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## REMINISCENCES



# REMINISCENCES

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2/10 FIELD AMBULANCE A.I.F. & "C" FORCE JAPAN

When we first marched into that Maruyama Camp we were marched onto the parade ground and there was this little runt of a Jap. He hopped up onto a platform with his jackboots and big sword hanging at his side - his name was Morimoto and as soon as we were standing at attention he shouted out three words, I'm not sure what they meant but it sounded like "Anonair - Immuggera -Kurrywah" but think it may have meant "pay attention you bloody fools" ! - or something like that.

He shouted out another word and the guards that were surrounding us all jammed a round up the spout and I thought to myself "gee this doesn't look too good" however, he then proceeded to read us this thing which was written in Japanese and was translated into English for us and was addressed to All Prisoners of War.

***To: All Prisoners Of War***

***From: Commander of Osaka POW Camp***

*"Recently most prisoners of war are working very conscientiously but there are still some whose attitude is not what it should be. It seems to me you are forgetting just where you are standing. You fought to protect your colours, for which I honour you as soldiers, but at the same time our people will not forget that you shot at our brothers and sons, killed some of them and wounded others. To this fact you must pay your toll very heavily. You fought well but lost and were taken captives. It would be all natural and possible that you would be standing before a firing squad before too long. However, by the august virtues and grace of His Majesty, The Emperor, and also benevolence of our military authorities, you are still sound and alive, having necessary quarters to live in with clothing and food properly supplied. More over, you are allowed to communicate with your loved ones. Did this fact ever occur in your mind? If not, just stop and think it over. If there are any who do not live up to our expectations in every respect, those are the ones who forget about the fact. We are doing our utmost to make your life comfortable under the circumstances. Our treatment is fair and impartial in regard with our military laws as well as the International Treaties. This fact should be appreciated, although we are not insisting it. When you work hard, you*

*may think that you are helping your enemy and by slacking down on your work or disobeying our orders, you may think you are doing your country justice. It may be true, but it certainly is not doing justice to yourselves, because we are watching over all P.O.W. individually and keeping daily records in every respect, so that when the time comes for you to return to your country, we will give the first preference to the best ones and those who dare not do their best will probably never get the chance to join their beloved ones. So it is only natural that you should do your tasks conscientiously to acquire your freedom and join your beloved ones at the earliest date. To conclude this statement, I shall like to say that to acquire freedom there is always hardships and sacrifices. Without the hardships and sacrifices freedom can never be acquired. Bear this in mind, never to forget, and then you would know how you should behave in the future."*

I was born in the Riverina at Farm 311 at Bilpul near Griffith NSW on 28 May 1921 and the 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion blokes were known as the Riverina Battalion. I made it my business to get to know as many of these blokes as I could and learn about where they came from and likewise they did the same to us and other blokes.

I distinctly remember 19 January 1943 - Des Mulcahy got a few of the blokes around him in the evening and they sat quietly and talked and I found out later that it was the time of the fighting on the west coast around Muar, Bakri Village and Parit Sulong and they were talking about mates they had lost in that conflict. I think I have the date right - I hope so because they'll chew me up if I haven't !

My first job in the shipyard at Kobe, Japan was working on tug boats which were down at one end of the shipyard. It wasn't long before I was put on one of the travelling cranes that used to run on rails which were used to lift all the plates for the building of the ship and place them in position. The job wasn't too bad and on wet days or in winter time the underground electric cables had leaks and would get water in them and of course when you got on one of those hot spots you were jumping around - you didn't know where to bloody well jump and I was glad when they took me off it.

My next job saw me placed in a gang with three other fellows - a Pommy from the RAF Sid Ward, a Dutch army chap and a Dutch navy fellow. As the shipyard ran on steam 24 hours a day we had to shovel all the ash that had been burnt from the coal the night before. We worked in a concrete pit which wasn't too bad and out of sight of most of the other Japs. The pit was about 15 metres long and you couldn't throw the ash off the wharf onto the barge but had to relay it in three or four different throws until you got it all there. We managed to shift about twelve tons a day. It was hard yakker but we yakkered away. Our boss on this occasion was a pretty good bloke, he was a Jap civilian and we hardly ever saw a guard. One morning we were coming down to the job and a dry dock was alongside.

There was a small Jap warship in it with the stern end blown off and we had a bit of a chuckle about it but the bloody Japs soon wiped the smiles off our faces when they saw we were laughing so we just went a bit quieter after that. Alongside the dry dock were pens for those Jap midget submarines, there must have been about 7 or 8 of them there and they used to bring them in to provision and refuel them and then they would go out and the mother ship would come in and they would go on their way. We never saw them being loaded or anything like that but they were there all the time and I can tell you they were a nasty looking little piece of work.

When we weren't shovelling the ash we were back at the other end of the shipyard near where they were working on tug boats and shovelling the shipyard rubbish

which Jap women used to collect in baskets and dump on the wharf. After loading the ash from the boiler room onto barges the tug boats used to come around and tow it about 3/4 of a mile out to sea outside the breakwater.

We were always pestering the Japs - our boss to let us go out and unload - it would have been a good bludge and for a long, long time they resisted, but on one occasion they said "OK" and so we got into the little cabin on the front of the barge and the tug boat towed us out past the breakwater. The doors on the barge used to open up and the water would wash most of the ash out. When we got back into the shipyard everybody had gone back to camp and there were four blokes missing ! I daresay they phoned through to the camp because when we got back there was no one on the parade ground which was the Jap's usual practice until a matter was resolved. Anyway no harm came to us or the bloke who took us out on the tug boat it put an end to our little jaunt.

1943 was a fairly eventful year and one day we went into work and there was this beautifully camouflaged armed merchant ship flying the Italian flag - this would have been around September 1943. The Japs were loading stuff onto it and there were some trucks up on the deck and one morning when we went in it seemed to be a bit low in the water and a bit later on the morning we saw that it was lower still. There was a scene of feverish activity there - boats going out loaded with Jap soldiers who were going on board and taking the people off. I don't know if the ship actually settled on the bottom but it was very close to being full of water. It didn't take the Japs long to pump her out and refloat her and it departed the harbour some time later. We didn't see it go but I daresay it was flying the Jap flag by this time.

What had happened was the Italian government had collapsed and Mussolini had been rescued by German paratroopers and Marshal Badoglio had taken over so. During that year large ocean going German submarines were coming into the shipyard and they were docking about 200 metres from where we were. We couldn't get close and they were provisioned and refuelled before going back out to sea. Actually it was an Out of Bounds area for troops etc., but the German sailors used to come ashore to wash at the tanks along the wharf and the blokes somehow or other used to sneak down and there would be some cigarettes or soap left on the tank stand - so really they could see the hardships we were under and they were doing their little bit to make life a bit easier for some of our fellows.

Each day while the submarines were in port - they only came in one at a time and not very regularly - there used to be a 5 or 6 metre half cabin boat flying the German swastika which used to go along very slowly past the wharves. We found out later that the suburb called Sunnomiya was where the Axis powers representatives lived as well as those from the neutral countries. They used to go and check out the submarine each day while it was being refuelled but they never at any time acknowledged us. We would see them and they would see us. I always remember the name of the little boat - it was the 'Iltis' and one of the Dutchy's said it was a male name.

Sunnomiya played a prominent part in our stay in the shipyards because the fellow I enlisted with - Ken Collins (we've been mates for over 60 years, Ken is living at Pelican Flat near Swansea NSW and I have only just finished speaking with him) somehow or other got onto a Jap in the shipyard who had a newspaper called the 'Mainichi Shimbun' which means daily newspaper.

This was the newspaper printed in English for the all the European people living in Sunnomiya rather than all the different languages because they could all speak and read English evidently. In it was the fair dinkum news of the war and they knew every blow that was being struck. They even got news of the Battle of Stalingrad in Russia and the different island conquests as the Americans and Australians fought their way through the islands.

