

Len Hygate – Accountant, Cricketer and Soldier

His life in Malaya 1935 to 1947

Colin Hygate

A Far East Adventure

Len was born in Sussex and grew up in Grove Road, Acton, London where his father worked as a toolmaker for D. Napier and Sons Ltd. making motor cars and aero engines. He attended Acton County School and after obtaining a Higher School Certificate was articled to R. Richards, an accountant in Chancery Lane, London. He was successful in the Chartered Accountants Examinations of 1934 and sought employment with an international firm of accountants McAuliffe, Davis and Hope who had offices in Malaya and were among the ten largest accounting companies at that time. The annual salary for a five-year contract was three times that of an equivalent position in the City. It also provided first class sea passage to Malaya and 6 months leave at the end of the contract. An exciting prospect for a 22-year-old with the world leaving the economic depression of the 20's behind and with the sun never setting on the British Empire.

So it was that Len boarded the R.M.S. Chitral at King George Vth Dock in London on Friday 16th August 1935.



R.M.S Chitral, 1930
(Watercolour by John Allcott)



and at King George Vth Dock, 1935

The tickets were for Singapore but until he reached Penang when the Senior Partner (one of the Grummit brothers who owned the practice) had assessed him and the

company's requirements, he was unsure if he would be working from an office in Kuala Lumpur, Penang or Singapore. His father had the foresight to send Len to a good London tailor to equip him with a dress suit and grey flannel suit. In addition, he also purchased a number of Sea Island cotton shirts from Austin Reed in Regent Street at 2 guineas each.

He was to share a cabin with another young Assistant Accountant appointed at the same time. At the cabin on C Deck they were met by their Goanese steward who was described as "a charming man of great experience and tact, only too willing to make sure that as new boys we did not give offence by unwittingly breaking any of the rules". As P&O had both the Royal Mail and the Government contract the other first-class passengers were "Judges, senior Civil Servants and other luminaries with their wives returning from leave, mainly to India". Despite being two almost penniless young men starting their careers in the far east they found that by simply observing the rules they gave no offence and found the others "to be the most friendly and amiable fellow passengers".

The ship was not particularly full even after collecting passengers from Southampton and then calling in to Gibraltar where a number disembarked. He learned that a number of passengers joined the returning P&O ship back to England having had a six-day cruise holiday! However, the ship filled almost to capacity in Marseilles where those passengers returning to India and the far east had gained an additional week's holiday in England before taking the Blue Train to Marseilles. His journey through the Suez Canal, Bombay and Colombo passed in pleasant company as rules were observed and consequently "no offence caused".

On arrival in Penang, Len had his first taste of Colonial Malaya and where he learned from F.H. Grummitt (the senior partner who had the wit to have married the daughter of the firm's founder, Sir Henry McAuliffe) that he would continue to the Singapore office of McAuliffe's the following day.

Boris Hembry's book, "Malayan Spymaster", provides a 1930 version of the same journey where also on arrival in Penang he met the Estates representative of McAuliffe, Davis & Hope as they acted as agents for the Ridsdell's rubber estates for whom he initially worked. Amusingly Hembry comments that "he was to learn later they were known as McAwwful, Davis & No Bloody Hope". He also provides a further anecdote referring to the nickname given to the Grummitt brothers as "Grubitt, Grabbitt and Keepit"! His book does provide many insights into both the working and social life Len was just entering, including service in the Malay Volunteer Force.

Landing in Singapore's Main Wharf on 13th September 1935 (a Friday!) Len went directly to McAuliffe's Office in Hong Kong Bank Chambers on Collyer Quay where he was allocated to a desk in the general open plan office with five fellow accounting assistants and the senior partner, Mr A. Dobson.



Collyer Quay, Singapore

A Colonial Life in Singapore

Accountant

His living accommodation, similar to most unmarried European men, was provided by McAuliffe where they were cared for by a number of servants. Len's accommodation was at 1 Bishopsgate Road, Tanglin which McAuliffe rented from the Anglican Dioceses of Singapore. The house and its' location provided pleasant accommodation with a camaraderie that came from spending time with colleagues, enjoying evening meals and the occasional stengah (whisky and water).



Bishopsgate Road, Tanglin, Singapore.

Len was engaged primarily on rubber estate auditing although that also extended to a range of other industries to whom McAuliffe's provided accounting and agency services. As an international accountancy group, they handled a number of

mercantile audits for the London-connected agency houses. One such business was MacLaine Watson and Company who provided agency services to many of the rubber, tin and pepper producers. It was here that a lasting friendship started with Colin McLean who worked for them. He too was a member of the Singapore based Straits Settlements Volunteer Force and sadly was one who did not survive although Len christened his son Colin as a living memorial to his friend.

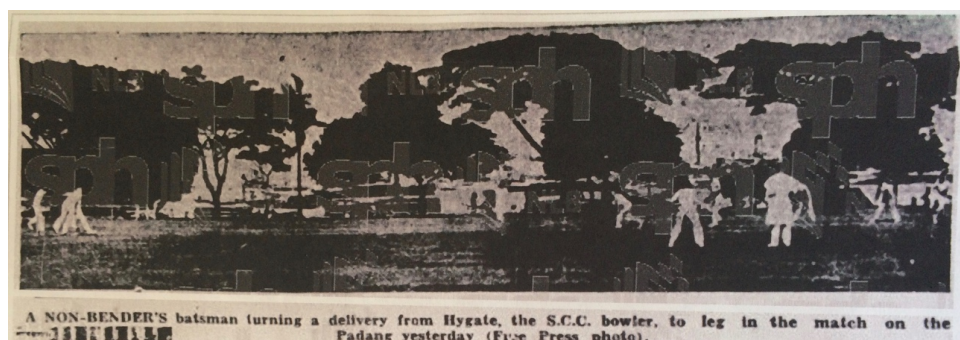
During these pre-war years Len made visits to rubber estates in Johore and Malacca. He also enjoyed travel to Penang and Kuala Lumpur where McAuliffe's had offices and clients when they needed additional support from Singapore. Those secondments provided opportunities to visit islands, beaches and mountains at these localities. The improvement in the world rubber trade, during that time, provided a growing workload for the practice. With this growth and the general development of the Accountancy profession there was an amalgamation on 1st January 1938 with Turquand Youngs & Co. to form McAuliffe Turquand Youngs & Co.

There would have been many office related social occasions but one that is recorded was in February 1939 when Len acted as Best Man to his colleague George Walker at his wedding to Violet at the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd in Queen Street, Singapore. Other colleagues included J.H. (Johnny) Phillips (Managing Partner 1939), W. McArthur, E.A. Corless, T. Leffan C.E. Firkins, R. Beale and G.E. Bondwick.

Cricketer

Sunday 1st March 1936 saw the first trial match that year for the Singapore Cricket Club on the Padang. Len was one of three new players that year to play in the trial. He played primarily as a spin bowler and enjoyed a lifelong love of cricket. That was the first of numerous matches over the years as he played regularly for the Club. Easter 1936 saw the Club's first tour where they played at Kuantan and Pahang on the east coast of Malaya and were not only victorious but also at "tiffin time" the team were presented to the Sultan of Pahang at the Istana.

Back in Singapore a few months later another match was reported in the Singapore Newspapers with the following photograph of Len bowling.



Len's playing record continued through until 1940 with very regular appearances not only at the Padang but also on Hong Lim Green and the Tanglin Club. He was a spin bowler and generally batted at 8 or 9. His membership of the Club and love of cricket gave him a wide circle of friends beyond his accountancy colleagues and clients.

