**Carl Wight Patterson**

**Son of Hawick**



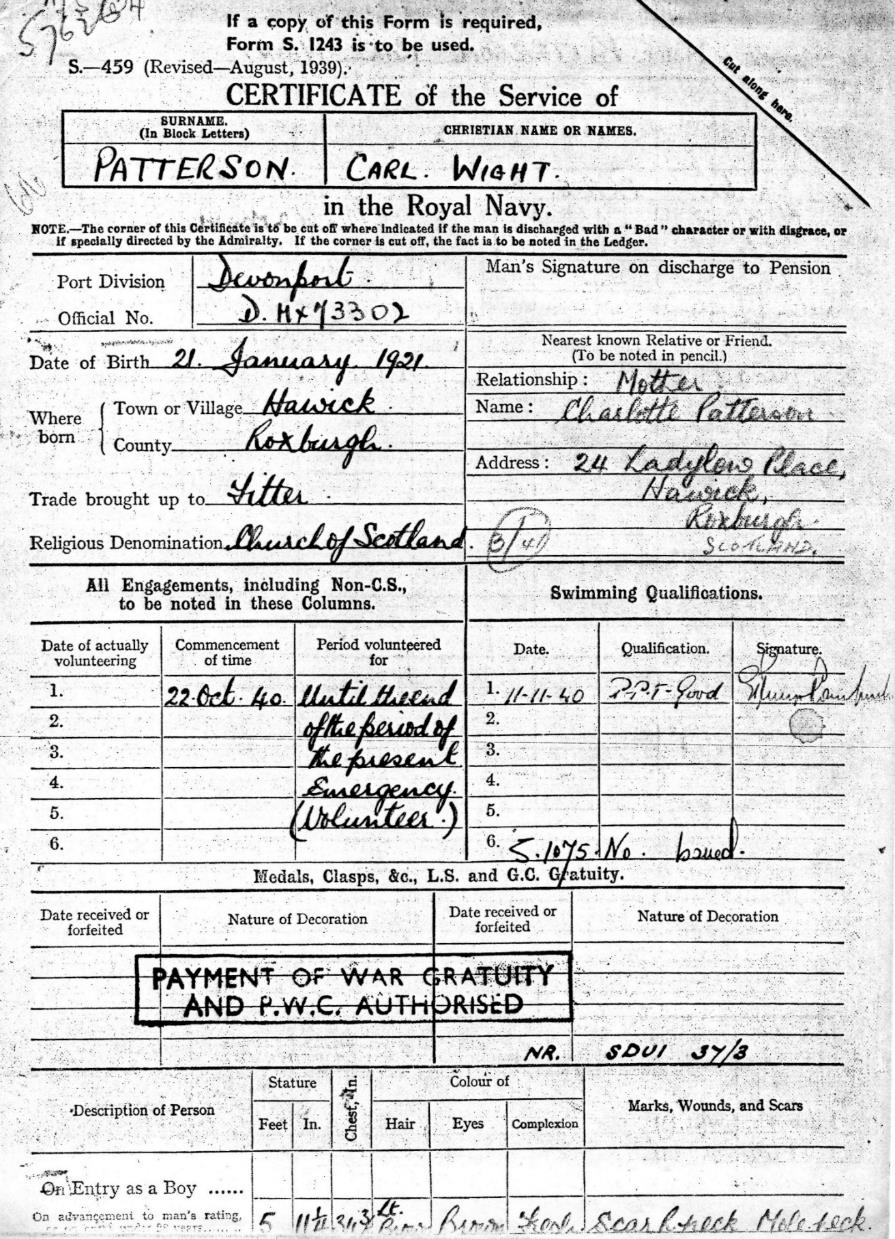
**Carl Wight Patterson**

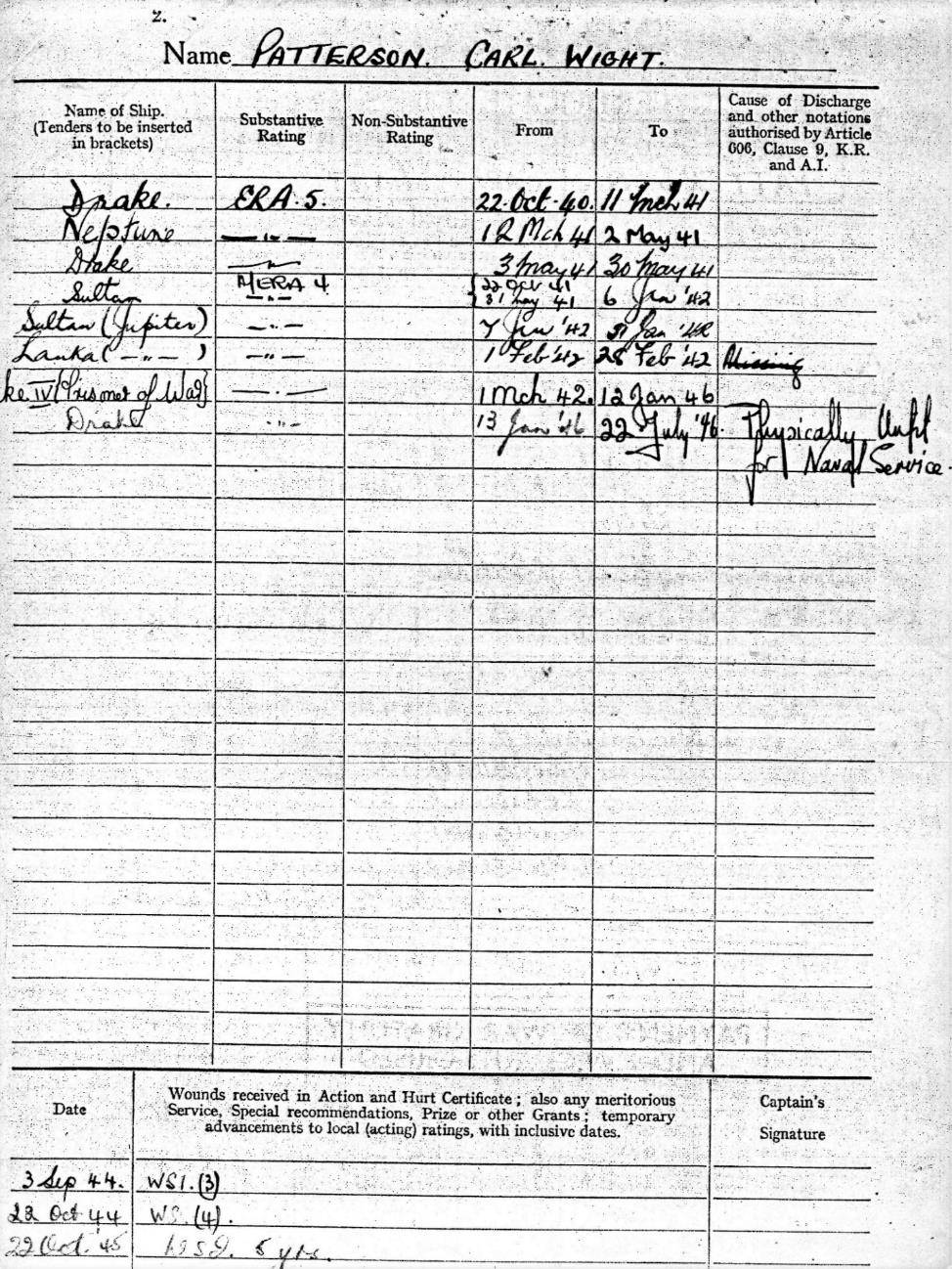
20 years old 1941

Royal Navy Engine Room Artificer - 5th class - D/MX 73302

This portrait, taken in Singapore in 1941, lay uncollected, until given to Carl when he was repatriated from Batavia (Jakarta) to Singapore in September 1945.

A fellow sailor had returned from the POW camps and returned to that same Chinese store, where he came across the portrait.





**Official Royal Navy Service Record**

**WARTIME THROUGH CARL’S EYES**

**From civilian life 1942 to the Royal Navy**

*Since Dad wrote this personal account, my research has allowed various documents and photographs to be woven into his story below. It is intended that these inclusions fill the events of Dad’s narrative more fully. Each of these inclusions is identified by \*.*

**1.0 INTRODUCTION TO WAR by Carl Patterson**

Until my mother’s death in 1967, in her 76th year, my parents lived, since their marriage in 1915, in the same tenement building owned by the Hawick Co-operative Society. The ground floor was used as the local grocery branch with a storeroom at the rear, just below first floor level and stretching into the slope, which was our backyard. The attic on the third floor, of necessity, had the sloping roof as part of its shape and in the local parlance, referred to as a garret, but it had some useful advantages. Where the lower floors had to share their common toilet, we had our own, and the extra height gave us a wonderful view over the town in the River Teviot valley. We had two and a bit flights of stairs up which to carry all the coal, washing from the washhouse in the backyard, the groceries and in later life, the bicycles from the ground level. I do not regard this as a disadvantage because, as I view it now, we became accustomed to climbing stairs and carried on doing so in later life.



**Railway viaduct across the Teviot River, demolished in 1975**

The living room window was set into the sloping roof and modified to open fully, with a box seat built into the alcove. Many hours of my younger days I spent during the summer watching the steam trains travel the long length of the river valley, both down and up from the railway station next to the high stone arched bridge over the river. The heavy trains which included most of the passenger trains between Carlisle in England and the Scottish capital Edinburgh (each about fifty miles away) had a shunting engine at the back to give them the necessary “push” to gather speed up the gradient. We had a great-aunt who lived on the first floor of a tenement block adjacent to the railway embankment and which was nearly at eyelevel with the track. The shunting engine parted company with the train at that point and it was always worth a wave from the engine crew if we were there at the right time! Sadly, since then, the entire railway link to Carlisle has been removed as being no longer an economic link.



**Carl - 1940 \***

I was sitting at this living room box seat enjoying the September Sunday morning sunshine and the view over the town to the opposite green hills, when one of our downstairs neighbours came to tell us that war on Germany had been declared. We had no radio set then, because my father was not receptive to anything new or different to the usual. In later life, I concluded that his experiences in WW1 trenches had left him with a permanent untreated trauma, of which one symptom resulted in a severe Victorian disciplinary approach to his children. I could sense the despondency of my mother and father at this news. Their memories of the horrors of WW1 just twenty years before, coupled with the knowledge that they had two sons at, or near to military call-up age, could not have made them think otherwise.

As the German armies swept over Poland, the country belatedly organised itself to face the coming conflict. The stop-gap British expeditionary force landed in France, general conscription was planned and the normal daily life slowly changed to accommodate the blackouts at night, and the issue of gasmasks which had to be carried by everyone at all times. I was in the habit of playing violin /piano duets one evening each week at a friend’s house - about a normal 15 minutes’ walk away. On my return one evening, I walked out into a moonless and very black night that was quite unexpected, and had a nerve-wracking hesitant journey before I found myself back home. This was just one of the many exigencies for which we had to adapt our habits; in that case, the answer was a torch with a cloth cover to mask the brightness. At that time, I was studying by correspondence a Post Office Engineering course and very soon afterwards the college advised they were suspending operations for the duration of the war. As an apprentice in a hosiery machinery engineering shop, the workload increased in a working day from eight in the morning to eight in the evening, from which overtime working, I banked the princely sum of ten shillings each week.

As the months went by, thoughts inevitably turned to the approaching date on which I would be conscripted into one of the Services. I seem to recall that all males were eligible at nineteen years of age. With knowledge of my father’s experiences in the trenches in France, an alternative to the Army seemed to be essential. If one volunteered, then there was a preferential choice of services and my inclination seemed to be towards the Royal Navy- if only for the reason that they took the cookhouse with them on their travels! On such flimsy reasoning are momentous decisions made!

The thought gradually developed into action and in company with a fellow apprentice, we drove in his car the fifty miles to Edinburgh and the Royal Navy recruiting office to volunteer as Artificers. The car had been bought for fifty pounds, had long lost its canvas hood and was open to the sun and rain. When it came to return to Hawick, the car would not start and a friendly policeman helped to get us going with a push start along St. Georges Street. To become a RN artisan, it was necessary to pass a trade test and in the very small recruiting office, I was shown an example of what had to be done, and asked if I could do it. When I said I thought I could do it, the old Chief Petty Officer barked at me, “Can you, or cannot you do it?” My reply was a very subdued, “Yes”.

Not long afterwards, a travelling voucher and instructions to report to Devonport Naval base in the south of England for the trade test arrived, and I duly caught the London and North Eastern Pullman express to London at 23h00. At that time, there were sleeping suites on the trains and it was a very comfortable journey. Arriving at St. Pancras Station in early morning and at the furthest distance from home I had ever been by myself, further adventure faced me. I travelled by tube train to Paddington Station, which was the terminus of the Great Western Railway, where I boarded the train for Plymouth. The sight of every pane of glass in the station roofs shattered by falling shrapnel from the anti-aircraft gun shells, and all the thousands of people sleeping at night on the underground platforms, remain vivid memories of that time. I walked into Devonport Naval base on the 21st October 1940, which happened to be an anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar in 1806, when Horatio Nelson was killed. A very fitting day to join the Senior Service. An air raid was in progress and the small group of young men who had been collected at the station were hustled into the nearest shelter; but not before I had my first glimpse of fighter ‘plane vapour trails high in the sky - all very exciting to this raw country boy.

We were allowed, if I remember correctly, three days of very hard filing work at the bench to complete the trade test. It consisted of preparing an oblong block of steel so that it would fit exactly, in whatever position it was inserted, into a U-shaped block. The puzzling thing about the test was that those who failed were given the option of joining up as aircraft fitters! Johnny McGillivray, whose service number was immediately in front of mine and so became one of my future buddies, was a boilermaker, who passed his respective test, part of which was used as the rough material for the fitters’ test. The degree of our skill and hard work, depended on how good the unknown boilermaker had been. I muse now that by passing that trade test, destiny passed me along to another fork in the road of life.

After another night in the barracks and after being kitted out with hammock, kitbag and cases, we were taken across the river by ferry for our seven weeks in training/acclimatization camp. The ferry boat was somewhat similar to a paddle steamer except that the paddles were wheels over which two chains, stretching from bank to bank and normally lying on the bed of the river were looped, and so the ferry hauled itself across accompanied by a great deal of noise. The weeks that followed were among the most enjoyable in my life. I had ‘escaped’ from the home tyranny of my father, had more money in my pocket than ever before, and with the addition of the company of young men in the same state of euphoria as myself. We did the usual square bashing with WW1 P1 rifles learning by rote the 24 parts of them, and eventually given live firings on the shooting range where my target remained untouched! This was a big disappointment at the time, but later I concluded that I had been aiming at the next-door target. During the “square-bashing” training, we suffered agonies from abused leg muscles and had lectures on Navy habits (embarrassed when the MO talked about sex and the possible consequences thereof) and finished physically fitter than ever before. One evening during the blackout, when on shore leave at Devonport I made my first acquaintance with a Cornish pasty. Going along with the other servicemen with me, I bought this “pie” in the near total darkness and hoped it was not a practical joke being played on us. The overwhelming impression that it was a potato pie could have been near the truth as meat was rationed at that time. We had in our group a somewhat older man who was a member of the Plymouth Brethren, which is a very strict Calvinistic sect, and the conversation that went on around our table in the hall must have been a rude shock to him. I was told later that in the course of time he had entirely jettisoned his narrow view on life. At the end of the training, there was a round-the-houses-of-the-village race where I got home in sixteenth place out of sixty runners and for a non-runner that was quite an event for me. Some of the runners knew the route prior to starting, but I was ignorant of the terrain, or the distance we had to run, so it was just a matter of keeping going in the hope that familiar landmarks would appear. The finishing leg was uphill into the camp and at the end of the race, I collapsed with others, in a small room to recover from the leg muscle pains.

Then it was home on leave for Christmas, arriving on a Saturday morning in time to go to the local park for a chance game of rugby. In my new state of unusual fitness, this proved to be a real “walk in the park” and at the end of the game, I recall jumping with ease over the wire boundary fence.

Engine Room Artificer 5th class D/MX 73302 was ready for active service.

**2.0 TIME AT SEA - or the lack of it**

During five years in the Royal Navy, my total time spent at sea was no more than six weeks, so I saw more land than sea during the war years. Such as it was, my time at sea was not without incident, some of which may be of interest.

I believe that as my name was Patterson, with ‘P’ as the 16th letter of the alphabet, my stays in barracks awaiting a drafting was prolonged beyond the average. My first draft (from HMS Drake barracks in Devonport) was to Chatham naval base in Kent, where I joined HMS Neptune, which was being re-fitted in dry-dock. Being a modern light cruiser, this was an enjoyable six weeks doing work with which I was familiar.

Shore leave was available every evening, and most weekends. All coupled with a convenient sleeping place in the workshop, where I could lie in my hammock and listen to the records of popular songs by Vera Lynn and Bing Crosby, played in the electricians’ cubicle. One weekend I went up to London where at some venue (now long forgotten) at Sunday midday, Myra Hess played the piano for the troops. When the ship was nearly ready to move out of dry-dock and become water-borne, it was recommissioned with a New Zealand complement and I returned a very disappointed sailor back to HMS Drake.

In my absence, Plymouth, which is contiguous with Devonport, had been blitzed and it was with shocked wonder that on my first “shore leave” I breasted the hill between the towns to view the total devastation of what had been the centre of Plymouth. It was quite simply an extended pile of rubble. Weekend leave in Plymouth was greatly facilitated by an institution known as Aggie Weston’s. At the time, we took it for granted, but I presume it had been founded by a charitable donation possibly as far back as the 1800s. It was a multi-level building where one could hire a cubicle with bed and bedding for a very small amount per night - which for most purposes, was Saturday night.

Johnny McGillvray provided an indication that my time was about to come when he was drafted to “China”, and proceeded on two weeks leave. The day he returned, I was summoned on the public address system to report at the ‘window’ where the elderly time-served and re-called Chief Petty Officer told me I was also on the draft that was leaving the next day. No matter how many announcements one heard in the course of a day, the mention of one’s Service Number brought instant attention, even to a raw recruit such as me –so, there was no embarkation leave for me!

We sailed from Southampton on the Durban Castle, which had not yet been converted for troop carrying, so we were six to a 4-berth cabin; four in the bunks and the other two on the floor under the bottom bunks. After the war, when emigrating to the Copperbelt, we sailed on its sister ship the Warwick Castle, and once on board I immediately knew the layout of the ship. Apart from the recollection of consistently winning when playing cards, the greatest sight for me, was being overtaken by the largest liners of the day, the Ile de France and the Queen Mary. Sailing together, and because of their high speed, travelling without a naval escort, they were carrying badly needed reinforcements to Egypt. Considering the thousands of men aboard and the dangers involved on their long journey, it was a feeling to be remembered. On board with us were troops whose senior officer at one time became greatly incensed at the failure of the naval ratings to salute him below decks. He reluctantly accepted the information that naval ratings only salute on the upper deck.