Every time the Japs lost a battle we lost one too but it was good that we were getting a bit of news. Ken got onto this fellow somehow or other - he had made a deal with him - how he made the deal I don't know but he used to get the newspaper about once a week and he would put it under his crutch - a bit of strange story here - the Japs were reluctant to feel around that area when they were searching you - I think they had an inferiority complex. The paper was taken back to camp and read by a person in each hut and the news would be relayed so that everyone in the camp knew what was going on except the Japs.

Whenever the Australians were able to get together and have a bit of a yarn amongst themselves, the stories went back before the war. What they expected to do after the war if they were lucky enough to make it back home.

I always remember blokes like Carl Holzhauser who was from down the Snowy Mountains and he used to talk about eating emu steak. In those days emu wasn't on the menu really. But when you are hungry, underground mutton - nowadays people don't eat the old rabbit however, many families lived on rabbit in those days, so why not emu steak.

It was the sort of thing we spoke about and of course there was Austin Hayden McCoy commonly known as Tim he came from Cathcart and he used to speak about the dairy industry. Us young blokes (he was a quite a bit older than us) and I particularly liked to listen to their stories and I was able to tell a bit about my life in and around the coal mining areas just out of Newcastle NSW.

Who would forget a bloke like Gentlemen Jim Reynolds who would talk about Armidale. I had never been more than 300 miles away from where I grew up just near Newcastle. Jim had interesting stories and he was a father figure to some. We were only 19-20-21 years of age, and fellows like the big, quiet fellow from Tenterfield, Paige Leech who was a farmer and only a lad then - I think he must be 80 now. He was a fellow I got to know pretty well because he slept quite close to me and used to talk about farming which was another source of interest. I met him 16 years later when I was shooting - I'd been a competitive shooter all my life on the rifle ranges. 1960-61 were good years for me, I had won a couple of prize competitions and a National Rifle Association Medal so I wasn't going too bad and we were down competing in the Queen's Shoot at Liverpool on the ANZAC Range which was the last year it was held there.

I was sitting in the mess hut one morning and I saw at the end of the table this big pair of boots planted down on the floor beside me. I kept eating and as they never moved I looked up and there was Paige Leech. It turned out he was a top shooter and after that I kept in contact with him and he eventually moved over to the northern NSW coast to Kingscliff and I ring him up every now and again particularly on 29 April - Hirohito's birthday and also Paige Leech's birthday. In the camp we used to celebrate Paige's birthday when we got the holiday for Hirohito's. At that shoot at ANZAC Range that year there were over 1100 shooters however my name never went up on the top of the board.

Harking back to those fellow POW's we were in camp with, what about Percy Bloomfield and his mate Johnny Brownlee ? They were a couple of lovable larrikins those two. Percy was from Leeton way and Johnny was from Kurri Kurri in the coal fields. When those two got together you wouldn't know what they'd get up to. There are many many more - Percy Hunt from Stockton - a great bloke who I met a couple of years ago in Newcastle and he seemed to be doing all right.

Les Coombs was another fellow in the camp - he's no relation to Joe Coombs, he was a Tasmanian and quite gifted as far as poetry was concerned. If you asked him to write something he would and I remember the poem he wrote about me when I asked him. It related to a Pommy bloke and myself and the piece goes:

"To the lot of the Newcastle lad  
To look after Chooms as they go mad -  
In his care for a month or two -  
They're then allowed the tea to brew"

The reason for this was this fellow out of the 2nd Loyal Regiment who had an old white singlet and was known as "Chesty Bond". He was a very well built fellow and had a large birth mark on the side of his face and if there was anything the Japs didn't like it was anyone who was disfigured in some way. They would shy away from them - tattoos - birth marks etc. This fellow woke up to this and when any of them came near him he'd snarl like an animal and they'd get the wind up. In the end the Japs took him back to camp.

This meant they were short of a man and the officer in charge said to me "he can go with you and you can keep an eye on him". I told him I had a job looking after myself but anyhow I did and we got him to boil the billy. We had this awful green tea - it was terrible stuff, anyhow he boiled it up and kept out of sight. He had a good lurk and I don't think he ever worked again.

As 1944 wore on the American bomber raids became larger and more frequent. They were based at Saipan in the Marianas by this time and they carried these spare fuel tanks. You'd hear them when they would drop them at night and although they weren't anywhere near us you would feel the concussion when they hit the ground. I don't know what size they were but would have hated to be underneath one of them.

Those B29 bombers used to come in at a great height - the sky was crystal clear in those days over Japan and suddenly you could just hear a drone coming in - you could just hear it and it would get louder and louder and you'd look up and see these vapour trails in the air and then see the little silver specks a little while later.

Then you'd hear them start to drop down to a bombing height and of course that's when the Japs used to start to panic a little bit - we were not actually panicking but we didn't like it just the same. Anyhow they'd come down and do their run - there was no aircraft or anti-aircraft fire to go up as all the stuff had been sent out to the islands - the Jap homeland was almost unprotected except for manpower.

It was at the end of 1944 that I went down with pneumonia and pleurisy and was in hut 4 which was being used as a hospital in those days. During the afternoon my fever suddenly rose up very high. One part of the hospital they called "Dead Man's Corner" so they shifted me down there. During the night I didn't know whether I was

conscious or unconscious and I reckoned I went to meet my maker but I also reckoned I didn't like what I saw and came back. It appeared to me that I was going up this steep hillside and the further I went the blacker and blacker it got.

When I reached the top it was so black you couldn't see anything. That's when I decided it was no place for me so I came back down again and the next morning my mate Ken, before he went to work came up to see if I was all right. I was propped up in bed and he told me later on that he expected to see me laid out - but that wasn't the case.

There were Red Cross parcels in the Jap store in the camp - the Japs were gradually munching through them and on one occasion came the day they gave one box between 26 blokes. It was quite all right - it kept you going for a little bit longer. On Christmas Eve of 1944 we came struggling in through the camp gates onto the parade ground and as the Pom's would say "we were completely knackered". In Hut 4 was Lieutenant Doug Lush of the Signals dressed up as Santa Claus (just where the hell he got the suit from I don't know) surrounded by this mound of boxes and he was shouting 'Merry Christmas'. When the roll call was over we filed by one by one and took a box. It was the best and only piece of enjoyment we had during our stay in that camp other than when we saw the Japs bashing one another up.

During the period there, naturally the food supply was very short and a lot of horse transport was used and I think this was a rather amusing incident. The soya bean is very rich in vitamins and when everything was extracted from it the residue was turned into a big cake about 2 feet square and a couple of inches thick, which was used to feed the horses. It would be nothing to see a bloke sneak away from his job or the lunch room or to go to the toilet or something and he would be over patting the horse on the forehead with one hand and his other hand would be in the horse's tucker bag sneaking a piece of this cake out and shoving it into his pocket and walk away and eat it later on. It was better than nothing at all!

On another occasion when shovelling the ash from the boiler room - we'd launched an aircraft carrier - one of many that we had put down and there was one at the wharf. When they were launched they would bring them to the wharf and clean them all out - all the bits and pieces of scrap iron that were in the bottom of the ship and ash from the coke fires - all that sort of rubbish - it was a terrible job and the din down there was terrific with the iron being chucked around in the bottom of the steel ship. When we were down there this day an air raid came on and of course we knew nothing about it.

We felt the ship bumping against the wharf and heard noises and vibrations and all that sort of stuff. Anyway when we came out the shipyard was deserted and our boss didn't know what the hell to do. I think they must have rung the camp again. The bombs didn't fall anywhere close but when they hit the ground you could feel the vibrations right over to the wharf. We got back to the camp about dark and the Japs were in the same frenzy running around like chooks with their heads cut off.

When the shipyard was eventually burnt out and destroyed except for heavy steel structures which they demolished later on with the big bombs, they kept us in camp until it was time to go down to the coal mines. We left there about 5 May 1945 to go down to the coal mines at Nagasaki. When I was down at Nagasaki - I think the village was Isuhi, anyway we dug this enormous big trench straight behind the guard house leading outside the camp. Outside was an opening through the fence and there were drums of fuel etc., stacked on top of it and we reckoned it wasn't an air

raid shelter and I found out later that Squadron Leader McCarthy of the RAF who was our Commanding Officer that they had formulated a plan for a break-out with some of our senior officers - Des Mulcahy may have been one of them, if there was a landing by the Americans on the coast adjacent to this point and the Japs were worried about it.

