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**Ian L. Duncan**

**Australian Captain Ian Lovell Duncan**

**NX35135 Medical Officer**

*Sydney University Medical School 1933- 1939 – Sydney University Regiment - Enlisted AIF 1940 – To Singapore 1941 – Became POW 1942 – To Thailand to work Burma Thai Railway 1943 as part “D” Force – To Japan June 1944 on Teia Maru (Aramis) – Camp 17 Omuta.*

Ian Duncan was born at Glenn Innes NSW 29 May 1915. He studied medicine at Sydney University 1933 to 1939. Whilst studying he joined the militia, became a member of Sydney University Regiment and attained the rank of Sergeant.

Ian became of member of the Australian Imperial Forces on 25 July 1940 being commissioned with the rank of Captain in the Australian Army Medical Corps (AAMC). In August 1940 he became the medical officer (MO) to HQ Royal Australian Engineers (RAE) at Victoria Barracks, Sydney. He was then posted to numerous places in New South Wales, Queensland and finally Darwin.

In September 1941 Ian embarked at Sydney for Malaya on the HMT Sibijak. On arrival in Singapore he was stationed with HQ RAE and 2/12 Field Company at Johore Bahru. From December 1941 to February 1942 he was allocated to Battle HQ 8 Division and for the most part was detached to help collect stragglers from the Battle of Muar.

In the Changi area from February 1942 he was Regimental Medical Officer (RMO) to HQ RAE, 2/10 Field Company (Fd Coy), 2/12 Fd Coy and 2/6 Field Park Company as well as 8 Division Signals. His Regimental Aid Post (RAP) was in a chapel, despite opposition from the Padres. Later in 1942 he was transferred to the 2/10 Australian General Hospital (AGH) following an argument with Lieutenant Colonel Kappe. Still later he was transferred to RMO of the Australian Army Service Corps (AASC).

In March 1943 Captain Duncan was one of the Medical Officers sent to Thailand as a part of “D” Force. This was a force of 5,000 POWs made up of 2,780 British and 2,220 Australians. There were 6 AIF MOs with this force. They were Major A Hazelton, and Captains R Parker, R Wright, P Millard, D Hinder together with a Dental Officer, Captain J Finnimore.

“D” Force endured the dreadful train journey from Singapore to Banpong in Thailand, where 30 POWs were crammed into steel rail trucks 18 feet by 7 feet and travelled for 4 nights/ 5 days with irregular meals and comfort stops. They then moved to Kanchanaburi (Kamburi). The next move was to Tarsau by truck. Ian was then sent with 500 Australians to Konyu River Camp where the group worked on embankments for about a month. They then moved to Kinsayok where they also worked on embankments for another month.

Captain Duncan says that the group then set out on foot for an unknown destination. They walked for 2 weeks and he contends the group ended at 3 Pagodas Pass (approx 300 Km from Non Pladuc- near Banpong). (This is also recorded in “Australia in the War 1939-45-Medical- Middle and Far East” by Allan S Walker). If this is correct they must have been moving there around the same time as “F” Force. After a time they came back to Purankashi (Brancassi) - 208 Km from Non Pladuc. They were in that area for some time. It is reported that the Japs blamed him for the level of sickness and would beat him. Some time later Captain Duncan was sent with one Japanese escort to a large base camp at Banpong where he worked in the hospital facility.

In June 1944 Captain Duncan was sent from Singapore to Japan in the Tiea Maru (Aramis). He says it was a fast, uneventful and uncomfortable journey. They arrived in Moji port and he obtained permission for all sick and himself to remain on deck for the arrival night. He says that night there was a massive air raid on Moji lasting about four hours. The Japs explained that it was an “air raid practice”.

On disembarking they were put into quarantine and stripped naked while their meagre possessions were sterilised. They were then taken by overnight train to Camp 17 Omuta to work in the mines. Here his Japanese POW number was 508. It is also understood that there was also zinc foundry work (refer book “No Time for Geishas” by G.P.Adams). There were around 2,000 POWs in this camp and Captain Duncan had other medical officers there. They were Captain Dick Parker POW number 1992 (AAMC) and American medical officers Little, Hewlett and Proff, with consecutive POW number 3, 4 and 5.