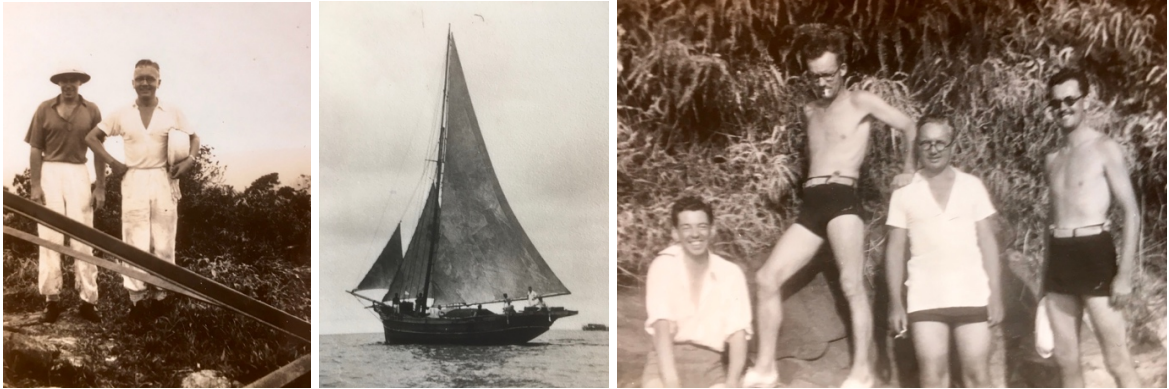
He would have been familiar with the Padang, the Changing Room, which has changed little since Len changed there as well as the view from the Balcony if not the present-day back drop!



Singapore Cricket Club today

The Singapore Cricket Club played a central part of Len's life between 1935 and 1940, particularly as it was located between the office on Collyer Quay and the Straits Settlements Volunteer Reserves Drill Hall on Beach Road.

Travel at Easter and Christmas was a further opportunity Len took.



Climbing Mount Ophir in Jahore with a rubber planter friend, John Cotterill, on Christmas Day 1937; a sailing trip on the Seri-Medan during Easter 1938; and another during Easter 1939, both with cricketing friends A. H. Murray, Grumley and Charles William Auchmuty on the Anak Marai (Len second from right). They were joined by Eric Corless on the earlier Easter '38 trip.

Leisure time was spent playing at the Cricket Club, attending drills and training with the S.S.V.F., travelling around the Peninsular and serving as Treasurer to The Friends of Singapore Society. There were many other social activities as Len enjoyed the life of a colonial accountant in Singapore including one occasion in August 1938 when he performed well in a comic sports meeting of the Springgit Harriers on the Malacca Club Padang where he came first in the biscuit and water race and second in the three legged race!

Soldier

He joined the 1st Battalion Straits Settlement Volunteer Force in 1936 and by 1939 was a Corporal Machine Gun Section Commander of No. 3 Section of Headquarters Company. Training camps were organised during the pre-war period and particularly after conscription started on 1st November 1939. As one of the serving members of the S.S.V.F., Len attended a number of such training camps.



Straits Settlements Volunteer Force Drill Hall, Beach Road Singapore (then and now)

In January 1940 he travelled back to England on leave as part of his overseas service contract which, since 1st January 1938, was with the newly merged McAuliffe, Turquand, Youngs and Company. Whilst on leave and with the country at war with Germany Len applied to transfer his military service to an English Regiment. However, this was refused by the Colonial Office as he was already a serving member of the S.S.V.F. and his contract with McAuliffe's required him in Singapore.

Before his departure he became engaged to Joan in June 1940. So, in mid-July Len left England with a heavy heart and some trepidation to return to Singapore. Poignant war time correspondence made it clear of his need to ensure his matters were settled in favour of his new fiancée should he not return. Joan joined the Wrens and served in a shore station at Bordean House in Hampshire whilst Len returned to his office on Collyer Quay and re-joined his Battalion in Singapore.

His return to Singapore was in time to attend a one-month long training course at the Siglap Camp. which was reported as being completed on 2nd November 1940.



Len is included in this photo (10th from the right in the 5th row back) taken at the break-up of the camp. The caption refers to the full company of infantrymen and machine gunners of the SVC Depot at the end of their one-month intensive training.

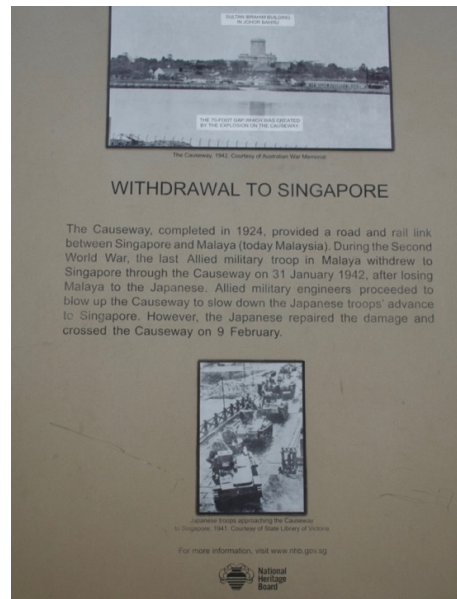
Interestingly Len is described as a Corporal although all his POW Records list him as a Private. It is unknown when or for what reason he was demoted although it may have simply been his break in service on leave in England. Also, standing next to him is a Private J.G. Baker who we believe could be Joseph G Baker, 13506 and who was a life-long post war family friend fondly known as "Jack".

Whilst such training was required for those with little military experience, exemptions were granted for more experienced men for whom their employers made the request. Exemptions were requested to a Tribunal by employers and Len was given exemption for the period February and March 1941 along with his colleagues Phillips and Walker but not granted to Westworth. However, with the imminent Japanese

invasion of Malaya (8th December 1941) Len was “Embodied” into the full service of the 1st Battalion S.S.V.F. on 1st December 1941.

Japanese Invasion and British Surrender

The beginning of December 1941 saw full time service for Len in his machine gun section of 1st Battalion SSVF and he described being located overlooking the Johore Causeway in a “Pill Box”.



Jahore Causeway

He always described quite vividly being equipped with a Vickers Machine Gun. He described in correspondence that he was in a Pill Box at Christmas 1941 when a present of a writing case from Joan was delivered there. Records show that the 1st Battalion. was withdrawn from the Causeway and positioned in a defensive position east of Singapore.

Of these events Len describes that: -

“During the battle on the island a Jap shell landed just a yard or so behind our gun pit and blew up all the hut – that was Feb 13 1942 – a Friday. It almost buried us but there it is. And two days later we were captured in what we stood in – boots, socks, shirts, shorts and a tin hat. Believe it or not I was wearing the patched and tattered shorts when the war ended. The Japs gave us nothing but two loin cloths, one in 1943 and one in Jan. 1945.”

It is not clear whether the shell fire on 13th was during the Battle of Pasir Panjang or an isolated incident in the defensive positions east of Keppel Harbour, however the next time Len was on the Padang it was as a Prisoner of War not a spin bowler for Singapore Cricket Club! It may be a salutary fact but his reticence to discuss this period of his life was as a result of being a very small part of the single biggest defeat in British Military history. Much has been written about the circumstances, particularly Brig. Ivan Simson’s ‘Singapore: Too Little Too Late’, but the most telling comment I have read was from the victorious General Yamashita:-

“My attack on Singapore was a bluff – a bluff that worked. I had 30,000 men and was outnumbered more than three to one. I knew that if I had to fight for long for Singapore, I would be beaten. That is why the surrender had to be at once. I was very frightened all the time that the British would discover our numerical weakness and lack of supplies and force me into disastrous street fighting.”

Prisoner of War, Singapore and Sarawak

Len was marched to Changi with the main group of captured allied forces where they were kept in exceedingly overcrowded and primitive conditions.