When the war was over they opened the safe, and in it was an Extermination Order and the due date shown was the 14<sup>th</sup> August 1945 - the day before the war finished. Unfortunately I could never get a copy of this one but have sent down a copy of one which would have been of the same nature. It took quite a long time to get the translation done - some of the Japs said it "was very old Japanese - we don't understand" and those that did were too ashamed to admit it. But eventually we got it done by an elderly Japanese and you will see that it is a very chilling report.

1<sup>st</sup> August

**The Army**  
**An Imperative Sentence (No. 15)**

1. Command to Tomiyo Umemoto to write this order at 23 July 1-en 30-sen in reward for obeying an order.

2. Fourth Unit Tadashi Miyagawa  
Tatsuo Okura  
Terumi Kawaniwa

Command these people for the Army guard at 4<sup>th</sup> Unit  
36-en in reward for obeying an order

3. First Unit Kaiei Chin  
and other 12 people  
Command these people for the superior guard at 1<sup>st</sup> Unit

4. First Unit Yukoku Ha  
and other 100 people  
Command these people for the first guard at 1<sup>st</sup> Unit

5. First Unit Keibun Yo  
Command these people for the second guard at 1<sup>st</sup> Unit

Imperative Sentence for 11 Unit's Chief of General No. 10

These are reply for emergency means at concentration camp  
Under the current system, when you take refuge from bomb explosions you must make every prisoner being at one spot under strict caution and kill them all.

Time and method of Erasure

1. Time

When the watchman's judge has been made by his own decision through the guard  
When the prisoners try to do riot  
When the prisoners try to escape from concentration camp

2. Method

No matter individually, or in a group, by gas, by bomb, by poison, decapitation, be drowned, choose yourself which suits the occasion. The principle object is "leave no traces". Take every possible means for that

3, Order to Commander of Military Police

All subjects of discussion between 11<sup>th</sup> unit, fortress headquarters states under the emergency guard consideration must be at prisoner camp must be reported (ultimatum).

4. Two articles left behind of English infantryman "Burton" were received with a death notice on the date 27<sup>th</sup> July.

5. Received a report of punishments from 6<sup>th</sup> unit

1) English navy sergeant major Night Chals and English infantryman Erdlet Henly were put to the 3 days torture for reasons of missing work.

2) English navy soldier Holly Chals, were put to the 3 days torture for the reasons of being late for work.

It came from an archive in the United States. The date of the Execution Order for our camp No. 26 was thwarted by the atomic devices dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and that in itself was a godsend because it saved not only millions of Japanese but also the prisoners of war who were still alive at that time.

Hostilities finished on 15 August 1945 and the following day we were free - when I say free we were - we roamed far and wide around the countryside looking for anything we could eat - pigs, horses, cattle, ducks, poultry. The Japs in their wisdom stored a lot of their animals in their houses because if they stored them on the outside they were goners.

It was about three weeks after the war had finished that the Red Cross officials arrived in the camp and they told us to stay there until someone came for us. Another 3 weeks went by and no one had arrived to take us out, but in the meantime American war planes had found us as we had put a big sign on the roof. They started parachuting food and supplies in to us in 44 gallon drums which was a dangerous exercise if you got under one. We thrived and fattened up and I myself was putting on as much as 2 pounds weight a day. Nobody came so they got a train - from where I don't know and it pulled up along the bottom of the camp down the embankment, complete with fireman and driver.

We got all our sick people down the embankment and onto the train and away we went eventually arriving at the wharf at Nagasaki where we were met by the Americans who stripped us of our clothes and put us through a series of cubicles. They sprayed us with water and powder and when we came to the other end there was set of American service gear which we put on. The USS Lunga Point an aircraft carrier was at the wharf and we went aboard that night. It was so crowded we had to sleep in relays. I met my old mate Paul Muller there and we smoked and talked all night and finished up at Okinawa in a day or so.

We were unloaded there and got onto a Liberty Ship which went across to Manilla in the Philippines and after a few days there went aboard HMS Speaker leaving there on 4 October 1945 for Sydney. We arrived in Sydney on 15 October 1945, exactly two months after the war had finished. There was a large crowd there to meet the ship, my mother, my wife, one of my brothers was there and I tell you what - it was good to be home. General Gordon Bennett was there to meet the ship as he did with each ship which came in with prisoners of war and he was given a rousing cheer by all the blokes on board. We didn't know the big problems he had when he got home. I think it was sorted out but he never fully recovered from that Enquiry.

Then came the re-adjustment to civilian life. I was discharged on 31 January 1946 and my intention was to train under the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme which I did in 1949 - it took me that long to get in. I had been apprenticed to an uncle in the building industry in 1939 but there was very little work about but when I came out of the Army I decided I would continue on but there was some union trouble and the old hands didn't want any 5 bob a day builders.

The Curtin Labour Government's Treasurer was Chifley a marvellous combination government and regardless of politics they did a really good job during the war. They set up a Ministry for Post War Reconstruction and at its head was a gentleman by the name of Mr John Dedman. The idea of the system was that when every ex-serviceman and woman came home and had no trade or profession to go back to they would take an aptitude test and be assessed for their capabilities as regards their chosen trade or profession. As I had done about a year of a carpentry apprenticeship with an uncle that was my best proposition and I accordingly applied for it but as I said the old die-hard unionists didn't want any five bob a day builders.

About the time I applied, that particular trade was halted because of the stand by these old blokes and I had to wait until 1949 before I could get in. As this particular trade wasn't open until then I chose cabinet and furniture making and no sooner had I done that and been enrolled and started on it, the other course in carpentry and joining was re-opened. I had a house in Gilgandra but I came to Sydney and I bought a block of land at Hurstville Grove - a beautiful area where I built myself a new home and from there was my base to go to the College everyday which was the Slazenger Annex down at Alexandria. Now this was a massive building and during the war years they had been making parts for the Mosquito bombers and all the plywood parts were still stacked up in the Annex and not only were there cabinet makers but we had carpenters and wool classers. There was a whole heap of people doing their post war reconstruction training all together in the one building.

The system was, you did 8 hours a day - you got paid the basic wage - for six months with the equivalent of the first two years as an apprentice in the lower trades and at the end of 6 months if you qualified you got your lower trade certificate. We started off on 40% efficient which the employer paid and the government paid 60% and they assessed you as you went along. As you improved the employer paid more, it went up fifty/fifty and so on until the employer was paying the whole 100% of your wages. The wage then was around £10-0-0 per week which was very good wage at that time and you were doing the employer a very good favour because you were working very hard - he was making money and he was getting it at a very cheap rate.

The Chifley government went out of power in 1949 and the Menzies government came in and he immediately - in my book set about bringing the working class down. In a way he did a lot of good but it tightened up the industry as far as furniture was concerned because people who were going to buy a new dining room suite, which I was making at the time decided to wait until next year to buy it due to the prices and it was put on the back burner. The company I worked for had a warehouse adjoining their factory and we filled that up with all different styles of period furniture before they started to retrench, and in those days it was a case of last on first off and as I happened to be last on - I was first off.

I had bought a block of land over at Mortdale Heights intending to build over there and I cut a framework of a house out and had it in a yard but because there was no work about in the furniture game I decided to go back to Gilgandra for a while and

try and get set up there in the building game which I did. I went and bought a block of land there and I had that frame transported to Gilgandra and I put it on that block of land. My wife and one son at that time came up and we settled into temporary residence while it was being built and I stayed there until 1965 building mainly for the farmers and graziers.

There was some town work and it was pretty good to me, I didn't make a fortune or anything like that but my wife wanted to get back to the coast - we had four children by this time and we decided to come to Burleigh Heads. The reason for that was being back on the coast I had a letter from one engineer to another for a civil engineering project for a fairly long job going at Tweed Heads and when I arrived he told me they were short of a man and they said they would be get me in within a few weeks when the job opened up a bit which he did, so that was a job for a couple of years to start with.

