**PLANNING AND REALITIES: THE RECOVERY OF BRITAIN’S FAR EAST PRISONERS OF WAR 1941-1945**

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**SUMMARY**

Although a great deal has been written concerning the wartime experiences of Britain’s Far East prisoners of war, less is known of Whitehall’s attempts to ameliorate the conditions the men experienced while in Japanese hands, or issues surrounding their repatriation to the United Kingdom. This study initially examines London’s diplomatic approaches to Tokyo, along with their attempts to send consignments of relief and purchase aid locally. It then focuses on the planning process for the recovery of prisoners and internees to the United Kingdom. Finally, the research examines the realities of the recovery operations, and draws distinctions between the experiences of those former prisoners who were repatriated by British-led operations in southern areas, with those who returned from American-led northern areas.

The first chapter discusses Whitehall’s changing understanding of Japan’s treatment of British prisoners of war, it goes on to analyse the problems which arose from Tokyo’s failure to provide information in connection with the identities of prisoners, and discusses Britain’s diplomatic approaches to Japan. The Second Chapter explores Allied attempts to send additional aid including bulk consignments of relief, and the local purchase of additional supplies in selected areas. The remaining chapters examine both the planning and the realities of the recovery process. The third chapter discusses the ways in which the plans for the Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees (RAPWI) operations evolved over time. Finally, the fourth chapter studies the realities of the recovery operations utilising the testimony of the personnel taking part in the RAPWI operations, together with accounts from those being recovered.

The thesis concludes that the reason for the failure of Allied relief efforts, lay with Tokyo’s attitudes towards the rights and needs of prisoners of war. Although Whitehall was aware of the likely shortfall in nutrition as a result of the poor rations provided by the Japanese, if the Allied governments had been successful in sending regular bulk quantities of aid, this would have potentially given prisoners a better standard of nutrition than Tokyo considered necessary for its own fighting personnel. As a consequence, London had virtually no chance of sending sufficient aid to the Far East to maintain the long-term health of its prisoners. When considering the overall understanding of the conditions the men had experienced, Whitehall claimed that it attempted to control the spread of information relating to the appalling treatment of prisoners in the Far East, in order to prevent unnecessary distress for their relatives. The study finds that this stance, when coupled with orders which aimed to prevent former prisoners speaking to the press, and advice to families relating to their treatment of returning prisoners, contributed to a lack of understanding concerning the full extent of the hardships the men had suffered. It concludes that this was compounded by the repatriation process which involved long sea voyages, which in turn allowed many to gain a great deal of their former weight, and argues that this had the effect of disguising the lack of assistance the prisoners had received during their time in Japanese hands.

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**Introduction**

With the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, the British defeats of Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore and Burma, vast swathes of the Far East and Pacific region rapidly came under Japanese control. During their advance across the Far East the Japanese captured large numbers of Allied service personnel. By 1943, it was estimated these included some 140,000 British Imperial servicemen,[[1]](#footnote-1) including personnel from British Dominions and India along with African and Eurasian troops. While the present study examines some issues surrounding the prisoners from India, the term British is primarily used to describe those prisoners who either originated from, or returned to Britain following the end of the Second World War.[[2]](#footnote-2) Most were captured from the forces defending Hong Kong, which was taken by the Japanese on the 25th December 1941, or from those defending Malaya, a disastrous military campaign which culminated with the Fall of Singapore on the 15th February 1942.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The Naval Base at Singapore was the main port where a British fleet could be maintained to combat any potential threat to British and Commonwealth interests in the Pacific region.[[4]](#footnote-4) Nonetheless, with Britain fighting alone, it had been impossible to retain a naval presence to deter potential Japanese aggression in the area. The British Chiefs of Staff had considered abandoning Singapore in the face of the Japanese advance, diverting any potential reinforcements towards the defence of Burma. On hearing the proposals, the Australian Prime Minister made it clear that he saw this as an ‘inexcusable betrayal’. He had been led to believe that Singapore would be made impregnable, and would be capable of being held until the arrival of a British fleet.[[5]](#footnote-5) British Army sent tens of thousands of soldiers to strengthen the defence of Malaya and Singapore, who now fell into Japanese hands. The loss of the Naval Base at Singapore came as a profound shock to a British public which had been led to believe that it was an invulnerable fortress, which would be held at all costs. The fall of Singapore presented the British government with what Winston Churchill called ‘the worst disaster and largest capitulation in British history.’[[6]](#footnote-6)

The tens of thousands of British service personnel who surrendered to the Japanese were transported into a world of deprivation, hunger, disease and ill-treatment, which for some culminated in torture and murder; thousands simply died due to a lack of food and medical care when combined with the workload they were given. A significantly higher percentage succumbed to a combination of these factors compared to British prisoners in Europe. According to Clifford Kinvig 25% of British prisoners died in the Far East[[7]](#footnote-7) compared with 5% who died as prisoners of the Germans.[[8]](#footnote-8) Death rates varied widely, and in some areas virtually all the prisoners perished at the hands of the Japanese: of the approximately 2,240 British and Australian prisoners who reportedly remained alive at Sandakan on Borneo in 1944, only 6 Australians survived the end of the war.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to consider British prisoners experiences as homogenous. The conditions the men faced in captivity varied greatly by location and time, their day to day treatment was equally varied. While the majority of guards despised the prisoners, there were others who treated the prisoners comparatively well. In this way death rates varied between areas, and changed over time according to factors such as the amount and quality of rations combined with the manual labour the men were required to carry out. British prisoners were dispersed through many countries and subjected to extremes of climate while many sweltered in disease-ridden tropical Jungles, others suffered hypothermia thousands of miles away on the Japanese Home Islands.[[10]](#footnote-10) For many of the British prisoners of war who survived three and a half years in Japanese captivity, their experiences brought both physical and mental scars which affected the rest of their lives.

The capture of such a large number of British prisoners in the Far East, presented the British wartime governments with a series of sensitive political and diplomatic issues in relation to their welfare and return. Their eventual knowledge of the poor treatment the prisoners were experiencing at the hands of the Japanese, brought about diplomatic approaches to improve conditions and send aid, however these met with very limited success. In turn, London had to make difficult decisions regarding the information which could be given to the next-of-kin and the general public. Although the British authorities were eventually forced to admit that there was little which could be done to help the prisoners without Japanese cooperation[[11]](#footnote-11); Whitehall still attempted to control the flow of information reaching Britain, concerning the welfare of British prisoners in the Far East. Indeed, this may have been a result of lessons learned earlier in the war, as there had been a public outcry as relatives became aware of London’s inability to supply relief for prisoners in Europe. Furthermore, the Japanese failure to notify the British authorities regarding the status of large numbers of British personnel thought to be prisoners in the Far East, resulted in many families being unsure of the fate of their loved ones. The circumstances of their surrender, and the lack of news regarding the welfare and status of the prisoners, led to some next-of-kin questioning London’s commitment towards the wellbeing of prisoners in Japanese hands. This study aims to add to the existing historiography on the subject, by asking important questions regarding the state’s obligations to its fighting personnel, and its manipulation of the information which was given to the British public in wartime.

From the outset, the study sought to add to the historiography by examining issues and topics which have received comparatively little attention hitherto. For instance, although a great deal of historical attention has been paid to the conditions in prisoner of war camps, the hardships the men endured, and the brutal treatment of those in Japanese hands; comparatively little has been written concerning the planning for the recovery operations which attempted to locate, assist and recover the tens of thousands of prisoners who were scattered throughout hundreds of camps spread across the Far East. This thesis contributes to the historiography of the Far Eastern theatre of operations between 1941 and 1945, by detailing the plans which were made throughout the war for the recovery operations, which ultimately returned the tens of thousands of British prisoners of war to the United Kingdom.

In order to examine the changing understanding of the British government’s attitudes towards the amelioration and recovery of Britain’s Far East prisoners of war, it is necessary to survey the published works on the topic. The earliest literature came in the form of memoirs and autobiographies written by former prisoners, many of which were adapted from records and diaries written during the course of their captivity. Understandably the accounts centred on the experiences of the men in camps, and tended to concentrate on stories of deprivation and ill-treatment. The majority were written by former prisoners who had taken part in the building of the Burma-Siam Railway.[[12]](#footnote-12) After being captured in Singapore in 1942, Rohan D. Rivett, an Australian war correspondent, collected and stored a wide range of records and kept a diary throughout his period of captivity; in 1946, Rivett published an account of his experiences entitled *Behind Bamboo*.[[13]](#footnote-13) It should be noted that all those who attempted to maintain diaries during their internment faced difficulties, as suitable writing materials were very scarce.

In addition, the Japanese forbade prisoners from keeping such records, and many were confiscated by guards. Rivett noted that with the help of various friends, he had managed to keep his records concealed through over one hundred searches.[[14]](#footnote-14) As the war progressed, penalties for keeping journals and diaries became so severe that many were forced to attempt to destroy or hide their accounts with the intention of retrieving them following the end of the war.[[15]](#footnote-15) Unfortunately by the time some former prisoners attempted to recover their accounts following the end of the war, many had been destroyed due to the fragile nature of the materials and the harsh tropical climate. Despite these difficulties, over the following years hundreds of memoirs and autobiographies have been published.

However, some published memoirs have been criticised as their narratives have been fundamentally altered by the requirements of editing and publishing, leading to accusations that they are little more than works of fiction. When Sibylla Jane Flower examined the first-hand accounts published by prisoners of war telling their part in the construction of the Burma-Thailand Railway, she pointed out problems with several prominent published works on the subject. For example, she claimed that Ernest Gordon who wrote *Miracle on the River Kwai[[16]](#footnote-16)* embellished and exaggerated events, furthermore his manuscript was ‘ghost written and altered by several editorial hands.’[[17]](#footnote-17) She also suggested that the events depicted in *And the Dawn Came up like Thunder* by Leo Rawlings and Bill Duncan[[18]](#footnote-18) were ‘embroidered’ and ‘inaccurate’ and the account was sensationalised for public consumption. Nonetheless, the most damning problem with this particular work lies in the fact that it has been subsequently proven that Duncan was never a prisoner of war.[[19]](#footnote-19) Flower also examined perhaps the most popular account, *The Railway Man[[20]](#footnote-20)* by Eric Lomax and concluded that the text has little historical value, again this was also written by ‘another hand.’[[21]](#footnote-21) In this way it appears that for some popular accounts, the need to tell an exciting story outweighs the need for historical accuracy.

A similar criticism has also been levelled at Alistair Urquhart, author of the best seller *The Forgotten Highlander*.*[[22]](#footnote-22)* During an interview with Leo Manning, who was interned in the same camp as Urquhart the end of the war, Manning suggested that there was a degree of embellishment in Urquhart’s account of his experiences when the atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki.[[23]](#footnote-23) Urquhart claimed that after the bomb was dropped, he was hit by a sudden gust of very hot air ‘like a giant hairdryer’ which knocked his ‘shrunken frame sideways.’[[24]](#footnote-24) Manning pointed out that the prison camp was some three hours journey by slow moving train from Nagasaki, and there was little or no chance that Urquhart could have experienced any such effect from the bomb.[[25]](#footnote-25) As Urquhart had already noted several occasions where he came close to death, it is possible to speculate that the effects of a normally occurring gust of wind was possibly exaggerated to demonstrate how he had cheated death for a final time. The above examples highlight the potential difficulties in using established literature for the current research topic.

Flower has also pointed out that the majority of accounts which have been written concerning the events during the construction of the Burma-Thailand Railway, have come from Other Ranks. Consequently, she suggests that ‘very little’ attention has been paid to the Allied officers who planned and maintained the administration of these camps, and that the ‘prevailing interpretation has been to disparage the Officers as a caste’. She argues that this has had the effect of skewing our understanding of the events, and ‘distorted’ both the history of prisoners on the railway and the general history of Allied prisoners in Japanese hands during the Second World War.[[26]](#footnote-26) Such comments highlight the potential pitfalls of the use of such testimony for the historian researching the experiences of those in Japanese hands.

During the 1950s and 1960s, publications gave the official accounts of both the war in the Far East, and London’s response to the humanitarian crisis which followed. Nevertheless, in comparison to the military campaigns, the plight of Britain’s prisoners of war received relatively little attention. The publication of the official history of the war against Japan gave a detailed account from the initial disastrous defeats, to the eventual surrender of Japan. The official British military history of the war against Japan was primarily written by Major-General Woodburn Kirby, and consists of some five volumes; however, the plight of the prisoners, and details of their recovery and return following the end of the war, is contained in a mere handful of pages and the content amounts to little more than an overview of the events.[[27]](#footnote-27) The final volume does nevertheless contain useful information and statistics regarding the Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees (RAPWI) operations in the southern areas. However, Kirby makes no reference to the planning which took place to prepare for the recovery operations. Furthermore, the recovery of British prisoners which occurred in northern American-led operations are outside the scope of the work, and in this way, Kirby fails to acknowledge the differences between the recovery operations in the two command areas. Despite this, the account proves to be a useful point of reference for comparison with the official documents which have been released on the subject.

In comparison, the official Australian history of the Second World War includes three chapters devoted to the experiences of Australian prisoners of war in Japanese hands, and a further chapter detailing events following the Japanese surrender.[[28]](#footnote-28) The only official history relating to prisoners has been written by W. Wynne Mason, who wrote his monograph predominantly with respect to the experiences of New Zealand prisoners of war.[[29]](#footnote-29) Regardless of his concentration on the experiences of New Zealand prisoners of war, Mason’s work addresses several themes which are pertinent to the current study, and makes valid observations concerning Allied attempts to send additional aid to prisoners throughout the Far East.

Other monographs also detailed the response from the Departments in Whitehall concerned with the welfare of British prisoners. In turn these gave an insight into the complex inter-departmental relationships between the various agencies involved, as they attempted to improve the conditions and the treatment British prisoners experienced while in Japanese hands. The official account of the work of the Prisoners of War Department (PWD) of the Foreign Office during the Second World Warwas published in 1950.[[30]](#footnote-30) The report looks at subject areas, and carries a great deal of detail, which are relevant to the present study. Sir Harold Satow and M. J. Sée examined the ways in which the British authorities attempted to improve conditions for the prisoners in the Far East, through both diplomatic and practical means. However, Satow perhaps fails to sufficiently detail the outside influences on the decisions made by the government during the course of the war. For example, when he made claims regarding the ‘publicity campaign’ he suggested that ‘it was only in the last resort’ that the British authorities ‘made known to the world the horrors of the Japanese camps’, and he further claimed that this was done ‘to spare relatives and friends fruitless worry and anxiety.’[[31]](#footnote-31) Satow failed to recognise that the timing of the announcements, and to a certain degree their contents, were dictated by events outside the control of the British government. As Sir Harold Satow was, at times, the head of the Prisoners of War Department, it is perhaps unsurprising that the work of the Department is not criticised unduly. Nonetheless, when considering what he called ‘the problem to which we devoted the greatest efforts’, the provision of ‘sufficient relief supplies for British and Allied nationals in the Far East to prevent them from dying of starvation and disease’ he was forced to admit that the Department ‘failed to achieve this on any but a minute scale.’[[32]](#footnote-32)

Additionally, an unpublished historical monograph has been written outlining the work of the work of the Directorate of Prisoners of War (DPW) of the War Office until 1945. The report was written by Colonel H.J. Phillimore, who was a member of the Directorate of Prisoners of War until 1945. However, some of the details were contested, and time could not be found to resolve these disputes. Officially the monograph was never published as ‘neither the author nor those in the War Office with an intimate knowledge of the subject could find time to put the manuscript in a final form suitable for printing.’[[33]](#footnote-33) Mr. W.H. Gardner, formerly of the Ministry of Defence, was invited to examine the draft; his reply took some three years to arrive; Gardner apparently ‘regarded the book with little favour.’[[34]](#footnote-34) He stated that the history was written from the perspective of someone who had little experience of the workings of the DPW in the early part of the war, and who had little experience of the War Office outside the Directorate.[[35]](#footnote-35) Gardner suggested that it was misleading both in the scope of the work, and on certain details, he complained the views expressed by Phillimore did not take into account the work of the other departments involved in dealing with prisoner of war matters. Overall, he concluded that the account amounted to an apologia for the work of the Directorate. Gardner’s comments are attached at the back of the draft, and passages which are commented on are cross-referenced.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Historians remain divided on the merits of this report, while Barbara Hately-Broad has pointed out that Bob Moore and Kent Fedorowich regard the work as being unreliable[[37]](#footnote-37), others such as David Rolf are willing to quote Phillimore, while recognising the validity of Gardner’s comments.[[38]](#footnote-38) Nonetheless, James Crossland apparently failed to recognise the limitations of Phillimore’s work, and simply suggested that the book was never published ‘owing most likely to the unwillingness of anyone from the War Office to edit the book.’[[39]](#footnote-39) Despite the criticism addressed towards the monograph, the draft contains some details and assertions which are germane to the study. With the above points in mind, any claims made by Phillimore are only included or commented on either when they can be corroborated with information from other reliable sources[[40]](#footnote-40), or when the claims made are at odds with the findings of the current study.

Along with the official accounts, the work of the British Red Cross Society and Order of St John of Jerusalem War Organisation has also been compiled from week by week summary reports by P.G. Cambray and G.G.B. Briggs. The monograph details the work of the British Red Cross War Organisation in all theatres and contains other information which is relevant to the current study, including the use of exchange shipping to send quantities of aid to prisoners and internees in the Far East. They also comment on the Red Cross Mission which met at Washington from September 1943, which attempted to arrange for the provision regular shipments of relief supplies, and highlight the frustrations which followed the Japanese stance regarding the distribution of the aid. Additionally, the work provides some insight into the local purchase of aid, and gives an indication of the quantity and type relief provided by the Swiss Consul in Bangkok for Allied prisoners in the area.[[41]](#footnote-41)

Cambray and Briggs also give an indication of the ways in which the British Red Cross was able to participate in the liberation and repatriation of the prisoners, and provides details of the work carried out by the British, Canadian and American Red Cross organisations, while assisting repatriates on their journeys across the United States and Canada.[[42]](#footnote-42) In addition, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) also published an official report covering its general performance, the central agency for prisoners of war, and the relief activities carried out by the Committee from 1939 to 1947.[[43]](#footnote-43) However, such publications at times give an overly positive view of the ways in which the organisations were able to assist Allied prisoners in the Far East. As will be discussed in the second chapter, the research strongly suggested that the Japanese largely refused to acknowledge the humanitarian crisis surrounding the needs of prisoners of war. Furthermore, the restrictions imposed by Tokyo on the relief efforts in all areas, prompted London to use whatever means possible to get as aid to camps. Despite their lack of impartiality, the reports proved to be a useful point of comparison with the official files released by the government.

A great deal of the subsequent published literature relating to the topic, give a comprehensive idea of what life was like for the prisoners in the Far East war using diaries, memoirs and in the case of Gavan Daws, Hank Nelson and Van Waterford extensive use of interviews.[[44]](#footnote-44) Nevertheless, accounts predominantly concentrate on the more lurid and sensational aspects of the experiences of those concerned. In particular those written by Daws and Brian MacArthur give somewhat graphic and perhaps over dramatic accounts of the events in the Far East. Of particular relevance to the present work is the study provided by Charles Roland, who gives a valuable insight into the treatment of prisoners and conditions in camps in Hong Kong and Japan.[[45]](#footnote-45) Roland’s account proves valuable for academic research as the work is systematically referenced and relies on accounts from various national archives, in addition to interviews with former prisoners. Although these authors recognise the relatively small amounts of aid which reached the prisoners, relatively little attention is paid to the diplomatic approaches to Japan, or the ways in which the Allied governments attempted to send further aid to ameliorate the plight of those in Japanese hands. Despite the fact that accounts provide some basic information concerning the repatriation process, including details of attempts to aid the prisoners following the Japanese surrender, no mention is made of the initial planning for the Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees (RAPWI) Operations.

Over the past twenty years many of the themes addressed in the major monographs have been expanded and challenged by edited collections from Bob Moore and Kent Fedorowich,[[46]](#footnote-46) Bob Moore and Barbara Hately-Broad,[[47]](#footnote-47) and Philip Towle et al.[[48]](#footnote-48) The historians contributing to the collections have examined various perspectives surrounding prisoner of war issues, in a more academic and dispassionate manner. The works examined governmental attitudes towards international conventions, and captor policies concerning prisoners of war; in doing so, these works have begun to widen our understanding of both the events in the Far East such as the Japanese attitude towards Allied prisoners, the Geneva Convention and their claim that they were acting in the interest of all Asian people.

Historians examining politics and international relations have pointed to the changing relationship between Japan and the West, during the early part of the twentieth century. The collapse of Japanese democratic political institutions, and the growing influence of the military in the 1930s, saw Japanese society moving from a position of actively seeking the approval of the Western powers. Japan increasingly embraced its own values, and the Japanese Army adopted a new set of rules which bound Japanese Service personnel to moral principles based on the Samurai system of honour, *Bushido*. Charles Roland asserted that *Bushido* was a ‘cultural hangover’, which was promoted by the military establishment to provide ‘appropriate Japanese behaviour on the battlefield.’[[49]](#footnote-49) When Susan Townsend investigated the intellectual theories which influenced Japanese policy, she noted that *Bushido* or ‘the way of the warrior’, was formulated during the early Tokugawa period (1615-1868). The *Hagakure*, a book of narratives told by Tseunetomo Yamamoto was compiled in the early eighteenth century, and was widely circulated among Japanese serving officers; she argued that the book represented ‘one of the most extreme and aggressive expressions of *Bushido*’ which fixated on death.[[50]](#footnote-50) As a result of the changes in Japanese society, the notion of surrender being dishonourable came increasingly viewed as a military and social norm.

The ideals of *Bushido* were eventually legitimised in the form of the Army’s Field Service Code (*Senjinkun*), which was released with Imperial sanction on the 7th January 1941. A key element of the instructions given to the soldiers included the notion that surrendering to the enemy brought shame not just on the individual, but on their family. The code stated ‘never live to experience shame as a prisoner. By dying you will avoid leaving behind the crime of a stain on your honour.’[[51]](#footnote-51) When Ikuhiko Hata evaluated the changing way that Japan viewed captives, he noted that the Field Service Code, included the instruction that ‘you shall not undergo the shame of being taken alive. You shall not bequeath a sullied name.’[[52]](#footnote-52) To the Japanese military mindset, when faced with capitulation, the only honourable course of action was to either die fighting the enemy or commit suicide. The marked differences between the attitudes of Japanese and Allied forces towards surrender, had far-reaching consequences for the treatment and welfare of Allied service personnel who allowed themselves to fall into Japanese hands.

The reasons for Japan’s reluctance towards ratification of the 1929 Geneva Convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of war, has also attracted some historical attention. When Yoichi Kibata appraised the historical background surrounding Japanese treatment of British prisoners of war, he noted that Immediately before the meeting in Geneva, the Ministers of the Army, Navy and Foreign Affairs wrote to the Japanese delegates stating: ‘in view of the difference between our way of living and that of European peoples, it is impossible to implement the detailed measures contained in the codes for the treatment of POW’s.’[[53]](#footnote-53) Although Japan eventually signed the convention, it was not ratified in the Japanese parliament. Hata stated that the Japanese government argued that if Japan came within the range of air raids, their enemies might be tempted to launch bombers against Japan if the aircrews were protected under the terms of the 1929 Convention.[[54]](#footnote-54) According to Kibata, the Japanese government contended that whereas foreign fighting men thought it inevitable to become prisoners once they were captured by an enemy, Japanese soldiers never expected to become POWs. As a result, the Convention was likely to impose an undue burden on the Japanese.[[55]](#footnote-55) Nonetheless, in spite of their outlook, the Japanese government gave the impression that they would abide by the terms of the Geneva Convention.

A telegram from the then Argentine Protecting Power, in February 1942, stated that the Japanese government, although not bound by the Prisoners of War Convention, had agreed to observe its terms ‘*mutatis mutandis*’ in respect of English, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and Indian prisoners of war.[[56]](#footnote-56) Regardless of their initial claims, it should be noted that the Japanese authorities failed to recognise status of captured Indian service personnel as prisoners of war. Instead Tokyo attempted to coerce as many as possible, into joining the so-called Indian National Army fighting against the British.[[57]](#footnote-57) By using this Latin phrase the Japanese suggested that they would treat the prisoners according to the terms of the Convention, with any necessary changes being made. Similarly, when considering food and clothing for the prisoners in their hands, Tokyo also claimed they would take into account national and racial customs on the basis of ‘reciprocity.’[[58]](#footnote-58) However, the differences between the Allied and Japanese attitudes towards surrender, resulted in a vast imbalance in numbers of prisoners between the two opposing sides.[[59]](#footnote-59)

The inequality in numbers, when coupled with the Japanese attitude towards their own ‘shamed’ personnel in Allied hands, had repercussions for the Japanese assertion that they would treat Allied prisoners according to the terms of the Geneva Convention. Although the Japanese made claims to the contrary, reciprocity did not exist between the opposing sides in the Far East. Consequently, the British government remained in a very poor position when attempting to influence the Japanese government to treat prisoners in its charge in an internationally acceptable manner.

During the Second World War, Tokyo simply used its apparent acceptance of the terms of the Geneva Convention, to disguise their true intentions towards prisoners of war. Philip Towle asserted that although Japan told the Allies that they would abide by international agreements, at the same time the Japanese Prime Minister told those in charge of prisoners that ‘International law should be interpreted from the point of executing the war according to our own opinions’. He suggested that the Allies were supposed to be ‘pacified’ by this claim.[[60]](#footnote-60) According to Kibata, Tadashi Tanaka argued Japan’s stance towards its observance of international law was ‘a tool for realising its ambition, not as a norm to be always observed.’[[61]](#footnote-61) As will be discussed in the first chapter while these observations are borne out by the current research, it took time for the London to realise that the Japanese claims regarding their adherence to the terms of the Geneva Convention were demonstrably false.

Flower pointed out that the provisions of the Geneva Convention towards prisoners, were not included in the training of either officers or other ranks of the Imperial Japanese Army. [[62]](#footnote-62) The very fact that the Japanese authorities failed to provide training concerning the details of the Geneva Convention for those in charge of prisoners, demonstrated the falsehood of their claim to be treating prisoners according to international law. Hata argued that although regulations concerning prisoners of war were in being, they were not being ‘properly implemented’; he puts the blame for this squarely with Japan’s military leaders who believed that their own troops should not surrender and those doing so would ‘forfeit all human rights’, in turn this attitude ‘was applied with equal vigour towards enemy POWs.’[[63]](#footnote-63) Although such comments are valid, the research suggested that these views needed to be qualified with observations regarding the decentralised nature of the Japanese command structure. As prisoners were held in locations thousands of miles from Tokyo, the lack of direct communication resulted in individual commanders having a great deal of autonomy concerning the way that prisoners were treated.

The Japanese claim that they would take into account the prisoners national and racial customs with regards to food and clothing, also bore little relation to the realities in the camps. The harsh tropical climate meant that clothing and boots quickly deteriorated, and were not replaced, many prisoners working in jungle conditions were forced to go barefoot and wore little more than a loin cloth.[[64]](#footnote-64) The rations provided by the Japanese were generally extremely poor and as the majority of the prisoners were required to carry out heavy manual labour, this combination of factors resulted in slow starvation, illness, and contributed to a great number of deaths. As will be discussed in the first chapter, the Japanese ill-treatment of prisoners carried both political and racial connotations.

In addition, historians have attempted to examine the wider issues surrounding the captivity of prisoners of war. Monographs and academic articles examine some of the themes addressed in the study, including the development of government policies towards the welfare of prisoners of war, the inter-relationships between Allied governments and the possibility of sending additional aid to prisoners in the Far East. Historians such as P. Scott Corbett, Jonathan F. Vance and Kent Fedorowich have detailed the exchanges of diplomatic personnel and civilians which provided an opportunity to send aid to those in Japanese hands.[[65]](#footnote-65) Nevertheless, the accounts from Vance and Fedorowich predominantly examined the inter-Allied relationships surrounding the exchange process, and highlighted the difficulties faced by Britain when dealing with not only the Japanese authorities, but also other Allied governments. These works emphasise the fact that although the British government attempted to present a united Commonwealth front to Tokyo, in reality, each of the Allied governments had their own agenda and priorities, when negotiating the possible exchange of their diplomats, civilian internees and prisoners of war. In turn, this affected the decisions which were made by Allied governments concerning which proposals to endorse.

Vance argued that for the Canadian government ‘self-interest’ played a major role in determining which exchange scheme to support, he suggested that Ottawa made its choices ‘on the basis of the anticipated benefits of any given proposal for Canada’ without considering the impact that this decision had on the negotiation process.’[[66]](#footnote-66) Similarly, Fedorowich gave details of the negotiations which took place as the British authorities attempted to recover a percentage of the 2,500 British internees from Hong Kong. He pointed out the cooperation of the United States, Canada and Australian authorities was ‘not always forthcoming’, and that ‘a clash between national and imperial interests’ was ‘unavoidable.’[[67]](#footnote-67) Despite the fact that such works include details relevant to the current research, they predominantly concentrate on the negotiations surrounding the exchange process. Although the authors acknowledge the possibility of sending relief on the available ships, they fail to provide details of the relatively small, but significant, amount of aid the exchanges provided for those who remained in Japanese hands.

However, when Suzanne Hall examined the relief efforts for prisoners in Thailand, she argued that although Foreign Office records demonstrated that ‘only 1,600’ citizens were exchanged in repatriation schemes in 1942, they were ‘more concerned’ with possible disruption to the exchange, than ‘coming to the rescue of the 300,000 British POWs and civilian internees in Japanese hands.’[[68]](#footnote-68) Although Cambray and Briggs correctly suggested that this route was ‘no more than a casual way’ of alleviating the needs of those in Japanese hands.[[69]](#footnote-69) Hall apparently failed to recognise that the exchange ships provided one of the very few opportunities to send aid to the Far East, and ignored London’s attempts to send any form of aid possible.[[70]](#footnote-70) In contrast to Hall’s assessment, the account of the exchanges from David Miller provides some details of the amount of aid which these exchanges delivered to the Far East. Nonetheless, the work has limited value for the academic researcher on the subject, as the author’s system of referencing gives little indication of the source or authenticity of much of the information quoted.

When considering the recovery and return of prisoners of war the planning for the recovery operations remains under researched, Clifford Kinvig claimed that the planning for the recovery of prisoners of war started in April 1945.[[71]](#footnote-71) In contrast to this, the current research suggests that the initial planning process began as early as September of 1942, although it took until 1945 for the plans to be put on a ‘firm footing’. Nonetheless, the recovery operations have received some historical attention. As noted above, the official British history of the Second World War carried some details of the Recovery of Allied Prisoner of War and Internees (RAPWI) operations. In addition, the experiences of recovery are noted in various accounts written by former prisoners of war. However, these generally take the form of a post script to the main body of the work. Furthermore, the individuals perhaps understandably knew little of wider issues affecting the recovery process. While some historians have examined various aspects of the RAPWI operations, a number of these concentrate on the more sensational or controversial issues which arose as the Allied forces attempted to recover tens of thousands of prisoners spread throughout the Far East. For example, while Felton makes some valid comments, he overstated the consequences of General MacArthur’s order which forbade localised surrenders taking place until he had personally had taken the formal Japanese surrender in Tokyo.[[72]](#footnote-72) He makes the observation that this order delayed the recovery operation, and resulted in the deaths of ‘countless’ more prisoners who ‘died needlessly from starvation, disease and ill-treatment.’[[73]](#footnote-73) Although it is true that considerable numbers of prisoners died in the weeks following the Japanese surrender, Brian MacArthur suggested that the death rate amongst Allied prisoners across the Far East at this time was 15 per day at this time.[[74]](#footnote-74) Indeed, Felton eventually acknowledged that despite the orders, the recovery operations began in earnest in southern areas before MacArthur took the official Japanese surrender. However, the current research strongly suggests that in the circumstances surrounding the Japanese capitulation, the recovery operations were extremely unlikely to begin immediately without significant risk to both the prisoners and those involved in the recovery operations.

When considering the recovery of Allied prisoners Peter Dennis gives one of the few accounts which addresses various aspects of the planning process which occurred prior to the commencement of the recovery operations. He also gives some ideas of the difficulties faced by Mountbatten in southern areas, as he attempted to organise the re-occupation of areas formerly under Japanese control. Dennis also indicates the problems caused for the RAPWI operations in various areas due to the politicisation of the indigenous population, as they attempted to stake their claims for political independence in the power vacuum which followed the Japanese surrender.[[75]](#footnote-75) Additionally, Romen Bose detailed the operations to liberate Singapore, and although the work is limited in its scope, it does nonetheless give an indication of the role of Force 136 in assisting prisoners following the end of the war.[[76]](#footnote-76)

When considering the role of covert operatives in the Far East, Ian Trenowden, M. R. D. Foot and J. M. Langley, Charles Cruickshank and Suzanne Hall have all provided an insight into the way that these organisations were able to assist in the RAPWI operations.[[77]](#footnote-77) Cruickshank gives details of the work carried out by Force 136 in assisting the recovery process in Thailand. However, he underplayed the rivalry which occurred between the British and American covert operatives and the impact this had on the recovery operations. In comparison, when Foot and Langley gave a comprehensive account of the work of covert operatives in assisting in escape and evasion in what they refer to as the ‘Asian war’, they were far more realistic concerning the inter-Allied rivalry which plagued covert operations in some areas. Nonetheless, their study failed to detail the operations to rescue those who survived the war in Japanese camps, and downplayed the actions of covert operatives in the recovery operations by describing it simply as ‘medicine and administration.’[[78]](#footnote-78) Although Foot later detailed the work of SOE in the Far East, he similarly neglected to provide details of the significant role played by members of Force 136 in the recovery operations in some southern areas. Despite the fact that the account from Trenowden does provide some information concerning the role played by covert operatives in the RAPWI operations, it amounts to little more than a brief overview of events. Nonetheless, he emphasises the ad hoc nature of the actions carried out by covert operatives, and suggests that the positive results were achieved with a combination of ‘bluff, tact, diplomacy and luck’, when they were given orders to attempt to arrange local agreements with the Japanese ahead of a formal surrender.[[79]](#footnote-79)

In her article, Suzanne Hall recognises that the proximity and numbers of clandestine operatives resulted these personnel being ‘ideally placed’ to take part in the initial recovery operations.[[80]](#footnote-80) Nonetheless, she also contends that the inadequacies on the part of the Red Cross, with regards to prisoner of war recovery, ‘may have been prompted by the deployment of other bodies such as SOE.’[[81]](#footnote-81) As noted above, the Japanese failure to recognise the authority of the International Red Cross Committee in southern areas, resulted in the ICRC having a very limited physical presence in these areas when Japan suddenly surrendered. In contrast to this, the thesis details the ways in which various national Red Cross organisations were able to make plans well in advance of the Japanese capitulation. In turn, this resulted in the British Red Cross being able to assist in the RAPWI operations and the repatriation process, by making both personnel and substantial amounts of relief supplies available. Similarly, in northern areas where representatives of the ICRC and Protecting Power were allowed to operate slightly more freely, the research demonstrated that these individuals were in some instances able to assist prisoners before the arrival of Allied RAPWI teams. Here Marcel Junod the ICRC Delegate in Tokyo provided an invaluable insight into his own attempts to aid in the recovery operations in northern areas.[[82]](#footnote-82)

From the survey of the literature concerning the differing aspects of the recovery process, it became clear that these have primarily concentrated on the British-led operations in southern areas. Comparatively little attention has been given to the recovery operations with respect to British prisoners of war from American controlled northern areas. Consequently, there has been little attempt to discuss the differences between the experiences of the two set of recovered prisoners. Similarly, little mention is made of the effect that delays in the repatriation process had on the reception the repatriated prisoners received on their arrival in the United Kingdom. The research suggested that although the British authorities planned that each returning ship should receive an official welcome, the fact that some former prisoners returned weeks or months following the initial flurry of excitement, resulted in considerable numbers of prisoners receiving little or no official welcome.

The current study argues that the methods of repatriation combined with the additional rations supplied for prisoners following the sudden Japanese capitulation, allowed many men to gain appreciable amounts of weight prior to their arrival back in the United Kingdom. Additionally, it is possible to suggest that the warnings issued to the returning prisoners and their families both prevented some repatriated prisoners from discussing the full extent of the hardships they had suffered while in Japanese hands, and discouraged families from asking difficult questions. These orders, when combined with the comparative lack of information received by the families of those in Japanese hands, potentially contributed to a lack of understanding, relating to the extent of the failure of the British relief efforts during the course of the war.

From the survey of the historiography it is apparent that although a great deal has been written on the subject of prisoners of war in Japanese hands, the majority of work has primarily concentrated on the day-to-day lives of prisoners in various camps. Comparatively few works have examined the recovery process in any detail, and there has been scant historical attention given to the planning process which occurred throughout the course of the war which aimed to recover the men from camps across the Far East. As a result of these omissions much of the information for the present study has, by necessity, had to come from primary sources.

**Primary Material**

When researching sources of available material, it quickly became apparent that records at the National Archives would be invaluable for many aspects of the present study. In addition to these official files, unpublished personal accounts have been utilised from the collections at the Second World War Experience Centre, the Imperial War Museum and the Liddle Collection at the University of Leeds. Information regarding the news which was reported to the British public regarding the conditions in the Far East came from several sources, the largest of which was the British Newspaper Archive. In addition, The British Red Cross Archives holds copies of *Far East*, the magazine which was published specifically for the families and friends of the men who were thought to be prisoners; this gave a clear indication of extra information regarding the treatment of the prisoners which was available to this particular group.

The National Archives contain details of the ways in which successive British governments attempted to deal with the issues raised by the loss, and eventual recovery, of tens of thousands of British fighting personnel in the Far East. The main body of material came from all three services involved, and is found in files from the War Office, the Admiralty and the Air Force. Information for the study also came from papers relating to the Foreign Office, Special Operations Executive in the Far East, the Colonial Office, the Prime Minister’s Office, the Cabinet Office, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Health. Relevant information was spread through a large number of record groups, and is frequently duplicated amongst files in other areas. Even though increasing numbers of documents have been made available on-line from the National Archives, the amount of applicable digitised material remains limited. Visits to the archives proved crucial and demonstrated that, while some files which at first appeared to be relevant prove to be of little value; others with little apparent significance have proven to be an extremely useful source of material.

From the outset, it was important to gain an impression of what the British government knew of the plight of the prisoners, and when this information was available. For this research, valuable sources of information were found in War Office records which included War Diaries, the minutes of the Imperial Prisoners of War Committee, its various Sub-Committees and files relating to the Directorate of Prisoners of War.[[83]](#footnote-83) As the accounts available remain incomplete, it was nonetheless extremely difficult to gain a completely unbroken week by week picture of the events. Further information regarding the treatment of the prisoners, came from documents from both the Foreign Office, and the Prime Minister’s Office. [[84]](#footnote-84) Linked to this area of research are the reports made to London by the ICRC and Protecting Power which gave details of the visits their representatives were permitted to make to camps in the northern area.[[85]](#footnote-85) Using a combination of these sources it was possible to gain a sense of the British knowledge of the atrocities committed against the prisoners, and when this information became available to the various departments concerned.

Despite the availability of records relating to the work of the Directorate of Prisoners of War (DPW) of the War Office, the relevance of some material is difficult to assess due to the changing structure of the departments involved. For example, in the autumn of 1941 while the Directorate officially consisted of just three departments, in reality it actually consisted of six with a sub-branch which was occupied with statistics. After a review, following the exposure of dishonesty amongst certain staff involving the misappropriation of funds, these departments were then reorganised into just two branches P.W.1 and P.W.2. Confusingly, as the war progressed, an additional three departments were added. Due to these changes it can be problematic for researchers to adequately locate the records. For the purposes of the present thesis, records are primarily found in P.W.2 which dealt with the welfare of British prisoners and P.W.5 which examined issues surrounding the repatriation of prisoners of war.

When investigating the ways in which the Allies attempted to put diplomatic pressure on Japan to improve conditions for the prisoners, records were located in a variety of record groups such as the Foreign Office, Colonial Office, War Office, Cabinet Papers and the Prime Ministers own documents.[[86]](#footnote-86) The material available demonstrated that although some in the War Office considered that the more moderate elements in the Japanese government were susceptible to negative publicity it was also thought that any claims which were made in public announcements, may have potentially encouraged further ill-treatment for the prisoners. Information available from War Office files included the original drafts of the announcements which were made to the public, with respect to the welfare of the prisoners. The records give a clear indication of the ways in which the British government attempted to control the flow of information during the war.[[87]](#footnote-87) The Allies were also prepared to use more speculative methods of attempting to influence the Japanese, including approaches to the moderate elements in the Japanese government.[[88]](#footnote-88) However, the accounts also demonstrated that the British were in a somewhat subordinate position to the United States when dealing with the Japanese, and that this relationship also had a direct bearing on the public announcements which were made regarding the Japanese treatment of the prisoners.

Detailed information relating to the ways in which the Allied governments attempted to ameliorate the conditions in the Far East, was again found in the minutes of the meetings of the Imperial Prisoners of War Committee and its Sub-Committees. The records gave comprehensive accounts of the inter-Allied negotiations and discussions in connection with the amount of aid being sent by each country involved, and the difficulties involved in attempting to persuade the Japanese to deliver the aid to both the northern and southern areas.[[89]](#footnote-89) Files demonstrate the increasing desperation in the various methods employed. Further documents from the War Office detail the ways in which the British government attempted to assist the prisoners by providing Swiss francs, which allowed the Swiss Consuls in some areas to purchase additional foodstuffs and medicines for the prisoners. The papers demonstrated that the Swiss Consul in Bangkok, although not officially recognised by the Japanese, was able to purchase aid in a private capacity. He was able to provide details for the British authorities concerning the amount of the aid which was sent, and also to obtain signatures from prisoners for a short time confirming the receipt of the aid.[[90]](#footnote-90)

Research into the planning and realities of the attempts to recover, liberate and repatriate the prisoners, uncovered that details of the plans for recovery operations are mainly located in War Office files, with the earliest records dating from 1942. Although more detailed plans evolved over time, the plans were only put on a firm basis in 1945.[[91]](#footnote-91) However the sudden Japanese capitulation necessitated a different strategy. Details relating to the attempts to assist and recover prisoners were found in Air Ministry, Admiralty and War Office files. Documents available include the minutes of the meetings of the Joint Logistical Planning Committee, which was part of Lord Mountbatten’s staff in Colombo, whose members played a major role in coordinating the relief and recovery operations in the southern area.[[92]](#footnote-92) When examining issues relating to the repatriation of the former prisoners, invaluable material was located in the reports relating to the recovery operations; these included individual accounts from both members of the recovery teams, and reports from various personnel including some senior officers onboard the vessels used as transportation.[[93]](#footnote-93) When read in conjunction with the experiences detailed in accounts from prisoners recovered in the southern area, the files highlight the contrasts between the British-led operations in the south, and the American-led operations in the north; these were of particular relevance to the study as they emphasized the disparity in experiences of liberation and repatriation of British prisoners recovered from various areas, and in turn highlighted the ways in which this ultimately affected the former prisoners’ experiences of homecoming.

Several institutions hold examples of unpublished personal accounts, which shed light onto the issues surrounding the recovery operations in the Far East. The information available at the Imperial War Museum includes diaries, memoirs and transcripts of oral history interviews with a number of former prisoners and personnel from clandestine units such as ‘E’ Group and Force 136. Other information available includes memoirs and diaries from members of the Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internee (RAPWI) teams, which were among the first to make contact with the prisoners at the end of the war and begin the recovery and rehabilitation processes.[[94]](#footnote-94) The Second World War Experience Centre also provided material which is relevant to the study. Although the archive contains some published accounts, much of the information is original and unpublished, including memoirs from those involved in the recovery and rehabilitation of the former prisoners.[[95]](#footnote-95) This resource has links to the Liddle Collection held at the University of Leeds whose archive contains both written and oral testimony from former prisoners, including some recollections on the ‘V’ organisation which helped to give aid to prisoners, and memoires from personnel from ‘E’ group which attempted to rescue prisoners during the conflict.[[96]](#footnote-96) These resources proved to be a valuable source of material which is both original and uncorrupted by the processes involved in editing and publishing process. In all cases the information is of differing qualities, and needs careful assessment as to its suitability for research purposes.

Details of the information available in contemporary press articles came from a variety of sources, these included cuttings from newspapers which were included in various governmental files at the National Archives. The press cuttings demonstrated that the government departments were aware of the information which was being published, and the impact that this potentially had on the British public. The largest source of this material was found at The British Newspaper Archive, which holds digitised copies of many popular newspapers from the period, and the information is readily available for researchers. Further records of relevant published material came from the British Red Cross Archives which hold copies of *Far East*, a magazine produced for the next-of-kin of the men in the Far East; the publication gave a clear indication of the type of information which was available to the families and friends of the prisoners at the time, and in turn was contrasted with official records.

**Chapter structure**

By examining the issues surrounding the amelioration and recovery of the British prisoners of war from the Far East, the study attempts to begin to fill some of the gaps in the existing historiography. The omission of some areas of research in the current literature has helped to shape the structure of the thesis. The first chapter examines the origin of the problems the British government faced, and includes details surrounding the circumstances of the capture of the prisoners in Hong Kong and Singapore. The main focus of the research examined the ways in which London, and the British public, reacted to the loss of tens of thousands of British prisoners in the Far East. In order to establish this, it was possible to utilise some of the secondary material available for an overview of the events, and contrast this with the records available in both the National Archives and the news which was reported in the contemporary press. This information was used to determine the response in Britain, and establish the attitudes expressed at all levels towards the losses.

The work goes on to explain the nature of the problems the Allies faced, when attempting to negotiate with the Japanese. This included an assessment of the Japanese attitude towards the British prisoners in their charge. It then examines the British government’s approach concerning the welfare of the prisoners in the Far East. In doing so, it was necessary to evaluate what information became available to London, and when it became apparent the British prisoners in Japanese hands were being ill-treated. This was contrasted with the British expectations, regarding the treatment of the prisoners, given the Japanese assurance that they would generally treat the prisoners according to the terms of the Geneva Convention. Using this information, it was possible to gain a sense of the difficulties Whitehall faced when attempting to negotiate with the Japanese, and this was contrasted with the ways in which London was able to deal with similar issues with the Axis governments in Europe. Following on from these themes, the research examined the announcements which were made to the British public, regarding the prisoners in the Far East. This also included an assessment of the pressure which was exerted on the British government by the next-of-kin of the men in the Far East, including calls from the British Prisoners of War Relatives Association, for London to change the ways it dealt with prisoner of war matters. In this way, it was possible to both understand the changing nature of the government’s knowledge of the events in the Far East and determine the ways in which the flow of information was controlled throughout the course of the war.

The second chapter appraises the practical methods used in an effort to improve conditions for the men in the Far East, and examines the increasingly desperate methods employed by the Allied governments to send aid to the prisoners; this includes details of both the practical consignments of relief supplies, and the monetary aid which was sent to facilitate the local purchase additional foodstuffs and medical supplies. The study also assesses the diplomatic measures taken to attempt to improve conditions for the prisoners and includes an assessment of the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the British Red Cross Society and Order of St John of Jerusalem War Organisation, and other organisations which were able to assist the prisoners.

In the third chapter the research examined the ways in which British planned for the recovery of the prisoners, it investigates the planning process for the recovery of the British prisoners of war which began as early as 1942, and charts the way that the plans evolved over time. The initial plans suggested that prisoners could be recovered as they were located, during the Allied advance across the Pacific region; other strategies included attempts to rescue prisoners who were used for road and rail-building projects outside established camps. The study discusses the dangers involved for the prisoners, as Japanese orders had been given to murder the prisoners rather than allow them to be recovered by the advancing Allied forces. Finally, it charts the changes to the plans which were made following the news of the existence of the Atomic bomb, and the subsequent Japanese capitulation, which necessitated the Allied Commanders in the field attempting to assist, and then to recover all the Allied prisoners simultaneously.

The fourth chapter examines the realities of the recovery operation, it details the successes and failures of the plans which attempted to recover over a hundred thousand prisoners who were spread across the Pacific region, of which some 37,000 were recovered to the United Kingdom. The research looks in detail at the logistics of the recovery operation, and the differences which occurred between the American-led northern operations and the British-led operations in the southern area. Although some prisoners only returned to Britain during the course of 1946, the bulk of prisoners were repatriated during the last three months of 1945, and it is possible to contrast the experiences of homecoming between those who returned on the first ships which arrived from the southern areas as early as October, with those who arrived on the later transport which arrived in November and December 1945.

**CHAPTER 1**

**Public Pressure on Whitehall and London’s Diplomatic Approaches to Tokyo**

This chapter considers London’s diplomatic approaches to Tokyo, through the Protecting Powers and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). It examines ICRC requests for the Japanese authorities to treat Allied prisoners according to the terms of the Geneva Convention, and discusses the reasons why such requests had little chance of success. The study briefly examines British governmental attitudes to the losses in the Far East, and considers suggestions that the welfare of those in Japanese hands may have been disregarded as a result of the circumstances of their capture. It attempts to establish what information became available to Whitehall with respect to the conditions and treatment the men were experiencing, and determine at what point it was realised in that the Japanese were systematically ill-treating large numbers of those who had fallen into their hands.

The chapter goes on to investigate issues which arose from the lack of reliable information which arrived in Whitehall from the Far East, and asked questions of London’s attitudes towards the welfare of those British Service Personnel who were thought to be in Japanese hands. It considers problems surrounding the spread of information to both relatives and the wider British public, with regards to the ill-treatment and atrocities committed against this particular group of prisoners. The work then goes on to explore how the next-of-kin of British captives in the Far East, attempted to influence the way that the government dealt with prisoner of war matters through emerging pressure groups. Finally, the chapter examines London’s increasing sense of desperation in its attempts to improve the welfare of prisoners through both orthodox and more speculative approaches to Tokyo.

**British, Imperial and Dominion attitudes towards Far East Prisoners of war**

Although thousands of prisoners were captured when Hong Kong fell on the 25th of December 1941, it was the circumstances surrounding the surrender of the Naval Base at Singapore which proved to be controversial. Various elements of the British forces were criticised for their actions during the operations, from the top of the command structure to the actions of raw Australian recruits, who after being sent into battle with little or no training apparently deserted in appreciable numbers.[[97]](#footnote-97) If we contrast the ways in which the surrender of Hong Kong was viewed in London with the Fall of Singapore, it is possible to suggest that Churchill’s comments may potentially have had a negative effect on the attitudes of some in Whitehall who were later concerned with attempting to improve the welfare for British prisoners in the Far East.

When considering the loss of Hong Kong, Charles Roland stated that although the colony had hitherto been a ‘significant node’ in Britain’s military chain defending her interests in the Far East, nonetheless, in the circumstances which existed in 1941, Churchill and his professional strategists realised that Hong Kong was ‘largely indefensible.’[[98]](#footnote-98) Britain was unable to amass significant numbers of fighting ships in the area, as much of the Royal Navy was engaged in areas such as the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, and the North Sea. Roland noted that London was faced with four distinct choices: they could have abandoned the colony; however, this would have had a severe impact on British prestige; they could have reduced the size of the military commitment, but this would have destroyed morale; they could have left the situation as it was; or finally they could have strengthened the defences of the colony.[[99]](#footnote-99) Despite the fact that Churchill had previously argued that Hong Kong could neither be held nor relieved,[[100]](#footnote-100) the British requested that the Canadian government provide reinforcements, and ‘two inadequately trained and equipped Canadian Battalions’[[101]](#footnote-101) were sent to the colony in the weeks leading up to the Japanese attack. The British forces surrendered after just 18 days of fighting. Subsequent correspondence demonstrated that the repercussions of the request for Canadian reinforcements carried on for several years following the end of the war.[[102]](#footnote-102) Indeed the reasons behind London’s request to Ottawa remain the topic of historical debate.[[103]](#footnote-103)

Given Hong Kong’s perceived vulnerability, those charged with its defence were considered to have acted in the best traditions of the British Army. In response to the surrender a telegram from the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Moyne, to Governor Sir Shenton Thomas characterised London’s reaction to its loss, it read: ‘It is a good fight you have fought, and I send to you and all who have held out so splendidly against overwhelming force the thanks of H.M. government.’[[104]](#footnote-104) In a tone which suggested that the men defending the Colony had done their utmost it continued ‘the defence of Hong Kong will live in the story of the Empire, to which it adds yet another chapter of courage and endurance.’[[105]](#footnote-105) The view in Whitehall appears to reflect the notion that the loss of Hong Kong was inevitable, and those defending the Colony carried out their duties to the best of their abilities in the face of overwhelming Japanese aggression.

In contrast to this view, the British base at Singapore had been portrayed to the outside world as being invulnerable to any attack.[[106]](#footnote-106) As often quoted Winston Churchill later claimed that the fall of this strategically vital outpost was ‘the worst disaster and largest capitulation in British history.’[[107]](#footnote-107) The British forces surrendered en masse in controversial circumstances on the 15th of February 1942. When Singapore surrendered some 38,496 British, 18,490 Australian, 67,340 Indian service personnel and 14,382 local volunteers fell into Japanese hands.[[108]](#footnote-108) Such figures demonstrate the scale of the British defeat, and give an indication of the loss of prestige for the British Empire.

It could certainly be argued that Churchill’s statements to a secret session of the House of Commons in connection with the Fall of Singapore, were primarily designed to deflect any criticism which may have been levelled at his own decisions, in connection with the planning or the resources which had been made available prior to the Japanese attacks across the Far East. Instead, he placed the blame for the defeat of what was a supposedly impregnable base, at the feet of those who were now in Japanese hands. When Churchill addressed a ‘secret session’ of the House of Commons on the 23rd of April 1942, just two months after its surrender, he made it clear that the blame for the failure to defend Singapore lay primarily with the poor performance and lack of fighting spirit of British forces. He told the House that ‘after five or six days of confused but not very severe fighting the army and fortress surrendered.’[[109]](#footnote-109) When considering the likelihood that British service personnel had fallen into Japanese hands, he noted that ‘the Japanese have not stated the number of prisoners they have taken but it does not seem that there was very much bloodshed.’[[110]](#footnote-110) He added, ‘this episode and all that led up to it seems to be out of harmony with anything that we have experienced or performed in the present war.’[[111]](#footnote-111) Regardless of his disparaging comments, it is worth noting that the vast majority of those captured were ordered to lay down their arms by their officers, and few surrendered voluntarily. Nonetheless Churchill’s assessment that there was an ‘endless field’ for recrimination and his assertion that ‘most of those concerned are prisoners’[[112]](#footnote-112), portrayed the actions of this group in an extremely negative light.

The rapid Japanese victories left some 130,000 British prisoners in Japanese hands. Those forces who were considered to be ‘British’ included Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, Indian, and South African service personnel, along with other locally recruited volunteers. The inclusion of Dominion and Imperial service personnel further highlighted the necessity for a combined Commonwealth approach towards the welfare of those now in enemy hands. The British and Dominion governments had already provided members of various committees and sub-committees which attempted to deal with the problems faced by their captured service personnel, as a result of the conflict in Europe; initially called the ‘Inter-Governmental Committee on Prisoners of War’, this later became the ‘Imperial Prisoners of War Committee’ (IPWC). Its formation had been announced by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs in the House of Lords on 30th April 1941.[[113]](#footnote-113) The members of the Committee included representatives from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa, India as well as representatives from the British Dominion Office, the Foreign Office, the Prisoners of War Office as well as the Director of Finance at the War Office and the Deputy Director of Prisoners of War from the War Office.[[114]](#footnote-114) It was through this organisation that the various British Imperial and Dominion authorities attempted to deal with issues surrounding the welfare of those now in Japanese hands.

Historians have argued over the effectiveness of the IPWC. Phillimore reported that the full Imperial Prisoners of War Committee met only three times during the course of the war.[[115]](#footnote-115) Satow noted that the High Commissioners for Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand were only present at the initial session.[[116]](#footnote-116) Neville Wylie suggests that meetings of the full committee became ‘redundant’ as the Dominion High Commissioners ‘had ample opportunities’ to raise any concerns in their daily meetings with the Dominions secretary.[[117]](#footnote-117) The fact that the full committee did not meet on a regular basis appears to have led James Crossland to claim that the IPWC was a ‘flop’ and in practice the handling of POW affairs remained firmly in the grasp of the PWD and the DPW.’[[118]](#footnote-118) Wylie suggests that in reality the IPWC was really a War Office committee which was camouflaged as being intergovernmental.[[119]](#footnote-119) Although it is true to suggest that the full Committee met less than a handful of times, in reality, the main work of the Committee was carried out through two Sub-Committees which met on an extremely regular basis. The Sub-Committees dealt with all aspects of the problems facing the British and Dominion governments relating to the welfare of both British and Dominion prisoners in Axis hands and Axis prisoners in Allied hands. For the present study, the records of the meetings of the various Committees and Sub-Committees nonetheless provide a valuable insight into the information available to Whitehall concerning the treatment of prisoners in the Far East.

The Japanese captured Allied prisoners in the northern areas including Hong Kong, Shanghai, Manchuria, Korea, Taiwan and the Japanese Home Islands and the southern newly-occupied zones where the majority of British prisoners were held, these areas included Malaya, Singapore, Burma, Java, Sumatra, the Netherlands East Indies, Indo-China and other remote Pacific areas. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Protecting Powers attempted to function as independent bodies which aimed to protect the welfare of captives from all sides, and ensure that they were treated in an internationally acceptable manner; difficulties arose for the Allied governments as the Japanese refused to recognise the right of the two bodies to fulfil their roles, with respect to prisoners held in the southern newly-occupied areas. However, this standpoint was not immediately clear to London, as Tokyo appeared to suggest that they would treat all Allied prisoners in accordance with the terms of the Geneva Convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of war, wherever they were held.

**Japan’s attitude towards the Geneva Convention**

Following Japanese attacks across the Far East, the ICRC offered all belligerents their assistance. The British government had already cabled the Japanese inviting them to adhere to the 1929 Convention and decided not to reply to the ICRC offer, until a reply had been received from the Japanese government.[[120]](#footnote-120) Japan’s intentions towards treating prisoners in captivity according to the terms of the 1929 Convention was initially unclear; Sir Harold Satow of the Foreign Office pointed out to a meeting of the IPWC in December 1941, that Japan had signed the Prisoners of War Convention of 1929, but this had never been ratified in the Japanese Parliament.[[121]](#footnote-121) Such observation perhaps pointed to British uncertainties with respect to Japan’s treatment of prisoners.

On a more positive note Satow stated that Japan was bound by the provisions of Convention IV of 1907, signed at The Hague. Furthermore, he added they had also ratified the Red Cross Convention of 1929, with the exception of a minor point on Clause 28 to which they had taken exception.[[122]](#footnote-122) Under the terms of the Red Cross Convention, it was agreed that soldiers or other persons attached to the armies involved who were wounded or sick, should be ‘respected and protected in all circumstances’, and that they should be ‘humanely treated and cared for without distinction of nationality by the belligerent in whose power they were.’[[123]](#footnote-123) Even before this Convention came into being, the Japanese had already proved that they were capable of treating prisoners according to the provisions of the Hague regulations of 1899. Indeed, the Japanese authorities had previously gained recognition from the ICRC for the humane treatment of Russian prisoners during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05.[[124]](#footnote-124) From these examples it is possible to suggest that initially at least, the British authorities considered that the actions of earlier Japanese governments demonstrated that they were capable of treating prisoners of war according to the terms of earlier international agreements. This attitude appeared to be confirmed by the Japanese response to queries with respect to their treatment of Allied prisoners.

Tokyo’s initial response to Britain’s diplomatic approaches appeared to confirm they would indeed treat Allied prisoners in line with international norms. After the surrender of Hong Kong on Christmas day 1941, it was unclear just how many British Service Personnel may have fallen into Japanese hands. In January 1942, the Foreign Office reminded the Japanese of their obligations under Article 4 of the ‘Red Cross Convention’. Furthermore, they also requested the Argentine government, who were at this time acting as the Protecting Power for British interests in the Far East, obtain any information available from the Japanese with regard to Imperial prisoners of war who had been captured.[[125]](#footnote-125) In reply the Japanese government declared that it was ready to transmit information concerning prisoners of war and interned non-combatants, on a basis of reciprocity.[[126]](#footnote-126) Such claims implied that the Japanese authorities considered large numbers of their service personnel would be captured by the Allies. In turn their calls for reciprocity naturally appeared to be positive news. British plans had already been put forward in December 1941, for the accommodation of ‘approximately 30,000 Japanese Prisoners of War.’[[127]](#footnote-127) Nonetheless, such proposals were an indication of the ignorance in Whitehall of the changes in the Japanese attitudes towards being captured by an enemy, which had occurred in the inter-war period.

