

THE ILL-FATED "F" FORCE - C.H.MOORE 1963

Lieutenant Clive Henry Moore QX6466 2/26 Battalion

Clive Henry Moore was born in Mount Morgan, Queensland on 30 January 1917. He enlisted in the A.I.F. 28 November 1940 (it is assumed he was a member of the Militia prior to that date).

He was captured in Singapore on 15 February 1942. In April 1943 he went to Thailand as one of the 7,000 POWs who formed the group known as "F" Force. As a POW he was in the dreadful POW camps near the border with Burma. He was in Shimo and Kami Songkurai Camps. His story "The Ill- Fated "F" Force", which was written from the diary he maintained, is on following pages.

It is well known that "F" Force comprised 3,400 British and 3,600 Australian POWs. Based on the casualty figures, this Force overall suffered more than any other. About 3,000 of them died in Thailand.

In 2008 this story was given to me by Neville Merryman who was a Sapper in the 2/10 Field Company and who had been in the same camps as Clive Moore. I am pleased to publish this account which goes part of the way in illustrating the conditions suffered by "F" Force.

Lt Col Peter Winstanley OAM RFD .JP March 2009 Typed by Mrs. Jean Hartz August 2009

FORWARD

This is a story written from original diaries kept by me whilst a Prisoner of War of the Japanese. The story of "F" Force naturally is told from the information gathered together from the actual areas that I covered during the period, and although the Force was scattered throughout several camps on the Railway, the conditions in the main can be applied to any one of the Camps. In some instances there may have been individual cases of more brutality or harsher treatment, but overall this story is written to simply tell of the general hardship, suffering and plight of all those who were members of the "Ill-Fated "F" Force".

WHAT IS "F" FORCE?

You will wonder how the name of "F" Force originated and what it stands for, well it was simply brought into being in this manner.

As the Japs commenced to call for work parties and indicated the move of large parties of them out of the Changi area and away from our local control, it was decided by our own Camp Administration that for the purposes of maintaining accurate records of all Ps.O.W. that once a group was moved off the Island of

Singapore, it would be a self-contained group with a letter of the alphabet as its designation, commencing with the letter "A" for the first party to move and so on until the A.I.F. became split up into many groups scattered far and wide and disposed as follows: -

| | | |
|---------|------|------------------|
| A Force | 3000 | Burma |
| B Force | 1487 | Borneo |
| C Force | 551 | Japan |
| D Force | 2218 | Eastern Thailand |
| E Force | 500 | Borneo |

And so "F" Force of 7,000 came into being as the next group to be moved away.

PART 1

Early P.O.W. Days

It is just 20 years ago last April (1943) since orders were first received to prepare for a force of 7,000 Prisoners of War to be moved by train to another area; and as one looked back over the past fourteen months since that eventful day of the 15th February 1942, when we became Prisoners of War after the calamitous fall of Singapore, I thought of the trials and tribulations we had all been through to this stage; little dreaming, how easy it had been compared to what lay ahead for those unfortunate enough to be selected to go away with "F" Force.

There had been Adam Park Road Camp from where work parties had been used to build a road through the Singapore Golf Links and erect a shrine to the glorious Japanese dead (as we were told), across the little bridge at the end of the road. Other work parties had to face the daily grind of breaking stones at Hindhede's quarry along Bukit Timah Road and do the crushing this had been back-breaking work for the troops and became harder as the rations began to taper off. However, the monotony was broken occasionally as small parties began to sneak off to raid the Pineapple Farm to supplement the diet, only to face a bashing as they were caught from time to time, until finally it was forbidden to have a pineapple in the haversack or in the camp precinct as reprisals were threatened against our normal food supplies to the camp.

Then there was the building of the Road and Shrine on Bukit Timah Hill, where men worked like coolies cutting away the steep embankments with primitive chunkels (hoes) and had to carry all the dirt away in little shallow native baskets, until finally the road was built and surfaced leading up to the summit of the Hill, where a giant totem like pole was erected as a Shrine to the Japanese dead. But once again there was a humorous side as the boys bored holes at the base of the pole before erecting it, and filled them with various types of bugs, white ants etc., which they had collected for several days at their camps and kept in bottles. Not to be outdone – the boys mixing the cement for the base of the structure certainly were known to have used more than normal water to add to the mixture

After a brief visit back to Changi it was out to work parties again, this time to River Valley Road and Havelock Road Camps where parties had many varied jobs to do, including working in the Go-Downs (warehouses), shifting foodstuffs, merchandise and radio equipment, whilst others went to work on the wharves loading ships for Japan with booty and the spoils of War. It was here that I spent some of the best months of captivity, as together with a Sergeant who was in charge of stores for the Cookhouse and his offsider, Clarrie, I was in charge of the Secret News Service and was fortunate enough to be able to listen to a Secret Radio every night between 10 p.m. and daylight to all broadcasts from the BBC and ABC. Our set was ingeniously concealed under a false bottom of a rice flour bin inside the store room located in the centre of the open Cookhouse. Around the outside walls of the room we had constructed all the work benches for the Cooks who worked through the night preparing Doovers (rice patties, etc.) for the troops to take out on the working parties next day. Whilst they were preparing these, they also acted as our cockatoos against any approach by the Japanese Guards, which gave us enough time to push the set back into the bin, close the sliding panel and kick a chock under one end and it was as if it was a normal box and the sliding panel could not be opened.

Each afternoon I would relay to the Hut Commanders the daily news service, which had all been memorized, and they in turn would have their groups to relay it to, so that eventually everyone had some idea of what was happening in the outside world and it was a great morale booster.

Clarrie did a great job in servicing and maintaining the set, as it was necessary from time to time to replace certain parts, and to obtain these, he would first of all during the day make his selection from the stock being held in one of the Go-Downs (warehouses) just outside the perimeter where he was working for the Japs and hide it near the top of the roof: after dark he would sneak outside the perimeter wire, dodge the Sikh Guards on their patrol, climb up to the roof and put his hand through and bring back the wanted parts; it was a dangerous mission and a job well done, as it helped to keep the camp happy and in good spirits to have the daily service.

"F" FORCE IS FORMED

After contracting a badly infected ear, I was sent back to Changi for specialist treatment, and whilst back there the word was received on the 8 April 1943, that the force of 7,000 P's.O.W. was to be moved. The orders issued by the Japanese Camp Administration Headquarters to our administration were as follows: -

1. The reason for the move was that the food situation in Singapore was difficult and would be far better in the new place.
2. This would not be a working party
3. As there were not 7,000 fit combatants left in Changi at this stage – 30% of the party were to be men unfit to march or work. The unfit men would have a better chance of recovery with good food in a pleasant hill place with good facilities for recreation.

4. There would be no marching except for a short distance from the train to a nearby Camp, and transport would be provided for baggage, and men unfit to march.
5. Bands were to be taken
6. All tools and cooking gear and an engine and gear for electric light were to be taken
7. Gramophones, blankets, clothing and mosquito nets would be issued at the new Camps.
8. A good canteen would be available in each Camp after three weeks. Canteen supplies for the first three weeks were to be bought with the Prisoners' money before leaving Singapore.
9. The Party would include a medical party of about 350, with equipment for a central hospital of 400 patients and medical supplies for three months.

How easily were we to be misled... and how eager were we to grasp at anything that augured well for the future in our dilemma. If we had only known!! As usual many Changi rumours began to circulate as to our destination, but most persistent of these seemed to point to our making for Thailand area. By April 13, we knew that the composition of the Force was to be made up of 3600 A.I.F., and 3400 English Troops, movement was to be made in 12 train-loads from Singapore and to move to seven different camps of 1,000 men to each.

The period of 13-21 April was a busy one, as each Unit selected its personnel and prepared its Nominal Rolls; there was the usual spate of needles (how fortunate we were that we had these as events turned out), there were two Cholera, two Anti-Test., Vaccination for Smallpox, Dysentery tests, Malaria tests for everyone. The plan of our A.I.F. Command was to try and keep intact Unit Groups as far as possible for record purposes and better comradeship and morale amongst the Troops themselves; and at all times to try and have Unit Officers in control of their own men, which was a good policy. My own Battalion finally started off with 34 Officers and 585 other ranks.

