

**IN MEMORY OF LES KENDRICK – A BRAVE MAN
956438
148th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, 25 pounders,
Bedfordshire Yeomanry**

The respected author Michael Kendrick, the son of Les Kendrick, has given his kind permission for the Griffydam history group to publish on their website the following transcript of the diary written by his father Les after he became a Japanese Prisoner of War following the fall of Singapore on February 15th 1942. We are greatly indebted to Michael for giving his permission for this important record of his father's diary to be published. The complete story of Les's life is included in the book entitled 'Sons and Daughters' Vol 1 by Michael Kendrick which can be purchased from the Coalville Times office.

This is an amazing piece of work considering the terrible and clandestine conditions under which it was written. If Les had been caught writing this diary by the Japanese, he would have undoubtedly been beheaded. It is therefore felt that he toned down his portrayal of what happened to him and his comrades for that reason.

The book written by Samuel T Stewart entitled 'In Memory of Three Men From Griffydam & Peggs Green Who Became Japanese Prisoners Of War during The Malayan Campaign & The Fall Of Singapore' and which appears on the Griffydam history website featured Les and his wife with the three men from Griffydam and Peggs Green - Sam Dimmock, Sam Hodges and John Howkins, during a reunion.

Les was in the same regiment as John Howkins, and therefore much of what he wrote would have mirrored what John endured during his time as a POW.

I was twenty years old when my call-up papers arrived on 12th December 1939: so becoming Gunner 956438, 148th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, 25 Pounders, Bedfordshire Yeomanry.

I enlisted at Ipswich into 419 Battery (H.Q. 148 Field Regiment) and on the same day was driven to billets at the Garibaldi Hotel at Great Yarmouth. The hotel was about two hundred yards from the Britannia



Private Leslie Kendrick. 14th January, 1940. The Garibaldi Hotel. Great Yarmouth.

Pier, and sometimes we did light exercises there.

Our first route march ended round the corner of the road- in a pub- where the bombardier in charge was treated to free drinks. From then on it was chests out, stomachs in and 'swing those bloody arms!' Our military training took place at a drill hall on Southtown Road near to Gorleston. Not much spare time there. The

Garibaldi Hotel toilets were frozen solid for several days, but we enjoyed marching and singing to and from the drill hall, finding it invigorating. I was given a forty-eight hour pass for Christmas, arriving at the London Road Railway Station, Leicester, at ten-thirty on Friday night, Christmas Eve. There was no train for Coalville, no buses, and having no money I walked the fourteen miles to Coalville with valise and kitbag over

*my shoulder in snow showers. I arrived home at two-thirty on Christmas Day morning: a short-lived happiness, catching the Boxing Day train from Coalville to arrive at the Garibaldi Hotel just before midnight. We were the British Army's new generation, and I rapidly grew an inch to five feet ten, fitter, heavier, stronger, wiser but strangely oblivious to the dangers of modern warfare. I was content to drift along and enjoy the comradeship, and ignored any chance of responsibility, promotion or leadership. I obeyed orders without question and I was prepared to do my duty whatever the cost, but in my heart I did not relish the idea of dying at the age of twenty; life was too good for me to let it be finished by a bullet! I bought a little **Invicta pocket diary** and pencil for future reference; little was I to know the dreadful future experiences I was to record in it. We used to go to the 'Regal' picture-house and sometimes to a pub, but there wasn't a lot to do in Great Yarmouth off-season. There were plenty of market stalls and you could always buy a fish or pie and chips if some of your two shillings a day was left over. We always had to keep a pound in credit, so in the early days we had some deductions."*

June 1940, a move of eight miles south to Hopton-on-Sea, billeted at a pre-war holiday camp. "The camp consisted of wooden chalets and a green activity area which reached out directly above the sea cliffs: a very



Harold Weston, 1940.



Harold Weston's grave, Alexandria.

bracing spot. There was a large hall and dining area at the front of the camp. It was rumoured that the Germans might invade the East Anglia coast and so we kept a sharp lookout. We enjoyed our Sunday morning church parade, several of us making up the choir and followed with a game of darts and a drink in the Red Lion. My twenty-first birthday came and my parents bought me a lovely watch. While based there I was detailed to spend two weeks on a water purification course at Aldershot. We were then posted a few miles south to Corton-on-Sea, again a pre-war holiday camp but we did not stay very long. I was still with 419 Battery as an Observation Post Battery Surveyor."

In August 1940 the Battery moved inland to East Dereham, living under canvas, and Les was in a section responsible for upholding a roadblock on the Swaffam Road.

"Our Bell tents were small: three men per tent sleeping on palliases; we were next to a stream and at night the mosquitoes bit us to death. We manned a roadblock and had a quiet time.

It was a pretty little town and we enjoyed the local pictures and sampling the beer at a nearby pub. The Germans were stepping up their activity with the Luftwaffe often passing overhead to bomb inland.. I was sent to Swanton Morley aerodrome for a week of guard duty. Lots of bombers passed over at night and I wondered if they might bomb the aerodrome. While off duty one day an Orderly Officer arrived on his motorbike and went indoors, so I borrowed the vehicle

and rode it around the aerodrome in bottom gear: not knowing how to change it.

Then my mate decided to try, but his luck was not in and the officer caught him: seven days fatigues! On returning to East Dereham my luck was out, being charged with 'caught asleep while on guard duty'. Major Merry discharged me after hearing I had been on duty for nearly twenty-four hours and could not keep my eyes open any longer. Sadly, Major Merry was one of the first to be killed at Singapore in 1942. At Dereham, I had a good pal, Ernie Weston of 20, Ranclyffe Crescent, Braunstone, Leicester. In October we were billeted at Brook Hall in the village of Brook; commandeered by the Army, it was ten miles south of Norwich. A magnificent building with a huge staircase, and even the stable-block architecture was superb. The grounds had vast lawns and a lake, and all was set in beautiful countryside. It was a pleasant stay but my treasured twenty-first birthday present, a watch from my parents, was stolen. German bombers continued to raid; we heard that a midland city had taken a thrashing (Coventry). We had trips to Norwich most Saturdays when not on duty. I was then transferred from 419 Battery to R.H.Q. as a Regimental Surveyor: travelling to Lark Hill Barracks, Salisbury, for a six-week course on surveying, doing well in the course."

Les has kept his exercise books, beautifully neat handwriting and accurate figures. Most on the course had studied trigonometry, not Les, he picked it up and finishing first on the course.



20th August, 1940. Rear left: Micky Dew, Jimmy Porter and Les. Front left: Ernie Weston, Joe Walton, Bill Nedler.

“Food was in short supply down there and I lost some weight. In December we moved to Hawick, a large town in Dumfriesshire, Scotland. A hilly area sandwiched between the Southern Uplands and Cheviot Hills. We were billeted in a large disused mill near to the town centre, and spent a lot of time on manoeuvres, sometimes as far off as Edinburgh. The snowy mountainous roads were treacherous: one gunner was killed when a twenty-five-pounder gun overturned its towing lorry! We spent several days in fields up to our calves in snow taking rounds of angles, church spires, etc, on the theodolite. We surveyors, just eight of us, worked in the ‘Independent Order of Good Templars’, doing computations. One day we wandered into cellars and found their band instruments; you can imagine the discordant racket made.

The pubs, shops and pictures closed on Sundays, but often we were given high teas by a local middle-aged couple. We bought them a little present when we left, never forgetting how very kind they were. Returning to England in March 1941, we moved into the Infantry Barracks in Rochdale, conveniently opposite to a pub called: ‘Oddfellows’. A few yards further on was a small brick air-raid shelter: it was still there in 1960 when my work took me to Rochdale. The eight of us slept on the ground floor near to the street and the mill girls wearing clogs used to rattle the windows and shout, “wakey-wakey” when they went to work at six-thirty am! We’d put on a vest and shorts

and run through town to a lot of wolf whistling! We were asked to play Rochdale Cricket Club, and got a thrashing. We scored a dozen runs and I got four of them: hitting the bowler straight over his head; he clean bowled me next ball: out of practise!

The weather was very good and we had plenty of manoeuvres. One morning there was no one to cook breakfast and so I was given the job. Thirty hungry men tucked in to egg, bacon, sausage and fried bread. The Regimental Sergeant Major was so pleased he excused me of fatigues and guard duty for six weeks. I then had seven days leave, but on returning my kit wasn’t satisfactory and so I was put on fatigues and full duty again. Whilst in Rochdale we checked out Ack-Ack guns in Liverpool and Barrow in Furness. Liverpool had taken a pounding from the Luftwaffe. I enjoyed Rochdale, the Lancashire folk were very friendly.”

In July 1941, they were at Monmouth on the Welsh Borders, stationed at Monmouth Castle but billeted in Nissan huts in a nearby field with a small wooden bridge. Duty was mainly manoeuvres, however eyebrows were raised when tropical kit, including pith helmets was issued. The Battery was annoyed that the public houses only served them cider: the landlords keeping the beer under the counter for locals.

“One night when returning to camp over the rickety bridge I was confronted by an abusive drunkard; he sobered up after I punched him and he fell into the river. The locals were not as friendly as Lancashire folk.

We had seven days embarkation leave and I asked Betty to marry me and she agreed, but we thought it wise to let the war finish. I said goodbyes to all my relations and friends: very emotional because I sensed that a time for battle was approaching. I returned to Monmouth and had a few games of football: chosen to play left half for the Regiment. Some good lads were in our side, professionals Albert Hall of Tottenham Hotspurs, Harry Moore of Oldham, Laurie Smith and several who played for Senior League sides. Albert Hall was so impressed with my game that he couldn’t understand why I wasn’t a professional footballer. We packed up and travelled in lorry- convoy overnight to a port that featured strongly in my later life. On 30th October 1941 we climbed from our lorries at Liverpool docks and embarked on ‘H.M.S. Andes’, in



148th Field Regiment at Poona, India, January 1942. Les Kendrick is second from right on the front row.



Albert Hall, Tottenham Hotspur's famous footballer and Les Kendrick.

convoy, destination unknown. I recall that while sailing down the Mersey and leaving the sleeping, bomb-damaged port we were singing some popular songs, and one in particular struck me as ironic: 'Bluebirds over the White Cliffs of Dover'. I thought, no bluebirds or white cliffs for us this early dark, wet, cold morning, and not a soul in sight, not even a bloody crow to wave off the 18th Division. So long BLIGHTY, be seeing you! My stomach wasn't troubled by the rolling ship and to my surprise ate two helpings of my first meal in a deserted dining room: most of the lads had seasickness! Later I got involved in a game of cards (Brag) that lasted all night, and when dawn broke found myself stony-broke. I cheered myself up with a good breakfast and slept well the next. After the dangerous 'U-Boat' infested crossing of the Atlantic Ocean we arrived at Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada on 9th November 1941. We were instantly transferred to the American troopship: 'Wakefield', the renamed passenger ship: 'Manhattan'. The all American troopship convoy left and dropped anchor off Port of Spain, Trinidad, for twenty-four hours. Setting off we crossed the equator and I was issued a 'Father Neptune' certificate and endured the ceremony. Included in the convoy were: 'West Point' and 'Mount Vernon', altogether ships carrying over twenty thousand troops. As protection we had an aircraft-carrier 'Ranger', two heavy cruisers: 'Quincy' and 'Vincennes' plus eight destroyers and a tanker for fleet oil. The two cruisers were sunk on August 9th 1942 at the battle of Savo Island in the Pacific Ocean."

In early December they docked at Cape Town,

South Africa, staying for three days with shore leave for every day. Les thought it a beautiful place with the massive 'Table Top' mountain, but were ordered to keep away from Black no-go areas. He also thought the heat was intense and doing a route march in full kit didn't help. They disembarked and set a northerly course in the Pacific Ocean, coinciding with the Japanese Air Force attack on 'Pearl Harbour', and the United States of America's declaration of war on Japan, and Germany likewise on the U.S.A. The convoy arrived at Bombay, India, on the 27th December 1941, with the troops spending a very hot Christmas Day basking on the decks.

"We slept on bunk beds at the ship's stern and as I peered into the starlit skies I wondered just what the future held for us. My shoulders were painfully sunburnt, but I could not report sick otherwise I'd have been put on a charge, so I packed them with board and dressed in full kit before going ashore. We spent three weeks in India, first under canvas at Kirkee, and then onto Kitchener Barracks at Poona, near to the racecourse. We went to the pictures in Poona and had a good English breakfast at a Salvation Army centre. Japanese Forces invaded the northern part of the Malayan peninsular on 15th January 1942, and on that day we set sail for Singapore: on the southern tip. The convoy food was very good and the Yanks were a nice, friendly lot of lads, however, we did come under attack from Japanese planes, but the fleet's anti-aircraft guns drove them off. We disembarked on January 24th and I was feeling none too well with a headache and a touch of sunstroke. We climbed into lorries and set off

for Teck Hock village, being issued with rifle and bayonet: not a standard issue for artillerymen. Our troops were in full retreat what with insufficient air and ground support. Major Merry was our first loss, shot and killed by a Japanese civilian sniper from one of the buildings. He was a good and fair officer with a wife and two children.

I sensed a part of history was in the making and so started making notes in my little diary."

Kitchener Barracks, Poona, India, Late December 1941

January 30th 1942.

Guns went into action for the first time and artillery fire to mainland of Malaya was intense. I sheltered in a shallow slit trench with Lieutenant Seebohm during a Japanese air raid. He admired my speed-of-thought and said I must join him on the Stock Exchange post-war.

Japanese occupy State of Bahrū in Southern Malaya. 148 Field Regiment now stationed at Hun Yeang. Position in Singapore now very serious, moved up to front-line on the west coast after Japanese had forced a landing. Bombarded continually by enemy aircraft and artillery. In a bad spot now, no planes or tanks to support us, Japanese have both to their advantage!