Tokyo continued to make positive claims in relation to their treatment of prisoners, and by January 1942, the War Office was informed that the Japanese authorities were establishing a Prisoner of War Information Bureau in Tokyo, whose duty it would be to cable the names of prisoners of war to the ICRC. In return, they requested that the notification of the capture of Japanese prisoners should be made to the Prisoner of War Information Bureau in India.[[128]](#footnote-128) In the following months the Japanese set up a POW Control Bureau to deal with administrative matters surrounding Allied prisoners.[[129]](#footnote-129) On the strength of these claims, there were certainly signs that the Japanese government would at least adhere to the spirit if not the letter of the Prisoners of War Convention of 1929.

This standpoint appeared to be confirmed in February 1942, when a telegram from the Protecting Power stated that although the Japanese government did not consider itself to be bound by the Prisoners of War Convention; it had nonetheless agreed to observe its terms ‘*mutatis mutandis*’ in respect of English, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, and Indian prisoners of war. As regards food and clothing the Japanese claimed they would take into account national and racial customs on the basis of reciprocity.[[130]](#footnote-130) The use of the term ‘*mutatis mutandis*’ suggested that they would treat prisoners according to the terms of the Convention, but with ‘necessary changes being made’. Naturally it was unclear at this time just what changes to the terms of the Convention the Japanese authorities would deem to be necessary. In addition, the Japanese government also claimed their own set of rules governed by the spirit of ‘*Bushido*’, acted as a guarantee for the good treatment of captives in their hands. If such claims were adhered to, Allied prisoners would have received acceptable treatment from their captors.

While Tokyo’s replies suggested that they would deal with the British government on the basis of ‘reciprocity’ and implied that they expected significant numbers of their Service personnel to fall into Allied hands. In complete contrast to this the Japanese Army Field Service Code stated:

those who know shame are weak. Always think of [preserving] the honour of your community and be a credit to yourself and your family. Redouble your efforts and respond to their expectations. Never live to experience shame as a prisoner. By dying you will avoid leaving behind the crime of a stain on your honour.[[131]](#footnote-131)

This standpoint was later demonstrated by the actions of Japanese commanders who when faced with hopeless tactical situations frequently ordered a *gyokusai* or suicide charge, rather than allow themselves or their men to be captured.[[132]](#footnote-132) The requests for reciprocal arrangements for Japanese prisoners hid their true attitudes; the Japanese Army simply did not expect their personnel to fall into enemy hands, they were to die honourably in battle. When addressing the families of service personnel, the Japanese government refuted any suggestion that Japanese personnel had been captured by the Allies. Ulrich Strauss points out that in an effort to deny this possibility the Japanese ‘routinely’ notified the next-of-kin of soldiers or sailors missing in action, of their ‘glorious’ death in battle.[[133]](#footnote-133) Indeed, their attitude to surrender had far-ranging implications for Allied prisoners in their hands, as many Japanese personnel treated any Allied prisoner with utter contempt. Although the Japanese government was aware of the divergent attitudes towards surrender between the two sides, it is possible to argue that Tokyo had failed to fully appreciate the possibility that Allied service personnel would be ordered to surrender en masse, when faced with what appeared to be a hopeless situation. Roland made the point that the Imperial Japanese Army were ‘quite unprepared to cope with the masses of POWs at Singapore and in the Philippines.’[[134]](#footnote-134)

The Japanese attitude towards capture by an enemy also had a significant effect on the way that Japanese guards treated the men in their charge. The Japanese authorities urged camp commandants to use captured enemy personnel as a mobile workforce, irrespective of which Service they belonged to before their capture. The treatment of prisoners in turn reflected Japanese attitudes towards Allied prisoners who were regarded as disgraced individuals, who by surrendering had dishonoured not only themselves but their entire family. Ikuhiko Hata noted that the status of Allied prisoners as disgraced personnel resulted in orders from the Japanese Prime Minister, Tōjō Hideki and other senior military figures which attempted to ensure that Allied prisoners were not to sit idle consuming resources, but were to earn their rations and work to further the Japanese war effort. Lieutenant-General Uemura Mikio, the first director of the POW Information Bureau, laid down the simple principles that ‘within the limits prescribed by humanity’ prisoners must be treated severely, and must be used to expand production. Further precepts continued to be issued and in May 1942, he stated to conferences of camp commandants, that ‘not a man amongst them must be permitted to eat the bread of idleness.’[[135]](#footnote-135) Regardless of these attitudes Tokyo nonetheless maintained its claims regarding their proper treatment of Allied prisoners.

**News reaching London concerning Hong Kong**

Just as Tokyo made assertions that prisoners would be handled in a reasonable manner, news of the improper treatment of captured personnel and the abuse of the civilian population began to reach London by the end of January 1942. The initial reports came through Britain’s military attaché in Chungking Brigadier Grimsdale, who received reports from individuals such as Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Leslie Ride who had escaped in an attempt to give the outside world the conditions being experienced by British prisoners in Hong Kong,[[136]](#footnote-136) Miss P. Harrap of the Office of Commissioner of Police and Colonial Secretary Hong Kong,[[137]](#footnote-137) along with other reports from Lieutenant Colonel G.D.R. Black and Captain Whitney.[[138]](#footnote-138) Communiqués received by the Foreign Office stated that nearly all Europeans had been interned ‘with little rice and water only and occasional scraps of other food’. Intelligence also claimed that an outbreak of dysentery had started in the military camps, and those interned were ‘dying like flies’. Other intelligence reported that 17 Royal Scots were found shot with their hands tied behind their backs, and this was not an isolated case.[[139]](#footnote-139)

By the 11th of February, a further telegram received by the Foreign Office contained additional reports of atrocities, and brought news that the rations provided for prisoners were below what was necessary to maintain life.[[140]](#footnote-140) Indeed as these reports arrived in London, British forces were in the final stages of fighting at Singapore. Such accounts gave a clear indication of the possible treatment of captured British service personnel throughout the Far East, and pointed to the discrepancy between the assertions of the Japanese government and the actions of their forces on the ground.

The discussions which took place in Whitehall in connection with the possibility of publishing this information in the days preceding the fall of Singapore, suggested that the British authorities took such reports seriously. Churchill suggested that news of the treatment of prisoners would both ‘fortify the determination of our own troops to fight to the death’ and to ‘shame the Japanese into improving the conditions of their prisoners.’[[141]](#footnote-141) Additionally he considered that the announcements would inflame American views and ‘wake public opinion in this country to a realisation of what we are up against.’[[142]](#footnote-142) However, the Colonial Office warned the Prime Minister that there was a danger of the contrary in Burma, India and Ceylon.[[143]](#footnote-143) Furthermore, it warned that ‘apart from the terror and defeatism which might be aroused, it is possible that some Orientals may even admire the Japanese for their attacks on our prestige.’[[144]](#footnote-144) The Military Attaché in Chungking suggested that the ‘studied barbarism’ which was employed in the treatment of prisoners was ‘undoubtedly employed with the object of breaking morale.’[[145]](#footnote-145) The Colonial Office also considered that ‘it would be playing the Japanese game to broadcast the news’ and that the publicity ‘might also queer the pitch for negotiations with Japan for better treatment.’[[146]](#footnote-146)

The British forces at Singapore surrendered on the 15th of February 1942, and the capitulation sent shockwaves throughout the British Empire and across the world. Tens of thousands of British Imperial Service Personnel were added to those already in Japanese hands. Their future was uncertain, and London faced difficult decisions with reference to the information it should pass on to both their next-of-kin and the wider British public, as it continued to receive reports of brutalities already committed against British personnel in Hong Kong.

In spite of the fact that London attempted to control the flow of information reaching the British public, news of the barbaric acts already committed by the Japanese proved difficult to control. This was demonstrated as discussions took place, between the British and Canadian governments, relating to the censorship of such reports. An ‘error of judgement’ at the Ministry of Information resulted in the news of Japanese brutalities being transmitted from the offices of *The Times* to the *Ottawa Evening Citizen*. The stories were published on Friday the 13th of February[[147]](#footnote-147), just two days before the fall of Singapore, and once the actions of the Japanese had been reported in Canada it became virtually impossible for the news to be suppressed in the U.K. and eventually led to a statement being made in the House of Commons on the 10th March 1942.

The initial reports reaching Whitehall pointed to the potential for atrocities to occur. In a draft statement to the House of Commons in March 1942, it was noted that the treatment of civilians and prisoners was described as ‘the same kind of barbarities which aroused the horror of the civilised world at the time of the Nanking massacre of 1937.’[[148]](#footnote-148) This comment appears to show that Whitehall was well aware of the kind of treatment that the Japanese were prepared to mete out to their captives. However, it could of course be argued that the British authorities did not initially consider that the Japanese would treat white British prisoners in the same manner they were prepared to treat Chinese civilians. Nonetheless, the reports pointed to a deliberate policy of ill-treating white prisoners.

Their ill-treatment of Allied prisoners, was used as a means of demonstrating Japans changing status, in the eyes of the indigenous population of the territories occupied during their advance across the Far East. Kibata asserted that the white POWs provided the Japanese with a ‘convenient means’ of demonstrating that ‘Japan was destroying the past order dominated by Europeans.’[[149]](#footnote-149) Nonetheless, Harumi Furuya claimed that Japan’s racial identity was a ‘contradictory combination’ involving ‘self-identification’ with and ‘latent antagonism’ towards the white race. She suggested that their animosity was ‘heavily tinged with envy’, and further claimed that their inhumane treatment of these prisoners was not simply for the purpose of ‘racial revenge’ it was a means by which Japan attempted to demonstrate its ‘racial superiority’ over the white prisoners ‘to the audience of Asians.’[[150]](#footnote-150) Towle suggested that they ‘deliberately humiliated’ western prisoners in front of the various Asian nations ‘to prove that the period of European superiority had ended.’[[151]](#footnote-151)

Flower stated that in April 1942, the Japanese Minister for War, General Tōjō Hideki pointed out the ‘propaganda value’ of using white POWs in a way that he considered ‘could help banish the sense of racial inferiority among people of the occupied territories’ and thereby instil ‘a feeling of trust towards Japan.’[[152]](#footnote-152) Similarly, Kinvig noted that a Japanese military orientation pamphlet declared that the humiliation of Europeans aimed at stamping out the respect for the Europeans and Americans’ which had been widespread in the territories now conquered by the Japanese.[[153]](#footnote-153) In an effort to prevent the ill-treatment of prisoners being used by the Japanese to build up the reputation in the eyes of fellow Asians, the British authorities attempted to ensure that any reporting of ill-treatment was linked to atrocities committed against the indigenous population.

The announcement by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Anthony Eden carried details of the ill-treatment of prisoners, Europeans and the local Chinese population. He reported that ‘50 officers and men of the British Army were bound hand and foot and then bayoneted to death.’[[154]](#footnote-154) Eden gave an idea of the condition the prisoners were enduring when he stated that they had been ‘herded into a camp consisting of wrecked huts without doors, windows, light or sanitation’. He added that dysentery had broken out ‘but no drugs or medical facilities were supplied’ and noted ‘the Japanese guards are utterly callous’. He concluded that two things were clear: ‘the Japanese claim that their forces are animated by a lofty code of chivalry, *Bushido*, is a nauseating hypocrisy’ and that ‘the enemy must by utterly defeated.’[[155]](#footnote-155) Even at this early stage Japanese claims that *Bushido* guaranteed the proper treatment of prisoners rang very hollow, and pointed to the potential ill-treatment of British prisoners throughout the Far East.

In the same month Whitehall also received more worrying information from southern newly-occupied zones, where some 80-90% of British Imperial Service Personnel and civilian internees were captured or held.[[156]](#footnote-156) While the Japanese were prepared to grant permission for limited inspections of selected prisoner of war camps in northern areas, their attitude towards the rights of neutral powers in southern areas had far-reaching consequences. At this time London received reports that the Japanese government had stated that ‘no foreign officials are allowed into the occupied zones.’[[157]](#footnote-157) The ICRC later admitted that its authority to act on behalf of all prisoners was extremely limited, especially in southern newly-occupied areas. Before the Japanese occupation the ICRC had appointed delegates in Singapore, Java, Sumatra and Borneo with the agreement of the local authorities, however, these were not officially recognised by the Japanese. Furthermore, when the Committee asked the Japanese to officially recognise delegates at Shanghai, Hong Kong, Thailand and the Philippines, this only led to an ICRC delegation being set up at Shanghai in March 1942, and Hong Kong in June of the same year.[[158]](#footnote-158) The Japanese refusal to allow the neutral assessment of conditions in these camps, presented Allied governments with a complex series of problems as they attempted to deal with issues concerning the welfare of not only captured Allied service personnel, but Allied citizens who had been interned by the Japanese authorities throughout the Far East.

After hearing news of the ill-treatment of British Imperial service personnel, London attempted to ensure that an ICRC Delegate would be allowed into the area by Tokyo. The IPWC noted that the Foreign Office had telegraphed the Swiss, asking for authentication of the accounts. It requested that the Japanese allow an ICRC Delegate to proceed to Hong Kong and Kowloon as early as possible, ‘in order to report on conditions and to exercise a restraining influence’. Furthermore, if this request was denied, then the ‘refusal would be regarded as evidence of the truth of the reports.’[[159]](#footnote-159) In the face of London’s weak position when dealing with Tokyo, a more encouraging sign came when the IPWC were informed in May 1942, that the Japanese government had eventually permitted the Shanghai delegate of the ICRC to visit Hong Kong.[[160]](#footnote-160)

After the initial reports of savagery following the defeat of Hong Kong, London faced difficulties in establishing reliable information in connection with the treatment of British Imperial service personnel in Japanese hands. Communications concerning the welfare and wellbeing of prisoners were somewhat contradictory. By March 1942, communiqués reaching the IPWC relating to conditions in Hong Kong appeared to be positive and suggested that conditions in camps in the area were improving, in addition the Y.M.C.A. had been authorised to work among prisoners of war in countries under Japanese control.[[161]](#footnote-161) However, the following month just as one account claimed prisoners of war were receiving sufficient food, other reports reaching Whitehall suggested that the Japanese had removed all food supplies from Hong Kong, and rations at Stanley camp were ‘inhuman.’[[162]](#footnote-162) These inconsistencies highlight the difficulties for London in gaining a clear picture of the treatment of prisoners and internees. Many reports regarding Japanese atrocities came from internees who had managed to escape from Hong Kong and passed on their experiences to the British authorities in Chungking.[[163]](#footnote-163)

For their part the Japanese government maintained its assertions that prisoners were being treated in an acceptable manner, and these claims appeared to be backed up by what little information was emerging from southern areas. By June 1942, reports reaching the War Office stated that conditions in some areas such as the Netherlands East Indies were recovering.[[164]](#footnote-164) Similarly other ‘unofficial information’ confirmed this, and added that this positive assessment also applied to the situation in Singapore.[[165]](#footnote-165) In the same month the IPWC were informed that the Vatican was able to cable funds to the Apostolic delegate in Hong Kong, and requests were also made for the Vatican to be able to assist the prisoners in the Netherlands East Indies.[[166]](#footnote-166) Similarly, communiqués from the Swiss Protecting Power suggested that the Japanese Red Cross was prepared to help in the distribution of relief sent from Allied countries to Japanese occupied territories, if reciprocal arrangements were agreed by the Allies with regards to Japanese prisoners.[[167]](#footnote-167) Other apparently encouraging news came as the Japanese government announced it was making a contribution to the funds of the ICRC.[[168]](#footnote-168) Such statements suggested that the Japanese were eventually beginning to honour their promises relating to the treatment of prisoners, in line with the terms of international Conventions.

By July 1942, the Japanese claimed that the main problem with the provision of food in Hong Kong came as a result of the British ‘scorched earth’ policy. They also somewhat scornfully suggested that the Europeans and Americans only complained because they had become accustomed to Hong Kong’s ‘luxurious life.’[[169]](#footnote-169) With regards to the welfare of prisoners, the Japanese asserted that the prisoners received ‘necessary clothes’ and although food rations were not the same in all internment camps, they also claimed they were providing prisoners with the same food as Japanese troops at the same places. They backed up this claim by suggesting that prisoners’ rations amounted to the equivalent of some 3,200 calories.[[170]](#footnote-170) The assertions relating to the provision of rations appeared in line with the stipulations made by the Geneva Convention, as prisoners were required to receive the same rations as those given to their captors’ depot troops. Indeed, Japanese statements seemed to be backed up by the reports received in London from ICRC delegates, who were able to carry out somewhat limited inspections to selected camps in northern areas. As will be discussed below, the ICRC provided London with a great deal of detail relating to the conditions in certain camps in the northern area, including extremely detailed accounts of the quantity and type of foodstuffs being provided by the Japanese authorities.[[171]](#footnote-171)

Although in theory the Japanese allowed the neutral inspection of prisoner of war and internee camps in northern areas, in reality the inspection process proved to be extremely compromised, especially when compared to appraisals of prison camps carried out in Europe. In areas such as Germany the Protecting Power and ICRC were granted access to most camps where British prisoners were held, and visits generally were carried out along the lines prescribed by the Geneva Convention. In comparison the Japanese authorities allowed restricted access to selected camps including those in Hong Kong, and at times it took months or years for permission for inspections to be granted. Furthermore, the inspection process was closely monitored by the Japanese authorities.

Following the war the ICRC recorded that its appraisals were carried out in accordance to Japanese rules and not those set out by the Convention, their duration was limited and those observing the conditions were both supervised and unable to speak freely to prisoners without supervision.[[172]](#footnote-172) Instead of being able to submit an un-edited account of the conditions which were observed the results of the inspections were censored by the Japanese authorities, and it was made clear to Delegates that they should be written in English to speed up this process.[[173]](#footnote-173) Individuals taking part in such visits were placed in an extremely difficult position as they had to be mindful of the information provided, and ensured their words were carefully chosen.

An idea of the limitations and restrictions on visits can be witnessed in the reports which reached Britain. When Mr. C.A. Kengelbacher an ICRC official working in Japan visited Zentsuji camp in April 1942, he gave details of how a Japanese *Kempei* official followed his movements closely. He noted his ‘gendarme friend’ took care of him, and he stressed: ‘he protected me on the way to the hotel, at the hotel till I closed my eyes and most probably all through the night.’[[174]](#footnote-174) His movements were tracked all the way back to Yokohama, and he finally commented ‘travel under these circumstances is no longer agreeable.’[[175]](#footnote-175) The ICRC later recorded that the Japanese mistrusted all foreigners, and its delegates were ‘barely tolerated’. Furthermore, they suggested that the actions of the Committee’s representatives were ‘systematically hampered.’[[176]](#footnote-176) In these circumstances, it is not surprising that the reports made by ICRC representatives were somewhat sanitised, and it would be understandable if the conditions described under these restrictions were influenced by the intimidating circumstances surrounding such visits.

Although the Japanese attempted to control the information coming from ICRC reports, covering letters in various government files suggested that these accounts were not always taken at face value; after receiving reports on the subject of camps in Hong Kong Lieut. Colonel, R.E.A. Elwes of the War Office, simply suggested that these were ‘not all equally reliable.’[[177]](#footnote-177) Caroline Moorhead pointed out that some in the Foreign Office remarked that the reports should be taken with ‘pounds of salt.’[[178]](#footnote-178) The Canadian authorities were more forthright when they complained that some accounts were ‘almost too good to be true’ as assessments from Hong Kong stressed the excellence of camp conditions, and painted a ‘most pleasant’ picture of life in Stanley Camp. Furthermore, after the Shanghai Delegate sent ‘enthusiastic’ descriptions of the Christmas spent by prisoners of war the Canadians also questioned some of the terms used, and pointed out that these were ‘nearly identical’ to claims from Japanese sources. In addition, they suspected that the Hong Kong Delegate hesitated to forward unfavourable news, and suggested the Japanese were ‘tampering with telegrams.’[[179]](#footnote-179) Moorhead claimed that in Geneva, the Far East section of the ICRC eventually learned to read between the lines of such reports. Nonetheless, she also noted that in it was pointed out in communications between the War Office and the Foreign Office that the real value of the ICRC delegates, resulted from their opportunity to ‘organise supplies and welfare’ where this was permitted by the Japanese.[[180]](#footnote-180) Britain’s attempts to send additional aid to the Far East will be discussed in the following chapter. It is possible to conclude that despite their claims to allow the inspection of camps in northern areas, the Japanese authorities only permitted access to carefully selected camps. Furthermore, they had little or no intention of allowing those inspecting camps to talk to prisoners without supervision, or report their findings freely. In spite of the restrictions forced on those inspecting camps, other reports gave a much better indication of the true state of affairs in camps in northern areas.

Although Mr. C.A. Kengelbacher had already given an idea of the restrictions imposed by the Japanese on the ICRC officials working in Japan in April 1942[[181]](#footnote-181), nonetheless by February 1943, an additional unofficial supplementary report sent by the ICRC Delegate in Hong Kong, gave a much clearer indication of the difficulties for both prisoners and those attempting to ameliorate their living conditions. In the days before one inspection took place the ICRC Delegates were approached by Swiss, Danish, and Portuguese residents, who were keen to pass on information. The representative simply stated that ‘by the time of my visit to the camps I had heard so much and had been reading so many private messages that the actual visit to the camps had, in my estimation, become superfluous.’[[182]](#footnote-182) He stated that it was clear that the Japanese had little or no respect for the prisoners of war. ‘In their eyes, the British prisoners are poor patriots and therefore do not deserve the paradise at the camps’. He finally came to the conclusion that this explained ‘why these unfortunate prisoners should, under no circumstances, be better off than the Japanese soldier.’[[183]](#footnote-183) As detailed in the next chapter, the British authorities faced extreme difficulties when attempting to send additional rations and comforts for those in Japanese hands.

**Japanese Refusal of the right of neutral inspection in Southern Camps**

In spite of their orders to camp commandants which attempted to ensure that prisoners would not sit idly consuming resources, in August 1942, in response to enquiries relating to the conditions in various areas, Tokyo assured London that ‘no anxiety need be felt with regard to the treatment of Imperial prisoners of war.’[[184]](#footnote-184) In stark contrast to these claims the conditions experienced by Allied prisoners in many of the work camps in newly-occupied southern areas were extremely primitive, and bore no resemblance to the conditions laid down in various international agreements. In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that Tokyo had no intention of allowing representatives of the Protecting Power or the ICRC to inspect camps in southern areas.

The Japanese standpoint was confirmed at the end of August 1942, when a telegram from the Swiss Protecting Power to the Foreign Office, stated: ‘as principle of Japanese Government is not to recognise representation of foreign interests in any occupied territory it cannot accept that Swiss delegates visit British prisoners of war or internees’ camps in these territories. It will make an exception only for Shanghai in occupied China and permission to visit must be requested from the competent authorities on the spot.’[[185]](#footnote-185) As neutral representatives in the newly occupied southern territories had either withdrawn, or were not recognised by the Japanese,[[186]](#footnote-186) this naturally allowed very little reliable information with respect to conditions in these areas to reach London at this time. Irrespective of the Japanese standpoint, the British government continued to push for visits to camps all areas where prisoners were held.

The IPWC appeared to believe that the restrictions only applied to representatives of the Protecting Power, and not ICRC Delegates. The matter was discussed by the Committee when it met on the 26th August 1942. It was agreed that in the view of the Japanese refusal, ‘added importance was to be attached to visits to prisoner of war and internee camps by International Red Cross Delegates; and that efforts to secure such visits should be intensified.’[[187]](#footnote-187) Diplomatic approaches continued for the remainder of the war, with respect to the possibility of inspections of camps in these areas. One consequence of the lack of neutral observation in southern areas was the fact that it took several months for independent news relating to the appalling conditions, widespread sickness and ill-treatment being experienced by Allied prisoners to reach London.

**News reaching Britain regarding the Ill treatment of POWs**

In October 1942, news arrived in Whitehall which told of prisoners employed on airfields in Malaya. Other reports stated that some 20,000 prisoners were being sent to camps in Japan, Korea and Formosa from southern areas.[[188]](#footnote-188) The following month, a report to the Directorate of Prisoners of War at the War Office (DPW), noted that a broadcast from Tokyo declared that disobedient of insubordinate prisoners of could be charged with High Treason.[[189]](#footnote-189) This obviously suggested that any noncompliance to Japanese orders could result in disproportionately severe punishments, and pointed towards the harshness of the regime the men were now facing. Regardless of such orders, over the following months, London received reports from Japanese sources which claimed that they were attempting to look after the interests of British prisoners, and gave the impression that conditions were improving after a somewhat difficult start.

By May 1943, the Japanese Prisoners of War Information Bureau continued to assert that prisoners in Japan, Korea, Manchuria, Formosa, Malaya and Java were being treated in an acceptable manner. The Bureau maintained that the conditions in camps and the health of prisoners were improving, and that drugs were being supplied in ‘ample quantities from Army stocks.’[[190]](#footnote-190) In the same month it gave reports of the medical assistance provided for prisoners in Malay Camps and the Bureau claimed that between January and March 1943, Army surgeons had ‘successfully’ checked outbreaks of dysentery, diphtheria, malaria and tropical infections; it added that amongst thirty thousand prisoners two carriers of diphtheria and twenty three of dysentery, had been isolated.[[191]](#footnote-191) If they were to be believed, the claims made by the Japanese authorities suggested that prisoners in many areas were receiving at least some form of medical care, and that the outbreaks of serious disease had been prevented or controlled. However, at this time the IPWC were also informed that British and Australian prisoners of war were ‘constructing roads and railways at nine camps between the Burmese-Siamese boarder and Bangkok’. In response some relief was being sent by local missionaries into the camps in the area.[[192]](#footnote-192)

The situation has been summarised by a number of authors such as Clifford Kinvig, Sibylla Jane Flower and Philip Towle, in an attempt to send supplies and men for the Japanese war effort in Burma, the Japanese had begun the construction of a railway link, between Burma and Thailand. The track was constructed through frequently extremely difficult terrain, using tens of thousands of Allied prisoners, and a greater number of native labourers, living and working in extremely primitive conditions, without sufficient food, equipment or medical supplies in the tropical climate. Kinvig noted that the first working parties had been shipped from the Changi area in early April 1942, and a much larger working party sailed for lower Burma over a month later. In June 1942 five parties of some 600 men had been shipped ‘up-country’[[193]](#footnote-193) to begin work towards the construction project. This was subsequently followed by larger parties, and between October and November 1942, some 20,600 British prisoners had been transferred from camps in Singapore along with an additional 400 transferred from Kuala Lumpur to Thailand, to begin work in camps north of Bang Pong in Thailand.[[194]](#footnote-194) The sheer number prisoners involved are a testament the scale of the work. Records demonstrate that overall some 61,806 Allied prisoners were employed during the construction of the railway project.[[195]](#footnote-195)

In light of the orders issued by the Japanese authorities in connection with the treatment of Allied captives, it is perhaps not surprising that Allied prisoners were dealt with harshly. However, the distances of prisoner of war camps and construction projects from Tokyo allowed those in charge of prisoners to interpret orders according to the work they were required to carry out. For instance, Clifford Kinvig noted that when a Japanese railway staff officer was summoned to the Imperial General Headquarters in Tokyo, in January 1943, to give a progress report on the progress of the Burma-Thailand Railway, he was given orders that the railway should be completed by May 1943. Although the officer explained the volume of work necessary to complete the line, this only resulted in a three-month postponement of the deadline; back on the railway, site engineer officers wondered if the project could be completed in another 12 months.[[196]](#footnote-196) Such orders, coupled with the nature of the Japanese army command structure resulted in the extremely harsh treatment of prisoners in an effort to comply with the demands of the authorities in Tokyo.

Kinvig examined how orders for the so-called ‘speedo’ phase of the construction of the Burma-Thailand Railway, were transmitted down the chain of command in the early months of 1943. Major General Shimoda, the Commander of the Railway Construction Unit, passed on his orders to his subordinates who in turn passed on the orders to lower-ranking engineers.[[197]](#footnote-197) He noted that as a matter of routine Japanese commanders only passed on the ‘scantiest’ of information, and a ‘spy mania’ ensured that only necessary orders were transmitted to the lower levels.[[198]](#footnote-198) Additionally, the decentralised nature of the Japanese Army allowed low-grade officers and other ranks to behave largely as they saw fit to complete the orders which filtered down.[[199]](#footnote-199) Sibylla Flower emphasised that many of the Japanese officers employed by the Japanese POW Administration were the ‘flotsam and jetsam’ of the Japanese Army.[[200]](#footnote-200) Furthermore, as most of the Japanese NCOs had seen active service in the brutal wars of the 1930s, these took a much harder line with POWs; in addition, what she referred to as the ‘lowest form of life in the Japanese hierarchy’ the Korean guards, were predominantly recruited as teenage peasants, most of whom had been brutalised by the Japanese and in turn passed on this ill-treatment to prisoners.[[201]](#footnote-201) Although the original orders came from the Japanese Imperial Headquarters in Tokyo, by the time they filtered down the chain of command they were to be obeyed regardless of the suffering to prisoners of war. As Philip Towle simply put it ‘the whole army was imbued with the notion that the end justified the means.’[[202]](#footnote-202) As prisoner of war camps were spread throughout the Far East many were effectively outside the direct control of Tokyo. In these circumstances camp commandants interpreted the orders according to the tasks they were required to carry out, irrespective of the human cost.

By February 1943, the ‘speedo’ phase of the construction process resulted in the Japanese driving the workforce even harder, for four and a half months through the monsoon season. The inaccessibility of camps, combined with climatic conditions, meant that in remote areas food was extremely short and the length of the working day weakened many prisoners further; it was during this period that the unhygienic conditions resulted in a cholera epidemic breaking out.[[203]](#footnote-203) The epidemic resulted in the deaths of large numbers of prisoners and thousands of native workers. It was eventually estimated that 12,399 Allied prisoners died during the construction of the railway, and of these some 6,318 were British.[[204]](#footnote-204) Kinvig also pointed out that a far greater number of locally-recruited labourers also perished, however due to the fact that the Japanese kept few accurate records and preserved none, the exact numbers will never be known.[[205]](#footnote-205) Between May and August 1943, news of the death toll, ill-treatment, lack of food and medical care began to reach London from extremely trustworthy sources.

The conditions experienced during the construction of the Burma-Thailand Railway has dominated much of what has been subsequently written relating to the experiences of Allied prisoners in Japanese hands. We should nonetheless recognise that ill-treatment, poor conditions, neglect and callous indifference to suffering, combined with a lack of food and medical facilities was common wherever prisoners of war were held by the Japanese. Although the Japanese authorities maintained their claims to be treating prisoners well, it was the emergence of independent accounts detailing conditions being endured by Allied prisoners involved in the construction of the railway, which began to bring home to the British government Japan’s true intentions with regards to the welfare of prisoners.

In the early months of 1943, Whitehall began to receive details of the appalling conditions in camps associated with the construction of the Burma-Thailand railway, the sheer detail of the information with reference to the conditions being experienced was remarkable; it was said to be ‘based on correspondence with Lt. Cols., and Majors of the 18th Division.’[[206]](#footnote-206) An idea of the rate of illness and paucity of rations provided by the Japanese was indicated by the claim that a ‘sick camp’ contained some 8,000 prisoners, after only 6 months in the Jungle. Many prisoners were simply described as ‘walking skeletons.’[[207]](#footnote-207) In addition, news from the Swiss Consul in Bangkok Walter Siegenthaler, confirmed the information being received. He stated that some 40,000 British, Australian and Dutch prisoners were building a road and railway under ‘slave conditions’, they were ‘without drugs’ and being fed on ‘only one third rations’. He asserted that prisoners were required to work 20 hours per day, and he described them as being ‘like coolies.’[[208]](#footnote-208) Information reaching the IPWC suggested that approximately 75% of the men had malaria, and that other tropical diseases were prevalent. At this time Siegenthaler estimated that there had already been 3,000 deaths among Allied prisoners in the previous nine months. In an effort to improve conditions, the Swiss Consul was authorised to distribute allowances at the rate of ‘one baht per head per week.’[[209]](#footnote-209) The details of his efforts to send aid to camps in the area will be detailed in the following chapter, and provides ample evidence of the difficulties involved in dealing with the Japanese authorities.

By August 1943, those reading such reports in Whitehall were left in absolutely no doubt, as to the conditions the men were enduring. The revelations were later backed up with additional intelligence from a variety of sources, including the unofficial ICRC representative in Singapore, and from clergy who the Japanese had allowed to work in the area. The track was eventually finished on the 17th of October 1943, with an ‘opening-to-traffic’ ceremony held eight days later.[[210]](#footnote-210) On the 21st of October, a memorandum was sent from the Secretary of State for War P.J. Grigg to the War Cabinet which detailed the conditions the men had faced, and included the rumour that as many as 12,000 had already died.[[211]](#footnote-211) Although it was aware of the likely death toll, London remained in a very poor position to pressure Tokyo to improve the conditions being experienced by British prisoners of war.

**Diplomatic Approaches**

British diplomatic approaches to the Japanese government were made on the basis that as Tokyo had initially promised to abide by the terms of the Geneva Convention, the British government expected this undertaking to be honoured. Throughout the course of the war, London maintained a virtually continuous stream of diplomatic protests to Tokyo on the subject of the treatment and welfare of British and Commonwealth prisoners of war. The approaches were made through the Argentine and the Swiss Protecting Powers[[212]](#footnote-212) and the ICRC. In addition, the means by which Allied governments could influence the Japanese into treating prisoners in a reasonable manner were the subject of a great deal of inter-Allied discussions.

In May 1943, just as London began to receive details of the appalling conditions in Burma and Thailand, the Combined Chiefs of Staff were asked to formulate a long-term policy attempting to stop the Japanese ill-treatment of prisoners, and improve conditions in camps. They explored the possibility of influencing the Japanese government through the publication of ‘reliable information’, with respect to the treatment of the prisoners. They also considered other uses for the ‘vast and increasing body of intelligence’ if publication of this information was either ineffectual or undesirable.[[213]](#footnote-213) However, at this time the militaristic elements in the Japanese government simply denied any suggestions that prisoners were being ill-treated. Furthermore, the publication of this information would have caused a great deal of distress to relatives, when London had little chance of persuading the Japanese government to improve either the conditions or the treatment the men were receiving. By June 1943, the United Nations War Crimes suggested that there may have been a chance of appealing to what were thought to be more moderate elements in the Japanese government. It was hoped these individuals would recognise that Japanese actions would result in a ‘terrible and lasting stain on Japan’s honour.’[[214]](#footnote-214) As will be discussed below, the announcement which was eventually made in January 1944, attempted to appeal to this group as it was hoped that these individuals may have been able to influence the more militaristic elements in the Japanese government into moderating their stance with regards to the treatment of Allied prisoners.

In spite of British diplomatic efforts, to ensure that the Japanese authorities were aware of the conditions in southern areas, Tokyo’s replies demonstrated the divergence in attitudes towards the welfare of prisoners of war. Japanese responses to protests could be characterised as being deliberately misleading and evasive. One example of this attitude came autumn of 1943, when the Japanese Minister at Berne was informed of British awareness of the poor rations being provided by the Japanese in Burma and Thailand, in an interview with the Swiss Foreign Minister Marcel Pilet-Golaz. The Japanese Minister’s answer seemed to ignore the suggestion that these individuals were starving, and although he ‘behaved in a very western and diplomatic way’ he first ‘treated the matter lightly.’[[215]](#footnote-215) He suggested that any complaints from British prisoners in connection with their rice based diet, was similar to those of Japanese prisoners in Allied hands, as Japanese prisoners preferred more rice and less meat in their rations.[[216]](#footnote-216) In reality, the calorific and nutritional deficiencies in the rations provided by the Japanese resulted in the physical decline of all those in their hands. Many who could not become acclimatised to the diet simply starved to death. Although the Japanese Minister had been informed of the gravity of the situation, and gave the impression that he realised ‘the seriousness of the matter’[[217]](#footnote-217) this did not result in an improvement in the conditions, rations or medical facilities available in these areas. Regardless of its diplomatic approaches to Tokyo, Whitehall took steps to ensure that the Japanese government was aware of the extent of the ill-treatment of prisoners in southern areas, and that those in authority realised they would be held accountable following an Allied victory.

**Political Pressure on Whitehall from the Relatives of British Prisoners of War**

As a consequence of British defeats across the Far East, tens of thousands of British service personnel were thought to be in Japanese hands. Despite the fact that the War Office had been informed that the Japanese authorities had established a Prisoner of War Information Bureau in Tokyo, whose duty it would be to cable the names of prisoners of war to the ICRC,[[218]](#footnote-218) the Japanese failed to provide complete lists of British service personnel in their hands. Regardless of the initial optimistic signs, the ICRC later reported that the Japanese Prisoners of War Information Bureau was staffed by retired Officers who distrusted foreigners, and their only contact with the Bureau was confined to the exchange of notes. The ICRC pointed out that the Information Bureau issued the least amount of information possible, and any enquiries merely relied on the records contained in the card-index in Tokyo.[[219]](#footnote-219) Moorhead noted that the POW Information Bureauwas discouraged from ‘pestering’ the authorities for lists of names, as these had ‘no vital connection with the prosecution of the war.’[[220]](#footnote-220) In these circumstances there was little chance that the Japanese authorities would provide full details of British prisoners now in their hands.

It is possible to contend that the failure of Tokyo to provide the names of those captured in the Far East was understandable, given their own attitude to surrendering to an enemy. As the Japanese considered that any service personnel who were taken prisoner brought shame not only on themselves, but their entire family, they potentially had little understanding that British relatives would be anxious to hear that their next-of-kin were alive and in Japanese hands; consequently, and in the face of repeated requests from London for information with respect to the identity of prisoners, Tokyo allocated a low priority to this task. In turn this attitude created problems for London as Whitehall was unable to confirm with any certainty to many worried relatives, whether their loved ones had been killed, were missing, or were indeed prisoners of war.

When considering the identities of those who were captured at Singapore, as reinforcements were sent under secrecy rules, many families did not know if their loved-ones had been in the area at the time of its surrender.[[221]](#footnote-221) In these circumstances as letters home stopped arriving in the United Kingdom, many families could only hope their relatives were alive and in enemy hands. Apart from the emotional strain, the lack of reliable information also carried financial implications. Barbara Hately-Broad pointed out that different allowances were made for the families of men who were missing, dead, or prisoners of war with Family and Dependents Allowances being paid by the War Office for the period of captivity for both Officers and Other Ranks.[[222]](#footnote-222) The War Office was eventually forced to assume that the great majority of the forces fighting in Hong Kong, Malaya, and particularly Singapore had been taken prisoner. If the British government had failed to adequately provide for welfare of the next-of-kin of those sent to fight on Britain’s behalf and who were now thought to be prisoners of the Japanese, this may have been a potential source of political embarrassment and could have led to a public outcry. London was already aware of the public concerns regarding the welfare of prisoners in Europe.

As a consequence of the capture of British service personnel, prisoners of war committees and support groups had already been formed in many towns and cities. Nonetheless, negative publicity surrounding the government’s failure to adequately provide a supply of relief parcels to prisoners in Europe, had already raised the profile of issues surrounding the welfare of prisoners of war both in Whitehall, and with the wider British public.[[223]](#footnote-223) The capture of British service personnel and members of the public by the Japanese resulted in enquiries to the British authorities, from some worried family members concerned with the welfare of their relatives. Records demonstrate the amount of correspondence and time was demanded of government departments; for example, Mrs Rose Hunt wrote letters to Mr Eden, Lord Cranborne, Sir John Wardlaw Milne, Sir Robert Craigie, Miss Megan Lloyd George and the Manchester Guardian.[[224]](#footnote-224) Her persistence was seen by some to be taking time away from the business of helping the prisoners of war and internees.[[225]](#footnote-225) Although individuals had some influence, collectively the relatives of prisoners were able to exert greater pressure on the government.

As a result of the paucity of information from the Japanese, it is perhaps not surprising that the British authorities had difficulty in dealing with enquiries concerning the plight of individuals. Satow and Sée stated that enquiries from the next-of-kin could only be answered after a ‘considerable delay’ and described the arrangements for providing information and publicity by the end of 1943, as being ‘little short of chaotic.’[[226]](#footnote-226) Given the uncertainty regarding the plight of British service personnel captured by the Japanese, it is perhaps unsurprising that the next-of-kin, relatives, and friends, were drawn to existing organisations concerned with the welfare of British prisoners in enemy hands. In addition to the existing locally run organisations the British Prisoners of War Relatives Association (BPOWRA), began to gain popularity nationally. The Association’s membership grew rapidly as it formed new branches, advertising the times and locations of meetings in local newspapers. The adverts suggested that anyone with a relative who had been taken prisoner was welcome to attend. The Association also gained more members by gradually taking over the control of existing POW groups and clubs. When they attended local meetings, its members were able to share information from letters received by the families of other prisoners, and to obtain reports from sources such as the British Red Cross, and the BPOWRA’s own news sheet. Politically the Association was able to attempt to put pressure on members of Parliament in an effort to improve the flow of relief to prisoners. Additionally, the Association attempted to also change the way Whitehall dealt with prisoner of war matters, as it called for the British Authorities to adopt a more coordinated approach.

Notwithstanding the fact that the British Red Cross War Organisation had assisted the BPOWRA by supplying funds and the War Office had provided office accommodation[[227]](#footnote-227), the Association were somewhat disparaging of the way that government departments and the British Red Cross War Organisation were handling POW matters. This was partially due to the difficulties encountered in supplying relief for prisoners in Europe, and the perceived failure of the government to publish details of an inquiry on the matter.[[228]](#footnote-228) In June 1942, a prominent member, Miss Irene Ward, the Conservative MP for Wallsend asked questions in Parliament; she cast doubts on the way the relief operation was being handled, and ultimately disputed the government’s commitment towards the welfare of British prisoners in enemy hands.[[229]](#footnote-229) Although in its newssheet, published in March 1943, the Association later claimed that it did not ‘set itself up as a Government critic’, and stated that it recognised ‘whole-heartedly the good work already done by the British Red Cross’,[[230]](#footnote-230) perhaps naturally, its motives aroused the suspicions of some in Whitehall and the British Red Cross War Organisation.

Correspondence concerning the BPOWRA demonstrated the sense of distrust in some government departments. In March 1943, Harold Satow the head of the Prisoners of War Department of the Foreign Office stated in a letter to George Warner, its former head, that ‘although its intentions are no doubt excellent, those who control it seem to have a down on Government Departments’. He added that they appeared to hold the view that the Departments ‘do not do anything to assist prisoners of war’, and went on to suggest that he could not guarantee that one day the Association would not ‘launch a campaign’ against the Foreign Office. Furthermore, he added that those in charge of the Association were ‘inclined to consider themselves as playing as important a part on behalf of prisoners of war as the British Red Cross Organisation.’[[231]](#footnote-231) Departments in Whitehall demonstrated that they were indeed sensitive to any criticism of their handling of matters surrounding prisoner of war welfare; as will be discussed in the following chapter, this was especially true with regards to the volume of aid Britain could send to ameliorate conditions in camps in the Far East. The lack of information available from the Japanese government regarding the identity of those in Japanese hands was also a cause for concern for the British authorities.

In 1943, the War Office received an appeal from relatives of men thought to have been captured by the Japanese. The petition, possibly arranged in conjunction with the British Prisoners of War Association, emphasised that a year or more after their likely capture, many relatives were still unaware if their loved ones were dead, missing or prisoners of war. It bore witness to the increasing sense of frustration among relatives as it stated: ‘we, the undersigned, must bring to your notice the fact that the fate of our men in Singapore and Malaya is, to date unknown’ and added, ‘most of us, wives, mothers, and sisters, have waited with almost inexhaustible patience to learn the fate of those dear to us.’[[232]](#footnote-232) Such comments marked the frustrations of relatives, but were also a sign of London’s poor position when dealing with Tokyo.

On a note which ultimately recorded the doubts of some relatives regarding the government’s commitment towards the welfare of those captured by the Japanese, the appeal stressed ‘this business may, in the eyes of the world, seem a military catastrophe, with the details of which we are not concerned, but the fate and treatment of these thousands of our men is very much our concern.’[[233]](#footnote-233) This comment appeared to imply that the families of those captured during the defeat of the supposedly impregnable Naval Base, were suspicious that the circumstances surrounding its fall were considered more important than the fate of British prisoners captured by the Japanese; in turn this seemed to suggest that this attitude may have affected the way the British government attempted to ameliorate the plight of British Far East prisoners. As will be discussed in the following chapter, the lack of aid reaching the men in Japanese hands can be sharply contrasted with the total received by British prisoners in German and Italian hands, and could have been taken as a sign that London regarded the two groups of prisoners in a different light.

In a more political tone, the appeal stated: ‘we insist that the attention of the Government is given immediately to this and that a responsible Committee be formed to watch the interests of these prisoners and their next-of-kin: also, that some arrangements are entered into whereby these names can be sent through with the shortest possible delay.’[[234]](#footnote-234) Such demands pointed to the lack of understanding on the part of relatives with respect to London’s inability to influence Tokyo. The government at this time failed to impress on those who had a vested interest in matters surrounding the welfare of British prisoners in the Far East, just how hard it was trying to improve conditions through diplomatic pressures, or the difficulties Whitehall faced in attempting to deal with the Japanese. Subsequent correspondence between government Departments and organisations such as the British Prisoners of War Relatives Association demonstrated the lack of understanding on the part of the Association, of the functions and responsibilities of the IPWC, and this resulted in the Association continuing to pressure Whitehall to adopt a more coordinated approach when dealing with POW matters.

In 1943, the BPOWRA appeared to have pulled off something of a coup by recruiting Lord Vansittart, who had been in charge of the department dealing with prisoner of war matters during the First World War, as its temporary Chairman. In the Association’s newssheet of March 1943, Lord Vansittart stated that in the First World War while at the Foreign Office, he had some success in improving conditions for prisoners of war. He suggested that issues surrounding the welfare of British prisoners had been facilitated by an inter-departmental Government Committee and that the establishment of similar Committees, in both Houses of Parliament, was ‘absolutely essential.’[[235]](#footnote-235) Regardless of the Association’s apparent accomplishment of recruiting such a high-level chairman, Vansittart made it clear in correspondence with Sir David Scott at the Foreign Office that he did not have time for the job and wanted the Association to find someone else.[[236]](#footnote-236) Although Vansittart undoubtedly had some influence, an examination of his correspondence with government Departments demonstrates the inconsistencies in his approaches.

In contrast to his claims in the newssheet Vansittart contacted Scott at the beginning of April 1943, and suggested what he and his associates wanted was not an interdepartmental committee, but ‘the formation of a proper Prisoners of War Department such as we had in the last war’. Furthermore, he stated that the Department should be ‘under’ the Foreign Office and not the War Office, as was the case ‘last time’. He additionally claimed that the Foreign Office was the ‘proper Department though which to exercise our supervision and express our complaints to the protecting power.’[[237]](#footnote-237) He added he could not see why there would be objections to ‘resuscitating something that worked well in the last war’ and suggested that the Government should ‘reconsider their attitude, for they will certainly run into much criticism of the present lay-out if and when, as I anticipate, worse things begin to happen to our prisoners.’[[238]](#footnote-238) When commenting on Vansittart's suggestions Walter Roberts of the Foreign Office refuted Vansittart’s claims, and instead stated that the Foreign Office had ‘disowned it in 1916 and refused to accept responsibility for P.O.W.s.’[[239]](#footnote-239)

In a reply in the same month Sir David Scott pointed out both the merits of the IPWC and the current differences in dealing with issues surrounding prisoners of war compared to the First World War. Scott explained ‘whatever the arrangements made during the last war, circumstances are now very different as the Dominions are not only keenly interested in prisoner questions but also expect as sovereign Governments to be consulted about them and be to be allowed to share in the decisions taken.’[[240]](#footnote-240) He also pointed this was a fact that ‘renders necessary the existence of an Imperial Prisoners of War Committee.’[[241]](#footnote-241) Addressing Vansittart’s comments on the role of working of the departments involved, Scott stated that although the Secretary of State for War is the Chairman of the Committee, all the ‘practical work’ is done in close cooperation with the Directorate of Prisoners of War at the War Office. He also pointed out that all correspondence with the Protecting Powers ‘naturally’ passes through the Foreign Office and their views are ‘constantly expressed and carry full weight.’[[242]](#footnote-242) Such comments demonstrated that the Foreign Office was already fully involved with prisoner of war matters when dealing with enemy governments.

Regardless of the validity of his initial comments, Scott nonetheless then went on to overstate the IPWC’s abilities to influence the way that Tokyo treated of prisoners in the Far East, when he concluded: ‘I hope the forgoing will serve to show that there is at present a Prisoners of War Department which is in most respects not unlike that which was formed during the last war and that the Foreign Office plays a large part in the efforts made, and they have not been altogether unsuccessful to alleviate the lot of our prisoners.’[[243]](#footnote-243) While Scott’s assessment may have been true of the collective efforts to ‘alleviate the lot’ of prisoners of war in Europe, as will be discussed in the following chapter, the same could not be said for those prisoners who were unfortunate enough to have been captured by the Japanese.

As noted above, over the following months the British authorities were left in no doubt as to the widespread ill-treatment and atrocities committed against British Imperial Service Personnel, who had been captured in the Far East. Nonetheless, this information remained classified, and messages between the Foreign Office and Members of Parliament demonstrated that, regardless of their knowledge to the contrary, the Foreign Office continued to make positive claims relating to the treatment of British prisoners in enemy hands, without differentiating between those in Europe, and the Far East. Evidence also suggests that London wanted to use announcements of the ill-treatment of prisoners for its own ends.

**Information Available to the Public**

The Prime Minister circulated a memorandum to the War Cabinet in July 1943, which demonstrated that in comparison to the war in Europe, he anticipated it would take years longer to defeat Japan. Accordingly plans were made for a two-stage ending to the war.[[244]](#footnote-244) Although there had already been one announcement with regards to ill-treatment of prisoners and civilians following the surrender of Hong Kong, Churchill suggested that news of the ill-treatment of British prisoners in the Far East could be suppressed until Germany had been defeated, and then used to stimulate the will of the British people to fight on against Japan.[[245]](#footnote-245) In spite of Churchill’s reservations some information concerning the conditions in the Far East was nonetheless made available the following month, and the reactions of members of the BPOWRA were recorded at the Foreign Office.

On the 16th August 1943, a broadcast talk was transmitted on the BBC, which detailed the conditions being experienced in some camps. In a letter to Brendan Bracken M.P., the Minister of Information, the President of the Glasgow and West of Scotland branch of the Prisoners of War Relatives Association, suggested that ‘nothing had been accomplished by it except an intensification of the depression among the relatives of Prisoners of war in Japanese hands.’[[246]](#footnote-246) However his comments also pointed to a lack of understanding in connection with the general conditions faced by the majority of the men when he commented: ‘admittedly the narrator was describing the horrors of a Penal Camp for Civil and Military offenders, but the vast majority of his listeners failed to realise this, or naturally enough concluded that similar conditions prevailed in prisoner of war camps.’[[247]](#footnote-247) He went on to conclude that ‘all concerned are painfully aware of our powerlessness to help ‘till Japan agrees to observe the terms of the Geneva Convention and give permission for help to be sent; it is difficult to see what the broadcast hoped to achieve by meticulously depicting to the last revolting detail, the experiences of the narrator.’[[248]](#footnote-248) The reactions to the broadcast giving news that men were being ill-treated, pointed to the potentially negative effect such accounts had on not only the next-of-kin of those in Japanese hands, but also the wider British public.

By October 1943, in an effort to attempt to influence the Japanese government to improve its treatment of Allied prisoners, discussions were held at the Foreign Office with regards to the possibility of publishing details of the treatment of Allied prisoners. The Secretary of State for War suggested that the earlier statement relating to the conditions in Hong Kong, had ‘probably worn off’ for the majority of the British public, with the exception of those with relatives in Japanese hands.[[249]](#footnote-249) As will be discussed in the following chapter, issues surrounding the possible exchange of diplomatic staff and civilian internees with Japan heavily influenced the information which various Allied governments were willing to make public. The American government in particular considered that any disclosure of this information would curtail the chances of further exchanges taking place. For their part the British were sensitive that accounts of atrocities would possibly encourage further Japanese brutality, and consideration was also given to the distress such announcements could cause for the relatives of those in Japanese hands. Nonetheless, the Minister of State suggested that publishing these details could only influence the Japanese government once they realised that ‘a day of reckoning would come.’[[250]](#footnote-250) Such observations pointed to the complexities involved for London when considering disclosing details of the ill-treatment of those in Japanese hands.

Phillimore stated that it took time to establish public confidence in connection with the handling of prisoner of war matters. He claimed that the War Office was hampered ‘by the normal reluctance of any department to give information which might be used as a stick with which to beat it.’[[251]](#footnote-251) However, he also suggested that on prisoner of war matters this reluctance was ‘undoubtedly put aside wherever possible and the fullest information was given.’[[252]](#footnote-252) This claim certainly overstated London’s approach to providing intelligence for both the public and the relatives of those in Japanese hands. As will be discussed in the following chapter, discussions were held at the War Office in connection with the possibility of providing the British Red Cross War Organisation with reliable information, which could be used to ensure any future announcements were accurate.

Nonetheless, publicity regarding the conditions in the Far East still remained something of a thorny issue. Despite the fact that Whitehall had relaxed the ban on former internees publishing the details of their experiences at the hands of the Japanese[[253]](#footnote-253), and books and pamphlets by some individuals had already been published.[[254]](#footnote-254) The failure to disclose the full-extent of the Japanese behaviour to the British Red Cross War Organisation, led to some public announcements which were misleading. By October 1943, information specifically provided for relatives of those in the Far East, continued to give a false impression of the conditions being experienced by prisoners throughout the area. Furthermore, as this information was reported in the national press, it was made available to a far wider audience. One example of this was published in *The Observer* dated the 10th of October 1943, under the headline ‘Far East Prisoners: No Atrocities’, it was reported that ‘not a single authenticated case of atrocities in prisoner of war camps in Japan’ had been recorded. This information was given by Mr S.G. King Controller of the Far Eastern section of the Prisoners of War Department of the Red Cross and St. John Organisation, to a meeting of 3,000 relatives of Far East prisoners. Additionally, he stated that the treatment of the prisoners was ‘considerate’ but food could have been ‘improved’ claiming that the solution was a ‘Red Cross Parcel every week for prisoners whose morale was tremendously high.’[[255]](#footnote-255) Obviously taken at face value, this was positive news for relatives who were desperate for any crumbs of comfort.

This information was of course extremely deceptive, as the report concerned camps in the northern area, which contained comparatively few British prisoners. In reality, the treatment the majority of prisoners bore no resemblance to the description provided for the families, and was far from ‘considerate’. Likewise rations in many areas were insufficient to maintain the long-term health of prisoners and, as we shall see in the following chapter, although there were some prospects of sending supplies to the Far East at this time, there were effectively no grounds for suggesting that there was any realistic possibility of supplying each prisoner with a Red Cross Parcel every week. However, as the claim was made by such a high ranking Red Cross official, this strongly implied that this was a possibility. The true conditions in the Far East were eventually made public as the American-chartered exchange ship the *Gripsholm*,which sailed under the auspices of the ICRC with a Swedish captain and crew[[256]](#footnote-256), returned to the United States*.* The ship carried internees and diplomatic staff who returned with stories of atrocities committed by the Japanese.[[257]](#footnote-257)

The potential publication of the details of the Japanese ill-treatment of prisoners and civilians in the American press, resulted in an announcement being made in the House of Commons on the 28th of January 1944. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs revealed to the British public that although recent postcards sent by British prisoners in Japanese hands suggested that prisoners were in good health, the true state of affairs was very different. He continued that 80-90% of the prisoners and civilian internees in Japanese hands were located in the southern area comprising of Borneo, Malaya, Burma, Siam and Indo-China. In these areas Japanese had withheld permission for any neutral inspection of any of the camps in question; he further stated that Britain ‘had not even been allowed to know the numbers of prisoners detained in various areas’ nor had the Japanese provided the names of a large number of those in their hands.[[258]](#footnote-258) Such statements finally exposed publicly the powerless frustration of the British government towards the attitude of the Japanese.

The Secretary of State continued that ‘it becomes my painful duty’ to tell the House that in Siam there are many thousands of prisoners from the British Commonwealth who are being ‘compelled’ by the Japanese military to live in tropical jungle conditions ‘without adequate shelter, clothing, food, or medical attention.’[[259]](#footnote-259) He elaborated that prisoners were forced to work on building a railway and making roads and that ‘their health is rapidly deteriorating’, he further pointed out that ‘a high percentage are seriously ill, and there have been some thousands of deaths.’[[260]](#footnote-260) He added that one eyewitness account stated that the prisoners ‘were skin and bone, unshaven and with long matted hair. They were half naked’ and wore no hats or shoes and that as the areas were largely uninhabited ‘there are practically no local resources which could provide medical or other material relief.’[[261]](#footnote-261) The details of the announcement carried deliberately graphic details in an effort by Allied governments in an effort to shame the Japanese authorities into improving their treatment of prisoners. As will be discussed in the following chapter although the announcement had some limited success, it nonetheless also gave the Japanese an excuse to delay their collection of relief supplies.

In line with the policies suggested by the United Nations War Crimes Commission, the announcement attempted to use Britain’s knowledge of atrocities to influence the Japanese Greater East Asia Ministry and Foreign Office. The Commission suggested certain personnel within these departments could potentially act as a moderating influence on the more militaristic elements in the Japanese government.[[262]](#footnote-262) The official statements made by Allies relating to the conditions in Thailand, targeted these elements and also ‘Japanese civilian officials, industrialists, businessmen and some military and naval officers, who have been abroad and know something of western psychology’, it was considered that ‘alarm within this group’ may have brought ‘pressure on the military.’[[263]](#footnote-263) Such plans demonstrated that the British authorities were open to any suggestions in an effort to improve conditions, and were no doubt a measure of the increasing sense of desperation felt in London.

In addition to the information provided by the January announcement, the government later opened a Prisoner of War (Far East) Enquiry Centre in London on the 24th of May 1944. This centre was intended as a ‘place where anxious relatives can obtain a sympathetic hearing.’[[264]](#footnote-264) Records demonstrated that in the first month, some 403 enquiries had been dealt with, of these 376 called into the centre and an additional 27 telephone enquiries had been answered.[[265]](#footnote-265) In addition, the centre dealt with some 922 articles of correspondence in the first month.[[266]](#footnote-266) However, its location limited its accessibility for the majority of those thought to have loved ones in Japanese hands, and the numbers of personal enquiries dropped off after the first few weeks.

In the same month, the government also produced a Handbook containing information for ‘Relatives and Friends of Prisoners of War and Civilians in Japanese or Japanese Occupied Territory.’[[267]](#footnote-267) In the booklet which was sold to the relatives of prisoners for two pence net, the War Office finally admitted the fact that London had little influence over the actions of the Japanese. With regards to their treatment of prisoners of war it stated: ‘it must be recognised that we have no power until victory is actually won to compel the Japanese authorities to do anything to which they are ill-disposed.’[[268]](#footnote-268) Nonetheless, it also assured relatives that the British government would ‘continue to take every opportunity of action in one direction or another to secure an improvement in the present situation.’[[269]](#footnote-269) These simple statements would seem to sum up the problems which the government faced throughout the conflict, when attempting to influence Tokyo.

