Australian Prisoners of War *1941–1945*

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MANCHURIA
(Manchukuo)
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Peiping
(Beijing)
KOREA
HONSHU
Tokyo
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Osaka
JAPAN
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KYUSHU
CHINA
Shanghai
INDIA
FORMOSA
(TAIWAN)
BURMA
HONG KONG
Hanoi
HAINAN I
Rangoon
THAILAND
FRENCH
INDO-CHINA
Bangkok
Manila
ANDAMAN
IS (INDIA)
PHILIPPINES
Saigon
MALAYA
Kuala Lumpur
SINGAPORE
SUMATRA
BORNEO
MOROTAI
BANKA I
CELEBES
AMBON
DUTCH NEW
GUINEA
NEW GUINEA
NEW IRELAND
Rabaul
NEW BRITAIN
BOUGAINVILLE
PAPUA
Jakarta
NETHERLANDS
EAST INDIES
LESSER SUNDA
ISLANDS
JAVA
TIMOR

Australians turn to the near north

On 16 February 1941 the Queen Mary, once one of Britain's grandest and best-known passenger liners and now a troop ship, was four days' sailing out of Fremantle. The heat of noon in the Indian Ocean was shattered when the Queen Mary gave several blasts on her siren, circled to the rear of the convoy, and at near top speed raced past the other ships. The bands of the 2/18th, 2/19th and 2/20th Battalions played on the deck of the Queen, soldiers and nurses on all the ships sang, waved, cooeed and cheered: 'It was a great sight'.[1] Even after his experiences in battle and as a prisoner on the Burma–Thailand Railway, Don Wall of the 2/20th battalion said: 'this was to be one of the most memorable events of our overseas experience'.[2] The Queen, carrying 5759 troops of the 8th Division, turned north and with one escorting cruiser ran at speed to Singapore. The other transports, crowded with Australians and New Zealanders, continued what was now a well-known route to the Middle East and war. That farewell at sea, seen by 12,000 Australians, was a significant moment in Australian history: for the first time, Australia made a substantial commitment of forces to its near north.

In August, another brigade of the 8th Division arrived in Singapore. Other units and reinforcements followed. The 2/4th Machine Gun Battalion docked at Keppel Harbour on 25 January 1942 and were fascinated by stately junks and small canoes with brown-skinned Malay boys 'shouting to us and cockily giving the V sign'; but already the gunners could see the impact of Japanese bombing on the wharves, godowns and city.[3] By the end of January there were over 17,000 Australians on the Malay peninsula and Singapore. On Java, with the arrival of men from the 7th Division, off-loaded on their return from the Middle East, there were soon to be nearly 3000 Australians. Those men of the 8th Division not in Singapore and Malaya were at three points across the north of Australia. Sparrow Force, comprising just over 1300 men, was near Koepang in Dutch Timor; Gull Force, of 1100 men, was on Ambon; and Lark Force, of just over 1400 men, was at Rabaul on New Britain in the Australian Mandated Territory of New Guinea. In Port Moresby there were another 3000 men and through the arc of New Guinea's outer islands of Bougainville, New Ireland and Manus were a few hundred men from the 1st Independent Company. Nearly all the troops

in Port Moresby were militia, and there were a few militia men in Rabaul, but the rest were Australian Imperial Force (AIF). Squadrons of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) were operating from Koepang, Laha on Ambon, Rabaul and Port Moresby. At the start of the war with Japan there had been three RAAF squadrons in Malaya and Singapore, but by January the two squadrons from Malaya were on their way to the Dutch East Indies. Included with the troops were 131 women of the Australian Army Nursing Service in Malaya and Singapore, another six in Rabaul and others in Port Moresby. They still wore the grey dress, red cape and white veil; they were yet to be issued with the jungle green slacks, shirt and slouch hat that so changed the appearance of the nurses in the tropics later in the war.

In total, there were over 27,000 Australians deployed to the north. It was, for Australians, an acceptance that their fate was to be determined in their own region. And it was, for Australians, a significant human investment—but in fact the force was small, being only about a third of what Australia had sent to north Africa and the Middle-East, and it had little support from Australian and Allied air forces and navies. While some of the men in the near north were filling out applications to get to the 'real war', the best informed of their senior commanders had few illusions. Even as the Australians went north to Rabaul in April 1941, the commander of the 2/22nd Battalion was warned that the Japanese might well attack with overwhelming strength. By mid-December the Lark Force commander was told to expect an attack in strength, and that Australia had little chance of providing re-enforcements or any means of evacuation.

Into captivity

On 7 December 1941, Australian aircrew of No. 1 Squadron RAAF, flying Hudsons, reported Japanese ships in the Gulf of Siam approaching the Malayan coast. The next day, the first day of the war with Japan, the squadron was in action and suffered its first casualties. Taking off from Kota Bharu, the Hudsons flew the short distance to bomb and strafe Japanese transports and landing barges. Flight Lieutenant JC Ramshaw and his crew of three were making their second attack of the morning when their Hudson was hit, and crashed into the sea. The observer, Flight Lieutenant DA Dowie, was the only survivor; he was plucked from the sea and became a prisoner of war.

Aircrew continued to be captured through the following weeks. Flight Lieutenant CH 'Spud' Spurgeon was in action on 8 December and saw some 'pretty damned magnificent flying'.[4] On 24 January his luck ran out. The pilot of a Hudson, he escaped Japanese fighters by disappearing into cloud, but when he emerged a Zero was waiting and the opening burst killed the wireless operator. Spurgeon was the only member of the crew to survive the attack, the forced landing on the waves and a night drifting at sea. Rescued and taken ashore by some Chinese, he was captured trying to make his way to friendly troops. The Japanese made him stand on the running board of a car, put his arms either side of the door post, tied his hands together, and with their prisoner trussed on the outside of their car, they drove him into captivity.

On a reconnaissance flight on 21 January 1942, Flight Lieutenant Bob Thompson was captain and Flight Lieutenant Paul Metzler was co-pilot of a Catalina. After sighting the Japanese fleet on its way to invade Rabaul, they shadowed it until attacked by fighters. Of the eight-man crew, one was killed in the air and two died of wounds soon after a crash landing at sea. The five survivors were picked up by a Japanese cruiser, and the doctor in the sick bay, Metzler said, was the 'soul of kindliness and courtesy', and through the next years he never met another Japanese like the good doctor.[5]

The Australian ground forces fought their first significant action against the Japanese in an ambush at Gemencheh bridge in southern Malaya on 14 January 1942. With the Japanese continuing to move quickly south, the Australians were constantly in danger of being encircled or stranded. Many survived for weeks, suffering malaria and malnutrition, as they evaded the Japanese. Several joined forces with Chinese communist guerrillas, but their death rate in the harsh jungle camps was higher than that of those who became prisoners. Three Australians survived with the guerrillas to emerge at the end of the war: Bill McCure, HR 'Bluey' Ryan and Arthur Shephard. Ken Harrison lasted over a month in the jungle before he realised that with the bullet wound in his ankle he was becoming a burden to his three companions. But his three mates decided 'one in all in'. They shook hands, staggered and crawled to a road and waited for capture. They and about 160 other Australians captured on the Malay Peninsula were imprisoned in Pudu, the civilian gaol in Kuala Lumpur, then transferred to Changi in November 1942.

Of the dispersed Australian troops, Lark Force on Rabaul was the first to be attacked on 23 January. As they could try and escape south and west along the coasts of New Britain,

the Australians did not surrender as a group but most were captured in small parties over the next weeks. With them were around 200 civilian men from the government, plantation and business communities; and seven civilian, six army and four Methodist mission nurses and one woman planter and business woman. More civilians, particularly missionaries, were gathered up by the Japanese as they occupied the other New Guinea islands, Bougainville and the north coast of mainland New Guinea. The 1st Independent Company men on New Ireland were captured but most on the other islands escaped or retreated to continue to fight as guerrillas and coastwatchers. Gull Force surrendered on Ambon on 3 February—the Japanese had not waited for the fall of Singapore but were taking key points in the islands. Singapore itself fell on 15 February, and in that greatest defeat suffered in the history of British arms, 15,000 Australians became prisoners. The Australians, then pushed back into a tight perimeter near Singapore city, remember the sudden silence when the guns ceased fire, and their own incredulity. They had fought in hope—hope that re-enforcements would arrive, and hope that in a peculiarly British way they might escape as at Gallipoli or Dunkirk, and defeat would then look like victory. On the 17th they began the march to Changi on the north-west of Singapore Island. As they topped a long, low rise, Sergeant Don Moore looked back at the apparently endless line of troops and could not understand how they had been defeated.

Most of Sparrow Force, surrounded by a vastly greater number of enemy troops, surrendered on Timor on 23 February: a few evaders, the 2/2nd Independent Company and Timorese continued guerrilla operations. After tough fighting in the battle of the Java Sea, the cruiser HMAS Perth, in company with the American cruiser Houston, attempted to leave Java by passing south of Sumatra through Sunda Strait, but ran into the Japanese invasion fleet. The Perth and Houston kept firing until they had exhausted ammunition, and both were sunk with shattering torpedo blasts. Nearly half of those on the Perth—23 officers and 329 ratings—were thought to have been killed in action or drowned, and 320 were captured by the Japanese. When the Australians on Java surrendered on 12 March, the succession of disasters that followed the Japanese southward advance had ended.

In less than two months over 22,000 Australians had been captured. Of the men deployed to the north, only those in Port Moresby, a few in the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles on mainland New Guinea who withdrew towards Wau, coastwatchers, guerrilla forces on Bougainville and Timor, some RAAF personnel ordered out just ahead of the ground

fighting and a few evaders and escapers (including General Gordon Bennett of the 8th Division) were still free. With the Australians captured in north Africa, Greece and Crete in 1941, over 30,000 Australians were prisoners of war. Nothing had prepared either the servicemen or the public for the disaster. In the First World War just over 4000 Australians had been taken prisoner and many had suffered extreme deprivation and 10 per cent had died after capture (often because they had been severely wounded in battle), but those casualties were so overwhelmed by the fact that more than 60,000 had died in battle that the prisoners of war were given slight notice in official and unofficial histories. The prisoners of the Japanese were to say that they had thought about death and wounds, and they had worried about whether they would be able to uphold the traditions established by the diggers in the Great War; but that they would, so early in the conflict, be prisoners of war had not occurred to them. Relief that they had survived their first battles was tinged by the humiliation of defeat, regret that they could no longer defend their homeland when it was under threat, and some apprehension about how they might be received at the end of the war. On 15 February Frank Christie of the 4th Anti-Tank wrote in his diary 'all over' and then added in capitals 'SURRENDER, CAPITULATE … a terrible show'. Included in his next entry covering the first two days of captivity was the admission: 'all rooted slept where we could'.[6]

Australians continued to be captured, but in small numbers. When the Australians were being pushed back on Kokoda a number of men, including Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Key, commander of the 2/14 Battalion, were captured. None survived. Similarly at Milne Bay, the Japanese killed the few men captured. Later in the war, some coastwatchers were captured, but only John Murphy, after extreme deprivation, survived in Rabaul. Aircrew remained at risk throughout the war. The case of Flight Lieutenant William 'Bill' Newton brought the vulnerability of captured aircrew to notice. Shot down in a raid over Salamaua on 18 March 1943, Newton and one of his crew, John Lyon, swam ashore from their sinking Boston, were captured, shifted to Lae and there executed. Newton was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for his 'great courage' and 'iron determination' in pressing home raids against intense fire, and later the advancing Australians picked up a diary with a vivid and disturbing account of his execution with a 'sweep' of the sword. But other airmen, such as Harvey Besley (captured in April 1944) and Lionel Hudson (captured in December 1944) both survived their time in Rangoon gaol in Burma. Besley said he looked forward to

being questioned. In spite of the bashings, it broke the boredom of his month of solitary confinement.[7] Pilot Officer Maxwell Gilbert, flying out of Tarakan on 7 July 1945, baled out of his Kittyhawk, was captured, and is thought to have died on 24 July, aged twenty, just three weeks before the end of the war. Some forty-eight members of the air force were executed while prisoners. If some of those who were known to be prisoners but who died in suspicious circumstances are added, then nearly half of the RAAF prisoners of the Japanese died by execution.

On 22 January 1943, the coastal supply ship Patricia Cam was travelling between Elcho Island and a coastwatching station in the Wessel Islands off the north-east of Arnhem Land. A Japanese float-plane strafed and bombed the Patricia Cam, sinking it. One crew member died immediately. The float-plane landed, picked up the Reverend Len Kentish of the Methodist Mission, left the rest of the crew in the water, and flew off. Two more of the crew failed to reach shore. On Dobo Island, just across the Arafura Sea in the Netherlands East Indies, Kentish was interrogated, tortured and executed by sword. The Reverend Kentish was captured in Australian waters; he was a civilian, and he was the victim of random, misdirected brutality.

From soldier to prisoner

Many of the newly captured prisoners of war resented the fact that they had volunteered in mid 1940, trained for well over a year, and had had slight chance to demonstrate what they could do as soldiers. On New Britain and Ambon, the fighting had been brief and the troops had suffered few battle casualties. The last units and re-enforcements to arrive on Singapore had gone into a battle already lost. On Timor, although the fighting had been brief, the Australians had fought well in the initial engagement before meeting an overwhelming force. But the Perth had already fought a long war, and some of the units engaged on the Malay Peninsula and on Singapore had borne the brunt of the Japanese attack. The 2/18th Battalion suffered over 240 battle deaths and the 2/19th 275, comparable to the losses of those battalions that fought through the north Africa, Greece, Crete and New Guinea campaigns. In the fighting in Malaya and Singapore, the Australians had suffered a total of 1789 killed, one of bloodiest campaigns fought by Australians in the

Second World War. But all the prisoners of war were to find that their experiences as prisoners overwhelmed all that had gone before. After the war, they were to struggle to establish that they were ex-soldiers as well as ex-prisoners.

The Australians were uncertain how they would be treated as prisoners. When David Selby on the east coast of New Britain appealed to some of his men to keep travelling ahead of the Japanese, only three agreed: most chose surrender, believing that gave them a better chance of survival and getting word of their fate to relatives.[8] Many knew of the brutal treatment of the Chinese in the Nanking massacre, and a few had heard of the killing of British men and women in Hong Kong in December 1941, but many were hopeful that the Japanese would feel bound by international law. The Japanese had said that while they had not ratified the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners of war, they would respect its authority. The Australians were quickly disabused. On the Malay Peninsula, about forty Indian and 110 Australian wounded were bayoneted and their bodies burnt. Ben Hackey, who survived, was in Pudu gaol by 20 March 1942. At the Alexandra military hospital on the eve of the surrender on Singapore, the Japanese killed over 150 Allied soldiers. Of the force of 309 Australians who defended Laha airfield on Ambon, all died in battle or in the executions that took place a week later. At Tol plantation on New Britain, the Japanese gathered about 160 surrendered men, bound their hands, led them into the bush and killed them. Within days the men imprisoned in Rabaul knew what had happened at Tol.

Fearful of what would happen to the nurses in the event of surrender, senior medical officers on Singapore got half away on the Empire Star, and although they were bombed heavily no nurses were injured. On 12 February 1942 the last sixty-five nurses went on board the Vyner Brooke. Singapore Harbour was already full of smoke and everywhere showing the signs of shelling and bombing. Caught in the open sea on 14 February by Japanese aircraft, the Vyner Brooke was soon sinking. Twelve nurses died in the attack or were drowned. All the surviving nurses spent a long time in the water before struggling ashore on Banka Island, off the east Sumatra coast, two spending seventy-two hours at sea. On a beach on north Banka the Japanese separated the men who came ashore there, marched them around a headland, then killed them. On their return, the Japanese ordered twenty-two nurses to walk into the sea and opened fire on them. All were killed except Sister Vivian Bullwinkel, who was knocked down by a bullet that passed through her. She lay

semi-conscious in the shallow water, and when she recovered all the Japanese had gone. Picked up nearly a fortnight later by other Japanese, she was imprisoned in Muntok where she 'howled happily' when she met another thirty-one of the nurses who had landed at other points on the Banka coast.

By the strange ways that news moved among prisoners, men captured on Sumatra and shifted to Changi brought news of the nurses. Gunner Frank Christie, then on a work party in Singapore, wrote in his diary on 22 July that twenty-one nurses had been driven into the sea and shot and thirty were either in 'brothel or solitary confinement'. He was right about the first, and the nurses were certainly under threat of the second, but evaded that fate.

Shocking atrocities

While most armies in the fury of battle or its immediate aftermath are likely to kill prisoners, the Japanese had killed prisoners in many places, often several days to a fortnight after battle, and sometimes the executioners were not troops that had been in the immediate fighting. Over 500 Australians were killed within a fortnight of capture. All prisoners then knew that as individuals their lives were of little value to their captives, and there was no obvious safety in numbers. Australians at home were less aware of the risk faced by the prisoners until April, when they read the first newspaper accounts of the Tol massacre: 'SHOCKING ATROCITIES BY JAPS'. The first of the men escaping from New Britain were interviewed in Port Moresby, and within a few days the scarred survivors were in Australia being photographed and interviewed: Driver Wilkie Collins told how he had 'seen his mates bayoneted before his eyes', and how some had not been killed outright and the Japanese had to go back into the jungle and 'finish off the wounded with rifle fire'.[9] Relatives, anxious for news, cut out the report and pasted it in scrapbooks or filed it with last letters received. But the sense of alarm had increased, because news of the Tol massacre was public before next of kin had been officially informed that a relative had been taken prisoner. In July, Mollie Nottage was told that her husband, Captain Stewart Nottage, 'must now be posted missing'. It was unhelpful—Mrs Nottage knew that her husband had been 'missing' since January—but it was all that officials could tell her. Even by February 1943 the Red Cross had official and unofficial information of only 7021 Australian prisoners of the Japanese, less than one third of the total.

Because of the ways divisions were put together, the impact of the early 1942 defeats were felt across Australia. The 2/40th Battalion captured on Timor were Tasmanians; the 2/21st on Ambon were Victorians; the 2/4th Machine Gun Battalion that arrived in Singapore in January were Western Australians; the 2/18th and 2/19th Battalions were from New South Wales, many of the 2/18th from the north and many of the 2/19th from the Riverina; the 2/26th Battalion, another unit captured on Singapore, was from Queensland; and the 2/3rd Machine Gunners, who fought in Syria and surrendered on Java, had been formed and did much of their training in South Australia, but included companies from Western Australia, Tasmania and Victoria. The imprisonment of more than 22,000 from a population of 7 million meant that nearly one in 300 Australians was missing. In a small town of 1000 where every one knew everybody, three or four were prisoners of war. Towns such as Yass in New South Wales or Beechworth in Victoria with populations of 3000 could expect to have ten missing, and Rockhampton, with 30,000 people, might have 100 young citizens in the hands of the Japanese.