After a stay of three days in Cape Town, we carried on to Bombay where we had a few days in barracks before being transferred to the Empress of Japan. This ship had been gutted to convey troops, and the lower decks were vast empty spaces; our showers were in the round of the stern and immediately above the propeller shafts. Also on board was the Maharajah of Patiala with his personal army, which we subsequently found to be an anti-aircraft unit, and were stationed within the perimeter of the Singapore naval base, HMS Sultan. These Indian soldiers lived very frugally; their ‘cookhouse’ was an open fire on deck from where an endless stream of chapatti emerged.

Whilst in barracks in Bombay, we had the opportunity of ‘shore leave’ and so I had my first experience of the dreadful poverty and social despair of what is now termed the underprivileged. There is no reason to believe that there is any serious change for the better in the situation now. So many people lived their short miserable lives from birth to death on the pavements with never a roof above their heads. Boys of around ten years of age were touting their younger sisters whilst the (deliberately) maimed cripples abounded. After dark, the broad streets were massive dormitories of orderly lined sleeping bodies. No snake charmers could be seen, but there was an interesting trade in removing corns with a small inverted straw cone. No doubt it was a confidence trick of some kind, but difficult to dispute.

From Bombay, we sailed to Colombo, where I had an opportunity to meet my cousin John Middlemiss who, after being at sea on the Clan Line ships, had settled in Ceylon as an employee on the tea estates. He had then moved to the engineering company of James Brown (from where he eventually retired as Managing Director) and on the day of my visit, had the satisfaction of dismantling and then re-assembling a faulty diesel engine. As he had to get back to see me, it must have been a pressure day for him. We had a spell in a swimming pool; was happy to beat him over 50 metres, because he was a good swimmer at school; and later had dinner with his then girl friend who was a nurse with the Australian troops. When much later she died during childbirth, it meant that I was the only member of the family who ever met her.

From Colombo we travelled to Singapore and so reached our destination of HMS Sultan, the Royal Navy base, which was in the north of the Island on the Straits of Johore. It was of very recent construction and the accommodation with its sporting and recreational facilities was the equal of a top-level holiday camp. Each rating had a bed and a chest of drawers for his belongings and hammocks were left in a store. Six memorable months were then spent working until 13:00 on ships in the dockyard, with the rest of the day completely free. If I could resist the lassitude of the tropical after-lunch feeling, I would swim, by myself, for extended periods in the deserted Olympic sized pool. Being easily the fastest swimmer available, I found myself co-opted to play in the HMS Encounter water polo team, with the sole purpose of gaining possession at the start of a leg. However, as a polo player I was a complete disaster, never having previously played the game; a bit of coaching would have helped, but they did not need me as an actual player. My efforts as a soccer player were not much better, as I was prone to hamstring injury.

I remember sitting on the upper floor of the recreation building in the sports fields writing my usual weekly letter home to Mother and commenting on the rays jumping out of the water of the Johore Straits. The balmy tropical evenings with scents of the flowers, notably the frangipani, can never be forgotten; such was the carefree spirit at the time. Working one morning in the engine room of the Kedah, which appeared to be a non-naval ship, I was fairly badly scalded on my back. Somewhere in the ship, a valve had been opened and boiling water came out of a disconnected pipe above me. At the time I was straddled between machinery and could not immediately jump clear; the water collected around my waistline where my boiler suit belt formed a collecting point. Unfortunately this happened on the floating dry-dock, and there was a delay while a boat was found to take me ashore to hospital. The young doctor tended to regard me as another case of malingering and treated the burn as being superficial. He changed his opinion the following day when he saw my blisters! I still have some scars to mark the area. The Kedah I have since found to be a coastal steamer requisitioned into a patrol boat and survived the war to lead the fleet under Mountbatten into Singapore in August 1945.



**Carl writing a letter to his parents from HMS Sultan, Singapore – 1941**

The good times came to an abrupt end with the arrival of the battleships Repulse and Prince of Wales, and the appearance one evening soon afterwards of Japanese ‘planes; coinciding with the attack on Pearl Harbour. The anti-aircraft fire from both land and ship-based guns seemed to me to be particularly ineffective in comparison with what had been seen in England. Most of my draft may have been young and inexperienced in the Service, but we were air raid hardened, and it was with great astonishment that we observed the panic reactions of the senior ratings in their first air raid. The base was blacked-out and for some obscure reason we had revolver practice - maybe it was the only thing the senior staff could think of. The handgun was so heavy that during the effort to lift it at arms length to point at the target I pulled the trigger, something that did not surprise me, recalling the rifle shooting when in training at Devonport when I had nothing on my target. Subsequently, I have retained absolutely no interest in firearms.

The night when the destroyers came in with the survivors from the sinking of the battleships Repulse and Prince of Wales off the east coast of Malaya, was an experience that could never be forgotten. At the time, we were not aware of the huge loss of life in the sinkings, but the condition of the sailors coming off the ships was sufficient for one to realise that this was a major emergency. With all of them covered in oil and suffering from shock, it was amazing how an issue of navy rum as they landed, rapidly improved their morale. Somewhere I read they got tea to drink – it must have been great tea! To make things even more difficult in the ablution block that night, there was a power failure; we handed out towels in the dark, and it must have been quite impossible to get all the heavy oil off the bodies. This was the end of comfort for all, overnight our mosquito nets became emergency bedding on the floor and orderly accommodation became a shambles.

I well remember looking down from an upper floor balcony the following morning to the parading of the surviving ship’s crews by divisions. It was a stark realisation of how many men had been lost in the sinkings. A few days later, as a small gesture of entertainment for the men, a swimming relay race (each leg the short distance across the pool) was organised and I found myself the anchorman in a team. I recall we were well behind as I took off, but seemed to take only a few strokes before hitting the other side to win a bottle of beer for each of us. That must have come from the Officers mess because there was no pub for the lower deck. The sharpening of the tempo of the war caught me unawares one evening as I was relaxing on the lawns and viewing the ships lying at anchor off shore. Over the hill from inland, came a plane flying very low and with flickering lights – or so it seemed. The belated realisation that the lights were the track of tracer bullets directed at the nearest destroyer was a shake-up to complacency. That was my first contact with the Japanese Navy Zeros; and by that time, the Japanese army was advancing rapidly down the Malaysian Peninsula and getting closer to Singapore Island.



**HMS Tenedos – Old WWI S-Class Destroyer \***

**Sunk in Colombo Harbour during Japanese air raid on 5 April 1942 with the loss of 33 crew lives**

Soon afterwards, my first opportunity came to go to sea for the first time in a fighting ship – some eighteen months after joining the Navy! However, this was only for a week as a relief for a wounded member of HMS Tenedos, which was a 1914-18 destroyer, of a mere 900 tons. This was like being thrown into the deep end as it were, because nobody thought it necessary to tell me the routine. I spent a few days trying to sleep on a bench that could not have been longer than five feet long, until someone took pity on me and lent me a folding bed, for which, after a search I found a place on a gun platform. Dawn saw me trampled on as the gun crew took up their action stations. One must realise that in wartime the ship’s complement is much larger than in peacetime, and on a small ship such as a destroyer, there is absolutely no place to sling a hammock. Trying to adjust to a schedule of four hours on shift and eight hours off, taking account of the dog watches of two hours each, was a rude introduction to life at sea. The heat in the engine room of a destroyer being extremely high – I recall later on HMS Jupiter, how an officer tried to experience an engine room visit and could only force himself into the hatchway up waist level before giving up the idea. I did my shift in the engine room with absolutely no idea what I was supposed to do; and in fact did nothing except pass the time by hanging on to an overhead valve with the sweat trickling from my elbows, and drinking the entire allocation of lime water. At least I was observant. When we returned from the patrol (I had no idea or interest where we had been) to dock at HMS Sultan, I was in the engine room and the on-duty officer took it for granted that I was experienced. Consequently, I found myself in front of the large forward and reverse control wheels (about four feet and five feet in diameter respectively on the same spindle, for each of the two turbines) for the docking. Little did he know that I had never been near such an arrangement in my life! Nevertheless I found it a great thrill and challenge as I spun the wheels from forward to reverse on each turbine, and then in the opposite directions as the signals came on the telegraph board. We must have docked without incident - I went back to barracks and heard nothing more!

In the New Year of 1942, I was again drafted; this time to HMS Jupiter, a fairly modern “J” class destroyer of around 1,800 tons gross weight. As I was a 5th class ERA (the lowest grade in the category), I was assigned, quite thankfully on my part, to nominal day duties. Again, on the assumption that previously I had done something similar, I was given a superficial tour of the ship to explain my daily tasks. One task was to check what I thought at the time was the smoke-making device in the stern. This was very difficult for me as it entailed passing through the officer’s quarters aft, and I was petrified that an officer might speak to me – officers at that stage were a different race of men to me! The air pressure in the torpedoes in their launching tubes on the upper deck had to be checked and pumped up to pressure if necessary, but this seldom needed to be done. My biggest headache was with the emergency electric generator in the boiler room. Driven by a two-cylinder diesel engine that was started with compressed air, and by ignition plugs inserted into the cylinder heads, this did not always work to plan, which meant going back to start the air compressor driven by an equally temperamental petrol motor. In theory, it was simple, but something I never mastered. Looking back on subsequent events, if a power failure had occurred the whole process would have been in darkness; a near impossibility.

When boiler water level glasses ruptured at any time of day or night, I was on call to carry out the replacement of them. As the spare gauge-glasses carried on-board were not quite up to specification this was a regular duty. With the rolling and pitching motion of the boat the wear and strain on the glasses was much greater than on a land installation. One night, in a fit of optimism I omitted to replace the safety guards before signalling to the stoker below on the operating platform to open the valves; and the glass burst in front of me. Fortunately, the flying glass missed my face, but many fragments hit my bare chest. Being personally at fault, this was not something to report, but I was picking out pieces of glass for some time afterwards, and still have a reminding scar on my chest.

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**HMS Jupiter – G85 - J-Class Destroyer \***

***To assist the time lines of Carl’s account of their movements at sea, the following extract from the Royal Navy operations records provides an insight to the movements of the Jupiter.***

***Of interest too, is the connection to Cape Town and Durban harbours. Carl would one day be living in Durban and one wonders if he was aware of the Jupiter having been there for repairs.***

***1940***

*September*

*2nd Detached from WS10 on arrival at Cape Town*

*3rd Independent passage to Durban.*

*4th Arrived at Durban requiring repair to hull structure defects caused by weaknesses forward which caused leaks.*

*5th Taken in hand for repair.*

*12th Took passage from Durban for Alexandria on completion of repair.*

*24th Joined Flotilla at Alexandria.*

*October*

*1st Carried out anti-submarine exercises off Alexandria with HM Destroyer JERVIS and HM Submarine RORQUAL.*

*(Note: Fleet service with Flotilla restricted for further defects due to poor riveting during construction.)*

*November              Nominated for transfer to Eastern Fleet*

*Took passage from Alexandria to Colombo.*

*28th Joined HM Battlecruiser REPULSE and HM Destroyer ENCOUNTER at Colombo.*

*29th Sailed from Colombo as screen for HM Battleship PRINCE OF WALES and HMS REPULSE during passage to Singapore with HM Destroyers, ENCOUNTER, ELECTRA and EXPRESS.*

*(Note: These ships were identified as Force Z.)*

*December*

*2nd Arrived at Singapore with Force Z and taken in hand for refit.*

*10th Docked at Singapore*

*(Note: Did not sail with Force Z to carry out search for Japanese invasion ships during which HMS REPULSE and HMS PRINCE OF WALES were sunk by air attacks. See THE HUNTING OF FORCE Z by RE Hough, ENGAGE THE ENEMY MORE CLOSELY, WAR WITH JAPAN (HMSO) and Naval Staff History for details.)*

***1 9 4 2***

*January       On completion of dockyard work, deployed for convoy \ escort and patrol off Singapore.*

*10th Joined military convoy DM1 with HMS ENCOUNTER and HM Destroyer VAMPIRE (RAN) as escort for final stage of passage to Singapore from Durban.*

*13th Detached from DM1 on arrival.*

*17th Detached from escort of SS MOUNT VERNON to carry out anti-submarine operations and carried out depth charge attack on underwater contact.*

*Sank Japanese submarine I-60 in position 6.19S 104.49E after gun, torpedo and depth charge attacks when submarine forced to surface in southern approach to Sunda Strait*

*(Note: Japanese submarine were later identified by addition of 100 to number but this had not been introduced and submarine is correctly identified.)*

*February*

*2nd Joined military convoy DM2 with HM Cruiser EXETER and HMAS VAMPIRE as escort during final stage of passage from Durban into Batavia.*

*11th At Batavia with HM Cruiser DURBAN, HM Destroyer STRONGHOLD and an auxiliary HMS KEDAH.*

*12th Passage to Singapore to evacuate personnel and under air attacks.*

*25th Transferred to Eastern Striking Force with HM Cruisers EXETER and PERTH (RAN), HM Destroyers ELECTRA and ENCOUNTER and took passage from Tanjong Priok to Sourabaya to join new combined Striking Force.*

*26th Sailed from Sourabaya with HMS EXETER, US cruiser USS HOUSTON, HMAS PERTH, Dutch cruisers DE RUYTER and JAVA, HMS ELECTRA, HMS ENCOUNTER, Dutch destroyers WITTE DE WITH, KOOTENAY, US Destroyers USS JOHN D EDWARDS, USS ALDEN, USS JOHN D FORD and PAUL JONES to intercept Japanese Eastern Invasion Force sighted on passage NW of Arenda Islands.*

*For details see WAR WITH JAPAN Volume II.*

*27th As the enemy ships were not sighted took return passage to*

*Sourabaya with Combined Striking Force to refuel.*

*Whilst entering harbour, further sighting reports were received and Force altered course to carry out attacks on invasion ships and their escort.*

*Under air attacks and without air cover.*

*Deployed ahead of cruisers with HMS ELECTRA and came under surface fire.*

*(Battle of the Java Sea – See Naval Staff History, Battle Summary No 28., HMS ELECTRA by T J Cain, THE BATTLE OF THE JAVA SEA by DA Thomas and above reference.)*

*During manoeuvres to avoid enemy fire, ship detonated mine in position 6.45S 112.6E and totally disabled. Remained afloat for four hours before sinking.*

*84 of ships company were killed or missing with 97 taken prisoner and 83 were either able to reach the shore or were rescued by the US Submarine USS S38.*

*(Note: A minefield had been laid that day by the Dutch minelayer GOUDEN LEEUW without knowledge of the Striking Force.) \**

In general, we were patrolling between Batavia (now Jakarta) and Singapore. On the night before Singapore surrendered to the Japanese, we went into Keppel Harbour to evacuate naval and other personnel (12 Feb 1942).\* Heavy fighting was taking place on the outskirts of the city, with the horizon alight from continuous gunfire, while the quite eerie rumble of war sounded. Australian troops had been deserting and to prevent any of them attempting to board the ship, there were armed ratings every ten paces along the deck beside the dock. At the time, I thought that all we loaded were some Royal Marines who had been sent up country after surviving the sinking of the Repulse and The Prince of Wales’, but later I have read that there were around a hundred ‘more important people’ also on board in the officers quarters. The Marines were in sorry state of battle fatigue, that was pathetic to observe, and in the circumstances, getting little help from anybody. On the trip back to Batavia, we were guarding a convoy of mixed vessels, among them the Empire Star with 2000 passengers including 137 Australian deserters. (25 Feb 1942).\* Bombs hit the Empire Star several times during the voyage; a tanker was hit and went on fire, and at night-time was an awesome sight; we were fortunate in that I have read that during the following day a Japanese aircraft carrier took up position near the Banka Straits. This no doubt explains why we seldom went through the Straits without being attacked by Japanese bombers; this passage was no exception and when the usual formation of 5/6 planes arrived we went to action stations. As I went through the entrance to the boiler-room airlock, which was a manhole flush with the deck in the forecastle of the destroyer, a group of Marines viewed my progress with horror. Marines are normally capital ship complement and the ways of a destroyer was a new experience to them. I assured them there was nothing to fear from the planes as we could manoeuvre to avoid being hit; I hardly think they were convinced at the time, but hoped they would get confidence when the ship heeled over as we changed course at high speed. As an aside, I would mention that when a destroyer is doing 35 knots the view of the bow wave from the forecastle is very impressive.

On one occasion, just after leaving Tandjong Priok, which was the harbour area of Batavia, we passed quite closely to an American WW1 four-stack destroyer on its way into port. It was rather embarrassing to see our manned gun turrets aimed at it, whilst their crew lolled around on deck as on holiday. With fresh memories of the debacle at Pearl Harbour, our opinion of the American navy was very low indeed. As usual we were on our standard patrol towards Singapore, the one occasion when we headed eastwards through the Sunda Straits, past the crater of Krakatoa and in to the Indian Ocean will be recounted later.

As ERAs, it was natural when in harbour, that maintenance work, which could not be done at sea, was the order of the day. Consequently, shore leave was something to be celebrated. The first time ashore at Tandjong Priok (which was the port area of Batavia) we got no further than the local drinking house. I recall awakening the next morning with wineglasses in my tunic pockets – a total mystery! Perhaps our favourite tavern in Batavia was a place called De Roode Leeuw (The Red Lion) where we became friendly with a group of American sailors. Once they got off their chests how good America was, they were acceptable company. At that time, we were not interested in what ship, or ships, they were serving on, as the USN did not have the RN custom of having ship’s names on the ratings caps. Today it would be of interest to know more about them. I have an uncomfortable recollection of falling into a drainage ditch (call it a canal) during one of my shore trips and crawling out up a grassy bank.

Funny the things people do for fun.

**3.0 THE SINKING OF THE JAPANESE SUBMARINE – I-60**

(The only time I heard our gun turrets in action.)