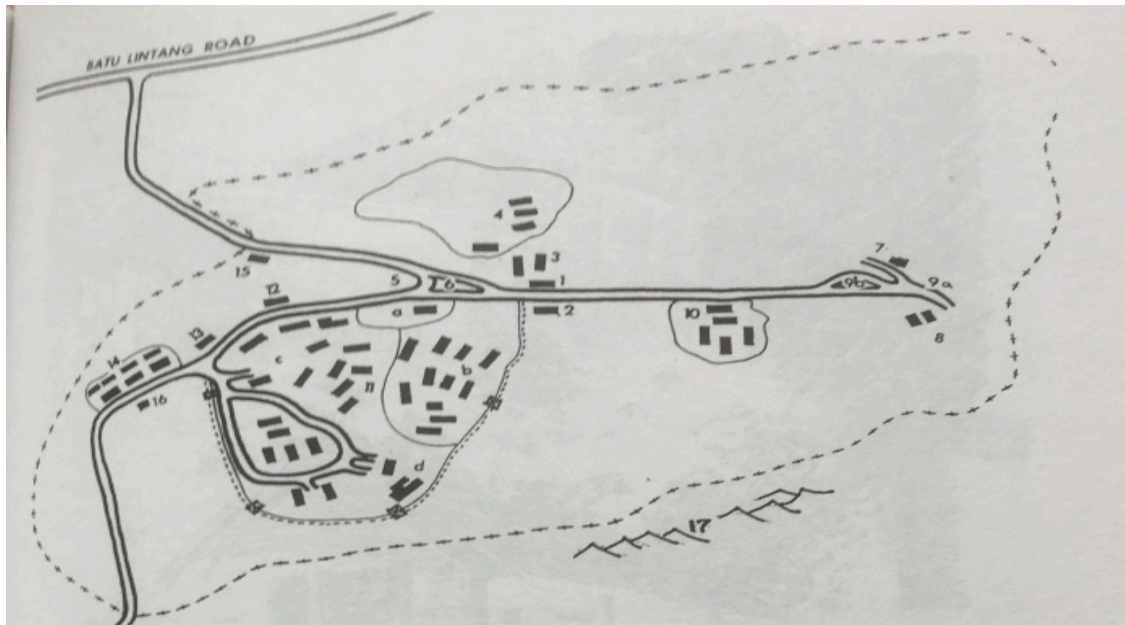
They learned very quickly that the rumours regarding the treatment of Prisoners of War by the Japanese Military who had not ratified the 1929 Geneva Convention were as inhuman as suspected. Much has been written elsewhere about the conditions and events at Changi. On 4th April 1942 Len was moved to Bukit Timah (No.5) Working Party as one of 800 men. It is presumed that his reference to Bukit Timah Camp is almost certainly "Sime Road" and is described by Jane Booker Nielsen as such in her "Guide to Singapore in World War II". Colonel Toosey in his book "The Colonel of Tamarkan" also refers to Bukit Time camp. Len was one of the first contingent to be moved there and may well have been working on preparing the internment camp from what had originally been a rubber plantation before becoming the RAF Headquarters which finally served as the Combined Military Headquarters from December 1941. It adjoins the Royal Singapore Golf Club and is described in detail in Jane's Guide.

After three months working at Bukit Timah Len has recorded that during July 1942 he was moved on to another camp at Pasir Panjang. This camp is also referred to as (Ayer Rajah Camp) and is located on Portsdown Road. This was the area where the final battle was fought before the surrender and was a heavily fortified location. It is probable that the work was associated with clearing the area for Japanese Military use. Len returned from Pasir Panjang to Changi in February 1943. We have no specific record of the activities these working parties undertook or treatment they received from the Japanese at either of these camps although there may be other records or recollections of which I am unaware.

On 28th March 1943 Len was included in a group of 500 British and 500 Australian POW's referenced as "E Force" under the command of Lieutenant Colonel T. C. Whimster R.A.O.C. that was transferred on the SS De Klerk to the Prisoner of War Camp at Batu Lintang in Kuching, Sarawak, Borneo where they arrived on 1st April.

Their journey was not without incident as there was a cargo of cigarettes on board and having bribed one of the Japanese officers with 100 cartons the POW's smoked their way to Kuching indulging in over 30,000 cigarettes. On arrival at Kuching the Japanese realised that the cigarettes were missing but did not pursue the matter as the Japanese officer receiving the bribe quashed any investigation. Also during the three day voyage Major Fairlie, the CO of the Australian E Force had smuggled a revolver and 20 rounds of ammunition on board with a plan to seize the SS De Klerk and sail to Australia. Lt Col Whimster, as senior officer squashed the plan immediately.

Layout of Batu Lintang Prisoner of War Camp, Kuching



Layout of the Batu Lintang Camp, Kuching

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Japanese Administrative office 2 Japanese Military Store; also house where punishments were conducted 3 Quartermaster's Stores (for storage of rice and other foodstuff) 4 Roman Catholic Priest's Compound 5 Artificial Hill (about 20 feet in diameter and 10-12 feet high) with the words 'One Happy Family' around the foot of the hill. There was a watchtower and sentry house on the top of the hill 6 Parade Ground 7 Lieutenant-Colonel Suga's Administrative Office 8 Japanese Guards' Quarters 9 a. Parade Ground for flag-raising and anthem-singing ceremony b. Driveway for Japanese cars | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 The Dutch, British and Australian Officers' Compounds, each enclosed by their own fences 11 a. Indonesians' Compound b. Compound for male civilian P.O.W.s c. Compound for British other ranks d. Kitchen Blocks 12 The Camp Hospital 13 Dr. Yamamoto's Office and his 'Laboratory' (up to 1943 it was Punjabi Soldiers' Camp) 14 Women's and Children's Compound 15 The Guard House 16 Ammunition Dump 17 Ridgeway which was cleared for cemetery 'Boot Hill' |
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SOURCES: After Peter H. H. Howes, "The Lintang Camp: Reminiscences of An Internee during the Japanese Occupation, 1942-1945," *JMHSSB*, no. 2 (March 1976), p. 34; and Ivor M. Purden, "Japanese P.O.W. Camps in Borneo," in *Borneo: The Japanese P.O.W. Camps—Mail of the Forces, P.O.W. and Internees*, Neville Watterson, 1989, p. 21.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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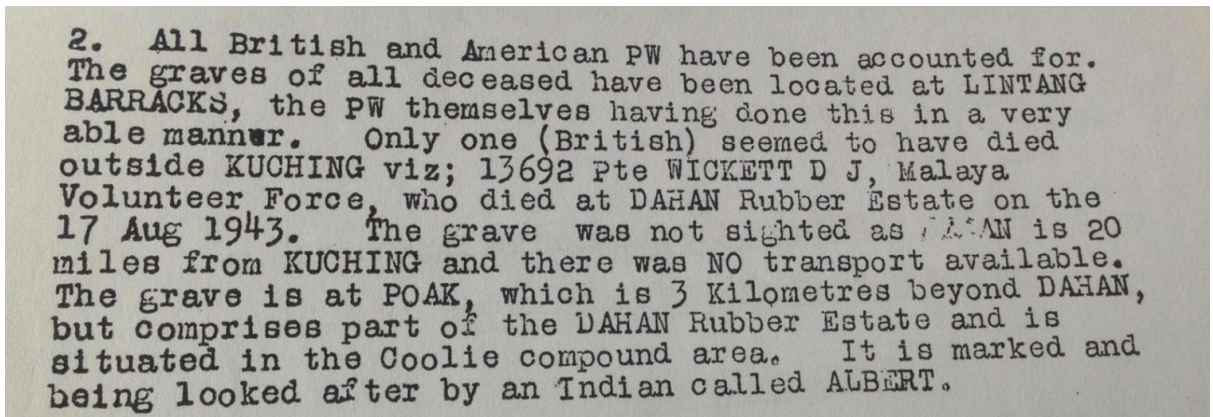
R.A.A.F. Photograph of Batu Lintang taken in 1945.