Changi

Changi, on the north-east of Singapore Island, was the largest prisoner of war camp. The pre-war British regiments had lived in its multi-storied quarters, and now most Australians were crammed into Selarang Barracks. It was soon apparent that the Japanese, overwhelmed by the numbers of prisoners, committed to other operations, and being largely indifferent to the welfare off those who had surrendered, were not going to do much for their captives. If the sick and wounded were going to be looked after, then the prisoners themselves would have to supply virtually all medical equipment, medicines and expertise. Immediately, critical decisions had to be made. If they were going to ration their medicines then how long should they assume they were going to be prisoners? One of the senior doctors, Glyn White, was indifferent to the cheerful cries, 'Home for Christmas', and started planning on husbanding scarce resources over four years. For a decision based largely on a guess, it was both accurate and prudent. The prisoners themselves had to clear the area of mosquitoes and flies. They walked round and round, pushing the handles on the augurs to dig the deep bore holes that became the latrines. And a 'bore-hole' became the Changi term for rumour—doubtful news said to have come from talk overheard at the latrines. The prisoners even had to build the

barbed wire fences that enclosed them, using the wire that should have been coiled on the beaches where the Japanese had landed.

Although the prisoners had taken some rations into Changi with them, they were soon dependent on rice for the bulk of their food. But Australians of the 1940s knew rice more as a dessert, as rice pudding, than as a staple food, and at first the army cooks turned out a glutinous sludge. It was weeks before they could mass produce the white fluffy rice that was both edible and providing maximum benefit. Then it became a matter of obtaining the necessary vegetables and meat to add to the rice. Soon Changi had extensive gardens and a poultry farm, but much of the produce went to the hospital. Additives, such as cooking oil, sugar (or gula malacca), chillies and salt, which in small amounts could change the flavour and nutritional value of rice, became important. To get wood for cooking fires and sea water from which to extract salt the men pulled trailers, often trucks from which the engines had been removed. Forming 'trailer parties', the teams that hauled on the ropes to tow the trucks, became a common task.

In the early days of imprisonment many men turned the humiliation of defeat into anger, and some directed that anger at higher command for its bungling. Inevitably, in their first battles, some officers had not performed well, and the 8th Division had little chance to transfer those who had failed or promote those who had excelled. When the Australians marched into Changi, some men thought all were then equal, and army privileges of rank and the reasons for army discipline had ended; they were not going to take being ordered around in a system that had failed them, and especially not by officers who had been conspicuous on the parade ground and invisible in battle. While in most units cohesion and an orderly command structure was re-established, there continued to be some tension between officers and men. In Changi there were too many officers with limited roles; officers received small payments from the Japanese, but in conformity with international convention these were higher than those paid to the men; the officers ate in separate messes and men suffering malnutrition could easily believe that the officers were eating better; and officers, unlike other ranks, could not be compelled to work for the Japanese. But by the time the men from Pudu arrived in Changi, they found 'our army had succeeded in establishing something very close to pre-war discipline and procedure'.[10] It was to the credit of the training of the units and the good sense of men and officers that Australian

units generally retained their discipline and cohesion through the tough years of imprisonment.

Within Changi, men could go for days without seeing a Japanese. Lieutenant-Colonel FG 'Black Jack' Galleghan even drilled his 2/30th Battalion in the hope that they would be ready to assist the returning Allies and to instil in them that were still soldiers. But other formal and informal pursuits helped the men combat one enemy of all prisoners—time. 'Changi University' enrolled thousands in its most popular courses of agriculture, teaching and business principles. At the other end of the educational scale over 400 illiterate men began their schooling. The Changi library had more than 20,000 volumes and over 3000 men would listen to George McNeilly, previously a professional singer, introduce and then play records from the donated and 'scrounged' Changi collection. The concert party put on variety acts, plays and musicals of high quality, and with so many men to call upon it was possible to arrange talks on everything from polar exploration to tram driving. Ken Harrison said that:

> … smaller groups met on the grassy slopes under the casuarina trees. By going from tree to tree, one could take a stormy passage down the Channel with the Yatchmen's Club, take a leisurely tour through the waterways of France with the Travel boys, or find oneself caught in a blizzard in the Alps with the Mountain Climbing group.[11]

Through all their time in Changi, the Australians had a wireless receiver. The most famous wireless was built into the head of a broom, but in spite of Japanese searches, other receivers and spare parts were kept so that all the major groups of Australians leaving Changi had a wireless. The Australians also built a transmitter, held for an emergency, although it was used briefly to report the movement of a Japanese convoy. Guarded news bulletins, at first written and then spread by word of mouth, were circulated, and many prisoners' diaries refer to major international events, such as the battle of the Coral Sea or the defeat of Germany.

In the early months of imprisonment sporting teams representing units and nations played on Changi padangs. Frank Christie noted in his diary on 26 April a 'test' match: 'we play English, win, Chums 125 we 7-184, Barnett 58'. Ben Barnett, a wicket keeper, had toured England with Australian sides in 1934 and 1938. The Australian Rules football matches may have been the first contested in Singapore.

Soon shortage of food and an ill-balanced diet led to the abandonment of most active sports. Men who stood up quickly 'blacked out', their eye-sight deteriorated, rashes flourished—'Changi balls'—, and men developed a tingling in their feet—'happy feet'—that prevented sleep, and forced them into aimless night-time wandering.

The 'Selarang Barracks incident' was a more dramatic disruption to life in Changi. When the prisoners refused to sign a sworn statement saying that they would not escape, the Japanese crowded over 15,000 British and Australian troops into the Selarang Barracks Square. At the same time they executed by firing squad in the presence of their commanding officers four prisoners who had tried to escape. Two were Australians, Corporal RE Breavington and Private VL Gale. With that grim warning, on reduced rations and with water scarce, the prisoners struggled to make the best of their conditions. At night, the Australian concert party put on a show, and under the watch of Japanese machine-gunners and before a vast crowd, gave one of their best performances. Fearful that disease might break out, the senior officers decided that all should sign. Many wrote false names, a surprising number of Australians being called 'Ned Kelly'. After three days, the men were back to their old quarters. Changi continued as a prison of confinement, deprivation and severe malnutrition, but it was never a camp of brutality or frequent deaths. Because of the fluctuating numbers in Changi—from a total of 45,000 Allied prisoners to 5359—it is difficult to work out the exact death rate. Many of the deaths occurred because of events elsewhere; men died because they had been wounded in the fighting on the Malayan Peninsula and Singapore Island, or they returned debilitated from harsh labour camps. The death rate among Australians in Changi was certainly under 10 per cent, less than the death rates in the German prisoner of war camps in the First World War.

Labour camps

In the long term, it was the Japanese demand for labour that took most Australian prisoners from the concerts, clubs and classrooms of Changi. The Japanese immediately began exploiting prisoners as a cheap source of labour, and in defiance of international convention they explicitly included work in support of military operations. Within weeks,

men were being taken from Changi to work around Singapore—cleaning up the debris of war, on the wharfs, and to build a shrine on Bukit Timah hill, the 'light of the south cenotaph', to commemorate the Japanese victory. The Japanese allowed the prisoners to erect a smaller wooden cross nearby for the Allied dead. In spite of the work camps bringing them closer to Japanese guards and the chance of face-slapping or even a severe beating, many prisoners volunteered for the work squads. The optimists always hoped that the next camp would be better; they wanted to escape the boredom of Changi; there was often more food outside Changi; and there was always a chance to pilfer. It was while they were housed in temporary camps such as the peace-time amusement park of The Great World or unloading ships and trucks that the Australians began to earn their reputation as audacious and inventive thieves. 'Scrounging', they soon learnt, was essential for survival.

In May the first of the major Australian work parties left, not just Changi, but Singapore. Within a year, over 15,000 Australians were on the move. As always, rumours began well before any orders, and one persistent rumour was that men were to be repatriated in exchange for bales of wool. On 14 May 1942, 3000 Australians in 'A' Force went on board two crowded, rusty ships. After much shoving, shouting and slapping the men found themselves crouching on temporary decks with head room of about 1.2 metres. In the heat and with some men suffering from diarrhea and dysentery, they had a tough initiation into travelling as prisoners. Already hopes of repatriation had faded, and they disappeared as the ships went north to Burma. In July 'B' Force, 1500 Australians, sailed for Borneo; in November 'C' Force, 555 Australians, sailed for Japan; in the following March 500 Australians in 'E' Force followed 'B' Force to Borneo; and in April 200 in 'G' Force and in May another 300 in 'J' Force sailed for Japan.

Others were leaving Changi and going 'upcountry' by train. 'D' Force of 2220 Australians left in March 1943; 'F' Force, of 3666 Australians, left in April; 'H' Force, of 670 Australians in May; 'K' Force, of 55 Australians, left in June; and 'L' Force, of 73 Australians, left in August. In addition, men captured on Java and Timor and from the Perth passed through Singapore on their way north, some groups joining 'A' Force and going to Burma and about equal numbers going to Thailand. One party of 1400 Australians from Java, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel EE 'Weary' Dunlop, arriving in Changi on 7 January 1943, were astonished at the organisation of the vast camp, resented their designation as the 'Java rabble' and

were largely unsuccessful in their attempts to persuade what they saw as fitter and wealthier prisoners to share with them. Dunlop wrote in his diary, 'I can't help feeling disgust at all the well-shod and clothed people here when contrasted with our ragged mob'.[12]

The railway

A ruthless rationality lay behind the Japanese decision to connect the Burma and Thai rail systems by building a new 421 kilometre line from Thanbyuzayat in Burma south-east to Bampong in Thailand. The Japanese had a large army in Burma, they thought it was essential to hold Burma to protect Singapore from counter attack, and both politically and militarily Burma was the base for any advance into India. But by late 1942 the Japanese knew that their sea route to Burma was under increasing threat from Allied attack, and the roads were primitive and disrupted in the wet season. The only possible way to supply and re-enforce their troops in Burma was rail, and that meant building a line through intensely hot lowlands, with much clearing of scrub, crossing the Burma–Thai border at the Three Pagodas Pass, continuing through mountainous forest and jungle, and following the Menan Kwa Noi River—the'River Kwai'—down into Thailand. Cuttings, embankments and bridges were frequent. It was a massive engineering task, and if it was to be of any strategic value it had to be built quickly. As the Japanese could transport little machinery to the site, nearly all work had to be done by men and what they could carry. Near the Thai–Burma border, there were few local people, and almost no surplus food. That increased the logistic problems, because all food for workers had to be transported long distances by difficult river and road routes. The Japanese themselves invested heavily in the railway, allocating over 25,000 men to the task; but they were vastly outnumbered by the 60,000 Allied prisoners of war and romusha, conscripted Asian labourers—Malays (including men from Java and other islands), Indians, Chinese, Burmese, and smaller numbers of Thais and Vietnamese. Just how many romusha is unknown, but it could have been around 200,000, with the peak number at any one time of 80,000.[13]

The first of the 'A' Force prisoners to arrive in Burma worked on airfield construction at Victoria Point, Mergui and Tavoy. The chance of getting to India and the hope that the Burmese would help, encouraged men to talk of escape, but eight men from the 4th Anti-

Tank who tried were quickly captured—other Australians dug the graves, saw them shot by firing squad, and buried them.

Shifted further north, 'A' Force was joined by other Allied prisoners and by October 1942 they had began work on the railway. At first the work was not excessive, but as they moved south, the country became more difficult, supplies decreased, the hours of work lengthened and the speed increased. In his diary, Doctor Rowley Richards recorded the deteriorating conditions of the camps: the 'soul-destroying sight' of the 55 Kilo camp hospital; the 70 Kilo was 'the foulest'; and the 80 Kilo 'was even worse' with the 'nauseating stench' of mud, slush and cow manure in the huts that had once been cattle shelters.[14] After a year in Burma, the Australians had lost ninety dead, but they now entered rougher country; the wet season began with drenching rains and black clouds hanging low over the camps; they had their first cholera cases; and the Japanese increased pressure on the work gangs to finish. In the last weeks in September and October even many 'light' sick suffering from malaria, tropical ulcers and malnutrition were forced to work long shifts through the night. The 55 Kilo base hospital, under the control of Lieutenant Colonel Albert Coates, soon had 1800 patients. JG 'Tom' Morris was one of the volunteer orderlies:

> For those bedridden patients on the bamboo slats, with nothing more than a rice bag or a worn blanket beneath them, there was neither incentive nor medicines to help them …. We had no bedpans, no facilities for bathing patients, no soap or disinfectants, and no special diets … Toilet paper was the large leaves from nearby trees… In the main ulcer ward the patients were packed three deep, head to foot …[15]

From 4851 Australians in 'A' Force, 771 died, a death rate of 15.8%.[16] The conditions were worse and the deaths more frequent on the Thai end of the railway.

Beginning in January 1943, the men were being trucked to Singapore station to board trains for Thailand. With the Japanese crowding between twenty-five and thirty men into each cattle or goods wagon, about 600 prisoners packed each train, but it still took over ten trains to carry the largest forces. The men were uncertain where they were going, but the Japanese had assured senior officers on 'F' Force that food would be plentiful and the work light and men should take musical instruments to use in their leisure. The excess gear increased the discomfort in the slow moving metal carriages that were intensely hot in the day and cold at night. Little food was provided, some men going thirty-six hours between meals, and there were no toilet facilities. At the first stop, Gemas, men rushed

from the train. Stan Arneil wrote, 'Modesty we now have none and the sight of crowds of men bogging all over the station yard was sickening'.[17] After five or six days, they stumbled from the trains at Bampong in Thailand. For those arriving after thousands of men had already passed through, Bampong was the 'filthiest camp' with 'open latrines, crawling with maggots, no water'.[18]

As on the Burma end, the first work sites and the quotas of earth to be moved could be managed by the fit. But the Thai work parties also came under the increasing demands of the 'Speedo', named after the constant calls of the guards and engineers for 'speedo, speedo', often accompanied by a slap, kick or a thrown stone or steel tool. And in Thailand the geography posed greater problems: the supply line was longer and more difficult and the Japanese administration was not only indifferent to prisoner welfare, but prone to failure. Embankments were built by men equipped just with a 'chunkel'—a large hoe—and lines of men carrying stones and earth in baskets or bag stretchers. The piers for timber bridges were sunk by teams of men who hauled on ropes to raise a weight on a primitive scaffold and then let it crash down on the top of the pier. Frames for the bridges were complex cobwebs of crossing beams held in place by wedges, spikes and cane binding. The 'Pack of Cards Bridge' at Hintok, which collapsed several times in construction, and the Wampo viaduct, where the railway clung to the cliff face above the river, were astonishing even to the exhausted men who built them. The hammer and tap men, one wielding a heavy hammer and the other holding the drill and giving it a slight turn between strikes, drilled holes in rock to take explosives. The Konyu Cutting, which became the site of the Hellfire Pass Memorial, was completed in August 1943, with the men working shifts of up to eighteen hours in the light of flaring bamboo fires. The slaving prisoners, the shouting, gesticulating Japanese and the shadows on the rock walls were dramatic and terrifying. 'Dante', Donald Stuart said, 'knew less about infernos than we knew. We could have given him lessons'.[19] The death rate in the Hintok and Konyu areas, less than halfway to the Burma border, where much of the work was done by 'D' Force and the men from Java, was comparable to that in Burma. The men at the middle and lower camps had the advantage of being able to trade with Thai food sellers, sometimes buying life-saving duck eggs. At great personal risk some Thais were prepared to sell medicines and food on credit, and even provide cash. Dunlop referred to his principal contact as 'that magnificent man, Boon Pong'.[20]

The tragedy for Australians was that they supplied many men to 'F' and 'H' Forces that were sent to the most distant and crudest camps, worked through a prolonged 'speedo', and were exposed to the most obvious case of the Japanese placing completion of the line above the lives of those who built it. As soon as they left the train at Bampong, 'F' Force was told to prepare for a long march. Men knew they would have to abandon all excess gear and traded what they could to the Thais for food. They marched at night. Stan Arneil's group covered 300 kilometres in fifteen nights of marching, arriving at Shimo Sonkurai, close to the Burma border, on 17 May 1943. Many of the 2/30th were in 'F' Force, and they remembered:

> Usually the march began about dark; a ten minute halt was made every hour and was signalled by a blast on the bugle when the men just collapsed where they were and often fell asleep immediately, oblivious of the myriads of sandflies which tormented them. Ten minutes later the jarring 'G' of the bugle seemed to set every nerve in their bodies quivering, and they forced themselves to their feet and plodded on again in the blackness.[21]

Every night was spent in the open, and the wet season had begun. From the 2/30th Battalion, about a quarter of the men fell out as a result of sickness and exhaustion, and in spite of the threats of the Japanese most were able to rejoin their comrades later. Four died en route.

Having arrived exhausted and ill-fed they were given brief respite to build camps, before they were forced to begin labouring on the line. Cholera, which had broken out in the camps of Asian workers, had got there before them. The deaths in 'F' Force began immediately. At the end of the first fortnight, Arneil wrote in his diary that there had already been forty-seven deaths in his camp; the next day he noted another four, and the following, 1 June 1943, he wrote, 'Twelve deaths in the last 24 hours'. The doctors, encountering what for them were new diseases and with few resources, were under extreme pressure. To get fluid into the desperately ill cholera patients, they made their own saline solution and injected it using 'needles' fashioned from copper taken from Japanese vehicles, and even bamboo. Roy Mills, the only doctor with Pond's party at Takunun, lamented the lack of sulphur. The next day he had some: some 'gallant fellows' had walked several kilometres up the line, climbed telegraph poles, smashed the insulators and taken

out the sulphur. Mills jotted down his description of the camp where he had forty-one cases of cholera and many of malaria and dysentery: 'humpies constructed with ground sheets, tent ends—pouring rain—workers out at daylight back after dark—no bathing in creek—ground fouled—men could not reach latrines in the dark, through mud…'[22] The doctors, attempting to protect the sick from the demands of the guards that more men must work, used every ploy they could, and most were bashed. The work of the doctors—Albert Coates, Weary Dunlop, Bruce Hunt, Rowley Richards, Roy Mills, Kevin Fagan, David Hinder and others—was praised by their fellow prisoners long before they returned to Australia.

Although 'F' Force was on the line only from May to December 1943, one third of the 3660 Australians died. The English prisoners on 'F' Force, who were less fit initially, suffered twice the casualties. The smaller 'H' Force also arrived late, was thrust into similar appalling conditions, and suffered a high death rate: 179 from a total of 670. In all, around 13,000 Australians went to the railway, and close to 2800 died, a significant proportion of the 12,000 Allied prisoner deaths. Just how many of the romusha died is unknown, but it was certainly over 50,000 and it could have been 100,000. For the Australians, the main cause of death was starvation. Malaria alone would have killed few men in the prime of life, but combined with malnutrition and its attendant ulcers, beriberi, dysentery and general weakness, it was lethal. The critical difference of slightly more food and less manual work is demonstrated in the fact that generally officers did not die on the railway.

