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How Prisoners of War used secrecy to gain intelligence about the war, to communicate with the outside world and other camps, and to boost morale

Introduction

This report covers the ways Prisoners of War (POWs) used secrecy to gain intelligence about the war, to communicate with the outside world and to boost morale. The main focus point will be on Changi POW camp and the Thai Burma Railway, as this is the majority of experiences of ANZAC POWs in the Pacific. Changi was a harsh POW camp that held over 13,000 Australian POWs, and the majority of those were not treated well. The camp was unsanitary, there was a lack of food, a lack of doctors, and a severely large amount of death. They needed a way to send messages in an out of the camp so they could learn the news, but the camp did not allow conventional ways of communication to and from the camp. Therefore, they used strange ways to send secret messages from the camp.

Our group, during this endeavor, also interviewed World War Two veteran David Trist. This interview gave us an insight in capturing Japanese POWs and how they were treated. He told us a story about himself, a guard, sharing a cigarette with a Japanese soldier, which we found really enlightening.

IMPACTS AND EXPERIENCES ON AUSTRALIAN P.O.W SOLDIERS



An Australian prisoner of war showing the effects of malnutrition from working on the Burma Railway.

Over 22,000 Australian servicemen and almost forty nurses were captured by the Japanese. Most were captured early in 1942 when Japanese forces captured Malaya, Singapore, New Britain, and the Netherlands East Indies. Hundreds of Australian civilians were also captured. In all, 9,500 Australian prisoners of war worked on the Burma-Thailand Railway, which ran from Bampton, Thailand, to Thanbyuzayat, Burma. The construction began at each end of the railway. Altogether, 2,646 Australians died working on the railway. Prisoners in Changi were divided into forces to work on the railway in either Burma or Thailand. The railway was completed on the 16th October 1943.

This is a significant event in our world's history and also Australia as a country. Australian Prisoners Of War were not able to contact the outside world while in these prisoner camps. Building the Burma railway had massive effects on the wellbeing of these men causing many mental problems such as PTSD and also the state of their bodies from starvation. There were outbreaks of diseases that had to be fought with many different types of

methods such as isolating the infected, boiling

drinking water and sterilising eating utensils.

"Over 22 000 Australians were captured by the Japanese when they conquered South East Asia in early 1942. More than a third of these men and women died in captivity. This was about 20 per- cent of all Australian deaths in World War II. The shock and scale of these losses affected families and communities across the nation of only 7 million people." ¹

¹Australian Department of Veteran Affairs, (unknown). *The Thai Burma Railway and Hell Fire Pass*. Available at: <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/history/conflicts/thaiburma-railway-and-hellfire-pass> [accessed - 2nd September 2019]

PRIVATE GEORGE ASPINALL – PHOTOGRAPHS

Using secrecy in the POW camps, Aspinall managed to collect vital data involving the brutality of the Japanese soldier guards and the harsh sufferings of the Australian POWs, thus giving future generations a chance to witness the savagery and cruelty of war in the Pacific Theatre.

Private George Aspinall was born in Old Junee, New South Wales, 18th October 1917, in the midst of World War One. As Aspinall grew up, he worked as a motor mechanic and ended up being enlisted World War Two on the 1st July 1941 at Paddington, New South Wales. On 29th July 1941, Aspinall joined the 2/30th Infantry Battalion, an Australian military group that focused in the towns of Johor and Gemas of Malaya, as well as Singapore Island. When the island of Singapore fell into Japanese hands during February 1942, Aspinall became a POW (Prisoner of War) confined to Changi Gaol for approximately a year before being transported to the Thai-Burma Railway on April 1943. As a POW in WWII under Japanese rule, there were uncompromising regulations against the use of cameras as photos would have served as legal evidence against the war crimes of the Japanese. However, against all restrictions and concealed from his Japanese captors, Aspinall managed to capture more than 200 photos of the Changi POW camp and Thai-Burma Railway. Some of which include the following:



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1. Changi, Singapore - Selarang Barracks Square incident, where 15,000 POWs were punished to confinement due to the refusal of signing a no-escape treaty with their Japanese oppressors.

² Australian War Memorial, (2019). *Changi, Singapore, September 1942 a Photograph taken By (Australian POW George Aspinalli)*. Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C40573> [accessed - 2nd September 2019]



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P02569.194

2. A group of skin-and-bones malnourished Australian POWs working on the Thai-Burma Railway. This shows that the Australian POWs had to work under harsh conditions and were given the bare minimum of the necessities of life such as food, water etc.



3. Thai food vendors selling local food to the POWs in "F Force" (the group Aspinall was assigned to by the Japanese troops), who had to endure a compulsory and tiring march in order to work at the Thai-Burma railway. In this picture it shows the struggles of the Thai people, they have simple camps and little regard to hygiene looking at the buckets and the food out.