One remaining (Replica) Hut at Batu Lintang and the remnant of the Japanese Flagpole today

“E Force” was a party of 470 British N.C.O.’s and men which included 108 Straits Settlements Volunteers, one Kelantan Volunteer and 28 of the Federated Malay States Volunteer Force. Len was only at Batu Lintang initially for a few days before being moved on 10th April to a camp he referred to as Poek but is now known to be Poak. It is further documented that the actual camp was located in the old Coolie Compound of the Dahan Rubber Estate. This is located 18 miles south west of Kuching close to the villages (Kampongs) of Puak and Seropak, along the southern

bank of a tributary of the Sarawak River variously referred to as Sungai (river) Puak and Sungai Staat on current maps. The location currently remains physically unidentified on the ground despite Poak being shown on the local map and a number of most helpful indications from local residents. The location was referred to in the Australian Army report prepared at the end of the war by the POW Liaison Officer, Headquarters 9th Division, Captain Darling and held by the Australian Military Archive with reference: AWM 1010/9/11.

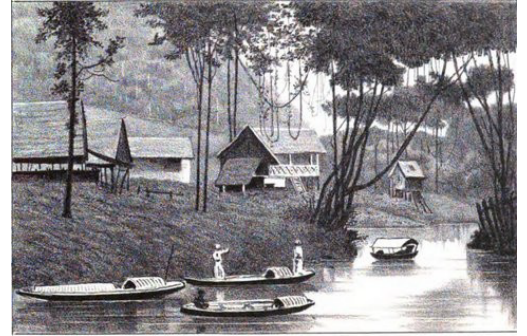


2. All British and American PW have been accounted for. The graves of all deceased have been located at LINTANG BARRACKS, the PW themselves having done this in a very able manner. Only one (British) seemed to have died outside KUCHING viz; 13692 Pte WICKETT D J, Malaya Volunteer Force, who died at DAHAN Rubber Estate on the 17 Aug 1943. The grave was not sighted as DAHAN is 20 miles from KUCHING and there was NO transport available. The grave is at POAK, which is 3 Kilometres beyond DAHAN, but comprises part of the DAHAN Rubber Estate and is situated in the Coolie compound area. It is marked and being looked after by an Indian called ALBERT.

Poak, Dahan Camp location reference

However, Len was a member of a group thought to be around 200 mainly S.S.V.F. Other Ranks who were sent to the camp on road building work. Len always spoke about "building a road from Kuching to Pontianak" although we now understand that this was actually a reopening of the access route to the Tegora Mine to obtain a supply of Mercury. A fellow survivor, Norman Marjoribanks FMSVF also spoke of the task being a road to Pontianak. As this would have been of significant strategic importance to the Japanese we have presumed they would wish to keep the actual purpose secret. There have been sightings of Japanese equipment at the mine.

The Tegora Mine is located south of the Dahan Estate in the Krokong mountain range. Images of the mine and the Quicksilver being transported on the Staat River were painted by Marianne North and Ludvig Verner Helms who discovered the deposits in 1867. The mine was set up and operated by the Borneo Company, now part of the international conglomerate Inchcape. The mine's history is described by Martin Laverty in his paper, "Tegora, A Mercurial Anthology". The metal bridge Jambatan Merah (Red Bridge) was built by the company with the assistance of the Rajah James Brooke.



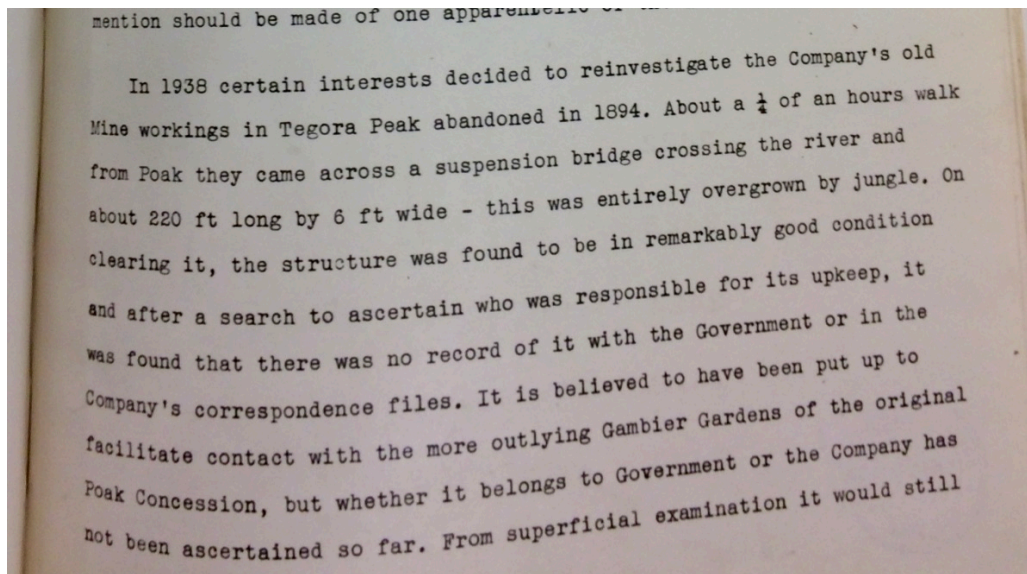
Illustrations of Tegora, and The Staat River 1870's.



Jembatan Merah today.

There are a number of contemporary accounts by fellow internees (J.L. Noakes and Rev. Peter Howes) of Len's arrival at Batu Lintang and subsequent assignment to the camp at the Dahan Estate.

Also, in Roddy Martine's book "Scorpion on the Ceiling" there is a description of his mother and sister's escape from Kuching over Christmas 1941 via the Dahan Rubber Estate. His father Charles Martine was the Borneo Company representative in Sarawak but was captured at the fall of Singapore and interned at Changi. However, it may have been the existence of a mineral assessment of Tegora mine carried out in 1938 that gave the Japanese the incentive to reopen the mine as they would have had both local intelligence of the assessment and possibly captured documents from the Borneo Company's Kuching office. The document below, on page 39 of the mineral assessment report, links the location of Poak, the Jambatan Merah and Tegora.



The Borneo Company Archive, Mineral Assessment

An account of the E Force arrival and deployment to Poak is contained in Julitta Lim's book "Pussy's in the Well". There is an account in the Sarawak Gazette dated 10th August 1950, presumably taken verbatim from J.L. Noakes' personal report of his experiences at Batu Lintang which is contained in Doc. 50 of Ooi Keat Gin's book "Japanese Empire in the Tropics". The relevant section is:

"On the 1st April 1943, an additional British force of twenty officers (Lt. Col T.C. Whimster, R.A.O.C in charge) and 479 N.C.O.'s and men arrived from Singapore. Among these were 108 of the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force, one of the Kelantan Volunteer Force and 28 of the Federated Malay States Volunteer Force. These volunteers did not stay long at Batu Lintang but were taken to Dahan to build the road to Tegora, where the Japanese imagined they had immense resources of cinnabar. They were brought back to Batu Lintang sometime later, many of them suffering with malaria and then they were sent to Labuan, where, so far as can be gathered, all of them died. Some of those few who stayed behind, mainly the very sick, were lucky as some of them survived the war."