The railway, built at such terrible cost, was of little military significance. Almost as soon as it was finished, the Allies began to advance in Burma and the railway came under attack from Allied aircraft.

Trooper Percy Roy Olle of Kyabram in Victoria served in a transport company in the Middle East. One of those diverted to Java in 1942, he was captured, survived working in Burma on the railway, came down into Thailand, and after recovering some of his health was sent to repair bomb-damaged rail lines. On 6 April 1945 while working south of Bampong on the Singapore line, he escaped. Having reached the edge of Bankok, Olle had vague plans of trying to get to China. The Thai police who picked him up allowed him to be taken away by an Englishman who hid him in an internment camp. In spite of Olle's suspicions, a Thai pilot flew him to north Thailand, where he was transferred to an RAF

aircraft and was in Calcutta by mid-June. After being in hospital in Delhi and convalescing in Colombo, he was flown to Australia, arriving in Melbourne on 26 July 1945. He was the only Australian to make a successful escape from the railway and reach home before the surrender.[23]

Sandakan

The 1500 men of 'B' Force reached Sandakan in North Borneo, marched to a camp eight miles beyond the town, and were soon at work making an aerodrome. They also began contacting former members of the British North Borneo administration and local police who had served the British. Through them—particularly Dr Jim Taylor—they bought medicines, began building up information about Japanese numbers and positions, and built a radio. They also found that the police were in contact with men still sailing between the islands in the Sulu Archipelago, and that opened communication with guerrilla groups who were operating in the islands and the Philippines. By the end of the year, the Australians at Sandakan had received a reply that their information had got through to Allied forces. In April 1943 750 British prisoners arrived at Sandakan, and the Australians through their outside contacts learnt that another 500 Australians of 'E' Force had landed on the small island of Berhala, just off Sandakan.

Realising they had a chance to escape, three small groups of Sandakan prisoners made attempts—all but one were recaptured and two of the last group were executed. Sergeant Walter Wallace was helped by the Sandakan 'underground' to reach Berhala Island, and there he joined six other prisoners in another escape bid, and the seven managed to join the guerrillas. Two, Lieutenant Charles Wagner and Sergeant Rex Butler, were killed fighting with the island guerrillas, and the other five were picked up by an American submarine early in 1944 and taken to Australia.

In June 1943 'E' Force joined the Australian and British prisoners at Sandakan. The Sandakan 'underground' began to plan for a response to an Allied landing, but Japanese suspicions were aroused and through the torture of local Chinese and then others they gained evidence, made intensive searches of the camp and found radios and incriminating

documents. The arrested prisoners and civilians were brutally tortured by the Kempeitai—the feared Japanese military police. Captain Lionel Matthews, two local members of the police and four civilians were sentenced to death. Others were given long prison sentences.

Nearly all the officers at Sandakan were transferred to Kuching, and the remaining men were subjected to more work, increased bashing and less food. Perhaps vindictive because of the underground and the 'escapes', and to render the prisoners less of a threat, the Japanese reduced the food ration further, so that by the end of 1944 even men who were not working were starving to death. There were also increasing signs that an Allied invasion might soon take place. The Japanese began a massive reorganisation of their troops. Senior Japanese commanders, perhaps Imperial Headquarters in Tokyo, ordered battalions to shift west when they could no longer travel by sea and through country that was malarious, had few roads and few points where rations could be obtained. Over half of some Japanese battalions died trying to reach their new positions.[24] With the Japanese themselves under stress, the prisoners were both exploitable and expendable. In the end, the Japanese were also keen to remove all evidence of the Sandakan camp and its prisoners.

After the officers had been shifted away, there were about 2500 British and Australian prisoners at Sandakan. By January 1945, 1850 were still alive, but many of them were malnourished and ill. On 29 January, 470 prisoners, 350 of whom were Australians, left in groups of about fifty, each man loaded with Japanese equipment. The Japanese were ordered that no prisoners were to be allowed to drop out of the march for any reason. They interpreted that order in the only way they could: they shot those who fell out because of illness and exhaustion. The Japanese were on their way to the west coast, but it was obvious that the prisoners would not get there. For the survivors, the march ended after 260 kilometres at Ranau, but at Ranau there was no prepared camp and no rations. In the second group of fifty prisoners and forty-nine Japanese who left Sandakan, probably twenty prisoners and ten Japanese had died. The prisoners continued to die at Ranau and at Paginatan, where some had been delayed. When all the prisoners from the first march gathered at Ranau in April, only about 150 were still alive.

At Sandakan starvation had resulted in an accelerating death rate: 317 died in March alone. With increasing fears of invasion, the Japanese ordered another march west. Of over 500 who set out, 142 Australians and 61 Englishmen reached Ranau. There they found

just six survivors of the first march. The appalling fate that awaited them was obvious: only escapers would live. The 290 prisoners left at Sandakan were all ill, and they all died of malnutrition or were murdered before the end of the war. Just six Australians survived from the 2500 Australian and British prisoners left at Sandakan after the officers went to Kuching: Gunner Owen Campbell and Bombadier Dick Braithwaite, escapers from the second march; and Warrant Officer William Sticpewich, Lance Bombadier William Moxham, Private Keith Botterill and Private Nelson Short, who escaped from Ranau. More Australians had died on the railway, but Sandakan was the greater atrocity.

Timor, Ambon and Rabaul

The men of Sparrow Force who were captured on Timor were gathered into a camp at Usapa-Besar on Koepang Bay. They were near a coconut plantation and in the evening could sit on the beach and imagine that they would soon see the navy steaming to their rescue. They were to look back on Usapa-Besar as one of their best camps. Two small groups were shipped to Java and then in September the main group sailed for Sourabaya and made a long rail journey across Java to Batavia. It was there that Peter McGrath-Kerr said, 'we struck the Koreans, or should I say they struck us?'[25] As other prisoners found, it was often the Koreans and Formosans, themselves brutally treated by the Japanese, who were most inclined to bash prisoners.

In Java, the Australians from Timor entered a major camp with senior Dutch and English officers in charge, but most were there for just three months before they were again on the move to the Burma–Thailand railway, many of them leaving with Dunlop's party and going to Thailand. By the end of the war the men of Sparrow Force were widely dispersed. The Tasmanians of the 2/40th Battalion, the main unit in Sparrow Force, were in Thailand, Japan, Java, Singapore and Sumatra, and three or four men were in Saigon, Mukden and eastern Indonesia.

On Ambon, about 800 prisoners from Gull Force were contained in their old barracks at Tantui outside Ambon town. At first, George Williamson said, 'Things were that easy. You could have your own little vegetable garden, keep your own chooks, have your own eggs …'[26] Tempted by the general laxity, the proximity of Australia and the friendliness of

the Ambonese, Lieutenant Bill Jinkins and six others escaped, made their way through the islands, picked up four other Australian escapers, and after seven weeks of risk and luck sailed into Darwin. Reacting to the escape, the Japanese tightened conditions, and the Australians became only too aware of their vulnerability after the 'Dutch Garden Party'. Dutch prisoners caught passing inoffensive notes to Dutch women were paraded and then bashed until a few were dead and about twenty were stretcher cases. In November 1942 it was the Australians' turn. Accused of trading for food outside the camp, men were battered and tortured. Eleven disappeared, presumably executed.

Told in October that 500 prisoners were to be sent to a 'convalescent camp', some sick men were included among the 263 Australians and 233 Dutchmen who sailed from Ambon. Landed in Hainan, they became labourers on the wharf, roads and sites where land was being reclaimed from the sea. As the health of the men deteriorated, tension between the other ranks and officers increased, reaching its worst when officers handed men to the Japanese for severe punishment. Those divisions continued into the postwar period.

On Hainan, the Chinese maintained resistance to Japanese occupation, and at the same time the Chinese nationalists, communists and independent warlords fought each other. Nineteen Australian prisoners were killed, apparently as incidental victims of a Chinese guerrilla raid on a camp where they were working; but near the end of the war Major Ian Macrae and five other prisoners escaped to take their chances with the Chinese and lived to rejoin their liberated fellow prisoners. By then, 182 of the 263 Australians who had gone to Hainan were still alive.

The men on Ambon always looked upon Allied aircraft with hope and fear. The Japanese had placed a bomb dump close to the Tantui camp and in February 1943 it was hit in a raid. The camp and all possessions were lost, ten men were killed and many injured. It was a disaster that speeded the general decline. As elsewhere, the men were fed too little and compelled to work too hard. But on Ambon much of the work was pointless: on the 'long carry' the weakened men lugged bombs and bags of cement over hills for no practical reason and when they could have been shifted easily by other means. In the end, the men were dying at the rate of six or seven a day. Lieutenant John van Nooten said he read the burial service so often that forty years later he 'could still remember it'.[27] Less than a quarter of the 528 prisoners left on Ambon in October 1942 were alive when the Australian

navy arrived in September 1945. As a result of deaths in action, the Laha massacre, executions, deprivation, Chinese guerrilla attack and Allied bombing, some 779 of the 1131 of Gull Force had died.

At Rabaul the civilian internees and prisoners of war were forced to work on the wharf. Some who had been most conscious of being white mastas thought it humiliating to labour in full view of those who had been their black employees; but other Australians accepted it as just part of the strange upheaval in which they were trapped. The New Guineans themselves were divided: some delighted at the sight of the sweating mastas and others evaded guards to bring food and other goods to men they knew. To the surprise of the prisoners, the Japanese asked them to write letters, which they then dropped during a bombing raid on Port Moresby. Many were eventually delivered to grateful families in Australia, the first letters received from prisoners of the Japanese.

Before dawn on 22 June 1942 the civilians and the prisoners, except for the officers, were paraded, searched and marched away. Some were able to get word to the officers that they thought they were on their way to Hainan. On board the Japanese transport Montevideo Maru, they were torpedoed by a United States submarine off Luzon on 1 July, and no prisoners survived. The loss of 845 prisoners of war and 208 civilians was the greatest single disaster suffered by Australia in the Second World War.[28] A few days later, sixty officers and eighteen women—the civilian, mission and army nurses and Kathleen Bignold—were shipped to Japan on the Naruto Maru. Of the few civilians who remained in Rabaul and the prisoners later captured in the New Guinea area—most being American, Australian and New Zealand aircrew—few survived. When the Australians returned to Rabaul, out of a hundred or so who had been held in Rabaul, Captain John Murphy was the only Australian prisoner of war, and with him were six Americans. Held elsewhere in Rabaul were four civilians who had not been sent on the Montevideo Maru, one New Zealand pilot, one United States and one Dutch soldier, and eighteen British artillery men, the sad remnant of 600 British prisoners captured in Singapore and shipped to Melanesia as labourers. At the Ramale internment camp just out of Rabaul, 157 men and women, nearly all members of the Catholic mission, responded to the Australian 'cooees' in September 1945. Over 500 civilians had died in the New Guinea islands and on the north coast of Papua and New Guinea, most after they were captured by the Japanese. The killing and later attempt to conceal the deaths in Kavieng was a particularly disturbing atrocity.

Japan

Soon after they arrived in Japan, the officers and the nurses from Rabaul were housed separately in the Yokohama Yacht Club. Most of the men were soon shifted to Zentsuji on Shikoku Island, and in 1944 the women were moved to Totsuka, just beyond the outskirts of Yokahama. Other officers captured in south-east Asia were also sent to Zentsuji, bringing the Australian total to about 100. Greater numbers of Australians were sent to Japan later in 1942 and 1943 when 'C', 'G' and 'J' Forces left Changi for Japan. After the completion of the Burma–Thailand railway, the fittest of the men from Burma and Thailand were gathered in Thailand, and in 1944 many were sent to Japan to meet a labour shortage in the homeland. In a protracted voyage of seventy days, the patched up Byoki Maru' carried cramped Australians through submarine attack and typhoon to reach Japan. Other prisoners came by boat down the Mekong River to Saigon, and from there the Japanese hoped to ship them on to Japan. Six-hundred Australians, one of the last groups to reach Japan, disembarked at Moji from the Awa Maru in January 1945. By then, there were nearly 3000 Australian prisoners in Japan. Smaller groups, including the senior officers from Singapore, had gone to Taiwan and then Manchuria, and a few Australians were in Korea.

The prison camps in Japan varied greatly. Zentsuji was one of the few camps inspected by the International Red Cross and supplied with Red Cross food parcels, and where letters arrived with reasonable frequency. By 1945, the officers in Zentsuji were suffering from starvation, but only one died before they were shifted to northern Honshu and Hokkaido just before the Japanese surrendered. None of the Rabaul women died, but they too had suffered from malnutrition and medical neglect. One died not long after her release. Most of the other Australians in Japan worked in dangerous conditions in underground coal mines, in ship yards and in various factories. The discipline was strict; slapping and sometimes more brutal punishment was imposed. For men who were underfed, the winter was harsh, particularly for those working at Naoetsu on the west coast, where the snow was several feet deep. Many thought they would not have survived another winter. As American air raids increased, the prisoners close to the main ports and industrial centres witnessed the intensity of the bombing, and several Australians were close enough to the point of impact of the Nagasaki atomic bomb to feel the blast. Only 190 Australian

prisoners of war were buried in Japan, a surprisingly small number relative to the total number of Australians and the severity of the conditions that they recall. Prisoners who were captured in Timor, Malaya or Singapore, then passed through several work camps, went to the Burma–Thailand railway, recovered in Thailand, and were later shipped to Japan, could claim they had done the 'full tour'.

Tragedy at sea

The loss of over 1000 men on the Montevideo Maru was only one of several disasters experienced by the prisoners who travelled in unmarked Japanese transports through seas increasingly dominated by American submarines. By the end of the war, over 10,000 Allied prisoners of war had died at sea. In June 1944 just under 200 Australians died in the sinking of the Tamahoko Maru within sight of Japan; and when American submarines attacked a convoy off Hainan in September 1944, their tally of blasted ships included two with over 2200 British and Australian prisoners on board. The Rokyu Maru, carrying 649 Australians and 599 British prisoners, was quickly abandoned by the Japanese and the prisoners were left to fend for themselves. After Japanese destroyers picked up the Japanese crews, the prisoners took over their life boats, but many men were still on hastily assembled rafts. After two days in the water, 136 prisoners were taken on board Japanese ships, others were probably shot in their life boats, and more died of thirst and exposure. American submarines coming back through the wreckage that they had wrought discovered that the victims in the water were Allies. Arthur Bancroft was one of the last to hear the welcome, 'Take it easy guys', as he was pulled on board. He had been six days in the water. Able Seaman Bancroft had survived his second sinking: he had been on the Perth.[29] The eighty Australians who were saved by the returning submarines were in Australia well before the end of 1944.

Civilian internees compelled to travel by ship in New Guinea waters were also vulnerable. In February 1944, Catholic and Lutheran missionaries on the Yorishime Maru—also Dorish Maru—were bombed and strafed by American aircraft off Wewak, killing sixty-three and leaving many wounded. But the danger was not just from Allied attack. In March 1943, sixty civilians on the destroyer Akikase, again mostly men and women from the

Catholic and Lutheran missions, were shot and their bodies thrown overboard. About 1800 Australian prisoners and internees died at sea—one in five of all prisoner deaths.

Nurses

The thirty-two Australian nurses who had survived bombing, drowning and the beach firing squad were first housed in the Muntok gaol that had previously held Asian prisoners. It was there, Betty Jeffery wrote, that 'we learnt to sleep on unadulterated concrete and eat filthy rice … the lavatory … was just a gutter, no protection, no privacy, and used by both the Japanese and us'.[30] After a fortnight the women were assembled before dawn, made the long walk down the Muntok pier and went by ship to Sumatra and up river to Palembang. There they were paraded through town—what the men called a 'gloat parade'—and were installed in houses previously occupied by Dutch families. Under pressure to 'entertain' Japanese officers, the nurses dressed as unattractive 'gaunt harpies' and successfully resisted all the offered riches of food and drink in exchange for sex.[31] Soon they shifted again to Irenelaan Street, where they stayed, over twenty to a house, for a year and a half.

Compared with most Dutch, British and Eurasian internees, the nurses were disadvantaged. Having lost all possessions during their long hours in the sea, including most of the clothes they were wearing, the nurses had no money and nothing to trade, while those women who had arrived in camp with one or two full suitcases could buy extra food and even quinine. But the nurses also had strengths: they were all fit and young; they had no children to look after; they had group strength; they were accustomed to living in institutions; they had already been through battle; and they had skills and energy. They took on much of the hard work in the camp that was necessary for basic hygiene; they looked after the health of others; and, having managed to shift a piano into one of their houses, they contributed to entertainment. Several of the nurses joined the voice orchestra conducted by the English woman Norah Chambers, or sang in the choir that performed original material composed by the missionary Margaret Dryburgh.

The nurses endured the dirt, malnutrition and lack of privacy of Irenelaan until October 1944, when they began the shift back to a new camp at Muntok. But the new camp was in

an intensely malarious area and the weakened women were vulnerable. Soon the strongest of the women were digging two or three graves a day, and that had to be added to the 'carrying'—the taking of the buckets of lavatory refuse into the jungle. The first nurse died in February 1945, and 'our girls' gave her a military funeral. 'It made the Japs sit up'.[32] Harried into another shift in April, the women went to Lubuklingau, an isolated rubber plantation in western Sumatra. The eighth and last nurse to die in captivity, one of their great workers, was buried on 18 August 1945, three days after the war had ended, but the nurses were yet to learn of victory. From the sixty-five who had sailed on the Vyner Brooke, twenty-four were still alive when—nine days after the event—the Japanese admitted that the war was over.

'Love to all at home'

When the war ended, senior Australian government and military officials had no more than indications of the location and health of many prisoners. They thought there might be 8000 in Japan when in fact there were about 2700, and 3000 they simply did not place anywhere. From the men who had survived the sinking of the Rokyu Maru they had detailed information of some camps. News had been spreading informally in Australia from late 1944, and the Australian and other Allied governments made public statements in November, saying what had happened on the Rokyu Maru and drawing on testimony from men who had worked on the Burma–Thailand railway. In his statement, Frank Forde, Acting Prime Minister, spoke of starvation and amputation of ulcerated limbs, warned that perhaps 2000 men had died on the railway, and said that conditions in other camps might not be as bad.[33] With the known losses on the Rokyu Maru, the railway, and in atrocities such as Tol, and the news that came out of the Philippines as the Americans freed prisoners early in 1945, Australians had every reason to be apprehensive. Most families had received little definite information, and all of it old. In about May 1942 they might have received an official letter saying there was 'no definite information available'. A few months later this was followed for the lucky with a letter saying that a son, husband or daughter was 'being held as a prisoner of war of the Japanese' and then there might be three or four cards which said little more than a printed message 'My health is good …' and a few personal words, 'My love to all at home' and perhaps the name of a camp—'Moulmein' or 'Nieke'.

Tom Morris, captured in Singapore and with 'A' Force on the Railway, sent four cards and received two letters, both in 1944.[34] Several thousand families had received no news, and that included those whose relative had been killed in action early in 1942.