We sailed out of Tandjong Priok harbour in our normal manner that morning of the 17th January 1942, but instead of proceeding north to Singapore, we turned towards the Sunda Straits between Sumatra and Java, and headed into the Indian Ocean. Hopeful thoughts turned to the possibility that our destination could be Colombo and a chance of shore leave. Later in the morning there was an announcement by the Captain over the Tannoy system, that we were turning back to intercept a submarine which had been sighted near Java. We were told that action stations would be sounded at five minutes to two that day. At exactly that time, the Klaxons went and the ships crew stood-by at their stations. As mentioned elsewhere, the noise in the boiler room is overpowering but the reverberations of depth charges exploding were unmistakable, even on hearing them for the first time. This was very soon after taking up our stations and was quite surprising. This was followed by the unexpected thud of our turret guns being fired which in turn gave rise to the frightening sight of the entire front of the boilers engulfed by flames. As suddenly as they appeared, they disappeared into the burner orifices, as the chief stoker increased the air pressure to compensate for the blast from the guns. There were many 'firsts' coming my way in a short space of time. The mystery of the gunfire was explained by the news filtering through that a submarine had been forced to the surface and was firing back at us. We could sense the ship manoeuvring and hear the main armament firing, whilst ones mind tried to visualize what was happening above deck. The proceedings carried on in this manner for a considerable time until the anti-aircraft pom-poms were heard; a sound that was most confusing, as it did not fit the picture of an engagement with a submarine.

All was explained when the action was over and we were able to return to the upper deck. The good news was that the submarine had been sunk, but the bad news at cost to us. Our ERA quarters were being used as a first aid station with blood very much in evidence. During the action, our "B" turret (the higher one at the bows) had taken a direct hit on the block between the guns and two gunners killed, with the rest of the gun crew badly shaken and with some slight injuries. This shell explosion was thus the reason for the boiler flames being blown back into the boiler room. The submarine I-60 was much larger in tonnage than we were and when forced to the surface, had immediately commenced firing with its solitary substantial gun. During the action, the order was given to fire a torpedo, but in the confusion, the entire bank of five had been discharged. The Captain in his subsequent address to the ship’s company deplored this in very strong terms, coupled with the over-exuberance of the pom-pom crew who could not resist the temptation to join in the fun when the submarine came within their range. My lasting impression was that by RN standards we were not a well-trained complement; an impression reinforced soon afterwards, when we were sunk.

The burial at sea of the two ratings (Able Seaman Frederick Pinion and Ordinary Seaman Kenneth Treleaven) was interesting in its simplicity of execution. The canvas wrapped bodies were laid on a board at the edge of the deck and covered by the Union Jack; the flag extending over the side to the water level some 4/5 feet lower. After a short biblical reading, whilst the ship came to a near standstill, the boards were tipped and the bodies slid unseen into the water. One’s thoughts turned to the many sailors throughout the centuries being buried at sea from which had evolved to the simple process just witnessed. (19 Feb 1942) \*

We were told that only two of the Japanese crew had been rescued; no doubt some of the gun crew on the deck that had the best chance of escaping the sinking vessel. After the action, we returned to Batavia to land the prisoners before resuming our usual patrol routine. In retrospect, the presence of the submarine in local waters must have been known when we proceeded into the Indian Ocean that morning, and in all probability had later been sighted by a Dutch Catalina flying boat that passed on the position to us. Some days later when the euphoria had subsided and preparing to write my usual letter home (without mentioning our recent action) the realization came that my 21st birthday had passed by unnoticed.

**4.0 THE BATTLE OF THE JAVA SEA - 26th February – 1st March 1942**

**Cruisers**

HNLMS Dutch De Ruyter and Java

USS American Houston

HMS British Exeter

HMAS Australian Perth

**Destroyers**

HNLMS Dutch Witte de With and Kortenaer

USS American John D Edwards, Alden, John D Ford,

Paul Jones

HMS British Electra, Encounter and Jupiter

A hastily assembled fleet of American, British and Dutch vessels sailed from Surabaya on the afternoon of 26th February 1942. Commanded by Admiral Doorman it consisted of 5 cruisers and 9 destroyers, and soon after departure it went to action stations. As mentioned elsewhere I was always a little vague about my daily duties on the ship and in particular, where I was supposed to be at action stations. Assuming it should be in the boiler-room I accordingly always settled there; the tremendous level of noise made conversation impossible, and it became a matter of just the passing of time



**Bombs from a Japanese aircraft falling near the Dutch**[**light cruiser**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Light_cruiser)[***Java***](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HNLMS_Java_(1921))**in the**[**Gaspar Strait**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaspar_Strait)**east of**[**Sumatra**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumatra)**,**[**Dutch East Indies**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dutch_East_Indies)**, on 15 February 1942.**

**(Source – Wikipaedia) \***

Most of the noise was caused by the air fans raising the pressure and forcing air into the furnaces to supply the oil burners. This had the beneficial effect of keeping the boiler room space comparatively cool, as opposed to the engine room where temperatures were extremely high. When action stations lasted too long, then it was a bore, and sleeping in an out-of-the-way space between auxiliary machinery was an alternative. If that appears to be a somewhat casual attitude, one must appreciate that no member of the crew ever thought anything would happen to his ship. Apart from the general apprehension we all had when in action, or being bombed, I did have a particular fear of being badly wounded and pinpointed a spot on the hull where, if a shell should arrive, there would be instant oblivion for me.

So it was, as action stations extended into the night, I got increasingly hungry and frustrated with idleness. On several occasions I went on deck to find no-one in sight to give me guidance. The manhole into the boiler-room airlock was situated just where the fo’c’sle (forecastle to others) joined the main deck and so was partially enclosed. A few paces to either side gave a view of the open sea and when contact was made with the invasion fleet some 24 hours later and the firing began, three pictures remain in my mind. Once there was a ‘waterspout’ not too far off the starboard side and I thought, “Well we are not messing around any more”. Only many years afterwards did I read that the splash was probably the landing of a large shell, so ignorance was bliss at the time. On another trip to the upper deck the scene was a smokescreen being laid by the destroyers in the fleet (including us); as this did not seem to be a good thing to happen, young Patterson made a hasty return below. Laying a smoke screen was a sure sign that all was not well on our side of the fence! Post war reading would indicate that this was when the Exeter, one of the largest ships in the fleet, with 8in guns was hit and had to retire to Surabaya. As the Japanese had several heavy cruisers in the invasion fleet, convoy escort firing power was very much in their favour. The most thrilling sight without doubt, was of the American heavy cruiser Houston steaming parallel and quite near to us with her 8” triple gun turrets firing straight ahead; this was surely a direct attack of the first magnitude! I was fascinated to see how slowly the big guns returned to their original position from the recoil after firing the shell. This was the first time I had seen a big gun in action – and in live action too. Wholly memorable! Both the Exeter and the Houston were eventually sunk and I believe the only Allied warships to survive the engagement were the four American WW1 four-funnelled destroyers that had to retire to Surabaya to re-fuel, and which were able to escape through narrow straits east of Java and so reach the safety of Australia.

The long spell at action stations was because, initially, we were searching for the invasion fleet, and then breaking off the daylight action making a manoeuvre for a night attack. We had no significant air reconnaissance to help, whereas the Japanese had spotter planes in the air throughout; when in the water the following day we saw them flying around in the distance; very small odd-looking tri-plane affairs.

During a rather half-hearted foray on deck after sunset in search of food I was in the waist of the ship and at the bottom of the stairs leading up to the bridge when there was a huge explosion. The realisation that we had been hit ,was hastened by the sudden silence; all the noises and vibrations of engines, fans, and propellers just stopped, and on running back into the boiler room air-lock, found nothing but darkness and silence only broken by the sound of moving water. I wondered how all the people had got out so quickly and abandoned all intention of returning to my action station and the emergency starting–up of the stand-by generator. To attempt to start the diesel engine in total darkness was in practice impossible. At the time, I assumed that a torpedo had hit us, but in reality, we had struck a mine laid only the previous day by a Dutch minelayer. The official account of the sinking notes that the mine exploded in the vicinity of the bulkhead between the engine and boiler rooms; which explains the silence when I returned to the boiler room. The entire shift of stokers must either have been killed in the blast or been stunned and then drowned in the incoming water. By leaving the compartment, I escaped death by a few minutes. (27 Feb 1942)\*

Then I was lost. No-one around for comfort or guidance and a walk along the starboard side brought me to the torn-open bulge in the deck where the mine had stuck. This was in the region of the engine-room and terrible moans of agony were coming from below and I was totally unable to figure out what should or could be done. Several seamen around said one man had been recovered with awesome injuries caused by the escaping superheated steam; injuries that no doubt would have been fatal in the best of circumstances. There were shouts for an ERA to help start the launch motor, but I had no confidence that I would be able to do so; motors being strange territory to me at the time. Coupled with recollections of being seasick in Tandjong Priok harbour on the same task, I therefore did not volunteer. I read post-war that the occupants of the launch eventually escaped to Australia, and often speculate what the future may have held for me if I had responded to the call. Curiously, I have never regretted my decision, because of the many fortuitous circumstances that have since kept me alive. If I had gone along, would I have survived the rest of my active duty? I am content to believe that the chances were at long odds on the big betting board.

Wandering aimlessly around the deck in a fruitless search for anything that could float, and blaming myself for my utter ignorance of the layout of the ship, I missed the opportunity to get something to eat where the NAAFI (Navy, Army, and Air Force Institute) shop door had been broken down by some enterprising member of the crew. Where the rest of the crew had disappeared to was a mystery to me! The moon was very bright in a cloudless sky: the sea almost a glassy calm on which the ship lay in silence. What a relief it was to meet fellow ERA Frank Platt on the port side, and after inflating our regulation air tubes, we lowered ourselves gently into the lukewarm equatorial water; the distance from deck level to the water surface being less than a metre.

We seemed to drift very quickly away from the ship, which was at that time, in no danger of sinking, as it was only partly flooded and with our eyes at near water level, it soon disappeared from sight. Some calamity must have happened to the scuttling party that included the second-in-command (Jimmy the One in naval slang) when the ship sank about four hours later because none of them were ever seen again.

During my six-month sojourn waiting for a drafting in Singapore Naval Base (HMS Sultan) our pay was at the minimum rate, whilst our records caught up with us, and it had been an event for celebration that month when back pay in the form of Dutch Guilders was received. This was in the breast pocket of my boiler suit and it was with great alarm that I saw my wallet floating away in the moonlight and slowly sinking into the depths of the Java Sea; a despairing grab was widely adrift of the target.

After that disappointment, we had a big stroke of luck. Floating towards us and approaching quite rapidly, was a paravane float; this is a device that is towed by the ship to cut mine cables. This must have been blown overboard when we hit the mine, as it was stored on deck in the area where the deck had been blown upwards. Its construction was in the form of two elongated pear-shaped floats held about 400mm apart, by two flat plates slightly angled to act as submerging vanes when in operation. We were lucky because it was coming directly towards us at the same speed as we had left the ship or else we would not have been able to get our hands on it. After many attempts which no doubt would have been good entertainment in a show, we managed to settle ourselves in sitting positions on the flat connecting plates, and after some practice we seemed to keep balance with no apparent effort. We both faced ‘forward’ with me in the front position. The time was probably around 21:00 because we had been hit some time after dusk and so the night stretched before us. There was no thought of friendly help in the area; immediately after we hit the mine a destroyer, probably HMS Encounter, sailed past us at high speed; it had other business in mind other than picking up survivors. The coast, some nine kilometres away, could be seen as a hazy outline and paddling in that direction seemed the only option left to us. So we floated along all that night on the flat warm flat sea in the moonlight, not expecting much to happen, but still looking around for any other signs of life. Apart from what must have been the flashing lights of gunfire over the horizon there was nothing to be seen or heard.

Morning eventually arrived and spirits soared when a Dutch Air Force Catalina flying boat on patrol, and flying very low came almost overhead and the crewman in the nose waved down to us. Then we waited and waited for something to happen. Firstly we realised that the ‘plane either could not land because of operational orders or because of the danger of hitting floating debris; the sea was flat enough for a landing. Eventually hope of useful development faded and the utmost despair overwhelmed me. In the bitterness of total disappointment that all probabilities of help had disappeared the tears flowed freely and mutely for a time. I could not see Frank sitting behind me, and of course he could not see my emotions; later we never discussed our feelings perhaps as a matter too personal to reveal. I recall picturing my mother at home weeping and resolved that there was no way she would ever have the bad news of my death and that it would never happen. It is possible that this subconscious desire was ever present in the passage of the years to come but not thought about as in that moment of total despair. We were obviously in hostile territory and making no progress towards land; had no food or water and very tired. When gradually I recovered from the flow of tears all sorts of thoughts progressed through my mind, and I could visualize the picture of my mother in our living room at home getting the news of my death. This was not at all to my liking and was my turning point – there was no way my Mother was going to get that kind of news – and henceforth I determined to survive. It is very likely that that this was what kept me going through all the, “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” of the succeeding years.

The land was still in sight, no nearer than before but still a place for survival. We paddled with our hands but with no visible result though it did give us an objective to work towards. As the morning wore on Japanese spotter ‘planes continued to fly over the area and we had mixed feelings whether to be spotted or not! Their presence was not reassuring. The sun continued to beat down on the tropical sea - and us. Stories of the bad effects of drinking seawater were remembered and frequently throwing water over us seemed the only means to alleviate the heat. We had not given much thought to the possibility of sharks in the area but a splash on the surface of the sea not more than four metres away had us pulling our feet up. Hardly daring to look at what could be very bad news, the sight of a small school of fair-sized fish swimming much the same way as dolphins do was a tremendous relief to the nervous system! Fortunately I grew up away from the sea and until visiting Durban Aquarium so many years later never saw a shark in the water; not that it helped my degree of fear at the time. It is possible that the passage of ships at high speed and the underwater explosions had scared the sharks away from the immediate surroundings.

There was not much conversation that I can recall between Frank and myself, yet I believe I was already having spells of delirium. The day went on with little change in the distance from shore; the little tri-planes continued to fly around out at sea, and we probably dozed off at times without overbalancing on our top-heavy mass of float and bodies. After the sun went down over the land our quiet surroundings were disturbed by all manner of explosions, thumps and flashes which went on for a long time. I have since read that this was the Japanese invasion fleet being attacked by Dutch torpedo boats as the beachhead was being established. It was all rather a mystery to us as we floated in solitude in the semi-darkness. Hallucinations became more frequent; I thought I was in a large dome-shaped hall with a small, lighted entrance in the distance with many people passing in and out. What was real was the appearance of a small Japanese naval ship passing very quietly and very close to us. It was the chance of a rescue and also a possibility that if sighted we would be shot at; no ship is going to ‘investigate” a strange object at night during an invasion operation. I compromised with a subdued shout of “Help”, which fortunately drew no response. At this stage we were so tired that fear was no longer a strong emotion; the mind just did not respond to stimulus, and this could have been a factor in our favour the next day.

When the sun rose on our second morning in the water the land was much nearer and more detail could be seen. We thought and hoped that our drift would continue and were happy to just wait. My hallucinations continued; I became greatly interested in an apparent rope, which stretched, from our float into the depths of the water and I recall Frank saying in his Lancashire accent, “I can’t see any bloody rope”. Later I thought I was seeing on green lawns bordering the shore a full scale Victorian garden party in full swing with ladies in crinolines and with parasols. The tables had white cloths and tea was being served; I wondered why they were so disinterested in our plight.

Then in a moment of clarity the shore seemed to be much nearer and I decided to swim for help. Frank reputedly could not swim so I gave him my air tube, took off my boiler suit and set off. On looking back I was horrified to see that Frank had seemingly abandoned the paravane float and was greatly annoyed at him being so stupid. As I write this I realise that my departure must have must have upset the balance and put him in the water. So I started swimming, prepared for a long spell in the same manner as I had practiced so many afternoons in the HMS Sultan Olympic sized swimming pool. Maybe I lost consciousness of my surroundings but suddenly the shore was in front of me, my feet felt the sand, and with wonderment, I emerged from the water totally naked. The white beach bordered by coconut palms seemed to be littered with round stones on which I stood at every tottering step. A paved road ran parallel with the sea and in my delirium there were hordes of small grotesque men – much like garden gnomes – all running around and mocking me. Staggering with weakness and swearing at them I looked in vain for help to get Frank out of the water, although no sign of him could be seen from the shore. The sea was empty and the road silently deserted, stretching straight and empty in both directions. On the verge was a bamboo and grass structure about a metre high and with sufficient space area to be able to lie down, no doubt a place for road workers to rest from the sun. I collapsed into this attap refuge and immediately fell asleep.

It is very difficult to know how long I lay there, but I was awakened by the Welsh seaman who was our mess steward on the ship – he brought our food from the galley to the ERA’s mess, which explains why I had no idea where on board the galley was situated. “Taffy” had a pair of boxer shorts under his boiler suit and they were promptly transferred to me to end my nudity. He was a regular navy serviceman as opposed to myself as a “Hostilities Only” volunteer, and had done a tour of duty in the Far East during peacetime and could recognize Japanese troops. These he had already seen in the area, so our first move was to get off the road and behind a bordering hedge. Our second decision was what should be done next. We reckoned that being on the North coast of Java, we were much nearer to Surabaya in the east than Batavia in the west, so eastwards we decided to go. However, there appeared to be a village to the west, so we first walked in that direction in the hope of finding food and water. Whilst on the way, we heard the sound of an approaching vehicle and crouched down to see over the roadside hedge the red disc and white background of the Japanese Army flag passing by. Not a pretty sight! Carrying on for a short distance, we came to a side road leading upwards and inland, and on following this, came to a settlement where the local natives barred our path. Although somewhat hostile (the Indonesians did not like their Dutch rulers), we were given water to drink. An alternative escape route going inland being denied to us, we retraced our journey eastwards and eventually crossed the road and walked along the beach at water’s edge. The beach seemed to be much wider than when I got ashore, so presumably the tide had gone out during the hours of my sleep. As we walked further along, the beach got even wider and became bordered with palms and dense undergrowth; no signs of the scattered stones I thought I had seen when coming ashore. We were continually on the lookout for something that could be eaten, and although some trees bore fruit, nothing seemed to be edible. Our total ignorance of things ecological was most depressing; at that time . For example, I had no idea how pineapples grew.

It is possible that we walked several miles along the shoreline, always hoping that we would come across a useful something that may have washed up with the tide. Taffy broke our silence search by exclaiming, “There are Japanese over there”. “Over there” was on the fringe of the bush about 100 metres away and slightly in front of us, and the “Japanese” was a machine gun post with three soldiers squatting around. My heart did a flutter! Starting to run would have been foolish and maybe we were too tired to run at all, so we feigned indifference and agonizingly maintained our slow pace along the water’s edge, not daring to look around or do anything, which would appear to be suspicious. So nervously, we carried on until we judged it safe to angle towards the palm trees, as the beach was no longer a safe place to be. Again crossing the deserted road, we came to a small path leading eastwards and landwards into the bush that seemed to suit our purpose. After a short distance along this path, just sufficiently wide to walk in single file with me in the lead, the terrain cleared on the right hand side to a large vista of rice paddy stretching away to the foothills. A few peasants in the distance could be seen walking away from us and apparently on ground just below the water level. Several attempts by us to do the same thing put us thigh deep in water and unable to find the dividing walls on which to walk. There was no alternative but to follow the existing footpath and so we wandered on.