Len was one of those 'lucky' ones and in one of his first letters after being released by the Australians he writes:

"The Nips kept us working in Singapore until March '43 and then I was shipped to Kuching in Sarawak. From there, after a few days, a party of us went up into the jungle on a road making job. The place was most unhealthy and living conditions exceedingly primitive. After ten months of it I was invalided back to Kuching with malaria and poisoned hands and feet – really, I was quite helpless. That was in Jan. '44. I was put in the P.O.W. apology for a hospital and at the end of February I was in the dreaded "little room" with 48 hours or so left to me of this life. However, and this is quite true, one of your letters arrived during that 48 hours and I decided that I'd carry on a bit longer and see whether this family-business couldn't be carried on a little before I finally pushed off. So, the Medical Officer (Col. King) found himself with a miserable specimen weighing 7 stone but undoubtedly alive and as he has told me since he didn't know what to do with me. As luck would have it the medical records clerk fell sick just then and they asked me if I felt strong enough to try the job. I had a go and kept it - and here I am."

That little is known of the existence or operation of the Poak, Dahan camp is explained from the Labuan massacre in that there appears to be very few survivors and consequently very few people looking to find the exact location and nature of the work.

During the time he was in the Poak, Dahan work camp he recounts a tale contained in full at Appendix A, entitled "The Amorous Ape" it recounts the time when, one morning on leaving the camp across the rickety bridge, a canoe with three Dyaks came from upriver to request the help of the Japanese in ridding their women of an Orangutan that had taken to watching them whilst they bathed in the river. Two of the Japanese guards took a party of six, including Len, a mile or so up river to the Kampong. When the Orangutan arrived, it was duly shot and although the Dyaks wanted the head, Len and his fellow prisoners took the body back to the camp as a very welcome supplement to the meagre rice ration. They were then escorted over the footbridge to their usual work on the road.

Another tale entitled "The Christmas Conspiracy", included at Appendix B, described the attempt by a Sapper, who was an organist and choirmaster from a church near Lewes, to organise a Christmas concert. He managed to persuade the Medical Officer, Capt. Campbell, to get some paper from the guards. This he used to write out the music and words for the members of the choir. A week before Christmas they gathered for a rehearsal when two guards, bayonets fixed, rifles cocked and blowing whistles held them until the remaining guards arrived and took them to the guard house. The paper was taken from them and some slapping accompanied by a torrent of abuse followed until the camp commander arrived. He studied the papers

for some time attempting to discover some hidden meaning until he eventually accepted the explanation. The papers were all destroyed, everyone received another slapping and sent back to camp. It had not occurred to the Japanese guards why an escape plot would be discussed openly in the only lit area of the camp! However, "Come All Ye Faithful" was sung on Christmas Day without the benefit of the music sheets.

Among his "Medical Miscellany" (contained in full at Appendix C) Len, whilst at Poak, recalls suffering from poisoned hands caused by tugging at the jungle creepers. The Medical Officer, Captain Campbell had some sulphur powder and managed to obtain some pork fat with which he smothered Len's hands, subsequently wrapping his hands in the remnants of his khaki shirt to retain this "ointment". That night he was woken by rats tugging at the bandages having been attracted by the pork fat! However, the cold water scrubbing in the river did remedy the poisoning after a week or so.

Len remained at Batu Lintang camp in the Other Ranks Compound from January 1944 until the arrival of the Australian 9th Division 11th September 1945. Having survived the "dreaded room" (Hut 19) he was occupied providing clerical assistance to the Medical Officer, Colonel King. He observed the simplicity of rudimentary medical treatment



Batu Lintang Hospital Building (AWM 118568)

keeping men alive and surviving despite the refusal of the Japanese to issue medical supplies until 28th August when they released the supplies they held. This included the use of sieved wood ash for stomach remedies, crushed eggs shells for calcium deficiency, maggots to both clean the dead flesh from wounds as well as keeping tropical ulcers free from gangrene in the absence of any proper antiseptics.

Life in Batu Lintang camp has been well documented elsewhere but the most chilling episode came as the Japanese realised that, with the Australian forces landing in the north of Borneo, any pretence of ultimate victory for them had gone.

It is well documented that the order to “Kill all the Prisoners” had been issued and the Camp Commander Lieutenant Colonel Suga had started to reopen the camp at Dahan to which all the POW’s capable of walking there, were to be transferred. It was anticipated that he would announce the implementation of the orders on 18th August, but 15th August arrived too soon for the work to be completed.

Before the arrival of Australian troops on 11th September there were regular air drops and almost continuous air surveillance to ensure that the transfer of prisoners for execution did not happen.

Whilst it was well known from the secret radio (Mrs Harris) that the Japanese had surrendered, it was not until 28th August that Colonel Suga officially announced the surrender to a full parade of the camp. On 11th September the camp learned that at 3pm the Australian 9th Division under the command of Brigadier Thomas C. Eastick would arrive at the camp to take the surrender of Suga and his guards.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

116924

BRITISH BORNEO AND NATOENA ISLANDS

INSTRUMENT OF SURRENDER

In accordance with GENERAL ORDER No 1 - MILITARY AND NAVAL issued by Imperial General Headquarters, by direction of the Emperor and pursuant to surrender by the Emperor to the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, of all Japanese Forces, I,

Major General Kiyoie Yamamura, Commanding General, Japanese Forces Kuching.
hereby

- A. Proclaim the Unconditional Surrender to the Commander KUCHING FORCE the officer designated to receive such surrender of all Japanese Armed Forces and all Armed Forces under Japanese control in SARAWAK SOUTH of the line of RAJANG RIVER to junction with RIRANG RIVER thence RIRANG RIVER to SARAWAK boundary.
- B. Command all Commanders and members of the Japanese Armed Forces and Controlled Forces within the aforesaid area to cease hostilities immediately, lay down their arms, remain in their present localities and do all such acts and things as may be required of them by the Commander KUCHING FORCE.
- C. Command all Civil, Military and Navy officials and all members of the Japanese Armed Forces to obey and enforce all Proclamations, Orders and Directions issued by the Commander KUCHING FORCE.

Signed *Pending* on the *Eleventh* day of *September* 1945

H. Yamamura
Commander

Accepted at *Pending* on the *Eleventh* day of *September* 1945

T. B. Eastick
Brigadier
Commanding KUCHING FORCE

Freedom and Repatriation

On 17th September 1945 Len was transferred by Catalina to the Australian Recuperation Hospital on Labuan island from which he was able to start writing to Joan on an almost daily basis. These letters recounted brief recollections of events and conditions he had endured. Relieved at the timeliness of the arrival of the Australians he writes from Labuan explaining:

“The Japs have recently discussed the arrangements made for killing us all in Kuching by Sept. 17th, so we were lucky. They exterminated two other camps in Borneo earlier on so they would have had no hesitation. Still I enjoyed seeing a photograph of the Jap Colonel in charge of us – who had arranged the killing party – after he had cut his throat. He was a wretched fat pig of a man named Suga. Apparently, after his interrogation he realised he was for it and decided to do it himself. There is still no trace of the 300 he sent here – including 70 Volunteers – not even a grave but so far as they can find out from natives they were taken off in small numbers and killed. Some cables arrived for some of them yesterday, but they must have been dead before last Christmas. Apparently the Japs were not very good at notifying deaths. The Red Cross had been told of 180 deaths in Kuching up to August. The actual total was then over 600.”

He recalled hearing on the “underground radio” (aka Mrs Harris) about the V Bombing raids over London and hoped that both families were safe. He asked for no more rice, explaining that after three and a half years on a diet of rice, which was enough for one lifetime! He also described the dietary supplements included “*bats, snakes, snails, a cat and part of an Orangoutan*”. There are also descriptions of the delight of the beach-side hospital and the wonderful treatment he received from the Australian nursing staff. Despite the one message received from Joan he received no further correspondence whilst at Labuan until 9th October. With recovery came an increasing frustration at having no indication of repatriation. However, that changed shortly after a visit from Lady Louis Mountbatten on 1st October. On 2nd October Len writes:

“So far we have had no message whatsoever from the British Army or Government. We had begun to think that they had forgotten us when, yesterday, Lady Louis Mountbatten arrived and came around to practically everyone and had a chat. She seemed surprised to find so many of us and said, ‘I’ll ask my husband what the hell he’s doing leaving you here!’ However, she was very pleasant and explained that her husband was a pretty busy man but that she would see that we were not forgotten altogether.”