Freedom

The day that all prisoners had lived and longed for, came late and without drama in most camps. The nurses on Sumatra learnt that the war was over on 24 August, but no Australians knew where they were. It was not until 7 September that Dutch soldiers dropped in by parachute, and it was 11 September before the first Australian troops arrived; soon the nurses were eating fresh bread and vegemite flown in from Cocos Island. It was over a month after the war ended before they were flown to Changi. Where the Australians had radios, they knew that the war was over, but had to wait for a reaction from the Japanese. At Nakom Paton in Thailand, Dunlop feared that the Japanese might kill all the prisoners in the event of an invasion or other crisis. His fears had some basis, for at several camps the Japanese were prepared to dispose of prisoners. But on 16 August the Japanese admitted that there was an 'armistice', and the men were no longer to be considered prisoners.[35] At Kuching the officers kept the news to themselves and the guards made no admissions, although they suddenly supplied Red Cross parcels and medicines. Even after Allied aircraft littered the camp with leaflets announcing the end of the war, the Japanese remained 'silent and even more sullen' for another five days before a parade was called and on 24 August the prisoners were told they would 'soon' be free. In Japan, most prisoners learnt quickly that the war had ended, their guards disappeared and the men cautiously left camp, venturing a little further each day. No Allied forces were ready to occupy Japan, but as the camps were identified with painted signs on their roofs, the 'biscuit bombs' found them, and stores floated down swinging from coloured parachutes. Armed with a carton of cigarettes as currency, Don Moore boarded trains and travelled the island of Kyushu.

It was 29 August before the prisoners from Zentsuji were found in Hokkaido, and it was a month after the end of the war before they were on their way home by train, then by air to Okinawa and the Philippines, and from there most men came home by ship. Even in the

prison camps close to Australia—Ambon and Rabaul—it was weeks before the men were located and liberated. Men who had kept themselves alive with thoughts of vengeance found that when they were at last free they had little desire to retaliate. Surprisingly few guards suffered summary punishment.

Detailed news of the prisoners came slowly, then suddenly, to Australia. On 30 August it was announced that there might be 17,500 Australian prisoners of war coming home. Soon that figure was known to be optimistic. From 1 September the Australian newspapers were full of stories of 'atrocities': 'appalling cruelty'; 'horror after horror'; 'Australians flogged, died in Borneo horror camp' and 'hell camp'.[36] The first 110 prisoners arrived in Sydney on flying boats on 17 September, and were greeted with cheering crowds and showers of torn paper and confetti. When the ships arrived later, most men were driven by bus through welcoming crowds, and many were given another welcome at home towns where bands and flag-waving school children lined railway stations. But for many families there was no one to greet. It was not 17,500 who came home—it was just 14,000. More than 8000 prisoners of war and many hundreds of civilian internees had died.

The returned prisoners felt that they had had three and a half years of their lives stolen, and many of them had been away for over four years. They tried to make up time—at work and by marrying and buying a house. But many suffered from the symptoms that would later be recognised as the consequence of trauma: they had troubled sleep, skin rashes, and an emotional fragility that caused them to be taken by surprise by their own anger or sadness. As the prisoners of war were to say, being an ex-prisoner was a life sentence. In spite of the wounds that they carried, the ex-prisoners were significant in public life after the war; several entering the federal parliament, and Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane all had ex-prisoners of war as lords mayor.

In the immediate post-war period, the prisoners of war remained in public consciousness as the trials of Japanese accused of war crimes continued into the early 1950s. The first of the ex-prisoner of war memoirs (Rohan Rivett, Behind Bamboo, 1946, and Russell Braddon, The Naked Island, 1952) were published and sold well. But by the 1960s there was a general decline in enthusiasm for remembering war, crowds at Anzac parades declined, and the prisoners of war, too, faded from national consciousness. Then, in the 1980s, there was an unexpected resurgence in interest in the history of war. The rediscovery of the enormity of

the prisoner of war experience and of the terrible events on the Burma–Thailand railway, at Sandakan and on Ambon, were central to the nation's recovery of its history. For the first time prime ministers visited the graves of Australian prisoners of war at Kranji on Singapore Island and at Kachanaburi in Thailand. At his death in 1993 Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop was one of the best known and most celebrated Australians. The prisoners of war of the Japanese had secured a significant place in popular and scholarly history.

End Notes

1 Robyn Arvier, "Caesar's Ghost!", p. 41

2 Don Wall, Singapore & beyond, p. 9

3 Les Cody, Ghosts in Khaki, p. 72

4 Hank Nelson, Prisoners of War, p. 13

5 Paul Metzler, Stand-To, Vol 8 No. 4, July–August 1963, p. 6

6 Frank Christie, diary, Australian War Memorial, privately published.

7 Harvey Besley, Pilot, prisoner, survivor, p. 73

8 DM Selby, Hell and high fever, pp. 58–9

9 Argus, 7 and 14 April 1942; also in other Australian and overseas papers.

10 Kenneth Harrison, The brave Japanese, p. 133

11 Harrison, p. 134

12 EE Dunlop, The war diaries of Weary Dunlop, p. 146

13 Yoshinori Murai, 'Asian forced labour (romusha) on the Burma–Thailand railway', in Gavan McCormack and Hank Nelson, eds, The Burma–Thailand Railway, p. 62

14 Rowley Richards, A doctor's war, pp. 162–163, 167

15 Tom Morris, 'Memories of the Burma–Thailand Railway', in McCormack and Nelson, pp.30–1

16 Lionel Wigmore, The Japanese thrust, p. 561

17 SF Arneil, One man's war, p. 72

18 Arneil, p. 75

19 Nelson, p. 49

20 Dunlop, p. 298

21 AW Penfold, WC Bayliss and KE Crispin, Galleghan's greyhounds, p. 287

22 Roy Mills, Doctor's diary and memoirs, p. 122

23 National Archives of Australia, Victoria, B3856, 144/1/230; and 'Trooper Percy Roy Olle' typescript by Geoff Olle, no date.

24 Yuki Tanaka, Hidden horrors, p. 69

25 Peter Henning, Doomed battalion, p. 151

26 Nelson, p. 86

27 Nelson, p. 96

28 Not all the civilians were Australian; many of the crew of the Herstein interned in Rabaul were Scandinavian, including twenty-four Norwegians.

29 A Bancroft and RG Roberts, The Mikado's guests

30 Betty Jeffrey, White Coolies

31 Jessie Elizabeth Simons, While History Passed

32 Jeffrey, p. 150

33 Frank Forde, statement in the House of Representatives, 17 November 1944, Commonwealth of Australia, Parliamentary debates, Vol 180, pp. 1921–3; 'Sinking of Japanese ship Rakuyo Maru …', Australian War Memorial file 54, 1010/9/109

34 JG Morris, A Soldier's Reflections Forty Years On, privately published, no date, reprints his cards.

35 Dunlop, p. 381

36 Sydney Morning Herald, 1 September 1945

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(1954); Ken Harrison, The Brave Japanese (1966); P Metzler, 'Recollections of a Catalina Pilot', Stand-To, Vol 8 No. 4, (1963); R Mills, Doctor's Diary and Memoirs (1994); JG Morris, A Soldier's Reflections Forty Years On (no date); G Olle, Trooper Percy Roy Olle, typescript; Rowley Richards, A Doctor's War (2005); David Selby, Hell and High Fever (1956); J Simons, While History Passed: The story of the Australian nurses who were prisoners of the Japanese for three and a half years (1954).

The stress on relatives of prisoners of war and the long term impact on the prisoners is central to: Michael McKernan, This War Never Ends: The pain of separation and return (2001); Carolyn Newman, ed, Legacies of our Fathers: World War II prisoners of the Japanese – their sons and daughters tell their stories (2005); and Margaret Reeson, A Very Long War: The families who waited (2000).

In October 1941 the recently appointed official war artist, Vaughan Murray Griffin, left by Empire Flying boat for Singapore. Murray Griffin, as he was known, had been born in Melbourne in 1903 and worked as a commercial artist and teacher. He was expecting to stay two months in south-east Asia before shifting to the Middle East, but the Japanese moved before he did, and after the fall of Singapore he joined the march to Changi. To his surprise, the Japanese made no attempt to stop his early efforts to record what was happening around him. As a prisoner, Griffin was able to document the three and a half years of Changi, and he met and talked with the men who had been away on the Burma–Thailand railway. In the immediate post-war period, Griffin travelled beyond Singapore to enable him to paint and sketch battle scenes and prisoner experiences 'upcountry'.

Several other prisoners had a facility with brush and pencil. The talented Ray Parkin had joined the navy at the age of eighteen, and fourteen years later he was a Petty Officer on the Perth. He was at the helm when Perth was torpedoed in Sunda Strait, and after capture he was imprisoned on Java, went to Thailand with Dunlop Force, and ended the war working in an underground coalmine at Ohama in Japan. Throughout his imprisonment, Parkin was writing and sketching, recording both the 'physical agony' and the 'beauty' of what was around him. His sketches on the Burma–Thailand railway ranged from men suffering extreme deprivation to the detail of the 'Vermilion blossom … of the white-trunked tree'. His words and illustrations appeared in his trilogy: Out of the Smoke (1960), Into the Smother (1963) and The Sword and the Blossom (1968).

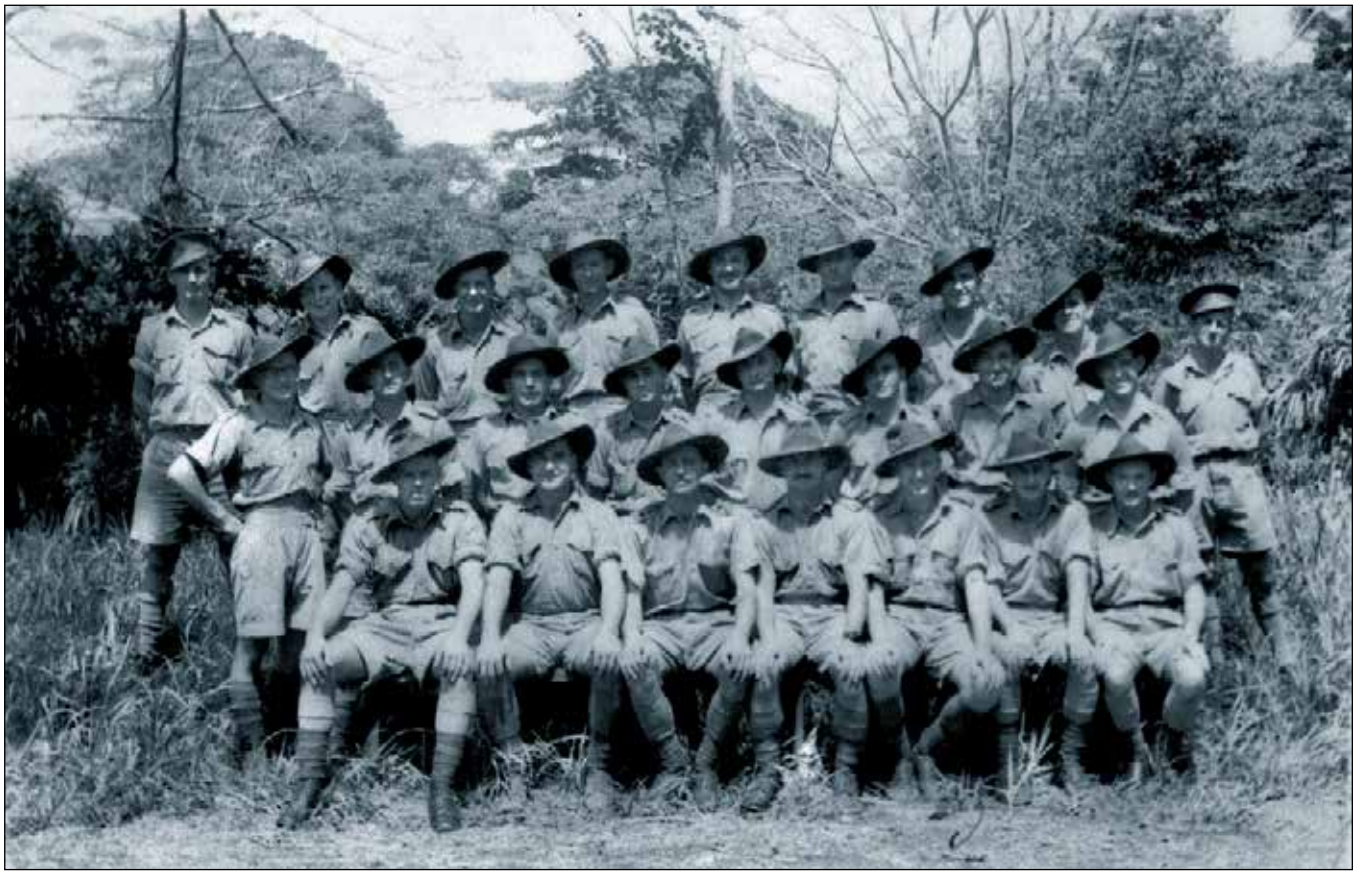
A student before the war, Englishman Jack Chalker was forced to defer his scholarship to the Royal College of Art in London when he was called up for service in 1939. A fortnight before the surrender, he arrived in Singapore as a gunner in the Royal Artillery. While he was able to make and preserve a few sketches and watercolours of Singapore, his main work was completed on the Burma–Thailand railway and in the hospital camps in Thailand. Dunlop realised the importance of recording details of the suffering of prisoners, the methods employed by doctors, and the technical ingenuity of the prisoners who were making everything from artificial limbs to dental drills and saline drips. To disguise his real purpose, Chalker was employed as a nurse and physiotherapist but, Dunlop said, 'His gentle compassion, keen intelligence and sensitive hands made him a marked asset in either

capacity'. Both Parkin and Chalker were at risk of severe punishment had they been caught with their words and images of conditions on the railway (Jack Chalker, Burma Railway Artist, 1994).

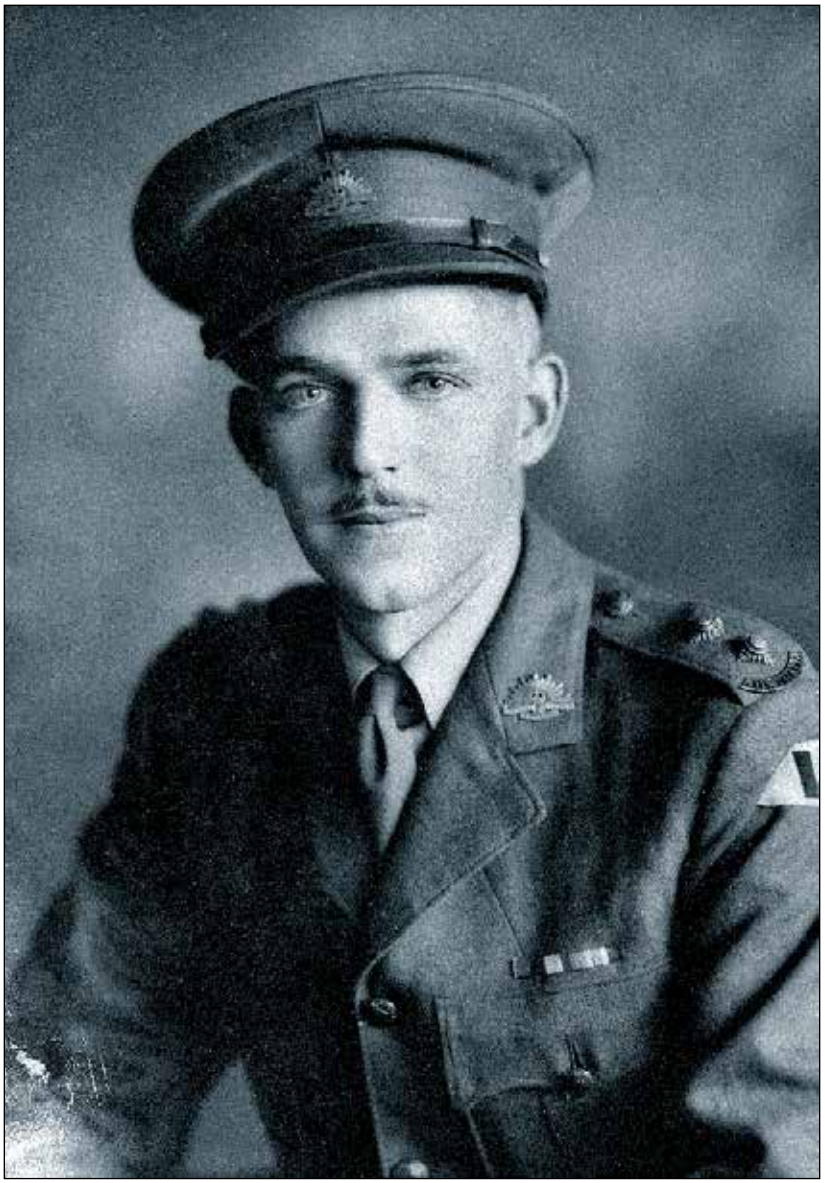
The artists have partly compensated for the lack of photographs of the prisoners of war. Few memorable Japanese photographs seem to have survived—or become known to Australians—and most of the post-war photographs by Allied cameramen were taken around Changi, leaving a limited visual record of many of the smaller, isolated camps. While a surprising number of prisoners risked the wrath of the Japanese and kept diaries, understandably, few were prepared to keep and use a camera. The best known of those who did was Private George Aspinall of the 2/30th Battalion, who enlisted under age at 17 and carried his going-away present of a Kodak camera with him to war and captivity. Aspinall disregarded the dangers and overcame technical difficulties to take photographs around Changi and film something of the horrors endured by 'F' Force on the Burma–Thailand railway. Finally, he too decided that the risks were too great and he destroyed his camera before his return to Changi in 1943. (Tim Bowden, Changi Photographer, 1984).