4. Australian troops of the “F Force” returning to Changi after a long day’s work at the railway. This picture highlights the dangers from working on the railway as we can see the sheer cliffs and difficult conditions.



5. Three angular and scrawny Australian POWs situated at Shimo Sonkurai Camp standing directly outside the camp’s medical centre. The first man from the right of the photograph has a protruding belly and his shorts are unable to be tightened around his waist as a result. This is a sign of Beriberi, a famous disease in the Thai-Burma railway that many POWs contracted as a result of a poor diet, in particular the lack of vitamin B intake. Beriberi can even lead to heart failure as it causes faster heartbeats and weakness in the body as a whole.

Aspinall captured his photos secretly using a folding Six-20 Kodak Brownie³ in a place where there was a strict regulation against photography. Aspinall hid the camera in his kidney-belt (a lengthy elastic band worn around the bottom torso) from his Japanese suppressors. This placed both him and his fellow POW members in great risk of corporal and possibly capital punishment.

³ Virtual War Memorial Australia. (2019). *George Henry ASPINALL*. [online] Available at: <https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/797681> [Accessed 13 Sep. 2019].

Afterwards, Aspinall would develop his negatives furtively without attracting attention and store them within in a hole constructed nearby a latrine (toilet generally located in barracks). Ordered back to Changi by Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Gallagher in 1944, Aspinall managed only to smuggle a small percentage of his photographs. Most of the photographs were retrieved by the same Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Gallagher then delivered back to Aspinall at the end of the war.

HOW POW'S USED QUILTS TO COMMUNICATE WITH OTHER CAMPS AND RAISE MORALE

In the POW camps, most forms of conventional communication such as letters or speaking were extremely restricted. The prisoners didn't get many opportunities to send letters or speak to anyone outside the camp and when they did, the letters were extremely censored and generally speaking to

people was not allowed.⁴ These heavy restrictions meant that if they wanted to speak to people outside the camps they needed to find other forms of communication which could be performed without the knowledge of their Japanese oppressors. One of these forms of communication were through secret messages through quilts, which had messages from women to their loved ones through signatures or messages woven into the fabric of the quilts.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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The Quilts were made by the women who were captured by the Japanese after the Fall of Singapore. The Japanese demanded the women to sew quilts for the injured Japanese soldiers and to relieve boredom. There were 3 quilts made, one by the British, one by the Australian and one by the Japanese. Each of the quilts had work from most of the women of that country.⁵ The work of nine known Australian women are represented in the Australian quilt, however there are many more identified messages that we don't know the meaning or origin of.

⁴ The Australian War Memorial. (2019). Changi | The Australian War Memorial. [online] awm.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/pow/changi> [Accessed 2 Sep. 2019].

⁵ Australian War Memorial. (2017). *The Changi quilts* | *The Australian War Memorial*. [online] awm.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/quilt> [Accessed 2 Sep. 2019].

The following are a list of nurses that we are aware of working on the quilt, however there are many who aren't identified:

Helen Latta, Dr Margaret Smallwood, Mrs Vera McIntyre, Mrs Betsey Millard, Miss Betsy, Nea Barnes, Mrs Alice May Watson, Mrs Eunice Austin-Hofer (also spelt Austen-Hofer), Judy Good.⁶

There were many examples of women hiding messages to their loved ones in the quilts, such as this which is a patch woven by Mary Buckley. She is was a British nurse. On the patch you can see symbols of Wales on her square - daffodils, a red dragon, and the caption 'Cymru am byth' (Wales forever).



The women took these quilts as an opportunity to send secret messages to their loved ones in the other camps. As every woman sewed at least one square of the quilt that meant that most women had the ability to contact someone else in another camp. The majority of the messages were most likely just ways to tell the other person that they were okay and alive. The messages were usually very simple, containing signatures, religious messages. The messages didn't need to be completely hidden as the Japanese didn't check the contents only having a brief look over the quilts. They sent these messages to improve the general morale of the men in the camps by allowing them to know that their loved ones are okay, as well as relieving and giving out religious messages giving others hope.⁷

⁸There weren't any major impacts made in the overall war by these messages but there were impacts in the camps. When the quilts were finished many people had a significant morale boost in the camps, which may have allowed for some of the other secretive methods of communication to be developed and implemented into the camps which had a larger impact on the war effort."

Overall the quilts were used to boost morale in the camps and provide secretive methods of communication between camps.

