

**Interpreting Memories of a Forgotten Army: Prisoner of War
Narratives from the Sumatra Railway, May 1944 – August
1945**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

In this thesis I set out the rarely-documented life history of the Sumatra Railway, which was constructed by prisoners of war (POWs) of the Japanese during the Second World War. I bring to light the personal narratives of former POWs, based on diaries, memoirs and sound recordings held predominantly within Imperial War Museum (IWM) archives. By doing so, I use some of the most powerful and comprehensive narratives from the men who survived the experience to address the gaps in current historical literature about the Sumatra Railway. Following this, and most substantially, I read these archival materials for what they tell us about the ways in which the captive experience has been represented by former POWs (and how their audiences have responded to their stories). Informed by interviews that I have carried out with the relatives of former Far Eastern POWs, I examine POW life-writing in the context of current cultural debates about forgotten histories and familial remembrance.

By focusing on the different genres of POW life-writing, I explore how specific narrative components shape the representation of captivity. Further, I establish that literature, and literacy, were key to maintaining a POW's imaginative freedom even when he was physically confined. My examination of the linguistic choices made by former POWs finds that the world of the camp was embedded into their words, and that a camp discourse developed as a means of forging bonds between men, and resisting oppression. This leads me to consider the physicality of incarceration – what I term the 'body biography' of the POW – and its impact on post-war responses to Far Eastern captivity. I conclude by reflecting on the transgenerational transmission of POW history (its postmemory), and question whether a new role is emerging for the third generation in exploring the affective impact of postmemory itself.

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Abbreviations

- ALFSEA – Allied Land Forces South East Asia
- AMES – Air Ministry Experimental Station
- COFEPOW – Children of Far East Prisoners of War
- FEPOW – Far Eastern Prisoner of War
- FMSVF – Federated Malay States Volunteer Forces
- IRCC – International Red Cross Commission
- IWM – Imperial War Museum
- JVE – Johore Volunteer Engineers
- LAA – Light Anti-Aircraft
- MO – Medical Officer
- MVG – Malayan Volunteers Group
- NCO – Non-Commissioned Officer
- NIOD – Netherlands Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies
- POW – Prisoner of War
- RA – Royal Artillery
- RAF – Royal Air Force
- RAFVR – Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve
- RAPWI – Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees
- RASC – Royal Army Service Corps
- RIMU – Radio Installation Maintenance Unit
- RNVR – Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve
- RNZAF – Royal New Zealand Air Force
- RSU – Repair and Salvage Unit
- SOE – Secret Operations Executive
- TNA – The National Archives

Introduction

Discovering Sumatra

I never met my grandfather. As I was growing up my mother spoke of him with great fondness – she still does – but for many years, all that I knew was that a black-haired, moustached man called Stanley Russell had worked on a railway, as a prisoner of war (POW) of the Japanese during the Second World War. With that information, I had come to the conclusion that he was on the Burma-Siam Railway, the ‘death railway’ I had heard about. I also knew that he walked with a stick periodically, having sustained an injury to his leg – a reminder, I would understand later, that he had been beaten by camp guards towards the end of the war. Following a series of strokes, Russell died at the age of fifty-four, when my mother was seventeen years old. He was never mentioned during family gatherings and his story was only something that I heard from my mother.

In the autumn of 2003, during the first semester of my Masters programme, I studied Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*: a two-volume graphic novel that tells the tale of Spiegelman grappling with his parents’ history as prisoners in Auschwitz, and the legacy of that history upon his own upbringing. I wrote an essay on the haunting of Spiegelman’s dead mother’s wartime diaries. Central to this essay was a scene at the end of the first volume of *Maus*, in which Spiegelman discovers that the diaries have been destroyed by his father (*My Father Bleeds History* 159). Another member of the seminar group said that they did not believe this part of the story, and that Spiegelman probably added it for dramatic effect. I disagreed and found myself telling the group that I knew that things like that could happen, because they had happened in my family too. I told them that my grandfather’s war diaries had been in a cupboard in the ‘back bedroom’ of my grandmother’s home for forty years. I knew that the past was hidden sometimes, and that – as Spiegelman’s father tries to explain – ‘these papers had too many memories’, even if I did not understand why those memories should also be secrets (159).

Spiegelman’s novel inspired me to make a concerted effort at reading the papers my own mother had passed to me: the diaries that my grandfather kept every day as a prisoner from March 1942 until August 1945. After several re-reads and some initial research on the place names that he mentioned, I realised that my grandfather had not been in Burma at all, but on the island of Sumatra. During the Second World War, Sumatra had been part of the archipelago that made up the

Netherlands East Indies, today's Indonesia. I had not heard of a 'death railway' being built there, and I wanted to know more. I sat at my computer and began to conduct some fairly haphazard internet searches for 'Sumatra Railway', 'prisoners of war' and the names of places my grandfather mentioned in his diary entries – Sibolga, Logas, Moeara, Atjeh. There was no real order to my search. I would find photographs that showed me what the landscape around him may have looked like, or where these places were in reference to others on a map. I transcribed his diaries and populated them with the images that I found of items that he obtained in the camps, such as specific brands of soap, and added references to the prayers and the books of which he made record in his diary. My search became a slow imagining of time on Sumatra through the things that my grandfather had seen, read and written.

It was not an easy search. Books that claimed to tell the story of POWs of the Japanese gave no mention of the Sumatra Railway. Indeed, any mention of Sumatra at all was brief and generally grouped with POWs on Java and Borneo, as if the disparate stories of these very different islands could be told in one short summary. One of my greatest frustrations was the concentrated focus in these accounts on the plight of those conscripted onto what was always termed 'the' death railway. This frustration was not out of disregard to the story of Burma-Siam, but a lingering guilt that I had made the same assumption as many: the assumption that there was only one 'death railway', of denying my grandfather's history and thinking 'no mate, you were in Burma'.¹

It was during this search that I happened upon the 'FEPOW² Community' – a body of largely private researchers who were making investigations in the hope that they would find answers to their own family histories. I had diaries, letters, postcards and the sketches that my grandfather had made in camp and in comparison to others, I knew so much already. But I was excited to find a group of people talking about POWs of the Japanese, since it meant that my search had a connection that was recognisable to others: 'FEPOW'. The image that I had of my grandfather, the story that I had constructed for him so far, morphed into something that sounded altogether more heroic. He was not just a prisoner of war, but a Far Eastern Prisoner of War. I was a member of a 'FEPOW' family. The acronym appeared to give some meaning to what I was doing: *because he was a FEPOW*. It

1 FEPOW Community, 'Sumatra Railway': www.fepow-community.org.uk/monthly_Review/html/sumatra_railway.htm; accessed 28 January 2014.

2 Far Eastern Prisoner of War

placed my grandfather into a group of POWs of an apparently different kind, and into a discourse of collective remembrance.

In the spring of 2006, I attended the inaugural ‘Researching FEPOW History’ conference,³ the brainchild of a group of people, many of whom are the children of former POWs, who had been affected by the history of the Far Eastern camps and wanted to share their knowledge and their resources with others. To the conference I took lists of all the men who were mentioned in my grandfather’s diary. One of those names was John Hedley⁴ and John was at the conference too. I was excited, at being able to match the physical presence of a human being to the stories that I had read. Yet, my excitement seemed out-of-place and even disrespectful to what John had survived. Whilst we talked, I showed the lists to him. His eyes widened as he began to tick off the names that he knew, so many of them, because John had been in the same camps as my grandfather, from being captured in Padang on 17 March 1942, through to road building in Atjeh, and then onto the railway line in 1944.

John told me stories that were connected to many of the names that he recognised. Some of those stories were tragic, whilst others were funny. I knew that he had finished when he went back through the list, found a particular name, tapped on the paper – ‘and that one’, he said, ‘still owes me a fiver’. He looked up, winked, and went on to tell me that this was the first time in many years that he was able to speak of ‘my boys’ and have his listener nod in recognition at the names of which he spoke. John’s own excitement at seeing that list, and even the fact that such a FEPOW conference was taking place, was enough to help me feel confident that at least some of these stories from Sumatra wanted to be heard.

Telephone conversations with, and visits to, John became a regular part of my life. He was always happy to talk, but I would hold back and wait for the conversation on Sumatra to be instigated by him. There were probably, with hindsight, questions about the experience and its aftermath that I could have been asking. But what I gained by talking with John was an appreciation of the way that he, as an individual, chose to remember and tell of his time as a POW.⁵ John was instrumental in informing my view of the Sumatra Railway as, first and foremost, a personal story: a story that still had a living memory in the form of a remarkably

3 Researching FEPOW History conferences are detailed here: www.researchingfepowhistory.org.uk; accessed 28 February 2014.

4 Lieutenant John Hedley, 1st Mysore Infantry FMSVF; became POW at age 25 at Padang on Sumatra, 18 March 1942.

5 John can be heard speaking of his time as a Malayan planter, and as a POW, via the IWM’s online catalogue: <http://m.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80023021>; accessed 07 June 2014..

sprightly ninety-year old gentleman who still always wore a cravat and was, it has to be said, much sharper than the rather musty notion of 'history' that I remembered from school.

Other FEPOW families can search for many years for small pieces of information, be it a clue as to the ship on which their loved one voyaged to the Far East, which camp they were in, or even how or where they died. I knew all of these things. I knew that Stanley Russell⁶ was imprisoned in March 1942 in Padang on Sumatra, from where he was moved to Gloegoer camp at Medan. He became a member of what was known as the Atjeh Party of prisoners and was sent road-building prior to working on the Sumatra Railway. By the end of his imprisonment he was very close to death, but he survived with treatment first in Bangalore and on repatriation in Liverpool. Then he went home to become a schoolteacher, meet his wife and raise a family of five children – four sons and one daughter. I knew that his early death, before any of his grandchildren were born, was attributable in part to the experiences that he had endured on Sumatra.

So, if I already knew all of this, what exactly did I still want to know? What was my search really about? In working through that, what I found was not just a desire to know or confirm the facts of what happened to my grandfather, but the story that he and his fellow compatriots could (but did not always) tell about how things happened and how, ultimately, they did that very telling. In meeting John, then, I had learned that the Sumatra Railway was a collective history, made up of the memories of individual men.

The railway

A railway construction project on Sumatra had been dismissed by Dutch authorities during the early twentieth century, as being an impossible task to undertake in the challenging terrain of tropical jungle and swampland. However, the Japanese administration was suffering a chronic shortage of fuel and Sumatra – an island rich in natural reserves of coal and oil – offered Japan valuable resources to continue its effort in creating a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere: a vision to lead an Asian empire free from Western domination. To ship resources to mainland Singapore and onto Japan it was, however, necessary to transport coal from the northern parts of Sumatra to the western shipping ports at Padang, and the

⁶ Lance Corporal Stanley Kay Russell, 18TH Division Royal Signals; became POW aged 26 at Padang, Sumatra, 17 March 1942.

Japanese decided to do this by rail. In December 1942, a core team of Japanese engineers who had been responsible for overseeing the construction of the Burma-Siam Railway arrived in the town of Pakanbaroe (this became the base camp of the Sumatra Railway). In March 1943, approximately 100,000 forced native labourers (romushas) began to excavate the foundations for the line. Romushas worked and lived in appalling conditions with no medical treatment and very little basic shelter or food: eighty thousand of those romushas who were conscripted onto the Sumatra line died during its construction – a mortality rate of eighty percent (Hovinga 304).

In May 1944, the first contingent of Allied POWs arrived at Pakanbaroe, having been shipped from camps on Java. In total, 4,968 POWs laboured on the Sumatra Railway between May 1944 and the day of Japan's surrender – the same day of the railway's completion – 15 August 1945.⁷ POWs were predominantly Dutch (3,866), but also comprised British, Australian and New Zealander troops (1,066), Americans (15) and one Norwegian. During the construction of the Sumatra Railway, 673 Allied POWs died (Neumann and van Witsen 39). The majority of deaths were attributed to malnutrition, and tropical diseases such as beri-beri, malaria and dysentery (War Office, *List of deaths*).

Although the field of POW studies is diverse, research into the experiences of Far Eastern POWs specifically is limited.⁸ Scholarly attention to-date has focussed on historical analyses of the POW experience (Flower; Havers), camp entertainment (Eldredge) and the medical impact of incarceration (Dunlop; Gill; Gill and Bell; Gill et al; Parkes, *Tins, Tubes and Tenacity*). Central to all of these studies is the experience of Allied POWs who laboured on the Burma-Siam Railway, or were incarcerated at Changi in Singapore. Very little critical attention has been given to the experiences of POWs who were incarcerated by the Japanese across Hong Kong, the Philippines, Netherlands East Indies, Borneo and Japan itself. Further, despite the mass of material available both in published memoirs and in public archives, the modes of representation adopted in the life-writing of former POWs from across the Far East – and what their narrative choices can reveal about the POW experience – has not been the subject of any detailed study.

⁷ This total does not include the nearly two-thousand POWs who died when ships transporting them to the line were sunk by Allied submarine (Hovinga 342).

⁸ For treatments of the POW experience across a broad spectrum of conflicts and areas of captivity (including the Far East) see Carr and Mytum, *Creativity*; Moore and Fedorowich; for the experiences of European POWs during the Second World War, see Makepeace, *A Pseudo-Soldier*.

It is these gaps that my research addresses. By necessity this work takes influence from across several theoretical disciplines. Cultural debate on memory and war representation coincides with historiography and the philosophy of history. Ultimately, my work is steeped, too, in analysis of the literary and the act of reading stories. Thus, I explore the way in which former POWs have represented their experiences through different life-writing genres, and the relationships between those modes of representation and the remembrances of younger generations.

Interpreting Memories

In this thesis I bring to light the life-writing of British former POWs who laboured on the Sumatra Railway during the Second World War.⁹ The majority of my primary materials comprises the unpublished diaries, oral histories and memoirs of former POWs, all of which are held in the Imperial War Museum (IWM) London. In chapter 1, I use those materials to provide the contextual history of the Sumatra Railway. In doing so, I consider how such materials have been used to gather, or corroborate, historical fact rather than for what the nuances of their narratives can reveal about the experiential and affective impact of captivity and its remembrance on the men who were there.

In writing and reading stories that have emerged out of conflict, Vietnam veteran Tim O'Brien identifies that there are two modes of truth that a wartime narrative can adopt. Firstly, there is 'happening-truth', which reflects the facts of an event that a historian may chronicle; and secondly, there is 'story-truth', which comprises the physical, psychological and affective experiences of the people involved. O'Brien writes that 'story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth', precisely because that 'story-truth' tells us of the humanity behind the history (179).¹⁰ In narratives from the Sumatra Railway there is the happening-truth of the

9 There were civilian internees and indigenous forced labourers also held captive by the Japanese on the island of Sumatra. For reasons of both focus and space, this thesis discusses the experiences of military POWs only. For first-hand accounts of the experiences of indigenous labourers on Sumatra, and on the Burma-Siam Railway, see Banning; for accounts of the civilian internee experience on the Netherlands East Indies, see Krancher 12, 98-102, 126-132, 175-213; Tyrer 234-240; and for a comparative study of the experiences of civilian internees across the Far East, see Archer.

10 In the 1980s, the psychoanalyst Donald Spence adopted the terms 'historical truth' and 'narrative truth' when devising a clinical framework for interpreting the narratives offered by his patients about their past experiences. 'Historical truth' is, for Spence, 'time-bound' and interpreting accounts for this form of truth, the 'aim is to come as close as possible to what "really" happened' (32). The 'narrative truth', on the other hand, offers a reader (or listener) 'the specific thoughts and feelings of the remembering moment'. The form of this 'remembering moment', for Spence, takes guidance from 'the narrative tradition' so as to give the account 'coherence and representational appeal' (31). Just as O'Brien asserts the 'truer' nature of 'story-truth' (179), Spence finds that once an account 'has

forced labour and tropical diseases suffered by thousands of men. This happening-truth has been recorded in detail by Dutch historian Henk Hovinga in *The Sumatra Railroad*, although since Hovinga's text favours the perspective of Dutch POWs, references to the accounts of British troops are minimal.¹¹ The story-truth, of the way in which men have remembered and told of their POW experiences on the Sumatra Railway, is given little attention by Hovinga. Due to the dearth of accurate official archives, it is impossible for a contemporary reader to know the happening-truths of the Sumatra Railway without reading them through the story-truths of life-writing: but the stylistic and linguistic choices that former POWs have adopted within these narratives have not been subject to scrutiny before. It is that story-truth with which I am concerned throughout my analysis.

In chapter 2 I identify the different life-writing genres that are adopted by POWs, and former POWs, to relate their memories of captivity. The choices that former POWs made in terms of style and genre reflect the manner in which each of them felt able to convey the happening-truth of the Sumatra Railway. However, in making those choices they reflected, also, the story-truth of their experiences. For example, John Boulter's¹² original intention to write his memoir of the Sumatra Railway as a narrative in the third person was, he admits, 'impossible' since he was 'so closely involved' with the story (1). The most common genres adopted in captivity narratives are diary, oral history and memoir, but this chapter also examines lists, poetry and auto/fiction. I find that these different genres of life-writing demonstrate the variable representability of the past, and the intricacies and unpredictable qualities of memory.

My examination of the various narrative genres sheds light on the different approaches POWs have taken to telling the story of the Sumatra Railway. Diaries offer the rawest form of happening-truth and story-truth. They are shaped in time as the writer attempts to make sense of the events happening around him. They can later be considered by their writers as being 'not memory', but rather the story and mind shaped by life as it happened (Surr 41). Memoir and oral history recordings, on the other hand, can show us how the story has continued to shape (and to be

acquired a narrative truth, it becomes just as real as any other kind of truth' (31). Although mindful of the criteria that Spence developed for these forms of 'truth', throughout this thesis I have adopted O'Brien's terminology as it emerges from a context closer aligned to my work: the life-writing of the veteran.

11 During my research, I have compiled a nominal roll of British troops held on the Sumatra Railway, which will be published online at <http://sumatrarailway.com> alongside various narratives and materials emerging from this work. As a result, this project will also redress the balance of happening-truth regarding the troops who laboured on the Sumatra Railway.

12 Gunner John Boulter, Royal Artillery; became POW aged 18 at Padang on Sumatra, 17 March 1942.

shaped) by that mind as events have receded further into history. I move on to show how these narratives are, paradoxically, characterised by techniques often equated as being 'non-narrative', plus a blurring of traditional generic forms and structures that offered the POW a chance to escape the confinement of captivity, if not literally, then figuratively through dreams and stories.

In chapter 3 I consider the specific linguistic features of POW life-writing, to identify the ways in which a polyglot camp discourse combining English, Dutch, Malay and Japanese came to both create and represent camp life on Sumatra. I apply Bakhtinian theories of discourse to understand the ways in which the contexts within which specific words have been used are embedded into the linguistic choices made by POWs (Bakhtin, *Discourse* 293). In reflecting their struggle to retain and express their identities as military personnel and family men, the linguistic practices of POWs resisted the dominance of Japanese in the camps: the language of Japanese was spoken in reference to working routines and guard commands only. Malay was reserved for the domestic aspects of camp life. I also highlight the significant role that the camp interpreter played on the Sumatra Railway. My focus on camp discourse identifies the inherent difficulties in accurately transmitting, transferring and translating, the POW story through history and across generations.

The experience of Far Eastern captivity, and its aftermath, was an intensely somatic one: in the life-writing of former POWs there are bodies confined, bodies suffering and dying, bodies being liberated and greeted by the bodies of their loved ones. In chapter 4 I focus on those bodies – and, specifically, on the different responses to those bodies: among the men themselves, the medics who cared for them in the camps, the troops who liberated them and their families as they returned home. Offering the term 'body biography', and paying particular attention to the artwork of Far Eastern POWs, I show how – with their skin wounded, scarred and festering with ulcers, and the ravages of starvation revealing the jagged bones of a skeleton – the topography of the body provides a series of reference points for the POW's narrative.

My final chapter charts the post-war narrative of the Far Eastern POW. Typical impressions of former Far Eastern POWs that are portrayed by their families, are of a group of men who did not speak about their experiences (for example, Kandler xii; ██████ *Interview*). However, I challenge that representation to show that former POWs did speak, but that they chose to do so through public, collective forums (for example through their claim for compensation from the Japanese Government, or within social club newsletters), rather than in the

domestic sphere. Out of this, a public figure of the 'FEPOW' emerged: a figure that was then passed on in the image of the children of the Far Eastern POWs, the 'COFEPOW'. This final chapter brings together material obtained from the visitor comments books from a touring exhibition of Far Eastern POW artwork (see Thrale), contemporaneous newspaper cuttings, copies of the official publication of the Red Cross, *Far East*, and the journal of the Returned British Prisoner of War Association (RBPOWA). Further, it includes the reflections of the relatives of former POWs with whom I have corresponded, and interviewed, throughout the course of this research. I show that the postmemory of the Far Eastern POW (that is, the impression that the history of the camps has left upon younger generations) began to emerge in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, and continues to develop as members of the third generation come to reflect on the role of postmemory in the remembrance of the camps.

Mute witnesses

Even in today's village of Pakan Baroe children play and hop on and off the rusting remains of engines and railway carriages. They do not have the slightest inkling that the rusting toys between their kampong huts are the mute witnesses of a nightmare that was once a reality. (Hovinga 12)

The 'mute witnesses' of the Sumatra Railway were first given a narrative in 1976, just over thirty years after the line was completed, when Hovinga published the first edition of what remains the only detailed history dedicated to telling the story of the Pakanbaroe Railway – *Eindstation Pakan Baroe 1943-1945 – Dodenspoorweg door het oerwoud* (titled *The Sumatra Railroad* for the English edition).¹³ Hovinga's work is based on over thirty years of research, including interviews and other correspondence with more than 100 former POWs who 'contributed historical facts and numerous personal accounts orally or in writing' to the project (327). Hovinga creates a distinction between 'historical facts' and

¹³ This was complemented by Neumann and van Witsen's 'documentary' of events on the Sumatra Railway, setting out the 'facts compiled [by the authors] during and immediately after the war' and published in Holland in the early 1980s. Subsequent editions of Hovinga's text have revised various inaccuracies that made up the 'facts' of Neumann and van Witsen's efforts. All references in this thesis refer to the English edition of Hovinga's text (2010).

'personal accounts', yet he relies heavily on the latter to construct the former. Drawing upon the memoirs and interviews provided by former POWs, Hovinga traverses between setting out a factual historical account and recounting the personal memories of the men working on the line. There is no analysis by Hovinga of how former POWs chose to represent their stories, he transcribes only what they said. Furthermore, whilst he acknowledges a silence surrounding the history of the Sumatra Railway, Hovinga makes no attempt to understand why such a silence has taken over (10, 352, 360).

In creating the happening-truth of history, the decision of historians not to depend on a single archive, but on a range of source materials and formats, emphasises the importance of corroboration in the construction of the happening-truth. This does not mean, to echo Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'that history has privileged access to facts whereas memoirs do not', but that multiple source materials are used to construct and verify the happening-truth (167). Within the collective there will inevitably be conflict, and memories from different individuals do not always fit well with one another, even when they are recorded immediately after an event in the same place and time, let alone decades later. Despite commonalities, despite the ability to agree to certain happening-truths, individual stories, are, after all, just that.

In his attempt to mitigate this issue, Hovinga describes how he collected the accounts of former POWs by 'combining incomplete data and providing witnesses with the memory fragments from other people' to spark their own recall (Hovinga 327). He acknowledges problems with this approach, namely that POWs could have difficulty remembering 'facts, especially when determining precise times and locations' where they had worked, or to which camps they were transported (327). However, he found that events 'one person could only vaguely remember, would stand out clearly in the memory of others' (327). The decision to offer existing accounts to prompt the memories of others raises questions about the validity of Hovinga's methodology in accessing the happening-truth with which his own research is pre-occupied. Hovinga represents that happening-truth of the Sumatra Railway as a collective memory using the recall of individuals, but that recall has been influenced directly by the 'memory fragments' of others. Consequently, there is no way of knowing how far that process of recollection for individual contributors has been coloured not just by their own imagination, but that of other men too.

Society from time to time obligates people not just to reproduce in thought previous events of their lives, but also to touch them up, to

shorten them, or to complete them so that, however convinced we are that our memories are exact, we give them a prestige that reality did not possess. (Halbwachs 51)

By aiding the memory of former POWs in this way, Hovinga suggests that the 'prestige' given by one man to a particular memory will help to encourage another to give his own the same weight. It is possible, then, that by sharing between his interviewees the data that each provided, Hovinga required POW memory to remain in harmony not with each other but with his own story-truth. This would have given him the data that he needed to corroborate the coherent structure that he envisaged for his own historical narrative. In offering the memory fragments of one former POW to another, Hovinga actively intervened in the recollective processes of former POWs. By subsequently deciding not to examine POW testimony for what it tells us about the 'mind' of specific prisoners – by demarcating 'historical fact' from 'personal account' – Hovinga implies that at least for him, there is no 'truth value' (to coin a phrase from Hayden White) to be gained from exploring the imagery, linguistic choices and modes of representation that former POWs have used within their own accounts (White, *Content* 19). This, is the crux of my thesis. Understanding the ways in which former POWs have told their stories is equally as important as it is to ensure that the happening-truth is recorded. The techniques that former POWs use to construct their memories, the genres and images with which they choose to express their own experiences of history, ultimately informs future generations about 'what really happened', too. Those specific narrative choices serve to relate to an audience, as linguist Michael Toolan reminds us, the very 'information that goes beyond external witnessing' – that is, the affective life of the former POW (119).

In his most recent work Japanese historian Fumitaka Kurosawa suggests that the traumatic events that have occurred in the history of Japanese relationships with the United Kingdom, China and Korea, need to be acknowledged and accepted 'using historians' eyes, 'to engender what he terms the 'historicisation of history'. By this Kurosawa means that history should not be used a political tool between parties and nations (what he terms, in contrast, the 'politicisation of history'), but as a means instead, to aid acceptance and reconciliation. To help this, Kurosawa believes that historical facts should be drawn out of personal accounts in order to transmit the human stories of the past to future generations (4).

This move from the 'politicisation' to the 'historicisation' of history can be traced within the narrative of POWs of the Japanese. The 'FEPOW' acronym that is

connected so closely with former POWs of the Japanese was only coined in the years after the war. It was not used during captivity, or immediately upon repatriation: it had no resonance on Sumatra, or with men anywhere in Southeast Asia at the time of their captivity, because it did not exist. Throughout the Red Cross and St. John War Organisation newsletter that was distributed to the families of Far Eastern captives during the Second World War, *Far East*, servicemen in captivity were referenced as 'prisoners of war' or 'Allied prisoners of war' rather than 'FEPOW'. During their journeys home, the men were part of the Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees (RAPWI), and only in the late 1940s did the 'FEPOW' identity emerge through the growth of social clubs associations where the men would reunite within their local communities. The FEPOW term is used sparingly in memoirs written many decades later.

Very quickly the local clubs came to be represented by the National Federation of FEPOW Clubs and Associations which, in the early 1950s, supported the claim for compensation from the Japanese Government for former POWs. Nowadays, 'FEPOW' is claimed by family researchers to learn, remember and transmit history: in other words, for the 'historicisation' of the history of POWs in the Far East. In Kurosawa's sense of the term, the 'historicisation' of history becomes a dialogue between present and past but also 'connects the future with the past' (11). It is a postmemorial act then, in which the story-truth plays a powerful role. Detailed analysis of the life-writing of former POWs who experienced the Sumatra Railway is a key aspect, then, of understanding 'the way in which the minds of the people concerned moved' (Kurosawa 7). Yet, it is not explored in Hovinga's work.

Life-writing as a form can provoke empathy (or otherwise) because of the 'autobiographical pact' that is made between a writer and their audience (Lejeune, *On Autobiography* 30). It is due to this pact that Lejeune views autobiography as a 'contractual genre', with autobiographical texts expecting the same level of commitment from their readers as they do of their authors. Lejeune says that the autobiographical pact asks readers to accept a tacit message of the genre, which is that the 'presuppositions of performance and autonomy' are adopted by life-writers to encourage a readership in its 'belief in a kind of identity' of the narrator (147). This autobiographical pact is critical, therefore, in enabling former POWs to transmit the story-truths of their captivity effectively. The audience needs to believe the voice of the writer, needs to feel spoken to, engaged and wanted. This, as I show in this thesis, has crucial implications for a writer and reader who relate to one another through a postmemorial autobiographical pact, comprising inter-generational and familial bonds, too.

The narratives in IWM archives are by and large unpublished,¹⁴ although all were written at least for private circulation and donated to a public repository for posterity. Upon donation, individuals must sign a declaration that they are the owner (or owner representative) of the items to be deposited within collections, and this form also contains a description of the materials included in the donation. Notes may be made on the condition of the items. In these circumstances, the hold of the 'pact' is stronger because there is a physical signature, a literal contractual process that involves the signing of a document to state exactly what a narrative offers. In the act of donating individual narratives to collections like those at IWM, private memory becomes part of public, collective memory within an archive that enables the story-truth to be delivered to new readers in locations far removed from the original event. Donation is an act that at once acknowledges the necessity of preserving the individuality of memory, but also the collective to which the personal belongs. The creation of the archive, as this thesis concludes, is also a postmemorial act: defined and categorised by the responses of younger generations to the history that came before.

Sources

The primary source materials I have used for this project are the diaries, oral histories and memoirs of former British POWs that are held in the archives of the IWM. To complement these materials and, where possible, to corroborate accounts I have drawn upon relevant documents held at The National Archives (TNA) at Kew, the Second World War Experience Centre, the regimental museum of the Northumberland Fusiliers at Alwick, the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Museon in The Hague, and NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Amsterdam.

During this project I have met the last known British survivor of the Sumatra Railway. I have also corresponded with, and interviewed, the relatives of former Far Eastern POWs. The latter include the son of a man on the Sumatra Railway, the daughter of a Medical Officer who also worked on the Sumatra Railway, and the nephew of a man who drowned en route to Sumatra. I have spoken with, or interviewed, the son of a man on Java, the daughter of a man incarcerated in Hong Kong and the son of a man who was imprisoned in Changi. Insight has also been

¹⁴ Those of Goulding and Saunders are exceptions having both been self-published, also.

gathered from an archaeologist who, with a small team, tracked the route of the Sumatra Railway, and a medical professional who has been closely involved in the tropical disease testing and treatment of former POWs for several decades.

Note on style

Stylistic choices (e.g. 'Second World War' instead of 'World War Two', and 'prisoner of war/POW' rather than 'Prisoner of War/PoW') are in keeping with IWM tone of voice guidelines. Variations do occur, however, in instances where source materials have been quoted directly.

I have retained place names and spellings as they were in 1945, when Malay was the *lingua franca* of Sumatra, rather than Bahasa Indonesia as spoken today. For example, I refer to modern-day Pekanbaru as 'Pakanbaroe' (the 'oe' would be pronounced as 'u'), Aceh as 'Atjeh', Jakarta as 'Batavia'. I refer to the Netherlands (not Dutch) East Indies and similarly, to Southeast Asia rather than the Asia-Pacific Region. The Burma-Thailand Railway is referred to as the Burma-Siam Railway. Again, exceptions occur where source materials have used variant spellings or modern place names.

All of the individual POWs referenced in this thesis have been identified as far as possible according to military service, rank, age and location of capture. These details are provided as footnotes when each man is referenced in the main text for the first time. These details have been identified using a variety of sources, predominantly the collection of Liberated POW Questionnaires held at TNA and the online database of Far Eastern POWs available via COFEPOW.¹⁵ Additional information has been obtained from the *Unsung Heroes* series of books by Pam and Les Stubbs.

¹⁵ COFEPOW Database: www.cofepowdb.org.uk/cdb2/Controller.jsp?action=simplesearch; accessed 28 February 2014.

Chapter 1

Telling the Story of the Sumatra Railway

Where is the genius of that other railroad who can write the tale of those months of slogging? ('That Other Railroad' n.pag.)

In May 1944, just fewer than five thousand Allied POWs joined indigenous slave labourers in the construction of the Sumatra Railway. In this chapter, I use the accounts of British former POWs to reconstruct a narrative of that work, the terrain through which the railway was built, and the camps in which POWs lived. In doing so, I present the accounts of men who did 'write the tale of those months of slogging', but for the most part have not been published before.

The construction of the Sumatra Railway

During the Pacific campaign of the Second World War, Japan regarded the island of Sumatra as a vital target, being rich in oil and coal, and placed strategically in terms of reinforcing Japan's military stronghold in Southeast Asia. Coupled with the Malay peninsula, Sumatra was a 'foremost fortress' in the development of the Empire of Japan's long-term ambitions to create its 'Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere' – a bloc of Asian nations that were to be free of Western influence (Post et al 12). Although intense guerrilla fighting occurred in the northern provinces of Sumatra for some weeks, South Sumatra was overtaken by the Japanese relatively easily. Precious oil reserves in Palembang were controlled by Japanese paratroopers by 14 February 1942, and one day later Singapore would fall. Larger troopships (converted from passenger liners) and other vessels had left Singapore carrying women and children from early January onwards, but troops (including some late-in-the-day attempts at forming official escape parties) were still leaving the Malay Peninsula in smaller vessels between 10 and 15 February. It was an exercise that, for some, would make Dunkirk look like a 'picnic' in comparison (Brooke 1).

Allied servicemen were ultimately told to 'leave Singapore...by any means they could find' (Hesford 1).¹⁶ In this attempt, many would make the treacherous journey from Singapore in lifeboats, motorboats, Chinese junks, and sampans¹⁷ to the western coast of Sumatra.

At its shortest, the distance to the central coastal area was little more than 40 miles but few, if any, managed a short crossing. Rapidly changing circumstances rather than original choice made the wide river mouths along the coast of eastern Sumatra the targets of late escape runs from Singapore. Routes were changed according to information received, anchorage and shelter were sought in small islands *en route*; some of these also served as staging points, allowing transfers between boats. Food and water supplies had to be procured frequently. (Kennedy 50)

That forty-mile journey often took several days of hard rowing in blazing heat against strong currents, with the backdrop of a burning Singapore and an unknown land ahead. Japanese bombers circled above, and mines littered the waters. Not all those who set out on that journey survived, but many kept going because – from the island of Sumatra – it was hoped that they could 'pick up a ship to India, Australia or anywhere else out of reach of the Japs' (Hedley, *War History* n.pag.).

The last large ship out of the Sumatran port of Emmahaven at Padang (the Dutch steamer, *De Veert*) sailed on 3 March 1942, reaching Colombo on 9 March; the ship prior, the *Rooseboom*, was torpedoed in the Indian Ocean (Kennedy 88). After 6 March, the few attempts to leave Sumatra were made in small sailing boats – and with the Japanese already occupying the southern provinces it was only a matter of time before the rest of the island, and the Netherlands East Indies as a whole, surrendered. Troops spent the next ten days 'hoping like hell that something might happen and we would control the Japanese. But we never did' (Hedley, *Interview with IWM*). The Japanese took control of Sumatra on 17 March 1942, with Allied forces gathered in the capital of Padang as POWs. After some months in Padang, five hundred troops were shipped to Burma in May 1942 to work on what was to be the first 'Death Railway' war project commissioned by the Japanese

¹⁶ Lieutenant Arthur Hesford, became POW at Padang on Sumatra, 17 March 1942.

¹⁷ Small wooden Malayan fishing vessels also known as koleks.

(Apthorp). Other groups of POWs who were captured in Padang were sent to camps in the Sumatran provinces of Palembang and Medan.

The idea of running a railway system across Sumatra was not a new one. Exploratory fieldwork had been commissioned by the Dutch authorities, mainly with the idea of creating an accessible trade route between Padang and Singapore.¹⁸ Deemed a 'difficult-to-execute and costly project' particularly at the time of the Great Depression, the plans for a railway were finally shelved by the Dutch Government during the 1930s, considered impractical since the line 'would run through an uninhabited, inhospitable region, rife with malaria' (Hovinga 75).

Such challenges did not deter the Japanese. With Japan suffering a chronic fuel shortage following US embargoes, and a 'cheap and expendable' workforce available in the form of POWs and local slave labourers (romushas), the construction of a railway provided a clear opportunity for Japan to exploit the energy reserves on Sumatra (Hovinga 75). Intelligence reports to the British War Office in April 1944 suggested that the Japanese were considering:

the construction of a trans-Sumatra railway in order to facilitate transport from South China to the Indian Ocean and also probably with a view to the quicker reinforcement and supply of their garrisons on the west coast of Sumatra if necessity should arise. (Allied Land Forces SEA n.pag)

Although there was no indication that Allied troops were being used as labour on the line, by December 1944, it had been understood that the 'construction southwards from Pakanbaroe...connects with Moeara...thus possibly linking the North Coast and West Coast Railways for the first time [and of] considerable importance to the Japanese' in terms of defence and the supply of troops. The railway line also removed the need to send cargo ships through 'waters extremely vulnerable to Allied attack' (Allied Land Forces SEA n.pag.).

With these ideas in mind, a company of Japanese railway construction staff (the same engineers that were responsible for the Burma-Siam Railway) had arrived in Pakanbaroe in December 1942 to begin the project. In March 1943

¹⁸ Early expeditions were carried out by W.H. Ijzerman in 1891; a further expedition in 1908 by K.J.A. Ligtvoet and Van Zuijlen; and finally by W.J.M. Nivel on behalf of the Netherlands Indies' Government Railway and Tramway Department, started in 1920 with detailed findings published in 1927, just before the worldwide recession of the 1930s (Hovinga 75).

romushas began to excavate the foundations for the line. The majority of POWs to be drafted onto the Sumatra Railway were shipped from Java, with the first contingent arriving in May 1944. In addition, the 'Atjeh Party' – a group of nearly five hundred troops who, having left Medan, had been tasked with road-construction work in the northernmost province of Atjeh – were marched eighty miles to the railway in November 1944.

For the POWs transported from Java to Sumatra, the discovery of conditions on Sumatra was when 'the blow fell'. Although the work on Java was 'physically hard, we were young and reasonably fit. We had no reliable news, but all were optimistic, with our sense of humour intact' (Fitzgerald, *A Day* 4). Basil Gotto¹⁹ came to rue his voyage to Sumatra following the shock that 'we were worse off than if we had remained' (Gotto 8). Conditions on board the POW transport ships were cramped and degrading. Furthermore, two of the transport ships were torpedoed by Allied submarines that had not identified the cargo as human: the *Van Waerwijk* in June 1944 and the *Junyo Maru* in September 1944.²⁰

In 1946 James Gordon²¹ gave a detailed account of the *Van Waerwijk* disaster, having been in charge of the men who were transported in the hold, where they 'had approximately 2' 6" x 5' 6" x 4' 6" in which to sit or lie with such kit as they possessed' (3). Such cramped conditions meant that the effective distribution of rations was almost impossible. It was only after vigorous remonstrations with the guards that twenty-five men at a time were allowed to leave the hold and go onto the deck for quarter-of-an-hour each, to get some fresh air. The *Van Waerwijk* was torpedoed at 14.00 on 26 June 1944 by HMS *Truculent*, causing nearly 200 casualties. Following their rescue from the waters, survivors were taken to the River Valley Road camp at Singapore, possessing 'nothing except the shorts in which we stood up, and not even those in some cases' (4). Although a small amount of clothing was handed out by the Japanese, it took 'at least three weeks' for eating utensils and basic footwear to be provided (4). Despite their lack of strength or fitness, many of these men were transported back to Sumatra to assist with the

19 Flight Lieutenant Basil Ashmead Gotto, 100 Squadron RAFVR; became POW aged 29 at Bencoeloen on Sumatra, 8 March 1942.

20 At 4.15pm on 18 September 1944, the *Junyo Maru* - carrying 6,500 personnel (2,300 POWs and 4,200 romushas) - was torpedoed by the British submarine HMS *Tradewind* just off the west coast of Sumatra. In total 5,620 lives were lost in the sinking of the *Junyo Maru*, which became the largest shipping disaster not just in the Far East, but in history at that time (Post et al 24).

21 Captain James Gordon Gordon, 9TH Coast Regiment RA; became POW aged 26 at Singapore, 15 February 1942.

construction of the railway, already malnourished and suffering the physical effects of long-term imprisonment, forced hard labour and now, shipwreck.

Identifying the number of POWs who had been on the Sumatra Railway was a difficult task post-war, since the Japanese Prisoner of War Information Bureau (Furyo Jōhōkyoku) did not create a systematic POW registration system until 1944, and on their capitulation, many administrative documents were burned or otherwise destroyed (Post et al 174). However, Dutch researchers have established that 6,764 POWs were originally destined to work on the Sumatra Railway. This includes the 1,796 POWs who died as a result of the *Van Waerwijck* and *Junyo Maru* disasters (Hovinga 342). Of that total figure, 4,968 POWs arrived on the Sumatra Railway, predominantly Dutch and Indonesians (3,866), but also British, Australian and New Zealanders (1,066), American (15) and one Norwegian. Of those working on the railway construction itself, 673 died (Neumann and van Witsen 39) with common causes of death including beri-beri, malaria, dysentery, malnutrition and pellagra (War Office, *List of deaths*). This means that the mortality rate overall was 13.5%, although this was higher among the British and Australian contingent at 16% than the Dutch, at 13%. The lower mortality rate of the Dutch POWs is likely attributed to the financial clout, extra kit and local knowledge possessed by the Dutch troops who had lived on Sumatra prior to its capture.

These overall mortality rates were lower on the Sumatra Railway compared to approximately 22% on the Burma-Siam Railway, and an average across Far Eastern camps of 27% - in comparison to less than 5% within European POW camps (Kinvig 47). The point in time at which the Sumatra project was undertaken meant that prisoners were well into their period of captivity and the impression given on conditions by Robert Braithwaite,²² senior Medical Officer at camp 3, suggests that mortality rates would have risen to the same levels of Burma-Siam had the war not ended when it did (Braithwaite). Further, accounts from former POWs state that some were forced to carry out 'day long digging of large six foot six wide, thirty foot long, six foot deep holes in the ground' – a mass grave in which all POWs were to be buried once the construction of the Sumatra Railway was completed (Cunyngham-Brown,²³ *Interview with IWM*).²⁴ The mortality rates for

22 Flight Lieutenant Robert Fenton Braithwaite, 153 Maintenance Unit RAF; became POW aged 31 at Tasikmalaya on Java, 8 March 1942.

23 Lieutenant Sjovald Cunyngham-Brown, MRNVR; became POW aged 36 at Baroes on Sumatra, 1 April 1942.

24 For an example of the order that was given for the 'final disposition' of all Allied POWs in Japanese hands, in which camp commandants were ordered to 'annihilate them all, and not to leave any traces', see www.mansell.com/pow_resources/Formosa/doc2701-trans.html; accessed 28 February 2014 .

POWs, on both 'death railways', are far outstripped however by those for the romushas. Approximately 80,000 romushas perished during the construction of the Sumatra Railway alone – a mortality rate of 80.84% (Hovinga 304). A similar number died on the Burma-Siam line (Kinvig 44).

Running a length of just under 140 miles (220 kilometres) the Sumatra Railway began from the port town of Pakanbaroe and gravitated across the island through thick jungle, swamp land, mountains and river valleys to Moeara (see Figure 1).

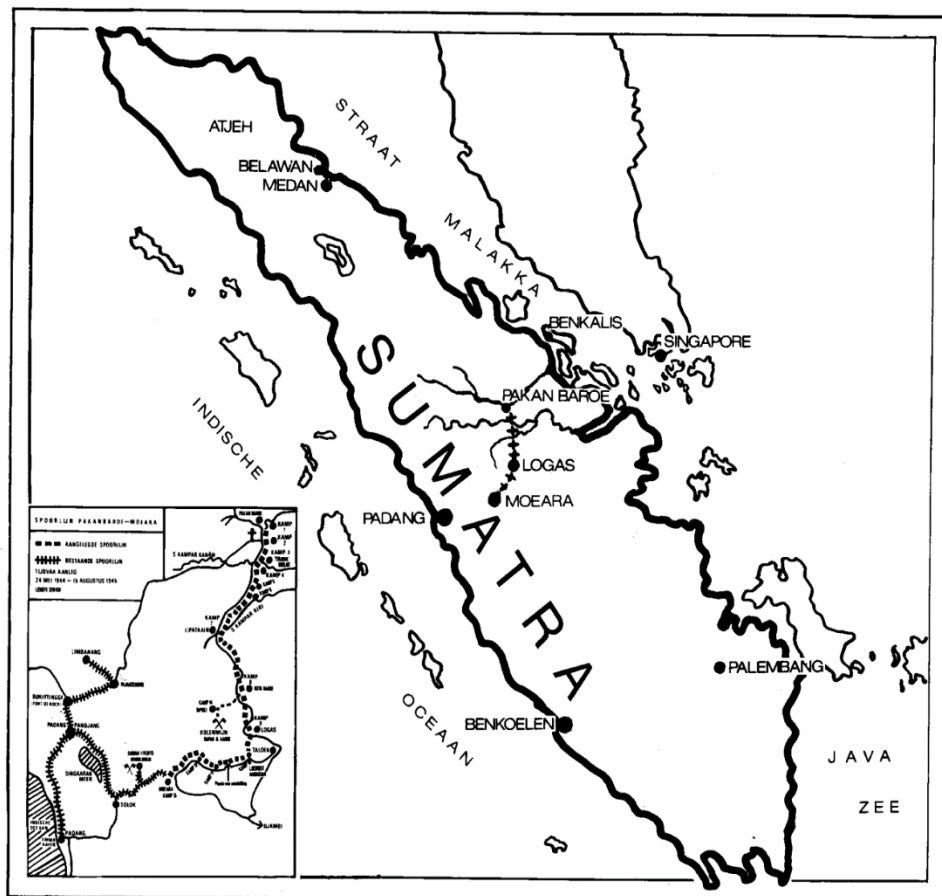


Figure 1: Location of the Sumatra Railway. (Hovinga 8)

If three small 'sub' camps are included in the tally (camps 2a, 7a and 14a), in total there were seventeen camps inhabited by Allied POWs at some point during the construction of the Sumatra Railway. Maps of the railway, however, tend to indicate just the fourteen 'main' camps, with camp 1 in the town of Pakanbaroe and camp 14 at the Tapoei/Petai site (see Figure 2 below). In chronological terms, the camps were not constructed one after another, and in particular there were two key deviations. Firstly, the necessity to collect and transport coal from the mines at

Sapar and Karoe meant that the construction of a tributary branch of the railway was prioritised midway along the line (located at Tapoei and Petai, approximately 120 kilometres south of the town of Pakanbaroe). This branch line was built by POWs from October 1944 until June 1945 and so the camps at Tapoei and Petai, despite being some of the first to be inhabited, were numbered as the last (14 and 14a). Secondly, in March 1945, when the Japanese deemed the progress on the railway to be too slow, a party of POWs was transferred to camp 13 at the town of Moeara in order to start building work simultaneously from the other direction.