Australians of the 22nd Brigade, 8th Division, on the deck of the troopship SS *Queen Mary*, 4 February 1941, the day they sailed from Sydney for Singapore. When *Queen Mary*, carrying some 5750 men, turned north in the Indian Ocean, Australia had made its first significant commitment of troops to its north. A year later, 25,000 Australians were deployed in south-east Asia and the Pacific and all were at risk. *(AWM P03478.001)*

Nurses of the 2/13th Australian General Hospital at the temporary hospital established in St Patrick's School, Singapore, September 1941. The 2/13th moved north to Tampoi on the Malay Peninsula, and returned to St Patrick's after the Japanese attack. More than 130 Australian nurses and physiotherapists were on Singapore Island as the Japanese assault began. The group includes seven nurses massacred on Banka Island, Sister Vivian Bullwinkel (back row, sixth from left), one presumed dead following the sinking of SS *Vyner Brook* and one who died as a prisoner of war in Sumatra in 1945. *(AWM P01344.001)*



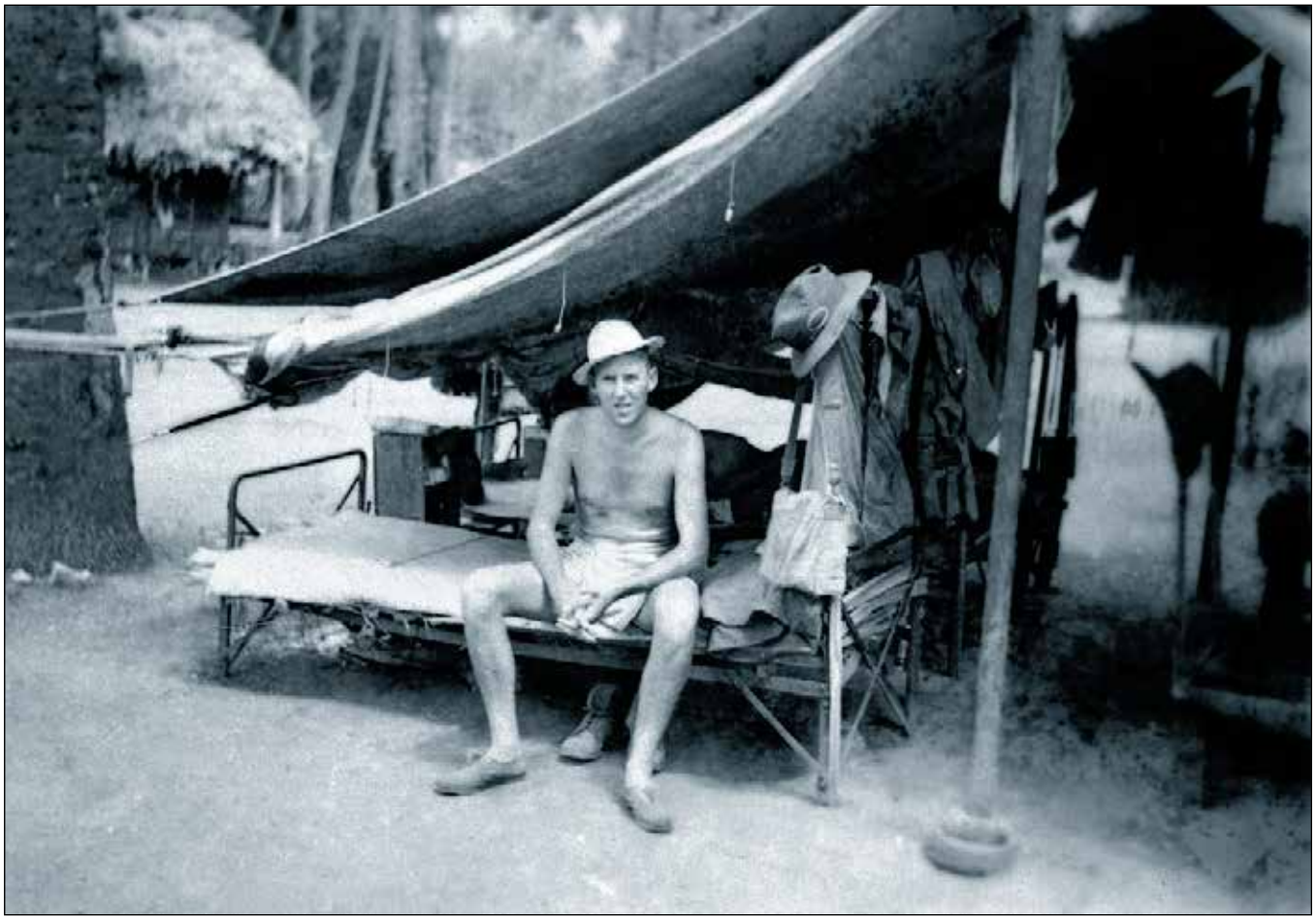
Twenty-four members of the 2/10th Field Ambulance, Rabaul, July 1941. Of this group, only six escaped capture by the Japanese. Of the eighteen who were taken prisoner of war, thirteen were executed, four drowned in the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru*, and only one survived to be a prisoner of war in Japan. *(AWM P00348.001)*



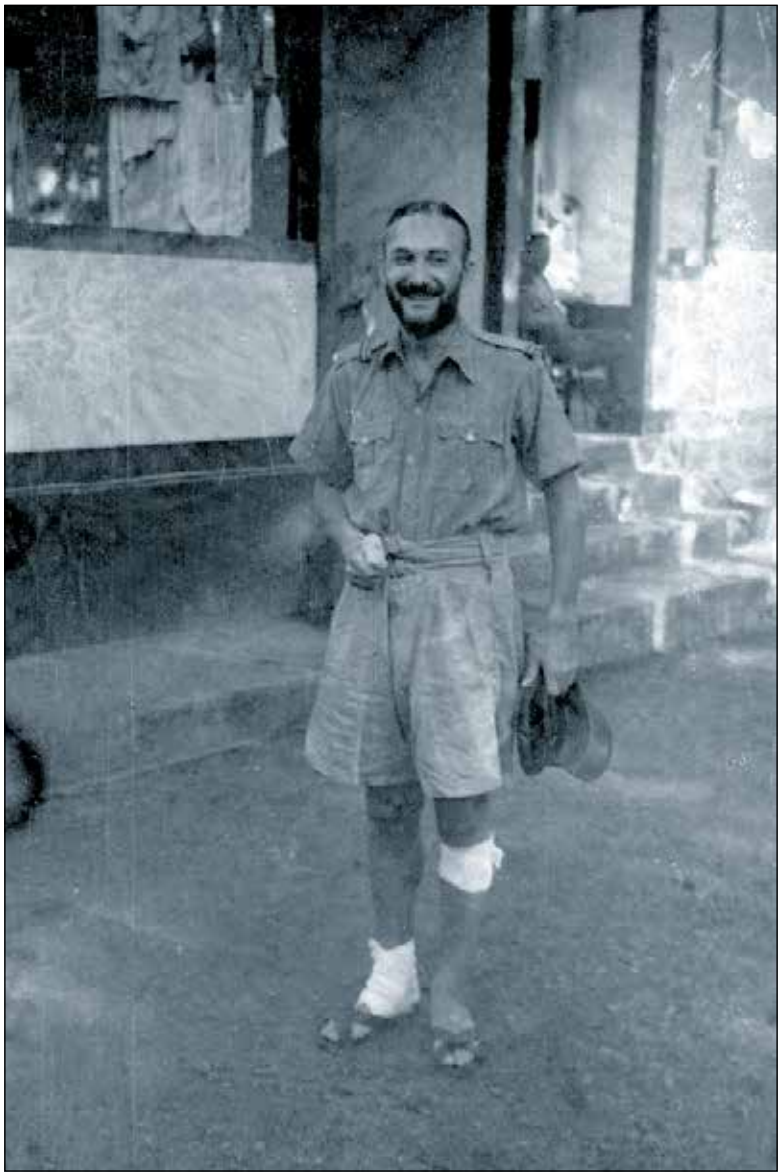
Lieutenant Ben Hackney, 2/29th Battalion, was one of only two men to survive the Japanese massacre of Australian wounded at Parit Sulong in January 1942. Feigning death, he later crawled into the jungle. Despite receiving some help from locals, Hackney was recaptured and interned at Pudu Gaol and later Changi Prison. He survived the war. *(AWM P02839.001)*

A studio portrait of Sister Dorothy Gwendoline 'Buddy' Elmes, 2/10th Australian General Hospital, one of the nurses who survived the sinking of the *Vyner Brook*. On 16 February 1942 Elmes was at Radji Beach, Banka Island, when Japanese soldiers ordered twenty-two nurses to walk into the sea and then shot them. Only Sister Vivian Bullwinkel survived the beach massacre. *(AWM P01180.001)*

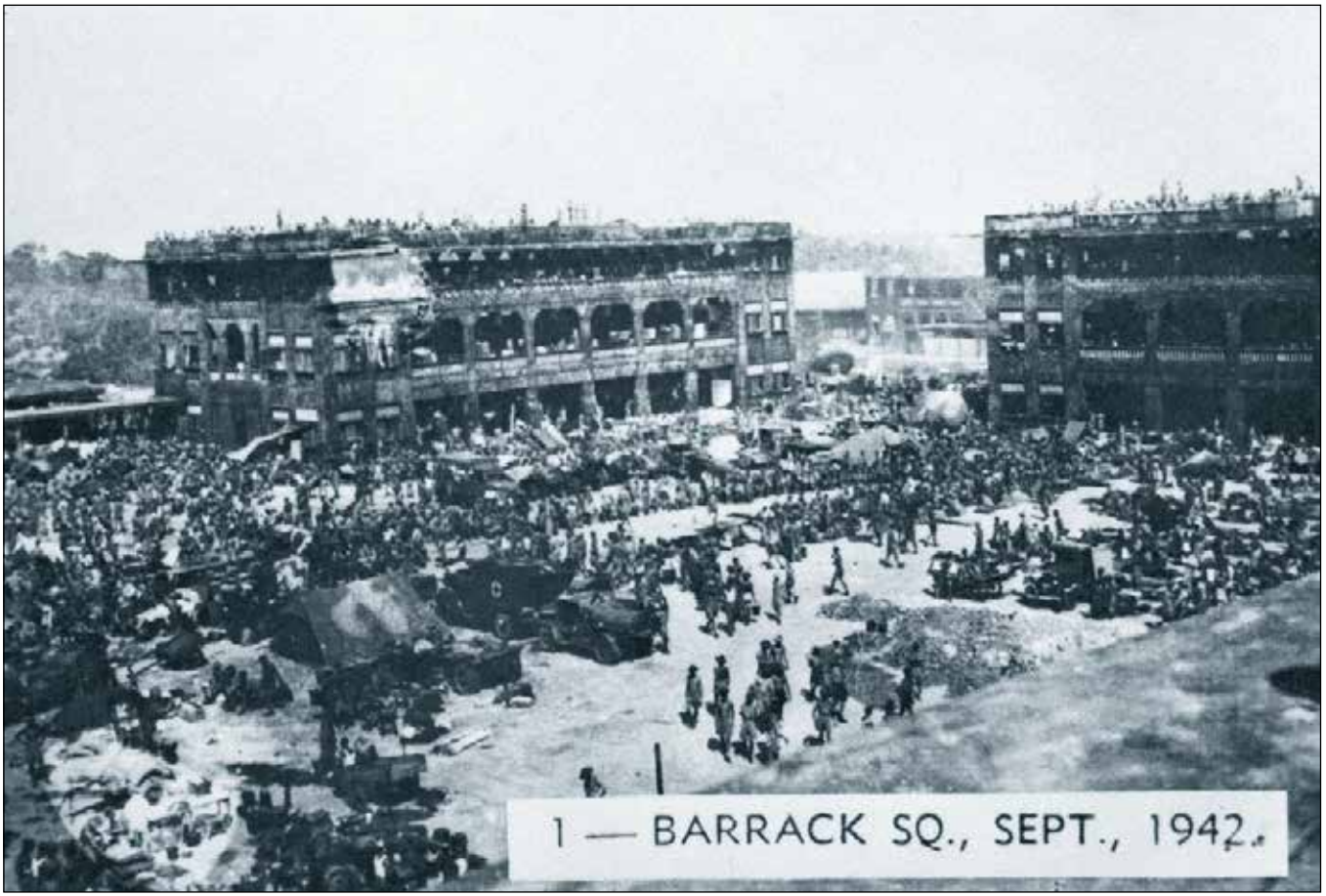
Three survivors of the sinking of the *Vyner Brook* who were to suffer different fates at the hands of the Japanese: Sister Dora Gardam (left) died in captivity in April 1945; Sister E Mavis Hannah (middle) was the only nurse of the 2/4th Casualty Clearing Station to survive captivity, and Matron Irene Drummond (right) was among those massacred on 16 February 1942 on the beach at Banka Island, Sumatra. This photo was taken in Malaya in 1941 by Sergeant-Major JD Emmett, who developed and hid the film at Changi Prison camp after being taken prisoner of war at the surrender of Singapore, then retrieved it at war's end.
(AWM 120519, photographer: JD Emmett)



Corporal Don Taylor sits on his bunk in an open tent in the prisoner of war camp at Oesapa Besar Timor, in 1942, where he and other members of 'Sparrow Force' were held after the Japanese invaded Timor. *(AWM P02699.008)*

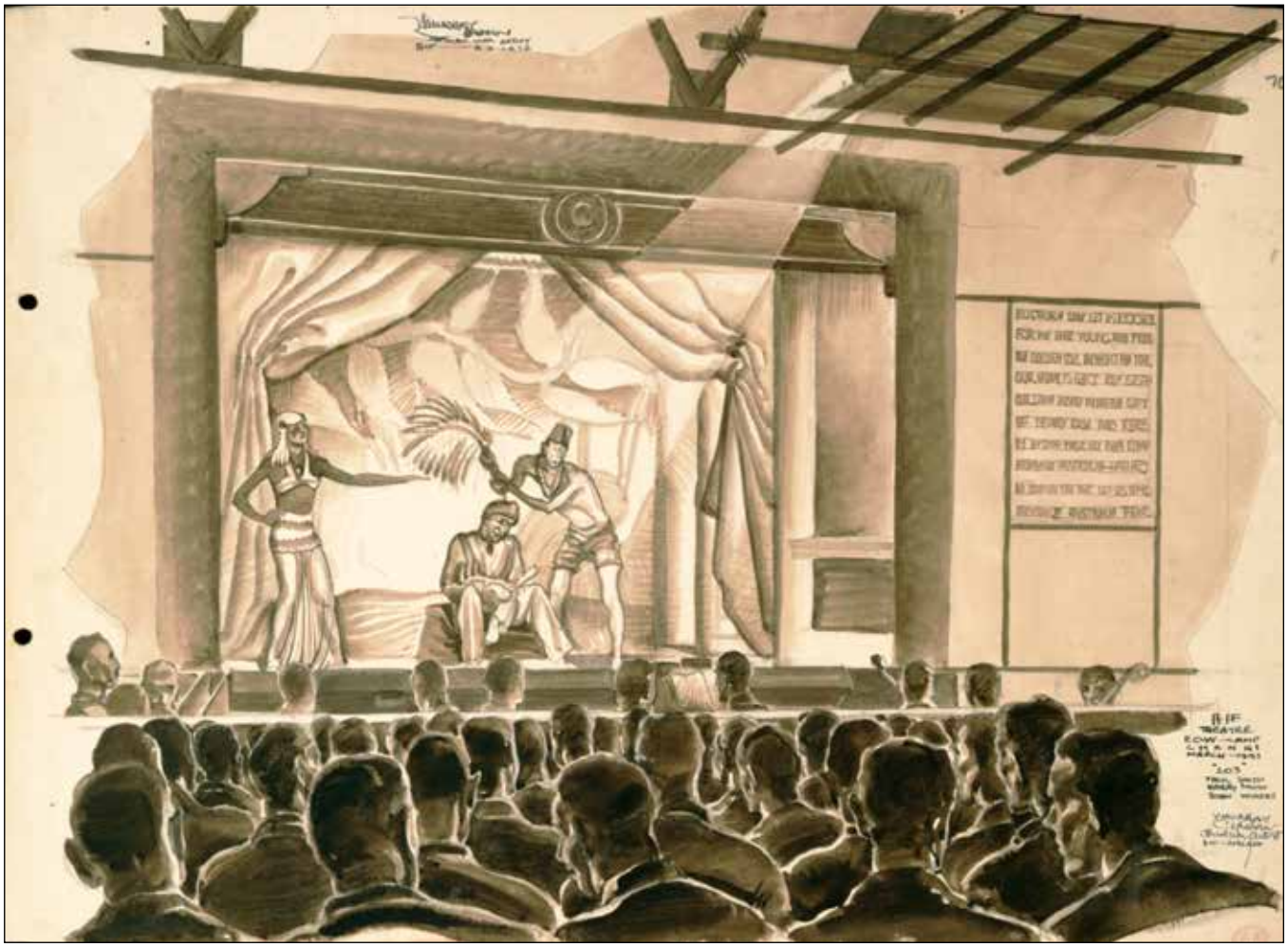


RAAF Flying Officer Gerrard Alderton, soon after his release into the 'Bicycle Camp', Batavia, Netherlands East Indies, in June 1942. Alderton had been held for thirty days and subjected to torture by the Kenpeitai—Japanese Military Police—in an unsuccessful attempt to obtain military information. *(AWM 030391/07, photographer: John Munslow Williams)*



More than 15,000 British and Australian prisoners of war crowded into the Selarang Barracks Square, Changi, in September 1942. The Japanese had determined that they were to stay there until they agreed to sign a sworn statement not to escape. Fearing the outbreak of disease and knowing that all men were suffering from the limited food and water, senior officers told the men to sign—assuring them that a statement signed under duress was not binding. This photograph was taken by Private George Aspinall, lying on the roof of the AIF building and taking advantage of a bomb hole in the brickwork. *(AWM P02338.001, photographer: George Aspinall)*

Troops de-bugging their beds, Changi, by Murray Griffin, 1942–43: oil over pencil on softboard, 63 x 81.2 cm. Lice, rashes, 'happy feet' resulting from malnutrition, hunger and trips to the bore-hole latrines constantly disrupted sleep. *(AWM ART24486)*



AIF theatre, Changi, by Murray Griffin, 1943: brush and brown ink and wash over pencil, 36.8 x 50 cm. Three well-known performers, John Woods, Jack Smith and Harry Smith, are shown on stage. *(AWM ART26497)*

Changi library, by Murray Griffin, 1943: pen and blue ink and brown wash over pencil, 50 x 36.8 cm. In his drawings of the cooks, trailer parties collecting wood, theatre, and men listening to music, Murray Griffin documented the range of activities in Changi. *(AWM ART26501)*

A column of British and Australian prisoners of war march through the streets of Pusan, Korea, on 25 October 1942. Captured at the fall of Singapore and transported to Korea on the *Fukkai Maru*, they were led on the march by a member of the Kenpeitai (Japanese security police), followed by a Korean guard. *(AWM 041107)*

Chaplain Charles Patmore, previously Rector of Castlemaine, conducts a funeral service on Ambon. This is one frame from a roll of film found at the prison camp after the island was occupied by the Australians following the end of the war. Patmore was killed in an Allied air raid on 15 February 1943. *(AWM 136290)*