February 12th to 16th 1942.

Bombarded by enemy artillery and mortars continuously during daylight, every day, and the same by enemy air bombing. Our artillery is magnificent, continually pounding away.

Our infantry is holding the front-line but time is limited without plane cover. Churchill promised us planes by February 15th, but none came. Cannot hold out much longer. Enemy bomb our ammunition supply and us. They've captured water supply for Singapore Island.

February 15th 1942, 1600 hours.

Sir Percival, Governor of the Straits surrenders unconditionally. We blow up all our guns.

We felt we could have held the Japs until supplies came, but Sir Percival surrendered on behalf of the civilian population. Thousands were killed through air raids and damage was immense, the city is in a terrible mess!

February 16th 1942, dawn.

Taken prisoner by the Japanese. Marched one mile to rendezvous. Horrible little bastards.

There was no alternative to surrendering in the situation we found ourselves in! However, the fanatical Japanese troops believe that it is a great honour to die in battle for their emperor, and that to surrender, no matter what the circumstances, is sub-human.

February 17th 1942.

Left rendezvous at 1400 hours and marched twenty miles in intense heat to Roberts Hospital (Barracks) Changi, arriving 22.30 hours. On coast, near prison. (Foot weary). Food during march limited to looted rations, mainly tinned food.

February 17th to 24th 1942.

First week as a prisoner of war. Lovely weather, swimming parades each day. Japs leave us alone. Shortage of drinking water. Fatigues in general: water carrying, barbed-wiring ourselves into camps, digging latrines, etc. Question of food, Japs say we must supply ourselves for five weeks, then they will think about giving us some! Some of the Leicestershire Regiment here, but have not seen Gerald. (Gerald Berry: a Hugglescote friend.) Prisoner tried to escape in a canoe; captured and shot by Japs. Several 'blacks' shot on beach this week.

February 14th 1942

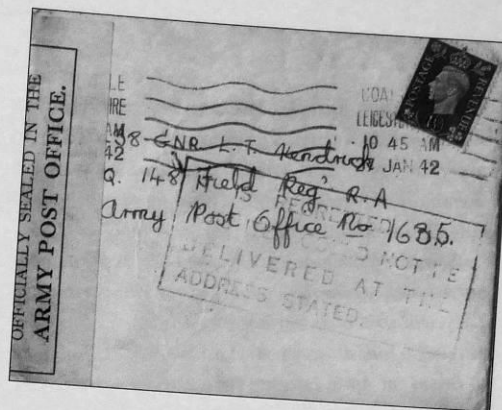
Food ration small, also water. Issue of cigarettes: five per week. Weather very nice, hot - rain occasionally. Change of billet to 400 yards nearer the coast. Swimming parades every evening. General fatigues each day as per usual.

February 25th 1942.

Parade on Changi Road for inspection by Japanese general (filmed). Gave good impression under the circumstances. Have not seen Gerald but hope to see him soon. Issue of rice and dried fish. Rice: 12 ounces per man, per day. (300 gram). No milk, little sugar or sweetener. Colonel Harris intends to start educational classes soon so that we can join in with civilisation when released from captivity. Colonel congratulates the regiment on its magnificent show on the front, very few casualties in 148 Field Regiment R.A. Indian



The last letter sent by Gunner Les Kendrick, January 1942 before his capture in February.



Betty Hatter's last letter sent to India in January 1942. It is stamped: 'It is regretted that it can no longer be delivered to the address stated.'

troops brought over from the mainland.

March 3rd to 10th 1942.

Very nice weather. Located Gerald, also several lads from Coalville in the Leicester's and East Surrey's. See Gerald regularly. Food position not bad now, rice every day is filling. Still plenty of fatigues, soon get hungry, rice seems to turn to water. Rumours galore flying around, most of them heartening, but most unlikely. Turned out for inspection: Jap Admiral.

March 9th 1942.

General move about of all troops. R.H.Q. now under canvas: 16 to a tent! Must be plenty of activity at sea with Jap planes flying out practically all afternoon. Bathing at sea stopped until further notice, hope to start again shortly and do a bit of fishing. Plenty of ants: bitten all over the place. Big number of troops now down with dysentery, caused by the water.

March 10th to 17th 1942.

New camp is all right. Weather is not too good this week, too much rain, very showery. Food is now rice, every meal, full rations of 12 ounces per man, per day. Bakery now working: regimental scones and pancakes every other day: one each per every other day. Rice stews occasionally, also plain rice with sugar. Rumours about European War all over! No one will confirm, neither Japs nor any officer. Work parties now going into Singapore. Bricklayers, plasterers, cleaning up squads, etc. Plenty of fatigues in camp: digging latrines, cook house fatigues, etc. Reveille-0800 hours. Lights-out 22.15 hours. Not allowed out

of regimental area before 16.30 hours. Have seen Gerald once here. Ill and don't feel up to walking, prefer bed, such as it is. A few cases of skin disease, many of diarrhoea and dysentery. News about us moving again shortly to a camp eight miles from Singapore. Dying for a smoke, only get ten a week issue. Very boring life. New rumours: we shall be home by July 1st and W.W.2 is definitely over. Hoping so! Sounds ridiculous to me, they must mean W.W.1. Church services every Sunday now. Bathing still banned.

March 18th to 25th 1942.

Weather very good indeed, hot and little rain. Fatigues plentiful. Sifting of rice to remove lime and poor rice quality. We tried grinding rice to produce flour and porridge, not unsuccessful but plenty of maggots in rice. No meat rations! Camp in good condition now, all bomb and shell holes filled-in, debris removed and unexploded bombs taken to a safe area. Busy engaged in laying barbed wire. Cannot visit Gerald now, not allowed outside of the divisional area. Own men patrol wire to stop men from visiting 'Wog's' (Western Oriental Gentlemen) village to buy cigarettes, etc. I tried it once, nearly caught, rather stupid of me. Inspected by Japanese High Command on March 25th 1942. Food: rice, occasional rice stew, scone odd days, not bad but insufficient to keep us really fit, need more vitamins. Church services on Sunday. We sit around and sing songs at night. Still plenty of rumours floating about. Officers read out old news to us, will not tell us the truth about the war. Issue of ten cigarettes.

March 25th to April 1st 1942.

Weather still good, hardly any rain. Storms every night over Singapore city thunder and sheet lightning. A 'humiliation parade' again. Camp inspected by own G.O.C. & Japanese officer.

Several of the lads were slapped across the face for not saluting, also some caught outside Divisional area. They will probably be shot as an example. Plenty of fatigues again all week. Rice a little better. Had issue of bread on April 1st (one slice each). Our next slice will be in 28 days time. Bathing allowed again, each unit allowed one afternoon every four weeks.

Battery fatigue party returns from Singapore, none the wealthier for their experience but believed to have had better food down there. Rumours: someone saw British, American, Russian and Jap flags flying on Government House this week (not confirmed).

March 31st 1942.

Divisional concert: a very good show by the boys. I was a bit despondent afterwards, wished I had just been to the 'Rex' at Coalville. (Picture House).

April 2nd to 9th 1942.

Rain every afternoon and sometimes during the night. Easter Sunday: went to Church Service at 11.00 hours. Thoughts very much of home this holiday. Still plenty of fatigues as per usual. Don't get much rest but days seem to fly by. Food still a bit of a problem, mess meetings each Saturday, general impression is that the officers are having the cream of the rations. I think this is feasible. Occasional rice scone and meat rice pasty, otherwise just rice with a little meat mixed in plus sugar or diluted milk. It practically all tastes like plain rice. Had tea without milk or sugar, using the latter two to experiment with our rice: not very successful. Officers pinching from us can't do anything about it unless we mutiny. On April 7th we had a G.O.C. inspection of billets—a farce! Cigarette ration still ten per week, I haven't had a smoke for four days. Issued with small portion of soap, no toothpaste, etc.

April 9th to 16th 1942.

Weather still good, occasional showers.

April 13th 1942.

Royal Artillery inspection by Corps Commander re:

general health, good impression. He congratulated us on the whole for the fine display during the action. Informed us that the Japs held much respect for the Royal Artillery, but no respect for the infantry after the show that they put up. Japs shot two men caught outside the barbed wire this week and no unit would claim them! As further punishment Japs cut down cigarettes down to five per week, and reduced food rations for four days. They tell us that the unit concerned, when found, would be severely dealt with! Jap fleet came in on holiday on April 13th am. Fourteen ships in all consisting of one battleship and several heavy and light cruisers. Some went out the following morning. Plenty of air activity.

April 14th 1942.

The 3rd Corps Commander informed us that our fighting days were not over: "We shall fight again before this war is over". Hope not! Food is same as usual. I experimented today with 'shortcake'. Oh for some good old English food again instead of rice three times a day. Still plenty of fatigues. Regimental fatigue party going into Singapore on Friday. Have not seen Gerald for over two weeks now. Don't suppose I will see him now- he's in another Division.

April 16th to 23rd 1942.

Very nice weather again, occasional rain. Food situation remains practically the same, slight decrease in rice issue, increase in sugar. Meat is better issue this week with less bone.

Fatigues as usual in the camp. Fatigue parties have been down in Singapore R.H.Q. twice in three days. I went myself on Tuesday to the docks, loading empty barrels onto Jap trucks. It was a very hot, worked very hard and lots of looting done. I did more than my share and nearly got drunk into the bargain. I managed to evade a sentry and steal into a warehouse, emptied a few bottles of beer and stole plenty of cigarettes and Capstan tobacco, also some condensed milk. Unfortunately one chap got caught and we had to hand everything back to the Japs. We were severely reprimanded by them, but it was worth it! Hope to go again by the end of the week. Nothing extraordinary happened. Canteen opened, able to buy soap, will be improved shortly. Plenty of rumours: everyone now hopes to be home by Xmas but I can't see it myself.

Plenty of cargo boats in the docks, loading up with rubber and flour or latex.

April 23rd to 30th 1942.

Went down to Singapore again on Friday 25th. I was not very successful this time. Went on a barge to Alexandra Island where we worked all day filling in bomb holes.

April 26th 1942.

Four hundred and fifty of Regiment left **Changi** at 0800 hours. We arrived at **Bukit Temah** Camp about 1800 hours. Very hot, had to march all of the way, about twenty miles in full-kit apart from that we discarded during the journey. I must have lost a stone in weight during this march. Our soles are worn through, feet blistered and sore and clothes saturated with perspiration. It is a better camp, wooden two tier huts with attap roofing. I work everyday in Singapore on jobs of all sorts, also visit coffee shops and buy bread, etc. Sleeping quarters very poor: too crowded. Much looting is done, our camp is like one huge market. Chaps come back with sacks full of tinned stuff. Parties are allowed out to buy bread, much better here. Hear Japs evacuated Sumatra and New Guinea and bombed Ceylon: unconfirmed. Much rain this week campground is sodden. Still very hot. (Les said: "Around this time the Japanese attempted to teach us their counting language to facilitate working processes; one to five phonetically was Itchy, Knee, San, and See, Go. Naturally we were not too willing to learn; hence the Japanese would get mad: Dammy-Dammy, no gud-enuh! (Damn-Damn, not good enough!). Japanese for five sounds like 'Go', and also the Japanese hand movement for beckoning was the reverse to ours. You can imagine the fun involved when the already angry Japanese guards became incensed when 'Go' was shouted only to see the P.O.W.s wander off, and when they waved to beckon us we appeared to continue to disobey them! We sometimes got a bashing for this". Japanese one to five= ichi, Ni, san, si, go).

April 28th 1942.

Emperor of Japan Tojo's birthday. No work, camp on holiday.

May 1st to 8th 1942.

Hard working week with variety of jobs like removing cement from the docks, loading up timber and iron, bricks and tiles and knocking down walls. Received first week's pay from Japs: 120 cents: 20cents per day, plus an issue of ten cigarettes. Weather good with very little rain. On most jobs we are allowed to have coffee, etc, at a nearby shop, it depends on the nature of the Jap in charge. Still much looting done, we've got tinned stuff of all varieties in 'S' section. Very nice to be able to go out and work and the Chinese are good to us, often giving us a little food. Living well down here, plenty of bread but food issue by Japs is very poor: rice, no sugar, and meat only occasionally. Issued with the Jap number 5247.

May 7th 1942.

Went to Kotah Tingi, crossed the 'causeway': partly repaired after being blown up. Travelled about thirty miles up southern Malaya and loaded twenty trucks with big timbers, an all day job. No rumours except we have sunk fifty odd Jap ships off Australia for the loss of eighteen of ours.

Have a slight cold this week. I raided a pineapple field and got a bag full, about fifty, heavy.

May 8th to 15th 1942.

General tightening up of everything this week by the Japs. New guards on the camp, stopped visits to coffee shops when we go out, so no looting coming into camp. More and heavier work. Japs getting rather hostile towards us, a few of the lads have been knocked about a bit when working. Electricity installed in camp, but complete blackout in the camp at 22.00. Blackout again in force in Singapore. Food situation: big improvement this week, meat every day (Irish stew issue), also flour and sugar again. Issue of one roll of bread each, value: 10cents. Weather good and very little rain. Three thousand more troops arrived from Changi, a Singapore Volunteer Force. Some are in the next hut to us. They are lucky, able to see their wives, parents, etc, over the barbed wire and unofficially receive money, cigarettes. From May 1st our pay was reduced to 15cents per day. Not much news, a rumour that Churchill has said the war will be over by September.

May 15th to 22nd 1942.

Weather is good again this week. No pay received as yet. Issue of food shows a big improvement, more European food coming in (does not include luxuries).