If we had been able to think logically, it would have been clear that our luck would run out, but it was difficult to appreciate that an invasion had happened and that the entire countryside was enemy-occupied territory. Whilst walking along the beach there was no sign of ships. Rounding a sharp bend in the track, we came face to face with another machine-gun post with its complement of three soldiers. Later we discovered that most of the Japanese infantry had never previously seen Europeans, and in addition, I also had fair hair, which to them was an indication of old age. Dressed in only a pair of boxer shorts, I hardly represented a threat and without a raised eyebrow that could be noticed, we walked past without a challenge. At this stage, I had been without food for three days, virtually no water for two days and at the most, a few hours’ sleep, so reactions were sluggish.

Further on, we came to a clearing, in the middle of which, was a similar structure to that by the roadside, but elevated on four corner poles. There was also a young Javanese boy tending two cows and who ran away when we appeared. The opportunity to have more rest could not be resisted and we climbed into the structure and lay down. No sooner had we done so when two soldiers appeared at the edge of the clearing and approached the hut; again there was no place to go so we lay still with our eyes closed as though asleep. There was a lengthy conversation in Japanese at close quarters as we were examined for what seemed to be eternity, all the time expecting a bayonet being stuck into one of us. Not an episode likely to be forgotten. Eventually the pair moved off and after a reasonable delay we evacuated the shelter and continued on our shaky way. What we were doing was walking directly into the beachhead area, which was being used to off-load the supplies, and every step was decreasing our chance of escape. Very soon, the path came to a regular road, on the other side of which appeared to be a lane behind a row of buildings. On the road, a file of Japanese riflemen were walking inland (to the ‘front’), others on bicycles and none looking very happy in the tropical heat.

Again, I was in the lead and after the events of the day, incapable of being afraid, casually walked across the road between the soldiers and into the lane. I was safely across, but Taffy’s boiler suit was a give a way and as he crossed over, there was a big shout from down the road and a Japanese officer appeared with a drawn handgun to halt our progress. Too exhausted to raise our hands, we gazed silently at the officer, who seeing we were no danger to anyone, gestured for us to walk down the road, round the corner of what seemed to be the main street of the village, and on to the Post Office building of Kragan. This was a very small stone structure with an archway through which could be seen, gathered in the courtyard, a group of our shipmates, a somewhat encouraging sign that a firing squad was not an immediate consequence. After a short delay, whilst we squatted on our haunches (sitting on the ground in tropical regions is not to be recommended,) we were taken in to join the others, amongst who was unexpectedly the ship’s captain.

There was no food. In the courtyard, about sixty very subdued Jupiter survivors, mostly in their boiler suits, were gathered on the bare ground under a very large tree. I felt at the time they were in much better shape than Taffy and me, but that was not a time for deep thought. In fact, they had been picked out of the water by a Japanese naval ship the day following the sinking and had been given food and water. At the rear of the courtyard was a veranda-surrounded bungalow, later presumed to be the postmaster’s house. Taffy joined his mates and I have no subsequent recollection of him. Aboard the ship, the Engine Room Artificers used a mess in a comfortable position in the forecastle and there was little contact with the deck crew, thus I had no acquaintance or familiarity with the others – I was on my own.

Soon afterwards, an English-speaking Japanese officer arrived and I was put against a tree trunk in a corner of the ‘garden’ with a soldier pressing his bayonet-capped rifle against my bare stomach. Unbelievably, I was quite unconcerned about the seemingly dangerous situation I was in. Despite my totally exhausted state, the very clear picture in my mind was that my answers to the questions would have to tally with the other interrogations. However, I decided that any mention of our recent sinking of a Japanese submarine was not on my agenda! Fortunately, I was able to assert quite truthfully that I had only been on the ship for three weeks and as most of my time was spent below decks, I was ignorant of much that went on. According to Patterson, we simply patrolled between Singapore and Batavia. My questioner was very casual; said he had attended Edinburgh University and wondered how far my home town of Hawick was from there. He wanted to know if I knew about 6,000 British troops who had landed at Surabaya – I didn’t, but immediately hoped it was true (which it was; Welsh gunners diverted from Singapore had arrived there), and why I had not gone to university. Thinking back on the incident as I now relate, it was possible he was somewhat intrigued by my manner of speaking. It must have been with recollections of the colloquial dialect he had heard on the streets of Edinburgh, that his closing remark was, “You speak very good English for a Scotsman.”

Later in the day, Frank Platt was brought in. He had drifted ashore further along the coast and had been collected by one of the machine-gun posts similar to those Taffy and I had encountered. To relieve their boredom, they had amused themselves by stubbing their cigarettes on his chest. Rather a phlegmatic individual, he was a bit amusing when he recounted the details in his Lancashire brogue.

If we thought at the time that conditions would get better, it is fortunate that we were not able to see into the future of our lives.

The official position of HMS Jupiter when she hit the mine and subsequently sank, is 9km NNE of Tubon, which is about 50km east of Kragan (a village on the Bay of Rembang on the north coast of Java, and the location of one of the Japanese invasion landing points). As Frank and I came ashore west of Kragan, the prevailing sea current had carried us well over that distance during the 36 hours in the water. Fortunately, we had drifted past the beachhead area before the night-time landings started, and so narrowly missed being caught up in the action. Presumably, most of the other Jupiter prisoners had been on rafts, and had been picked up in that area by Japanese naval craft - which might explain why they were in better shape than Frank and me when we joined them.

The military planning for the landings could not have included any provision for the taking of prisoners and it was perhaps to our advantage in the longer view that the Japanese encountered minimal resistance as they advanced beyond the beachhead. It took the Japanese several weeks to consolidate the occupation of Java before thought was given to prisoners, so that if there had been prolonged fighting, we would not have survived the lack of food and attention

Frank Platt, Taffy and I were the last of the Jupiter crew to be captured. The following night, a lorry load of survivors from the Dutch cruiser de Ruyter arrived; one man was badly injured and died the following day. A grave was dug in the corner of the compound and a Japanese officer attended the burial, with the utmost military decorum. A man who had died of wounds, although an enemy, was by their creed, a man who had an honourable death. The Dutch group occupied a rather secluded corner of the compound and it was not until many years afterwards that I learned they had two American sailors (signalmen who had been seconded to the flagship) with them. Within a week, a Jupiter prisoner died quite suddenly and was also buried in the corner of the compound, but in his case there was no Japanese presence. My recollection is that the sailor was the ship’s writer (Francis Pethick - the clerk who did all the routine paperwork on board) or some similar rank, and my assumption was that he had eaten something poisonous.

We were not allowed to sit around doing nothing for very long; labour was needed to off-load the barges bringing supplies ashore and we were obviously available! The beach was nearby and we were soon at work wading into the water to take a shoulder load from the wooden barges to the shade of the palms. There was nothing military about the goods coming ashore; my thought at the time was that it was loot from Philippines warehouses. Mixed up with large boxes of cigarettes – which we tried to sabotage by dipping them in the water – there were bundles of assorted shoes, and kitchenware. Few, if any of us had footwear and the sand under the tropical sun was burning hot. We hopped and jumped on our journeys across the beach without much sympathy forthcoming from any quarter. Eventually wetting the sand was a very short-term solution, and then laying down sacking to create a pathway did not make significant improvement to our discomfort.

To varying degrees all of us must have been in a state of mental shock; stupidly optimistic that our forces would come to our rescue, unbelieving that our ship could have been sunk, and looking at the scene on that tropical beach as some kind of unreal dream. Using us to off-load part of the war effort was the idea of an individual; what happened otherwise to us was not his concern. That we needed to eat seemed to be of no importance. When eventually, someone got around to the problem, we were served with what I now recognize as the scrapings of the army cookhouse pots with a filling-up of water. So, what we got, was a tub of dirty looking water with some rice floating on the top and until the day before we left for Surabaya, some six weeks later, that was our daily sustenance. At that time, we had no knowledge of local vegetation, or the ways of our captors, to make any improvement to our conditions.

In the centre of the courtyard was a large tree with outspread branches. Trying to rest at night on the bare ground with only a pair of boxer shorts as covering was no rest from discomfort. The countless numbers of mosquitoes fed away merrily and the itch from the bites made sleep almost impossible. The constant scratching with dirty fingernails was the origin of the numerous tropical ulcers suffered later by all of us. Lying on the ground and looking up through the branches one could see many lizards jumping through the tree. They had large blue heads and could have been a concern, but such was the total misery and discomfort of our circumstances, they were just another possible hazard.

Rather interesting was an incident that occurred soon after our capture. A Japanese soldier, semi-clothed and in a state suggesting he had already been roughed up, was hauled in by the military police. The accompanying local village woman had a long story to tell of how the soldier, who was then tied to a tree further back in the courtyard and given a routine pounding with rifle butts every two hours when the guards switched over, had molested her. This carried on for 24 hours. The policy seemed to be, as with the Australians, those future citizens of the Japanese empire should not be antagonized.

One morning some Japanese troops gathered outside the fence at a corner of the area and it transpired that one of them was an American resident who had been on holiday in Japan when war had been declared and had been conscripted into the Army. Jokingly asked about his duty to die for the Emperor and gain everlasting honour he said, “You have to be kidding.” I wonder if he survived the war. In retrospect, a much more serious incident happened, which has haunted my thoughts for many years. One day, an officer in a passing force of soldiers came into the yard and selected one of our sailors who was taken away and never seen again. At the time, we envied him for escaping our misery, but there is no doubt in my mind that he was a chosen victim for sex abuse and could never have stayed alive. As a good-looking young man, by a stretch of imagination, it could have been any of us. At that time, I was suffering from the effects of the sun when in the water, and had both lips fully covered with fever scab. Fortunately, not a pleasant sight at all, and I can recall one guard grimacing at me.



**Hawick Newspaper March 1942**

Military planning eventually descended to our level, and as the order came down the ranks for our transfer to Surabaya, the local commander moved into action with the usual ‘cover my back’ procedure common to service departments everywhere. Some report that we were lacking in clothing saw one member of our number installed in the Postmaster’s bungalow with a sewing machine making the basic Japanese garment of a strip of cloth about 12 inches wide, perhaps 36 inches long and with a tying tape sewn across one end. My phonetic recollection of the garment was ‘fanduchi” but it is actually “fundoshi”. It is a standard issue for the Japanese troops, as we often saw it worn in later years. The tape is tied around the waist with the cloth hanging down the back, which then is pulled forward between the legs and looped over the tape at front. The loose end then hangs down as a neat covering to complete the picture. So equipped with this useful Japanese item, we were ready to face the outside world.

Authority also had to ensure that the prisoners left Kragan properly fed, and the local quartermaster had a field day. Into the courtyard was led a pig and an ox for the big occasion. Both had to be killed and prepared by the prisoners and a big knife and a hammer were provided for that purpose. I believe the pig was killed, unseen by me, by the Dutch contingent, but the ox was a much bigger problem. Attempts to cut its throat were not successful and only prolonged blows with the hammer on its head finally brought it down. It was a bizarre performance by a crowd of starving men – picture a wolf pack around a kill. In the peculiar way that there is always someone for the occasion, one of the crew knew something about civilized butchery and he was able to disembowel and dismember the carcass. Interesting to note how the entire innards can be removed in one big bundle.

The local knowledge of the Hollanders (as it did on so many times in future events) came to the fore and the good rice also provided, was cooked together with the pork, in containers of dished iron on open fires. So it was in the dusk of a tropical evening, that we made our acquaintance, in the direst of circumstances with the well-known dish Nasi Goreng (fried rice in Malay). A feast never to be forgotten; we ate, we gorged, we went back for more, until not one extra mouthful could be swallowed. For the first time in weeks, we could lie down on that ground with a filled stomach. The carcass of the ox? The quartermaster kept that for himself; an action that was probably typical of all the quartermasters in all of our camps until our return to Java much later.

So, on Easter Friday, some six weeks after our capture, we were loaded on two open trucks with only room to stand, and driven for several hours to Surabaya, arriving after nightfall. We stopped outside the main exhibition hall in the Jaarmarkt where a large assembly of Hollanders was expecting our arrival. Our appearance was greeted with cries of disbelief and there was a rush to help the dirty, unshaven, unkempt and suffering bunch of derelicts off the trucks. I remember walking barefoot across a stretch of pebble stones, ignoring the extended helping arms, and somehow at the sight of all the well-dressed and well-fed civilians, I had sudden antagonism towards them. In the evening darkness, we were handed plates of food, which at that time was cooked at home by their families and brought to the camp. Tucking into this meal of rice and Indonesian additions, I encountered my first taste of chilli sauce, which mistakenly taken for tomato sauce, gave me some anxious hot moments!

Supplied with soap, we soon had the wash place flooded with water. The squat-pan toilets with the accompanying bottle of water as the equivalent of western toilet paper followed suit, when the septic pit drainage became overloaded. Most of us were given the standard grass sleeping-mat that we gratefully put on the concrete floor of the main hall and fell into a thankful and contented sleep. There were electric lights, running water, and all the signs of modern civilization around us; future living appeared to be much, much better.

**5.0 SURABAYA - East Java - April 1942 - April 1943**

The Jaarmarkt showgrounds, apart from the main hall, was the usual scattering of small structures used for individual displays by companies on show-days. There were the squat-pan toilets, petrol pump islands with their kiosks, a children's playground, and an area laid out as a typical Indonesian village (the pertukanan as I remember it phonetically) for the display of local arts and crafts. Converted into what could be called a residential plot, there were some very curious adaptations to find sleeping space for all the prisoners. As mentioned elsewhere, during the early days, the Hollander womenfolk brought in all the food. In time, as the Japanese administration became more organized, every European family was also put into camps and our own internal cookhouse came into service. One vivid memory of it is of my first sight of a (dead) rat from the storm water drain draped over a shovel for disposal. The size of a very big cat, it seemed a bit unbelievable at the time; amongst a myriad of other things, just another introduction to the big wide world out there. Although I cannot recall ever having to use or answer to it, my official POW number was 27230.

The daily roll calls took several hours to complete. We would stand there in the hot sun whilst innumerable manual counts were done and the several abacus operators toiled away to get the same resultant count. After much chatter and repeated checks on people who were not present on parade, we would finally get the all clear. No doubt, it did serve to fill some of the time for us. In the early months, there were few outside working parties; though on one occasion I was toiling on an extension to the Surabaya airport runway when there was a massive fly-past display of Navy Zero fighters to impress the local population. I recall what we would now call an old-school British Army Colonel parading and drilling a small group of his soldiers each day, for what no doubt he felt was necessary for discipline. I have often wondered if he was ever able to accept the conditions he would eventually encounter; so different to what he had been trained to believe. Certainly, he would have had his share of face slapping in the learning process.

Unexpectedly, each day on the central notice board would be a report in English of world war news and probably was a verbatim repeat of a BBC news broadcast. At that time, the British Army was making large advances across the Western Desert and this was fully included in the bulletins. One could surmise that the Japanese assumed it was mostly lies in the first instance and could do no harm to disseminate; and they were not much interested in the happenings outside their own war zone. They were going to win their own war, extend their Empire and be truly Dai Nippon.

In comparison with later events, these were somewhat carefree days. I learned the elements of how to play bridge and chess. The recognition of future food shortages saw beds of groundnuts and tomatoes planted for use in the sickbay. Some welcome additions to our clothing were provided by the distribution of green breeches and tunics from the Dutch army stores. This was top quality wearing material and lasted many prisoners for several years. Working parties gradually became the normal routine and I recall an instance when we were crossing by ferry to the island of Madura for the day’s toil. The way some sleight at hand was observed in stealing wares from the traders who were also crossing on the ferry, was a new kind of education and a gentle introduction to the guile that would be necessary to survive.

After several months, we were moved to another camp for a short stay. Apart from the fact that that we were moved, I have no clear recollection of the place or the circumstances. Subsequently, we were transferred to the HBS School where we had a prolonged stay. At first, the discipline was very strict, with the familiar cage in the middle of the square where unfortunate individuals were confined for unknown offences; it seemed Hollanders were the usual sufferers. The occupants of the cage were given a beating at every change of the guard; a proceeding, which every camp resident could observe as a deterrent to other transgresses. A favourite punishment was to make a prisoner kneel on a length of bamboo immediately under his knees, very simple and very painful. In these prison moves, the prisoners were retained in their Service grouping; all the naval personnel stayed together as did the Army units; seemingly, this also applied to the Hollander groupings, particularly between Army personnel and former civilians.

Customs may have varied in other camps, but one common to my experience was that whenever a Japanese of any category came near, the prisoner first sighting him promptly yelled “Kiri”, whereupon every prisoner within earshot had to stop, turn towards the guard and bow. The guard would then acknowledge the recognition with a nod of the head. On one occasion, I was in the middle of clothes hanging up to dry when I spotted a guard through a gap in the clothes. Stupidly, I ducked away, but the guard had seen me see him, and for my omission, I got a hefty whack on the face with the palm of his hand – the standard punishment! The same rule applied whenever one passed a guard on duty, whether in or outside the camp perimeter, one stopped, bowed and then went one’s way.

Our “classroom” was all navy types. We had a rating called Strong, who was a very pleasant singer and if he was unaware of an audience, gave a great deal of pleasure to his roommates. There was an old three-badge OD (twelve years service with minimal promotion) who was an outstanding storyteller; some of his tales could extend to an hour in the telling. No matter how many times they were re-told, they were listened to with great merriment. One story was about a cat from Newcastle that mysteriously found itself abandoned in Portsmouth barracks, and after many unlikely adventures in its return walk, finally reached home.

One quiet afternoon, with most men resting in the heat of the day, there was a resounding explosion on the outside verandah near to our doorway. A Welsh gunner had been working on a detonator with the idea of making a lighter from it. When it exploded and blew off one of his hands, he was taken away for treatment. Surprisingly, there were no Japanese reprisals, and quite to the contrary, the senior Japanese officer complimented him on his sang-froid acceptance of the incident. The loss of a hand did not prevent him from being included in working parties and much later in Haruku, he was an expert carver of chessmen. He could also deliver a good “whack” with the end of his ulna and radius bones! It is probable that he got the detonator during one of our working parties, which unbelievably had the task of sorting out a huge assembly of handguns that had been handed in by the general public. There were revolvers and automatic pistols of all makes and sizes – I forget now what we were supposed to be doing to them. Something of much heavier calibre in the vast collection had been left loaded, and inevitably was accidentally fired. There was a huge bang followed by an apprehensive silence; and again there was a surprise. Instead of anger, the Japanese soldiers in the area had a good laugh about it. So far, in these notes, I have referred to the enemy as “Japanese”, but to use that word in the camp within the hearing of a guard was to invite immediate and very angry retaliation. The politically correct word to be used was “Nippon”, and that became normal usage.