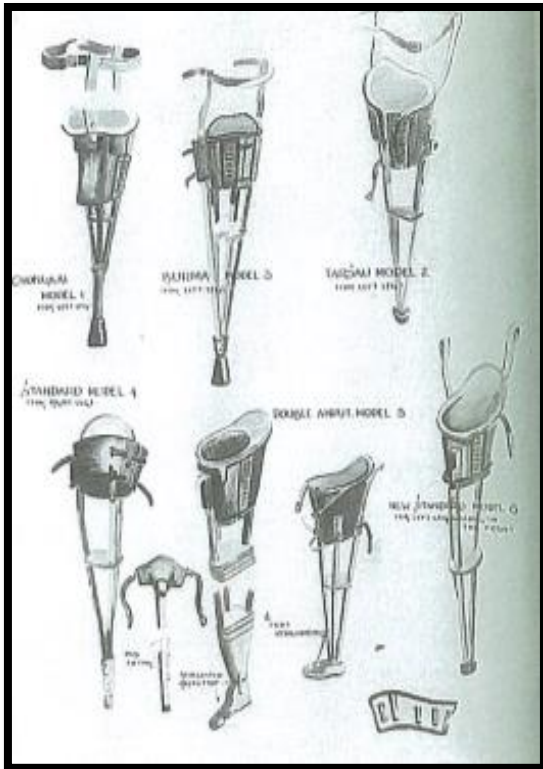
⁶ Australian War Memorial. (2017). *The Changi quilts | The Australian War Memorial*. [online] Awm.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/quilt> [Accessed 2 Sep. 2019].

⁷ British Red Cross. (2019). *Changi Quilt*. [online] Available at: <https://changi.redcross.org.uk/> [Accessed 3 Sep. 2019].

⁸ Photos from Brune, P. (2014). *Descent Into Hell The Fall of Singapore -Pudu and Changi-the Thai Burma Railway*. Sydney, Melbourne, Auckland, London: Allen & Unwin.

DOCTORS OF THE THAI- BURMA RAILWAY

A range of soldiers were captured to work on the Burma railway but among them were also trained medical officers, although you mostly only hear about the soldier actions whilst in the camps you never hear about the true heroes.



Not all heroes came from Australian soil. This is known especially from Gordon Bell. Gordon Bell was an Australian posted as a medical orderly to tend to wounded, even though he would stay as a POW for most of the war. This was the case until he met a Japanese doctor by the name of Yasuteru Mitsufuji. Gordon and Dr Yasuteru Mitsufuji formed a mutual respect towards each other without being under the eye of the Japanese secret police or, Australian officers. This friendship proved very useful later. This is when the Japanese came to collect POWs to be transferred to the camp to be put to more work, Dr Yasuteru Mitsufuji told them that Gordon was not fit to work and should stay at the hospital. This resulted in Gordon returning home after the war had ended marrying his wife and having three daughters.⁹

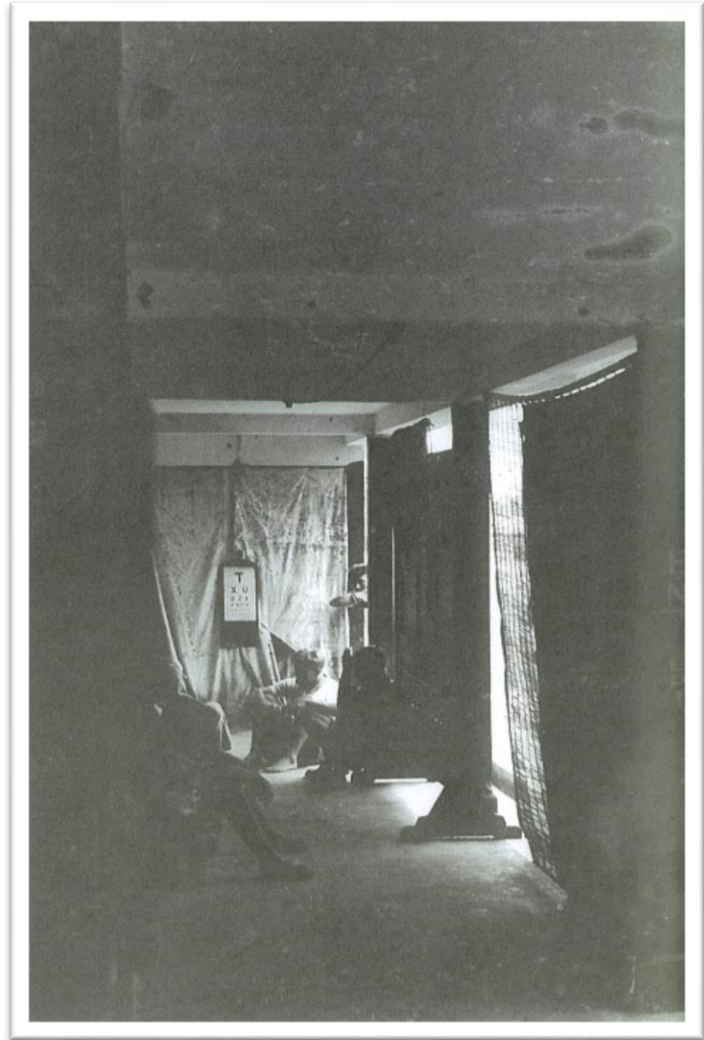


➤ On the left is Australian POW Gordon Bell and Japanese Imperial Medical Officer Dr Yasuteru¹⁰

⁹ Roberts, M. (2019). *'If I went, I was dead': How a Japanese doctor saved an Aussie POW's life*. [online] SBS. Available at: <https://www.sbs.com.au/language/english/audio/if-i-went-i-was-dead-how-a-japanese-doctor-saved-an-aussie-pow-s-life> [Accessed 12 Sep. 2019].