Although London made efforts to contain any further disclosures of information, one additional statement was made to the House of Commons in November 1944. The announcement was prompted by the repatriation of U.K. and Australian prisoners rescued from a Japanese transport ship, which had sunk as the result of Allied attacks. Their stories had reached the U.K. through letters written in Saipan. Although the press had only published ‘an official statement’ up to this point, as British survivors began to return to the United Kingdom it was considered that news of their treatment was ‘bound to leak out.’[[270]](#footnote-270) In these circumstances it was thought that the stories told by individual prisoners, would be ‘far more harrowing’ than the proposed statement by the Secretary of State for War.[[271]](#footnote-271) An official announcement coordinated between Britain, Australia and the United States, was made following the interrogation of the recovered prisoners.[[272]](#footnote-272) As with the earlier disclosures the British authorities were effectively forced into giving details of the ill-treatment of prisoners, as a way of limiting the damage that may have occurred to British morale if the experiences of individuals had been published in what Cabinet Ministers regarded as the less responsible elements of the press.

The announcement made in the House of Commons on the 17th of November 1944, gave further details of atrocities committed against Allied prisoners and described the general conditions the men had been facing. The Secretary of State for War P.J Grigg concluded ‘all that we have learnt from these men reveals that our prisoners have been true to the highest traditions of our race.’[[273]](#footnote-273) He also made it clear that the Japanese would be held accountable for their actions.[[274]](#footnote-274) Although the information made available to the public in announcements in the House of Commons contained distressing information with respect to the ill-treatment of prisoners in southern areas, much of the other information reaching the relatives of prisoners remained generally positive, as it originated from northern areas and largely avoided details which may have added to the anguish felt by the next-of-kin.

Other official information available concerning the general conditions in the Far East came in the form of a dedicated magazine, aimed specifically at the friends and relatives of those in Japanese hands. Although a magazine published by the British Red Cross entitled *‘The Prisoner of War*’, was already available for all relatives of all prisoners of war, the publication contained relatively little information relating to those captured by the Japanese. In an effort to remedy this situation, the British Red Cross produced a magazine specifically aimed for the next-of-kin of those in the Far East.

The publication was simply entitled ‘*Far East: Special Monthly Edition of* “*The Prisoner of War*”’. Although plans were made for the magazine to be published monthly, after the first three editions were published in February, March and April 1944, the lack of information available meant that thereafter the title was subtly changed to ‘*Far East: Companion Journal to* “*The Prisoner of War*”’; just three further editions were published during wartime, in August 1944, January 1945, with a final edition in March 1945. As much of the news published in these magazines came from northern areas, the accounts generally portrayed the life of prisoners as being relatively tolerable; the information suggested that the conditions experienced in prisoner of war camps were broadly similar to those experienced by British prisoners in Europe. However, details published in the magazine in March 1945, reflected the fact that by this time some former prisoners were beginning to be repatriated to the United Kingdom, and it contained a somewhat sanitised account of conditions in ‘Siam.’[[275]](#footnote-275) As will be discussed in the third chapter towards the end of 1944, the American operations to attempt to recover Philippines resulted in the recovery and repatriation of small numbers of British prisoners of war. Although some news of the conditions the men had experienced was gradually reaching Britain, it could be suggested that such accounts also played into the hands of the British authorities. In line with Churchill’s suggestions the stories which were emerging maintained public awareness of the continuing struggle in the Far East and in turn raised the profile of the war in the Pacific, highlighting the need for a continued war effort following the eventual defeat of Nazi Germany. [[276]](#footnote-276)

**Continuing diplomatic efforts in the latter stages of the war**

Notwithstanding the fact that Tokyo refused to allow the neutral inspection of prisoner of war camps in the occupied southern areas, London continued its diplomatic approaches for access to be granted. By October 1943, the Minister of State noted that a communiqué had been sent to the Japanese government which informed them that Britain was aware of the ‘many grave infractions of the spirit of the Geneva Convention.’[[277]](#footnote-277) In addition, he stated that Tokyo had been asked to ‘lose no further time’ in applying the ‘necessary remedies’ and grant ‘without further delay the fullest right of inspection to the representatives of the Swiss Government.’[[278]](#footnote-278) We can of course suggest that this request was again sent in hope rather than belief that the Japanese authorities would immediately change their attitudes towards the treatment of prisoners and the inspection of camps in these areas. However, as the war progressed and as the Japanese position weakened, diplomatic pressure combined with Allied advances eventually appeared to yield some positive results.

By June 1944, the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs stated to the Swiss Minister in Tokyo that the question of permitting visits to camps in the occupied territories was ‘under consideration’[[279]](#footnote-279), and two months later the Swiss Minister in Tokyo reported that there had been some ‘progress’ in his negotiations.[[280]](#footnote-280) It was not until December 1944, that there appeared to be a breakthrough and the Japanese promised that visits could take place in southern areas, although they placed limitations and conditions on the inspections. [[281]](#footnote-281)

The Swiss Minister in Tokyo received a letter confirming that the Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs, M. Shigemitsu, had promised that the ICRC would be allowed to visit prisoner of war camps in occupied territory.[[282]](#footnote-282) Shigemitsu was described in Allied documents as a ‘cultured and humane’ man who would have been ‘disturbed’ by the ‘vile actions’ towards prisoners by Japan’s military authorities. The War Crimes Commission suggested that the fact that individuals such as Shigemitsu existed gave some ‘faint hope for the future’ and that their influence may have increased ‘when the tide of war’ turned against the militarists.[[283]](#footnote-283) Indeed as this apparent change of heart coincided with the American invasion of the Philippines, the positive news relating to the inspection of camps in southern areas seemed to vindicate Allied attempts to appeal to the more moderate elements in the Japanese government.

The proposed visits were to begin in the Philippines and Malaya, and in turn the Japanese Minister demanded ‘reciprocity’ for visits to prisoner of war and civilian internment camps in New Caledonia, Saipan Tinian and Guam.[[284]](#footnote-284) In response, the British pointed out that full reciprocity already existed with regards to ICRC visits to Japanese prisoners held in the British Empire, and other Allies were being approached respecting camps in their territory.[[285]](#footnote-285) Although the Allied governments attempted to promote a unified front when dealing with Tokyo, there were frequent disagreements and conflicts of interest which Tokyo was keen to exploit.

One example of the disunity among Allied governments occurred when the United States government had earlier proposed the exchange of American prisoners of war for Japanese and Korean service personnel. In June 1944, the U.S. government offered Japan the opportunity to evacuate Japanese garrisons which had been by-passed during Allied operations in the Pacific for American POWs. If the Japanese accepted the proposal this would have resulted in the evacuation of all American prisoners of war. This matter was discussed by the War Cabinet on 28th July 1944.The Prime Minister agreed with the Secretary of State who felt that public reaction to the American proposals ‘would be most serious.’[[286]](#footnote-286) Whilst any initiative was welcomed, it was also stressed that any arrangements which did not include some of the British Commonwealth prisoners of war would create serious ill-feeling between the Allies.[[287]](#footnote-287) While space does not allow for the full details of the proposals and counter-proposals relating to the exchange of either Japanese fighting forces or civilians, the inter-Allied negotiations demonstrated that the Americans reserved the right to deal with the Japanese on a bilateral basis.[[288]](#footnote-288) During the next months the British, Commonwealth and American governments put forward proposals and counter proposals to the Japanese government which demonstrated the potential for both disunity and independent action between not only the British and American governments but also between the British, Canadian and Australian governments as the Dominions looked towards whatever scheme would possibly secure the release of their own prisoners of war.[[289]](#footnote-289)

Even though the Japanese authorities appeared to be suggesting that camps in southern areas may have had some form of neutral inspection, the Japanese proposals nevertheless came with a list of stipulations which proved to be a source of disagreement between the British and American governments. The Japanese authorities stated that visits would only be allowed to those camps ‘which do not cause obstacles to [the] military operations of the Japanese forces.’ [[290]](#footnote-290) Furthermore, the visitor was required to ‘reside on the spot’ and be both recommended by the ICRC, and approved by the Japanese government. The representative was to carry out the visits as an agent of the ICRC in Tokyo and in return, the Allied powers were required to allow reciprocal assessments of camps were Japanese subjects were detained.[[291]](#footnote-291) While the British regarded the offer as being a step in the right direction, the American government nonetheless saw the Japanese proposals as being too restricted.

At the end of January 1945, the American State Department advised the Japanese that their offer, which included the proposal to allow visits to Santo Tomas Camp in the Philippines was unacceptable.[[292]](#footnote-292) The fact that this camp had already been liberated can be taken as a sign of the weakening Japanese position. Other American objections centred on Japanese demands to be allowed to inspect prisoner of war and internee camps in Saipan, Tinian, and Guam.[[293]](#footnote-293) Although the Japanese government was largely indifferent to the plight of captured Japanese service personnel in Allied hands, they were concerned with the plight of Japanese civilians held by the American government. The Japanese had already accused the American government of abusing Japanese civilians interned in camps in the United States, as a means of countering Allied announcements concerning the Japanese ill-treatment of their own prisoners in the Far East.[[294]](#footnote-294) At this point the American authorities simply suggested that the Japanese offer was unsatisfactory, as the State and War Departments considered the proposals were biased in favour of the Japanese position.[[295]](#footnote-295) In turn it appears that the continued restrictions imposed by Tokyo on potential visits to camps in southern areas remained as a source of conflict, especially as the American standpoint could have opened the door for the Japanese to justify their own position refusing the right of independent inspections.

The Foreign Office expressed their disagreement with the American attitude.[[296]](#footnote-296) The British Ambassador to Washington suggested that the American stance made a mockery of the position, which both Allied governments had taken with the Japanese up to this point. Furthermore, he suggested that the Japanese would be ‘justified’ in retorting that the Allies only complied with the Convention obligations when it suited them, and that their objections to breaches of Articles 78 and 86 were ‘mere propaganda.’[[297]](#footnote-297) As these articles related to access to camps by relief societies in order to distribute relief, and the access of representatives of Protecting Powers to places where prisoners were held, this was a potential source of political embarrassment. Colonel Phillimore was informed that he should advise the American representatives at the Conference at Yalta which was held between the 4th and 11th of February, of War Office concerns in connection with the American attitude.[[298]](#footnote-298)

London was willing to accept the Japanese offer, which included proposals to allow a visit to a camp in Singapore and a hospital in Siam. The British Ambassador to Washington suggested that the proposals represented ‘considerable progress’, and was the first weakening of Japanese inflexibility.[[299]](#footnote-299) In addition, the Ambassador stated ‘if we fail to profit by the Japanese offer’ then the public reaction in Britain was likely to be ‘violent.’[[300]](#footnote-300) Again we can see how perceptions relating to public opinion concerning London’s performance in improving conditions affected the decisions made at this level. At the same time the Ambassador was aware that even though the Japanese were not really concerned about the treatment of their nationals in Allied hands, they would ‘seize any opportunity of promoting disunion’ between the British and American governments which he considered should have been avoided ‘at all costs.’[[301]](#footnote-301) In turn this reflects the complexities of inter-Allied relations and the difficulties Allied governments faced when dealing with the Japanese, as the Japanese attempted to exploit any differences between the views of the various Allied governments.

Although by June 1945, the Japanese authorities again agreed ‘in principle, and subject to reciprocity, to visits by representatives of the Protecting Power and ICRC to camps in occupied territories, including camps in Malaya and Thailand.[[302]](#footnote-302) It was nonetheless noted by the IPWC that although visits were in theory permitted these areas, in reality these offers resulted in ‘vague promises from the Japanese authorities, but no concrete results.’[[303]](#footnote-303) We can of course question if Tokyo had any intention of allowing access to ‘all’ prisoner of war camps. Although the Japanese had in theory granted permission for access for neutral observers in northern areas from the start of the war, as we have seen the Japanese placed restrictions on all aspects of the visits as they saw fit. In reality visits to limited numbers of camps frequently took many months to organise, and came with stipulations and limitations.

Although the Japanese had refused to recognise ICRC Delegates in southern areas, Cambray and Briggs pointed out that on the 10th of August 1945, they finally agreed to the nomination of delegates in Indo-China, Siam, Singapore and the Netherlands East Indies, they noted that ‘it was a last-minute repentance which deceived no one about its sincerity.’[[304]](#footnote-304) As will be discussed in the final chapter; when camps in the Japanese Home Islands were eventually liberated, it was only at this point that the Delegates of the ICRC and Protecting Powers learned of the existence of tens of additional camps hitherto unknown to them. Events eventually overtook negotiations with respect to visits to camps in all areas and following the Japanese capitulation, it became all too obvious why the Japanese had not allowed the inspection of camps in southern areas, as Harold Satow later wrote, they were simply ‘not fit to be seen.’[[305]](#footnote-305)

**Conclusions**

During the course of the war Tokyo held the upper hand with London when dealing with matters surrounding the welfare and treatment of British prisoners. One major difficulty for the British authorities came as a result of the Japanese attitude towards surrender to an enemy. The Japanese standpoint considered that any service personnel who allowed themselves to be captured by an enemy had disgraced not only himself, but his entire family by his actions. In short, the Japanese authorities expected their service personnel to fight to the death. When faced with certain defeat, Japanese commanders frequently issued orders for suicide charges rather than allow their men to be captured; in comparison, when faced with similar situations British commanders saw no disgrace in saving the lives of their men by ordering them to surrender, despite the fact they had also received orders to fight to the last man. In turn this attitude resulted in a vast disparity between the numbers of prisoners of war in Japanese in comparison to Allied hands. Consequently, while Tokyo frequently spoke of ‘reciprocity’ in diplomatic exchanges the sheer difference in numbers pointed to the difficulties for Whitehall. Furthermore, although London was aware of issues surrounding the welfare of British prisoners of war in enemy hands, for their next-of-kin and the wider British public, in contrast Tokyo had little interest in the welfare of those Japanese who had allowed themselves to be captured by the Allies.

The British authorities faced the extremely difficult task of attempting to deal with issues surrounding the welfare of tens of thousands of prisoners of war spread over millions of square miles across the Far East. However, when they approached Tokyo on the subject, the Japanese government originally claimed that they would treat British prisoners in accordance with the terms of the Geneva Convention, albeit with some necessary changes. Although it gradually became all too obvious to Whitehall that this claim had little or no basis in reality, nonetheless, London’s diplomatic responses throughout the course of the war attempted to maintain the stance that they expected the Japanese to honour their initial promises. However, Tokyo had no intention of treating prisoners in accordance to the terms of the Geneva Convention. The Japanese navy later argued that the disparity in numbers of prisoners meant that the Convention would function as a one-sided regulation which only imposed obligations on the Japanese side.[[306]](#footnote-306) Their attitude towards capture also allowed the Japanese to feel justified in ill-treating Allied service personnel in their hands; these individuals were not to sit idle they were to work to further the Japanese war effort.

Japan’s refusal to recognise the right of the ICRC to carry out inspections in all areas, exposed the somewhat toothless nature of the Committee. The ICRC later recorded that the notion that it was able to exercise any control over the application of the Convention of 1929, may have led to ‘assumption that the ICRC is the “guardian” even the “guarantor” of the Convention.’[[307]](#footnote-307) Nonetheless, it also pointed out that the Committee had no means of ensuring that the Convention was applied, and that the only ‘sanctions’ which it could ‘wield’ would be the ‘withdrawal of the benefits of its welfare activities on behalf of the PW who [were] nationals of the recalcitrant state’, such action, ‘even in contemplation’ was ‘utterly barred’ and went against the ‘very principles’ of the Red Cross.[[308]](#footnote-308) The authority of the ICRC to act on behalf of prisoners of war relied on the acquiescence of the states involved; as Japan chose not to recognise the right of inspection of camps in southern areas, the ICRC had effectively no means of attempting to influence the Japanese apart from further diplomatic protests.

Although the treatment, rations and medical care for prisoners resulted in the deaths of thousands of prisoners, when pressed the Japanese authorities treated the topic as little more than a diplomatic game. In many instances they simply denied any wrongdoing, and steadfastly maintained that their own ‘*Bushido* spirit’ was sufficient guarantee that all prisoners of war were treated with consideration and courtesy.[[309]](#footnote-309) Tokyo’s refusal to allow independent bodies to inspect prisoner of war camps in the so-called newly-occupied southern zones initially resulted in relatively little reliable information emerging with respect to the appalling conditions in many camps in the areas concerned. This decision was significant for the British authorities, as the great majority of British prisoners had been captured in these areas.

Although the British authorities were aware of the likelihood that prisoners in the Far East would be suffering while in Japanese hands, the information which emerged in the early months of the war was frequently somewhat contradictory and confusing. It was not until the early months of 1943, that reliable news regarding the plight of captives involved in the construction of the Burma-Thailand Railway, brought home to Whitehall the full extent of the hardships these individuals were continuing to experience. Nonetheless, London remained in an extremely poor position with respect to the pressure which it could exert on Tokyo, to improve conditions for prisoners.

While the Japanese authorities initially suggested they would provide information regarding the identity of prisoners in their hands and set up relevant departments accordingly, they failed to provide comprehensive lists giving the identities and locations of prisoners to Whitehall. In Britain, the lack of news on the subject of the identity of those who may have been captives of the Japanese resulted in some relatives becoming politically active and many joined pressure groups such as the British Prisoners of War Relatives Association (BPOWRA). This Association attempted to ensure that the British authorities endeavoured to assist prisoners wherever they were held; it also tried to encourage the British authorities to use a more coordinated approach between government departments when dealing with matters concerning the welfare of those in enemy hands. However, their demands met with limited success, as the IPWC was already attempting to coordinate matters surrounding the amelioration of British prisoners in Japanese hands on behalf of British and Imperial governments.

As Whitehall struggled to control the flow of information to both the relatives and the wider British public, in April 1942, the IPWC discussed the Japanese attitude to prisoners of war and suggested that the treatment of prisoners of war was ‘so unequal that it may provoke a strong public demand for repressive action on our side.’[[310]](#footnote-310) Although the British government eventually threatened to expose the crimes committed against the British prisoners, in an effort to both demonstrate the falsehood of Japanese claims to be treating prisoners well and to attempt to appeal to what were thought to be the more moderate elements in the Japanese government. Issues surrounding the publication of the details of the ill-treatment meted out to Allied prisoners in the Far East highlighted a complex series of issues for the British government. Despite the fact that Winston Churchill expressed the opinion that details of the full extent of Japanese atrocities should be held back from the British public, and used to bolster their will to fight on following the defeat of Nazi Germany.[[311]](#footnote-311) In reality, it was not simply the case that London could publish their knowledge, without considering the wishes of other Allied governments.

As will be discussed in the following chapter, the possibility of the exchange of civilian internees and diplomatic personnel affected the views of the United States, as the American authorities suggested that any official statements regarding the conditions in the Far East would affect the chances of further exchanges taking place. In the United Kingdom, Whitehall was also aware that publishing details of the atrocities committed would distress the next-of-kin of those held captive by the Japanese, when little could be done to persuade the Japanese of the rights of prisoners in their hands. The British authorities were also aware that publicity surrounding the ill-treatment of British captives in Japanese hands could adversely affect not only the morale of the country, but also bring added pressure from the relatives and the British public to ameliorate the conditions the men were experiencing. Furthermore, there were also fears expressed that the publication of the details may have encouraged their forces to commit further acts of brutality. While Phillimore later claimed that the government put aside its reluctance to pass on information which could be used against it, and wherever possible gave the fullest information.[[312]](#footnote-312) It could certainly be argued that although announcements were made regarding the conditions in the Far East, the publication of this information came about as the result of circumstances which were outside the control of the British establishment.

Nonetheless, as Japan’s fortunes changed and the tide of war turned decisively against Japan, there appeared to be something of a softening of Tokyo’s previous attitudes; it was only at this point that the Japanese government showed signs of allowing the inspection of camps in southern areas, again subject to reciprocity, with respect to camps holding recently captured Japanese civilians. In spite of prolonged negotiations, the Japanese again appeared to be using this as an opportunity to divide the Allied governments. Just as the British authorities regarded any Japanese offer as a potentially positive sign, in contrast the United States authorities regarded the Japanese offer as being limited, in light of Japan’s changing fortunes. Regardless of the differences of opinion and in spite of the fact that negotiations continued throughout the remainder of the war, it could certainly be argued that the Japanese had little or no intention of allowing neutral inspections of camps in southern areas. The conditions which were discovered in various camps following the Japanese defeat were proof of the atrocious treatment the men had endured in many camps in southern occupied areas, and it would have been inconceivable for the Japanese authorities to allow access for the inspection of such camps.

**CHAPTER 2**

**Practical methods of sending Aid to the Far East**

This chapter set out to examine London’s reactions to the unfolding humanitarian crisis in the Far East. It examines issues surrounding both the diplomatic and practical methods employed to attempt to improve the conditions and treatment of those in Japanese hands, and asks questions of Whitehall’s obligations towards the welfare of service personnel who had been sent to fight in the Far East on behalf of Britain.

From the earliest days of the conflict, London was aware of the potential shortfall in nutrition which was likely to be provided by the Japanese for U.K. prisoners of war. As a consequence, Whitehall endeavoured to send additional supplies of aid in an effort to maintain the long-term health of British prisoners and internees. However, given the pitiful quantity of aid which actually reached camps, the prisoners and internees could be forgiven for concluding they were well down the British government’s priority list. Diaries and memoirs are littered with references to prisoners receiving a small portion of a Red Cross parcel shared between a number of fellow prisoners. Although writing the history from the perspective of New Zealand prisoners, Wynne Mason gave the examples of men in Singapore receiving as little as a sixteenth of a food parcel on just three occasions throughout the course of the entire war; in addition to other bulk supplies, he noted that in Java and Sumatra, men received similarly low portions on just two occasions, and some in Thailand received just a seventeenth of a parcel on one occasion.[[313]](#footnote-313) Even though any relief reaching camps was frequently shared between many individuals, each additional item nevertheless provided evidence that the outside world was aware of their plight.

When Harold Satow assessed the performance of the Foreign Office in attempting to help prisoners in the area, he stated that the main problem was to provide sufficient relief supplies ‘to prevent them from dying from starvation and disease.’[[314]](#footnote-314) However, following the end of the war he was forced to admit that the Prisoners of War Department ‘failed to achieve this on any but a minute scale.’[[315]](#footnote-315) Potentially because of this fact, Whitehall’s endeavours have received relatively little historical attention. While Kent Fedorowich, P. Scott Corbett and David Miller have given details of the exchanges of civilian internees and diplomatic staff between the Allies and Japan, only Miller provides detailed information concerning the Allied attempts to send aid on these ships.[[316]](#footnote-316) When Caroline Moorhead assessed the bulk supplies which were sent on the exchange shipping, her comments were confined to a single paragraph.[[317]](#footnote-317) This chapter examines the ways in which Allied governments attempted to send quantities of aid to the Far East in an effort to ameliorate conditions for those in Japanese hands.

Satow noted that the problem was simply that the standard which the British government wanted the Japanese to ‘concede to enemy nationals’ was a better standard of living than the Japanese thought was necessary for their own people.[[318]](#footnote-318) While this statement implied that the Japanese fed the prisoners with the same rations that they enjoyed, in reality, the Japanese frequently demanded that prisoners carried out arduous physical tasks working long hours, while being fed on a rice-based diet which was far inferior to that received by Japanese personnel. As we saw in the previous chapter the ICRC reports on camps in northern areas seemed to give the impression that the men in these areas were receiving adequate rations. In reality this was far from the truth. Roland noted that the rice being fed to the Allied prisoners was second or third rate and contained rocks, broken glass, dirt, rat dung and worms; the Japanese would not issue this to their own soldiers so it was given to prisoners of war.[[319]](#footnote-319)

When considering the possibility of sending large amounts of aid on a regular basis to prisoners in the area, the main difficulty for the Allied governments lay with the gulf between what they considered necessary to maintain the health of prisoners, and the Japanese understanding of the needs of the men in their care. While the British were aware that the forces originating from the United Kingdom would need supplementary rations on a regular basis, to maintain their long-term health; it would however have been inconceivable to the Japanese mindset, for captives who owed their lives to the benevolence of the Japanese Emperor[[320]](#footnote-320) and the generosity of their captors[[321]](#footnote-321) to receive a better diet than their guards. Records from the meetings of the Imperial Prisoners of War Committee, suggest that this issue was discussed from the earliest days of the conflict.

**The initial response of the British Red Cross Joint War Organisation**

As early as the 12th of December 1941, even before the Japanese had captured significant numbers of British personnel, it was noted at a meeting of the IPWC that the provision of an adequate quantity of food to maintain the health of British prisoners would potentially prove to be difficult. Major-General E.C. Gepp, the Director of Prisoners of War at the War Office, pointed out that the daily ration scale for the Japanese soldier amounted to approximately 64oz of food of which 20oz was rice, while the daily ration for white British solders was significantly greater and of a ‘western’ type of diet.[[322]](#footnote-322) This being the case it was pointed out that Britain would have difficulty in persuading the Japanese to provide suitable rations for any white prisoner of war.[[323]](#footnote-323) Such statements recognised that even if white British prisoners were fed on the same ration scale as the Japanese, this would mean both a significant reduction in their calorific intake as well as a drastic change in their diet. In these circumstances, Britain would need to provide additional rations to maintain the long-term health of those likely to be captured by Japanese forces.

The work of the British Red Cross was central to London’s efforts to send relief to British service personnel in enemy hands. On the 29th of December 1941, just days after the fall of Hong Kong, a meeting was held at the War Organisation of the British Red Cross Society and Order of St. John of Jerusalem, usually referred to as the British Red Cross Joint War Organisation (BRCJWO) or simply the Joint War Organisation (JWO), to discuss the position concerning prisoners of war. Representatives of the Foreign Office, the War Office, the New Zealand High Commissioner, the India Office, the Red Cross Societies of America, Canada, South Africa and New Zealand were also present. The Chairman Sir Philip Chetwode of the Joint War Organisation opened the meeting by stating that it was essential that ‘steps should be taken as soon as possible to ensure the welfare of these prisoners.’[[324]](#footnote-324) Perhaps naturally the War Office considered that they would be allowed to send Red Cross ships into the area, which would be used to transport significant quantities of relief supplies. Although little concrete information was available, it was considered likely that a substantial relief operation would be needed.

Chetwode suggested that the most direct route for relief would be from Sydney, Australia, as the Australian government through the Australian Red Cross, had intimated that they could supply the necessary foodstuffs. Mr Butler from the Foreign Office suggested that Shanghai might be a ‘suitable’ reception and distribution centre as ICRC Delegates were already in situ organising relief for China; it was agreed the proposals should be forwarded to ICRC at Geneva.[[325]](#footnote-325) The ICRC already had a foothold in the Far East as during the Sino-Japanese war of the late 1930s, and the ICRC and the American Red Cross had set up a relief base for Chinese civilians in Shanghai. James Crossland noted that the relief operation was able to purchase stocks originally sent for the ICRC relief operations following Japanese aggression against China; he suggested that the food and clothing was ‘crucial’ for the subsequent Red Cross relief efforts in 1942.[[326]](#footnote-326) These proposals suggested that if the Japanese had permitted the Allied powers to supply relief for prisoners and internees stocks would be readily available.

At this early stage, it was considered that large quantities of western-type foodstuffs would need to be sent to the prisoners. The Foreign Office Minister Mr. R.A. Butler, pointed out that the needs of the prisoners would be ‘very pressing’ owing to the lack of European commodities in the area. It was suggested that bulk consignments would be necessary, sufficient for ninety days’ supply, of nine pounds of staple food per person per week, for 50,000 prisoners of war and civilian internees in the Far East.[[327]](#footnote-327) These figures suggested that substantial numbers of British personnel were expected to fall into Japanese hands, and that the relief operation would need to be carried out in a similar manner to that which was becoming established for Allied prisoners in Europe. In order to service the needs of prisoners’ bulk food supplies would be required, until the machinery for sending large numbers of food parcels was in place. Although the estimated number of prisoners was considerable, the British authorities could perhaps be forgiven for not envisaging the huge number captured during the campaign in Malaya and of course following the defeat at Singapore.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the initial Japanese replies to ICRC enquiries in connection with the welfare of prisoners in their hands, suggested they were willing to abide by the terms of the Geneva Convention, albeit with some changes deemed necessary. In addition, the ICRC had been informed that the Japanese Red Cross was undertaking relief for the prisoners of war and internees ‘in the spirit of the Geneva Convention and with the authority of the Japanese Government.’[[328]](#footnote-328) By the 30th December 1941, the British Red Cross asked the ICRC to organise a Pacific route for relief supplies. The Australian Red Cross expressed its readiness to provide the first relief supplies, and the Japanese Legation at Berne informed the Committee that the Japanese government ‘would not object’ to a neutral ship being used.[[329]](#footnote-329) Communication between the Foreign Office and the ICRC suggested that it appeared likely that a regular service could be set up with cargo being sent from America, Canada or from Australia. It was envisaged that the ship would carry food and clothing for prisoners of war and internees, and could also be used to transmit comforts for Japanese prisoners of war and internees in Allied hands on its return voyage.[[330]](#footnote-330) Such plans were in line with the Japanese request for reciprocity regarding Japanese prisoners in Allied hands.

By March 1942, in response to the initial British approach, the Japanese authorities claimed that they did not consider that the despatch of a ship to Hong Kong was necessary at this time.[[331]](#footnote-331) The following month, the Japanese refused the passage of Red Cross Ships on the grounds of ‘the danger of navigation.’[[332]](#footnote-332) In spite of a number of Allied offers, the Japanese refused to allow neutral ships to enter Japanese-controlled waters. The diplomatic enquiries and responses demonstrated the mismatch between British estimates of the amount of aid required to maintain the long-term health of prisoners, and the Japanese understanding of the needs of the prisoners in their hands. As we saw in the previous chapter, Japanese replies to legitimate concerns relating to the health of those in captivity in Hong Kong, brought the response from the Japanese that Europeans and Americans complained because they had become accustomed to Hong Kong’s ‘luxurious life.’[[333]](#footnote-333) Regardless of the divergent attitudes, the British government sought any avenues by which it could send additional relief supplies.

**The possibility of sending Aid on Exchange Ships**

The capture of thousands of additional British Imperial Service Personnel, following the disastrous defence of Malaya and Singapore, added to the growing sense of desperation in London. This was witnessed in April 1942, when the War Office gave consideration to whether the Vatican, rather than the ICRC, may have been able to assist with the distribution of any aid which could be sent to the areas involved.[[334]](#footnote-334) A report to the IPWC stated that it was known that the Vatican had already established a diplomatic relationship with the Japanese government, and that local Bishops and Missionaries were actively attempting to help European prisoners of war with funds provided from Rome.[[335]](#footnote-335) Furthermore, as Roman Catholic Missionaries in Japan were continuing their work without interference, the IPWC considered if an approach should be made to the Vatican, to propose that the missionary organisation could take charge of the distribution of medical supplies on their arrival in Japan. At the same time, the IPWC realised that this involved ‘a letting down’ of the ICRC.[[336]](#footnote-336) Crossland noted that this proposal was condemned by the British Red Cross, as the ICRC represented the only credible channel for sending relief to the Far East.[[337]](#footnote-337) Naturally this would have been a departure from the accepted stance of allowing the ICRC to supervise the distribution of relief supplies; the proposals also suggested that every avenue was being considered in London to distribute whatever aid could be sent.

In the same month in meetings of the Imperial Prisoners of War Committee, it was recognised that there was a possibility that British and Commonwealth prisoners of war in Japanese hands would be ‘fatally short’ of medical supplies, and that in these circumstances aid should be sent ‘on any terms which can be obtained.’[[338]](#footnote-338) The wording appeared to imply that Whitehall was aware of the gravity of the situation, and pointed to the growing sense of unease when dealing with Tokyo. As plans were underway for an exchange of diplomatic personnel and civilian internees between Britain and Japan, and similar exchanges were in progress involving American personnel and internees, Dr Paravicini, the ICRC delegate in Tokyo, suggested that ships being used for the exchange of civilians could also be used to carry parcels for both Japanese and Allied prisoners. As the Japanese government had refused to allow Red Cross Shipping to enter Japanese-controlled waters, the Allied governments seized this opportunity to send limited quantities of aid to the Far East.[[339]](#footnote-339)

The DPW and the PWD initially rejected the idea that ships used for exchanges could also be used to send aid to the Far East, on the grounds that the scheme would take too long to organise and would also contravene the regulations for the use of ships laid down in the Hague Convention.[[340]](#footnote-340) Notwithstanding these reservations, the War Organisation provisionally arranged for upwards of £9,000 worth of medicines to be sent from South Africa, to be loaded on the exchange shipping. For their part the Japanese made it clear that they would only allow the supplies to be sent on the basis that the aid would be controlled by them and distributed through the Japanese Red Cross Society.[[341]](#footnote-341) Such stipulations were naturally a cause of concern as it was open to abuse, as there was no guarantee that the aid would reach the captives. The IPWC was aware that the Japanese could potentially loot any supplies which were sent without independent control, as they had already known to have removed food and any other supplies they wanted from occupied territories without any regard to the resulting shortages to the inhabitants, prisoners or internees.[[342]](#footnote-342)

Although reports suggested that medical supplies were urgently needed and illness and disease was rife leading to the possibility of epidemics, the IPWC also recognised that allowing the Japanese to distribute aid, breached the vital principle that relief supplies should be distributed by an independent international organisation. Furthermore, the War Office realised that re-establishing the independent distribution of relief supplies at a later date ‘would be difficult, if not impossible.’[[343]](#footnote-343) In addition, allowing other bodies to oversee the distribution process would mean that the ICRC would face a serious setback, just as it was beginning to gain some standing in Japan. While the offer of relief supplies being distributed by the Japanese Red Cross appeared to be generous, the War Office also recognised that the organisation was ‘almost entirely controlled by the [Japanese] government.’[[344]](#footnote-344) The decision was a difficult one, the lack of aid could mean outbreaks of disease and malnutrition, at the same time it was recognised in Whitehall that if they allowed the Japanese to distribute the aid, there would be little chance of Tokyo accepting ICRC supervision of the distribution of any future relief supplies.

By June 1942, more encouraging news emerged as the Foreign Office received a telegram stating that the Japanese government had accepted the ‘principle’ of neutral supervision of relief cargoes, in transit and at destination. Furthermore, the Japanese Red Cross was prepared to help in the distribution of relief sent from Allied countries to Japanese occupied territories, on the condition that the Allies would undertake to do the same. This was taken as a ‘distinct advance’ from the position taken by the Japanese authorities at the start of the war.[[345]](#footnote-345) Furthermore Geneva was also informed by Prince Tokugawa that the Central Committee of the Japanese Red Cross had set up a ‘Prisoners Aid Service’ under the presidency of Prince Shimadzu, brother of the Emperor and vice-president of the Japanese Red Cross.[[346]](#footnote-346) Naturally such positive news appeared to be something of a breakthrough with regards to the distribution of any aid which could be sent to aid those in Japanese hands. Nonetheless, such promises hid the real Japanese attitudes towards prisoners of war.

In reality, as their own troops were facing extreme hardships at this time, the Japanese authorities had very little interest in Allied calls for additional supplies of aid to be sent for prisoners. Ikuhiko Hata noted that at a conference of the Heads of Army Ministry Directorates on the 22nd of July 1942, a conversation was recorded between Tōjō, the Prime Minister and Minister for the Army and Lieutenant-General Uemura Mikio, the first director of the Prisoner of War Information Bureau. Uemura stated “we rejected a British offer to send relief goods to the POWs at Hong Kong and now the Americans are making a similar offer for the POWs at Bataan”. Tōjō added that “where Japanese troops are facing hardships...there is no need to pamper POWs”. Uemura noted that “the Red Cross wants to send quinine” Tōjō replied “reject them all. There’s no knowing where this might end”.’[[347]](#footnote-347) This being the case, it is unsurprising that the Allied governments faced the almost impossible task of persuading the Japanese that Allied prisoners should receive large amounts of aid. In the face of these attitudes, the Japanese authorities did however appear to be willing to allow limited quantities of relief to be sent on the vessels employed in the exchange of diplomatic personnel and civilians between the Allied and Japanese governments.

In August 1942, the Japanese authorities announced that they would not allow any neutral ships to enter either Japanese waters, or any waters surrounding territories occupied by Japan. However, they would allow the relief to be sent on ships used for the exchange of diplomats and civilians between Japan and the Allied Powers.[[348]](#footnote-348) Despite protracted negotiations during the course of the war, just three such exchanges took place; during the summer of 1942, two separate exchanges occurred, one American-Japanese the other between Britain and Japan. It was not until the following August that a final exchange between the United States and Japan came about. It was originally agreed that the personnel exchanged would be diplomats and other officials in government employment, although it was later agreed that those exchanged could include civilian internees.[[349]](#footnote-349) As we have seen in the previous chapter, although the Japanese authorities had little regard for their service personnel who had surrendered to the Allies, they were however concerned for the welfare of Japanese civilians in enemy territory. Despite their initial reservations, when the opportunity arose to send aid on the diplomatic exchange ships, the British Red Cross Society arranged in cooperation with their Australian, Indian, and South African counterparts, to use cargo space available for relief supplies for Singapore, Netherlands East Indies and Indo-China.[[350]](#footnote-350)

Relatively few Japanese citizens were interned in Britain, as witnessed by the fact that Palace Camp on the Isle of Man contained some 90 Japanese internees by February 1942[[351]](#footnote-351); this resulted in London being in a relatively poor position when negotiating with the Japanese. In contrast, America contained significant numbers of Japanese-Americans many of which were second generation or *Nisei* who had been born in the United States. In February 1942, Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 which allowed for the relocation of Japanese-Americans away from ‘military areas’. Some 120,000 were forced to abandon their homes and were required to move to one of ten relocation centres under orders from the War Relocation Administration. In addition, a further 16,849 were imprisoned under the Enemy Alien Internment Program.[[352]](#footnote-352) These internees proved to be useful for the United States as a bargaining chip in the attempts to release American civilian internees in Japanese hands. Nonetheless, the negotiations for possible exchanges highlighted the complexities of the situation. In spite of the supposedly unified Allied front when dealing with the Japanese authorities, the actions of various Allied governments demonstrated the possibility for independent action as Allied governments attempted to recover their citizens from Japanese hands.

Satow and Sée gave an indication of the complexities of the exchanges carried out in late August 1942. The British-Japanese exchange involved the recovery of internees and diplomatic personnel from Japan, occupied China, Siam, Indo-China, and the Philippines and the American-Japanese exchange covered similar areas, apart from the Philippines being substituted for Hong Kong. However, Satow suggested that the continuing negotiations concerning the recovery of additional women, children and those who were sick from Hong Kong were ‘doomed from the outset.’[[353]](#footnote-353) Fedorowich details the failure of the negotiations which took place between 1942 and 1945, as the British authorities attempted to recover a percentage of the 2,500 British internees from Hong Kong. He noted that the negotiations involved cooperation between the British, Australian, Canadian and United States authorities, and pointed out that as these states also had some of their own nationals in Hong Kong a conflict involving national and imperial interests was ‘unavoidable.’[[354]](#footnote-354)

Missing from negotiations with respect to the recovery of those who were normally regarded as being ‘British’ were Canadian citizens. Although Canada was part of the British Commonwealth, their approach towards the diplomatic exchanges which took place was pragmatic. Vance noted that Canada had linked its efforts at securing the exchange of its citizens in the Pacific with the American exchange process, ‘on grounds of practical convenience’ and the fact that the Canadian government feared a ‘backlash’ if Canadians did not return with North American repatriates. He also suggested that Canadian officials considered that they would do better with Washington than with Whitehall.[[355]](#footnote-355) In line with Canada’s somewhat business-like approach, Fedorowich pointed out that when in November 1942, there was apparently little progress on a further American-Japanese exchange, Ottawa contacted the British authorities in an attempt to take part in the negotiations for a second British-Japanese exchange.[[356]](#footnote-356) The first exchanges took place at the port of Lourenço Marques, in the Portuguese colony of Mozambique.

In September 1942, the War Office recorded that three consignments of aid had been sent to the Far East on exchange shipping used primarily for the exchange of diplomatic personnel. On the 26th of August the *Asama Maru* carried 427 tons of aid, including 300 tons from America and Canada, plus 77 tons of assorted foodstuffs and 50 tons of jam from South Africa. On the 2nd of September, the *Tatuta Maru* was loaded with over 1,340 tons of supplies including food, tobacco, medical supplies, Vitamin B1, clothing, hats and boots; in addition on the 10th September, the *Kamakura Maru* transported at least 1,367 tons of supplies including food, food parcels, clothing and vitamin B1.[[357]](#footnote-357) In some instances the quantity of aid which was loaded was limited by the attitude of Japanese captains who restricted both the time allowed to load the vessels, and the amount of cargo they were willing to carry. The IPWC Chairman Mr Duncan Sandys, M.P., Financial Secretary of the War Office, wanted the Committee to take note of the ‘extremely unsatisfactory position in which the Japanese attitude had placed us’, as they restricted the turn round of the ships to two days, and sent ships whose cargo capacity was only half that originally notified. However, in discussions at a meeting of the IPWC held on the 26th of August 1942, it was suggested that there was little which could be done, save loading the ships with as much aid as possible.[[358]](#footnote-358) The restrictions resulted in some 3,600 tons of much needed aid being left uncollected.[[359]](#footnote-359)

A measure of the growing desperation in London is reflected in the fact that by August 1942, the War Office considered that any attempt to control the local distribution of relief supplies was ‘out of the question’ and they were prepared to take the risk that the supplies would be ‘unevenly distributed’ and that ‘some of them may never reach prisoners.’[[360]](#footnote-360) However, it was felt that the risks were ‘justified’ rather than missing an opportunity ‘by insisting on a more precise knowledge as to what would be done with supplies.’[[361]](#footnote-361) Although the Japanese were allowing small quantities of aid to be sent, these initial consignments represented just a fraction of what would be needed to assist prisoners and internees in the long-term. The main issues for the Allied governments lay with securing a route by which additional supplies could be sent on a regular basis. Details of the first consignments of aid which reached various areas remained somewhat obscure, and it was extremely difficult for the British Imperial authorities to assess just how much of the relief was received by prisoners and internees. Regardless of the limited volume of aid which could be sent in this way, as further exchanges were anticipated, negotiations began almost immediately to allow further consignments of relief to be sent.

It was hoped that the aid which remained in warehouses in Lourenço Marques could be loaded onto the next ships used for the next United States-Japan diplomatic exchange operation, which was expected to take place during October 1942. It was proposed at a meeting of the IPWC in September 1942, that the ICRC should charter a Japanese ship to take any supplies which had been left from the first exchange; the vessel could then sail to the port in company with the Japanese ships engaged with the exchange operation which was proposed to take place the following month.[[362]](#footnote-362) At this time the Japanese Red Cross ‘hinted’ that there was a greater chance of agreement if the ships used to transport aid had a Japanese crew, and the ICRC contemplated creating a ‘regular line’ with Lourenço Marques being used as a half-way house.[[363]](#footnote-363) If this route had become established with regular shipments, it would have allowed thousands of tons of aid to be sent to those in Japanese hands. Nonetheless, the Japanese made it clear that they were unwilling to allow additional vessels to accompany exchange shipping.

To counteract suggestions that additional aid could be sent on ships other than those used for the exchange process, in September 1942, Mr Roberts of the Foreign Office POW Department, read an extract from a telegram received from the Japanese government to a meeting of the IPWC which stated: ‘the Imperial Government (of Japan) must maintain for the moment its refusal to allow for strategical [sic] reasons any vessel to cross the Western Pacific. As it has no intention of sending to Lourenço Marques Japanese ships other than exchange vessels, relief from American Red Cross can be transported only with latter ships.’[[364]](#footnote-364) Roberts added that the shipping position was such that it was likely that only one British ship could be spared for future exchange operations, and that future calculation must therefore be based in the services of one British and one Japanese ship.[[365]](#footnote-365) In turn this suggests that the amount of aid which could be sent in future on any potential exchanges between Britain and Japan would have been extremely limited. In these circumstances the problem of sending sufficient supplies to maintain the health of prisoners became all too obvious to the War Office.

In spite of Tokyo’s standpoint, various schemes were proposed by Allied governments in attempts to circumnavigate Japanese assertions relating to neutral shipping which could have been used to send additional aid; in November 1942, the Canadian government proposed a plan for ships manned by Japanese crews to sail between Lourenço Marques and the Far East. In January 1943, the British government suggested an alternative scheme whereby a neutral ship under ICRC supervision could be sent to any port designated by the Japanese.[[366]](#footnote-366) By March 1943, it was noted in reports to the DPW that the American Red Cross had also put forward their plans to Japan for regular deliveries of relief to be sent on ships sailing to the Far East. In turn the British long-term relief policy ‘remained in abeyance’ pending the result of a Japanese reply.[[367]](#footnote-367) The American authorities proposed that a ship would be made available sailed by the American Red Cross, and delivered to a port designated by the Japanese. The ship was then to be handed to a Japanese crew, and used to distribute supplies to ports in Japanese control. The ship would then be returned to the original port, and handed back to the original crew. Although the plan was rejected by the Japanese, they did nonetheless agree in principle to receive supplies via the Russian port of Vladivostok.[[368]](#footnote-368) This gave something of a lifeline to a possible Allied relief effort, although the usefulness of this offer again depended on the attitude of the Japanese towards collecting and delivering the aid sent to the port.

The Japanese authorities suggested that they were willing to consider granting facilities for the United States government to forward relief supplies either by vessels sailing under the Soviet flag to the port of Vladivostok, or alternatively sent to the port by an overland route. The United States government instructed their Ambassador to enquire whether the Soviet government was willing to accept the general principle of transporting relief supplies using the port. The Ambassador suggested that 1,200 tons of supplies monthly might be dispatched to Vladivostok from vessels from America.[[369]](#footnote-369) If we consider the quantity of aid which the Allied governments considered necessary to service the long-term needs of Allied prisoners and internees, the scheme still fell short of what was required.

A memorandum from the War Office in August 1942, had already pointed to the size of the problem faced by the Allied Powers, when attempting to augment the provisions for those in Japanese hands; it gave a ‘rough estimate’ made on the assumption that 250,000 prisoners and internees ‘would need to be serviced’. To achieve this, the Allies would need to send at least 36,000 tons of food and an additional 16,000 tons of other supplies per year. To meet these targets at least three vessels carrying 5,000 tons of relief would need to be continuously employed. It was considered that this would be at a cost of £10 million sterling per year in total with the British share being between four and four and a half million, the United States would provide five million and the balance of a further half a million in sterling would come from Australia. These figures were regarded as ‘tentative’ and were to be re-examined, ‘if and when Japanese agreement to a regular service [was] obtained.’[[370]](#footnote-370) While these suggestions pointed to the amount of aid which Allied governments were willing to send, the figures also indicate the expected shortfall of supplies considered necessary to maintain the long-term health of all those in Japanese hands. Although the Japanese authorities were prepared to allow comparatively small quantities of additional provisions to be sent, there would have needed to be a major change in the attitude in Tokyo to arrange for the distribution of 52,000 tons of relief supplies annually.

**Attempts to Synchronise Inter-Allied Relief Efforts for the Far East**

As we saw in the previous chapter, Churchill considered that the colony of Hong Kong could not be defended against a Japanese attack; regardless of this point of view some 1,975 Canadian reinforcements were sent to defend the colony in the weeks leading up to the Japanese attack. One consequence of the fact that many of these were now in Japanese hands, was that it had given the Canadian government a stake in the Allied efforts to improve the welfare of prisoners of war in the Far East.[[371]](#footnote-371) In August 1942, a War Office memorandum proposed that the Canadian government and Red Cross, should be invited to ‘accept their responsibility’ in cooperation with the United States Red Cross, for organising all future relief for prisoners in the Far East.[[372]](#footnote-372) However, records demonstrate that the various Allied governments did not always agree on the most productive ways of attempting to send aid to those in Japanese hands. At this time the American State Department replied that until the Japanese gave consent for a method of sending aid into Japanese controlled territory, it would be premature to set up the machinery for discussing details.[[373]](#footnote-373)

Regardless of the apparent lack of coordination in Allied relief efforts, the national Red Cross societies demonstrated their willingness to cooperate. Cambray and Briggs noted that in January 1943, representatives of the Dominion Red Cross Societies and officers of the War Organisation met informally in London along with an officer of the American Red Cross, to discuss the opening of supply routes to the Far East. The meetings which were held at regular intervals became known as the British Empire Red Cross Societies Standing Conference. Its officers in London were able to keep the respective headquarters ‘informed of every turn and development’ of the efforts of both governments and Red Cross bodies to change Japanese attitudes towards the welfare of prisoners of war.[[374]](#footnote-374) It was not until August 1943, that Allied governments, along with their Red Cross Societies, began to fully coordinate their relief efforts.

Although the numbers of Canadian prisoners in the Far East was comparatively small[[375]](#footnote-375), Colonel F.W. Clarke, the Chairman of the Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Canadian Prisoners of War in enemy hands, attempted to facilitate greater Allied cooperation. Clarke spelled out his concerns regarding the lack of synchronisation between the efforts of the Allied governments in a memorandum in August 1943, to J. L. Ralston the Canadian Minister for National Defence. He urged that representatives of the Allied governments should be included in any proposed meetings of Red Cross Societies, and that a full-time organisation be set up in Washington. The aim of the organisation was to ‘think out, plan and execute the necessary steps for securing shipments of essential Far East relief supplies’. He suggested that the organisation ‘should also have the financial, diplomatic and executive backing of the Allied Governments concerned.’[[376]](#footnote-376) In this way a coordinated relief operation would be ‘ready to go into action the moment any way is opened by the Japanese for the regular entry of relief supplies.’[[377]](#footnote-377) As will be discussed below, shipping quantities of aid to the Far East proved to be only part of the problem faced by Allied governments.

Following the end of the Quebec Conference in August 1943, Churchill had a brief break at a property owned by Colonel Clarke[[378]](#footnote-378), who took the opportunity to give the British Prime Minister a copy of the memorandum he had given to Ralston.[[379]](#footnote-379) His proposals were similar to those put forward by the British authorities the previous year.[[380]](#footnote-380) They were based on the principle that supplies for the Far East were best directed from North America rather than from the United Kingdom, and that the primary responsibility for sending supplies should be carried out by the Canadian and American Red Cross Societies.[[381]](#footnote-381)

Matters surrounding Allied attempts to deliver aid to prisoners in the Far East were discussed at the Conference of Allied Red Cross Societies held in Washington the following month. The Conference was also attended by representatives of the governments involved; meetings discussing the problems associated with the provision of relief supplies took place between the 20th and 24th of September. Churchill had already spoken to the American President about the possibility of sending aid, and expressed the hope that the Conference would lead to closer contact between the Societies and the government departments concerned;[[382]](#footnote-382) he passed Clarke’s memoir to the American President, and it was thought that ‘success’ of the Conference was partly due to the President’s interest on the subject.[[383]](#footnote-383) During the subsequent meetings at Washington it was noted that part of the motivation for the conference lay with public disquiet that not enough was being done in connection with the welfare of those in Japanese hands.[[384]](#footnote-384) It could be suggested that Roosevelt was aware of the special status of US prisoners captured by the Japanese at Bataan in the mind of the American public, and in turn this spurred on the American efforts to send as much aid as was possible.

Vance noted an official in the Foreign Office pointed out that the Americans viewed their soldiers, who had been captured at Bataan, as ‘special heroes’. The resistance of these men was regarded as saving Australia from invasion, and on these grounds ‘the Commonwealth owed them a certain debt.’[[385]](#footnote-385) Although there was disquiet in Britain with respect to the welfare of British prisoners in the Far East, there have been suggestions that the British public viewed some British prisoners in a less heroic light. David French claimed that in early 1942, the army reached the ‘nadir of its public esteem’ following defeats in North Africa and the Far East.[[386]](#footnote-386) Regardless of these views there were nevertheless suggestions that the British authorities were also sensitive to the notion that they were doing less than their American counterparts, with respect to the welfare of prisoners in Japanese hands.

Phillimore pointed out the divergent British and American approaches to the problem. He claimed that the British policy towards its prisoners was to establish a ‘fair channel of relief’ and then to maintain a steady flow ‘sufficient to build up a safe reserve in neutral territory.’[[387]](#footnote-387) In contrast to this, the American approach anticipated an agreement for a route for the aid to be sent and then ‘send plenty and then exercise every pressure to force it through to the camps.’[[388]](#footnote-388) For Phillimore the coordination of these approaches was ‘far from easy.’[[389]](#footnote-389) While this approach may have been appropriate for prisoners in Europe, this method perhaps failed to take into account the Japanese attitudes not only towards prisoners of war, but also the fact that sending large quantities of aid would have provided Allied prisoners with a higher standard of food than they considered necessary for their own fighting troops.

Nonetheless, when representatives of the American and British Red Cross Societies met in Washington on the 22nd of September, there were some with a realistic sense of what could be achieved. It was suggested that the considerations which impelled the United Nations did not seem to concern the Japanese, and their behaviour towards and rations provided for our prisoners, was ‘not much different’ than their treatment of and diet available for their own troops.[[390]](#footnote-390) However, this assessment was perhaps made without knowledge of the full information which had reached the Allied governments in the preceding months. As we saw in the previous chapter, such comments suggest that although by mid-1943, Allied governments were well aware of the full extent of the lack of rations, ill treatment, and disease suffered by Allied prisoners, this information had still not been passed on to their respective Red Cross Societies.

In the previous months there had been some discussions with respect to providing the British Red Cross Society with details of Japanese atrocities and the conditions the men were enduring. In correspondence at the end of August 1943, D. M. Man the representative of the Colonial Office for prisoner of war matters in the Far East gave details of discussions which had taken place with G.A. Wallinger of the War Office. Wallinger suggested that the British Red Cross should be provided with hitherto confidential information, relating to the ill-treatment of prisoners in Thailand. He suggested that this intelligence would enable the British Red Cross War Organisation to undertake long-term planning, in collaboration with the Americans. Furthermore, he pointed out that knowledge of the situation would prevent any loose statements being made by the BRCS, as up to this point they had not even received copies of reports on the conditions in camps by the representatives of the Protecting Power.[[391]](#footnote-391) Nonetheless, statements made by the British Red Cross to the public later in the year suggest that they had still not been given the relevant information, with respect to the conditions in the Far East. For example, in December 1943, the Colonial Office noted that Lord Iliffe, the Chairman of the Duke of Gloucester’s Red Cross and St. John appeal, continued to give assurances that ‘bulk supplies of food and comforts’ were ‘getting through in greater quantities’ and that ‘the wants of our men were being met.’[[392]](#footnote-392) Although he pointed out that everything had to be sent in bulk, he suggested that the supplies were reaching the camps.[[393]](#footnote-393) Such statements continued to mislead the British public, in connection with conditions in the Far East and the quantity of aid which was actually getting through to the men. Satow & Sée later noted that as reports from the Protecting Power and secret sources were not made available to the British Red Cross Society, ‘it was not wholly to blame’ if its announcements misled the public.[[394]](#footnote-394) Such comments point to the complex nature of the arguments surrounding the amount of information London was willing to make public, concerning Japanese atrocities in the Far East.

Although the delegates at the Washington Conference discussed the ways in which the Allied Powers could attempt to send aid, the dialogue seemed to lack a sense of urgency which full news of the plight of the prisoners in southern areas may have brought to the proceedings. It should also be recognised that wider knowledge of the conditions faced by Britain’s Far East prisoners potentially brought political difficulties for the British government. Whitehall was aware that any statements which gave details of the poor diet provided for Far East prisoners, would result in calls for action to be taken remedy the situation. Nonetheless, when Allied governments were eventually forced to make public announcements concerning the conditions the men were enduring, this also seriously affected the possibility of Tokyo delivering the consignments of aid which were discussed at the conference.

Although the Japanese had agreed to collect relief supplies from the Soviet port of Vladivostok, it took some months before this was agreed by the Soviet authorities. Proposals had been made to the Soviets by the American government in February, March and April 1943, nonetheless, such relief supplies were low on their priority list compared to their fight against Nazi Germany. After being told that the matter was closed in August, the U.S. Ambassador to Moscow met Stalin, and implied that a renewal of the Lend-Lease agreement would be dependent on help in moving relief supplies to Japan.[[395]](#footnote-395) By September, the Soviet government had agreed to allow stocks of aid to be built up at the port, and the British Ambassador at Moscow was instructed to request similar facilities for British Commonwealth prisoners and internees.[[396]](#footnote-396) The possibility of sending supplies was discussed at the Washington Conference.[[397]](#footnote-397) If the Japanese had honoured their promises to collect and deliver the regular shipments of Allied aid delivered to Vladivostok, this would have solved at least some of the problems faced by the Allies in servicing the needs of the prisoners and internees throughout the Far East.

During discussions at Washington it was suggested that 240,000 food parcels per month could be provided on Russian ships sailing between Portland Oregon and Vladivostok. It was agreed that the American and Canadian Red Cross societies should each find the supplies, pack and ship 50% of all parcels for the Far East.[[398]](#footnote-398) Attempts were made to both standardise the contents of the parcels and increase the proportion of protein being supplied, in light of the diet being provided by the Japanese. It was considered that the amount of aid sent by this route could eventually rise to between 3,500 and 4,500 tons per month. This would represent the equivalent of two food parcels per person per month, plus medicines and a small quantity of clothing for all Allied nationals. While the possibility of sending next-of-kin parcels was also put forward by the American delegates, on the grounds of the morale-building effect on the relatives of prisoners, the British authorities argued that this was not practical due to the ‘great shifting of prisoners’ and the fact that the Japanese had failed to report their addresses.[[399]](#footnote-399) Again the American standpoint appeared to show that they were conscious of the importance of the welfare of this group of prisoners to the American public.

The first consignment of relief left on the 20th September 1943. By the end of October, it was estimated that there would be some 1,500 tons of supplies consisting of 200,000 food parcels, 100 tons of medicines, 180 tons of clothing and miscellaneous other items awaiting collection by the Japanese. Although there were plans for similar shipments to be made each month, in November 1943, the Soviet authorities asked the American Red Cross not to send any further shipments. This was due to the fact that despite repeated requests made to the Japanese government, the Russians had not received any information detailing their plans to pick up the stocks at Vladivostok.[[400]](#footnote-400) Naturally the effectiveness of the relief effort was wholly dependent on the Japanese willingness to arrange collection and delivery of the aid.

Following the end of the Conference a British Red Cross delegation remained in Washington, and a permanent mission was established. This body attempted to ensure that the views of the national Red Cross Societies for the British Empire were represented in future discussions.[[401]](#footnote-401) Those attending the conference could have been forgiven for viewing the possibilities of further deliveries of aid in a somewhat optimistic manner. The delegates had been provided with details of the consignments of relief supplies which had been delivered on the first exchange ships which sailed for the Far East. The *Conte Verde* and *Asama Maru* delivered American, Canadian and South African supplies to Singapore, the Philippines, Shanghai and Japan. British supplies on the *Tatuta Maru* were carried to Singapore and the Dutch East Indies, and British supplies on the *Kamakura Maru* were delivered to Singapore, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Formosa, Korea and Japan. The relief sent totalled 4000 tons.[[402]](#footnote-402) Despite these optimistic signs, at this time the second American-Japanese exchange recovered internees who were anxious to share their experiences of life in internment camps. The publication of details of the conditions in the Far East, highlighted the difficulties faced by Allied governments when dealing with the Japanese.

**Difficulties in getting the Vladivostok supplies delivered**

As the exchange occurred, the United States authorities displayed ‘considerable anxiety’ that sensational stories of Japanese atrocities would be spread from their civilian repatriates.[[403]](#footnote-403) However, a Foreign Office telegram to Washington at the end of December 1943, made it clear that reports of the conditions experienced by the exchanged internees arriving in America, were already becoming known.[[404]](#footnote-404) With the threat that uncensored stories of Japanese brutalities would be published in the *Chicago Tribune* some Congressmen wanted accounts of atrocities carried out at Bataan, to be read into the Congressional records.[[405]](#footnote-405) Up to this point President Roosevelt had taken steps to ensure that no news of this nature had emerged in the American press. However, once the American government realised that they were no longer able to stop the articles emerging, the President lifted the ban and stories which had been ‘held up for two years’ could now be published.[[406]](#footnote-406) The chances the Japanese authorities would collect the aid which had been delivered to Vladivostok were dealt a blow, as the impending publication of conditions in the Far East forced Allied governments to make announcements in connection with the Japanese ill-treatment of prisoners.[[407]](#footnote-407)

As noted in the previous chapter, the announcements made in January 1944, carried graphic details of Japanese acts of cruelty and neglect against Allied prisoners. In turn this prompted Tokyo to make counter-claims concerning the Allied treatment of Japanese internees, and the Allied bombing of a Japanese hospital ship.[[408]](#footnote-408) By February 1944, an official statement made in the Japanese Press claimed that although the Japanese had ‘formulated a concrete plan’ with respect to the collection of the aid, it was deemed proper to postpone its reply to the American Government.[[409]](#footnote-409) In light of an increasingly acrimonious press campaign the Japanese used their counter-claims as an excuse to withhold the execution of their supposed ‘concrete plan’ for the collection and distribution of the aid, which had already been waiting collection in Vladivostok for several months.