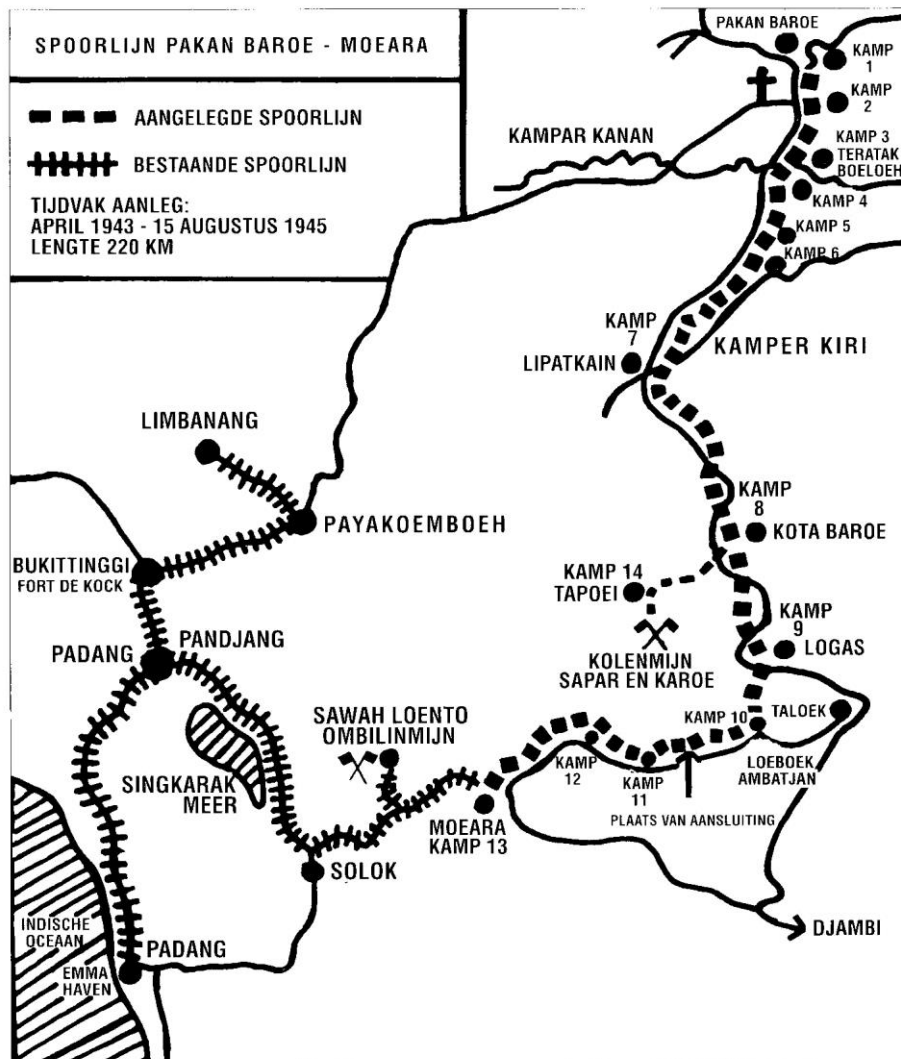


Figure 2: Position of POW camps along the route of the Sumatra Railway. (Hovinga 8)

It was planned that the track constructed by POWs and romushas (the 'aangelegde spoorlijn' or 'laid railroad' in Figure 2) would be linked at Moeara to one of the island's existing rail tracks (the 'bestaande spoorlijn'). The timeslot ('tijdvak')

allocated to the construction project ('aanleg') was April 1943 when romushas first started labouring, until 15 August 1945. It was intended that the new track would enable fuel to be sourced from the Sapar and Karoe mines (the 'kolenmijn' near camp 14), hauled up the track and shipped away from Sumatra. Conversely, military supplies could be shipped to the island and transported to troops overland by rail.

POWs were informed that they were 'on loan to "The South Manchuria Railway Construction Company"', and the construction work was undertaken under the control of the Japanese 25th Army (Parsons 17 November 1944). When the first POWs arrived at camp 1 at Pakanbaroe in May 1944, they had no firm idea of the work to be done:

but we took it for granted that it was a major job, and on the second morning we soon found out. After we had had the *tenko* [roll call] we were marched a short distance to where the work was to begin. We saw at once that we were to build a railway. There were piles and piles of railway lines ready for use, an assortment of tools to use on the job, spades, shovels, pick axes, two sizes of sledge hammers, seven and fourteen pounders, chunkels (like a spade with the blade fixed at right angles to the handle) and a drill known as a 'dassy'²⁵... There were also scores of wicker baskets in various sizes to be used for carrying the soil for building the track, and lastly there were stacks and stacks of sleepers which had been no doubt cut and prepared by the natives from various trees out of the jungle. Some of them were much too soft for the job as they had used rubber trees for some of these sleepers and they split very easily; certainly not fit for the job for which they were intended. (J Saunders, *It Seems* 135-136)

Construction methods were primitive at best, and monotonous. Due to the single-track design, shunting yards and switching points were built by POWs at several places along the line to enable trains to pass and/or change direction.

²⁵ The 'dassy' or 'dassi' was a wood-boring augur that was used to create the holes necessary for jointing and fixing the rails to the sleepers.

Working parties would be grouped into small cohorts of men, each of which was designated a specific role:

1) Rope men. 2) Marker men. 3) Sleeper men. 4) Rail men. 5) Dassi men. 6) Bar men. 7) Hammer men. 8) Noko²⁶ men and 9) Jointing men. (Smith 74)

Each working party was overseen by Allied non-commissioned officers (NCOs), one of whom would also be entrusted as the 'Gauge Man' (Smith 76). For Walter Smith,²⁷ the first two roles were the 'cushy numbers' since the job of laying and marking the rope along the route of the track did not require the stamina demanded of other men who were hauling and laying the sleepers and rails (76). Sleeper and rail men, however, had extremely demanding jobs, having to carry the sleepers and rails on their shoulders to the marked-out points along the line. Joseph Fitzgerald²⁸ describes what took place next:

The first carrying party, about ten in number, with cloth pads on their shoulders, positioned themselves at intervals along the length of the rail, then lifted it onto their shoulders...Each man would probably carry one hundred weight over rough ground possibly barefooted. They walked forward until the rear end of their rail coincided with that of the last rail laid, when a halt was called. The 'Lifting off' party, also about ten in number, would be in position, and at a word of command, the rail was lifted from shoulders and dropped to the waiting sleepers. (Fitzgerald, *A Day* 6-8)

The weight of the sleepers and rails was not the only challenge faced by the carrying parties but 'the narrowness of the side footway', the 'soft soil' and 'working right on the Equator...meant the sun had heated the steel rails to the extent that

²⁶ 'Noko' is short for nokogiri, a Japanese woodwork saw that cuts on the 'pull' stroke, rather than on the 'push' as is typical with European tools.

²⁷ Aircraftman 1st Class Walter Raymond Smith, 153 Maintenance Unit RAF; became POW aged 19 at Tasikmalaya on Java, 8 March 1942.

²⁸ Corporal Joseph Graham Fitzgerald, RIMU RAF; became POW aged 22 at Tasikmalaya on Java, 8 March 1942.

they were so hot that they couldn't be handled with bare hands' - hence the 'cloth pads' that Fitzgerald recalls on the shoulders of the carrying parties (Smith 76).

The struggle to work was impacted by mental as well as physical duress:

Our legs stumbled along, shuffling along the hot baked clay, kicking into mounds and throwing tired sagging bodies off balance. On and on relentlessly, urged on by shouting Japs, we proceeded to build the line. We were growing, in spite of ourselves, to become more and more proficient in the job. Our captors, cursed and kicked, screamed and exhorted us to more effort. Faster, faster, Speedo! more lines, more lines. The fools, they couldn't know our feelings. That numbed sense of movement that just automatically drove us on in one direction only. Somewhere ahead maybe there was something to eat, something to drink. Not a meal to look forward to, to enjoy, but just something to fill that gnawing painful hole and moisten those dirty cracked lips. Keep going! It can't be long now! They must be stopping for food soon. Blast this sweat! Wipe it away. Sod it! Sod it! Sod it! Sod everything! Work a bit faster and stop for a quick smoke. Smoke that parched mouths even more and hit empty stomachs hard, but soothed, just for a little while. Pick up that hammer again, you're behind now, get those feet shuffling again. In with a peg, up with the hammer, down it comes, misses, and clangs on the lines...A screaming voice penetrates the mists, and as you straighten up from putting the peg straight, a fist, a piece of wood, a rifle, something, hits you on the side of the face, and in your weakness, the mind now a blanket of deadened misery, down you go. (Robson 50)

The sensory overload of physical pain, exhaustion, heat, noise and hunger plagued the POWs as they worked, with men urged on only by the slightest hopes of a break, meagre rations or a cigarette because 'the greatest relief for this hunger was smoking' (C Thompson 171). So significant was this short respite that, Claude

Thompson²⁹ tells us, even the doctors 'recognised the value of tobacco' in keeping hunger and tempers at bay (172).

Once rails had been positioned, then came the 'dassi men', 'bar men' and 'hammer men' to position and prepare the rails for fixing to the sleepers.

It was now the turn of the spannermen [or 'Jointing men' as called by Smith] to perform, as they bolted two fishplates to each rail junction. As soon as the rail joint was made, the rail was positioned on the sleeper, and a hammer party drove in a few spikes spaced along its length. Shortly afterwards the second rail on the other side of the track would be down, positioned by wooden rail gauges, and lightly spiked. (Fitzgerald, *A Day* 7)

Fitzgerald places no focus in his account on the rail gauge specifically, but to Smith this seemed an 'almost sacred' piece of equipment to the Japanese:

It was kept, when not in use, in a soft-lined case. The gauge itself was made in Varnished & Polished Hardwood & and all the fittings to it were polished & machined Brass. It looked somewhat like a large 'Spirit- level'. It had two hinged pointers on the lower edge. One of these could be slid along & secured in any desired position. When both pointers were at their nearest to each other, this represented the Standard Gauge between the inside surfaces of the Rail Lines (1.067 metres – 3ft 6 inch). (Smith 77)

The senior NCO in charge of the gauge would be responsible for the safety and proper use of this tool, ensuring each rail was positioned accurately. After this had been confirmed, the 'track laying continued until all the rails to hand were in place on the track' (Fitzgerald, *A Day* 8). This process would be repeated day after day until the railway was complete. All of this, Kenneth Robson³⁰ points out, 'sounds terribly well organised...but in practice everyone had to take part in all facets of the work' (49).

29 Warrant Officer Claude Goodwin Thompson, 100 Squadron RNZAF; became POW aged 29 on Java, 8 March 1942.

30 Signalman Kenneth Robson, 3 Malaya Command Signals; became POW aged 28 at Garoet on Java, 8 March 1942.

Although the Sumatra Railway was half the length of the Burma-Siam Railway (220km and 414km respectively), it took almost the same number of months for POWs to complete (15 versus 16) – with progress being approximately 16km per month slower on Sumatra than in Burma and Siam (Neumann and van Witsen 118). This slow progress each month indicates specific difficulties for those on Sumatra, two of which dominate the narratives of former POWs. Firstly, the railway construction had to navigate through a ‘chain of mountains’, the ‘rolling hills of volcanic and sedimentary rocks’ and the ‘swampy and jungle-covered’ lowlands characterised by long rivers, sandbanks and mud-flats (Naval Intelligence Division 48); and secondly – having already been POWs for over two years – the general condition of the workforce was poorer than that on Burma-Siam.

The varying experiences of the POWs who worked on the Sumatra Railway – shipwreck, forced marches, changing landscapes – present difficulties in bringing together a single, coherent narrative of the experience. Further, the backgrounds, health and previous experiences of prisoners entering each camp had an impact on camp functionality, organisation and social structures. Although commonalities running through the narratives are useful for envisaging what historian Jeremy Popkin refers to as ‘typifications’ (11), there is unlikely to be any set of POW narratives – even including official camp reports – that could be used to create the definitive story that historians such as Henk Hovinga want to construct, and to which all POWs would agree. Just as – to borrow from Maurice Halbwachs – ‘several pictures of a common past are generated’ by former POWs producing their memoirs and recording oral histories, there are several approaches that any one historian can take in order to explain those various ‘pictures’ (Halbwachs 32).

The Sumatra Railway was a construction project made up of lots of smaller sections of track joining each other camp to camp, and parties of men shifted to different locations regularly. It is a story of movement and change that cannot be interpreted through one overarching narrative, or one historical account of ‘the’ railway. The number of camps inhabited and the great variations among these in size, core activities, working and living conditions make a definitive account nigh on impossible. An attempt to tell such a narrative risks blurring the memory of individual camps and the men who inhabited them, and challenges historians like Hovinga to leave out potentially anomalous pieces of information in order to complete their puzzle of the happening-truth. In Hovinga’s text this amounts to the absence of the British POW experience and a relative lack of camp narratives for the middle section of the railway. For the latter, the conditions suffered by POWs meant that records were difficult to maintain, for example in diary or sketch format,

and only a very small number of these contemporaneous documents survive from the Sumatra Railway (I have identified just two POW diaries from the railway, including that maintained by my grandfather). Camp diaries are rare due to the dangers inherent in keeping them and, combined with all the movement between camps, they were a challenge to keep secure. Furthermore, paper was scarce and confiscated by guards during routine camp searches. The 'men [were] too tired and worn out after a heavy day's work' whilst also suffering from a lack of adequate food and medicines, and the 'inadequate control and corruption' of the guards meant that detailed note-taking, sketch-drawing or the maintenance of regular diaries was very difficult for POWs (Neumann and van Witsen 163).

A report given by Patrick Kavanagh³¹ on the conditions at the base camp at Pakanbaroe gives a glimpse of the physical situation faced by POWs, which was - he says simply - 'hopeless in all cases' (2).

The space allotted to each man was very small; about 140 men to a hut built by ourselves, and always leaking. The 1,500 of us at Pakanbaroe had a section of the river, 12 ft. by 40 ft. for bathing, cooking etc., and we were just below a coolie camp in which the Japanese had placed a number of dysentery victims. Medical supplies were nil, the Japanese flatly refusing to supply anything at all. Food for the patients in the hospital hut was 150 grammes of rice per day, and for the men in working parties 250 grammes. (Kavanagh 2)

The shock of the hardship experienced by POWs on the Sumatra Railway is embodied in the narratives from the Atjeh Party. These men, prior to road building in Atjeh, had experienced relatively easy conditions in the camps at Gloegoer (in the northern province of Medan). At Gloegoer, there were 'properly tile roofed hongs'³² and a 'shower room' at the end of each (Hedley, *Interview with IWM*), the 'general health all through much better', and POWs experienced a 'much more complete diet' (Parsons December 1942). Apart from the working parties that were sent to build a temple, Hedley recalls that exercise at Gloegoer had consisted of 'moving oil barrels from one side of a compound to another....to keep us occupied I

31 Sergeant Patrick Francis Kavanagh, 3RD Negri Sembilan Battalion FMSVF; became POW aged 27 at Padang on Sumatra, 11 June 1942.

32 Huts/sleeping quarters

think' (*Interview with IWM*). Or, as John Parsons³³ noted in his camp diary, during the day POWs were 'free except for preparing vegetables as required' (December 1942). However, the move to Atjeh brought a distinct shift in living environment and working conditions for the prisoners.

They [the Japanese] split us into working parties to go up into the mountains in Atjeh – and they wanted about 500 men. Now 500 men out of ours, that meant having the lot – so we decided, 300 Dutchmen, 200 British. The 200 British were made up, this is how we decided to do it – 40 from the Navy, 40 from the Army, 40 from the Air Force, 40 Aussies and New Zealand, and a Headquarter company and a mixed bag. That's 200. And we were taken away up into Atjeh, we had one, really one main camp there, eventually. A hell of a long way we had to march. One main camp up in Atjeh itself, over the period of the months we were up there building their road. You started at one end at Khota Chani and another group started up at their end at Blankedgkjerren. Worked towards each other...Cut out the jungle. All the hills. It's in the mountains, so you were cutting the road out of the hillside. First of all the trees would be felled... If you came across rock there would be a party which would have the use of explosives, of gelignite. There would be a hole bored in and the stuff jammed down and packed up, light the fuse, run like hell, and then hope for the best. And then back to your tools.
(Hedley, *Interview with IWM*)

Along with much harder labour at Atjeh, there was a deterioration in accommodation. Atap³⁴ huts were built by POWs on their arrival at the new camp, 'about a foot off the ground, a platform, again of the local sort of bamboo...just to hold you off the deck a bit. And that was all. Built round a square' (Hedley, *Interview with IWM*). Having experienced these conditions for the best part of a year, in October 1944 the Atjeh Party were moved once more, this time marched eighty miles in just over three days – many with no footwear or at best 'broken to bits and tied up with string' (Parsons 10 October 1944). Despite the promise of being en

33 Sapper John Edward Roden Parsons, JVE FMSVF; became POW aged 27 at Padang on Sumatra, 28 March 1942.

34 Construction materials that comprised palm leaves and bamboo

route to a 'rest camp' (Hedley, *War History*), this group of men was sent to work on the Sumatra Railway in thick jungle, predominantly at camps 9 and 14. Arguably the most exhausted prisoners on Sumatra had been placed into the most challenging conditions and terrain, to make up the most unrelenting working parties along the railway – organised as they were in a continuous shift rotation twenty-four hours per day. By the end of 1944, Parsons felt that the general health among the men had become 'very bad':

In Aceh [sic] our chief troubles were diarrhoea, dysentery, oedema – caused by deficiency of diet. Since we've been down here [Petai] there appears to have been a lessening of oedema but an increase of dysentery and a certain amount of malaria... 1944 has been a bad year for us and we are all pleased to see the end of it. (Parsons December 1944)

With this, the maintenance of contemporaneous records of the Sumatra Railway became exceptionally difficult. The lack of other diaries, and inaccurate and incomplete archival data, means that establishing and telling the happening-truth of the Sumatra Railway is fraught with the pitfalls of not being able to verify what happened. The accounts found in the oral histories and memoirs of former POWs become all the more compelling, and the story-truth that they offer all the more necessary.

Challenges to telling the Sumatra Railway

The official *Encyclopaedia of Indonesia in the Pacific War* produced by NIOD gives only cursory mention to the plight of POWs drafted onto the Sumatra Railway. The most detailed reference is a two-line summary of the fact that prisoners were shipped from Java 'to build a railroad from Pekanbaru to Muara for the transportation of coal to the coast near Padang' (Post et al 177). The focus, even in this encyclopaedia of Indonesian history, remains on those shipped *from* the Netherlands East Indies onto the Burma-Siam Railway (179-184). Similarly, an account of the 'defining years' of the Netherlands East Indies makes no reference to the construction of the Sumatra Railway (Krancher).

Aside from Hovinga's research, which has also updated the data compiled by Neumann and van Witsen, the most comprehensive published sources relating to the construction of the Sumatra Railway appear online, in particular NIOD's *Dutch*

East Indies Camp Archives and a collaborative project between several institutions to create the digital archive, *Memory of the Netherlands*.³⁵ The latter includes images of artefacts and a large collection of drawings produced by POWs across the Netherlands East Indies during the Second World War. Yet the narratives of former British POWs who were on Sumatra are rare, even where appeals have been made to the general public to submit their stories. For example, as part of the BBC's online *People's War* project there were over 47,000 stories uploaded by members of the general public, but no search results appear for 'Pakanbaroe'/'Pekan Baru', and although the term 'Sumatra Railway' brings back forty-six stories, the large majority of these accounts are from those men who were captured on Sumatra but then transported to work on the Burma-Siam Railway.³⁶

Examining official reports and documentation reveals patchy data, and a frustrating notion of the mutability of the Sumatra Railway through history. An end-of-war report on the conditions of camps in the Netherlands East Indies and marked for preservation as part of 'official' history, makes no reference to a railway on Sumatra. The only detail that this report offers is that 'there seems to have been three camps in the Pakanbahru area...but whether all at once or at different times is not clear. They contained Dutch prisoners, and British prisoners arrived there from Java in February, May and October 1944' ('Allied POW Captured' n.pag.).

Information outlets for families did not disseminate better data. During the Second World War, the Department of the Red Cross and St. John War Association produced *The Prisoner of War*, a journal for the relatives of men held captive by enemy troops. From February 1944 this journal was supplemented by a special eight-page edition, *Far East*, to enable information 'appropriate' to these families to be distributed more effectively than in a publication that was 'concerned mainly with the affairs of prisoners of war in Europe' ('Editor Writes: February 1944' 1). Initially *Far East* was intended to be a monthly supplement, but by the third issue it was clear to the editors that this was not going to be possible ('How To Write To Civilians' 8). Since news from the Far Eastern camps was received 'at irregular intervals', *Far East* was published in a likewise manner ('Editor Writes: August 1944' 1). Between February 1944 and December 1945, twelve issues were published. The journal offered what information that its writers and editors could about the camps, reprints of letters and postcards received from the POWs and

³⁵ For the *Dutch East Indies Camp Archives*, see: www.indischekamparchieven.nl/en/; accessed 8 February 2014; for *Memory of the Netherlands*, see www.geheugenvannederland.nl/?/en/homepage; accessed 8 February 2014.

³⁶ www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/categories/c1204/index.shtml, accessed 8 February 2014.

civilians interned in the Far East,³⁷ and official reports from International Red Cross Commission (IRCC) inspectors who were permitted to visit 'a few camps in the northern area [of Japan's occupied territory]' ('Official Reports from the Camps' 4). Attempts were made by the editors of *Far East* to provide a spread of information from across the Far East, regarding both civilian and POW camps.

However, being part of the southern territories, visits by the IRCC were not permitted to camps on Sumatra. This meant that very little official news from this island was available to the editors of *Far East*. The first mention of the Sumatran camps is found in the seventh issue, published May 1945, with a report that 'about 600 British subjects' were being held as civilian internees on the island 'but that there may be a certain number still unreported'. The brief article goes on to offer what was in fact a key piece of information regarding the specific whereabouts of the contingency of POWs who were labouring, at the time of the publication, on the Sumatra Railway: 'The writers [of the civilian letters from Sumatra] were all former residents of Malaya' ('Civilian News on Sumatra' 10). This was a clue, because the POWs captured at Padang on Sumatra in March 1942, and who remained on the island for the remainder of their captivity, were also officially recorded by the Japanese as being held captive in 'Malayan POW camps' (Tett, *Dutch East Indies* 197). Nonetheless, it was not until the tenth issue of *Far East*, published September 1945, that 'fifteen camps containing P.o.W. have now been located in Sumatra. Of these, five contain P.o.Ws from the United Kingdom, of whom there are some 1,800' ('Free at Last!' 8). The 'fifteen camps' was a conservative estimate, and included camps at Medan and Palembang as well as some of those along the railway – but the existence of the railway itself was not reported. It remained, until liberated men could speak to their families directly, unknown.

The first detailed accounts of the experiences of Far East POWs to emerge into the public domain were those offered by survivors of the torpedoing of the *Rakuyo Maru*, a vessel that the Japanese were using to transport POWs from Singapore to Japan in early September 1944. Just as the *Van Waerwijk* and the *Junyo Maru* were sunk by Allied torpedoes, the *Rakuyo Maru* shared the same fate. When it was recognised that the *Rakuyo Maru* carried POWs, rescue attempts were made and sixty men survived the shipwreck and some returned to the UK. Attempts were made by official organisations to shield relatives from the details of their stories. Notably, articles in *Far East* glossed over the atrocities of the Japanese

³⁷ The writing of letters, rather than postcards, was permitted by the Japanese in some areas of the Far East, notably from the camps in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Korea.

camps – ‘horrifying reports which it is not the concern of this journal to dwell upon’ (‘Editor Writes: September 1945’ 1). Indeed, one of the survivors of the *Rakuyo Maru* wrote a double-page spread for *Far East* that attempted to appease the concerns of families: ‘I know by the way I felt during my two and half years that our greatest wish was for you not to worry’ (Wilson 4). Subsequently Wilson attempts to assuage the ‘worry’ of readers of *Far East* about the lack of clothing available to POWs, by stating that ‘you were better off’ because ‘for one thing, if you had clothes you would be more uncomfortable on account of the lice’ (4). The punishments that were dealt by guards to POWs are portrayed by Wilson with a diminished severity (‘it’s not because, usually, the Japanese wants to be cruel or torture you. It’s the fact that they have always been used to being beaten themselves’), and there is much focus in Wilson’s article on the men ‘sitting down on their bunks or on the floor’ listening to a campmate read, or a ‘lot of fellows’ making musical instruments and generating ‘a good feeling’ by singing whilst they marched from the railway to the camp (4). With the refusal of official organs such as *Far East* to ‘dwell’ on atrocity and being unable to report from Sumatra, men emerging from the railway camps likely had an even greater challenge to convince audiences back home of the happening-truth.

The sheer scale of the Burma-Siam Railway inevitably dominated those narratives that did emerge from the Far East. As historian E.H. Carr asserted, ‘numbers count in history’ (50); and they count later, too, when the stories of that history are being told and heard. The Burma-Siam Railway was by far the largest forced labour project in the Far East during the Second World War with the workforce totalling approximately 64,000 POWs (Flower 240). Consequently, some former POWs from Sumatra felt as if they were ‘other’ to ‘the’ Death Railway, or sensing that ‘quite enough’ had already been told:

Everyone naturally knows the Burma Railway because that was the first one that was discovered by the relieving troops at the end of the war. And by the time they got to us, they’d seen quite enough horror and we were just sort of second hand, not proper news at all... It’s now known among POWs as the ‘other’ Railway, rather slightly I think. Anyhow, we’re rather particular about keeping the distinction.
(Greenwood, *Interview with IWM*)

Greenwood's³⁸ belief that 'relieving troops' had already discovered the 'Burma Railway...at the end of the war' is not accurate. The Burma-Siam line had been completed in 1943 and prisoners who laboured on it were not liberated for another twenty months. Yet Greenwood's narrative, his story-truth, demonstrates a curious exchange between the different cohorts of Far Eastern POWs where the 'other' railway - an 'otherness' that has since become a 'distinction' – was not at the time perceived as being 'other' or 'distinctive' enough as the men were liberated. This has been reaffirmed through film and literary representations that present a popular notion of Burma-Siam as the archetypal experience of a POW of the Japanese (Boulle; Lean; Teplitzky; Warner).

The narrativisation of the Sumatra Railway

I have so far established that the culmination of different experiences among POWs during their early days of captivity, the varying conditions along the railway itself, and the ranging quality of source materials now available, makes one definitive history of the Sumatra Railway difficult to hold down. Affirming O'Brien's belief in the authority of the story-truth, Hayden White asserts that historical accounts 'are, in effect, *lived* narrativisations, [and so] it follows that the only way to represent them is through narrative itself' (*Question* 30). All testimony and historical documentation, White posits, comes from a 'human past' that can only be imagined and recreated in the present using the 'linguistic, grammatical, and rhetorical features' that people use every day to construct the stories of themselves (32).

How else can any "past", which is by definition comprised of events, processes, structures, and so forth that are considered to be no longer perceivable, be represented in either consciousness or discourse except in an "imaginary" way? (White, *Question* 33)

So, an 'imaginary' telling of history requires the historian to manipulate narrative devices such as emplotment and characterisation to frame the aesthetic, epistemological and ethical choices that they make in the structuring and processing of historical data (White, *Tropics* 62). Further, this 'imaginary' telling then influences a reader's perception of history. So, when Hovinga relates how –

38 Corporal Wilfred Owen Greenwood, 84 Squadron RAF; became POW aged 32 at Garoet on Java, 18 March 1942

following the collapse of the original in a flood – the rail bridge over the Kampar Kanan river was rebuilt by POWs in early 1945, we read an account imbued with the sense of a man who can imagine himself there. After the new bridge was completed, a steam locomotive was driven across the structure.

After the first metres (ten feet), the piers started to shiver, then the colossal structure creaked in all its joints, a thunderous noise which increased with the progress of the locomotive. When it was halfway across the bridge, the noise sounded like a quickly approaching thunderstorm. The couple of hundred POWs did not dare to look anymore. But the locomotive continued. The creaking subsided as it crossed the bridge. The Japs were exuberant and shouted 'Banzai, Banzai!' (Hurrah, Hurrah). And the machinist blew the engine's steam whistle as if he wanted to blow away all his own bottled-up fear and anxiety. (Hovinga 92-93)

This record of the bridge being tested appears to be shaped in part by Hovinga's affective response to the stories that he finds within his materials. Therefore, a whistle is not blown for a functional purpose such as to warn of the locomotive's movements, but as a form of stress-relief, 'as if [the machinist] wanted to blow away' his fears; the Japanese, he imagines 'were exuberant', and all of the POWs were too afraid, 'did not dare' to look. Inevitably, what White refers to as the 'constructive imagination' of the historian takes over, and the story-truth that Hovinga tells is the kind of story that Hovinga can create using his own affected notions of narrative explanation (White, *Tropics* 60). Hovinga's 'constructive imagination' comes to re-present, re-create and – to echo Suleiman – 'stand for' the accounts of individual witnesses (134). Hovinga can only imagine the 'thunderous noise', the 'exuberant' Japanese, the 'bottled-up fear and anxiety' of the POW: but these imaginings are embedded into his account. What they also emphasise – although Hovinga does not acknowledge this – is that the account that Hovinga tells us is a story-truth involving his own responses to the history, and not just a happening-truth. The processes involved in the construction of the Sumatra Railway are represented by Hovinga in an 'imaginary', rhetorical manner. Hovinga deduces his own meaning from the source materials that he examines: it is the account Hovinga chooses to give of how history might have been.

Hovinga's text risks oversimplifying what was a complex set of relationships between POWs and their campmates, military officers and their men, POWs and

the guards, and the Korean and Japanese guards between one another. As Hovinga points out, the Dutch POWs carried an extra burden of knowledge that wives, children and other loved ones were being held in the civilian internment camps nearby of which, at the start of Japanese occupation, there were 93 on Sumatra alone (Archer 7). Hovinga's text offers sympathy to the Dutch POWs through the portrayal of 'hardened professional soldiers' among the British troops (219) – despite few on the Sumatra Railway being military regulars – an apparent attitude that did not sit well against the worries of Dutch men who had suffered an 'abrupt separation from wife and children' and the loss of their homeland (209). However, an oral history account that was recorded by IWM offers the British perspective that 'distrust and enmity between Dutch and British' was increased because 'we had nothing' (Hedley, *Interview with IWM*).

The Dutch had all they could take into camp [from their homes] - put it that way. And so I suppose jealousy in one way crept in quite a lot and there wasn't all that much good blood between the two groups of people. (Hedley, *Interview with IWM*)

By bringing together these two perspectives, recurring conflict within the collective narrative of Sumatra can be identified. A major contributing factor in Hovinga's misrepresentation is that the voices of the British and Australian POWs are generally absent from his 'total' history (12). Hovinga offers an interpretation that disregards the perceptions of a large contingent of Allied troops on the Sumatra Railway. And so, the British POWs are described by former Dutch POWs as looking 'down on the Dutch and brown KNIL soldiers who could not even speak English' and behaving 'in a superior manner just because they ate potatoes instead of rice' (Hovinga 227). The few descriptions of British Officers are less than complimentary, with Philip Davis³⁹ (Camp Commandant for all POWs on the line) a 'haughty' man, 'guilty of nepotism, always favouring the British over the Dutch' despite his 'organisational talents' and 'personal courage' (227). Captain Armstrong⁴⁰ in charge of camp 3 is described in Hovinga's book as 'pompously strutting around with a stick similar to a marshal's baton' (227). However, according to British accounts, Armstrong:

39 Wing Commander Philip Slaney Davis, Army HQ; became POW aged 28 at Bandoeng on Java, 8 March 1942.

40 Captain Sydney Armstrong, 68 DID RASC, became POW aged 38 at Tjekarang on Java, 8 March 1942.

in spite of his fear... would speak to [the Japanese] on our behalf if he thought it was necessary. He did everything possible for us, particularly by complaining about the shortage of food. In many cases he handled the Nips like a skilled diplomat to get some concession for us. He was very tactful in his approach. (J Saunders, *Journey* 141-142)

Hovinga's account is an explanation as to how events developed 'as they appear to have done' (White, *Tropics* 63), or at least as they appear to Hovinga to have done. This is particularly powerful since Hovinga's use of a specific group of voices to construct his narrative (and mine in this chapter, too), echoes one of the most important factors in POW life: the significance of the *kongsi*, a small close-knit group of POWs – often of only two or three members – to which an individual belonged and which he depended upon for survival.

The bond between us still exists, and will remain to the last two survivors. (Fitzgerald, *FEPOW's Lot* 4)

Individual accounts of events on Sumatra tend to be overridden by the demands of collective remembrance, with group membership a cornerstone of the Far Eastern POW identity and signified by the camp *tenko*⁴¹ (roll call), working party and *kongsi*, right through to the 'FEPOW' associations, clubs and groups still meeting today. The *kongsi* in the camps, in the collective working and cooperation of small groups of men, meant survival. With the continuing preservation of testimony within archives, in texts like Hovinga's, and among the various FEPOW clubs and associations, *kongsi* can now be argued to have taken on a larger

41 The *tenko* was so integral to the Far Eastern POW experience that in the immediate aftermath of repatriation, regular social events for returned POWs included 'tenko nights'. By August 1947, 'four highly successful "tenko nights" have been held. It is the intention to hold one on the last Saturday of each month from 7-11p.m. Members in town, or "up from the country" are especially invited to attend these. Wives and friends are always most welcome. On each occasion there will be a bar, buffet, tenko, news session, dancing, and a "guest" or "guest artist"' ('Far East Notes' n.pag). The 'tenko' of the evening was used to lampoon the Japanese and Korean guards that the former POWs remembered, but also as a solemn reminder of captivity. During a reunion of former Far Eastern POWs for the fourth anniversary of their captivity, and following a minute's silence for the POWs who had died in the camps: 'a voice gave the command "Tenko" and the men who had obeyed for years while in Japanese hands solemnly lined up. A "Japanese officer," accompanied by two N.C.O.s, entered and called the roll. This was "tenko" – the Japanese word for roll call, and used by them whenever they wanted to worry the prisoners. But on this occasion the ritual was performed by ex-prisoners dressed in captured Japanese uniforms' ('F.E.P.O.W.s.' n.pag.)

significance. *Kongsi*, so closely linked to the survival of men in the camps, now comes to mean the survival of the story itself. The historian Jeremy Popkin reminds us that collective narratives ‘constitute the groups in the same way that life stories constitute individuals’, they become necessary for remembrance, for understanding and acknowledgement (53). First and foremost, each individual man needed to survive a personal, individual, and isolating experience. This increased as incarceration continued, when after three years ‘we no longer had anything left to prove except that we were not going to die now...Everybody was a potential enemy. Everybody threatened our space, everybody threatened our individuality, everybody threatened our food supply’ (Goulding, *Yasmé* 41). Yet, despite this threat, Harold Goulding⁴² understood from his time at Palembang that ‘it was essential for our well-being to have a mate’ (17). And so it remains, since the reunion of former POWs has been, and continues to be, a way in which individuals can create and share narratives to remember by themselves, for themselves, and of themselves (see chapter 5).⁴³

Translating Hovinga

At the end of the English edition of Hovinga’s text is a ‘note from the translator’, Bernard J. Wolters,⁴⁴ that raises additional questions about what Hovinga calls the ‘historical totality’ of his text (12). This is particularly significant since Hovinga’s book is currently the only major source available on the Sumatra Railway to an English readership.

Wolters’s translation of Hovinga skews the meaning of the text. For example, quotations from British reports, which were translated for the Dutch edition of the book, have been *re-translated* back into English from the Dutch rather than being taken directly from source materials. Take the following excerpt from Davis’s report

42 Lance Bombardier Harold Buchanan Goulding, became POW 8 March 1942.

43 Post-liberation, the *kongsi* was also a powerful reminder of the need to remember other individuals who could not share their own stories, who ‘have remained speechless’ (Suleiman 134). As Suleiman continues: ‘This representative role places upon the survivor-witness of collective historical trauma an unusually heavy burden of responsibility. Every witness by definition, promises to tell the truth of his or her experience, to the best of her or his recollection, just as every autobiographer implicitly or explicitly undertakes to do the same but when one is seeking to tell the truth about an extreme experience that was lived through by many others as well as by oneself the responsibility is far greater than usual’ (134-135).

44 A member of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL) which, poorly trained, had been disbanded on Sumatra after Dutch capitulation on 9 March 1942. However, in an attempt to revolt they continued a guerrilla campaign against Japanese forces. Although most Indonesian soldiers were freed, all Dutch soldiers within the KNIL were made POW by the Japanese (Post et al12).

to the Office of the Judge Advocate General in November, 1945. Hovinga's text (re)translates as follows:

The general situation of the captives deteriorated so rapidly that time and time again I urged Lieutenant Doi to make some improvements. All requests were turned down. We prepared statistics which revealed that the death rate had risen to eighty a month, due to the lack of proper nourishment combined with a heavy workload. But lieutenant Doi told me that the officers had to work harder and that my staff and myself were trying to sabotage the Japanese war effort. Conditions deteriorated at an alarming rate because an increasing number of sick men were coming to our camp from the railway camps and they could only be replaced by men from Camp 2 who had only partially recovered. Around 16 June 1945 I was informed that the railway had to be completed on 15 August 1945 and that each man capable of standing on his feet had to be put to work. Despite all our protests, medical roll calls were conducted and the men were forced to work on the railway. The men's health in the area declined very rapidly. No medicines were distributed. The whole group was completely exhausted and the moral [sic] of the men was falling rapidly. Due to the Kenpeitai slave drivers several extra disciplinary measures were taken that made our burden even heavier. (Hovinga 252)

Below is the text as it appears in Davis's original report:

At this period, the general situation regarding prisoners of war was deteriorating rapidly and I again made repeated appeals to Lieutenant DOI for an improvement in the situation. The appeals were all refused. We produced statistical reports showing the increasing death rate rising to approximately 80 per month was entirely due to lack of food and heavy work, but Lieut. DOI merely informed me that he considered all the Officers should be made to do more work and that I and my staff were merely trying to sabotage the Japanese war efforts. These conditions deteriorated further and the death rate rose due to the constant exchange of personnel from

the up country camps who had fallen sick who were replaced by only semi-fit men from No.2 Camp.

On approximately 16th June, 1945, I was informed that the railway must be finished by the 15th August, 1945, and that every available man who could walk must be sent out to work. Despite our protests, medical parades were held by the Japanese and the men were forced out to work. The health situation of the whole area was now deteriorating with great rapidity, no medicine was available and the whole group was utterly exhausted and all personnel were extremely depressed due to constant slave driving by the Kenpetai (Japanese Secret Police) was felt and all sorts of additional disciplinary pressure was brought to bear on us. (Davis 8)

Despite a fairly comparable account of events across the two versions of Davis's statement, the way in which this testimony is translated creates a significantly different impression to the reader of the tone in which Davis presented his report. Firstly, the results of the (re)translation mean that Davis is portrayed as using unusually affected phraseology for an Officer's report. This is characterised by Wolters's choice of insistent and forceful verbs compared to the measured, detached and military tone of Davis's original ('urged' rather than 'repeated appeals', 'had to work' rather than 'should be made', 'deteriorated at an alarming rate' rather than 'deteriorated further'). This is compounded by Wolters's adoption in his (re)translation of an accusatory tone towards the Japanese (for example, 'lieutenant Doi told me' rather than 'merely informed me that he considered', or that 'Kenpetai slave drivers' rather than 'slave driving by the Kenpetai'). When taken in isolation these examples alter slight nuances of tone, but as a whole the translation of Davis's narrative makes him appear less measured than he did in his original. The subsequent danger here is that some factual aspects of the report are misrepresented, so that the death rate of 'approximately' eighty per month is a more definite figure ('it had risen' to this level), or that men just 'capable of standing' were sent to work, rather than those 'who could walk'. Despite Hovinga's claim of 'historical totality', the retranslation jeopardises his telling of the happening-truth. The translation of a narrative, in this instance, subverts both the happening-truth and the story-truth and questions how far a reader might trust the 'truth value' of either.

The 'note' from Wolters at the end of the English translation of Hovinga's work explains that he carried out his translation as a 'work of charity in memory of comrades and natives' from Sumatra. So after finishing a first reading, we come to realise that this version of Hovinga's text was produced, in part, by a survivor of the Sumatra Railway: a survivor to whom the book is not 'just' a telling of the happening-truth, but a chance for him to help to ensure that it is 'read by people in many nations, so they will come to know that Japan stood in violation of the human rights rules adopted by the Geneva Convention'. Wolters goes on to assert what he believes were 'racial and discriminatory practices of the harshest kind', to lay out his personal opinion that 'Japan has not compensated these POWs', and that without fully acknowledging atrocities committed, 'Japan will never be a worthy member of the United Nations Security Council'. Indeed, Wolters goes further in his opinion to state that '[Japan] should remain a pariah within the United Nations' (364).

Wolters's impassioned statement hits hard, but it also undermines Hovinga's version of the happening-truth. An account claiming to present the 'historical totality' of the Sumatra Railway experience, based on a scientific interrogation of 'historical fact' from 'personal account', is turned around and becomes linked indissolubly with the deeply personal narrative of one man re-imagining his own trauma through the act of translating the memories of others. The name is also familiar, since a look back through the pages of *The Sumatra Railroad* confirms that Wolters's own accounts are used throughout Hovinga's text. We also learn that the process has affected Wolters: translating others' as well as his own memories, left him 'often crying and enduring sleepless nights' (363).

With this single-page afterword, we understand that the story-truth of the POW experience cannot be uncovered in the number of camps, the movements between camps, or the way in which the Sumatra Railway itself was built. It is in those sleepless nights, the tear-filled memories, and the need for a man to keep telling and re-telling that story six decades later. We learn that the happening-truth and the story-truth are inextricable: the former for verifying the latter, the latter for making sense of the former. If story-truth is doubted, then there are inevitably greater problems in accepting the happening-truth, and so the two forms of truth are interdependent in ensuring that a written or spoken record remains 'just as real' as what 'really happened'.

Hovinga's claim that he has 'completed' the historical jigsaw of the Sumatra Railway requires reconsideration (327), particularly given the comparable lack of perspective other than from the Dutch POWs in *The Sumatra Railway*. The reports of senior British Officers and intelligence reports from British sources are omitted

(apart from that by Davis), and references by Hovinga to 'Allied' Commanders are invariably to Dutch individuals. Since British and Australian troops made up 21% of the total POW workforce arriving to work on the Sumatra Railway, the absence of their voice is conspicuous. This means that the Atjeh Party for example, is represented by Hovinga as growing 'into a close-knit team under the leadership of Captain J.J.A. van de Lande and Dr. F.F.L. Lingen' (26), when this contingent was in fact commanded by a number of British Officers also, including Gordon, Henman⁴⁵ and Hedley. Part of my aim through this work, is to supplement historical accounts with these narratives. Strikingly, there are no camp diaries referenced within Hovinga's archives and indeed, source materials contemporary to the railway's construction are not referenced except as images to illustrate the text. My treatment of the diary of John Parsons in chapter 2 helps to correct this omission. Daily life for the POW revolved around three main focal points: working parties, food and illness/disease. Hovinga uses each chapter to frame his narrative around the core topics of working and living conditions ('Beatings and starch'), meals ('Maggots with sambal'), and medical treatments ('The shadow of death'). However, the affect of dramatic changes to the physical body, or the mental processes of POWs, is overlooked. My exploration of the genre (chapter 2), discourse (chapter 3) and body biography (chapter 4) of POW life-writing redresses this balance. Further, my focus on the experiences of British POWs supplements Hovinga's Dutch collective with that of the British on the Sumatra Railway, too.

Both history and life-writing blur the divisions between public and private, fact and truth, reality and imagination, and ultimately, narrative and history. It is the act of putting the 'lived narrativisation' onto paper (White, *Question* 30) that enabled Henk Hovinga to draw 'historical fact' from 'personal account'. By doing so he provided a structure to events that made (in Popkin's terms) 'imagined communities possible' (Popkin 21). In doing so, Hovinga has offered a basis upon which to explore now the story-truth of the happening-truth. In celebrating these 'imagined communities' – the narratives created by former POWs – it is possible to 'give history back' to members of the second generation who still attempt to (re)know it (Popkin, 21).

