is something I can't find words for. It's more than love. It's more than camaraderie. But there's nothing more sure than from the day we were liberated, we are bonded for life. We are a brotherhood that conquered adversity beyond comprehension. Somehow we snatched victory out of defeat. Then a frightening thought hit me. How in the name of hell are we going to handle the humdrum existence of civilian life?

I can't remember just how long it took us to travel across the continent. I didn't record it. The reality was that life without war was nothing short of boring. God alone knew how we were supposed to cope. Eventually, the almost continual tooting by the engine-driver alerted us to the fact that we were in the eastern suburbs of Perth. Apprehension fills the carriages. Smiles appear on faces almost bloated with unaccustomed good food. Ribald comments are freely traded. Can this be really happening? Perth station comes and goes and we wonder where the bloody hell we are going. But we do not have long to wait for an answer. Almost halfway to Fremantle we find ourselves crawling into Claremont station. Dear God - we are home at last!!

Now we're shaking hands again and choking out farewells. 'See ya mate', 'see ya around', 'good on ya, son'.. The crowd swallows up my mates like a giant vacuum cleaner and for the first time it hits me. Where the bloody hell am I going? I hang back to let the other blokes out, so by the time I step from the carriage the crowd is thinning out. I have no family in West Aussie so I'll make for a local hotel. I take a last look around and suddenly I catch my breath and stop dead in my tracks. I can't believe what's happening. Making her way towards me is a lonely little woman dressed in black. Her face is strangely familiar. It's Richie Reed's mother and I freeze in a bewildering array of emotions. The next moment she is holding me and searching my face with an intensity that only a mother can give. Then she clasps me to her and at that moment I instinctively know that for us – this incredibly brave woman and me – the future would never be free from the tragedy of war.

The sofas at Changi airport were not the most comfortable in the world, although they were a big improvement on trying to curl up in a lounge chair. So although I managed periods of disturbed sleep during the long wait, the call for passengers to board the plane for Osaka came as a welcome relief. Once again a polite airport employee helped me into a wheelchair for the lengthy push to deliver me unobstructed through the necessary checkpoints until depositing me right at the aircraft's door. The other advantage, of course, was that my wife was able to load me up with her hand luggage and duty-free purchases, leaving her free to tackle the obstacle course entirely unencumbered. Once again, a petite smiling hostess welcomed us aboard to settle us into our spacious seats for the six-hour flight. It was 1.00am, so shortly after take-off, my own time-zone computer calculated that the time was right for an uninterrupted sleep before breakfast was served.