It was not until May 1944, that there appeared to be something of a breakthrough, as the ICRC reported that they had received a telegram from their Tokyo delegate which stated that the Japanese government was willing to comply with the United States request for the supply of Japanese vessels to Vladivostok.[[410]](#footnote-410) This was confirmed in a further communication from the Japanese authorities in which it was claimed that they were willing to send a ship to Vladivostok each month, to take relief goods and letters from the United States to Japan.[[411]](#footnote-411) Although the Russians appeared to accept Japanese proposals for the Vladivostok route for relief supplies,[[412]](#footnote-412) negotiations surrounding the details of the collection and delivery process nonetheless took several more months. It was eventually agreed that the relief supplies would be transferred to a Japanese vessel off the Soviet port of Nakhodka, as the Russian authorities refused permission for Japanese ships to enter the Naval Base at Vladivostok.[[413]](#footnote-413) If the apparent change in Japanese attitudes towards the delivery of quantities of aid was to be believed, this may have resulted in deliveries of additional relief supplies, along the lines discussed at the Washington Conference, becoming established. Regardless of the potential progress, the British authorities were more realistic with regards to the chances of the Japanese honouring their agreement to collect and deliver aid on an established basis.

The Foreign Office did not regard this route as being the answer to Allied problems. Instead it suggested that the Vladivostok route for sending supplies was merely ‘better than nothing’, as it did not ‘bring about a regular relief route.’[[414]](#footnote-414) There were doubts with regards to the sincerity of the Japanese offer to actually deliver the aid being sent and it was further suggested that even if a land route to Manchuria was established by the Russians, there would still be ‘plenty of opportunity’ for the Japanese to ‘shuffle out’ of transporting the supplies across to Japan.[[415]](#footnote-415) This standpoint obviously reflected the sense of frustration in the Foreign Office relating to the way that Japanese promises frequently amounted to little, after a great deal of time and effort in negotiations. In addition, the Japanese authorities also made demands with regard to their potential expenses in making the deliveries of aid to Allied prisoners and internees, which in turn highlighted British sensitivities regarding their own aid efforts.

In response to Japanese demands the Department of State asserted that the United States government had agreed that it would pay all taxes, rates, duties, and all other public charges which may have been levied at Soviet ports on Japanese ships. The Americans also agreed to bear the cost of loading such ships and freight charges from ports under Japanese administration, as well as the cost of landing and warehousing ‘and all other expenses calculated on a fair and reasonable basis.’[[416]](#footnote-416) The US government noted that the Japanese were prepared to defray import duty and other taxes to be charged at ports under Japanese administration, as well as freight charges by the Japanese government railway.[[417]](#footnote-417) Such communications demonstrated the complexities of the relief operations.

When representatives of the British Red Cross became aware of press reports of the American offer, they demonstrated their sensitivity towards the notion that the Americans may have been considered to be expending more effort and achieving better results than the British. Sir Ernest Burdon the Deputy-Chairman of the British Red Cross War Organisation sent a telegram to Sir Kerr Fraser-Tytler, the representative of the War Organisation in Washington, in which he stated: ‘I presume this is merely [an] initial arrangement and ultimately we shall be allowed to bear our share’. He noted that ‘comment is growing here that Americans are doing more than we are and are being more successful in regard to Far East relief.’[[418]](#footnote-418) The telegram was sent from the Foreign Office to Washington on the 28th of September 1944, and suggested that London was aware that their own success or failure, was being judged against any possible American achievement with regards to Far East relief shipments. Despite the comments in connection with the American relief operations, there were also fears expressed in Whitehall regarding America’s continued commitment following the commencement of operations in the following month which aimed to liberate the Philippines where the majority of American prisoners were held.

Although the United States government appeared to be driving the process of attempting to send further consignments of aid to the Far East, there were doubts expressed by the War Office that if operations in the Philippines developed, then the United States could ‘cut all Japanese communications between Japan and the southern areas by sea.’[[419]](#footnote-419) Such a move would have possibly prevented any aid from being transported to southern areas, which held the greatest concentration of British prisoners and comparatively few from the United States; in addition it was also suggested at the War Office that as there were only a few hundred American prisoners in southern areas, ‘the American interest in the distribution of supplies from Japan may diminish when the Philippines are free.’[[420]](#footnote-420) A similar sentiment had been expressed when discussions took place regarding the possibility of exchanging American and Canadian prisoners for Japanese garrisons which had been by-passed by American operations in the Pacific. Vance noted that there were concerns in Britain that once all American prisoners had been freed, Washington ‘might be less interested’ in continuing efforts to send relief supplies to the prisoners who remained in Japanese hands.[[421]](#footnote-421) It remains unclear if such suspicions were justified, nevertheless they point to the fact that each of the Allied governments had their own agenda in the Far East.

Towards the end of 1944, the British authorities made further suggestions on the subject of the possibility of sending quantities of aid to southern areas. When Major-General E.C. Gepp, the Director of Prisoners of War at the War Office, W.H. Gardner Assistant Secretary at the War Office and Colonel H.J. Phillimore Assistant Adjutant-General at the War Office along with W. St. C. Roberts Head of the Prisoners of War Department of the Foreign Office visited the Swiss government and the ICRC in November 1944, it was made clear there was no likelihood of the Japanese modifying their refusal to allow any ship with a neutral crew to enter Japanese controlled waters or even go to a port on the periphery of Japanese held territories.[[422]](#footnote-422) However, this did not stop further proposals being suggested, and Whitehall maintained its attempts to send additional aid to the area by offering to provide not only a ship to deliver relief supplies, but a Japanese crew to sail the ship.[[423]](#footnote-423) Regardless of the logistical difficulties involved in such an offer, further communications between the War Office and the Foreign Office confirmed the Japanese position.[[424]](#footnote-424) Although British proposals can be taken as a measure of the desperation of their position, on a more positive note at this time the Japanese finally honoured their promise to collect and begin the distribution of the aid which had been delivered to Vladivostok some twelve months previously.

**Distribution of aid from Vladivostok**

It was not until November 1944, that the Japanese authorities eventually dispatched a ship, the *Hakusan Maru*, to Nakhodka to collect the supplies which had been stored at Vladivostok. After picking up its cargo the ship arrived at the Japanese port of Kobe on the 11th of November, and had off-loaded its supplies three days later.[[425]](#footnote-425) The shipment included 46,165 American Red Cross food parcels, 2,625 Canadian food parcels, a further 13,610 from the British and Dominion Red Crosses which were case marked Lourenço Marques; the supplies also included 299 packages of books, gramophone records, theatrical kit, 195 packages of shoes and miscellaneous foodstuffs. It was further recorded at that 5000 parcels from the American Red Cross and an unspecified quantity of other supplies had been offloaded at Rashin for POWs and Civilian Internees in Korea and Manchukuo.[[426]](#footnote-426)

In addition, some 300 tons of food parcels and other relief were to be sent to camps in Hong Kong, Indo China, Thailand, Malaya and Java and that the remainder were distributed to camps in other northern areas with 2% destined for Hakodate camps on the Japanese island of Hokkaido, 12% for camps in Tokyo, 16% for Osaka, 6% for Zentsuji, 18% for Fukuoka and 4% for Taiwan. It was also recorded that Civilian Internment camps in Japan would receive 2% and ‘all camps’ in Shanghai and North China would receive 20% and the Philippines 20%.[[427]](#footnote-427) The American Authorities were asked to grant safe-conduct to two Japanese ships carrying some of the supplies to southern areas.

At this time it was noted that the American Red Cross Society, in cooperation with the British Red Cross Mission in Washington, and the Canadian Red Cross Society were planning to dispatch a further shipload of relief supplies to Vladivostok to be available ‘should a further ship be sent by the Japanese government.’[[428]](#footnote-428) The proposal suggested that the Canadian Red Cross could supply 100,000 of the food parcels and it was thought that this consignment could be assembled in Portland by early December 1944.[[429]](#footnote-429) The volume of relief supplies which were made available demonstrated the intention of the Allies to attempt to send as much aid as was possible in the hope that the Japanese would make further collections.

By the end of November 1944, it was thought that the Japanese could undertake the distribution of the relief supplies, already brought from Nakhodka to Japan, to Allied prisoners and civilian internees in China, Formosa, the Philippines, Thailand, French Indo-China, Malaya and Java. The Japanese proposed the use of two ships one was to travel to China, and the other to southern areas ‘at the earliest date.’[[430]](#footnote-430) Requests were made that the ships involved should be granted safe passage, so that further relief for American nationals in enemy territory would not be jeopardised.[[431]](#footnote-431) Such requests may have pointed to the changing fortunes of the Japanese fighting forces, and the fact that by this time the tide of war had turned against Tokyo. In turn this situation appeared to change Japanese attitudes towards the distribution of relief supplies.

Miller noted that of the 1,900 tons of relief supplies in warehouses in Japan, some 800 tons had been distributed to POW camps in the Japanese Home Islands and that this left some 1,100 tons to be transported to other areas. On the 23rd of December, the Japanese government informed the United States that the first delivery would supply prisoners of war in China, and that the *Hoshi Maru* would sail from Moji on the 7th of January 1945, travelling directly to Shanghai with 275 tons of food and medicines returning to Moji on the 28th of January.[[432]](#footnote-432)

In addition to the deliveries of aid from Vladivostok, at the beginning of 1945, the ICRC considered that negotiations to establish a regular route for supplies may have had some chance of success. Two lines were proposed, one linking Europe to Sumatra for the supply of the Sunda Islands and the other between the United States and Japan for food supplies to Japan and China. Two Swedish ships the *Mangalore* and the *Travancore* appeared to be suitable for the new route and ‘ships of the Japanese coasting trade’ were considered for the ‘shuttle service’. These proposals were discussed with the Japanese Legation at Berne in February 1945.[[433]](#footnote-433) However such plans did not come to fruition as the result of the sinking of the ship used to deliver aid to southern areas.

In January 1945, the *Awa Maru* was prepared for a ‘Safe Passage Mission’ and loaded with a cargo of Red Cross relief supplies. The following month the State Department agreed that the ship would be granted safe conduct to transport aid to Southern areas. It successfully delivered Red Cross supplies to Takao in Formosa, and from there it travelled to Hong Kong on the 22nd of February 1945. The ship then proceeded to deliver further consignments and was in Saigon between the 24th and the 28th of February, and made deliveries to Singapore on the 2nd of March, and then on to Batavia in the Dutch East Indies.[[434]](#footnote-434) However the ship was sunk as a result of an Allied attack during its return journey, even though the submarines in the area had been warned of the ship’s presence and safe passage status. On the morning of the 1st of April, the captain of the American submarine the USS *Queenfish*, mistook the vessel for a Japanese destroyer in thick fog. In the ensuing attack the *Awa Maru* was hit by four torpedoes and the radar target disappeared in just four minutes; the ship which at the time was carrying some 1,700 passengers sunk without issuing a distress signal.[[435]](#footnote-435) Although Satow and Sée failed to recognise the significance of the sinking of the relief vessel and simply recorded that although the USSR agreed to accept further consignments, ‘no agreement was reached with the Japanese government for their onward passage.’[[436]](#footnote-436) The Allied attack on the *Awa Maru* effectively curtailed the chances of any further deliveries of aid taking place.

Although the Allied plans attempted to send some 200,000 food parcels monthly to be distributed via Vladivostok, the initial Japanese promises relating to this route amounted to very little in practical terms. In spite of the combined Allied efforts, during the course of the Second World War just 225,000 parcels were delivered to the Far East,[[437]](#footnote-437) Roland pointed out that this roughly equated to just one parcel per person during the entire war.[[438]](#footnote-438) It is worth noting that the relief supplies were unevenly distributed between areas and camps. This state of affairs resulted in some prisoners receiving multiple parcels. However, the corollary of this also meant that in many instances the men were given just a fraction of a parcel shared with a number of others, and in some areas no aid was received during the entire war. Roland made the point that the men in the Far East felt ‘abandoned’, and this intensified when they subsequently discovered the amount of help their European counterparts received.[[439]](#footnote-439)

If we compare the quantity of aid received by prisoners in the Far East with those in Europe, Crossland noted that by March 1942, the British government looked to the BRCS to produce 90,000 parcels per month for this group of prisoners and by the end of the year the BRCS had packed and despatched some 5,552,151 parcels.[[440]](#footnote-440) David Rolf stated that overall some 19,000,000 food parcels were sent, packed by some twenty-three centres in the United Kingdom. In addition to this some 1,643,000 parcels were sent to sick prisoners between 1942 and 1945, and in the last two years of the war 39,758 medical parcels were sent to camps along with twelve dental units containing the essentials for establishing a dental surgery and laboratory. [[441]](#footnote-441) In the face of the obvious gulf in the aid provided between Europe and the Far East, reports pointed to the fact that as the calorific intake of the prisoners in some camps in the Far East had dropped each year, the British government was also aware that on occasions prisoners would have starved to death if it had not been for the few Red Cross parcels which they were allowed to receive.[[442]](#footnote-442)

**‘Cash Payments would be Preferable’**

One other avenue open to the Allied governments involved the local purchase of additional supplies. While the British originally anticipated relief operations would involve sending bulk quantities of aid, in contrast to this as early as March 1942, a report from the ICRC delegate in Japan suggested that ‘the despatch of ships with food supplies was difficult’ and that ‘cash payments would be preferable.’[[443]](#footnote-443) Although enquiries were made through the Minister in Berne in an effort to estimate the amount of cash required, no further information was received.[[444]](#footnote-444) The possibility of sending funds to the Japanese proved to be something of a difficult issue, and it was feared that the Japanese may have used the situation to their advantage.

It had been suggested, in meetings of the IPWC, in May 1942, that this could lead to a situation whereby the Japanese effectively blackmailed the Allies by blocking other channels of supply. The Committee were also aware that this would be opposed by the Ministry of Economic Warfare, as sending large amounts of funds could potentially be detrimental to the war effort.[[445]](#footnote-445) Supplying the Japanese with funds, by which it could purchase goods locally for prisoners and internees, also provided the enemy with much-needed foreign currency which could allow the Japanese to prolong the war.[[446]](#footnote-446) When considering the assistance that the British authorities were willing to send wherever British Service Personnel were held, Phillimore suggested that the relief effort was ‘limited by our resources and by the policies of economic warfare which imposed constant care lest the enemy war effort should derive benefit.’[[447]](#footnote-447) In the early stages of the war there was little enthusiasm in London for supplying Tokyo with large amounts of foreign currency, which would potentially benefit the Japanese war effort. However, as the scale of the suffering was exposed all avenues were explored, as Whitehall attempted to get aid to those in the Far East who were in desperate need.

As early as May 1942, the Vatican had already demonstrated that it was possible to purchase relief supplies locally; funds had been cabled to the Apostolic delegate in Hong Kong and further requests were also received to assist the prisoners in the Netherlands East Indies.[[448]](#footnote-448) Satow noted that at this time the British authorities also received urgent appeals, from the Director of Medical Services for funds to purchase food, drugs and clothing for the internees at Stanley Camp in Hong Kong. He suggested that funds were made available by the Hong Kong government with the approval of the Treasury, and with the ‘grudging consent’ of the Japanese authorities. At this stage the funds were to meet the needs of civilian internees, but not for prisoners of war.[[449]](#footnote-449) The Japanese authorities maintained their position that the needs of prisoners of war were being adequately provided for.

Although the Japanese authorities originally refused to allow the funds to be used for prisoners of war, by October 1942, the IPWC noted that the Vatican had distributed some £7,500 to prisoners of war, internees and other needy persons in Hong Kong and Malaya.[[450]](#footnote-450) In the same month, the British government authorised the ICRC delegate in Hong Kong to meet the requirements of needy British subjects. From November 1942, following an initial transfer of £10,000, to the ICRC representative, arrangements were made for the transfer of £10,000 per month for at least six months, and this arrangement was to continue if local supplies were available.[[451]](#footnote-451) The British Red Cross War Organisation undertook to repay the expenditure. Similarly, the Australian Red Cross Society advanced sums to the ICRC delegate for prisoners of war in Malaya and Singapore. Likewise, in Thailand, the Catholic Mission was able to purchase goods locally which were sent into camps on their behalf.[[452]](#footnote-452) It is difficult to assess the true monetary value of these funds, as across the Far East the scarcity of goods combined with rising inflation resulted in the transferred funds losing a great deal of their purchasing power.

Satow and Sée noted that in January 1943, the ICRC representative ‘called special attention to the very great need’ of those in Shamshuipo Camp which resulted in the situation being reconsidered by the Japanese. The ICRC representative was authorised to use any funds not needed for civilian internees, to meet the ‘immediate needs’ of prisoners of war. From this time ‘all schemes for relief in Hong Kong were framed so as to cover both prisoners and internees.’[[453]](#footnote-453) Roland noted that between the beginning of January 1943, and the end of the war the Hong Kong Red Cross sent 18 bulk stores of food of varying sizes.[[454]](#footnote-454) The initial sum was increased in 1944, from £10,000 to £15,000 per month, with one quarter of this total made available to meet the needs of prisoners of war.[[455]](#footnote-455) Such payments pointed to the potential for locally purchased aid to benefit prisoners in some areas.

By May 1943, IPWC Sub-Committee B noted that there had been several payments which provided financial assistance for the British prisoners in Japanese hands. These included payments of the equivalent of £23,000 sterling, to the Vatican in Swiss francs, as the Japanese authorities had consented to the expenditure of £10,000 for Malaya, £10,000 for the Philippines and £3,000 for the Netherlands East Indies.[[456]](#footnote-456) The IPWC noted that if further opportunities arose to purchase aid locally these would be considered on an ad hoc basis.[[457]](#footnote-457) Neville Wylie has pointed out that the Swiss franc was an internationally accepted medium of payment and a ‘safe refuge currency’ which was both protected and reinforced by Swiss strict neutrality.[[458]](#footnote-458) The way these funds reached the Japanese highlighted the complexities of the situation.

In June 1943 IPWC noted that the provision of Swiss francs was ‘exceedingly difficult’, and could only be obtained through the goodwill of the Swiss government which seemed to be ‘extremely reluctant’ to provide the currency on any terms suitable to H.M. Governments. Accordingly, the War Office suggested that it would be difficult to accept a commitment for more than a limited period of some six months. It was however recognised by the Committee that these funds would ‘add appreciably to the ration provided by the Japanese Authorities’. It was considered at the War Office that the funds could be found from the British Red Cross, as a gift in lieu of relief supplies. Alternatively the money could come through public funds, and as such it was to be treated as a subsistence allowance which was not recoverable from pay being credited in Britain; the expenditure would amount to £104,000 sterling per year.[[459]](#footnote-459) These proposals came about as information reached Whitehall relating to the scale of the ill-treatment and poor rations being provided by the Japanese, and demonstrates that London was willing to provide funds in the hope that aid could be purchased locally and sent into camps.

The IPWC recorded that the British government were able to obtain Swiss francs by supplying the Swiss government with gold in Ottawa. However, at this time the Swiss were ‘showing increasing reluctance’ to accept gold, unless it could be exported to Europe; it appeared that even gold seemed to be unacceptable as compared with goods which the United Nations as a whole are unable to supply.[[460]](#footnote-460) London was in a perilous financial position with regard to both American dollars and Swiss francs, and through the actions of the Bank of England, Britain had compromised its relations with both. Accordingly, the Swiss made it exceedingly difficult for London to purchase Swiss francs. Wylie stated that by the winter of 1941-42 the Bank of England was ‘doubly compromised’. It had avoided US currency regulations ‘by selling dollars on the Continent and conspired to gain control over Switzerland’s gold stocks in London.’[[461]](#footnote-461) Over the winter of 1941-42 Washington insisted that London stop using free dollars to cover its financial needs on the Continent, and the Swiss made life difficult for Britain. From March 1942 until December 1943, the Swiss National Bank refused to release francs in exchange for blocked gold or sterling. [[462]](#footnote-462)

In an explanation of ‘the machinery for the despatch of funds to the Far East’ to the IPWC, in August 1943, a War Office memorandum noted that it was not always clear how funds were transmitted from Geneva to Japanese controlled territories. It was considered sufficient for the Sub-Committee to know that the only effective way of transmitting funds, was by placing at the disposal of the ‘body concerned’ Swiss francs in Switzerland, and that ‘the whole problem’ was one of making Swiss francs available. In turn the Swiss government would only provide Swiss francs in return for ‘free dollars’ which could be transferred into other currencies such as Argentine Pesos or Portuguese Escudos.[[463]](#footnote-463) This was contrary to American policy, and would only be allowed for ‘special reasons’ such as relief for prisoners of war in the Far East.[[464]](#footnote-464)

The IPWC noted that the Japanese government was dependent on their ability to provide either Swiss francs, or gold to maintain their missions and activities in Europe. They also relied on the currency for the purchase of any supplies which they could obtain outside their own occupied territory, including supplies from their own allies. However, their resources of gold outside Japan were thought to be small and their supplies of Swiss francs were ‘practically exhausted.’[[465]](#footnote-465) Notwithstanding the British position, placing Swiss francs at the disposal of the Japanese government was unavoidable, when transferring funds for the prisoners of war.[[466]](#footnote-466) It was noted in meetings of the IPWC that ‘the Ministry of Economic Warfare would not urge this argument as conclusive against such payments, but suggest that, in considering whether such payments are necessary, the implication of any decision to make such payments should be given full weight.’[[467]](#footnote-467) These observations point to the difficulties faced in Whitehall, with regards to the provision of funds for the local purchase of aid; even though they were fully aware that the prisoners and internees were suffering at the hands of the Japanese, they were also conscious that by supplying the finances to purchase additional supplies, the British authorities could have assisted the Japanese war effort, may have potentially prolonged the war, and ultimately cost additional Allied lives.

Wylie suggests that London was in such a poor position that the matter was only resolved on the 18th of December 1943, when the British had been forced to concede to Swiss demands and in return for unlimited quantities of francs, London committed itself to providing free gold for Swiss use in Portugal and Spain.[[468]](#footnote-468) By January 1944, the IPWC were informed by G.D. Roseway the Director of Finance at the War Office, that the contract to provide Swiss francs came into effect on the 1st of January and was to last for 1 year, it would then continue subject to 3 months’ notice between the Bank of England and the National Bank of Switzerland Authorities in London. Swiss francs would be ‘forthcoming’, as long as gold was made available to the Swiss Authorities in London with the right to export to the continent. It was anticipated that for the next year, there would be ‘no danger’ of a complete breakdown in the machinery for payments to Switzerland. In spite of securing the finances Swiss francs remained ‘a very hard currency’ for Britain, and it was still necessary to avoid ‘all but essential expenditure.’[[469]](#footnote-469) Although the means of obtaining further payments had been secured for future purchases of aid, the funds were made available on the provision that this was limited to vitally important aid.

Despite the fact that London made finance available for the purchase of additional relief, from 1944, currency had to be sent to Tokyo as the transfer of monies to territories outside Japan was subject to a ‘special permit’. Furthermore, owing to the rate of exchange imposed by the Japanese government the funds often lost a large part of their purchasing power. In addition, currency intended for various destinations were required to be converted a number of times into different currencies at rates which were fixed by the Japanese authorities.[[470]](#footnote-470) These conditions limited the purchasing power of the sums provided. Nonetheless, it should be stressed that although the Japanese appeared willing to allow the purchase of additional supplies, the majority of the funds which were provided, assisted civilian internees rather than prisoners of war. Notwithstanding this position, in some areas the British and other Allied governments were able to provide funding which aimed specifically to ameliorate the conditions for captured service personnel. In some areas the relief operations occurred as individuals attempted to send any assistance they could to the aid of prisoners of war. For example, when he learned of the conditions being endured by Allied prisoners during the construction of the Burma-Thailand railway, Walter Siegenthaler, the Swiss Consul in Bangkok set about attempting to supply additional relief for Allied prisoners in the area. He used the finance provided by the British Red Cross Joint War Organisation through the British government, to provide large consignments of aid for prisoners of war in Thailand.

Before the Japanese attacks Siegenthaler had worked for the Swiss firm Diethelm and Co, which was in the import-export business. He was eventually able to use his links to the firm to purchase foodstuffs and comforts, which as the war progressed became increasingly scarce. His efforts began on a modest scale, as in March 1943, the Swiss Consul obtained permission for some relief to be sent into the camps.[[471]](#footnote-471) He was able to acquire and deliver clothing material, mosquito nets, coffee, tea and condensed milk for about 200 men. In the same month the Catholic Mission in Thailand was allowed by the Japanese authorities to ‘donate gifts’ to prisoners of war, and ‘in particular’ to the sick.[[472]](#footnote-472) By allowing aid to enter camps the Japanese authorities demonstrated that they were not completely indifferent to the needs of prisoners of war, although it could equally be suggested that by allowing a limited volume of aid to reach prisoners this in turn enabled the men to work more effectively and complete their allotted tasks.

As his initial approaches were successful, the Swiss Consul attempted to extend his relief operations; in June 1943, he met the Japanese chargé d’ affaires and asked him to obtain permission from the Japanese Military Authorities that Siegenthaler be allowed to place funds at the rate of 1 baht per head per week, at the disposal of camp commandants for the benefit of the 30,000 prisoners which were in the area.[[473]](#footnote-473) As noted above this expenditure amounted to £104,000 sterling per year.[[474]](#footnote-474) The Japanese ‘had no objection in principle’, and in July he was authorised to spend these funds on ‘Red Cross comforts’ for prisoners of war from the British Commonwealth in Thailand. However, the Japanese were suspicious of the source of the funding, and required assurances that issuing such money to prisoners would never be misused as propaganda.[[475]](#footnote-475) Such comments suggested that the Japanese were sensitive to the way their treatment of prisoners may have been portrayed to the outside world. The Allies were aware that Tokyo wished Japan to be regarded as a civilised nation and admitting these funds were required, was tantamount to the Japanese authorities accepting that the rations provided were insufficient to maintain the health of prisoners.

By September 1943, Siegenthaler received permission from the Japanese Embassy to organise a regular relief service. This obviously provided one of the very few opportunities for the British government to send any form of relief into this area. By this time London was aware of the poor conditions, ill-treatment, and lack of medical care, which was resulting in the deaths of thousands of prisoners from a wide variety of diseases including cholera, malaria, beriberi, pneumonia, and intestinal complaints.[[476]](#footnote-476)

Even though the Japanese authorities had allowed the Swiss Consul to supply relief, by March 1944, they informed him that they did not recognise either the ICRC delegate in Thailand, or the Swiss Consulate in Bangkok, as representing the British and American interests in the area. They were nevertheless prepared to accept gifts made to prisoners of war from Siegenthaler in his private capacity. However, when he was informed that receipts for the relief were to be signed by Japanese Camp Commandants rather than Allied officers, Siegenthaler suspended all relief operations pending Foreign Office views on the matter.[[477]](#footnote-477) Without confirmation of their receipt by prisoners, the Consul had only the Japanese word that these supplies were in fact reaching the men. As will be discussed in the final chapter, these fears were justified as a percentage of the relief which eventually reached camps were withheld by Japanese camp commandants, and was only made available following the Japanese capitulation. The British response perhaps reflected the pressure on Whitehall relating to this group of prisoners. The reply to Siegenthaler suggested that the UK government felt that the position of the prisoners of war in Siam was so desperate, that ‘the risk that the supplies might not be reaching the prisoners of war must, for the moment, be taken.’[[478]](#footnote-478) The Swiss Consul was urged to continue to despatch relief, taking any steps in his power to ensure that the supplies reached the men, and the IPWC agreed to continue the payments for relief supplies for a further 3 months.[[479]](#footnote-479) Later meetings of the Committee demonstrated that this arrangement continued[[480]](#footnote-480) and were approved by the Treasury.[[481]](#footnote-481)

While early shipments could be sent specifically for British prisoners of war, the Japanese later stipulated that the Swiss Consul could only send shipments to benefit ‘all’ prisoners. By December 1944, the British agreed that Siegenthaler should accede to their demands. In addition, he was asked to coordinate his relief efforts with those of his ‘Swedish colleague’ who was despatching relief for Dutch prisoners of war.[[482]](#footnote-482) It was therefore decided that the relief efforts should be coordinated with the Netherlands government, the Netherlands Indies Red Cross Society and the British Red Cross War Organisation that funds should continue to be made available. The Swiss and Swedish Consuls, along with the unofficial ICRC agent in Bangkok, were asked to cooperate with all arrangements for the purchase and despatch of relief supplies for all prisoners irrespective of their nationality. They were requested to furnish all available information relating to the prisoners they were servicing, including the numbers and nationalities and camps.[[483]](#footnote-483) Such information no doubt helped the British authorities to gain a better picture of the distribution of prisoners, and potentially assisted with the recovery operations following the end of the war. The number and type of consignments give an indication of the aid which was sent to aid prisoners in the area.

The War Office noted that medical supplies had been sent in consignments in March, April, May and June of 1943, and that other supplies had been sent in March, April and June with a further two consignments with no date given.[[484]](#footnote-484) Siegenthaler also provided quantities of relief in July, August, October, November and December of 1943. In 1944, he despatched shipments of aid in May, July, September and October as well as additional sums for ‘pocket money’ in July and September.[[485]](#footnote-485) War Office records show that the consignments consisted of medical supplies, food, clothing, soap, cigarettes and tobacco. Some of these supplies were signed for by Japanese officers, and some by British prisoners of war, and in one instance by the Japanese Commandant of Camps.[[486]](#footnote-486) The remarks made by the IPWC, pointed to the importance of the Swiss Consul’s attempts to send any relief, and were also a sign of their desperation to send any aid possible into camps.

Although the real value of the funds provided by the British government changed over time due to rising inflation, Siegenthaler provided detailed accounts concerning the amounts he was able to spend in the local currency, along with details of ‘pocket money’ he sent into camps so the men could purchase additional comforts.[[487]](#footnote-487) Perhaps a better indicator of the purchasing power of British funds came as he also submitted details of the aid he was able to purchase locally; for instance the IPWC received information detailing the 3rd and 4th consignments despatched by the Swiss Consul at Bangkok on the 6th of May and the 10th and 17th of July 1944. Records demonstrate the quantity of foodstuffs which had been provided for camps consisting of 15,836 tins of assorted foodstuffs, including 2,880 tins of jam, 4,800 tins of green peas and 1,360 tins of milk powder. The consignments also included 9975 kilos of ham, 1972 kilos of dried white beans, 1276 kilos of peanuts, 110 kilos of vegetable seeds and 133, 33 kilo bags of sugar. Other items included over 20,000 bars of soap, 1,200,000 cigarettes and 1000 40 gram boxes of pipe tobacco. Siegenthaler also supplied 500 pairs of boots and 2,200 shirts; additionally, he distributed 1114 tins of sweetened condensed milk and condensed food such as Ovaltine and Bovril for hospitals along with 300 rolls of toilet paper and 68 cases of medicines and other clothing items.[[488]](#footnote-488) Wynne Mason recorded that by late 1944, the Consul was spending £11,500 per quarter on behalf of the British authorities as well as some £900 per week pocket money for prisoners to buy food on the spot.[[489]](#footnote-489) Kinvig noted that Siegenthaler’s efforts were ‘a truly life-saving factor’. He also suggested that even though a tin of condensed milk may have been shared between eleven men, it also provided a sign that they had not been completely forgotten.[[490]](#footnote-490) Such observations also point to the difficulty in providing a significant volume of additional rations for tens of thousands of prisoners on a regular basis. Other more speculative attempts to send even small amounts of aid were a sign of the desperation of Allied governments.

**Plans for supplying vitamins**

As we saw at the start of the chapter the British authorities were well aware of the likelihood that the change in diet, along with the paucity of rations was likely to present a real problem for British service personnel who had been used to a western-type of diet. The British authorities received numerous reports regarding instances of disease which were occurring as a direct result of the rations provided. For instance, by May 1943, the ICRC were requested to enquire what type of rice was issued to prisoners as this was known to have a bearing on the high instances of beri-beri.[[491]](#footnote-491) The disease is caused by a lack of Thiamine which is better known as vitamin B1, present in whole grains and foods, and was as an indicator of the poor quality of the diet given to the prisoners and internees. By February 1944, Whitehall was receiving ‘disquieting reports on conditions in Japan’ from ‘censorship and intelligence sources’ these also included reports of outbreaks of beri-beri in Siam. ICRC instructed their agent in Bangkok to examine the possibility of purchasing and delivering medicines along with supplies of unpolished rice or rice-bran.[[492]](#footnote-492) This simple remedy could have miraculous results in the treatment of this otherwise debilitating disease.

Having seen reports which recorded the deficiencies in the diet provided by the Japanese, London was aware that the poor rations caused various medical diseases.[[493]](#footnote-493) In an effort to assist prisoners, various plans were put forward to remedy this situation. By June 1944, while it was thought that some supplies could be sent via Vladivostok, the Foreign Office was also aware that these would be ‘unlikely’ to meet all the needs of prisoners and internees ‘for a very long time to come.’[[494]](#footnote-494) In addition to other forms of aid by May 1944 there was an attempt to secure a Soviet agreement that mail could be used to send vitamins to prisoners of war in the Far East.[[495]](#footnote-495) Discussions were held at meetings of the IPWC and it was considered that ‘letter packets’ containing vitamins could be posted to the British leaders of various prisoner of war camps in the Far East. Each of the packets was to contain two kilograms of vitamins and other medical supplements, and in this way, a gross total of between 100 and 200 lbs could be sent per month.[[496]](#footnote-496)

The provision of medical supplies was discussed during the first months of 1945, and vitamins and selected medical supplies were sent by air from Britain to Teheran, from there they were transported by train to Moscow and then by the Trans-Siberian Railway to Japan. This represented the only regular route by which mail could be sent to prisoners or internees throughout the Far East. The Soviet government had agreed to handle the packets which were then to be handed over to the Japanese and twelve packets were sent weekly, until the Soviet declaration of war against Japan.[[497]](#footnote-497) David Miller noted that the American Red Cross also established a similar scheme, following the same route. He suggested that in addition to mail, the Society were also able to send quantities of drugs, and by mid-1945, it had sent 604 packages of 2,000 multivitamin capsules together with 60,000 units of insulin.[[498]](#footnote-498) It could be argued that in comparison with other schemes aiming to send quantities of medical supplies, this simplified approach although limited in its scope had a better chance of not only gaining Japanese approval, but achieving success as it relied on the avenues already open for the transmission of ordinary mail. However, as with other schemes, these supplies were likely to primarily benefit prisoners of war in Japan and northern areas, rather than those in the south.

Other more speculative approaches marked desperation of the situation. Various schemes were put forward including plans to allow a Japanese aircraft to fly to a British or American airfield to collect quantities of medical supplies. Similar proposals suggested that supplies could be dropped by parachute at a point and time designated by the Japanese, or that larger quantities of medicines, might have been ferried in coastal launches, to selected delivery points by the British Navy.[[499]](#footnote-499) It remains unclear if any of these schemes brought positive results before the Japanese surrender. Regardless of the results of the schemes, the number and nature of the discussions with reference to such proposals resulted in extremely protracted inter-departmental and inter-Allied negotiations.[[500]](#footnote-500) In reality there was little chance that the Japanese would agree to the proposals, and an even slimmer possibility that the supplies would be successfully distributed. Such plans are a sign of the impotence of the Allied position, when dealing with an enemy which had little regard for the welfare of prisoners of war.

**Conclusions**

Based purely on the results achieved by London, it would have been easy for those in Japanese camps to conclude that little time and effort was expended by Whitehall, in attempting to ameliorate the conditions experienced by British prisoners and internees in the Far East. In reality London faced the unenviable task of attempting to send large quantities of aid to simply to maintain the long-term health of prisoners held by the Japanese. From the outset it was recognised in meetings of the IPWC that additional supplies would be needed on a regular basis, to supplement the predominantly rice-based diet. This chapter demonstrates that while a great deal of time and effort was expended by Whitehall in an effort to send bulk quantities of aid for both prisoners and internees, in the great majority of camps the amount actually received by individuals ultimately bore little or no relation to their efforts.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the Japanese attitudes towards of prisoners of war resulted in captives frequently being employed in projects to further the Japanese war effort. In these circumstances the health of prisoners rapidly deteriorated. Generally speaking the Other Ranks suffered a greater shortfall in rations than their Officers, who were less likely to be asked to carry out arduous physical activities, and who also had a greater chance of obtaining supplementary rations. The fundamental issue for the Allied governments lay with the fact that any attempts to provide aid, by which prisoners may have received adequate amounts of food and medical assistance to maintain their long-term health, would have potentially given the recipients a better diet than their captors.

The initial plans for the amelioration of Allied prisoners envisaged the setting up of a regular relief route, by which substantial quantities of aid could be delivered to camps across the Far East. However, in accordance with their attitudes towards prisoners of war, the Japanese authorities maintained that they provided adequate rations and medical care for prisoners, in the face of what was at times overwhelming evidence to the contrary; this issue proved to be largely insurmountable for Allied governments, as their offers to supplement Japanese rations depended on the cooperation of the Japanese authorities. The health and welfare of Allied prisoners remained low on the Japanese list of priorities, and the Allied governments found they were largely powerless to persuade the Japanese to change this stance.

While various Allied governments were quite prepared to send large quantities of aid to the Far East, Tokyo consistently refused to allow shipping chartered for this purpose to enter either Japanese waters, or any waters surrounding territories occupied by Japan. In these circumstances aid was sent in any way possible. Although the Allies were able to make use of the cargo-space available on the return voyages of shipping used for the exchange of diplomats and civilian internees, in an effort to send limited quantities of relief, only three such exchanges occurred during the entire war. The difficulties for Allied governments lay with attempting to set up a means by which regular supplies could be both sent to the Far East and actually delivered to camps. This was best demonstrated by the issues surrounding the relief which Tokyo agreed to distribute for prisoners of war and internees from Allied shipments sent to the port of Vladivostok.

The initial supplies of relief delivered to the port demonstrated that it would be possible to send considerable quantities of aid by this route. In spite of the possibilities opened up by this route, diplomatic issues arising from the publication of details of the ill-treatment of prisoners, impacted on the potential for the collection and delivery of these supplies and resulted in the aid sitting in the port for over 12 months. It was perhaps only as the tide of war eventually turned against Japan that Tokyo showed some interest in delivering these supplies. The Japanese authorities perhaps became increasingly aware that they may have been held accountable by the Allies for the treatment of prisoners in the event of an Allied victory.

The prisoners who had the greatest chance of receiving larger quantities of aid were held in or transferred to northern areas; the difficulty for Britain lay with the fact that for the majority of the war, British prisoners were concentrated in newly occupied southern zones. Of course, delivering supplies into camps did not necessarily mean that the relief was of benefit to the prisoners as even as additional aid reached camps, the Japanese forces looted quantities of the supplies. As occurred throughout the Far East and as will be discussed in the final chapter, although some aid from the outside world reached prisoners, considerable quantities of relief were also withheld by the Japanese. This was witnessed by the substantial quantities of the potentially life-saving Red Cross supplies which were only made available to prisoners following the end of the war.

In addition to the bulk supplies of aid which was sent to the Far East the British government was able to provide funding to ameliorate conditions through the local purchase of aid, and prisoners in various areas benefitted from this approach. Although the British were suspicious from the outset that this method of providing aid could result in them being effectively blackmailed by the Japanese into sending ever greater sums of money, the amount of aid which was delivered into camps demonstrated the viability of this option in some circumstances. In Thailand, the Swiss Consul in Bangkok, Walter Siegenthaler, was able to purchase considerable quantities of aid using British funds. The detailed records of the aid he was able to provide gives an indication of the number of lives which were saved by his actions. Despite the fact that Phillimore stated that the relief sent to British prisoners was ‘always limited by our resources and by the policies of economic warfare which imposed constant care lest the enemy war effort should derive benefit.’[[501]](#footnote-501) It could certainly be suggested that the difficulties involved in providing the funding for these relief supplies, which in turn ran contrary to the position adopted by the Ministry of Economic Warfare demonstrated Whitehall’s knowledge of the plight of these prisoners and determination to send aid in any way possible. In turn this also marked the increasing desperation of the British position as the knowledge of the true conditions the men were experiencing eventually reached London.

As the relatives of the men in Japanese hands attempted to pressure the government into securing the means of improving conditions, this only served to highlight London’s impotence when dealing with Tokyo. While the study finds no evidence that the welfare of POWs was dismissed or neglected by London, remarks from the British Red Cross War Organisation seem to suggest that the motivation for the British effort was due, in part, to the American approach towards the welfare of its own men who were captured in the Philippines. The United States authorities were aware that the men who were captured at Bataan were regarded as heroes by the American public and the American government utilised its resources to attempt to send quantities of aid to these individuals in any way possible. Remarks from Sir Ernest Burdon the Deputy-Chairman of the British Red Cross Joint War Organisation suggested that the War Organisation was sensitive that the British public may have considered that Washington was both trying harder, and achieving a greater level of success, in ameliorating conditions than London.[[502]](#footnote-502)

When considering the British position in connection with the welfare of their service personnel in Japanese hands, as we saw in the previous chapter, Churchill regarded the prisoners captured at Singapore as being responsible for the disastrous fall of the strategically important Naval Base.[[503]](#footnote-503) The study found no evidence that these views affected the ways by which Whitehall attempted to improve the conditions the men were experiencing. However, it could be suggested that Whitehall was well aware of the negative public opinion surrounding prisoner of war matters, and was conscious that their own success or failure was being judged against American relief efforts. As London was sensitive to the effect that this potentially had on the morale of the country as a whole, it could be suggested that Britain’s efforts to send aid to the Far East were partly motivated by the American approach to the problem.

**CHAPTER 3**

**Planning for the Repatriation of U.K. Prisoners from the Far East**

The chapter set out to examine the plans which were made for the recovery of Britain’s prisoners from Japanese hands. The research attempted to determine the various stages which the planning process went through, and the changes deemed necessary as the result of the sudden Japanese capitulation. The planning process for the Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees (RAPWI) operations from the Far East has received relatively little historical attention, in comparison to the more sensational aspects of the experiences of those who were taken prisoner by the Japanese. While the Official History of the War against Japan gives some details of the recovery operations, these are confined to a handful of pages in five volumes, and there is little mention of the inter-Allied negotiations to facilitate the RAPWI process.[[504]](#footnote-504)

This chapter details the initial suggestions concerning the recovery and return of Britain’s Far East prisoners of war; it discusses the ways in which government policy changed as former prisoners began to be repatriated to the United Kingdom, as Japanese transport ships were sunk, and POW camps began to be liberated during the course of Allied offensive operations. It goes on to examine how the proposals for the recovery process changed as the war drew to its conclusion, and details the revisions deemed necessary as a result of the sudden Japanese surrender. From the outset it is worth noting that proposals were fluid, and although a great deal of discussion was carried out with respect to the administrative details, the logistics of recovery operations were very much left to the Allied Commanders. Along with the problems associated with the recovery of men from southern areas, the British authorities also faced difficulties in attempting to assist in recovery operations in northern areas. The chapter examines the difficulties in communication which stemmed in part from American suspicions concerning British motives in the Far East, and which resulted in the American reluctance to allow British Forces to take part in offensive operations against Japan.

From relatively early in the conflict Whitehall realised that it faced an extremely difficult task when attempting to recover tens of thousands of prisoners of war who were thousands of miles away from the United Kingdom, and who in turn were incarcerated in hundreds of prisoner war camps spread throughout the Far East. As noted previously, the Japanese were unwilling to provide adequate details of the locations of prisoner of war camps in many areas and regardless of their promises, failed to provide comprehensive lists of prisoners. Furthermore, as reports from ICRC Delegates and representatives of the Protecting Power in northern areas and reliable sources in southern areas suggested that the health of the majority of those in Japanese hands was very poor, this eventually led to the assessment that up to ninety percent of prisoners would require immediate medical attention at the time they were eventually recovered.[[505]](#footnote-505) The potential problems associated with the future return of British prisoners to the United Kingdom, resulted in a great deal of discussion and planning, both in Whitehall and between the Allied authorities throughout the course of the war and beyond, due to the eventual nature of the Japanese capitulation.

**The Preliminary British plans for recovery operations, 1942-1944**

From relatively early in the conflict discussions were held in Whitehall with respect to both the return of British prisoners, and the possibility of a two-stage ending to the war.[[506]](#footnote-506) Christopher Thorne noted that at the Arcadia Conference held in Washington in December 1941 and January 1942, it was agreed that the defeat of Germany was the first priority, and once this had been achieved the defeat of Italy and Japan would follow.[[507]](#footnote-507) However, there were no suggestions that the war against Japan would be over quickly. For instance in July 1943, Winston Churchill suggested that the conflict in the Far East was likely to continue for several years following the defeat of Italy and Nazi Germany.[[508]](#footnote-508) Discussions had already taken place with respect to the return of British prisoners from Europe, and the Imperial Prisoners of War Committee (IPWC) considered that it was essential that arrangements for the repatriation of prisoners and internees from the Far East should also be included in discussions among any committees directly concerned with repatriation and demobilisation. Matters concerning demobilisation and a possible two-stage ending to the war was discussed at Cabinet level and was the subject of various memoranda.[[509]](#footnote-509) In September 1942, a memorandum from the War Office put forward various proposals by which British prisoners in Japanese hands could receive assistance and be returned to the United Kingdom, following an Allied victory. The preliminary plans discussed by the IPWC were both speculative and open to revision.[[510]](#footnote-510)

The War Office suggested that a general scheme based on plans already agreed in respect of prisoners from Germany and Italy, would be appropriate for the post war repatriation of prisoners from the Far East.[[511]](#footnote-511) Although Whitehall only became fully aware of the extent of the lack of food and medical care in areas such as Thailand by mid-1943[[512]](#footnote-512), the initial discussions suggested that by September 1942, the IPWC already believed that the health of this group of British prisoners was likely to be ‘considerably worse’ than British prisoners in Europe.[[513]](#footnote-513) As we saw in the first chapter, this assessment came as a result of reports from the Far East which highlighted a combination of factors likely to affect the health of prisoners, including their poor living conditions and level of sickness resulting from under-nourishment and climatic conditions.[[514]](#footnote-514)

From the earliest days of the conflict, discussions in the IPWC cast doubt on the likelihood that the Japanese would provide adequate rations for Allied prisoners.[[515]](#footnote-515) For this reason proposals suggested that at the earliest possible time following an Allied victory, priority should be given to the supply of additional foodstuffs and medical provisions. Due to the distances involved and the relatively short range of transport aircraft, the preliminary scheme suggested that supplies would have to be transported by sea, as the use of heavy bombers to carry the aid appeared to be out of the question.[[516]](#footnote-516) The initial plans did not take into account the possibility that Allied advances which occurred in the following years, would eventually result in air-transportation becoming the most effective way of sending large quantities of supplies to isolated camps. Relief flights were eventually carried out from bases in Calcutta, Ceylon and the Cocos Islands, indeed some supplies were flown from as far away as Darwin.[[517]](#footnote-517)

The planning process was hampered by the lack of information from the Japanese authorities, and it was apparent to the War Office by August 1942, that large numbers of prisoners were already being transported from the southern areas to the north.[[518]](#footnote-518) Furthermore, owing to the numbers of men who were reported as missing, arrangements were being made for the provision of search parties along the lines of those envisaged for European theatres.[[519]](#footnote-519) The emphasis on searching for those thought to be missing, suggested that it may not have occurred to the War Office at this time that the Japanese would fail to provide adequate information detailing the location of camps, and the identities of large numbers of those in captivity.

The proposed scheme suggested that winning the war in the Far East was likely to involve the eventual unconditional surrender of Japan, following an Allied invasion of the Japanese Home Islands. It was envisaged that a Repatriation Commission would be formed in Tokyo, with staff appointed by each of the Allied Commands; the Commission would act as a co-ordinating body for the repatriation of all prisoners.[[520]](#footnote-520) Due to the distances involved, the War Office suggested that the responsibilities for the recovery operation needed to be divided between Allied Commands. The initial strategy was for the recovery operations to be divided into three main areas: the China Area controlled by the Canadian Military Authorities, the Singapore Area controlled by the Indian Military Authorities, and the East Indies Area controlled by the Australian Military Authorities.[[521]](#footnote-521) Routes were also suggested by which the recovered prisoners could be returned to the United Kingdom, and provisional maps were drawn up for the homeward journeys. Additionally, ideas were put forward giving details of ports which could be used for the reception of the former prisoners, as well as the types of personnel suitable to take part in the recovery process.[[522]](#footnote-522)

Notwithstanding the fact that the war against Japan eventually relied heavily on the forces provided by the United States, the British plans did not appear to envisage the role that the American forces ultimately played in the recovery process. Nonetheless, as will be discussed below the planning for the recovery operations remained somewhat fluid, and following the end of the war South East Asia Command was made responsible for the recovery of additional areas including the Netherlands East Indies. As the Japanese had promised the native population their independence from the Dutch, and it was thought that this area contained tens of thousands of additional prisoners and internees[[523]](#footnote-523), the revisions added to the problems faced by those attempting to plan for the recovery operations in these areas. Although the initial proposals were put forward in September 1942, it took until February 1945, before a revised scheme was placed on a firm footing.

**The Lack of Cooperation and Coordination, 1944 - May 1945**

The operations devoted to recovering prisoners from the Far East became known by the acronym RAPWI, or Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees. The term appears to have been used by the various Allied Commands in both northern and southern areas. Somewhat confusingly, official reports also refer to ‘RAPWI’ when describing recovered Allied prisoners of war and internees or ‘APWI’ when referring to Allied prisoners of war and internees.[[524]](#footnote-524) During the recovery process priority was only given to the recovery of sick and wounded repatriates, and no difference was to be accorded to the recovery among prisoners from different nations, services or between officers and other ranks. In addition to the recovery of prisoners during operations, the Supreme Commanders were also asked to ensure that adequate provision was made for the care of prisoners of war in any armistice agreement with the enemy.[[525]](#footnote-525)

Although the British authorities attempted to plan for the recovery of prisoners from all theatres of operations, their American counterparts were reluctant to commit to the planning process until relatively late in the war. When considering the recovery of prisoners from Europe, Phillimore noted that as late as April 1944, the British Army Staff in Washington attempted to enlist the support of the American Chiefs of Staff with reference to the directive of the Combined Planning Committee on repatriation from Europe, however the American attitude was that planning for repatriation was ‘premature’ at this stage.[[526]](#footnote-526) As a major Allied offensive to cross the Channel and liberate France was proposed for summer 1944, the American authorities perhaps considered there was little prospect of the immediate recovery of large numbers of Allied prisoners from Europe, and a far smaller chance of recovering those in Japanese hands.

In early 1945, the latest War Office estimate suggested was that there were 130,000 British and Indian prisoners of war, along with 15,000 American and 30,000 Dutch spread across the Far East; in view of the rapid progress of operations in the Pacific, the War Office considered that plans for the repatriation of prisoners of war, both during the course of operations and on the cessation of hostilities, should be placed on a firm basis.[[527]](#footnote-527) As the Allied position gradually strengthened, consideration was also given to the possibility that men would need to be recovered and repatriated en masse in the event of a sudden Japanese surrender. However, far from a rigid set of proposals the outlined scheme emphasised the individual nature of recovery operations, and the need for individual Commanders to be responsible for the welfare and transportation of prisoners as they were located.

In comparison with similar operations in Europe, the situation in the Far East remained far more difficult to assess with regards to the recovery and repatriation of Allied prisoners. Although the Japanese had begun to provide some information with respect to the identity and location of prisoners during 1944, this intelligence was by no means complete. As will be discussed below by using information from a variety of sources, including clandestine operatives in some southern areas who were able to provide not only the locations of the majority of camps but estimates of the numbers of prisoners requiring recovery,[[528]](#footnote-528) the Allies were eventually able to form a picture of the distribution of the prisoners between areas and camps in some areas.[[529]](#footnote-529)

The initial suggestions anticipated that prisoners would gradually be recovered during Allied offensive operations. The uncertainties of the situation resulted in the local Commanders being responsible for the overall control of the recovery operations in their individual areas. The Commanders were required to ensure that lists of all prisoners who were recovered were transmitted to the War Office or War Department, and make the necessary preparations for the repatriation of prisoners; they were charged with taking control of prisoner of war camps, providing necessary food, clothing, comforts and medical attention and were also required to ensure that records kept by the enemy were preserved.[[530]](#footnote-530) While the guiding principle was that members of the forces to which the prisoners belonged were employed throughout the process, in order to assist in the care of their own nationals,[[531]](#footnote-531) in reality, assembling national teams ready to take on these responsibilities eventually proved to be problematic; due to the sudden Japanese collapse, many officers being trained for roles in recovery operations were still in Britain, as the Japanese surrendered. This resulted in RAPWI teams being hastily put together locally, pending the arrival of teams from Britain.

The need for greater communication between Allied governments, was highlighted as men began to be recovered from sunken Japanese transport shipping. During the course of the war large numbers of captured Allied personnel were transported between areas predominantly using unmarked cargo ships, which were vulnerable to Allied sea and air operations. Although transport ships were sunk earlier in the war the greatest losses occurred as men were transported from southern to northern areas. During the course of 1944, Japanese transport ships carrying thousands of Allied prisoners were sunk as the result of Allied aerial and submarine attacks. For example, the War Office received reports of transports which were sunk on the 20th and 26th of June and the 7th and 12th of September 1944.[[532]](#footnote-532) The following month a report from the IPWC noted that there were grounds for believing that some 10,000 British prisoners of war had been moved from Thailand and Burma, and of these some 1,400 had been lost as a result of the sinking of transports.[[533]](#footnote-533) By the middle of November it was noted at the Foreign Office that the total losses of Allied prisoners during this period was ‘around 4,000.’[[534]](#footnote-534) It was later discovered that Japanese records suggested that during the course of the war, of the 15,812 Allied prisoners on ships which were sunk, 10,739 lost their lives.[[535]](#footnote-535) Although many of those prisoners who survived and were recovered fell back into Japanese hands, the attacking Allied submarines were in some circumstances able to pick up small numbers of survivors. The lack of coordination between Allied authorities meant that the repatriation of these individuals was dealt with in an ad-hoc manner, and in turn began to highlight the need for a more coordinated approach towards the recovery operations.

As the Allied offensive in the Pacific region gathered pace, there was a greater chance that they would encounter and release British captives from Japanese hands. By May 1944, the IPWC noted that General MacArthur recovered some 462 Sikhs in the Admiralty Islands and New Guinea.[[536]](#footnote-536) The likelihood of the piecemeal recovery of prisoners continued to be discussed among British, Imperial and Dominion governments. Nevertheless, it was not until November 1944, that the ‘basic principles’ on the subject of the recovery operations was agreed. The British Chiefs of Staff then transmitted the proposals to the United States, in an effort to obtain a directive from the Combined Chiefs.[[537]](#footnote-537) By February 1945, there were Press reports in Britain that there was a ‘sprinkling’ of British prisoners among the 500 who were recovered from Luzon.[[538]](#footnote-538) The War Office cabled the British Army Section (BAS) Washington and Landforces Head Quarters (LHQ) Melbourne on the 6th February, requesting that arrangements be made for the repatriation of 15 recovered prisoners by way of the United States. In addition, advance payments were authorised and set at 20 dollars initially, and thereafter 1 dollar per day for each man.[[539]](#footnote-539)

In the same month, the British authorities were sent a nominal roll of 66 British prisoners who were recovered from Bilibid Prison in Manila. Reports from the War Office in February 1945, stated that arrangements had been made for any prisoners from the Philippines or Manila to be repatriated via the United States.[[540]](#footnote-540) The following month prisoners of war were recovered by the advancing Allied troops and the names of 131 prisoners recovered from Leyte and Luzon had been communicated to the British Staff Section at GHQ. Of these some 125 were members of the United Kingdom Army; 73 had already arrived in the United Kingdom on the 31st March. Furthermore 20 more were due to arrive in the United States in early April, and a further five were in Australia. The remainder were still in hospital in the South-West Pacific Area.[[541]](#footnote-541) Such communiqués demonstrated that increasing numbers of British prisoners were being recovered at this time; however, more worrying information suggested that along with the prospect of the recovery of large numbers of Allied prisoners during the American offensive against the Philippines, these operations also carried inherent dangers.

**Fears regarding the potential murder of prisoners**

Allied operations also brought the possibility that prisoners would be murdered by their guards, rather than allowing their recovery. One example of this was reported towards the end of 1944, when the United Nations War Crimes (Far East) Commission noted that some 34 Indian prisoners had been put to death on the 26th of June 1944, as American forces attempted to rescue them; the Commission recorded that ‘Japanese riflemen slaughtered the Indians with bullet, bayonet and grenade.’[[542]](#footnote-542) The War Office eventually received details of another similar massacre which occurred on Palawan Island in December 1944. After an American convoy was observed ‘prisoners were driven into shelters, under the pretext of an impending air-raid; petrol was then poured in from above followed by lighted torches, and any men who succeeded in running out were shot by machine-guns.’[[543]](#footnote-543) The incident occurred as a result of the mere sighting of an Allied convoy. As information concerning the prospective massacre of prisoners during recovery operations reached Whitehall, the War Office called a series of meetings from January 1945, which were held in association with members of other governments of the Commonwealth and the United States, and aimed to ‘deter the Japanese as and when operations develop in the areas where prisoners of war are held.’[[544]](#footnote-544)

During American operations in the Philippines General MacArthur promised to hold the Japanese military authorities responsible for the ‘proper treatment and due protection’ of prisoners, civilian internees or civilian non-combatants.[[545]](#footnote-545) Daws also noted that at MacArthur’s headquarters intelligence summaries were circulated daily which gave detailed information of POW movements and by September and October 1944, MacArthur was aware of the potential dangers to Allied prisoners. After the *Shin’yō Maru* was sunk off Mindanao, several dozen survivors were taken to Australia to be debriefed.[[546]](#footnote-546) The British authorities linked the order with the American General’s attempts to ensure that the Japanese were aware they would be held accountable for any ill treatment of any Allied prisoners.

As prisoners began to be recovered an ambiguous picture of their treatment emerged from different areas; while there were instances whereby Japanese guards were prepared to systematically murder prisoners, in other areas prisoners were simply abandoned and left unharmed. One example of this came when Allied forces approached Rangoon, in early May 1945. Although the Japanese initially attempted to march some prisoners in the direction of Moulmein, the rapid Allied advance meant that those marched off were eventually abandoned by their guards.[[547]](#footnote-547) In Rangoon gaol itself, the Japanese abandoned the prison during the night and instead of massacring prisoners, simply left a message on the gate informing them that they could ‘regard themselves as [being] free’. The note also informed the men that their former guards ‘hoped to meet them again on the battlefield.’[[548]](#footnote-548) Despite these actions it was subsequently discovered that the Japanese War Ministry had issued orders in the previous summer that camp Commandants were to make every effort, and spare no pains ‘to prevent the prisoners of war from falling into enemy hands.’[[549]](#footnote-549) If these orders had been followed to the letter, tens of thousands of Allied prisoners would have been in danger as the Allied forces advanced. As will be discussed in the next chapter the Japanese had indeed made plans for the mass execution of prisoners in southern areas, which were to coincide with the planned Allied offensive.