Wolters's note is an unapologetic statement to readers that resonates long after the first reading. It exemplifies how carrying out research on the POW

45 Lieutenant Owen Robin Templer Henman MRNVR, HMS Huang Jao, became POW aged 30 at Baroes on Sumatra, 1 April 1942.

experience, even whilst remaining sensitive towards history, retains the potential to provoke intense responses. Wolters's resentment towards the Japanese drives his need to translate Hovinga's text, to make his personal contribution to the narrative of the Sumatra Railway. Evidence of such hostility triggered questions about my own motivations for this research. Since Wolters was actually there, since he experienced the Sumatra Railway as it 'really happened', did that render his motives for working with the subject somehow more appropriate than mine? What validity did my work have, as a member of the third generation, to explore this story in any way different to the former POWs themselves? And because Wolters's point of view cannot be ignored at the end of *The Sumatra Railroad*, I should not fail to acknowledge the influence that my relation to the history has on my own approach – the original driver of wanting to hear the stories being told was, after all, equally personal.

How and why we come to our places of remembrance inevitably moulds the way in which we represent that process of remembering. Wolters is overcome by the stories of his comrades, the story-truths of the men who lived the history but whom the 'history books do not recall' (364). Hovinga's text may provide what we as readers can know about the happening-truth of history but, by giving Wolters such a forceful final word, the English edition emphasises the continuing need to tell and to explore the story-truth of that history. Exploring the genres (chapter 2), language (chapter 3) and images (chapter 4) produced by POWs shows not just the workings of the minds of the 'people concerned', but the way in which their histories still resonate within contemporary family narratives (chapter 5). My research was originally inspired by a wish to make sense of my grandfather's history and its legacy within my family; it has been pushed forward by a desire to understand how forgotten histories can still be told and, conversely, how they come to be heard.

Chapter 2

The question of genre

'It must surely be impossible', Thomas Chatfield⁴⁶ mused about his captivity on Java and Sumatra, 'for the written or, for that matter, the spoken word, to convey the sensation of the stinking smell of fear and filth' (i). Although brief (but not the briefest) at nineteen typescript pages, Chatfield's notes written in 1981 repeatedly question the stereotypical image of the Far Eastern POW. His reminiscences of POW life are not focused on the supportive bonds of mateship but give mention of the times, less popularly acknowledged, when deteriorating camp morale created an atmosphere in which 'stealing and fighting were rife' among POWs themselves, and where 'corporal punishment by our own troops' was considered 'the only effective remedy' (10).

Chatfield tells us about the humanity of prisoner life, of the drudgery and the danger. Furthermore, Chatfield acknowledges the struggle to find a way to speak his truth. It is surely 'impossible', he tells us, to be able 'to convey the sensation' that he experienced. What Chatfield wants to tell does not lend itself easily to the coherence of a narrative and, reflecting the apparent impossibility of the task he set himself, his notes are disjointed. They do not flow smoothly into one another but read like a sequence of anecdotes, jumping through brief moments in captivity. In one half-page of typescript, for example, the notes move through work conditions, 'easier for a short period', through to 'much suffering caused by Happy Feet'⁴⁷ and the relief POWs found for this condition. The same half-page covers quiet periods when 'lectures and study periods were organised, and I managed to run a course in book-keeping', and quickly to contemplation of the war, which was 'always going to be over in three months and the possibility of defeat did not exist' (7). Each one of the short anecdotes that Chatfield adds could be the start of a much longer exploratory narrative on the effects, impact, incidents and ailments associated with

46 Aircraftman Thomas Holman Chatfield, Far East Command RAF; became POW aged 28 on Java, 20 March 1942.

47 This is most likely to be a reference to peripheral neuropathy, a condition that indicates damage to the peripheral nervous system (those nerves outside of the cranium and spinal cord), with symptoms commonly including aching, tingling and itching skin and especially hypersensitivity of the feet. Vitamin deficiency and physical injury are common causes of the condition, which ties in with hard labour often carried out in bare feet on a starvation diet.

captivity in the Far East. Instead they remain as almost stand-alone thoughts 'in terms of work', the 'quiet period', the 'suffering' and 'blessed relief' (7). In this way Chatfield's notes reflect the tangential nature of observations often found in a personal diary, as the writer documents brief episodes that become definitive moments for the day. Chatfield did not – to my knowledge – polish, refine or edit his thoughts into a longer or different narrative as other former POWs did,⁴⁸ and so a reader finds a document that is presented like a diary, 'simply as a record' (i).

The diary, though, is not the only genre that Chatfield's notes evoke. They form a sequence that works exactly as memoir does, to 'personalise history and historicise the personal' (Buss 595). In the introduction to his notes Chatfield writes that his record is written 'in no chronological sequence' (i). The date and time of the events that Chatfield records may be uncertain, but there is still a general chronological structure to his story. He begins with the start of his captivity on Java, works through to his time on Sumatra and ends with his own perception of the response to troops returning home.

This is a story that Chatfield and others like him clearly wished to tell. In his opening lines, and paradoxically by professing an inability to do so, Chatfield immediately impresses 'the stinking smell of fear' onto his reader's mind (i). In Kate McLoughlin's survey of the literary representation of war, the hyperbolic technique known as *adynaton* – the refusal to directly speak of events whilst alluding to their extremity – is a common trope of war writing. According to McLoughlin the 'suggestive power of the absent referent' is likely to cause a reader to 'envisage horrors exceeding anything that straightforward description could invoke' (156). In Chatfield's case, by stating that the 'stinking smell of fear' is 'impossible to convey', he is automatically suggesting to his readers a level of fear that is beyond his powers of 'straightforward description'. Readers have imagined worse than he can describe.

The wish 'to convey' implies an active search by Chatfield for an audience who will read, engage with and have a response to his words. In this search, Chatfield discovered challenges. At the end of his narrative we find that telling the story was 'very difficult' for him, and the responses he received directly contributed to this difficulty:

48 For example, Fitzgerald and Saunders both revisited and rewrote their memoirs. Fitzgerald wrote two distinctly different narratives approximately ten years apart. The first was written in the 1990s, *A Day On Sumatra's Forgotten Railway*; the second in 2001, *If You See Any Japs Don't Shoot, The Dutch Have Capitulated*. In contrast, Jack Saunders wrote two versions of the same memoir. It was published in 1995 as *It Seems Like Yesterday*, but a manuscript of the original version dated 1972 and entitled *Journey to Hell* is retained within IWM collections.

Not only has everyone else their own war stories but the experiences of Japanese POWs were quite beyond their ken. I gave up when an aunt said 'Poor dears, didn't they even give you clean sheets!' (13)

He adds that an older brother had told him he 'must be careful of water for drinking' despite the fact 'I had been drinking water downstream from latrines for months!' (14). In these few lines, Chatfield's 'notes' remind us that there is no single narrative of history – 'everyone else [has] their own war stories'. Stories that 'everyone else' will, as O'Brien's later tales of Vietnam remind us, all carry too. Chatfield's struggle acknowledges how telling a story at home was difficult when family members were unable to fathom the enormity, and strangeness, of the POW experience: it was 'quite beyond their ken' (13). Chatfield indicates that an attempt to tell the story was made by some men on repatriation, but reader/listener response dictated its legacy.⁴⁹ As novelist Elizabeth Bowen wrote in the aftermath: 'War's being global meant it ran off the maps: it was uncontainable. What was being done [in the Far East]...was heard of but never grasped in London' (298).

So home audiences were not always able to 'grasp' what was being said, and Chatfield felt this keenly. He was right: they too had 'their own war stories'. Further, the men returning in 1945 were much changed – physically and personally – from those who had gone away and been missed in the intervening years.⁵⁰ In this chapter, I argue that it was the specific function of life-writing to enable POWs (and former POWs) to engage with their memories in ways that melded the happening-truth with the story-truth. As a result each writer was able to move beyond the confines of captivity, breaking boundaries imaginatively even when they were not able to do so literally in the camps.

⁴⁹ Early post-war reactions in Britain towards Far Eastern POWs are discussed in chapter 5.

⁵⁰ Both Ben Wicks and Julie Summers have written studies on the strains and pressures faced by families who were welcoming men home, not just on release from captivity but from all fronts of the Second World War. See Summers; Wicks.

Forms and functions of POW life narratives

The POW diary

Diary is the rarest form of Far Eastern POW life-writing. I have identified only two daily diaries kept by British POWs on the Sumatra Railway: one maintained by my grandfather, and the other by John Parsons, whose diary is held at IWM. The scarcity of such documents does not demonstrate a lack of will on the part of POWs to record their experiences. On Sumatra, amid a railway construction project running through deep swamp and thick jungle, paper was a precious and dwindling commodity and would only have been used for writing by POWs who did not barter with it, sell it in order to obtain food and other provisions, or roll precious cigarettes with it. Despite the valuable contemporaneous detail that the diary contains, some of the most significant events in captivity, particularly the punishment of POWs by guards, may not have been recorded at all. Diary keeping for the POW was a prolonged act of self-censorship, remaining ever-conscious as they did of the 'frequent unscheduled searches for such items, or radios...under the threat of death for such offences' (Munro 10). Parsons transcribed his diary thirty years after repatriation, and he wrote in the introduction to that transcript, that 'the consequences for me would have been somewhat unpleasant' had the diary been discovered by guards. As a result, 'this necessitated recording only those events to which the Japanese would not take too violent exception', as well as hiding the diary – although Parsons added a note to the transcription that he made thirty years later that he was 'uncertain as to how and where' (n.pag.). Secreting the diary was most essential during the searches that were carried out by camp guards, due to the fear of provoking reprisals and punishments of the very nature (and potentially worse) than would have already gone unrecorded by him. John Sharples,⁵¹ who managed to keep a diary during the first half of his captivity on neighbouring island Java, confirmed this self-censorship at the end of the transcription of his own diary:

My diary omitted all reference to some activities which were pursued in the prison camps of an under-cover nature or which related to gross Japanese ill-treatment of POW. Had such references been made and my diary been discovered during the not infrequent

⁵¹ Sub Lieutenant John Sharples, HMS *Laburnham* RNVR; became POW aged 29 at Tjilegon on Java, 7 March 1942.

searches of our belongings, the consequences could have been calamitous, not only for myself, but also for many of my fellow POW.
(Sharples n.pag.)

The potential for these 'calamitous' reprisals meant that POW diaries were, by necessity, a carefully sanitised version of events. Unlike the writing of a novel or poem, diary-keeping was not likely to have been a creative, mentally liberating experience. Diaries are a valuable narrative form historically, telling of the minutiae of camp life. But the diary is also, unlike any other type of text, a record of references that the reader will never likely be able to access fully. It is a form populated by images and experiences known only by a narrator who has no immediate need to describe (as they do, for instance, in a memoir) very familiar surroundings, objects or people in a document created – at least primarily – for themselves.⁵²

The adjective form of 'diary' is defined as a process that will last 'for one day' – so a 'diary fever' in the late nineteenth century was a fever that remained for one day (OED). This gives a good indication as to the expectations for the diary as a practice. It tells us that diaries are temporally framed records and reflections of activities and events. As a form of life-writing however, the diary 'lies on the border between life and its representation' (Cottam 268). This means that there is a 'relationship between the life and its narrative', the self and the text representing it (Peterson 926). Diaries are inherently personal, even if at some stage they are made public. The 'lack of premeditated structure' in terms of the content of a diary may also assist war diarists in particular to 'express their emotions', to 'escape from' military roles and to 'come to terms' with their experiences (Peterson 926). Diaries are diverse texts in terms of the functions that they can have, and prisoner diaries specifically can represent a form of 'empowerment', and a 'replacement for physical retaliation' against captors. Keeping a diary of captivity makes life-writing an 'act of memory and of psychological assertion' (Homburger 730). The physical document of the diary itself – as much as its contents – comes to represent the need for the diarist to remain in control, in a small way, of his identity beyond that of 'prisoner'.

⁵² Former POWs who kept diaries did, however, have imagined readers and these were wives and sweethearts who they hoped were waiting for them back at home. For examples see: Attiwill; Boddington; Mackintosh; Steel; Stevens.

Lejeune's work *On Diary* is the most comprehensive analysis on the modern form, moving as it does through the unsolicited unpublished diaries of young French women and his own diary-keeping, to analyses of edited and published works. In this, Lejeune determines that the 'authentic' or 'honest' diary, in being 'discontinuous', 'full of gaps', 'allusive', 'redundant and repetitive', is also 'non-narrative' (170). The diary, in its use of summary anecdotes and reflective jottings, can also be regarded as an extended, regular form of note-keeping, much like that found in the Chatfield collection. Take for example the following entries from Parsons's diary:

12th March/ Down the line, weren't nattered at for a change but did the hell of a lot of work and were all tired out.

13th March/ 4 kms up the hill, carrying timber for a new Jap billet, must have walked 20-25 kms before finishing and were damned tired. Just the smell of meat for supper.

14th March/ Up the hill, clearing landslides and raising the line. A very good meat – brown bean for supper.

15th March/ Carried barong up to the new Jap billet and then atap-ed it; they really are an impoverished shower, the kit we carried was just trash. Meat for supper. Just recovering from another go of diarrhoea, not as bad as before, but nonetheless unpleasant.

(Parsons March 1945)

These entries are indeed 'allusive', 'repetitive' and contain 'gaps' and they are anecdotal, too. As readers we do not know for example, what 'down the line' or 'up the hill' looked like since Parsons gives no descriptions. All we know about 'down the line' is that there was a 'hell of a lot of work', but we do not find out exactly what work was on that day. We are left to imagine what the jobs of 'clearing landslides and raising the line' would entail, whilst being (rather euphemistically) 'nattered at' by guards. On 15 March, we read that Parsons is 'just recovering', but we have not known in the days prior to this that he was suffering – although a closer consideration of 'just the smell of meat for supper' concludes either that the meat ration was infinitesimal that day, or Parsons was feeling so sick that he could only smell, rather than eat, his food. Certainly the days written about here are not the full days as they were lived. For example, 'Up the hill, clearing landslides and raising the line' followed by supper would not have been the only events in Parsons's day on 14 March, however banal the rest of camp routine may have seemed. Instead,

the day is edited by Parsons as he writes, to include only those aspects that were of most significance to him during that writing moment. So we find out that it was his work 'up the hill' that likely left him exhausted and particularly appreciative of the 'very good meat – brown bean' served back at camp in the evening. Nothing else impressed upon him, or at least nothing that he wished, or was able, to record.

The diaries that Parsons kept in the camps comprise four small notebooks plus approximately fifty sheets of loose paper, including the backs of six type-written letters that Parsons received from his parents ('Pom' and 'Mamie'), dated between 1941 and 1943. Parsons used these letters to create diary space for 1945. Each letter is inscribed with a handwritten note from 'Mamie' in thick black ink – all but one using the same words to write her affection for her prisoner son, 'I love you with all my heart'. There is an incongruous message in the letter dated 25 April 1943 that tells us of the 'delight' of Parsons's parents on 'getting a message from Vatican City saying that you were a P of W in Malaya!' They had already heard, they say, but 'it was lovely hearing again' – his mother adds, 'I had written asking the Pope's help so perhaps it was in answer to that'. Parsons's parents no doubt mean that 'it was lovely' to know that their son was (at the time of the message, at least) still alive. 'I make so many plans for your future', his mother says: and so with the hope of a 'future' now ahead, 'keep as cheery as you can' – a message to herself, as much as to her son – without knowing that there would be another two and a half years before they were reunited (Parsons, *Letter* 25 April 1943). To maintain the 'cheer', Mamie sent Parsons constant updates about the garden that he had clearly shared her enthusiasm for, and he will have been able to imagine the blossoming of the fruit trees that she refers to as 'your plum tree' (Parsons, *Letter* 16 May 1943) and 'your greengage' (Parsons, *Letter* 8 June 1943).

The presence of Mamie's writing on the letters that he used to supplement his diary adds an enduring impression of an imaginary interlocutor for Parsons. The use of the letters to create additional space for his diary confirms the scarcity of paper foremost, but when he could not respond in kind to Mamie by letter, Parsons was still able to imagine and maintain his tie with her by adding his own daily news to the reverse of hers to him. Although his father's presence is felt (it was 'Pom' who typed the letters out), it is clearly Mamie's news dominating the letters from home. In the first of the series, Pom tells Parsons that they have received instruction 'that all letters must either be typed or written in block letters so I am writing as I think it would take your Mother all night' (Parsons, *Letter* 8 March 1941). Three weeks later, Mamie is 'most labourously learning to type' – and the effort, consisting of 13 fairly short sentences, 'has taken 3 hours, so do please appreciate

it' (Parsons, *Letter* 29 March 1941). In May 1943, she is back to 'getting Pom to type this for me as it takes me so long' (Parsons, *Letter* 16 May 1943).

As Mamie was telling of the minutiae of her life, Parsons's diary was filling with his. It is written in pencil in tiny, tightly spaced script with barely any space left at the corners or edges of each page. The crammed leaves display the precious nature of every scrap and inch of paper that Parsons could obtain. 'Thank heavens Mamie can't see my nightly afterbath ritual' Parsons exclaims (16 January 1945) indicating both his appreciation that 'Mamie' would care and worry for him, and his own pride in what she would think of him if she could 'see' his 'ritual' in the evening.⁵³ This nightly ritual 'consists of going very carefully through the shirt and shorts I sleep in and picking out lice'. It is, Parsons says, 'a most edifying sight especially when done by a number of blokes' and for a reader too, when the next entry begins with 'What a birthday!' (17 January 1945).

Parsons's diary was a documentary record, confined by the restrictions and dangers of camp life. As a form it restricted the written word to that day and that (and not every) moment, thereby reinforcing the sense of Parsons being trapped by the boundaries and prohibitions that were imposed upon him whilst he was in captivity. What the availability of this small amount of paper did offer to Parsons, however, was a chance to reflect. This occurs most evidently at very specific moments in captivity, when there is not just a shift in pace of working parties but also a shift in the very genre adopted by Parsons. During his most reflective moments, Parsons moves away from recording short daily diary entries to writing annual 'mini-memoirs' instead.

Between Christmas and New Year every year for three years (1942, 1943 and 1944),⁵⁴ Parsons wrote entries that are several paragraphs in length. These are rather complex pieces compared to the shorter daily entries that are generally no longer than three or four lines long. These 'mini-memoirs' summarise the previous

⁵³ The term 'bath' is somewhat misleading here, for bathing took place – when possible – in rivers and creeks. At this stage in his captivity Parsons is at Petai (camp 14a) and says on 2 March 1945 that his washing place is 'in the river'. Prior to this at camp 3 (Taratak Beoloeh), 'Bathing arrangements are crude...a shallow stream that muddies at the slightest shower' (4 April 1944). Bathing at camp 7 took place 'in a small creek in the jungle. It had to be approached by a very muddy, slippery path down a steep incline, it was very shallow and slow running and it was full of water leeches' (C Thompson 174). To get a wash at camp 5 POWs had to 'walk along the road for about 400 yards and then enter the jungle swamp for about another 300 or 400 yards...our bathing place was composed of a mass of fallen timber from which we could dip up water and splash it over our bodies' (C Thompson 147-148). Despite the 'crude' nature of the 'bathing place', washing was essential psychologically, with 'cleanliness' a 'great booster for morale' (C Thompson 150). Even when it was 'cold as hell', Parsons records his 'regret' that at times he was 'too busy and tired to bathe every night' (4 April 1944).

⁵⁴ Parsons's diary ends during his journey back home in October 1945, containing no summary for the months of that year spent in captivity.

twelve months, invariably following the pre-determined structure that the diary did not allow. With the New Year came a traditional time for reflection and the 'mini-memoirs' provided a focus for that contemplation, during a typically festive period, when memories of home were most likely to be at the forefront of Parsons's mind.

Parsons's 'mini-memoirs' are structured by theme, and are set out under specific headings: Food, Health, The Day (1942) or Working Parties (1943), and then a 'General' section at the end to include subjects such as morale, pay, and mail received. Tellingly, for this was the year that construction of the railway began, the summary for 1944 is the shortest – health is 'very bad', there are 'continual shortages' of food and overall, 'it has been a bad year'. Parsons had already carried out hard labour on road construction work throughout 1944 and had subsequently endured a forced march over eighty miles down to the Sumatra Railway. With men exhausted, starving and suffering increasing bouts of ill-health and disease, morale at the end of 1944 would only 'last out a few more months!' (December 1944).

Rather remarkably, there is also a brief mention that 'we've been very fortunate' compared to 'what appears to have happened in Thailand and Burma' (December 1944). Although men were shipped away from the Netherlands East Indies to the Burma-Siam Railway during 1942, there are no known records of movements of POWs in the opposite direction. It is also unlikely that a description of the Burma-Siam Railway was broadcast or heard via any secret radio maintained by POWs on Sumatra.⁵⁵ A definitive answer for how Parsons knew about Burma-Siam – and had already started to form his own perception and comparisons of the experience – remains a mystery, although the most likely reason is that the Japanese engineers attached to his camp spoke of their time on the Burma-Siam line.⁵⁶

By tracing one of the themes over the course of the three 'mini-memoirs' a reader can use the diaries to see how Parsons's own perspective of his situation developed. For example, for the theme of 'health':

1942: The general health all through has been much better than I had dared to hope.

⁵⁵ Allan Munro confirms that some group of POWs on the Sumatra Railway 'knew nothing of the Burma-Thailand line' (10).

⁵⁶ This seems possible since John Boulter wrote in his memoir that on arriving at Logas (camp 9 along the Sumatra Railway), they 'met up with more of the engineers fresh from their railway building on what has become known as the Railway of Death in Burma and Siam' (150).

1943: Was again very good, the chief complaint still being ulcers and a few cases of malaria...I personally feel much fitter since I've been out on working parties and I think that the good health generally is due to the continuous working parties.

1944: Compared with last years, the health has been very bad... Since we've been down here [on the Railway] there appears to have been a lessening of oedema but an increase of dysentery and a certain amount of malaria.

The references to health being 'again very good' and then deteriorating when 'compared with last years' shows a continual re-assessment being carried out by Parsons of his situation. This comparative thought indicates that Parsons referred each year to the previous summary, and attempted to analyse and position his current situation within a broader narrative for his captivity. He shows the ability to measure his current state against what he 'had dared to hope', in such a way that also alludes to the fears and anxieties that he had. The 'mini-memoir' offered precious time for Parsons to be able to reflect on his situation, which would have been impossible during the exhausting day-in-day-out ('diarised') nature of the railway construction itself.

The 'mini-memoirs' provide a lengthier narrativised version of the situation compared to what was possible within the standard daily diary. It was clearly an important part of Parsons's diary-keeping, since he maintained the 'mini-memoirs' each year, despite them requiring a much larger proportion of paper than he usually gave himself for each entry. By moving beyond the boundaries of the diary's structure through the adoption of these 'mini-memoirs', Parsons was able – at least mentally – to move beyond the boundaries of confinement too. He could step back and assess the deprivation and suffering that he was experiencing and seeing around him. The sensation of time suspended, or at least elongated, in these 'mini-memoirs' intensifies the effect of Parsons's observations since they contrast vividly with the brief notes he usually made. His return to the quick and hurried notes of daily existence on the railway seem all the sharper after having had chance, as a reader, to settle into a more recognisable, predictable narrative structure. Such snatches of relative rest from the tireless work on the railway emphasises how precious any personal recuperation time was to the POW – both physically, and psychologically.

Consideration of the morale and the 'frame of mind' of 'the blokes' was an intrinsic part of Parsons's assimilation of 'the circumstances'. The diary is not just a

record of captivity, then, but was used as a tool for processing a challenging – traumatic – experience. According to the psychoanalytical model produced by Dominick LaCapra, the key to encouraging healing from trauma is the recognition that a repetitive memory is occurring – being ‘acted out’ – so that the individual can attempt to regain control of that memory and allow it to be ‘worked through’ (LaCapra 45).⁵⁷ By writing his diary every day in camp, Parsons went through a form of ‘acting out’ of his trauma whilst he was in camp. But, the shift from diary to ‘mini-memoir’ also enabled his life-writing to support an interaction between ‘acting out’ and ‘working through’. Parsons’s diary (the compulsive remembering) transformed into a ‘mini-memoir’ (a critical working through of that remembering). This enabled Parsons to gain a surprisingly analytical perspective of his years in captivity. It also offered the potential for the next twelve months to be looked upon with slightly more optimism: morale is ‘still fairly high and should last out a few more months’ (December 1944). In emphasising the monotonous, protracted nature of captivity – ‘same again’⁵⁸ – repetition is found in the themes with which Parsons is continually pre-occupied: food (‘meat sambal for lunch’), health (‘feel absolutely worn out’) and labour and pay conditions (‘paid 9.35, drew 4.24’) (Parsons 5 – 8 January 1945).

The POW diary is an exceptionally valuable form for appreciating the specificities, the happening-truth, of incarceration in the Far East.⁵⁹ Life was

57 Similarly for Cathy Caruth, trauma is discovered in the act of repeated memory as an ‘unclaimed’ experience, a ‘forgotten wound’ (5), one that ‘cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise’ (4). This conception of trauma is one of a wound created by the event, but not ‘fully known’ by the individual at the time of its happening (6). In Caruth’s work the knowing and claiming of the wound, of the traumatic experience, only comes afterwards in the individual’s repeated attempts to ‘know’ the event. Caruth believes that the victim needs to ‘claim’ the experience, as his or her own (64), to wake not just from the memory but into it. Crucially for neither LaCapra nor Caruth is the trauma within the ‘event’ itself: it is not in a locatable dateable place, but situated in future attempts to remember and assimilate that event into the narrative of one’s experience.

58 Emphasising the repetitiveness of the POW existence, Parsons repeats the phrase ‘same again’ throughout his diary. Examples can be found on 24 September 1943, 7 December 1944, 21 December 1944, 22 December 1944, 6 January 1945.

59 Jochen Hellbeck, in his analysis of diaries maintained by individuals living in Stalinist Russia, has demonstrated explicitly ‘what is meant by writing the word I in an age of a larger We’ (xi). For Hellbeck, the autobiographical narrative was a political tool in the proliferation of the Communist ideal. From the diaries of factory and construction workers, to memoirs of those involved in the October Revolution, autobiographical writings were invited (and in many instances demanded) by the state in order to create and monitor the developing social sense of the new regime (27). Diaries in particular offered a way for officials to trace the development of a revolutionary consciousness: ‘it took work and struggle’, Hellbeck notes, ‘to align the self with history’ (67). The diary functioned here as a ‘tool of purification’ (109), to push the individual mind into alignment with collective political and social agendas, and to construct and reconstruct a self that could be written into – and made part of – history. Similarly, Mass Observation (the archives of which are now based at the University of Sussex) began across Britain in 1937, recruiting members of the public from across Britain to send in reports and survey responses, but also a vast number of diaries, ranging from one day to year-long documents. Using the theme of continual observation, the surveys ‘tell us not what society is like but what it looks like’ to members of the public (Calder and Sheridan 6). By

monotonous, routine and diarised to the extreme through reveille, roll calls, working party schedules and individual portions of rice that were measured out, every meal, to the gram. The diary, through the requirements of its genre and the entries repeating 'same again', conveys that monotonous experience to a reader. Further, Parsons's entries were self-censored in case of discovery by the guards, meaning that many of the events on the railway can only be found in the notes that Parsons does *not* make. And so, the happening-truth that is hiding in the gaps, discontinuities and allusive entries of the diary becomes one of the striking story-truths of the Parsons collection.

For example, on 11 January 1945, Parsons wrote: 'Bill Lovsey [sic] (RN)⁶⁰ died this morning. A couple of kerban⁶¹ came into camp'. In this entry the death of a campmate is given less space than the prospect of precious protein from 'a couple of kerban'. There is no time to dwell on the death of a campmate, when one may expect such sentiment in a personal diary. Since Parsons was a Malayan Volunteer rather than a professional soldier his terseness cannot be attributed to the training of a military background, nor was he maintaining a regimental diary. We see here that death has become a matter of fact in the camps – 'Lovsey died'. The death had to be acknowledged, but there was not the energy to mourn each individual man. Death also served as a reminder of the need to survive and a small piece of hope towards survival comes in the next sentence: 'A couple of kerban came into camp'. Parsons is starving and exhausted, his previous entries have told us that he is 'absolutely worn out although I really don't do much' (8 January 1945). He has seen another man die, but he has also seen a means – in the buffalo – of staying alive a little longer. The story of experiencing incarceration in the Far East is recorded in the daily entries of the diary; the story of how such deprivation was survived lies in the gaps and discontinuities between the sentences, in the words that remain (and, for some, remained) unsaid.

the end of the first year, more than 500 members of a 'panel' of writers had been recruited to send in – unpaid – their observation diaries and reports. A culture of expressing what society 'looks like' to the individual had developed, reflecting the 'documentary movement...in literature' (led by George Orwell), and the preoccupations with consciousness and selfhood that had consumed modernist writers. Mass Observation continued into the 1960s, although after 1949 was more concerned with commercial research. In the early 1980s Mass Observation was re-launched and continues to collect materials. Coincidentally, one of the founders of Mass Observation, Tom Harrison, was posted to Borneo by the Special Operations Executive 'to mobilise guerrilla warfare against the Japanese in 1944' (Calder and Sheridan 112).

60 Leading Seaman William Lovesey, HMS *Jupiter* Royal Navy, became POW on Java 17 March 1942.

61 Bullocks

The memoirs of former POWs

The majority of the narratives produced by former POWs from Sumatra are memoirs. Memoirs are documents that make up, according to G. Thomas Couser, the 'literary face of a very common and fundamental human activity: the narration of our lives in our own terms' (9). The latter part of Couser's statement is fundamental for the memoirs of the former POW, who was often retired by the time that he sat down to write 'in [his] own terms',⁶² with more freedom than the secretive and self-censored diary writer.⁶³ Derived from the French for memory (*mémoires*), memoir is a particularly enduring form of personal narrative, one that has 'permeated contemporary culture' (Couser 8). In addition, the shaping, transformation and delivery of memoir underlines its performative nature (Gornick 91), and as Nancy Miller has referred to in her discussion on the form, it is a 'rendez-vous with others', reinforcing Lejeune's autobiographical pact between writer and reader (Miller *Enough 2*).

POW life was, for Joe Fitzgerald, the stuff of not one but two memoirs. His first describes an archetypal 'day' on the Sumatra Railway and as such, it reads like one single, prolonged diary entry. Thus, Fitzgerald's first memoir is 'diarised' and portrays the monotony and routine of life, framed by repetitious bugle calls, 'infinite' roll calls (*A Day 4*), and the mechanistic movements of the working parties sent out onto the railway. Reflecting a mirror image of Parsons's 'mini-memoirs', here the memoir becomes a diary, albeit a refined and polished version rather than the quick entries typified by Parsons. This merging of genres is necessary for Fitzgerald, too, to 'act out' (diarise), and to 'work through' his memory (memoir). The mixing of genres gives an overall sense of the happening-truth of the Sumatra Railway for historical purposes, but does so in a manner that also allows the writer a chance to offer his story-truth, his personal representation of the experience.

62 Sometimes men would write in notebooks soon after they returned, turning these notes into memoirs in later life. Michael Nellis, whose father was a POW on the Burma-Siam Railway, recalls as a young child watching his father write: 'There were times when he would sit quietly in his chair in front of the fire, sucking silently on his pipe and gazing into the fire back, deep in thought, he would suddenly move to the desk and pull out the "Black Book" (as we knew it), here he would earnestly write for an hour or more, then having read through what he had written, he would close the book, go back to his chair, fill his pipe with tobacco and with a faint smile of memory on his face, puff away contentedly for a few minutes, before turning and saying something like, "Well Mary, what are going to have for tea today then?" Nothing much you might think, but for Dad, an escape from the horrors he had just committed to paper' (Nellis 101).

63 As Saunders wrote: 'When I returned home from the war in 1946 I started to write these memoirs but found that I could not concentrate enough because of the pressure of work ... but when I retired in 1972 I decided to continue where I had left off ...' (J Saunders, *Journey* 'Introduction')

In his memoir of 'a day' on the railway, Fitzgerald describes the process of laying the rails through the day into the evening.⁶⁴ Interspersed throughout this 'one day' are short passages where Fitzgerald refers to events 'months previously', the 'long time' it took 'for the feet to harden' against the terrain, or the medical issues not resolved 'until long after return to civilian life' (*A Day* 3). Generally, however, Fitzgerald's voice is close to the events as they would happen in the course of one day: 'this time of the morning' (5), 'now came to life' (7), 'about this time' [my emphasis] (8). The present tense gives an urgency to the work being described, but also an immediacy to the memory itself. This is interspersed with fleeting shifts towards the historical present, giving the impression of a narrator acting out his memory, and of a narrative and not just a memory that 'now came to life' (5):

with noise from the engines and rail clatter, the convoy set off. *The journey might last* from minutes to over an hour. (5)

It is as if 'the journey' is happening in the very moment that Fitzgerald writes about it, and what 'now came to life' at 'this time' is not just the memory of railway workers but the experience for Fitzgerald himself. The author gives himself a chance, via his narrative, to 'act out' his memory – just as Parsons did each day through the act of writing his diary. This first memoir, written in the 1990s (*A Day*), runs to a single-spaced typescript of twelve pages. In his epilogue, Fitzgerald points out to the reader that they should appreciate 'that this account refers to ONE DAY of the twelve hundred that survivors endured', that the men on the railway 'would listen to the bugle some four hundred times more before the end' and there would be 'many tasks...mundane, exhausting and monotonous to perform' (12). Given that the bugle sounds four times in this 'one day', from the 'four hundred' bugle calls left, a reader could reasonably deduct that this narrative occurs during the last three months of captivity on the Sumatra Railway and 'the end' was near.

However, from the memoir Fitzgerald wrote a decade later, it seems that the experiences described in *A Day* were those from camp 5 on the line – a camp that Fitzgerald inhabited, not during the last three months, but the first three (*If You See* 59-61). This mismatch in chronology is much easier to pick up with the assistance of liberation questionnaires obtained from TNA and after detailed study of camp movements. Whether the chronology in Fitzgerald's first memoir is entirely accurate

⁶⁴ See Chapter 1 for these extracts from Fitzgerald's memoir.

or not, what he portrays is a typical 'day' and a group of men desperate for 'the end', regardless of whether that day was at the start or the finish of the construction work. As Chatfield noted, too, liberation was 'always three months away' (7). At the time of building the railway (whether in the first three or the last three months), the point at which 'the end' would come was unknown to POWs. Fitzgerald's memoir tells us that the hope that the 'end' was near – only 'four hundred' bugle calls – will have sustained many a man through his labour.

These captivity narratives from the Far East are reminiscent of the memoirs of African American slavery. They are stories written by individuals dispossessed of familial and homeland bonds, shipped on cramped voyages to strange places, forced to labour under horrific conditions, known only by a number and shackled with little to no chance of escape. The link between Far Eastern POW and slave narratives is strengthened by the evidence that black and white minstrel shows were performed in the Far Eastern camps. Figure 3 is taken from the 'playbook' of Arthur Grieve⁶⁵ in which Grieve drew pictures to record the productions that were performed in POW camps in Hong Kong. In small script on the banner on the fence in Figure 3, Grieve recorded that performances of 'the Dixie Minstrels' were staged on 8, 9 and 10 April 1943. Like in the diary of Parsons Grieve found a means of representing – without telling explicitly – the ways in which the experience of captivity was survived: here, through theatre, music and art.

⁶⁵ Major Arthur Grieve, became POW on 25 December 1941.

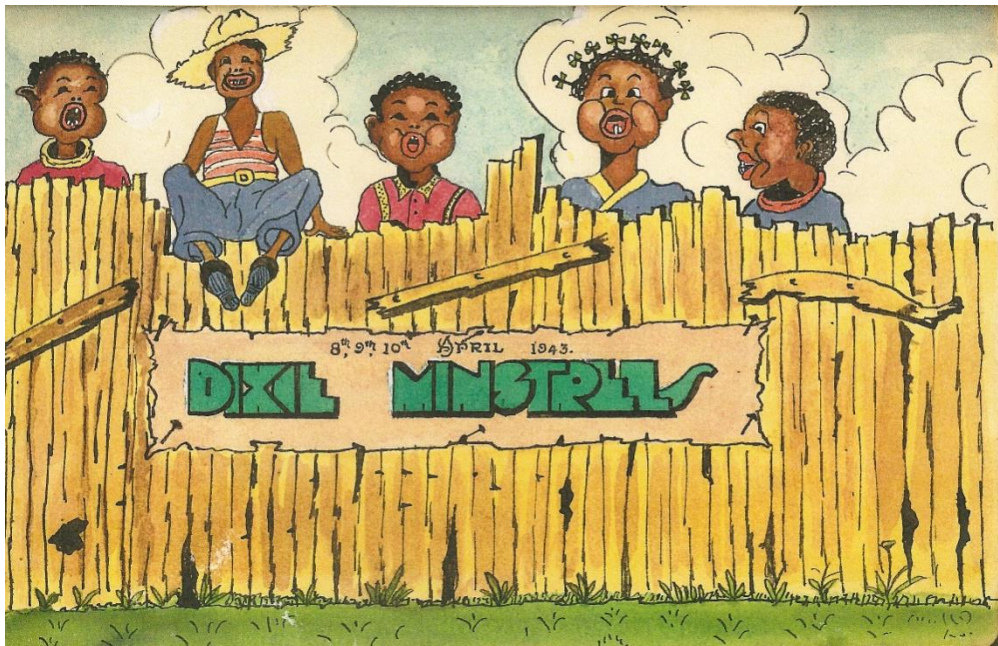


Figure 3: 'Dixie Minstrels'. Taken from the playbook of Major A Grieve (n.pag.) IWM 65/127/1

It is likely that POWs identified with, rather than mocked, the slave characters in minstrel shows. Other stories of human bondage were appreciated by men in the Far Eastern camps. For example, on the Burma-Siam Railway, the story of Cinderella was a favourite 'because of its metaphorical implications that spoke to the plight and the hope of the POWs' (Eldredge, *Chapter 9 2*). Theatrical performances rarely took place in the camps along the Sumatra Railway, where almost permanent 'speedo' conditions diminished dramatically the time that was available for rest, let alone entertainment.⁶⁶ Peter Hartley⁶⁷ remarks that Christmas 1944 (the one Christmas of captivity that this group of POWs spent on the Sumatra Railway) was seen in with 'no jollity, no Christmas dinner' (189). In Gloegoer two years previously, the same men had put on *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*: 'The whole production', Hartley wrote, 'was a skit on the prison camp life' (84) with the words of the songs and script revised. Indeed, in his diary from Gloegoer, Albert

66 The diary of John Parsons records one 'cabaret' being performed on a day that was granted as a 'holiday' (1 January 1945). In December 1944, the Japanese are noted to have produced 'a propaganda cinema show at night, poor photography, all warlike stuff', although no other details are available as to what this comprised or how this 'show' was staged (9 December 1944).

67 Sergeant Peter Goodwin Hartley, 5TH Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment, became POW aged 23 at Padang on Sumatra, 17 March 1942.

Simmonds⁶⁸ notes the 'Panto of "Snow White"...Very dirty. Very good' (Simmonds 26 December 1942).

Memoirs of African American slavery tend to contain formulaic elements at 'almost the level of ritual' (Yagoda 85). There is usually included an engraved portrait of the narrator, showing that the liberated slave had a face and therefore a personal identity. Likewise, the collections relating to former Far Eastern POWs in IWM archives often contain photographs of the author, typically black and white portraits of each man standing proudly in his military uniform (accompanied by a more informal shot sitting and smiling with other servicemen). Typically, these pictures were taken prior to imprisonment, with the author looking young and healthy and his uniform clearly designating him a public role that a readership is likely to recognise immediately. The inclusion of a photograph is also, like secreting a diary in a prison camp, an act of empowerment that asserts the validity of the narrative when the position of captive is 'intrinsically ambiguous' (Thomas 152). As POWs, men are reduced to property, men are soldiers but non-combatants, they are troops that are part of a war but that have no arms to fight. Even when they returned home, POWs on the Sumatra Railway were not necessarily believed that they had ever been on Sumatra, and tales from the Far East were 'beyond the ken' of relatives. Likewise, readers of African American slave narratives telling of 'cruel scourgings, of mutilations and brandings, of scenes of pollution and blood' were reported as 'becoming indignant at such enormous exaggerations' (Douglass 6). The inclusion of a photograph enables the assertion of a face and a name that had been reduced to a number during captivity.

The memoirs I have encountered, like Fitzgerald's, are the stories of individual men recording their moments as POWs, both in and for history. In doing so, all adopt very conventional structures for their memoirs: they adhere to chronology as faithfully as possible, and anachronies⁶⁹ are exceptionally rare. The majority of memoirs are broken down either into chapters or, at the very least, there are clear section breaks. Rowland Pressdee, a prisoner not on the Sumatra Railway but in Palembang camp on Sumatra, did not write a complete memoir, but did create a detailed sketch of the memoir that he planned to write. This is a five-page document including chapter titles, anecdotes to fill out and impressions to relate. Pressdee's plan shows the structure to which he wanted to adhere, with ideas noted such as

68 Leading Aircraftman Albert Bernard Simmonds, 250 AMES Unit RAF, became POW at Padang on Sumatra, 17 March 1942.

69 Anachronies are events appearing earlier or later in the narrative than they did in the actual story itself. See Genette (40).

'preface this chapter by describing Brad who was a Bradford-born Australian, a solid man with fantastically black hair and black beard who ran the party with a quiet calm' (2), 'more about him [a particular guard] in next chapter' (2), and 'one can describe the [Japanese] surrender speech' (4). As Lejeune notes, the 'illusion of an objective definition' can be the driving force of a person's life-writing (*On Autobiography* 150). For Pressdee, and other former POWs like him, writing a memoir that also recorded the historical event of the Sumatra Railway gave an 'objective definition' to their personal narratives.

To combat 'indignant' responses from readers (Douglass 6), slave narratives often included a statement or foreword by abolitionists or editors that testified to the slave's good character. These validations from high profile, public voices served to give credence to stories of slavery: they became a verified part of a new discourse on abolition and with it created a social role for the narrator. The memoirs of former Far Eastern POWs often include a foreword, perhaps a military colleague vouching for the dependable or reliable character of the writer, or a note from someone who has helped with the editing or transcription process. For example, 'Colonel G W Noakes OBE' writes in a foreword for Saunders's memoir of the author's good character, his 'quiet dependable way' (*Journey*, n.pag.), and 'Group Captain Mike Peaker' (who transcribed Basil Gotto's wartime notebooks) describes Gotto as being 'understated and objective' (Gotto n.pag.). In the 'Foreword' to his second memoir, Fitzgerald acknowledges that he later received help in determining the dates and chronology of events (*If You See*, n.pag.). A need to deliver the story-truth of the Sumatra Railway has merged with a desire to relate the happening-truth as accurately as possible. The writer of the POW memoir says that this is 'not my memory' – it really happened (Surr 41). But they also say: this is not just 'my' memory, others lived it too.

There is also evidence of authors having checks made by proof-readers for 'all the commas and full stops in the right places' (Cuthbertson n.pag.) of intending to provide 'a true record of events' (Boulter n.pag.), or to give 'notes of conditions and events...simply as a record' (Chatfield 1). Official camp reports and MI9 interrogation forms, for example, indicate a process of referencing and cross-referencing liberated POW statements. For example, John Hedley, James Matheson⁷⁰ and Dudley Matthews⁷¹ testified to planning an escape attempt, each

70 Lieutenant James Matheson, Force 101 SOE; became POW aged 27 at Padang on Sumatra, 17 March 1942.

71 Lieutenant Dudley Shields Matthews, Force 101 SOE; became POW aged 27 at Padang on Sumatra, 17 March 1942.

signing individual copies of the same report and referencing one another in separate evidence (see for example, Matthews). David Fiennes's⁷² MI9 statement includes an explicit note to refer back to a report provided by another POW that has been given elsewhere (Fiennes, 'Liberated POW Questionnaire' 2). Footnotes appear in memoirs where points are verified, clarified or endorsed by the other narratives that writers have read, or the conversations that they have had. In his memoir, Frederick Freeman⁷³ references the memoir of Derek Fogarty⁷⁴ using extensive footnotes throughout (Freeman, *Memoir* 3). Correspondence occurring between Jim Surr⁷⁵ and Geoff Lee,⁷⁶ and Surr and George Duffy⁷⁷ shows attempts on the part of former POWs to remember and record the happening-truth (for example, in ensuring they have the chronology of events correct in their memoirs), but also as story-truths that they can share with others (Surr 41, 46).

Chronology and dates, memoirists tell us, have been checked and verified wherever possible; other sources of information (particularly Henk Hovinga's history) are referenced, and quotations attributed.⁷⁸ This not only indicates the potential influence that wider reading had on the memory of former POWs, but in the figures of the footnote and the citation, these memoirs signify a scholarly approach to life-writing. Alongside the expression of their story-truth, recording the happening-truth, and telling it as authoritatively as they could, was paramount to these writers.

When negotiating the gaps between the personal and the historical aspects of their memoirs, former POWs predominantly adopt – to echo Lejeune – 'non-narrative' features to represent the experience of incarceration in the Far East. These features include the interchangeable use of summarised versus scenic

72 Lieutenant David Eustace Martindale Fiennes, RNVR HMS *Sultan*; became POW aged 26 in Bangka Straits, 15 February 1942.