At this camp we had a visit from a representative of the Salvation Army, who handed out sweets and packets of cigarettes, the name of which I have always remembered as Davros – I wonder if they are still manufactured? This was the only occasion when we received any form of help from an outside organisation. The relatives at home assiduously wrapped and dispatched personal parcels during the course of the war, but my own experience was that apart from a batch of mail received late in the war, I never saw International Red Cross help, and never saw help to anyone else.

In time, we were transferred back to the Jaarmaarkt. As preparation for the future, large boards were erected in the camp with the phonetic pronunciation of all the usual military commands and how to count in Japanese. Then we were given our first “opportunity” to write home. We could choose any three of a list of prepared sentences – none of them remotely resembling the truth – that were then typed on a postcard. About twenty words of our own choice could then be written on the remaining space. On the card which I sent, and which I still possess, are the phrases:

“My daily work is easy and we are paid according to the number of days we work. We have plenty of food and much recreation. The Japanese treat us well, so don’t worry about me and never feel uneasy”.

With every card bearing the same nonsense, how could they think the censors in the UK could be fooled? The answer could lie, in part, that the Nipponese considered themselves a superior race; that the allied forces were a despicable lot when they allowed themselves to be taken prisoner without visible shame, and we were stupid people. As prisoners, when on working parties, we did indeed foster that last opinion.

A sick/fit parade was held which simply consisted of walking past a table of Japanese assessors and only a very few individuals were rejected as being unfit for work. We were then issued with new Japanese army canvas/rubber boots with a separate compartment for the big toe. We did not have long to wait before we were on the move.

**6.0 HARUKU: A small island close to the island of Ambon, in what was then, the Dutch East Indies - April 1943 to July 1944**

In remote areas, where insufficient local labour was available for work on military projects, the Japanese Army generally utilised P.O.W.s for this purpose. Thus, thousands of men were transported long distances in primitive conditions and endured the consequences of poor planning and the exigencies of wartime priorities.

All the men who could walk and issued with the Japanese Army boots (with the separate compartment for the big toe) were loaded aboard cargo vessels at the docks. At the time and for much later, I was under the impression that only one ship was used for the transportation of the 2,000 POWs destined for Haruku, but I have since read that three ships left with prisoners on board. Various accounts of events differ in many details. This is a typical instance where writers and researchers either get their facts wrong, or else get them mixed up. The three cargo ships were - the Amagi Maru, the Cho Saki Maru, and the Kurimata Maru (Michno refers to it as the Kunitama Maru). Sorting out the differences in accounts, I would believe that I travelled on the Amagi Maru with 1,000 prisoners aboard that sailed directly to Haruku in 7 days; the other 1,000 men in the draft apparently arrived some ten days later on the Kurimata Maru.

The Kurimata Maru was a ship of perhaps 4,000 tons; a double tier wooden platform added around the sides of the hold gave three levels of bunking. Five hundred prisoners packed into each of two holds, needless to comment that there was insufficient space for all to lie down at the same time. It is quite possible that this arrangement was standard practice for Japanese troops in transit, but we had the disadvantage of being much bigger in size. Access was by a single vertical steel ladder, so that the route to the latrines, which consisted of a bamboo structure cantilevered over the ship's side, was a somewhat hazardous journey. We were allowed on deck for a while when in the harbour, but this came to an end when a ship about a mile away suddenly blew up and we were hustled back into the hold before debris could fall in the vicinity. Still, it was with quiet enjoyment we saw the superstructure of the ship soar, seemingly slowly, high into the air. Food was a watery swill of rice only, and came down in a large bucket. With no means of knowing the time (all watches long since been confiscated) the nights spent in total darkness seemed never to end. Little wonder then that after the seven days and nights aboard, we were delighted to go ashore during a very dark night and in torrential tropical rain.

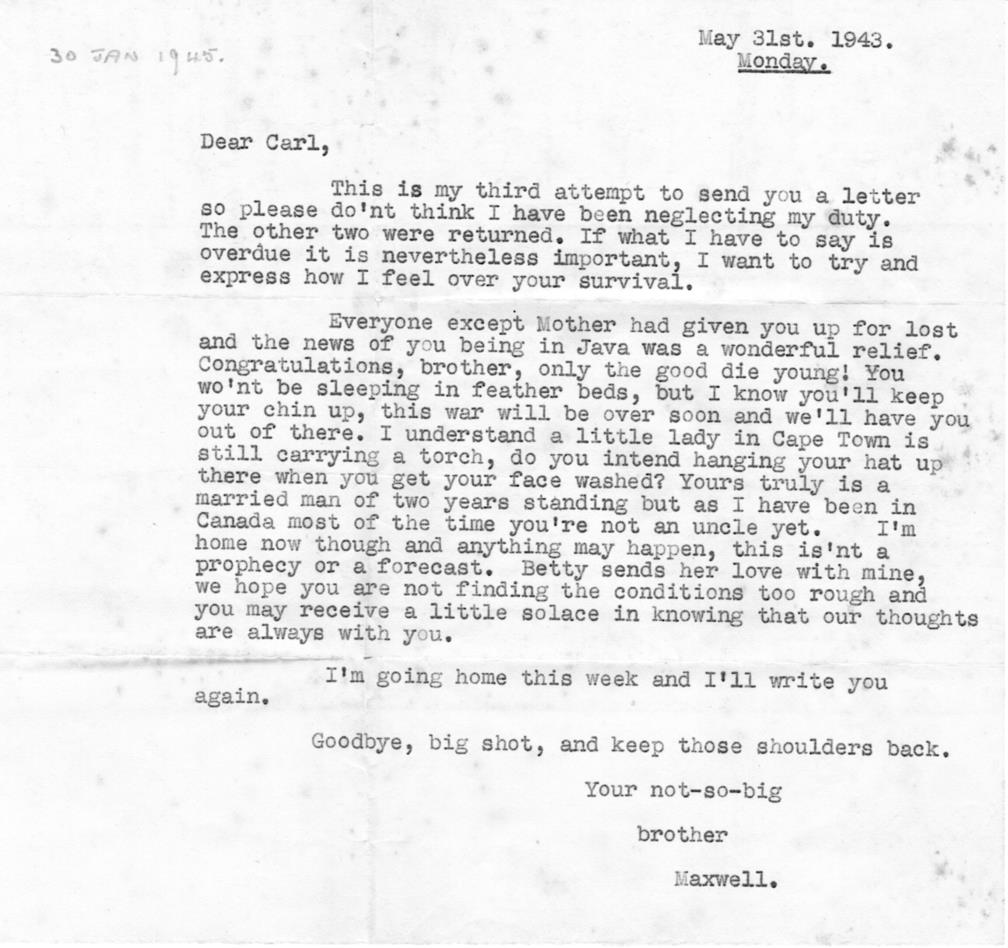
We stumbled our way through the darkness and the rain to drink unseen soup, which may have been only heavily, chlorinated water and then gratefully stretched out on the ground under an open-sided structure with attap roof. What bliss was this freedom of movement after confinement of the ship’s hold! According to the Hollanders in our midst and who throughout the years seemed to better informed than most of us about current events, we were on either of the adjacent islands of Haruku and Saparua. It was Haruku where we were destined to spend most of the next fifteen months struggling to stay alive. As we were the first group of prisoners to arrive, there were no cooking facilities or latrine systems. The camp had been set up close to the shore in a nutmeg plantation, and the partially completed shelters followed the contours of the ground between the rows of trees. Within two days of getting ashore, we were at work. I have subsequently read that the Haruku camp, although it has had little publicity, was the Japanese POW camp with the highest mortality figure. More than six in every ten prisoners who arrived there, never returned to Java. However, we did not know that then!

The main and original purpose of the contingent of 2,000 prisoners was to construct a bomber airstrip on the island. The contour of the land chosen for the site was roughly two hills parallel to the steeply rising land on one side and a corresponding drop towards the sea on the other. The tops of the hills were to be cut down and moved to fill the intervening valley, to provide a level platform for the runway. Quite a straightforward task it must have appeared to the planners; no special surface treatment needed, as the coral fill would be self-compacting. Perhaps they should have noted the obvious – this area had no bush growing on it, in great contrast to the surrounding tropical and virtually impenetrable vegetation.

The first day on site saw several hundred men sitting on the slope, each with a 4lb hammer and a steel chisel, fruitlessly trying to make the slightest impression on the coral surface. The second day was a repeat of the first day – no visible progress. Subsequently we were given picks with which even the Welsh coalminers in the party could make little impression; there was a bulldozer on site, but all I can recall, was that the Indian operator was tied to a tree when it broke down. The eventual solution was to use steel chisels, much like those used in mining drilling and sledgehammers; one man holding the steel and another two alternately hitting it with their hammers. A hole approaching a metre deep and 30mm in diameter resulted, and then all the holes of the day charged with explosive and fired. It delighted the Japanese sappers to set off the charges at short notice and this usually resulted in a wild scramble to get clear. As time went on, many men, including myself, were too weak to run and it was distinctly not funny to us. A tanga - a sack hanging on a bamboo pole - carried by two bearers, was the transport for the coral. Over the following months, many tons of coral carried in this fashion, is a lasting memory of how effective this labour-intensive approach can be in completing large projects.

When work started on the runway, what must have been the Japanese equivalent of an engineering branch, constructed in the valley between the hills, a large French drain about three metres in width and two metres high, to lead the storm water from the high ground under the eventual runway to the sea. The prisoners took no part in gathering the large rocks used in the drain. In some process of selection, of which I was unaware, two prisoners had the coveted job of boiling the drinking water for the day in 44-gallon drums. They were able to disappear into the bush to find firewood and carry water to fill the drum. Once the water boiled, they were free to roam the area in search of food. In some similar manner, the camp cookhouse staff was almost entirely ratings from the Jupiter, not that I recognized them at the time.

During the months we spent on the island, ancillary works probably needed more labour than on the runway alone, such as more direct roads from the camp to the airstrip, where originally we had to walk single file along a narrow and rough winding path through the bush. Supplies such as bombs and fuel had to be unloaded, and definitely, the worst work of all was driving coconut palm tree piles into the shallow water to form unloading jetties. The ‘pile driver’ was a tripod with a pulley, weight, and length of rope. About twenty prisoners lifted the weight by walking back on the coral seabed and then releasing the rope when the weight was at its highest point. In the tropical sun this was slave labour in every respect, and as mentioned later, a workplace allocation to be avoided at all costs at the morning parade.



**Letter to Carl from his brother Maxwell \***

**Carl added the date 30 Jan 1945, in pencil, to the top right-hand corner, being the date he received it in the POW camp**

We cut clearings in the jungle, ostensibly to make vegetable gardens for produce we never saw; dug air raid shelters into sand dunes, which fortunately caved in only after completion, and near the end built U-shaped safety bays for the twin–engine bombers. These bi-plane bombers, very old and close to WW1 vintage with the rear gunner sitting in an open cockpit were never observed or heard to take to the air, and like the fighter planes based on the adjacent island of Amahei probably were grounded by a shortage of fuel. Certainly during the several attacks by American four-engined Liberators that occurred there was no enemy retaliation by air, and there were no anti-aircraft guns on land. The only resistance was Gunso Mori, stalwart soldier as he was, furiously waving his sword at the planes.

Gunso (Senior Sergeant) Mori Masao was the effective controller of our lives on the absence, through indifference of his commanding officer. In the Japanese army of the day, an appointment as o/c of a POW camp, on a remote island, must have been a permanent demotion. Mori was the typical Army Sergeant Major, bull-necked and very strong, a disciplinarian and with the expected fetish about tidiness. As previously mentioned, when we arrived on the island, the attap huts were between the rows of nutmeg trees, roughly following the slope of the ground between the trees. When we left the camp, the entire accommodation and parade ground was on the level, everything square and army like. In contrast to the airfield site, the camp was on sand base and it was comparatively easy to cut channels through the undulations to erect new huts on the flat ground. We had one official rest day each month from working parties, and generally used by Mori to get HIS camp in order. Often on return from outside, we had additional work to do on the grand scheme, though in his favour, one must admit that in the end, the physical conditions in the camp were very good. Work never stopped. Internally, a trip down to the river for water meant picking up a log at the top of the slope and taking it to the cookhouse for fuel, and on return carrying a stone from the river back up the slope for road making. On one occasion, the guard at the river adjudged that the stone I had taken was not big enough and made me stand with it above my head until he thought I had received sufficient punishment. There was possibly no malice on his part in this ,because if Gunso Mori saw what he thought was too small a stone, then the guard was in big trouble. Equally, trips across the camp always involved some task; so consequentially one did the minimum of movement, if only to conserve energy. An ‘outsider’ wandering in an area could only be construed as a potential thief ,so ‘visiting’ was not a popular pastime, which may explain why today I have only vague recollections of how the camp changed over the course of time.

Although we had some Allied officers, mostly RAF personnel in the camp with us, they were not very visible. Occasionally, they were in the invidious position of accompanying work parties with no authority of their own, and generally taking the blame (and face slapping) for any transgression that occurred. Except for our ship’s gunnery officer, Lt. Furneau, generally referred to as ‘Guns’, frequently coming to our huts to teach and play chess, there was no contact with the general run of officers. An exception was the two Dutch Army doctors, given some of the contraband food brought in by the smart operators in appreciation for the good work they did with the sick and ailing. I wondered for many years how this was smuggled into the camp and when I got the answer, it was very simple. The cookhouse was at the stream, where there was no fencing and the cookhouse staff as already mentioned, were mainly Jupiter ratings who were very streetwise. The original path from the camp to the airstrip started at the river and thus it was a simple business for the bold and brave to make their way unseen to the nearest Japanese encampment, get into the storeroom and hide the loot in the bush over the river, to be collected at leisure. Stratagems by the Japanese to catch thieves were not effective. I recall a story where the Japanese were putting slivers of bamboo just below the surface of the rice to detect theft, but with no effect. In addition, I wonder if the story of catching the hens by tying a piece of nut to a string had any substance in it – under the circumstances, anything was possible. On one occasion, the “thieves” were interrupted and in their haste to depart, a RAF rucksack was left behind. The usual stoppage of all food followed until the culprits made themselves known, and who were immediately removed to somewhere outside the camp. The general opinion was that we would not see them again, and it was with some astonishment that they returned to the camp a few days later with smiles on their faces. It appeared that the Japanese troops themselves were looting the stores, when fortuitously other culprits took the blame! Consequently, when it came to the normal beatings, in punishment, there was no malice behind the blows.

It was only a matter of weeks after landing on Haruku that dysentery made its appearance, spreading rapidly through the camp and incapacitating nearly half the prisoners. The system devised at the runway site for water boiled in a 44-gallon drum for drinking water was a step too late; no one thought drinking hot water in the tropical sun was a problem. In one of the attempts by the Japanese to prevent the spread of the disease, each prisoner had to kill and deliver 50 flies each day. On the face of it, just another demand on the little free time there was, but to compensate for the sick and ailing, the actual kill was nearer 100 flies per active person. Staff in the cookhouse helped by large-scale efforts with wet sacks, but as always, cunning bred from constant hardship came to the rescue. The resultant accumulated ‘kill’ handed over each day consisted in large part of ground tea-leaf.

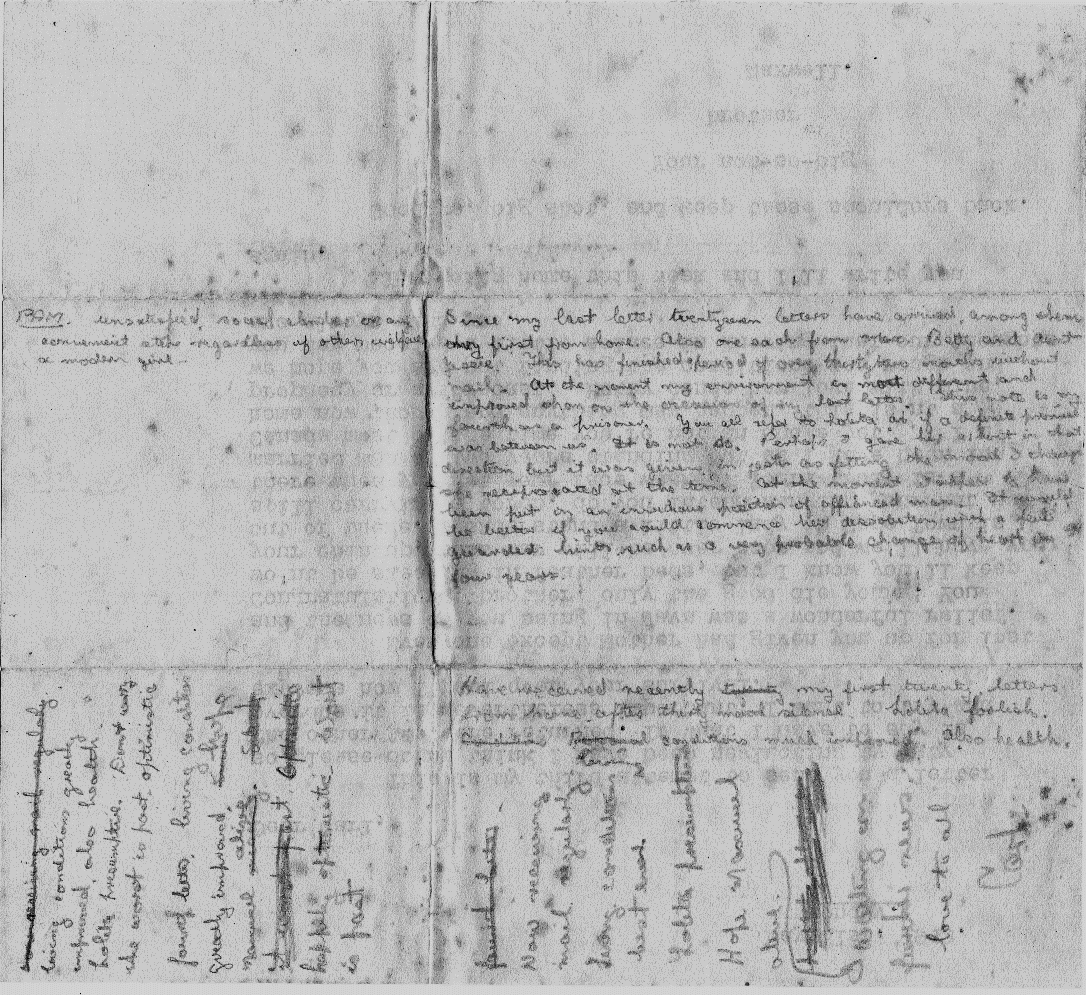
Another temporary idea was to place half paraffin tins at the entrances to the grass huts. Filled with a liquid similar to Jeyes fluid all persons entering the huts had to wash their hands. Not surprisingly, the levels of liquid soon dropped as the wet hands after every wash took away a bit of the original filling. For some reason that was not obvious to Dai Nippon and clearly, the empty containers were a sign of willful misuse. The camp interpreter, Kasiyama Yoshikichi, who spoke English in a singsong manner similar to the lilt of Welshmen addressed us; Kasiyama was of Korean ancestry and a second-class citizen in Japan (buraku), was by force of circumstances, a constant attendant on Mori to the extent that they were nicknamed ‘Blood and Slime”. In the middle of this exposition of our wrongdoing, some wag in the assembly murmured, “We drank the bloody stuff”. As so often happens, this came out clearly and seemed the complete answer to the problem. We had at that stage of imprisonment a fairly good concept of Japanese thinking - the expression ‘the inscrutable East’ arises from ignorance - and the subsequent lecture on how injurious it was to our health the drinking of the liquid could be, was listened to with mild amusement.