As Allied prisoners began to be recovered, the circumstances surrounding the repatriation of individuals suggested that there was scant communication between the American and British commands. Reports of the experiences of one individual, demonstrated the security implications of prisoners being repatriated without receiving formal directives on what information could be passed on to the Press. At the end of January 1945, Able Seamen Allen R.N. had been liberated from a prisoner of war camp on Luzon and news of his recovery was reported in the Sydney papers a few days later. After learning of his release, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Pacific Fleet attempted to contact the former prisoner. In spite of his requests for Allen to be flown to Sydney where he was to report to the British Pacific Fleet Headquarters, the recovered prisoner could not be located; his whereabouts was only discovered on the 7th of March, by which time he had ‘hitch-hiked’ his way to Sydney on British and American ships. Prior to his arrival he received no medical examination, interrogation or security warning, and his whole story had been published in an Australian ship’s newspaper. The manner of his recovery resulted in all ships and liaison officers being requested to send details of any British Naval prisoners of war recovered to the Commander-in-Chief of the British Pacific Fleet, who in turn would issue ‘disposal’ instructions.[[550]](#footnote-550) The British authorities were naturally mindful that the publication of any details of atrocities committed by the Japanese would have caused distress to the families of those still in captivity.

As the first prisoners began to be repatriated to the United Kingdom, some found they were harassed by the families of those who remained in Japanese hands who were desperate for any news of the plight of their loved-ones. Such was the demand for information that when a small number returned in November 1944, after being liberated from camps in Luzon, three former prisoners had to change addresses during their leave due to constant enquiries; indeed, one returnee received over four hundred letters following the publication of his address.[[551]](#footnote-551) The political pressure exerted from relatives of those still incarcerated in the Far East, encouraged the government to promise to return this group at the earliest possible opportunity. It could be argued that pressure from both relatives and the wider public eventually helped to shape the policy of the new Labour government towards the recovery process, following the end of the war.[[552]](#footnote-552)

**Planning for the Recovery Operations in Northern Areas**

When considering the planning for RAPWI operations, cooperation between British and American authorities in American-controlled northern areas was affected by American suspicions concerning Britain’s motives in the Far East. Thorne asserted that there was a common belief among the Americans, that Britain’s only concern during operations in the area was the re-establishment of her colonial rule.[[553]](#footnote-553) Peter Dennis notes that Lt General A.C. Wedemeyer belittled British efforts against the Japanese, and was hostile to what he saw as the ‘British intention to shape the course of operations against Japan in accordance with post war British imperial ambitions in Asia.’[[554]](#footnote-554) Indeed General MacArthur nicknamed Mountbatten’s South East Asia Command as ‘Save England’s Asiatic Colonies.’[[555]](#footnote-555) Dennis further recorded that Wedemeyer made it clear in a meeting with an American consular official that the British priority lay with ‘restoring their prestige throughout southeast Asia and secondarily interested in defeating the Japanese.’[[556]](#footnote-556) As detailed below, the orders given to Mountbatten following the Japanese surrender demonstrated that the American accusations were somewhat justified. He was told that British forces should be the first to enter areas such as Hong Kong in an effort to reassert Britain’s influence over her former colonies. Likewise, the sense of distrust also appeared to affect the planning process with regards to the cooperation between the British, Australian, and American governments for operations in southern areas.

Notwithstanding American suspicions in connection with British intentions concerning her former colonies in the area, there was in theory at least a degree of coordination between British and American policy, with respect to the recovery and repatriation of former prisoners. Proposals were distributed to both the British and American forces and the strategies employed by the forces were to be approved by the War Office or War Department of each government concerned. Furthermore, plans were to be coordinated between the British Supreme Commander SEAC and the American Supreme Commander in the South West Pacific and the Commander in the Central Pacific Areas. It was suggested at this time that the problem was the responsibility of the military.[[557]](#footnote-557) This preliminary emphasis caused difficulties for British forces in American-led northern areas.

In areas under American command, the only British forces capable of assisting in the recovery operations came from the British Pacific Fleet. However, when Sir Bruce Fraser Commander-in-Chief of the Fleet began to make plans for a small team to assist recovered prisoners of war, the Admiralty again made it clear that the recovery operations were a ‘military’ commitment.[[558]](#footnote-558) The Commander-in-Chief was advised that orders would be issued by Admiral Nimitz, General MacArthur or by the Combined Chiefs of Staff and that he should accord any assistance to MacArthur which was requested. Regardless of their offer of assistance, the British Naval contingent was informed that the British Fleet would not be needed to assist with the recovery operations.[[559]](#footnote-559) As the proposals for RAPWI operations stated that wherever possible recovered prisoners should be dealt with by recovery personnel of their own nationality[[560]](#footnote-560), the orders were interpreted by the Commander of the British Fleet to mean that a request would be made by the American Commanders for National Recovery Sections, with the British section being formed in the United Kingdom.[[561]](#footnote-561) American requests for national teams were not issued for some time, and it is possible that in the early months of 1945, that as the numbers being recovered were relatively small and the American military considered that they were capable of dealing with the recovery operations.

While the British and Australian forces in American-controlled areas were willing to assist in any way they could, the lack of information available detailing American plans for the recovery operations in northern areas, eventually led to the British and Australian forces to begin making their own preparations. In May 1945, the Australian authorities were planning the invasion of Borneo, as they were aware that this was likely to result in the prospective release of several hundred Australian prisoners of war, the Australian authorities were finally convinced of the need to establish their own RAPWI organisation.[[562]](#footnote-562) This decision later proved to be extremely useful, given the nature of the Japanese capitulation, as Australian personnel were already trained and able to assist in other recovery operations.

There appeared to be a sense that the British authorities were unwilling to attempt to pressure the American government, on the subject of their plans for recovery operations. A telegram from the British Army Staff in Washington to the Directorate of Prisoners of War in May 1945, stated that they were aware that the United States had shown ‘great kindness’ when dealing with the evacuation of prisoners from the Philippines, and did not want to make ‘unacceptable demands’ or to interfere with the American arrangements. In these circumstances it was considered ‘imperative that the British had the organisation in working order and that Contact teams, Liaison officers and Reception units should be ‘in the right place without delay.’[[563]](#footnote-563) By June, the British had decided to attach the RAPWI control staff representative teams to the forces involved in the Allied advance across the Pacific. Each team was to consist of one officer of Major’s rank or equivalent and not more than two clerks equipped with typewriters.[[564]](#footnote-564) The choice of personnel was a testament to the lack of information provided by the Japanese relating to the identity of prisoners, and the bureaucracy surrounding any recovery operations.

By July 1945, the War Office suggested administrative arrangements, for the processing and repatriation of British Commonwealth prisoners of war recovered by forces under American Commands. The plans stated that wherever possible members of the UK forces should be repatriated via Australia or America, whichever was more convenient, and that members of the Canadian forces should go either directly to Canada or America. Members of the Australian, New Zealand, Indian and Colonial forces should travel via Australia and any British Commonwealth prisoners of war recovered by American forces operating in China should travel via India. The administrative plans emphasised sending details of the identities of those released from Japanese hands to the War Office, at the earliest possible time. In addition, drafts were requested for all those embarking on returning shipping from concentration points in the final stage of their repatriation with copies being sent both by air and by telegraph to the War Office.[[565]](#footnote-565) The administrative proposals did not suggest the rationale for the recommended routes, however it could be suggested that for the majority of recovered prisoners these routes represented the most direct passage home.

For Indian prisoners of war their repatriation was somewhat complicated by their status in the eyes of Tokyo. As the Japanese authorities refused to recognise that captured Indian service personnel were prisoners of war, they denied that any camps containing Indian prisoners existed.[[566]](#footnote-566) Satow suggested that the Japanese ‘set themselves up as the sponsors of Indian independence’ and ‘strong pressure’ was put on Indian prisoners to support the ‘Free India movement’; those who refused to join the movement were subjected to ill-treatment including torture and murder.[[567]](#footnote-567) As early as December 1942, there were reports that a considerable number of Indian prisoners of war had been ‘compelled by terrorist means’ to join the Japanese controlled ‘Indian National Army.’[[568]](#footnote-568) Regardless of these claims, in London the official view was that the ‘great majority’ of Indian prisoners remained loyal to Britain.[[569]](#footnote-569) In reality the situation was complex, and numbers of Indian troops had either willingly or had been coerced into joining the Japanese sponsored Indian National Army (INA) to fight against the Allies.[[570]](#footnote-570) The report on the recovery operations eventually noted that an Indian Military Mission was sent to both northern and southern areas and a further mission was established in Brisbane, to advise and help in the eventual recovery operations. The missions were established to assist in the recovery operations but were also required to sort ‘genuine’ prisoners of war from members of the INA.[[571]](#footnote-571)

**The Repatriation of British Commonwealth Prisoners of War from Southern Areas**

Just as the American authorities were suspicious of British intentions in the area, Whitehall was also wary that the American authorities would attempt to guide operations in southern areas. Towards the end of May 1945, the Canadian government suggested that an ‘intergovernmental body’ be formed and located in Washington, and that the Combined Chiefs of Staff should be represented at its meetings. The Canadians suggested that the body would prevent contradictions and inconsistencies in policy between the British, the United States and one or other of the Dominions; they also suggested that the coordination of recovery operations would also prevent unilateral decisions being taken by the American authorities.[[572]](#footnote-572) Nonetheless, some in the War Office were mindful that the United States would have too much influence in deciding RAPWI policy, if such a body was formed.

In response to the Canadian suggestions the War Office pointed out that this role was already being carried out by the IPWC; it stated that an organisation for consulting Dominions and India and other services had been ‘operating satisfactorily’ in London for some years. In addition, the British authorities appeared to be wary that the Americans could interfere with British plans in southern areas, and noted that communication with the Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia (SACSEA) and India were ‘probably more satisfactorily conducted from London’. In turn the British Army Section (BAS) in Washington was warned not to discuss the Canadian proposals with either the U.S. Authorities or the Dominions.[[573]](#footnote-573) While outwardly the Allied governments attempted to demonstrate their unity, such opinions point to the complex inter-relationships between the Allied powers, as each sought to maintain control over the planned recovery operations in its own areas.[[574]](#footnote-574)

As operations continued in Burma, the prospect of the recovery of large numbers of British prisoners became a reality. A provisional directive was issued by the C in C Allied Land Forces South East Asia (ALFSEA)[[575]](#footnote-575), which suggested that contact teams should be formed in the area and operate with the forward formations with the aim of undertaking the documentation and questioning of recovered prisoners.[[576]](#footnote-576) In addition, South East Asia Command (SEAC) produced a draft ‘Green Plan’ for the repatriation process which emphasised that prisoners should ‘stay put’, pending the arrival of Contact teams.[[577]](#footnote-577) While the advice to ‘stay put’ may seem somewhat curious given that the men were thousands of miles from the United Kingdom, as we have already seen individuals were prepared in some circumstances, to attempt to make their own way to British areas. As will be discussed in the following chapter, similar orders were also issued by the American authorities in northern areas. However, following the Japanese surrender significant numbers of former prisoners on the Japanese Home Islands were so desperate that they left their camps to attempt to find help.[[578]](#footnote-578) Indeed, this was one of the factors which prompted the American Commanders to begin the recovery process before it was originally designated to start.

In addition to the plans made by the Allied authorities, various national Red Cross Societies also attempted to plan for their part in any recovery operations. A Red Cross Co-ordinating Committee was formed at HQ SACSEA, which included representatives of the Red Cross organisations from Great Britain, Australia, India, Burma, France and the Netherlands.[[579]](#footnote-579) The Committee under the chairmanship of the Director of Medical Services S.E.A.C.[[580]](#footnote-580) aimed to coordinate the efforts of the various national Red Cross Societies and allocate the available resources according to the changing situation. Once prisoners and internees were recovered, the Red Cross Societies planned to meet their needs by distributing comforts including food and cigarettes.[[581]](#footnote-581) The BRCS was later asked to coordinate their efforts to assist ex-prisoners of war with those of the British government.[[582]](#footnote-582) The plans which were put into place at this time meant that the various national Red Cross societies were better prepared to be able to provide comforts for recovered prisoners of war, when the eventual Japanese surrender occurred.

By the 14th of June 1945, the Combined Chiefs of Staff issued the Far Eastern Theatre Commanders with a final directive with regard to the repatriation of prisoners of war recovered from Japanese hands, which was ‘substantially the same as that approved by the British Chiefs of Staff.’[[583]](#footnote-583) Five days later the War Office issued a memorandum for the Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia and the Commander-in-Chief India. Plans were made to examine the health of the prisoners and establish a procedure to treat the sick, and evacuate them once they were fit enough to travel. It was originally proposed that most of the prisoners needing treatment would then be sent to hospitals and reception camps which were to be established in India.[[584]](#footnote-584) The administrative directive set out some of the arrangements which were to be incorporated into the detailed plans for the recovery operations in southern areas. The instructions covered the processing and disposal of all British Commonwealth prisoners recovered under SACSEA, including those who had either escaped or evaded capture, both during and on cessation of hostilities.[[585]](#footnote-585) The information contained in the planning documents show that all aspects of the recovery operations were planned for from pay, campaign ribbons and the length of time that the men could keep any temporary rank attained in the camps and demonstrated the amount of bureaucracy planned for those involved in the recovery operations.

Plans were also made in preparation for future operations in Malaya. It was anticipated that the recovery operation would present special problems for the forces in the field, as it was originally anticipated that considerable Japanese resistance would be encountered. Nonetheless, it was thought that large numbers of prisoners would be recovered and dealt with by formations in the field, as each camp was located and evacuated. To assist the Force Commander with recovery operations No.1 RAPWI Control Staff was raised, and attached to 34 Corps with administrative units earmarked to assist in the recovery operations as they occurred. A second RAPWI Control Staff was also planned to be phased in prior to the operation against Singapore. These Control Staffs were designed to relieve Force Commanders of the detailed responsibility for the control, administration and evacuation of recovered prisoners.[[586]](#footnote-586) In July 1945, a small organisation consisting of a Liaison Officer with the H.Q. 14th Army and 34 Corps was added to the A.G. Branch planning staff at HQ ALFSEA. The organisation had been working on the problems presented by the recovery of Allied prisoners of war for some months.[[587]](#footnote-587)

In addition, a Searcher Clearing house was also established to handle all records and give direction to the three Searcher Party Teams which were to operate in the field attempting to trace all personnel reported as missing in that territory.[[588]](#footnote-588) Regardless of the fact that by April 1945, requests for the notification of the names of the prisoners of war who had died during the construction of the Burma-Thailand Railway brought an undertaking from the Japanese to telegraph the names of some 6,000 prisoners.[[589]](#footnote-589) The emphasis on searcher party teams gives an indication of not only the lack of information concerning those who had died in captivity, but also of men who were still recorded as missing, large numbers of whom were presumed to be prisoners. A measure of the changing Japanese fortunes came in June 1945, when the Japanese ‘expressed regret that so many prisoners of war died on the Burma-Siam railway.’[[590]](#footnote-590)

By the end of July 1945, the War Office issued an administrative directive with regard to the processing and repatriation of British Commonwealth prisoners of war recovered by SACSEA. The instructions stated that the coordination of plans for British Commonwealth prisoners was the responsibility of the IPWC, and the War Office had arranged to notify the Commanders in the Field with regards to the decisions which had been taken. At this point it was estimated that there were some 70,000 British Commonwealth prisoners, who were in the operation zone of SACSEA.[[591]](#footnote-591) The prisoners were thought to be split between some 227 POW Camps.[[592]](#footnote-592)Although these figures were provisional due to the Japanese movement of prisoners, they nevertheless give an indication of the scale and the difficulties involved in any RAPWI operations; in addition, changes to the recovery area covered by SEAC following the Japanese surrender also brought large numbers of additional prisoners and internees who needed to be recovered in what proved to be difficult circumstances.

Administrative proposals requested that details of the identities of those recovered were sent to the War Office at the earliest possible time. Drafts were requested for all those embarking on returning shipping from concentration points in the final stage of their repatriation, and lists of those embarking were to be sent to the War Office, both by air and by telegraph.[[593]](#footnote-593) Naturally with the prospect of tens of thousands of British Service Personnel being recovered not only to the United Kingdom, but throughout the Commonwealth, attempting to chart the movements of these individuals at each stage of their homeward journeys was likely to be something of a logistical nightmare if complete records were not kept and forwarded on at the earliest possible time.

In an effort to assist the recovery process, plans were also made for the War Office to provided lists of those who were thought to be missing along with the information which had already been provided by the Japanese, giving the identity of and location of thousands of prisoners. It was suggested that the lists would be available within the next two or three months.[[594]](#footnote-594) As noted previously the information provided by the Japanese authorities was by no means complete, but may have assisted in the recovery process. Such directives pointed to the extent to which the sudden Japanese capitulation caught those preparing for the recovery operations off their guard, as at the point of surrender the records were still unavailable.

**Covert Operations**

Both British and American authorities attempted to use covert operatives, who were in the field in southern areas.[[595]](#footnote-595) The British utilised operatives of ‘E’ Group, which was an off-shoot of the British M.I.9 and American MIS-X organisations. When long-range bombers began to operate from bases in India in autumn of 1944, ‘E’ group operatives were parachuted into otherwise inaccessible areas. With the capture of Rangoon in May of 1945, greater areas came within range of Allied aircraft; covert operatives began to gather information on the location of prisoner of war camps due to the fact that some camps had been built in close proximity to military targets and it was feared that casualties might have occurred during Allied air operations.[[596]](#footnote-596) In addition, it was planned that each of the forward headquarters would have two teams of trained agents who would be led by an officer and prepared to rescue by force if necessary, prisoners of war who were being held in ‘forward areas’ and used for maintenance tasks.[[597]](#footnote-597) Covert operatives in the area were also used to rescue downed airmen and even attempt to establish some contact with prisoners in established camps.

Lt Commander (A) K.B. Brochie was appointed as officer in charge of ‘E’ Group on 20th June 1945. His responsibilities included the long-term planning in connection with the release of prisoners of war, and liaison with other clandestine organisations. He also directed ‘E’ Group operations in South East Asia Command including those in French Indo-China, as well as controlling operations in Malaya and Sumatra through the country sections concerned. In addition, he was responsible for the dissemination of intelligence gathered in relation to the location of prisoner of war camps.[[598]](#footnote-598) Following the sudden Japanese collapse, ‘E’ group was able to provide a map giving the location and strengths of various camps across the Far East.[[599]](#footnote-599) The map listed the numbers of prisoners and internees in 10 countries, from Burma to the Andaman Islands, and concluded that there were at least 98,059 prisoners and 10,211 internees.[[600]](#footnote-600) This information was invaluable to the planning process for the RAPWI operations.

South East Asia Command also employed operatives of Force 136, a branch of the Special Operations Executive, which recruited volunteers from the indigenous populations in various areas of the Far East to act against the Japanese. M.R.D. Foot has pointed out that this resulted in the British forces becoming involved with various independence movements including the Communists in Malaya, in what represented an extremely complex picture of resistance, cooperation and collusion under Japanese rule in the Far East.[[601]](#footnote-601) According to Suzanne Hall, in Thailand Force 136 established bases for guerrilla activities and by August 1945, S.O.E enjoyed the support of some 90,000 recruits.[[602]](#footnote-602) In addition, Force 136 operatives were able to report on the location of prisoner of war camps and the movement of prisoners. Although there was a possibility that operations could recover relatively small numbers of prisoners, it was thought that this would alert the Japanese to the covert operatives’ presence.

Once prisoner of war camps were located, Force 136 operatives were able to observe the prisoners from a distance and were ordered not to approach camps directly.[[603]](#footnote-603) In some instances covert operatives made attempts to contact prisoners through the use of a micro-filmed sheet of questions which was photographed, and reduced to a size of 5.5 cm by 5.5 cm.[[604]](#footnote-604) The questionnaire attempted to ascertain if prisoners could provide any information concerning troop movements, supply dumps, or military camps; they were also asked if they wanted to escape, and if the local population could be trusted.[[605]](#footnote-605) As the operatives were aware of the risk that the Japanese may have attempted to massacre the prisoners, plans were made for arms and ammunition to be stored in police stations near some POW camps; these were to be used in the event that the Japanese attempted to murder prisoners.[[606]](#footnote-606) It could of course be argued that even with the assistance of the local police, the relatively small numbers of covert operatives would have been little use against a concerted Japanese effort to slaughter the men rather than allow their recovery.

**Urgent Changes to the Planning Process, July-August 1945**

With the prospect of larger numbers of prisoners being recovered, by July 1945, the IPWC proposed to issue solemn warnings to the Japanese with respect to the treatment of the prisoners and internees in their charge. In an attempt to prevent the possible murder of prisoners the Committee considered if a ‘stand-still’ agreement could be put to the Japanese; if the men were spared, the British would guarantee that they would not to be used in any offensive actions. Such an offer gave the Japanese a way of allowing the prisoners to remain in their camps without loss of face.[[607]](#footnote-607) Nevertheless, it was not the events in the Far East, but news which came from Europe, which highlighted the urgent need for detailed plans for recovery operations.

Lord Louis Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander of South East Asia Command, attended the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, during which the Potsdam Declaration promised ‘prompt and utter destruction’ if Japan did not surrender unconditionally.[[608]](#footnote-608) Winston Churchill advised Mountbatten of the existence of a new type of weapon, which would end the war within a month. However, Mountbatten was effectively sworn to secrecy and although Churchill stated that he could advise his command of the likely Japanese capitulation, he could not explain ‘how or why.’[[609]](#footnote-609) In addition Mountbatten was informed on the 24th of July, that his command was to be enlarged to include Borneo, Java and the Celebes Islands and that there would be changes to Indo-China.[[610]](#footnote-610) The prospect of a sudden Japanese surrender meant that, instead of a gradual piecemeal recovery operation, it was likely that all Allied prisoners and internees would need to be both assisted and recovered in the quickest possible manner.

At the beginning of August 1945, as the Japanese appeared to be ‘on the point of surrender’ it became increasingly apparent to Mountbatten that the task of caring for the immediate needs, and then planning for the release and repatriation of tens of thousands of prisoners and internees, would present a problem ‘of the first magnitude’. Furthermore, the plans which had been made hitherto required immediate and drastic revision. Up to this time the responsibility for the preparation and implementation of the recovery schemes had been delegated to ALFSEA.[[611]](#footnote-611) Rather than being simply regarded as a military commitment, any plans for recovery operations required a great deal of planning and inter-service cooperation, if prisoners and internees were to be supplied with much-needed food and medicines before they could be recovered and returned to the United Kingdom. In an effort to facilitate the recovery plans, an Inter-Service Organisation was set up at the headquarters of the Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia in Kandy. It was decided that the responsibility for the recovery operation should be divided between the three Services, in order to make the fullest use of the resources and transport available.[[612]](#footnote-612) It was at the point of the Japanese surrender that Mountbatten received a further directive.

The instructions appear to confirm American suspicions with regard to Britain’s position on the subject of her former colonies. On the 13th of August, Mountbatten was given orders that as soon as the Japanese surrendered his main tasks would be to reoccupy key areas of occupied territories in order to secure effective control, and to enforce the surrender and disarmament of Japanese forces. He was also asked to ensure the earliest release of British and Allied prisoners of war and internees. His other responsibilities included protecting British interests in China, and taking part in the occupation of Japan. Mountbatten’s priorities included the completion of the reoccupation of Burma, the reopening of the Strait of Malacca, and the occupation of Singapore and key areas of Malaya. Following on from this he was also asked to plan for the re-establishment of the British garrison at Hong Kong, the initial occupation was to be undertaken by the British Pacific Fleet and an Australian force from Borneo. Additionally, he was also given orders to despatch forces to French Indo-China, Siam, Java and Sumatra.[[613]](#footnote-613) Although all these areas contained prisoners of war, many of whom were in desperate need of help, nevertheless given the resources available, it was impossible to attend to the needs of all prisoners or to commit the resources required for all these disparate tasks simultaneously.

The sudden capitulation occurred as a result of the dropping of the new atomic weapons, which Churchill had described earlier to Mountbatten. The decision to surrender was taken on the 14th of August 1945, and the Japanese Emperor announced the reasons for the capitulation to the nation the following day. However, the capitulation did not mean that the RAPWI operations could commence immediately. It was at this point Mountbatten received orders from MacArthur the forces under his command could not occupy any Japanese-held territory or accept any local surrender of Japanese forces until MacArthur had personally received the official Japanese surrender in Tokyo. Furthermore, Mountbatten realised that this order would mean a delay in the commencement of recovery operations of a further three weeks.[[614]](#footnote-614) In reality the transport and personnel necessary for the recovery operations would not have been immediately available. Although offensive operations against Malaya and Singapore codenamed operations ZIPPER and TIDERACE were planned to take place the following month, these could not be quickly re-scheduled and re-equipped for a recovery rather than an offensive role. In addition, given the Japanese attitude towards surrender it would have been foolhardy to send British Service Personnel into areas containing large numbers of well-armed and potentially volatile Japanese troops, without local assurances that a ceasefire was in place.

On the 15th August, the responsibility for the recovery of prisoners from Borneo, Java the Celebes Islands and Indo-China was transferred from General MacArthur to Mountbatten. The details of the new boundaries had only been dispatched to Mountbatten’s headquarters on the 2nd of August.[[615]](#footnote-615) This was effectively a massive extension of the area to be covered by SEAC which had not been accounted for, either in the provision or the positioning of the stores. For example, preliminary reports suggested that on Java there were approximately 55,000 additional Allied prisoners and internees scattered across the areas involved, and this figure was accepted for planning purposes. At this time the only base which was available for the relief operation was on the Cocos Islands, however, this could reach the western half of the island and the Australians were enlisted to send aid to the eastern half of the island.[[616]](#footnote-616) Naturally this added greatly to the demands being made on those attempting to plan for, and eventually cope with, the recovery of prisoners.

Although the full details of the recovery operations in the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) are outside the scope of the current study, the planning process for recovery operations was further complicated by the fact that the Japanese had encouraged Indonesian nationalists to declare independence from the Dutch. In these circumstances the situation in the NEI deteriorated rapidly following the Japanese surrender. Prisoners found that they were threatened by Indonesian nationalists, some of whom had been trained and armed by the Japanese. Indeed, some camps containing Allied prisoners and internees fell into the hands of those seeking independence. The British were forced to call on Japanese forces to attempt to maintain order until personnel involved in the RAPWI process could recover Allied personnel.

Mountbatten was instructed by the Chiefs of Staff on the 21st of August, that he was to take over official command of his new area on the date that the formal surrender was signed.[[617]](#footnote-617) The southern area under the control of SEAC now included Thailand, French Indo China, Sumatra, and the Netherlands East Indies which comprised of Sumatra, Java, Dutch Borneo, Celebes, fifteen minor islands and a vast number of smaller islands.[[618]](#footnote-618) The recovery zones covered by SEAC ranged over one and a half million square miles, containing three quarters of a million Japanese troops, of whom 630,000 were armed. In addition, the area included 123,000 Allied prisoners of war and internees.[[619]](#footnote-619) Such statistics give an indication of the enormity of the problems faced in planning for the RAPWI operations. Although recovery operations were not scheduled to begin until MacArthur had personally accepted the Japanese surrender in Tokyo, the planning process naturally gathered pace as Mountbatten was aware of the desperate plight of many of the prisoners of war. He realised that any unforeseen delay once recovery operations were allowed to commence, could have resulted in additional deaths.

**Plans for the Assistance of Prisoners in Southern Areas**

In contrast to the suggestions made in 1942, the use of air transportation was by far the quickest way of getting the much-needed aid and recovery teams to prisoners who were widely dispersed in remote locations. Indeed, this also provided a means of attempting to communicate with both prisoners and their guards, in areas which by this stage may not have received news of the end of the war. The initial phases of the recovery operations involved a leaflet drop, dubbed Operation BIRDCAGE. The leaflets were produced in both Colombo and Calcutta in packs of 10,000 weighing 25 pounds which could be dropped by most aircraft, including Spitfires. It was initially anticipated that 170 packs would be produced as the low-level drops would give greater accuracy. [[620]](#footnote-620)

During operation BIRDCAGE leaflets were dropped in an attempt to ensure that the prisoners, their guards, general Japanese forces and the local population were aware that the war had ended. In addition, the contents of leaflets were intended to assure prisoners and internees that Allied forces would take control of the situation at the earliest possible time. It was thought that a leaflet drop would carry a considerable psychological effect for prisoners. However, it became clear during discussions that the contents of the leaflet needed to be carefully phrased; concerns were voiced that after learning of the Japanese surrender prisoners may have taken matters into their own hands, and confrontations with guards may have led to unnecessary deaths. As will be discussed in the following chapter, there were certainly fears expressed by Allied commanders that various elements of the Japanese army would not accept the call for unconditional surrender.

It was suggested by Major General Denning, who later became Mountbatten’s political adviser, that the leaflets should not just contain information for the Allied prisoners, but should also contain guidance for their guards. He considered that instructions for the guards should be printed on the back of the leaflets informing them that Japan had surrendered, and that the war had come to an end. The guards were to be informed that the prisoners had been told to remain quietly where they were, and that they should be treated with ‘every care and attention.’[[621]](#footnote-621) It was eventually decided that dropping a single leaflet containing information for both prisoners and guards was likely to lead to altercations between the two groups, and it suggested that two leaflets should be dropped approximately one hour apart; the first instructing Japanese guards that the war was over and they should remain in their quarters, followed by a second drop intended to be read by the prisoners.[[622]](#footnote-622) In this way the timing of drops and the contents of leaflets attempted to avoid any unnecessary conflict. Nevertheless, such discussions also highlighted the powerlessness of the Allies at this point, given the possible volatility of Japanese forces.

Following the capitulation of Japan, the most immediate problem faced by those planning for recovery operations was the preparation and positioning of contact teams, medical stores, clothing and food to meet the needs of the prisoners and internees, in preparation for the commencement of the RAPWI operations. This programme was set up in conjunction with HQ India, as many of the requirements included special items which would not normally be carried in the field, and which in turn had to be specially packed in the country.[[623]](#footnote-623) Ian Trenowden noted that packing supplies began before full information was available, it was originally thought that the priorities would be food, blankets, clothing and pharmaceuticals; in reality the stores needed to be re-packed as the requirements proved to be in exactly the reverse order.[[624]](#footnote-624) At this point it remained unclear just how many of the prisoners would need immediate medical assistance, and could possibly die of disease or malnutrition before the recovery operations began. Whilst the initial estimates had suggested that up to ninety percent of the men would need immediate hospital treatment, this figure was revised following the recovery of former prisoners from Manila and Rangoon.[[625]](#footnote-625) Naturally any estimates were provisional as conditions varied between locations and camps, and it could certainly be argued that any revisions were based on the conditions in Rangoon which was far better than many of the camps in other areas were unduly optimistic.

The operations to drop supplies came under the codename Operation MASTIFF. The operations were to be coordinated through Mastiff Main Control, which was located at the headquarters of the Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia under the overall command of Lt. Col. Driscoll.[[626]](#footnote-626) The MASTIFF relief operations were planned in two stages: Phase 1 codenamed MASTIFF ‘A’ involved the infiltration of airborne parties including Medical Officers aimed to bring immediate relief of the prisoner of war camps through the supply of some 200,000 pounds of medical supplies, food, clothing and ‘amenity parcels.’[[627]](#footnote-627) The teams were to consist of one Officer, one NCO, one medical Officer and a medical Orderly, along with provisions including necessary stores, special food and Red Cross Stores. It was suggested in communications that 10 teams would be needed immediately, with a possible further 20 teams for other territories.[[628]](#footnote-628) In this way aid and recovery personnel could be sent to as many areas as possible in the shortest possible time.

The second phase codenamed MASTIFF ‘B’ was initially limited to the supply of food, which included special medical foods for both the prisoners and the Force 136 operatives in the field.[[629]](#footnote-629) Further sorties would then be carried out to meet the continuing needs of both prisoners and RAPWI personnel, until camps could be evacuated either by land or air.[[630]](#footnote-630) Plans were made to utilise the 20 tons of Red Cross Parcels for British prisoners, and the 40 tons of Red Cross Parcels which were available for Indian prisoners. In addition, medical aid was ready to be dropped into camps. At this time, it was suggested that each camp was allocated only 160 pounds of medical supplies from a total available of just 11 tons.[[631]](#footnote-631) It should again be stressed that the MASTIFF operation was originally only scheduled to commence following the signing of the unconditional surrender in Tokyo, which was planned for the 2nd of September 1945.

Orders for Mastiff Main Control were issued on 17th of August and the Control was located at HQ SACSEA, and consisted of staff officers of HQ SACSEA, ALFSEA, Force 136, ‘E’ Group and ACSEA (Air Command South East Asia). The functions of the Control were to receive, collate and disseminate information, on the recovery operation by allotting priorities for the flying in or parachuting of personnel and stores, and arranging the bulk provisioning and positioning of stores at airfields once operations began. Sub-Controls consisting of representatives of ALFSEA, Force 136 and ‘E’ Group were located at Calcutta for French Indo-China, and Rangoon for Thailand. These acted in the same manner as the main control at the local airfields. Once operations commenced an additional sub-control was established at Singapore, to coordinate the supply dropping operations on Java and Sumatra from the Cocos Islands. A dispatch organisation was located at Colombo. Its functions were to work out flight plans and to pack and position containers for the Mastiff operations.[[632]](#footnote-632) In addition, immediately after the Japanese surrender HQ ALFSEA raised four more RAPWI Control Staffs for Allied forces going into Thailand, French Indo-China, Hong Kong and Java. They also provided additional officers for the staff of 12 Army Rangoon.[[633]](#footnote-633) The number of Controls and Sub-Controls involved in the operation gives some idea of the complexities of attempting to assist prisoners throughout the southern area when the operations were allowed to begin.

Once Mountbatten was assured the Japanese High Command would cooperate, they would be required to obey orders issued by the Supreme Allied Commander with respect to the welfare of prisoners and internees, and to inform them of the Japanese capitulation.[[634]](#footnote-634) Although the War Office was preparing printed lists of those thought to be in Japanese hands, these were unavailable at the time of the Japanese surrender.[[635]](#footnote-635) In an effort to remedy this situation, the Japanese authorities were asked to provide ‘full particulars’ of the locations of all Allied prisoner and internees’ camps and their nearest airfields; they were ordered to supply particulars of the numbers, nationalities and sex of all prisoners and internees in each camp. They were also required to give details of the state of health of prisoners and internees and advise if there were serious incidence of sickness, and advise the Allies of shortages of food and other supplies. [[636]](#footnote-636)

Additionally, the Japanese authorities were to hand over all records pertaining to the prisoners and internees including those who had died in captivity, were transferred, or released.[[637]](#footnote-637) These requirements were intended to allow those involved in planning for recovery operations to gain a better picture of the locations and concentrations of prisoners, as well as identifying particular camps where prisoners had urgent medical requirements. Although the Japanese generally cooperated with the recovery operations, Mark Felton noted that the Chief of POW Camps in Tokyo issued orders which officially authorised guards to flee from camps to avoid prosecution for war crimes. Further instructions sanctioned the destruction of documents unfavourable to the Japanese in the hands of the enemy.[[638]](#footnote-638) The hiatus before the recovery operations were permitted to commence allowed numbers of guards who may have been accused of committing crimes against Allied prisoners to make their escape. In addition, in line with Japanese orders, the delay also gave the Japanese authorities’ time to destroy large amounts of incriminating evidence throughout the Far East.

The details of the recovery operations will be discussed in the following chapter, however, before the recovery operations were able to get underway Mountbatten attempted to ensure that the operations ran as smoothly as possible. Once he returned to his headquarters on the 15th of August, the British Commander appointed various committees and conferences to look into the problems surrounding the recovery operations. The Joint Logistical Planning Committee (JLPC) attempted to deal with the difficulties associated with planning for the RAPWI operations; its members conferred on matters which arose from other Coordinating Conferences which were taking place and analysed the day to day issues which arose. Once the recovery operations began the Committee reacted to problems on the ground as they were encountered, and discussions covered all aspects of the recovery process in an effort to ensure that recovery operations were carried out as smoothly as possible.[[639]](#footnote-639)

In addition, Mountbatten also set up a RAPWI Co-ordination Committee at his headquarters, the Committee which was formed on the 22nd August, had representatives from the three Services and of Allied Missions.[[640]](#footnote-640) The suggestions made by the Joint Logistical Planning Committee were, in turn, passed on to the Head Quarters Allied Land Forces South East Asia by 10.00 am the next day, in time for the RAPWI Co-ordinating Conference.[[641]](#footnote-641) Mountbatten’s headquarters became the coordinating centre for the whole RAPWI operation; the Co-ordination Committee was placed under the chairmanship of his deputy Lieutenant General Raymond Wheeler[[642]](#footnote-642), and acted as the nerve centre for the Recovery operation and as a clearing house for information and declared decisions on policy priorities and the allocation of responsibility. The decisions on the day to day problems of the recovery operation were worked out on an ad-hoc basis.[[643]](#footnote-643)

Mountbatten commented on the 24th of August, that he remained ‘perturbed’ that there was a ‘demonstrable difference’ between the proposed policies of the Australians and British in the treatment of RAPWI.[[644]](#footnote-644) Clifford Kinvig noted that once RAPWI operations began, the 6000 recovered Australian prisoners were processed and sent on their way quickly by the British RAPWI Control Team, before their Australian counterparts arrived. Indeed the swift departure of the recovered Australian prisoners meant they reached Australia before they were able to receive fresh uniforms and clothing.[[645]](#footnote-645) Indeed Kinvig noted that Mr Forde, the Minister for the Army, suggested that this ‘brought disrepute’ on the Army for its treatment of returning prisoners of war.[[646]](#footnote-646) Such observations pointed to the potential for political embarrassment surrounding the return of prisoners, and as will be discussed in the following chapter, the recovery process for those prisoners returning to Britain appeared to ensure that similar accusations would not be made in the United Kingdom.

It was decided that the overall plan for the RAPWI operation in each area was to be dealt with concurrently; however, if this was not possible then priority was accorded to Singapore and Siam, then Java followed by Burma, Sumatra and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, this was followed by Indo-China, Celebes, Borneo and the Lesser Sunda Islands.[[647]](#footnote-647) As will be discussed in the following chapter, the RAPWI Operations began in the ‘nearer and safer’ areas: Burma, Siam and northern Malaya.[[648]](#footnote-648) As noted above, there was also a strong political element to the schedule by which prisoners were recovered, as orders which were issued to Mountbatten in the aftermath of the eventual Japanese surrender stressed his responsibility for the recovery of former British territory, alongside the recovery operations.[[649]](#footnote-649) Once the recovery operations began Mountbatten was ordered to attempt to assert British influence over her former colonies; for instance, a British naval task force arrived at Hong Kong on the 29th of August, as it was thought essential that the Japanese surrender was accepted by British rather than Chinese or American forces.[[650]](#footnote-650) As the MASTIFF relief operations allowed prisoners to begin their recovery by drops of food and medicines this in turn allowed some leeway in the planning process, as the immediate needs of prisoners were being met relatively quickly following the commencement of the operations.

The sheer numbers of prisoners, and distances involved, meant that it was simply not possible, given the limited resources and number of recovery teams available for the Allied recovery operations to attempt to recover all the prisoners and internees simultaneously. For example, recovery teams were not initially expected to reach some outlying areas such as Rabaul on New Britain Island which contained some 6,500 RAPWI until the 15th of November, and the recovery operations were only expected to be completed by the end of the month.[[651]](#footnote-651) As will be discussed in the following chapter, once the recovery operations began plans evolved as the RAPWI teams reacted to the situation on the ground. This resulted in the recovery operations being prioritised according to the needs of the individual camps, and the conditions on the ground. Indeed, the prioritisation of the recovery operations meant that the more organised camps were accorded a relatively low priority, as they posed the least amount of trouble to those organising the recovery operations. In turn this led to complaints concerning the length of time some in well-established camps, were forced to wait before beginning the first stages of their journeys home.

**British involvement in the recovery operations in Northern Areas**

With regards to British involvement in recovery operations in northern areas, as noted above although British forces had been advised to render all possible assistance to American Theatre Commanders,[[652]](#footnote-652) it had been made abundantly clear to the Commander-in-Chief of the British Pacific Fleet that recovery operations were a military, rather than naval commitment. However, when, just seventeen days before the Japanese surrender, he made enquiries as to the British military representation in the area, he was informed that there was no suitable British Army Representative in the South West Pacific Area (SWPA).[[653]](#footnote-653) As the Civil Adviser to the British C. in C. had been visiting London, he was able to outline the communication problems to the British Authorities; this prompted the British to send a representative of the Directorate of Prisoners of war to visit Admiral Nimitz and General MacArthur and Land Forces Headquarters Melbourne, to attempt to discuss the problems associated with the recovery operations.[[654]](#footnote-654)

The British representative Lt. Col. Meadley later reported that he was sent to Washington at the end of July, in an attempt to ascertain the plans of the US Commanders for the RAPWI process in the Pacific Area. On arrival he was informed neither Brigadier Loup of British Army Staff Washington, nor officers of the U.S. War Department could provide any detailed information. Meadley then obtained permission to visit the Australian Military Authorities in Melbourne, to discuss the subject and then travel to MacArthur’s Headquarters in Manila. He was en route to Australia when Japan surrendered.[[655]](#footnote-655) While the planning process for the recovery operations envisaged that the prisoners should be met by teams of their own nationality at the point of their recovery, nonetheless, in northern areas there were very few British personnel trained for a recovery role at the time of the sudden Japanese capitulation.

Meadley at first considered that it would be necessary to speed up preparations for the handling of British prisoners of war, and provide personnel to assist the American-led operations. He was aware that the British teams being assembled for the recovery roles were still in the United Kingdom when the war ended and were unlikely to arrive before the 10th of October. In order to assist the recovery operations in northern areas, British personnel were required for the Reception Camp in Manila and personnel volunteered for this purpose from members of all three British forces in Australia prior to Meadley’s arrival. It was agreed with the Australian Authorities that until the arrival of the British personnel being trained in the U.K. these teams would be responsible for dealing with all British Commonwealth prisoners of war.[[656]](#footnote-656) In an attempt to ensure that former prisoners were recovered by personnel of their own nationality, it was decided that the contact officers should eventually be made up from one third Australian, one third from the United Kingdom and the remainder from Canada and India.[[657]](#footnote-657)

For their part, the representatives of the British Fleet hoped that Colonel Meadley and Brigadier Loup would provide details of General MacArthur’s plans for the recovery operation; this proved not to be the case, as it was noted in reports ‘neither held detailed plans of any kind, as none had been made.’[[658]](#footnote-658) While undoubtedly a great deal of planning for the RAPWI operations in northern areas had already taken place the British were not privy to this information, although British teams were eventually able to play a part in the recovery operations in northern areas, their actions were by necessity carried out on an ad hoc basis as and when the American authorities asked for their assistance.

**Conclusions**

The planning process for the recovery of British prisoners from the Far East went through several stages as the war progressed. From the very earliest proposals the British authorities were aware the recovery of tens of thousands of British prisoners who were spread between hundreds of camps throughout the Far East, was always likely to prove to be extremely problematic. Concerns were expressed in the meetings of the IPWC in January 1942, which stressed the possibility that the men would be provided with inadequate rations, later reports pointed to the likelihood that they would also be likely to be ill-treated and receive inadequate medical care; accordingly, the preliminary schemes suggested in the autumn of 1942, indicated that large numbers of those being recovered were likely to need immediate medical attention at the time of their recovery. However, as these plans were made relatively early in the war, they were naturally open to revision.

The proposals relating to RAPWI operations evolved over time and operations were likely to remain somewhat improvised, as a consequence of the fact that the Japanese failed to give detailed information in connection with the identities of all prisoners and even the whereabouts of a considerable number of camps. It was originally envisaged that prisoners would be recovered as camps were located during Allied offensive operations. In these circumstances, the War Office issued directives in connection with the responsibilities of individual Commanders and the type of information they were to gather. The bureaucracy surrounding the recovery operations attempted to account for those who were recovered, and also gather details relating to those who had not survived captivity. However, the potential piecemeal recovery of prisoners also brought dangers for all those concerned, and the British authorities received reports which demonstrated that in some circumstances the Japanese were quite prepared to murder prisoners to prevent their recovery.[[659]](#footnote-659) Such reports pointed to the very real possibility that significant numbers could have been killed during Allied recovery operations.

While the Allied governments attempted to present a unified front to the Japanese, it could certainly be argued that inter-Allied cooperation relating to the planning process was hampered as the United States authorities were suspicious of Britain’s motivations relating to the re-acquisition of her former colonies; likewise, in southern areas London was wary of American interference with British plans. It was not until November 1944, that the ‘basic principles’ on the subject of the recovery operations was agreed. The British Chiefs of Staff then transmitted the proposals to the United States, in an effort to obtain a directive from the Combined Chiefs.[[660]](#footnote-660) However, as prisoners began to be recovered following both the sinking of transport shipping and the liberation of camps during the American invasion of the Philippines, this gradually highlighted the need for a more coordinated approach to future recovery operations. It was not until the early months of 1945, that plans were eventually placed on a firm footing, and only in June 1945, that the Combined Chiefs of Staff issued the Far Eastern Theatre Commanders with a final directive with regard to the repatriation of prisoners of war recovered from Japanese hands.[[661]](#footnote-661) Such directives still concentrated on the recovery of prisoners during Allied offensive operations, nonetheless, they also began to consider the possibility that Japan would surrender. The possibility that this would occur required a drastic change in plans.

In July 1945, Mountbatten was given the news of the new atomic weapons and was warned that the war would be over within a matter of weeks. This information resulted in an urgent need for a new strategy for RAPWI operations. When the Japanese capitulated, Allied Commanders were now faced with the prospect of assisting and then recovering prisoners from all areas en masse. Nonetheless, the RAPWI operations could not begin immediately, as General MacArthur forbade Mountbatten from accepting local surrenders of Japanese forces, until he had personally accepted the formal Japanese surrender in Tokyo. While Felton suggested that this order was ‘immoral and self-serving’[[662]](#footnote-662), it could be argued that there was effectively little chance that the RAPWI operations could have commenced immediately.

In spite of the fact that Mountbatten was aware that any delays in the recovery operations would potentially cost the lives of prisoners, it could be suggested that in the circumstances surrounding the sudden Japanese capitulation, there was effectively little or no chance that such operations were likely to begin immediately. The change of fortunes left Allied Commanders unprepared for the commencement of recovery operations. In addition, the distances involved and the sheer numbers of prisoners needing food, medical attention and clothing prior to their repatriation meant that the recovery operations would need extensive planning. Teams would need to be assembled to assist in the operations on the ground. In addition, leaflets were composed and printed as a means of informing prisoners and their guards that the war was over and preliminary supplies needed to be prepared ready for the commencement of operations. However, there were some doubts surrounding the intentions of the Japanese Army as commanders who despite direct orders to the contrary, may well have decided to fight on given the Japanese attitudes towards surrender hitherto.

The planning process for recovery operations in southern areas was further complicated as orders given to Mountbatten considerably enlarged the area and number of prisoners who would need to be recovered by his command. In addition, he also received a directive which suggested that American suspicions regarding London’s intentions to attempt to regain control over her former colonies were indeed justified. The delay before the recovery operations commenced nevertheless allowed those involved in the planning process in areas controlled by Mountbatten, to make detailed arrangements for the recovery operations in anticipation of their commencement. As will be discussed in the following chapter, the power vacuum which resulted from the Japanese withdrawing their forces in some southern areas resulted in various groups staking their claim for independence, which had the effect of further complicating the RAPWI operations.

When considering the planning process for northern areas, the lack of cooperation between the American and British commands again appeared to reflect the American belief that Britain’s first priority lay with re-establishing her influence in the Far East. Evidence suggests that the sense of distrust affected the planning process with regards to the cooperation between the British, Australian, and American forces. Although the British Pacific Fleet was ordered to assist the American operations, the recovery process was deemed to be a military commitment; however, Britain had very little military representation in the area, and the Commander-in-Chief of the fleet was initially informed that the services of the British navy would not be needed. This attitude hampered any planning which could occur for with respect to British and Australian participation in the recovery operations in northern areas. The lack of information from the American authorities resulted in the British and Australian forces beginning to make their own plans in anticipation that their American counterparts would eventually involve their recovery teams in recovery operations.

As will be detailed in the following chapter although British forces were involved in recovery operations in American-led operations in northern areas, the lack of a British military presence in the area led to the operations being carried out in a somewhat ad hoc manner. Although the recovery of prisoners which followed American operations in the Philippines highlighted the need for more coordinated plans, suspicions regarding Britain’s intentions towards her former colonies ultimately prevented full cooperation with regards to plans for the recovery operations.

**CHAPTER 4**

**The Realities of the Recovery Operations**

The final chapter set out to examine the realities of the RAPWI operations which recovered tens of thousands of prisoners from hundreds of POW camps, spread across millions of square miles of the Far East and Pacific region. It attempted to ascertain if Whitehall attempted to control the flow of information reaching Britain from the returning prisoners. Furthermore, the chapter questioned if the delays in the recovery process, which allowed the former prisoners to gain appreciable amounts of weight before their repatriation, amounted to deliberate policy to disguise the lack of assistance the men had received while in Japanese hands. Finally, the chapter attempted to determine if the differences between the recovery operations in northern areas and those in the south affected the way that prisoners experienced their return to the United Kingdom.

On what became known as VJ day, August the 15th 1945, Clement Atlee, the British Prime Minister announced two days of celebrations as Britain was informed that Japan had surrendered unconditionally, and the Second World War was over. The new Labour government in Britain wanted to be seen to be doing all it could to bring home the Far East prisoners as rapidly as possible. In his speech given at the State Opening of Parliament following the surrender of Japan King George VI stated ‘In the Far East my Ministers will make it their most immediate concern to ensure that all prisoners in Japanese hands are cared for and returned to their homes with all speed.’[[663]](#footnote-663)

While the recovery operations have received comparatively little historical attention, the historiography dealing with Recovery of Prisoners of War and Internees (RAPWI) operations in the Far East gives the overall impression that the men were returned to the United Kingdom relatively quickly.[[664]](#footnote-664) The majority of accounts focus on the recovery process from southern areas where the greatest number of prisoners who originated from the United Kingdom, were held. However, the northern area under American control contained an additional 30,000 British Imperial servicemen, thousands of whom were also repatriated to the United Kingdom, whose experiences of recovery have been less well documented.

Following the end of hostilities, the War Office was aware that prisoners and internees would need to be recovered from locations as diverse as Japan, Korea, Manchuria, North China including Shanghai, Formosa, Hong Kong, Borneo and Sarawak, Java, Sumatra, Singapore, Malaya, Burma, Siam and Indo-China. In terms of those who needed repatriation to the United Kingdom it was estimated towards the end of August 1945, that there were less than 30,000 UK prisoners in areas south of the Philippines and more than 10,000 in areas north of the Philippines.[[665]](#footnote-665) Those in southern areas were repatriated by British-led operations, and those in northern areas were recovered by American recovery schemes.

By comparing and contrasting the experiences of recovery of former British prisoners in Thailand, Bangkok and Singapore in the south, with those on the Japanese Home Islands in the north, the chapter aims to give a more varied and complete picture of the way prisoners reacted to the end of the war, the realities of the recovery operations and their homeward journeys. Furthermore, although the British authorities planned that all prisoners would receive a hero’s welcome, the study contrasts the differences in the reception of those repatriated from southern areas, in comparison to those who returned later, from further afield.

**Political Issues surrounding the RAPWI Operations**

Following the promise to recover British prisoners and internees ‘with all speed’[[666]](#footnote-666), Whitehall was aware that the effectiveness of the recovery operations would be called into question if this was not the case. For instance, one communication between London and SACSEA on 13th September 1945, considered delays in the recovery operations in areas such as the Netherlands East Indies, Java and Sumatra. It stated: ‘we shall be exposed to increasing criticism unless we can give [the] public satisfactory assurances with details that areas in question are not forgotten.’[[667]](#footnote-667) There remained a real chance of a public outcry if the former prisoners were not considered by their relatives and indeed the general public, to be returning to the United Kingdom at the earliest possible time. It was therefore in the interest of the government, that the recovery operation was carried out both swiftly and efficiently.

However, the government’s claims relating to the rapid return of these individuals also raised some difficult issues. Although official announcements had been made with respect to the Japanese ill-treatment of prisoners of war, the full extent of the effect of this on individuals was perhaps less well known at this time. Nonetheless, the rapid return of thousands of emaciated and ill men would also have highlighted the fact that the wartime government had been completely unable to ameliorate their plight; in turn, this may have led to questions in connection with its wartime performance, and possibly to doubts concerning London’s commitment to the welfare of those who took part in the disastrous defeat at Singapore.

The decision to return the repatriates to Britain by sea voyages which gave the men additional weeks to recover, recuperate, and be brought up-to-date with the events of the war, was made for a variety of reasons; in addition, this method of recovery to the U.K. also effectively masked the worst of the treatment these individuals had experienced. When considering the number of deaths amongst prisoners and internees Mountbatten pointed out, just six weeks after the Japanese surrender, the health of many former prisoners had already improved rapidly. For this reason, he suggested that ‘it was essential that the public should realise the privations and maltreatment which our prisoners had suffered.’[[668]](#footnote-668) He pointed out that ‘these facts might well otherwise be lost sight of, since the appearance and condition of RAPWI had so greatly improved after a period of medical care and proper food.’[[669]](#footnote-669) Irrespective of Mountbatten’s fears, London was perhaps more cautious with regards to the information which it was prepared to make available at the time.

Although some press exposure was inevitable, the British authorities attempted to control the information which came out of camps. Indeed, official orders to the recovered prisoners either emphasised that any information given to the press could cause great distress to the relatives of their fallen comrades, or forbade them from speaking to the press without official permission.[[670]](#footnote-670) As a result, many returning prisoners were extremely reluctant to speak of their ill-treatment. Such orders also helped to mask the full extent of the ill-treatment the men had suffered, and in turn disguised Whitehall’s shortcomings with regards to the assistance they were able to provide for British Service Personnel who had fallen into Japanese hands.

There was obviously no universal experience of the way that the prisoners in the Far East received the news they had been waiting years to hear, as there were no official lines of communication between the British authorities and the prisoners in Japanese hands. Although diaries and memoirs are full of descriptions of euphoric celebrations, albeit somewhat muted given the fact that the Japanese were still very much in charge, news of the end of the war eventually reached prisoners in a variety of ways. In some areas prisoners gradually became aware that there had been a change in attitudes by their captors, and realised that this may have been significant. In camps close to centres of population, news filtered through from a variety of sources, local civilians were already attempting to tell prisoners of the situation by flashing ‘V’ signs to show an Allied victory.

Indeed, in camps where news from the outside world giving details of the end of the war had reached prisoners, they could do little apart from wait. Rumour was part of camp life and few dared to believe the war had ended, until the Japanese camp commandants made official announcements. As will be discussed below orders given to Mountbatten from MacArthur and other concerns relating to the safety of the clandestine operatives on the ground, meant that the recovery operations could not begin immediately after the surrender was declared by the Japanese Emperor. Until the various Japanese forces on the ground had signalled their willingness to accept the Japanese surrender sending in Allied forces, or beginning to drop leaflets advising prisoners that the war was over, may have led to confrontation and in turn resulted in unnecessary deaths.

In southern areas such as Thailand for those outside established camps the sudden change of fortune demonstrated the potential dangers for prisoners. One such prisoner who later wrote of his experiences of both the end of the war and his homeward journey, Major H.G. Dicker, realised that something momentous may have occurred as his train was in sidings; he noted that throughout the area there were a large number of Japanese standing in groups, some openly weeping. He described them as being ‘distinctly hostile’ and stated that they threatened anyone approaching them with bayonets.[[671]](#footnote-671) It was here that as guards who were supposedly in charge of the prisoners disappeared, and in turn Dicker realised that he and his group may have been in danger. He noted that salvation came in the form of a Japanese NCO, who ensured that the prisoners crossed a nearby river and who then entrusted the prisoners to another group of guards. The group were then marched at some speed towards Bangkok for the next five hours.[[672]](#footnote-672) Reports of the movement of large numbers of prisoners in the area including prisoners who were too weak to walk, reached Mountbatten’s Headquarters by the 16th of August.[[673]](#footnote-673) This intelligence led to concerns that this would result in needless suffering as prisoners who were already ill were forced to travel. It was feared that the situation would get out of hand, and the British requested that the Japanese stopped such movements of prisoners.[[674]](#footnote-674) Such appeals marked the fact that although the Japanese in Tokyo had surrendered unconditionally, there was some doubt that the order would be universally followed by Japanese Commanders in the field.

As we saw in the third chapter, as he had done during the course of the war, the Swiss Consul in Bangkok also continued to try to provide assistance to the prisoner of war camps in this area following the end of the war.[[675]](#footnote-675) Major Dicker’s account suggested that partly due to the efforts of the Swiss Consul the situation was less serious than Mountbatten had been led to believe. After being forced to walk for hours he and his fellow prisoners finally entered a large warehouse at the port of Bangkok, where they collapsed through exhaustion and slept. When Dicker awoke he and the men could hardly believe their eyes as ‘food was arriving by the lorry load and not a grain of rice among it – mountains of fruit, bread and freshly-roasted ducks, also a radio and British newspapers, all sent by the Swiss and Swedish Consuls’. The food continued to pour in and the prisoners ‘stuffed themselves.’[[676]](#footnote-676)

The situation immediately following the Japanese surrender was somewhat confused. In some camps in Thailand Allied prisoners had already been informed by camp commanders that the war was over and Senior Allied Officers were able to take charge of the situation and begin to purchase additional supplies locally, before the commencement of recovery operations. In addition to these supplies Japanese camp commanders finally released Red Cross Supplies which in some camps had been hoarded since their arrival rather than being distributed among Allied prisoners. It could certainly be argued that these supplies could have saved lives. One account which reflected the realities of the situation in many areas recorded that by the 20th of August, 9 truckloads of Red Cross stores had already arrived. By lunchtime of the same day 15 Red Cross trucks had entered the camp and supplies were still flooding in. The consignment had been delivered in January 1944, and had sat in Japanese hands for 18 months.[[677]](#footnote-677) Charles Roland suggested that instances whereby the Japanese withheld Red Cross stores were so widespread that it must have been an official Japanese policy.[[678]](#footnote-678) Regardless of the positive signs fears relating to the attitudes of Japanese Commanders and an order from MacArthur, meant that Mountbatten was unable to issue orders for the commencement of recovery operations in southern areas.

On 16th August 1945, General MacArthur became Supreme Commander of the Allied forces. Mountbatten received orders from MacArthur that he was not to sign any individual surrender agreements with the Japanese forces in the southern areas, until the American Supreme Commander had personally taken the Japanese surrender in Tokyo Bay.[[679]](#footnote-679) Mark Felton has suggested that this order was both ‘immoral and self-serving’ as MacArthur did not want to be upstaged ‘in the moment of his greatest victory’ by the commencement of the recovery operations, and although Mountbatten protested the matter was not negotiable.[[680]](#footnote-680) As the official surrender was to be signed on the 2nd of September, if Mountbatten had fully complied with this order there would have been a considerable delay before relief operations could be launched. Indeed, Mountbatten later stated that he was unhappy with this decision which might cost the lives of prisoners who were on the verge of starvation at this time.[[681]](#footnote-681)

Irrespective of MacArthur’s orders, Mountbatten was also uncertain of Japanese attitudes to surrender in southern areas and unwilling to order the RAPWI operations to begin before he was certain that those involved would be safe. Notwithstanding the fact that the Japanese Emperor had signalled Japan’s intentions to abide by the Allied call for unconditional surrender, the areas where Allied prisoners were held contained vast numbers of Japanese troops who remained well armed, undefeated in battle. The southern areas under British control contained some 630,000 Japanese troops who remained armed.[[682]](#footnote-682) As noted above in some areas Allied commanders doubted the willingness of their Japanese counterparts to surrender, indeed Field Marshall Count Terauchi, the Commander-in-Chief of Japan’s Southern Army initially stated he intended to fight on, and General Itagaki initially refused to surrender Singapore Island.[[683]](#footnote-683)

Similarly in outlying parts of the South West Pacific Area fighting continued and it was not until the 21st of August, that a message was received by the First Australian Army from the Japanese which attempted to establish a ceasefire.[[684]](#footnote-684) Two days later the cessation of hostilities was ordered by the Japanese High Command[[685]](#footnote-685), and by the 25th an armed truce existed in New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and New Britain.[[686]](#footnote-686) Even with the Japanese surrender, and the fact that the Japanese authorities generally followed the Emperor’s orders, there were instances whereby the Japanese guards were prepared to continue murdering prisoners. Of the 2750 British and Australian prisoners who arrived in north Borneo during 1942 and 1943, some 2240 were still alive in September 1944. Over the next 11 months all but six died, those who survived did so as a result of escaping.[[687]](#footnote-687) For their part, when questioned the Japanese claimed that deaths were due to the fact that the region was ‘plague ridden’ and malarial and claimed that both the prisoners and their Japanese guards had perished.[[688]](#footnote-688) In reality the last thirty prisoners of war were murdered at Ranau on the 27th of August, 12 days after the Japanese surrender.[[689]](#footnote-689)

In spite of MacArthur’s initial orders, Mountbatten nonetheless arranged for a ceasefire which was agreed by local Japanese Commanders.[[690]](#footnote-690) In these circumstances the British Commander was able to order recovery operations to begin before the official surrender had been signed in Tokyo. Regardless of the localised agreements with the Japanese authorities until the security of the personnel involved could be guaranteed, the clandestine forces on the ground were ordered to remain undercover. Charles Cruickshank noted that Mountbatten issued an ‘unshakeable order’ that no camp should be approached until he was satisfied that the surrender was holding.[[691]](#footnote-691)

By the 26th of August, clandestine operatives received orders to approach only camps which were known to have been abandoned by the Japanese[[692]](#footnote-692), and it was not until the 28th that a ‘preliminary’ surrender document had been signed in Rangoon, and Japanese Commanders agreed to obey Mountbatten’s orders and cooperate with the recovery operations.[[693]](#footnote-693) Once he was assured that the Japanese would comply with Allied directives, Mountbatten ordered the British and American covert operatives of Force 136, ‘E’ Group and OSS to be given their code words, GOLDFISH for operatives in Thailand, and SWANSONG for those in Malaya, and they were allowed to approach prisoner of war camps.[[694]](#footnote-694) At the same time orders were issued for the planned BIRDCAGE leaflet drops and MASTIFF relief operations to begin.