A NIGHTMARE TRIP

Trainloads were made up of some 600 personnel with all their baggage and were numbered Trains 1 – 12, the Group I had been allotted to was Train No.3. We left Singapore on 21 April 1943, in a rice train consisting of 23 steel wagons (similar to our own closed in goods wagons) and 27 men were cooped up in each wagon with only the door in the middle of each side as ventilation. This was to be our home for the next three days and three nights, there was no sanitary facilities and no room to lie down and sleep during the nightmare trip. The train stopped only twice a day for food which consisted of rice and onions boiled in water. The heat was sweltering during the day, as this was a tropical climate and became oppressive in the closed in steel wagons. The most humorous side of the whole trip was the daily halt and then the whistle blast from the Guards which was the signal for 600 men to leap from the train as one to complete their daily toilet arrangements, and no one was the least concerned at the staring native population scattered alongside the railway line.

After crossing the border from Malaya into Thailand we continued on until No.3. Train eventually arrived at a little village called Banpong near Bangkok, at 7 a.m. on the morning of 24 April 1943 and it was here that we received our first setback.

PREPARING FOR A MARCH

As each trainload of 600 men arrived at Banpong, they were informed to their astonishment that a march of several days was to be carried out by all men including the 30% unfit. All kit that men and Officers could not carry was to be dumped at Banpong. This amounted to the equivalent of about fifteen truckloads of stores and baggage.

Next came the horror word – “SEARCHO!!” – an immediate search of all Prisoners’ belongings were to be carried out by the Japanese KEMPI (Military Police). We were made to line up inside the huts and lay out all the kit and baggage we had with us onto our groundsheets, and then file past the KEMPI guards at the door and be searched on our way out. This put me in a dilemma at the time as I had in my kit two of my personal Diaries that I had completed to this stage, so quickly assessing that it was probably a search for any means of escape such as maps, compasses, ammunition (some of which was discovered in one prisoner’s kit) or secret radio sets, and knowing from previous searches that the Jap only looked for what he was told to look for, I took the risk and left my Diaries sitting on top of my other gear and hoped they would be overlooked. It was a great relief to come back into the hut and find them intact, tossed amongst the clothing.

It was here at Banpong that we had the first taste of things to follow as quite a bit of hurry up was introduced by our Korean Guards and bashings started spasmodically, and in particular the first inkling of future events as far as one Guard called Toyama was concerned, began to show when he savagely bashed one of our Officers across the back with a steel shafted golf club.

However, one thing we were thankful for was we had two days grace before we commenced the march, and as each train load behind us started to arrive, we were able to inform them of what was in store for the future. On leaving Changi my personal batman during the War, Jack, had been classed medically unfit due to Tinea of the feet, and was quite upset that he could not remain with us for the trip, and so it was with great surprise that I spotted him arriving with a later Train Group at Banpong and he informed me he had tossed the M.O. to be classed among the 30% unfit as B.Class and so try to catch up with us. Little was I to know when I said goodbye to him as our Group left next day, that we would never meet again. Although he was always one day behind me on the march, he never caught up. With the complaint of Tinea becoming more aggravated on the march he was forced to drop out with others too sick to keep up and was left behind at one of the Staging Camps and later died on 13 September 1943, suffering from Dysentery/Beri-Beri/Malaria, and was buried at Kanburi only 50 kilometres from Banpong.

Jack displayed the staunchest loyalty and service to me from the time of joining the Unit until his death and will never be forgotten.

VALE JACK.....GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

Tomorrow.....we march on ANZAC Day.

THE MARCH AND MEDICAL PROBLEMS

It was now ANZAC Day 1943, as we rested at Banpong and I gave this message for future ANZAC Day thoughts.....

As you know ... this is the day we honour those who gave their lives in three Wars, and naturally our thoughts go back to the heroic deeds and actions of the men who made the name of ANZAC a byword in the Annals of History, and to those who in later years carried on the traditions of their forefathers in other Wars...

TO THESE WE PAY HOMAGE

In doing this let us think not only of those who gave their lives on the field of battle, but spare a thought for the many thousands of Prisoners of War from many theatres of war, who died through sickness, disease, brutality and hardship ... for they, too, gave their lives in the cause of Freedom that we may LIVE...

And so it is, with this in mind, that I turn my thoughts back to that ANZAC Day, 20 years ago, to the little village in Thailand of Banpong, as it was from here on the night of 25 April 1943, that we commenced an epic march into the heart of the jungle to construct a Railway ... to become known as the 'Railway of Death'... for our Japanese captors. As we left Banpong our thoughts turned back to what the day stood for 'ANZAC' and we wondered what was to become of us, the march will live forever in the memories of those who returned.

THE MARCH BEGINS

The march in fact was one of the 300 kilometres (about 200 miles), in fifteen stages and lasted two and a half weeks. Marching was done at night along a rough jungle track (except for the first two stages), and as torches had been taken away from all P's.O.W. during the search at Banpong, control by Officers and N.C.O's was difficult, or impossible.

After the first stage, the unfit men who were at first fairly fit but rapidly themselves became ill and exhausted as they had to help and even carry the growing numbers of men who were not able to walk unaided.

At times one thought it was beyond our endurance to carry on, but somehow the spirit of ANZAC and comradeship seemed always to the fore and got us through.

Conditions at the staging camps were appalling, there was no overhead cover provided, except for a few tents for 100 men at ONE camp only. The weather was

most variable and the rainy monsoonal season started while the march was in progress. Food supplies were generally poor and in many camps consisted of rice only, whilst at many halts during the night we were issued only with a cup of Hot Water to drink. Water was always short at the staging camps and at Kanburi our second stop... 50 kilometres from Banpong, we had to buy, with what little money we had left, drinking water from a privately owned well.

No proper arrangements existed for retaining sick at any of these camps, and men who were absolutely unfit to march, owing to disease and weakness, were beaten and driven from camp to camp. Officers, including Medical Officers, who begged and pleaded for sick men to be left behind, were themselves beaten at many camps.

In one particular case a Japanese Medical Lieutenant ordered the Jap Corporal in charge of Tasho Camp to leave thirty-six men behind as they were too ill to move. The Corporal refused to obey this order, although it was repeated in writing. A British Major (Interpreter) together with an A.I.F. Medical Major were severely beaten when they strongly protested, and as a matter of fact a bone in the doctor's hand was broken. Of these sick men who were compelled to march, nearly all died over the next few months, including an A.I.F. Chaplain who died at the next camp. The Japanese Medical Officer had particularly stressed that the Chaplain should not march as he was an elderly man with a weak heart and already was at the end of his tether.

AND STILL WE MARCH ON.....

The march was carried out at night usually from 1900 hours (7p.m.) to 0700 hours (7 a.m.) next morning and the average march was about 20 miles. The troops had to perform camp duties on arrival, get their meals and wash during the day so had very little rest before they were on the move again.

By 7 May, after passing through such camps as Taro, Kanburi, Oneya, Wampo, Tasho ("D" Force Base Camp), Tonshan, Kinsaiyoke, and Wopin after ten nights of marching and having covered 205 kilometres (approximately 130 miles) we arrived at what was known as the 'HITLER' Camp, Prangkari; where we were to have a night's rest, at last, again. Here is the actual extract from my Diary for that day.

7 May 1943

Arrived at Prangkari Camp 205 kilometres from our start, feeling very tired after a 23 kilometre march through the night from Wopin. Left Wopin at 1930 hours 6 May and after going about 8 kilometres it rained like hell, so the column halted for 1 ½ hours and lit fires. It was pitch black and one couldn't see a yard in front of him, so it was a nightmare of a march for the next 4 kilometres to our halfway stop which we reached at 0100 hours (1 a.m.) this was Hindatong Camp and a cup of hot water was supplied to each man. We rested 3 hours and lit more fires to dry out our clothing and keep warm.

Left Hindatong at 0430 hours for final 11 kilometre march and arrived at Prangkari at 0830 hours (8:30 a.m.). No.2 Train were still here which means a 36 hour stopover, our fourth on the trip so we are all looking forward to a good night's rest again. The Camp guards here are very officious and do quite a lot of bashing if you are not quick off the mark. Three meals a day for the first time on a trip – rice and coloured water – worst to date. No.2. Train group left at 1800 for the next stage.

While at Prangkari a Dutch Medical Officer whom I had met in Changi visited us, as he is stationed at this camp, and he told us some of the conditions they were experiencing here.

That week he performed an amputation of an arm using a Jap Carpenter's saw for the last part of the operation as that was all that he had available to complete the job. He had only 28 M & B Tablets left for Dysentery cases in a camp of over 500 men, but he said the food had improved slightly over the past month. On 9 May we left for Takanoon Camp and I wrote as follows in my Diary: -

We are now on our way towards the Three Pagoda Pass into Burma which is about 92 kilometres from here. The first part of tonight's trip is probably the most interesting we have done so far, as we are passing over mountains and below us there is the Kwei Noi River winding through the valley whilst in the distance there are high and precipitous mountains standing out in the Twilight.