No looting this week. Basic food ration is still rice three times a day. Boiled with sugar for breakfast, boiled and dried off with vegetable stew, fried with meat stew or dried fish. Dried fish looks like hides of leather. Big parties going out each day building roads off Alexandra Road. Other jobs: knocking down blast walls, collecting bricks from brick works, also iron, cement and sand from Changi. Biggest concern was collecting wood (timber) from several mills in Singapore and Kotah Tingi. Chinese show kindness again—often giving us coffee, lemonade, cigarettes and bread when out working. We hear that Russia has attacked Japan and Chinese are advancing in Indo-China. Japs admit in Siamese Times that the Germans will show the white flag any day now. It sounds like fast progress to me!

May 22nd to 29th 1942.

Weather is good, very little rain. Japanese on ground defence exercises. Siren sounded. Work as usual, odd jobs. The main job is collecting timber from sawmills all over Singapore and depositing it at Fogden and Fraser's. Food situation quite good, more meat and greens, etc. Issue of tinned Irish stew and occasional potatoes. Received fifteen days pay. Bread very scarce now in the village. (Japs believed to be taking it away from the Chinese).

May 29th to June 5th 1942.

Weather good with a little more rain. Received another sixteen days pay, rate still fifteen cents per day. Food still quite good in comparison with Changi. Biggest concern is still collecting timber. Went to Kotah Tingi again this week. News: four Jap aircraft carriers included in seventeen vessels sunk by Yanks in naval battle. Russian front static.

June 5th to 12th 1942.

General tightening up again by the Japs this week. No bread coming into the camp. A few of the lads jumped the barbed wire to bring it in. I managed one trip, buying twenty-one loaves for a dollar. I sold them for 5cents each. It gave me one free, not worth the risk.

(Jap hit a fellow with his bayonet and broke his wrist). One Jap is taken and beaten up by the guards! New orders out instructing Japs not to hit prisoners of war (English). (Another farse).

Work as usual (none at Kotah Tingi), plenty of timber elsewhere. A few Jap nurses arrive, not for us. Rather wet this week, time for monsoon season to start? Food O.K. this week. More news: Russian front still static. Japs are no longer a naval power. No pay yet. Always perspiring: skin is never free from sweat!

June 12th to 19th 1942.

Issue of ten Woodbines per man, sold in camp at 35cents, sold outside camp at 45-50 cents. Also issue of soap. Rather a wet week again. Flour rations cut, only had one pasty in five days. Very little coming into camp from outside now. Bread very scarce.

Still plenty of work: heavy timber again, also removing cases of asbestos sheets (very heavy work this). Jap nicknamed the 'rat' annoyed one of our lads (Albert Hall, the Tottenham Hotspur's footballer) and promptly got a 'clip' under the chin, quiet for the rest of the day!

(Les: "Albert was a good chap but quick tempered. The guard was showing how capable he could be in a punch-up, and started pushing Albert around. Albert delivered an uppercut and floored him! No guards were around and the dishevelled man never reported the incident.")

Chinese are terrified of Japs. Local paper says Axis forces occupy Tobruk with 25,000 British prisoners taken and a vast booty captured. Japs on attack all over China, Bardia evacuated. British troops retreat to Egyptian frontier. Churchill flies to Washington Rumour is that Japs ask Hitler for naval assistance. We have named the ugliest Jap: 'frog face'.

June 19th 1942.

Paid: 2 dollars 25cents, so rate is still 15cents per day. Issue of ten Woodbines and a piece of soap. Weather good, occasional rain. Improvement in food issue this week. Cookhouse staff using more initiative. Shortage of bread outside camp, Japs taking nearly all of it. Japs have stopped us selling our cigarette ration outside camp. Jobs same as usual, collecting timber and iron, etc. We had some propaganda photographs taken this week. News that Axis forces

occupy Sullum and Sidi Baranni.

British and American forces amalgamate: are we now Anglo-Americans or is it just a rumour? Hope to send a postcard home soon on Jap orders.

June 26th to July 2nd 1942.

Sent card home this week. (I wonder if it will arrive.) Issue of ten cigarettes. Weather very nice again, very little rain. Had a rest from timber carrying this week, easy job on sand and gravel, etc. Received fifteen days pay less 5cents distribution to Changi Hospital sick. (Postcard never reached its destination.)

July 2nd to 9th 1942.

Weather still good, very hot after mid-day dinner. A few executions have taken place this week, several severed heads on show all over Singapore. Four huge posters under heads say they have been punished for stealing: a warning to everyone! Lots of air activity this week. Still carrying sand and gravel with one job of timber. Library is formed in camp. Food is very good this week, new cookhouse staff. Cholera reported at Singapore so we are vaccinated against it. News: Fall of Sevastopol. Axis forces within range of Alexandria, Egypt. Headlines in local newspaper say British are to blow up the Suez Canal. Looks like we are in a bad spot.

July 1st 1942.

Betty's Birthday, Friday. Happy Birthday, love!

July 9th to 16th 1942.

Weather very good, no rain. Food still all right, more used to it now. Inoculated once again against cholera. Had three days off from work this week, don't know why. Working on timber again. Lots of the lads are going back to Changi for treatment: none here. Rumours are that we are doing well everywhere, with Japs at a standstill and Axis withdrawing in Egypt.

George Craig has gone to Changi with malaria and looks very thin. No bread coming in these days, we are unable to get anything in from outside. Japs using 'Sikh' guards. Have they gone over to the enemy?

July 16th to 23rd 1942.

Lovely weather and very hot. No change in food yet. Boot and clothing situation very bad now, with boots

worn out. One of the lads in our hut was killed this week; he fell off a lorry and went under its back wheel, it was carrying seven hundred bricks. He died in hospital. Still no medical supplies, Japanese refuse our offer to buy some, they say it is an insult; evidently there must be a shortage. Work on Alexandra Road going well, several warehouses under construction. Rumour is that all officers will be going to Japan and we shall be repatriated.

My twenty-third birthday last Saturday, thoughts were very much of home. We have a few lectures now in our huts and the occasional concert.

July 24th to 31st 1942.

Weather very good, hot, but sticky. Our hut debate this week: 'Are conscientious objectors cowards or men of moral courage'? Food good again. Cricket in circulation in the camp with leagues fixed. Teams: R.A.O.C., V25 Anti-tank, 148 Field R.A., Platoons 1, 2,3,4,5. One team: platoon No5 won two games up to now, lost none. Some hard work this week unloading barges of timber, very tiring. Issued with pair of plimsolls, but still no boots. Forced to go out now as Japs only issue passes to the sick. Towel is useless, I don't know what to use. Several officers have left island; rumour is they are off to Sumatra. News not good: Germans taken Stalingrad and most of Caucasus. Burma is anti-British. Unloading crates at Singapore harbour, stung on thumb by scorpion, Chinese worker cut open flesh with knife and removed the poison. Felt much better next day. He saved my life!

August 1st to 8th 1942.

Working down the wood yard unloading barges, dangerous job and heavy work. Food quite good, we get a pasty every evening now. The stews show improvement too, not much meat of course but fresh tropical vegetables make greens and watery stew a little tastier. Barge job finished Friday. Our main job now is collecting bricks from Jurong Brick Works at **Bukit Timah**, seven hundred bricks per truck.

Jap 'girls' billeted in a big house (brothel) at Bukit Timah. We have not received pay this week, yet. Still a lot of lads returning to Changi sick, with lots of skin disease about now. Rumour: Yanks in possession of six of the Solomon Isles. 'Syonan Times' states that Japs

admit fighting there, naturally they say they are winning everything. These Jap prostitutes look really hard done by. Japs queue up for their comforts.

August 9th to 15th 1942.

Little change in climate, a bit colder with a little more rain. Still working on bricks, some 'labour' lads are building a sea wall and jetty on the west coast. Alexandra Road warehouses are near completion, twenty in all. Construction of 'monument' on Burkit Timah hill in progress. Singapore aerodrome being greatly enlarged. Had a few games of cricket this week, was very enthusiastic. News in camp: we are doing very well in the Solomons, holding own in Russia and Libya. Japs say they have sunk thirteen cruisers, nine destroyers and two transporters off the Solomon's (lies we hope)! Cigarette issue of ten Blue Bell, English brand.

August 16th to 23rd 1942.

Lots of skin disease. Treatment for sore 'balls' by using an anti-gas treatment (some good high-jumpers!) Issued of ten Blue Bell cigarettes again. Received pay on August 23rd. Still plenty of work, mostly taking cement from warehouse to Alexandra Road for sea-wall work. Allowed twenty-minute swim after work in afternoons. Sea wall nearly finished now. Sixty men a day going back to Changi with skin disease. News: Russia doing well, also China. British raid French coast, unsuccessfully. Skin disease mainly ringworm and septic sores.

August 23rd-30th 1942.

Work slack, occasional cement job, also timber, sand, and gravel. No work at Alexandra. Camp inspection by Jap Major-General Yasme. Given two days rest. Fresh job now (no trucks - shortage of petrol - good sign), straightening up timber at Fogden and Brisbane's, lousy job. We are now very good in numbering off in Japanese at roll call and on working parties, also at cursing Japs who don't know English. Mind you the Japs are terrible at arithmetic, they are really thick! News: Yanks occupy the Solomon Islands and New Guinea, Russia advancing. Britain opens up a new front in Brittany. A Chinese man is shot and killed by a Jap guard in Singapore.

August 31st to September 6th 1942.

Weather good: a little rain. I'm sick with ringworm, some bad cases in camp. Off work on Tuesday. Still working at Brisbane's timber yard, no other jobs for us. Had a few games of cricket, also boxing and rugby. Football has started in the camp. Trouble at Changi: fifteen thousand troops ordered out of camp and put in an area of ground 350 yards square.

There are no cooking or toilet facilities. Men have to sleep in relays. This was punishment because the men would not sign 'parole' as the Japs wanted. Trouble sorted after two days, our officers ordered the men to sign, as they feared an epidemic. Only news this week is that Germans have made a three-point landing in England. I don't believe it. Play darts, draughts, cards or dominoes now at nights: happier. Food as per usual: rice stew, rice with sugar and a pasty each night. No pay yet.

September 6th to 13th 1942.

No pay, still at timber yard. Ringworms, very sore in tender places but big improvement. Very little in the way of medicines. Food as per usual. Weather is good. Very few rumours.

September 14th to 21st 1942.

Reduction in rate of pay from 15cents to 10cents. No pay at all for sick. Food about same. Received pay this week. I am still ill but show improvement. Plenty of cricket matches, also darts, crib, draughts, with tournaments and inter hut matches. Whole hut is searched this week; nothing is taken away from us. Tinned food coming in again from outside. Cigarette issue only ten every five days. Five hundred men sent to work on sea wall. No news at all this week. Very little work, lads are taking up pipes from Alexandra to the R.E. depot. Several 'yasmes' (rests) these days. No pay.

September 22nd to 29th 1942.

Tons of Red Cross food and others arrived and stacked in camp. One-pound sugar already issued, also margarine, flour and tea. Still sick, I have been on yeast for two weeks. Had a touch of Dengue Fever this week. Very little work now, lads only go out about three days a week. The official 'yasme' is now a Sunday. Sikhs and Indo-Chinese troops now on guard over us, the old guards have left, probably off the

island. Lads are now 'pooling' pay to pay for the sick. Weather good.

September 30th to October 7th 1942.

Weather good, cloudy for two days and not quite as hot. Only odd jobs around. Red Cross stuff still pouring in, not much has been issued. I'm still sick but not internally. Japs have cut our rations to off balance the Red Cross food. Sods!

The Railway Job

October 8th to 15th 1942.

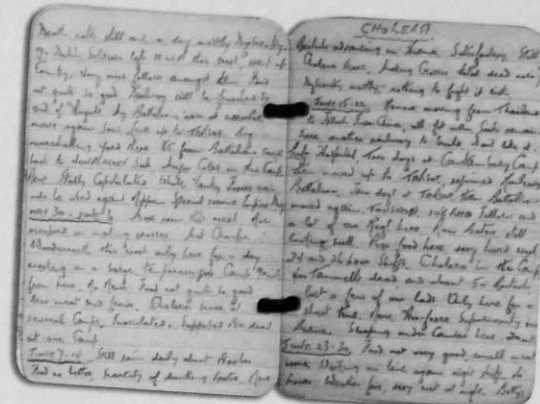
Left River Valley Camp and travelled for five days by railway in cattle trucks, arrived at **Bampong**, Thailand at 07.00 hours. The travelling was very rough: twenty-nine men per truck, very hot in trucks during day and cold at night. Covered in septic sores over my body and so left behind at reception (transit) camp with a few other lads. The rest of the lads left after three days rest for a railway job. Had to march through jungle in three days, it should have taken four-five. Men unable to complete the journey are left behind to finish somehow (unless very ill). Weather good, hot climate, we are close to the Burma border. Siamese or Thais seem to be very friendly. Fruit is cheap, if you have any money. Jap food rations none too good. Water has to be boiled before drinking. No transport (shortage of petrol). Camp in a vile state: muddy, lousy with mosquitoes, flies, and very bad sanitation. Thais very untidy race. Have eaten all Red Cross rations issued in Singapore. When will next issue be?

(Fiancée Betty Hatter joins A.T.S on 9th October and volunteers for Ack-Ack posting).

October 16th to 23rd 1942.

Left Bampong for 1st Base camp H/Q at **Non Pladuk** (two miles away). With 137 Field R.A. and on staff. Good jobs and I'm versatile. Camp has two thousand men. Camp canteen run by officers: make big profits! No pay: it has been given to the canteen to supplement rations. Weather good, cooler, but very hot here in dry season. No news at all. Camp is near to a large marshalling yard (railway). Climate dryer than Singapore so less sweating.

October 24th to 31st 1942.