¹⁰ Roberts, M. (2019). *'If I went, I was dead': How a Japanese doctor saved an Aussie POW's life*. [online] SBS. Available at: <https://www.sbs.com.au/language/english/audio/if-i-went-i-was-dead-how-a-japanese-doctor-saved-an-aussie-pow-s-life> [Accessed 12 Sep. 2019].

Besides Dr Yasuteru Mitsufuji, there was a plethora of other medical officers that worked in secrecy in the dark corridors of the sleeping quarters with only very knowledgeable doctors actually given offices or wards to work from. Most of these doctors would consider themselves as Commanding Officers as well as medical ones, this was because the soldiers had nothing to add once they had been captured as they were trained to fight, not to live in a hell hole for a majority of the war. The mention of them being Commanding Officers ties into the act that they used to put on to reduce either the severity of beatings or probability of them.



HOW CHANGI PRISONERS OF WAR UTILIZED SECRET & HIDDEN RADIO'S TO COMMUNICATE WITH OTHER CAMPS AND GAIN KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE WAR EFFORT

Communication and knowledge of the outside world was limited to POWs, so people who had the knowledge to create devices that were able to communicate to the outside world had a very big following and praise. One of the main men who was known for making radios was Lieutenant Russel Wright.

LIEUTENANT RUSSEL WRIGHT

Russel Wright was a member of the 8th Australian Division, meaning he was a volunteer. The 8th Australian Division was intended to join the other Australian divisions in the Middle East but when the war with Japan began in 1941, the group was divided into four different forces which were all deployed in different parts of Asia-Pacific. Most of the members of the division were captured and taken as POWs. Russel Wright had time to work with his father before he volunteered to go to war and this was where he learned how to make radios.

Russel Wright was so good at not just making the radios so that they were heard by everyone surrounding it but also disguising the radios. Every day the Japanese would thoroughly search all areas of the camps for anything suspicious and not once was Russel Wright caught using, making or having possession of a radio.

Russel Wright was very intelligent in the way that he delivered the information to different people from the camp. He would gather the information from the radios about the war and life in general and would then that night write it down on a piece of paper. He would do this behind a math textbook.¹¹ He would then pass it to someone anonymously. He was never told who he was passing the piece of paper to and the person receiving the paper never knew who was giving him the paper so that if one was caught the other would be safe. Only four officers in the hut knew that Russel was listening to the radio. The broom radio was not the only radio set Russel built, often ensuring that each group who left Changi had a radio. He also built a radio in a concertina, which was a musical instrument, which a Japanese guard played. Unfortunately, one of the wires of the radio fell out of the concertina when the Japanese guard was playing it, but he didn't realise, and instead thought he had broken the instrument.¹²

¹¹ Unknown (1945). *Nambour Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser QLD*. [online] Trove. Available at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/78519448#> [Accessed 12 Sep. 2019].

¹² Unknown (1945). *Nambour Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser QLD*. [online] Trove. Available at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/78519448#> [Accessed 12 Sep. 2019].



◀ In this picture we are able to see Russel Wright construct one of his famous radios. We are able to see he didn't have much to work with only a self-made screwdriver and a broom.