73 Aircraftman Frederick George Freeman, AHQ; became POW at Tasikmalaya on Java, 8 March 1942.

74 Aircraftman Derek Robert Fogarty, 1 Squadron RAF; became POW aged 19 at Tasikmalaya on Java, 8 March 1942.

75 Lance Bombardier James Surr, 48th LAA Regiment Royal Artillery; became POW aged 20 at Garoet on Java, 17 March 1942.

76 Aircraftman John Geoffrey Lee, 84 Squadron RAF; became POW aged 20 at Tasikmalaya on Java, 8 March 1942.

77 Captain George Duffy, United States Merchant Marine; became POW of the Japanese (passed from German hands) aged 20 at Batavia on Java, 6 November 1942.

78 For example, in his memoir Boulter states: 'Having been an avid reader of all books written about the Jap Camps and met with many people involved both allied and Japanese, I can now take an objective view of many matters and events. To preserve the atmosphere of the book however these views and corrected histories have been added as an Appendix' (n.pag.). Smith's memoir, too, draws heavily from early research undertaken by Neumann and van Witsen and updated by Hovinga - for example, Smith's description of the state of native romushas (73-74).

descriptions, the use of allusive references, and a continual return – in the passive voice – to the repetitive nature of daily life in the camps.

Firstly, where a reader may expect detailed development of key moments in a story, captivity narratives tend to subvert these expectations. My first chapter has already presented the lengthy, scenic descriptions ('scene') that are employed in the memoirs of former POWs to convey daily routines. However, the passages containing pivotal moments – such as the punishment of a prisoner – are relatively truncated ('summary'), appearing in sudden bursts that break the monotony of that routine, and its narrative.

[The guards] had got a very heavy piece of the trunk of a tree and they made our man hold it at arm's length above his head, which was asking the impossible. It was more than he could reasonably do, and when his legs began to give way under the strain, they would beat and punch him until he collapsed. (J Saunders, *It Seems* 151)

Immediately after the beating, Saunders continues to tell of 'another morning when I was having my breakfast'. He requires his reader to absorb the summary of a campmate being punished 'until he collapsed' and just as swiftly move back to the mundane normality of POW existence, signalled here by the disappointment of daily meals and the breakfast 'so called for the want of a more suitable word' (*It Seems* 151). The use of summary increases the affective impact of captivity memoirs. This is achieved through a compression of time in such a way that the harshness of the experience is intensified, and yet that harshness is also normalised alongside the 'breakfast' that Saunders is about to consume. Like the repetitive 'same again' that Parsons noted in his diary, the changes between summary and scene encapsulate a major facet of the POW experience: a life of tedium and repetitive hard labour, swiftly and, at times, incoherently broken with sharp, intense moments of violence. The sudden violence unsettles the narrative and its reader – a stark representation of how it would have been for POWs to live with such unpredictable brutality from their captors. Such techniques increase the pathos of the captivity narrative, rendering an affective response from a reader when the prisoners themselves are portrayed as numb – after seeing a young Dutch POW sobbing 'as if his heart

would break', James Pentney⁷⁹ divulges that he was 'glad that he [the Dutchman] could show an emotion that we couldn't. We had no emotion left, no feeling, nothing' (14). Pentney, too, was young – he was in his early twenties when this took place – but he said, he felt 'four times as old' (19).

The need to preserve one's self and, as we saw with Parsons's diary, censor oneself in the camp may go some way to explain why former POWs from the Sumatra Railway tend to use allusive references in order to describe the brutality of the guards. When recounting a task he was allocated in order to mend a pair of boots for a guard, Saunders writes:

I felt scared, knowing what would happen if he did not approve of the finished job. (*It Seems* 147)

whilst Fitzgerald remembers that:

It was sometimes possible to slip off into the undergrowth for a little foraging. It was advisable not to get caught. (*A Day* 6)

We are never explicitly told 'what would happen' if guards did not approve of finished work, or if prisoners were caught foraging – and the reason, I think, is twofold. The POWs themselves were never certain 'what would happen' either, since the guards could be unpredictable in their reactions: Saunders knew that 'what would happen' would include a punishment, but that punishment was unknown. As Saunders had already acknowledged, 'there were many horrible scenes of brutality that we had to witness but could do nothing about' (*It Seems* 140). In the memory of being able to do 'nothing', former POWs choose to tell 'nothing'. Saunders's refusal to write about the 'horrible scenes' of 'what would happen' to POWs suggests that, for him, to 'witness' is not adequate if there is 'nothing' one can 'do' in response.⁸⁰ Writing is by nature a selective process, and the writing of memory even more so. For reasons ranging through literary ability or affective response, to ethical or even legal responsibilities, the memoirist will always

79 Aircraftman James Douglas Pentney, 81 RSU RAF; became POW aged 20 at Tasikmalaya on Java, 3 March 1942.

80 Debates about the necessity – or otherwise – of depicting the horror of captivity continued throughout the post-war narrative of the Far Eastern POW. For example, when Charles Thrale exhibited his work from the camps, he removed from display fifteen of his drawings that were said to show 'all the horror' of the Far Eastern camps. I return to this exhibition in chapter 5. (See Thrale, *Valleys of the Shadow of Death* 2)

'know more than [they] can tell' (Barrington 55). But by adopting this use of 'adynaton' – alluding to 'horrible scenes of brutality' and immediately dismissing them – these memoirists depend upon the 'power of the absent referent' to convey their experiences, just as we saw in Chatfield's notes at the start of this chapter (McLoughlin 156). It is as if – like ex-slave girl Harriet Jacobs writes in her memoir of captivity – a former POW is telling his readers 'you can imagine, better than I can describe' (28).

There are several reasons as to why to 'imagine' would be 'better' than to 'describe'. These likely include a lingering fear from the knowledge that keeping records during imprisonment was absolutely forbidden. Frederick Douglass reminds us that across slave plantations there was 'the maxim, that a still tongue makes a wise head' and as a result, captives would 'suppress the truth rather than take the consequences of telling it' (Douglass 29). Such habits, drilled into the captive under fear of brutal reprisals, will have been hard to break. Even in freedom, Douglass did not name some of those who helped him learn to read: he wishes to acknowledge them, 'but prudence forbids' him to risk the safety of his teachers (44). Yet despite his 'stinking' fear (Chatfield i), we remember from Parsons's diary that captivity narratives are also narratives of empowerment. By saying 'nothing', former POWs (and slaves) refuse to show, through the aesthetics of their writing, an acceptance of their captors' behaviour. The memory of brutality becomes a motive to remain mute, to remove the beatings and punishments: by doing so, memoirists like Saunders rebuke the treatment that they received and censor the guards' physical control over them once their own freedom to speak has returned.⁸¹

Post-liberation, the muteness on the part of the memoirist was no longer an act of censorship from the guards, but from himself. Reflecting the tone of the Great War poetry of Wilfred Owen, of which the men incarcerated in the Far East would most likely be aware (and after whom Wilfred Owen Greenwood, a POW on the Sumatra Railway, was named), 'the very act of vivifying' the brutality of his wartime experiences also 'calls attention to the emotional necessity' for Owen to fail to

⁸¹ Thirty years after liberation, John Parsons transcribed his diary. As he transcribed the entries, he made some changes to the text. These are small edits, generally, such as amendments to his grammar and translations for foreign language terms that he used. However, Parsons also removed some of the detail from his entries. One of the most significant redactions is for the entry on 7 January 1945, where he had written that the 'Japs are suffering a lot from beri-beri' but this is not included in the transcription. By removing this point, Parsons censors the 'suffering' of the Japanese troops, and his diary enables him to regain control over his captors. The gap in the transcription also tells the story-truth of Parsons being unable, in his remembrance, to acknowledge the experiences of his guards.

remember it (Howarth 191). Peter Howarth was writing in reference to Owen's 1918 poem 'Insensibility', where in the third stanza Owen writes:

Happy are these who lose imagination:
They have enough to carry with ammunition.
Their spirit drags no pack.
Their old wounds, save with cold, can not more ache.
Having seen all things red,
Their eyes are rid
Of the hurt of the colour of blood for ever.
(Owen 19 – 25)

Numbed to 'the hurt of the colour of blood', to the 'ache' of 'old wounds', Owen's soldiers still 'drag' the memory of brutality with them. Like O'Brien's memoir of Vietnam, these soldiers 'carry' more than 'ammunition': it is a 'happy' state, to 'lose imagination', and in losing that imagination, write with a weariness that Saunders does in his POW memoir, 'there were many horrible scenes'. But those scenes of happening-truth would require too much of the story-truth in order to be told. As POWs they could 'do nothing' except, having 'seen all things red', find themselves numb, echoing Pentney's response to the sobbing young Dutchman: there is 'no emotion left, no feeling'.

This numbed affect is compounded by a third 'non-narrative' feature in memoirs from the Sumatra Railway, that (having highlighted it throughout) I will revisit briefly here: continual references to habitual, routine activities in daily life. In his 2001 memoir, Fitzgerald writes that 'I suppose I let out a yell' (64) and 'I suppose we must have taken our midday meal' (64). The passive voice of 'I suppose' suggests that Fitzgerald's memory is uncertain, but the drudgery of its tone also indicates that these things most likely happened because that is what generally happened: Fitzgerald does not recall any other significant moment that created a change in action or circumstance. It lends Fitzgerald's memoir an impression of intransitivity - the men are confined, and so too is the direction of his narrative. In this sense, the happening-truth and the story-truth are confined to the same mode of representation because, in the words of Peter Hartley, 'one day followed another with monotonous barren sameness' (173). Again, the challenge for the former POW is to convey 'nothing'. The description of ever-repeated roll calls, rice rations and working parties are where we find the most prominent depiction of what life in a Far Eastern POW camp meant: mundane, monotonous and harsh

routine. Memoirists were not just challenged by the boundaries of camp life, but by the conventions of what may be considered 'ordinary' narrative representation, by which I mean where actions and characters develop continuously. The construction of the Sumatra Railway was repetitive in its very nature, 'non-narrative' to the extreme: on a regular basis 'nothing' happened, and when something extraordinary did happen, there was 'nothing' that could be done in return. The former POW from the Sumatra Railway had to attempt to create a memoir out of events that offered a 'non-narrative' and this made the limits of representation quite formidable.

Oral history

One of the most common forms of recording the recollections of former POWs – indeed of former captives – is the gathering of oral history.⁸² Although IWM no longer records oral history interviews with former Far Eastern POWs from the Second World War, sixty-two were carried out between 2007 and 2009 by the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine.⁸³ The aim of the project was 'to capture, before it was too late, the memories and long-term perspective of veterans who are now in their late 80s and 90s' – to gather their narratives as they told them. Oral history, then is focused on 'memories' and perspective': the story-truth of the experience. Indeed work of the oral history department at IWM is concerned with 'establishing an archive of what people believe to have happened to them – not a body of truth', with 'truth' meaning the happening-truth of historical fact (Hart 1). By recording and presenting the story-truths of history, as remembered by individuals, the integrity of 'what people believe to have happened' can be preserved in institutions such as IWM, alongside a 'body of truth' of historical knowledge. In terms of showcasing the personal accounts held within museum archives to a viewing public, oral history recordings are more easily transmittable compared with large chunks of written text, and can be disseminated to wider audiences by enabling the digitised versions of recordings, for example, to be accessed remotely from the museum's online database.

82 For example, the audio-visual/oral testimony of survivors of the Holocaust and genocides in Armenia, Cambodia, Rwanda are collected and preserved by the University of Southern California's *Shoah Foundation*; the Veterans History Project in the United States preserves the oral histories of former POWs, from all conflicts, which are digitised and available online, see Library of Congress.

83 See 'Captive Memories: The Oral History Project',

www.captivememories.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=195&Itemid=22; accessed 31 January 2014.

But oral history skews the representation of an individual's life narrative, for it is produced in dialogue with – and shaped directly by – the interests of the interviewer who is also the first 'reader' of that spoken story. A 'full coherent oral narrative' does not therefore, as Alessandro Portelli has contested, 'exist in nature' – it is, instead, 'a synthetic product of social science' (24). Oral history is different from the memoir and diary not just because it is a spoken narrative, a genre of dialogue, but because 'the basis of authority has shifted' (Portelli 31) – the dynamic between interviewer and interviewee is crucial to its development and execution.⁸⁴ But oral history is also 'the first kind of history', pre-dating literate communities (Paul Thompson 25). It is a fitting tool for collecting and reflecting POW history, too, since orality was central to the efficiency and the morale of camp life: of men with scant access to the written word surviving through mateship, the common bonds of conversation and the rumour-mill of war news whispered around a fire.

It is also through the rise and fall in fortunes of oral history that the usage, and esteem, of autobiographical genres as historical sources can be traced. From once being the 'first kind of history', oral history was overshadowed by the power of documentary evidence, which now holds 'the final authority' and validity in transmitting the story of history to the future (Paul Thompson 25). By the end of the nineteenth century, when the novelist Henry James was writing that history was contained in 'documents and records' (5), interviews and other oral sources were used generally for contextual background, rather than being interpreted in and of themselves as primary sources. Instead, historical interest in life-writing remained fixed on contemporary written sources such as diaries and letters.

The mid-twentieth century saw a shift in the prestige of oral history with the advent of 'new' technologies. The portable tape recorder – as the forerunner to today's digital voice recorders – was small enough to become fairly innocuous in the recording room. The opening of the IWM Sound Archives to the public in the late 1970s supported and maintained the tradition of historical fieldwork, and of bringing historical disciplines into contact with wider communities. The collection of Holocaust testimony, black folk history, and dialogue from women's movements throughout the 1980s asserted, once again, the value of oral history in bringing 'the character of history' to life (Paul Thompson 61). More recently, anthropologist

84 In *Anzac Memories*, for example, Alistair Thomson created what he called the 'memory biographies' of three Anzac (Australia and New Zealand Army Corps) soldiers based on the detailed oral history recordings that he undertook with them over the course of several years (238-239). In his critique of carrying out those interviews, Thomson acknowledges that the 'relationships that were established' between himself and his subjects 'influenced the remembering' (230). Each interview is clearly 'influenced', too, by what Thomson wanted to know.

Elizabeth Tonkin has called for historians to view oral history within the social context of its production, and most particularly in terms of analysing the characteristics of performance, so that the different 'genres' of oral history can be identified and with them, an audience's expectations (50). Tonkin views the identification of oral history genres as a 'dynamic process', with audiences – readers – waiting for 'cues' on how to interpret a particular oral history (51). It is the reader's interpretation of the voice, the occasion and context for the telling, and the delivery, that will then compel them to define a recording by its 'genre', such as adventure story, comedy, or romance (52).

Oral history narratives that follow the conventions of a traditional genre such as an adventure story are likely to retain their popular appeal. For example, during his interview with IWM, Leonard Williams⁸⁵ was asked by the interviewer to tell 'in detail' what he remembers of being shipwrecked whilst en route to Pakanbaroe on the *Van Waerwijk*.⁸⁶ On the recording, there is little hesitation in Williams's response. He speaks clearly and answers the questions promptly, with a confidence that suggests that he has told these parts of the story many times.⁸⁷ As the conversation between Williams and his interviewer continues, we learn that the interviewer possesses notes that have been written by Williams. When Williams tries to remember the date of the shipwreck, he is prompted – 'on these notes you've written the 24 June 1944'. So it is reasonable to assume that the conversation has been shaped and the stories rehearsed by Williams if only as, to recall Chatfield's collection again, notes (L Williams, *Interview with IWM*).

It is possible that Williams was aware, too, that his listeners would enjoy the sense of adventure, danger and peril that is inherent in a story of shipwreck, whilst remaining safe in the knowledge – from the very fact that Williams is there to regale his story – that he survived it all. We also learn that Williams considers himself:

very very lucky because every hour or two hours [whilst on board the *Van Waerwijk*] they [the Japanese] used to let people up from down below to the upper deck to get fresh air...and we were very lucky because as we were coming down to the hatch down below we were

85 Chief Petty Officer Leonard Walter Williams, HMS *Dragonfly* Royal Navy; became POW at Padang on Sumatra, 17 March 1942.

86 See Chapter 1 for the details of the *Van Waerwijk*'s sinking.

87 For the full recording of Williams's interview, recorded in 1990, see www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80011290; accessed 2 February 2014.

torpedoed, so that hatch started to flood and we were floated out of the ship. (L Williams, *Interview with IWM*)

It is a little incongruous to read of a shipwreck as being a narrative of 'luck'. Yet it is not horror or sympathy that Williams engenders here, but an appreciation of the strange serendipity that he describes in being 'floated out of the ship' mid-sinking. However, as the interviewer's questions move towards his time labouring on the Sumatra Railway, Williams's voice softens, quietens and begins to waver. The oral history of the POW then, is also, like the other genres of captivity narrative covered in this thesis, rich in the non-narrative and in the 'hesitations, indirections, pauses and silences' that LaCapra sees as epitomising the conventional depiction of a traumatic event (122). It is in the sound (or indeed the lack of sound) rather than any specific dialogic content that the traumatic effect – and affect – of captivity in the Far East can be found. Most obvious on the recording is an increase in the frequency with which Williams clears his throat with a short cough. This continues as he tells the story of a campmate (whom he names as a Lance Corporal Smith⁸⁸) being hit by a guard whilst cutting trees in the jungle – 'and as he hit him on the head, so this Corporal brought the axe down and it went down the side of his foot, and opened up all of his foot'. The sight, he tells the interviewer, 'you can just imagine'. Offering no further description Williams becomes hesitant, he chooses his words slowly and carefully at this juncture, with many pauses as he begins to explain that Smith was left at the 'base of the Railway where the train stopped', and that he was still found here at 7 o' clock in the evening, at the end of the working day. Williams relates that the men tried to help 'Smith' but by this point it was too late, 'everything had set in', and the leg was amputated. There was nothing to be done, no escape and this time – no 'luck'. And without survival, escape and luck to fall back on, the 'non-narrative' pauses, hesitations and silences that are indicative of trauma creep back into Williams's speech (L Williams, *Interview with IWM*).

The interviewer steers the conversation back to the supervision of working parties, and Williams no longer clears his throat or pauses over his words with quite as much frequency. This may have been coincidental, but then a similar pattern emerges when Williams is asked about the sorts of punishment that were handed out to prisoners on the railway. He speaks of men being placed in isolation:

⁸⁸ It has not been possible to confirm the identity of this individual POW, there having been several men under the name of 'Smith' on the Sumatra Railway, none of whom are ranked as a Lance Corporal. See, COFEPOW Database; *Liberated POW Questionnaires* (TNA); and Stubbs.

You was put in a hole with just a trap over the top and you was left there, with no food or anything. If you survived umpteen days and you came out of that, well then you'd suffered quite a lot. (L Williams, *Interview with IWM*)

The interviewer (denoted below by 'IWM') then asks for specific examples and Williams's story becomes staccato once more. He uses only a few short words to explain that one particular man was placed in isolation for stealing food.

IWM: How many days was he in it?

LW: He was in for about fifty days. Terrible. Terrible.

IWM: Fifty days without being fed, or...

LW: Well, he used to have some water and it was in a position where sometimes we used to drop food into him...[here, there is a very long pause].... Terrible he was.

(L Williams, *Interview with IWM*)

The pause is full of the brutality that Williams cannot narrate, of the same kind that Wilfred Owen saw 'drag' on the spirits of soldiers, and that O'Brien saw men 'carry' along with their kit. Just like Saunders's memoir, there was for Williams 'nothing' that could be done, and so there is a silence where nothing can be said. I have found no evidence to confirm that such a prolonged form of this punishment was brought against a prisoner on the Sumatra Railway in MI9 statements. Henk Hovinga, from his interviews and correspondence with former Dutch POWs, writes of a man who was starved in a cell next to the Japanese guardroom – also for stealing food, along with other items including 'clothes, blankets, mosquito nets and cutlery' (158). Hovinga tells us that this man was placed into 'the lock-up', becoming an imprisoned prisoner:

a kind of bamboo cage with enough space between the bars to stick an arm through...[the guards] amused themselves by giving him a thrashing from time to time. Of course, the culprit did not receive any food or water. And he was continuously exposed to the scorchingly hot sun. No time limit had been put on this punishment and after a

few days the prisoner was more dead than alive, listlessly lying on the floor of the cage. (Hovinga 159)

The tales recounted by Hovinga suggest that this sort of event occurred more than once and that perhaps more than one man was punished like this over the course of a few days. It is a shocking impression given by Williams that a single POW in an already depleted state could have survived 'fifty days' continuous of this treatment. Nonetheless, the memory is so intense for those like Williams who watched and remembered – and the treatment so brutal – that the significance of the event is amplified within his narrative. In the same way that Saunders depicts the punishments in his memoir, the lasting image from Williams and Hovinga is of a man lying on the floor, 'listlessly' waiting for the punishment to end. For Williams himself, the sight can only be expressed through one word: 'terrible'. The 'few days' suggested by Hovinga merge with the 'fifty' recounted by Williams when such brutality is witnessed. The happening-truth – the barbaric punishment of POWs – also has a story-truth – the memory of the men who watched the 'happening' take place. Once again, the interviewer in Williams's recording shifts the conversation. This time, we return to the sinking of the *Van Waerwijk*: the hopeful story of 'luck' and survival (L Williams, *Interview with IWM*). So the lack of linearity and chronological disruption that is characteristic of a trauma narrative is created *not* by Williams, but by the response of Williams's audience. The trauma is not situated just in the telling of the story (Williams's hesitancy and silence), but in its transmission, too (the disruption created by the interviewer).

When listening to oral history interviews, we hear the roles of narrator/reader shifting: the interviewee becomes the reader of the interviewer, and the interviewer (the reader) is, through the questions that he decides to ask, often the one in control of the narrative. This interplay between the oral historian and the 'source' does not translate onto a tape, nor a transcript – it cannot be observed and absorbed through body language, facial expression, or the dialogue prior to and in between recordings, because these aspects of the encounter are not on record. The listener's interpretation is based, therefore, on alternative stimuli: speech, voice patterns, and silences. This means that my own 'reading' is couched in ambiguity, in the 'perhaps' and the 'maybe', and Williams's narrative is now a story of how the memory, the experience, is transmitted to new audiences – and how those audiences respond. As I will show throughout the remainder of this thesis, the transmission of the narrative becomes an integral part of the 'working through' of

memory. With powerful implications for the familial legacy and affective impact of such narratives (their 'postmemory' – see chapter 5), the transmission of these narratives is also the point at which the traumatic nature of the happening-truth is preserved and perpetuated as a story-truth.

Generic exceptions

Although the three genres recounted above are the most common in POW life-writing, other narrative forms were adopted too. For example, Harold Goulding's narrative of incarceration in Palembang on Sumatra is set as 'a study' (*Yasmé* 2). Although he explains his 'objective in writing' is to 'investigate the behaviour of young men as individuals and groups who lived and worked in a hostile natural environment', Goulding also describes the 'subjective purposes' of his work to explore the sociological and psychological impact of his captivity and to treat it as 'a form of therapy' (2). Elements of Goulding's 'study' are considered in greater detail in chapter 4, but there are three additional genres that deserve a mention here. Diary, memoir and oral history retain a faithful focus on the happening-truth, but lists, poetry and fiction added an element of creative freedom to the story-truth, an essential imaginary world into which incarcerated men could escape.

The 'prisoner list'

The most common exception to the three main genres considered above, is a pre-occupation with list-making that seems to have developed amongst POWs. Indeed, if a list of POW lists had been created, it could have included entries such as 'meals to make', 'recipes to try', 'books to read', 'journeys to take', 'gifts to buy for children or close relatives', 'items to have (or to completely avoid having) in a future home'.⁸⁹ List-making was a valuable exercise for those suffering the privations of captivity.⁹⁰ It was not an activity exclusive to prisoners in the Far East, for example wartime logbooks distributed by the YMCA to prisoners across Europe

89 These lists are among those found within the collections of two POWs at Palembang on Sumatra. See the private papers of Brewer and Fiennes.

90 Another 'prisoner list' to which the title of this section alludes is that made by Richard Kandler's father, Reuben. Reuben Kandler was a prisoner in Saigon and on the Burma-Siam Railway and, despite the difficulties and dangers in doing so whilst in captivity, compiled a list of the 1,000 men who had been captured in Saigon and then transported to Singapore, recording 'name, age, occupation, rank, army number and prisoner number...next of kin, any other relevant family information and home address' and, where necessary and known, 'the cause, place and date of death' (Kandler 128).

were used to compile similar inventories. Taking one from Milag Nord in North Germany (1944), the logbook of Edwin Tipple includes the listing of names and addresses of campmates, 'prices of goods' in camp, 'shows put on' by prisoner theatre groups, or 'ships sank and represented' by naval personnel at Milag (Tipple n.pag.).

The rudimentary form of the list enabled prisoners to record some of their experiences without the committed undertaking of a full diary. Principally, list-making would have provided a means to alleviate boredom, and highlights the fundamental need for prisoners to remain active mentally under such harsh physical conditions. Interrogation of Tipple's lists, for example, can create a basic picture of prisoner backgrounds, pay and rationing conditions, 'leisure' activities and other endeavours by European POWs to boost morale within the camp. Lists made by POWs also indicate the importance of supporting an imaginary narrative that countered the dominant one of captivity. This 'imaginary' narrative was often a narrative of the intensely familiar: of home, having the freedom to read, to travel, to cook meals and purchase gifts towards the celebration of a special occasion. As a genre, the list is – like the prisoner – physically confined by the structure and form in which it appears. At the same time its content – filled by the imagination of the prisoner – conjures a world beyond physical perimeters, a world populated with familiar home comforts, the nourishment of warm food and the precious ability to move around, share experiences and communicate freely with loved ones. The broad popularity and upkeep of list-making across camps in different theatres of captivity demonstrates the importance of the narrative imagination to the morale and continuing survival of POWs through traumatic and desperate times. Due to its popularity and its prominence in the development of a POW camp discourse on Sumatra, list-making is considered in more detail in chapter 3.

Poetry

There is a phrase synonymous with tales of the Burma-Siam Railway that building that railroad cost 'a life for every sleeper'.⁹¹ Although it is appropriate for both railroads the original source of the phrase is from a poem, 'Hell's Railway',

91 See for example, Hugh V. Clarke. *A Life for Every Sleeper*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986; Jeffrey English. *One for Every Sleeper: The Japanese Death Railway Through Thailand*, London: Robert Hale, 1989; Michael Hughes' photographic project 'A Life for Every Sleeper'; 'Every railway sleeper represented a victim's life' (SHBSS); 'One man died for every sleeper laid' (Rowley).

written about Sumatra.⁹² The line goes: 'Every sleeper claimed a body – every rail a dozen more' (Rees 11), and the misappropriation to Burma-Siam has been embedded into popular culture despite the very first line of the original poem referring to 'Pakan Baru, where the nightly tiger prowls' (Rees 1).

Penry Rees⁹³ completed his twenty-five verse poem on release from captivity, a poem that fellow POW Walter Smith regarded as expressing 'everything that all of us wished to say' (Smith 123).⁹⁴ 'Hell's Railway' is, online, dated 1944 – but this cannot be the case (at least not for the final version) since Rees writes of 'When the Day at last arrived and when the rest of them were free' (93) and he is able to tally accurately the number of railway dead – 'thirty times a score' (13-16). Notwithstanding its short length in comparison, the poem reflects the distinct character of traditional epic verse, a genre Rees was likely to have studied at school. For example, every stanza is arranged into a quatrain,⁹⁵ and all quatrains contain two rhyming couplets each. Yet, the heroics in Rees's poem are subtle – they do not tell of great battles over vast plains and across nations – they may not even suggest heroism at all, given that prisoners in the Far East reflected a sense of shame at 'being part of a completely defeated army which surrendered unconditionally to a numerically inferior enemy' (Goulding, *Yasmé* 2). This subversion of the heroic is emphasised through Rees's use of the regular, insistent but trochaic meter.⁹⁶ The value of the trochaic form rests in its ability to make the poem's subject matter forceful, by overriding the conventions of iambic pentameter that readers perhaps expect.⁹⁷

Rees conveys that POW life formed a new battle for men who were no longer wielding weaponry but still 'battled for their life' (49), who attempted to 'steel their will to conquer' (75) and 'force themselves to live' (76). To survive was in itself an act of defiance against an enemy army that judged POW status as shameful: to die

92 For a full version, see: www.pows-of-japan.net/articles/101.html; accessed 1 March 2014. Here the poem is entitled, 'At the Going Down of the Sun', a distinct reference to Laurence Binyon's 'For the Fallen' in remembrance of the casualties of the Great War.

93 Gunner Penry Markham Rees, 77TH Heavy Anti-Aircraft RA; became POW aged 33 at Garoet on Java, 8 March 1942.

94 Rees was not the only POW on Sumatra to turn to poetry. Gerald Tait, a veteran from the Great War who kept a detailed diary during 1914-15 campaigns in France, turned to poetry and prose during the Second World War to tell the story of his time as a POW on Sumatra – both during and after his imprisonment. See Gerald Tait, private papers.

95 Four lines in length

96 Each line consists of an alternating pattern of stressed and then unstressed (or long then short) syllables. This is an iamb in reverse and is reminiscent of the poetry of Blake, Milton and Pope.

97 For a detailed discussion of the implications of using the trochaic form, see Fussell, *Poetic Meter* 50-60.

by one's own hands was preferable for the Japanese Imperial Army than enduring – let alone surviving – captivity under the enemy (Hata 268 - 272).

The meter of 'Hell's Railway' creates the rhythm of the train tracks, distinguished in the stresses placed consistently onto alternate syllables in each line. Only one caesura occurs⁹⁸ (albeit the same one twice) and this happens at the moment of a campmate's death. The pause is signalled clearly by the use of a colon that gives a clear break between the thing to be described (the untidy burial of a POWs body) and the description itself:

It was: Tie them in a hurry in an old discarded sack,
With a plank of rough-cut timber to support them in the back.
It was: Lower them as gently as a withered muscle may,
And commend them to their Maker and remain a while to pray.
(Rees 65-68)

The 'It was:' signals a pause, a moment to reflect on the 'discarded' bodies. The sudden and isolated break in the meter elevates the poignancy of a life wrapped in an 'old discarded sack', a sack that is carried and put to rest by men who are 'withered' already. Rees's remembrance of the fallen weighs as heavily as the 'rough-cut timber' throughout the poem, and those commended 'to their Maker' are never forgotten as he repeats the phrase 'thirty times a score'.⁹⁹ But the caesura is a pause that is 'in a hurry' too – death is not to be dwelt upon, for there is no time given in the daily routine, nor energy available in the 'withered muscle', to mourn. POWs could not stop moving or else they too risked being 'discarded'. So neither does the poem stop moving: it picks up immediately with its regular structure and punctuation, reminding a reader that still 'for those they left behind them there were brutish things to bear' (69).

The novel

Gerald Tait wrote a novel entitled *Emergency Commission*, quite remarkably 'while a prisoner in Japanese hands on Sumatra' (n.pag.). It is a novel that at times

98 A caesura is a break or pause in the line.

99 This is direct reference to the 673 lives lost on the construction of the Sumatra Railway: the final time Rees uses this phrase he amends it to 'thirty times a score and more' (97).

reads like memoir (autofiction). *Emergency Commission* begins in India and focuses on the adventures of Edward Hartner, a 'conceited ambitious, selfish' socialite (2), a bachelor who 'deluded himself that he was a real power among the bright young things of Calcutta' (3). Edward is also petrified at the thought of engaging in war and avoids being called-up for a long period prior to joining forces in Malaya just before the Fall of Singapore. His mental capacities begin to deteriorate rapidly at the onset of his service, and before long Edward 'obviously had no control over his mind or body' (46). Edward's friends pity him for his insecurities, particularly Captain Vincent Cunningham – a 'tall, lean, dark, young barrister' who is also posted to the Far East. The two men meet in the same POW camp. While they are prisoners, Vincent is able to organise an escape plan for which Edward is 'not at all enthusiastic' (125). As a result of Edward's psychological deterioration, Vincent deems that his friend would be 'hopeless in such an enterprise' as an escapee, and be 'likely to jeopardise its success' (125). Edward, as a result, is left behind in the camp. As Vincent escapes, arriving home to a celebratory fanfare, Edward deteriorates further and he dies a prisoner. The moral from Tait is resolute: a strong and brave soldier who is vigorously supportive of the war will succeed and 'win' the battle with quite some degree of brilliance, but a man who weakens under subjugation will die. The psychological analogy for an author who was a POW at the time of his writing, is clear.

Tait's novel survives, like Parsons's diary, handwritten in pencil on a bundle of less than two-hundred loose sheets of paper. Each of these sheets has printed in black block capitals in the top left corner, 'Departement van Onderwijs en Eeredienst', denoting that the paper that Tait had acquired was once the stationery from the Netherlands East Indies Department of Education (Onderwijs) and Religion (Eeredienst). This suggests that Tait had bartered with a Dutch POW for the precious bundle of paper, marking the endeavour of writing a story as being all the more important to him. Most compelling is the fact that the novel describes an escape from the camps that Tait had planned actively at Palembang with two other prisoners, but the plan was never 'really' carried out.

As Tait explained in a covering letter to an unidentified prospective publisher for his novel:¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ The novel was submitted to the prospective publisher(s) in handwritten pages as Tait's ill-health prevented the production of a full typescript. It was not, as far as I am aware, ever published.

The story is true except for one or two little episodes which I have added to give colour. The end is imagination. At the same time that part is really the story of the escape three of us had planned. This had been worked out to its smallest detail as you will gather from the context. The escape never took place owing to my friends and I being transferred from our camp to another a few days before the date fixed. We lost our contacts and were unable to get in touch with them again. (Tait n.pag.)

Tait says elsewhere in this letter that the account that his 'story' includes of the Malayan Campaign is 'from my personal point of view'. The novel is a memoir too, then, but a memoir that Tait admits has received 'colour', plus the imaginary element of a new ending. Like the cramped body of Harriet Jacobs, hiding in her grandmother's garret roof on escape from slavery, there is an inevitable need to move within this confinement and 'bring warmth and feeling' to the bones of the story (H Jacobs 121). And so to bring 'warmth' to 'the bones' of his story, Tait's novel – like Parsons's diary – contains a blurring of genres: 'the principal characters are fictitious', Tait assures the addressee of his covering letter, but 'all the incidental people exist'. So the memoir ('people exist') weaves itself into the material of the novel (the 'fictitious'). With this blurred set of genres to maintain whilst writing hurriedly and secretly in the environment of a cramped POW camp, Tait's momentary lapses into the first person seem inevitable as he recounts the confusion at Singapore in 1942: 'either our intelligence was at fault or some grave error had been committed'; 'our troops stood up well but were constantly outflanked by the enemy' [my emphasis] (54).

Whilst the memoir-like chapters covering the Malayan Campaign enabled Tait to situate his novel in history, the fictional genre of the novel with its 'colour' and 'imagination' also allowed Tait to move beyond the confines of the experience itself. The creative narrative freed the POW from his immediate surroundings, and it also had the potential to boost morale. The imagining of a world beyond the prison camp enabled Tait to dream, through the character of Vincent, of a hero's welcome home and the woman that his campmate loved. This revelatory ending is the culmination of a small but significant plot discrepancy. In the final few paragraphs of the novel, Vincent learns of Edward's death as a POW and immediately sets off to find Eleanor, 'Edward's wife', for whom Vincent has confessed a deep 'longing' that 'became an obsession' (165). However, Eleanor and Edward do not marry in the early parts of the novel. Edward does not find 'suitable occasion' to propose (18)

and it is made clear that it was 'Vincent Cunningham [who] meant far more to [Eleanor] than she could admit', rather than Edward (17-18). Tait must have changed his mind through the course of writing his novel, perhaps to increase the dramatic effect of Vincent's decision to find her, and (forgetting that he had never married them in the first place), he made Eleanor into Edward's widow after all. And so it happens that Edward, the weak and nervous man who is dependent on the care of others, a man with no imaginative powers for escape and who would 'jeopardise' any attempt by others to use them, ultimately has to die (125). Vincent, the courageous and strong combatant who does not allow his captors the victory, the man who represents the core message of the novel – the mental need for escape – redeems his status of family protector and returns to rescue a widow from her own lonely heart.

It is a particularly rousing return. Champagne flows and strangers are keen at all times to hear Vincent's tale of adventure and courage, so much so that Vincent and his co-escapees are 'pestered by friends, newspaper reporters and even strangers for a first-hand description of their adventures until the very names Malaya and Sumatra became nauseating' (164). The rapture associated with the return of the men to freedom gives an indication of the sort of welcome that Tait might have hoped for upon repatriation, the wish to give and be asked for 'first-hand description' of (to recall Williams's oral history) his 'adventures'. The ending to Tait's novel also reflects the captive imagination craving pleasure, comfort – 'the best [hotel] rooms...hot baths...a bottle of champagne' (163) – and companionship: a counterbalance to the extreme degradation of imprisonment where 'life from now on became meaningless except for food' (111).

Edward's fate could not be more different to the celebrations of Vincent. The reader does not witness directly what happens to him in the camp, although we have been told that 'death from disease and wounds was ever present', and that 'no medicines were forthcoming, nor was any effort made by the captors to provide suitable food' (111). It is nonetheless a stark moment in the narrative, when Tait (a man whom we know was still imprisoned on Sumatra at the time) wrote:

Vincent took the papers and rapidly glanced down the columns. A strange feeling came over him, part expectancy, part dread. Suddenly his eyes focussed upon an entry. "Captain E Hartman died in Sumatra". (Tait, *Emergency Commission* 165)

Tait has written the possibility of his own death. And yet, the confusion between his 'principal characters' has occurred again: in an earlier part of the novel it was Vincent who was made Captain, and Edward a Second Lieutenant (10-19). It is a minor error but it confirms the sense that Edward and Vincent are two faces, if not of Tait himself, then of the same POW. The fear and weakness of Edward the prisoner battles against the courage and resilience of Vincent the escapee. The fictionalised memoir (autofiction) is a story-truth bounded to and by the happening-truths of the experience, but nonetheless, it is a narrative that grasps towards freedom, whether dreamed or obtained. *Emergency Commission* shows us that a 'real' and 'true' telling of the happening-truth of captivity has been told, but that the 'colour' of that telling has to be added by 'imagination' – the story-truth.

Emergency Commission is a complex narrative to unpick: Tait has stated that the 'story is true', except for the 'imagination' and the 'colour'. Yet conversely, the imagined escape is an escape that Tait had 'really' planned. *Emergency Commission* is a 'real' and 'true' telling of the POW's 'imagination'; Tait depicts the dream that POWs used to survive, and the plan for the 'end' that did not 'really' take place. That plan had been 'worked out to its smallest detail' in the camps but only ever existed in the 'imagination' of the prisoners involved. Throughout, the story resounds with the collective voice of other forms of POW life-writing. Whilst reading *Emergency Commission*, I am reminded of Thomas Chatfield's struggle 'to convey the sensation' of imprisonment, of being told by Leonard Williams to 'just imagine' what he could not describe, and of understanding from Jack Saunders that in the circumstances in which these men found themselves, 'nothing' could be done. There is 'nothing' that these men can write or speak 'to convey' what they knew as being 'really' the story of their captivity, and this struggle is encapsulated by Tait's 'true' work of fiction.

Although circumstances transpired against his plan – and it is almost certain that he would have been unsuccessful if he had attempted escape from Palembang – Tait held on so tightly to his dream of freedom that, since he could not have it 'really', he used precious resources and energy to turn it into a story. Tait's decision to write *Emergency Commission* highlights the importance of the imagination in offering escapism to the POW.¹⁰¹ The imagined character of Vincent, who 'really'

¹⁰¹ In attempting to answer what 'accounts for the survivability' of individuals 'whose physical vulnerability has been exploited', Judith Butler has examined the poetry written by prisoners held at Guantanamo, finding that 'the body breathes, breathes itself into words, and finds some provisional survival there' (*Frames* 61). The ability of prisoners to write narratives that create 'a radical act of interpretation in the face of unwilling subjugation' becomes a figurative means for their escape. As they are read in a world beyond the prison whilst inmates remain behind its

does escape, acted as a psychological buffer for the 'real' man Tait, who imagined – whilst a POW – how that escape may feel. Indeed, other captivity narratives from the Second World War have also professed that 'one's imagination remains unfettered even in captivity' (Kertész 156). As such, that imagination becomes one of the most significant vehicles for survival.

The necessity of escapism: the POW camp library

The popular memory of the Far Eastern POW, highly likely to influence a reader's preconceptions of a POW narrative, is dominated by images that have come to represent the myths of history, rather than the experience itself:

The nuances of the struggle, of survival, and of the human spirit disappear behind the images of bamboo fences, barbed wire, and the intense Japanese sun, which came to symbolise the suppression of Asia... Alternative accounts or different voices and images get pushed to the background because they don't fit the current established perspective on the past – a standard view that later generations have grown up with as well. (Willems 137)

In camps along the Sumatra Railway there was very little barbed wire – often absolutely none – and likewise for bamboo fences. Furthermore, the 'Japanese sun' was more than the symbol of the nation holding the men captive. It created the temporal framework to a prisoner's daily routine: prisoners on the Sumatra Railway did not work to Java time (as the Western part of the Netherlands East Indies would have typically), but to Japan Standard time. This meant that POWs were getting up to work in the dark at what would have been around 4.30am Java time. Heather Jones has identified a tension within First World War accounts of POW life, between the brutality suffered during captivity and the need for these men to 'return to peacetime norms of masculinity'. Indeed, it may not have been politically expedient to remember the violence of POW life, either, whilst government officials attempted to conclude reparative peacetime agreements (315-316). Consequently, Jones suggests that popular representations of incarceration in the aftermath of the

walls, Butler shows how the poems 'break through the dominant ideologies' of the prison, as well as the physical and mental boundaries of incarceration itself (*Frames* 61).

Great War avoided any allusion to POWs as 'powerless or humiliated'. Instead, narratives were created that showed POWs 'mastering captivity' (353).¹⁰² Even for POWs, this sense of 'mastering' captivity – albeit imaginary – was essential. Tait's novel depended on the main character succeeding in his escape attempt from Sumatra, and I have shown that the memoirs written several decades after repatriation show a lingering tendency for POWs from Sumatra to mute the depiction of their 'powerless or humiliated' experiences.

On a jungle island where the natives were as fearful as prisoners 'there was no perimeter to keep the prisoners inside as there was nowhere to go anyway' (Chatfield 10). There was no place to escape or to hide and there are no records of any prisoner doing so from the Sumatra Railway.¹⁰³ In addition, the band of men who became POWs during the early 1940s had – in their own understandings of recent history¹⁰⁴ – potentially been subject, as Jones has shown, to a 'selective amnesia' within cultural memory towards the mistreatment and wider commemoration of the harsh dangers of wartime captivity (370). 'The First World War' Jones reminds us, 'was a murky, subjective frame of reference' (370), and the memoir of Joe Fitzgerald confirms as much:

We knew about POWs in Germany in WW1, and from a small amount of news from the countries in the current conflict, which indicated humane treatment. We anticipated much the same from the Japs. How wrong we were! (*If You See* 1)

The collective image prisoners themselves 'anticipated' of POW life was therefore subverted: for a start, they were not necessarily fenced in as they may have expected.¹⁰⁵ Although there was no barbed wire around many camps, strict

¹⁰² This need for post-war cultural representations of POW life to show men 'mastering captivity' is echoed in Pierre Boulle's novel *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, and the 1957 film of the same name, in which we see the fictional, and – in terms of the happening-truth of Far Eastern captivity – wholly impossible, escape of an American POW, Commander Shears, from the Burma-Siam Railway. See Boulle; Lean.

¹⁰³ There were some early attempts to evade Japanese rule. But, given the small number of these, the period of captivity in which they occurred (generally the two weeks following 9 March 1942 when the Netherlands East Indies capitulated to Japan), and the fact that most men either gave themselves up due to hostile environment (and an unsympathetic local population), or were re-caught by guards and brought back to camp within a matter of days, these are better regarded as attempts to evade captivity rather than full escapes from captivity. For an example see the Liberated POW Questionnaire Interrogation Report of Alastair Munro).

¹⁰⁴ At least one Sumatra Railway POW discussed in this thesis, Gerald Tait, also served in the Great War.