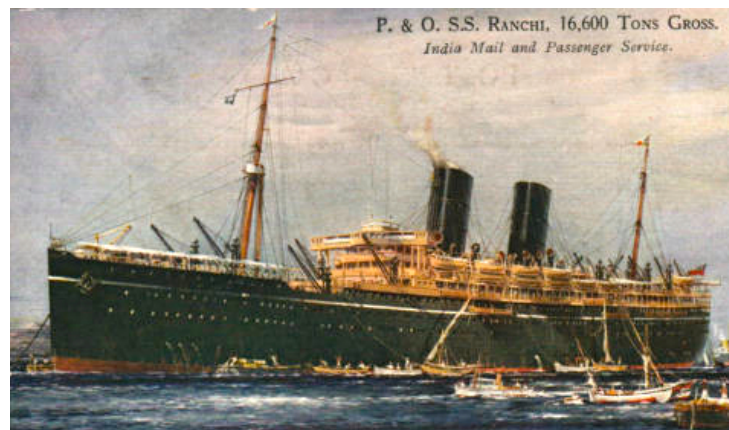


Australian 9th Div. Recuperation Unit Labuan



Lady Mountbatten, Labuan Visit

It seemed to work as just over two weeks later on 16th October Len boarded the HMT Ranchi for his repatriation voyage to England.



Despite this ship being a P&O ship, commandeered for war time troop ship duties, the journey would be somewhat different from his earlier outward journeys albeit he had survived to make the journey. He was also leaving many dear friends buried in Borneo who had not been so fortunate. One in particular was Colin McLean who was one of the S.S.V.F. prisoners transferred in that fateful party from Kuching to Labuan in 1944. He reportedly died of malaria and beri-beri on 26th November 1944. Such a close friend that he christened his son (the writer) in Colin's memory. The M.O. Capt. Campbell at Poak, who was instrumental in keeping Len alive and invaliding him back to Batu Lintang, also perished as a member of that Labuan party.

Docking at Singapore between 18th and 20th of October Len was able to make contact with the Senior Partner F.H. Grummitt, at McAuliffe, Turquand, Youngs. He had returned to Singapore in September, serving in the Malacca Street office of the Supply Distribution Unit of the British Military Administration.

Len writes:

On departure from Singapore on the HMT Ranchi Len expected to call at Colombo and then continue to Suez and Tilbury arriving on 20th November. Later the destination changed to Southampton. However, after Colombo the ship was directed to Bombay where the voyage was delayed by a week. Frustration at delays and treatment were building and in his letter to Joan of 28th October he wrote:

“We are taking on 900 more troops at Bombay so our troop decks will be really crowded. We wouldn’t mind it at all because we know shipping is limited but in the 1st and 2nd Class are dozens of Dutch, Swedes, French and Swiss. After all we are British and this is a British ship. Still we are on our way home and when I am with you all this will be forgotten. But it was a bad day when we left the Australians and fell into British hands.

We went ashore in Colombo. They told us on the ship that we could draw money ashore. A General met us and made a speech of welcome saying that we could draw £5 each. We went to the Pay Officer who said the General was misinformed and that we could not draw anything! Luckily, I met some old friends who gave me tiffin at the Galle Face otherwise I should have been thrown on the charity of the Barracks canteen. At the Galle Face there was a large notice saying that O.R.’s were not admitted but we ignored that. In another office the Dutch Civilians were given money from the British Government. I can assure you sweetheart that it doesn’t pay to be British or in the Army.

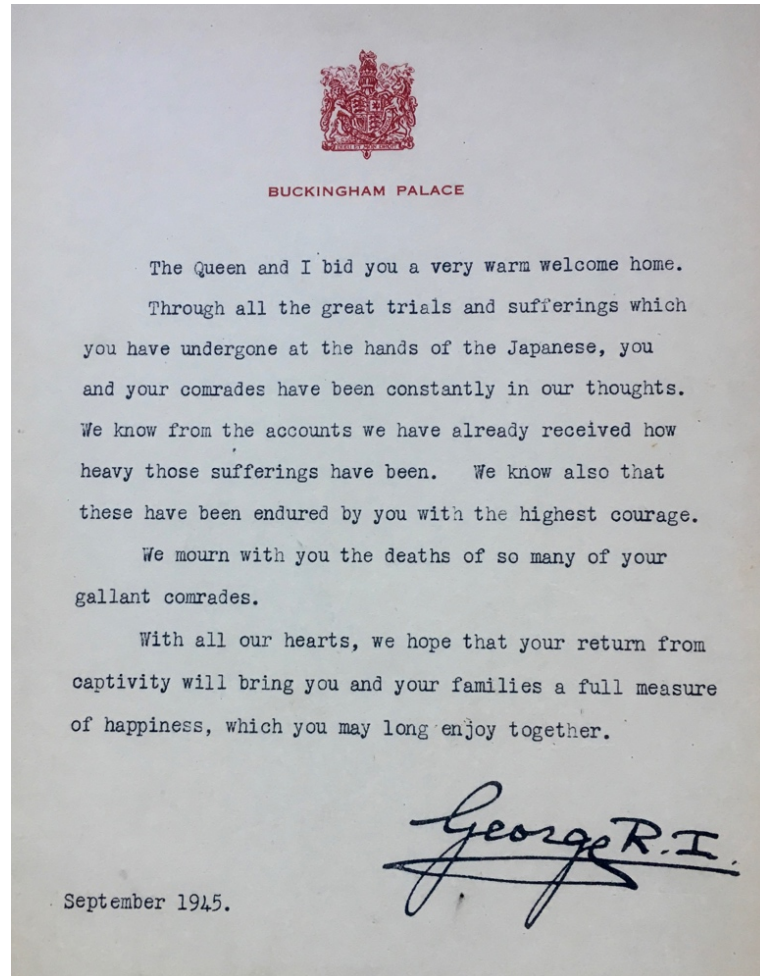
However, there are a few signs of a better order. Since leaving Colombo we have had a daily ration of a pint of beer and yesterday they gave us cigarettes – from the Australian Red Cross. Thank God for the Aussies.

Some old friends from Singapore have come aboard. They are civvies and in the 1st Class which is ‘Out of Bounds’. However, I have a written permit from the Adjutant to go and visit them which makes a change from the troop decks but on the whole I prefer to be with the lads. We have been through a lot together.”

Joan was able to get leave from her duties as a WREN at a shore station, HMS Excellent, Bordean House, Hampshire to meet the ship having booked accommodation for herself at the YWCA at Southampton. Len expected to be required to spend two days at the transit camp before being able to leave with Joan to make their wedding preparations.

At 1.00am on 24th November 1945 the HMT Ranchi called at Dartmouth for mail before berthing in Southampton at 8.30am.

The Mayor arrived to greet the returning prisoners and to deliver the welcome home letter from The King.



However, delight at arriving home quickly changed to further despair as they were transported to another barbed wire encampment albeit a brief transit camp.

There are stories of almost immediate escape through holes in the wire to enjoy the hospitality of the local pubs and nothing is known of how and when Len managed to meet up with Joan. During the afternoon the men collected their repatriation supplies from the Quartermasters Store and were issued with their travel warrants.

It would appear that their final imprisonment by the British Army was rather brief.

Family life

Len and Joan married at Kingswood Church, Surrey on 11th December 1945.



They lived in Grafton Road, Ealing, close to his childhood home in Acton. The house being shared with his sister Mona and her husband Fred Jackson who had served with the R.A.F. On 23rd January 1946 Len received a letter from Turquand, Youngs, McAuliffe requesting that he initially return to work at the London office prior to returning to his position in Singapore but advising that this would not include wives at this stage. His Army service continued until 22nd April 1946.