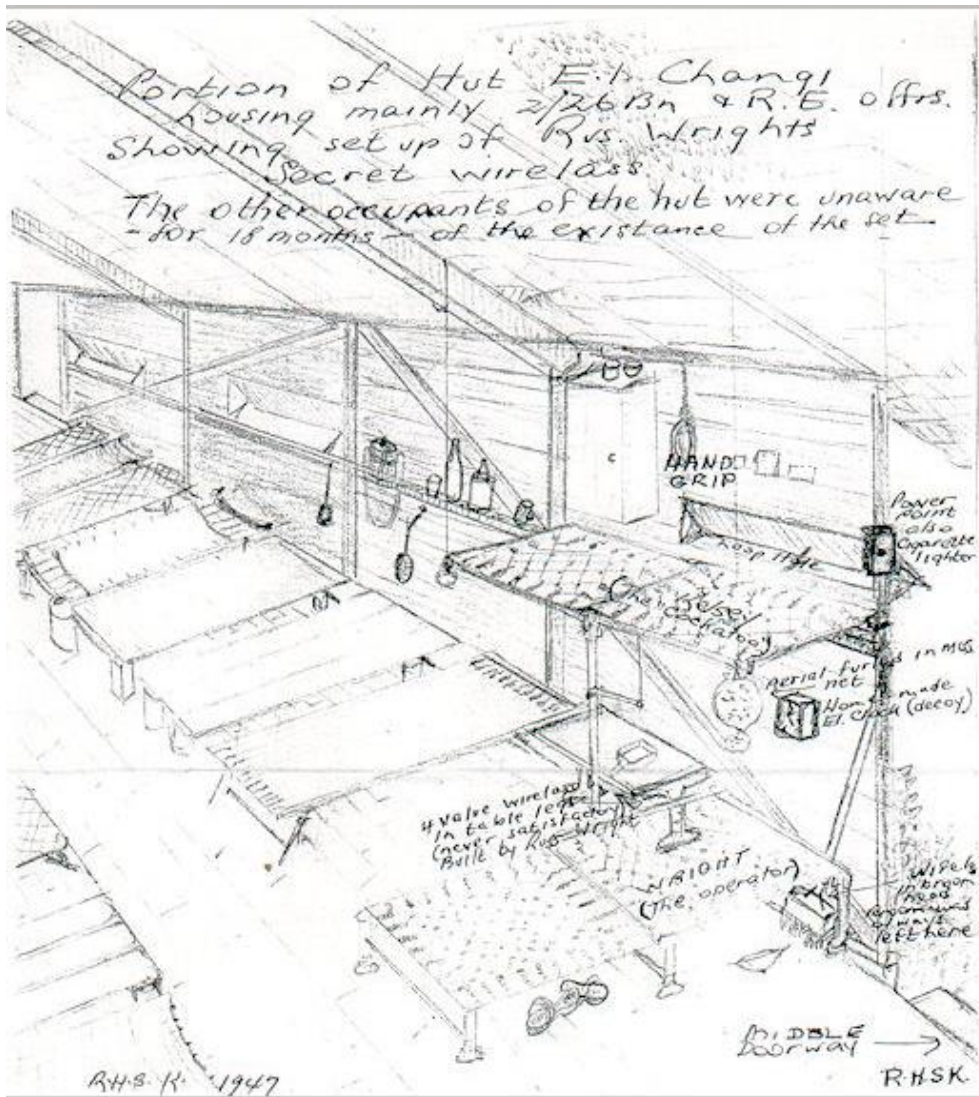
◀ In this second photo we are able to easily identify what Russel Wright used and how it works. By the looks of it he used parts of clocks, electric tools and even self-made equipment. He was a very intelligent man and for this he was very much praised by other POWs.

ROBERT HASELWOOD SAVILE KELSEY

Robert Haselwood Savile Kelsey was a member of the 2/26th Battalion AIF which was an infantry battalion of the Australian Army raised in late 1940 for service during the Second World War, the battalion undertook garrison duties in Malaya and Singapore during the war. He became a POW and was transported to the same camp as Lieutenant Russel Wright.

He was approached by a senior officer with links to the British High Command about taking on something that was very dangerous - if he were caught the penalty would be death by shooting or beheading and subsequently others living in the same hut would also be executed. Robert agreed and was transferred by his immediate command to a different bunk in hut E1.¹³

In this hut, he stayed on the upper bunk and the bunk below belonged to Russel Wright. Robert was the lookout for Russel Wright. Robert explains that he was told to tap Russel Wright if he ever had the volume up to high or even if he was writing too loud. They didn't even have to say any words which shows us the bond these two men had. Below is a picture of E1, the hut Robert was transferred to:



Radios being listened to and smuggled in by POWs seems to be a common theme. In one camp the men were able to transfer information throughout the camps were the toilets. The toilets were 20 long strips of holes on the outskirts of the camp. The men would gather around a hole, which were never looked over by the Japanese soldiers, and the man with the information would tell everybody. This was the safest way to spread information because it was never checked by the soldiers as well as it being not suspicious as it is a toilet.¹⁴

¹³ Bobkelsey.net. (2019). *Bob Kelsey: Wireless in a Broom*. [online] Available at: <http://www.bobkelsey.net/wireless.html> [Accessed 13 Sep. 2019].

¹⁴ Maclaren, D. (2013). *Changi Diary*. [online] Hindsight. Available at: <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/archived/hindsight/changi-diary/5064554> [Accessed 12 Sep. 2019].

JOHN NOEL DUCKWORTH - DELIVERED RADIO NEWS IN A DISGUISED MANNER

John Noel Duckworth was a Chaplain in Pudu POW camp who spent a lot of his time bartering with the Japanese to sell cheap items to provide money to help the people in Pudu POW camp. He would aggressively barter with the Japanese to secure funds which he would then give to a soldier named Archer who had outside contacts who would then secure supplies for the POW. However, when Pudu received a radio transmitter he was now able to deliver more than just money to the soldiers. He would go to the north eastern corner of the camp and would deliver news from the radio in a disguised manner similar to a sermon. There would be two lookouts nicknamed 'Cockatoos' positioned away from the sermon, and where Japanese soldier would have to pass by. If the 'Cockatoos' would start whistling the tune of 'Mother McCree' Duckworth would change from reports from the radio to the 'The Lord's prayer'. This is an example of the type of sermon Duckworth would give:

'...under thee dear Lord, our brother Winston who has to day dropped three thousand golden eggs on Wilhelmshaven, Bremen, Hamburg ...and under thee dear Lord, our brother Douglas has vowed that he will return.' [Then comes the sound of 'Mother McCree]... 'Now gentlemen, We'll all rise and have the Lord's prayer.' 'Our father which art in heaven...'¹⁵

This way of delivering the news was incredibly uplifting to the soldiers as they finally had authentic outside news about the war effort so they could learn of every victory even the small ones.