We arrived at Takanoon and here there were elephants hauling logs to the bridge being built close by, and it was a strange sight to us to see these monsters working in their natural surroundings and every now and again emitting their shrill trumpeting, a sound that was all so foreign to us at this stage, but became familiar to us later on.

From Takanoon we went to Tamerompat – thence on to Konkoita without a night's rest and everyone was feeling very tired and fatigued as we had now covered 267 kilometres (approximately 170 miles) and been on the march for over two weeks. It was now 11 May and as we arrived at Knokoita everyone just flopped down to sleep. Here No.1 and No.2 parties were camped under command of an A.I.F. Lieutenant Colonel. There are no roofs on the huts which are constructed of bamboo, and the Burmese coolies are still working on the Attap Roofs.

My Diary Reads:-

11 May 1943

We are unable to buy any goods here and the food is rice and onion stew. Once again we are not to rest but must march again tonight to another camp about 22 kilometres away. There seems no end to this march and this will be our fourth night on the road with no sleep, it is colossal and must go down as one of the epic marches of the A.I.F. as we have covered 170 miles in 17 days with only 4 night's sleep and carrying all our belongings and only eating rice twice a day. At times we have carried sick on a stretcher all night and carried packs belonging to men with

Dysentery as well as helping them to struggle on. The spirit of the A.I.F. has been more than up-held on the march.

On the 12 May we arrived at another newly constructed camp after a march of 27 kilometres and the name of this camp is Shimo Nieki; everyone was overjoyed to hear that there would be at least another 48 hours rest. Changi guards are camped here and their attitude was slightly better towards us than at the last few camps. It was here that we learnt of Cholera infection existing amongst the natives up the River where there had been about 15 deaths reported; as a result, all water had to be boiled before drinking. We have had quite a number of cases of Dysentery during the trip but after starting to march 18 days ago with 600 men and marching 180 miles we are still 524 men and they are to link up with us to make up a party of 1,000 men to move on the 15th may to our final destination about 20 kilometres away. Meals are better here and we again came under the Jap Changi Administration Guards who are apparently going forward to our Camp with us.

Finally the day for our final march came and here is what I recorded in my Diary:-

15 May 1943

Companies fell in at 0300 hours (3 a.m.) ready for the final march to our permanent camp which is supposed to be 10 kilometres. We are in two parties of 500, the first under a Major of the 2/26 Battalion and the second under a Captain from the same Unit. The march was quite the easiest of the whole journey and we reached the camp at 0830 hours (8:30 a.m.). Well it was disillusionment as none of the huts have roofs on and we have been packed into 10 to a cubicle size 12 ft x 10 ft, it is like living in a cattle pen. The huts are all bamboo with ridgy bamboo floors to sleep on. It rained all afternoon and everyone was wet through with no shelter. The afternoon was spent preparing the huts for occupation, whilst we had only two meals for the day. Everyone is pleased the journey is over and we covered approximately 200 miles with full packs. The water problem is rather sticky as there is only a small creek through the camp for all purposes and as there is to be about 2,500 men here it may be a bit grim at times. The name of the camp is Shimo Sonkrai meaning lower Sonkrai.

THE MEDICAL PROBLEM

Such medical supplies as had been hastily selected at Banpong and carried by hand with the marching parties were rapidly exhausted and the march continued with no medications at all.

Dysentery and Diarrhoea broke out and exhaustion in all parties was general. Ulcerated feet occurred in large numbers due to sick men with blistered feet being forced to march on, day after day. At Konkoita camp the marching parties were quartered in the same camp as the Thai Labour Corps (coolies) who were suffering from Cholera. The infection was picked up by each of the columns marching Prisoners.

On 15 May, Cholera broke out at Shimo Neiki where we had passed through only a few days before, and Lt. Col. Harris (Commander of all P's.O.W.) immediately reported to Lt. Col. Banno (Jap Commander) and requested that movement should cease until the outbreak was under control, and that Konkoita Camp should at all costs NOT be used for further parties.

Unfortunately Lt. Col. Banno did not comply with the request and as a result Cholera was spread into all the other five camps occupied by the Force.

Only a very small quantity of medical stores at Banpong were later brought up and over three-quarters of it still remained there when the Force returned in December. The I.J.A. (Imperial Japanese Army) were unable at this time to produce any medical supplies whatever, except Cholera vaccine and some Quinine. As a result of the camps having no roofing on the huts when the parties arrived, and as the monsoonal wet season had commenced and rain fell daily the men were subjected to being continually wet through and consequently deaths from Pneumonia were numerous. In spite of the existence of the above conditions, the general state of exhaustion of the men after the gruelling march, the presence of an epidemic of Cholera in all camps and practically universal Malaria, Diarrhoea, and Dysentery, the men were put to work by the I.J.A. Engineers immediately.

THE MARCH AT A GLANCE

| Date | Distance From Banpong | Distance Of March | Camp | Remarks |
|-------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 24/25 April | km 0 | km 0 | Banpong | Start of march |
| 26 April | 25 | 25 | Taro | Stage Camp |
| 27 April | 50 | 25 | Kanburi | Stage Camp |
| 29 April | 70 | 20 | Oneya | The Temple Camp |
| 30 April | 90 | 25 | Wampo | The Bridge Camp |
| 2 May | 115 | 25 | Tasho | D Force Base |
| 2/3 May | 120 | 5 | Kanyu | Water Point |
| 3 May | 133 | 13 | Tonshan | Bamboo Swamp Camp |
| 4 May | 157 | 24 | Kinsaiyoke | Dutch P.W Camp |
| 6 May | 183 | 26 | Wopin | Corral Camp |
| 7 May | 205 | 22 | Prankart | "Hitler" Camp |
| 9 May | 22 | 17 | Takanoon | Elephant Camp |
| 10 May | 224 | 22 | Tamerompat | Bamboo Camp |
| 11 May | 267 | 23 | Konkoita | Cholera outbreak |
| 11/12 May | 274 | 7 | Taimonta | Waterpoint |
| 12 May | 294 | 20 | Shimo Neiki | Parties grouped |
| 15 May | 300 | 6 | Neiki | "F" Force HQ |
| - | 305 | 5 | Shimo Sonkrai | No.1. Camp |

| Date | Distance From Banpong | Distance Of March | Camp | Remarks |
|-------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| - | 311 | 6 | Sonkrai | No.2. Camp |
| - | 315 | 4 | Kami Sonkrai | No.3. Camp |
| - | 318 | 3 | Chang Karang | English Camp |
| - | 325 | 7 | Thai Border | 3 Pagoda Pass |

Tomorrow....Shimo Sonkrai and work on the Railway begins

On the 16 May, the day after arriving at Shimo Sonkrai, all men were required on cleaning up the camp area which made a big difference. The huts were in bad shape and with the continual rain during the day started to collapse in parts and one complete floor fell through. Work parties commenced to stay the main hut and to repair the floor. After the first Jap check parade that night, we were informed that work was to commence immediately on the Railway and there was to be no rest to recover from the long and arduous march just completed. Many of the men were suffering from exhaustion and as a result of having to go to work immediately many of them never regained their strength and were to become easy prey to all types of sickness and disease.

WORK ON THE RAILWAY

The first demands from the I.J.A. for work were hard to meet as they wanted 300 men to start on the railway and a party of 500 men to build a bamboo fence, known as the "Tiger Fence", around the camp area. We could not muster the full quota owing to sickness, so on the first day had to supply 100 less than demanded. This was only the beginning and as days wore on we found it harder and harder to muster anywhere near the figures they demanded. On the 17 May we had our first Cholera case – a man from No.10 Co. (2/19 Bn) was stricken down and he finally died at 0230 hours (2:30a.m.) next morning and we were isolated from No.2. Battalion. On 20 May a work party of 700 was supplied from our Battalion, there were now 150 sick men out of our 1000 and included eight Cholera cases; two work parties of 200 each were kept out working until 2100 hours (9 p.m.) and then did not finish the task set them.

That night as the roofs were still not all covered many of the men had to sleep huddled under groundsheets as it rained all night.

To give you an idea of how swift and deadly the dreaded disease of Cholera is I relate the entry in my Diary for the 21 May.