I decided then that I would branch out into the building and civil engineering projects - my father had been a surveyor and engineer and when I went on holidays at different times I used to go out on a job with him just to get the experience. So I bought my own theodolite and dumpy level and I became a site supervisor - working all types of buildings and water reticulation, sewerage, road work. One of the main projects I was supervisor on was the Hinze Dam (at Advancetown in the Gold Coast hinterland) which supplied the Gold Coast with water. Our company there did all the road works above the dam through the mountains above the catchment area and I later came back and did the upper intake system for a private contractor working for the government - it was a pretty good time really.

After the atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki in 1945 I suffered a very very high fever that continued on all through the years and it reached a climax in 1978 - I had been in hospital once or twice in the country and also in Concord in Sydney anyway they didn't know what it was or wouldn't say what it was. I couldn't say whether they knew or not, however in 1978 I spent most of the year in and out of Greenslopes Hospital in Brisbane and when I came out I asked them what it was and they said they still didn't know what it was and I started to fight for a TPI eventually getting it in 1985. My friends and relatives used to ask me "what was wrong with you what did they do to you ?" and I said "Well I don't know what was wrong with me - I had my own ideas - but the government doesn't admit to anything - I said they shoved things up me - they shoved things down me they shoved things in every hole that I had and where there was no hole they made a hole.

In the intervening years I reverted back to my first love which was the making of period style furniture - I had a lovely little workshop up in the back yard and pretty well equipped - I was very careful with power tools and hand tools and I have never had any serious mishaps.

So I started buying a little bit of cedar here and a little bit there - it was very hard to get the Australian red cedar (good quality) and I started making little pieces of furniture. People would give me their little bits of cedar and I'd make them a little occasional table sometimes Chippendale, sometimes Queen Anne or a Colonial Pattern and as I sit here now I look at five lovely pieces I made and kept for myself - I never did it for a profit - just for the love of working with beautiful timber.

In the year 2000 my eyesight started to fail fairly quickly and I was suffering from macular degeneration and today I can't read or write except by memory and my own signature and perhaps a few words. My wife had passed on nearly 17 years ago

and for a number of years I've had a very loving little companion Theresa who comes every day to see that I am OK and does near pretty well everything for me.

Theresa as a child of 11 years of age went into the prison camps in Java and she was nearly 15 years of age when she came out. A lot of her family died and other members were scattered so an uncle came and found them and took the girls to Holland. In 1957 Theresa migrated to Australia and she met and married her husband here and he passed on a number of years ago so I think myself very lucky to have found such a lovely little lady who is so caring.

CAPT Wys the Dutch Officer who was next in line to CAPT Patterson in that particular camp was a gutsy old bloke and he handed a letter to the Red Cross officials one day. Anyway the Japs wanted to read it so that was the only visit we had from the Red Cross. The Red Cross officials handed it over and when the Japs read it they got old Wys up there and gave him one hell of a thrashing - he was battered from top to bottom.

There was another chap - Sam Willestrum who was in the Dutch Army - he was a big black man from the old Dutch colony of Dutch Guiana in South America and the Japs hated anybody who was black and particularly those who were big. He had such a wide mouth and white teeth when he smiled I think that they took offence at that too. Nishikawa always used to call him "Corumbo" which meant black and would stand him to attention and he had a ball pein hammer about a pound weight and Nishikawa would hit him on the left temple then the right temple then the left again then the right again and so on and you could just imagine the agony he was going through. Eventually he would fall down and he would then be booted and booted until he got back onto his feet again. If any of the other Japs were nearby they would take part in it as well. Eventually they killed him.

How this came about - we came in from the shipyard this afternoon we were all bugged as usual and when we got inside the gate we could see all the guards out on the parade ground and we thought "hullo - what the hell's going on here". Anyhow they lined us all up in rows and they pulled big black Sam out and he was out the front and there was a lot of yabbering going on. But we still didn't know what was happening but as it turned out the Japs sometime before had handed us all an old Jap raincoat which was bugged which was why they gave them to us - but they were still Japanese property and they had to be rolled up on your bed when it wasn't raining and they would come along and count them. On this particular count there were 2 missing - ~~Black Sam's was missing and that~~ of the old Dutchman that slept alongside  it. So we were lined up in rows - the Japs called out the old Dutch bloke who was with Sam and they started to beat the crap out of him - he didn't know what was going on but Sam knew but he wouldn't let on.

The Japs then bashed all of us while we were standing out in rows and in the cold for 7 hours. Meanwhile Big Black Sam and the Dutchman were over in the guard house getting the hell bashed out of them before Sam eventually admitted that he had sold his one to a Japanese civilian and had also stolen the one belonging to the old Dutchman. It was sad because the old Dutchman was a real gentleman - he wasn't even in the services. The Japs had taken off their leather belts and they were using them to flog us around the face and they were using the buckle end first so you can imagine what some us looked like the following morning. They put Sam into the cells at the back - wooden cages - no clothes on - in winter time I don't know

what the temperature was but it was down around the freezing point and it took four days for them to kill him - he was a pretty tough bloke I can tell you.

On another occasion my mate Paul Muller had sauntered into the Jap store out at the shipyard where they kept all sorts of oil - peanut oil, whale oil and other oils and stuff and he walked out with a 4 gallon can on his shoulder and planted it in a heap of steel. He didn't know that someone had seen him coming out of there and when we got back to the camp that night we were all lined up and thought "hullo what the hell's on" ? anyway they pulled him out of the ranks and he had a Dutch Navy cap on and someone had recognised him. He was pulled straight out and they started to thump the hell out of him - he knew what had happened to Big Sam before so confessed that he took it - it was about 7.30 p.m. at night by this and back they went to the shipyard and found it.

It wasn't peanut oil or whale oil - it was four gallon tin of gasoline. The Japs said it was "Gasorene Number Ten" and that he wanted it for a boat he was going to steal so he could escape. An incident that happened to me - it was snowing - there was snow on the ground and we were in the shipyard and you passed a lot of water in those days particularly on the smallest rice diet - apart from the temperature. Anyhow I had a good look around where I was in the shipyard and I couldn't see anyone about, so I immediately started to urinate into an electric motor which attached to a winch. I didn't know that "The Cat" had been watching me. Anyhow I was doing what I had to do when I felt this smash in the back of my head which knocked me down into the snow and then I felt the boots go up the ribs - those leather boots with the steel caps instead of those split toe things they used to wear and I got up onto my feet and he started to roar and bellow at me and told me what I had been doing.

I denied it of course - I told him I was having a pee alongside - but he wasn't buying it and he gave me another one this time with a bayonet boss fair down the forehead - I've still got the scar and down I went again and in went the boot again. I got up on my feet and he got at me again and asked me what I was doing - I just said nothing this time and he gave me another couple of thumps with his rifle and away he went. His name went in the memory bank and when the war ended I was in the south at Nagasaki and he was up in the Kobe area. Australia was south and there was no way I was trying to head north I was heading straight south to that place I loved.

This incident relates to "The Cat" again. We were marching out to the shipyard in these old overcoats they had given us - they had been discarded from the Japanese army - they acted as a little bit of break wind but you could shoot peas through most of them anyway they were better than nothing. You weren't supposed to have the collar turned up and of course when we were marching along - the blokes would have the collar turned up and if a guard coming along saw you they'd hit you across the shoulder blade with the back of a bayonet. I've still got a knob on my shoulder from one hit that I got from one of these blokes. I always remember this morning the road was icy and the Japs had these leather boots on and we had these cloth boots with compressed cardboard soles which went to pieces in about 4 days and they were all about the one length - you just chopped a bit off and just sewed it up the best way you could across the toes.