Now one year since leaving England. Still at Non Pladuk, food very poor. There's neither a flour nor sugar issue, simply rice and vegetable stew plus Chinese tea. Need canteen supplements. Plenty of mosquitoes and wood bugs here—I'm bit all over. Now on the sick and working at Jap billets on easy jobs. Lads continue to arrive from Singapore, have not seen Gerald yet nor any of the Leicester's, they must be further up country. No entertainment or camp competitions. A lovely place to get 'browned off'. No news. Weather good. I squashed a bug and it smelt awful. When we see anything on us at night we simply squash it!

November 1st to 8th 1942.

Rather wet this week. Went to 1st reception (transit) camp, up country: about twenty-four miles to **Tamuang**. I was digging drains, very hot and heavy work. Men still arriving at Bampong from Singapore. The rest of 148 Field R.A. arrived and then went up country. I never saw them. Informed that four lads have died here in three weeks. In the jungle camps dysentery is very bad, averaging one death per day. In two bad days thirteen died. Japs must be trying to get rid of us. Food not good. Rice and stew three times a day.

November 9th to 16th 1942.

On the 11th we observed a two minutes silence on the 19.30 hours roll call. Bugle sounded last post and reveille. Japs also observed it! Odd jobs in the Engine Shop (shed) this week. Our own tradesmen are working in the machine room.

News: rumoured that an offensive has started in Burma with Solomon's and New Guinea in our hands; Java has been bombed. We think we were evacuated

from Singapore, but why have they taken us close to Burma? Dysentery and malaria very bad. Japs issued a few 'family' mosquito nets this week, not to me, not with my luck. Had a few carols at church.

November 17th to 26th 1942.

Very hot this week, no rain. Allied planes went over one night and bombed the aerodrome, docks and sidings at Bangkok. What an encouraging sound. Good news in the Bangkok Times: Rommel has successful withdrawal from Libya, German troops fighting heroically against Russian hoards. 'Davell' hands over French navy to Allies and we are advancing in North Africa. Had my second blanket stolen, bastard thief! Three lads have died this week. I am in hospital with malaria, not too bad. Twenty more lads have been sent further up country.

November 27th-December 4th 1942.

Weather still nice but rather cold at night. Lots of malaria cases. More British planes bomb Bangkok. Heavy work now, with hundreds of sleepers arriving by train for railway construction! Jap Ack-Ack guns passed through, en route to Bangkok.

December 5th-12th 1942.

Cooler, no rain. Food not great. In hospital again with malaria. Lads working on railway lines and sleepers, etc. Several sidelines have also been built. We have started a pig and duck farm in the camp, twenty pigs and two hundred chicks brought in. News: Churchill's given a speech saying we will soon be liberated and the Japs will feel the full brunt of British Empire!

December 13th to 20th 1942.

Weather good and no rain. Hard work this week loading up lines and sleepers for Bampong railway. Worked from 08.00 to 19.30 hours one day and given just one puffed rice biscuit.

More Ack-Ack guns and troops gone through to Bampong. News: Burma offensive has started, slowly advancing.

Christmas Day December 25th 1942.

Given day off. Camp presented with chicken, eggs, flour, sugar, salt, bananas, sauce, beef.

All comes from the Thais and we are very grateful to them! Breakfast: Rice and chicken broth. A fish

cake and sweet coffee (rice). Dinner: Rice and stew. A scrambled egg and sweet tea. Tea: meat stew and rice. Rice and diluted cream. A rice doughnut and sweet tea.

A concert at 19.30 hours. Church services at 8.30am, 9.30am and 5.30pm. Very pleasant Christmas. Received 50cents to credit from R.I.P. We sing songs till late at night.

Thoughts very much of home! News: Advanced one hundred and sixty miles into Burma now approximately one hundred and fifty miles west of Rangoon.

December 29th to January 5th 1942/3.

Weather is good and very hot, little rain. Japs celebrate New Year's Day, so given morning off, working after dinner. Thoughts very much of home on New Year's Eve. Hope to be freed this year! News good: advancing in Burma, Accuhab in our hands. Chinese troops cross border into northern Thailand. Much activity: Japs making us build machine-gun posts and dig trenches. Plenty 'Speedo': the Japs use this word a lot; it means 'quickly, get moving'! The word is usually followed by a swear word: 'Dammy-Dammy or Buggero!'

(Having no mail he didn't know that his mother had died on 2nd January 1943 aged 52 years.)

January 6th to 13th 1943.

Came across George Foster, George Jarvis, Harold, Pat and Spud, etc, at Non Pladuk and we all had a good time. Gerald is up country somewhere! Weather good. Moved to another camp this week between Non Pladuk and **Kanchanaburi**. It is No1 camp- **Tamuang** - small party of five hundred men. This is a good camp with very few flies and mosquitoes. Plenty of work to be done on the railroad, very heavy work. My job is carrying sleepers all day long from 'bogies' to laying down on the track (two men to one sleeper at present, backwards and forwards all day long!) Out from 09.00 hours to 19.00 hours with 'Tiffin' (food) on the job.

We are hoping to have a canteen in the camp as soon as we can get a contractor to bring the stuff in. News: Rangoon heavily bombed, in flames for four days.

January 14th to 1st 1943.

Very strenuous work again on sleepers with the railroad progressing at the rate of one mile per day. The sun's heat is making a mess of it; it's more like the Pacific Railway line at Great Yarmouth! Weather is good, no rain, very cold at night. Had a sore throat and lips this week. Food quite good in its way, and I got some monkey nuts, porpors and bananas whilst out on the job. Received no pay at this camp yet and very little is available in the canteen.

January 22nd to 29th 1943.

Nice weather, no rain. Doing good work on the railroad. Reached No1 (hospital) camp on the 27th January, a total distance of 50 Km for the month. Spent the 28th putting in a siding at **Bampong**. Left camp on the 29th January and moved back up to Kanchanaburi: about thirty miles north west of Bampong. It's a nice camp surrounded by hills, and warmer here at night. Very little rice. News is we are supposed to be doing well everywhere. Hope to be free soon!

January 30th to February 6th 1943.

I am working in the camp now, a good job, plenty of digging. Little solid food, but not bad. A rissole every other day. Lads started work on the railroad again, less work here. Twenty-four bogies of rails and sleepers per day instead of thirty but on schedule (ten lines and seventy-five sleepers per bogie). Lads return to work each day at about 17.00 hours. Very little in canteen. Received pay for last fifteen days: 1 dollar and 20cents for the cookhouse to help buy rations. Weather still good, no rain. News: Mandalay surrounded by British troops on west, Chinese troops on north, and fighting in Indo-China.

February 7th to 14th 1943.

Weather good and I'm working on the line again. Had a relapse of malaria. Pay has been increased to 25cents a day from 10cents. (Thais have met this increase). Food has improved with more vegetables. A cow was purchased this week for seventeen dollars from Battery funds, and four pigs were given to us. This gave us a very tasty meal for one day but we regretted it afterwards: stomach trouble.

February 15th to 22nd 1943.

We will be moving on Tuesday to a camp further up the line. Allowed to swim in the river after working on the railway line. Now doing twenty-four bogies a day with rest on Sunday.

We had another cow for dinner today (cost 10 dollars). Football matches being played at night but I do not feel well enough to play! There are plenty of Dutch and Javanese P.O.W.s working on railroad. Japs celebrate the first anniversary of the fall of Singapore. Cows around here not well fed like back home - more like spring chickens.

February 23rd to March 2nd 1943.

Travel daily over the bridge on the river **Mae Klong** that was built by our lads. ('Bridge on the River Kwai', but stands on the Klong, the two rivers converge near Kanburi).

Weather good, no rain. Not moved yet. Have completed 89km to date and it is taking us ninety minutes to get to work using the bogies. A sleeper fell on my foot, obtained an accident report so I'll get the full daily rate pay. Food is not bad and the canteen is improving. Clothing in very bad state, we will require a new issue. I have no socks, no shirts and my shorts are in rags. News: Goebbels asks British to fight against Russians. German people must work sixteen hours a day to defend Germany from Russian hordes. Rumour British subjects to leave Thailand and that the Dutch and Javanese are to finish railroad. Rangoon is surrounded. Daylight air raids on Bangkok.

(Pre-war, private contractors had been asked to construct a Burma-Siam railway through jungle and mountainous passes. They said that it would be physically impossible.)

March 3rd to 10th 1943.

Weather good and we have moved to **Bankao**: about twenty-five miles further north. Camp is situated off line and in the jungle. Good camp.

Now with about two hundred Dutch and Javanese troops (latter very clean and friendly race). Good canteen. Food not up to much: meat that arrives has gone bad and has to be thrown away. We're living on rice and weak vegetable stew. Hoping to have pictures soon. Received a long pair of green trousers, hope to get a shirt and some socks soon. Very few mosquitoes

but plenty of flies. A few edible snakes have been caught. No news. This send messages by beating drums like African tribes.

March 10th to 18th 1943.

Weather very hot: one hours rain. Had a concert this week. Meat is still arriving in bad state; why don't they send it to us alive for us to kill? Came across some 'leggy' (extras) bananas near to Bampong while we put in a siding and three points. News: big battle off Rangoon lasting four days with heavy losses on both sides. We are still advancing in Burma. Japs attempt a landing in northern Australia but repulsed with heavy losses.

March 19th to 26th 1943.

Improvement in food, we are paying 5cents a day towards 'messing'. Rail laying is finished for a bit while we build an embankment. Some of the lads have gone further up country; we are expecting some to join our battalion soon. Using river water for all purposes: dysentery being in the camp. Inoculated for plague. Weather good but too hot. Some Japs have travelled up river, probably to Burma. Roll on the end of the war, getting browned off with this life. Embankment work is so monotonous, chain gang basketwork. No news. The sun is so hot!

March 27th to April 3rd 1943.

Guards now 'bash happy'. Jap officers walk away when we get knocked about, pretend they haven't noticed. Very hot, lots of swearing. On four successive days we return to our jungle camp in dark after working all day in the rain. The camp is mud ridden, the attap roofs leak so the beds and blankets are wet through. Don't know how we will get on when the monsoons begin. Saw a few of the lads from my regiment this week, they were O.K. but browned off! Digging cuttings and building embankment because we have caught up with other gangs on the track so causing a delay. Pay arrived in camp. Food not bad, the cooks are trying and fewer men are sick, but they need money! Rumour that some of us will return to Non Pladuk. News: British Division invade Burma. A million British and Yank troops invade continent. April 1st: horrible day: saturated; I'm fed up, lots of cursing and bashings from guards.

April 4th to 11th 1943.

Rain practically every evening now. Still working on embankments, the two viaducts at **Wampo** will soon be completed. Saw several lads who were down at Non Pladuk this week. Food not bad. Mail waiting at Non Pladuk for us. No news. Received ten days pay.

April 12th to 19th 1943.

Viaducts completed and we are now on the railroad again. We work until its dark each day. The sleepers are very heavy and now it is one man per sleeper. Rains daily. We have now reached 116Km to a camp called **Tarsau**. You need nerves of steel to ride on this railroad at night; it just isn't safe in the dark. News: North African war nearly finished, many prisoners taken. German offensive repulsed.

April 20th to 27th 1943.

Weather good. I have been sent down to **Kamburi Hospital** camp with a bit of steel embedded in my right eyeball. It shot into my eye when I was hammering a spike into the rail line sleeper. Sorry to leave the lads, I have been with them for four months and they are a grand lot. Kamburi camp is all right and food quite good. I arrived here after dark with a small party. Nowhere to sleep so I got down on the floor on my groundsheet outside a hut next to a fellow with a mosquito net. I spent most of the night watching the wood bugs trailing up and down the net like an army of ants. When you squash one it smells of creosote, revolting. Big water problem here with only one well for the whole camp, and only to be used at permitted times of the day. Had a little margarine, two free duck eggs and a little more meat in the stew.

The steel was removed from my eye and after five days I was discharged to the camp working party. Met a few of the lads from the River Valley camp in Singapore. The work there is quite easy, digging circular holes for uprights for Jap H/Q hut construction.

April 28th to May 5th 1943.

A day off work for the Jap emperor's birthday. Bless him!

Received seven letters from Mam and Betty: I now feel like ten men, these are the first letters received since embarkation leave. I want to get home, no future

in this way of life. We are busy building Jap Headquarters.

May 6th to 13th 1943.

Jap H/Q nearing completion, seven huts in all. Weather good. I go down to the river for a wash after the day's work. Received ten-day's pay. Food not bad, more meat in stew. Issued with a jacket but badly in need of shorts. News: Tunisia finished, 140,000 prisoners. Turkey declares war on Germany and together with Greek and Allied forces marched into Bulgaria.

May 14th to 21st 1943.

Very heavy rain all week, camp is flooded. Jap H/Q is finished. Deaths: one a day, mainly from dysentery. A lad from my rail battalion died this week from this illness. I was caught and punished by the Japs for being out of camp, I slipped out to fill bottles with drinking water. I had to stand to attention in front of the Guard House for five hours in the raging sun (pm). A bayonet was placed against my back to ensure I did not collapse! The guards watched me all the time, laughing and chatting amongst themselves. Heaviest rainfall and blizzard on 20th. Happy birthday Mam.

May 22nd to 29th May 1943.

Weather quite good with little rain. Death rate is still one a day from dysentery. Ninety Dutch soldiers left this camp and went up country. Some very nice fellows amongst them. Food not quite so good. Railroad will be finished by the end of August. My rail battalion is now at **Wampo** and expects to move soon. Eighty-five lads from rail battalion returned to Non Pladuk with sickness. Major Coles is in this camp. Special service: Empire Day, no May pole.

May 30th to June 6th 1943.