¹⁵ Brune, P. (2014). *Descent into hell*. Sydney, Melbourne, Auckland, London: Allen & Unwin, p.509.

HOW LOCALS IN THE PACIFIC IMPACTED THE WAR AND THE ROLE THEY PLAYED IN HELPING POWS

During the time of the War on The Pacific the locals were deeply impacted by the war. Armies rolled into their native land and would take their crops for the war and also use their space to set up camps and prisons .The locals were therefore frequently bombed by American and Australian forces. With the arrival of Prisoners of War at the Thai Burma Railway (“Death Railway”) local Thai workers fled the construction site of the railway. This left only the POWs to work on the construction. The local Thai people could observe the harsh and intense labour that the POWs endured and grew a sense of sorrow and sympathy for them. They decided to supply the POWs with contraband items such as money, medicines, food from outside the camp and even radio parts. Along with this they supplied the POWs with certain information that they craved and treasured, news about the war. All of this came with the risk of being caught and the locals new of the punishments that could be given to them if they were caught, however this did not stop them from helping.

One Thai man that helped the POWs was a man named Boonpong Sirivejaphan who was a shopkeeper. He had direct access to the Railway construction site as he was instructed by the Japanese to provide rations and supplies to the workforce. However, in secret Boonpong worked alongside a resistance of POWs that laid inside the camp, he brought the resistance lifesaving medical supplies but also grew great danger on not only himself but his daughter as well.¹⁶



◀ Pictured is Boonpong Sirivejaphan in his small shop in Thailand.

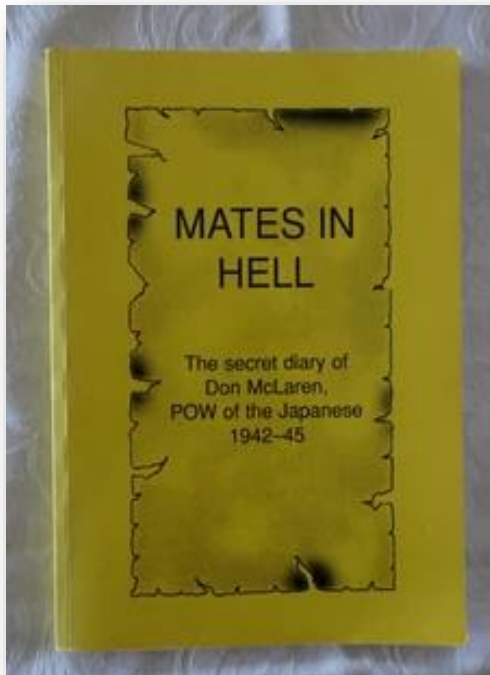
“Men of the line” a biographical novel about Gordon Nelson’s time during World War Two, he speaks of his time in the army and being a prisoner of war. Throughout his time in POW camps there were always men trying different ways to get news about the war, whatever the cost was. However, Gordon Nelson speaks of a time himself and other men working in the camps would be sent down to the docks in Singapore to help work. During their time he spoke about local villagers and how they would tell them about news going on in the war. Getting caught speaking to locals came with a painful punishment, usually a bashing with a bat type object. Locals were also forbidden in contacting with prisoners and the risk of the same punishment was placed upon them.¹⁷

¹⁶ Australian War Memorial, (n.d.) The Anzac Portal Beyond the century of service. *Thai and Burmese Involvement* Available at: <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/history/conflicts/burma-thailand-railway-and-hellfire-pass/events/thai-and-burmese-involvement> [Accessed 13 Sep. 2019].

¹⁷ Nelson, G. (2005). *Men of the Line*. Australia: Australian Military History Publications, pp.33-34.

THE SECRET DIARIES OF POWS

Don McLaren was 19 when he was captured and sent to the POW camps in 1942. He spent 3 years as a POW and was relocated multiple times and ended up at the Thai Burma Railway. He kept a secret diary which was written on cigarette wrappers and any other scraps of paper he could find. This was very dangerous because if the guards found out about this, he would be badly punished.



Despite these risks, Don kept a diary and fortunately survived the war and brought his diary with him. His diary was published in 1998 as a book. It was called *Mates in Hell*, pictured. His diary discusses about his day to day life as a POW but he mentioned many incidents that occurred that was considered a secret.