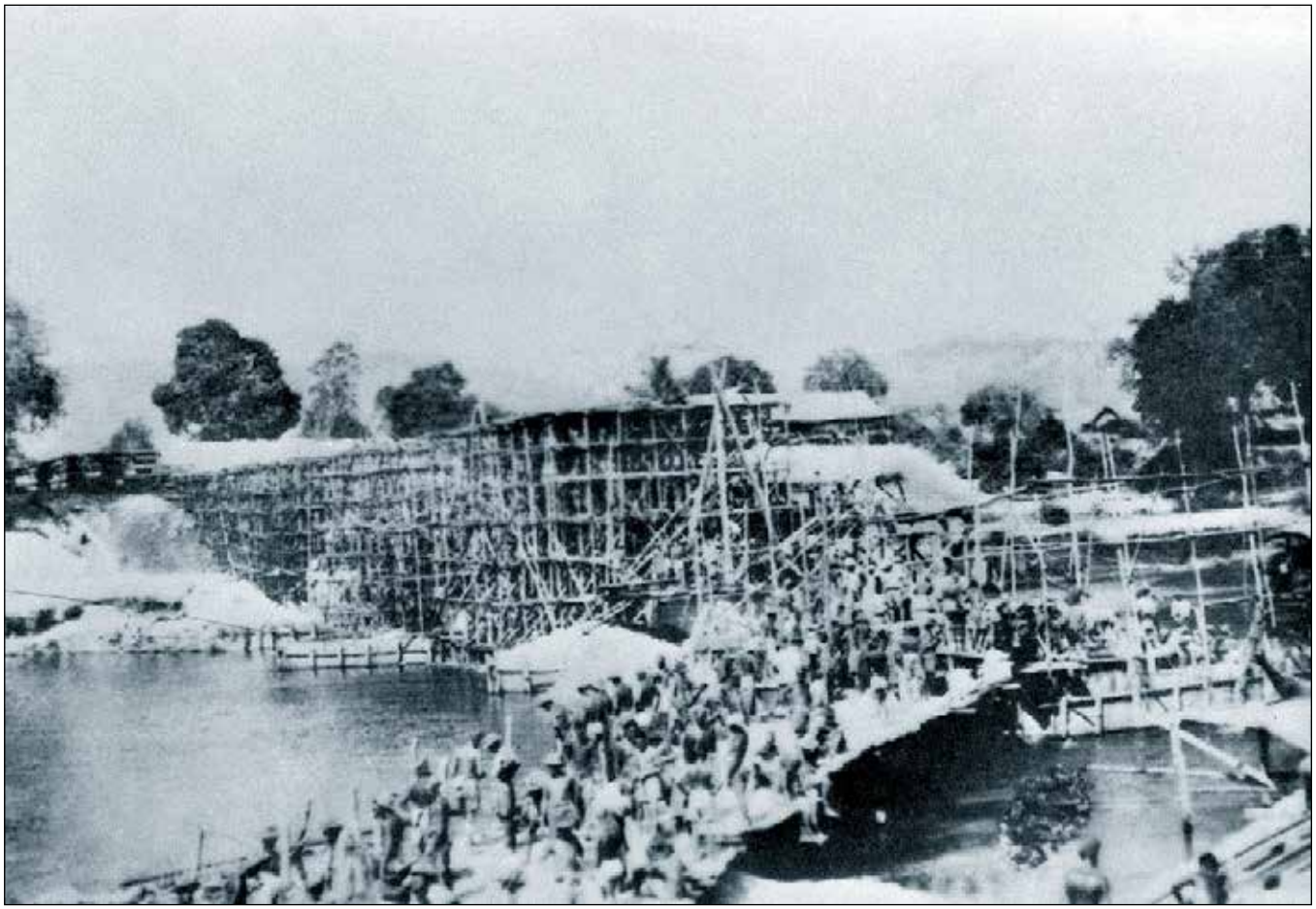
A Japanese soldier stands on guard near the entrance to the prisoner of war camp at Thanbyuzayat, Burma, in late 1942 or 1943. This camp was the starting point of the Burma section of the Burma–Thailand railway, and was used from September 1942 as an administration base and transit camp for POWs, and later as a base hospital for seriously ill patients from other camps. In June 1943, Allied aircraft bombed and strafed the camp, killing nineteen prisoners and injuring thirty others. *(AWM 045258)*

Australian prisoners of war of 'A' Force march to a new campsite south of Thanbyuzayat during construction of the Burma section of the Burma–Thailand railway in late 1942. *(AWM P00406.006)*

Slim River, a stop on the railway journey from Singapore to Bampong, by Jack Chalker, 1945: pen and black ink, brush and ink, pencil on paper, 10.6 x 18.2 cm. Chalker said: 'We were prodded, thirty-two at a time, into closed metal-box trucks with sliding doors'. He made a 'small sketch' at Slim River in 1942, but this drawing was completed in 1945. *(AWM ART91845)*

The march up-country from Bampong to Konyu, by Jack Chalker, 1942: pen and black ink, brush and wash on paper, oil on canvas board, 9.8 x 12.6 cm. The march of 150 km was hard on men already suffering from a year of imprisonment and six days on the train from Singapore. *(AWM ART91810)*

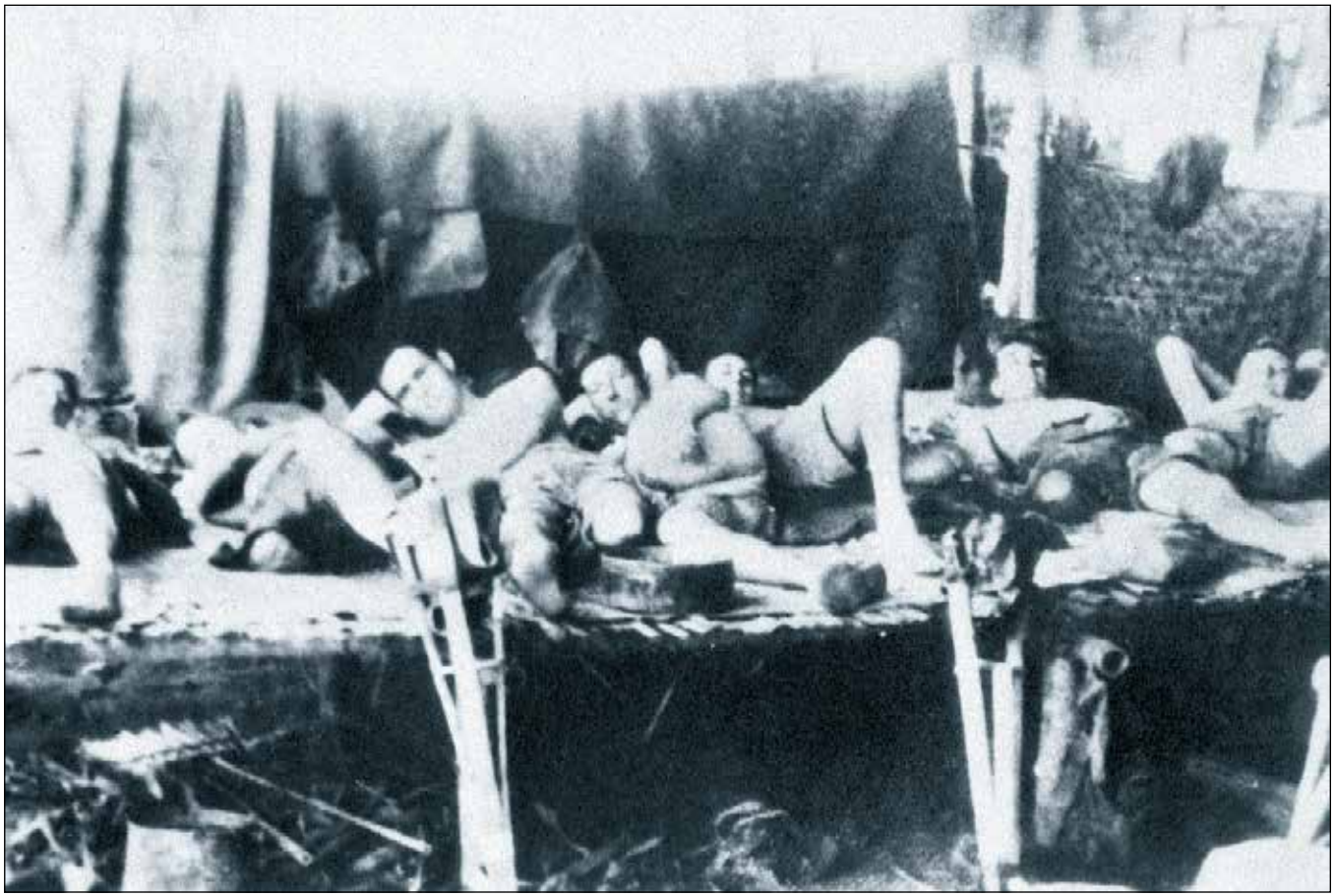
Australian prisoners of war carry sleepers along the line, approximately 40 km south of Thanbyuzayat, Burma, circa 1943. *(AWM P00406.026)*



Allied prisoners of war build a bridge at Tamarkan, near Kanchanaburi, on the Burma–Thailand railway, circa February 1943. The scaffolding, made from bamboo, is at the site of the eleven-span steel bridge that was completed in April 1943, spanning the Mae Klong river, later renamed the Kwai Yai river. *(AWM 118879)*

Funeral at Ronsi, Burma, of a prisoner of war who died during the construction of the Burma–Thailand railway, 1943. *(AWM P00406.031)*

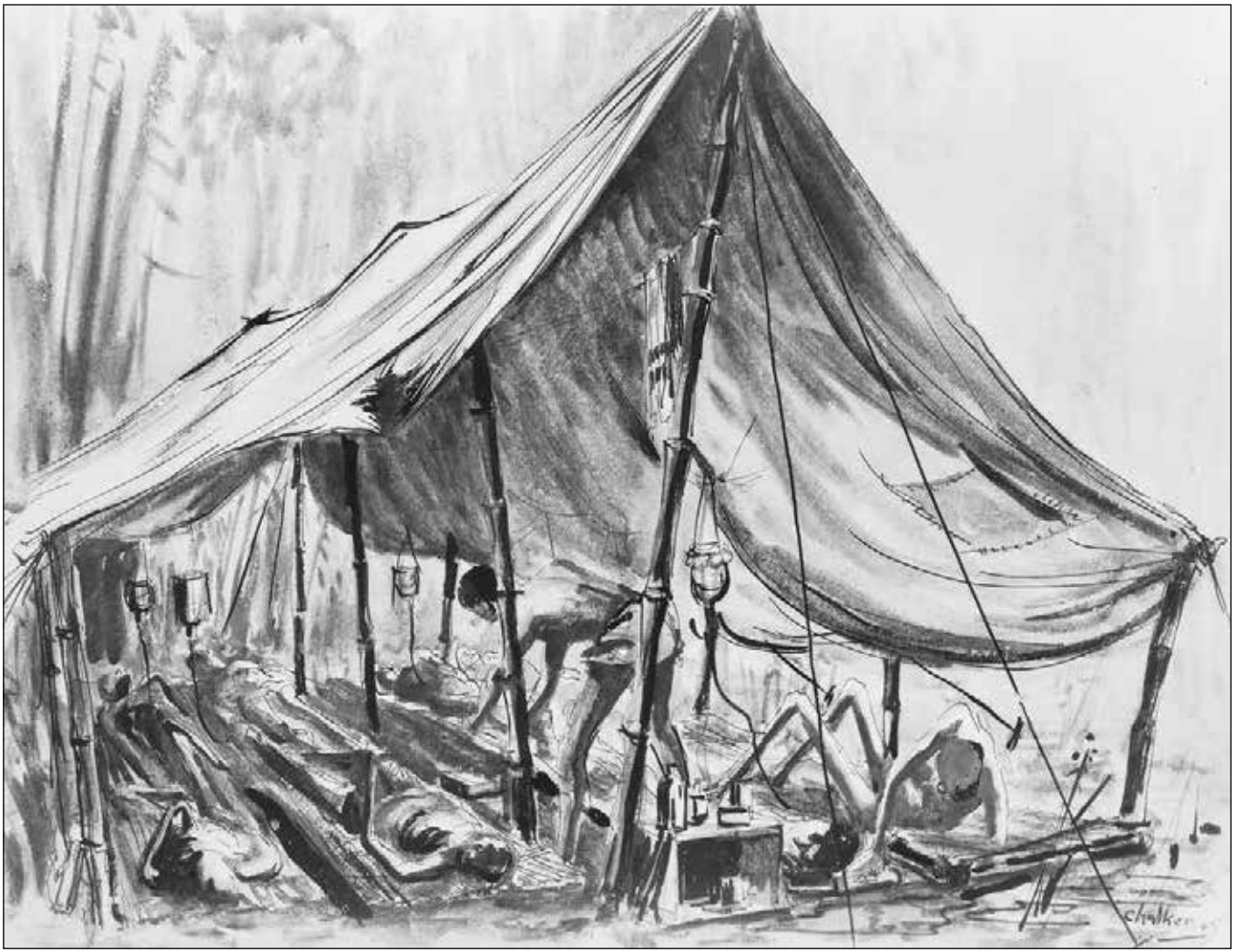
Prisoners in a hut at Wampo, Thailand, on the Burma–Thailand railway, circa April 1943. The typical hut was 100 metres long, had an attap (thatched) roof and open sides, and allowed about 75 cms of sleeping space for each man, on platforms that extended the full length of the hut. *(AWM 157878)*



The amputation ward of 'Bamboo Hut Hospital' at a prisoner of war camp on the Burma–Thailand railway. Most of the patients had their legs amputated because of uncontrollable tropical ulcers. *(AWM P00761.012)*

Advanced tropical ulcer on the leg of a prisoner of war on the Burma–Thailand railway at Tarsoe, Thailand, 1943. Tarsoe was used by the Japanese as a staging camp for POWs moving north to work on the railway and as a base hospital from November 1942 to April 1944. During this period 15,029 sick passed through it, of whom 806 died. *(AWM P00761.010)*

Colonel Edward 'Weary' Dunlop and Captain Jacob Markowitz working on a thigh amputation, Chungkai, by Jack Chalker, 1946: oil on cardboard, 21 x 29.7 cm. Dunlop is facing, and Markowitz has his back to, the viewer. In this painting, Jack Chalker brought the distinguished surgeons together as a tribute, although in fact Dunlop had followed Markowitz at Chungkai. The fabric that draped the bamboo poles is old mosquito netting. *(AWM ART91848)*

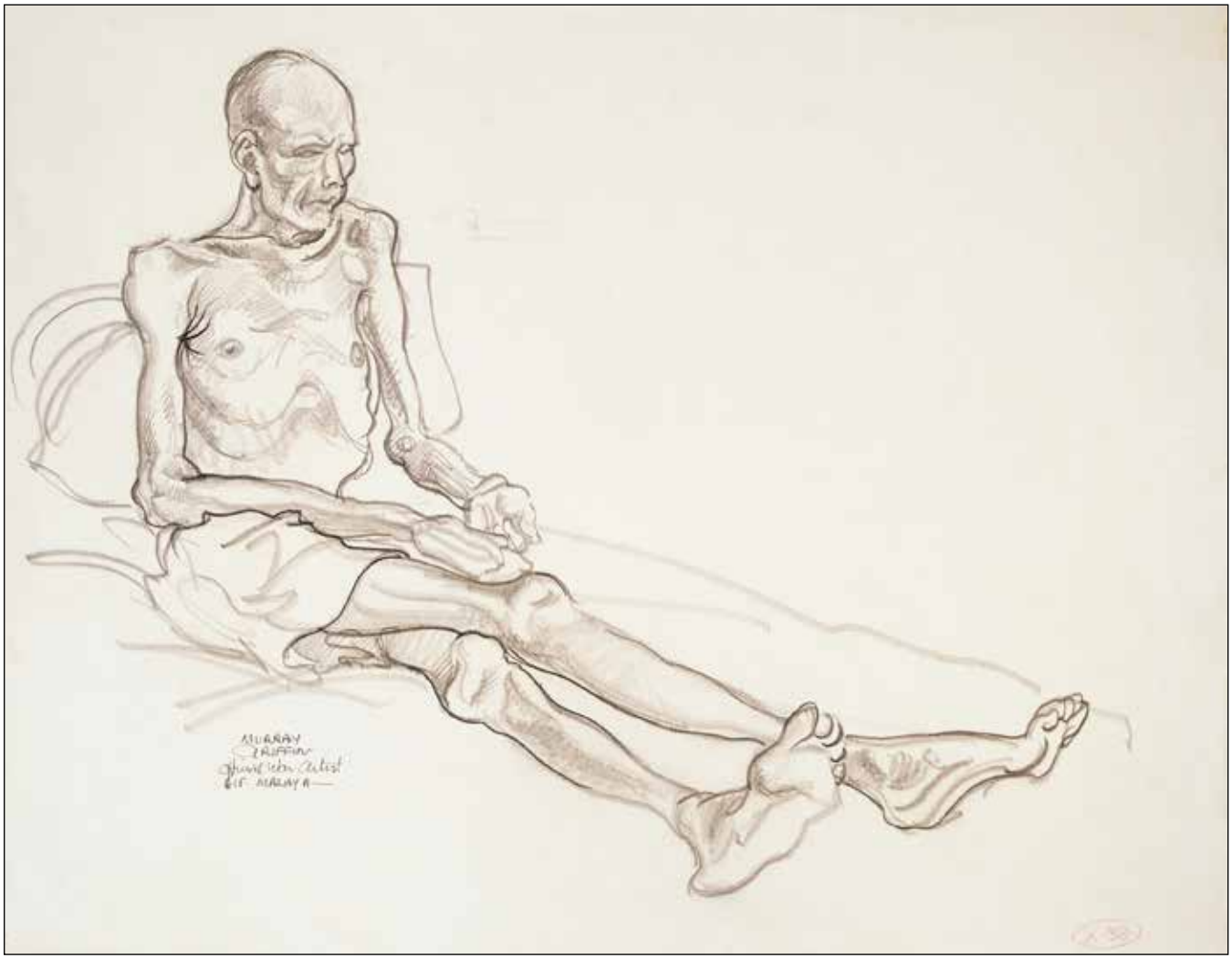


Cholera tent at Hintok prisoner of war camp, Thailand, sketched by Jack Chalker, 1943. In the monsoon rains that lashed the tents, the medical assistants attempted to keep the makeshift saline drips operating. *(AWM 101030)*

Track laying at Ronsi, 60 kilometres from Thanbyuzayat, Burma. Several different teams of some of the fittest prisoners were laying tracks and hammering home the dog spikes at feverish speed. The men pictured are British and Australian prisoners of 'A' Force. *(AWM P00406.034)*

The 'Konyu Cutting' or 'Hellfire Pass', circa September 1945. Construction started on Anzac Day 1943 and much of the work was done by hammer and tap teams, with one man swinging a heavy hammer and another holding and turning a drill. Other men with bag stretchers or cane baskets carried away the rubble left by explosions or teased-out by prisoners of war with pinch bars, picks and shovels. The work went on for twenty-four hours a day; the light was provided by fires of piled bamboo. The Konyu Cutting cost the lives of at least 700 Allied prisoners of war. On 24 April 1998, to commemorate the experiences of the prisoners on the railway, the Australian Government officially opened the Hellfire Pass Memorial, which includes a three and a half hour walking trail that takes visitors to several of the cuttings and bridge sites. *(AWM 157859)*