More rain this week. I am now occupied in making crosses, digging graves and burying the dead. I take them out on a handcart covered by just a groundsheet and bury them as such in nearby **Kamburi**. One day an Indian was buried, he was 'squatted', and then covered in earth and some fruit was left on his earth mound! Needless to say the fruit did not stay there long—beat him to it! Because of the very hot climate the dead are buried almost immediately. I met Charlie

Woodiwiss this week: he was only here for the day, working on a barge. His camp is ninety miles from here. Food not quite so good with less meat and flour. Cholera scare at several camps with supposed 180 dead in one camp. Inoculated. No news.

June 7th to 14th 1943.

Rains most evenings from about 18.00 hours. Food no better, scarcity of drinking water. Still a cholera scare. Making crosses, total dead for this camp is seventy-one, most from dysentery. There is nothing to fight the illness with, the body is weak and there are no medicines to treat the disease. A lot of the lads are now just skin and bone, and most suffer from malaria.

June 15th to 22nd 1943.

Rumour that we are moving from Thailand to French Indo-China (only fit men, the sick to remain at Kamburi). Another railroad to build—I don't like it! Left the hospital camp, but remained for two days in nearby Kamburi and then taken to my rail battalion at the camp of **Tonshon**. A lot of 148 H.Q. lads here and Ron Bates looks well. Poor food and very hard work. We have twenty-four and thirty-six hour shifts!! There's cholera in the camp, about fifty of the lads here are dead and four hundred Thais dead in a nearby camp. We shall only be here for a short time before moving further up. We are sleeping under canvas—twenty men to a tent, so no room for insects. Saw Albert Hall, he is O.K. A Thai chased Albert and me with a long knife; he caught us on his banana patch.

June 23rd to 30th 1943.

Food not good and smaller meat issues. I am working on the line again: nightshift and sixteen hours at a time. The midges drive me crazy. Weather fair, very wet at night.

My job is now removing bogies off the line when emptied of rails and sleepers, and then putting them behind the full ones as they are moved ahead. One sergeant and three men handle the bogies, we are a good team! It is very heavy work but I quite like it and it keeps us out of trouble with the guards. Betty's birthday tomorrow, the 1st July. Cholera now in hand, but Indians still dying. All water is boiled and eating utensils are dipped into boiling water before use. No washing in river. No news.

July 1st to 8th 1943.

Food same. Rains all night. Working very long hours on straightening lines by levering with crowbars, but this is better than carrying sleepers. Had a touch of colic last night whilst working: severe stomach pains, vomiting, diarrhoea. I was scared, as these are early symptoms of cholera! Spent a day in camp and saw a cow being slaughtered for our meal.

It was tethered to a stake and hammered above the eyes with the blunt end of a large axe. One blow was not enough to fell it, it took six more before it was stunned and fell. I will never forget the look in the animal's eyes. Expecting to move camp shortly. Ron Bates doesn't look well. Issue of fifty-five cigarettes per man. Few tins of milk, butter, jam: went into the cookhouse and hospital. Could do with soap and toothbrush, been without for ages. No news.

July 9th to 16th 1943.

Very wet week. Working twenty-four and thirty hour shifts. Moved up to **Konyu** camp on July 15th. A poor place and very muddy. Rail battalion has evaded cholera up to now but we have several cases of dysentery since arrival. Had a relapse of malaria on 16th July, but I was sent to work again on the 18th. Sergeant Major White killed when train ran off the rails. Still the four of us on bogies, we have now laid 156 Km to **Hintok** mark. News: Sicily is now in our hands. This camp is situated on a hill, but the cookhouse is by the river. We take it in turns to collect the meals and to carry them up the seven/eight hundred feet to our camp. I was tired and after queuing for the rice, etc, and a little cake each, I slipped on the way up. Did my best to clean food, don't think lads noticed! Japs chuck explosives into the river, and lots of dead fish come to the surface for us! Dangerous bridge nearby, easy to fall when tired.

July 17th to 24th 1943.

My birthday on 18th July. Out to work again, feel a bit weak. We expect to finish the line in about a month's time. Work is held up due to track being under water in long cutting just outside of **Konyu**. Contacted Aussie from camp higher up the line, the death rate there was seventy in two months (cholera). Very wet again. Pork issued this week. Boots in a bad state: the

Jap-issue of rubber boots is no good: no support for the instep, would be flatfooted in no time. Now 12 months since Mam and Betty wrote first letter to me as a P.O.W.

July 25th to August 1st 1943.

Very wet again. Camp in hell of a condition. Three shifts are now working on the line. Hours of 06.00 to 18.00 hours very rarely kept. Line is now up to **Kinsaiyok** (172 Km). An advance party will be sent to work further up on the 28th. Food not bad. Have no boots, the souls came away in the thick mud. I'm now working barefooted, its horrible. Have sores between the toes. Cholera still around. News: Russia advance on a two thousand mile front. Roll on liberty.

August 2nd to 9th 1943.

Weather bad, very wet! Moved to a new camp: **Kinsaiyok**. Very grassy and dry at first but now very muddy after five days of continuous rain. Three of the lads died this week, one from cholera and the other two from dysentery. Still no boots. Food much better with bigger meat issue. Thousands of Tamils now working on the line, ballasting, etc. Saw some Tamils lying dead near the track by a pool of water, cholera! Rumour that a steam train has been blown up in **Kanyu**. Dead Tamils by the pool: cholera has the effect of rapidly dehydrating the body.

August 10th to 17th 1943.

Improvement in weather, much drier. Food quite good. No issue of footwear. Expect to move to another camp about thirty Km higher up. Feet a little better, less mud. *
(*He knew of W.W.I. soldiers developing gangrenous feet resulting in amputations.)

August 18th to 25th 1943.

Moved on the 17th August to **Brangkassi** (208Km from start). A bad camp, very muddy and the weather is wet, wet and more wet! Jap issue of 167 cigarettes per man (Mascot, Black Horse and Nip brands). Food good. Butter issued to cookhouse. One tin of condensed milk between four men, a bar of soap, a few pair of white plimsolls but only small sizes. Size six was the largest, I take size 8: I'll keep working bare-footed! River is close by.

Very little work done on the line. Rumour is of a twenty-eight day hold up, so preparing for long stay. News: Russians fighting on Polish border. Churchill and Roosevelt say war will soon be over.

August 26th to September 2nd 1943.

Improvement in weather, just a steady shower each evening. Food quite good. Hold up on the line again, spent six days working on a cutting, resting on the seventh! Many rumours about another 'presento' from Japs, also about moving to a permanent camp 15Km up the line. Still without footwear. No news. On September 3rd it will be four years of war, and on December 12th I will have completed four years as a soldier.

September 3rd to 10th 1943.

A little more wet weather. Ulcers on feet, legs and arms are now getting very bad. Many of lads have them, some enormous resulting in amputations with local anaesthetic only. Railroad will not be finished before October. Food O.K. More lads rejoin us from Kamburi.

September 11th to 18th 1943.

Weather worse. Plenty of 'trench foot' cases. Expect to move camp next week. Have not come across Gerald or any of the 1st Leicesters. It's deadly working in the mud on this line; hope to be out in the hills soon. Small ulcer on ankle: looking after it myself by wrapping wet cloth around it, as the cloth rots so does the ulcer, always works for me!

(23rd September 1943, Red Cross: P.O.W. Department send a letter confirming Les is alive).

September 19th to 26th 1943.

Moved to **Tamajo**: 236Kms from base. Weather very bad, wetter still. This camp in very bad condition, it is just like a paddy field of mud. Meat ration takes two days to come up from last camp, so consequently it is bad. Hold up on line due to track being unfinished four kilometres from here, so put to work 'banking,' etc.

October 3rd to 10th 1943.

'N.F.' laying the line now. Our Nip officer away for an operation on his eyes. Now engaged on ballasting and odd jobs. Supposed to be going to Non Pladuk when the line is finished, and a promise of

being fitted up with new clothing and footwear. Hear that there is some mail for us! Rumour that we will be sent to Indo-China to work on another railroad. Weather is now much better and the camp is drying out. News: Yanks are ready to launch a big offensive against the Nips as soon as the monsoons finish.

October 11th to 18th 1943.

Received three letters this week, two from Mam and one from Betty. (Heavily censored). **Railroad was finished on October 17th 1943.** It linked up with line from Burma at **Konkoita**, 262 kilometres. It took us twenty-four hours to complete the final section, and then we spent several hours lying about in the jungle while the Japs held a special celebrative ceremony! At the joining up point special 'fish plates' used we hear. Lots of high-ranking Jap officers with General giving speech, also some 'noise' from a Jap band. Weather good. All serious leg ulcers cases sent to Kamburi. Have not seen Gerald, I wonder where he is? Hope to go down country soon. (I won a race with a Nip on 'spiking' the rails to the sleepers on the last one hundred meters.)

October 19th to 26th 1943.

Weather good. I've been out surveying the bends this week, no idea where we are going next. Had no 'presentos' off the Japs as promised. More sick men sent down to Kamburi hospital camp. One lad died of dysentery this week, also the padre from disability. A steam train is now running all the way from **Bangkok** to **Moulmein** in Burma, through jungle and hilly country, a distance of about two hundred and fifty miles, not bad! (The Force Les was in constructed 160 miles of the railroad, the northern Force, mainly Australians 90 miles.) Very little food in canteen because the barges cannot get here due to the monsoon swollen river.

River here is lower. My blanket is now dry again and I'm able to wash in the river, great!

October 27th to November 4th 1943.

Still at this camp. 'N.F.s' have moved down to Tamajo. My principal job at the moment is chopping wood for the steam train. Food rations not very good, no fresh meat or vegetables for a week. Weather: just a little rain now and then. Still no boots! Battalion



The trestle bridge near Kensoyak.

only just over two hundred strong, the rest dead or at base hospital with ulcer cases. News: Philippines now in our hands. People in Singapore have been warned their city will be next war zone.

Hoping to be freed soon, our c/officer is optimistic, "Christmas" he says! I hope he is right my little book is nearly full now and pencil is nearly gone. It would be nice to have a shave and a haircut, haven't had either since I left Singapore.

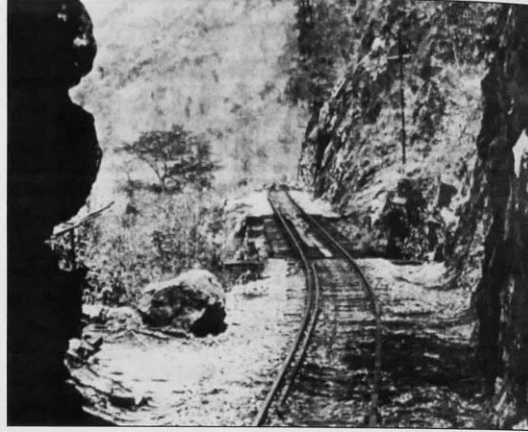
November 5th to 12th 1943.

Nothing in the canteen, not even cigarettes. Food rations poor, no meat, just a little vegetable. Work practically finished, odd jobs like carrying bamboo. I'm now working in the cookhouse, poor rations. Weather good. No pay. Worse job this week was carrying one hundredweight of rice on my shoulders for one mile without boots

November 13th-20th 1943.

No pay, no cigarettes in the canteen. 'N.F.s returned'. Boxing tournament: prizes given by Japs. Weather good. Lads past through from Nikki 281 kilometres: on their way to Singapore.

Our Colonel Harris (148 Field Regiment) was in charge. He looks well but has aged a lot. Told 3,500 men out of 7,000 died at Nikki from plague, cholera, etc, and that the survivors looked grim! Rations still poor. Latest rumour is that we are staying until



A sharp drop on the left of the photograph shows another danger during the railway construction.

January 1944. Lots of Nip troops sent up country by train every day, together with horses for cavalry or pack.

Les worked on the above trestle bridge near Kensoyak. The Japanese used green timber fastened with wooden wedges, spikes, bamboo ties and canerope. The bridge was 400 yards long by 80 feet high. The similar Hintok Bridge cost 60 men: 31 fell and 29 murdered.

November 21st to 28th 1943

Canteen goods arrive and pay. Plenty of stock but no meat or tinned pork. Nip troops still passing through each day. Still working in the cookhouse, good job. Mainly all Korean guards, the last of the Japs say they are leaving to fight in Burma. Good sign!

November 29th to December 8th 1943.

Same camp. Continue to work in the cookhouses and putting weight on. No meat yet. Feeling much fitter now. Weather good. Dutch celebrate Xmas on December 5th. Issue of thirty-one cigarettes and one biscuit bar per man (Red Cross). No cloths or boots, my feet will soon be worn out! Have contained foot ulcer, nearly better. News: Philippines and New Guinea in American hands. Nips say they will be prisoners of war themselves. I expect to be free soon!

December 7th to 14th 1943.

Moved camp at last to **Hindato**, about 40 kilometres down country. Met Gnr P. Handford, H.Q. surveyor like me, but none of Coalville lads. Dutch cookhouse, food not bad, plenty of meat: no vegetables. I am out to work again, fairly easy, cutting through the jungle to provide more spaces for huts. About three thousand



Sixty years on still the wooden sleepers remain in this section of jungle near to Hellfire Pass.

here, including Dutch. Canteen still working, we have our meals in camp, and have a slight nap after lunch. Very hot after noon.

December 15th to 22nd 1943.

British take over cookhouse and improvement in food. 148 Field Regiment lads transferred to No4 Company. 155 Regiment, and N.F.s have formed three companies of two hundred - fifty strong. Yasme (rest day) every Sunday. A holiday has been promised for Christmas Day but not for Boxing Day. Latest 'griff': free in four months. Tokyo heavily bombed. It will soon be Christmas; I'll be home for next Christmas so get some turkey in, Mam, and give the old pudding an extra stir, Dad! Now four years since being called up on December 12th 1939.