One of these incidents was when the Japanese guards searched the bunks and turned the place inside out. This shows how significant it was to keep the diary hidden. Don said he had his diary hidden inside a bamboo stick.

In the book, Don says that he would pile the wood (from the jungle they were forced to cut down) in a trail behind them and set it on fire when returning back to the camp so ally aircrafts flying nearby could spot them.¹⁸

Another event that Don recalls is the mango tree incident. Essentially what happened was the POWs found a tree full of mangoes but the section was occupied by “Tommies” (British soldiers). The Australians convinced the Tommies that the mangoes on the tree were poisonous and you would “die before you hit the ground”. Then 6 Aussies in lab coats went and took the mangoes from the tree to “prevent the Tommies from getting poisoned.”¹⁹

Don also reveals that the Japanese tried to get the POW to sign an agreement saying that they would not escape. None of them signed it, with the hope that an opportunity to escape would come up.

¹⁸ McLaren, D. (2013). *Changi Diary*. [online] Hindsight. Available at: <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/archived/hindsight/changi-diary/5064554> [Accessed 12 Sep. 2019].

¹⁹ McLaren, D. (2013). *Changi Diary*. [online] Hindsight. Available at: <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/archived/hindsight/changi-diary/5064554> [Accessed 12 Sep. 2019].

Eventually, the officers encouraged their men to sign, but many signed under false names including Ned Kelly and Mickey Mouse.²⁰

Don wasn't the only one who kept a diary. Many other soldiers kept diaries and authentic copies of these can be found at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. Another one of these risk takers was Sergeant Jack O'Donnell. He was a POW at the Changi camp. He too hid his diary in an unexpected place, the inside of a broom, which informs us that brooms were quite popular amongst the POW as they used it to hide radios and diaries.

*"Many a time their bombers flew low over the buildings and often we would get word by phone that 54 bombers were headed our way."*²¹ This was an entry in Jack's diary and his mention of the phone gives us an insight on how they received information, and the phones were not allowed at the camp.

"When it rains here you sure see some funny sights - there are nude men everywhere having a rain shower, while up on the top storey of this block, the chaps sleeping there have their shower through a huge bomb hole in the roof."

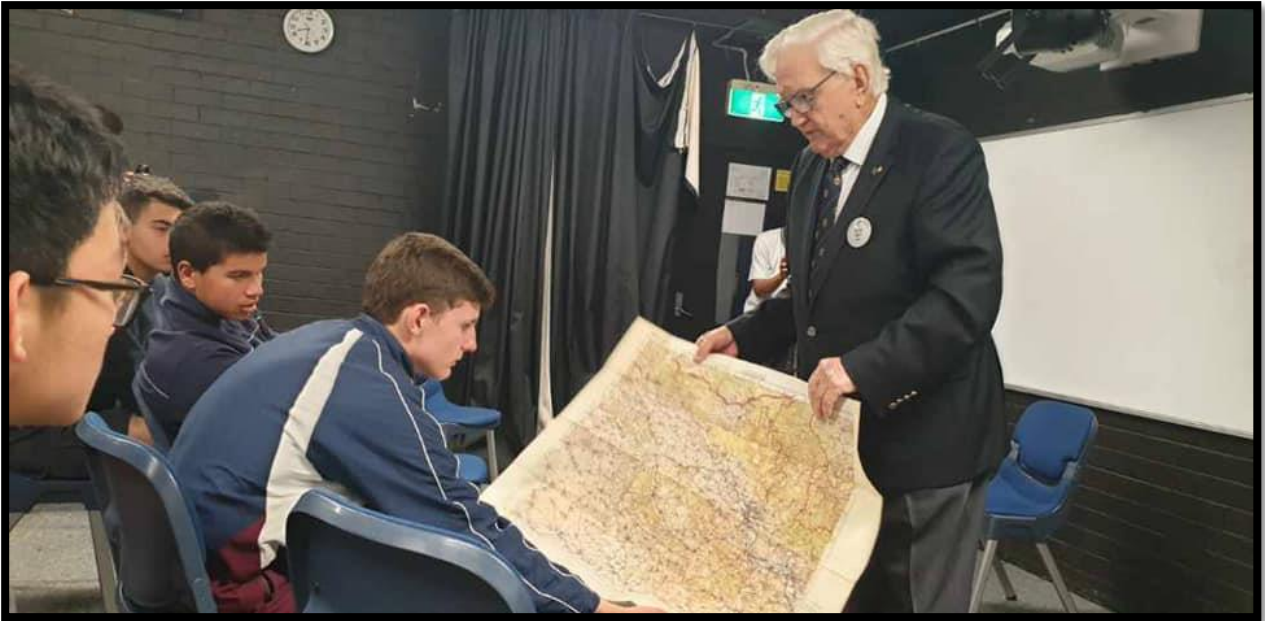
If it was not for the diary entry by Jack we wouldn't know about the POW using rain as a way to cleanse themselves. This first person recount is precious as it details the insignificant events that would have been forgotten.