¹⁰⁵ The status and identity of the 'POW' required negotiation too. As Ian Mackintosh wrote in *Changi* in February 1942: 'One of the patients, an old soldier, came up to me and said "You are a P.O.W. now, Sir", and instinctively I knew that the initials stood for Prisoner of War, although I had never heard the expression before'. Mackintosh's words indicate that although they were trained for various eventualities within combat situations, the vast majority of men taken captive in the Far East were unable to comprehend the life of a POW: some 'had never heard the

limits on freedom were nonetheless imposed. In response POWs kept diaries and wrote stories or poetry, using their imaginations to breach those borders figuratively. Although focusing on the narratives of POWs from European camps during the same conflict, Clare Makepeace's study of the imaginative life of the POW shows how 'escapism, rather than "escapes", was absolutely crucial to how POWs made sense of their imprisonment' (*Living Beyond* 3). This 'escapism', for POWs in Europe, came from the sending, and receipt, of regular letters to and from home. However, Far Eastern POWs had much more restricted (almost non-existent) contact with home compared with those across Europe. The latter could send 'between two and five letter-forms home per month...plus four postcards. A letter-form consisted of just twenty-four lines, a postcard only eight' (Makepeace, *Living Beyond* 4). In comparison, POWs on Sumatra were, at best, able to send less than a handful of twenty-five-word postcards during the entire duration of captivity.¹⁰⁶ In February 1945 on Sumatra, James Pentney received his first communication from home since December 1941 – 'It didn't say much but it told me there was a world outside, away from all this, a world I had almost forgotten' (18). From the long delay between sending and receipt of the letter we can ascertain that prisoner mail was not often distributed within the camps, and that POWs were not able always to read the messages that were sent to them by family and friends. Therefore, POWs in the Far East were deprived, for very long periods of time, of alternative narratives that could have encouraged them (as European POWs were able) to sustain their identification with a world outside of the camps.¹⁰⁷

It was therefore necessary for POWs on Sumatra to create their own narratives, and we have seen this in the diary of Parsons, the lists and notebooks of Sharples, or the novel of Tait. But they could also, when they had the opportunity, enjoy the narratives that were created by others. Literature – and literacy – are intrinsic to the ability for captives to 'escape' and crucially, to survive their confinement. Within African American slave narratives, literacy equated to freedom.

expression before', so neither had they contemplated, nor been prepared for living – and surviving – the existence of a prisoner (Mackintosh n.pag.).

106 Regulations regarding POW mail differed between camps across the Far East. For an exceptionally detailed, six-volume work on the analysis of POW and internee mail across the Far East, see Tett, *Postal History*.

107 In her analysis of diaries and letters maintained by POWs in European camps, Makepeace has suggested that diaries provided POWs a 'place where they could exist and survive in an alternative reality' (*Living Beyond* 9), imagining time with family members, particularly on special occasions such as birthdays and anniversaries – and synchronising their thoughts at moments when they were fairly sure that loved ones would be thinking of them. In Parsons's diary for Christmas Day 1944, he writes that he has 'suffered far more from nostalgia than before' suggesting that as conditions deteriorated, he increasingly needed to imagine a world beyond the camps (Parsons 25 December 1944).

For example, Harriet Jacobs was able to read in her garret hideaway, once she had become 'accustomed to dim light'. She wrote later that this brought 'great relief to the tedious monotony of my life' (106). Frederick Douglass, too, understood the importance of literacy when he realised that his captors saw 'education and slavery' as being 'incompatible with each other' (44). Being able to read, and eventually to write, meant that Douglass was able to 'utter [his] thoughts'. Such an achievement provided Douglass with 'the valuable bread of knowledge' (44). To the slave, learning to read had become as sustaining and nourishing as food. Makepeace has identified, too, that 'the strength [that European POWs] gained from this correspondence [reading letters from loved ones] was considered to be so powerful that it was deemed to verge on physical sustenance' (*Living Beyond* 7).

Although the arrival of mail into Sumatran camps was cherished by POWs, it occurred so infrequently that it could not be depended upon in the same way. However, prior to work beginning on the Sumatra Railway, libraries were set up by POWs – one of which was at Gloegoer in Medan. In his memoir, Peter Hartley describes how this library was 'made up of all kinds of English books' that had been removed from Dutch houses in the area, or 'surrendered by individual prisoners who had hitherto guarded them' (70). Dutch as well as British POWs donated books, and 'quite a representative collection resulted, covering all shades of writing, some very old and in any other circumstances probably unreadable, others quite up to date' (70). Alongside The Bible and the works of Shakespeare, books that Hartley remembered were Richard Llewellyn's *How Green Was My Valley*, Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom The Bell Tolls*, and quite amazingly from the point of view of Japanese censorship – a collection of Winston Churchill's speeches *Blood Sweat and Tears* (70). Many books were contemporary to the time, showing that the modern novel remained, for a little while, accessible to POWs on Sumatra. These books were likely to have been shared from Dutch provisions, and the few books that men had saved when they escaped Singapore. Many of the books that POWs read on Sumatra were by writers from the 1930s onwards, a period that W.H. Auden termed, in his poem of the same name, the 'Age of Anxiety'. It was an age that saw the world go to war for a second time and where the narratives of novelists and poets would once again be called upon to represent 'a war imagined' (Hynes, *War*).¹⁰⁸ For those men who had not read much previously, Hartley noted that they

108 For a summary of the literature that proved popular both in Britain and among Allied troops abroad during the Second World War, see Fussell, 'Wartime' 228 – 252. For a response to Fussell's work that offers a comparative analysis on the poetry produced from the First and Second World Wars, see Stout. For a summary of

'began to taste the delights of book reading for probably the first time in their lives', and emphasising the importance of literature in maintaining the morale of POWs, the creation of this library was considered to be 'one of the most important events' of early captivity on Sumatra (Hartley 70).

The diary kept by Simmonds during his first year of captivity at Gloegoer corroborates this assessment from Hartley. In his pocket diary, Simmonds wrote – like Parsons and Tait – in pencil, covering every page from corner to corner in the tiniest writing. The writing is so cramped that it is difficult to determine where one entry ends and the next begins, indicating how writing space came at such a premium. However, the library was so important to POWs that between April and December 1942 Simmonds used this limited space to record the books that he read, and even the days he 'changed library book'.¹⁰⁹ Very few weeks pass where Simmonds does not update his reading record, often with one or two-word reviews of each book. The autobiography of Margot Asquith was 'not very good' (21 April 1942), *Tomorrow for Apricot* by Ursula Bloom was 'a bit poor' (23 November 1942), *Topper Takes a Trip* by Thorne Smith was 'quite funny' (17 October 1942), *Fame is the Spur* by Howard Spring was deemed 'excellent' (26 November 1942). Literature read by Simmonds ranged from *Reader's Digest* compilations through to short stories, novels and some non-fiction titles. The 'Century Of' collections published by Hutchinson & Company during the 1930s appear to have been common in the camp library, as Simmonds worked his way through *A Century of Sea Stories*, *A Century of Creepy Stories* and *A Century of Detective Stories* (10 August 1942; 18 August 1942; 6 October 1942). Other books recorded in Simmonds's diary include PG Wodehouse's *Damsel in Distress* (3 June 1942), D.H. Lawrence's *Kangaroo* (1 August 1942), Edgar Wallace's *The Guv'nor* (19 August 1942) and John Galsworthy's *Beyond* (26 December 1942). On 19 December 1942, the camp library received 'a lot of *New York Times*' that were dated from the middle of 1941, although Simmonds does not state from where these arrived. The newspapers made 'quite interesting reading for a change' – and although the newspapers will have provided some information, albeit out-of-date, about world events, this 'interesting reading' also held another appeal. Within a day of the arrival of the papers, 'all the photos of the women cinema stars & pretty society girls' had been

correspondence received from literary figures by one POW in Europe, and the books that were read by POWs (and censored by their guards) in European camps during the Second World War, see Gillies 247 – 263.

¹⁰⁹ This note is made five times by Simmonds in October 1942 alone, on 5, 17, 22, 26 and 28 of the month.

cut out by POWs in Gloegoer and stuck 'upon the wall in their bedspaces' (Simmonds 20 December 1942).

Thus we know, from Simmonds's diary and Hartley's memoir, that contemporary literature was integral to the daily lives of POWs for at least the first half of their captivity on Sumatra.¹¹⁰ Some men, as Hartley said, 'began to taste the delights' of reading perhaps for the first time and, given the breadth of writers and their works available, had in camp a large number of examples of the modern novel (70). Following the First World War literature had become a world of 'solace and reaffirmation' for popular audiences, since it offered a 'familiar ground on which Englishmen could regroup both to explore, and to find some alternative to, the nightmare of history' (Eagleton 19). So it is of little surprise that this literature found its way into, and was highly prized within, the prison camps of the Second World War, too. It is not too much of a stretch to consider, also, that such prized possessions 'guarded' zealously by POWs will have retained their influence long after release.¹¹¹ In the following chapter, then, I explore the linguistic characteristics of the stories that former POWs came to tell, and the challenges of transmitting a story-truth that – by necessity – included the untranslatable, and ultimately unknowable, corpus of camp discourse which evolved along the Sumatra Railway.

110 At the same time, Penguin Books had launched a Forces Book Club in 1942, and in March 1943 its POW Book Service. Relatives of POWs joined the Service by subscription (3 guineas per annum, although six-monthly and quarterly subscriptions were also available). Ten books were packaged per month and sent to the individual POW. However, it seems that this was only offered to the relatives of POWs imprisoned in Germany and Italy - I have found no mention of any books arriving in the Far East and if they had, it is unlikely that the Japanese censors would have approved their entry into camps. Penguin archives regarding this Service were destroyed, but their selections were heavily dominated by the popular fiction writers of the time such as Conrad, Bowen and Galsworthy, as well as classic literature including several titles by Jane Austen (Pearson). For a list of eighty Penguin POW titles' see Pearson (47-49).

111 Indeed, the stylistic choices in the narratives referenced in this chapter do suggest an influence from modern writers (for example, in Fitzgerald writing about the minutiae of his 'day' on Sumatra), adventure stories (in the oral narrative of Leonard Williams), and classic poetry as reflected by Rees. In her summary of books read by some European POWs, Midge Gillies quotes a 'Padre Read' as stating that he would 'ever associate Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* with sitting on a patch of grass surrounded by other semi-naked bodies in a hot summer month of 1943; and Motley's *Dutch Republic* with crouching as near to the radiator as I could in the only heated room of the camp in that last winter had cast an indescribable gloom over the camps of Germany; and Thackeray's *Newcomes* with a blissful fortnight in the camp hospital to which I had been rather flimsily consigned by my friend the doctor' (Gillies 263).

Chapter 3

POW camp discourse

What fun you will have, recivilising an ear which has heard no music, a palate unjaded by caviar and Burgundy, a nose sensitised to the merest whiff of fish frying five miles away, an eye which has seen no skirt for 3 ½ years until one appeared out of the sky this morning attached to a parachute and encasing a strange soft-voiced animal with a Sydney accent. (Fiennes, *Letter n.pag.*)

When David Fiennes wrote to his mother on 15 September 1945, one month after his release from captivity in Palembang on Sumatra, he imagined she would have 'fun' in 'recivilising' him whilst he would find the experience a little 'bewildering'. His latter conclusion was based on the challenges that newly released POWs had already faced in reading newspapers dropped into their camps from Liberator planes. This was done as part of efforts to get supplies to Allied personnel in the first weeks after Japanese surrender. 'During the past month', he wrote, 'various copies of the People, the Sphere, Punch, News of the World etc. have descended from heaven'. It was 'perhaps to prepare us for the skirt, a sort of primary and secondary education before reincarnation' Fiennes ruminated – but it was an education that proved 'almost unintelligible, being filled with D days, VE days, GI Joes, people who frat, etc.' It would be 'fun' for his mother, he thought, but 'a bit bewildering' for him (Fiennes, *Letter n.pag.*).

One of the thoughts that Fiennes found most 'bewildering' about repatriated life was not, however, 'the skirt' and the recommencement of physical relationships that it implied. Most 'bewildering' was what Fiennes could only describe as the 'unintelligible'. In the camps there was a group of men supporting one another to decipher the reports: 'we put the best brains on compiling a glossary and are now pretty good at unseen translation' (Fiennes, *Letter n.pag.*). POWs would have learned additional entries to the 'glossary' fairly quickly: VJ Day, RAPWI, and in the not so distant future, their own designation as Far Eastern POWs or 'FEPOWs', a term to which I will return in detail in chapter 5. Fiennes's words give a hint of the fear that POWs from across the Far East felt upon release: that his own stories would be 'unintelligible' to his mother, so much so that she would have to take time

'recivilising' her son in order to comprehend him; a fear that he would prove to be as 'unintelligible' to his loved ones, as the string of war and post-war acronyms had been to him.

Such fears were not made any easier by the instructions given to former POWs by Allied authorities. The communication of stories of captivity from the Far East, at least at first, was actively discouraged by officials overseeing repatriation procedures. The first tranche of men leaving Rangoon were informed explicitly by Allied Land Forces South East Asia (ALFSEA) Command to 'not say anything to anyone' until they had provided a written statement to interrogators from MI9, a body tasked with investigating attempts at escape and evasion.

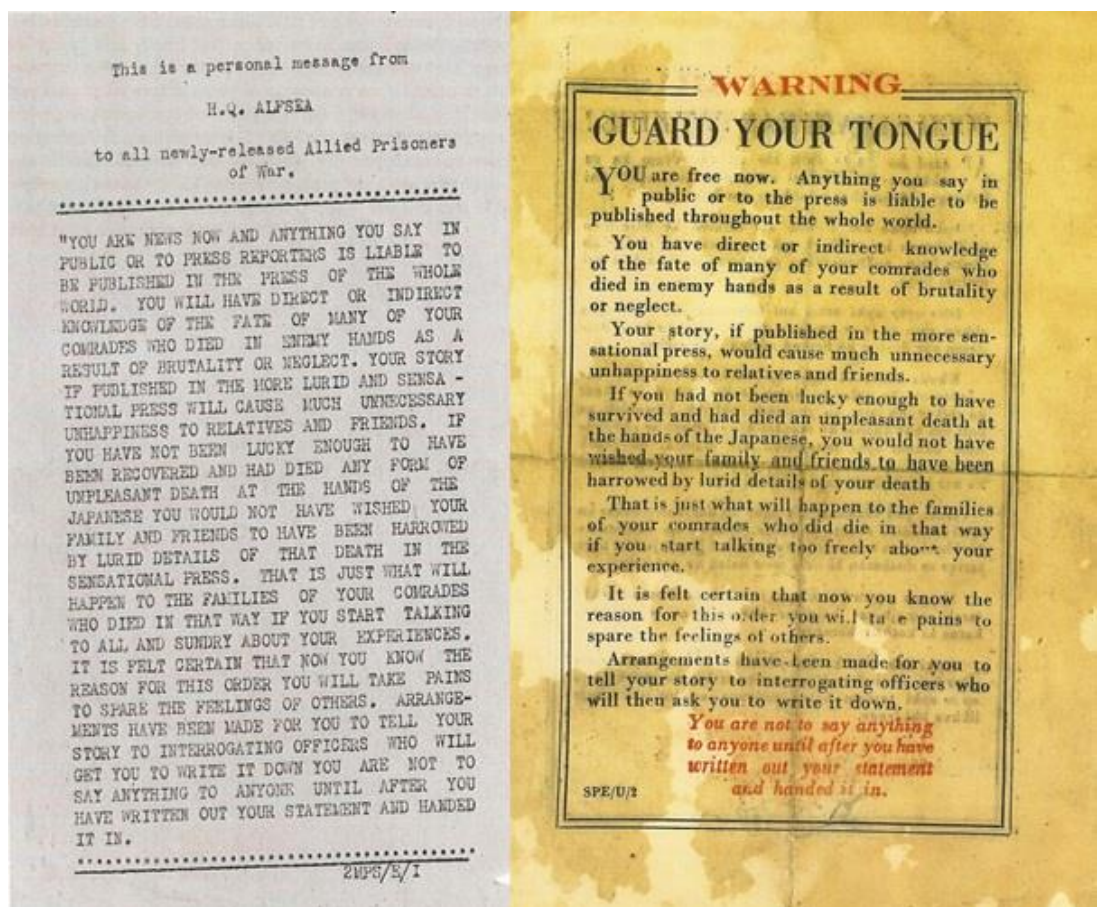


Figure 4: ALFSEA Command. Warnings to newly-released Allied POWs from the Far East. (Nellis 38; Mitchell, private papers)

The wording of the initial ALFSEA warning was particularly fierce:

Your story if published in the more lurid and sensational press will cause much unnecessary unhappiness to relatives and friends. If you had not been lucky enough to have been recovered and had

died any form of unpleasant death at the hands of the Japanese you would not have wished your family and friends to have been harrowed by lurid details of that death...That is just what will happen to the families of your comrades who died in that way if you start talking to all and sundry about your experiences. It is felt certain that now you know the reason for this order you will take pains to spare the feelings of others. (qtd. in Nellis 38)

A slightly altered version of the same command told men from the outset to 'guard your tongue' against 'talking too freely' (qtd. in Mitchell n.pag.). The invocation of the 'guard' on their tongues recalled the repression of the past three and half years, and implied the continued need for close self-censorship, and for what Fiennes had called 'unseen translation' at all times. Included at the bottom of both leaflets is the same phrase: 'You are not to say anything to anyone until after you have written out your statement and handed it in'. This tells us that on repatriation, the narratives of former POWs of the Japanese were treated in two ways: there was an enforced silence stopping men from saying 'anything to anyone', and yet an enforced telling, too, of those narratives 'to interrogating officers', with these interviews typically taking place in early 1946. The warning conveyed the message that the rather fearsome sounding 'interrogating officers' – a term that must have been reminiscent of the dreaded Kempeitai¹¹² in the camps – were allowed to know the 'lurid details' of what men had witnessed and experienced as POWs, but that their families and those attempting to help them in the aftermath ('anyone'), could not.

Very few examples of these harshest warnings exist, suggesting that it was recognised fairly quickly that a gentler tone and approach was required. A less emphatic 'Warning As to Publicity (Press, Broadcasting and Careless Talk)' is more commonly found in collections of POW papers, which concerned itself with forbidding individuals to 'publish in any form whatever, or communicate, either directly or indirectly, to the Press' those accounts 'which concern the existence of an official Escape Organisation'¹¹³. The necessity to 'guard' language and censor records runs throughout the stories of the Far Eastern POW. I have shown already that there were dangers inherent to the maintenance of diaries and other notebooks in the camps. Before arriving home, former POWs were then told to keep 'guard' of

112 Japanese military police

113 For an example, see Wootton.

their 'tongues' and, regardless of their experiences, to 'spare the feelings of others'. I demonstrated in my second chapter that former POWs from Sumatra still told their story-truths, despite the barriers, challenges and historical misconceptions that stood in their way. In this chapter, I explore how a culture of 'unseen translation' and the camp discourse of the Far Eastern POW created a very specific challenge to the transmission of those stories.

Learning a new language

In practical terms, language learning was an essential aspect of surviving camp life. It offered various opportunities for developing friendships, negotiating with others for food and other items, for self-protection, intellectual stimulation, placing order onto a new and strange existence, and even developing skills and making plans for the future. For instance, learning Japanese commands helped protect a POW against the brutality of punishment. Learning Malay helped when bartering with locals on what was known as a 'squeeze' (bartering for goods), but also – for at least some of the British POWs – foreign language development encouraged the formation of some 'great friendships' with the 'Dutch native troops who were with us' (C Thompson 176). The development of these friendships, where it happened, will have provided solace and companionship to POWs. However, such friendships also offered the potential to exchange, share or purchase additional necessities for survival. As Claude Thompson recounts of his friendships with Dutch POWs: 'they were wonderfully kindhearted and often if they had managed to get extra food would share it with me' (176).

For those POWs with access to notebooks or paper, learning a new language was all the more possible since they were able to create physical lists of lexical items. These records of new vocabulary often sit alongside other lists (as introduced in chapter 2) that contain recipes, books to read, itineraries of journeys to make, or wardrobes to buy. Such list-making – to quote Umberto Eco's extensive analysis of the form – would have provided both a 'practical' and a 'poetic' function for POWs, depending on the 'intention' with which their lists were created and reviewed (Eco 371).

In their 'poetic' guise, such lists show that despite the confined space (mental and physical) offered by a sparse amount of paper in a prison camp, there was still a desire among POWs 'to reiterate that the universe of abundance and consumption' was available to them, if only through daydreams, whilst they existed

on starvation diets and their lives were characterised by the absence – rather than the abundance – of things (Eco 353).¹¹⁴ The ‘planning of holiday itineraries in Britain, the compiling of long, long lists of books that must be read and the drawing up of lists of personal effects lost in the war in case we should be able to claim compensation’ were ways of expressing ‘nostalgia for good old days’, but also ‘a more practical look forward to the hoped for release’ (Brewer, *Memoir* 91). This is particularly exemplified in the notebooks of David Fiennes and Frank Brewer,¹¹⁵ who were both POWs in Palembang on Sumatra.¹¹⁶

As a POW, Fiennes took a great deal of care in compiling lists of all the study that he needed to undertake, the travelling that he wanted to do and the items that he wished to buy for his home in order to be able to achieve his life’s plan, which he also listed in his notebook as ambitions for life ‘before 40’ and ‘by 50’.

Before 40 plant a root somewhere in English country – especially if married. Get trees and fruit planted etc. Plan to make life what one would like it to be, not just drift from one day to the next.

By 50 have a wife, children, an established home in English country, useful interests and undertakings besides the money-making job. Have travelled all over the world. Keep an up-to-date library so that children may learn and use their minds broadly; let them travel...Wife must be intellectually stimulating, respondent to the whole wide wealth of knowledge. (Fiennes, private papers n.pag.)

Fiennes added after the requirements that he had for his future wife, a list of three necessary hobbies: ‘Cheese-making. Ham curing and cooking. Goats for milk’. The ‘poetic’ list of ‘abundance and consumption’ was fully exploited by Fiennes, as page after page of his notebook contains this sort of ‘daydream’ – the letters that he would write (‘a delight for the sender’s recipient’), the sort of reading that he would do (‘For relaxation. For interest & information’), the sorts of meals he

114 Harold Goulding wrote of his time on Sumatra that ‘some people used to go round with their little notebooks and ask other people for recipes, which they would write in the books...People used to lie down on their own and read them, often out loud and really get some sort of satisfaction, very sensual in nature, by just reading food out loud’ (Goulding, *Yasmé* 44-45).

115 Lieutenant Frank Brewer; became POW aged 27 in Banka Straits, 17 February 1942.

116 Although POWs imprisoned in Palembang did not mingle with the men labouring on the Sumatra Railway, their geographical proximity is indicative of the languages in use on the island at the time.

would eat every day ('Big lunch – long afternoon, high tea after dark'), and at least seven different types of diary and account books that he would keep (Fiennes, private papers n.pag.). Frank Brewer carried out a similar exercise in writing up a 'plan' for 'life' beyond incarceration. This planning included the compilation of lists of clothes for 'immediate purchase' and his 'home requirements'. But interspersed throughout Brewer's notes are lists of foreign language translation (Brewer, private papers n.pag.).

Arguably the most 'practical' of the lists, the foreign vocabularies served a useful purpose in fighting 'the biting canker of increasing mental inertia', negotiating the linguistic demands of the camps, and developing skills that were transferrable beyond captivity (Bell 70).¹¹⁷ Brewer split the pages of his pocket notebook into five tightly squeezed columns, headed 'English', 'Chinese character', 'Hokkien', 'Malay', 'Dutch'. Most of the entries are written in ink, a precious resource rarely in evidence in the contemporaneous papers that I have collated from the Sumatra Railway, and in these columns Brewer recorded the vocabulary for a wide array of words. He focused predominantly on English to Dutch translation, no doubt because Dutch was the language that he most required in order to communicate with other POWs in the same camps. The verbs that Brewer learned included 'to think', 'to tire', 'to work', 'to write', 'to recover', 'to instruct', 'to weep'. The nouns included: 'conscience', 'commander', 'family', 'swelling', 'poison', 'corpse', 'grave', 'credit', 'chicken', 'duckweed'.¹¹⁸ By reading through these lists of words, an impression begins to form of the demanding, unforgiving life that POWs lived, the locally different worlds in which they were living, and the sort of communication that was necessary between the men as a result. This indicates, to follow Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of discourse, that embedded within each word are the 'contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life' (Bakhtin, *Discourse* 293).

Thus, whilst providing the definitions of translated terms, the foreign language lists also evoke the corpses and the graves at which the POWs wept, the families to which they would want to write, the need to barter and to obtain credit, and the recovery from swellings caused by the oedema of malnutrition and disease. Evident

¹¹⁷ For the extraordinary story of the 'University of Kuching', in which POW Frank Bell set up an 'organised educational programme' (20) for the teaching of modern languages to POWs held captive in Sarawak, Borneo, see Frank Bell's *Undercover University*. This foreign language programme was devised into full term dates (85), with examination periods (88-89). Languages covered were Dutch Spanish, German, Russian and French (86-100), with a class in Urdu also convened (100). By the end of the war, 41 'diplomas' in modern languages had been awarded by Bell to his fellow campmates (100).

¹¹⁸ On neighbouring Java, John Sharples's translations included verbs such as 'blow', 'break', 'call', 'carry', 'choose', 'cut', 'die', 'drink', 'endure', 'fall', 'fight', 'forget', 'fly', 'help', 'hold', 'know', 'laugh' and 'leave'. Like Brewer, Sharples designed his lists in tabular format – English, Dutch, Tamil and Malay; see Sharples, private papers.

in these word lists, then, is the development of a camp discourse. By this I mean that the words used by POWs in their life-writing evoke both the polyglot contexts within which they lived, and the histories of expression to which their words belonged. What Bakhtin refers to as the 'contextual overtones' of a word resonates through these lists (*Discourse* 293). For example, the evidence that Brewer was learning and recording the Dutch terms for 'grave' and 'corpse' suggests that he was joining Dutch POWs in mourning the losses of their campmates, and in learning the term for 'credit', he was bartering with them for food and other provisions.

The compilation of diverse lists was not solely the activity of POWs on Sumatra. Midge Gillies writes of POWs on Sarawak that:

the mishmash of material kept the reader on his toes. A page of handwritten notes on Russian literature, for example, might be followed by two closely printed lists of horses and the races they had won or lost. (Gillies 212)

They may have 'kept the reader on his toes' and the POW's mind active, but these lists also pronounced the 'practical' need to create order out of the chaos and the 'mishmash' of captivity. The very strictly ruled ledgers of Malay into English into Dutch gave referential meaning to foreign objects and foodstuffs (for example, *atap/attap*¹¹⁹, *obat*¹²⁰, *parang*¹²¹, *kerban*¹²²) and the development of a camp discourse assisted in making more sense of the POW's place within the camps.

119 Roofing made from palm and bamboo leaves. Examples of the its usage are given as follows: 'the bamboo full of bugs, our clothes with lice and boring beetles in the poles and atap above us, showering sawdust down on to us' (Parsons 6 February 1945). 'The billets are attaped and about 40 mtrs long, 140 to a hut' (Parsons 28 June 1945); 'Eventually we straggled into camp and were shown into a crude atap hut which was to house us for we knew not how long. These atap huts were crudely made with the usual six-foot platform of rough nine inch by one inch boards along the length of each side' (C Thompson 145); 'There was no food for the first day, there was no kitchen anyway, just four poles and an atap roof. The atap thatching was made from the dried fronds of the leaves of the coconut tree, the huts themselves were made from bamboo poles with atap thatching for walls as well as roofs' (Robson 46). 'This draft of 500 travel-weary POWs are set-down on a site with only a deserted number of barracks built from bamboo & atap. (Atap is palm leaves sewn to bamboo rods with rattan thongs)'. (Smith 72)

120 Medicine. For example, 'Still spend most of the night running to the lavatory; the Doc has tried about every obat that there is' (Parsons 3 September 1945).

121 Large machete-type knife for cutting jungle vegetation. For example, 'The Jap handed us a parang, and indicated we should cut down stout branches' (Fitzgerald, *If You See* 39); 'Parangs to cut away through the jungle, which was overgrown with bamboo and other trees and creepers' (Surr 38).

122 Buffalo/bullock. For example, 'About 3 kilos of meat as well as a kerban came in' (Parsons 25 April 1945); 'A kerban came in and was killed within a quarter hour!' (Parsons, 2 May 1945); 'Our meat issue here seems to consist of kerban carcasses almost daily, so we don't get much meat' (Parsons 3 August 1945).

Strange and yet meagre foods, new smells and tastes, the sounds and sights of the jungle up-close, Japanese commands and tropical diseases – all with different and new terms – must have seemed an ‘infinity of names’ to remember: and when faced with that infinity, ‘the fear of being unable to say everything seizes us’ (Eco 67). However, in creating these vocabularies and demarcating the different parts of their multilingual life for precise functions (Japanese for work routines, Malay for camp life), POWs ‘seized’ upon and controlled that fear. In doing so, they created a discourse that capitalised on the multilingual nature of their communities to communicate nuanced meanings to each other.

In considering the evolution of a POW camp discourse I am examining not just the individual experience described within the words of each narrative, but a collective knowledge that is evoked, but not explicitly referenced, within those words. This collective knowledge understands, mutually, what it was like to live the history: a history that can only be appreciated by those who heard the words being spoken in their original context. Therefore, I regard discourse as a language event ‘intimately bound up with human experience’ (Werth 50). In his discussion on discourse, Michel Foucault suggests that because of this intimate connection with human experience, discourse is also an authoritative construct: for Foucault, discourse holds a form of ‘power’ that ‘translates struggles or systems of domination’, and it is also, crucially, ‘the thing for which and by which there is a struggle’ (*Order* 52-53). Just as Eco describes being seized by ‘the fear of being unable to say everything’, Foucault identifies the ultimate ‘power’ of a discourse for which the POWs retained their ‘struggle’ (to retain their identity beyond that of a subjugated people). But by developing a culturally-charged discourse (as per Bakhtin) a ‘system’ through which POWs could find a way to ‘say everything’ was developed: subtly invoking different meanings through the words that they spoke. Through the development of a ‘system’ of communication among oppressed men who needed to ‘translate’ their ‘struggles’, camp discourse was a key element of resistance against their very oppression.

The development of a camp discourse: control and resistance

The camps along the Sumatra Railway were, by nature of their population, polyglot communities. There was a varied use of language combining Malay,

English, Japanese and Dutch. Some men also knew Tamil, the Hokkien¹²³ dialect of Chinese (Brewer; Sharples), other European languages aside from English and Dutch, or some 'tried to learn Greek' or Latin (Hartley 88).¹²⁴ In compiling a glossary for his memoir of 'some of the Japanese and Malay words in common use by Prisoners and Japanese alike', Boulter noted that 'no grammar was understood by either party [involved in the conversation] or used'. Instead, 'one strung the words together in a literal translation mixing all three languages perhaps in one sentence, Malay, Japanese and English' (Boulter n.pag.).

Claude Thompson, a POW in Palembang on Sumatra, agrees that 'language was quite a feature of our POW life':

If any normal English-speaking person had suddenly found himself in amongst us he would have marvelled at the language and almost certainly would not have understood half of what was said... Often our sentences would have words of half a dozen languages plus a very good sprinkling of profanity'. (C Thompson 187-188)

From these accounts of how language was used in the camps, it is possible to determine that different languages were 'strung...together' through a linguistic feature similar to 'code-switching', where multilingual communities alternate between two or more languages during the same discursive act (Blom and Gumpertz 75). Despite the apparent lack of rules, this 'stringing together' of languages, I think, both represented and created the identity of the POWs incarcerated on Sumatra in a strange amalgam world.

Without recordings of contemporaneous speech from the camps themselves, it is impossible to know exactly how phrases were spoken by POWs. Nonetheless,

123 Sharples initially needed to learn Hokkien in his pre-war role as a diplomat in Singapore (Sharples, private papers). However, Hokkien were also the dominant Chinese community across Central and Eastern Java, and western Sumatra. On Sumatra, Hokkien peoples were employed as plantation labourers (Skinner). This suggests that POWs such as Brewer and Sharples had a valuable reason to maintain their knowledge of the dialect, for example when bartering for goods with local populations on the island.

124 It is likely that these Greek lessons were given to Hartley by my grandfather, who also transcribed Greek and Latin texts during his time as a POW at Gloegoer. As part of the canon of the classic English education system, Greek and Latin lessons may have offered a means of maintaining a connection with home (and therefore a means of resisting oppression) through language. There is also some evidence that these lessons were undertaken with a future career, and therefore, an end to captivity, in mind. Frank Bell notes having taught Greek to one POW in Sarawak: 'One of the younger officers of the camp asked me to teach him Greek because he had decided that he wished to go into the Church. He saw fit to change his mind after six weeks' instruction at my hands. I had done no Greek for ten years and cudgelling my brain to bring it all back was an enormous strain. However, I was helped greatly by the collaboration of another officer who had studied Greek at Oxford' (Bell 81).

in his memoir John Boulter indicates the ways in which languages were alternated without regard for the correct grammatical structures of any or all of them: 'one strung the words together in a literal translation' (n.pag.). This approach opposes the large body of analyses into code-switching that suggest that it is a phenomenon that usually occurs 'at points in discourse where the juxtaposition' of two languages will 'not violate the syntactic rules of either' (Poplack 217). However, these analyses are generally undertaken on stable and fully proficient multilingual populations. POW existence would fall into neither of these categories but the use of a form of 'code-switching' to differentiate between the different contexts, activities and conversational participants was still prevalent in the POW camps on Sumatra. My evidence for this is based on written accounts rather than oral recordings and therefore requires some caution but, nonetheless, where 'code-switching' is incorporated into memoirs over fifty years following repatriation (and also occurs in a contemporaneous camp diary), I think this is indicative of its social significance in relation to the POW experience.

Within POW narratives, the use of 'code-switching' indicates the designation of activities, social roles and power relations involved in camp existence. The Japanese language signified the enslavement of POWs, and therefore Japanese words were used only in reference to working routines and orders from guards (*tenko* – roll call;¹²⁵ *speedo* – intense working periods;¹²⁶ and *yasume/yasmé* – rest/break¹²⁷). Conversely, Malay terms were reserved for domestic camp routines and especially those involving the preparation of food or cleaning: 'food was almost universally the Malay word makan' (C Thompson 187) and many specific foodstuffs

125 Examples of the use of *tenko* include: 'A normal day comprised the following tenkos or counts: 1) early morning tenko in the dawn after we had taken our food; 2) working party tenko inside the camp; 3) tenko as the camp guards handed us over to the working party guards; 4) division into parties and issuing with tools when each section was counted; 5) tenko after the trip to the job; 6) tenko after our half hour lunch break; 7) tenko when work was finished; 8) tenko of tools back at station; 9) tenko by working party Japs; 10) tenko by camp guards before being allowed into camp' (C Thompson 159). 'Always after Tenko, the last counting of the day, group of men would sit around in the near dark, talking, mostly about food' (Robson 56); 'the unfortunate recipient might lose whatever work tool he was carrying. This spelt trouble when the train arrived at the Working Location, & there took place a "Tool Tenko" (Smith 75); 'I suffered the usual tenko, but then had to wait around until the purchases were sorted out. I dashed away as soon as I could, and got to my hut' (Fitzgerald, *If You See* 61).

126 For an example of the use of *speedo*: 'The Nips had one thing in mind however and that was that the whole thing had to be completed quickly. Thus evolved the word "Speedo", their version of "hurry up" the most used word in their vocabulary' (Robson 49).

127 For the use of *yasume/yasmé* see: 'A "yasme" spent all morning on our beds as the bugs have been so bad the last few nights that I've hardly been able to sleep' (Parsons 16 February 1945); 'A yasme and not before time, it is ages since we had a day off and we all needed it badly; (Parsons 1 April 1945); 'He would allow us three men to carry away to the track saying when finished "all men Yasume" meaning that the cubic metre dug out and carried away would complete our days work' (J Saunders, *Journey* 181); 'The army chaplain would attend to boiling water in a 40 gallon drum in readiness for the meal time of the occasional yasume (break) during our working hours' (Surr 38).

and dishes were also denoted by their Malay terms (nasi,¹²⁸ sambal¹²⁹). Understanding the motivations for this form of 'code-switching' is helpful in explaining why these terms are employed within the writings of former-POWs many decades later. As Blom and Gumpertz identified in their examination of the linguistic choices of a small polyglot community in Norway, the 'context in which one of a set of [linguistic] alternatives is regularly used becomes part of its meaning' (88). Consequently, it follows that when the term is 'then employed in a context where it is not normal', (so for example in a memoir written by a former POW, fifty years after repatriation), the usage of the term 'brings in some of the flavour of this original setting' (88). The former POW who writes a memoir is investing his narrative with a significance that is specific to the language and culture of the camp of which he is writing. When, in their memoirs, former POWs choose to adopt Malay or Japanese vocabulary, they are invoking 'the flavour' of their captivity and recalling directly the context in which these words lived.

But what of the 'struggle' of, and for, discourse? In the POW camps on Sumatra, from the start of captivity in March 1942, language was used directly by camp guards as a tool to subjugate the men who had fallen captive to them.¹³⁰ As soon as POWs arrived in the camps, 'from all time, all commands were given in Japanese' (Goulding, *Interview with IWM*) and 'enforced ruthlessly' (Brewer, *Memoir* 103). Thus, roll calls were 'done in Japanese, the drilling too' (Fitzgerald, *A Day* 4). It was imperative, Goulding recalls, to learn quickly 'Japanese military commands and also numbering', for an innocent misunderstanding made by a POW could lead to a guard 'really beating him up very very hard indeed' (Goulding, *Interview with IWM*). This is corroborated by Baxter, who says in his oral history interview with IWM that 'the only Japanese we could speak, or most of us anyway,

128 Nasi is rice. For examples of its use see: 'A nasi-goreng for supper, very good in spite of an almost complete lack of ingredients' (Parsons 5-6 May 1945); 'Part of our feast [at Christmas 1944] was nasi kuning, rice coloured a bright yellow with saffron, the yellow colouring of curry' (C Thompson 175).

129 Sambal is a spice-paste used to flavour dishes. For its use, see, : Off work but also off rations which is the devil as there was a sambal with a little pork in it for tiffin and obi cayou, meat sambal for supper! All I got was some clear soup and greens water (Parsons 31 December 1944); 'Meat and coconut sambal for supper' (Parsons 9 April 1945); 'a peanut sambal with bits of fried leek and offal cut up in it, all in all I think the nicest meal that I've had for ages' (Parsons 22 May 1945); 'drew breakfast and then the other two meals, rice and a very tasty dry coconut-trassi sambal' (Parsons 24 July 1945).

130 Although out of the scope of my project, Japanese was also enforced as the language of internment camps (containing over 100,000 Dutch citizens) and of the local population across the Netherlands East Indies. The Japanese occupation of the Netherlands East Indies saw 'the process of 'Japanization' of the society...Every remnant of Dutch rule was banned from daily life. Batavia, the capital of the Dutch East Indies, was renamed Jakarta. Japanese became a mandatory subject in schools, despite the shortage of instructors in that subject. The use of Dutch was strictly prohibited. Even the calendar was changed – 1942 became 2602. Local time became Tokyo time, meaning that sunrise and sundown now occurred ninety minutes later'. (Krancher 6)

was when they used to do daily musters' (Baxter, *Interview with IWM*). This roll call happened several times each day:

And the only way they could do it was by Japanese guards standing in front of the line of troops and he'd go to the first one and say itchi, ni, san, shi, go, yoko, and you had to remember that, so what you did was each day, you'd try to stand in exactly the same place. If you were fourth in the line that day, you'd try and stay in fourth in line every day. And of course it was mucked up if somebody was sick and didn't turn up and of course the Japs used to go furious if you called out the wrong number, but we could all eventually number up to a hundred. Or ninety-nine, I couldn't go past ninety-nine. (Baxter, *Interview with IWM*)

As has been written from other theatres of captivity during the Second World War, when violence happened to man 'the violence', too, was 'inflicted upon language' (Levi 68). On Sumatra, because the Japanese did not speak English fluently, language became a tool through which to subjugate POWs – this was 'the only way they could do it' – and also to demean and punish if POWs made a mistake, with guards being 'furious if you called out the wrong number'.¹³¹ Of course, such control also implies resistance. The issue of commands and impositions of 'orders usually given' in a specific language (Baxter, *Interview with IWM*), opened up a 'space for linguistic returns' – that is, 'an opportunity for the subjected to retort and subvert' (Cole and Graham n.pag.).

In linguistic studies it has been found that one form of such resistance is 'the oppositional discourse' developed by subjected groups 'as a conscious alternative to the dominant or established discourse'. Such 'oppositional discourse' is sometimes referred to as an 'anti-language' (Mayr 22). This 'anti-language' typically sees a group of subject peoples using mutually recognisable terminology between its members, in order to denote the world around them. Crucially, the group will use

¹³¹ On repatriation, Fitzgerald writes that Japanese was still used to control the troops. 'As we crowded on to the prescribed area, we found our RIMU officer getting us in some sort of order. He did this by yelling commands with which we were all too familiar – IN JAPANESE! It worked, for in double quick time our little party of nineteen was standing to attention' (Fitzgerald, *Journey* 84). This account is unusual, and other examples to corroborate it have not been found. However, it remains an interesting representation of how the Japanese language was perceived by a former POW as being able to condition and control the behaviour of Allied troops once they were accustomed to hearing it, even after captivity had ended.

new terminology that excludes speakers of the dominant discourse. On Sumatra, we see that POWs developed their 'anti-language' slightly differently, since these men did not create a 'new' vocabulary (although it was new to many of them) but adopted phrases and words from the different languages in use around them. In the use of 'code-switching' – where Japanese was used only to respond to 'daily musters' or commands, and Malay for domestic processes – we see the clear designation and separation of working and living roles. In doing so, POWs made powerful statements of resistance by embedding them within the 'contextual overtones' of each word (for example, by creating a domestic world that was expressed through the Malay language, POWs developed roles for themselves that went beyond those related to labouring for the Japanese).

So we can see that a multitude of power relations were negotiated through the unspoken 'contextual overtones' within camp discourse. These revolve around the maintenance of a hierarchy of interpersonal relationships between POWs and guards, the officers and other ranks, fellow campmates, and between POWs and the local natives who were prepared to barter with them.

Communicating the 'untranslatable'

Salman Rushdie, in his novel *Shame*, explores ideas of language and the importance of 'untranslatable' words in the formation of a society and its language (104). To paraphrase Rushdie, to 'unlock' this camp society it is necessary to look more closely at its 'untranslatable words' (104). That is to say, no literal translation or close reinterpretation can convey the nuances that are contained within a single word or phrase in its original context and moment of utterance. What is most 'untranslatable', then, is not a word itself but the culture, the community and the 'contextual overtones' that are embedded within, and represented by, that word. This presents challenges for historians and family researchers attempting to uncover and recover (translate and interpret) the memories and experiences of former POWs. Even in-depth knowledge of the literal translations of Japanese, Malay and Dutch will be unlikely to enable cross-cultural, inter-generational communication of the original context of the camp itself. In translation, something is always lost.

The *lingua franca* of Sumatra during the period of Japanese rule was Malay (the Indonesian language spoken today – Bahasa Indonesia – is a standardised version of the Malay dialect). Some POWs such as John Parsons and John Hedley had been living and working in Malaya on rubber plantations prior to the war and

had developed knowledge of languages other than English, such as Malay and Tamil, at least to some extent, since 'all planters had to take an exam in the Tamil language...so we all knew a bit of Tamil and we all knew a spattering of the local lingo Malay' (Hedley, *Interview with IWM*).

Former POWs provide translations of foreign language terms within their life-writing, generally in parentheses or using brief explanations.¹³² Johns Parsons offers definitions for foreign language terms in the transcription of his diary, which he made thirty years after release. In his original diary, the definitions and translations are not given, signalling that using the terms in the camps had become natural to him at the time. For example, on 3 December 1944, Parsons 'Had mashed obi rombat¹³³ for breakfast but there were a lot of bad pieces in it'; or on 16 February 1945, a 'yasme¹³⁴ spent all morning on our beds as the bugs have been so bad the last few nights that I've hardly been able to sleep'; and on 18 March 1945, 'we cleaned out a food store and six of us were given about 150 lbs of trassi'.¹³⁵ This can be explained in part by the fact that Parsons was working on rubber plantations in Malaya before entering the Federated Malay States Volunteer Force (FMSVF) – and so the Malay language was already impressed upon him. Yet still, there is no active resistance on his part to using these terms within his writing. This is significant since resistance to language change tends to continue much longer in written compared to spoken forms (Fishman 61). Being contemporary to the construction of the Sumatra Railway, Parsons's use of Malay and Japanese terms within his diary exemplifies how these terms were an 'untranslatable' part of the experience.

One of the most socially significant 'untranslatable words' in POW camp life is *kongsi* – 'a short word', Rushdie could well have written about it, 'but one containing encyclopaedias of nuance' (33).¹³⁶ Those nuances in *kongsi* tell of the bonds that developed between POWs as a 'mutual protection group':

132 For example, Fitzgerald writes: 'the Jap said "Barang unka", which meant we should bring our bags' (If You See 56) and Smith explains, 'Instead of picks & shovels they issued "chunkles". These are a type of pick-cum-spade, where the spade portion is fixed at right angles to the shaft' (89); Boulter remembers that, 'Ubie kayu leaves were bitter flavoured and hard to digest, kayu means wood. Despite our hopes we never received the potatoes only the leaves for our rations' (139).

133 Sweet potato

134 Rest period

135 Shrimp paste

136 Rushdie wrote this in reference to the Urdu term *sharam*, 'for which this paltry 'shame' is a wholly inadequate translation' – a translation that did not take into account 'embarrassment, discomfiture, decency, modesty, shyness, the sense of having an ordained place in the world, and other dialects of emotion for which English has no counterparts' (33).

KONGSIES – In my experience loners were a rare breed in the camps. Instead, the general practice was for two, three or more men to form their own little mutual protection group called a Kongsie, the meaning of witch [sic] is a “small combine”. The group pooled its resources and each member took the others “for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health”, an arrangement which, undoubtedly, ensured the ultimate survival of many prisoners. (Lee 11)

The reference that Lee makes to the traditional Christian marriage vows – ‘for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health’ – highlights the domestic emphasis placed upon the *kongsi* ‘arrangement’. This ‘arrangement’ made by POWs to pool together their meagre ‘resources’ was a physical necessity for ensuring ‘ultimate survival’. The *kongsi* was a small group – two or three men – who helped each other survive the tough monotony of POW life. In his memoir, Claude Thompson defines *kongsi* as meaning ‘company’, but the activity of the *kongsi* represented a great deal more than this translation manages to convey (162). In the camps, Thompson says, the *kongsi* ‘shared everything’. The ‘extra spoonful of rice’ one of them might have purloined was shared with the other members of his *kongsi*. If one member was sick in camp he would – if capable – clean living areas, mend clothing or perhaps cook a morsel of food or brew a hot drink for when others came back from labouring on the railway line (162).