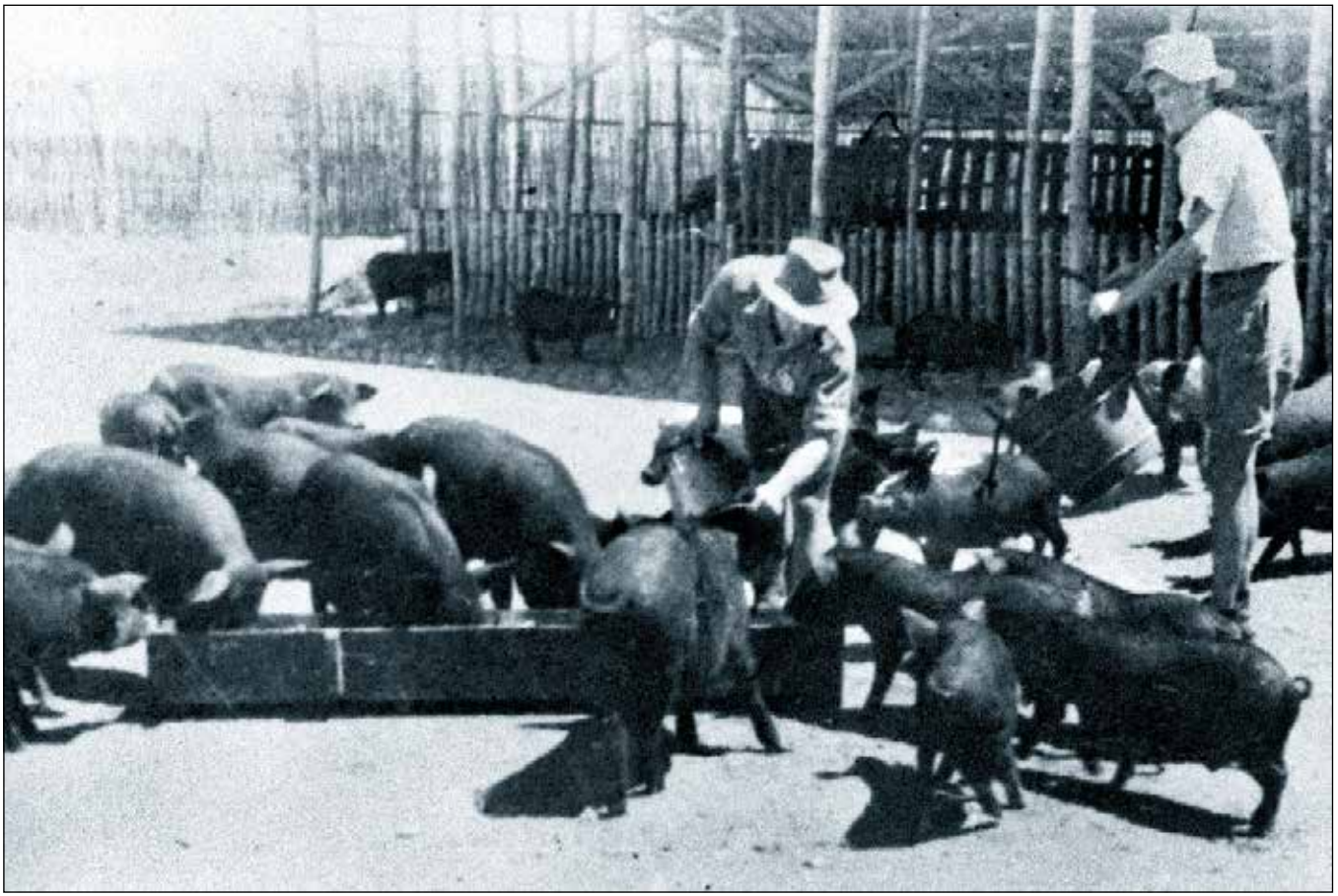
Two working men, Konyu River Camp; verso: Study for 'Two working men', by Jack Chalker, 1942: pen and black ink, brush and wash on paper, verso pencil, 13.9 x 8.1 cm. This sketch survived by chance when Chalker was caught by a guard, forced to tear up his sketches and beaten for two days. He found this sketch had survived undetected in a pile of rags. *(AWM ART91811)*



P.O.W. just returned from Burma, by Murray Griffin, c1943: pencil on paper, 28.3 x 36.4 cm. In his drawings, Griffin recorded the gradual decline in the physical condition of the prisoners of war in Changi, but the extreme emaciation of the returning survivors of 'F' Force from the Burma–Thailand railway at the end of 1943 shocked the Changi POWs, and Griffin made several immediate sketches. The title of this work suggests the subject had been working in Burma, but the return of 'F' Force from Thailand had affected Griffin and his work became increasingly pessimistic. *(AWM ART26524)*

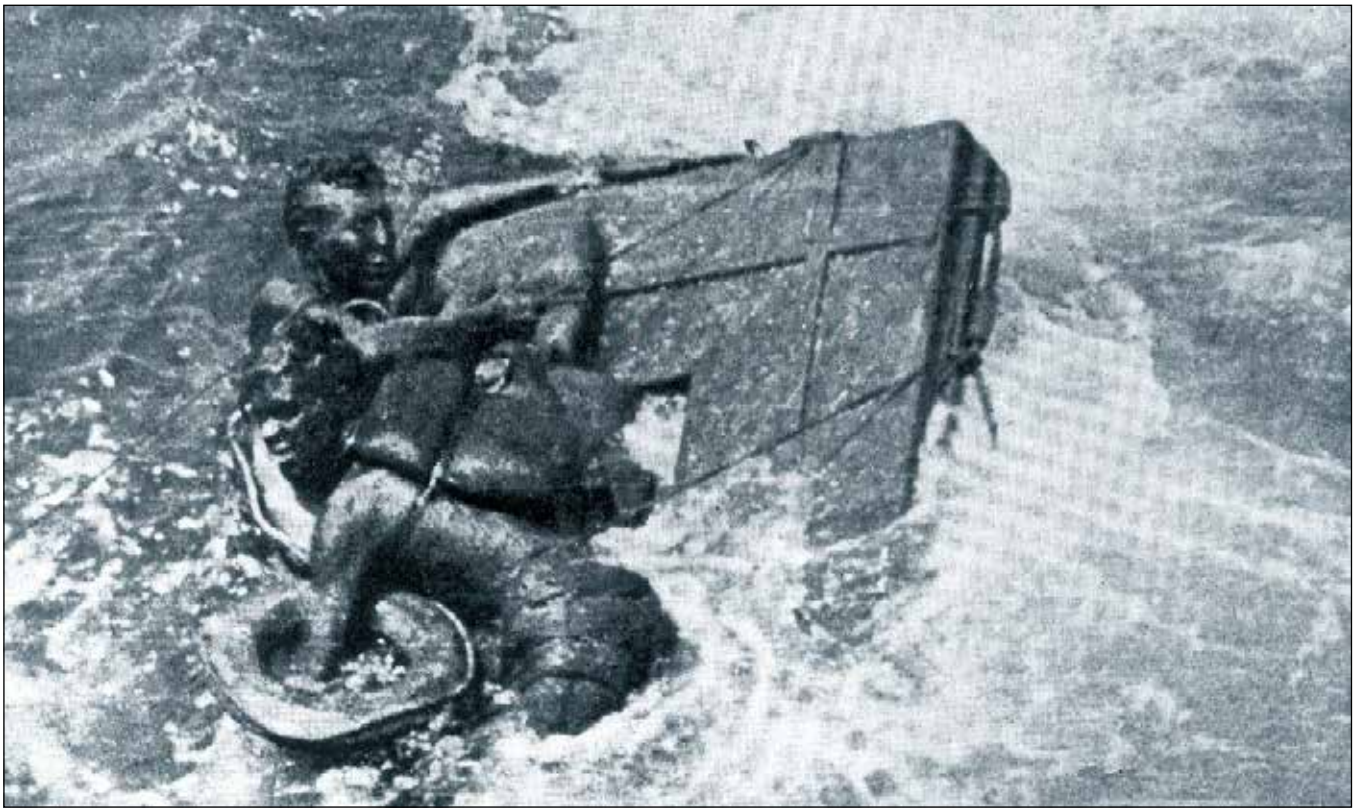
Prisoners of war return to camps by train after the completion of the Burma–Thailand railway, Thailand, circa 1943. *(P00406.011)*

A curved trestle bridge approximately one kilometre south of Hintok, Thailand, on the Burma–Thailand railway, 19 October 1945. There were several similar timber bridges in the area. The higher, and less stable, 'Pack of Cards' bridge was just north of Hintok and was so named because it fell down three times during construction. *(AWM 122309)*



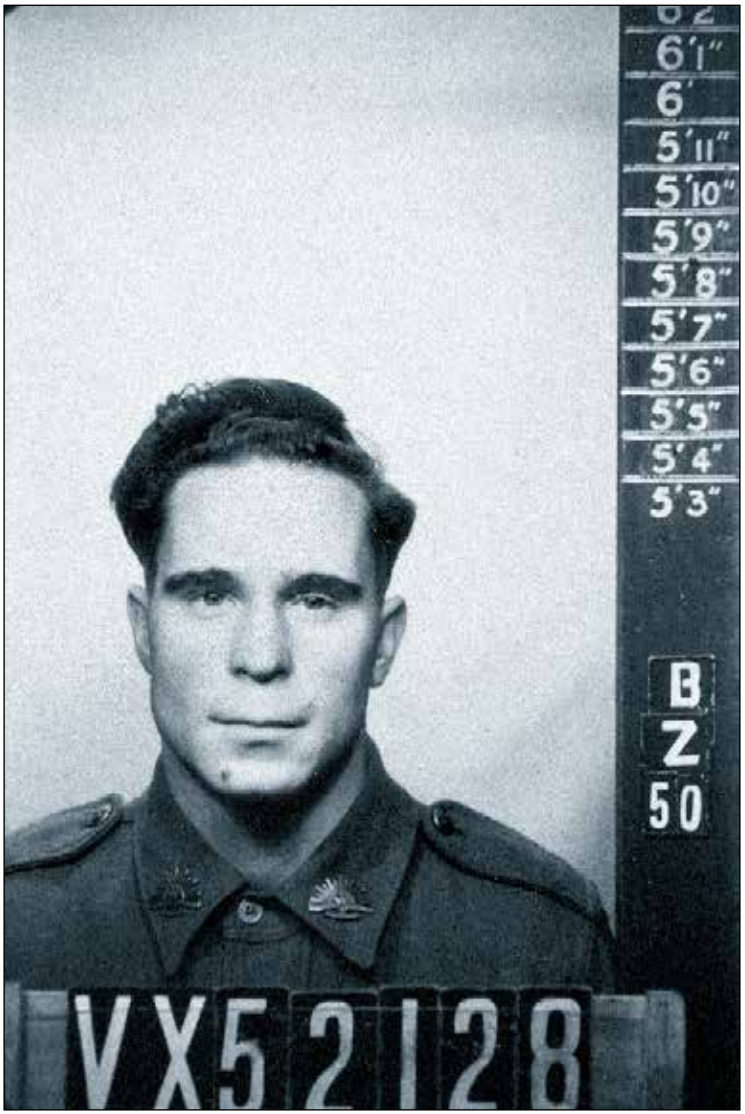
Allied prisoners of war tend pigs, Taiwan, June 1944. This was an event staged for the benefit of a representative from the International Red Cross. The pigs, and other signs of a plentiful food supply, were removed immediately the inspection ended. Most southern camps were never open to the International Red Cross and visits to those in Taiwan, Korea and Japan were infrequent and closely controlled. The Japanese released propaganda film footage about selected camps. *(AWM 041209)*

Australian prisoners of war chop and saw wood in front of the cookhouse at the prison camp at Kanchanaburi, Thailand, in 1944. Many prisoners were brought here from Burma after the Burma–Thailand railway was completed, and chopping wood for the cooking fires was a daily chore. *(AWM P01502.001, photographer: JM Williams)*



On 12 September 1944, five American and British submarines, including USS *Pampanito* and *Sealion*, attacked and sank at least ten Japanese ships in the South China Sea, including *Rokyu [Rakuyo] Maru* and *Kachidoki Maru*, two transports that were loaded with Allied prisoners of war. Most of the POWs, abandoned by the Japanese crews, died at sea, and some may have been shot. Covered in oil and clinging to debris, many survivors drifted for several days before being rescued. *(AWM P02018.326, photographer: Hutchinson)*

British and Australian prisoners of war, survivors of the sinking of *Rokyu Maru*, are picked up by USS *Sealion* after three days adrift, 15 September 1944. Of the 1248 British and Australian POWs on *Rokyu Maru*, 136 were rescued by the Japanese and 141 by the Americans. The survivors of the sinkings brought to Australia the first detailed information about the POWs of the Japanese, including the disaster of the Burma–Thailand railway. *(AWM 305634)*



Gunner Albert Cleary, 2/15th Field Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery, aged twenty-five, escaped from the Sandakan camp in north Borneo in March 1945, with Gunner Wally Crease. They were recaptured by natives, who handed them over to the Japanese for a reward. Both men were tortured and beaten, and Crease was shot trying to escape again. Cleary was tied up and beaten again for many days before he was finally released and died on 20 March 1945. A memorial now stands on the spot where he died. *(AWM P02468.516)*

Private Harry Robinson, 2/21st Battalion, who was captured on Ambon, rests in the improvised hospital at Bakli prisoner of war camp, suffering from dysentery and starvation, Hainan Island, China, 28 August 1945. *(AWM 030358/05, photographer: Leonard Woods)*

A group of nurses and civilians on their way home after their internment at Yokohama, Japan, wait at a prisoner of war processing centre in Manila, 4 September 1945. The group included members of the Australian Army Nursing Service, mission and civilian nurses and Kathleen Bignell, a planter, all of whom were captured in Rabaul. The elderly woman in the centre is the only non-Australian—Mrs E Jones, an American school teacher, had been captured in the Aleutian Islands. Her husband, a weather observer, was killed by the Japanese and she was interned with the Australians. At the time of this photograph, the group had been flown from Japan via Okinawa and were to continue by air to Australia; they were among the first ex-prisoners of war and internees to arrive home. *(AWM 019146)*

Ex-prisoners of war returning from Japan are inoculated by Australian Army Nursing Service nurses in Manila, Philippines, 4 September 1945. *(AWM 030261/19, photographer: LG Massingham)*

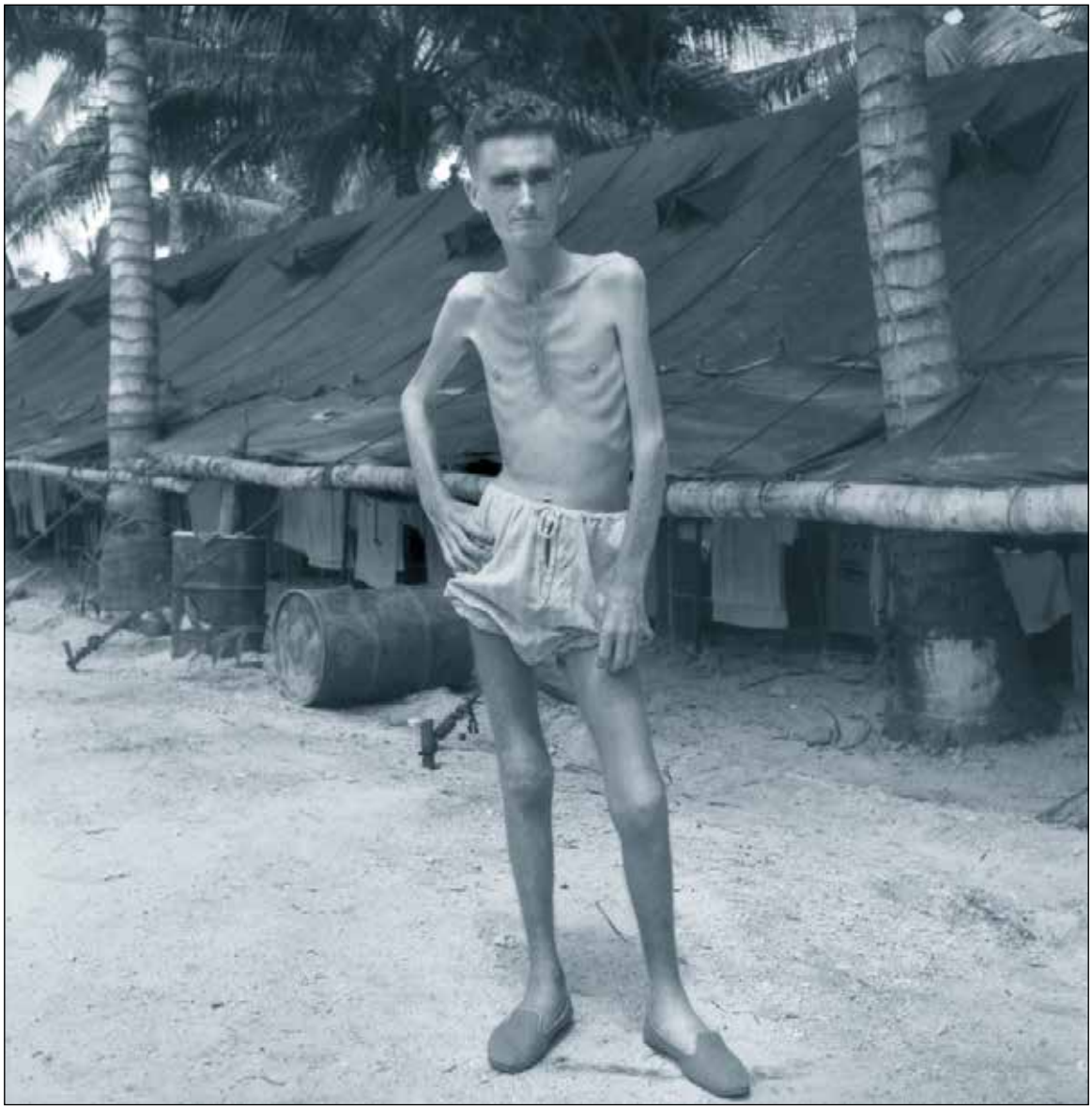
Australian ex-prisoners of war carry rice from the mess at Changi camp, Singapore, in September 1945. This amount of rice would be supplied as rations for 250 men. *(AWM 019192)*

Private Robert Gill, a member of the 8th Division, released from the Changi camp suffering from beri-beri and malnutrition, rests on a hospital bed in Singapore, September 1945. *(AWM 019195)*

Lieutenant Robert Savile-Kelsey, 2/26th Battalion, and Driver William Fackender, Australian Army Service Corps, examine the famous 'broom' wireless set of Changi Gaol, which the Japanese failed to discover, Singapore, September 1945. The set was made by Lieutenant R Wright of the Australian Army Ordnance Corps. *(AWM 117006)*

Liberated Australian and Allied prisoners of war from Palembang, Sumatra, relate their experiences to a British war correspondent in Singapore. *(AWM P00444.193)*