We had a system call when a guard was approaching "Red Light". "Red Light would go down along the column. I always remember this bloke - he was such a laid back real bushie type and he was a 19th Battalion bloke - I won't mention his name - he had his hands in his pockets and the collar turned up and "The Cat" sneaked up on

him a bit quick and he had the bayonet out and was about to give him a smash on the shoulder blade when his boot slipped on the ice on the road and when he went down he skidded forward and his head crashed onto the hard road and knocked him out. Of course by this time he had gone past the 19th Battalion bloke who looked down at "The Cat" as he walked past him and he had this great mouthful of phlegm - we all had a great chest full of it by this time and he let him have one - a great gobbet - as he went past and I distinctly remember the words he said "Serves ya right ya yellow bastard".

I remember Big Black Sam doing the same thing - the little Jap kids used to run alongside the column and they'd sing out this word "Corumbo" anyway he'd be smiling and they'd be looking up at him and he let a great mouthful go into this kid's face. I tell you he didn't get any more "Corumbo".

Sometimes when you were crook and you lost a little bit more weight than as normal under those circumstances when you got out of the hospital - if you were lucky enough to get in there ! They'd put you in the cook house for a month to build your strength up and I always remember this young bloke he was a signaller from 8 Div Sigs, and he was a bit of a larrikin. These Japs even though our food ration was small they would come down and nip a bit now and again and one of them would get some potatoes and he would bring them down and get the Australian blokes to make some chips for him - a mean sod of a bastard but anyhow this young signaller bloke this day when they had the chips done said "bring them over here" and he spat a beaut one right in amongst them and mixed it in and when the Jap came down for his chips - he was all smiles - and he went away. The cooks never had any complaints but the Jap didn't ever know what he was eating and it served him right.

There was a stoat in the camp - a little animal something like a ferret and these rats and mice that were in the camp squealing of a night time - we thought that it was their sexual activities but this old fellow was loose amongst them and eventually he was killed. How it came about - the Japs bought a dozen scrawny old chooks and they said the eggs were for the sick blokes up in the hospital hut and one morning they had a look and found that all the chooks were dead in the yard. Us POW's got the blame and got into a bit of bother over it but the officers in their wisdom or otherwise talked the Japs out of it why would they kill them and just leave them there ? I don't know who eventually killed the stoat - whether it was some of our blokes or the Japs. They didn't know what to do with him - but our blokes did - they had him skinned and gutted and all the best parts of him except the food that was inside of him was chucked into a copper and boiled up with some veggies and we had Stoa Soup. Poor old bugger he had no teeth and he must have been the oldest stoat in Japan and on closer inspection it was found that the chook's throats had been bitten and their blood sucked and that was why they had died. Another incident at the shipyard one day there was a mad bastard by the name of "Hata". He gave me a belt up the chops one day and

I put his name in the memory bank too. On this day at lunch time they were bringing the gangs back to the shed for lunch and when this Hata had brought his mob in he pulled these two fellows out - one was Les Cameron of the Div Sigs and Sammy Horton - a 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion bloke - a little fellow he was, anyway Hata stood them up there in the yard and Hata was given the say so to deliver the punishment whatever for - I still don't know.

He started on Sammy him being the smallest one, so he knocked him down a couple of times and Sammy was a bit groggy on it and he got up and then he took to

Les Cameron. He must have knocked Les Cameron down at least six or seven times but he wouldn't stay down - he tried to push him down but he wouldn't stay down anyhow when he went down the last time he was trying to pile lumps of iron on top of him to keep him on the ground. Meanwhile Sammy was lying there and every now and again you'd see him open one eye for a bit of a sticky beak and quickly close it again. Eventually the Jap knocked himself up - he couldn't go on and Cameron was too bloody tough for him.

We were still living in Gilgandra about 1946 when I was visited by an Army Officer from the Intelligence Section. At the end of the war I had filed all these affidavits about these people and even that much later on they were still interested. This officer came with his offsider and we talked and I clarified everything I had written - he had it all there. He pulled out a list of photos and asked me if I could identify these blokes and I told him I could.

I identified them all but one bloke had me beat!-\*1 looked at this photo there was something familiar anyhow in the end the officer put his hand across the forehead of the bloke in the photo and his name just flashed straight into my head. He was the medical orderly known as "Sleepy" and he became a real bastard with another little fellow we nicknamed "Kewpie". He came along and he was a real bash artist so Sleepy started to bash too and he became just as big a bastard as Kewpie was. The Japs always had their hair shaved and cut right off at the skull and this bloke had been cunning and had let his hair grow.

Another incident - we were coming up the steps onto the Kobe Electric Railway Station from the shipyards and I don't know what happened or why it happened - there was a young fellow named Murphy I'm not sure of his unit. This guard "Horseface" - he had a face like a bloody horse - an ugly horse too! Anyway he took to him and kicked him and knocked him down the steps and while he was laying there he got the butt of his rifle and was thumping into his head with it - as hard as he could go and I'm sure that young bloke would have been killed if the other guards hadn't pulled him off. He was a real murderer. We left that camp to go down to the coal mines at Nagasaki - Murphy went down on that party and when the war finished he got a bit of revenge - he had a bayonet and the Japs were all coming back from wherever they were stationed and they seemed to have all their gear plus any booty that they had wrapped up in a sheet like a great bag over their back.

He used to wait on the railway station and when they'd get off he'd go up behind them - slash the thing open and spill everything out of it and I think he had more souvenirs than the Japanese Army. To my knowledge he never ever hurt anybody he just went and picked out what he wanted and sent them on their way. There were some bashing incidents in that Camp 26 out of Nagasaki right towards the end of the war but I never once saw anybody seek retaliation on those people and they were still there in the camp. The senior officer Squadron Leader McCarthy kept them all there and I don't know what happened to them in the end. If it had been me I would have sought a bit of retaliation.

When the war finished and before the Americans parachuted supplies into us and even after we just roamed around the district there and the village - I think it's name was Isuhi - where there was a lovely Japanese bridge over this stream of fast flowing water which came down out of the mountains. We used to swim there every afternoon in the nude particularly after we started to get a little bit of flesh over our bones again and it was a marvellous relaxation. The whole village used to turn out to watch these mad bloody Australians head down bums out of the water swimming

around like a bunch of kids. Most of spectators were the women of the village - the men were still out working. A Field Ambulance bloke in 1943 - he was 18 years of age and the Japs used to call him "Juhatchi boy" - Juhatchi is eighteen.

In the village was a tea house and we went in there and we had a little bit of Jap money by this time which we got by various means. A lady and her 2 daughters had this tea house and the minute they saw this young bloke they fell for him - and he lived like a bloody king - he wanted to move out of the camp - didn't want to leave he was laying back with women both sides of him. In that area was a big Kempei-Tai fellow stationed around that village he was a big Jap he would have been 6 feet tall and was big mean looking bastard but we had the wood over him so it didn't worry us too much and we'd have shot the bastard if we had to but he went along quietly. He didn't know it but in this tea house there was a radio and in those days all the radio broadcasts came in English from Chungking from Chiang Kai Shek's Headquarters in China and I don't know how long these people had the radio there but there may have been broadcasts in Japanese and Chinese as well - but anyway the English part was good because we used to just listen to it whenever we wanted to.

Eventually the time came for the young bloke to leave and there was a very very tearful farewell when we managed to extricate him from his love affairs and get him back to camp - I think we were gone the next morning on that train. I met this young bloke on numerous occasions after the war at reunions - but he never brought the subject up so I never mentioned it either. As this camp was in a rural area, about 6 or 8 weeks before the war finished the Japs decided to buy a cow.

The "Black Snake" was the interpreter and he lived outside the camp and he kept a cow in his yard so it was milked there. He and his family took some and the rest was brought in to camp and the CO of the Japs took some and what was left was given to the blokes in the hospital hut - they got a small cupful each. I remember one young bloke who swapped his cup of milk for a cigarette. The cow was our property when the war was finished and it was decided we'd kill and eat it.

I can always remember and I'm pretty sure it was Tim McCoy who was the slaughterman. We had a bath house there which was always filled with black water from the coal and there was no soap but there was a concrete apron around and there were glass windows. This day they brought the cow down and put it in the bath house and of course there were people peering in through the windows and there were a couple of Japs amongst them - I think the bloke with the axe waited until the cow closed its eyes before dealing it a smashing blow between the horns and down she went and old Tim was onto it like a bee onto a daisy.