This provision of mutual support served as a psychological boost to the POWs, as much as it did a physical necessity. Thompson, writing in 1996, could ‘still remember the joy of a hot cup of coffee or tea when I came back exhausted’ (162). This small offering was an acknowledgement from another man that he empathised with the feeling of returning to a sparse POW camp after many hours on the railway line. It was a warming comfort for a ‘shivering’ body ‘exhausted’ from jungle toil. It served as a reminder to a man that another person ‘did [his] best’ by him for as long as their arrangement stayed in place (C Thompson 162).¹³⁷ The *kongsi*, then, represented a great deal more than ‘company’. Without that

137 The *kongsi* was, after all, an arrangement that did not always succeed or end happily. When he was sick in Palembang, Harold Goulding overheard his *kongsi* ‘mate’ trying to obtain his personal belongings in the belief that Goulding would not survive his illness: ‘lying there like that and hearing my property being disposed of before I was even gone made me very, very angry’. Inevitably, ‘I changed mates, which could be done by mutual agreement (i.e. my saying ‘****’ off, you ‘****’ and his reply, ‘You too, mate!’ This was the POW equivalent of a judge awarding a decree nisi, made absolute)’ (Goulding, *Yasmé* 2).

connection and 'partnership' Thompson did not believe that he, nor his *kongsi* partners, 'would have made the grade and come out alive' (162). The few lines that Thompson writes – the contents of which I have repeated here – is the only reference that he makes within his memoir to his *kongsi*. Yet, it was one of the most significant factors of his POW experience that helped him to 'come out alive'. The *kongsi* was precious. It was also 'untranslatable' as an experience and a bond, and those 'untranslatable' connections between men were signified by the word that came to be 'untranslatable' itself.

The idea of the *kongsi* in the camps was closely related to the *kampongs* of Malaya: local communities that are founded on the principles of mutual support and reciprocal cooperation. In the foreign language vocabularies that are listed in the notebooks of John Sharples, for example, *kampong* is given no corresponding translation in English or Dutch – indicating that the *kampong* was, for Sharples, a notion that remained 'untranslatable' (n.pag.). Fitzgerald provides a translation in his memoirs: 'We did see a few kampongs (villages), but they were quite small and looked very rural' (*If You See* 57). 'Villages' is not, though, an adequate translation of the bonds that were formed among the members of individual kampongs. Parsons, in his diary, noted 'a few blokes were taken along to an old kampong to gather leaves'¹³⁸ (28 March 1945), and following liberation, how he had travelled 'into the kampong and bought 1 kilo of nice looking fish' (5 September 1945). In his analysis of the language, behaviours and customs of the Javanese and Balinese peoples in the 1950s and thus, not too distant from the Japanese occupation of the Netherlands East Indies, anthropologist Clifford Geertz identified a culture of mutual cooperation, or the 'joint bearing of burdens' (211). Local communities are 'intricate institutions', Geertz states, that are 'culturally charged and fairly well indefinable' but that are based upon 'reciprocal assistance' and littered with the 'symbols of the deep interfusion of things' (211). This 'joint bearing of burdens' resonates powerfully with the reciprocal arrangements that existed among the members of a *kongsi* within a POW camp.

Thompson's belief in the power of the *kongsi*, then, was not unwarranted and nor was it unusual. Jim Surr writes that his 'companion', a man named Tindle,¹³⁹ died from the effects of dysentery and malaria in April 1945 in the hospital in camp

¹³⁸ Likely to refer to vegetables/greens to supplement the rice, since in the same diary entry, Parsons records that 'still no rations come in' (28 March 1945).

¹³⁹ Leading Aircraftman Roland Henry Curtis Tindle, 605 Squadron RAF; became POW on Java, 20 March 1942. Tindle died on 8 April 1945 and is buried at the Commonwealth War Graves cemetery in Jakarta, at Plot 1.E.21. See CWGC, 'Jakarta War Cemetery', www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/2014900/Jakarta%20War%20Cemetery; accessed 2 February 2014.

2 on the railway. As Tindle's 'only companion', Surr 'inherited his personal belongings, which consisted of his ring, photographs and kit bag with a few toilet instruments' (41). Despite his intentions to return the photographs and ring to Tindle's relatives 'if and when I got home', Surr was also an inhabitant of camp 2 and therefore unfit for work and could not earn his pay. Eventually Surr sold Tindle's belongings, including the ring, to acquire money for additional rations. In Surr's view the *kongsi* had made the ultimate sacrifice: 'I always think Ron had to die that I might live, because if I had not been left with his possessions and being unable to work I would not have survived' (41). The *kongsi* meant survival, psychological and physical – and it is this 'partnership' and connection that the men came to 'still remember' and foster, many years following liberation.

After a short time, those of us who did return discovered we were missing something. We were missing the comradeship that existed in our POW days. We started an ex-POW organisation known as FEPOW. We have clubs and associations throughout the country where we still meet to this day – not to look at the horror side of it, but to keep the comradeship going and also to look after the welfare and to help our less fortunate colleagues who are still suffering from their experiences in the Far East. (Payne, *A Part of the Life* 22)

Burgeoning from the sense of 'partnership' and 'comradeship' in the camps, local Far Eastern Prisoners of War (FEPOW) clubs were established across the United Kingdom – ultimately represented by the National Federation of FEPOW Clubs and Associations, which was formed in 1951. The spirit of the *kongsi* – traces of all that went unsaid but was embedded into the discourse of the camps – continued, and with a small number of these clubs still in operation, still 'meet to this day'.

Romushas

The term from the Far Eastern camps that is most burdened with its context and its history is the Japanese word *romusha* – directly translated as 'labourer'. As with *kongsi*, such a translation does not suffice in conveying the meaning of what it meant to become a romusha. In the context of the prison camps across the Far East, romushas were not mere labourers. They were native forced labourers, predominantly from Java. They were slave labourers living and working in

conditions that were far more deprived and brutal than those suffered by Allied POWs. Approximately 120,000 romushas were conscripted onto the Sumatra Railway alone.¹⁴⁰ Although some initial estimates following the end of the war placed the death toll of romushas on the Sumatra Railway at 25,000 (Neumann and van Witsen 26), the most recent research places this figure over three times higher at 80,000, an attrition rate of just over 80 per cent.¹⁴¹

Within POW narratives, romushas are generally referred to as 'coolies':¹⁴²

Very fortunately for our people, the initial track preparation had been carried out ahead by coolies, many of whom were forcibly transferred from Java. What was seen of them indicated that they were far worse off than we, and thousands must have died.
(Fitzgerald, *A Day* 10)

This was not so 'fortunate' for the 'coolies' themselves. Fitzgerald's passage does suggest that little awareness existed among POWs as to the fate of the romushas – 'what was seen of them' just 'indicated that they were far worse off', but it was not possible to know for sure. Fitzgerald was able to surmise in the 1990s that from 'what was seen' in the 1940s, 'thousands must have died'. The 'what was seen', however, has remained relatively unspoken, even in comparison to the little recorded history of the POWs on the Sumatra Railway. References to romushas in POW narratives are generally brief – 'the conscripted coolies', Robson mentions, 'were used for making preliminary clearing work, they were very unorganised in looking after themselves and later died in their thousands' (49). Fitzgerald writes of the 'coolies' aboard the ill-fated *Junyo Maru* (*If You See* 57), and notes that 'many more coolies had been involved' than POWs in the construction of the Sumatra Railway (80). The term romushas itself is rarely used. In a rare example, Munro says of his arrival at camp 4:

140 It is estimated that over 4 million romushas were forced into labour under the Japanese. 'In a territory extending from Burma all the way to New Caledonia, they were put to work under unbearable conditions and died in enormous numbers...and their nameless graves dot a large portion of Southeast Asia'. (Krancher 6 – 7)

141 This recent figure was based on data obtained by Hovinga from the Netherlands Forces Intelligence Service (NEFIS), the Netherlands East Indies Red Cross (NIRK), and British military reports.

142 'Coolie', originating from the Hindu term, *kuli*, invokes the colonial relationships between the troops who had become POW labourers and the communities who were indigenous slave labourers on Sumatra: 'coolies' were still, from the perspective of the POWs, communities to be subjugated even if they were. Denoting the imperial hierarchies to which the POWs, even during their own captivity, still referred, on liberation some labelled themselves as 'white coolies' ('Railroad of Dead Men' n.pag). A recent book by Mark Felton examining the captive experiences of Senior Officers including General Percival is entitled *The Coolie Generals*.

Our new home consisted of numerous bamboo huts about 100 feet long, with communal sleeping benches on each side of a central walkway. These huts had been built by 'romushas' – press ganged young Javanese slaves – 25,000 of whom would die and be buried in unmarked graves. (Munro 10)

Munro's figure of 25,000 is likely to have come from reading Neumann and van Witsen's study, and Munro's definition of romushas – 'press ganged young Javanese slaves' – better reflects history than the literal translation of 'labourer'. At times, POWs would hear of the 'appalling state of the coolies' who were working further up the line – so 'appalling' were the sanitary conditions for romushas that even though they were billeted separately, Boulter claims that just 'coming up to their camp and having to pass it daily' would have 'dire consequences' for the health of POWs' (143). He says nothing of the health of the romushas themselves.¹⁴³ As POWs arrived at Padang from Java in May 1944, Robson found 'death...in the dull eyes of the natives who filled the outside of the compound...in the coughs that racked the skin and bones that were their bodies. In the excreta, which lay around in the dirt, with blood suspiciously colouring it' (42). The sight, smell and sound of those bodies left the POWs appalled by the 'dirt covered shells of men' that the natives had become, and 'their women, just as thin just as dirty' (43).

In 1943, romushas had been sent to begin the excavations for the Sumatra Railway, approximately one year before any POWs arrived at Pakanbaroe. POWs worked along 'a track that had been scraped, literally scraped out of the earth, by natives and our forward parties, in front of us' (Robson 49). Jack Saunders wrote that following the death of a prisoner at camp 3, the body would be buried 'at a convenient spot nearby, and usually near a very tall tree' (J Saunders, *Journey* 180). Saunders remembers that as part of the burial rites that the POWs performed for their fallen comrades 'we would get a fairly large board and write the name of

143 POWs did have some contact with indigenous populations on Sumatra. This generally related to bartering and trade. Robson recalls that 'natives could bring in dried fish, eggs, fruit, coffee beans, tobacco etc. all of it very dear' (63). Surr writes that trading occurred 'while taking a rest on the working party...[after slipping] into the jungle as though we were going to evacuate our bowels' (39). Instead, POWs would 'negotiate with the natives' in the jungle to buy and sell personal belongings and food (39). The risk was great, and brutal punishments were meted out by the guards 'for being caught trading with the natives in the jungle at each side of the track' (38).

the person on it and got a Native Coolie to climb up the tree and nail the board across the tree – it could then be seen from quite a distance away' (180). These were not the only tasks that the 'native coolies' carried out for the POWs. When the river overflowed, a 'gang of native coolies' were sent 'to build new huts for us' (204). These huts did not provide full protection from the elements, since 'the Nipps reduced the supply of materials to the local native builders, so that in the heat of the day, the sun penetrated the many gaps in the roof' and when the rain came it was 'falling on occupants and bedding' (Fitzgerald, *A Day 2*). Yet, these huts will have been far more sanitary and spacious than anything the 'native coolies' experienced for themselves.

On the return to base camp at Pakanbaroe at the end of the war, Claude Thompson noted that the 'dilapidated atap huts' at camp 5 were still standing, 'and it looked as if it was occupied, probably by natives' (199). His assumption is more than likely correct. The situation for romushas at the time of the Japanese surrender in August 1945 was already dire – in the confusion and threat of an uprising of local insurgents fighting for a free Indonesia, finding aid for romushas, thousands of whom required urgent medical care, was a major – and politically fraught – challenge. The dominant discourse of Far Eastern captivity is one of an experience that was suffered by white Allied troops only. Nonetheless, interest in the story of the romushas continues to grow (Banning; Kratoska). It is a story that requires and deserves much more consideration than I can give here, but in ensuring that this work does not contribute to a further silencing of their plight, it is necessary to place them as part of the enduring and 'untranslatable' discourse of the Sumatra Railway.

The role of the camp interpreter

In 1988, in his mid-sixties, Walter Raymond Smith – known as Ray to his friends – took 'a most beautiful' trip to the Far East and on his return home he 'put Typewriter to Paper' and decided to 'record the story of my earlier visit to that area of the World, under very different circumstances!' (1). Those 'different circumstances' saw Smith become a POW on Java in March 1942, before being transported to Sumatra in May 1944 as part of the first cohort of POWs to labour on the Railway. However, it would transpire that construction work was not to be Smith's only duty whilst he was on Sumatra.

Having initially been based at camp 1, and then camp 2, in July 1944 Smith was told by Wing Commander Davis (Commandant of all POWs on the Sumatra Railway), that he was amongst the party of men who had been chosen to make another move and set up the third camp along the line.

He [Davis] was very accommodating & I felt at ease with him. The conversation (which I will never forget) went something like this – “I understand that you speak Japanese”. I was “stunned” & replied to the effect that I had been “helping” when there had been trouble out on the Railway Line. I tried to emphasise that I did not speak Japanese. He went on to explain that No.3 Camp was about to be set up ... & that he wished to have an ‘all-British’ administration instead of the customary Dutch & for that reason he required an English Interpreter. The suggestion to say the least was ridiculous. He was quite serious in his intentions & concluded the interview by saying “I’ll give you seven days to think it over”. I went away a very worried person. (Smith 80)

After one week Smith attended a second interview with Davis and informed the Wing Commander that, having thought over the proposition, he was not going to accept the position of ‘English Interpreter’. Davis’s response was unequivocal: ‘you are going’ (80). It was a decision that caused Smith a great amount of anxiety and to lose sleep both before and after he had left for ‘No.3 Camp’ – a move that was made on 14 July 1944, to a camp set up ‘in the sweeping curve of a wide river’ (80).¹⁴⁴ In his capacity as ‘Official Interpreter’, Smith was no longer required to go out on working parties to the railway every day (80). Instead, he was expected to be on call at all times in case there was a requirement for interpreting services between guards and POWs. Accordingly, Smith’s ‘first brush with the Japs’ came quickly (80). On his second day in camp 3 Smith was required to interpret proceedings at the disciplinary hearing of another British POW who, whilst stealing sugar from Japanese supplies, had been caught by the guards. The POW placed under questioning was Jack Saunders.

Saunders was also in the group that had moved to camp 3, but he required some dental treatment and this could only be carried out by the dentist who was located back at base camp 1 in Pakanbaroe. As this necessitated a specific trip being made down the railway line, Saunders describes how the Japanese would wait until a small group of approximately six POWs needed to visit the dentist, and then, when one of the lorries was visiting camp 1, this group would be taken along too. Following his treatment Saunders made the return journey to camp 3, sitting on

¹⁴⁴ This river was the Kampar Kanan, which would breach its banks more than once, causing serious flooding and forcing camp 3 to move to higher ground on 19 November 1944 (Neumann and van Witsen 171).

sacks of rice and 'other foodstuffs' in the back of the lorry (J Saunders, *Journey* 188). Some of those 'other foodstuffs' were sacks of sugar, and Saunders realised that this was one of the sacks upon which he sat. 'The temptation', Smith tells his readers, 'was too great' for Saunders (Smith 81).

I hadn't tasted sugar for a long time, possibly two years, so I naturally thought that this was too good a chance to miss... So, looking towards the cabin of the lorry, I pushed one hand into the sack of sugar. After opening the flap of my side pack and put some into it, I did this several times, I suppose when I decided I had enough, there was probably half a pound of sugar in the bag. I then fastened the bag and did my best to look innocent. (J Saunders *Journey*, 188)

The 'innocent' look was not a successful tactic: one of the guards travelling in the lorry with the POWs had seen Saunders moving the sugar into his pack (J Saunders, *Journey* 188). Smith's story slightly differs here, as he tells of the lorry driver noticing sugar 'in the folds of [Saunders's] tunic & thereupon searched him & found the booty' (Smith 81). Whichever is the more accurate, both memoirs agree that if Saunders 'didn't have toothache before, then he was left after a beating, with some more aches & pains' (Smith 81). As Saunders recalled:

[The guard] knocked me down several times telling me to get up after each time and I can well remember after a short time, being so punch drunk I thought there were about five guards hitting me... After going unconscious, I was revived with a dousing of water and after a minute or so he would start again. (J Saunders, *Journey* 189-190)

Following the beating, Saunders walked back into camp 3, chastising himself for stealing the sugar and also wondering whether there would be any further consequences. He knew that on arrival into camp that the incident would be reported by the guard to the Japanese Officer, Lieutenant Nagai. At this point, Smith – in his role as interpreter – was sent for by Nagai who instructed him 'to command all camp occupants to "fall in" in front of the barracks' (Smith 81).

This punishment 'in front of the barracks' seems to have come later in the day, after an initial consultation with Nagai, because Saunders remembers a discussion

happening indoors between Captain Armstrong (the British Officer in charge of camp 3), Lieutenant Dallas¹⁴⁵ (who had witnessed the incident and was also camp Adjutant) and 'Smith our young interpreter' lined up in front of Nagai's table (J Saunders, *Journey* 191). Sat behind the table, Nagai toyed with a revolver throughout the conversation (191). Saunders writes that it was eventually agreed between Nagai and Armstrong that he would go without extra rations for one month, as well as carry out additional work inside camp every morning and night, before and after the usual working party out on the railway construction. Nagai's revolver was not fired, but Saunders was required to undergo the punishment 'in front of barracks', as Smith recalled. At the evening roll call, 'the guards brought out a table and stood it in front of the prisoners and then they brought a chair from the office and stood it on the table' (J Saunders, *Journey* 194). Saunders then had to stand on the chair and, 'through the interpreter' his campmates were told 'to look at this "English Thief". Here was a man who had abused the Japanese hospitality and disgraced his friends by stealing sugar' (194). This carried on until the roll call was over.

The discussion between the Japanese and British Officers, and Saunders, is summarised in English in Saunders's memoir with a brief acknowledgement that 'as this was all spoken through the interpreter, I understood everything that was said' (*Journey* 192). 'Everything that was said' by the interpreter, however, was not necessarily 'everything that was said' by Nagai. Saunders's confidence in the ability of Smith to translate the meaning of the conversation is in amusing contrast to Smith's account that, as the interpreter, he 'understood' rather less and 'didn't comprehend one single word' spoken by Lieutenant Nagai (Smith 81).

When he [Nagai] paused, I turned to Lt Dallas & said to him, "I don't know what he is going on about, but I know the subject". I then extemporised by saying to Dallas "It is wrong to steal from the Imperial Japanese Army". This he repeated to the assembly. After a while (whilst wondering when Nagai would stop) I found myself repeating what I had said earlier. (Smith 81)

¹⁴⁵ Lieutenant Ronald James Grant Dallas, 3RD The Kings Own Hussars; became POW aged 20 at Tasikmalaya on Java, 1 April 1942.

That the men who mediated between the Japanese and British are referred to as the camp 'interpreter' rather than the camp 'translator' is indicative of the way in which they worked.¹⁴⁶ The use of 'understand' in Saunders's memoir and 'comprehend' in Smith's signals much the same point: Smith's role was one that went beyond a literal translation of words from one language into another. Instead, Smith's role was to attempt to 'understand' and to 'comprehend' the words being spoken by the guards. He needed to interpret the meaning beyond those words, interpret the nuances within them, and communicate them as best that he could to his fellow POWs. He did not always 'know what [the guard was] going on about', but he definitely needed to 'know the subject'.

Linguists tend to use the three terms – understand, interpret, translate – interchangeably,¹⁴⁷ but the subtle differences in approach implied by these activities are essential depending upon the context of their application. In POW memoirs of the Sumatra Railway, the 'camp interpreter' is not *just* translating Japanese words into English words. By necessity the interpreter had to 'extemporise' (Smith 81). For Smith to meet the needs of his audience (both Japanese and English) it was crucial to 'know the subject' and convey the meaning – by which I mean the significance – of the words, rather than repeat the specific words in a different language. First and foremost Smith needed to ensure that the other POWs understood - 'It is wrong to steal from the Imperial Japanese Army' – even if this was not the exact word-for-word translation of Nagai's speech. As Michael Billig has pointed out in his analysis of the language of war, in order 'to understand something dangerously unfamiliar and seemingly incomprehensible, familiar categories of meaning have to be applied' (xiii) – and it was these 'familiar categories of meaning' that Smith needed to convey to his campmates. Smith's interpretation of Japanese communications then assisted his fellow POWs in giving the guards what they hoped would be an acceptable response. For example, he knew that it 'did not help a POW if I told him that his chances of "getting off" were small, & hopelessness spread over his face' (Smith 86). Instead, Smith needed to manage the reaction of a POW by carefully choosing the meaning that he conveyed in his interpretation.

146 Henk Hovinga also adopts the term camp interpreter in reference to Dutch POWs Kraal, Visser and Simons who carried out translation in the camps, and in his book reports that interpreters were either idolised as saviours or mistrusted and regarded as 'a little too friendly with the Japanese' (Hovinga 346).

147 For detailed discussion on the differences between understanding, interpretation and translation, see Martinich 541-545.

Following the experience of Saunders stealing the sugar, Smith was determined to 'improve my knowledge of Japanese' and he received as a gift – from a Dutch interpreter who was working in camp 2 – a Japanese-English vocabulary book (81). However, he learned that any improvement in his 'knowledge of Japanese' was not as vital as his ability to interpret each situation in which his services were required. Smith's role was to mediate between the different facets of camp discourse: 'On every Official (& unofficial) Meeting between the Japanese Command & the Camp Leaders I had to be present' (86). Even when a second interpreter fluent in Japanese arrived at camp 3, Smith's attendance was still the 'preference' for the Japanese (86). He had developed what he referred to as 'the art' of interpreting'.

When having to give instant translation of a speech by an irate Japanese, there were times when I did not put the precise question to the "offending" POW. Instead I might say to him, "When I finish speaking, nod your head up & down". As the POW did so, then the Jap got his answer most quickly. (Smith 86)

Smith's situation was not unusual. In Palembang, the camp interpreter developed the skills of understanding 'the subject', condensing and interpreting for his campmates. James Cuthbertson¹⁴⁸ remembers that, during an incident when the camp resisted signing 'non-escape' forms and were subsequently assembled for punishment, a Japanese official 'went on for several minutes' (55).¹⁴⁹ Despite this announcement that was 'several minutes' in duration, the interpreter 'told us in two sentences what he had said; then the General spoke...for a further five minutes. Then the interpreter told us in three more short sentences what he had said' (55). So the 'art' of interpreting was well practiced in camps other than those on the Sumatra Railway, too.

148 Petty Officer James Cuthbertson, HMS *Repulse*; became POW aged 22 on Bangka Island, 2 March 1942.

149 The Japanese forced Allied POWs to sign a pledge not to attempt to escape from captivity, contravening the Geneva Convention; when POWs refused to sign these forms since they contradicted the Geneva Convention, severe punishments were given out by camp commandants. The Selarang incident at Changi was the most extreme of these incidents, in which at least 15,000 POWs were crammed into Selarang Barracks after they refused to sign the no-escape pledge. Selarang Barracks and its adjoining parade ground was designed to accommodate just 800 men and dysentery soon broke out. No toilet facilities were available since the Japanese cut off most of the water supplies; only one tap was put in use, from which men could collect drinking water. Four men were executed during the incident, which continued for three days before the men agreed to sign. It was an agreement that Allied Officers decided would be viewed as invalid by international communities, having been signed under duress (Peter Thompson 557 – 559).

Everything that was left unsaid during each consultation between guards and POWs needed to be assessed, interpreted, and then a decision made on how best a POW should respond: perhaps with a word of apology, or to 'nod your head up & down', or to be silent and await a further question. 'Without realising it', Smith recalls, 'I had branched into "applied psychology"' (86). Despite being the 'preference' among the Japanese, Smith was 'not really [in] an enviable position' in the camp, 'since by experience you knew that certain Japs did not trust you' (Smith 86). So, the role that Smith undertook was not just concerned with communicating Japanese orders to the POWs but in appeasing the guards too, to give 'explanations' on behalf of the POW – often in the knowledge that the POW was lying and that the guard was already suspicious – and to offer 'a twist of explanation' where this may help the POW avoid 'corporal punishment' (86). Smith had to anticipate and attempt to control the response of the POW to his interpretation. After all, a sign of 'hopelessness' was as risky to him as the interpreter as it was to the 'offending' POW (86). If the guards deemed the response unsatisfactory, Smith's abilities would be questioned and punished, also. When communications did not go smoothly, 'the one standing the nearest received the first whack and that was invariably the interpreter' (Hovinga 209).

Even when the case against the POW "failed", if the Jap was eager for revenge, he would still find a motive for severe punishment. In that case the POW would be inclined to blame the Interpreter for wrongly stating his case! Some "way out" POWs, although utterly mistaken, would believe that the Interpreter had "sided" with the enemy. Heaven forbid! (Smith 86).

Smith, then, was both interpreter and (mis)interpreted, giving him an ambiguous but authoritative role in mediating camp discourse. The key to his 'art' was expediency: of not giving 'instant translation' even when it was required. It was not even to interpret 'the precise question', but the context within which that question was being asked. So Smith needed to make quick judgements on the 'irate' nature of the Japanese, the 'question', the offence and the likely punishment. In a clear demonstration of the power of camp discourse, Smith represented the necessity to mediate between the dominant discourse and the 'anti-language' – between the controlling guards and the resisting POWs – and create a third discourse of expediency, extemporising and explanation.

'Words and things': transmitting a 'FEPOW' discourse

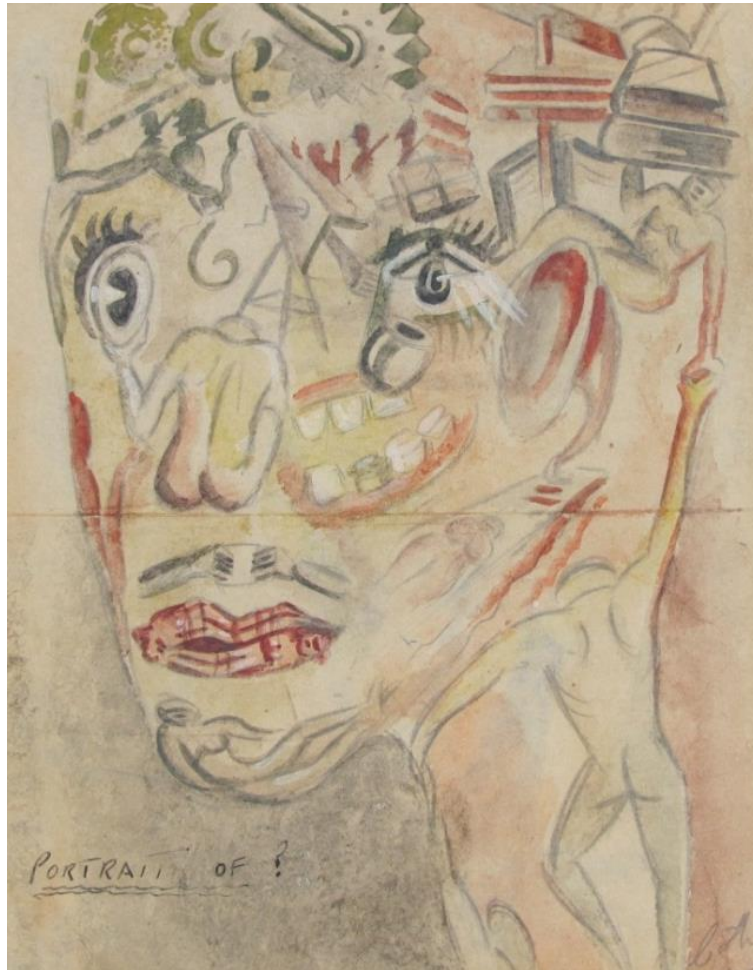


Figure 5: Charles Thrale. 'Executed for no apparent reason; a study of the mind or something'. 1942. IWM Art: 15417 101

Charles Thrale was a POW on the Burma-Siam Railway and following release, his drawings of camp life were exhibited throughout Britain from 1946 until the early 1960s. Thrale drew the picture above, 'Executed for no apparent reason', in 1942, its title a stark reminder of the futility and senselessness with which many POWs viewed the captive life, and the deaths, of their comrades. Although Thrale depicted the 'mind or something' of a man along the Burma-Siam line rather than on Sumatra, the drawing is a rare representation of how the different facets of captivity came to form the psychology, identity and the life of the men who endured it. As Thrale himself wrote of a second, similar piece of art portraying the contents of a POW's mind as he dug the grave of a campmate: 'It tells my story almost on its own, and it tells the story of us all' (Thrale, *The Valleys of the Shadow of Death* 8).

Given the comparable aspects of the two railways in terms of deploying the same Japanese engineers, working methods and conditions, Thrale's picture is a valuable means of accessing the 'unheard' memories of the collective experience of Far Eastern captivity, of seeing the 'unintelligible' and understanding the 'unseen translation' that took place among the men, by necessity, on a daily basis – and in reunions of the FEPOW clubs in later life. At the very top of the picture, the sharply drawn cog is a fascinating inclusion particularly since mechanised equipment was not used in any of the construction work –it was carried out manually, using the most primitive tools. This addition may perhaps be portraying the mechanical structures of the steam engines themselves, or be analogous with the workings of 'the mind' Thrale is depicting. If the latter is the case then the silhouettes of helmeted guards in the top centre, a line of them marching across his forehead with bayonets resting over their shoulders, become all the more oppressive: ever present, foremost and central to a POW's thoughts. Moving down the picture to the 'cheek' of Thrale's man, there is the gaping mouth exposing a bad tooth – signalling, I think, a painful memory of visiting the camp dentist – as Saunders did before stealing the sugar – a dentist who will have worked with no anaesthesia and tools as primitive as those used on the railway. The other features of the picture include a gramophone ear, acknowledging the importance of concert and music parties to camp morale, and the pipe emphasising the vital nature of tobacco to POWs. The cutlery resting against an empty plate to form the man's moustache reminds us of their need for, and lack of, food.

The man's throat, signifying his life, his breath, and his speech, is formed by the profile of another POW. Like all other bodies of POWs in the picture, this man standing in the throat is naked and – despite the thin fragility of his arms and the shadow of his ribcages on the side of his torso – he reaches up the neck of Thrale's POW firmly and strongly, claspng onto the outstretched arm of another POW who, lying prone, reaches down towards him. The symbolism is powerful: the *kongsi*, as this chapter has shown, was essential in keeping him alive and remains in his throat – vital to his life and to his speech. And then finally to the mouth which, with its criss-crossed pattern, looks as if it could be a barbed wire. It recalls more recent images of the stitched lips of refugees protesting against threatened deportation,¹⁵⁰ and the deep red mouth of Thrale's POW draws attention to itself with its bold

150 For example, the image of asylum seeker Abas Amini in Britain in 2003, with lips and eyelids sewn shut: www.standupforphotojournalism.org/100-Years/iranian-kurdish-asylum-seeker-abas-amini. Several incidents of the same nature have been reported in Australian detention centres over the last decade, the most recent involving an Iranian refugee in February 2012.

colouring and firm, strong lines. It tells us that language, speech and the telling of the story is vital, but the barbed wire brings dangers, and the powerful silence of words that are unable to escape.

Unlike the totality of the refugee's protest, there is an attempt in the half open mouth of Thrale's prisoner to speak. The partially parted lips of Thrale's POW do not hide the silence of the 'unintelligible' or the 'untranslatable', but boldly draw attention to everything that the closed half of his mouth leaves unsaid. Rather than painting a veil over silences, Thrale helps us acknowledge that POW discourse contains the 'repressive presence of what it does not say' (Foucault, *Archaeology* 28), remaining ever-conscious of the guards in the centre of the POW's mind.

The image created by Thrale compels us to do as Foucault suggests and look at both 'words and things' and identify 'the objects that language forms' (*Archaeology* 54). The objects that Thrale uses within his picture have been arranged carefully so that they form a new object, of the POW himself and the life he lived. At the top of his drawing, Thrale added a typed instruction to his audience that asked whether they were able to 'understand' rather than just 'read' his work. In doing so, he told them that 'the mind or something' of captivity in the Far East was to be found in the objects of camp life. It was, perhaps inevitably, a mind that remained 'unintelligible' to 'all and sundry': but for the men building each railway, it 'tells the story of us all'.

In the centre of Thrale's picture, making up the nose, is the hunched over body of another naked POW, back turned and holding up an eye of Thrale's. Perhaps he did not want to witness, but he also knew that he had to: whilst turning a back, and thereby condemning, the horror that he saw, Thrale's POW looks out with a stare that entreats his audience to 'read' and attempt to 'understand' everything that the half-open mouth – the 'untranslatable' parts of camp discourse – could not relate. In the words of T.S. Eliot, 'words strain/Crack and sometimes break' (172-3) and in these circumstances, grasping towards the 'things' – as I will explore in the following chapter – may help to fill in the gaps left by the 'untranslatable' and 'unintelligible' parts of the 'words'.

Chapter 4

The body biography of the Far Eastern POW

Whilst POWs on Sumatra began to lay the tracks of the railway, in Auschwitz Primo Levi dreamed of a railroad.¹⁵¹ The wagons that ran along Levi's railroad were those that arrived in and out of the camp on a daily basis bearing their cargo of human bodies, sombre reminders of the ever-changing population of Auschwitz. It was a recurring dream for Levi, invading the nights when he found himself 'between the unconscious and the conscious', and so the snoring of the person next to him would create the rumble of the wagons in his dream, a whistle from the work yard's nightshift morphed into the whistle of an engine (65). Accompanying Levi in this dream are his sister and a group of other people he is unable to identify. In his dream, Levi is telling this group of people his story; telling them about the whistle and the disturbance that his sleeping neighbour creates; he tells them about hunger, lice, being beaten and then ordered to clean up his own blood. Levi finds in this half-conscious vision, 'an intense pleasure' that is 'physical, inexpressible', at being at home and able to speak to his loved ones (66). Yet even though he is speaking in his dream, his listeners 'do not follow':

In fact, they are completely indifferent: they speak confusedly of other things among themselves, as if I was not there. My sister looks at me, gets up and goes away without a word. (Levi 66)

This indifference is unbearable for Levi and a 'desolating grief' is 'born' within him, a 'pain in its pure state', unmediated by the physical 'reality' of the world around him (66). He forces himself to wake fully, and yet finds his consciousness still plagued by the dream. He confides in another inmate of Auschwitz about this dream, and 'to my amazement...it is also his dream and the dream of many others'. But 'why does it happen?' asks Levi, 'Why is the pain of every day translated so constantly into our dreams, in the ever-repeated scene of the unlistened-to story' (66).

¹⁵¹ Far Eastern POWs began to construct the railroad on Sumatra in May 1944. Primo Levi was an inhabitant of Auschwitz for eleven months from February 1944, until January 1945.

I think the answer lies in the fact that Levi discovered that 'the pain of every day' needed to be 'translated'. In chapter 3 I established that the very *untranslatability* of camp discourse, is integral to the experience – and the representation of the experience – of wartime incarceration. Just as the literal translations for some of the terms used in camp were inadequate to the meanings that they held at the time, the meaning is rendered untranslatable within the narratives in which they appear. Readers and listeners external to the camps, like Levi's sister, cannot comprehend and therefore 'do not follow'. The challenges to the representation of captivity, I have thus far concluded, are not in the telling of the story *per se*, but in the thing that Levi feared the most: the 'unlistened-to story', and the shame caused by his family, indeed a member of his own generation – his sister – getting up and walking away from that story 'without a word'.

Indeed, Levi's difficulty lies not in his ability to tell his story – he does this beautifully – but to convey to his audience that he *wants* to tell it, and that it gives him comfort, an 'intense pleasure' to be able to do so. It is this pleasure that he finds 'inexpressible' through language and that is instead a 'physical' sensation that he finds himself unable to articulate to his listeners. In the process of telling his story, Levi is coherent. It is the act of his audience moving away that breaks the telling of his story and the continuity of the narrative. It is Levi's sister – not him – who remains silent, and it is Levi's audience – in receiving his narrative – that acts 'indifferent' and speaks 'confusedly', unable or unwilling to acknowledge the story that Levi is telling. As a result, his experience is left 'unlistened-to'. In becoming 'confused', the speech of Levi's audience can also be seen to undermine the hope and 'pleasure' that he had discovered in the very act of telling. It is the sort of speech which, in her essay 'The Aesthetics of Silence', Susan Sontag refers to as 'bad speech': a language that is 'unmoored from the body' and that has little (or even no) organic connection with the occasion or the place in which it is being used (11). In other words it is a language that remains 'indifferent' to the impetus for Levi's need to speak, and 'indifferent' to the freedom with which his audience are able to listen and to speak in return.

The affective impact of the story is mirrored in the bodies that Levi depicts. As Levi feels a 'physical' pleasure in the ability to speak, his sister offers a bodily gesture, too – standing up, walking away – in being unable to hear. By responding 'without a word', Levi's sister signals the 'inexpressible' experience of being the reader of such a personal, traumatic history. Indeed silence, as Sontag reminds us, is in itself a 'form of speech' (5). If the trauma lies in the transmission of the

narrative, than the response to that trauma is found in the affects that develop among and within listeners 'without a word'.

Whether it be the pleasure of the interlocutor, or the retreat of the listener, there is a bodily connection, then, between the representation of the ineffable and the response to that representation. That reaction – the standing up and walking away– is I think, driven by the sister's affective response to Levi's narrative. But her affect is displayed through her physical gestures and actions. In other words, the exteriority of the bodily response is the outward sign of an internalised, affective reaction to the narrative of violence. In her meditations on war, violence and mourning, Judith Butler calls for a greater 'bodily ontology' (*Frames* 2), meaning an awareness and interpretation of the physical reactions that take place within (and by), our bodies 'at moments of primary affective responsiveness' (*Frames* 34). These 'moments of...responsiveness' have prompted much recent critical debate (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*; Berlant; Sedgwick) and the skin – as the bodily surface upon which a response can be marked or viewed has received specific attention (Ahmed, *Thinking*). Jay Prosser has coined the term 'skin autobiography' to encapsulate the different modes through which the skin has been written ('Skin memory' 66). But what are the responses to those 'skin autobiographies' as they are read?

In second-generation narratives from the concentration camps of the Second World War, Eva Hoffman has written of a private, bodily language that emanated throughout the familial home – 'the past broke through in the sounds of nightmares, the idioms of sighs and illness, of tears and the acute aches that were the legacy...of the conditions my parents endured' (10). Likewise, Lisa Appignanesi writes that her mother's body 'remembers more than her mind', and Appignanesi can 'read more' from her mother's stares and postures 'than from her words' (7); for Appignanesi, the child adopts 'the texture' of such habits 'without knowing they are memory' (8). This 'texture' of memory, or textural memory, is embodied quite literally in the physical reactions and responses of the second generation, but also in the objects and papers (such as Thrale's artwork) that connects the happening-truth of the camp to the transmission of its story-truth. It is the proximity to a scarred surface, whilst simultaneously being at a distance historically from the cause of the scarring, which urges second-generation writers to explore the histories beneath the skin of the story. In doing so, second-generation narratives attempt to permeate the barrier that 'the skin of memory' can create between a parent and their offspring (Delbo 2). Indeed these narratives are replete with second-generation writers making physical connections to their familial past, the most overt of these being the

long journeys and international pilgrimages that many undertake in order to understand the impact of that history upon them.¹⁵²

In 'Executed for no apparent reason', reproduced at the end of chapter 3, one prominent symbol is repeatedly invoked by Charles Thrale: the body of the POW. But as my discussion on the *kongsi* showed, the individual body of one POW was dependent upon the collected bodies of the camp. Thus, the head of Thrale's prisoner is bodiless – as if 'executed' from the torso – with many of the structural outlines, facial features, and sensory receptors of the POW (the neck, side of the skull, eye, nose and ear) symbolised by the bodies of other prisoners. Thrale emphasises that where there may have been strength in the spiritual body of the *kongsi*, this was made up of the sinewy, skeletal and often bloody bodies of diseased and emaciated campmates. Indeed, Butler has identified that an individual's 'survivability' is dependent on 'the constitutive sociality of the body' (*Frames* 54), on a recognition of the 'interdependency' of the body on the bodies of others. This 'sociality of the body' is a fundamental driver for the gathering, function and endurance of the *kongsi*, both during incarceration and (as I will show later in chapter 5) in the post-war narrative of the social clubs and associations.

Rather than a 'skin autobiography', then, I offer what I term a 'body biography' of captivity. Through this I mean to encapsulate not just the happening-truth of the blight of tropical disease and the wounds of injury that were visible on the skin of the POW himself, but the story-truth, too, of the deeper affective response to that skin: how the captive body has been written and drawn by the men themselves, through to how those bodies have been read and written by others. Academic studies have examined masculinity in war (Bourke; Dawson; Hutchings; Roper), and the representation of masculinity within the photography of liberated Far Eastern POWs has received a little critical attention (Twomey). The medical situation in camps in the Far East has received a much greater amount of scrutiny, with studies published by both the medics in the camps (Dunlop) and those who have treated former POWs in tropical disease units since liberation, such as at Queen Mary's Hospital in Roehampton and the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (see Gill et al). Research has also been conducted into the medical ingenuity shown in the Far Eastern camps (Parkes, *Tins, Tubes and Tenacity*; Gillies 172-183). However, these investigations have not considered the affective

¹⁵² The bodily language of nightmares, and the affective response of the postmemorial pilgrimage, return later in this chapter and in chapter 5.

impact of those physical problems, nor the ways in which they came to shape the narratives told by men, and the memory and remembrances of their families.

The brutal physicality of Far Eastern incarceration pervades every narrative from former POWs – be they written or drawn – weaving ‘a tapestry of sadism and dysentery’ across the history of the camps (Shephard, ‘Clouded Homecoming’, n.pag.). There was the sound of the bugle for morning reveille that brought aching and tired bodies out of a fitful sleep into the start of another day’s hard, physical labour. There were the mechanised movements of ‘tired sagging bodies’ performing the same tasks for hours, and the trudge of the march to and from the camps (Robson 50). There were the bodies of guards, also suffering, but with the power, at any moment, to deliver pain and torment to the bodies of the POWs. There was the stench that came from bodies suffering with dysentery and rotting ulcers. And there were the dead bodies that lay waiting to be buried at the end of each working day, by funeral parties made up of the half-alive bodies of surviving comrades. But how did this physicality, this sensory overload of the camps, impact on the way in which that experience has been represented and remembered? How did the men view the starvation and brutalisation of their own bodies? And how did loved ones respond to those sufferings, when they were transported back to Britain from the Far East in late 1945?

‘Mirror, mirror’: accepting the POW body as one’s own

In writing ‘The Aesthetics of Silence’, Sontag was ruminating on the relationships between the artist and their audience(s), the artworks that are produced – often in a silent, meditative state – and the spectators who view those artworks often with a similar, silent meditation: a ‘ruptured dialogue’ that takes place between the storyteller and the audience, the artist and the spectator (3). The materiality of the art invokes an affective response within its viewer: a response that POW artists such as Thrale asked for when he challenged audiences to ‘read’ and ‘understand’ their work (chapter 3). Yet any early attempts by relatives to respond to the histories of the camps will have necessitated their engagement with contemporary public representations of events in the Far East. These were not, however, the cartoons and ‘campicatures’ that were produced by POWs in camp as a means to boost morale and survive psychologically (see later in this chapter), but the stories of extreme deprivation and suffering along the Burma-Siam Railway. The affect provoked among audiences was, as a result, intense (see chapter 5).

One of the earliest Far Eastern memoirs to be published was Russell Braddon’s *Naked Island*, published in 1952 and illustrated by Ronald Searle. *Naked*

Island details the Australian's experiences on the Burma-Siam Railway and at Changi, and Braddon was also a vociferous supporter of the former Far Eastern POWs' post-war claim for compensation from the Japanese, contributing a number of vehement articles to the UK's national press.¹⁵³

Braddon's memoir includes an especially vivid sequence that details the effects of tropical disease on the human body, and the primitive way in which these problems were treated in the camps. Sometimes, tropical ulcers developed from scratches whilst on working parties – ulcers that the POWs who were on the Sumatra Railway recall as being so deep and wide that the men 'could put a fist into' their wounds (Robson 59). To treat these ulcers, Braddon writes that a nursing orderly would 'dig his spoon firmly into the stinking pus until he had reached firm flesh...draw the spoon carefully down one side of the gaping wound and up the other' whilst the patients were 'not moving nor uttering more than a few small grunts' (Braddon, *Naked Island* 225). The silent stoicism with which Braddon saw his fellow campmates bear the pain of ulcer-cleaning led him to feel 'shame' at his own reaction, as he vomited or fainted each time that the 'small craters round my ankle bones' were scraped clean (225 – 226). Noting the 'grunts' of his campmates who are suffering from larger ulcers, Braddon refuses the urge with which, otherwise, he would have 'screamed with terror and with pain' (226). Both the scream and the grunt are indicative of another element of camp discourse that was untranslatable: the physical, 'inexpressible' pain of a body experiencing the process of degradation, a pain so great that words becomes superfluous and language is rendered meaningless. The 'grunts' of campmates increased to the 'scream' that Braddon wanted to make, his vomiting leads to an eventual loss of consciousness altogether. The world of the prisoner, beyond his own physical pain, has collapsed with him.