Recovered prisoners of war from Ambon being landed at Morotai from an Australian corvette, HMAS **Junee**, 12 September 1945. Just 123 of the 528 Australians from Ambon were then alive. Two more died before they reached Australia. *(AWM 115763)*



Private Leo Ayers, one of the recovered prisoners of war from Ambon, at 2/5th Australian General Hospital, Morotai, 13 September 1945. The surviving prisoners from Ambon had suffered extreme deprivation and photographers saw them immediately on release. *(AWM 116271)*

Recently liberated RAAF and British prisoners of war discard the pig trough formerly used to prepare the daily ration of boiled rice for 1200 internees of the camp at Kuching, Sarawak, 14 September 1945. *(AWM OG3516, photographer: John Thomas Harrison)*

Sisters and priests board an army barge, New Britain, 16 September 1945. The members of the Catholic mission were first allowed to stay in their own quarters at Vunapope, east of Rabaul, but later were shifted inland to Ramale, where they were more protected from Allied bombing but suffered deprivation. Many of those held at Ramale were German nationals, nominal allies of the Japanese, but others were from neutral or enemy countries, and this complicated relations with the Japanese. In the foreground, left to right are: Mother Martha (Dutch), Sister M Flavia (Australian) and Sister Berenice Twohill (Australian). *(AWM 096887)*

The nurses who had survived the sinking of the *Vyner Brook* and three and a half years of imprisonment arrive by air at Singapore at dusk on 16 September 1945. Just twenty-four of the sixty-five nurses who had gone on board *Vyner Brook* were still alive. *(AWM 044480)*

Sister Jess Doyle, 2/10th Australian General Hospital, soon after her release with other nurses from a prison camp on Sumatra. On arrival in Singapore, the nurses went into the hospital in St Patrick's School, the place where many of them had worked before capture. *(AWM P01015.005)*

Warrant Officer Leslie Cody, 2/4th Machine Gun Battalion, an ex-prisoner of war and member of the War Graves Commission survey party, lays paybooks and other documents out to dry after their recovery from the graves of prisoners of war at a camp on the Burma–Thailand railway, September 1945. *(AWM P00761.046)*

Members of the 8th Division liberated from Japanese prisoner of war camps are given an enthusiastic welcome by crowds in Sydney, 16 September 1945. The men were flown from Singapore into Rose Bay by Catalina flying boats, and then bussed to hospital for medical examination. Cheering crowds lined the bus route. *(AWM 115982)*

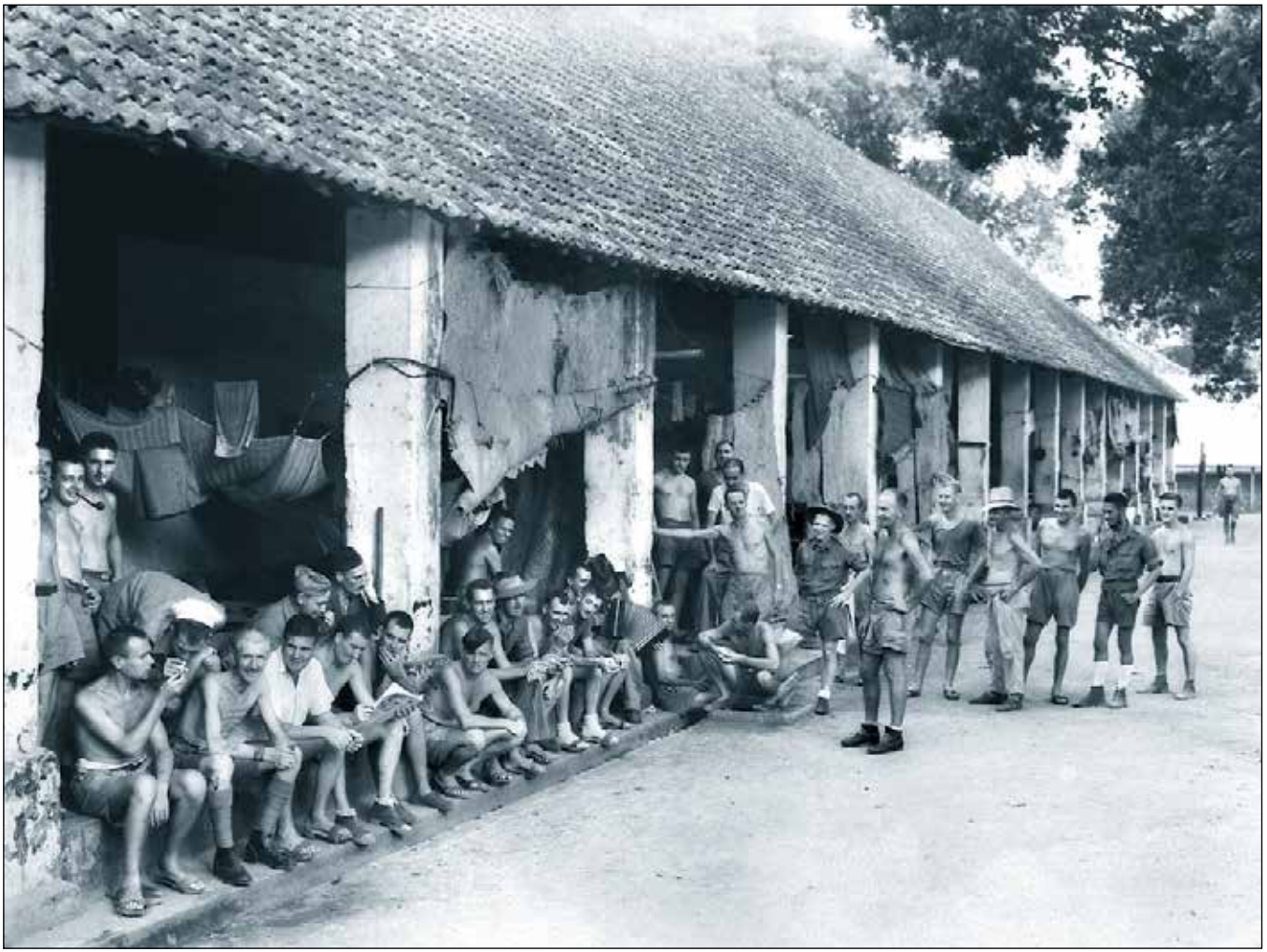
At Kuching, Sarawak, on 18 September 1945, the Japanese were marched into the barracks which they themselves had guarded. During captivity many prisoners of war had relished thoughts of revenge, but when released few took action against their former captors. *(AWM 120753)*

Australian ex-prisoners of war, Osaka, Japan, 1945. After the end of the war the POWs in Japan had to wait several weeks before Allied occupying troops arrived. As the guards left the camps, some men liberated themselves. These men hitch-hiked 200 miles (320 kms) to reach Allied troops; this was their first ride in a car in three and half years. Left to right: Privates Allan Scott, Amos Skinner, Stan Rixon, Robert Lowe and Walter Wright. *(AWM 019371)*

Recently returned prisoners of war travelling by ambulance train from Sydney to Melbourne stop at Benalla, where they are given sweets and food. The crowds meeting the ships at the wharfs and at central railway stations were so large that relatives and friends were instructed to meet the prisoners where there was more space—such as Melbourne's Flemington Showgrounds. *(AWM 115850)*

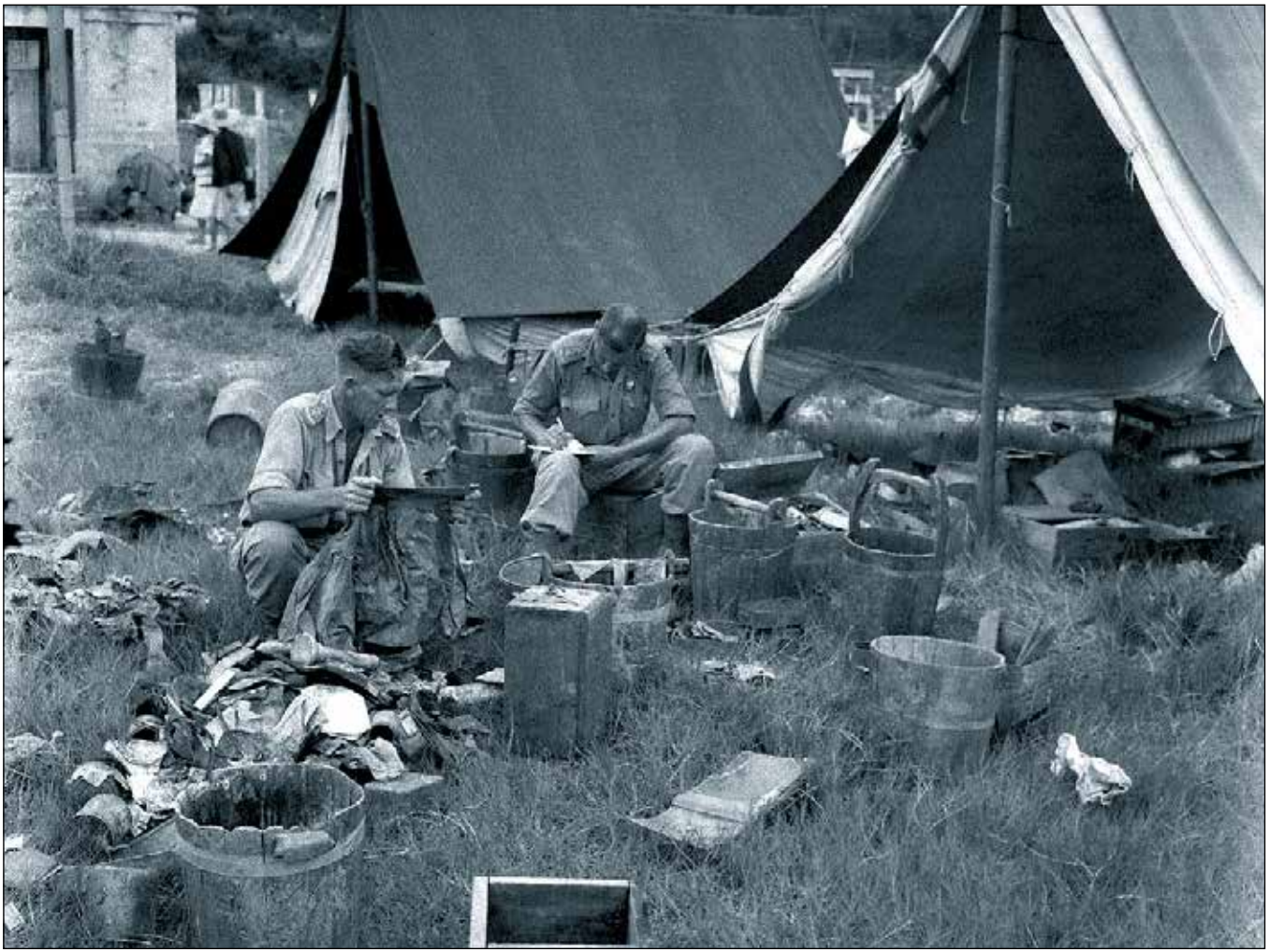
Volunteers from the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria drive returning prisoners of war through the streets of Melbourne, 19 September 1945. The POWs were uncertain how the people of Australia would receive them. In fact, they were met by large and enthusiastic crowds. *(AWM 116149)*

Aided by friendly natives following their escape from the Japanese prison camp at Ranau, having survived the Sandakan death march, Private Nelson Short, Warrant Officer William Sticpewich and Private Keith Botterill were flown out to the Labuan airstrip by RAAF Auster pilots on 20 September 1945. From left: Group Captain Jerrold Fleming, Pilot Officer John Thomas, Short, Sticpewich, Botterill, Flying Officer Ted Dowse. A fourth man who survived the march and escaped from Ranau, Bombardier William Moxham, was too ill to be photographed with this group. *(AWM OG3552, photographer: John Thomas Harrison)*

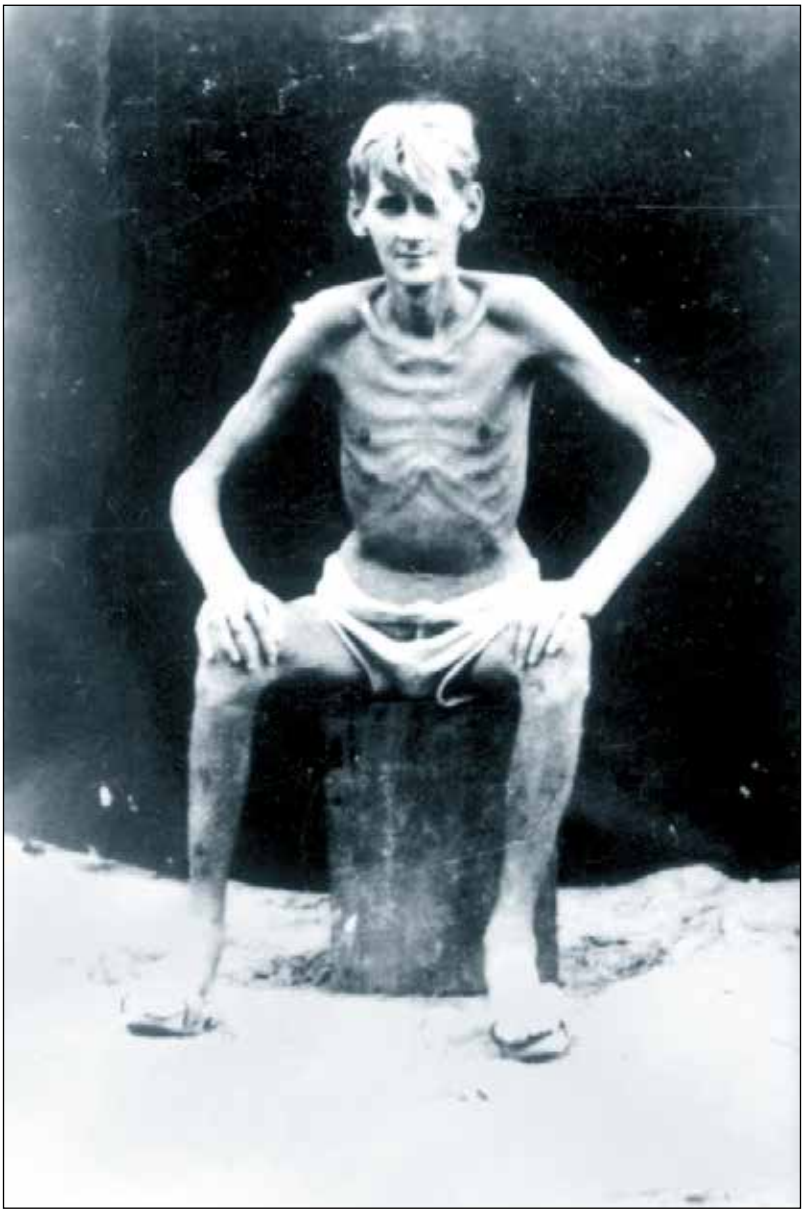


In September 1945, recently liberated Australian and British prisoners of war await repatriation at the 'Bicycle Camp', a former Dutch military barracks in Java later used by the Japanese as a POW camp. It gained its distinctive name from the large number of bicycles discovered when the camp was first occupied by the POWs. *(AWM 123661, photographer: Lt R Buchanan)*

A RAAF Medical Air Evacuation Transport Unit (MAETU) nurse helps Australian ex-prisoner of war amputees—'leggies'—on their arrival at Singapore from Bangkok, 25 September 1945. *(AWM 119706)*



Captain Gerald Cocks reads out a name and regimental number from the band of a pair of shorts to Lieutenant Eric Robertson, Sandakan, 26 October 1945. Both men were of the 3rd Australian Prisoner of War Contact and Inquiry Unit, attempting to identify missing servicemen. The clothing and belongings around them were found in the camp at Sandakan and many bore identifiable names and numbers of deceased Australian and British POWs. *(AWM 121783, photographer: Frank Albert Charles Burke)*



Private Kenneth Reid, 2/29th Battalion, was captured in Malaya in April 1942 and spent three and a half years as a prisoner of the Japanese before his release in late 1945, with severe malnutrition. *(AWM P01433.019)*

An unidentified Australian prisoner of war on his release from a camp in Burma or Thailand in late 1945, in a physical condition typical of many of the Allied prisoners of war of the Japanese at the end of the war. *(AWM P01433.024)*

Australian Army Nursing Service members Sister Jean 'Jenny' Ashton of the 2/13th Australian General Hospital and Sister E Mavis Hannah of the 2/4th Casualty Clearing Station arrive home in Adelaide in October 1945. In the month that the nurses had spent on Singapore and on the voyage home on the hospital ship *Manunda*, they had made a rapid, if superficial, physical recovery from three and a half years as prisoners of war following the sinking of the *Vyner Brook*. They had also been provided with the new safari jacket uniform. *(AWM P00431.001)*

Prisoners of war from Ambon, Sapper Les Hohl of Toowoomba and Private Jim Rogers of St Kilda, catch up on the news, October 1945. The prisoners thought of their years in captivity as their stolen years, and they were eager to make up time. *(AWM 019301)*

Ex-prisoners of war from the Burma–Thailand railway line the rails of the troopship *Circassia* as it berths at Fremantle, Western Australia, 29 October 1945. *(AWM P01538.003)*

Crowds welcome home ex-prisoners of war, Sydney, 1945. *(State Library of Victoria* Argus *newspaper collection image an002442)*

The grave of an Australian serviceman from the Sandakan death marches; he was shot trying to escape and was buried by a local near the 16 Mile peg. *(AWM 042578)*

The graves of some of the 365 Australian prisoners of war at Galala, Ambon, October 1945. Prisoners of war buried their dead close to many of their camps. In the extreme conditions on the Burma–Thailand railway, some work groups were forced to cremate their dead, but that was exceptional. On the Sandakan death marches and at Ranau, prisoners had neither the opportunity nor the energy to bury all those who died or were murdered. *(AWM 121114, photographer: Sgt RL Stewart)*

A memorial service on the beach at Rabaul on 23 January 1946 in memory of over 1000 civilian internees and prisoners of war who died when the Japanese transport *Montevideo Maru* was sunk off the Philippines four years earlier. It has been difficult to create a site of mourning for an incident that took place at sea, and the shores that they left at Rabaul are distant and have been covered in volcanic ash. The men in the background wearing crossed white webbing are members of the Royal Papuan Constabulary band. *(AWM 124109, photographer: BA Harding)*

Allied war graves at Thanbyuzayat, Burma, January 1955. The prisoner of war dead were reburied in selected sites, designed and tended by the Imperial, later Commonwealth, War Graves Commission. Few Australians have been able to visit the Thanbyuzayat cemetery, where more than 1300 Australians reinterred from burial sites along the Burma–Thailand railway are buried. The cemetery at the Thai end of the railway, at Kanchanaburi, is better known. *(AWM 066376)*

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