As soon as the blood started to flow one of the Japs fainted. There was no cutting the cow up for steaks or whatever - she was just chopped right up and the horns, the hooves, the hide and the contents of the gut were the only parts discarded and we ate it in 2 sessions if I remember rightly. It was the first decent stew we had for years. There was no eating of the bones this time - the bones were just crushed up and boiled up and all that beautiful marrow used to flavour another meal that we had without the meat.

Little incidents keep popping in my head day after day. One day John Brownlee, Percy Bloomfield and I were walking from the camp down to the village - we were still a bit hungry and looking for some rice. On the way down we struck this big Kempei Tai bloke that hung around the place and with him was a Japanese civilian

policeman in his black uniform and a sword strapped on and as we approached we could see that he was completely drunk waving his arms and making loud noises and the big Kempei Tai bloke was trying to keep him in order. It was lucky for the policeman that day that we didn't have a weapon with us as another Japanese might have bitten the dust.

We went on down to the village and poked around and found a store and in there were quite a lot of bags of rice, and we thought, well, we'll take a bag of rice and there was a hand cart nearby. As we were getting the bag of rice this civilian Jap came over waving his arms and shouting. I don't know whether it was Johnny or Percy but one of them said "we'll put him in the bloody shafts". We put him the shafts and away we went about a mile back to the camp and when we got him up there he was completely knocked up so they gave him a bowl of rice and a kick in the arse and sent him back down the track again.

The 2/10 Field Ambulance was completely filled by May of 1941 and a detachment of them was sent from Bathurst Camp up to Rabaul in New Britain to join Lark Force and set up a hospital with some nursing sisters and a couple of doctors, Major Palmer and Captain Robertson. Anyway when the Japs came into Rabaul there was a general retreat because there was a massive landing there. They retreated down New Britain and were cornered at the Toll Plantation.

Now the Webb Report of 1946 (Mr Justice Webb) detailed the massacre that took place there - the blokes were cornered - not only our fellows and they were tied in heaps and bayoneted and shot. One of the persons there Bill Cook from Bexley in Sydney, managed to get free - he had 11 bayonet wounds and he got down to the coast and into the salt water and kept his wounds clean and he was eventually picked up and brought back to Australia.

The boys that were at the hospital there were taken prisoner and they went down on the MV Montevideo Maru off Luzon at the end of 1942 when they were being transported to Japan. There were no survivors whatsoever from the ship.

Five fellows managed to escape, one believe - Bill Collins was shot twice and a couple of years ago he was still alive at Culburra Beach on the south coast of NSW. The two doctors managed to get away with the 2/22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Battalion under Colonel Scanlon and a lot of them were picked up. It think five of our fellows came back and I don't know whether they ever went back into the jungle again and were brought back to Australia.

I had gone to Sydney in 1948 from Gilgandra to do my Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme Course and I picked up the paper in 1951 and saw where this fellow Bill Cook - he was a shunter at Central Railway - a train had backed over him and cut both of his legs off pretty close to the crutch and it was the same Bill Cook who had the 11 bayonet wounds from the Toll Plantation massacre. So I left it for a couple of days before I went into see him - he was sitting up in bed and said his only problem was that when he went to prop himself up he fell forward on his face - he had no legs to prop himself up. That was the only complaint I ever heard him make.

I went back to the bush in 1952 and came down as regularly as I could for the ANZAC Day March in Sydney and I went out to see him at Bexley this day and he was as bright as a button - he was growing orchids - he had a little trolley that the Repatriation Commission had given him - he bowled at Penshurst and he had made

a real life for himself. I asked him if he would like to go to the march the next day and he said "How the bloody hell could I march" ? I said you've got a car - yes - he had the controls fitted under the steering wheel so he didn't need legs it was all done by hand - Have you got a wheelchair ? - Yes - so the next morning we got in the car and a copper stopped us around Mark Foys in Elizabeth St and we had to wheel it up from there to the starting point.

For the next 2 or 3 years I came down from the country and I wheeled him around. One year I wasn't able to get there but somebody took over the job. Eric Baume was the commentator in those days and he always used to give Billy a good mention and the Toll Plantation massacre. Sadly Billy Cook died in 1981 - he was a pretty tough little bloke. The nursing sisters were taken by ship to Japan later on and most of them survived and one of them I met here on the Gold Coast in the year 2000 and she told the story of what happened to them.

I've just received the March issue of the United Defence and I note the photograph on the back page with Des Mulcahy and Warrant Officer Guest and officers unknown of the Royal Navy. I didn't know any Naval Officers so I don't know just which camp they were in because the bloke that was in charge of it was Squadron Leader McCarthy. Jim Gatley was a Warrant Officer and like Warrant Officer Guest was from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Loyal Regiment and they came across in early 1943 to the Maruyama Camp at Kobe.

They were fit and fat and had been working on the wharves in Pusan in Korea and when they saw us skinny looking articles - they said "you've dropped your so and so bundles lads". It wasn't too much longer before that they were looking much the same as us and realised what great difficulties we were working and to survive under. I do remember that when they got there after a little while they reckoned the Dutch doctor was favouring the Australians and the Dutch more so than the English so they asked the Japanese to get an English medical officer down there and to our amazement they did - they got this fellow Flight Lieutenant McSweeney out of the RAF and he turned out to be a beaut fellow.

I remember that when they first went to work at the shipyard one of their fellows - a bloke named Clarke - known as Nobby Clarke and they were still pretty fit. One of the Japs started to push him around a bit out at the shipyard one day and he dropped him. A couple of more Japs came to the rescue and he dropped them.

It finished up one of the security blokes from the shipyard helped to overpower Nobby however he got a little bit of a beating up from the blokes he was fighting and the Jap guards didn't do anything to him - actually he got 2 or 3 days rest in the camp. The Japs didn't know that Nobby was a bit of a pug and could handle himself.

Warrant Officer Jim Gatley - he was the senior bloke - he was a big bloke and had a flattened conk. I always reckoned he hadn't let too many stray lefts go past. He had this big booming parade ground voice and the Japs loved anyone who could roar and shout and bellow and go on and Jim Gatley did exactly that and not in a nasty way either.

On going through my papers here I came across a news sheet which was from the ship we went to Singapore on - the code number was 'HMTEE' the MV Marnix Van Sintaldegonde and I think the 2/26 and 2/29 Battalions were also on board with my unit the 2/10 Field Ambulance.

Its sister ship was the Johann Olden Van Barnebelt, I think had the 2/30 Battalion aboard and we picked up another Dutch ship in Fremantle called the Sibajak. I'm not too sure what the escort ship was from Sydney to Melbourne - it may have been HMAS Hobart but I think HMAS Sydney took over from that point and escorted us through to Singapore.

Coming down from Sydney was the old coastal ship the 'Katoomba' and I think the 2/15 Artillery was on that. Some went from Melbourne by ship and others went across by rail to Fremantle to join the convoy. Going across the Bight we had a lot of blokes seasick - about 90% were seasick and to top it off we had an outbreak of mumps. By the time we got to Fremantle there were some very sick men aboard.

On arrival in Singapore those blokes were all distributed around the various hospitals and I think there was standing room only. On the trip across the Bight our escort ship in the morning seemed to be out in front and you could almost see the full length of the ship as it raised up in the air and went down again into a great trough. It was one hell of a trip I can tell you. To make matters worse we had a blockage in the sewerage system on board - the ship had never been used for troop transport before and we thought that when we got to Fremantle we would have a few days to do a bit of sightseeing, but they fixed the problem up overnight and we had gone by the next morning.

Some of the fellows managed to get ashore - but I was one of the unlucky ones and had to stay on board. The trip from Fremantle across to Singapore through the old Dutch East Indies as it was then was a pretty good trip all those little islands sticking up out of the sea like jewels - beautiful days plenty of flying fish during the day and see the phosphorescent shapes of them by night time, it was a really magical trip.