**The first phases of Relief Operations in Southern Areas**

Once orders had been issued for the commencement of recovery operations, the Allies dropped leaflets in an effort to inform Japanese troops, camp guards, the local population, and of course prisoners and internees that the war was finally over and the Japanese government had surrendered. In southern areas these drops went under the codename BIRDCAGE; the operation started on the 28th of August, was completed by the 31st. In line with earlier plans and in order to prevent unnecessary conflict in camps, the drops were carried out in two stages. The initial drop was primarily aimed for the Japanese in both camps and towns with concentrations of Japanese troops. The leaflet carried instructions for guards, who were told that they should remain in their guardhouses, and in an effort to maintain the safety of prisoners, camp commanders were informed that they would be held responsible for the safety of the men. This was followed by a second drop, one hour later, containing information and instructions for the prisoners. [[695]](#footnote-695)

The leaflets intended for prisoners stated that they should remain in their camps, and promised that relief supplies would be sent as soon as was possible; information was also provided on the subject of the men’s dietary needs, and warnings in connection with the dangers of overeating. The men were also cautioned against accepting gifts of food from the local population. In addition prisoners were requested to provide a list of any special requirements with respect to medicines and food, and asked to prepare ‘nominal rolls’ of those in the camp in preparation for the arrival of Allied recovery teams or the local authorities.[[696]](#footnote-696) Although some of the information contained was undoubtedly valuable, warnings with reference to accepting food from locals was a source of amusement for prisoners who had survived by eating anything which walked, flew or crawled to remain alive.

The personnel involved in Operation BIRDCAGE flew a total of 77 sorties dropping leaflets on 90 camps and towns thought to contain large numbers of Japanese troops in Burma, the Andaman Islands, Siam, French Indo China, Malaya and Sumatra. An additional ‘daily news sheet’ was also printed and dropped onto the main towns in the Singapore, Kedah, Perak and Selangor areas.[[697]](#footnote-697) The fact that two separate drops occurred demonstrated that, although Japan had surrendered, the Allies were effectively powerless to deal with the situation in individual camps at this time. Although in some areas clandestine forces were breaking cover and beginning to approach camps, they were few in number and lightly armed and would have little chance of preventing guards attempting to massacre prisoners.

Following on from the leaflet drops, the MASTIFF relief operations aimed to begin to assist prisoners by providing food, clothing and medical aid for camps. The operation was carried out in two phases, with initial MASTIFF ‘A’ drops being made to provide immediate assistance to prisoner of war camps. The secondary MASTIFF Operation ‘B’ attempted to ensure that both prisoners and covert operatives in the field, continued to receive sufficient relief supplies until such time as they could either be reached by land-based forces, or they could be recovered by air.[[698]](#footnote-698) It was initially considered that it may have been necessary to maintain all prisoner of war camps for a period of 4-6 weeks by air drop, before the expeditionary forces were able to reach camps in some areas.[[699]](#footnote-699) As will be discussed below, the sudden Japanese capitulation along with the sheer number of prisoners needing assistance and the distances involved meant that it was simply not possible to recover prisoners from all areas simultaneously. In addition, Mountbatten’s orders from London made it clear that there was a strong political element which affected the order by which the RAPWI operations were organised, and it could be suggested that as British forces entered their former colonies they hoped to regain some of their former prestige.

The scale of the MASTIFF relief operation can be judged by the number of flights and the quantity of aid dropped. As with the leaflet drops, the number of flights and distances involved also brought dangers for those involved and the RAF and RAAF flew 452 sorties with the loss of three liberators and 24 air crew.[[700]](#footnote-700) MASTIFF Control SACSEA and MASTIFF Sub-Control at Colombo ceased to function as of 29th September 1945.[[701]](#footnote-701) The Sub-Controls at Calcutta and Singapore continued with some 100 sorties still being flown to Sumatra and Java.[[702]](#footnote-702) During the operation some 2,292,600 lbs of Red Cross supplies, food, clothing, medical supplies and other miscellaneous were dropped over Malaya, Sumatra, Java, Thailand and French Indo China.[[703]](#footnote-703) These figures, along with the Allied knowledge of the likely ill-health of prisoners and the fact that tens of thousands of those being recovered needed to be repatriated to the United Kingdom, gives some idea of the enormity of the problems faced by the staff attempting the RAPWI operations.

Along with the drops of aid, plans had been made for recovery teams to be dropped into the vicinity of camps in some areas. However, with the sudden end to the war many of the contact personnel being trained were still in Britain at this time. This resulted in new teams being hastily put together locally. The 40 new contact teams, three quarters of which were parachute trained, were formed from members of Force 136 and ‘E’ Group with additional personnel provided from Indian Airborne Division. The teams consisted of one officer, one non-commissioned officer, one Medical Officer, a medical orderly with stores and additional special foods and comforts.[[704]](#footnote-704) Contact parties located camps and signalled this information along with the number of prisoners by nationality, service, and the immediate requirements of food and medical supplies and suitable drop zones in the vicinity. They were also asked to advise if medical staff were available in the camp and if armed assistance was required.[[705]](#footnote-705) It was only at this point that those who were sent to assist in the recovery operations learned of the full extent of the hardships the men had suffered over the previous years.

In addition to the locally formed teams as the recovery operations began, personnel who had been trained in Britain also began to arrive in the area to assist in the operations. Captain T. Newell subsequently gave an account of his experiences, which in turn provides an indication of the conditions in some camps. Although official reports suggest that the prisoners were in better condition than had been expected, the sights which met recovery teams in some areas came as a shock. Newell described the conditions he encountered at Kanchanaburi camp; he was confronted by men lying on bamboo slats. He recounted that these were ‘the most grotesque forms of human beings I had ever set my eyes on’ and that ‘above all, was the appalling stench.’[[706]](#footnote-706)

Newell was led to the first bed and met a skeleton of a man, who was so thin that Newell thought he could have put his middle finger and thumb around his thighs. His ribcage stuck out accentuating his lack of stomach, his sunken eyes were closed and his lower jaw dropped. Only a guttural sound from his throat indicated that some form of life was still present. Newell crossed the isle chatting to those who were still conscious. He observed that some had limbs missing amputated without anaesthetic because of gangrene, while others had huge rotting holes in their legs due to tropical ulcers.[[707]](#footnote-707) Such descriptions contradicted the subsequent official reports which noted that no more than 10% in the worst camps required prolonged treatment for 10 days or more.[[708]](#footnote-708) Similarly reports to the press emphasised the fact that, although they were undernourished, 90% of the prisoners were relatively healthy.

Other clandestine personnel who were already in Thailand had been acting with the cooperation of the local authorities for some time, albeit in a manner governed by their need to maintain their cover.[[709]](#footnote-709) Following orders to begin to approach prisoner of war camps the clandestine Force 136 and ‘E’ group and American OSS teams made contact with the local authorities and Japanese army representatives. With the arrival of the contact teams the situation in Thailand and Bangkok came quickly under Allied control, as the Japanese cooperated with the operations.[[710]](#footnote-710) The clandestine forces in Thailand were advised that they could expect ‘assistance on a liberal scale’ from the local Siamese authorities, orders suggested that small parties of prisoners would be moved towards airstrips where they could be flown to safety.[[711]](#footnote-711)

Mountbatten’s original plans which aimed to gain a foothold in Malaya and liberate Singapore were codenamed Operations ZIPPER and TIDERACE. Although the forces and shipping assembled for the operations were now ideally located to take part in the recovery operations, it had not been possible to equip the ships with the necessary medical parties, stores and clothing prior to their departure. In these circumstances, it was not recommended that the TIDERACE shipping should be used to return the recovered prisoners and internees to the United Kingdom.[[712]](#footnote-712) Regardless of the general Japanese cooperation with the recovery operation, Mountbatten still wanted a show of strength, and called for the earlier plans for the assault on Malaya and Singapore to be, somewhat symbolically, carried out. It was not until the 5th of September before the ships of the TIDERACE convoy arrived at Singapore. Following on from this the amphibious landings of Operation ZIPPER took place on the 9th of September were unopposed and formed part of the first wave of the recovery operations.[[713]](#footnote-713) By the 12th of September Mountbatten had formally received the surrender in Singapore. Again, there was a political dimension to these operations as Britain attempted to re-assert its influence both in the region and in particular over her former colony. Nonetheless, as the Japanese Army had withdrawn their forces from the streets this did not prove to be a simple task.

The recovery of prisoners had to be carried out in conjunction with the re-occupation of southern areas, and the British authorities were aware of the need to re-establish some form of ‘ordered Civil Government’ through armies of occupation. As land communications were largely unavailable, the evacuation was to be carried out primarily by sea or air. At the same time as this process was being carried out, the Allies needed to land sufficient supplies for armies of occupation.[[714]](#footnote-714) Although there was supposedly a degree of cooperation between the British and American forces on the ground, observations from British agents suggest that this was not always the case as we saw in the previous chapter the American’s were suspicious of British motives in the area. Given the somewhat ad-hoc nature of the recovery operations, it is perhaps not surprising that the various elements failed to communicate fully in connection with their own plans. In spite of clear orders to the contrary, it appears that the American OSS operatives were determined to move any U.S. prisoners they found, and were ‘not paying slightest attention’ to SACSEA directives.[[715]](#footnote-715) In light of these movements the British operatives also sought permission to move their own prisoners as the Americans made the British ‘look rather foolish.’[[716]](#footnote-716) Due to the limited numbers of aircraft and shipping available, men could only be liberated from their camps as transport became available. The RAPWI operations took into account not only the severity of the conditions in the various camps, as detailed below they were also influenced by the behaviour of some groups of prisoners.[[717]](#footnote-717)

In areas such as the Netherlands East Indies calls for independence from the Dutch and the power vacuum created by the withdrawal of the Japanese troops resulted in difficulties for recovery operations. The British and American decisions played a key role in the fate of the Netherlands East Indies. In April 1944, the Dutch established an East Indian government-in-exile near Brisbane. From October they applied pressure in Washington and London, through their representatives at SEAC headquarters in Kandy. The Dutch aimed to have numbers of their troops available as soon as the war ended with Japan. To this end they trained five thousand marines in the United States. However, proposals to train more troops in the United Sates, and plans to move a further 30,000 troops to Australia were blocked by the Australian Prime Minister following domestic opposition.[[718]](#footnote-718)

Orders given to Mountbatten to attempt to reassert Britain’s influence over her former colonies also impacted on the recovery operations in the Netherlands East Indies, and at a meeting in Kandy at the end of August 1945, Mountbatten told the Dutch representative, Dr Van Mook, that in view of the shortage of transport and the priority of Malaya, Singapore and Saigon no allied troops would enter Java or Sumatra before 4th October. Notwithstanding the delay, no change was contemplated in the application of the civil affairs agreement between the British and Dutch government of 24th August. This agreement suggested that the Dutch would re-establish their authority as the result of the Allied reoccupation.[[719]](#footnote-719)

To add to the difficulties faced by those involved in the recovery operation in the power vacuum created by the Japanese capitulation various groups, including some who had assisted the Allied clandestine operations in southern areas, took the opportunity to stake their claim for independence. In the Netherlands East Indies, the Japanese had encouraged the local population to rebel against their former Dutch colonial masters. It was not until September that the Dutch began to realise that they would not be dealing with a political vacuum, but with an independence movement that had proclaimed an independent Republic of Indonesia just two days after the Japanese surrender. Moreover, the delay in the Allies attempting to regain control left the Republic time to appoint a president and vice president, a cabinet of ministers was formed, and a constitution was drawn up. The Republic also had time to create its own armed forces and take control of substantial areas of Java. Due to a lack of intelligence the Dutch knew little of the growing independence movement, and even when in September 1945, they received intelligence reports suggesting that a Republican Army which numbered up to 50,000 men, it was assumed that they would not pose a threat to the Dutch military reoccupation. [[720]](#footnote-720) In this way the Dutch underestimated the strength of the support for both the independence movement and the strength of its leadership.

As the Allied forces were in no position to assume control, Mountbatten was forced to call on the Japanese authorities to maintain law and order, for their part the republican forces armed themselves by acquiring weapons both from the Japanese and also by storming the Japanese arsenal at Surabaya.[[721]](#footnote-721) Mountbatten gave temporary control of the situation to the Japanese commander of the Southern Army, Field Marshal Count Terauchi. His original plan was to delay the military re-occupation until the arrival of the 26th Division in early October.[[722]](#footnote-722) It was stressed in communiqués that the ‘so called Indonesian Republic’ which was set up by the Japanese was ‘not recognised’ by the Allies and that all RAPWI staffs should be instructed to ‘deal only with the Japanese military authorities’.[[723]](#footnote-723) As armed groups patrolled the streets Dutch colonists, many of whom had been born in the Far East and had never been to Holland, were now threatened by nationalist groups.[[724]](#footnote-724) While the Japanese were ordered that they should not recognise the Republic, on the 17th of August in this order was disobeyed and practically the whole of the civil administration had been passed over to the republic before the first Allied landing.[[725]](#footnote-725) Initial reports regarding the potential numbers of prisoners and internees suggested that there was a far larger number than was originally anticipated, and this prompted Mountbatten to revise his earlier plans. A small SOE force was sent to Batavia, and its report on the conditions they found in the camps brought the despatch of an advanced naval force to put a RAPWI Control Office on the island.[[726]](#footnote-726)

Although the full details of the recovery operations in the Netherlands East Indies lie outside the scope of the present study, the political unrest which developed in the Netherlands East Indies added greatly to the difficulties faced by RAPWI teams attempting to recover former prisoners and internees from the area.[[727]](#footnote-727) The declaration of the Indonesian Republic resulted in numbers of Dutch prisoners not being allowed to return to their homes in Java and Sumatra. Julie Summers noted that Dutch prisoners had to remain in camps in Thailand where they were trained to fight, and many former Dutch prisoners were still in Thailand some 12 months after the end of the war.[[728]](#footnote-728) In comparison, although the great majority of British prisoners began the first stages of their journeys homeward comparatively quickly, this did not stop some complaining with respect to the length of time they were held in camps before they were recovered.

**RAPWI (Retention of All Prisoners of War Indefinitely)[[729]](#footnote-729)**

Mountbatten promised that the prisoners and internees would start their homeward journeys as soon as was possible. In the notification sent to the camps he stated ‘this has been a long war; but from the time you fell into enemy hands you have never been forgotten either in England or among the armies that have defeated the Japanese. I hope that it will now be only a matter of a few weeks at most before you are on your way home.’[[730]](#footnote-730) However jubilation quickly turned to frustration, as men naturally wanted to be on their way home at the earliest possible time. Although some camps were cleared relatively quickly and former prisoners were on the first stages of their homeward journeys on the day the MASTIFF Operations commenced, others had to wait several weeks before being recovered.

As the MASTIFF Operations began, Allied aircraft landed in Bangkok’s Don Muang airport[[731]](#footnote-731) and from there the recovered prisoners were flown to reception centres in the Rangoon area to begin the first stages of their journeys home.[[732]](#footnote-732) As noted in the previous chapter, it was originally planned that all recovered prisoners were to be sent to reception centres in India. However, this was later changed[[733]](#footnote-733) and only those who were considered to be hospital cases were flown to Bangalore, to begin the first stages of their recovery from the effects of disease and malnutrition.[[734]](#footnote-734) Records demonstrate that some of those who returned to the United Kingdom were only fit to travel many months later; although official records document men still returning up to October 1946, they also record that 40 former prisoners remained in hospital at this time.[[735]](#footnote-735)

In line with the plans made in Whitehall during the recovery process priority was given to the recovery of the sick, and orders made it clear no other distinctions were to be made between ranks, service or nationalities. The majority of sick RAPWI were evacuated to India, apart from a small number who were recovered to Ceylon by Sunderland flying boats which had been used to carry Red Cross parcels to Singapore.[[736]](#footnote-736) The initial plans suggested that recovered prisoners and internees were not to be held in the theatre of operations longer than necessary, and were to be given top priority in repatriation.[[737]](#footnote-737) Although the Japanese had been moving large numbers of prisoners to the Bangkok area, E Group reported that the Thai authorities had agreed that some 1600 former prisoners could be evacuated from Bangkok daily, therefore it was considered that the concentration of prisoners in this area ‘would not present any major difficulties.’[[738]](#footnote-738)

The recovery operations were prioritised by conditions on the ground. Summers suggested that the initial RAPWI operations focused on getting prisoners out of the Bangkok area, ‘where discipline had collapsed and troops were making up for lost time in the city’s restaurants and brothels.’[[739]](#footnote-739) Naturally conditions varied between areas and once aid began to arrive, prisoners in well-established camps who were suffering fewer hardships and those where discipline was under control were perhaps of a lesser concern to those organising the recovery operations. Summers noted that when Colonel Toosey made enquiries about the recovery of his own men, he was informed that they were of lower priority as they were ‘well-disciplined and not causing trouble.’[[740]](#footnote-740)

Although conditions were improving, this did not stop some questioning the length of time they were held when others were already on the first stages of their homeward journeys. As weeks went by, Mountbatten was given the nickname “Linger Longer Louis” by some British prisoners who were awaiting liberation.[[741]](#footnote-741) Although they were unhappy with the situation the natural humour of soldiers during times of adversity, had not left the men; the perceived chaos and delays in the operation brought alternatives for Army acronyms: SEAC was dubbed Supreme Example of Absolute Chaos, and the RAPWI operation was dubbed Retention of All Prisoners of War Indefinitely. However, others had a more realistic grasp of the difficulties involved in the recovery operations, and acknowledged that ‘a POW easily gets an exaggerated idea of his own importance and considers that all operations should be aimed at getting him out.’[[742]](#footnote-742) While the former prisoners waited their turn to be sent on the first stage of their journeys home, the British authorities attempted to begin their rehabilitation.

Jones and Wessely noted that the newly formed Directorate of Army Psychiatry (DAP) set up a controlled study involving repatriated prisoners of war. The military psychiatrists identified an adjustment disorder which they classified as ‘a psychological form of ‘caisson disease’, which required a process referred to as re-education, rather than formal psychological treatment.[[743]](#footnote-743) Caisson disease is more commonly referred to as ‘the bends’ and the implication was that the sudden exposure to a different set of circumstances other than those of the prison camp can cause mental problems for prisoners of war. In an effort to attempt to begin the process of re-education[[744]](#footnote-744) during their time awaiting evacuation, former prisoners were provided with newspapers, books, copies of music and gramophone records, which had been popular throughout the war. In addition, Army Education Corps personnel arranged for films of an ‘entertaining and educational nature’ to be shown along with organised entertainments, games for the fit, and lectures on current world affairs.[[745]](#footnote-745) In this way efforts to commence the rehabilitation of the men began relatively early in the recovery process, and those taking part in the RAPWI operations were keen to dispel the impression that the prisoners’ welfare had been dismissed by the outside world. As a means of beginning the rehabilitation of the former prisoners, members of the recovery teams attempted to fill in the gaps in their knowledge of the war, and brought news of the changes which had occurred in Britain during the previous years. This process continued throughout their homeward journeys.

As Allied personnel entered camps the former prisoners were suddenly exposed to new expressions and new words, however some of the information contained in the papers which began to reach camps highlighted the changes which had occurred in the previous years. As illustrated papers such as ‘Punch’ arrived in the camp library one prisoner noted that the jokes fell flat, as ‘most of the jokes refer to things which do not mean a thing to us.’[[746]](#footnote-746) Other publications such as *Weekly Illustrated* and *Picture Posts* nonetheless, filled prisoners with nostalgia and homesickness. However, some of the news was far less welcome and one prisoner only learned of the death of his wife as he read *The* *Times* which was dated two weeks previously.[[747]](#footnote-747) Major Dicker noted that when newspapers began to arrive from Britain, the stories did not always match the idealised picture of home that many had dreamed of over the previous years. He was struck by the amount of crime which was reported after having lived in a ‘crime free’ environment. He stated, ‘the British newspapers recorded their catalogues of murder, rape and robbery, apparently the Britain of 1945 was not quite the kind of paradise we had thought it was, in fact I had a sneaking feeling that if might be better if we stayed where we were.’[[748]](#footnote-748) This pointed to the fact that the idealised picture of Britain that many prisoners had built up over the years of captivity did not necessarily represent the reality the former prisoners could expect on their return. As will be discussed below when former prisoners received replies to their initial contact with family and loved-ones, some found that circumstances had changed in the years they had been away.

The use of aircraft allowed a relatively large number of prisoners to be transported quickly from French Indo China and Bangkok to reception centres in Rangoon. In addition, the efforts to supply Java enabled some prisoners to also be flown from the area rapidly to Singapore, on transport planes which had been used to land supplies. Similarly, some prisoners were able to be flown directly to Australia and New Zealand by the 27th of September.[[749]](#footnote-749) Official figures suggested that during the evacuation by air from Siam and French Indo China some 16,624 were flown to Rangoon, and 5000 to Singapore and a further 2,500 direct to their home countries.[[750]](#footnote-750)

While this appears to have been a largely successful operation, ‘*The News of the World*’ suggested that there had been ‘innumerable crashes’ involving transport aircraft; however at SEAC it was suggested that just one aircraft had been lost, and the newspaper headline was ‘so far from the truth as to be malicious.’[[751]](#footnote-751) While the claim that there were ‘innumerable’ crashes may have been an exaggeration, the official report on the recovery operations recorded that 19,543 prisoners of war and internees were evacuated by air from Burma, Thailand, French Indo China and Netherlands East Indies. However, records also demonstrate that these flights resulted in the loss of 12 aircraft, resulting in the deaths of 64 recovered prisoners and 59 aircrew.[[752]](#footnote-752) Although the headline from the newspaper was perhaps misleading, the official report into the operations appears to suggest that SEAC were not kept up to date with the loss of life of those involved in the recovery operations.

**Reception Centres**

Prior to the commencement of recovery operations reception centres needed to be both equipped and staffed. This was carried out by replacing the fighting troops and equipment which were originally required for the assault on Malaya with administrative and medical units, along with quantities of supplies and equipment required for the recovery operations.[[753]](#footnote-753) The large numbers of prisoners and internees being recovered resulted in additional problems in reception areas. The decision that India should only accept its own recovered personnel and those of other nationalities who were in need of immediate medical attention resulted in transit and holding facilities being made available in Burma and Ceylon; in Burma, the Rangoon area was utilised to hold large numbers of former prisoners who had been rapidly flown out of Thailand and French Indo China, as well as smaller numbers from Malaya. Ceylon was used for the reception of large numbers of prisoners coming from Malaya, Sumatra and later Java.[[754]](#footnote-754)

Accounts detailing the reception the men experienced in the Rangoon area describe how the recovered prisoners were met from their planes by nurses and after a brief medical examination, the former prisoners entered tents which contained tables with white table cloths, plates of sandwiches and real tea.[[755]](#footnote-755) The men were then transported to hospitals in the Rangoon area, where they were immediately allocated hospital beds and were assessed for any infections or treatment which was necessary.[[756]](#footnote-756) After their initial reception the men were medically examined and Dicker described the process involving ‘bossy nurses’ who did not seem to mind if the recovered prisoners were clothed or not.[[757]](#footnote-757) For many these were the first white women they had seen since their capture years earlier. They had lived in a virtually exclusively male environment for years and the attitudes of nurses who had been used to dealing with men, highlighted the changes which had occurred while they had been in captivity.

Although the accommodation available was later described in the official reports of the RAPWI operations as ‘barely adequate’[[758]](#footnote-758), this was not an accusation which came from the former prisoners. For many of the prisoners these staging and recovery areas presented the first sign of a return to a normal life. For those flown directly from camps they found they were suddenly in a different world, and the change of conditions came as a shock.[[759]](#footnote-759) Major Dicker noted that for the first time in nearly four years the men slept on real beds. He discovered that they were now ‘RAPWIs’ and that according to notices posted around the barrack room, we are expected to be ‘disorientated’ and ‘confused’. He made it clear that ‘nothing was further from the truth was we are all now well-fed, comparatively fit, and dedicated survivors.’ [[760]](#footnote-760)

Once the men were deemed to be fit for onward travel they were then transferred to Forward Area Reinforcement Holding Units, where they awaited their turn for shipping to be allocated for the last stage of their journeys to the United Kingdom. As we saw in the previous chapter, national Red Cross societies had made plans for their role in the recovery operations, and throughout the Far East British Red Cross workers attempted to care for the needs of the recovered prisoners and internees. Cambray and Briggs recorded the work of the British, Indian and Australian Red Cross welfare officers, both male and female, who attempted to assist prisoners on each of the stages of their journeys. While some helped at airfields and docks others went daily to service hospitals, or worked at transit camps for internees. Similarly, at Indian rest camps other Red Cross workers assisted with documentation, stores and canteens. When prisoners from Siam passed through Rangoon they received comforts, welfare officers also arranged entertainment, and for those fit enough sight-seeing trips as well as bathing and shopping excursions. For others who were hospitalised, welfare officers waited on them and encouraged them to occupy themselves with ‘diversional [sic] therapy.’ [[761]](#footnote-761)

**Return Transport to Britain**

It had been agreed by Joint Logistical Planning Committee on the 3rd of September that all recovered prisoners and internees who were considered to be fit to travel, should be on their way to Britain by the end of the month. This resulted in the decision that that there would be no advantage of sending some by the Air Trooping Scheme.[[762]](#footnote-762) Later reports suggested that the physical condition of the prisoners and internees, and the limitations of the transit camps on the Air Trunk Routes also made the mass evacuation by air impracticable.[[763]](#footnote-763) A number of former prisoners were nonetheless evacuated by air from Singapore and Rangoon to India, Ceylon, and in a limited number of cases to the United Kingdom.[[764]](#footnote-764) In September 1945, the UK authorities made arrangements for parties of less than 25 to be processed at the London District Assembly Centre. It was also suggested that arrivals by B.O.A.C. at Poole or Hurn would go to Southampton Transit Camp.[[765]](#footnote-765) Although the official report of the recovery operations suggested that those flown to the UK were primarily ‘urgent medical’ and ‘compassionate’ cases[[766]](#footnote-766), records also suggest that those transported in this way included higher ranking internees such as the Governor of the Straits Settlements and the Governor of Hong Kong who arrived in England as early as the 5th of September.[[767]](#footnote-767) It could be suggested that this method of recovery was exploited by those of higher rank and privilege who would not be expected to return with troops on long sea voyages.

The vast majority of prisoners returned by sea. However, due to the limited number of vessels available for RAPWI operations, plans attempted to ensure that the shipping was utilised to its maximum effect. The ships which were allocated to repatriate Australians from Singapore were utilised on return journeys to recover former Indian prisoners from the South Pacific area to India, or to assist the Commander-in-Chief British Pacific Fleet to evacuate personnel for areas under his control. The remainder of the shipping was utilised to build up stocks of supplies for Malaya and other occupational tasks, and on their return journeys also recovered Indian returnees to their homeland. However, the vessels which were allocated to repatriate former prisoners to the United Kingdom from Rangoon and Singapore were lost to the South East Asia Command pool of shipping after leaving Colombo, and could not be used for further RAPWI operations.[[768]](#footnote-768)

In addition to the purpose-built troopships, the Royal Navy provided other vessels such as aircraft carriers, as the lower decks were able to provide accommodation for large numbers of returning prisoners and internees. The recovery ships were loaded according to the health of the prisoners and internees, with troop decks being utilised at 50-60% of their normal capacity; the exact numbers onboard the ships depended on the condition of the prisoners and internees and on the number of women and children. All ships had to be stocked with special food and additional staff. These included medical and nursing personnel, as well as welfare workers.[[769]](#footnote-769) The provision of additional food and nursing staff allowed the men to continue their recovery during their homeward voyages.

As early as May 1945, during discussions at the War Office it had been suggested that the effect of a long sea voyage would be ‘very beneficial’ for those recovered from the Far East as it brought the advantage of ‘convalescence en route.’[[770]](#footnote-770) Although the men were medically examined prior to embarking on return shipping, one report from the southern area stated that ‘no less than 1500 personnel passed through one ship’s dispensary in the first 24 hours of the voyage and the ship’s hospital was full within a few hours of the ship leaving Singapore.’[[771]](#footnote-771) Although they had already been medically examined it is possible to suggest that some prisoners hid the full extent of their medical conditions, fearing that this would delay their homeward voyages. Although many had already gained a great deal of weight since the Japanese surrender such voyages allowed the men to gain further weight and receive additional treatment for the physical problems that they had encountered in the Far East, prior to their arrival back in the United Kingdom. The appearance of many of the prisoners had already changed markedly in the weeks after the surrender, and the voyages home continued this trend. As will be detailed below, it could be suggested that the rapid weight gain masked the effects of the systematic malnourishment that the prisoners had experienced, both to their families and the wider British public on their arrival back in the United Kingdom.

By mid-September Dicker was transferred to a Forward Area Reinforcement Holding Unit, located in a hutted camp to the north of Rangoon. He suggested that at this point the administrative system appeared to have collapsed, and the former prisoners had to set up their own organisation. Each former prisoner was given a number when he arrived in the camp, and the men were loaded onto ships in sequence with these numbers. Dicker was loaded on the troopship *Worcestershire* on the 17th of September.[[772]](#footnote-772) In contrast to this, Summers noted that when Colonel Toosey was told that his men would be split up into small parties and sent home on a number of ships, he made a cable to a ‘great friend’ who was head of shipping in Delhi and was able to arrange for them to come home on one ship.[[773]](#footnote-773) Obviously the arrangements for the availability and loading of shipping were open to some manipulation and potential corruption.

The rehabilitation of the men continued and during their voyages and the British Red Cross played their part filling in the gaps in the lives of the men by answering questions in connection with the events of the war and issuing books and magazines.[[774]](#footnote-774) The duties of the British Red Cross welfare officers posted on the repatriation ships were not officially detailed and varied from ship to ship. Cambray and Briggs noted that the individuals concerned assisted with the ‘comfort and entertainment of the repatriates’ which the ship’s staff could not reasonably be expected to undertake. They answered innumerable questions with regard to the conditions they would face on their return such as details of rationing and coupons.[[775]](#footnote-775) On board the returning ships welfare officers attempted to both keep the men, women and children occupied by organising entertainments such as whist tournaments as well as various sporting ventures and competitions.[[776]](#footnote-776)

Many of the returning prisoners noted the warmth of their welcome at various stages of their homeward journeys which at times was spontaneous and at others well organised. Toosey noted that on the first stage of his journey the men from his camp travelled by train towards Bangkok; at each station the train was met by an official welcoming committee with food, flowers and drink for the prisoners. He recounted that flowers were thrown onto the train, school children danced and sang songs, in addition to messages of good luck and presents from groups such as boy scouts, local schools and Chinese traders. The quantities of food provided by locals eventually resulted in the former prisoners arranging to take it in turns to eat the food provided when the train reached stations en route. As will be discussed below those who travelled across North America and Canada similarly experienced receptions as their trains stopped at various towns and cities on their journeys,[[777]](#footnote-777) although this warmth was not always reflected in the welcome some ships received on their arrival back in Britain.

In addition, official orders also arranged that ships bound for the United Kingdom were greeted at ports such as Colombo with rapturous welcomes from the crews of the assembled shipping. The JLPC recommended that details of the reception and the facilities which were available at Colombo be passed on to the Officer Commanding Troops on the transports so that the RAPWI passengers could be informed of this, as the former prisoners were anxious to put on their regimental crests and service ribbons.[[778]](#footnote-778) During their stay at Colombo canteens and concerts were arranged, some returnees were able to make visits to the local area and an enquiry office was set up.[[779]](#footnote-779) From their various starting points, prisoners from Thailand and surrounding areas then travelled towards the Suez Canal, and before entering they were kitted out at nearby ports with clothing more suitable to the British climate, where they again were met with extremely warm welcomes, and from there travelled on towards the Mediterranean.

Following their recovery, the prisoners were allowed to send both cables and mail informing their relatives and loved-ones that they were safe in Allied hands, and would soon be returning home. The British Red Cross attempted to assist in the location of families for former prisoners, and was able to provide recent addresses for those relatives who were registered with the organisation. The bureaucracy surrounding the recovery operations in theory allowed a percentage of replies to these communications to reach some on their return voyages; in reality many failed to receive any news from their families as their knowledge of the addresses of their loved-ones was at least three or four years out of date. Indeed, some regular troops had been in the Far East for some time before the Japanese attacks occurred, and families and next-of-kin had moved or been forced to move due to the circumstances of war. The replies which were sent from the United Kingdom had to be delivered by air in bundles which were sorted for each ship according to the nominal rolls of passengers, and distributed in time for ships as they arrived in ports.[[780]](#footnote-780) In this way some replies from the U.K. were able to meet the vessels at the various stops where they refuelled and re-stocked such as Colombo, at ports near the entrance of the Suez Canal, and Gibraltar. It was here that some of the prisoners realised that circumstances had changed in the years they had been away.

Dicker noted that when he had reached Colombo the ship was met with a ‘flood’ of cablegrams from ‘our nearest and dearest’. Nonetheless, the one he personally received from what he considered during his time as a prisoner to be his fiancée, was ‘rather more formal’ than he had expected this in turn gave him ‘considerable food for thought.’[[781]](#footnote-781) Summers noted that on board the ship transporting Colonel Toosey, cables met the prisoners as they reached Suez. Messages arrived from wives, who believing that their husbands were dead had found new boyfriends, and from others who had divorced the prisoners in their absence and re-married. [[782]](#footnote-782) Barbra Hately-Broad suggested that the question of women re-marrying after receiving official notification that their husbands were dead when they were actually prisoners of war, continued to present problems both during and immediately after the war had ended. The women had re-married on the grounds of official information, and the War Office decreed that it was up to the women concerned to make up their own minds who they would live with following the return of their former husbands.[[783]](#footnote-783) On board Toosey’s ship, the *SS Orbita* ‘The Jilted Lovers’ Club’ was formed, and regular meetings were held for the rest of their homeward voyage.[[784]](#footnote-784)

By the end of September, a total of 53,747 men had been evacuated out of SEAC; of this figure 2,216 were moved by air. By the end of October, the total figure had risen to 71,000. After this date the evacuation continued more slowly as the balance of RAPWI became available either on release from hospital or deferred repatriation.[[785]](#footnote-785) In total 96,575 prisoners and internees were eventually recovered from areas covered by SEAC of these 23,923 prisoners of war who were referred to as being ‘British.’[[786]](#footnote-786)

**Warnings to Prisoners regarding the information they could pass on to the Press**

As we have seen in the second chapter, the limited number of statements which were made in the House of Commons which gave some details of the conditions the men had experienced came as the result of the imminent publication of news elsewhere in the world. The failure to suppress such stories and the threat that uncensored details would reach the U.K., effectively forced the British government to make announcements, in an effort to control the information reaching Britain.[[787]](#footnote-787) The post-war government continued this trend and although there was certainly no ban, care was taken concerning the news released to the Press following the end of hostilities.

Although statements were indeed factual, they naturally hid the full extent of the hardships that the men had suffered. One example of this came in a War Office statement issued to the Press on 27th August 1945, it was reported that ‘Allied representatives sent to Mukden, Weihsien and Peking have reported that the general condition of the inmates in the prisoner of war and internment camps at those places was good although all were under weight and some 10% would require hospital treatment.’[[788]](#footnote-788) While virtually all prisoners were undernourished and many were suffering from a variety of diseases, the realities of the 10% who needed to be treated in hospital was that their condition was so poor that many were not initially expected to survive.

Although reporters were allowed to visit camps such as Changi, the advice to prisoners appears to have aimed at ensuring that the men did not supply the full details of their experiences. On the 3rd September HQ ALFSEA sent a message to all control staff to be distributed at reception centres and hospitals. The notice was to be seen by all Allied prisoners of war and internees, it read:

You are news now and anything you say in public or to press reporter is liable to be published in the Press of the whole world. You will have direct or indirect knowledge of the fate of many of your comrades who died in enemy hands as a result of brutality or neglect. Your story if published in the Press with the names of the victims will cause much unnecessary unhappiness to their relatives and friends.[[789]](#footnote-789)

In addition the instructions to prisoners stated ‘if you had not been recovered and had died any form of unpleasant death at the hands of the Japs [sic] you would not have wished your family to have been harrowed by details of that death in the Press.’[[790]](#footnote-790) Although falling short of banning prisoners from talking to correspondents, it suggested that it was to be made clear that names of any victims of atrocities were not for publication and that the men should ‘take pains to spare the feelings of others.’[[791]](#footnote-791) Instead of talking to members of the press, arrangements were made for the men to tell their stories to interrogating officers.[[792]](#footnote-792) Such orders were designed to appeal to the loyalty that prisoners undoubtedly felt to their fallen comrades, in order to prevent unnecessary details from reaching the press. In reality, many were unsure of the amount of detail they could pass on to reporters and this had the effect, in line with government wishes, of preventing them from giving details of their experiences.

Similarly, instructions to those dealing with recovered prisoners in northern areas warned that although ‘security certificates’ were not considered necessary, prisoners should be warned ‘against imparting intelligence information to unauthorised persons.’[[793]](#footnote-793) Instead recovered prisoners were similarly given the opportunity to pass on any information to an Intelligence Officer for transmission to the Appropriate U. S. or British Intelligence Branch, especially in relation to War Crimes.[[794]](#footnote-794) Other express orders went further in attempting to control the information given by repatriates. Instructions in leaflets handed to Royal Navy, Naval Ratings and Royal Marines other ranks prisoners during their return voyages, simply stated ‘you should avoid giving interviews to the Press or the B.B.C. unless permission is given.’[[795]](#footnote-795) Such warnings gave the impression that the returning should only talk to official interrogators in connection with their experiences, and this stopped many openly discussing their experiences.

**Resentment and ill-discipline: Other Ranks, Officers and Army Bull**

The British authorities were naturally concerned with issues surrounding the rehabilitation of hundreds of thousands of prisoners of war. In February 1944, a report to the War Office on the psychological aspects of the rehabilitation of repatriated prisoners of war by Lt. Col. A.T.M. Wilson, R.A.M.C., suggested that for all men who had been overseas for long periods, there could be the potential of difficulties in readapting to life in Britain; he suggested that ‘in many cases this difficulty leads to prolonged limitation of the individual and social capacities of the men concerned, and, in some cases, may prove permanently incapacitating.’[[796]](#footnote-796) The sheer numbers of men returning to the United Kingdom potentially presented Britain with one of its most important post-war issues.

However medical studies relating to the mentality of British prisoners were of course based on the experiences of those in Allied hands in Europe,[[797]](#footnote-797) until men began to be recovered from the Far East there was little indication as to the way that they had coped with life in Japanese hands. When T.F. Rodger, the psychiatrist attached to Mountbatten’s staff studied the attitudes of prisoners released from Rangoon gaol, he gave the impression that British prisoners in the Far East fared better than their counterparts held in German hands. He suggested that one of the reasons for this was that, unlike the situation in Europe, Officers had remained with Other Ranks for a longer period.[[798]](#footnote-798) In spite of the fact that this study was carried out using the experiences of a very small group of prisoners, it gave the impression that the observations would be representative of the experiences of the men throughout the Far East. In contrast to this, some Other Ranks viewed the way their Officers behaved in a negative manner and the very fact that Officers had remained with Other Ranks, served to highlight the disparity between the experiences of the two groups.

Issues surrounding the attitude and comparative experiences between Officers and Other Ranks remain divisive. The views expressed by some Other Ranks suggested that their resentment came from a combination of factors. Although the majority of Officers behaved in an exemplary fashion towards the welfare of the men others were accused of not standing up to the Japanese, or cooperating with Japanese orders at the expense of the wellbeing of their men. Roland noted instances of collaboration with the enemy were sometimes ‘real and deliberate’ at other times they were unintended or thoughtless, and largely innocent and sometimes unproven. He however acknowledged that Officers were often put in an unenviable position when dealing with the Japanese.[[799]](#footnote-799) Sibylla Jane Flower noted this situation was especially true for British Officers, some of whom were appointed POW camp commander by the Japanese regardless of their seniority. She suggested that the policy of ‘limited co-operation’ was adopted by the most resourceful camp commanders, as a means of ensuring the survival of as many prisoners as possible, meant that the dividing line between co-operation and collaboration was narrow.[[800]](#footnote-800)

Following his return Lt. Col. Toosey wrote ‘once you were made equal in a POW camp the real man came out. It didn’t matter what his rank was, if he was a man he was a man, and that was all there was to it.’[[801]](#footnote-801) In contrast to this, there were certainly accusations that Officers had fared far better at times than their men with regards to the quality and quality of food which was available to them, as they had greater opportunities to supplement their own rations with payments received from the Japanese. In addition, Roland pointed out that although in some camps Officers and Other Ranks received the same calorific intake, however, unlike Officers the men were required to carry out arduous and physical work, and this widened the gap between their calorific needs and calorific supplies.[[802]](#footnote-802) In turn this appears to have fostered some resentment that the Officers had a generally easier time than the men in their charge.[[803]](#footnote-803)

The controversy surrounding officers remains complex and nuanced. Brian MacArthur quoted Lt. Col. Francis Dillon who simply stated, ‘men without officers were dead men’. MacArthur suggested those officers who maintained discipline even in the worst conditions both raised morale and saved lives.[[804]](#footnote-804) Flower stated that the retention of Officers up to the rank of lieutenant-colonel in the camps on the railway was a central factor in keeping military discipline.[[805]](#footnote-805) Such observations contrasted the death rates among native workers (*Romusha*) on the Burma-Thailand Railway, with those of POW camps. Although the two sets of workers were at times sited in close proximity to each other, the native workers died in far greater numbers.

Kinvig suggests that the numbers of native workers who died during the construction of the Burma-Thailand Railway can only be estimated due to the paucity of reliable records. He claimed that on the Burma end of the line out of a native workforce of 178,000 somewhere between 40,000 and 75,000 native labourers had died. In comparison on the southern end of the line the workforce was smaller at 91,000 nonetheless Japanese records suggest that almost 33,000 had died.[[806]](#footnote-806) In comparison he noted that of the 61,806 prisoners who were taken to work on the railway, at least 12,399 had died by the end of the war.[[807]](#footnote-807) There was a fine line between life and death in the camps, a good Officer could make the difference between the two. While these observations may have been valid, there was however a degree of resentment which was borne out of the privileges that some Officers enjoyed over their men. Brian MacArthur gives numerous examples whereby British Officers retained their privileges of rank when Other Ranks around them suffered.[[808]](#footnote-808)

The claims from Other Ranks relating to the lack of equality are backed up by the comparative death rates of Officers compared to those of their men. Brian MacArthur noted the survival rate amongst Officers was telling; in the Australian F Force just 3 Officers died in comparison with 1065 Other Ranks, in H Force 26 British officers died, a death rate of 6 per cent, in comparison to 627 deaths among the Other Ranks which equated to 37 per cent.[[809]](#footnote-809) Although judging any situation with bald statistics is fraught with danger, such stark figures strongly suggest there were differences between the experiences between the two groups. When examining the comparative death rates amongst Australian prisoners of war, Joan Beaumont noted that among the Australians of Gull Force: among captains and lieutenants 19% died in captivity, among NCO’S 62% died and 75.2% of privates.[[810]](#footnote-810) It is not surprising that there was a degree of bitterness expressed by Other Ranks towards those who they considered should have been looking after their welfare. When examining comparative mortality rates in Hong Kong, Charles Roland came to the ‘inescapable’ conclusion that ‘one’s lot was significantly improved if one had the good luck to be an Officer.’[[811]](#footnote-811)

Nonetheless, some Officers like Colonel Toosey were respected by their men for standing up to the Japanese at great personal risk, while taking difficult decisions for the good of the camp. Indeed, on his return voyage, Toosey was forced to take command of the ship after articles were stolen from the captain’s cabin. His threat to stop the beer ration for the remainder of the trip meant that the articles were quickly returned.[[812]](#footnote-812) In contrast to this, the actions of some men on board ships repatriating former prisoners demonstrated a real resentment by some Other Ranks to the re-imposition of Army authority. The available reports demonstrated the depth of ill-feeling on ships returning from northern areas. On H.M.S Speaker the Commanding Officer noted ‘very few of the Officers and NCO’s seemed to carry any weight’, although he suggested that this was due to the fact that their authority had been undermined by the Japanese.[[813]](#footnote-813) On other ships the actions of a significant minority pointed to a general lack of discipline. On H.M.H.S. *Tjitjalenga* the Medical Officer suggested that there was a tendency for former prisoners to resent even medical discipline, furthermore there was a generally prevalent tendency to ‘make things just a little ‘difficult’ for people in charge.’[[814]](#footnote-814)

It was perhaps true to say that the re-imposition of discipline was a thorny issue. In one report from H.M.S *Speaker*, the Commanding Officer suggested that the individuals ‘who had come through it best were those who had achieved the highest skill in evading regulations.’[[815]](#footnote-815) He additionally pointed out that it was initially very hard to get the former prisoners to be punctual, or obey even minor rules. Nonetheless, he concluded that ‘by patience and firmness (and in one case cells) this improved as time went on.’[[816]](#footnote-816) One report from Australia suggested ‘it was quickly discovered that RAPWI differ considerably from any normal service personnel. While the majority gave no cause for complaint, and fully deserve the privileges and good treatment they receive, in contrast a minority were ‘extremely troublesome, abusing all privileges and lacking any kind of discipline.’[[817]](#footnote-817) These instances suggest that a significant minority of prisoners were unwilling to accept the re-imposition of authority, and at least part of the reason for this was their resentment of the actions of their Officers.

**British Contribution to the Recovery of Prisoners in Northern Areas**

When considering the recovery of prisoners from northern areas, British estimates suggested that there were some 16,000 British Commonwealth prisoners in areas allotted to the American Pacific Commands. Although the responsibility for the planning for the recovery operations naturally rested with the American Theatre Commanders, Commonwealth liaison staffs were advised to render all possible assistance.[[818]](#footnote-818) While the British Fleet had offered to cooperate in the recovery operation, by mid-August they had received no definite orders or requests from the Americans. It was initially unclear what part British or Australian personnel would play in the RAPWI process. Indeed, it was still uncertain as to who was responsible for transporting the prisoners and internees once they had been recovered.

The British involved in the recovery operations assumed that the Americans would at least deal with all nationalities recovered from the Japanese mainland, and elsewhere in areas such as Hong Kong the work would fall to the British Pacific Fleet.[[819]](#footnote-819) Eventually a request was received by the War Office from General MacArthur asking for 27 contact teams each with 1 Officer and 1 Other Rank and a large reception section of approximately 40 Officers and 160 Other Ranks to join the American organisation in Manila. As only nine contact teams were known to be on their way by air from the United Kingdom, and the remaining 236 could not arrive in Manila until the 10th of October, it was decided that the teams should be sourced locally. Although a few personnel volunteered from the Army and Air Force serving in Australia, the bulk of the teams were found from the British Pacific Fleet.[[820]](#footnote-820)

Prisoners in northern areas also learned of the end of the war in a variety of ways, and as in southern areas there was a general reluctance on the part of the Japanese to admit that the war had been lost. One prisoner in a camp in Taiwan recorded that by the 17th of August, he had already received news that the Russians had invaded Manchuria and were ‘sweeping all before them’. In addition, several of the prisoners who were working outside the camp, heard that the war had ended the day before. He wrote that after hearing these rumours, the men were ‘living on hopes and scared of being thrown back into despair.’[[821]](#footnote-821) Nonetheless, for prisoners starved of news of the outside world it was not uncommon for speculation to sweep through camps. However, after ‘lights out’ the men heard a ‘horrible wailing’ from the Japanese, which gave them further hope. The next morning a British Officer announced that ‘peace negotiations’ were taking place, and the C.C. hoped we would be free soon.’[[822]](#footnote-822) Despite this news, the men remained under Japanese control. He recorded that on the 22nd of August, the Japanese Camp Commander ‘issued orders that things [were to] carry on as before’, and sentries were told to shoot any prisoners who were ‘outside the camp area.’[[823]](#footnote-823) However, such experiences can be contrasted with those of prisoners on the Japanese Home Islands where at the end of the war many guards simply abandoned their camps. As noted above this course of action was officially sanctioned by the Japanese authorities, as Felton pointed out guards were authorised to flee from their camps to avoid prosecution for their ill-treatment of prisoners ‘by immediately transferring or by fleeing without trace.’[[824]](#footnote-824) Indeed, guards who had treated prisoners poorly may have fled fearing reprisals from prisoners as the tables were turned.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the murder of Allied prisoners was officially sanctioned to prevent their recovery by Allied forces. Even in their weakened state of health, the Japanese authorities always regarded Allied prisoners as a potentially murderous group who were likely to attack their guards. Laurens van der Post pointed out that the Japanese had already arranged for the murder of prisoners to be coordinated with the Allied invasion of the South-east Asian theatre of war, which in southern areas was set as the 6th of September.[[825]](#footnote-825) In northern areas the American plans for a possible assault on the Japanese Home Islands anticipated that the Japanese would mobilise the whole country to fight against an Allied invasion. In these circumstances it would be safe to assume that large numbers of prisoners would have been murdered to prevent any chance they would act against the Japanese. In contrast to this the original planning for an assault on the Japanese Home Islands, anticipated that prisoners would be liberated as their camps were located during the Allied offensive. However, when it became clear the Japanese would surrender unconditionally and cooperate with the recovery operation, no alternative plan was available.[[826]](#footnote-826)

In the days following the surrender Marcel Junod the ICRC Delegate in Tokyo, and Monsieur Gorge the Swiss Minister in Tokyo, had already attempted to coordinate the RAPWI operations. Junod later stated that he had requested that the Japanese government increase food rations for all prisoners and internees.[[827]](#footnote-827) Notwithstanding the fact the Japanese had allowed limited inspections of some camps by representatives of the Protecting Power and the ICRC, they failed to inform neutral observers of the existence of large numbers of others. Junod later explained that although the Japanese authorities admitted to the existence of some 42 prisoner of war camps on the Japanese Home Islands, he eventually discovered that there were actually over 100 camps.[[828]](#footnote-828) Furthermore, Moorhead pointed out that Junod only discovered the existence of the camp at Ofuna in late September 1945, when he heard of it ‘almost by chance’ in the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[[829]](#footnote-829)

The seven main camps in Japan were Hakodate, Sendai, Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka, Hiroshima and Fukuoka. In each of the main areas the ‘camps’ were sub-divided into a number of smaller operations spread over the area concerned, as dictated by the needs of the Japanese. In order to supervise the evacuation of prisoners and internees, Junod arranged for seven groups of Delegates from the Red Cross and the Protecting Power to enter the camps in these areas.[[830]](#footnote-830) In spite of the fact that the Japanese authorities actively cooperated with the recovery operations they were also aware of the orders to destroy incriminating evidence. When Junod attempted to obtain travel documents he noted that Japanese officials seemed more occupied burning tons of papers and ‘compromising documents.’[[831]](#footnote-831) By the 24th August, Junod had established a plan with the Japanese authorities for the evacuation of prisoners of war; he arranged for them to be transported towards various ports by train, and also attempted to arrange hospital ships to be made available. By the 26thof August, he boarded an American cruiser and explained his proposed scheme.[[832]](#footnote-832) Regardless of his efforts, he was advised by telegram that he should take no action in connection with the movement of Allied prisoners of war to ports of embarkation. Instead he was informed that a strategy was already in place which provided for an orderly evacuation from camps.[[833]](#footnote-833)

Regardless of Allied fears that the Japanese would rebel against orders to surrender unconditionally, a Japanese delegation which left for Manila communicated their intentions to Allied General Headquarters; they made requests for aid from the ICRC for the prisoners in Manchuria, Korea, occupied China, Malaya, Indo-China, Thailand and the Dutch East Indies. In addition, the Japanese Government immediately liberated all civilians in occupied China, including Shanghai.[[834]](#footnote-834) Nonetheless, in the face of their apparent readiness to abide by the call for an unconditional surrender, a telegram from General MacArthur to the American War Department noted that the Japanese government appeared to suggest that the recovery operations should be carried out along the lines suggested by Junod, utilising Japanese personnel in conjunction with other independent agencies.[[835]](#footnote-835)

A message from the Japanese stated that their own preparations for the recovery process were underway, and with the cooperation of the Swiss and Red Cross Officials the prisoners and internees were being ‘adequately provided for’; it added ‘it seems unnecessary for the United States to send special personnel to get into contact with various camps.’[[836]](#footnote-836) In addition, the communiqué noted that although personnel assisting the recovery operations had been given ‘ample protection’, it was ‘impossible’ to guarantee the safety of all such personnel and concluded ‘we hope that such manner of contact is discontinued.’[[837]](#footnote-837) MacArthur had no intention of following the Japanese requests and given Japanese attitudes towards the welfare of prisoners hitherto, it would have been inconceivable to allow this course of action.

The American plan for the evacuation of prisoners envisaged that all recovered prisoners would initially travel to reception centres in Manila apart from ‘cot cases’ which would be sent directly to the United States on Hospital ships. The plans were subsequently modified and naval personnel and recovered Canadian prisoners were evacuated to Guam, as this route was shorter.[[838]](#footnote-838) Due to the shortage of suitable transport, General MacArthur sent telegrams to the War Office in an attempt to obtain additional British personnel shipping to assist in the recovery programme in American controlled areas. War Office proposals were made to utilise shipping which was en route to Australia and New Zealand, also acknowledged that any loss of shipping in this area could have serious repercussions for the movement of prisoners and internees within SEAC.[[839]](#footnote-839) As we have seen Mountbatten was forced to utilise vessels in the most economical manner, as ships which transported men back to the United Kingdom could not be replaced. In these circumstances, the British Pacific Fleet was asked to provide the necessary shipping to allow the operation to be carried out without undue delay.[[840]](#footnote-840) As in southern areas the Allies used stripped-out and converted aircraft carriers, or troop ships operating at a reduced capacity to avoid overcrowding in order to move the repatriates on the next stages of their journeys.

Although the recovery operations were only planned to begin following the signing of the formal surrender agreement, nonetheless, when the Allied fleet reached their anchorage in and around Tokyo Bay, it became obvious that plans needed to be hastily revised. Junod had informed the American’s of the appalling conditions he had witnessed in nearby camps just days before, suggesting that a quarter of the men he had met were on the verge of death.[[841]](#footnote-841) When advance parties from the Allied Fleet were sent to occupy strategic posts, they were met by prisoners of war who had left their camps in an effort to find help.[[842]](#footnote-842) When they saw Allied ships some of the former prisoners who had been camping out on nearby beaches, began to swim out to the approaching vessels. The first prisoners to be picked up by were a Royal Marine and a British soldier[[843]](#footnote-843) who were fished out of the water by an American patrol vessel, and were taken onboard H.M.S. *Duke of York*.[[844]](#footnote-844) Even at this stage of the recovery process, there were deaths among prisoners; General Sir Peter Whiteley later recalled that as the first American landing craft reached one beach some former prisoners were so delighted that they rushed down to greet their rescuers, and two were crushed to death as the first craft dropped its ramp.[[845]](#footnote-845)

When the Commander of the Third Fleet was informed that the prisoners were breaking out of their camps in the Tokyo area, a Special Task Group was established under the command of Commodore Simpson and the evacuation began immediately.[[846]](#footnote-846) In this way the situation on the ground resulted in the recovery operation beginning before the surrender was officially signed. Similarly, in other northern areas the American-led forces did not wait for the official signing of the Japanese surrender, and in similar circumstances to those occurring in southern areas the Americans began relief operations.

By late August, the United States forces began dropping leaflets advising the prisoners that the Japanese had surrendered, and that they would be evacuated as soon as was possible. The prisoners were informed that until they could be recovered, their supplies would be augmented by air-drops of U.S. food, clothing and medicines which would follow within a couple of hours.[[847]](#footnote-847) While the location of some camps was already known, and even though the Japanese were providing the locations of many additional camps, others were only found through aerial reconnaissance; once camps were identified, they were then re-visited daily by aircraft from the Fast Carrier Force or by U.S. Army aircraft from Okinawa, and aircrews made daily reports detailing the number of prisoners they had seen.[[848]](#footnote-848)

The methods employed for dropping supplies by air, nonetheless carried inherent dangers for prisoners. It appears that the combination of aid which contributed to the threat for those below. The supply drops frequently contained a mix of ‘storepedoes’ which were constructed from 56 gallon oil drums which had been welded together, and packed with supplies; these containers relied on parachutes to slow their descent. However, the cargo also included individual supplies which could be pushed out of planes without parachutes.[[849]](#footnote-849) Difficulties arose as inexperienced pilots frequently released the life-saving rations and medicines from lower altitudes which did not allow parachutes to open, or from higher altitudes which turned other supplies into deadly projectiles. The official report downplayed the dangers resulting from such drops, when it stated: ‘unfortunately a number of containers were dropped without or with inadequate parachutes and some casualties were caused among P.O.W. by containers falling through the roofs of huts or into crowds.’[[850]](#footnote-850) Nonetheless, accounts given by prisoners and others on the ground suggest that casualties and deaths occurred all too often as a result of the relief operations.

Descriptions suggest that prisoners were literally ‘bombed’ with Red Cross and other supplies. One account describes how provisions were released from a low altitude resulting in the deaths of two men and injuries to a further fourteen, as supplies hit the ground before their parachutes opened. On subsequent food drops the prisoner stated that he would watch how the pilots approached the camp and run in the opposite direction.[[851]](#footnote-851) Similarly in Taiwan a former prisoner stated ‘huge bales of oil drums full of tinned food dropped around us and unfortunately on us. We buried three men and sent several to hospital. Taihoku camp had two killed and several injured.’[[852]](#footnote-852) At Hamamatsu camp two servicemen had been killed and others injured by a drum of food dropped by parachute.[[853]](#footnote-853) Indeed, this appeared to continue after some camps had been cleared of prisoners. Marcel Junod recalled after the camp at Omori had been evacuated he had been given permission to distribute aid to both foreigners and Japanese who were destitute; he noted that that one consignment of boots ‘burst’ just a few yards from where he was standing.[[854]](#footnote-854) These few examples suggest that this was unfortunately an all too familiar occurrence.