As already said, the Japanese considered themselves to be (and probably still do) superior people and all others definitely inferior. At that stage of the war, they had no reason to think otherwise, and that the POW’s were the most stupid people possible. We gave them every opportunity to confirm that opinion when on working parties. Tools got broken, sack-loads of coral went to wrong places, and generally, we were a bunch of morons, knowing just how far to go in acting the charade. (In later life, this was useful in understanding the performance of African labour gangs where exactly the same thing happened when being poorly supervised.) In a contrary gesture, we delighted in showing the enemy how smartly we could number off at the morning work-party parade. Invariably the soldiers who had come to collect their working gangs were amused when the, “ichi-ni-san-shi-go-rocku-shichi-hachi-ku-ju etc" shot down the front row when the command to ‘number’ was given. The word was, if I remember correctly ‘bengo’ – not to be confused with the word ‘benjo” which was the latrine. We had an RAF sergeant who was familiar with the language, but after unfortunately using some wrong word in conversation, received the standard face-slapping treatment, kept his knowledge to himself. This was an easy mistake to make.

The performance, which occurred at tenko, the morning parade when we had to form up in three lines, must have been good enough for any Goon show. There were what could be termed ‘fairly good’ and ‘very bad’ work locations, and the various gangs divided off from the right of the parade. As a rule, the people for the ‘bad’ jobs were first, so the usual result was that no-one wanted to fall-in on the right, and a great amount of subterfuge was needed to achieve a subsequently good day without running into trouble for not getting into line. This was a serious matter, as no one wanted to be on the pile driver job, when there was for example, a possible alternative to being on forest clearing where there was every chance to forage the countryside for food. In the early days, bananas, coconuts, yams and sweet potato were easy to find; thereafter one had to go further afield to find something edible.

It was generally assumed that Gunso Mori (the equivalent of the name of Wood in English) had syphilis and/or suffered from lunar madness, as his mood changes were predictable around the time of a full moon. His rank was evidence that he had been a competent regular army NCO and that he was no longer with the front-line troops, indicated that his record was blemished. My present day assessment is that he was an alcoholic (if his red-rimmed eyes any indication) and this could explain much of his behaviour. On one occasion, he hit with his heavy belt, a POW called Hands and broke his arm. The next day he had him in his hut to listen to gramophone records! An extract from the diary of Squadron Leader Pitts, who was the senior POW officer in the camp, but whom I cannot remember seeing at any time, is worth quoting. “It must be said that first and last, he is a soldier with some fine but indefinable quality, perhaps the absence of meanness, which suppressed as it was, won for him a certain admiration which was not accorded to any other Japanese. It is difficult to appreciate how one man can indulge in such bestial and brutal savagery upon another, and still be regarded with a certain amount of esteem, yet such a state did indeed exist.” Personally, I learned with regret, the execution of Gunso Mori for war crimes after the end of the war. Certainly he was held responsible for the horrific conditions that occurred on the vessel in which we returned to Java, but to a large extent he was left, as they say, “holding the baby” in the absence of logistic help as the Japanese lost equipment, supplies, and control of the war areas.

Although open fires inside the attap (grass and bamboo) huts for cooking any personally acquired food were permissible, it was mandatory to carry a container, usually a half-coconut shell of water with one if smoking. As the Hollanders said, “moenie rook nie loop nie”, and a contravention of this rule qualified for a hefty slap in the face. We made drinking glasses by burning a piece of string, Red Indian fashion, around a bottle and then quenching in water so that the neck portion broke off. It needed some practice to get the knack of it. Night lamps with vegetable oil in a half-coconut shell with string wicks worked very well. Before the nutmeg trees finally disappeared as the camp was developed, grated nutmeg was a must to flavour the rice cooked with an excess of chlorine in the water; any old tin with holes made by a nail, served as a grater. The rubber boots issued at Surabaya soon wore out and some quite well-carved wooden soles were made by individuals. As I was unable to keep these pieces of wood on my feet with only a strap support, I went barefoot for most of the time. Strangely, the need for clothes, which in practice meant something resembling shorts, does not seem in my memory to have been a problem. No doubt, the high death rate helped the supply of all items such as blankets and RAF rucksacks. The Dutch army green breeches were cut off at the knees and seemed to last for ever. The fandushi (my spelling) (Japanese ‘fundoshi’) was a piece of cloth worn in the fashion of Japanese wrestlers, and issued to us in Surabaya before leaving completed our wardrobe.



**Letter or notes (?) written by Carl on scrap paper, which appears to have English typewriting on the reverse side. It is unknown when this was written and if this was posted home and received, or held by Carl until the end of the war. I have no idea of who ‘PAM’ might be – probably someone mentioned in one of the letters he received. \***

***Translation:***

***Top left***

*PAM unsatisfied social climber or any convenient steps regardless of others welfare a modern girl*

***Top right***

*Since my last letter twenty-seven letters have arrived, among them my first from home. Also one each from Max, Betty and Aunt Jessie. This has finished a period of over thirty-two months without mail. At the moment my environment is most different and improved than on the occasion of my last letter. This note is my fourth as a prisoner. You all refer to Lola as if a definite proposal (?) was between us. It is not so. Perhaps I gave her a hint (?) in that direction, but it was given in jest (?) as fitting the mood (?) I thought she reciprocated at the time. At the moment I appear to have been put in an invidious position of affianced man. It would be better if you could commence her dissolution with a few guarded hints such as a very probable change of heart in four years.*

***Bottom left***

*~~been receiving mail regularly~~*

*living conditions greatly improved, also health.*

*Lola presumptive*

*Don’t worry the worst is past*

*optimistic found letters*

*living conditions greatly improved*

*hope Maxwell alive*

*happily optimistic*

*Worst is past*

***Bottom right - horizontal***

*~~found letter~~*

*Have received recently my first twenty letters after thirty month silence*

*Lola foolish*

*Living conditions much improved*

*Also health*

***Bottom right***

*Now receiving mail regularly*

*Living conditions best now*

*Lola presumptuous*

*Hope Maxwell alive*

*Waiting on further news*

*Love to all*

*Carl*

One day I found myself in a working party on a site along the coast and in the opposite direction to the airstrip. This was new territory and promised some successful foraging. We were also new to the army personnel there who thought a little fun would relieve the monotony - made to strip (not much to take off!) and marched naked through the adjoining native village, much to the amazement of the womenfolk there. All good clean fun except that it backfired on them. I was lucky but most others in the party suffered sunburn on the buttocks and were unable to work the following day. It may be difficult at times to plead a sore back, but the reason for the incapacity was clear for all to see, and the cause made known. Rendering anyone unfit for work was akin to national treachery and the retribution dealt out by Gunso Mori to the offending troops must have been something to behold.

On another day, a small working party of not more than ten men (including myself) landed up at a remote area above the airstrip. The sole Japanese whose shoulder tabs showed he had a little seniority, disappeared after setting out what he wanted doing. When he did reappear near the end of the day, and apparently in a drunken bad mood, lined us up without preamble and gave each of us two stunning blows on the head with a length of bamboo around three inches in diameter. It would have been profitable to report this through interpreter Kasiyama, but in the general context of prison life just another incident.

At the time, it was puzzling to me why some POW’s remained fairly fit and active. On reflection it should have been useful education in life to observe the criminal element at work; one must admire the ingenuity and quickness of mind. Part of one side of the camp bordered on the beach from which there was access to an elementary pier that served in later months as a latrine after space was running out for digging further septic pits. During the middle of one night, we were aroused from sleep by a Japanese bellow followed by the sound of running feet. It transpired that at least two prisoners had been foraging along the coast (one story was that they were looking for a suitable boat) and on their return to the beach had encountered the guard on that section of the perimeter. With great presence of mind, they knocked over the guard and ran for ‘home’. The carbines carried by all the guards reputedly held either one cartridge or were empty; certainly not more than that. The entire camp searched for ‘wet’ prisoners, but had no success; the culprits had disposed of whatever clothes they were wearing in some of the remaining septic pits containing seething masses of large maggots that could engulf anything thrown in within minutes, and then donned dry ones. All heads were shaven, so wet hair was not a possibility; the beach was largely one of broken small shells, so there was no sand to stick on feet. The non-outcome of the incident the following day was quite understandable. An up-ended guard was not a public reason for the usual reprisal measures, because it was a humiliation. The guard no doubt got the equivalent of 30 days hard labour, and the incident was forgotten.

The usual reprisal measures mentioned included a total stoppage of food until information wanted by the Japanese was forthcoming. Mass punishment for individual errors was the norm, so it was in the interests of all to cover–up any observed evidence left by others. As a means of control, it was a wonderful system for the Japanese. This banding together towards the common enemy led in turn to an almost total absence of serious personal quarrels, or differences between prisoners. As time went on, most men had either not the spirit, or the strength for physical abuse. Incipient quarrels were stopped from escalating by fellow prisoners by the same sense of common cause. With the lengthening period of hardship, I believe the ways of the animal kingdom gradually crept into our lives; safety in numbers and a herd outlook for perceived danger became normal. The threshold of pain became higher and intellectual thinking faded away.

I doubt if the ordinary person is capable of understanding what privation means in practice. One can pose the question of the consequence of having, for example, no access to soap for an extended period (on the equator) and the answer could be somewhat vague. I have found that it is beyond the average comprehension to imagine the situation of no soap, no means to cut finger or toenails, no bed or bedding, no medicine or wound dressings among many others; all in the foreground of no freedom of movement. Likewise, it can be difficult for people (even those who have experienced hunger at some time of their life) to appreciate the difference between being temporarily short of food, and a situation where there is no prospect of sufficient future food. I recall an incident in the latter days at Haruku when, because of weakness, I found myself unable to step over a crack in the ground. Besides the physical and depressive effect of dysentery, which could kill a person within days of contraction (men of typically soccer-playing build seemed to be particularly susceptible to the disease) there were the niggling little things like lice, scabies, crabs and bed bugs. For a long time I had listened to the complaints about lice, and wondered why, for some mysterious reason I had no worries. Then one morning after wakening, I was looking at the nearest part of my blanket tucked around my chin, and to my utmost horror and dismay it was almost a solid mass of movement of lice!! That day the blanket laid in the hot sun with frequent turns of side to catch the lice unawares - a useless exercise. I recalled my mother relating how during WW1 she hung my father’s uniform on the wash line in freezing weather and the lice walked unharmed on the ice. Only steam can kill them and we had no means to do that and strangely, lice never seemed to have much effect on me. A tropical ulcer on my left leg, originating from a mosquito bite, (one of hundreds) received when sleeping in the open at Kragan some two years previously and scratched to infection by dirty fingernails, for no obvious reason decided to get better. It was not as large as the horrific sores suffered by others; but was a constant problem. The usual covering was a portion of a banana plant leaf and it was a daily concern that it was not increasing in size.

One day I felt unusually well. That night when tropical rain was falling, I awoke suddenly and had to rush outside to the realization that dysentery had caught up with me. There I stood as in a shower cubicle cleaning myself in the heavy rain and with despair in my mind. As a matter of routine, I had to move into the fenced off area containing the dysentery victims and the prospect of reduced rations and restricted movement. It was isolation without treatment and the luck of the gods for recovery; either one got better or died, my observation remains it was the healthy looking men who died quickly. The point of no return was when the flies collected in a black mass on the dying person’s lips. My position in the hut was close to the dividing wire fence and able to see the bamboo coffins carried past each evening after dark when the outside working parties had returned and dug some shallow graves. One evening, there were fourteen coffins in the procession and ones’ macabre thought was another day survived without the moving finger of fate pointing to me - very much the essence of the game of musical chairs. There was no opportunity that I could think of to better my situation. Therefore, it was a day-to-day hope that the passing of blood and slime would stop; one could return to the outside camp and get back on working parties, whatever the accompanying hardships. It was easy to see the regular workers by the extent of sunburn as they returned at the end of the day, almost indistinguishable from the native islanders.

Fortuitous circumstances are mentioned elsewhere, and this was one of them. I had sustained a cut under my left big toe which did not receive much of my attention at a time when there were more pressing problems to counter in our fight for survival. Swelling occurred in three places in my leg and rapidly became very pronounced. The available medical attendant drew out fluid with what looked like a horse syringe in an attempt to relieve the discomfort, but the situation was critical when Dr Springer of the Dutch Army returned from operating at the Amahei camp on the much larger neighbouring island of Seram. “Op die tafel” (On the table) was the dreaded call sign for those who had their tropical ulcers scraped to the bone – without anaesthetic -, and “op die tafel” it was for me. The table was four bamboo legs set into the ground with the top made with strips of split bamboo. Fortunately, there was ether available and I subsequently woke up in my usual place in the hut, on my back, with the left leg elevated so that a saline drip from a bottle, ran down the large open wound as irrigation. In the immense relief that certain death had again been avoided, any discomfort of having to stay in the same position on the bamboo slats was bearable. The huts were quite long and in cross-section comprised a centre walkway about two metres wide, and on each side a continuous platform of split bamboo, also about two metres wide and about 600mm from the ground. That the wound was a trifle ghastly became clear when a passing guard grimaced at the sight of it! The wound improved daily; I marvelled at the dexterity of Dr Springer when he pushed replacement gauze, without giving me pain, through the hole that connected the top and bottom of the incision. When his ‘assistant” tried the same procedure it was a very different story indeed. Dr Springer was a Hollander with a good sense of humour; when one day I remarked that it was itching (my feeling that it was a good sign of healing) he retorted, “Ah dat is de louses.”

I suppose the Hippocratic Oath of the medical profession covered the treatment of the Japanese troops who surreptitiously sneaked in to Dr Springer treatment – we genially ascribed all their ailments to syphilis. They were attending in desperation whatever the cause, in the absence of any worthwhile treatment from their own medical services, and the charge levied on our side was whatever medical supplies they could steal from their own stores. That was where the ether, etc., came from. The standard Japanese army medical resource seemed to be Mercurochrome.

The language of the camp gradually became a mixture of English, Dutch, Malay and Japanese. To do any successful bargaining in the bush with the local population during working parties, one had to know some Malay and it was useful to be familiar with some key Japanese words to keep ahead of the opposition as it were. The Hollanders, despite their relatively few numbers, were prominent with their local and ‘secret’ information. In my hut, we had a Guajarati who, at the time not considered incongruous, despite an obvious attempt in Surabaya to plant two Sikh dissidents in the camp. Also in the hut was a Canadian who made a banjo from a cigar box and dispensed much needed enjoyment with his rendering of folk music. I can still see him sitting on the edge of the sleeping platform holding forth with his rendering of, “Miss Otis is unable to lunch today!”

As has been mentioned, the proposed bomber airfield project on Haruku was originally allocated 2,000 POWs; the fighter ‘plane strip at Amahei was given 1,000 men. Amahei was a much more congenial project, because the terrain was sand, and when this was completed, the workforce transferred to Haruku. By that time, the number of Haruku prisoners had shrunk to nearer 1,200 survivors, so there was no problem with accommodation. Amahei had been disease-free and with a tolerant administration, so their introduction to Gunso Mori and our situation came as a rude shock to them! My companion of the water, ERA3 Frank Platt and our Jupiter CERA Perryer, were among the newcomers, so I had people I knew around for a while. Chief Perryer, soon after confiding to me one day, “Jock, I cannot carry on any longer” lost the will to live and died very soon afterwards. A native of Devonshire he was one of the older men in the camp and of very slight build.

On one occasion, the POW who slept next to me, gave me his rice ration with the comment that, “Rice gives one beriberi.” I had no hesitation in eating it, although I told him he was wrong. Strangely, I have little recollection of what additional food we got; apart from the usual dirty floor-sweepings of rice, there was not much to remember. Occasionally we had a soup made from the flowers of the banana plant that was purple in colour and very aptly called “Blue Danube”. Once we thought we were in for a treat when something that looked like seaweed and was part of the Japanese army rations came our way, but as it proved to be quite inedible in the manner of a piece of rubber, it was safe to assume that it was reject stock! I had the same experience when I tried to cook and eat a small snake. As far as I can recollect, there were no efforts to catch fish from the sea. This has subsequently puzzled me without finding a reason for it. Personally, at the time, I had no experience of the sea or of fishing, but surely, someone must have seen the possibility as a source of food. The fish were there, because I recall seeing a large fish break the surface of the small bay when squatting on the latrine jetty. Lack of equipment coupled with the scarcity of leisure time no doubt played their part. Any mass effort to catch fish would certainly have seen all the catch go to the camp guards. Once we came across an off-duty soldier from the garrison catching large eels in a small stream flowing through the undergrowth. When clearing bush, there were many wild pigs around, but they were extremely fast and wary. Apart from shooting them, I doubt if there was any other way to secure them for food, but again in retrospect, one can only ponder on any alternative method.

Some did not suffer from some effects of beriberi; conversely, there were many badly affected, excessive swelling of legs and genitals occurred, very often leading to death. I recall a man lying naked on the bench opposite to me in such a state, with the flies clustered thick on his mouth and nostrils. All his belongings had unobtrusively disappeared, as it was obvious that he would die and I viewed him with a total absence of sympathy, such was the individual desire for survival. Of necessity, many men were circumcised to relieve their discomfort, and were the subjects of much banter from fellow prisoners. Considering our diet with a total absence of meat, it is not surprising that toothache did not seem to be a problem.

On examining the geography of the region, there seems no sense in the work involved in the airstrips when there was a regular airport not far away at Ambon. Fuel for the aircraft must have been a logistic problem. One consignment in 44-gallon drums arrived by throwing the drums overboard and the working party had to ‘swim’ them to shore. Long before the strip was ready, we had to handle a consignment of small bombs, each carried as usual on a bamboo pole between two men. This was the most exhausting job I ever experienced; we had no idea of the number of bombs and the work carried on well into the night.