We arrived in Singapore on 15 August 1941 about midday to be introduced to an entirely different world that we had never seen before. I was away from home a bit over 4 years and I spent my 21<sup>st</sup> - 22<sup>nd</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> birthdays away and it seemed to be one hell of a bloody time to be away from home. A few lines here, I don't know who wrote it:

*Land of sickness sin and sorrow  
An inch of rain perhaps two tomorrow,  
Singapore ear, footrot rife  
Sooner be home with my darling wife,  
Chinese heaven, Aussie hell,  
Bastard country fare thee well*

I mentioned about the newspaper being brought home in a water bottle. That was the case earlier on, but blokes were bringing liquids home in their water bottles of all types and the Japs found out and they made you tip the bottle upside down of an afternoon. So that's when the paper was transferred from carrying the paper in the water bottle to carrying it under the crutch.

My water bottle - I couldn't get the smell of linseed oil out of it - it was used for mixing with oil based paints but you can eat it in small quantities - I doubt if anyone had died from it. When I was working on one of the aircraft carriers - they were fitting it out with that thin ply the Japs used and it looked as though it was a cook house where we were and there was these bags of stuff - they looked like breakfast delight fine grain breakfast food.

I thought, God this is all right so I got about ten pounds of it and brought it back to camp and I swapped it for this and that and something else and I tell you what, I wasn't real popular the next morning when the blokes found out it was cold water glue and, fortunately, no one had eaten any of it.

There were harsh and hard conditions on the Burma Railway, - but I'll give you a bit of an idea of what it was like to be a shipyard worker in Japan during that period 1942 to 1945. You were turfed out of bed at about 4 o'clock in the morning and they did a roll call which was a rather painful affair because if you made a mistake in the numbering the Jap in charge would race up and belt the bloke who made the mistake and roar out at the top of his voice "BUNGOR YATOI" which means "number again".

After that was over and done with, a couple of blokes would go over to the cook house and get the rice which was enough to give us a small bowl each – sometimes with a little bit of seaweed or a bit of soya bean paste – or maybe nothing at all to go with it. We'd get that over and done with and the next thing to do was to get the little scones that we had for lunch at the shipyard. Someone would get those and they'd be dished out and the next thing we'd be up on the parade ground for another roll call and when that was over and done with and everything was correct, away we'd go out to the shipyard.

It was about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile walk from the camp to the Takatorimishi Railway Station and we'd get on a train there and go down in about ten minutes to the main electric station at Kobe. From there we'd walk – perhaps a mile or a mile and a half down to the shipyard. I'm not just quite sure how far it was and then the men would be divided up into gangs and each one would go to their separate part of the shipyard and they'd stay there until it was time to come home in the afternoon, sometimes in the evening.

It didn't matter a damn to the Japs – we went out and we had to work in those shipyards with steel in those days – well any day it was freezing cold and I can remember years later talking about the boys in Korea – their fingers used to stick to the steel of their rifle and if they weren't careful they'd tear the skin off their fingers. Well, it was much the same in the shipyard in Kobe. In the early days some gloves were issued for working but over a period of time they wore out or were lost or stolen – the Japs on the night shift would lift anything they could get their hands on. The result was I used to hunt around with many others for a bit of cardboard, a bit of paper, rag – anything to wrap around your hands when you were handling the steel because you suffered that peeling off of the skin if you weren't careful. The clothing I may have mentioned earlier – it was like a green hessian, slightly fleecy lined and you could shoot peas through it. During that period around April for one month we used to get those bitterly cold strong winds blowing across from the Siberian Plains and that's when most of the fellows went down with pneumonia and pleurisy.

You never got rid of it until well into the summer. I know it took me almost 6 months to finally throw it off. Some of the work force in the shipyard were young Japanese – I presume they'd been students and pulled out to go into the work force because they were very young and when they saw the brutality of the Japanese guards and our bosses, they decided they'd try a little bit out as well. So the result was no matter what age the Jap was, he had the right to give you a thumping whenever he felt like it. Each day it was struggle to get back to camp. In the mornings you felt a little bit revived after a bit of rest.

Coming back was always a struggle with many men helping each other, which was indicative of the condition they were in. The Japs weren't too fussy how they got you onto your feet if you went down. That period was for 2 years and 6 months before the Americans came along and blasted the shipyards. After that there was no more work. So we went to the coal mines in Nagasaki and I'll give you an indication of life in the day of a coal miner working for the Japs.

We worked 2 shifts – a night shift and a day shift and those shifts could be anything from 12 to 14 hours. Because of the changeover of shift you could be without sleep for almost 24 hours at a time. The mine was a tunnelled mine – it tunnelled from the surface down into the bowels of the Earth. Some of the mines had elevators like a cage which would run up and down and tunnels ran out from that shaft. It was all tunnels similar to the one I worked at out of Newcastle before the war. It was a gas mine - it was very unsafe, you couldn't take a cigarette down or anything like that because you could blow the whole bloody thing up. We started working on level 14. Now the galleries there where you work on the face – were only about 3ft 6ins high and there was a metal chute into which, when the coal was dug out – you knelt on your knees and dug it out - the coal was thrown and someone with an implement like a squeegee used to push the coal down the chute into a skip, which was standing just below it on the railway line.

I mentioned skips once before in an article – these were small wagons that take the coal – around about a ton to 23 cwt usually. We worked on this particular level for quite a while and then one day they came along and said "well you've got to go down further down to level 16". We thought we were already on the bottom of the mine, but evidently we weren't so they took us down to level 16.

At this particular level the railway lines stopped and all you could see in front of you was a massive cavern – no ceiling, no wall – you couldn't see any part of it and they tried to get us in there to work. The Japs wouldn't go in – so we didn't go in either. We got a few belts and clouts but I don't remember taking one piece of coal out. So back up to level 14 we went and were there when the war finished. About a fortnight after - perhaps 3 weeks after the war was over, there was one helluva fall down in the mine and I gather it might have been in the area where we refused to work.

I might add that the temperature down there was 125 degrees Fahrenheit and it was so steep getting into it, you would slide down a steep incline at an angle of 45 degrees on your bony old bum. It was quite painful and you had to crawl your way out at the end of the shift. To save time when you were down there we had to go from one lot of tunnels to another, there was a hole dug across – about 2 ft high and half a kilometre long overall but it saved us a long walk of around a kilometre to get into the other tunnel. Fortunately, we had no claustrophobic people with us.

I'll give you one example of how caring and loving the Jap could be. When we were working in the pits where they unload the coal from the barges at Kawasaki shipyards there was a group of Jap contractors – they worked damned hard. They used to get the coal out with a big sling for a start and then when it got down into the little nooks and crannies, they would shovel it out into baskets on a stick and carry it up that way. Now and again, the boss bloke would give us a little bit of goat's cheese – he wasn't such a bad sort of a bloke.

Anyway, this day there was a difference of opinion about something – I don't know what it was about – and he was up on top of the coal pile armed with a shovel. There were about half dozen attacking him and he was laying about them with his shovel.

One bloke I swear he damned near got his head cut off. He was going alright until some bloke got a length of steel and drove it into his back like a spear and he took off – I don't know what happened – but it's an indication of a loving, caring people !

When I was in Gilgandra – I was out there for 20 years and on the edge of town there was a market garden and an orange orchard - this would have been about 1961-62. I happened to go there for something one day and I saw this bloke coming towards me and I looked at him and I thought I know this bloke – it was George Bucknell from 2/19 Battalion.

There were 2 Bucknell's in 2/19 Battalion – one was "Wild Bill" and George was his cousin. Bill was real wild fellow. Anyway, George was working the market garden and orange orchard with an elderly sister. I left there in 1965 and in the period between we had quite a few chats – he was a very quiet bloke. I happened to be down at Valentine on Lake Macquarie near Belmont – this would have been in the early 1980's, visiting Peter Hendry, who had been a doctor up on the Burma-Thai Railway (Captain Hendry).