December 23rd to 30th 1943.

Nips give us Christmas Day off, but not the Sunday! Had quite a good day. Breakfast: sweet porridge, egg waffle and sweet 'rice coffee' (burnt rice). Dinner: fish, roast beef, meat pie, jam pie and sweet 'coffee'. Tea: fried rice and pie, sweet tea. Church service in camp at 11.30 hours with carol singing by choir. Still without boots, I do a lot of walking too! Thoughts very much of home again this second Christmas, especially during carol service. I re-read my letters and looked again at my old photographs. British planes passed overhead twice and machine-gunned **Konchoita**.

(The letters didn't survive but the photographs did: contained in the same small wallet.)

December 31st to January 6th 1943/44.

Issued with a shirt but no boots. Yasme (rest-half day) given on New Years Eve, and all day on New Years Day. Had a good concert put on by the lads. Football matches played, I played 45 minutes without boots! I did not realise how unfit (ill) I was, but I seem to be better than most! Sick inspected by Nips (given a glass rod injection to find out extent of dysentery in the camp. More sick evacuated, we shall be moving south soon. Had a smallpox vaccination. One dollar 'presento' from Red Cross. No air raids this week. Weather fine but too hot. I'm bamboo collecting and carrying for use as bedding in huts. The bamboo is a two-mile walk and the sun is making the ground hot - hard on the feet! Food O.K. Rate of pay reduced from 25cents to 10cents per day now the railroad is finished. Can't break the habit of mid-day nap, bugle call sets us back to work. No news.

(Les knew Captain E.W. Swanton well. He was always organising sporting activities and became quite famous after the war as a newspaper columnist, radio and T.V. cricket reporter).

January 7th to 14th 1944.

Weather good. Food not up to usual standard. Our aircraft pass over almost every other day.

Now building hospital huts for Dutch/British and a canteen for the British. Little in canteen: no money to buy anything.

January 15th to 22nd 1944.

Same camp. Weather good. No news. Work is mainly in camp, outside job is collecting bamboo. Canteen is full again and there is now a snack bar in action (useful if you have money). Commissioned Officers receive thirty dollars a month whether they work or not; other ranks get 10cents a day (if you work). There is not a lot you can buy with 10cents: two duck eggs if you are lucky! Rumour that all fit men going to Japan in March. Two air raids sounded this week. Mabel's birthday. Supply of Red Cross goods arrived, fourteen cigarettes per man.

January 23rd to 30th 1944.

Weather good. Very little work. Reconnaissance plane over in daylight, no night planes. Played the Nips at football on Yasme day. Food not good, shortage of

rice and meat. No news about evacuation of the sick. Received eight more letters: Mam⁴, Betty³, and Dad¹.

Mam's last letter said she had a quiet Christmas (1942). Does latest letter from Dad (not Mam) mean Mam has died? News: British troops advancing in Burma.

January 31st to February 6th 1944.

Down with fever: gone into hospital hut. Evacuation party of sick men passed down to Non Pladuk: took sixteen hours, conditions bad, no water, no wood for cooking fires. No news.

February 7th to 14th 1944.

Yasme on the 12th. Wrote letter home. Photographs taken of football match. (Propaganda). Managed to buy a pair of flip-flops to keep my feet off the ground at night when visiting the bogs. Not up to work, still in hospital (dysentery), having a rough time, lost a lot of weight! How much more can a mind and body take? We've had it for two years now!! Hear we are going down country and then onto Japan or Formosa. Two air raid warnings. Weather fine. Two years since capitulation and we are now only 'shadows'. Disease, starvation, slavery, isolation, cannot take much more of this!! (The pencil is getting a bit low and I'm a bit down).

February 15th to 22nd 1944.

Yasme on the 15th. Japs ordered us to put on a concert to celebrate two years of P.O.W. life. Fever epidemic getting worse. One death from spinal malaria—a fairly fit man brought back to camp in a coma from a working party. He was dead in eight hours! Was discharged from hospital on February 15th, sent to work on 16th feeling very weak. Sent a small issue of liver, tripe and black pudding from hospital (only usually given to sick that have lost a lot of weight).

February 23rd to March 1st 1944.

Weather good. Hard work this week making rat traps to keep the rats away from the sacks of rice. More cattle arrived, also boots, but none issued yet. One daylight raid by aircraft - couldn't see plane. No news about going down country. A lot of 'bashing' going on this week.

March 2nd to 9th 1944.

Still at Hindato. Move cancelled until all P.O.W.s from Burma have gone down country. Slight rain twice this week. Food very good, the beasts were suffering from foot rot and so had to be killed off. Have mail in camp but the interpreter is away. Small issue of boots per section: still have none. Have fever again and diarrhoea. Can't hold any food down.

March 10th to 17th 1944.

Our Perce's birthday. Received no pay for last period. Companies 6, 5 and a half of ours have already gone down country - Speedo move! Remainder of us are expected to go any day now. Food is good with plenty of meat. Weather good. Three air raids in locality. Working hard moving Jap stores, bamboos, logs, etc, to rail station. On night shift. Yasme on 10th.

March 18th to 25th 1944.

Moved down to an extension camp between Non Pladuk and Bampong: it took sixteen hours to get here. Weather good. Fine camp, up to now the Dutch are in charge. Food is good but rations very small. This hospital camp holds about eight thousand men. There's another small camp next to ours containing P.O.W.s to go to Japan. (They are not allowed to mix with us). They must be fit men, I wouldn't have thought there were any after the last year in the jungle!

March 26th to April 2nd 1944.

Food not bad. Work is mostly building huts and collecting bamboo from Bampong. Reshuffle of companies: all Royal Artillery going together, trying to keep British as one. Pay monthly. Rumour: become a rest camp as soon as work finished. The party for Japan has left.

April 3rd to 10th 1944.

Church service on Sunday, 10th April: Easter Sunday. I'm in hospital again, malaria. Work getting small now. Air raid this week, nothing happened here. Weather good, very hot. Food all right. Sorting us out again for Japan. Received pay up to 20th March. No griff (news).

April 11th to 18th 1944.

Still in hospital but improving. Weather good. Thai

canteen started in the camp but prices are too high for us 'working lads'. (The officers will be able to live like lords now). I am longing for some good old-fashioned food - I cannot eat much food these days.

Parties of our lads off to Saigon. Little work here and only get paid 10cents a day (when we work). Hope war will soon be over, longing for home, I will soon be twenty-five years of age (July 18th). Cannot take much more of this life, we are all looking rather grey and grim now!

April 19th to 26th 1944.

Still in hospital but I am much better. The rice ration has been cut for some reason, and the Thai canteen is the only one in operation now. I am short of cash, rather! Lads playing plenty of football as there is very little work. Working hours are: 10-1pm and 5-8pm, so quite good. Received no more letters, longing to get back to civilisation!

April 27th to May 4th 1944.

Emperor's birthday. All men Yasme. Nips hold sports-day. Also informed Queen Julianne's birthday (Dutch). I am out of hospital and feel much better. Weather good. Rice ration is still reduced. Very hot in afternoons.

May 5th to 12th 1944.

Still here! Very heavy thunderstorms one night, camp like a lake, and I am still without boots. Have to wear a boiler suit type (shirts and shorts all one piece) - nothing else to wear. Sleep on old dirty grey blanket. Still have army mess tin: looking the worse for wear, one wooden spoon made out of bamboo, a tin mug, also self made with shaped handle. Anything of value has been sold off to buy essential foods like duck eggs, bananas, brown sugar, nuts, etc. Work is in camp, making gardens. Latest rumour - Red Cross parcels in Bangkok. No news.

End of Pencil so end of Diary.

The story doesn't end there: Les survived his hellish ordeal and documented what happened after the final entry into his diary. Historians state that the experience of 'Railway of Death' veterans was in a horrific league of its own. Victims of German 'Concentration Camps'

had a dreadful time, suffering from insufficient food and dying from similar diseases, but less was demanded of them physically. Les' experience deeply scarred his outlook! For many years he wouldn't discuss his captivity, but it was sufficient to see the look of horror on faces of his generation when it was mentioned.

Readers will now appreciate that I am writing about my dear parents. I retained the use of their Christian names so as not to apply bias. Their storyline is longer, but feel that I must use the memorabilia in my possession to encapsulate what happened to the 'many', and hope that readers appreciate this. After studying books on the subject I gently encouraged father to complete his diary, which he did in March 1987. I am privileged to publish the experiences of a Far East Prisoner of War: they do not portray the full horror; by nature Les underplayed his experiences, a trait familiar to a generation of W.W.I fathers and coalminers of the 1930's Depression. For those who have seen the Fifties film: 'Bridge over the River Kwai', please remember it was graded: 'U' or suitable for family viewing. Censors would never pass a representative and realistic film, even by today's lesser standards! Father explains why he stuck to a certain formula for writing his diary: all will become clear.

Continuation

It is now nearly forty-three years on, and I can only search my memory to recall what happened during the next fifteen months of captivity, because it was August 1945 before I tasted freedom. I will keep to a similar text.

May 12th 1944.

During the past few weeks I have been confined to the hospital hut with malaria again, and like most of the lads we are in a very poor condition. To smile demands a supreme effort because we cannot continue for much longer with this way of life. How much longer can we go on? When will the war end? I cannot see any light at the end of the tunnel, will the war ever end, and what if we loose? I am several stone underweight, gaunt, grey and weak.

I look like a skeleton!

Later May. Tropical stomach worms share whatever little we eat, and nothing remains in my stomach too long what with regular attacks of

diarrhoea and dysentery. No treatment as we have few medicines, also, Doctor Dunlop says the lack of quinine for my bouts of malaria means that my spleen is greatly enlarged.

(His first two children suffered with enlarged livers and spleens in their early life.)

June 1944.

Recurrence of beriberi in my feet and ankles, they are very swollen and slow down my movements. You can get wet and dry forms of Beriberi, a serious illness. With the wet form the body retains water and can be a killer. Some more small ulcers on my legs, I'm fortunate that I seem to be able to contain them, but hundreds of lads suffer horribly with huge ulcers. The doctor's scoop out the septic with metal spoons, the pain is so bad that in some cases the lads start screaming before the doctor starts. The bone is exposed on the bad cases. Another treatment is for the lads to sit with their feet and legs in the river, whereby you can see these little fish entering into their deep ulcers and feeding on the septic and gangrene. If this doesn't work, the gangrenous limb (awful stench) has to be amputated. They use hand-saws to cut through the bone, and only local, if any anaesthetic is available, meaning many die shortly afterwards from shock! There's a lot of thieving going on in camp, and because I'm not fit enough for work I've been given a temporary job as policeman. I never caught anyone.

Still early June:

Having trouble with my chest, I'm coughing all the while: a lot of phlegm and pain! I feel a bit better now, in hospital, almost died! I was at morning roll call when I collapsed and fell flat on my back. They say I was carried on a stretcher to hospital. I've had pneumonia and was delirious for three days. When I was slipping in and out of consciousness I had some strange dreams. I dreamt a large saw was cutting me up; I was just a carcass in a butcher's shop. I suffered no pain, I watched myself being sawn away piece by piece, and not bothered.

(I think this dream illustrates the low esteem they all suffered. They were treated as fodder: the lowest of the low, and the Japanese (Koreans) had little concern as to whether they lived or died. Most P.O.W.s were at their wits end, to the point whereby they

considered death to be a welcome release. In his semi-conscious world father is considering whether to settle for the escapism of death, and so forget about his physical pain. (They can see me up, I don't care).

Another dream: It was a lovely sunny day and the camp was peaceful. The lads and the Nips were strolling about as though in an English park. I then saw my mother being pushed towards me in her wheelchair by a 'driver from our R.H.Q.' She had a nice colour to her face and she was smiling. In my dream she had come to visit me, all the way from England!

(Les suspected that his mother might be unwell or dead when a letter from his father- who rarely wrote- and didn't mention much. Les was drifting between life and death and part of his mind was focused on the quintessential English tradition of a peaceful stroll in a park. The already dead 'driver from R.H.Q.' pushing his mother towards him in the camp is unexplainable, and provides a warming reassurance.)

When I regained consciousness there was no strength left in me. I was wet through with perspiration and could not remember either eating or drinking. The flesh fell off me and I look like a skeleton. I mentioned to the orderly that something on my back was troubling me. The medical officer looked and said he had no drugs to help. My bed is simply bamboo poles tied together, and because the orderly had not turned me when I was unconscious a bedsore developed at the base of my spine (I'd had an abscess there when I was eighteen years of age). The bedsore quickly turned into an ulcer and became gangrenous. The Camp medical officer who is treating me is very kind. He can do no more than remove the gangrenous tissue and cut away the dead flesh. Very painful, I bet I'll have quite a scar, but I am still alive.

(He had a strong constitution and I believe his inner reserves helped when he was gravely ill.)

I've begun to feel better, but I'm fed up. I felt like some extra food and thought I could use the money I earned when working.

I had 2 Dollars 40cents in my army valise, and knew that boiled duck eggs, bananas, brown sugar, peanuts, etc, would build me up. But no, some bastard has stolen my money during my delirium. I am certain it is not the young Malayan lad who is in a hospital bed near me. He is in the early stages of leprosy, and

he has been very kind to me. He fetches my food from the cookhouse, does my errands and loans me his clean shirts, washes them and returns them to me, and did so until I left hospital. When the tall doctor heard that my money had been stolen he gave me 2 Dollars and arranged for me to have a better diet with the cookhouse to last a month!

(Les said the tall Australian doctor was the legendary Edward 'Weary' Dunlop, later a Knight of the Realm. People say that adversity either brings out the best or worst in people.)