Two more deaths from Cholera overnight, a Private from the 2/26 Bn and Sgt. from the 2/10 Fd. Regt.

Most amazing, I was talking to Pte..... yesterday morning walking round the camp, he was admitted in the afternoon stricken with Cholera and died early in the morning. Corporal.....admitted today with Cholera and very low. The two bodies are to be cremated this afternoon. Jap work party of 650 supplied today from our group making a total of 1228 all told from the camp of 2000, whilst in the camp there are now about 500 sick men. Corporal died at 1600 hours from Cholera.

Soon Cholera, Dysentery, Beri-Beri, Tropical Ulcers, Typhus and Malaria became rampant, and many showed signs of malnutrition, their resistance gone after the march. It was becoming impossible to keep up the supply of fit men to work on the Railway and soon we were forced to supplement with Light Duty and even sick men, so great were the demands of the Japanese Engineers who seemed to control the whole situation, and no amount of pleading to our Japanese Camp Administration had any effect as they, too, seem to be under the thumb of the Engineer Group.

THE CHOLERA SCOURGE

A fresh wave of Cholera broke out in the camp on 26 May and there were 28 admissions on that day. The doctors appealed to everyone to cooperate in their plan for hygiene, and sanitation to try and stop the spread of the disease, as this was all we had to combat it with, there being no other normal medical means at their disposal. During the night of 26 May and the next day 27 May, ten more deaths occurred from Cholera, now bringing the total to twenty in just on ten days. The position was now so serious that Major Hunt, the Medical Officer went to the Jap Commander, Lieutenant Fukuda and put a very straight and hard proposal to him on the facts and did a wonderful job by finally getting the work parties cancelled for tomorrow. Following this the next day all available men were put on camp hygiene and sanitation work, new latrines were dug and the old ones filled and burnt off. The results of the Cholera glass rod tests showed 53 carriers suspects out of 500 so there was still a long and ghastly road ahead of us before we were out of the mire. On 1 June I lost the first member of my own "I" section in the whole of the war when he died of Cholera that day. There were fourteen deaths for the day and this brought the total in the camp to 67.

On 2 June, work was commenced again on the railway and we sent out 450 men, due to the larger number of sick men to the fit ones, we re-organized the camp strength into two battalions, No.1. of fit men about 800 strong and No.2. the Hospital Camp of 1100 of which 950 were sick and patients. Malaria had, by this time, started to get a hold and seriously affected the work force. We learnt at this time from Colonel Banno (Japanese Commander) that the position at the English Camp forward of us was also serious and there had already been 100 deaths there. By 7 June we had dropped our work force to 230 on the railway after having sent out 1300 men on 21 May, so that in just over a fortnight we had about 75% of the force sick and unfit for work; then we reached the all-time low of only being able to supply 80 men for road work on 11 June.

RATION PARTIES

By now we were commencing to experience trouble in maintaining continual supplies of rice and rations as no railway existed and there was no permanent road, only a bullock track, and with the Monsoonal rains in full swing even this had become impassable to traffic from No. 5. Camp at Chang Karang, which was our main supply base for rice.

On 10 June, 50 men went forward to Sonkrai, 6 kilometres away, hauling some Yak carts and loading them with sacks of rice, onions and maize flour and struggling back to our camp with the heavy loads, finally arriving back at 2030 hours (10:30 p.m.) We now had received some Yaks (Thai oxen) in the camp for rations and about three were killed at a time to supply 2000 men, and this was after the Japs had taken the hind quarter section for their use, so it was at least a flavour for a while in the stews.

The Japs were starting to get more definite in their demands for work parties as it was essential to keep the road parties working to keep the way open for rations to get through as they were now becoming short, and on 13 June there was only eight bags of rice left in the camp, which was the equivalent of one day's supply at the rate of 15 ozs, per man per day, for the work parties, and 9 ozs per day for the sick and hospital patients.

On 14 June a party of nine officers and seventy one other ranks left with eight Yak carts for rations at No.5. Camp at the 114 km peg which meant a haul of 13km each way, the whole trip was a nightmare and some of the bogs were unbelievable, at one stage it took us one hour to move 500 yards. We passed through No.2. and 3 Camps on the way and met many of our mates at No.3. Camp which was under the control of Captain Swartz (now Minister for Civil Aviation); after reaching No.5. Camp at Chang Karang we loaded up with supplies and left for the return journey at 1700 hours (5 p.m.), the trip back was even worse on account of the load and we were pulling carts like beasts of burden; we finally arrived back at Shimo Sonkrai at 0230 hours (2:30 a.m.) in the morning with 10 bags of rice, 2 bags of onions, 2 salt and 3 of beans which was about two days rations for the camp.

By this time Malaria had really started to get a hold of the camp and we were in a parlous state as far as medical supplies of Quinine were concerned and so after repeated requests to the Japs, the M.O. finally gained their permission to send a party to get supplies of the tablets from the Japanese Medical Supply Base in Burma.

QUININE TRIP

On 17 June I left with a special party of 10 men at 0900 hours to collect Quinine from a Jap supply camp in Burma with a Jap guard, we passed through No's 2,3, and 5 Camps stopping for meals or a rest at each one and finally at 1500 hours (3 p.m.) we rested beside the Three Pagodas at the pass into Burma, and thought of that famous song "On the Road to Mandalay". Still we pressed on and passed a Dutch Camp at the 108 km peg and here they were doing gravelling of the road, we

noticed two Dutch boys doing punishment holding up logs above their heads, but we were not allowed to speak to them. At 1650 hours, we arrived outside an A.I.F. Camp at the 104 km peg, I tried hard to get our guard to allow us to go into the camp, but he was adamant that we were to have no contact with them. Prior to reaching the camp precincts I had evolved a plan with the boys to take it in turns at feigning sickness and had to stop several times first with someone with Diarrhoea, then one would have a vomiting turn, all the time telling the guard that some men were "Bi-oke" (sick) and I wanted them to see a doctor at the camp. He refused, so finally we emptied all our water bottles before arriving. He finally agreed to allow us to have our water bottles filled and for myself and two sickest men to go into the camp to see the doctor, I was successful in delivering some notes I had hidden, and conversed for a while with my own Battalion 2 i/c who was in this camp.

My Diary then reads:

At 1720 we left the camp and pushed on towards our destination and most of us are now beginning to feel the effects of the trip after marching 23 kilometres. "A" Force were working on the road near the camp and there appears to be an experimental section going on as the first patch is being corduroyed by Australia troops with logs running across the track, the Japanese Engineers were working on the second section with logs running with the track and the Burmese natives on the third section were using gravel. The road is not the best from here on but I would say it was trafficable from the 105 to 114 kilometre pegs. Passed a Jap rice dump at the 102 kilometre about 1800 hours then passed the 100 kilometre camp consisting of Dutch-Australian and American troops, they include some of the crew of the USA Cruiser Hewston sunk off Java. The road is becoming very slushy and boggy but still we are pushing on and at 2000 hours (8 p.m.) we passed a Japanese Engineers Camp on the side of a big river where they were sawmilling for the bridges. At 2030 (8:20 p.m.) we finally arrived at our destination at the 95 kilometre Camp very weary after a march of 33 kilometres about 21 miles, in just on 11 hours.

After a day's rest we collected our load of Quinine, consisting of some 280 bottles of 500 tablets each and 40 tins of 1500 tablets in each, making a total of just over 200,000 tablets; the following day we left on the return journey taking it in two stages, stopping overnight at No.5 Camp and the next day we left some of our supplies at No.3 Camp and at Sonkrai Camp, finally arriving back in the mid-afternoon of 20 June after a very interesting and fruitful trip.

THE FUKUDA – TOYAMA REGIME

We now began to feel the first effects of the ever increasing brutal and harsh treatment by one particular guard, a first class Private called Toyama, backed up by his Officer Lieutenant Fukuda, over whom he seemed to be able to rule the roost. This guard went out of his way to make trouble and took particular spite out on all Officers. Lieutenant Fukuda turned a deaf ear to all our complaints about this guard and seemed to delight in backing him up.

On 30 June after every fit man had been sent out to work on the railway, Fukuda ordered another 50 men out to carry rations, we tried to get the party cut down to 30 men but he refused, twenty-three men just discharged from hospital were forced to go on the march and many of them collapsed on their return and were admitted to hospital again. The same thing happened again on 2 July but once more Fukuda refused to cut down and seven sick men had to be included and one had to be carried back on a stretcher after collapsing.