I am not a natural risk taker. One day on a working party, I was drawn by one of the bolder individuals into a foraging jaunt. I have forgotten his name, but he was in civil life a postal worker in Wales. We equipped ourselves with the ubiquitous tanga, and set off from the army camp where we were working for the day, walking a goodly distance (or so it seemed to hesitant me) to the high ground above the airstrip. Quite obviously, it was not the first time Taffy had been to the area where there was a widespread plantation of papaya trees with abundant fruit. There was no finesse about choosing what to pick, as Taffy simply shoved the whole tree over, much to my alarm, at the tremendous noise in the quietude of the plantation, and took the largest. With a full sack load of large ripe papaya and an apprehensive apprentice carrying the back end of the bamboo pole we made the return journey. As we passed through an encampment not far from where we should have been working a Japanese officer, (not often seen) intercepted us and I thought the game was over. Taffy did not turn a hair – if he had any ­- and offered the officer a choice specimen that was smilingly accepted. Regaining base, I had to ask myself if I was really cut out for such ventures and had to answer in the negative. My upbringing just had not prepared me for such streetwise activity.

Gavin Dawes in his book, ‘Prisoners of the Japanese’, makes the comment that it was essential to survival for prisoners to form combines and that being a loner was in most cases a death sentence. From the moment I joined the rest of the Jupiter survivors at Kragan, I was, except for one short period at Haruku, on my own. Taffy the postal worker, was a member of a group of Welsh artillerymen on the opposite side of the hut to me. On one occasion, I joined up with their community and did my share of the chores - and hopefully a share of the outcomes. I soon found that I was not able to keep pace with the after-work activities that were involved and returned to my independent ways. Once a fellow prisoner said I lay down too much (the implication being that I was giving up the struggle for survival), but in fact, I was always balancing the expenditure of energy against the potential benefit of action. At the end of every day, I could consider whether I had lost ground health wise, and scheme what to do the following day to gain some ground. Thinking had to be the order of every day. As an idle example, I recall an incident when we were on a narrow path passing through an area of high grass, when a flight of Liberators appeared and on line to fly over us. Everyone except me promptly disappeared into the long grass. I thought that was very stupid, because once in the grass they could not see what was happening; I stayed on the path to observe what side the bombs, if they came, would fall and then I could move in the opposite direction.

The encampment where we encountered the officer on our papaya expedition was the place of work one day, where I was carrying logs in partnership with a robust prisoner nicknamed “body beautiful”. Picking up a log a little too vigorously for me to handle at the other end, caused it to drop on the middle toe of my right foot. Marching back to camp that evening in great pain, I recall being very much annoyed when a guard laughed at my obvious discomfort. A bit more pain added to the daily burden seemed insufficient reason to visit Dr Springer, and in time, the pain wore off. It was many years later when looking into a shoe-shop X-ray viewer in Cape Town, I realized that two toes had been broken and healed very much out of line.

Occasionally we would be paid five cents for a day’s work (I still have some of the mass printed notes in my possession) and from a camp point of view, it was real money. In time I owned a blanket; the one with the lice, a RAF rucksack, and an aluminium mug, all bought legitimately! As the death rate was constant, there was a steady supply of ‘surplus material’. My own moneymaking device was to buy tobacco on outside working parties, when a search on return to camp seemed unlikely. One always had to be observant, like a sparrow on a branch, to all the dangers and potential benefits in the environment. Fortunately, I never was caught and the tobacco re-sold inside at 400% profit. Thus, it was, that the best part of the day, was to sit on a stump in the tropical evening and enjoy a one-cent cigar. The local natives caught pythons by snaring them by the neck and poisoning them (thereby not damaging the skin) by putting tobacco in their mouths.

On the way from the camp to the airstrip, we passed the Japanese army brothel. Of course, at that time, we did not realise that these ‘comfort women’ were conscripted into the work. But it did seem strange when we passed the structure, the Korean women were vociferous in their taunts towards our guards and the guards did not answer back with jibes as would be expected, but remained silent and seemingly embarrassed by the shouting. From this, we learned many derogatory words in the Japanese language (they have no swearwords as we know them) and as is the way of things, I can still remember some of them. What the guards did find amusing, was our singing on the way back to camp from the airstrip. One of our favourites was the student (?) song about “coming round the mountain etc.” which lent itself to endless improvisations and thus could last a long time. For some reason, which no doubt could be very simply explained if one could speak Japanese, the chorus of “hi-yi-yippi-yippi-yi” invariably caused great merriment in their ranks.

Each morning the guards for the day paraded and sang several songs. No doubt one was their national anthem of the time, and others related to the Emperor and the Shinto religion, but coupled with their bugle version of reveille, the whole thing became, as I lay listening, a rather soothing introduction to the day. The camp guards were quite definitely not frontline troops and even today, I assume they were conscripts from the second-class Japanese citizens who had Korean ancestry. In civilian life, they were inferior people and could well have transferred their frustrations on to the new inferiors in their life. Most of them had never previously seen a European and were nearly as far from home as we were. They led a very barren and austere life at Haruku. In a way, they were also prisoners in their environment and the only pastime they seemed to have was stick fighting. They were certainly not in the same class as were elite troops I saw in a barracks in Batavia, who were well fed and looked like Japanese nationals. In general, Japanese troops going into action wore old uniforms and got new kit as a bonus for success, a factor that could account for the forlorn appearance of the troops Taffy and I were dodging through at our capture at Kragan.

Very often during the night, American ‘planes could be heard flying in the vicinity, but the first daylight raid occurred when we were working on the airstrip. With no prior warning, three Liberators, flying in tight formation and only a few thousand feet high, approached the runway at the end where I was working. To say I was panic-stricken would be an understatement. Out in the open by myself, a long way from any cover and too weak to run, all I could do was fall flat forward on the coral when the distinctive sound of falling bombs was heard. Some fell on the Japanese storerooms and in the native village of Pelauw on the lower ground next to the sea and others came down on the bomber bays on the other side of the runway. Such was the pain in my stomach region, I was certain something bad had happened, but forcing me to look down, found the cause of the pain was a small stone on which I had fallen. What a relief that was to find I had again escaped injury. A Hollander injured in the raid, subsequently had a leg amputated and no doubt lived to tell the tale. The Japanese publicly recommended the prisoners who with presence of mind carried him back to the camp, a good mile away and condoned their (unauthorised) actions.

*My research is that Beaufighters of No.31 Squadron on 26 March 1945 made one pass over the airfield and dropped their bombs.*

*At this stage of the war, more planes had been made available to the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) under command of the Royal Air Force (RAF) with support from the American Air Force. More smaller sorties were being deployed to destroy as many Japanese positions, supply points, shipping and airfields as possible, to deny supplies and frustrate and isolate these forces across the geographical area.*

*(War Against Japan1943-1945 – George Odgers – Australian War Museum)\**

One day at the airfield, a Hollander took shelter from the sun under a Japanese truck at the midday yasume (rest break) and by mischance, the driver drove off without noticing him, resulting in the resting prisoner being killed; another incident where an official Japanese apology was made. In Amahei, a prisoner died after falling from the coconut tree he was climbing, and immediately the practice was forbidden in Haruku. Many prisoners were surprisingly adept at going up the very high trees for the fruit.

Seldom in my wanderings did I see any military might. At the beachhead at Kragan, the biggest weapons on show were carbines; no anti-aircraft guns and the transport trucks were ordinary commercial vehicles. Working on the extended runway at Surabaya in the early days, a victory (and show of force) fly-past of at least 200 planes, plus a battleship in the harbour, were the only evidence of modern equipment. At Laha airport on Ambon when we left, there was a huge dump of derelict ‘planes piled up at the end of the runway. The whole area was held by the Japanese on a shoestring and could have been reclaimed by the Allies at little cost, but that was not part of the American plan, and the invasion of Singapore by Mountbatten came too late to matter.

**7.0 THE RETURN TO JAVA - From the island of Haruku**

As the months passed, it was obvious to all of us that the Allies were gaining the upper hand. The frequency of American planes flying in the vicinity was increasing, and somewhat suddenly, I found myself preparing to leave the island. Fortunately, it was at a time when both my long-standing tropical ulcer on my leg, and the wound from my thrombosis operation were (somewhat surprisingly) on a healing cycle. We were a comparatively small group of around 100 prisoners, possibly classified as “sick” and were loaded on a very small ship for a voyage that could not have taken longer than half a day. I can only remember landing on the island of Ambon and then having a very long walk to an area, which was barren of vegetation.

The rocky ground was almost black in colour and in the midst of this scene of desolation, we arrived at a camp that evidently had been in place for a long time and occupied by other POWs. No part of it was flat and by dint of past occupation, the rough surface had been somewhat polished by the passage of many feet. A more forbidding and grim outlook would be hard to find, and one could only guess to the reason why this site should be chosen for a camp. This camp could have been Tiga (three in Malay) Rumah and may have existed from the early days of captivity, when the initial expectation of the Japanese was that we would behave as they imagined their own people would behave. It was far from the work areas and far from a source of water, which arrived by gravity through a pipeline constructed by joining lengths of bamboo end-to-end. Whatever the quantity of water was at source, it was reduced by leakage to a trickle at the camp delivery point and a consequence of this, was a day and night queue to collect water. By some extraordinary effort (bearing in mind our futile attempts at Haruku to cut into the coral) air raid trenches, about two feet deep had been dug on a slope within the camp. There we spent many miserable hours at night shivering in the bright moonlight. Although the passing ‘planes could not be seen, the typical throbbing drone of the WW11 engines of the four-engine Allied bombers was not reassuring, as we tried to get lower in the shallow trenches.

As previously mentioned, there were some prisoners who were fit enough to use every opportunity that arose for their survival. One night, some of these bold spirits got out of the camp (probably not for the first time) and broke into the Japanese storeroom some distance away. Interrupted in their looting and in their haste to escape, they left some RAF rucksacks behind in the store. This was irrefutable evidence as to who had been there and the standard measure brought into action – no food in the camp until the culprits identified themselves. On this occasion, it was two days before peer pressure and a few deaths forced them to confess. As they were taken away, the general feeling was that we would not see them again; a week passed; great was the surprise therefore when they re-appeared in the best of spirits and in good health. Apparently, the store was also being plundered by Japanese troops who were under suspicion, when a trap netted the POWs. With all possible blame being removed from the Japanese thieves by this result, when the prisoners were brought in for punishment, they were treated as saviours to the cause. Whatever punishment decreed, was largely ignored by the relieved Japanese fellow looters and substituted with extra food rations.

Whilst in this camp there could have been the usual working parties- there was a permanent squad working on repairing leaks in the bamboo water main –but only one recalled, because of an incident that seemed strange to me at the time. The work party was conveyed in the usual manner by standing up on the back of a lorry. For some reason it came to a halt in an area of tall grass, and as we were standing there, out of the grass appeared two Australian soldiers dressed in comparatively new uniforms and wearing their unique wide brimmed hats. They were casual, seemingly in the best of health, and from our deprived state, viewed with some astonishment. Perhaps they were not active collaborator, but there was the feeling that the Japanese regarded Australians as special people. In the early days at Surabaya, all the Australian prisoners had to write an essay about their hometowns. Obviously, this was a search for information for use in the invasion of Australia and subsequently kept apart from the other POWs. In the Australian POW camps, an established large measure of self-government allowed. One can only wonder what really went on, especially when the war was over and we were interrogated before repatriation, regarding bad treatment at the hands of individual Japanese and co-operation with the enemy.

Our stay in this desolate camp could not have been longer than two months. I was included in a small batch of prisoners who moved back to the coast to a very elementary camp sited in a grove of coconut palm trees. By this time, I was extremely weak and barely able to walk. There was no apparent reason for the move and in our exhausted state, we did not have the energy to speculate on anything but how to stay alive.

By this time, the war was not going well for the Japanese and in the Southern Pacific zone, were under great pressure to maintain an organised presence. One mass daylight-bombing raid by a very large formation of American Liberator four-engine planes was more frightening than the Haruku runway raid. As seen through every gap in the palm fronds above, flying quite low it seemed to me very reminiscent of a scene in an old Korda film version of the futuristic H. G. Wells’ story, “Things to come”. Then there came the terrifying fluttering sound of small bombs coming down, seemingly on us, but falling on the town of Ambon on the other side of the bay. This was another unforgettable experience, a huge physical effort being needed to get flat down on the ground. A working party later returned to recount tales of fires and ammunition dumps set off by the bombs. There was a measure of compensation some days later when we had a grandstand view of a strafing attack on the ships at anchor in the bay, by twin-boomed Lightning fighters flying in columns from the open sea and up the bay. This was to our eyes a most welcome and encouraging sight, being clear evidence for the first time, that our forces were much closer and that the end of the war was getting nearer.

The next day we were ferried aboard a small vessel about the size of a small coaster and with one small hold. This could have been according to Michno in “Death on the Hellships” the 443 ton Sugi Maru. The joy of the previous day was somewhat tempered by the signs of cannon holes in the superstructure, and on the way we had passed a freighter with the entire bow section blown off at water level. Once again, a fortuitous circumstance occurred and which certainly proved to be a lifesaver for me. Despite my extreme weakness, I was among the first of the party to go down the vertical ladder into the single hold that was about four metres deep. Halfway down the ladder, I came to a bunker filled level with coal and against the bulkhead recess there was a wooden bench stretching the width of the hull. With memories of the voyage from Surabaya to Haruku, I promptly stepped off the ladder and lay down on the bench to stake my claim. It was an ideal place, almost like a bunk with easy access to the ladder and the deck, and as the voyage progressed, the men on the floor of the hold were lying in the wetness of urine, faeces and vomit. How ideal it was for me manifested when within a day I was stricken with malaria and rendered immobile. I remained for several days in that state not expecting or getting help from any direction. In the way of things, it could have been speculation to others, that a bunk would be available when I died. On recovering a little, I was able to force myself up the ladder and onto the lavatory structure erected and overhanging the side of the ship. With the remnant of strength left in me, I had to crook my arms over the rungs as support and use the back of my knees as feet. Getting on and off the bamboo structure was a fearsome exercise as with the roll of the vessel, it was almost at the level of the sea that was rushing past with the speed of the ship. On one occasion, my snail-pace ascent of the ladder annoyed the guard at the top, who proceeded to ‘encourage’ me by bumping my head with the butt of his carbine. Never will I have to call on so much willpower as I did at that moment. I had to hold on and continue climbing because the consequence of a fall to the floor of the hold would have put me beyond recovery. This could have been the same guard who, when we were leaving the boat at Surabaya, gave me another encouraging bump with his gun when I was unable to step up to the end of the gangplank.

At a guess, the voyage to Surabaya took between two and three weeks. Some nights we anchored and sometimes we stopped during the day. We were a small ship, all alone on our voyage in an area where Allied submarines were dominant. Such was the strain on Japanese resources, there was very little food. Once, a quantity of small fish caught in a seine net was purchased from a fisherman and I recall eating – very guiltily - some of them raw as they lay on the deck. Bad as the conditions were, in some ways we were lucky because in other shiploads, Royal Navy or American submarines sank several, one was machine-gunned and another took two months to get to Surabaya. My researcher friend in California has told me that there were 17 deaths on the voyage, but that figure could have included those who died on the train. I was too sick to have taken any interest at the time.

On arrival at Surabaya, we were loaded into two carriages on a train that would travel the length of Java to Batavia (now Jakarta). Wooden benches ran down each side of the carriage along with a central wooden bench. I have mentioned that for the most part I have little recollection of what food we had additional to rice, but there was no forgetting what was awaiting us on the journey. Halfway to Batavia at a station stop, beautifully cooked white rice and dried fish ‘takeaways’ wrapped in banana leaf was served to each of the still living prisoners. The memory of that entirely unexpected feast of white rice is still vivid, whenever I have rice on the menu.

Reviewing these events so many years later, it is clear that the ‘takeaway’ was the demarcating point of our entry into an area of POW administration that was beyond criticism. Little did we realise then that our travails had ended. When we arrived at Batavia, on the central bench were the bodies of those who had died on the last leg of their journey. As we disembarked from the train, with a large crowd of Javanese watching through surrounding wire mesh fence, some of us, including myself, went directly to the Mater Dolorosa convent that was serving as a hospital. As there was an adjoining leper colony, it could have been a regular hospital and/or a kind of home in peacetime. So, unexpectedly, I found myself in a regular bed with linen sheets and in a ward of around twenty men. Welcome back to civilization!

**8.0 EAST JAVA -The last year in captivity.**

By my reckoning, my stay in the Mater Dolorosa must have been close to five months. The attacks of malaria abated and slowly my weight increased from skin and bone to reasonable appearance. Sometime during that time, the ward doctor decided that two of us needed dosing for worms and administered the foulest tasting mixture I never hope to meet again. Such was the taste that afterwards we had the utmost luxury of a teaspoon of sugar. The mixture was effective, and the culprit roundworm and I duly parted company! There were many good books available - among them, *Science for the Citizen by Hogben* and Hawthorne's, *The House of Seven Gables* - all of which was much to my liking. It was an opportunity to make many lasting friendships with fellow sufferers and with the POWs who were helpers there. Only years later and only after he died, did I discover that Nobby Clark of Barrow-on-Furnace, had received a decoration for the work he did in that hospital. On my birthday in the January spent there, two of my friends in the next ward made, and presented me with a birthday card that is still one of my prized possessions. On the cover is a drawing of a work camp prisoner in typical attire, and inside a verse from the Ruba'iyat of Omar Khayyam:-

*And if the Wine you drink, the lip you press,*

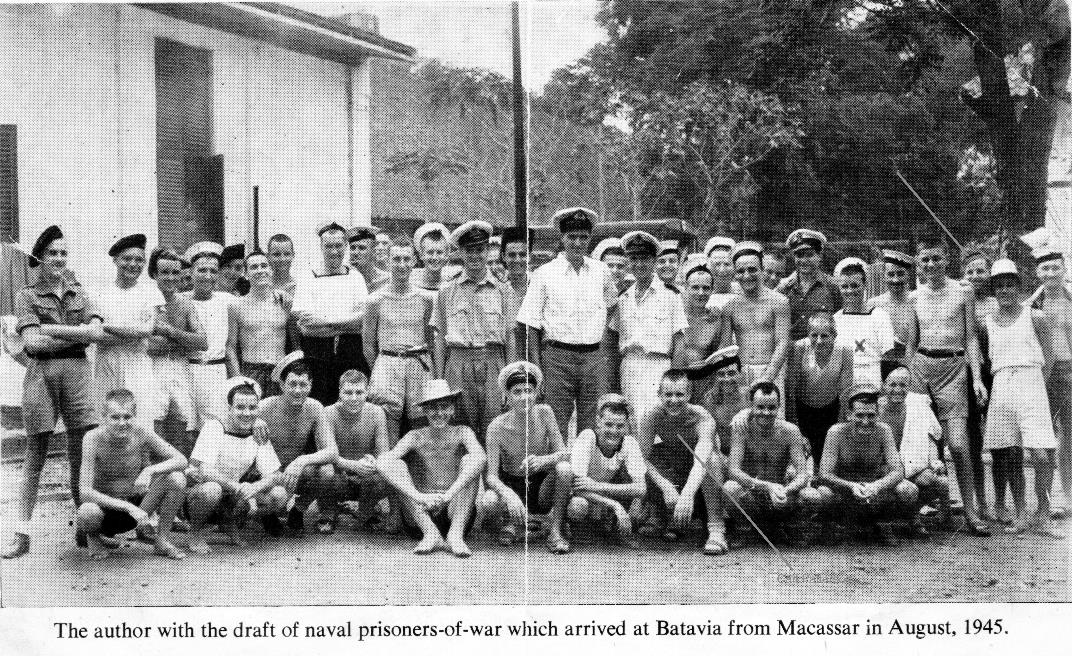
*End in what All begins and ends in - Yes*

*Think then you are Today what Yesterday*

*You were - Tomorrow you shall not be less*

On further consideration, it must have been a regular hospital, because major operations were done there. In permanent residence were POWs who were seriously disabled. In common with all regions in the early days of capture, all reasonably healthy prisoners were drafted away to distant worksites, and the residue (so to speak) had remained. There was a sailor from the USS Houston, sunk in the Sunda Straits, who had built a model of the ship from scrap wood. Strangely, I remember his name as 'Rafalovich' and although he looked healthy, he must have had some serious injury. There was a Welsh Royal Artillery soldier, blinded, and losing most of both arms when blowing up the guns before surrender, the most remarkable man I am ever likely to as special people meet. He was completely independent and could use the showers, dry himself unaided and always full of fun and good cheer.