I was about to leave hospital when I went down with toothache! I had to visit a Dutch dentist and that was not pleasant experience. There was no freezing, no anaesthetic, just a strong wrist and hope it came out cleanly. He decided to repair the double tooth. I had to sit for a hell of a while as he hammered away on a fine chisel (no drills available). Was I born lucky?

August/September 1944.

Feeling a bit better now and I'm part of a working party of about two hundred being sent up country again to do some jobs. The medical officer apologised and said I was not fit enough to go, but there were none fitter than those chosen! I had a cholera injection before going, a very blunt instrument! We're to be taken on the tops of ammunition trucks, which are going to Burma. Dropped off in a small camp, don't know the name, only three bamboo huts and a cookhouse. Food very poor, back to rice and vegetable stew again. We walked from the railroad track and the Japs instructed us to saw down the largest silver birch trees I've ever seen. We are now lumberjacks! The trees have to be tall enough to produce five 'meter' lengths before the outcrop of branches. We've become expert in felling the trees to a safe position, cutting away the smaller branches, then the bark to meter lengths, and tie them up to elephants which drag them to a clearing. One baby elephant took a dislike to me and chased me through the jungle for several minutes. I must look a bit of a sight with long red hair, beard and skeletal body of five feet ten! When the meter lengths of bark are in the clearing we reduce them by axes to logs of suitable size for the steam-railway engines. The above job lasted two or three weeks until it is not possible for the Japs to find a party of men fit to work. The problem was a fever and the medical

team cannot diagnose it. We all had a constant high temperature, headaches, no appetite, etc. We were ordered to leave the camp but not before we had to set fire to the huts to prevent it spreading. We were all very sick, about two hundred of us spending several hours in open topped railway trucks before reaching **Chungkai** base camp. I have just spent several days in hospital resting and recovering. One lad higher up our hut kept on hiccupping every two to three seconds, all day and all night for three days. We did not curse him, poor lad he must have been sick. We all sensed that if the hiccupping stopped he would die, and that is what happened. Weather generally good, but gradually getting a bit colder in the September evenings. Air activity stepping up and we can hear our bombers blowing up what may be sections of the railroad. Can only be a good sign. We are all fed up and look forward to going home. Who will and who won't go home?

October/December 1944.

Still at **Chungkai**. Lots of air activity, our lads must be doing their best, but just hurry up! Food is good with some meat and vegetables to go with our rice. We still have trouble with all the old problems - skin disease, internal worms, beriberi, dysentery, cholera, etc. With dry beriberi the symptoms are similar to wet beriberi, rapid dehydration, but the brain suffers the most and turns to a sawdust constituency. Death is quick! Keep on bumping into old friends from time to time, but everyone looks so ill these days! No letters. No news. We've moved south and are back at **Non Pladuk - Bampong** extension camp. This is close to where we first started to build the railroad. As before we are fairly close to a marshalling yard and in a siding near to us is a trainload of trucks filled with gasoline.

Air attacks are more frequent these days, and we hope our planes don't bomb this area. I don't think they will, as they must know we are here! *It's happened! I heard the distant drone of aircraft, very faint, but I'd heard it many times before so discounted it. But this time it was different, it got louder and louder, and so several of us went outside to look. It was at night and there was a low and quite a full moon, and we watched several aircraft seeming to encircle the moon and then turn toward us. All too soon bombs came screaming down in our direction. We ran from

the camp and into the open, no trenches, no sand bags, nothing, so where could we hide? All around were blinding flashes of light as bombs exploded and blasts of air seemed to deafen us. Debris of all kinds was tossed around, and huge streaks of flame lit the whole area as the gasoline trucks exploded. The raid probably only lasted about ten minutes but we were all badly shaken: a terrifying experience. We heard that one bomb landed in the middle of the nearby camp, slap onto a hut, and reckoned fifty lads have been killed. To survive all what we've had to contend with and now to be killed by our own side. (Published figures show that ninety-five P.O.W.s were killed and three hundred more wounded). We buried the dead the next day in one communal grave, each one being buried side by side. We're now demoralised, and whom can we turn to! Most of us are Christians but we have long since given up asking God for help. It is as though he is not listening to us. Why does he allow our young lives to be so blighted, why has he forsaken us? We used the pages from our bibles to roll up cigarettes; a cigarette does more to calm the nerves than the bible!

Christmas Day 1944.

After everything we said we had a good Christmas Day (Our third as P.O.W.s.) Yasmé all day. Church service (we praised God) and sang carols, again thinking very much of those we love back home. No idea how much longer we will be slaves or how much longer we can stay alive. So many die of various diseases: some quickly, some slowly. I'm twenty-six next July: life is passing us by! (But we are still alive and will still try to do so).

January /August 1945.

Weather good. (I will explain all about the 'variable weather' at some future date). Nothing changes we've seen it all before: the red hot sun, monsoons, clinging mud, beatings, starvation, dreadful illnesses—painful deaths, lads screaming with deep ulcerations down to the bone over a large area and waiting for the hack saw treatment, blown to pieces by our own air force! One week drifts into another and we loose track of many events. We no longer listen to any news; surely

the rumours have been just that, rumours. I have been working in camp, but our condition is now so poor that we are no longer of much use to the Japs. Our camp is well run and the food is quite good, but by no stretch is it good enough to help us put any meat on our bones, or improve our fitness - it simply keeps us alive - just! These days I'm a chronic malarial case, and about every fifth day I have to have quinine to keep my temperature down. I have become accustomed to having malaria, it no longer puts me off my food and I can still walk around with the symptoms! Still keep having attacks of dysentery, and I find it difficult to cope with this: very tiring! Whatever the work we are given it has to be done as Speedo! I must survive; nothing must stop this resolve for it could be only a short time before we are freed. Had quite a bit of rest for a few days "stick it out, mate"! I'm worried about a further build up of air raids; there is a lot of Jap troop movement and ammo on the railway. Oh no. I've been included in a party of three hundred men to go somewhere up country. I'm ill but I look physically stronger than a lot of the other lads. We were packed into an open topped ammo train, literally sitting on the stacks of ammo. Please don't bomb us! Thankfully we travelled at night, so let us hope our luck is in. After a long journey and a lot of stopping and starting we arrived in a camp somewhere on the Thailand/ Burma border.

June 1945

The work is very hard, digging tank traps in the jungle, five metres deep by ten metres wide and one hundred metres long. The weather is rotten monsoons. The food is very poor, being where we are, at the end of a chain makes delivering the food difficult! Working from sunrise to sunset in the most appalling conditions. Many of the lads are very ill, falling like flies.

This could be our last posting the way things are going. The guards indicate we will not be wanted for much longer, and pull their finger across their throats as though to say we'll have our throats cut! What can we do? We are too ill to try to escape, and if we try we will be shot! Live for the minute! Several of the lads and me just had bad beatings, they demand Speedo!

I've gone down with dysentery again. Never had it this bad before, the little flesh I've got on my bones is

falling off me! I can't eat anything and have to keep dashing to the 'bog'. I feel so very weak, we could all be getting very close to the end of our road! Horrible experience in the 'bog' which is a ten feet deep hole in the ground and slated with bamboo poles over which we squat. Oh for some toilet tissue, I detest using large leaves from the jungle if you have time. I will never forget the smell of the 'bog' out here, no words for it! We squat over a seething mass of excrement that crawls with maggots, and we squat there in a heavy cloud of flies! All our 'bogs' are like this! We tread very carefully on the bamboo platform no matter how faint we feel for to fall in would result in death (it happened).

July 1945.

Surprisingly, the guards are easing up a bit: they don't seem to beat us so often. I wonder what is happening on the world stage. Maybe room for a bit of optimism. The guards are a lot friendlier and they talk about a big bomb that was dropped on Japan, destroying a city and its entire people. It does sound as though the war will soon be over. The guards are even friendlier now, even humble and seem concerned about our welfare. I went to the 'bog' last night and it was usual to see one of the guards patrolling the camp, the fact that I didn't see one did not concern me. I returned to my bed in the sick hut and lay on my bamboo bed space next to a sergeant who had amoebic dysentery, and fell asleep.

(With Amoebic dysentery the lower bowel haemorrhages: death results if not treated.)

It was not until daybreak that I realised something was different, the Japs and guards had all gone, and we were unguarded and alone. There was no roll call, no bugle call for the workers, nothing but peace and quiet. Our officers called us together and told us that the war was over. Most men took it very calmly was it really true or just a dream, then gradually more and more cheering and the singing of patriotic songs. I was happy but in a somewhat sombre mood, the sergeant, a decent lad who had been lying alongside me had died in the night. He never saw freedom; he never knew we were so close, so close and yet so far away. It could be said his release was earlier than ours, but it reminded me of the soldiers who died a few minutes before the end of W.W.I - 10.58 hours on 11th November 1918.

It is now safe to write about the Japanese and Korean guards. It was a serious offence to keep a diary, but I thought it important enough to risk death or punishment to record some of my P.O.W. life. I purposely quoted the weather conditions and other simple details because I considered that if discovered I could point out the simplicity of my records, and so avoid death by beheading.

There were many atrocities and tortures and I hated the torture whereby a prisoner was tied to a tree with a metal bucket (with a serrated edge) hanging from his neck. The bucket was filled with water, food or earth. The weight of the bucket pained and arched the neck forwards, but to straighten it up would mean that the serration would bite deeply into one's chest. Another punishment was where we had to stand with a heavy boulder above our heads. The guards told us that we had to stay in that position until dismissed. This rarely happened and when we could no longer support the boulder we would get a beating!

Every working day resulted in a beating or bashing for someone. What was important was not to react to punishment. When punched or knocked to the ground by a rifle butt no attempt must be made to defend oneself otherwise other guards would swarm in on you. Also, when they knock you over it was vital to get up straight away; to remain on the floor would result in severe kicking until unconscious! If I had to go through it all again I would hope that all the guards were Japs, not Koreans. The latter are taller, stronger, thicker set: hurt you more!

*I would also like all the Japanese to be of equal rank because trouble from the top was always handed down, so the ordinary Jap private took most punishment, and we would receive it from them. They even clobbered us if we were married and had no children: we were no good, and they'd give us a nasty punch that usually bloodied our nose or lips. Commonplace! Two days have passed and we have left the camp and journeyed down country to **Hindato**. Planes fly over and drop parcels containing medical supplies, chocolates, cigarettes, etc. To taste chocolate and smoke an English brand of cigarette. Will we get home, meet our loved ones, and eat a good English breakfast again? I'm still suffering from dysentery. We stayed for one week and now we have reached a small camp near to **Bangkok** - the end of the line.*

WELCOME TO RANGOON ! !

At last the day has come. Three years of darkness and agony have passed, and a new dawn is here, bringing with it for all of us deliverance from danger and anxiety, and for you above all freedom after bondage, the joy of reunion after long separation.

Through these long years we have not forgotten you. You have not been at any time far from the thoughts of those even who had no personal friends or relatives among you. We of the Red Cross have tried every way of establishing contact and relieving your hardships. Some provisions have been sent, and many messages despatched; but we do not know how much has reached you, for the callous indifference of the enemy has made the task well nigh impossible.

But now that that enemy is beaten and you are free once more, we are doing all we can to give you the welcome you richly deserve and to make your homeward path a pleasant and a joyful one. If our preparations in RANGOON leave something to be desired, it is only because the end has come sooner than we dared to hope and has found us unprepared. These deficiencies will be more than made up by your welcome in India and your homeland.

On behalf of the Indian Red Cross and St. John War Organization we welcome you. May God bless you and send you home rejoicing!

G.B.G.F.O.—No 34, Army (Am. R.C.C.) 79-8-45—12700—1.

Freedom. After three and a half years, a welcome for P.O.W.s in Rangoon.

When will they do something with my raging toothache? The medical officer said I must wait until I get back to England to have it removed. Why? A Dakota took us to Rangoon. It was very moving as we passed over the jungle to look down upon our railroad. It all looked so green, so peaceful, but we knew that the only ones who knew peace were our lads laying in graveyards. We are leaving them behind, almost certainly we will never return! We had worry and drama over Rangoon as we ran into an electrical storm; the pilot lost radio contact and had to keep on circling until it was clear for him to land (with quite a bump). We landed at Rangoon University, which is used as hospital. What joy a hot bath, the soap made a superb lather. I can't believe that a towel can be so white, and how can bed cloths look so rapturous. I had forgotten just how comfortable civilised conditions are! I was able to keep a few private possessions like my diary and wallet with photographs of home, but the rest was taken from us: like saying goodbye to old friends who had served us well. The old mess tin, tin mug, bamboo spoon, ragged 'cloths', Jap happy (G string), my hat made from rice material, all dumped and due for destruction. I have had a shave, haircut and put on a clean pair of pyjamas, and slowly eaten a poached egg on toast. Life can only get better. What a horrible 'chore', I have had to give details of atrocities I have seen and put it into writing. I know it had to be done, but I really don't want to have to remember such grim brutality! Left hospital after a week, and we are now aboard a hospital ship on our way to Calcutta, India. Weather great, food

CONFIDENTIAL

INTERROGATION CERTIFICATE

Certified that: E Op/Gen. TRANS/356 (Serial No.)

No. 958438

Rank Lt. Col. KENDRICK

Name (Block Letters) Lt. Col. R.A.

Unit 1st Lt. Regt. R.A.

has been interrogated on 22nd Sept 1945 and has completed Form Q to the best of his ability.

Copies of the Interrogation Reports have been sent to E-Group SACSEA.