He sailed for Singapore on 20th October 1946 with a commitment to establish a home for his married life to continue there and for Joan, now carrying their first child to arrive soon afterwards. He arrived back at the office on the 3rd Floor of Hong Kong Bank Chambers joining, amongst others, his old friend and colleague Johnny Phillips, the Senior Partner. However, his assessment of the situation, in the aftermath of the Japanese occupation, with the scarcity and consequent high cost of suitable married accommodation quickly convinced Len that the relatively low salary of an Accounting Assistant could not provide a suitable home for Joan and a baby. Despite some impassioned pleading by both Phillips and Addington in London Len left Singapore on 23rd December 1946 aboard HMT Orbita, never to return.

Len's far east adventure was at an end although he continued to carry fond memories of the local people he met and of the country where he worked, played and was captive in. Having visited Singapore, Kuching and Sarawak we can now better understand his warmth of feeling for the area and the people, despite the difficult privations of his internment there.

On his return he moved with his family to Gloucestershire where he joined a rapidly growing company, Erinoid Ltd., as their Chief Accountant.

His cricketing exploits continued with the company cricket team and he was very proud of arranging county cricket to be played on the company pitch for a week each summer between 1956 and 1963.

He continued his soldiering with the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars and the Royal British Legion.

His accounting activities flourished with the company that he ultimately managed, becoming a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in 1960.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Len's Far East story would not have been possible without the assistance of many people, organisations or access to archival material available both online and at national or local archives. I apologise in advance to any reader who I have inadvertently omitted and ask that they bring that omission to my attention so that this Acknowledgement can be corrected.

As far as possible the following is in chronological order.

Having started to research the detail history of my father as part of my whole family genealogy I contacted the Institute of Chartered Accountants who provided me with details of his membership and of the Accountant to whom he was articulated. This took me to Ernst and Young as the organisation that incorporates the company my father worked for in Singapore. Sharon Wun and Sophia Mah provided a copy of their publication "An Account of 120 Years in Singapore". I was delighted to meet Sharon in Singapore to thank her personally. My father is mentioned on page 98 and the whole publication provides a wonderful insight into Singapore and the company activities both pre and post war.

The online access to Singapore Newspaper Archives provided an astonishing number of references to a search on our surname. This revealed a history of his cricketing exploits playing for the Singapore Cricket Club we hitherto knew nothing of! There were innumerable references to matches in which he played. We were most grateful through contacts with the M.V.G. to meet a Past President of the Club, Neill Aitkin. We met him and Morag at the Club where we enjoyed a delightful morning and most informative insight into its history and current activities. I was assured the changing rooms were little different other than décor from when my father played. Fiona Tan of the National Archives of Singapore provided wonderful help in guiding our research there which produced some very helpful documents and illustrations.

We knew the generality of his military service with the S.S.V.F. but little of the detail so I joined the Children of Far East Prisoners of War Association. I was greatly assisted by Keith Andrews with his research guidance and encouragement. This led me to Rosemary Fell and the Malayan Volunteers Group where she so kindly encouraged my research, introducing me to Jonathan Moffatt and Liz Moggie. I had a copy of Jonathan's "Moon over Malaya" so it was a great privilege to receive his assistance. Liz not only provided maps and articles waiting for us at our hotel "The Ranee" in Kuching but also introduced us to Dr. John Walker of the University of New South Wales who has made a detail study of the politics of James Brooke and the "White Rajah's" of Sarawak. We had the privilege of meeting him in his "Kuching office" at Green Hill corner. John introduced us to Dr. Peggy Day who, in addition to being Professor of Religion and Culture at Winnipeg University has made a significant and in-depth study of Batu Lintang Prisoner of War Camp in Kuching. Peggy was instrumental in making a success of our search for the Dahan Estate and Poak work camp location. She arranged for her friend Diweng Bakir to drive us to the area around Dahan and gaining the assistance of a local craftsman from Kampong Puak (different from Poak!) to guide us to the possible locations including Jambatan Merah. Peggy also provided access to the Archives office in Kuching where we were able to find further historical information relating to the Japanese occupation and subsequent A.W.M. references to Poak.

A business contact, Antony Quek and his family were a wonderful help in Singapore, particularly finding the locations overlooking the Causeway and the adjacent Marsiling Tunnels where we believe the "Pill Box" was located. We also briefly visited Changi although it is currently (2019) closed for major refurbishment.

London Metropolitan Archives hold the Borneo Company Archive which provided further helpful Dahan Estate information, particularly the Mineral Assessment report relating to Tegora and the proximity of Poak to Jambatan Merah.

Most importantly, my wife Sue who has not only enthusiastically assisted in both research and travel but also proofread and corrected the text!

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APPENDICES

The Prisoner of War memories written by Len Hygate

- A The Amorous Ape**
- B Christmas Conspiracy**
- C Medical Miscellany**

Appendix A

THE AMOROUS APE

One morning at Poek we assembled as usual at 6.30 on the road between the camp gate and the guard room for the morning working party Tenko. This being completed, one guard led the single file procession across the rickety footbridge to the other side of the river, but just before the last party left, a canoe arrived from up-river bearing three Dyaks who shouted for the guards who hastily scrambled up the bank. We halted and with our knowledge of Malay were therefore able to help translate to the guards the cause of their excitement.

They came from a Kampong a mile or so up-river. The bank opposite to their Kampong was covered in jungle. The river, of course, provided water for all their purposes and particularly for washing and keeping themselves clean.

According to them, whenever the younger ladies entered the river to bathe themselves, a large Orangutan would appear on the bank opposite and watched the proceedings. Although no-one so far had been attacked, the girls were becoming nervous and they therefore wished the guards to deal with the problem for them. This the guards agreed to do and two of them selected six of us to go with them, presumably to act as beaters in case the ape decided to try and escape. This did not seem like a feasible proposition to us but provided a relief from working on the road.

The Dyaks then left to return to the Kampong in their canoe and we and the guards set off on the jungle track until we arrived at a position opposite to the bathing area. The two guards positioned themselves near to the bank and we formed a rough semi-circle between them.

Once we were in position the guards called to the Kampong and shortly afterwards, with much giggling, half a dozen young women wearing sarongs tucked under their armpits waded into the river and began their usual bathing operations, throwing water over their shoulders and heads and rather showing off in view of the audience they knew was watching them.

At first nothing happened and then after a few minutes there was a noise in the trees and a large Orangutan swung down onto the bank and stood there watching the activity. Both guards then opened fire and the beast fell dead. One guard approached gingerly and fired another round through the side of its head to make sure all was well.

At the sound of the shots a canoe had left hurriedly to cross the river and Dyaks, who had been notorious head-hunters, came ashore requesting the head of the animal, presumably to shrink and hang up under the eaves of their longhouse in the usual way.

This having been completed, the guards indicated that we should return to camp but the sight of such a large amount of meat being wasted, did not at all appeal to us and we therefore asked if we could take the body back to camp, in order that the meat could be used to supplement our meagre rations. The guards thought this a great joke and agreed so long as we were quick about it. The Dyaks also thought this amusing and with their parangs quickly cut wood and lianas to bind the animal, so that we could carry it back more easily.

Arrived at the camp we quickly delivered our prize to the cookhouse with a brief explanation of how we had come by it and were then escorted back to our usual work across the footbridge onto the road.

As we normally had only a small ration of meat on two days, the Emperor's Birthday and Christmas Day, the evening meal of Orangutan stew with rice, went down very well.

As the Dyak girls in the river had looked so attractive however, we felt a certain sympathy with the amorous ape, but were nevertheless grateful to him for sending us to bed, for once, with a full stomach.