While leaflets warned the men that they should not eat too much, after years of semi-starvation, this advice was frequently ignored. One prisoner wrote that the food rained down like ‘manna from heaven’. When containers split open on landing prisoners ran from box to box ‘like children at Christmas, picking up food and other luxuries’; he ran back to hide his ‘booty’ under his bed, before dashing back for the next lot and stated it was ‘impossible to resist gorging yourself.’[[855]](#footnote-855) Similar scenes were enacted throughout the northern area as men who had been receiving subsistence rations for years, suddenly changed their diet. Many of those fit enough to eat solid foods were able to rapidly gain weight, and once more acclimatise themselves to a Western diet. As men began to regain their strength some sought alcohol. One account from Japan recorded the disastrous consequences of drinking methyl alcohol purchased from local Japanese; the diary entries for the 7th and 8th of September noted that two former prisoners were dead and four more seriously ill. The next day he learned that there was a burial parade for 6 men and 3 more were very ill.[[856]](#footnote-856) Such tragedies occurred just days before the recovery operations began.

**Experiences of British Personnel involved in the Recovery Operations**

It was considered that the presence of Royal Navy personnel would give the British prisoners an early opportunity to meet their fellow countrymen and volunteers from H.M.S. *King George V* and H.M.A.S. *Shropshire* assisted in recovery operations on the Japanese mainland. In all eight teams consisting of one officer and one rating were employed. Arrangements were also made for British personnel from various British ships including H.M.S. *King George V* and H.M.S. *Duke of York* to record the details of prisoners as they were recovered to docksides.[[857]](#footnote-857) The experiences of the teams recovering prisoners demonstrated that rather than opposition, the Japanese authorities actively cooperated with the recovery operations.

Although it had been originally suggested that the recovery operations were a War Office responsibility, in reality this was hampered by the fact that no senior Military Officer was in charge of the work ashore on the Japanese Home Islands.[[858]](#footnote-858) Instead the recovery teams acted alongside their Allied counterparts reacting to the situation on the ground as they entered camps, and sending out additional personnel when they discovered others in the area. In some cases, the recovery teams only discovered the existence of camps as they encountered prisoners who had made hazardous journeys from isolated locations, in an effort to find help. Although the Japanese authorities initially warned that they could not guarantee the safety of the recovery teams[[859]](#footnote-859) nonetheless, the recovery operations appeared to be carried out with little animosity being shown from the Japanese population. For their part the personnel involved made it clear they only wished to liberate prisoners, and were not part of an Army of occupation.

The Japanese authorities appeared to be willing to assist in any way they could, indeed all parties were anxious not to offend the other, and in some cases the Japanese welcome appeared surprisingly warm. After a stay in a local hotel in which the RAPWI team were treated to a seven course meal accompanied with local wines and spirits. Lieutenant J. P. Stevenson reported that when they left the next day to take up quarters on board one of the hospital ships ‘the whole household, backed up by the police escort, gave us a rousing send off.’[[860]](#footnote-860) Indeed the Japanese appeared to take active roles in some aspects of the recovery operation. Lieutenant T.P. Baillie-Grohman observed that at one airfield the Japanese were ‘still in charge’ and the usual administrative routines carried on, indeed the Japanese sentries were still armed. However, he also complained with respect to the attitude of some British Officers of one contact team as they dined with their Japanese counterparts. He remarked that if the prisoners got wind of this, there would be some ugly scenes.[[861]](#footnote-861) While some saw this as unacceptable, it could be suggested that the cooperation of the local Japanese authorities undoubtedly helped the operation to run relatively smoothly.

As in southern areas, conditions varied markedly between camps and the situation on the ground frequently dictated the priorities of the recovery operation. While some prisoners were literally on the verge of starvation others were emaciated, but in comparison relatively healthy. In spite of the fact that leaflets had been dropped asking that former prisoners remain in their camps, in the Osaka area some Officers and men from various camps set up their headquarters in a newly built hotel. They cleared the streets of traffic, and sent twelve taxis to the station to await the arrival of the recovery teams.[[862]](#footnote-862) Such actions demonstrated that in some camps the prisoners were both fit and resourceful enough, to take an active role in the recovery operation. On the Japanese mainland the recovery teams noted that many prisoners had received little or no news of the outside world apart from Japanese propaganda, since their arrival.

As noted in the previous chapter, the American authorities were suspicious of London’s motives in the Far East, and had attempted to downplay Britain’s contribution to operations against the Japanese. One British observer on the Japanese Home Islands recorded that British prisoners remarked that it was only when they saw their fellow service personnel among the recovery teams that they realised that British Forces had taken an active part in the war. Lieutenant A.B.L. Edmonds commented that the British prisoners he encountered ‘knew nothing of the British activities whatsoever, and were really convinced that America had won the war.’[[863]](#footnote-863) The British contingent attempted to make sure that the prisoners began to be brought up to date with the events of the previous years. As with southern areas, they also attempted to do their best to ensure that their countrymen were aware that they had not been forgotten. Lieutenant J.D. Harris described his meeting with former prisoners as ‘Englishmen meeting Englishmen. The evidence of the return of the way of life they knew someone from the outside world with the same background, ideals and spirits.’[[864]](#footnote-864) Such observations continued wherever British recovery teams operated.

Even though prisoners had been ill-treated while in Japanese hands, the reactions of prisoners towards the local population on the Japanese Home Islands could be considered somewhat surprising; although many prisoners expressed a strong desire to harm their Japanese guards at the end of the war, the reactions of some prisoners demonstrated that this attitude did not extend to the local Japanese population. Despite the threats against gaolers when the war finally ended, across the Far East there appear to have been relatively few acts of revenge. As Rohan D. Rivett later wrote, ‘even after three and a half years of brutalities and degradation one just didn’t feel interested in kicking the man who was down.’[[865]](#footnote-865) Daws simply suggested that the reason for the lack of acts of revenge was due to a simple formula ‘freedom plus a full belly.’[[866]](#footnote-866) Nonetheless the absence of hostility between prisoners and the local population was obvious to some involved in the recovery operations on the Japanese Home Islands. One member of a recovery team noted that many of the men were entertained by their employers after the war. He suggested that ‘their hates extended to little beyond the military and the gendarmerie with the latter taking first place.’[[867]](#footnote-867) The observation with respect to the views of the prisoners towards the general population and vice versa, was echoed by accounts from prisoners who while waiting for their camp to be evacuated by RAPWI teams, spent some of their free time on sightseeing trips.

In one account George Wills stated that he could not believe that the war had finally come to an end, and that he wanted to get away from the camp. Wills described visiting a popular nearby cinema where he managed to convey to the manager that he wanted to watch the film. Even though it was part way through, the manager re-started the film from the beginning for his benefit. He recounted that the no locals showed any animosity, although he did note that the local children would not take the sweets he offered.[[868]](#footnote-868) In another account, Leopold Manning similarly described how former prisoners would pass the time before their camp was evacuated by catching a train to visit local villages. The former prisoners took cigarettes for the locals and chocolate for the children.[[869]](#footnote-869) Lt. Commander H.R.K. Bates D.S.C. R.N.V.R. noted when ten Japanese civilians had been killed by a ‘concentrated’ B29 food drop the former prisoners were upset, as these same villagers had given them food supplies whenever they could be spared.[[870]](#footnote-870) Other accounts describe how former prisoners distributed the rice ration from the camp amongst local villages, once they began to receive relief supplies dropped by air.

Such accounts back up the observation that although many had thought of revenge against their former gaolers, there was little animosity between prisoners and the local population. These views were in sharp contrast to the assessment of British Army Psychiatrists who suggested that British prisoners in Japanese hands showed fewer psychiatric symptoms than those in Europe due ‘in larger measure to the contempt which British soldiers were able to feel for the Japanese and the absence of any feeling that the enemy was a man of similar outlook and cultural background to themselves.’[[871]](#footnote-871)

As in southern areas the bureaucracy surrounding the recovery process attempted to ensure that the details of each man were accounted for. Lieutenant J. P Stevenson explained the procedure for dealing with prisoners before they began their homeward journeys. Prior to their arrival at the evacuation area, each prisoner had to complete a form which included information about himself and his unit. He was asked to provide an address or area to which he wished to be evacuated. He was allowed to make out a ten-word telegram and his physical condition was assessed by a doctor on the spot. In this way rosters were made up of each camp, and the details were then sent on to Manila. The telegrams were sent by air to Osaka and relayed on from there by wireless telegram. Each repatriate then attached a précis of this information to his uniform for ease of identification. Each camp then adhered to a pre-arranged train schedule en route to the dockside.[[872]](#footnote-872) The ten-word telegrams sent to families were somewhat misleading as they told families they were well.

Directives on the way that the British recovery personnel should treat prisoners suggested that the men should be handled in a ‘tactful and sympathetic’ manner. Plans were also made to provide special food products, in the early stages of the recovery process, until the ‘digestive mechanism has been re-educated’ to assimilate ordinary food ‘served in the ordinary way.’[[873]](#footnote-873) Special instructions were provided by the War Office Director General Army Medical Services, giving details of the types of foodstuffs which could be given to prisoners. However, as in camps in southern areas the initial supply of food by air had already begun the process of acclimatising the former prisoners to Western-type foodstuffs before they were recovered. Regardless of the fact that they had received additional rations before recovery teams reached camps, many former prisoners remained extremely ill at this point. When General Sir Peter Whiteley went to the railhead to witness the former prisoners arriving from camps he commented that the men ‘looked like living skeletons’; he added that some could not even walk and that he was sure that about twenty per cent would not live more than a few more days.[[874]](#footnote-874) In reality with medical attention and proper nutrition the health of the majority of prisoners continued to improve rapidly.

At various ports throughout the Japanese Home Islands, prisoners and internees were ‘processed’ throughout the following days and evenings. Some accounts describe an almost carnival atmosphere surrounding the proceedings. When recovered prisoners reached the dockside Stevenson noted that attempts to tell the men the plans for their movement were rather hopeless, as they were drowned out by the noise of the band playing ‘hail, hail the gang’s all here’ and men cheering and asking questions all at once. The men then went through several further stages in the process of sending them on their way. They were fed as much coffee and doughnuts as each man wanted. Nurses then gave the men a medical examination and took details of the health conditions they had suffered while in the camp. Later they were stripped of their clothes and anything they did not want. Any possessions they wished to keep were placed in a kit bag which was then disinfected with DDT. The men were medically inspected for lice and scabies, and then ‘thoroughly cleansed’ under a row of 24 high-pressure hot and cold showers. Once clean they were fitted out with new clothing and given their kit bags back; in addition, they received a Red Cross bag, cigarettes, toilet gear and newspapers. The men were then treated to ice cream, malted milk and a sandwich bar. Finally, they were loaded onto landing craft and taken to evacuating ships.[[875]](#footnote-875) From various accounts it is apparent that this rapid transformation of circumstances had a profound effect on the recovered men, as they were suddenly all too aware of the differences in physique between themselves and their rescuers. MacArthur quoted one prisoner who observed that his rescuers were ‘radiantly confident in their sheer health’, in contrast he stated, ‘we went among them as shaven skeletons with distended pot stomachs’. Similarly, the prisoner noted that his rescuers smelled ‘affluent and gross’ and concluded that he on the other hand ‘stank of prison and defeat and disease.’[[876]](#footnote-876)

For their part the British personnel involved in the operations attempted to ensure that the released British prisoners did not board ships without meeting representatives from the United Kingdom. When there were no recovered British prisoners passing through the processing sheds, the U.K. recovery personnel used their time by entering the wards of nearby hospital ships, talking to the patients and passing on news from Britain.[[877]](#footnote-877) Some of the British recovery teams attempted to continue the rehabilitation process once they had finished their other duties; one officer later described how he went around the wards simply talking to the men, distributing cigarettes, and trying to ‘bridge the gap’ in some men’s lives.[[878]](#footnote-878) When other British ships were anchored in the vicinity of docksides teams were sent ashore with gifts of British cigarettes, chocolate, books and papers which were contributed by the ships’ companies.[[879]](#footnote-879) In this way the reintegration of the former prisoners began relatively early in the recovery process, and as in southern areas continued during their onward journeys.

Administrative directives were issued in an effort to bring prisoners up to date with the events of the war and back in Britain, during their period of captivity. It was suggested that arrangements should be made for the provision of welfare personnel of the appropriate services and information in connection with opportunities for their full employment. In addition, ‘information rooms’ were to be established and arrangements made for the distribution of suitable information such as A.B.C.A. (Army Bureau of Current Affairs) pamphlets and films which documented the events of the war. There were also suggestions that the ex-prisoners should be given the opportunity to learn of the conditions of life in Australia, the United States or Canada by means of short visits and tours provided that preparation was not delayed for this reason.[[880]](#footnote-880)

**Exodus from Northern Areas**

As in southern areas, a combination of ships and aircraft were employed to carry out the recovery operations as men were recovered and transported to reception centres, the largest of which were on Manila. Although the initial proposals envisaged that the men would be flown from the islands, some difficulties were experienced as American transport planes proved to be too large for some of the smaller Japanese airfields. This resulted in some lighter American bombers being hastily converted to carry passengers, and reports suggested that up to 1500 prisoners were flown daily to reception centres.[[881]](#footnote-881) Other prisoners were transported by sea to Okinawa, and from there by smaller boat or aircraft to Manila. In this way large numbers of British prisoners were removed rapidly from the Japanese mainland, to begin the first legs of their homeward voyages. However, Daws claimed that deaths occurred on the voyages home as some former prisoners died as a mine blew out the side of a ship during a typhoon, and two planes crashed as a result of the same bad weather. In addition, he claimed that one plane flew into the side of a mountain, and that a bomber which was being used to transport former prisoners accidentally opened its bomb-bay doors over the Pacific with disastrous consequences.[[882]](#footnote-882) The poor weather meant that air operations had to be stopped in mid-September, and some prisoners who were at sea had to be diverted to Sydney.[[883]](#footnote-883)

It was initially feared that there would be no British representatives who would be available to deal with U.K. prisoners on their arrival at the reception centre, which had been set up in Manila. These fears proved to be unfounded, as we have seen teams were formed from service personnel in Australia, and it was agreed that these personnel would assist in the recovery of U.K. prisoners until they could be relieved by British recovery teams. The 3rd Australian P.O.W. Reception Group handled matters concerning all British and Commonwealth prisoners and following his arrival from India, Lieutenant Col. A.D.R.G. Wilson of the British Army was put in charge of the section dealing with U.K. prisoners.[[884]](#footnote-884) Although Britain sent contact teams to assist in recovery operations the individuals arrived too late to take an active role on the Japanese Home Islands. They were however utilised at the reception centre at Manila. A further 19 remained in Australia and were able to assist in the handling of prisoners of war there.[[885]](#footnote-885)

Once the prisoners arrived, they were segregated in a camp for British personnel, where they were processed and interrogated. Here Leopold Manning recounted that the camp contained tented accommodation, the rations provided catered for 12 recovered prisoners for each tent, and if the accommodation was not full, each man got extra. He noted that personnel could not do enough for the former prisoners, and they were fed so much they could not eat it all.[[886]](#footnote-886) The official report on the activities claimed that the majority of the prisoners were sent on the next leg of their journeys within a few days.[[887]](#footnote-887) Although during their voyages many still had relapses of the diseases they had contracted they were now receiving the latest treatments available and the best possible medical care, this coupled with the volume of food available continued their rapid weight gain.

From this point the recovered prisoners were transported towards either the United States or Canada. Official reports suggested that the ex-prisoners arriving at Vancouver or Seattle were mainly routed across Canada, and those arriving at San Francisco[[888]](#footnote-888) and Los Angeles were generally routed to New York.[[889]](#footnote-889) Plans for the recovery of British personnel suggested that it was necessary to establish transit camps which were ‘suitably staffed’ in the United States, Canada and Australia to receive prisoners of war evacuated from forward areas.[[890]](#footnote-890)

Although it was initially envisaged that supplies of clothing and comforts would be sent for the ex-prisoners routed across North America[[891]](#footnote-891), there were nevertheless some signs that the British authorities were conscious of the costs involved in the recovery process due to the end of the American Lend Lease Scheme. Thorne noted that the British authorities only found out on the 20th of August that Lend Lease supplies were to be terminated immediately and even the goods which were ‘already in the pipeline’ had to be paid for in cash.[[892]](#footnote-892) Considerations with regard to the expense of the recovery operation extended to the cost of uniforms issued to the men while travelling across the United States. As Britain was charged for any uniforms issued to the returning prisoners’ travelling across America, instructions to British Liaison Staff noted that arrangements should be made for American pattern garments to be returned to the American authorities.[[893]](#footnote-893) In turn such cost considerations appear to have prompted a greater number of prisoners being repatriated via the Canadian route.

By September 1945, the Canadian government accepted responsibility for the administration and movement of UK prisoners being repatriated via Canada, and a small staff of liaison officers were dispatched to Vancouver to assist in the reception of prisoners of war.[[894]](#footnote-894) A reception centre was located at Esquimalt in British Columbia, for ships which travelled directly from Manila. Indeed, accounts of former prisoners noted that the welcome was so warm in areas such as Canada that some decided to stay and ended up marrying local girls.[[895]](#footnote-895) From there the men embarked on the Canadian Pacific Railroad to cross the country. The prisoners who travelled by this route noted both the quality and the quantity of food which was available, as well as the reception they received as they reached various stations.[[896]](#footnote-896) However once they reached either Halifax or New York the men were then returned to British hands. From there men travelled across the Atlantic on the various ships such as the *Queen Mary*, the *Queen Elizabeth* or the *Ile de France* to Southampton.

Some accounts tell that they received a different response when they were back under the control of the British Army, while some had a pleasant journey on the *Queen Mary*. One former prisoner who returned on the *Ile de France*, suggested that the returning prisoners were treated like second class citizens, as they were kept below decks on their journeys and were not permitted to mix with other passengers.[[897]](#footnote-897) While there may have been some valid reasons for the segregation, such as the fear that former prisoners may have carried disease, however, for some former prisoners any negative experiences encountered on their homeward journeys reinforced the idea that the British government and public still regarded the circumstances of their capture as a source of shame.

The outward appearance of many of those who were on the verge of returning to Britain bore little resemblance to the skeletal figures, whose photographs remain as a testament to the systematic ill-treatment and starvation that the majority of prisoners had endured while in Japanese hands. As we have seen the men had received additional rations while awaiting their recovery, and their weight gain was in some circumstances so rapid that one prisoner recounted that as he was flown from his staging camp, the pilot commented that he was expecting a ‘bunch of skinny skeletons’ but instead suggested that they were in ‘pretty good shape’ to which the former prisoner retorted that he had already received ‘six weeks of good feeding.’[[898]](#footnote-898) Although their increased weight may have given the men a relatively robust appearance, many remained far from healthy at this point. Mountbatten realised relatively early in the recovery process that this was likely to be the case and stated ‘it was essential that the public should realise the privations and maltreatment which our prisoners had suffered’ and that ‘these facts might well be lost sight of, since the appearance of RAPWI had so greatly improved after a period of medical care and proper food.’[[899]](#footnote-899) Nonetheless, it could be suggested that such observations were not in the interest of the British authorities, who had been able to provide just a tiny fraction of the requirements of British prisoners in Japanese hands.

**Rapid Weight Gain**

At the beginning of the chapter we saw how the post-war Labour government promised to bring the prisoners and internees home as quickly as was possible, following the sudden Japanese capitulation. Regardless of this claim, the pledge also raised difficult political issues in connection with the way that London had been able to ameliorate the conditions for prisoners throughout the course of the war. In turn the conscious decision to allow the men to recuperate on lengthy sea voyages allowed the majority to gain a significant amount of weight, and begin to recover from the diseases they had contracted while in Japanese hands, prior to their arrival back in the United Kingdom. The extent of the changes to the weight of returning prisoners was recorded by the medical personnel.

The largest weight increases were recorded on the hospital ships. For instance, the report from the Medical Officer on board H.M.H.S. *Tjitjalenga* which transported men from the Japanese mainland to New Zealand, noted that some former prisoners put on up to three stones (42lbs) in weight during the voyage.[[900]](#footnote-900) The official report on the recovery operation from southern areas similarly recorded an average gain of 2 stone 4lbs (32lbs) per man occurred in just over two months, with the greatest individual gain during this period being 3 stone13lbs (55lbs).[[901]](#footnote-901) As noted above, we should also bear in mind that in many cases the men had already gained a considerable amount of weight prior to their liberation, as the result of the air-drops of foodstuffs. Irrespective of their increases prior to their arrival on recovery shipping, it could be suggested that even the average weight gain recorded would radically change the appearance of most prisoners, and that this trend was perhaps even more marked for those recovered from northern areas.

Some returning prisoners expressed their anxiety, with regards to the reception they might receive on their arrival in Britain; they voiced fears relating to public reactions to the circumstances of their surrender at Singapore, and their involvement in the construction of a railway which furthered the Japanese war effort. In contrast to these fears a signal from the Cabinet Offices to Mountbatten, stated that every ship carrying ex-prisoners was to be met on arrival by either an Adjutant General or an Army Commander. Furthermore, the personnel were to receive a civic reception at their port of disembarkation, and every man was to be handed a personal message from His Majesty the King.[[902]](#footnote-902) This message included the statement ‘through all the great trials and sufferings which you have undergone at the hands of the Japanese, you and your comrades have been constantly in our thoughts. We know from the accounts we have already received how heavy those sufferings have been.’[[903]](#footnote-903) This theme continued during meetings of committees which planned for the repatriation of the recovered prisoners.

Matters surrounding the reception of repatriated prisoners were discussed at various meetings in Whitehall. For example, on the 29th of September the Air Ministry Post-War Repatriation of Prisoners of War Committee met to discuss arrangements for the return of prisoners. During discussions it was suggested that ships should be met at docksides by bands and officials. It was emphasised that speeches given to returning FEPOWs should contain references to the notion that ‘we have been thinking of them all the time’ and that ‘we are going to take every opportunity to help them.’[[904]](#footnote-904) Such messages aimed to try to refute any suggestions that the repatriated prisoners had been forgotten during their time in Japanese hands.

Notwithstanding these intentions, evidence suggests that the experiences for those who returned on the first ships differed a great deal from those who returned later. During October 1945 some 24,992 prisoners of war arrived back in the United Kingdom from the Far East.[[905]](#footnote-905) Accounts written on the subject of the men’s arrival in the U.K. are dominated by the experiences of those from southern areas, who returned on the earliest ships. For instance, when Major H.G. Dicker arrived in Liverpool in the middle of October, he described his reception as being ‘totally overwhelming’ with ‘bands playing, people cheering and thousands of women going absolutely crazy.’[[906]](#footnote-906) After the men were disembarked they were transported by coach to a nearby transit camp where the staff worked non-stop through the night to get everyone issued with all the necessary documents required in post-war Britain. In addition, another group of ladies were busily engaged in sewing badges and shoulder-titles to uniforms. He recorded that the following day the men were sent in batches to board special trains ‘running the length and breadth of the country, to disperse thousands of men, who had for nearly four years lived a totally alien existence from that to which they now returned.’[[907]](#footnote-907) Perhaps it is understandable that those who returned on the earliest ships received such a welcome, however this can be contrasted with the experiences of those who returned the following month from northern areas.

Even though the official plans envisaged a warm welcome for all those who returned, evidence suggests that this was not always the case. For some who were sensitive either about the conditions surrounding their surrender, or the fact that they had been building a railway which allowed the Japanese to wage war against British forces, this reception was taken as a sign. When Leopold Manning arrived back in Britain on the 18th of November, he recalled that the *Queen Mary* was met by no ceremonial greeting. There was no band and no reception of any kind, ‘just a bloke sweeping up.’[[908]](#footnote-908) During November a further 9,558 prisoners were repatriated.[[909]](#footnote-909) The men who returned after the excitement of the first returning ships frequently received very little in the way of an official welcome. Furthermore, those who returned on later vessels had weeks further to gain weight they returned with less signs of the ordeals they had suffered.

Leopold Manning noted that his weight, prior to the war, was ten and a half stones. At one point during his time in Japanese hands he weighed less than half of this; he had witnessed men being so hungry that they ate their rice-ration one grain at a time. He had survived the Burma-Thailand Railway, and the sinking of the *Kachidoki Maru*, and witnessed the explosion of the atomic bomb which was dropped on Nagasaki. During his return journey he stated that the Americans provided so much food that he was unable to eat it all. By mid-November, when he arrived back in Britain, he was back to his pre-war weight. Furthermore, he returned with a haversack filled with American sweets and cigarettes for his father.[[910]](#footnote-910) The rapid weight-gain clearly hid the worst of the treatment that he had experienced, as he returned home apparently fit and healthy and bearing presents with no sign that he had been malnourished at any point.

**Conclusions**

The British post war government promised to bring the prisoners home at the earliest possible time following the surrender of Japan. However, this pledge was something of a double-edged sword. The sudden and rapid return to Britain of thousands of emaciated former prisoners would have served to highlight not only their poor treatment, but also underlined the lack London’s success in ameliorating their plight during their time in Japanese hands. On the other hand, if the men were recovered too slowly this may have also led to complaints that the government had accorded a low priority to the recovery of prisoners from the Far East.

The planning process for the recovery operations were undoubtedly hampered by Washington’s distrust concerning Britain’s intentions with respect to her former colonies. In turn the lack of communication concerning American plans for recovery operations, resulted in the British and Australian commands having to make their own preparations for RAPWI operations. Nonetheless, the initial insistence that the recovery of prisoners was to be carried out by the military, resulted in the Commander-in-Chief of the British Pacific Fleet being informed that he would have to wait for further instructions. Additionally, the American reluctance to allow the British to take an active role in the military operations resulted in Britain having no senior military presence on the Japanese Home Islands who could have coordinated the British RAPWI teams ashore. In southern areas, as the recovery operations commenced the tension between the British and American covert operatives resulted in American operatives refusing to follow Mountbatten’s orders. Instead they made their own arrangements for the recovery of United States prisoners of war.

The American suspicions were justified, as orders given to Mountbatten shaped the schedule for recovery operations in line with London’s intentions to re-assert Britain’s influence in the area. It was at this point that Mountbatten received orders from MacArthur which initially prevented the recovery of prisoners until the surrender had been signed in Tokyo. The period following the sudden Japanese capitulation allowed Mountbatten to set up various committees, commands and sub-commands aimed at controlling and prioritising operations. The delays also allowed stores and RAPWI teams to be assembled and allowed time for leaflets to be printed informing the prisoners, the Japanese and the local populations that the war was indeed over in preparation for the commencement of the recovery operations.

Although there was some initial opposition from individual Japanese commanders, once the operations were allowed to begin, they encountered little or no opposition from Japanese forces which withdrew their troops to Barracks and holding areas. Despite MacArthur’s orders regarding the timing of operations, it could certainly be argued that given the sudden nature of the Japanese surrender, the recovery operations could not have commenced immediately. The plans for the schedule of recovery operations nonetheless reflected London’s attitude towards Britain’s former colonies and this resulted in camps in more remote areas having to wait some weeks before they were finally recovered. The delays in the commencement of operations combined with the withdrawal of Japanese troops resulted in a power vacuum which in turn added to the difficulties involved in recovery operations in some areas as various groups sought independence from their former colonial masters.

The recovery operations on the Japanese Home Islands were similarly hampered by the lack of information available from the Japanese, as witnessed by the fact that although there were over 100 prisoner of war camps in the area, the Japanese had only informed the ICRC of some 40. As they had been carried out in southern areas, leaflets were dropped on camps as they were located, the former prisoners were then provided with additional foodstuffs by air drops of supplies which aimed to begin to build up the strength of prisoners prior to their recovery. Despite the fact that MacArthur had originally planned for recovery operations to only commence once the Japanese authorities had signed the official surrender agreement, the situation on the ground dictated that the RAPWI operations commenced some days ahead of the planned schedule. This was due to the fact that some former prisoners were in such a poor state of health that their comrades had left camps to attempt to find help. The decision was also made due to the appalling condition of the first camps which were encountered in the proximity of Tokyo Bay.

Although the Japanese government claimed they could not guarantee the safety of the recovery teams, the situation came under Allied control relatively quickly, as the local Japanese authorities demonstrated that they were willing and able to assist the Allies. For their part the recovery teams made it clear that they were not part of an army of occupation and both sides generally appeared to attempt to ensure that they did not insult the other. In these circumstances the recovery operations were carried out relatively smoothly. As had occurred in southern areas, the camps were evacuated in accordance with the conditions encountered by the RAPWI teams, with some prisoners being evacuated immediately they were located.

However, the experiences of the recovery personnel and indeed some personal accounts from former prisoners perhaps contradict the narrative of hatred expressed by some towards the Japanese as a nation. Accounts from those sent to find camps and recover prisoners suggest that their hatred was confined to prison guards and the police. Nevertheless, acts of revenge against former guards appear to have been relatively uncommon, despite the threats to the contrary from prisoners throughout the course of the war. Indeed, testimony from those who were employed in factories suggested that these prisoners were treated relatively well by their former employers. In some cases, prisoners were friendly with the local population who had attempted to supplement their rations when a surplus of food was available. Likewise, as the men waited for their recovery, some narratives suggest that they were able to travel to nearby villages and the local population showed no animosity towards them. Indeed, in some instances the former POWs were happy to provide local villages with their camp ration of rice once supplies of western food had been dropped onto camps.

Accounts from both areas suggest that the rations and medical aid which were available as camps were located and supplies were dropped or became available from stockpiled Red Cross supplies began to increase the weight of prisoners, many of whom were on the verge of starvation. Similarly, the recovery teams attempted to begin the process of rehabilitation by educating the men with the events of the war. Likewise, recovery operations were prioritised according to the conditions in individual camps. Over the following weeks those who were comparatively healthy began to recover rapidly from their ordeals.

While there was undoubtedly some public knowledge of the treatment the men had experienced during their time as prisoners, there were also signs that the British authorities attempted to prevent distressing personal accounts from reaching Britain. When considering the type of information the recovered men were permitted to give to the press, in some circumstances official orders stopped short of banning the men from giving details of their experiences to reporters; instead, they were warned not to give too many personal details in connection of the fate of those who did not return. Official advice played on the loyalty which many undoubtedly felt towards those who died. Other orders were more direct, forbidding prisoners to talk to the press without specific permission. Likewise, their families were warned that they should not ask too many difficult questions regarding the experiences of their loved-ones. It could be suggested that a combination of these factors effectively gagged many prisoners, as they were unsure of the type of information they were officially allowed to pass on, and as a result of this felt unable to discuss details of their experiences.

The method by which prisoners were recovered also served to hide the full extent of the horrors many had experienced. While Mountbatten expressed his concerns relatively early in the recovery process, suggesting that the full-extent of the hardships the men had experienced would be ‘lost sight of’ as the men began to gain weight rapidly.’[[911]](#footnote-911) It could be argued that it was not in the interest of the British authorities to highlight their lack of success in assisting prisoners during the course of the war. By recovering former prisoners through the use of lengthy sea voyages, the majority of returning prisoners were able to gain a great deal of their former weight, begin treatment for their medical conditions and continue the process of rehabilitation prior to their arrival in the U.K. Indeed, some of those who were recovered in American-led operations from northern areas were back to their pre-war weight on their return. Furthermore, as these individuals primarily returned via the United States or Canada many returned bearing gifts of foodstuffs which were simply unavailable in post war Britain, where rationing continued for some years. The majority of the prisoners recovered from the Far East who returned towards the end of 1945, bore little resemblance to the skeletal figures who greeted RAPWI teams in camps following the Japanese surrender.

The question however remains as to how much of the lack of understanding surrounding the experiences these men had suffered was a consequence of the war time policy to restrict the information available to the British public. As we saw earlier during the course of the war the publicity surrounding the hardships endured by prisoners was censored to a certain degree. This was carried out on the grounds that relatives of those in the Far East would be distressed by atrocity stories, when little or nothing could be done to either stop such actions or to improve the conditions they were experiencing. Although some information reached the British public, the announcements were few and far between. If we add to this, the fact that the men were warned to hold their tongues, and their families were warned not to ask too many awkward questions, it is perhaps not surprising that this group of returning prisoners were somewhat misunderstood; it is possible to suggest that although the British public was aware that prisoners had ‘a rough time’ at the hands of the Japanese, there was similarly a sense that people in Britain had also suffered during the course of the war.

Although the study finds that the British authorities were aware of the health benefits of returning prisoners through sea voyages, good food and medical care, it would be difficult to sustain that this was a deliberate policy aimed at hiding the full extent of the failure of London to ameliorate their plight. Nonetheless, it could be argued that although Mountbatten was conscious of the change in physical appearance of the men due to the increase in rations and medical assistance, it was perhaps not in the government’s interest to highlight its own failures. The outward appearance of many returning prisoners gave the impression that they were indeed fit and relatively healthy, in turn this gave little indication of the horrors that many had suffered. However, as has become clear subsequent examinations of the mental and physical issues which large numbers continued to carry for years, demonstrated their outward appearance was deceptive.[[912]](#footnote-912)

**CONCLUSIONS**

The thesis set out to answer the research questions by utilising a variety of sources to examine Whitehall’s attitudes towards British prisoners in Japanese hands, the obligations of the British State in connection with the welfare of its service personnel captured by an enemy, and its responsibilities towards their families. The findings of the study lead to a number of conclusions relating to the attitude and performance of the British wartime authorities. It demonstrates that because of the lack of information available from official sources, Whitehall was initially forced to rely on intelligence from third parties which proved to be relatively unreliable. In these circumstances London had to react at short notice as a fragmentary picture emerged concerning the appalling conditions in prisoner of war camps, and the ill-treatment of Allied prisoners of war.

When considering Britain’s diplomatic approaches to Tokyo, the study comes to the inescapable conclusion that throughout the course of the war Whitehall remained in a very poor position, when attempting to pressure the Japanese authorities to improve their behaviour towards British prisoners. Although Japan initially claimed that it would treat its captives according to the terms of the Geneva Convention, albeit with changes deemed necessary, this claim was little more than a blind. Part of the problem for London lay with the fact that the British and Japanese mindsets viewed the capture of their service personnel in very different ways; although both sides urged its soldiers to fight to the last man, the British authorities saw surrender as an option when all else had failed. In contrast, the Japanese considered that any man who was captured by an enemy, brought absolute shame not only on themselves but also their entire family. This central tenet raised several issues for the British authorities, as London attempted to improve the conditions being experienced by British prisoners in the Far East.

Tokyo’s perspective towards surrender appeared to affect the chances that they would inform London of the names and locations of prisoners, and it is possible to suggest that the Japanese authorities simply could not understand the fact that British relatives would wish to hear that their loved-ones were alive and in enemy hands. In turn, the scant information with regards to the status of these individuals, brought pressure on Whitehall from anxious relatives who had no knowledge of the fate of their loved-ones. The War Office was eventually forced to assume that the majority of those who were missing following operations in the Far East, were alive and in Japanese hands.

In contrast to this position, Tokyo showed little interest in the identity and welfare of their own men who were captured by the Allies. Indeed, the Japanese authorities frequently informed the families of missing Japanese service personnel of their glorious death in battle, and denied that any Japanese prisoners were in enemy hands. While Tokyo spoke of ‘reciprocity’ when approached on diplomatic matters by London, the outlook of the Japanese Army to surrender resulted in a disparity in numbers of prisoners between the two sides. For example, in 1942, the IPWC was aware that some 280,000 prisoners and internees were already likely to be in Japanese hands.[[913]](#footnote-913) In comparison, just 35,000 Japanese service personnel were captured by Allied forces during the course of the entire war.[[914]](#footnote-914) In these circumstances London had little or no leverage with Tokyo, and no way of persuading the Japanese authorities to treat British captives in what they considered to be an acceptable manner. Despite their lack of influence, the British authorities maintained a constant stream of diplomatic protests to Tokyo, and adopted the stance that as the Japanese had initially suggested they would treat prisoners according to the terms of the Geneva Convention, they expected this promise to be honoured.

As a further consequence of the Japanese outlook towards surrender, the Japanese and their auxiliary Korean and Taiwanese guards generally displayed a callous disregard for the welfare of Allied prisoners, who were subjected to physical and mental abuse. This was perhaps especially true of the treatment of prisoners involved in the many and varied construction projects, which employed captured Allied personnel to further the Japanese war effort. Allied prisoners were considered to be expendable in the service of the Emperor, and were generally forced to live in extremely unsanitary conditions while receiving very poor rations and little or no medical assistance from their captors. Although the Japanese authorities allowed some limited inspection of prisoner of war camps in some northern areas, they refused to allow the inspection of camps in southern newly-occupied zones. The significance for Britain was that as some 80-90 percent of British Imperial prisoners were initially captured and held in these areas**,** it took time for news of the full scale of the ill-treatment of prisoners to reach London.

The study adds to the current historiography by examining London’s attempts to control the information which reached Britain, in connection with the ill-treatment of those in Japanese hands, during the course of the war and beyond. The research demonstrated that although London was aware of the potential for the ill-treatment of captured British Imperial service personnel from relatively early in the conflict, as witnessed by the news which reached Whitehall of the atrocities committed by the Japanese in the aftermath of the surrender of Hong Kong. However, the contradictory reports which emerged from the Far East in the months following the Fall of Singapore, along with Japanese assurances concerning their proper treatment of captives, for a time at least hid the true attitude of the Japanese authorities towards Allied prisoners. It was not until the early months of 1943, that Whitehall began to receive reports from extremely reliable sources, in connection with the appalling conditions being experienced by those prisoners taking part in the construction of the Burma-Thailand railway. In turn, this placed London in an unenviable position regarding the information which should be made available to both the relatives of this group of prisoners and the wider British public, as the British authorities gradually realised that they had little or no chance of influencing the Japanese government to improve the conditions the men were experiencing.

Whitehall used the pretext that they attempted to keep news of atrocities committed against prisoners away from the public as they did not want to distress the relatives of those in Japanese hands. In contrast to this claim the study suggested that the decisions surrounding the possibility of passing this information on to the public were complex in nature, and involved other Allied governments. While in the autumn of 1943, there were certainly calls from some in London to make the news which they had received during the course of the year available to the public.[[915]](#footnote-915) Winston Churchill had already argued that information concerning the atrocities committed against British prisoners should be kept from the public, until Germany had been defeated. He suggested that the information could be used as a means of ensuring public support for the continuation of the war, when the immediate threat to Britain had passed.[[916]](#footnote-916) The United States government also made it clear that they were against any publicity, fearing the revelations would adversely affect the chances of further exchanges of civilians with the Japanese. It could also be suggested that the American authorities were aware that any announcements would be likely to provoke counter-claims from Tokyo concerning their own treatment of Japanese internees held in the United States.

Although some atrocity stories reached Britain, the sheer scale of the ill-treatment was perhaps less clear. The thesis examined London’s management of the news of atrocities and general ill-treatment of prisoners which reached Whitehall. The account written by Phillimore in particular can be called into question, as his monograph which detailed the actions of the War Office, clearly overstated the willingness of the British authorities to keep the relatives of those in Japanese hands informed as to the conditions in the Far East. Although Phillimore made the claim that it took time to establish confidence by the public regarding the handling of prisoner of war matters, and that the natural reluctance of government departments to provide information which may have been used against them, was ‘undoubtedly put aside wherever possible and the fullest information was given.’[[917]](#footnote-917) The research contradicted this claim and instead found that London attempted to control the reports reaching both British public and in particular to the relatives of those in the Far East.

While the main reasons for the lack of reliable information coming from southern areas was a direct result of Japanese attitudes towards the rights of the bodies such as the ICRC to operate in the newly-occupied territories. The research highlighted the fact that although London had ample opportunity to advise the British Red Cross of the true state of affairs, the War Office was reluctant to provide the organisation with this information. In turn this resulted in misleading reports being made to the relatives of prisoners by this supposedly reliable source. Consequently, much of the news which reached the British public from the British Red Cross was based on reports originating from the neutral inspection of camps from northern areas, which generally portrayed the living conditions for prisoners as being tolerable. In turn, these reports were unrepresentative of the horrific experiences of many British Far East prisoners in southern areas. Although the British authorities made some information available to the British public, the study found that the three main disclosures relating to the ill-treatment of British prisoners in the Far East, which were made in the House of Commons, came as the direct result of information emerging in the international press. As Whitehall realised they were unable to prevent news of the barbarities committed against prisoners from reaching Britain, the public announcements were made as a means of controlling the intelligence which reached the British public.

Despite the fact that London made a virtually continuous series of enquiries and diplomatic protests relating to the treatment of British prisoners and internees, the Japanese authorities simply denied any wrongdoing. Tokyo maintained that Japan’s own set of values guaranteed the proper treatment of prisoners. This attitude only began to show signs of softening following Allied advances in the Pacific. In spite of the fact that diplomatic approaches eventually appeared to yield positive results, with respect to the neutral inspection of camps in southern areas, in reality any apparent change in Japanese attitudes towards the welfare of prisoners did little in practical terms to ameliorate the conditions the prisoners and internees experienced. The study found that any promises made in connection with neutral inspection of camps in southern areas had little basis in reality, as this process would have simply highlighted the falsehood of Japanese claims relating to their treatment of prisoners hitherto.

Tokyo also gave London assurances that the Japanese authorities would provide adequate food and clothing for British Imperial prisoners in their hands, on the basis of reciprocity. Nonetheless, it was suggested at meetings of the Imperial Prisoners of War Committee (IPWC), that prisoners in the Far East would probably receive inadequate nutrition, due to the likelihood that the men would be provided with a diet which was rice-based, and lacking in essential nutrients, proteins and vitamins. In these circumstances, London attempted to send additional aid to British prisoners and internees in an effort to maintain their long-term health.

The thesis examined the avenues which were explored by London and other Allied governments during their attempts to send quantities of aid to prisoners in the Far East, and indicated the reasons for the abject failure of British relief efforts. From the beginning of the conflict, Allied governments put forward a series of proposals for relief shipments to be sent to various locations in the Far East on Red Cross ships. However, the Japanese authorities either refused the right of such vessels to enter Japanese-controlled waters, or simply denied that this relief was necessary. Other schemes which met with limited success utilised the cargo space available on exchange shipping to send quantities of aid. However, a measure of the increasing desperation of the situation was witnessed by the fact that London was prepared to allow the distribution of this aid by the Japanese authorities, rather than the ICRC. Indeed, the IPWC acknowledged the likelihood that a considerable quantity of aid reaching the Far East would be pilfered by the Japanese; regardless of these fears, Whitehall continued to push for supplies to be delivered in the hope that at least some would reach British prisoners. Nonetheless, such deliveries were only likely to account for a fraction of the aid needed to maintain the health of prisoners and internees.

The Allied governments were aware that thousands of tons of aid were required to be sent to the Far East on a regular basis if the health of prisoners and internees was to improve. One promising avenue, which could have ensured that a considerable quantity of relief reached prisoners and internees, came as Tokyo agreed to collect and distribute aid which had been delivered to the Soviet port of Vladivostok. The potential for this route to become established as a means of sending aid to the Far East was discussed at a conference which was held in Washington in September 1943, which brought together not only delegates of national Red Cross Societies but also involved representatives of various Allied governments. The conference aimed to coordinate Allied relief efforts for prisoners and internees in the Far East. The study suggests Whitehall’s reluctance to provide the British Red Cross with details of the appalling conditions in some southern areas, was reflected in the lack of urgency evident during discussions held at the Conference. However, despite the fact that Allied governments were prepared to send regular large consignments of aid, the combined approach amounted to little in practical terms. As was the case with other relief efforts, the actions of Tokyo demonstrated that the Japanese authorities had little enthusiasm for the collection and distribution of aid which reached the Far East. Indeed, the protracted discussions which ensued concerning the collection and distribution of aid from Vladivostok, demonstrated that Japan treated the matter as little more than a pawn in a diplomatic game.

Although from relatively early in the conflict Tokyo suggested that they were prepared to allow aid to be purchased locally, this avenue again proved to be extremely limited. Despite the fact that such payments were generally opposed by the Ministry of Economic Warfare, due to the seriousness of the situation the British authorities were willing to provide considerable amounts of Swiss francs in an effort to acquire relief supplies. However, the Japanese generally maintained their stance that prisoners were adequately cared for, and although they were willing to allow the funds to be used to assist internees, they were reluctant to allow the purchased supplies to assist prisoners of war. Nonetheless, in some areas the Japanese were willing to allow individuals, such as the Swiss Consul in Bangkok, to provide a significant volume of aid for prisoners of war, albeit in a private rather than official capacity. Again, London demonstrated that it was willing to send funds to allow these supplies to be procured. While it is possible to suggest that there was no chance that the Japanese would allow the sufficient aid to guarantee the long-term health of prisoners in all areas, such contributions no doubt saved many lives and also provided the prisoners with a link to the outside world.

One issue which has been regarded as possibly affecting the way in which Whitehall endeavoured to improve conditions for British prisoners, came from the perceptions of the relative performance of British forces attempting to repel the Japanese attack at Hong Kong, with those of the British Imperial service personnel defending Singapore. While in both cases the fighting forces were urged to fight to the last man, the Colony of Hong Kong was viewed as a lost cause prior to the Japanese attack; in comparison, the Naval Base at Singapore was thought to have had a far greater chance of resisting the Japanese onslaught. The loss of Singapore was a military disaster for Britain, and a severe blow to British prestige across the world. This led Ben Shephard to suggest that the attitude of the War Office towards the welfare of Far East prisoners was ‘coloured by the memories of the humiliating loss of Singapore and a feeling that the men had brought their misfortunes on themselves by surrendering to a smaller Japanese force.’[[918]](#footnote-918) While some in Whitehall may indeed have denigrated the fighting performance of some sections of British Imperial service personnel, the study found no evidence that this had any bearing on the efforts of Whitehall when attempting to ameliorate the plight of British prisoners, and had no impact on the quantity of aid which actually reached those in Japanese hands. This was witnessed by the amount of time and effort expended by the British authorities attempting to send aid to the Far East, irrespective of their chances of success.

Despite this, the study found that some relatives of those thought to be in Japanese hands, were wary of Whitehall’s attitudes towards the welfare of British service personnel who were captured at Singapore. A petition from families received by the War Office emphasised that the loss was viewed as a military disaster, rather than one involving tens of thousands of individuals needing assistance from London.[[919]](#footnote-919) The lack of news emerging from the Far East regarding the identity of those captured, resulted in significant numbers of relatives joining support groups and organisations such as the British Prisoners of War Relatives Association (BPOWRA). As its membership grew, the Association pressured the British authorities to adopt a more coordinated approach to the way they dealt with prisoner of war matters. The research indicated that it would be easy to overstate the influence either individuals or groups such as the BPOWRA, had on the efforts of the British authorities in connection with the welfare of British prisoners. However, evidence did suggest that the British Red Cross Joint War Organisation was certainly mindful of any negative public opinion surrounding Britain’s attempts to ameliorate the conditions in the Far East. Correspondence between high-ranking British Red Cross officials suggested that London’s efforts, if not its success, were being judged against those of the United States.[[920]](#footnote-920) As there was the potential for the British public to view London’s attempts to send additional aid to the Far East as being poor in comparison to those of Washington, this appeared to spur on Whitehall’s efforts.

The research concluded that the reason for the failure of the Allied relief effort was simply a consequence of Tokyo’s attitudes towards the rights and needs of prisoners of war. While Tokyo initially claimed that it would treat prisoners according to the terms of the Geneva Convention, the huge disparity in numbers of prisoners was regarded as placing an undue burden on Tokyo. Nonetheless, Allied governments demonstrated that they were both willing and able to send large quantities of aid to supplement the diet which was likely to be provided by the Japanese. From the earliest days of the war, Whitehall was fully aware of the quantity of additional foodstuffs which would need to reach prisoners, to maintain the long-term health of prisoners who had originated from the United Kingdom. The difficulty for any Allied relief efforts remained in persuading the Japanese authorities that these were necessary. Given the Japanese attitudes towards surrender, it would have been inconceivable that prisoners of war would have been allowed to receive a greater quantity of food than the Japanese authorities considered necessary to maintain the health of their own fighting personnel.

The research also adds to the current historiography by examining issues surrounding the planning for RAPWI operations, which hitherto have received little historical attention. The planning process for the repatriation of U.K. service personnel in Japanese hands was always likely to prove to be somewhat problematic. The fundamental difficulties for Whitehall arose as a result of the lack of information reaching London from Tokyo, relating to the identity and the location of those prisoners who had been captured, and was compounded by the movement of tens of thousands of prisoners during the war. British prisoners of war were eventually held in hundreds of camps spread across an area which was thousands of miles both north to south and east to west. Although preliminary plans for the recovery of prisoners were put forward by the War Office as early as autumn 1942, these demonstrated that even at this early stage of proceedings, it was recognised that the men were likely to be in a very poor state of health. Indeed, as London became aware of the widespread ill-treatment of prisoners, it was estimated that up to ninety percent of the men were likely to need immediate hospitalisation at the time of their recovery.

Although small numbers of prisoners were rescued and returned to Britain, as a result of the sinking of Japanese transport shipping, it was only as Allied forces gradually began to gain ground against the Japanese that significant numbers of U.K. prisoners were likely to be recovered during the course of Allied offensive operations. As the United States forces began to release men from camps in the Philippines, this in turn highlighted the need for greater coordination and cooperation between Allied governments. It was not until February 1945, that a revised set of plans for RAPWI operations were put on a firm footing. As a result of the lack of information from the Japanese authorities, preliminary plans concentrated on the bureaucracy necessary to process those who were recovered and ensure that their movements were accounted for during their homeward journeys.

With the exception of various negotiations which took place between Allied governments and Tokyo in connection with the possible exchange of diplomats, civilian internees, or military personnel; the Allies generally attempted to present a united front when dealing with the Japanese authorities. Nonetheless, the study suggests that American suspicions in connection with London’s intentions towards its former colonies, affected the cooperation between the American and British forces with regards to the preparations for the recovery of prisoners. As the American authorities were reluctant to allow British forces to take an active role in the offensive operations in northern areas, this standpoint resulted in little British military presence in areas containing thousands of U.K. prisoners. Despite repeated requests, no information concerning the plans made by the United States, for the recovery operations in northern areas, was made available to the British forces likely to be taking part in any American-led operations. As the recovery operations were deemed to be a military commitment, this resulted in the Commander-in-Chief of the British Pacific Fleet being informed that he would take no part in the recovery process. Due to the lack of available information, the British and Australian forces began to make their own preparations for the recovery of their own men.

The sudden Japanese capitulation, which followed the dropping of the Atomic bombs, resulted in the urgent need to plan for food and medical assistance to reach prisoners at the earliest possible time. Due to the dispersed nature of the camps this was best carried out through the use of aircraft. Following on from the first drops of aid, additional supplies of food and medicines were to be supplied to improve the health of prisoners until such time that camps across the Far East could be liberated. However, it was by no means certain that the situation would quickly come under Allied control; one example of this came as the Commander in Chief of Japan’s Southern Army initially vowed to fight on, irrespective of the Emperor’s call for Japanese forces to surrender unconditionally.[[921]](#footnote-921) The recovery operations in southern areas were further complicated by the extension of SEAC boundaries, which resulted in the British-led operations being responsible for a vastly increased area containing an estimated additional 55,000 prisoners and internees. This additional requirement had not taken into account during the preliminary planning process. In addition, Mountbatten also received a directive from London which confirmed American suspicions concerning Britain’s intentions to reassert her influence over her former colonies.

Although Mountbatten received orders from MacArthur to delay the commencement of RAPWI operations in southern areas until the American Commander had personally received the Japanese surrender in Tokyo, Mountbatten was also aware that any delays might cost the lives of prisoners. Despite the fact that many prisoners were on the verge of starvation, the research suggested that due to the sudden change in circumstances the available forces were in no position to mount recovery operations immediately. Instead, the relatively short delay which occurred before the commencement of the RAPWI operations, allowed for better coordination of the available resources and manpower. In southern areas it gave time for Mountbatten to assemble committees to assist in the planning process, it allowed relief supplies to be assembled, and leaflets to be printed which aimed to inform the prisoners, the Japanese forces and the local populations that the war was over.

Mountbatten’s orders from London emphasised the recovery operations were carried out according to a political agenda, rather than simply in line with the humanitarian needs of prisoners and internees. Regardless of this schedule it would have been simply impossible to recover all Allied prisoners simultaneously. Nonetheless, the withdrawal of Japanese troops from the streets in preparation for the arrival of Allied forces, allowed various indigenous groups to begin to stake their claims for political independence. In areas such as the Netherlands East Indies the recovery operations were delayed, as orders from London prioritised the order of recovery operations in favour of Britain’s former colonies at the expense of the Dutch. In these circumstances Indonesian Nationalists were able to attempt to consolidate their control over the newly-created Republic of Indonesia, in turn, this created difficulties for the recovery operations when they eventually commenced.

Once Mountbatten was given assurances that the local Japanese forces would abide by the ceasefire, and he was sure that the RAPWI teams and covert operatives would be safe to approach camps, he gave the signal for the recovery operations to commence. In this way the initial aid and recovery operations were able to begin prior to the signing of the official surrender agreement. Once the aid began to reach camps the health of many prisoners began to improve rapidly. The research suggests that the recovery operations were also prioritised according to the perception of trouble which was likely to be caused by the former prisoners. As Summers noted, the initial RAPWI operations focused on getting prisoners out of the Bangkok area, ‘where discipline had collapsed and troops were making up for lost time in the city’s restaurants and brothels.’[[922]](#footnote-922) As a consequence of this policy the recovery of men in more organised and disciplined camps was given a lower precedence.

This proved to be a cause for complaint from men who were desperate to begin the first stages of their homeward journeys. As former prisoners were forced to wait for transportation to become available to take them to reception centres, this allowed time for the RAPWI personnel to begin the process of rehabilitation by filling in the gaps in their knowledge caused by enforced isolation. Although in many camps in southern areas some scraps of news of the outside world had reached prisoners, either by word of mouth, or in some camps through radio sets constructed and maintained at great personal risk, the men were still anxious to hear of the events of the war and the changes which had occurred in Britain during their time in Japanese hands.

The northern American-controlled RAPWI operations were also scheduled to begin following the signing of the official document of surrender in Tokyo. However, as the Allied Fleet assembled in and around Tokyo bay, Allied Commanders were informed of the appalling conditions in some areas, and were confronted by prisoners who had left their camps in an effort to seek help. As a result, the recovery operations were forced to begin earlier than planned. In similar operations to those in southern areas, aid was dropped by air to assist prisoners until camps could be reached by land. Despite warnings from the Japanese authorities that they could not guarantee the safety of those taking part in the RAPWI process, these fears were unfounded and the operations were assisted by the active cooperation of the Japanese forces in the area.

Although recovery operations on the Japanese Home Islands were led by American personnel, their British counterparts made significant contributions to the overall recovery process. In spite of the fact that the British were unable to provide officially trained recovery personnel, volunteers from the assembled British shipping ensured that British prisoners met some of their own countrymen during the recovery operations. Prisoners from northern areas, and in particular those on the Japanese Home Islands, had heard virtually nothing from the outside world following their arrival. In these circumstances the rehabilitation of the men commenced as they encountered the first recovery teams, and it was only as U.K. prisoners met British personnel that many realised that America had not won the war singlehandedly. The British presence also increased as other personnel volunteered to assist with the processing of the recovered prisoners on docksides, or visited prisoners on recovery vessels and hospital ships. As in southern areas, the former prisoners continued their rehabilitation as RAPWI teams attempted to fill the gaps in the lives of the prisoners caused by three-and-a-half years of captivity.

Research pointed to the perhaps surprising lack of ill-will expressed by some prisoners towards the general Japanese population and RAPWI teams emphasised that the prisoners’ hatred towards the Japanese, was mainly confined towards their guards and the military police. Accounts suggested that following the Japanese surrender, some prisoners who worked in industrial settings were wined and dined by their former employers. Similarly, civilians showed no aggression towards prisoners who, in some cases, boarded trains and took sight-seeing trips to local towns and villages while waiting for their camps to be liberated. In other instances, once the men had received sufficient drops of Western-type food, they distributed their now surplus camp rice supplies among the local population. Such instances demonstrated that there was no collective narrative of hatred expressed by former prisoners towards all Japanese, in spite of their years of ill-treatment by callous guards.

One perhaps understandable observation which emerged in various accounts from those taking part in recovery operations, demonstrated the resentment which some Other Ranks felt towards their Officers. Although of course not universal, numbers of Other Ranks expressed their anger and bitterness at the inequalities which had existed during their time in Japanese hands. In comparison to their men Officers were generally not required to carry out the same level of physical work, and due to their higher wages had more opportunities to supplement the meagre rations provided by the Japanese. Furthermore, many Officers faced difficult decisions in relation to the work the Other Ranks were required to carry out, as they attempted to balance the welfare of their men against the demands of the Japanese. While the majority of Officers acted in the best interest of Other Ranks, others were accused of being too eager to comply with Japanese demands, and in isolated cases others were accused of actively collaborating with the enemy. The reports which emerged from the returning vessels suggested that a small but significant minority of Other Ranks resented any form of discipline, to the point that they were considered to be a disruptive influence during their return journeys.

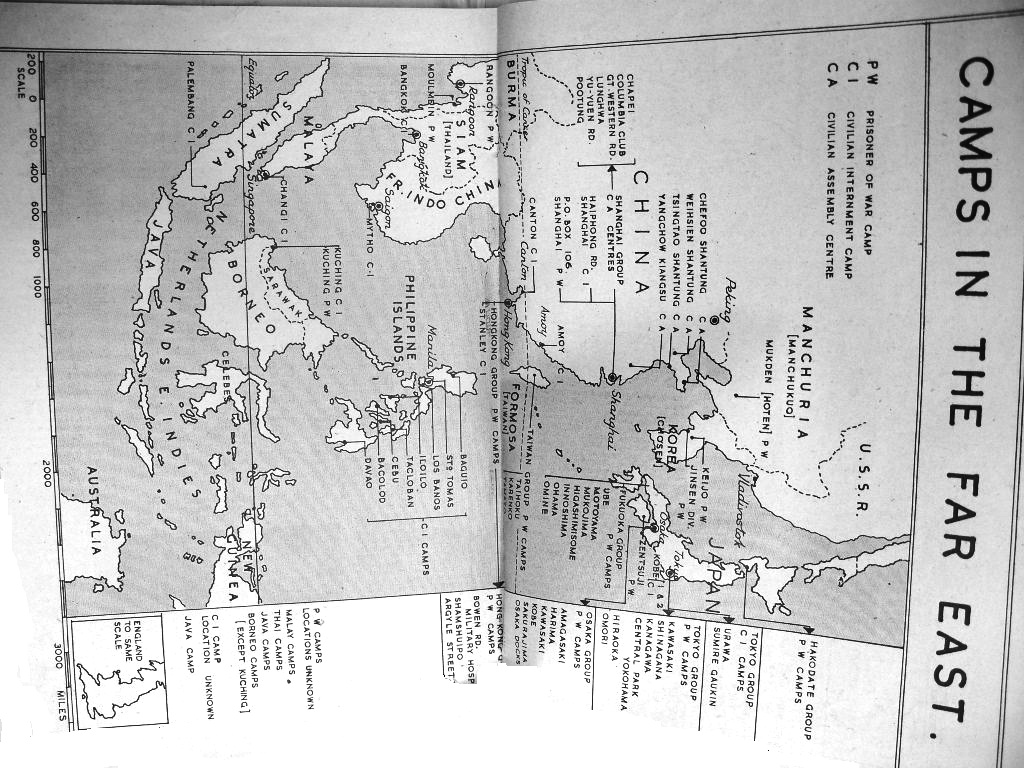
The return journeys of prisoners have been relatively well recorded in individual memoirs and diaries. The thesis compares the experiences of those returning from southern areas, with those who returned from camps in the north. Although generalisations are of course dangerous, the research has demonstrated that prisoners who were repatriated on later ships appear to have had somewhat different experiences of welcome on their arrival in the United Kingdom, in comparison with repatriates who returned on the earliest ships from camps in southern areas.

Former prisoners who were recovered from southern areas spoke of being treated as heroes at various stages of their journeys. Although the Japanese surrendered in mid-August 1945, the decision to recover the vast majority of former prisoners using sea transport rather than air, allowed additional time for the men to begin to recuperate from their ordeals. The majority of prisoners had already gained weight, due to the supplementary rations provided in camps and reception centres and this trend continued during their time on board vessels as they travelled to the United Kingdom. Medical records from returning ships demonstrated the majority of repatriates had gained a significant amount of weight during their homeward voyages. The first ships returning to Britain arrived in early October 1945, and were met by crowds of well-wishers and officials, as bands played on docksides to welcome them back to the United Kingdom. In line with the official recommendations, their receptions emphasised that the former prisoners had not been forgotten during their time in Japanese hands.