Eventually a contingent of recuperated patients including myself transferred to Cycle Camp, previously a regular Dutch Army barracks, somewhere in the city. Undoubtedly, this was to allow space for another batch of the POWs returning from Ambon and Haruku in similar states of health as we were on arrival.

**Prisoners disembarked the ships in Surabaya – August 1945**

**Front row (yellow arrow) Carl Patterson (HMS Jupiter) with no hat and wearing sandals**

**Back row (blue arrow) Gordon Evans (HMS Exeter)**

**Note the emaciated condition of the men**

Apart from the prevalence of bed bugs (a Heath Robinson disinfesting facility erected for lice, never seemed to be in use) the barrack accommodation was tolerable. There was a regular cookhouse where eventually I worked each morning, and there was minimum Japanese presence within the camp. The heat was more oppressive than in the islands and it was more pleasant during the night to sit outside on the edge of the verandah. When the guard came along on his round he would genially wave down the daylight rule of having to shout, "Kiri" followed by the general bowing. The Dutch astronomers amongst us always knew when an eclipse of some sort was due to happen and clear skies always gave us a good view of the happening.

There were regular working parties detailed from the morning roll call parade. Although much improved in health, I often found the work taxing to my strength. On one occasion, we were offloading bags of rice (which buckled my knees when dumped on my shoulders) from a ship and having to cross a narrow plank between ship and wharf. Looking down on the drop to the water below, each crossing over the plank was almost a life or death threat; not a good day at the office! The compensation was the five-cent note paid for every working party. When at the docks, I always took the opportunity to buy a goose egg - or what I have always assumed to be a goose egg! They appeared to have been buried in the ground and were green in colour and solid inside. At the time, I reasoned that although the taste was not of the best, it was the most nutritional value I could get for my money. As practiced in most of the animal world, food was not for hoarding and the eggs hurriedly eaten immediately on purchase. Dealing with civilians was not allowed and the transactions were always covert affairs.

One working party, of which I was part, had to transfer supplies from trucks into the basement of a building. Part of the supplies was boxed trays of condensed milk. This was too good a chance to miss, and although the smell of condensed milk is quite distinctive, we succeeded in consuming an entire case of it without discovery. The incriminating evidence of crate and empty tins safely hidden away, we were slightly sick from having had an overdose of sweetness. Such was the casual attitude of the Japanese by that stage of the war that when the midday break came along, we were generously given some cans of condensed milk. Much to their surprise, we did not appear to be wildly grateful for their donation!

In the same space of the barracks as mine, was an RAF POW with only one leg. Sgt. Alan Smith had been in a Catalina flying boat on patrol over the Bay of Biscay when, emerging from low cloud cover, they were shot down by a blockade running German cargo boat. The doctor on board had been forced to amputate the badly damaged leg, and as the subsequent first port of call had been Batavia, he found himself a POW in the East Indies when operating from a base on the English south coast. At the time, that must have been a mystery to many people in England. Another blinded RAF POW, in contrast to the soldier in the Mater Dolorosa, was unable to adjust to his circumstances and was led around.

In what can only be ascribed to the compassionate administration of the camps in East Java at that time, the men who had returned from Ambon were transferred to a camp in Bandung. This more or less coincided with the arrival of a further group of POWs returning from Ambon, and very probably the survivors of the Maros Maru, on which there was a 50% death rate, and who were in such poor health, that their section was screened from the view of the main camp by hessian sheeting. When the engines of the Maros Maru broke down, Frank Platt was one of the men who carried out the vital repairs, and probably the whole experience was the primary reason for his early death from tuberculosis after demobilization. The journey to Bandung was by way of a narrow gauge railway line travelling up and along a scenic route into the mountains of the interior of Java - the equivalent of the pre-war hill stations of India. This was a most pleasant journey, completed as far as I can recall within one day. At Bandung, we were billeted in what had been a rehabilitation settlement for delinquent boys. Grass lawns surrounded the wooden huts with their concrete floors and being in the mountains, the climate quite temperate; a rest camp in every sense of the word. The huts had no furniture and we used our grass sleeping mats as beds - sleeping on concrete was no discomfort to us. There were no working parties and the food menu for the day was posted on the notice board and there was no "kiri" when the guards strolled by. I took down the menu particulars on a fragment of paper one day when brown beans featured, but much to my annoyance mislaid it soon after repatriation. As a change from rice, soya beans were often on the menu. It was a comparatively good time for us, with much of that time spent playing cards, and I once had Grand Slams in two successive deals in bridge. Our stay lasted for several months and then we returned to the barracks in Batavia where little had changed.

We must have been aware to some extent of the course of the war after VE day and that it should be only a matter of waiting until the war in the East would stop. When the news of the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan came known, there was no wild celebration, but rather a quiet sense of at last we would be going home fairly soon, followed by the acknowledgment that the war finally had ended.

The first sign of relief was the appearance of a Mosquito bomber overhead and the announcement that two representatives had parachuted in. The next day a British Army major arrived at the camp and stood on a raised platform to make an announcement. His reception was not what he expected, because apart from being, to our eyes, unbelievably young to be a Major, when he removed his beret to speak, thereby exposing a full head of dark hair to the shaven-headed throng, there were catcalls of amusement. Being quite taken aback at this reception, he reddened with embarrassment before realising the cause of the good-natured hubbub.

Quite near to us, there was a concentration camp for mostly the Dutch women and their young children. We had brief glimpses, as we passed by on trucks to our working sites, of young girls chopping wood for their fires; first of the supplies dropped by parachute were used to help them

 Food supplies improved, but little else happened for some days and because General Macarthur wanted to have the official surrender ceremony in Tokyo Bay, there was a two-week standstill before Lord Mountbatten, then in Singapore, could officially take control.

A County class cruiser, *HMS Cumberland,* arrived at Batavia and all the naval ratings in the camp were taken down to the docks for a visit. When we arrived at the quayside, there were Royal Marines with automatic weapons guarding the ship and in the circumstances very serious about the matter. So accustomed were we to the Japanese guards and their mediocre arms, the equipment on view was a real fillip to we war-news starved prisoners. Naturally, we got a very sympathetic welcome in the respective messes aboard the cruiser, and returned to the camp with wonderful issues of the London Illustrated News and the like, with photographs of such things as jet-propelled planes to feed our ignorance of the outside world. There was the chance to write the first letters home on whatever scraps of paper we could find, and seemingly from nowhere press photographers appeared.

It was a situation of semi-truce. In the euphoria and boredom of the waiting for something to happen, I boldly became part of a group who wanted a night 'on the town'. Dressed in our best we followed what seemed to be a well-worn route to a place in the wire where one could get through unobserved. To some it was a repeat performance and I followed the leaders into town. We arrived in a drinking place filled with Japanese officers and a multitude of what must have been European prostitutes. Nobody paid much attention to us and from some unknown source we were drinking firewater! I do remember tripping over a stay-wire of a transmission line pole and very painfully hurting one of my knees.

The party split up with part making a return to camp and the others off to other regions, despite being warned by a pedestrian that it was dangerous to do so. I was in the returning party, walking with difficulty and not very sober. As we were going along a wide and brightly lit street alongside a canal, or large storm water drain, a collection of Indonesians armed with parangs and standing on a bridge crossing the water came to intercept us in an unfriendly manner. Things looked very bad until one of the Malay fluent members of our party made clear that we were not Hollanders but British, and this changed their attitude. With the war over, the return of Dutch rule was not wanted.

My sore knee gave me pain for several succeeding weeks, and I philosophised how all that the time as a prisoner could have been nullified in one moment at that bridge.

**9.0 THE RETURN HOME - repatriation.**

Each Service looked after its own members for evacuation, and the day eventually arrived when we - the RN contingent - went aboard an LCM (Landing Craft Mechanised) for our voyage to Singapore. The craft had bunks that we found very comfortable, and for a day and a night, we happily fed on bully beef on the first stage of our way home. On our arrival at Keppel Harbour sometime before noon, we awaited the arrival of the Supreme Commander, Lord Mountbatten himself.

At the time of the Jupiter sinking, he was then a destroyer flotilla captain. We did not wait long in the sun before he made an appearance with Lady Mountbatten and promptly ordered everyone into the shade of a warehouse shed. Asked to form a circle around the box on which he stood to address us, and Lady Mountbatten urging us to get closer to the box, whilst we were a bit strange about the proceedings. Irrespective of the war ending as it did, he said he would still have been in Singapore as his invasion fleet was on its way to occupy the island. Then occurred an episode, unbelievable at the time, and which many years later I realised was the result of excellent staff work. He and Lady Mountbatten went around the circle, shaking hands, and personally welcoming each man back from captivity. In the course of doing so and when they were about on the opposite side to me, Lady Mountbatten paused and said to a rating, "I know you; you were on my husband's ship the *Kelly*". Moreover, the rating agreed with her that he had been! It made a tremendous impression on us; rational thinking would say that after the several years of her war it was not possible to remember such a trivial item. Alternatively, perhaps it was just possible.

That the Allies would have been in Singapore in any case was evident by the enormous piling of war equipment at the docks. The fleet carrying all this equipment had to off-load willy-nilly so that they could move on, and an assortment of vehicles were piled many layers deep as though it was a scrap yard.

We stayed a few days in a hotel at Singapore whilst being provided with basic clothing such as footwear and underwear. A panel of military men interrogated each prisoner with regard to atrocities personally endured, or witnessed, and knowledge of any subversive action by allied prisoners. I was too intent on my immediate future to make any worthwhile statement and duly received my card of clearance. Interestingly, one member of our party returned from a visit into town with studio photographs of me taken before the Japanese occupation nearly four years previously. They had been lying in the Chinese proprietor's shop since then, until recognised by chance by a fellow prisoner, were collected free of charge and presented to me. The chance of this happening must be very low indeed.



**Back row - Carl is third from the left**

**Taken in Colombo en route from Singapore to Liverpool aboard the MV Cilicia**

**Oct 1945**

We subsequently boarded the *MV Cilicia* bound for Colombo, where we were kitted out with basic uniform, for which we personally had to pay. According to regulations, having lost everything in action is not the fault of the Royal Navy; and then it was full speed for Liverpool. The ship was equipped in the latest fashion for troop carrying with multiple level bunks, so once more we were in luxury. Besides the ex-prisoners, there were many civilians and their families returning from captivity and for the very young children in particular, we had a special feeling. In passing, I should mention that the ship's crew had been warned against our acquired thieving habits; and without trying, I left the ship with three very large tins of sliced pineapple, and half of a KPM (the pre-war Dutch Steamship line) tablecloth to take home to Mother; though where the tablecloth could have come from baffles my imagination!

Just before entering the Suez Canal, I had another attack of malaria, and caught only a fleeting glimpse through the hospital porthole, of the moonlit desert passing silently by. As the only patient and so that the staff were completely free again, I was discharged as soon as possible. We sailed into Liverpool on what seemed to be a warm autumn day and caught the train to Carlisle, where to my great discomfort; there was a wait of three hours from two o’clock in the morning for the train to Scotland. The night was cold and I shivered in my navy overcoat.

When eventually, I was on my way home, I was somewhat confused and recall getting the guard to check on a sound under the compartment seat, which transpired to be merely from the steam heating, which stopped with the turn of a valve. He was very tolerant and clearly realised that I was not quite all right in health, especially with my yellow complexion caused by the mepacrine tablets taken for my malaria attack. Arriving at Hawick station early in the morning, my father met me and had a taxi waiting for the short ride home.

Before being demobilized some six months later, with an assessed pensionable disability of 30%, I spent happy times at naval hospitals in Devonport and Newton Abbot (both in Devon), and then at Sherborne in Dorset. Whilst at Newton Abbot, the Sunday evening routine was to go down to a musical concert on the pier at Torquay. The memorable thing at Sherborne was walking on centuries old turf around the old abbey that had a ‘700’ date on one of its stones.



**Newton Abbot Naval Hospital – 1946**

**Back row left – Gordon Evans and centre – Carl Patterson**

**Front row sitting – Frank Platt**

Frank Platt was with me at Newton Abbot and after de-mob, I went over with him and a group of his friends, to the Isle of Man for the TT races. Within two years, he died from tuberculosis.

At Sherborne I made a good friend of Gordon Evans from Ebbw Vale, who was a Royal Marine, and visited him during my 1969 trip to the UK; he too later died from war-induced disease.

\* *Carl corresponded with Gordon for many years after he had emigrated to Africa, having married his South African wife, Lolita Plumb, in Hawick.*



**Carl outside Navy Hospital Newton Abbot with Frank Platt**

**Feb 1946**



**Portrait taken whilst in Newton Abbot**

*\* In sorting through Dad’s paperwork after his death, I found an email he had sent to Margaret Martin at the FEPOW Club, regarding Frank Platt.*

*Although Frank Platt (ERA3C), Carl Patterson (ERA4C) and Harold ‘Chiefy’ Perryer (CERA) served on HMS Jupiter and were captured and held in the Jaarmarkt Camp in Surabaya, they were parted when Carl was shipped to the Haruku Camp on Ambon Island.*

*Carl wrote,*

*‘Frank Platt and Chiefy Perryer did not go directly to Haruku, as their first stop of call was at Amahei on Ambon Island, where their party had to construct a fighter airfield. This by all accounts was a walk in the park as the airfield was mostly sand-based. When completed, a contingent of prisoners was transferred to Haruku, where, because of the high death rate, there was lots of space for replacements.*

*Platt and Perryer were among those replacements and among other things, came face-to-face with the Camp Commander, Gunso Mori, in his empire. A very rude surprise! Frank in some way wangled a position as odd job man and did not go on outside working parties. I cannot remember ever being on the same working party as Chiefy, but then I was much more experienced and skilled at avoiding, for the most part, the bad ones. My stay at Haruku was around 15-18 months and the Amahei people probably arrived during the last six months.’*

*Chiefy’ Perryer died in Haruku Camp and after Dad had his memories published, Chiefy’s niece in the UK contacted Dad by telephone to hear from him whatever he knew of her uncle. I recall Dad telling me that she was so pleased to have spoken with him, because reading in black and white about Chiefy, paled by comparison with her hearing his firsthand account. This conversation had enabled her to feel a stronger and more personal connection to her uncle.*

*In reading Carl’s memoir, you will be aware that the airfield being built at Haruku was using coral blasted out of the seashore reefs, which was very different from moving sand. The coral was sharp and manually crushed by the prisoners, resulting in numerous cuts, which led to the men suffering from tropical ulcers. Many were without footwear, which occasioned Dad severely damaging the nerves in the soles of his feet and throughout his life, suffered intense pain whenever he went barefoot and happened to stand on any very small pebbles*

**10.0 MUSINGS ON THE PAST**

During the several years whilst these memories were being put to paper at random opportunity, with many subsequent alterations and corrections, and as additional detail was included, I have found my prejudices and - no doubt – my bitterness, changing. As other oddments of memory return, this account will get longer, but in my writings so far, with the always present striving to give a true report, the causes and reasons for events have become more prominent in my thinking.

The exigencies of war, through no direct ill will of those in authority, bear most heavily on the lower ranks of people and of service members in particular. This is true of all nations in all wars. Thus, for a balanced assessment of what could be 'wrong things' the inadvertent must be divorced from the intentional. The moral profile of all peoples is the same no matter what kind of sampling is used, therefore we always have the same proportion of sadism present; only the arithmetical size of the effect is different.

I now view the situation at Haruku as an order from central authority, which could not be challenged by the troops on the ground. No doubt, a date for completion had been issued, which in practice, could not possibly be achieved, and until this directive was altered, Gunso Mori had no alternative but to drive the prisoners.

Because of this consideration, my unthinking repulsion of all things Japanese over the succeeding years, since the end of WW2, has, during my writing, relaxed to a very large degree. This of course is my own personal summing-up. Perhaps if I had witnessed some of the extreme atrocities reported in other camps and ships, my opinion could well be quite different. My account is largely of hardships endured because of indifference and the lack of control to effect improvement and although there were some bullyboys over whom, at the end of the war, I would have been quite happy, in retribution, to bend some bamboo over their heads.

As cousin Colin and his wife Helen have recently remarked after their several years stay in Japan, the people living there now are, as were their parents, quite ignorant of the war record of the Japanese Army, as is known in Western countries. There can be no change in the course of history, so let the passing of time do the healing.

**Glossary of Japanese words**

Lakas Hurry - A word we heard all and every day on the airstrip

Chunkel A hoe-type digging implement

Makan Food

Kiotsike Come to attention on parade

Yasume ‘At ease’, rest period

Roko Cigarette

Tenko On parade

Benjo Toilet

Bengo Number – when on parade

Tanga The ubiquitous sack and bamboo pole transporter

Tida apa “never mind”

Tida ada “haven’t got”

**Patterson family c1940**

**L to r - James, Maxwell, Gladys, Carl and Charlotte**