S. G. Neville Signature of Interrogating Officer.

20/10/45

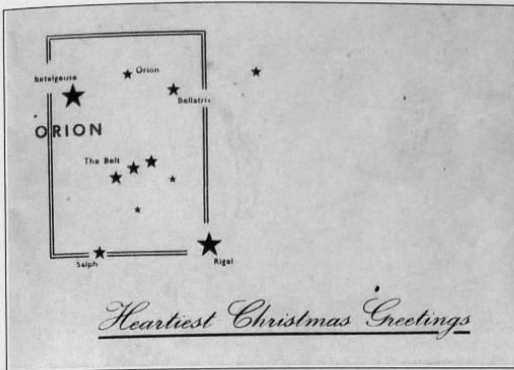
IMPORTANT. This certificate must be retained by the R.A.P.W.I. throughout his evacuation to country of domicile. Failure to produce it may result in delay in starting leave.

Prisoners of war were interrogated after their release to determine whether the enemy had committed war crimes.

marvellous. So far this rich food is not troubling me, it has many lads. Down with malaria— again. Being treated as V.I.P.s but have been ordered not to divulge information regarding atrocities other than to our own officers!

September 1945.

Arrived at Calcutta and billeted in a camp. Received fresh kit and clothing suitable for return to Britain. After three and half years what can we expect of an English climate? Some of these heavy clothes are going to take some getting used to. With back pay I have just bought some rich blue tapestry with silver treads passing through it. (Still got it). Visited 'Belvedere' in Calcutta, what a fine and beautiful building. It had been the official residence of Lieutenant Governors of Bengal from 1854 unto the time of transfer to the Imperial Capital to Delhi. It is particularly nice to see 'white' women again and clothed so neatly in their uniforms. They all look like film stars; it has been over three years since we last saw a white woman. Oh joy! a pint of beer and an English brand cigarette! Everything so refreshing and new: the taste of bread, cake, roast beef, pork, lamb with mint sauce, chipped potatoes, gravy, soup, apple pie and custard, and other luxuries that were once just the norm! To be able to clean your teeth with a brush and toothpaste, soapy water and a tap, scissors to cut your nails. A young Indian boy removed a corn from under my foot! The good old Salvation Army: help and food! To visit the cinema, to enjoy a nice cigarette before retiring to blindingly white bed linen. To wake up and realise it is not all a dream: many P.O.W.s still shattered by the shrill blast of a bugle or cornet for roll call. To see cold morning mists or monsoon rain and to know we hadn't to labour all day, or to suffer



Les Kendrick returned to Great Britain on the Orient liner 'Orion'.

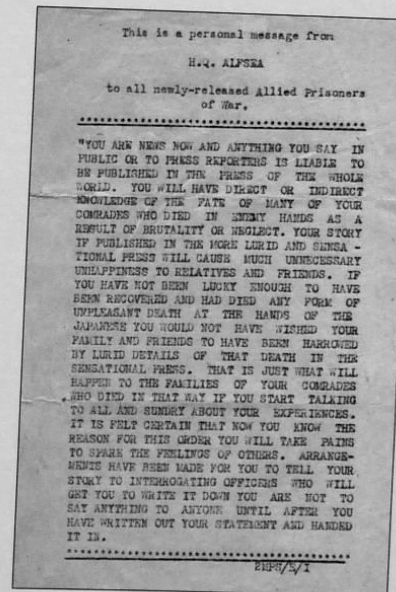
humiliation, frustration, and brutalisation by an illiterate and uncivilised gang of slant eyed little yellow bastards from the Land of the Rising Sun! Spent ages just looking at my photographs of home. Will I really be seeing everyone soon?

After a train journey from Calcutta to Bombay we have just climbed aboard the Orient liner: 'Orion'. Set off on 7th October 1945. 5,000 passengers and 150 P.O.W.s. It is a grand ship but feel off with another dose of malaria, so I'm in the hospital quarters. Feeling a bit better and what a marvellous trip: fresh sea air and not the fetid air of jungle! We pass through the Suez Canal. Captain A.C.G. Hawker claims that our 14 day 21 hours trip to U.K. has set a record time for a liner. We all thank him for getting us home so quickly.

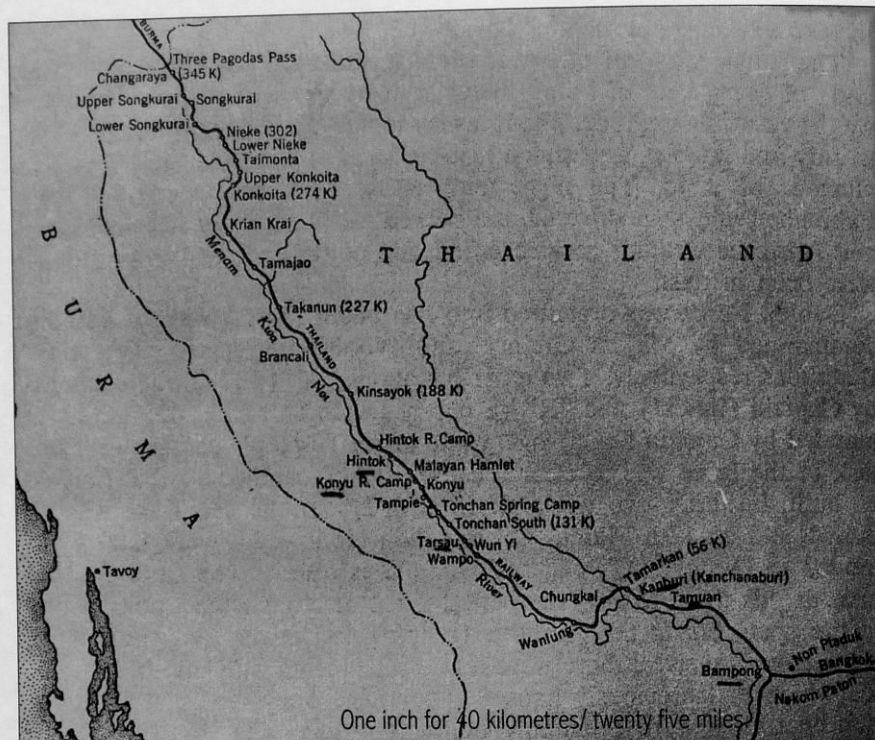
21st October 1945.

We have just docked at Southampton and it feels strange and ironic again. When we left Liverpool it was wet and cold, and here we are back again with identical weather and there's hardly a soul on the docks. I'm feeling pretty rotten and so I am among the first to be taken ashore by stretcher and placed into a waiting ambulance. Later, I could not believe how rosy our children's complexions were as they played, the blue of a policeman's uniform, young soldiers, airmen and sailors so smart, the elderly, a parson, laughter, buses and the sounds of traffic, the peeling of church bells. Oh what pleasure, narrow, winding (and well maintained lanes), green hedgerows, fields, trees, healthy looking cattle and types of birds I'd almost forgotten (not a vulture in sight!) It hit me just how much we had all been denied during our three and a half years of captivity. It was as if we had suddenly been shaken out of a coma. At Aldershot Hospital bay

(with no prying cameras) we were told to walk into hospital, no stretchers and we had to carry all of our kit. True to form the good old British Army had brought us back to life with a bump! Did we grumble? Not one bit, it was great, there was nobody here who was going to bash the living daylights out of us for no good reason! Would you believe it, I have got quite annoyed with the hospital dentist! After suffering for several weeks he 'froze' my gum and then asked me to wait outside for my turn. When he invited me into the surgery the dentist gave one hell of a pull and I was in agony for minutes, the anaesthetic had worn off: he knew I was annoyed all right! I spent one week at Aldershot Hospital for tests and made partial recovery and was allowed a small leave at home before spending another four weeks in Lincoln Hospital. What words can I find for returning home and seeing Betty and everyone else? What words can I use when I was told mother was dead or how I felt when I visited her grave! What words to use when my father has remarried and my stepmother don't want me to stay at what was once my home? Betty's Mum and Dad have said I can stay with them. It is very comfortable here in Lincoln and my ward overlooks the cathedral, a truly comforting sight, especially just before I fall asleep and when I open my eyes first thing in the morning!



Army Headquarters warn the released prisoners not to speak to the press.



The Burma/Thailand Railway.

December 1945.

I have a short leave and so today I am returning to Hugglescote and will soon be marrying Betty after a four-year engagement! We married on 15th December 1945, and spent a few days on honeymoon at Blackpool: Mrs. Cooper's Boarding House, 17-21 Blundell Street. Betty understood when I asked if we could watch Joe Davis (our World Champion) play snooker in the Tower. I returned to Lincoln Hospital and was eventually discharged in February 1946 as A1 fit. So ended my life in the British Army after six years and it was back to civilian life. There was no such thing as counselling in those days, but I did receive a year's free prescription for 'Bengers', a vitamin packed food-drink to build me up.

Hilton's Footwear re-employed our father as manager of their shop at Burton-on-Trent. After three years of living with his in-laws he placed a deposit on 38, Avebury Avenue, just outside of Leicester. By the early Fifties and with two children, Michael, born 1946 and Maureen born 1951, father was an assistant footwear-buyer, and star footballer in Hilton's side! In 1956 he achieved full buyer status at 'Littlewood's Chain Stores', in Liverpool. We lived at 100, Chesterfield Road, Great Crosby and have many memories. Pamela was born in 1958. In 1963,

continued success enabled him to gain further experience at 'Direct Fashion', a retail chain at Leeds. The family lived in semi-rural peace at 241, Tinshill Road, Cookridge: happy memories.

Throughout our childhood our beloved mother brought us up with endless love to be decent, honest and polite individuals, and it was her devotion that helped us through anxious times when father endured mental scars that originated from his days of captivity! In 1964, a return to Leicestershire, with father rejoining Hilton's (180 shops) in the hope that his experience would lead to extra rewards: he was invited onto the Board. We lived at 32, Laburnum Avenue and then 4, Mallory Close, Newbold Verdon. In 1981, father retired after a successful business career and settled down to family life. In 1986 our parents returned to their roots and bought 79, Fairfield Road, Hugglescote. For a decade they were choristers at St John Baptist Parish Church, and father a churchwarden. This is the church where father was head-choirboy and where he heard of the start of W.W.2 back on 3rd September 1939. He had a good singing voice and this he used to great affect with the Coalville Male Voice Choir. Our parents played lawn-bowls and Les had a year as President of the Coalville Club.



Close relatives to P.O.W.s had the chance to obtain the Far East magazine.

Mother and father enjoyed a tranquil lifestyle with weekly visits from their enlarged family. Father loved his gardening and his 'green-fingered touch' was so evident in an immaculately kept garden of sylvan pleasure.

Mother, always a devotee of flowers, blossoming aromas and wild birds was in her element in such delight, and dearly loves her snug home. Father was a member of the Japanese Labour Camp Survivors' Association for several years and relished in writing to and meeting old comrades, including Harold Smalley, John Howkins, Sam Dimmock and Samuel Hodges.

Mother is a patient at: 'The Meadows' nursing home at Thringstone and continues to suffer from dementia. For five or six years, until he became ill himself, father looked after mother with the most dedicated home-care possible. He passed away in the Leicester Royal Infirmary on the 5th January 2006, shortly after their Diamond Wedding Anniversary; he had been in hospital for a few months. Some readers may find it upsetting to read (I do) but father wrote a last letter for our mother. I decided to print it so that younger couples may draw inspiration from the knowledge that love grows with age.

MR. P. of W. FOR EXEMPTION LEAVE CERTIFICATE Army Form X 201A

Army No. 926492 Person Rank CWK (BY JUB)

Residence (Block Letter) A11111111

Christian Name V. A. P. A. A. (Vet)

Date of Birth 12.12.31

Date of Year advanced 2/2 APR 1946

Calling up by military service 7 Public employment in hospital

(1) Trade or profession 3RD ARTIST (AOP)

(2) Service Trade Battery Surveyor Group 4 Class 5

(3) Any other qualifications for civilian employment

Military Qualification

Signature of Soldier P. A. P. A. A. (Vet)

Signature of Officer

THE ABOVE-NAMED MAN PROCEEDED ON RELEASE LEAVE ON THE DATE SHOWN IN THE BRITISH HONORARY LEAVE CERTIFICATE.

MR. - I certify during the date of transfer to the appropriate Army Reserve (A.P. X 201B) will be issued by the Office for Issued Files.

Les's record: Exemplary; it explains that only imprisonment curtailed his army career and that a future employer should appreciate that he was a Battery Surveyor in the Royal Artillery.



The children: Maureen, Pamela and Michael, 1960.



The 1970's. Good health and long may you both be remembered.

Friday 7th December 2005 at 6.25am.

To my darling wife, Betty,

I am so sorry, my love, that I have not written to you before: it is only sixteen days to go to Christmas and six days to our Diamond Wedding Anniversary, but my chances of coming out of here: The General Hospital are hopeless. I just don't know when I shall come out again, but at least my handwriting has improved. I think of you all the time, wanting and hoping that I shall see your lovely face again. I know you will not understand much of what I am writing because of your condition, but I have always loved you my Darling and we shall be close together again in the near future.

Tell Herbert and Mary that I miss them too and all the friends we made at the 'Rowans'. I love you and miss you very much. Have a nice time at Christmas, my love, we shall be together one day: for good!

All of my love,

Les.

XXXXXXX

Post Script:

Father somehow summoned the strength for an afternoon trip from the General Hospital in Leicester to be with our mother on 15th December 2005. There was a small celebration and a congratulatory card from



Frank Jobburn with wife Mabel, sister of Les Kendrick.



Perce Kendrick and wife, Jean (Moon). Les' brother.

Queen Elizabeth. Father read out the above letter knowing that he was dying and gave his beloved a final kiss before returning to hospital. The funeral service took place at 11.00am, St. John The Baptist Church, Hugglescote, and had members of Coalville Male Voice Choir; they sang a solo chorus.

Les left daughters, Maureen (and husband, David) Jarvis and Pamela (and Michael) Gray, and grandchildren: Rebecca, Joanne, Laura and William. I married Beryl Hare and can testify for the above comments.