

## Dad's War Memories

My father, Tracey George Clifford Sinclair, volunteered for the armed forces at the outbreak of World War II when I was still an infant. In a letter to me dated 13<sup>th</sup> March 1966, he gave me details of his military career:

“Regards my military career, here it is for what it is worth. I volunteered for service in the Indian Army through the European Association, went to Bangalore OTC and was posted to the 2/10<sup>th</sup> Punjab Regiment at Meerut and subsequently seconded to the 13<sup>th</sup> Auxiliary Pioneer Battalion at Camtee, Poona. My designation was Company Commander and my rank at the end of the war, was that of Captain, Emergency Commission No. 3492. So much for that!”

Dad opted for the Indian Army rather than the British Army, as being European, he could be offered a higher rank. He did want to join the British Gurkha Regiment as he spoke Nepali fluently, but since he was also fluent in Punjabi, he was chosen for the Punjab Regiment, as there was already a British Officer candidate, Desmond Doig, who besides English, spoke only Nepali, so he was selected for the Gurkha regiment in preference to Dad.

When he was finally posted to Singapore, he stayed at the Raffle's Hotel which was probably commandeered by the Army to accommodate serving British officers, but when Singapore fell to the Japanese invasion forces in February 1942 which led to the capture of 80,000 British, Indian and Australian troops, he was transferred to Changi Prison in Singapore, which was quite a transition from the comfort of Raffles hotel!

Dad did relate a little story about one of the British officers in the hotel, who wanted to take his golf clubs with him. The arresting Japanese officer, who they nicknamed “Smokey Joe” said, “But Sir – you can't play golf there!”

After a time in Changi, prisoners were transported to various Japanese prison camps, mainly in Korea. Dad related that the ship they were being transported on had several floors of crude wooden planks which had large cracks between the joins, and when the one above was being swabbed (several of the prisoners were suffering from diarrhoea) drips of water mixed with human excrement fell on the prisoners below, and even on the small bowl of rice they were given to eat. Dad said, they were all so hungry, that they simply flicked away the bits of offending material and continued to scoff their meal!

Dad described life at the Jinsen POW Camp in Chosen, Korea as dull and uninteresting. The Japanese prison guards seemed bored and disinterested with their charges. Security was rather lax, as they were surrounded by jungle and if one did make a bid for freedom, you would usually perish in the inhospitable forest. The prisoners in their ragged clothing, usually spent their time foraging around for anything edible to eat. Dad said he was suffering from tapeworm, and this was steadily and surely devouring any sustenance he was given to eat – usually a small bowl of rice with perhaps a few bits of vegetable or fish (mostly heads and tails) floating in a thin soup. Scrounging around the campsite, Dad said he found a coconut that had fallen from a tree, and breaking this open, he

scooped out the flesh and gobbled this up. Miraculously, he passed the tapeworm the next day. If he hadn't, he believed he would have surely starved to death.

Discipline in the camp was largely lacking, but sometimes, those reserved for punishment were lined up, and the short Japanese Camp Commandant, with his Samurai sword trailing on the ground, would slap the offending prisoners on their faces. When it came to a tall Englishman, the officer's orderly placed a small stool in front, so the officer could climb up to gain enough height to slap his face.

The one traumatic incident my Dad suffered was one day, two bored prison guards took hold of my father and tied his hands behind his back. They led him to a ditch just outside the camp and told him to kneel in front of it. He heard a sword being unsheathed, and felt the edge tap the back of his neck – once, twice – my Dad had visions of his decapitated head lying in the filthy ditch below – but then he heard the sound of the sword being returned to its scabbard, laughter from the Japanese guards, and the bonds on his hands were cut.

Dad kept a sort of diary on a roll of toilet paper which he scribbled on when going to the toilet. He had to keep this carefully concealed, and somehow he managed to do this.

There was no news about the progress of the War, but towards the end of his term, he noticed the prison guards looked more despondent, and security was even more lax. Then one day, the officers were summoned by the Camp Commandant and told that the War was now at an end. They were invited to a small celebration by the Camp Commandant to show there were no hard-feelings, and given Saki to drink. They were even some geisha girls in attendance!

They were transported by the USS Noble to a South-East Asian port, and while waiting to be sent back home (I'm not sure where all the prisoners were awaiting repatriation), the British authorities kept assuring the former POWs with – "We'll soon have you home chaps," but they waited and waited in vain, while entertainers like Vera Lynne were sent out to amuse them. It was at a local bar that Dad met two American Air Force pilots. When he told them of these delays, one of them said "My buddy is flying to Calcutta tomorrow. He can take you back home." So now, outfitted by the Americans in a smart flying jacket, Dad was flown to Calcutta and arrived back home in Darjeeling in August 1945, unannounced and far in advance of his fellow POWs. He did bring back some trophies with him – a Japanese Samurai sword, and I remember he gave me (a six-year-old) a Japanese painted bottle.

James Sinclair 12<sup>th</sup> May 2014.



Written on back of photograph in Dad's handwriting:

Lt. James, Lt. Robinson, Self, Lt. Brake, Lt. Shaw, Capt. Vining, Capt. Raund, Capt. Hayden, Lt. Stevens, Capt. Mackay. Xmas 1943 Jinsen POW Camp, Chosen.



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收容所 Camp	朝鮮 昭和 17年 9 月 25 日	番 號 No.	朝本 129 13
姓 名 Name	Sinclair, Tracey George. シンプレア トレイジイ ジョージ	生年月日 Date of Birth	20th June, 1913.
國 籍 Nationality	英	所屬部隊 Unit	No. E.C. 3492. 13th Auxiliary Pioneer Battalion.
階級身分 Rank	Captain (Army). 陸軍大尉 2/WEVT	捕獲年月日 Date of Capture	昭和 17 年 2 月 15 日
捕獲場所 Place of Capture	Singapore City. シンガポール 市	父ノ名 Father's Name	
本籍地 Place of Origin	Darjeeling, India.	母ノ名 Mother's Name	
(Fiance) 通報先 Destination of Report	Miss Tweedie, Glendaruel Lodge, Lopchu P.O. Darjeeling, India. (Nth. Bengal).	職 業 Occupation	系、栽培 (十年間即チ支那人)
		特記事項 Remarks	

朝鮮俘虜收容所用箋

From: T.G. Sinclair  
British  
Captain  
CHOSEN P.O.W. CAMP.

To: Mrs. C.P. Finney  
4 Beech-wood Cottage  
Darjeeling,  
INDIA.  
23rd November 1944.

Dear Mama,

Another three months have dragged by and I am permitted to write you these few lines and trust they will reach you safely and find you all fit. This is my third letter to you. I wonder if you have received the others yet? I have received no mail so far and I almost feel that God himself has forgotten me. However I am constantly thinking of you all. How are the children keeping? I do hope they are all well and getting on with their studies. I feel quite old when I think what big boys and girls they are now. Give them a big kiss from me dear and get them to write and enclose a few snaps for me. I am longing to see them again.

There is no news I can give you from here, except that I'm well. Every day is like the previous. One just lives and that's about all. However I hope to see you all again.

Will have to close now. Please remember me to all friends. With love and best wishes to self and the children for Xmas and the New Year.

yours affectionately,

*Tracy*



USS Noble Sep 16 1945