Captain Duncan remained at Omuta until the war’s end and witnessed the A Bomb explode over Nagasaki. He left Omuta on a hospital train which took them to Nagasaki where the sick were transferred to a hospital ship USS Haven. He returned to Australia via Okinawa, Manilla and finally to Sydney on the HMS Formidable. He was discharged 26 November 1945.

He managed to keep the medical records of the prisoners in Camp 17 and these were invaluable when medical assessments were made after the war. In the mid 1980s, when he was Vice President of the ex Prisoners of War Association, he co-authored a study titled “A Study of the present health of ex-Prisoners of War”. The study was sent to the Department of Veterans Affairs and other interested bodies in U.K., U.S.A. and New Zealand. An extract of the report follows-.

“The age group surveyed was 60-70 years of age (as at 1983). The actual figures collected were from over 600 ex POW men and women interviewed personally by members of the panel, from disabilities already accepted by the Department of Veteran Affairs. This necessitated retaining some of the euphemisms used by the Department. Other figures were obtained from certificates by doctors and from an Australia wide questionnaire sent out by the N.S.W. Branch of the POW Association.

Great care was taken by the panel to ensure that the disabilities listed were those actually being treated or presently causing trouble to the ex-POWs. The figures will therefore err on the conservative side.

Some features not listed were only found by accident and an accurate estimate was not possible. For instance it was found that there was great difficulty in getting the men to talk freely of their disabilities. It became apparent that these men had accepted their often apparent disabilities, as a way of life and had accepted them and lived with them uncomplainingly for years. A major breakthrough was made when the wife was interviewed with the ex POW. It was often only then that the true story was revealed. It was also found that there had been a profound disruption to family life. Many ex- POWs were divorced, separated or had unsatisfactory marriages. In many cases it was evident that it was only the understanding and devotion of the wife that had kept the marriage intact.……………..

Figures obtained from the Department showed that in June 1983 there were 12,300 ex-POWs surviving in Australia. Of these 8,500 were Prisoners of the Japanese POW (J), 3,000 were prisoners in Europe POW (E) and there were 32 prisoners of the Koreans.”

Compiled by I.L. Duncan MB BS, J.H. Greenwood OBE M Econ (Hon), K.G. Mosher AM OBE ED BSc and S.E.J. Robertson AM MB BS FRCP FRACP.

Having survived the war he continued to practice medicine in Tamworth and later at Five Dock, a Sydney suburb. Mental and physical scars remained with him, which included three fractured vertebrae from being beaten. He was one of the associate Surgeons at Balmain Hospital and Consultant Emeritus. He also took a keen interest in community affairs, being prominent in the Returned Services League (RSL), Lawn Bowling and a world acknowledged expert in orchids. He also gave a great deal of his time to helping ex-servicemen in their applications to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

# Very descriptive oral interview of Dr. Ian Lovell Duncan experiences as a prisoner of the Japanese, 1940-1945, interviewed by Margaret Evans. Oral Interview accessed here: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1008143>

***Credit: Australian War Memorial -*** [***https://www.awm.gov.au/***](https://www.awm.gov.au/)

In 1989 Duncan was made a member of the Order of Australia. He passed away on 26 September 1994.

**NOTE:** Dr. Duncan is credited with trying to save life of David Runge. Tortured and forced to kneel for days in snow; Dr. Duncan had to amputate legs below the knees. Guards carried legs around laughing. Documented Whitecross's excellent book, "Slaves of the Son of Heaven". Published in 1951, the book mentions many names and incidents from Camp 17. Account is also documented in Don Tweedie's account- see Runge and Tweedie Biography page.  
Back in Australia Duncan fitted Dave with prosthetic legs that helped him return to gainful employment again. Dave Runge had huge respect for him.

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*The assistance of Mrs Joyce Duncan, who provided some of Ian’s notes, Mr. Roy Whitecross EM BEc JP (fellow ex POW at Omuta – POW number 1477 and author of the book “Slaves of the Sons of Heaven”), Ken Gray (fellow ex POW and former National President of the ex POWs Association) and Mrs. Laurice Hinder, widow of Captain (Dr.) David Hinder who provided a copy of the Study of the Health of ex POWs).*

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