Another incident occurred at this time, a pick was found to be missing and as a result the Officer in charge of these tools was forced to stand up in the blazing sun all day outside the Jap Guard House, or, until the pick was found, by nightfall the pick was still missing, so the Major in charge of our group was called to the Jap Hut and told by Fukuda that if the pick was not found by daylight, every man would go without rations for 24 hours. Everybody was pulled out of bed at 0100 hours (1 a.m.), and searched but still no pick found. Next morning we were allowed to give breakfast to 330 men going to work on the Railway and light diet to 700 hospital patients, but the other 800 men in camp had to starve for the day unless the pick turned up.

Fukuda then issued an order that all men left in camp were to be concentrated in 3 huts and no movement outside was allowed. The pick was found under a heap of bamboo beside a hut at 1100 hours (11 a.m.) and returned to Fukuda, but it made no difference as he now wanted the man responsible. As this was well-nigh impossible to find we continued our punishment until, at 4 p.m. he suddenly decided he had been satisfied and the ban was lifted.

On 7 July Fukuda ordered 20 Cholera convalescents to be paraded to him as he accused them of being fit for work, they were mostly skeletons and living on a meager ration of 400 grams of rice a day. That night the work parties did not return until 2300 hours (11 p.m.) after a terrible day, when sick men were forced to stand and hold a large log above their heads for some time; Fukuda was advised of this but refused to do anything. At midnight of 15/16 July, the Major in charge of the work battalion was called to Japanese Headquarters and ordered to produce 330 fit men for work. He and the Medical Major argued till the small hours of the morning to get the party cut down, but to no avail as both Fukuda and Toyama were on the Saki and ordered the men to be produced. On 21 July, Fukuda severely bashed both these Majors over some missing blankets and tents which P's.O.W. had used to clothe themselves with, as there had been no issues from the Japanese and clothing was rotting with perspiration and mud and slush.

THE END OF SHIMO SONKRAI

During the period of 15 May to 28 July 1943, there had been 122 A.I.F. deaths in Shimo Sonkrai – the problem of maintaining continuous supplies of rations was becoming serious and more and more men were becoming sick. The conditions were bad at No.2. Camp, Sonkrai, where at this stage they had lost about 300 men out of 1500, whilst at No.5. Camp Chang Karang the death roll had been just as high.

At this stage some of the hospital cases and very sick personnel were being moved to the Burma Hospital recently established in the Thanbyuzayat area, Nominal Rolls were completed and then it was decided that owing to the difficulty of obtaining food supplies in this area and the infection existing in the camp, that all the remaining convalescent and fit men in Shimo Sonkrai would be moved and absorbed in Sonkrai (No.2. Camp) and Kami Sonkrai (No. 3 Camp), and this camp would be closed. We eventually moved out on 28 July and I left for Kami Sonkrai where conditions were to become worse.

Authors Note:

In referring to individual deaths on the railway, I have purposely left out the Surnames of all personnel in deference to their relatives and friends, who have already suffered enough.

Tomorrow... Kami Sonkrai and Railway Work

Authors Note:

At Kami Sonkrai Camp I was appointed to the Staff assisting in looking after the daily records, of Strengths, Sick in Hospital, Check Parades and general records of Death etc., in the camp and it was from these that I was able to keep an up to date Diary and record of all happenings from day to day. These facts are presented in this ensuing article.

By this time the road from the south was impassable and the north difficult, and the scale of rations fell to below the requirements to help the sick men back to health. It has been said that we were on the same rations as the I.J.A soldiers but this was not true as can very easily be proved.

The rations of the men in hospital were fixed at too low a scale, (250 – 300 grams of rice a day and a small quantity of bean only). In our opinion this was a great mistake and the Japs were continually told. There seemed to be an idea that the lack of rations should soon drive the sick men out of hospital to get on to the higher scale of the workers, but this of course would only happen if the men were not really sick. There was however no deception about the illness of our men who were dying in large numbers.

CONDITIONS DETERIORATE

As the health of the men grew worse the demands of the Jap Engineers were more and more difficult to meet and their treatment of our weak men while at work became more and more brutal. The work was often beyond what could be reasonably expected of fit men and it was certainly beyond the strength of the weaker ones, this especially related to the carriage of heavy logs. It was noticeable that where Thai or Burmese labourers were used, two or three times the number were used.

It became common for our men to be literally driven with wire whips or bamboo sticks throughout the whole of the working day. The beatings were not for disciplinary measures but solely for the purpose of driving men to efforts beyond their strength. The hours of work were also excessive and fourteen hours a day was a common occurrence and work went on day after day without a break for months for some men who never saw their camp in daylight hours for weeks on end and never had a proper chance to wash themselves or their few clothes.

By the end of July 1943 more than half the Force were without boots and this caused a large number of poisoned feet and trench feet from continual work in the wet; blankets were not issued as promised in Changi to the men; clothing issues were negligible and issues of medical stores were totally inadequate; bandages and dressings were seldom issued and only small quantities. For hundreds of Tropical Ulcer cases, dressings were improvised from banana leaves and bandages from sleeves and legs cut off from prisoner's shirts and trousers, consequently many limbs had to be amputated unnecessarily and many of these men died.

It was during the foregoing period that several men, sometimes alone and others in groups disappeared into the jungle probably with the idea of escaping, some only left probably to die in freedom rather than in captivity by disease and ill treatment. These men were in despair, the choice in front of them seemed to be death from disease or never ending toil and brutal treatment at the hands of the Engineers; their Officers were unable to protect them in spite of all their efforts. One party of Officers, including a Senior Officer, seeing their men dying and ill-treated all around them and in despair of being able to get any redress from the Japs, attempted to escape so as to let the whole world know what was happening to the Prisoners and obtain help from the Red Cross. This party failed as was inevitable; five perished from privation in the jungle and the remaining four were recaptured to face their harsh punishment.

KAMI SONKRAI

With conditions existing as outlined above troops began to concentrate into the two camps of Sonkrai and Kami Sonkrai from as far south as Nieki and from the north the English troops of Camp No.5 were also moved, when some 300 men under an English Major and 300 men from Neiki arrived together with the rearguard of the troops from our last camp at Shimo Sonkrai on 8 August we were 1689 strong at Kami Sonkrai, of which 850 were hospital cases and 50 sick in lines.

By this time, our arch enemies Lieutenant Fukuda and Toyama had arrived to take over command of this camp and immediately Toyama showed his teeth on the check parade that night when he slapped the face of a Medical Captain for some trivial irregularity in the count. A stormy session took place over work figures between our Commanders and the Japs on the night of the 9 August when they demanded 550 for work next morning and we only had 450 fit men available. The session lasted until 2330 hours (11:30 p.m.) when our Lieutenant Colonel was slapped across the face by Toyama and ordered to produce 550. As a result 160 Light duty men had to be sent out, and after they left, Fukuda called for 50 men to do construction work in

the camp, this meant using sick men, our sick figures at this date were now 925 out of 1687 (400 being in isolation). On 10 August we had our first fresh case of Cholera and everyone was apprehensive of the possibility of another outbreak. After a hurried glass rod test by Jap Medical officers they isolated 170 men from Shimo Sonkrai Battalion as likely suspect carriers. Our fears were well grounded as it soon proved beyond doubt that we were faced with even a far greater outbreak than before and many men were to die in a very short time.

On 16 August I wrote: -

I.J.A. work 450 (A.I.F. 328 ENG. 122) Including 55 from the English Hospital. Deaths during the day were 3 English.

Medical - *During the night 15/16 there were six British patients admitted to Cholera, 2 more at 1000 hours and 2 more at 1100 hours making a total of 13 English and 5 Australian patients and 35 carriers in Cholera isolation.*

Work – *After having out every available fit man to work, the Japs demanded 50 men for camp work which was impossible without using hospital patients. Toyama came up and demanded 50 men be produced or else whole camp to go on ½ rations. We were forced to take some bed patients out to make up the numbers as the Senior Medical Officer decided it was better to do this than have the rest of the serious cases cut down to half rations which would be detrimental.*

Strength – *1673 (English 661, Australian 1012). Sick in hospital English 198 A.I.F. 362. Isolation section English 300 A.I.F., 116. No Duty English 19, A.I.F. 80. Total sick 1075. Cholera seems to have got a swing on today and most cases are coming from the one area of the English hospital ward. One Diphtheria case has now been reported. Tomorrow the Japs are wanting 350 for the road and railway and 250 for construction work in the camp.*

Next day Fukuda informed us that we would have to accommodate all our camp of 1670 men in one long hut measuring 750 ft long by 30 ft wide, this meant putting 15 men to a bay of 13 ft, as the Burmese natives are to have the hut next door to us only 6 ft separating us. Our long hut was turned into a double decker Toyama, our arch enemy, continued to be a thorn in our side as instanced in my Diary of 30 August.