Bodily pain is so wholly contained within a physical being that, as Elaine Scarry argues in her powerful monograph on pain, it 'comes unsharably into our midst' (4). Since it is inexpressible through language, the bodily pain experienced by the POW therefore creates another layer of difficulty in enabling audiences to hear his story. Scarry's analysis of the way in which torture denies the victim the world beyond their own body, shows us that – in driving an individual to experience

¹⁵³ Examples of these articles include: Braddon, 'Man from infamous Jap prison replies to the £15 insult'; Braddon, 'Men bearing the scars of the "Death Railway" discuss question that sears the heart: Do you atone with a fiver? -or buy forgiveness with flowers?'; Braddon, 'Could you face the men who never returned?'; Braddon, 'They'll get you: Beware those Japs'; all of which can be found in Payne, private papers.

a sensation so 'incontestably and unnegotiably present' in their own body – pain is, for a listener, a reader, an 'elusive' phenomenon that cannot be known by them (4). To learn of another's pain is to doubt it. Aligning her work with the discourse of trauma, Scarry argues that there is no way for a listener to know with any certainty what that pain feels like: whilst it 'cannot be denied' by the sufferer, pain 'cannot be confirmed' by their witness (Scarry 4). And so, Primo Levi could not deny the stories of his beatings, but his sister was unable to acknowledge them; Leonard Williams begins to stutter and clear his throat, and his interviewer breaks the sequence of his story, as he tries to tell of his campmate being punished in the lock-up (chapter 2); Braddon cannot deny the pain of his own tropical ulcers, but nor can he confirm the pain of his campmates. It is Braddon's own admission that 'I shall never know the pain they bore' (*Naked Island* 225). This suggests that former POWs could tell the stories of pain from their experiences in captivity, but they could only do so 'unsharably'. That is, the pain could not be known outside of their own body, it could not be told to listeners – to families. All they were able to describe is what Scarry terms 'pre-language', which is, through the articulation of primitive sounds such as grunts and screams, the very 'failure of language' to enable an individual to express the physical fact of pain (10).

If language fails with pain, so does the ability to tell that pain to others. Instead of describing the pain that they felt, representations of the Far Eastern POW experience are full of the bodies that experienced pain. Writing of beri-beri, a disease caused by malnutrition and specifically a lack of Vitamin C, Boulter describes how men's 'legs filled with the water, their bodies bloated, faces grew puffy...Then even after daily puncturing of the skin to drain off copious amounts of water the victim would literally drown in his own water, a painful death' (140). The irony of beri-beri is that it bloats starving bodies so that they appear to be overfed. As Smith adds:

Quite frequently there would be an 'onset' in the area of the genitals...The testicles were enlarged to roughly the size of a football & had to be 'carried' by the individual to avoid the intense 'dragging down' pain. (Smith 93)

Parsons writes in his diary that there was the agony of 'blisters from the boots and cuts from walking barefooted' (28 September 1944). Men would wait for the skin on the soles of the feet to harden against the ravages of the jungle floor, the metal railway tracks heating and burning in the tropical sun, and 'hookworm, a

parasite which entered the body via the feet' (Fitzgerald, *A Day* 3). The feet were the site of pellagra (otherwise known as 'happy feet'), also caused by chronic malnutrition. There were leeches in the rivers that 'would attach themselves to lower limbs' and once removed would leave 'an open wound, the breeding ground for future infection' (9); likewise, ringworm was 'disfiguring to see, and itching unpleasant' (Fitzgerald, *If You See* 62). Malaria delivered a recurring pattern of shivers and fevers, sickness and delirium, countless attacks of which many men would suffer for decades post-liberation before they were treated. The cramping and violent diarrhoea of dysentery were as ubiquitous as the tropical ulcers, and deepened the 'humiliation' and 'self disgust' at 'not being able to control oneself' (Robson 55). These are bodies which, in the period of three-and-a-half years, became 'wreckages of humanity', bodies that 'did not look like men' but were 'not quite animals' either (Braddon, *Naked Island* 223).

Their thighbones and pelves stood out sharply...All their ribs showed clearly, the chest sloping backwards to the hollows of throat and collarbone. Arms hung down, sticklike, with huge hands, and the skin wrinkled where muscle had vanished...Heads were shrunken onto skulls with large teeth and faintly glowing eyes set in black wells...The whole body was draped with a loose-fitting envelope of thin purple-brown parchment which wrinkled horizontally over the stomach and chest and vertically on sagging fleshless buttocks.
(Braddon, *Naked Island* 223 – 224)

Former POWs repeatedly return to the site – and sight – of the skin within their life-writing. It is the skin that frequently appears as the place of injury, the 'breeding ground' for disease, the means through which parasites would enter the body, and the surface of the skeleton that needed to 'harden' against labour and the intense heat of the equatorial sun. It is the skin that is 'disfiguring to see' when infections and parasites attack, the skin that is swollen and bloated by beri-beri, and the skin that shows evidence of the chills and fevers of malaria. When Braddon describes the bodies of his campmates, the 'meat' of their limbs 'looked as if bullets exploded inside them', with the flesh 'bursting' with creeping, rotting ulcers, or 'torn' from injuries and working barefoot (*Naked Island* 223). But by the end of captivity, it is not skin but a 'purple-brown parchment' that is 'draped' loosely over the skeleton of the captive body. The skin is the medium on which the story can be written, the 'parchment' for the narrative of Far Eastern captivity.

Using the analogy of Braddon's parchment, the writing and reading of the skin in the camps is part of the POW's body biography. Drawing on the theory of Didier Anzieu's skin ego, 'where the ego, the sense of self, derives from the experience of the material skin', Prosser has described the skin as the surface that 'holds each of us together', so that the skin 'protects us, keeps us discrete, and yet is our first mode of communication with each other and the world' (*Second Skins* 65). In the development of the self, the skin acts as both the surface for the projection of that self – the means of communicating that self to others – and the primary surface through which the self is experienced. The skin is the 'locale for the physical experience of body image and the surface upon which is projected the psychic representation of the body' (72).

So what happens when that skin becomes damaged through, for example, the beatings from a guard or the bursting of ulcers? How does the self of the POW continue to present itself if the surface of that self is broken? If damage to the skin equates to damage to the way in which the self is communicated to others, then others will fail to read that skin in return. For Primo Levi, the story of being beaten – of his skin being broken by another and having to clean up that damage to himself, by himself – is mirrored in the lack of recognition that his audience show him: the damaged self is unrecognisable, unreadable. For the POW, the assaults upon the skin were ceaseless: the equatorial sun, the punishments, the physical exertion of hard labour, and the diseases and infestations that they carried. The latter could be catastrophic, indeed fatal, and it could be fatal to others also. As the body of the POW was being broken down, the damage was being perpetuated within others: diseases such as dysentery and malaria are communicable, transmitted as they are from one body to the next, one self to another.

Thus, in the descriptions of having his ulcers scraped clean, Braddon reveals his difficulty in having others quite literally digging into the flesh beneath his skin. Having his skin dug into, he is forced to vomit and to purge his body of the untranslatable pain. He loses consciousness, thereby ridding himself of a pain that 'cannot be confirmed' because he is no longer sharing it even with himself. In being unable to write of the grotesqueness of his own skin, Braddon turns to that of his campmates and, hearing other men 'grunt', declares that he 'shall never know the pain they bore' either. Braddon writes as an onlooker, describing figures who 'did not look like men', of '*their* shins' and '*their* thighbones' [my emphasis] without acknowledging that he, too, was one of them and that his body was one of 'theirs'.

Accepting the state of the self as being the same as 'theirs' was to accept a loss of dignity and pride. Kenneth Robson recalls the 'humiliation' of defecating

uncontrollably, and that a man's inability to control his basic bodily functions 'was accepted by everyone, except yourself!' (55). If we return to Fitzgerald's memory of ringworm, we note that he writes that it is 'disfiguring to see' the ringworm [my emphasis]. Of itself, the skin infestation was not disfiguring, but being forced to see it, accept its presence and acknowledge the degradation of the body, was the moment of disfiguration. One memoir from Sumatra offers rare insight into this moment of being confronted with the damage being done to the self. Harold Goulding was a POW in Palembang on Sumatra from February 1942 onwards, before being transferred to Changi in Singapore in May 1945. It was in Changi that, for the first time in just over three years, Goulding saw himself in a mirror. Although he had seen the bodies of his campmates, their 'walking and working skeletons', he had not equated their thin frames and protruding ribcages with his own: 'or perhaps, more accurately, I couldn't picture what looking like them really meant' (Goulding, *Yasmé* 61). But that changed in Changi where Goulding was able to take advantage of the relatively more sophisticated facilities by obtaining a shave and a haircut courtesy of 'an open-air barber shop'. Part of the 'barber shop' was a full-length mirror in which Goulding saw his reflection, and 'froze into what must have been catatonic shock' (62).

I just could not believe that the apparition I was looking at was me.
There seemed to be no points of recognition at all...my thighs were
thinner than my knees. (Goulding, *Yasmé* 62)

These 'points of recognition' – or indeed, the lack of them – were crucial for Goulding's physical and psychological well-being at this point. In the same moment that Goulding stared at thighs 'thinner than my knees', his own stare was looking back, challenging him to find 'points of recognition' on a body that he could no longer recognise as his own. The effect of such self-imposed and self-reflected scrutiny, for Goulding, was immediate and severe. By seeing and having to confront the emaciated state of his own body, he saw his own death. He 'decided it was impossible...to survive for more than a few months', and his weight dropped 'quite rapidly' at this point (*Yasmé* 62).

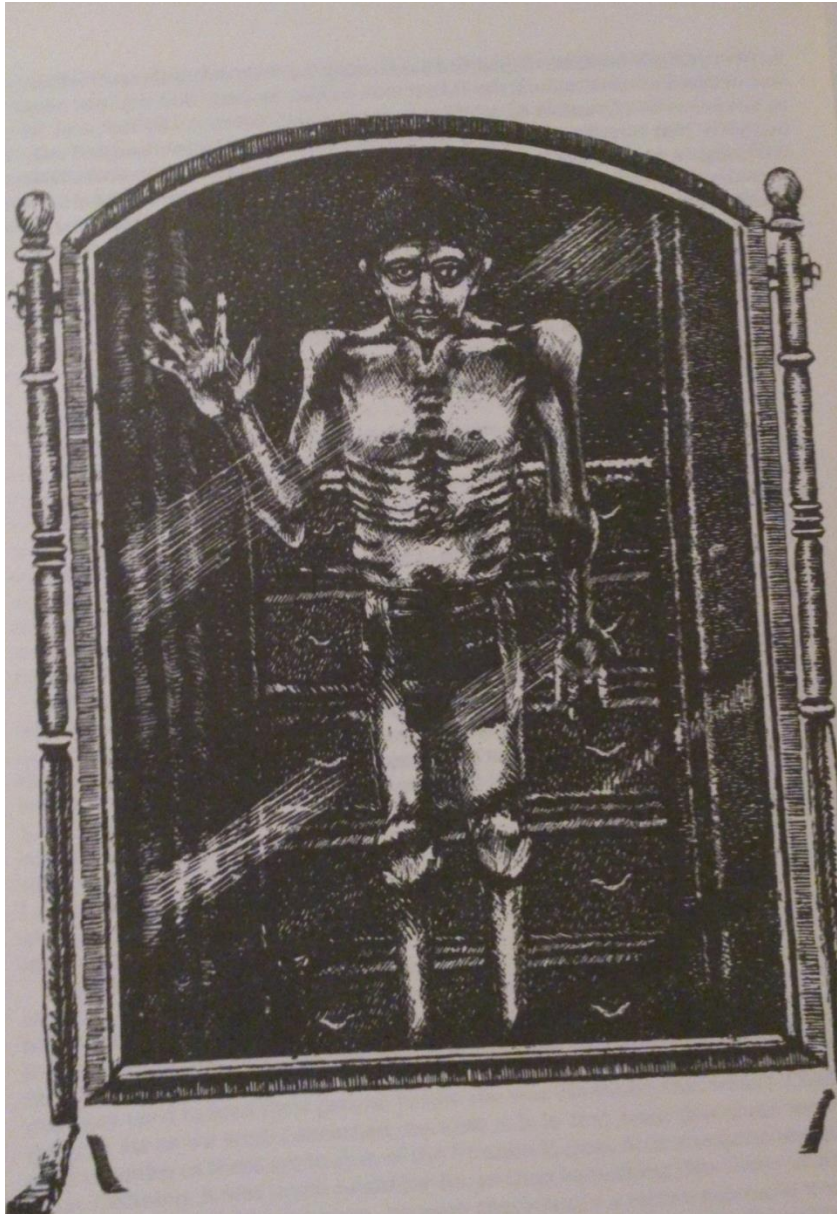


Figure 6: Claire Henley. 'Mirror, Mirror'. 1987. (Goulding, *Yasmé* 68)

Goulding was retired when he decided to write his memoir. This retirement was reflected in his choice of title: *Yasmé*, the Japanese term for rest period. The transcript of that memoir was deposited with IWM and does not include any images. However, on discovering that the memoir was self-published in 1988, I found that no changes had been made to the text itself except for the inclusion of maps of the island and the Sumatra Railway, and three black and white illustrations. The first depicts the shipwreck in the Bangka Straits between Singapore and Sumatra in February 1942, when Goulding's escape ship from Singapore was caught in a Japanese bombing raid; the second shows POWs dreaming of food rather than pin-up girls whilst in camp; and thirdly, a recreation of Goulding being confronted in the mirror by this sight of his own emaciated body (see Figure 6). These three

illustrations were created by Claire Henley, the daughter of a close friend and post-war colleague of Goulding. Henley was in her mid-twenties at the time of illustrating Goulding's memoir and had previously painted pieces for him, including a portrait of his wife. Henley had graduated from art college and was working in her first design job when Goulding sent her the manuscript of his memoir and asked her to create the illustrations for him.

Goulding specified the images that he wanted Henley to draw, as these encapsulated what he considered to be the defining moments of his captivity. Goulding briefed Henley to create the pictures in black and white due to a limited printing budget for the publication, but Goulding was also insistent that the pictures should be 'stark'. Consequently, Henley opted to create the illustrations on scraperboard: a piece of white hardboard pre-treated with a black coating, or vice versa (Henley, *Correspondence*). To create an image on scraperboard, the coating is scratched and scraped away by the artist using sharp tools such as curved blades, wire brushes and steel wool. With the coating acting like a skin, once it has been made the mark on the scraperboard remains and cannot be removed. Like the 'scratch or scrape on the skin invariably turning into an ulcer' in the camps (Robson 59), the initial scratch on the surface of the scraperboard broadened and deepened to symbolise the wounds created by captivity on Goulding's image of himself. Even as they healed, the memories – the marks made within his body, like the marks on the scraperboard, remained.

Goulding survived, probably because liberation came within a few weeks of seeing his reflection and he did not lose too much further weight. But when writing his memoir forty years later, Goulding was unable to decide whether he had been frightened more at his 'physical debility', or at 'the sight of me stripped naked of civilised sophistication, leaving merely an angry, ferocious savage ready and eager to kill for food' (*Yasmé* 62). The imagery that POWs use, that is 'burned' into their brains, not only describes the physical 'privations' they endured. At once a creation and then a rejection of that same image ('I can see it vividly...yet I still cannot recognise myself), this psychological denial of the physical 'sight of me' also provides significant clues as to how POWs sustained their ability to endure. On the return home, for example, Boulter felt that people would see his thinness and his 'mepacrine yellow tinted' face and identify him immediately as a former POW rather, than he may have hoped, as himself (164).

Cholera and ‘campicatures’: the carnivalesque of the Far Eastern POW

Cameras were forbidden in the Far Eastern camps. Although some photographs do exist, the paintings and drawings of prisoners themselves tend to offer us the perspective of those missing cameras. Indeed, the most iconic images associated with the Far Eastern camps were produced by men whilst they were POWs (Chalker; Searle).¹⁵⁴ Invariably, these images capture moments on the Burma-Siam Railway, but they have come to encapsulate how incarceration across the Far East during the Second World War – from the coal mines in Japan to the jungle islands of the Netherlands East Indies – has been represented in Britain in the seventy years since liberation.

The image reproduced below was drawn by Jack Chalker – a POW on the Burma-Siam Railway – and was among the first to be published after liberation in 1945. This and other pictures were used by Edward Dunlop, a Medical Officer on the Burma-Siam Railway, to illustrate academic articles that he produced for the *British Medical Journal* regarding the medical experiences of Far Eastern POWs, and the manner in which they were treated for tropical disease. Dunlop recognised that ‘many prisoners of war will suffer for the remainder of their lives from disabilities related to their grim ordeal’ (4474), and Chalker had drawn the bodies of men who were desperately sick, in pain and dying.

¹⁵⁴ Recent work highlighting the significance of art for Far Eastern POWs from theatres of captivity other than the Burma-Siam Railway includes F Williams and R Williams.



Figure 7: Jack Chalker. 'Dysentery'. (Dunlop, *Medical Experiences*. n.pag)

These are skeletons of men. They are dark and despairing, each line and shadow etching out the protruding bones and gaunt, pained faces.¹⁵⁵ Chalker's images were used by Dunlop to further wider medical knowledge and understanding of tropical diseases. However, they are also some of the most reproduced images of the Far Eastern camps, with Chalker's work appearing in two books of his own work, as well as the books of others (Churcher; Kandler), and being put on display at the Children of Far East Prisoner of War (COFEPOW) Memorial Building at the National Arboretum in Alrewas, Staffordshire. Chalker's work also makes up collections and has appeared at exhibitions at the IWM¹⁵⁶ and the Australian War Memorial.¹⁵⁷ Despite the many artworks that were made and, incredibly, saved by the men in the camps, the same images are reproduced continually, and have become iconic representations of Far Eastern captivity. Similar to Marianne Hirsch's readings of Holocaust representation, the visual landscape of the history of the Far Eastern camps has been 'radically delimited' to a

155 Judith Butler has identified the image of the human face as a fundamental vehicle in the mass representation of contemporary conflicts, from the framing of media portraits of political leaders through to the unveiling of Afghan women's faces as they remove their burkas for a camera, all of which offer, Butler asserts, the different human 'faces' of violence, and the ensuing 'ideals of the human' that shape our affective responses to the representation of war. (Butler, *Prekarious Life* 141 – 146). When viewing POW art, we are offered the face of incarceration rather than of conflict, but there exists within these portraits, too, a need 'to convey the human' through the image of the face: an image that, when shrouded or inscrutable - as the face of the POW is, in some of the examples of this chapter- is able to convey the very dehumanisation of that captivity.

156 For example, works by Chalker appeared in IWM 'Captive: Forgotten war', 2006 and IWM 'Far Eastern Prisoner of War Art Exhibition', 2005.

157 For example, see Australian War Memorial, 'The Stolen Years':

www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/stoloneyears/ww2/japan/burmathai/story3.asp; accessed 8 December 2013.

small number of stark images (Hirsch, *Generation* ch.4). Indeed I have contributed to the perpetuation of these images of the Far Eastern POW by reproducing Chalker's drawing above. But work like Chalker's remains a forceful reminder of the degradation to which those in captivity descended, and such artwork is an important means for second-generation family members to 'bring to life' the story-truth, whilst preserving the memory of the happening-truth of the atrocity of the camps (Hadoke, *Interview*). However, there is a counterbalance to this representation and, whilst remaining sensitive to the suffering, the remainder of my chapter focuses on the means by which POWs used their art, too, to survive that degradation, as well as to represent it.

Hirsch notes that, unlike in the Far Eastern camps, soldiers and guards in the concentration camps would 'officially [photograph] inmates at the time of their imprisonment and recorded their destruction' – surviving images created or taken by victims are, however, rare (*Generation* ch.4). The opposite is true of the Far Eastern camps. Any documentation created on Sumatra by the Japanese command, for example, was destroyed in the days leading up to Japan's surrender, and many writings and paintings created by prisoners were confiscated and destroyed during searches. But many images did survive and were brought back to Britain.

For prisoners of war, art was used particularly to witness the circumstances of captivity and to acknowledge the individuality of fellow captives...The artists caught up in this situation seem to have felt a mission to record and bear witness. (Suddaby and Wood, section 2.3.8)

In itself, art offered a practical means to help men survive their incarceration. It was an activity that exercised mental acuity during the monotony of POW life, offered psychological respite and, not least, created a valuable commercial product in camp. By accepting commissions for portraits from campmates of their wives and girlfriends back home (copied from dog-eared and fading photographs) POW artists could earn a little money with which to purchase additional scraps of food or tobacco. But harnessing any creative talents was not just a practical imperative in the camps for the practicalities and psychology of survival (Carr and Mytum, 'Importance of Creativity' 5-6). The creativity of POW artists was an essential aspect of enabling the happening-truth, and their story-truth, to endure, too. Paintings were a means of recording testimonies of captivity

whilst it happened. As a result, the art produced in the camps did not just focus on atrocity and suffering and, despite the perpetual reproduction of Chalker's images, POW artists did not 'record and bear witness' to horror only. Through their artworks, POWs also recorded the strategies that they developed to survive that horror: medical ingenuity, musical and theatrical entertainments, and humour.

In 2012, a 'FEPOW Art Review' was carried out at IWM to 'determine the documentary significance and coverage' of the drawings and paintings from the Far Eastern camps held by the museum, and to establish the 'relationship [of the art collection] to the written holdings' that are stored in the Documents section of the museum (Suddaby and Wood, section 1). This art review involved the detailed examination of the work of forty-one POW artists who created individual artworks in the camps and whose work has been donated to IWM, along with the work of 22 additional POW artists who drew pieces for prison camp journals or created the artwork, for example, for the programmes of camp theatre productions or posters for camp cookhouses. The review identified a number of significant themes within the art of Far Eastern POWs: portraiture, travel and transport (such as lorries and wagons), disease and medical treatments, entertainment (musical and theatrical productions), living conditions and daily camp activities, topographical studies (including the built environment of the camp and the tropical landscape of the Far East), and cartoons (Suddaby and Wood, sections 2.3.1 – 2.3.8).

For all of the pain, discomfort and shame that came with captivity in the Far East, the response of some POW artists was not to dwell upon the difficulties and the challenges that they faced. Indeed, humour played a distinct and significant role in enabling captive populations in the Second World War to develop friendships with one another, resist oppression, and ultimately to survive. Clare Makepeace has identified that POWs in European camps used humour to forge bonds through the common experience of being alienated from home and separated from loved ones (*A Pseudo-soldier* 147), and likewise in the camps in the Far East, cartoonists and satirical artists were hard at work lampooning the situations within which POWs found themselves. Providing a counterbalance to representations of suffering that can be found in pictures like those produced by Chalker, comics and caricatures were drawn to boost morale, whilst still acknowledging the horrors of captivity.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ In her study of the cartoons produced by Allied POWs in German captivity, Anna Wickiewicz identifies camp satire as a 'weapon against despair and homesickness. The targets of ridicule were the POWs themselves: their weaknesses, desires and problems which they had to overcome every day. The enemies – the camp authorities as well as the guards – were also the butt of the prisoners' jokes, as a ridiculed enemy was less intimidating' (Wickiewicz 114).

One of the most influential cartoonists of the twentieth-century, and creator of the *St. Trinian's* series of books, Ronald Searle, honed his artistry whilst a POW on the Burma-Siam railway. Searle's collection of paintings from that time is one of the most significant and renowned collections of POW art known to have survived Far Eastern captivity.¹⁵⁹ Other cartoonists in the Far East included, Basil Akhurst ('Akki') and Charlie Simpson in Thailand, William Poltock in Hong Kong and Sid Scales on Java (Suddaby and Wood, section 2.3.3). Finding a natural progression from the abundance of grotesque images that were on view in the camps, these cartoonists chose to employ what Mikhail Bakhtin describes as the *carnavalesque*, or carnival laughter. In medieval folk culture, the carnival held a significant place within social ritual and ceremony, mimicking that very ceremony and marking itself with a 'suspension of rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions'. The carnival, for Bakhtin, is a 'special type of communication' – a breaking down of the distances between communities that were created by rank and officialdom (*Rabelais* 10). Such freedom of expression, a focus on renewal and change, and the removal of prevailing authority meant that the carnival became open to 'numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanities, comic crowning and uncrownings' (*Rabelais* 11). With the dissolution of social hierarchies and ideals, the laughter of the carnival becomes 'universal in scope', it is 'directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants', and it is 'ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives' (*Rabelais* 11-12).

The *carnavalesque* is not applicable generally to the humour that can be found in literary representations of warfare – laughter 'in and about war', Kate McLoughlin has asserted, 'has greater affinities with the comedy of the absurd (176). But the *carnavalesque*, I think, is appropriate for the representation of the POW. He is a figure removed from the absurdity of the battle zone and finds himself in the 'ambivalent' state of a non-combatant soldier – a position in which he still 'asserts' his identity as a military man but that 'denies' him the ability to fight. The *carnavalesque* brings the bodies together in a community that responds through 'all and everyone', as part of the world of the camp – a world created beyond the battlefield, or home. Indeed, IWM's art review established that cartoons and caricatures used visual humour to 'lampoon shared circumstances' and served the

¹⁵⁹ See Searle, *To the Kwai and Back*. Immediately after the war, Searle was appointed as an official war artist for the Nuremberg trials and so was in a unique position of witnessing the accounts of the atrocities that were occurring in Europe whilst he had been a POW in the Far East.

'dual function of relieving tension and affirming common values' among the POWs (Suddaby and Wood, section 2.3.3). The cartoons, therefore, were created for 'all and everyone'. On Java, for example, Sid Scales created 'campicatures' (see Figure 8).



Figure 8: Sid Scales. 'Campicature No.1' in Mark Time Daily News No. 125, Bandoeng camp, Java. 1943. IWM: E.J.3976.

Scales's 'campicatures' were specifically aimed at 'minimising the divide between officers and other ranks' (removing, therefore, the dividing nature of social hierarchies) and instead accentuated 'with equal measures of affection and perspective' the character traits of individuals who held authoritative positions or carried out functions essential to the running of the camps (Suddaby and Wood, section 2.3.3). 'Campicature No 1' for example, depicts Cecil Gilbert, the Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM) of the British camp at Bandoeng on Java. Though his eyes were 'innocent blue', says the limerick underneath the drawing, Gilbert's flame-coloured beard was indicative of a fiery authoritative nature. The need to maintain discipline was an essential aspect of POW existence, not least for preserving an identity among the men as British military troops, and helping to

sustain morale. But the lampooning of Gilbert brings the spirit of the *carnavalesque* to the camp. He upheld military discipline and was still “Mister” to you’ (‘Mark Time’ No 125), but the laughter of the *carnavalesque* was a communal response to a communal experience, and offered a means of reaffirming the bonds between the men that Gilbert led.

‘Humour’, Gillies has asserted about Far Eastern captivity, ‘offered one way of hitting back’ at the ‘insistence on hierarchy’ among the military ranks of POWs themselves (219). However, this humour was also a means of ‘hitting back’ at the ‘insistence’ and ferocity with which POWs were pushed by their Japanese and Korean guards. As such, the ‘oppositional’ power of an alternative discourse – in this instance, of humour – was used to rally against the ‘disciplinary properties of discursive practices’ that were employed against POWs by their guards (Graham 120). This opposition and resistance was displayed, through language, in the belittling and demeaning of individual guards by POWs through the use of nicknames.

Nicknames given to the guards often exaggerated physical or personal characteristics; POWs would lampoon stereotypes of Japanese and Korean cultures, and mock the personal traits that made the guards appear as ‘Other’ to the POWs. For example, at camp 3 there was ‘Gladys’ so named because he was ‘effeminate’, ‘The Chinaman’ merely because he ‘had moustache’, and there was ‘Rubber Neck’, ‘the Aga Khan’, ‘the Wrestler’, ‘the Basher’, ‘the Old Man’, and ‘The Yid’ among many (Smith 90). In other narratives we find ‘Snake face’ who ‘spread a load of rumours’ (Parsons 10 November 1944), or a ‘squat barrel shaped Jap’ who was ‘agile as an ape’ and as a result was ‘promptly nicknamed Gorilla’ (Boulter 142).¹⁶⁰ Others included ‘the Rat, the Butcher, Tom Thumb...and so on’ (Boulter 143). These nicknames dehumanise, and often animalise, individual guards in a way that belittles the captor to the captive. It is no small irony that Saunders calls them ‘pet names’ rather than nicknames (*Journey* 181). For Fitzgerald, such ‘pets’ included ‘the Rat’, ‘the Snake’, ‘the Pig’ and ‘Gorilla’, and he recalls that ‘Black Joe’ had ‘a voice like a bull’ (*If You See* 67). Saunders remembers that there was:

”King Kong” a huge man, very well built and always boasting of his strength...Then we had “Hatchet face” a much “milder” man who seemed more understanding... in contrast to him there was the

¹⁶⁰ Henk Hovinga’s history refers to guards ‘identified as King Kong, Flower Pot, the Bully, Baby Face, Fat Lip, Four Eyes, the Prizefighter, Fat Porky, Black Panther...the Slime, John the Slapper, Porky, the Elephant, Cross-eyed’ and ‘Horse Face’ (345).

“Basher” who was vicious and brutal in his behaviour towards us. (J Saunders, *Journey* 181-182)

It is likely that such nicknames will have offered POWs the spirit to maintain a communal identity away from their captors, and as in the novel *The Garden of Evening Mists*, about the experience of civilian internees in Malaya, giving ‘the worst of the guards nicknames...made us feel, if only for the briefest instant, that we had some control over our lives’ (Tan Twen Eng 254).

In reviewing the function of humour in representations of the Holocaust, Terrence Des Pres aligns Bakhtin’s vision of the *carnivalesque* with the comic literature produced by second-generation artists such as Art Speigleman. Des Pres identifies the necessity for laughter as a strategy for surviving the trauma of the camps (219). But neither Des Pres nor McLoughlin acknowledge that Bakhtin’s theory of carnival laughter is intimately bound up with the image of the *grotesque*, and specifically the predominant role that the degradation of the human body plays in the characterisation of the carnival: that is, the ‘lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract...to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body’ (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 19).

In Bakhtin’s image of the grotesque, bodies are deformed and incomplete, and their convexities and apertures— pot bellies, gaping mouths – become its focus; the functions of digestion, defecation and procreation are placed at the fore of images of the grotesque. Further, the grotesque body is not an isolated body: ‘the stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world’ (*Rabelais* 26). For Bakhtin, the grotesque is typified by obsessions with ‘food, drink, digestion and sexual life’, it degrades the body. But the work of the grotesque does this so as to ‘bring [the body] down to earth’, and crucially, to produce laughter – carnival laughter – from ‘the bodily lower stratum’ (*Rabelais* 20). The image of the POW as drawn by Chalker is a grotesque image: the skeleton protruding, ulcers bursting and diseases entering the body, communicating that grotesqueness to the other bodies around it. It is a starved body slumped or lying on the floor, united with the earth. In this representation of captivity, the body of the Far Eastern POW is a body ‘brought down to earth’, digging latrines into which dysentery will force that body to continually defecate. On Sumatra, as working parties monotonously ‘bored and hammered, walked on, bored and hammered’, they followed the foundations for a track that had been ‘literally scraped out of the earth’ by romushas who were deployed to clear the jungle in preparation for rail laying (Robson 49). The

scratched earth, like the body of the former POW, still bears those marks made on its surface. The scraping of ulcerated wounds on the body, and the scraping of the memory on the scraperboard later, is still echoed in the environment within which the men were incarcerated (Figure 9).



Figure 9: Tesso, Sumatra. 2009. Courtesy of Amanda Farrell.

No subject was too intimate or unsavoury to be beyond the scope of cartoonists: latrines, lice-hunting, dysentery, washing and queuing for 'leggis' (leftover food) illustrate common features of life in captivity. (Suddaby and Wood, section 2.3.3)

Artwork from the POW camps on Sumatra is rare, and no examples were identified during the art review undertaken by IWM. Being isolated on an island, resources were scarcer than those available to artists on the Burma-Siam Railway, and with the majority of the Sumatra Railway constructed under gruelling 'speedo' conditions, it is of no surprise that very little documentation survived from these camps. There are however, some images from Sumatra within memoirs and

scrapbooks – illustrations intended to accompany texts rather than standalone portraits or landscape drawings, for example. The most substantial of these are the illustrations created by two men who added their images to their scrapbooks and memoirs. Boulter included sketches in his memoirs that he had made on his escape from Singapore to Sumatra in 1942 – the seemingly serene landscape of a rowing boat nestled in a bay belies the terror with which men escaped mainland Singapore and rowed through waters full of mines, and at risk of aerial bombardment or capture by boat from the Japanese (chapter 1). The meditation of art offered respite, and Boulter created line drawings, too, of early POW life in the camps at Medan prior to moving to the railway. Likewise, Walter Lang's art offered a distraction from the hardships of captive life whilst he was a POW at Palembang on Sumatra,¹⁶¹ with many of his surviving drawings focusing on the flora and fauna of the island. Many of Lang's pictures record a visual depiction of the environment around the camps, rather than of the activity in the camps themselves.¹⁶²

It has therefore been necessary to examine the holdings of other archives to find representations of the experience of captivity on Sumatra. Valuably, sketches from the Sumatra Railway were preserved by some Dutch former POWs. Two of these, of the medical huts at camp 2, are reproduced later in this chapter.¹⁶³ However, the largest collection of sketches that I have identified as being produced by a British POW artist on the island of Sumatra during the Second World War, is the work of my grandfather, Stanley Russell. Twenty sketches by Russell survived captivity, and all were drawn between 1943 and 1944 at Gloegoer camp in Medan, prior to the construction of the railway. Draft versions of most of these sketches are also retained with Russell's diaries, but the finished colour versions are held at Museon in The Hague, a natural history museum that contains a large repository of artefacts relating to the POW and civilian internment camps established by the Japanese across the Netherlands East Indies.¹⁶⁴

Notably, the majority of Russell's pieces are comic in their tone, although his subject matter is typical to that of other artists who were working within the Far Eastern camps: transport or troops (such as the transportation of POWs by lorry

161 Captain Walter Ernest Hermann Lang; became POW aged 43 in Bangka Straits, 15 February 1942.

162 These pictures from Boulter and Lang are accessible at IWM on microfilm only and the low quality of the copies available does not make them reproducible here. See Boulter; Lang.

163 Henk Hovinga's research on the Sumatra Railway includes sketches created by other Dutch former POWs including representations of the hong at camp 1(104) and working parties on the railway itself (106 – 109, 130 – 139).

164 Museon, www.museon.nl; accessed 9 February 2014.

from Padang to Gloeoger following their capture¹⁶⁵), medical aspects of incarceration (see 'Diseases at Medan' below), topography (such as a sketch of the nest of a weaver bird¹⁶⁶) and portraiture of individual POWs (for examples see 'Boredom' and 'Prisoner of War' reproduced in this thesis).

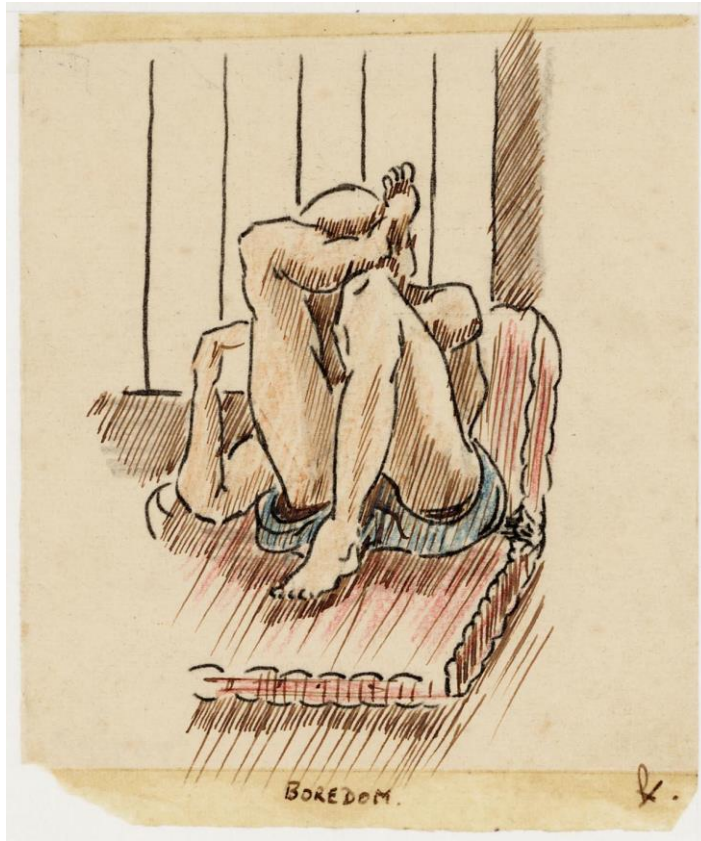


Figure 10: Stanley Russell. 'Boredom'. 1943. MUSE01:11484

Russell offers commentary on the monotony of camp life with a single word: 'boredom' – an image that also reveals the small bedspace available to each man, even in a relatively sanitary camp as the one at Gloeoger. The barred window is a reminder that later, much less solid atap huts would be constructed in the deep jungle, but is also an immediately recognisable symbol of incarceration for his viewers. The figure depicted in 'Boredom', its face shielded and shadowed becomes an anonymous body – the body of one that represented many: a body that is already semi-naked and barefoot, although he is not yet displaying the wounds and ulcers of daily hard labour. Furthermore, this body still retains some definition of muscle that would, in time, waste. But 'Boredom' reveals that the mind

165 Russell, 'On The Road From Padang to Medan'. MUSE01:11472

166 Russell, 'Weaver Birds' Nests'. MUSE01:11478

of a POW also required attention. The inertia of captivity was a strain psychologically, but the image also exemplifies the means by which men such as Russell combated that inertia – they drew, they staged theatre and musical productions, set up libraries and language-learning classes, and they fashioned artefacts out of any scraps of material that they could find. As Albert Simmonds wrote in his diary at Gloegoer, the same camp as Russell:

I see prisoners passing the time by, reading books from camp library, sleeping, playing cards, dominoes, chess + draughts... Porter¹⁶⁷ and others are making works of art in wood, wire, metal etc. from chess sets to model battleships...Some are making themselves wooden shoes & stools & tables & clothing. A hive of activity. (Simmonds December 15 1942)

Several of Russell's pieces stand out from other examples of Far Eastern POW art because of the short narratives that they tell, as if they are single pages taken from a longer graphic novel. Examples reproduced here are 'Dysentery at Medan' and 'Diseases at Medan', but Russell also developed other graphic narratives that told for example, the stories of the working parties who would spend their days loading trucks with rocks¹⁶⁸ and moving oil drums.¹⁶⁹

167 Most likely to be Warrant Officer Edward W Porter; became POW at Padang on Sumatra, 17 March 1942.

168 Russell, 'Working Parties at Delitoewa'. MUSE01:11468.

169 Russell, 'Medan Oil Dump'. MUSE01:11467.

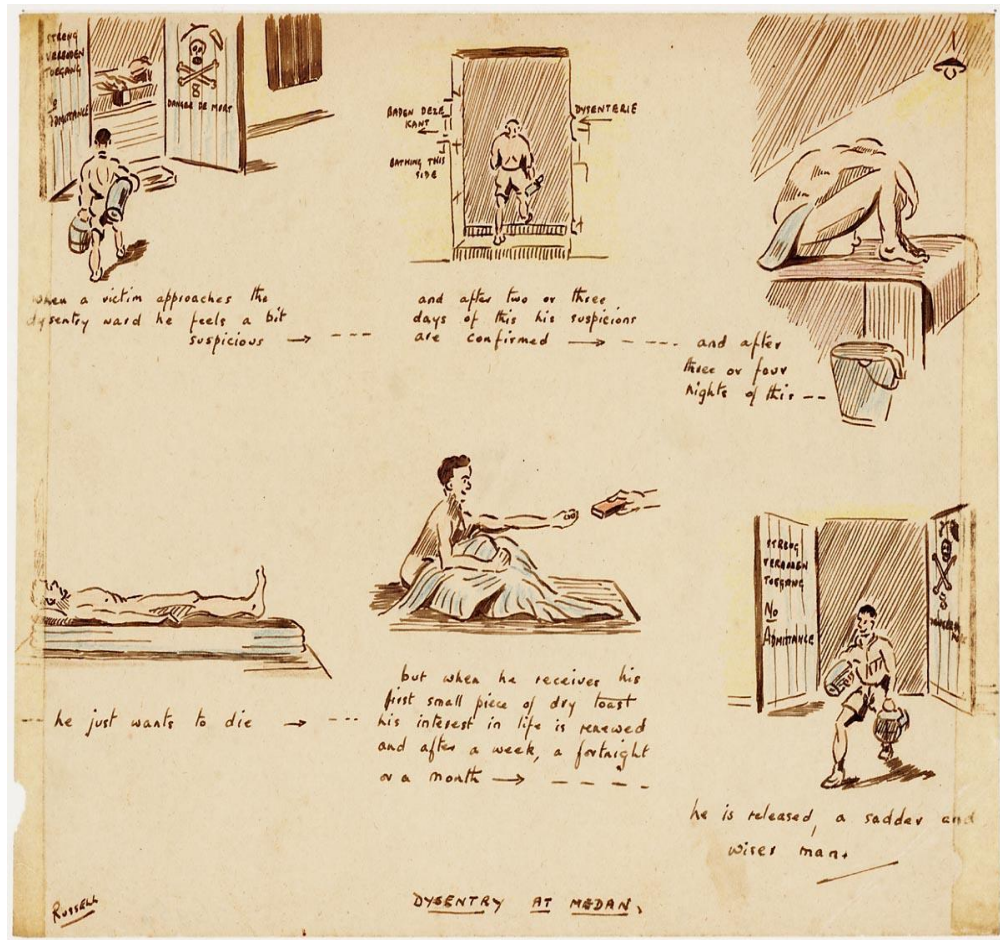


Figure 11: Stanley Russell. 'Dysentery at Medan'. 1943. MUSE01:11486

These cartoons are in contrast to the 'campicatures' that pick on the traits of one character, and to the despairing images drawn by Chalker. Russell's drawings offer, much like a pictorial diary, a narrative of events as they occurred for the captive. In the depiction of dysentery at Medan, for example, Russell traces the symptomatic progression of the disease and the rudimentary facilities available to the POW who required treatment (Figure 11).

These sketches were drawn prior to the construction of the road at Atjeh, and the railway at Pakanbaroe. As a result the figure of the POW at Medan is still relatively well nourished. His muscles have definition, even if a protrusion of the ribs is beginning to show in the image of the patient lying in the hospital. Indeed, the building that Russell's POW lies in is a solid construction, and there is an electric light hanging above the bowed head of the POW in the third scene. He has a blanket that is not yet threadbare, a fairly uncramped bedspace and the luxury of what looks to be a mattress. In the final scene, he leaves the hospital wearing a pair of shorts rather than the 'Jap-happy' loincloth, which was all the clothes that the

men had remaining when they arrived on the railway.¹⁷⁰ In Russell's pictures there is not, for example, the darkness and despair represented by Chalker's dying men or that would come later for the men transported from Medan to the railway. But despite these relative comforts, Russell's story of dysentery demonstrates the impact at the time psychologically – as he writes in the piece, it makes a sufferer a 'sadder and wiser man'. Russell acknowledges the potential for death – 'he just wants to die' – but true to the relationships between the grotesque and the carnivalesque, there is also rebirth and an 'interest in life' that is 'renewed' through the carnival image of the feast (a 'small piece of dry toast').

These connections between the bodily impact of, and the psychological reaction to, incarceration are continually made in Russell's work. For example, in Figure 12 below, Russell writes of diseases 'prevalent among the prisoners', with 'mental petrification', 'moral putrefaction' and 'nostalgia' being written alongside dysentery, malaria and the physical 'putrefaction' of the skin caused by tropical ulcers.

¹⁷⁰ An example of a loincloth that was saved and brought back to Britain upon liberation can be found in the scrapbooks of Harold Payne and called 'the article'. See Payne, private papers.