Appendix B

THE CHRISTMAS CONSPIRACY

Amongst our number at Poek was a Sapper who had previously been an organist and choirmaster at a church near Lewes in Sussex. As Christmas 1943 approached he had an idea of forming a small choir to sing carols on Christmas Day and recruited about twelve of us who had previously been in church choirs and in any case were glad of any diversion.

To our surprise he decided to do the thing properly and approached the M.O., a Capt. Campbell, who was the best person to obtain paper from the guards on the pretext of keeping medical records. Paper throughout this time was extremely hard to come by.

The choirmaster then was busy every evening in the cook-house area where there was a hurricane lamp, there being no other lighting in the camp area, and finally called us together a week before Christmas to have a regular choir practice. We then found that he had very cleverly and industriously copied out simple music, some treble, some bass so that there was a sheet between each two of us according to the roles to which we had been assigned and we therefore gathered under the hurricane lamp while he explained what he had in mind and we followed his instructions from the sheets that we were sharing.

It was the habit of the guards to patrol in pairs from time to time but as we were studying our music and listening to the choirmaster's instructions, we did not notice the approach of the two guards until there was a clicking of rifle bolts and a frantic blowing of whistles. We then saw that our small group was being threatened by two guards with loaded rifles and bayonets fixed, each of them with a whistle between their teeth which was being blown at regular intervals.

In response to the whistling the rest of the guards came running into the camp and we were all marched off to the guard room still bearing our sheets of music, although as soon as we reached the guard room these were snatched from us and kept to be used as evidence.

The M.O. Campbell who had a billet near the cookhouse followed us down to see fair play, but we were all quite baffled as to the cause of the excitement until the Jap officer arrived, having been summoned on an emergency basis from his own quarters.

While waiting his arrival we had all been given various slaps around our faces and treated to a stream of Japanese which seemed to threaten dire consequences, while the guard commander himself was studying the hand written sheets bearing the notes of Come All Ye Faithful, in various vocal parts as if to try and find some hidden meaning which has so far escaped him.

It finally emerged that the two guards seeing us standing under a light studying pieces of paper with mysterious signs on them, had concluded that this was some form of code and that our meeting was a conspiracy designed either for a mass escape or uprising. The fact that any such plot would of hardly been discussed in the only lighted public place in the camp had, apparently, not occurred to them.

However, the officer finally accepted the explanation which we offered but, presumably as a sop to the guards, destroyed the offending music and allowed the guards to give us one final slapping before marching us back into the camp.

On Christmas Day we did sing Come All Ye Faithful but unfortunately without the music which the poor choirmaster has so laboriously and industriously prepared.

Appendix C

MEDICAL MISCELLANY

All the service personnel captured in Singapore were forced to march out to Changi on the Tuesday following the surrender on Sunday, 15th February 1942. This was a large Army area with dozens of barracks and Officer's married quarters in peacetime, although it would normally have accommodated about a quarter of the number which now arrived.

Of the barrack blocks, Roberts Barracks was taken over by the Medical Corps as a central hospital and all medical supplies from all units were concentrated there. Men falling sick on working parties on Singapore Island were returned to Roberts and in due course as the working parties were sent abroad each one was given a ration of whatever medical supplies which were left as none were ever provided by the Japanese and no Red Cross supplies were allowed to reach us.

As the water supply had been cut off on the night of Thursday 12th February and was not restored to the Changi area until the beginning of March, we depended on collecting rainwater, but in spite this hygiene was extremely difficult. As a result, there was a dysentery epidemic which in the course of three or four weeks, counted for the deaths of between 1,200 and 1,500m men. As the cases were routed through Roberts hospital it was almost impossible to keep track of the numbers from a Japanese point of view and the doctors there very wisely recorded less deaths than actually happened so as to have a few places vacant which were later used to hide people who were, for one reason or another, on the run.

The lack of water over the last three days of the fighting had a curious beneficial effect. Wounds from battle casualties were cleaned out as best as could be and then covered in plaster until such time as the water might be restored. The men so injured complained of faint irritation and when the plaster was removed, it was found that most wounds were clean, but full of maggots which eat only dead flesh, and this rather primitive method was later responsible for keeping tropical ulcers free from gangrene in the absence of any proper antiseptic.

On the jungle road job at Poek in Borneo which we started in March 1943, the effects of poor diet were beginning to show and causing a number of skin diseases especially scabies. Owing to the poor accommodation men were lying close to each other and especially so in the hut reserved for the sick, Malaria by now being very common. On one occasion, we had a much-heralded visit from a Japanese so-called Welfare Officer who was escorted around the camp by our M.O. Campbell. The Japanese apparently spoke no word of English and our M.O. went through a great pantomime of sign language to explain the various complaints that he had with regard to conditions in the sick hut. He was placing his two hands together and saying loudly and slowly "One man scabies, another man lay touching him, other man get scabies; then man other side he get scabies." Following this the Japanese looked at him solemnly through thick glasses and said very clearly,

“Ah, contagious.” These were the only words of English he uttered during the entire visit, and no change at all in the conditions was made as a result of the visit.

The huts, which were of bamboo and attap, were infested with rats which would occasionally fall from the roof where they normally lived and scrambled amongst us to regain their lodgings. Towards the end of 1943 I contracted some poisoning of the hands, probably from pulling aside jungle creepers in clearing the site, and the only treatment was apparently to stand in the river and scrub them twice daily in cold water. This kept them reasonably clean but did not appear to have a curative effect. The M.O. had a certain amount of sulphur powder and managed to obtain a quantity of pork fat from the Japanese in order to make an ointment. This he smothered on my hands and by sacrificing the remains of a khaki shirt which I still retained, he made bandages to bind the fingers and hands and retain the ointment.

Having so been treated and being full of confidence, I then lay down on the floor of the hut, as everyone else did, and went to sleep anticipating being able to see a great improvement in the morning. During the night, however, I was awakened by violent tugging on my hands and sat up to find several rats pulling at the wrappings, having been attracted no doubt by the smell of the pork fat. They ran away at any movement and I straight away abandoned the project, went to the river and scrubbed my hands clean and returned to an undisturbed night's sleep. The following morning the M.O. had to admit that this was a possibility which he had not foreseen. A week or so later the cold-water scrubbing seemed to have worked a cure.

Back in the Kuching main camp, to which I was returned early as a casualty from the road, this time with poisoned feet, I found the maggot cure in full swing and also a number of curious but effective remedies instituted by a splendid Medical Officer, Col. King.

For stomach ailments a jar of specially sieved wood ash was always on hand and from this the sufferer had to take a large teaspoonful washed down with cold water. This presumably had the same effect as charcoal tablets being prescribed in England for similar disorders.

Owing to the meagre diet, nails on both fingers and toes grew hardly at all but occasionally, through lack of calcium, a man would get very badly cracked nails which tended to disintegrate. For this Col. King obtained eggshells from the Japanese cookhouse and instructed the patients to whom he gave them, to break them up as small as they could, mix them with rice and eat them. This also proved to be an effective cure, although the first man put on this diet escaped the notice of the M.O. for some months when it appeared that he had eaten nearly 700 eggshells! He was immediately ordered to stop and after that a better record of the numbers issued to each man was kept.

Through being incapacitated for some months I became attached in a semi-clerical position to Col. King and was able to see how through keeping men on their feet and working as long as they possibly could, he prolonged the lives of many and saved the lives of not a few. The necessity to

make these improvisations was due entirely to the fact that the Japanese decided that they had no medical supplies to spare and blamed the Allied blockade of Borneo. This story was disproved when upon the day that the local commander informed us that we were free, the medical stores were opened and ointment, bandages, quinine, mosquito nets and even framed beds were liberally provided, although from then on we were properly supplied by the Australian Ninth Division.