This morning Captain Pearce, of the English lines, was caught talking to a truck driver through the fence and Toyama tied him up with hands above the head to a large tree stump for 3 hours. The Nip Sgt. has gone away for the day, and Fukuda is also absent from the camp, so Toyama is in charge and he is showing it. He stopped our wood party coming in the wrong gate and made them stand to attention holding the bamboo above their heads.

During the 3/4 September Toyama was again left in charge while Fukuda was away and he made the highest demands for work asking for 450 men, despite pleas by the Medical Officer, he refused to budge and as a result many sick men were sent

out, some to die later. The Engineers didn't want men that could not work and sent 35 of them back threatening to bash them if they came out next day, but still Toyama refused to reduce the figures.

The work on the railway by this time had been progressing well despite all the setbacks, and the particular sector our troops were working on at this stage was nearing completion.

During the period of 28 July to 2 September, just on five weeks, we had had 101 deaths in our new camp of Kami Sonkrai.

CONDITIONS BECAME WORSE

During September conditions became worse and sickness and disease were more prevalent. Deaths were the highest for any one month, and work became harder. The men are terribly debilitated and some of the ulcer cases are pitiful to see, with bones showing out of great open wounds. The daily ulcer parades for treatment was a sight never to be forgotten and the screams of the patients as it was carried out lived in the memories of those who heard them, let alone how it must have played on the minds of the poor victims themselves, the treatments, the only method the MO's could resort to, due to absence of normal medical supplies, was to daily gouge out the residue puss and proud flesh from these gaping wounds with a teaspoon or suchlike.

Orderlies had to hold down the patient whilst it was being done as there was no way of killing the pain involved.

Some men at this stage had been working on the road and railway continuously for 35 days on end without a break and were just about burnt out. As the month of September rolls on so the demands grew harsher and the work was stepped up outside, and the pressure was really applied from 14 September onwards, when the work parties who left the camp at 0630 hours (6:30 a.m.) in the morning did not return to camp until 0230 hours (2:30 a.m.) the next morning, and then with only 4 hours sleep, were pushing out again at 0630 hours the same morning, working 20 hours a day. This quickly told on their already weakened condition and finally killed many of them. The total deaths in Kami Sonkrai for the month of September 1943 was 105 making 200 deaths in this camp since 28 July. These consisted of A.I.F. 93 and English 107.

During the check parade of the afternoon of 13 September we showed 4 men short in our figures and although we found out our error in calculations, and explained it to the Japs they made us stand on parade from 1700 hours (5 p.m.) until 2200 hours (10 p.m.) and checked and rechecked, but it made no difference as they would not admit to a mistake and so ordered another count in the morning.

On 16 September, I wrote as follows;-

I.J.A. work English 148, A.I.F. 254. Total 402 including 31 from convalescent department. Work parties did not return 0200 hours (2 a.m.) having worked another 19 hours on end and after only 4 hours rest had to move out again to work, it seems they are determined to push the line through regardless of life. Men are just about done in. Reveille was at 0530 hours Toyama in one of his rages today, bashed the R.S.M. and Captain Allan because the returns were not typed on time. Lt. Col. Kappe and Toyama later left for Neiki Camp to collect the pay for the troops. Workers returned at 2300 hours (11 p.m.) the line being held up about 2 kilometres away due to a fault in the bridge. A complete check made of all camp equipment by the I.J.A. "A" Force reported laying rails at No. 5 Camp (only 3 kilometres to the north).

Deaths – 1 English, 2 A.I.F., (1 Cerebral Malaria, 1 Cardiac Beri-Beri)

THE RAILWAY PROGRESS

On 18 September the climax to all our labours came when the rail reached the bridge near the camp at 1100 hours (11 a.m.). It was a great achievement as far as the Japs were concerned but had been a tragedy to us, as the cost of life had been terrific and it is estimated at this stage that "F" Force had already lost about 1500 men in all out of the original force of 7000, and there will be many more before the line is finally linked right through. In appreciation of the completion of the railway task allotted our camp having been completed, Fukuda very graciously presented cigarettes (apparently being held all this time) to the workers on the following basis:

| | |
|-----------------------------|------------|
| Working over 40 days on end | 20 packets |
| 31-40 days | 15 packets |
| 21-30 days | 10 packets |
| 15-20 | 5 packets |

Work parties were then knocked off at 1800 hours (6 p.m.). The following day they were granted a holiday from outside work. This built false hopes as the very next day, we had to provide 400 men to go out and work on the road, now that the rail embankment had been finalized; there were 8 deaths during the night and as it rained all night and day on 20 September, we were unable to carry out any cremations although there were some 15 bodies awaiting cremation, so we were forced to dig graves and bury them, a burial service was held in the afternoon by one of the Padres.

Diesel trains were now using the line as it was laid to bring up more sleepers and rails to continue the line. Work parties were engaged on repair work to the embankment in places where the rain was causing washaways, and in one instance the diesel became derailed. "A" Force troops were doing the laying of the line past our area and were hard pressed to keep up to it handling all their own baggage for each move as the line progressed, despite the fact that the line runs right past their

camp, yet the I.J.A. were transporting the native coolies and their baggage, but not Anderson Force.

On 25 September, the whole camp was reorganized, making a Camp Headquarters, an A.I.F. Battalion, and an English Battalion. I was attached to Camp HQ "A" Staff. That day more funeral services were held when the ashes of 16 English and 5 A.I.F. were buried in their separate containers. Each man's ashes were put into a hollowed out bamboo container, which had been made by hospital patients, with their serial number carved on it. After burial, crosses were also made by the fitter hospital patients under the guidance of the Padres and these too had the serial number cut into them.

HEALTH DETERIORATES

Deaths were now occurring with monotonous regularity, and although we seemed to have the Cholera problem back in hand, as only 16 remained in Cholera isolation at this stage, we were losing men just as fast from other causes, and it was the rule rather than the exception to average 4 – 5 deaths a day and each one to be from a different cause, such as Beri-Beri, Cerebral Malaria, Dysentery, Malnutrition, Pneumonia, and Tropical Ulcers to name but a few of the causes. A typical example was on 28 September, when 3 A.I.F. died of Malnutrition, 1 A.I.F. Pneumonia, and 4 English from Dysentery.

At this time we received word back from the Burma Hospital, where our sick from the early camps had been sent to recuperate, that the death roll had reached 320 all ranks including English and A.I.F. The remainder of the Cholera isolation patients were finally cleared on 29 September, and once again we had been successful in mastering the situation, thanks to the wonderful work of Medical Officers, Hospital staff and the co-operation of the troops themselves.

It was now the end of September which had been a bad month all round and we were looking forward to the fast approaching time when we would finish our work here and we hoped to be moved back to Malaya, as instanced by this entry in my Diary on 30 September;

I.J.A. Work again 257 including the 7 Dynamiters and it is thought that outside work will finish shortly as all heavy gear and tools have been brought in from the job. All surplus camp equipment, tents, mosquito nets, etc., have been called in and packed. With more men available in camp we are now attempting to build up a reserve fuel dump in case of any numbers of sick having to be left behind, during the move. Wood has already been a problem to date as owing to pressure for numbers on the road and railway, we have had to live on day to day consumption, the I.J.A guard today handed over to our Korean guards, as they are under orders to move to Burma front as we will have to tighten up our salutes etc., with the Koreans.

Submitted the usual monthly returns to the Japs. Deaths for the month totaled 105 which has been our worst so far. Today's were 4 A.I.F. (Beri-Beri and a Dysentery)

and 1 English from Ulcers. Total for camp now stands at A.I.F. 93, English 107 Total = 200.

The position was to grow even worse before we moved and the death rate increased alarmingly in October.

Final Instalment To follow

Move delayed – Final days at Kami Sonkrai

At last we move A Journey to Changi

CONCLUSION INSTALMENT – MOVE DELAYED

Although it was apparent that we would be on the move very shortly back towards Malaya, nothing definite was forthcoming from the Japs themselves as to the possible date. Preparations by our own Administration continued in the hope that it was imminent and preliminary steps were taken to get organized in case of it being cast upon us suddenly, and with the biggest percentage of our troops being either actual hospital cases or in various stages of serious disabilities it presented a big problem to have everything in readiness for a sudden move, as would be the case once the Japs made up their mind as to when it would take place.