The homecoming of some later ships arriving in the United Kingdom contrasted sharply with the reception enjoyed by the first ships to reach Britain from the Far East. Research indicated that the lack of an official welcome was taken by some repatriates as a negative sign. Many former prisoners who were recovered from the Japanese Home Islands had been treated to American-style rations, in greater quantities than they could possibly eat. Narratives suggest that their return voyages were something of a trip of a lifetime, as the returning prisoners were greeted by crowds of well-wishers at each step of their journeys across the United States or Canada. As their journeys generally took weeks longer, the former prisoners gained on average more weight than those who had already returned from southern areas. However, their treatment and experiences during their journeys were in sharp contrast to their welcome on the dockside on their return to Britain. As Alastair Urquhart pointed out nothing could have prepared him for his arrival back in Southampton, ‘no quayside band, no media or fanfare awaited us’. He claimed that ‘all the men felt devastated.’[[923]](#footnote-923) Leo Manning similarly recorded a complete lack of any welcome.[[924]](#footnote-924) Their reception was contrary to official plans, which suggested that all returning ships should receive official welcomes. Furthermore, their return did little to allay the fears of those who were sensitive to the possibility that they were thought to have disgraced themselves, either by the circumstances of their capture, or by the fact that they had worked in the service of the Japanese war effort.

The thesis argues that the lack of reliable information concerning the full-extent of the suffering endured by U.K. prisoners of war while in Japanese hands, coupled with the fact that the men had received increased rations for an extended period prior to their repatriation, disguised the full extent of the failure of Britain’s relief efforts in the Far East. Despite the fact that the appearance of the majority of the returning prisoners had changed a great deal in the months following the surrender of Japan, considerable numbers continued to suffer physical and mental issues which affected their health for the rest of their lives.[[925]](#footnote-925) Mountbatten had pointed out in September 1945, that the appearance of the men had already changed rapidly, and that this would disguise the hardships that they had suffered.[[926]](#footnote-926) Although the study found no evidence of a policy of deliberately hiding the suffering the repatriated prisoners had endured, it could be suggested that the British authorities had little vested interest in pointing out their own lack of success in helping the Britain’s Far East prisoners during their time in Japanese hands.

Following their arrival Britain’s Far East prisoners of war were processed, and those fit enough were quickly dispersed back into society. The repatriates returned to a United Kingdom which had already began to move on following the end of the war. Although there was some knowledge in Britain of the hardships the former prisoners had suffered, the warnings which were issued to the men relating to the information they could give to the press, meant that many considered they were officially prevented from speaking of their experiences. These orders, when coupled with advice given to their next-of-kin which suggested that they should not ask too many difficult questions, compounded the situation. In these circumstances, it is perhaps understandable that many felt they were unable to discuss their privations as prisoners of the Japanese, and in some cases family members only discovered the full extent of the horrors and hardships the men had endured, as diaries and memoirs came to light following the death of the former prisoners.



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99. *Ibid*., pp, 3-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
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101. Roland, *op cit*., p, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
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133. *Ibid*., pp, 234-235. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
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155. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. WO32/10738 Statement by Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in the House of Commons on 28th January 1944 Regarding Japanese Treatment of British Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. WO169/59 Summary of Action taken in Matters Relating to Prisoners of War (Summary No. 10.) March 1942. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
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160. WO165/59 Imperial Prisoner of War Committee Summary of action taken relating to prisoners of war Summary number 12 May 1942. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. WO165/59 Imperial Prisoner of War Committee Summary of action taken relating to prisoners of war Summary number 10 March 1942. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
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163. PREM 3/157/3 gives some indication information available to the British authorities following the fall of Hong Kong, for example, PREM3/157/3 Telegram from Lisbon to Foreign Office news from Macao 29th January 1942. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
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167. WO163/584 Telegram No. 2183 from Protecting Power at Berne to Foreign Office dated 20.6.42. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
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170. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
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182. WO224/188 Supplementary Report on the Visit to the Prisoners of War at Hong Kong Dated February 18th1943 signed C.A. Kengelbacher delegate of the Swiss Legation in Tokyo. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
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186. Satow and Sée, *op cit*., p. 126. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. WO163/582 Imperial prisoners of War Committee Minutes of the Second meeting held in room 109, The War Office, on Wednesday, 26th August 1942. Point 15 Refusal of Japanese government to recognise the right of the Swiss government to inspect prisoner of war camps. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
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189. WO165/59 Directorate of Prisoners of War Monthly Directorate Letter No 13 November 1942. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
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212. WO163/583 IPWC Sub-Committee A 3rd meeting 12th December 1941. See also WO366/26 Phillimore Report, *op cit*., p. 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. PREM3/364/14 Statement of Policy to be followed by the United Nations War Crimes (Far East) Commission in respect of the Publication of Information regarding the Japanese Maltreatment of Allied Prisoners of War (Statement of Policy of June 4th, 1943), Appendix A. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. PREM3/364/14 Statement of Policy to be followed by the United Nations War Crimes (Far East) Commission in respect of the Publication of Information regarding the Japanese Maltreatment of Allied Prisoners of War (Statement of Policy of June 4th, 1943) Reproduced in Appendix A. Point 7 Conclusions. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
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226. Satow & Sée, *op cit*.,p. 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. Cambray and Briggs, *op cit*., footnote p. 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
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229. PREM4/98/1 Parliamentary Question by Miss Ward stamped 2 June 1942. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. FO916/550 British Prisoners of War Relatives Association Newssheet No35 March 1943. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. FO916/550 Letter to Mr George Warner C.B.E. from H.E. Satow Dated 13th March 1943. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. WO32/11118 Prisoners of War Central Enquiry Bureau Information and Functions: Petition from the next-of-kin of prisoners in the Far East. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. FO916/550 Copy of March 1943 ‘News Sheet from The British Prisoners of War Relatives Association’. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. FO916/562 Letter from Vansittart to Sir David Scott of the Foreign Office dated 1st April 1943. [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. *Ibid*., (Underlining as per the letter). [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. FO916/562 Letter from Vansittart to Sir David Scott of the Foreign Office dated 1st April 1943. See also FO916/550 for further correspondence between the BPOWRA and the Foreign Office. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. FO916/562 Letter from Vansittart to Sir David Scott of the Foreign Office dated 1st April 1943. Note in marginalia signed W.R. [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. FO916/562 Letter from Foreign Office to The Right Honourable Lord Vansittart, 14th April 1943. Sgd. Sir David Scott. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. CAB66/39/27 W.P (43) 327 21st July 1943 signed W.S.C. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. FO916/550 Letter to the Rt Hon. Brendan Bracken, M.P. Minister of Information from W.G. MacDonald. Prisoners of War Relatives Association Glasgow and West of Scotland President dated 5th October 1943. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. FO371/35989Mr Redman to Mr Harvey regarding Draft Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War dated 7th October 1943. [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. WO32/10738 Publicity Concerning Japanese Treatment of British Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees: Memorandum by the Minister of State dated 27th October 1943. See also FO371/41787, WO32/10738, FO371/35989, Prem3/364/5. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. WO366/26 Phillimore Report, *op cit*., p. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. WO32/10738 Publicity Concerning Japanese Treatment of British Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees: Memorandum by the Minister of State dated 27th October 1943. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. For instance, accounts were published regarding by former internees and journalists: Otto Tolischus a *New York Times* journalist wrote 3 books: *They Wanted War*, 1940, *Tokyo Record*, 1943 and *Through Japanese Eyes*, 1945, Samuel Heaslett also wrote the pamphlet *From a Japanese Prison*, 1943. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. FO371/35989 Clipping from *The Observer* 10.10.43. [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. David Miller, *Mercy Ships: The Untold Story of Prisoner-of-War Exchanges in World War II*. (London and New York, 2008), pp. 107-112. [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. See WO32/10738 and FO371/35989 files which deal with the inter-Allied negotiations regarding the announcements which were made in January 1944 and November 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. WO32/10738 Statement by Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in the House of Commons on 28th January 1944 Regarding Japanese Treatment of British Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees. [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. PREM3/364/14 The United Nations War Crimes (Far East) Commission, Progress Report No7 for the period 1st October to 31st December 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. FO371/41787 Naval Cypher by Cable from J.S.M. (Joint Staff Mission), 23.01.44. [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. CO980/205 Note on first month’s working 1st July 1944. See also WO32/11118. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. CO980/205 Prisoner of War (Far East) Enquiry Centre, personal enquiries to the centre in the first four weeks. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. CO980/205 Prisoner of War (Far East) Enquiry Centre, correspondence in the first four weeks. [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. CO980/205A Handbook for the Relatives and Friends of Prisoners of War and Civilians in Japanese or Japanese Occupied Territory, War Office May 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. PREM3/364/5 Extract from W.M. (44) 151 Conclusions Thursday 16th November 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. WO165/69 P.W.3 War Diary, S.C.T. to B.A.S. Washington dated 19th October 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. Announcement 17th November 1944 by Sir James Grigg (Secretary of State for War) Hansard Vol 404 cc2244-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. A complete set of the magazines are available in the British Red Cross Archive and give a clear indication of the way that the conditions were portrayed to the relatives of those in the Far East. [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. CAB66/39/27 W.P (43) 327 21st July 1943 signed W.S.C. [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. WO32/10738 Publicity Concerning Japanese Treatment of British Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees: Memorandum by the Minister of State dated 27th October 1943. Annex II Communication to the Japanese Government. [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. WO165/59 D.P.W. Monthly Directorate Letter No.32. June 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. WO163/582 Report from the Imperial Prisoners of War Committee: Summary of Action in Matters Relating to Prisoners of War in August 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. WO165/69 P.W.3. War Diary, Protecting Power, Berne telegram No. 5287 Dated 15th December 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. PREM3/364/14 The United Nations War Crimes (Far East) Commission Progress Report No.7., for the period 1st October to 31st December 1944. Appendix A. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. WO165/69 P.W.3. War Diary, Protecting Power, Berne telegram No. 5287 Dated 15th December 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. WO165/69 P.W.3 War Diary, Protecting Power, Berne telegram dated 28th December 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. CAB65/43/14 W.M. 98 (44) Conclusions of a meeting of the War Cabinet 28th July 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. CAB66/53/4 W.P. (44) 404. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs 23rd July 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. CAB66/53/4 W.P. (44) 404. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs 23rd July 1944 Annex Letter to the Foreign Office from the United States Embassy dated 14th June 1944. See also Kent Fedorowich, ‘Doomed from the Outset? Internment and Civilian exchange in the Far East: The British failure over Hong Kong, 1941-1945’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 25:1 (1997), pp, 130-131, Satow and Sée, *op cit*., p. 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. Jonathan F. Vance, ‘The Trouble with Allies: Canada and the Negotiation of Prisoner of War Exchanges’ in *Prisoners of War and their Captors in World War II*, Moore, B and Fedorowich, K. (eds.) (Oxford, Washington, D.C. 1996), pp. 69-85, see also Kent Fedorowich, ‘Doomed from the Outset?’ *op cit*., pp. 113-140. [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. WO165/69 P.W.3. War Diary Protecting Power, Berne Dispatch dated 18th December 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. WO165/69 P.W.3 War Diary, Washington Telegram dated 29th January 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. WO32/10738 Telegram from A.M.S.S.O to Argonaut 9th February 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. WO165/66 War Diary (P.W.2 (A). Far East Questions: Extracts from Tokyo broadcasts 2nd February 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. WO32/10738 Telegram from A.M.S.S.O to Argonaut 9th February 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. WO165/69 P.W.3 War Diary, Foreign office telegram dated 31st January 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. WO32/10738 Telegram from H.M. Ambassador Washington Feb 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. WO165/69 P.W.3 War Diary, War Office telegram to Washington dated 9th February 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. WO32/10738 Telegram from H.M. Ambassador Washington Feb 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. WO32/10738 Telegram from A.M.S.S.O to Argonaut 9th February 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. WO32/10738 Telegram from H.M. Ambassador Washington Feb 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. 163/582 Report from the Imperial Prisoners of War Committee: Summary of Action in Matters Relating to Prisoners of War in July 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
303. WO165/59 Imperial Prisoner of War Committee Summary of action taken relating to prisoners of war Summary number 49: June 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
304. Cambray and Briggs, *op cit*., footnote p. 286. [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. Satow and Sée, *op cit*., p. 126. [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. Yoichi Kibata, ‘Japanese Treatment of British Prisoners of War: The Historical Context’, in Towle, Kosuge and Kibata (eds.) *Japanese Prisoners of War*. (London and New York, 2000), p. 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
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492. WO165/59 Imperial Prisoner of War Committee Summary of action taken relating to prisoners of war Summary number 33: February 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-492)
493. For details of the diseases suffered by Far East prisoners see Charles G. Roland and Harry S. Shannon, ‘Patterns of Disease among World War II Prisoners of the Japanese’ *op cit*., pp. 65-85. Roland, *Long Night’s Journey into Day*. *op cit*., pp, 323-324, A number of accounts of the experiences of the medical officers who were in camps include E.E. Dunlop, *The Diaries of Weary Dunlop: Java and the Burma-Thailand Railway 1942-1945*. (London, 2009), R Hardie, *The Burma-Siam Railway: The Secret Diary of Dr Robert Hardie 1942-1945*. (London, 1983), S Pavilliard, *Bamboo Doctor*. (London, 1960). [↑](#footnote-ref-493)
494. WO163/590 IPWC Sub-Committee B: Despatch by Post of Medical Supplies to Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees from the British Commonwealth in the Far East dated 12th June 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-494)
495. WO165/66 War Diary (P.W.2 (A). Far East Questions: D.O letter from Mr Gardner to Mr Roberts (F.O) dated 18th May 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-495)
496. WO163/590 IPWC Sub-Committee ‘B’: Despatch by Post of Medical Supplies to Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees from the British Commonwealth in the Far East dated 12th June 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-496)
497. Cambray and Briggs, *op cit*., p. 283. [↑](#footnote-ref-497)
498. Miller, *op cit*., p. 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-498)
499. WO163/590 Carriage of Supplies by Air to the Far East: Memorandum by the War Office for the consideration of the IPWC Sub-Committee B at the 39th meeting on the 20th October 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-499)
500. For examples of discussions see WO 163/590 IPWC Sub-Committee ‘B’: Despatch by Post of Medical Supplies to Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees from the British Commonwealth in the Far East dated 12th June 1944. FO916/1067 War Cabinet Chiefs of Staff Committee: Despatch by Air for Relief Supplies for British Prisoners of War in the Far East. 10th September 1944. FO916/1068 Telegram from JSM, Washington to AMSSO 25th November 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-500)
501. WO366/26 Phillimore Report, *op cit*., p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-501)
502. FO916/1067 Telegram for Fraser-Tytler from Burdon 27th September 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-502)
503. *Secret Session Speeches by the Right Hon. Winston S. Churchill, O.M., C.H., M.P*. Compiled by Charles Eade, (1946, London, Toronto, Melbourne and Sydney), p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-503)
504. Major General S. Woodburn Kirby, *The War Against Japan: Vol V The Surrender of Japan*. (London, 1969). [↑](#footnote-ref-504)
505. WO366/26 Colonel H. J. Phillimore, Historical Monograph: *The Second World War 1939-1945, Army Prisoners of war*. p.160. [↑](#footnote-ref-505)
506. CAB66/38/34 The Two-Stage Ending of the War and Demobilisation, Military and Civil, Memorandum by the Minister of Labour and National Service 29th June 1943. Similar statements had already been made by several other government Ministers and Secretaries of State. [↑](#footnote-ref-506)
507. Christopher Thorne, *The Issue of War: States, Societies, and the Far Eastern Conflict of 1941-1945*. (London, 1985), p. 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-507)
508. CAB66/39/27 W.P (43) 327 21st July 1943 initialled W.S.C. [↑](#footnote-ref-508)
509. See CAB66/39/27 of June 1943, CAB66/38/34 of June 1943. Matters surrounding demobilisation was discussed on various occasions throughout the war see: CAB66/30/28which includes details of Cabinet meetings in May 1941, and October 1942 and November 1942, and CAB65/43/40, September 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-509)
510. WO163/584 IPWC Sub-Committee ‘A’ meeting 30th September 1942. [↑](#footnote-ref-510)
511. WO163/584 IPWC Sub-Committee ‘A’ Scheme for the Post War Repatriation of Imperial Prisoners of War from the Far East 19th September 1942 (Memorandum by the War Office for the consideration by Sub-Committee A at their 13th Meeting on 30th September 1942. [↑](#footnote-ref-511)
512. See Chapter 1 for details of the information which became available with regards to the ill-treatment of prisoners in southern areas during the course of 1943. [↑](#footnote-ref-512)
513. WO163/584 IPWC Sub-Committee ‘A’ Scheme for the Post War Repatriation of Imperial Prisoners of War from the Far East 19th September 1942 (Memorandum by the War Office for the consideration by Sub-Committee A at their 13th Meeting on 30th September 1942. [↑](#footnote-ref-513)
514. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-514)
515. WO163/583 IPWC Sub-Committee ‘A’ 3rd meeting 12th December 1941. [↑](#footnote-ref-515)
516. WO163/584 IPWC Sub-Committee ‘A’ Scheme for the Post War Repatriation of Imperial Prisoners of War from the Far East 19th September 1942 (Memorandum by the War Office for the consideration by Sub-Committee A at their 13th Meeting on 30th September 1942. [↑](#footnote-ref-516)
517. AIR23/1980 Report on the Recovery of Allied Prisoners and Internees H.Q. S.A.C.S.E.A 28th May 1946, p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-517)
518. WO165/59 Directorate of Prisoners of War Monthly Report 10 August 1942. [↑](#footnote-ref-518)
519. WO163/584 IPWC Sub-Committee ‘A’ Scheme for the Post War Repatriation of Imperial Prisoners of War from the Far East 19th September 1942 (Memorandum by the War Office for the consideration by Sub-Committee A at their 13th Meeting on 30th September 1942. [↑](#footnote-ref-519)
520. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-520)
521. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-521)
522. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-522)
523. AIR23/1980 Report on the Recovery of Allied Prisoners and Internees H.Q. S.A.C.S.E.A 28th May 1946, p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-523)
524. Daws, *op cit*., p. 345: Daws contends that in northern areas the American term for those recovered was RAMPS or Recovered Allied Military Personnel. [↑](#footnote-ref-524)
525. WO106/4986 Telegram from War Department to C in C India, SACSEA, British Staff Section GHQ South West Pacific Repeated: BAS. Washington (For Loup). Cipher P.W.2. 4th February 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-525)
526. WO322/26 Phillimore Report, *op cit*., p. 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-526)
527. WO106/4986 Telegram from War Department to C in C India, SACSEA, British Staff Section GHQ South West Pacific Repeated: BAS. Washington (For Loup). Cipher P.W.2. 3rd February 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-527)
528. AIR23/3208 JLPC (45) 23 13th August 1945 Aid to Allied Prisoners of War and Internees on the Capitulation of Japan. Map referred to as ‘E’ Group Broadsheet No 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-528)
529. AIR23/1980 Report on the Recovery of Allied Prisoners and Internees H.Q. S.A.C.S.E.A 28th May 1946, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-529)
530. WO106/4986 Telegram from War Department to C in C India, SACSEA, British Staff Section GHQ South West Pacific Repeated: BAS. Washington (For Loup). Cipher P.W.2. 4th February 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-530)
531. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-531)
532. FO916/1102 letter from R.E.A. Elwes to C.G. Whitteridge Esq. Prisoners of War Department, 3rd November 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-532)
533. WO163/582 Report from the Imperial Prisoners of War Committee: Summary of Action in Matters Relating to Prisoners of War in October 1944 (41). [↑](#footnote-ref-533)
534. FO916/1102 Subject: Torpedoing of Japanese transports carrying Allied prisoners of war Signed G.C. Whitteridge Foreign Office November 17th, 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-534)
535. ADM116/5492 Notes on a talk given by Dr, Marcel Junod (Chief Delegate of the International Red Cross Committee in the Far East) in Room 407, War Office, 21st June 1946. [↑](#footnote-ref-535)
536. Imperial Prisoner of War Committee Summary of action taken relating to prisoners of war Summary number 36: May 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-536)
537. WO322/26 Phillimore Report, *op cit*., p. 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-537)
538. WO165/69 P.W.3 War Diary, Report dated 1st February 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-538)
539. WO165/69 P.W.3 War Diary, War Office telegram to B.A.S Washington and L.H.Q. Melbourne 6th February 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-539)
540. WO165/69 P.W.3 War Diary, 24th Feb. 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-540)
541. WO163/582 Report from the Imperial Prisoners of War Committee: Summary of Action in Matters Relating to Prisoners of War in March 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-541)
542. PREM3/364/14 The United Nations War Crimes (Far East) Commission Progress Report No.7 for the period 1st October to 31st December 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-542)
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544. WO32/11130 Note from Col. Elwes 4th January 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-544)
545. WO32/11130 Directorate of Prisoners of War Paper number PWCA/P (45)29 Imperial Prisoners of War Committee Sub Committee ‘A’ Protection of Prisoners of War in Japanese Hands. (Memorandum for the consideration of the Sub-Committee at their 52nd Meeting to be held on 4th July 1945). [↑](#footnote-ref-545)
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551. WO32/9906 Information to Conducting Officer relating to Press visit signed Staff Captain L.V. Massey P.W.2. Curzon Street House, Mayfair dated 30th March 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-551)
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553. Thorne, *op cit*., p. 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-553)
554. Peter Dennis, *Troubled days of Peace: Mountbatten and South East Asia Command 1945-1946*. (Manchester, 1987), p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-554)
555. Suzanne Hall. ‘The politics of prisoner of war recovery: SOE and the Burma-Thailand Railway during World War II’, *Intelligence and National Security* 17:2 (2002), p. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-555)
556. Dennis, *op cit*., p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-556)
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558. ADM116/5492 Report on the part played by the British Pacific Fleet in the RAPWI operation by Lt. Col. R.M.M. Porter dated 19th February 1946, p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-558)
559. *Ibid*., p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-559)
560. WO106/4986 Telegram from War Department to C in C India, SACSEA, British Staff Section GHQ South West Pacific Repeated: BAS. Washington (For Loup). Cipher P.W.2. 4th February 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-560)
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562. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-562)
563. WO106/4986 Telegram from War Office to B.A.S. Washington for Loup from D.P.W. dated 18th May 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-563)
564. WO203/294 Memorandum from the Assistant Chief of Staff: Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees 22nd June 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-564)
565. WO193/349 Suggested Administrative arrangements regarding the processing and repatriation of British Commonwealth prisoners of war recovered by forces under the American Command in the Pacific, July 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-565)
566. FO916/1069 Telegram from Berne to Foreign Office No. 3438 Dated 27th May 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-566)
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574. For discussions on the inter-relationship between London and Ottawa see Kent Fedorowich, ‘Directing the War from Trafalgar Square: Vincent Massey and the Canadian High Commission, 1939-1942’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 40, March 2012, pp. 87-117. Wylie, Neville, ‘Prisoner of War Relief and Humanitarianism in Canadian External Policy during the Second World War’, *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 3:2 (2005), pp. 239-58, Philip Buckner, (Ed.) *Canada and the End of Empire, 1939-1982*. (Oxford, 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-574)
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576. AIR23/1980 Report on the Recovery of Allied Prisoners and Internees H.Q. S.A.C.S.E.A 28th May 1946, p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-576)
577. WO106/4986 Telegram from War Office to B.A.S. Washington dated 18th May 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-577)
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580. Woodburn Kirby, *Vol V The Surrender of Japan*. *op cit*., 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-580)
581. AIR23/1980 Report on the Recovery of Allied Prisoners and Internees H.Q. S.A.C.S.E.A 28th May 1946, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-581)
582. WO163/582 Report from the Imperial Prisoners of War Committee: Summary of Action in Matters Relating to Prisoners of War in July 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-582)
583. WO163/582 Report from the Imperial Prisoners of War Committee: Summary of Action in Matters Relating to Prisoners of War in July 1945. WO165/59 Imperial Prisoner of War Committee Summary of action taken relating to prisoners of war Summary number 50: July 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-583)
584. WO203/294 Unparaphrased Cypher from Landforces to SACSEA DETARMINDIA 26th June 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-584)
585. WO193/349 Administrative Directive Regarding the Processing and Repatriation of British Commonwealth Prisoners of War recovered by S.A.C.S.E.A. 23rd July 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-585)
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588. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-588)
589. WO163/582 Report from the Imperial Prisoners of War Committee: Summary of Action in Matters Relating to Prisoners of War in April 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-589)
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592. AIR23/1980 Report on the Recovery of Allied Prisoners and Internees H.Q. S.A.C.S.E.A 28th May 1946, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-592)
593. WO193/349 Suggested Administrative arrangements concerning the processing and repatriation of British Commonwealth prisoners of war recovered by forces under the American Command in the Pacific, July 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-593)
594. WO193/349 Administrative Directive Regarding the Processing and Repatriation of British Commonwealth Prisoners of War recovered by S.A.C.S.E.A. 23rd July 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-594)
595. For details of the operations carried out in the Far East see Hall, *Op Cit*., Charles Cruickshank, *S.O.E in the Far East*. (Oxford, 1986), M. R. D. Foot, *S.O.E. An outline History of The Special Operations Executive 1940-46*. (London, 1993), M. R. D. Foot & J. M. Langley, *MI9: The British Secret Service that fostered Escape and Evasion and its American Counterpart*. (London, 1979) Ian Trenowden, *Operations Most Secret SOE: The Malayan Theatre*. (London, 1978). [↑](#footnote-ref-595)
596. Woodburn Kirby, *Vol V The Surrender of Japan*. *op cit*., p. 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-596)
597. WO203/294 Note on ‘E’ Group to S.E.A. & I. Commands from Lt. Col. R.C. Jackman Head of ‘E’ Group. [↑](#footnote-ref-597)
598. WO203/294 Directive from R.C. Jackman head of ‘E’ Group to Lt. Comdr. (A) K. B. Brochie 20th June 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-598)
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600. AIR23/3208 JLPC (45) 23 13th August 1945Aid to Allied Prisoners of War and Internees on the Capitulation of Japan. [↑](#footnote-ref-600)
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602. Hall, *op cit*., p. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-602)
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609. Richard Hough, *Mountbatten Hero of Our Time*. (London, 1980), p. 195. [↑](#footnote-ref-609)
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612. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-612)
613. Woodburn Kirby, *Vol V The Surrender of Japan*. *op cit*., pp. 228-229. [↑](#footnote-ref-613)
614. Hough, *op cit*., p. 198. For details of MacArthur’s orders see also Woodburn Kirby, *Vol V The Surrender of Japan*. *Op Cit*., p. 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-614)
615. Dennis, *op cit*., p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-615)
616. AIR23/1980 Report on the Recovery of Allied Prisoners and Internees H.Q. S.A.C.S.E.A 28th May 1946, p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-616)
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618. *Ibid*., p. 307. [↑](#footnote-ref-618)
619. *Ibid*., pp. 230-231. [↑](#footnote-ref-619)
620. AIR 23/3222 Joint Logistical Planning Committee meeting held 23rd August 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-620)
621. WO203/5193 Extract from 142nd Staff Meeting 13.08.1945 Aid to Allied Prisoners of War and Internees on the Capitulation of Japan WO203/5193 Aid to Allied Prisoners of War and Internees on the Capitulation of Japan dated 13th August 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-621)
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638. Felton, *op cit*., p. 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-638)
639. For details of the meetings held by the JLPC see AIR23/3222. [↑](#footnote-ref-639)
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650. Dennis, *op cit*., p. 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-650)
651. AIR 23/3222 Joint Logistical Planning Committee RAPWI Co-ordination Committee 20th October 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-651)
652. AIR2/8621Administrative Directive to British Liaison Staff Melbourne and B.A.S. Washington regarding the Processing and Repatriation of British Commonwealth Prisoners of War recovered by Forces under American Commanders in the Pacific 12th September 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-652)
653. Lieutenant. -General C. H. Gairdner the Prime Minister’s representative was attached to MacArthur’s acted as a senior liaison officer between Mountbatten and MacArthur. [↑](#footnote-ref-653)
654. ADM116/5492 Report on the part played by the British Pacific Fleet in the RAPWI operation by Lt. Col. R.M.M. Porter dated 19th February 1946, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-654)
655. AIR2/8621 Post War Repatriation of Prisoners of War Committee: Report by Lt. Col. Meadley (War Office P.W.5) 20/11/45. [↑](#footnote-ref-655)
656. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-656)
657. WO366/26 Phillimore Report, *op cit*., pp. 163-164. See also AIR2/8621 Post War Repatriation of Prisoners of War Committee: Report by Lt. Col. Meadley (War Office P.W.5) 20/11/45. [↑](#footnote-ref-657)
658. ADM116/5492 Report on the part played by the British Pacific Fleet in the RAPWI operation by Lt. Col. R.M.M. Porter dated 19th February 1946, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-658)
659. PREM3/364/14 The United Nations War Crimes (Far East) Commission Progress Report No.7 for the period 1st October to 31st December 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-659)
660. WO322/26 Phillimore Report, *op cit*., p. 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-660)
661. WO163/582 Report from the Imperial Prisoners of War Committee: Summary of Action in Matters Relating to Prisoners of War in July 1945. WO165/59 Imperial Prisoner of War Committee Summary of action taken relating to prisoners of war Summary number 50: July 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-661)
662. Felton, *op cit*., p. 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-662)
663. House of Commons: H L Deb 15 August 1945 volume 137 cc8-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-663)
664. In his official history of the war against Japan Woodburn Kirby devotes just six pages to the RAPWI process in five volumes, see Major General S. Woodburn Kirby, *The War Against Japan: Vol V the Surrender of Japan*. (London, 1969), pp. 248-249. [↑](#footnote-ref-664)
665. WO32/9906 Repatriation from the Far East of British Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees. The War Office 22nd August 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-665)
666. House of Commons: H L Deb 15 August 1945 volume 137 cc8-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-666)
667. WO203/5194 Telegram from London to SACSEA 13th September 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-667)
668. WO203/5194 Extract from SAC’s 285th Meeting of 25.9.45. Item 11: Percentage of Deaths among APWI. [↑](#footnote-ref-668)
669. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-669)
670. AMD116/5492 Leaflet ‘*To All Repatriated Naval Ratings and Other Ranks Royal Marines Ex-Prisoners of War from Japanese Hands*’. Admiralty, October 1945, points 19 and 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-670)
671. Second World War Experience Centre, Transcript of Interview 758/759 Major H.G. Dicker p. 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-671)
672. Second World War Experience Centre, Private Papers of Major H.G. Dicker Memoir. [↑](#footnote-ref-672)
673. WO203/5193 Telegram dated 16th August 1945 from Somers informed that the Japanese had moved 1500 prisoners to Tayang Airfield of whom 500 were too weak to walk and require hospital planes. [↑](#footnote-ref-673)
674. HS1/62 Telegram dated 26th August 1945 from ‘Wool’ to Lt. Col. Driscoll. [↑](#footnote-ref-674)
675. WO165/59 Imperial Prisoner of War Committee Summary of action taken relating to prisoners of war Summary number 51: August 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-675)
676. Second World War Experience Centre, Private Papers of Major H.G. Dicker Memoir. [↑](#footnote-ref-676)
677. Sir Harold Atcherley Typewritten Transcript of Diary 1944-1945 Vol II 29th April 1944 to 13th Sept 1945, pp. 224-225. [↑](#footnote-ref-677)
678. Charles G. Roland, *Long Night’s Journey into Day: Prisoners of War in Hong Kong and Japan, 1941-1945*. (Ontario, 2001), p. 298. [↑](#footnote-ref-678)
679. Richard Hough, *Mountbatten Hero of Our Time*. (London, 1980), p. 198. [↑](#footnote-ref-679)
680. Mark Felton, *The Final Betrayal: Mountbatten, MacArthur and the Tragedy of Japanese POWs*. (Barnsley, 2010), pp. 142-143. [↑](#footnote-ref-680)
681. Hough, *op cit*., p. 198. [↑](#footnote-ref-681)
682. Brian MacArthur, *Surviving the Sword: Prisoners of the Japanese 1942-45*. (London, 2006), p. 421. [↑](#footnote-ref-682)
683. *Ibid*., p. 420. [↑](#footnote-ref-683)
684. CAB/129/2 Report for the Month of August 1945 for the Dominions, India, Burma, and the Colonies and Mandated Territories, point 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-684)
685. MacArthur, *op cit*., p. 420. [↑](#footnote-ref-685)
686. CAB/129/2 Report for the Month of August 1945 for the Dominions, India, Burma, and the Colonies and Mandated Territories, point 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-686)
687. MacArthur, *op cit*., pp.377- 394. Gavan Daws, *Prisoners of the Japanese: POWs of the Second World War in the Pacific*. (Great Britain, 2007), p, 327. See also Paul Ham, *Sandakan: The Untold Story of the Sandakan Death Marches*. (London, 2013), Lynette Ramsey Silver, *Sandakan: A Conspiracy of Silence*. (Burra Creek, New South Wales, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-687)
688. WO203/5194 Telegram from Saigon Control Commission to SACSEA for Admiral Mountbatten from Field Marshal Count Terauchi dated 19th September 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-688)
689. Daws, *op cit*., p. 336. [↑](#footnote-ref-689)
690. In this way the British recovery operation was able to begin before the official surrender had been signed without contravening direct orders from General MacArthur. [↑](#footnote-ref-690)
691. Charles Cruickshank, *SOE in the Far East*. (Oxford and New York, 1986), p. 239. [↑](#footnote-ref-691)
692. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-692)
693. MacArthur, *op cit*., p. 420. [↑](#footnote-ref-693)
694. Cruickshank, *op cit*., p, 239-248. Cruickshank gives examples of the difficulties involved for the clandestine operatives in various areas breaking cover and dealing with both the Japanese, native populations and armed guerrillas. [↑](#footnote-ref-694)
695. WO203/5193 message marked Top Secret Appendix ‘C’. [↑](#footnote-ref-695)
696. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-696)
697. AIR23/1980 Report on the Recovery of Allied Prisoners and Internees H.Q. S.A.C.S.E.A 28th May 1946, p. 44 Appendix ‘D’ to Report on RAPWI. [↑](#footnote-ref-697)
698. AIR23/1980 Report on the Recovery of Allied Prisoners and Internees H.Q. S.A.C.S.E.A 28th May 1946, p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-698)
699. AIR 23/3222 Joint Logistical Planning Committee meeting held 23rd August 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-699)
700. AIR23/1980 Report on the Recovery of Allied Prisoners and Internees H.Q. S.A.C.S.E.A 28th May 1946, p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-700)
701. AIR23/2669 Telegram from Mastiff Sub Control Colombo to Mastiff Control SACSEA sit rep up to 0900 hours 29th September 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-701)
702. WO203/5194 Telegram from SACSEA to Sub controls at Singapore, Calcutta and Colombo 26th Sept 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-702)
703. AIR23/1980 Report on the Recovery of Allied Prisoners and Internees H.Q. S.A.C.S.E.A 28th May 1946, p. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-703)
704. *Ibid*., p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-704)
705. HS1/62 Operation Instructions Operation Mastiff /Operation Swansong 17th August 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-705)
706. Imperial War Museum, account written by Captain T. Newell describing his service with ‘E’ Group North and his involvement in the RAPWI Operation, p. 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-706)
707. *Ibid*., pp. 69-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-707)
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709. HS1/62 Operation Instructions Operation Mastiff/Operation Swansong 17th August 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-709)
710. AIR23/1980 Report on the Recovery of Allied Prisoners and Internees H.Q. S.A.C.S.E.A 28th May 1946, p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-710)
711. HS1/62 Telegram dated 27th August 1945 from the Commander No.1 Adv H.Q. ‘E’ Group. [↑](#footnote-ref-711)
712. WO203/5193 telegram from C in C India to SACSEA dated 15th August 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-712)
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715. HS1/62 dated 23rd August 1945, quoting signal from ‘Wool’ to Lt. Col. Driscoll. [↑](#footnote-ref-715)
716. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-716)
717. For details of the recovery operations in Singapore see Romen Bose, *The End of the War: Singapore’s Liberation in the Aftermath of the Second World War*. (Singapore, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-717)
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719. Dr. S.L. van der Wal., Officiële Bescheiden Betreffende de Nederlands-Indonesische Betrekkingen 1945-1950, Derde deel 1 jan. -30 maart 1946, Memorandum by Van Mook 7th March 1946, p. 515. [↑](#footnote-ref-719)
720. Thomas, Moore & Butler, *op cit*., pp. 296-298. [↑](#footnote-ref-720)
721. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-721)
722. *Ibid*., pp. 298-299. [↑](#footnote-ref-722)
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725. Dr. S.L. van der Wal., Officiële Bescheiden Betreffende de Nederlands-Indonesische Betrekkingen 1945-1950, Derde deel 1 jan. -30 maart 1946, Memorandum by Van Mook 7th March 1946, p. 515. [↑](#footnote-ref-725)
726. Thomas, Moore & Butler, *op cit*., pp. 298-299. [↑](#footnote-ref-726)
727. For details of the difficulties encountered during recovery operations in the area see Dennis, *op cit*., [↑](#footnote-ref-727)
728. Julie Summers, *The Colonel of Tamarkan: Philip Toosey and the Bridge over the River Kwai*. (London, Sydney, New York and Toronto, 2006), p. 304. [↑](#footnote-ref-728)
729. Sir Harold Atcherley: Typewritten Transcript of Diary 1944-1945, Vol II 29th April to 13th September 1945, noted that prisoners who were waiting their turn to be recovered from prisoner of war camps voiced their frustrations with humour. Acronyms were therefore changed by prisoners frustrated that they were not on their way home by suggested that RAPWI stood for the Retention of All Prisoners of War Indefinitely. [↑](#footnote-ref-729)
730. WO203/5193 Notification to be sent to Allied POWs and Civilian Internees signed Louis Mountbatten 18/8. [↑](#footnote-ref-730)
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732. WO203/294 Unparaphrased Cypher from Landforces to SACSEA DETARMINDIA 26th June 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-732)
733. WO366/26 Colonel H. J. Phillimore, Historical Monograph: The Second World War 1939-1945, Army Prisoners of war, p. 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-733)
734. WO203/5195 extract from SAC’s 291st meeting on 17th October 1945: Report on Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees from Japanese Hands. [↑](#footnote-ref-734)
735. WO163/582 Report from the Imperial Prisoners of War Committee: Summary of Action in Matters Relating to Prisoners of War in October 1946. [↑](#footnote-ref-735)
736. AIR23/1980 Report on the Recovery of Allied Prisoners and Internees H.Q. S.A.C.S.E.A 28th May 1946, p. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-736)
737. *Ibid*., p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-737)
738. AIR 23/3222 Joint Logistical Planning Committee meeting held 29th August 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-738)
739. Summers, *op cit*., p. 301. [↑](#footnote-ref-739)
740. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-740)
741. Felton, *op cit*., p. 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-741)
742. Sir Harold Atcherley: Typewritten Transcript of Diary 1944-1945, Vol II 29th April to 13th September 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-742)
743. E, Jones, and S, Wessely ‘British Prisoners-of-War: From Resilience to Psychological Vulnerability: Reality or Perception’, in *Twentieth Century British History*, vol 21n No. 2, 2010, p 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-743)
744. Documents at the time referred to the ‘re-education’ of the recovered British prisoners. However, this term has subsequently taken on a different connotation, Rafael A. Zagovek referred to ‘reeducation’ as ‘the attempt to alter the political beliefs of a group of individuals in order to influence and possibly reshape the political and ideological fabric of the country they hail from and is synonymous with the reeducation of German prisoners of war. See Jonathan f. Vance, (eds.) *Encyclopaedia of Prisoners of war and Internment*. (California, Colorado, Oxford, 2000), Henry Faulk, *Group Captives: The Re-education of German Prisoners of War in Britain, 1945-1948*. (London, Chatto and Windus, 1977), Uta Gerhardt, “A Hidden Agenda of Recovery: The Psychiatric Conceptualization of Re-education for Germany and the United States during World War II,” *German History*14 (1996): pp, 297-324, Ron Robin, *The Barbed-Wire College: Reeducating German POWs in the United States during World War II*. (Princeton, NJ, 1995), Arthur L. Smith, *The War for the German Mind: Re-Educating Hitler’s Soldiers*. (Providence RI, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-744)
745. AIR2/8621 Directorate of Prisoners of War: Recovery of British Commonwealth Prisoners of War. 13th August 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-745)
746. Second World War Experience Centre unpublished account by Sir Harold Atcherley: Typewritten Transcript of Diary 1944-1945, Vol II 29th April to 13th September 1945, p. 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-746)
747. *Ibid*., p 239. [↑](#footnote-ref-747)
748. Second World War Experience Centre unpublished account of Major H.G. Dicker. [↑](#footnote-ref-748)
749. WO203/5195 extract from SAC’s 291st meeting on 17th October 1945: Report on Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees from Japanese Hands. [↑](#footnote-ref-749)
750. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-750)
751. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-751)
752. AIR23/1980 Report on the Recovery of Allied Prisoners and Internees H.Q. S.A.C.S.E.A 28th May 1946, p. 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-752)
753. *Ibid*., p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-753)
754. *Ibid*., p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-754)
755. Second World War Experience Centre: Unpublished account written by Major H. G. Dicker Chapter XXII pp, 192-193. [↑](#footnote-ref-755)
756. Ian Denys Peek, *One Fourteenth of an Elephant: A Memoir of Life and Death on the Burma-Thailand Railway*. (London, 2005), pp. 645-646. [↑](#footnote-ref-756)
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758. AIR23/1980 Report on the Recovery of Allied Prisoners and Internees H.Q. S.A.C.S.E.A 28th May 1946, p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-758)
759. E, Jones, & S, Wessely, ‘British Prisoners-of-War: From Resilience to Psychological Vulnerability: Reality or Perception’, in *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 21n No. 2, 2010, pp. 163-183 See also P. H. Newman, ‘The Prisoner-of-War Mentality: its Effect after Repatriation’ *British Medical Journal* 1: (1944), pp. 8-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-759)
760. Second World War Experience Centre: Unpublished account written by Major H. G. Dicker Chapter XXII, p. 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-760)
761. P. G. Cambray and G.G.B. Briggs, *British Red Cross & Order of St. John of Jerusalem War Organisation Official History 1939-1947*. (London, 1949), pp. 314-315. [↑](#footnote-ref-761)
762. AIR 23/3222 Joint Logistical Planning Committee meeting held 3rd September 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-762)
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765. WO165/59 Imperial Prisoner of War Committee Summary of action taken relating to prisoners of war Summary number 52: September 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-765)
766. AIR23/1980 Report on the Recovery of Allied Prisoners and Internees H.Q. S.A.C.S.E.A 28th May 1946, p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-766)
767. CAB129/2 Report for the Month of August 1945 for the Dominions, India, Burma, and the Colonies and Mandated Territories, point 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-767)
768. AIR23/1980 Report on the Recovery of Allied Prisoners and Internees H.Q. S.A.C.S.E.A 28th May 1946, p. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-768)
769. *Ibid*., p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-769)
770. WO193/349 12th May 1945 Repatriation of British Commonwealth Prisoners of War Recovered from the Far East. Paper for discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-770)
771. AIR 23/3222 RAPWI Co-ordinating Committee held 29th September 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-771)
772. Second World War Experience Centre: Unpublished account written by Major H. G. Dicker Chapter XXII, pp. 192-193. [↑](#footnote-ref-772)
773. Summers, *op cit*., p. 310. Toosey came home on the SS. *Orbita* on the 11th of October 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-773)
774. Cambray and Briggs, *op cit*., p. 321. [↑](#footnote-ref-774)
775. *Ibid*., pp. 317-318. [↑](#footnote-ref-775)
776. *Ibid*., p. 321. [↑](#footnote-ref-776)
777. Summers, *op cit*., pp. 309- 310. [↑](#footnote-ref-777)
778. AIR 23/3222 RAPWI Co-ordinating Committee held 29th September 1945. Various accounts detail the warmth of the welcome received on their homeward journeys. [↑](#footnote-ref-778)
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780. *Ibid*., p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-780)
781. Second World War Experience Centre: Unpublished account written by Major H. G. Dicker Chapter XXII p, 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-781)
782. Summers, *op cit*., p. 313. [↑](#footnote-ref-782)
783. Barbra Hately-Broad, ‘*Prisoner of War Families and the British Government during the Second World War*’, Unpublished PhD Thesis, pp.102-103. [↑](#footnote-ref-783)
784. Summers, *op cit*., p. 313. [↑](#footnote-ref-784)
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786. *Ibid*., pp. 46-48. The term ‘British’ is used in distinction to other forces from the Dominions or Commonwealth which area also recorded. [↑](#footnote-ref-786)
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788. WO32/9906 Recovery of Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees in the Far East: statement issued to the Press on 27th August 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-788)
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791. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-791)
792. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-792)
793. AIR2/8621 Administrative Directive to British Liaison Staff Melbourne and B.A.S. Washington regarding the Processing and Repatriation of British Commonwealth Prisoners of War recovered by Forces under American Commanders in the Pacific 12th September 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-793)
794. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-794)
795. AMD116/5492 Leaflet ‘To All Repatriated Naval Ratings and Other Ranks Royal Marines Ex Prisoners of War from Japanese Hands. Admiralty, October 1945, points 19 and 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-795)
796. WO32/10950 Report to the War Office by A.T.M. Wilson February 1944, point 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-796)
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802. Roland, *op cit*., p. 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-802)
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810. Joan Beaumont, *Gull Force: Survival and Leadership in Captivity, 1941-1945*. (North Sydney, 1988), Table 8.5. [↑](#footnote-ref-810)
811. Roland, *op cit*., p. 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-811)
812. Summers, *op cit*., p. 313. [↑](#footnote-ref-812)
813. ADM116/5492 Appendix to report by Commanding Officer H.M.S. *Speaker*. [↑](#footnote-ref-813)
814. ADM116/5492 Report by the Medical Officer H.M.H.S. *Tjitjalenga*. [↑](#footnote-ref-814)
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816. *Ibid*., brackets as per the report. [↑](#footnote-ref-816)
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831. Junod, *op cit*., p. 278. [↑](#footnote-ref-831)
832. ADM116/5492 Notes on a talk given by Dr, Marcel Junod (Chief Delegate of the International Red Cross Committee in the Far East) in Room 407, War Office, 21st June 1946. [↑](#footnote-ref-832)
833. WO106/4986 Telegram from J.S.M. Washington to A.M.S.S.O dated 27th August 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-833)
834. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-834)
835. WO203/5194 Telegram from the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers distributed to Headquarters SACSEA. Marked from C. in C. AFPAC to War Department U.S. Military Mission 22nd August 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-835)
836. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-836)
837. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-837)
838. ADM116/5492 Report on the Naval Aspects of the Recovery of Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees from the Japanese Mainland dated 15th October 1945 signed by Vice Admiral of British Third Fleet. [↑](#footnote-ref-838)
839. WO193/350 Shipping for British Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees in the Far East: Note by the War Office dated 13th September 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-839)
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841. Junod, *op cit*., p. 281. [↑](#footnote-ref-841)
842. ADM116/5492 Liberation of Prisoners of War and internees: Signal Sent to Admiralty on 14th September 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-842)
843. *Ibid*., [↑](#footnote-ref-843)
844. ADM116/5492 Report on the Naval Aspects of the Recovery of Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees from the Japanese Mainland dated 15th October 1945 signed by Vice Admiral of British Third Fleet. [↑](#footnote-ref-844)
845. Second World War Experience Centre: Transcript of Tape 1037 Interview by Peter Liddle with General Sir Peter Whiteley dated August 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-845)
846. ADM116/5492 Report on the Naval Aspects of the Recovery of Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees from the Japanese Mainland dated 15th October 1945 signed by Vice Admiral of British Third Fleet. [↑](#footnote-ref-846)
847. Charles Rollings, *Prisoner of War: Voices from Captivity During the Second World War*. (St. Ives, 2007), p. 327. Notification of the Japanese Surrender: leaflet dropped to Far Eastern POWs in August 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-847)
848. ADM116/5492 Report on the Naval Aspects of the Recovery of Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees from the Japanese Mainland dated 15th October 1945 signed by Vice Admiral of British Third Fleet. [↑](#footnote-ref-848)
849. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-849)
850. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-850)
851. Second World War Experience Centre: Transcript of an interview with Peter Liddle with Mr N.S. Vickerstaff. [↑](#footnote-ref-851)
852. Second World War Experience Centre: Diary of Gunner Heard 968382 Malaya to Taiwan Far East POW November 1941 to September 1945, p. 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-852)
853. AMD 116/5492 Narrative by Mr. E. Blatchford 15th October 1945, p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-853)
854. Junod, *op cit*., pp 286-287. [↑](#footnote-ref-854)
855. John Wyatt with Cecil Lowry, *No Mercy from the Japanese: A survivor’s account of the Burma Railway and the Hellships 1942-1945*. (Pen and Sword, Barnsley, 2008), pp. 129-130. [↑](#footnote-ref-855)
856. Second World War Experience Centre: Unpublished account written by Rod Martin, Home at last: Bert Martin’s War. (Diary entries for 7th and 8th September 1945), p. 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-856)
857. ADM116/5492 Report on the Naval Aspects of the Recovery of Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees from the Japanese Mainland dated 15th October 1945 signed by Vice Admiral of British Third Fleet. [↑](#footnote-ref-857)
858. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-858)
859. WO203/5194 Telegram from the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers distributed to Headquarters SACSEA. Marked from C. in C. AFPAC to War Department U.S. Military Mission 22nd August 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-859)
860. AMD116/5492 Narrative by Lieutenant J.P. Stevenson, 15th October 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-860)
861. ADM116/5492 Report by Lieutenant T.P. Baillie-Grohman, dated 13th September 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-861)
862. ADM116/5492 Narrative by sub Lieutenant J.D. Harris R.N., dated 15th October 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-862)
863. ADM116/5492 Narrative by Lieutenant A.B.L. Edmonds, 15th October 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-863)
864. ADM116/5492 Narrative by sub Lieutenant J.D. Harris R.N., dated 15th October 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-864)
865. Rohan D. Rivett, *Behind Bamboo*. (Victoria, 1991), p. 378. [↑](#footnote-ref-865)
866. Daws, *op cit*., p. 338. [↑](#footnote-ref-866)
867. ADM116/5492 Narrative by sub Lieutenant J.D. Harris R.N. dated 15th October 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-867)
868. Imperial War Museum: interview with George Wills, (transcript of recorded interview). [↑](#footnote-ref-868)
869. Author’s Interview with Leopold Manning 23/11/2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-869)
870. ADM116/5492 Narrative by Lt. Commander H.R.K. Bates D.S.C. R.N.V.R. on the activities of the British Reception Team in H.M.H.S. *Tjitjalenga*. [↑](#footnote-ref-870)
871. WO165/129 Minutes of the 31st meeting of Command Psychiatrists held on Saturday, 2nd June 1945 in the Conference Room, 39 Hyde Park Gate, London, S.W.7 Quote from Brigadier Rodger’s most recent letter from ALFSEA. [↑](#footnote-ref-871)
872. AMD116/5492 Narrative by Lieutenant J.P. Stevenson 15th October 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-872)
873. AIR2/8621 Administrative Directive to British Liaison Staff Melbourne and B.A.S. Washington: The Processing and Repatriation of British Commonwealth Prisoners of War Recovered by Forces Under American Commanders in the Pacific. [↑](#footnote-ref-873)
874. Second World War Experience Centre: Transcript of Tape 1037 Interview by Peter Liddle with General Sir Peter Whiteley dated August 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-874)
875. ADM116/5492 Narrative by Lieutenant J.P. Stevenson 15th October 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-875)
876. MacArthur, *op cit*., p. 434. [↑](#footnote-ref-876)
877. ADM116/5492 Narrative by Lt. Commander H.R.K. Bates D.S.C. R.N.V.R. on the activities of the British Reception Team in H.M.H.S. *Tjitjalenga*. [↑](#footnote-ref-877)
878. ADM116/5492 Narrative by Lieutenant K. P. Hardwick 15th October 1945, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-878)
879. ADM116/5492 Report on the Naval Aspects of the Recovery of Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees from the Japanese Mainland dated 15th October 1945 signed by Vice Admiral of British Third Fleet. [↑](#footnote-ref-879)
880. AIR2/8621 Administrative Directive to British Liaison Staff Melbourne and B.A.S. Washington regarding the Processing and Repatriation of British Commonwealth Prisoners of War recovered by Forces under American Commanders in the Pacific 12th September 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-880)
881. ADM116/5492 Report on the Naval Aspects of the Recovery of Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees from the Japanese Mainland dated 15th October 1945 signed by Vice Admiral of British Third Fleet. [↑](#footnote-ref-881)
882. Daws, *op cit*., p. 345. [↑](#footnote-ref-882)
883. ADM116/5492 Report on the Naval Aspects of the Recovery of Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees from the Japanese Mainland dated 15th October 1945 signed by Vice Admiral of British Third Fleet. [↑](#footnote-ref-883)
884. ADM116/5492 Report on the part played by the British Pacific Fleet in the RAPWI operation by Lt. Col. R.M.M. Porter dated 19th February 1946, p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-884)
885. WO165/59 Imperial Prisoner of War Committee Summary of action taken relating to prisoners of war Summary number 52: September 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-885)
886. Author’s Interview with Leopold Manning 23/11/2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-886)
887. ADM116/5492 Report on the part played by the British Pacific Fleet in the RAPWI operation by Lt. Col. R.M.M. Porter dated 19th February 1946, p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-887)
888. Leopold Manning landed at San Francisco and then travelled on a Hospital train to Tacoma in Seattle and from there to Canada. [↑](#footnote-ref-888)
889. WO 163/582 Report from the Imperial Prisoners of War Committee: Summary of Action in Matters Relating to Prisoners of War in August 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-889)
890. AIR2/8621 Administrative Directive to British Liaison Staff Melbourne and B.A.S. Washington: The Processing and Repatriation of British Commonwealth Prisoners of War Recovered by Forces under American Commanders in the Pacific. [↑](#footnote-ref-890)
891. WO 163/582 Report from the Imperial Prisoners of War Committee: Summary of Action in Matters Relating to Prisoners of War in August 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-891)
892. Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain, and the War Against Japan, 1941-1945*, p. 506. [↑](#footnote-ref-892)
893. Air2/8621 Administrative Directive to British Liaison Staff Melbourne and B.A.S. Washington regarding the Processing and Repatriation of British Commonwealth Prisoners of War recovered by Forces under American Commanders in the Pacific 12th September 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-893)
894. WO165/59 Imperial Prisoner of War Committee Summary of action taken relating to prisoners of war Summary number 52: September 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-894)
895. John Wyatt with Cecil Lowry, *op cit*., p. 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-895)
896. *Ibid*., pp. 135-136. [↑](#footnote-ref-896)
897. Far-eastern-heroes.org.uk, War is Ended: account written by James McHarg Miller, Accessed: 21/7/14. [↑](#footnote-ref-897)
898. Denys Peek, *op cit*., p. 644. [↑](#footnote-ref-898)
899. WO203/5194 Extract from SAC’s 285th Meeting of 25.9.45. Item 11: Percentage of Deaths among APWI. [↑](#footnote-ref-899)
900. ADM116/5492 Report by the Medical Officer H.M.H.S. *Tjitjalenga*. [↑](#footnote-ref-900)
901. AIR23/1980 Report on the Recovery of Allied Prisoners and Internees H.Q. S.A.C.S.E.A 28th May 1946, p. 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-901)
902. WO203/5195 Signal from Cabinet Offices to SACSEA 3rd October 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-902)
903. AIR2/8621 Message to repatriated prisoners of war from King George dated September 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-903)
904. AIR2/8621 Air Ministry Post-War Repatriation of Prisoners of War Committee: Minutes and Conclusions of the 9th Meeting held in Room 561, Adastral House, at 10.30 hours on Saturday, 29th September 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-904)
905. WO163/582 Report from the Imperial Prisoners of War Committee: Summary of Action in Matters Relating to Prisoners of War in October 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-905)
906. Second World War Experience Centre: Unpublished account written by Major H. G. Dicker Chapter XXII, p. 195. [↑](#footnote-ref-906)
907. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-907)
908. Author’s Interview with Leopold Manning 23/11/2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-908)
909. WO165/59 Imperial Prisoner of War Committee Summary of action taken relating to prisoners of war Summary number 54: November 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-909)
910. Author’s Interview with Leopold Manning 23/11/2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-910)
911. WO203/5194 Extract from SAC’s 285th Meeting of 25.9.45. Item 11: Percentage of Deaths among APWI. [↑](#footnote-ref-911)
912. Medical studies of this group of prisoners began shortly after their arrival in the United Kingdom,

     W. H. Whiles, ‘A Study of Neurosis among Repatriated Prisoners of War’ *British Medical Journal*, Nov 17, 1945, gives a strong indication of the way in which the mental problems of ex-prisoners were studied in the immediate aftermath of the war. Newman, P. H, ‘The Prisoner of War Mentality: Its Effect after Repatriation’, *British Medical Journal*, (January 1944), pp. 8-10, T. F. Main, ‘Clinical Problems of Repatriates’, *Journal of Medical Science*, Vol XCIII (1947), pp. 354-363, R Kemball Price, ‘R.A.P.W.I.: An Impression’, *British Medical Journal*. (April 1946), pp. 647-648, A. Curle, ‘Transitional Communities and Social Re-Connection: A Follow-up Study of the Civil Resettlement of British Prisoners of War. Part I ‘, *Human Relations*. 1:42 (1947), pp. 42-67. Indeed, the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine continue to research the issues that the few remaining prisoners still carry to the present day. [↑](#footnote-ref-912)
913. WO163/586 IPW Sub-Committee A: Notification of Prisoners of War in the Far East: meeting 9th June 1943. [↑](#footnote-ref-913)
914. Ulrich Straus, *The Anguish of Surrender: Japanese POWs of World War II.* (Seattle, 2003), p. ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-914)
915. FO371/35989 Mr Redman to Mr Harvey regarding Draft Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War dated 7th October 1943. [↑](#footnote-ref-915)
916. CAB66/39/27 W.P (43) 327 21st July 1943 signed W.S.C. [↑](#footnote-ref-916)
917. WO366/26 Colonel H. J. Phillimore, Historical Monograph: *The Second World War 1939-1945: Army Prisoners of war*, p. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-917)
918. Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists 1914-1924*. (London, Pimlico, 2002), p. 321. [↑](#footnote-ref-918)
919. WO32/11118 Prisoners of War Central Enquiry Bureau Information and Functions: Petition from the next-of-kin of prisoners in the Far East. [↑](#footnote-ref-919)
920. FO916/1067 Telegram for Fraser-Tytler from Burdon 27th September 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-920)
921. Brian MacArthur, *Surviving the Sword: Prisoners of the Japanese 1942-45*. (London, 2006), p. 421. [↑](#footnote-ref-921)
922. Julie Summers, *The Colonel of Tamarkan: Philip Toosey and the Bridge over the River Kwai*. (London, Sydney, New York and Toronto, 2006), p. 301. [↑](#footnote-ref-922)
923. Alastair Urquhart, *The Forgotten Highlander: My Incredible story of survival during the War in the Far East*. (London, 2010), p. 283. [↑](#footnote-ref-923)
924. Author’s Interview with Leopold Manning 23/11/2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-924)
925. Research suggests that although the British authorities were aware that the men may suffer reoccurrences of diseases contracted in prison camps, psychological issues were given less consideration. Ben Shephard pointed out that after returning home it was impossible to say how many former prisoners had a ‘crisis’ of some kind, he noted that one report suggested that ‘there were suicides, accidental deaths, cirrhosis of the liver and a good deal of depression. Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists 1914-1924*. (London, Pimlico, 2002), p. 322. [↑](#footnote-ref-925)
926. WO203/5194 Extract from SAC’s 285th Meeting of 25.9.45. Item 11: Percentage of Deaths among APWI. [↑](#footnote-ref-926)