²⁰ Maclaren, D. (2013). *Changi Diary*. [online] Hindsight. Available at: <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/archived/hindsight/changi-diary/5064554> [Accessed 12 Sep. 2019].

²¹ Australian Department of Veteran Affairs (2002). *Secret diary of life in Changi*. [online] Available at: <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/history/special-features/veterans-stories/australians-war-stories/secret-diary-life-changi> [Accessed 12 Sep. 2019].

INTERVIEW WITH DAVID TRIST A WW2 VETERAN

David had a lot to say when he came to our school for us to interview him, so the interview changed into more of him just telling us of his experiences in the war, and while interesting, it was not really relevant to our subject of Changi or the Thai-Burma railway. However, he had two stories that were interesting that involved POWs.



David showing us his father's map of the French trenches in World War 1

The first was that while he was in the jungles of New Guinea, he was tasked to guard a POW until dawn. He spoke about how he was nervous to do this job, as the Japanese were fierce fighters. So he dug a hole and laid the prisoner down in it and stood on their back, as he felt that the POW wouldn't be able to hurt him this way. As the night progressed, he realised that the Japanese POW wouldn't hurt him and let him sit against a tree.

We asked him why he no longer felt threatened, and David told us he thought the poor man was suffering from shell shock. David was taught pigeon English at school, and the Japanese POW also knew some pigeon English, so they tried to communicate. David started to roll a cigarette, the prisoner noticed this and asked for one. David gave him one and they shared the tobacco until dawn. This story was touching and I didn't expect people to be that kind to Prisoners of War. It also highlights that friendships can be made in harsh situations and first impressions may not always be as important as people make them out to be.

After the Armistice of WW2, David was involved in guarding the Japanese POWs in Rabaul. He told us how they assigned Japanese POWs to each ANZAC to help them with their daily chores. David called them a comfort boy (though made it clear they served a different purpose to comfort women) and the POW would polish their boots and wash and iron their clothes. He told us about how the allies had stacked the weapons of the Japanese on the beaches in heaps (we believe it was different types of ammunition though he was unclear). These stockpiles would then be bought somewhere else and

detonated. One evening, one of the stacks were detonated on the beach, causing ammo and grenades to blow up everywhere and a powerful fire to begin. The only way David and his division could escape from the huge fire was to call in a tank. The tank then guarded them from the heart of the fire as they escaped. The only casualties were two Japanese POWs, who were missing after this event. We asked David what had happened, and he thought those two Japanese POWs may have purposefully blown the ammunition up. We attempted to research more about this event, but couldn't find any other sources. David also spoke about the repatriation of Japanese POWs, and how they squashed huge amounts of people onto the boats. He discussed they were even packed on above deck and commented it would have been an uncomfortable journey.



BANGKA ISLAND MASSACRE



Survivor ... Vivian "Bully" Bullwinkel

The Australian Government and the surviving nurse of the Bangka Island massacre kept a secret on how the Australian Nurse POWs were treated.

In 1942, a group of 22 nurses were marched into the sea at Bangka Island in Indonesia, and shot. Only one nurse survived and her name was Vivian "Bully" Bullwinkel. She would testify against the Japanese at the War Crimes tribunal for this execution of her fellow nurses but she left out an important detail that she only recently told the Historian Lynette Silver.²²

Most of the nurses had been raped prior to being executed by the Japanese soldiers and when Vivian went to testify, the Australian government stepped in and told her not to talk about the rapes, but it was for a more benevolent reason than you might expect. She was told not to talk about the rapes because senior army officers believed that telling of the rapes would bring undue distress and sadness upon the grieving families of the nurses. There was also a stigma against rape victims at the time that would have inflicted shame on the families of the victims and the memory of the nurses.

Prior to Mrs Bullwinkel's admittance of the event occurring, there was evidence of it happening such as there being tears in her nurse uniform that were repaired with different coloured thread and bullet holes left in the uniform.

When forensics was run on these bullet holes and tears and it was found that the only way the holes could have matched up with the entry points on Bullwinkel was if the uniform was open at the waist and down at the front. Something interesting that happened along with this is that in 1992-93, Japanese academics came across records released by the Japanese and raised the idea of the rapes but nothing seemed to come of it.²³

²² Nunn, G. (2019). *Bangka Island: The WW2 massacre and a 'truth too awful to speak'*. [online] Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-47796046> [Accessed 12 Sep. 2019].

²³ Meacham, S. (2012). Stoic nurses stared down an atrocious death. *Sydney Morning Herald*. [online] Available at: <https://www.smh.com.au/national/stoic-nurses-stared-down-an-atrocious-death-20120424-1xjhb.html> [Accessed 12 Sep. 2019].

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