However, it was not to be during the month of October 1943 as was anticipated, and our hopes were shattered very early in the month when on 1 October we had to send out 250 men to work on the maintenance of the railway embankment and prepare it for ballasting. This continued daily for the first week, despite the fact that the Engineers had hurriedly recalled most of the tools on 3 October and transported them north by truck. On 7 October we were forced to step up our work party to 350 men, as the Engineers complained that too many men were idle in the camp.

On 8 October, I made the following entry in my Diary;-

I.J.A. Work 350 men – Today for the first time, Toyama had to do guard duty much to the delight of everyone in camp. Learnt from Koriachi (interpreter) this morning that our departure may be delayed a little owing to a hold up near Konkoita, where a rock formation is causing some trouble, but he still expects us to be on the move by the end of the month.

Then on 10 October 1943

I.J.A. Work outside still 350 and with extra pressure on again we find it hard to muster the number of fit men. Our strength is decreasing at an alarming rate having now dropped to 1527 in Camp No, 3 Kami Sonkrai, and we are losing men at the rate of 5 a day or more. There is still no definite word of our date of return to Changi as the line appears to be held up below Shimo Neki. Today we did our usual 10 day Return to the Japs, including Medical per cent summary, Roll of Deaths, and pay return. Our only creek and source of water supply is getting very low now with

the dry season approaching. Received reports of arrival at Neiki of "L" Force under Major Andrews consisting of 75 Medical personnel who left Changi in August last.

Deaths today – 1 A.I.F. Ulcers and Malnutrition.

2 English (1 Dysentery and Ulcers and the other Beri-Beri and Malnutrition).

Final days at Kami Sonkrai

From August onwards things improved slightly at No.2. Camp Sonkrai, but did not improve at our Camp No.3. Kami Sonkrai. The death rate seemed to step up a bit if anything and at one stage for the four days between 20-23 October, the death roll reached the appalling figures of thirty-four men.

About the second week of October the Japs were employing our men on quarry work, blasting stone etc., for road and railway use, and we were supplying some 350 men daily for this task. The quarry was situated just behind the Prisoners Hospital area, and the Jap Engineers were blasting in such a manner that rocks and stones fell on the Hospital huts at each blast. The huts were crammed full of patients many of whom were dying, (now at the rate of 8 a day) and as a result all patients became terrorized, (one man ran into the bush in terror to escape it and subsequently died from his illness).

Many were hit or less seriously injured, and one man had his arm broken and subsequently died from the combination of the injury and his previous disease. This went on for over a week before representations by the I.J.A. Officer in charge of the camp were successful in having it stopped. Blasting continued in such a way that rocks did not fall on the Hospital area, thus showing that the previous practice had been avoidable.

This was recorded by me in my Diary on 12 October 1943

I.J.A. work party 353 on quarry work, Captain Allan and Lieutenant Coleman arrived back from No.2. Camp but without canteen supplies as negotiations had broken down between the Neiki merchants and the I.J.A. Military Police, who won't allow the elephants to leave the village with supplies. No.2. Camp managed to get some canteen stores up by man power, a few tins of milk were brought back for the Hospital use. Ration issues have shown a slight improvement since the advent of Tomiama who really works hard to improve the diet of the Prisoners and today for the first time we actually tasted some English potatoes. The blasting in the quarry is becoming a menace and strong complaints have been lodged to the I.J.A. Headquarters re falling rocks in the Hospital area. One patient was hit today and suffered a fractured arm, whilst another was hit on his Tropical Ulcer.

*Total deaths to date in this camp are;
A.I.F. 115, and English 138. Total 253.*

On 14 October we were requested to make up a Nominal Roll of all the fit personnel in the camp for the Japs, and after a classification parade by our Medical Officers we

had out of a total of 1500 men only 600 fit men including cooks, staff personnel and camp workers, this was made up of 445 A.I.F. and 180 English. At this time we were most worried about the close proximity of several hundred Tamil (Indian) labourers quartered only ten yards from our own quarters and they were suffering with cases of suspected Cholera and Smallpox. Their hygiene left everything to be desired, and we actually patrolled along the fence with some of our men to stop some of the troops from attempting to trade with the natives as the risk of infection to the remainder of the camp was too great at this stage and we were apprehensive the Japs would cancel any move should we become infected with the dreaded disease of Smallpox, which was a possibility at this stage. As a matter of fact one of the men had been diagnosed as a definite case and had been moved to a spot away from the camp in a special tent with a medical orderly to care for him. He died on the 22 October, but the Japs were never informed of our fears and his death was recorded on our records as Tropical Pempidas, as there was no doubt had we recorded it as Smallpox that would have been the end of our chances to be moved out of the area in the near future, and if we had to face up to another monsoonal season, then it was generally conceded that no one would survive in the condition they were in.

Again on 30 October an Englishman died of the same disease and his death was also recorded as Tropical Pempidis, so we had some anxious days ahead fearing for the spread, but fortunately the Medical officers had succeeded in isolating it and as there were only a few of us who were in possession of the facts, the news never leaked out.

RAILWAY LINKED – WORK CONTINUES

On 16 October the first steam train passed our camp and was hailed with great glee by the Nip soldiers, and secretly we were quite pleased to think it was one step nearer to our departure and we hoped by train instead of marching. This did not mean the end of our work parties as still we were being forced to send out maximum numbers of over 300 to work on repair work and quarry work. These numbers were maintained to the last and worked all through the remainder of October and well into November before the final move. There was a most amusing incident occurred at work on 20 October and I recorded it as follows;-

20 October 1943

I.J.A. work party 300 Quarry work again. The men are back on contract work again and as a result quite a few of them return home earlier than usual when their task set is finished. A rather amusing but quite significant incident occurred at work today between the I.J.A. Engineers and our Korean guards.

Prior to being checked in at the conclusion of work it appears some English troops had been slow on their job as a result the Engineer Corporal made them slap one another, but not being content with that, he proceeded to hit each one himself, when suddenly one Korean guard intervened and knocked him down. There was then quite a brawl with other Engineer Nips joining in, and followed by the Korean guard Commander from camp rushing over and trying to stop it but it continued for

about another quarter hour. The P's.O.W. were then returned to camp. As result of this Lieut. Fukuda has order that no men will be sent to work tomorrow until the incident has been cleaned up, much to the delight of everyone.

The Padre has been doing a great job since his arrival, in organizing lectures and concerts in the Hospital wards and it is a much appreciated effort by the patients.

Deaths today: A.I.F. 1 (died of Toxaemia following the amputation of his leg. English 5 (4 Dysentery and Malaria and 1 Cardiac Beri-Beri).

The following day there was no work and Lieut. Colonel Banno the I.J.A. Prisoners Commander arrived from Neiki and together with Lieut. Fukuda went to consult the Engineers on the incident and then Banno continued on to No. 5 Camp for a conference with other senior Japanese Officers.

Apparently satisfaction was gained all around as the next day 300 men were out working again, although the atmosphere between the two faction of Japs seemed to be rather tense, as a matter of fact the Korean guards told our men to tell them if any of the Engineer Japs struck them and they would march us straight back to camp.

On 25 October another holiday was granted as it now appeared the final linking of the railway had occurred as some high ranking Japanese Officers passed through on the train on an inspection of the line. Following this, we were granted permission to hold a Concert in the lines that night and it was a most welcome diversion to our normal hum-drum existence. This little amenity was short lived however, as the following day it was on again and out to work again with a party of 300 men required and so it continued right to the last days in the camp.

DEATHS ROLL ON

Although rations were beginning to improve slightly and some canteen supplies were now getting through which we could buy to supplement our diet of rice and other issues, the men were at such a low ebb in health and malnutrition had set in so badly, that everyone was an easy prey to all the various sicknesses and diseases raging throughout the lines, and as a result the death roll grew at a staggering daily rate during October as the following summary shows;-

| | | | |
|----------------|-----------|---------|-------------------|
| 1 – 15 October | A.I.F. 27 | English | 28 |
| 16-20 October | A.I.F. 8 | English | 13 |
| 20-23 October | A.I.F. 16 | English | 18 (34 in 4 days) |
| 24-31 October | A.I.F. 10 | English | 23 |

This made the total for the month at Kami Sonkrai (No.3 Camp) A.I.F. 61 and English 82 in all 143 deaths, and the total loss in the camp from 28 July to the end of October had now mounted to the horrifying figure of 346 men made up of 154 A.I.F. and 192 English troops. The ratio of English deaths to the Australians stepped up considerably in the last days at Kami Sonkrai and from 1-12 November it became

2 to 1 when 54 died to the A.I.F., bringing the total deaths to 427 (181 A.I.F., 246 English).