I was visiting him there – we'd been lifelong friends and he said there's a bloke living a couple of streets away up here who was prisoner of war – his name's Bucknell. So I went up and it was George alright and we had a great old yarn. He was there with 2 of his sisters and it was pleasing to see that he was living his life out with a couple of his loved ones, I thought that was marvellous. I suppose George, if he is still alive would be over 90.

Going back to the shipyard at Kobe – a couple of funny incidents – I laugh about them now – but at the time it wasn't real funny. During the air raids when the planes were coming in there would be the long wail of the sirens and when they were headed towards our area we'd get the undulating wails, and we knew then it was time to take off.

This day they surprised us a little bit – we didn't get the second warning and of course we were all dashing up this laneway between the brick buildings of the shipyard to take cover on the outside. Tim McCoy had boiled a billy and he was running alongside Paul Muller, my Dutch Indonesian mate, and me and I heard this howl coming from Paul – Tim had tripped and splashed a bit of the hot tea fair up Paul's backside – hence the howl of pain ! Poor old Tim was so apologetic afterwards and at that time none of us thought it was funny !

The previous raids had knocked out a number of the buildings and this particular toilet was knocked out too. As it was a pit toilet, someone had put a plank along the top of it and hand rails so you could squat over the plank and hang onto the hand rails. One of the blokes was in that position and the air raid suddenly came and the planes were on us so quickly he tried to get up – tripped on his pants and fell into the pit with 4 ft of excreta in the bottom. For about a week after, no one wanted to go near him.

When we were at the camp at Kobe and anybody died there – the Japs would bring in a barrel on a couple of poles and the old Dutchman Dr Eykman, would prepare the bodies and they would be put in a barrel made of bamboo, and would be taken down

the line. Just between our railway station and Kobe was Nagata which had a crematorium. The bodies would be cremated there. I never found out what happened to the bodies after – whether they were brought back to camp or just thrown away.

Recently, I was speaking to Percy Hunt who you know went up to Korea and served with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, and he told me that on his wanderings around on leave in Tokyo he went out to the war cemeteries at Yokohama. And there, side by side were three of the boys out of his own section from the shipyard. He only remembers the name of one bloke – it was Dally Messenger.

I don't know whether Des Mulcahy ever told you about the time he was seriously ill with pneumonia and pleurisy – he had a great deal of fluid in his lungs. The old Dutch doctor got him sitting on his mat in the hut with his knees pulled up and his head down between his knees and he had a needle – I reckon the thing looked as big as a 3 inch nail. Anyway, he plunged this thing into Des' back and he withdrew the syringe and unclipped it from the needle and he squirted the fluid into a pan nearby. He did this many times and I don't know how much fluid came out – but there was hell of a lot of it.

There was a chap by the name of Arnie Small – a Sergeant in 2/19 Battalion and he had these awful pains in the gut and he couldn't work out what was wrong with him. The old Dutchman figured out there was something wrong and somehow or other he managed to get hold of some salt. He mixed up a strong solution and he got Arnie to swallow it down. It was no sooner down than Arnie started to vomit and he must have vomited up a thousand worms – there was one lump of worms that came out – about two thirds the size of a golf ball but after that he never had any pain. That old Dutch doctor - he may not have been a brilliant doctor or surgeon but he had many clues and he relieved a lot of the blokes who were in intense pain and suffering on many occasions.

The ornamental pond in the camp had an overflow pipe which drained onto the gardens outside. At night, some of the men would go down the pipe to steal the vegetables from those gardens. The worms the fellows got may have come from the gardens outside because the vegetables were unwashed and had been fertilised with human excreta from the big pits and houses around about the place. This was put into little dams on these small farms and gardens and it seemed that this was the main source of the problem with the fellows getting the worms.

The Australian officer in charge of the camp found out about this escapade of going down the pipe so to deter this dangerous practice in a round about way he mentioned to the Japs that it would be dangerous if anyone went out through there and got caught on the outside and particularly if they were stealing which was a capital offence in Japan. This would have brought repercussions on the rest of the camp if they had been caught.

I might add here that the guards at the camp were always on the inside of the fence and not on the outside.

## **REMINISCENCES**

During the winter of 1943-44, two good friends of mine went down with pneumonia and pleurisy. They were Roy Manwaring and Allan Mashman. They were in dead

man's corner in Hut 4 for about 8 months. During that time there was a small amount of Red Cross food and other items issued to us. Amongst those items were small cakes of soap, similar to that found in motels. Roy Manwaring would give me a cake of soap which I would take to the shipyards and exchange for a small item of food, such as the scones that were issued to us for lunch. There was a risk attached to this trading; however, I was not caught. I am sure that others were doing the same to help their mates. I knew Allan Mashman when I was a kid. His family and mine had settled on the land at a small place called Martinsville in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I had not seen Allan since we were children until I met him in Changi in 1942. In his later years, he retired to the Tweed Coast where we played golf together with the Veterans at Coolangatta – Tweed Golf Club and Twin Towns Golf Club.

Bluey Britton was a source of great fascination to the Japanese kids, with his red hair and beard. I do not believe that the Jap adults had seen anybody with that colour hair before.

During 1943-4 Lt Morimoto was promoted to the rank of captain which gave him command of several camps in the Osaka & Kobe areas. Another Jap, Lt Asagawa, came to the Maruyama camp and he spoke perfect English with a slight Jap accent. He said his home in Australia was at Pymble, on Sydney's north shore. He invited some of us to dinner in the camp; however that was OK until he said we had to bring our own food! Only about 20 went, and I was one of those. Lt Asagawa inquired where we came from and he knew all of the places we mentioned, including the industries located in those areas. He was quite a pleasant bloke and things were a bit easier in the camp during his stay. He brought in some orange coloured powder and gave it to us, paid for out of our **10 SEN** a day! It was orange powder, ground from orange peel. It probably had some vitamin C in it, although not enough.

An interpreter came to the camp, a dapper little bloke who was a cross between a Jap and a Cockney! It was hard to believe the accent, but it was easily understood. We christened him Alice. There was a young bloke, Jack Brebner (Dagwood) out of the 2/19<sup>th</sup> who did something to upset Alice, who then threatened to cuff Dagwood about the ears. Dagwood said *"You do, you bastard, and I'll knock you arse over head!"* Just as well Alice walked away; otherwise Dagwood might have been in a bit of strife.

When I think of the boys from the bush, I think of blokes like Jack and Charlie Fanning from Forbes – Grenfell way, and also Jack Hall from Trundle, if my memory serves me correctly. Norm Fitch and Max McCabe (a Bren gun carrier duo) and Bill Cartwright, with the great big smile – the names keep flooding back. Always great blokes to have on your side in a bit of a stoush.

The 15<sup>th</sup> August 1945 came along and the war was finally over, and those who could, slowly returned to Australia and their loved ones. I may have mentioned that I left Nagasaki on the U.S. aircraft carrier USS LUNGA POINT to Okinawa, and then on an American transport to the Philippines and from there to Sydney on HMS SPEAKER, a British aircraft carrier, arriving in Sydney on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1945. I was met there by my wife, Jean, my mother and a younger brother. My wife had her employer's car for the day and we went home to a friend's place. My personal gear had been put on a truck and taken to Ingleburn, where it was dumped on the parade ground. When I arrived there to collect it, the base "wallahs" had been through and both my packs were gone. I swore to my brother that I would kill the bastards that had stolen my gear, not that there was much of it. One pack was full of cigarettes that

I had picked up from the Yanks in the Philippines. The first hut that I searched contained my packs, but no one was present, perhaps fortunately.

So the adjustment began to a different life. I was discharged on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1946. I later did a stint with the Army School of Military Engineering and finally left the Army in December, 1947.

Thank you for the privilege of being able to contribute these stories to the Frontline Journal.

Mick Kildey

Editor's (Frontline) Note:

And our sincere and grateful thanks to you Mick for sharing your experiences with us.

The following short tribute to the ships complement of HMS "Speaker" was sent to me. I am ashamed to report that I do not remember who sent it and, accordingly, I am unable to acknowledge their kind gesture.