On 9 November two of our senior Officers returned from a trip to Tanbaya Hospital Camp and brought back the sad news of more deaths and these were far beyond what was expected and conditions seemed to be on a par with all the other camps; they had lost 599 (361 A.I.F. and 438 English) and the total death roll in "F" Force was now known to be set at the colossal figure of 2200 out of 7000 men, and many more were to die before the Force finally returned to Changi.

AT LAST WE MOVE

On 4 November we received the first inkling of the projected move back to Changi in a few days as the work was now supposed to be completed and the railway had been linked. The Japs were using some native labour to build more huts and strengthen our existing structures which we thought were being prepared as a staging camp for Jap troops on their way through to the Burma front or as a supply dump, as bulk supplies were arriving for storage including many bags of rice.

My entry in my Diary says:

2 November 1943

I.J.A. work 260 on railway work. Padre Walsh marched in on exchange with Padre Polain. Lieutenant Bourke arrived for duty as dispenser in the Hospital. Driver was diagnosed as a Cholera suspect and placed in isolation. The I.J.A. medical people arrived and isolated and fumigated the section he came from. Lieutenant Tannio the I.J.A. Medical officer made a personal inspection and glass rod tests and injections are anticipated. Another amputation carried out today. Lieutenant Tannio informed us that orders for the projected movement of personnel from this camp could be expected in a few days. Though our destination is Changi for fit and Kanburi for sick.

By 8 November there are still no further definite word as to our movement and work parties continued to be used on maintenance work on the railway, although on this day the Engineers closed down on all tool issues and there was increased traffic on the railway with steam engines and we noticed more Jap troops moving north with horses and small guns on hand carts. On 10 November, we received official word that 500 fit personnel would move on 17 November, but it was not known what was to become of the remainder of the camp. Then on 11 November we observed the customary two minutes silence in memory of Armistice Day.

The usual upsetting tactics by the Japs were then encountered during the next few days as it was not until actually 20 November that we entrained despite the fact that the Nominal Rolls had been called for on 12 November. A typical example of this was recorded on my Diary;-

Orders received for party of 500 to move sometime during the day. At 1300 hours (1 p.m.) party moved out on road but shortly after returned to lines. At 1800 hours (6 p.m.) I.J.A. advised party would move tonight probably in loads of 100, 200, 200. At 1900 hours (7 p.m.) party moved out again but returned after a search and heavy rain had fallen. At 2100 hours (9 p.m.) party again assembled on road and 50 personnel only under Lieutenant Colonel Kappe entrained in the pouring rain. The balance of 450 returned to camp.

Eventually it was not until 20 November that the move proper started and then they had to march to Neiki Camp, a distance of some 15 kilometres before entraining for Kanburi Camp about 50 kilometres from our original starting point of Banpong. Here the Prisoners had about a week's rest to recuperate and reorganize into train groups and prepared to be lifted back to Changi. Some 46 men died on the train journey down to Kanburi and despite better food and living conditions at this camp the men were in such a state that another 186 died over the next three weeks.

A JOURNEY TO CHANGI

Finally the journey back to Changi commenced under similar conditions to our trip up 8 months previously, still 27 men to a rice truck but this time it really was a nightmare as all were very sick and suffering from either Malaria, Beri-Beri, Dysentery, or with Tropical Ulcers and the stench from these after traveling a few hours in the confined area of the trucks was putrid as once again there was no toilet facilities available and no room to lie down for the three days and nights. However, the morale began to lift as we neared our journeys end and there was many a man who said a silent prayer in thankfulness for his deliverance from a living death at the same time remembering all his pals who had been left behind buried beneath the jungle soils of the many camps occupied by "F" Force.

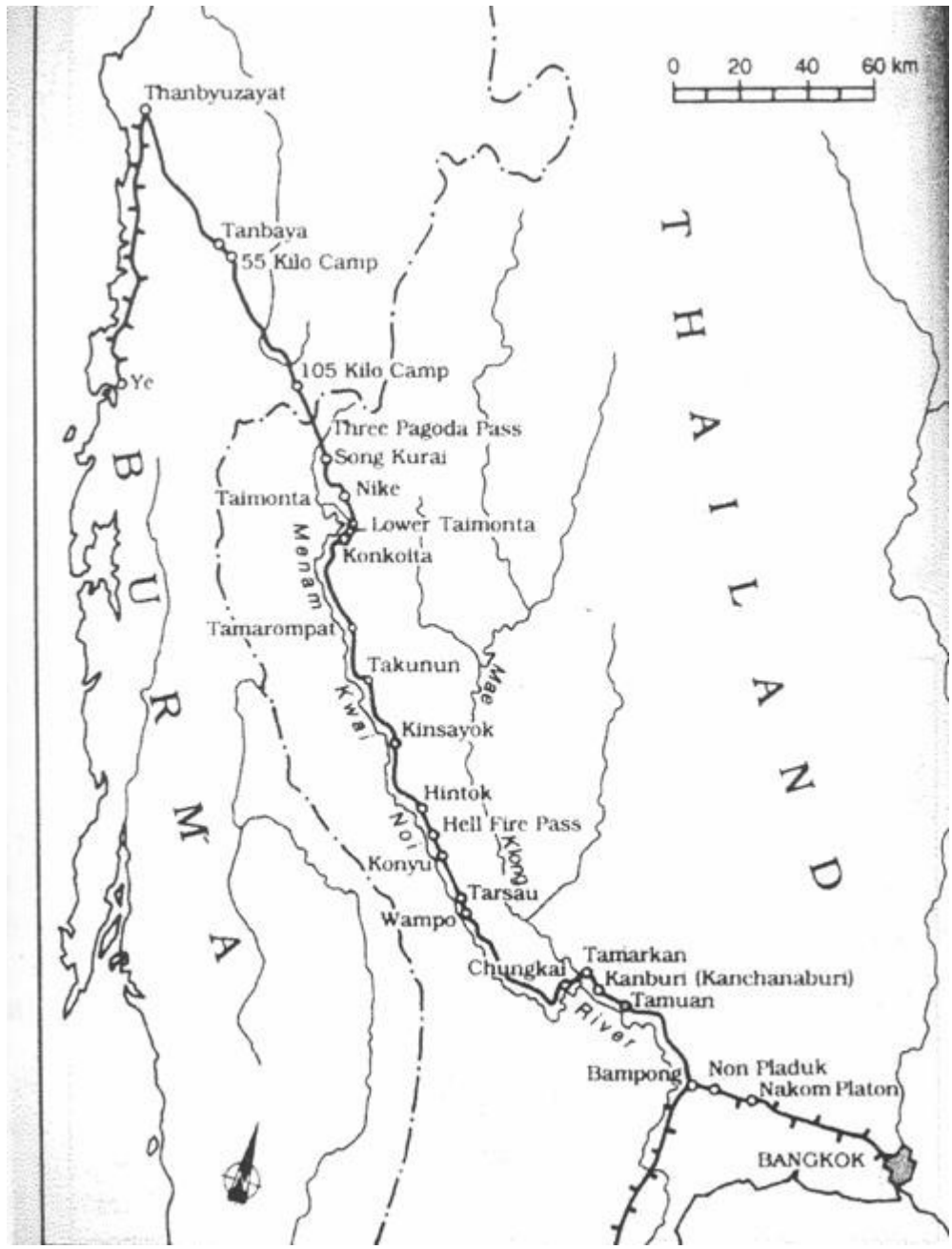
CONCLUSION

Out of the original force of 7000 men who left Changi on 21 April 1943, only 3800 men remained alive after eight months of Hell on the construction of the railway and the ensuing convalescent back at Changi, as in May 1944 just twelve months on, the officially known death roll of all personnel of this Force was 3200 (A.I.F., 1100 and English 2100).

The story however has been only the barest outline of the period of intense hardship suffered by a party of Prisoners of War and could rightly be referred to as "The Ill Fated "F" Force".

Authors Note:-

Lieutenant Fukuda and Gunsoku Toyama were both tried by the War Crimes Tribunal after the War and Toyama was sentenced to death for his crimes against P's O.W.



**"F" Force area - see above map around Nike/Songkurai
3,000 POWs and untold Coolies died in this area**