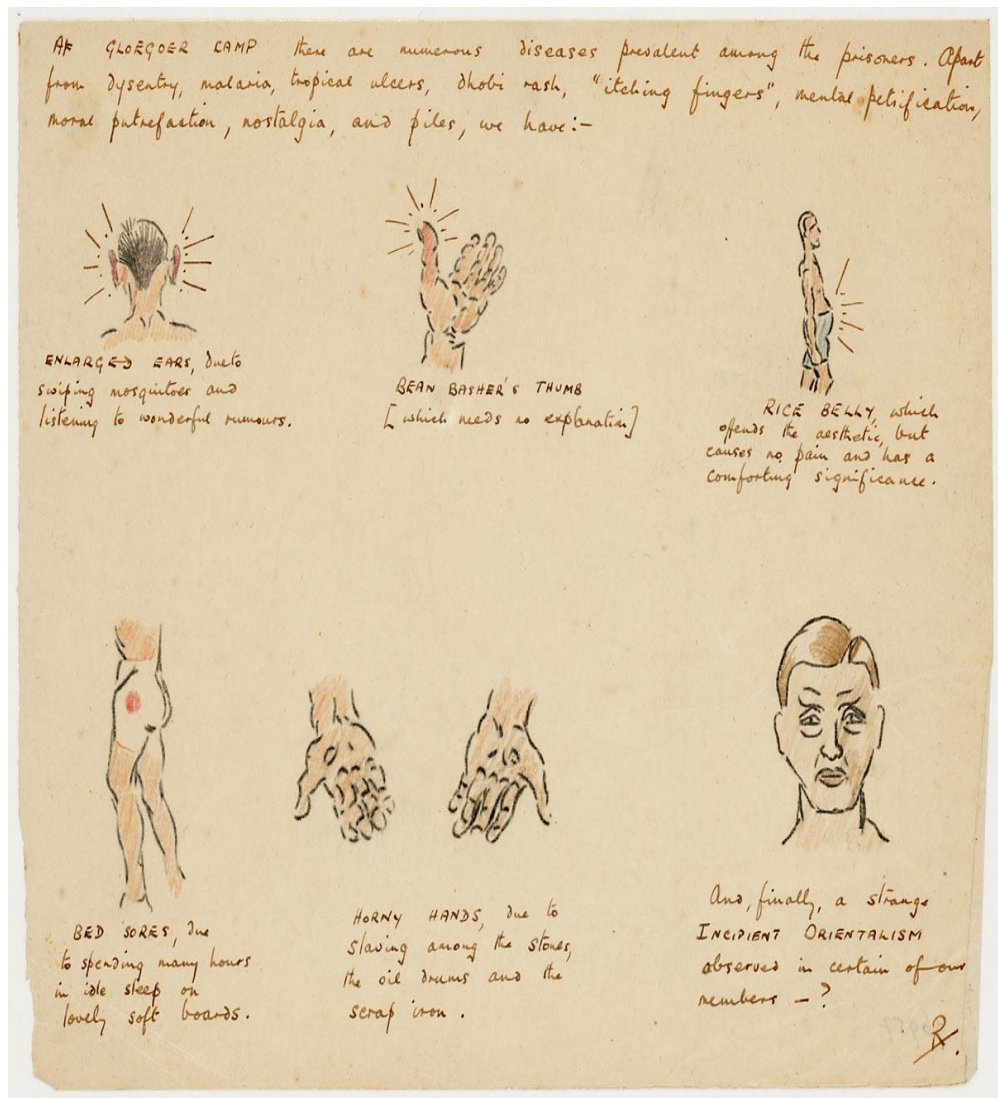


Figure 12: Stanley Russell. 'Diseases at Medan'. 1943. MUSE01:11475.

Russell quips that the swollen ears of the POW are not caused by mosquito bites only, but by hearing 'wonderful rumours' and rice belly has a 'comforting significance'. His narratives demonstrate that captivity has a bodily biography that goes beyond the physical marks of bites and a swollen belly of rice. The body remembers the hope that is brought by 'wonderful rumours', and the 'comforting' respite from hunger pains that is brought by a small bowlful of rice. The body depicted by Russell reflects the physical experience of the camp but it tells of the response to that experience, also. It was a response that led POWs to find solace in treating bed sores and blistered hands, and to lampoon their captors in the 'incidental orientalism' of campmates.

The POW's body is a body ambivalent: it is a body swelling as it dies, with pot-bellies growing as men starved. But the repetition of images such as Chalker's forgets that the image of the grotesque also 'determined the images of the culture

of folk humour' (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 29). The repetition of the images of the diseased and dying silences the narrative that was produced by artists such as Russell (and Scales on Java), that out of the degradation of captivity came hope, and out of the misery came mirth. In this sense the cartoons and 'campicatures' were a protest against the oppression that the POWs faced. The value of a comic or 'impious' approach to trauma (Boswell), is that it 'permits us a tougher more active response' (Des Pres 232). Laughter forces us to move, to be not 'wholly...compelled to standstill by the matter we behold' (232). Laughter is, after all, a bodily response too. It brings relief 'without betraying convictions' and as such, comic representations of, and responses to, the history of wartime incarceration 'foster resilience and are life-reclaiming' (Des Pres 232). By reclaiming life – 'his interest in life is renewed' – when knowing that others 'just [want] to die', the POW cartoonist created a positive bodily response, an 'active response' to counteract the pain that the body felt.

The role of the Medical Officer

The care & attention shown by the Doctors & Medical Orderlies in the Sick Bay as well as out on the Track was beyond praise. (Smith 92)

As in other Far Eastern camps, the work of the Medical Officers (MOs) across Sumatra, and particularly on the railway, was crucial to POW morale and their ability to survive the most deprived conditions. Not only did medics treat sick and wounded men (whilst sick and wounded themselves), they were also instrumental in attempts to maintain a basic level of hygiene in camps, and remonstrating with the Japanese commandant against meagre rations and the lack of medical supplies.

Among the British contingent on the Sumatra Railway, three MOs made a striking impact on the memories of the men who experienced the camps there: Robert Braithwaite, based at camp 3 (the main administrative camp on the line), John Wyatt¹⁷¹ (who helped set up the hospital at camp two before moving along the

¹⁷¹ Surgeon Lieutenant John Cameron Wyatt, HMS *Exeter* Royal Navy; became POW, 1 March 1942.

line), and Patrick Kirkwood,¹⁷² who was attached to the 'Atjeh party' of men who arrived on the railway in November 1944 and was therefore a key medic in the camps on the central part of the line. There were Dutch MOs, too, and other men who – although all weak themselves – worked alongside the MOs as nursing orderlies.

As the number of sick and injured men increased, camp 2 became established as the main hospital camp for the railway, 'with a nice big graveyard (an essential part of this kind of camp)' (Freeman, *Memoir* 4). To be sent to camp 2 was viewed by the men as a 'virtual death sentence', so much so that 'if a man could stand he preferred to go out and risk dying on his feet than risk going to No. 2' (Boulter 154). Joe Fitzgerald recalled being 'very shocked', despite being ill with an attack of malaria, to be sent to camp 2 (*If You See* 77). He remained there until liberation and 'thought we were doing something unimaginable...leaving Camp Two alive' (80).

John Wyatt was in the original group of POWs who were transported to Pakanbaroe from Java in May 1944, and was therefore part of the group who set up base camp 1 before moving along to the second, in which a single hospital hut was created:

To call it a hospital was a euphemism. The patients lay in rows on the boarding with whatever bedclothes they possessed and their belonging at their heads. (Wyatt 27)

Wyatt recalls that at this early point, four British POWs acted as nursing orderlies and these nurses, too, needed to be looked after – 'kept in three watches of eight hours on and sixteen off in an attempt to conserve their strength' (27 – 28). Facilities with which to provide any care were rudimentary, and, with no bedpans available, those suffering dysentery were still forced to leave the trench latrines outside. Supplies of vital medicine such as quinine tablets were minimal, with large quantities held back by the Japanese until August 1945 (Braithwaite 3). In all camps, as happened right across the Far East, medical ingenuity and creativity enabled doctors to be resourceful. Old pieces of clothing were boiled and used as dressings for wounds and ulcers (Wyatt 29), latex was drained from the bark of

¹⁷² Captain Patrick Murdock Kirkwood, Indian Medical Service (Malaya Command); became POW aged 29 at Rengat on Sumatra, 20 March 1942.

rubber trees to provide adhesive for dressings and close wounds, a potential epidemic of diphtheria was contained by isolating one patient with one member of nursing staff, and boiling all of their cutlery and plates separately in boiling water (33). A solution rich in vitamin B ('dodek') was obtained from the husks of rice and valuable in the treatment of avitaminosis (Braithwaite 1).

Wyatt moved away from camp 2 to go further up the railway line and his memoir contains detailed reports on the treatment of malaria, dysentery, surgery performed on a perforated duodenal ulcer, typhus and the omnipresent tropical ulcers. His expertise was paramount in ensuring that items were sterilised with boiling water, and he focused as much as he could – like the other MOs – on the basic changes that he could make to the diets of the men. For example, the man with the perforated ulcer was nourished, following his surgery, with 'powdered milk obtained from the Japanese...and then rice pap and spinach' (Wyatt 34). Despite the care that the medical teams took, 'we left behind at each camp a carefully railed in cemetery and as we progressed the cemeteries grew larger' (35). When returning to camp 2 upon Japan's surrender Wyatt found it to be a 'very distressing place' – the one hospital hut that he had helped to build had become a camp that was 'nearly all hospital' with a 'huge cemetery' and men dying daily from dysentery, malaria and avitaminosis (38).

The images reproduced below (Figures 13 and 14), were drawn by a Dutch POW on the Sumatra Railway (F. de Jong) and highlight the differences in the way that he represented camp 2 in November 1944 and then, the same scene again in August 1945. These images offer clear indication of the physical deterioration in the men, and their ability to record what they were experiencing. Figure 13 was drawn in November 1944, and shows the single hospital hut as described in Wyatt's memoir. In the background, there is the faint outline of a roofless, timber-frame construction: the shadow of the larger hospital being created and the increasing levels of disease and injury to come.



Figure 13: F.de Jong. 'Hospital, Camp 2'. November 1944. MUSE01:4397

The men in this first image of camp 2 are, notably, all upright and moving on their feet. The POW in the foreground, carrying a bowl, still retains some definition of shape in his frame and wears a pair of 'klompers' (flat wooden sandals) on his feet, meaning that hard labour on the railway had not yet reached its most intense level. The attention given by de Jong to the fine detail in the drawing means that each line provides definition to the ground, and shadowing to the trees and the hut itself. However, by the time that Figure 14 was drawn, de Jong had lost this definition from his work.

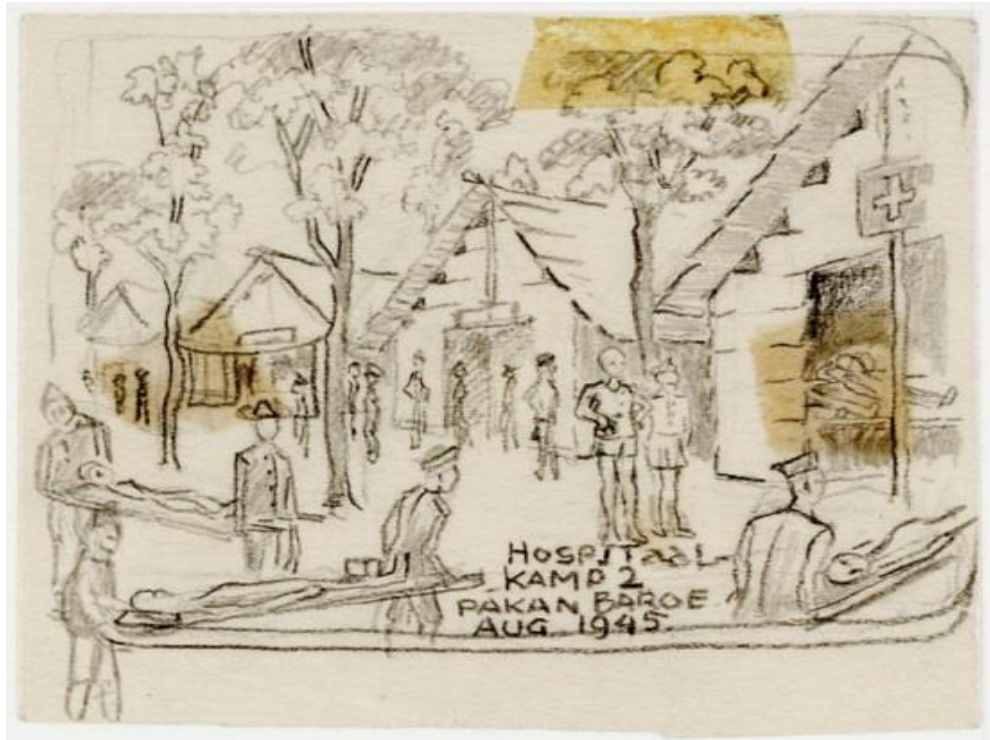


Figure 14: F.de Jong. 'Hospital, Camp 2'. August 1945. MUSE01:4399.

Now there are bodies lying on stretchers, faceless and almost formless. A body being carried in a makeshift stretcher, on the far left of the picture, is nearly indeterminable from the piece of cloth on which he is lying. There are now four huts, with more bodies lying inside them – many more bodies are prone now, needing to be carried by others. Indeed the men who are still standing appear to be predominantly in uniform and therefore the guards on duty, or they are shadowy stick figures, transparent and fading. There is no longer any vegetation on the ground, the men are barefoot, and the leaves on the trees are represented by basic shapes rather than the fine drawing from the previous November. De Jong, the artist, is weak too, and he has little energy to spend on his art. He may also be hurrying his work so as to hide it from the guards. He is surrounded by malnourished, diseased bodies, each one of them entering a camp from which they have very little hope of return.

Wyatt continued to treat the sick men post-liberation, when they were airlifted from Sumatra to the military hospitals. Even whilst he, too, received treatment for malaria, Wyatt 'visited all the patients' and was 'given the job of allocating all our men to the various ships' for the voyages back to England (40). In working out the logistics of the transportation, Wyatt turned his attention to the psychological wellbeing of the men.

I thought it better to divide them up into batches rather than put most of them in one ship, as contact with new faces would hasten their return to normality. (Wyatt 40)

For the same reasons, he chose not to travel back with his patients nor his campmates: 'I had become tired of dealing with all their troubles and illnesses' (40). He, too, needed 'contact with new faces' and to remove the sight of the sick and wounded men whom he had treated whilst suffering and surviving himself. Wyatt was 'tired' of their 'troubles': a tiredness that would linger in the memory – and the postmemory – of another of the MOs, 'Doc' Kirkwood, for the remainder of his life.

Like Cameron Wyatt, Patrick Kirkwood was a medic on the Sumatra Railway. Born in India, Kirkwood – 'following in the footsteps of his own father' – trained as a doctor and, during the Second World War, he served in the Indian Medical Service – the same service in which his father had served as a surgeon (Holmes, *Footsteps* 1).

[Kirkwood's] first posting was in Secunderabad in 1939, but after 2 years was posted to the Asiatic Hospital on Blakan Mati (now Sentosa) and was there when Singapore fell he was ordered to leave Singapore with several wounded servicemen and a medical team aboard the Red Cross launch, Florence Nightingale, on 15th February. (Holmes, *Footsteps* 1)

Caring for the wounded in the aftermath of the fall of Singapore, Kirkwood transported some of the injured troops to a hospital on the island of Singkep. Once fit enough to continue with an escape voyage, the group travelled along the Indragriri river to Sumatra and it was here, in the town of Rengat, that Kirkwood – along with his patients – became a POW of the Japanese on 23 March 1942. Kirkwood was a prisoner at Gloegoer, and a member of the Atjeh party of men who were forced to construct roads at the northern tip of Sumatra prior to being marched onto the railway in November 1944. Kirkwood's efforts as a medic were noted in the reports of returning men,¹⁷³ in their memoirs, and their art. Russell created a comic

¹⁷³ A former POW with the Australian Imperial Forces, Bill Davies, remembered that Kirkwood had found himself in 'trouble with the guards whilst trying to stop them from entering the Hospital hut with their rifles', maintaining a

strip to tell of 'some aspects of life at Medan'. In this picture he describes the cramped conditions (a "sardine" atmosphere'), the unappetising prospect of another meal of boiled rice ('men remaining in somnolent posture when the clarion call rang out'), and 'the dysentery epidemic' (Figure 15). It is in the latter, in the third scene of this picture, that 'poor Dr.Kirkwood' receives a personal reference. With his unshaven profile on the far right of the picture, holding a steaming cup, Kirkwood is depicted not drinking from that cup, but 'smelling scores of samples of prime excrement'. The initial impression of a comforting and warm drink, part perhaps of a carnival feast, is only to be subverted by the grotesque and stinking effluence of dysentery. Through its literal toilet humour, Russell tells us that it was Kirkwood's medical knowledge and bodily senses that would help to treat the sensations and symptoms of others. From the early days of captivity, here at Medan, through Atjeh and onto the railway, Kirkwood – and the medics like him – would be an intrinsic member of this group of POWs on Sumatra:

Operating on people with spoons, doing amputations in the dark, just trying his very best to keep people alive, everyone was just hanging on by a thread and yet he was hanging on by a thread. (██████████, *Interview*)

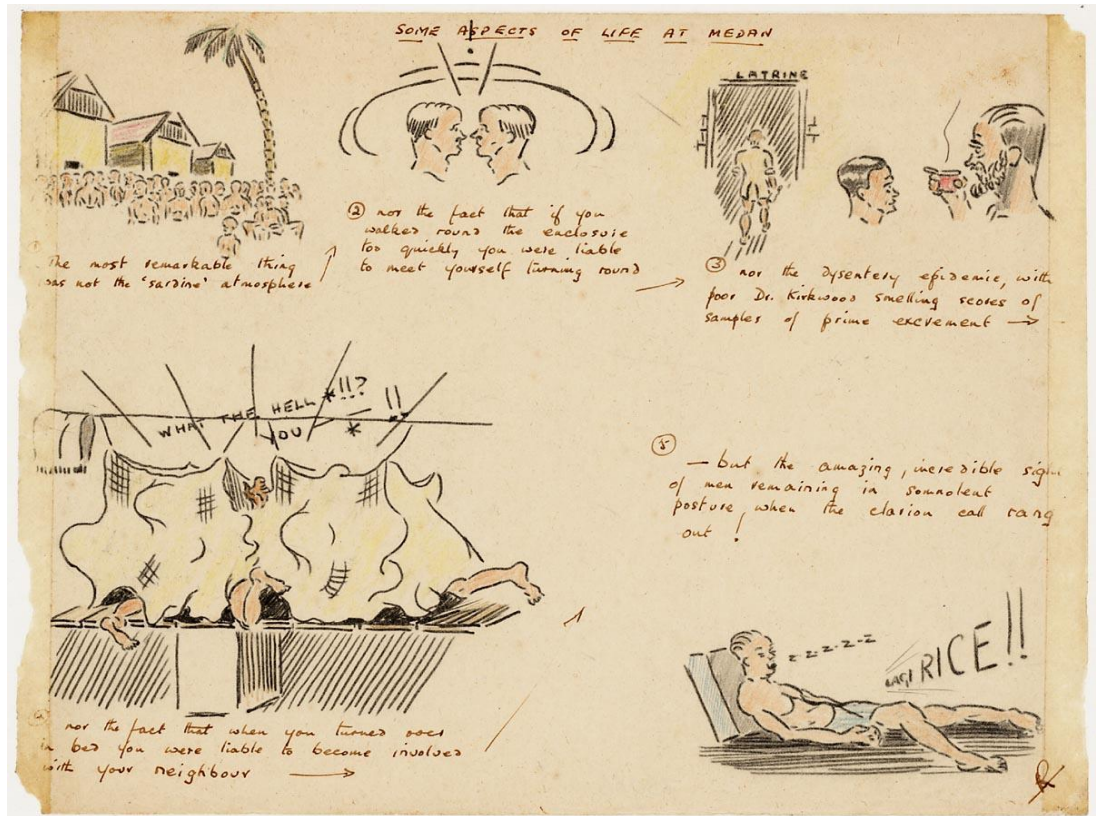


Figure 15: Stanley Russell. 'Some aspects of life at Medan'. 1943. MUSE01:11485

Seventy years after Russell's picture was drawn Kirkwood's daughter, Imogen Holmes, followed in her father's footsteps, too. In February 2012, Holmes travelled to the Far East to attend five days of services and commemorative events marking the anniversary of the fall of Singapore. She travelled with members of the Malayan Volunteers Group (MVG), an organisation that has evolved through the informal gathering of British Malaysians who were Volunteer Veterans.¹⁷⁴ The MVG began holding an annual meeting every October. This meeting was not just attended by veterans but by increasing numbers of their children and other family members, and it continues to thrive as a result. Following the ceremonies in Singapore, Imogen travelled by boat through the South China Sea to Palembang on Sumatra. In taking this very journey 'following in my father's wake' (Holmes, *Footsteps* 1), she travelled as Kirkwood had, 'following in the footsteps' of his own father too. Imogen was able to travel close to where the railway line ran, and although she did not get as close as she wished 'the whole point of my being there was to follow in my father's footsteps and get a feel for the place' (3). She was able

¹⁷⁴ Malayan Volunteers Group, www.malayanvolunteersgroup.org.uk/, accessed 26 January 2014.

to stop at the memorial that stands at Pakanbaroe, next to a locomotive from the railway that was abandoned in the jungle at the time of the Japanese surrender (Figure 16).



Figure 16: Detail from Sumatra Railway memorial, Pakanbaroe. 2009. Courtesy of Amanda Farrell.

On her return, Imogen wrote an article for the MVG newsletter, in which she described her father's service background and her own decision to travel to the locations in which her father worked as a doctor whilst living as a prisoner (Holmes, *Footsteps*). Undertaking such a pilgrimage is a literal bodily response to the history of the camps. It embodies a need to move to a focal point for where the story – at least for Holmes and those like her – appears to begin: the moment of her father's capture.

Holmes's journey was not just prompted by a response to the story that she already knew of her father's imprisonment. Her journey also involved a search for a different response: a need to 'get a feel' for the place in which her father was a POW, to experience the affect for herself of sailing the routes that he would have

taken to get to Sumatra, and to place her feet on the ground where his bare feet would have once trodden (Holmes, *Footsteps* 2). This was a trip, to echo my introduction to this thesis, that was concerned with 'discovering Sumatra'. Holmes describes Kirkwood as 'following in his father's footsteps', whilst she wished to travel in her 'father's wake'. The act of recording her journey, and of sharing it in an article to the MVG, also reflected the life-writing format that many men adopted on their repatriation, by writing articles and letters to the newsletters of Far East social clubs and associations (chapter 5).

This text has been removed by the author of this thesis as it contains personally sensitive information.

Chapter 5

The postmemorial archive of the Far Eastern POW



Figure 17: POWs liberated from Sumatra, September 1945. IWM: HU 69972.

Our intelligence about Sumatra had indeed been poor. The size of the problem was formidable. (G Jacobs 71)

In early September 1945, Major Gideon Jacobs and a small team of troops parachuted onto Sumatra. This was the first time that the two camps at

Pakanbaroe, and the fifteen others along the railway line, were discovered by Allied forces. Having toured Padang and Fort de Kock on Sumatra, Jacobs had been flown to Pakanbaroe and from the air had viewed rows of atap huts situated in forbidding jungle terrain. Having met Wing Commander Davis at the base camp, he queried the positioning of the huts that he had seen from the plane. Davis told him that 'it was the railway' (97). At that point, nearly nine hundred men had been identified as requiring urgent hospital care, some unable to move at all because they were so poorly (97).¹⁷⁵ A serious problem also existed in the 'listless' spirit of the liberated men – 'they could not take it in' that they were free men (98). Jacobs recounts that the psychological recovery of former POWs was of paramount concern to the liberating forces: 'but it was apparent that none of them could recover in such an unhealthy area, where they had suffered such mental and physical torture' (99). Sumatra had become associated with what Paul Connerton terms as an 'empathic projection', a process through which 'life-spaces' are invested 'with the attributes of our bodily states' (149).¹⁷⁶ The site of the railway was unsanitary, facilities for adequate care were non-existent: the bodies were sick and the 'life-spaces' which they inhabited offered 'an unhealthy area', too.

In September 1945, Jacobs inspected some of the huts at camps 1 and 2 along the railway. Camp 2 by this point was being used solely as a hospital camp. He described men who were 'apathetic, broken in spirit', who 'bowed, as the Japanese had forced them to do' when they greeted him. They were men who 'shuffled', many suffering from 'large suppurating ulcers' and yet those still able to move were 'acting as nurses and trying to relieve the suffering of their companions' (100). The smell, for Jacobs, was 'nauseating' with flies hovering around the 'listless' bodies (101).

Nearly all the men were suffering from beri-beri...In many cases, the men's bodies had become swollen to grotesque proportions, their limbs looking like water-filled balloons. In others the swelling had subsided and with the water drained away only the skeletons remained. Their skins withered and shrunken, hair matted and eyes

¹⁷⁵ A trip to Logas, the site of camp nine on the railway, led to the discovery of several hundred POWs who were so cut off by thick jungle that they had not been aware that the war was over. For several weeks these men had been 'surviving on tree bark and plant roots for food' (110).

¹⁷⁶ The empathic echoes in the journeys taken by relatives such as Imogen Holmes, to walk in the footsteps of their fathers and 'get a feel' for the experience of captivity and hard labour in a tropical climate.

sunk into deep hollows, they were spectres from a haunted world. (G Jacobs 100)

Jacobs's response encapsulates many of the themes that I have explored throughout this thesis. It is Jacobs, the onlooker, who is the receiver of Davis's story, and it is Jacobs who is overwhelmed physically. The affect felt by Jacobs on seeing the bodies of the starving men is deep-rooted within his own body: he is nauseated and he finds, echoing Bakhtin, the sight of the starving and diseased men 'grotesque'. Jacobs writes that he is appalled by such 'withered and shrunken' bodies and feels as if he has found himself 'in the company of the living dead' (102). But Jacobs's response also helps to move us beyond the camps, to the post-war narrative of the Far Eastern POW. This is a narrative that, as this final chapter shows, is 'haunted', too: ghosts and 'spectres' pervade the transmission of Far Eastern history from the moment of liberation, culminating in what became referred to as the 'spirit' of the former Far Eastern POW.¹⁷⁷

The two images collated in Figure 18, 'Hope' and 'Fear' were painted by Geoffrey Hamilton¹⁷⁸ when he was in hospital with tuberculosis in 1956, nine years following his liberation. On first glance, they appear to have had their titles attributed incorrectly: the archetypal image of the prisoner behind bars, gripping on to the structures that restrained him, was – for Hamilton, having been freed – a figure of 'Hope'. Yet, the image of open doors, a bright sunlit exit and, it is to be assumed, a return to freedom, suggests 'Fear' to Hamilton. What is pictured here, then, is the 'Hope' that POWs required to stay alive – the 'spirit that kept us going'; but also, the 'Fear' of walking out, a liberated man, into a strange world that was full of post-war language (chapter 3), and the need to heal a starved and battered body (chapter 4).

¹⁷⁷ *Spirit* appears frequently throughout the papers of Harold Payne, who was President of the NFFCA for thirty years, and it was a term that he inscribed at the heart of the work of the NFFCA. For example, in his memoir during the 1990s, Payne wrote 'when you have been in a retreating army and then a capitulated army, you are not in the very highest of spirits' (Payne, *A Part of the Life* 9). Writing, then, of the motto of the NFFCA, "To keep going the spirit that kept us going". The great things were our pride, our spirit de corps [sic] and our comradeship. These were the things that kept us going' (Payne, *A Part of the Life* 10). The remit of the NFFCA included 'To promote the material and spiritual welfare of Far East Prisoners of War' and 'to perpetuate the Spirit that kept FEPOWs going' (Payne, *Reception* n.pag.).

¹⁷⁸ 2nd Lieutenant Geoffrey Cadrow Hamilton, 2nd Royal Scots Hong Kong; became POW aged 24 in Hong Kong, 25 December 1941.

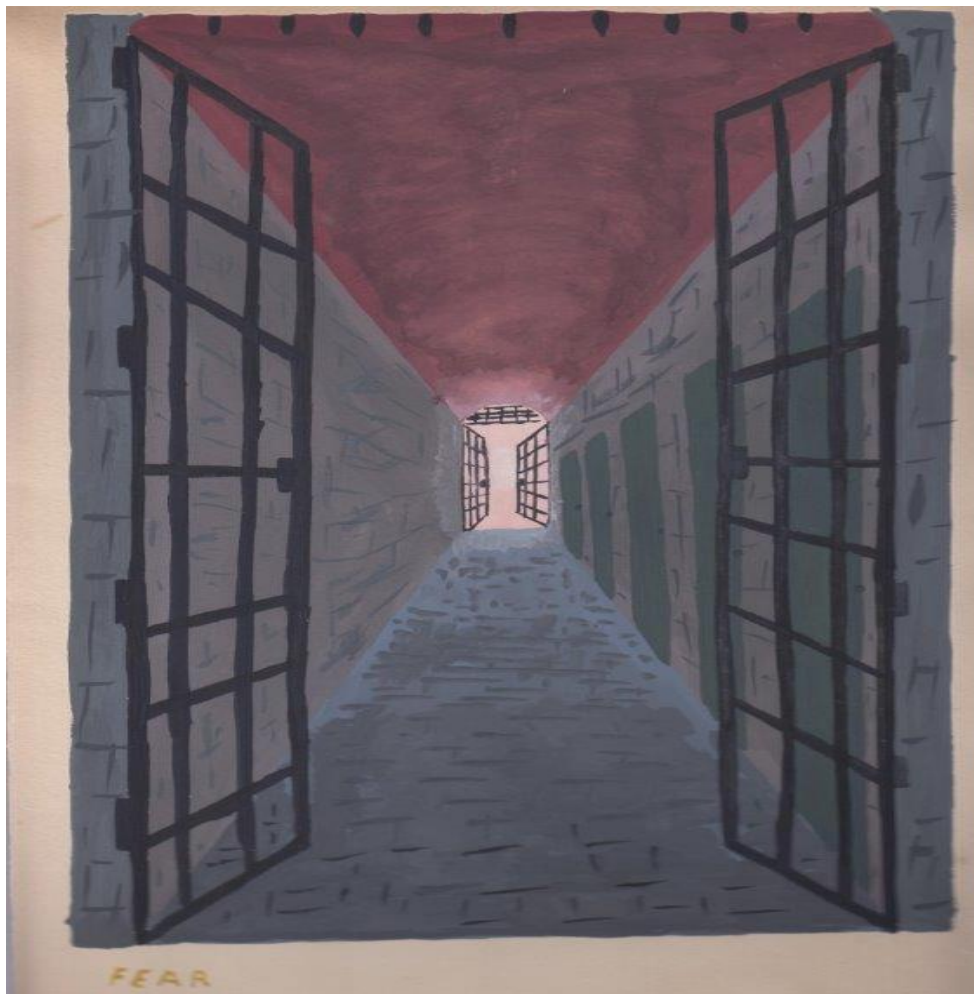


Figure 18: Geoffrey Hamilton. 'Hope' and 'Fear'. 1956. Courtesy of Hilary Hamilton.

The liberated men were 'skeletons' and the sight prompted Jacobs to describe the emaciated and apathetic figures as 'spectres from a haunted world'. But Jacobs also reports the automated bodily movements that were being performed by the men in the camp. Following their liberation, men remained deferential, bowing to Jacobs as they had to their guards, and displaying a form of kinaesthetic memory that Elizabeth Behnke has called 'ghost gestures', referring to actions that have been 'emotionally meaningful' in the past, and continue to be carried out as learned behaviours (197), part of a system of 'holding patterns' and movements that can reflect a body's history, and a 'more pervasive "social shaping"' (187) – as, for example, the 'shaping' of the bow in the former POW. Ghost gestures are habitual movements that take time to cease, if at all. The simple but significant gesture of bowing by instinct signifies the performative element of the affect of captivity: the bodily manifestation of the POW's fear of punishment – if he bowed to each guard that he saw, including his own officers post-liberation, he would be more likely to avoid that punishment.

Notions of the 'haunted' and haunting are prominent in the narratives of former Far Eastern POWs, but they are integral too, to the development of current theories of postmemory. Returning to Freud's work on mourning and melancholia, Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok developed the psychoanalytical framework of transgenerational haunting. In this framework, an individual is visited by the 'phantom' of unspoken and unexplained family secrets: or, 'the gaps left within us by the secrets of others' (171).¹⁷⁹ According to this theory of transgenerational haunting, those 'secrets of others' remain buried within a family's unconscious, whilst 'the words used by the phantom' – in the case of my research, for example, the discourse of captivity - 'do not refer to a source of speech in the parent' but instead 'they refer to the unspeakable' (174). For the relatives of former Far Eastern POWs, the words from the phantom refer to the untranslatable aspects of captivity that the parent – the former prisoner – cannot explain, and that the listener – the child of the former prisoner – cannot comprehend. Crucially for members of the

179 In her seminal text on memory, *Family Secrets*, Annette Kuhn writes: 'perhaps for those...who have learned silence through shame, the hardest thing of all is to find a voice: not the voice of the monstrous singular ego, but one that, summoning the resources of the place we come from, can speak with eloquence of, and for, that place' (123). The 'shame' of the family secret encapsulates the challenge that members of the second generation have in creating a new archive, a new story-truth, through which a 'voice' can speak – a voice that recognises and acknowledges the phantom of their parents' history, but also finds a 'place' for their own response to that history. It is a 'voice' that has to push beyond a childhood, ██████████, of being 'conditioned not to ask' about those family secrets – as if, by asking, a shameful history would be revealed – and finding a 'place' and a 'voice' through which ██████████ (and other children of former POWs like her) can allow both the phantom 'to speak' and to 'fill in the blanks' for herself.

second generation, however, the presence of the transgenerational 'phantom' does not refer to the trauma that was originally suffered by the parent – here, their history of captivity – but rather uncovers 'the effects, on the descendants' (so, the postmemory) of that original trauma (174).¹⁸⁰ Abraham and Torok determined that the haunting of the 'phantom' can become so embedded within families that, perhaps inevitably, it is then offered 'sustenance' by the words that invoke its presence and that refer, at the same time, to its unspeakability: 'these are often the very words that rule an entire family's history and function as the tokens of its pitiable articulations' (176). Meg Parkes is chair of the Researching FEPOW History Group, a group that facilitates the sharing of information between individuals who are interested in the history of the Far Eastern camps, as well as fundraising activities for memorial purposes. Parkes has written on the familial legacy of her father's captivity on Java during the Second World War:

For me...it was normal that whenever the words "Japanese" or "Japan" were mentioned, my father would erupt in a fit of rage, exploding his feelings...He could be very frightening. (Parkes, *Notify* viii)

Relatives of former Far Eastern POWs often refer to outbursts of sudden anger, and to being 'woken by Dad's screams as he relived the FEPOW experience in his nightmares' (██████████, *Interview*). One of my interviewees for this project spoke of his father having 'shut down emotionally' (Anon, *Interview*). Michael Nellis, whose father was a POW on the Burma-Siam Railway has written that: 'I would balk at [some] food and Dad would go spare at me, no matter what...I was throwing away food which Dad would have given his eye teeth for when he was a Prisoner' (96-97). The 'haunting' of the second generation by their parents' history, and the recording of the 'phantom' of that history within personal – and public – archives is a well-established phenomenon within studies of the concentration camps of the Second World War (Epstein; Hartman; Hass). Although not confined to the history of the Holocaust,¹⁸¹ there have been various attempts, since the rapid proliferation of Holocaust studies, to articulate and encapsulate the complex - and

180 Although Abraham and Torok write here of the 'effects' of transgenerational 'haunting', both chapter 4 and my work in this chapter show that those 'effects' also translated into affects, into the felt experience of the memory of captivity.

181 In her novel *Beloved*, Toni Morrison writes of the 'rememory' of African-American slave narratives (36).

often unspoken – exchanges that occur between those who have experienced captivity, and their kin.¹⁸² Deepening interest in the inter- and trans-generational transmission of the history of the Holocaust has prompted notions of what James Young calls a ‘received history’ (Young, *Towards* 21) – a history that is ‘received’ by what Eva Hoffman describes as a ‘hinge generation’. This generation, Hoffman finds, is the generation within which ‘the past is transmitted into history or into myth’. For Hoffman, this ‘hinge’ is a potentially dangerous point for the history of the concentration camps, as it is the point at which the ‘realities of historical experience’ can be lost in the ‘frozen formulae of collective memory’ or, alternatively, and more hopefully, the point at which that experience is apprehended ‘in all its affective and moral complexity’ (Hoffman 198).

It is this ‘affective’ impact of ‘received’ historical narratives that focused Marianne Hirsch’s study of the life narratives produced by second-generation writers and artists from the Holocaust, and that led her to develop the concept of postmemory: that is, the ‘relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before’ (Hirsch, *Generation*, Introduction). Echoing Abraham and Torok’s theory of transgenerational haunting, Hirsch, herself a child of Holocaust survivors, explains that postmemory both signals the ‘inter- and transgenerational return of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience’, and documents the ‘consequence of [that] traumatic recall ...at a generational remove’ (*Generation*, Introduction). At the core of postmemory dwells the compelling need of younger generations to explore the ways in which they have inherited the memory of their parents’ history, and how their own lives have then been shaped by its legacy. In the pursuit of postmemory, pilgrimages to the sites of historical trauma are undertaken, old photographs are scrutinised to peel away the layers from history, and material objects tend to hold particular resonance in enabling individuals to read a story that they may have not heard from their predecessors (Spiegelman; Mendelsohn; Miller, *What they Saved*; Hirsch and Spitzer, *Ghosts of Home*).

Despite the centrality of the concentration camps to its development, postmemory is equally applicable to the history of the camps in the Far East. Further, I show in this chapter that postmemorial responses to the stories of Far

182 See for example, James Young. ‘Towards a Received History of the Holocaust’. *History and Theory* 36: 4, December, 1997: 21-43; Nancy Miller, *What They Saved: Pieces of a Jewish Past*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011; Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer. *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011; Daniel Mendelsohn. *The Lost*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2007.

Eastern incarceration were developing – not during the ‘memory boom’ of the late 1970s onwards (Winter 1) – but in the immediate post-war period. For the children of Far Eastern POWs, postmemory has been, and remains, a significant force in their lives. Many authors of published works relating to the POW experience during the Second World War (across Europe as well as the Far East) are the children or grandchildren of former POWs themselves (see Gillies; Flower; Kandler; Makepeace; Parkes; Summers). We see that in living with, and within, the aftermath of captivity, the wish to know more about the history of incarceration during the Second World War involves more than a search through personal papers and archived information. This search often becomes a lengthy research process forming careers as well as family histories. My third and fourth chapters established that the discourse that developed in the POW camps, and the harsh physicality of captivity in the Far East, have had a key influence on the way in which former POWs have chosen to represent their experiences through life-writing. This final chapter examines how that discourse – the words upon which the ‘phantom’ thrives – and the post-war continuation of the POW’s body biography – connect through the affective responses of their audiences and the postmemorial archive of the Far Eastern POW.

‘Nil abnormal detected’: the haunting of the POW body

Along with more than two-thousand fellow POWs and 4,200 romusha, Frederick Freeman was transported to Pakanbaroe from Java in September 1944 aboard the *Junyo Maru*, a cargo vessel commandeered by the Japanese to ship men to the railway. Whilst carrying Freeman and his comrades, the *Junyo Maru* was torpedoed by an Allied submarine, which had not identified the transporter’s cargo as being human let alone its own troops.¹⁸³ The ship sank quickly, leaving ‘just a mass of wreckage and bodies’ (Freeman, *Memoir* 3). Those bodies spent many hours in the water before Japanese ships returned for those still alive. No romushas are known to have survived, and only 700 POWs were picked up from the water by the Japanese – including Freeman – and immediately transported to Pakanbaroe where they joined the existing working parties to assist in the

¹⁸³ This was the second of two such incidents, the first being the sinking of the *Van Waerwijk* in June 1944 (see chapter 1).

construction of the railway. This group of shipwrecked men were located initially at camp 3 along the line.

It was in camp 3 that Freeman caught malaria, likely due to the lack of mosquito nets available to the men. This malaria recurred regularly, the only treatment for which was a raw form of powdered quinine, ground down from bark.¹⁸⁴ According to Freeman, this medicine was 'so rough that it tore the linings of our stomachs and touched off the dysentery again' (*Memoir 4*). Suffering, too, from dizziness and headaches caused by the ferocity of the sun, Freeman was declared permanently sick with dysentery and malaria and sent to the hospital camp at camp 2. By May 1945 he was well enough to be transferred up the line to camp 4, where he worked as a tailor and remained until liberation (4). This did not mean, however, that Freeman's physical difficulties had abated. The impact of captivity on his body dominated the rest of Freeman's life. Like thousands of other former Far Eastern POWs, Freeman experienced the health effects of captivity for several decades post-liberation and, in his case, up until his death forty-two years later in 1987. Indeed, the Freeman collection held at IWM documents the unrelenting presence of the past in, and on, Freeman's body. As such, it offers a vivid case study through which to examine how the memory of the camps was embodied in the skeletal, malnourished frame of the POW: a frame that was covered with new flesh as weight was gained, but a frame that retained the bodily memory of captivity.

The majority of the Freeman collection comprises a record of his disability pension assessments, and the claim made by Freeman's widow for a continuation of that pension following his death. Over the course of forty pages, the repetitive assessments of pathologists, neurologists, ophthalmologists and gastroenterologists record the slow and devastating decline in Freeman's health. His body biography is framed by the clinical discourse of the consultant and the medical assessment board. These assessments started in July 1946, and were reviewed at least twice a year by the Medical Board of the then Ministry of Pensions. Additional statements are included, generally provided by hospital consultants with whom Freeman came into contact in between his Medical Board reviews. In March 1950, Freeman, five years post-liberation and aged 28, was diagnosed with the 'effects of malnutrition with associated headaches, malaria' and 'nerve deafness' (*Tribunal Assessment 6*).

¹⁸⁴ 'We had large crates of quinine barks, about the size of a tea chest. The big pieces of bark were pounded into powder in the stomper (like the natives prepare their meals). The powder was mixed with "ongle-ongle" (a paste made from tapioca flour mixed with hot water so that it made it look like wallpaper glue). If you were suffering from malaria, you were given a big ball of the quinine and rolled it into small balls to take at the doctor's recommended rate. When the malaria had run its 4 day cycle, you reverted back to a small dosage as a prophylactic treatment'. (Freeman, *Memoir 4*).

Otherwise, his pathology was unremarkable, his 'general condition and nutrition' at that point were assessed as 'good', and the phrase 'nil abnormal detected' is repeated in the reports on his 'heart and systems' (6). At the same time, March 1950, Freeman also underwent a neurological assessment that found him 'thin, excitable, talkative' and noted that he 'had a bad time' as a POW, was 'knocked about definitely' and 'detests Japs'. The report notes twice 'memory good' and the bold statement: 'war repressions nil' (6). The statement is an uncomfortable one to read. The very nature of 'repressions' would suggest that these were unlikely to be detected so openly in the early post-war period. Freeman is, however, recorded as being claustrophobic and this is demonstrated in the reports by his dislike of the low roof in the local theatre (6). It was agreed that he would receive twenty percent of a disability pension at this point, but would continue working.

By the age of 37, in February 1959, Freeman is reported as still having 'frequent headaches', with sight and hearing problems (*Appeal Tribunal* 13). Having been an engineer prior to the war, Freeman worked as a bus conductor following his liberation and discharge from service, and in this occupation he struggled to maintain his full-time hours. In March 1960, the House Physician at Bevendean Hospital at Brighton reported that Freeman had been an in-patient of the hospital 'for short intervals for different investigations in the past 3 months' (16). On admission:

The patient was found to be a man of nervous disposition. He had tremors, and was sweating...There was tenderness in the whole of the abdomen, mostly around the umbilical region (*Appeal Tribunal* 16).

He was prescribed medication for nerve pain, anxiety and pancreatic malfunction. Transferred to Brighton General Hospital for further investigations, Freeman was 'getting a good deal of abdominal discomfort' with 'some diarrhoea' and the consultant physicians treating him believed that 'anxiety is a major causal factor'. At this point, doctors became 'reluctant for him to undergo any further investigations' and put it 'as plainly as I can' that holding down employment – rather than being pensioned as permanently sick – was a key strategy in enabling Freeman 'to be fully rehabilitated' (*Appeal Tribunal* 18). But this 'full rehabilitation' was never to occur: just over two years later, Freeman was diagnosed as being in a 'chronic anxiety state', suffering from 'sensory disturbances' and his concentration and memory were both 'poor'. Although it was recorded that he had 'no POW dreams' at this stage, the fact that this history of his captivity reappears in the notes – its presence indicated by the noting of its very absence – suggests that

Freeman's 'tense anxious' demeanour and 'severe shakes and palpitations' were the manifestations of his time as a prisoner.

Further, Freeman's pancreatitis had worsened and a stent was fitted into his duodenum to relieve some of the related symptoms. Doctors also became concerned about his nutritional intake: apart from eggs and potatoes that he ingested as 'sporadic' meals, Freeman is reported as taking – despite attempts to dissuade him – 'a fair proportion of his calories as Guinness' (*Appeal Tribunal 22*). In this state he retired at the age of 55, with the disability weighting on his pension having increased to eighty percent. Just two years later, a note from welfare officers state that Freeman has 'put his affairs in order':

He cannot eat and he told me that his wife says that he eats less than a cat. He lives on 32 pills a day. He can sleep during the day but not at night. His eyesight is deteriorating and he has hardly any sight at all in the right eye. He had a recurrence of malaria 6 months ago. (Freeman, *Appeal Tribunal 23*)

Death was preoccupying Freeman. The disease he had contracted in the camps more than three decades previously – malaria – was still haunting his body, and the repetitive signs of trauma were invoked by the continual recurrence of the disease. That haunting is crucial in foreshadowing postmemory for here, too, is the first mention that Freeman's family receive within his collection. Suddenly we are struck by a new, silent, narrative: the pathological assessments of his 'heart and systems' with 'nil abnormal detected', and even the neurological reports declaring that he was an 'excitable man' with 'no POW dreams' did not detect at that time the affective life of those very 'heart and systems'. The body biography does not tell us one crucial thing: Freeman had a life exterior to that written in the ailments of his body. He was married, and by the end of a separate document, his short memoir, we learn that he had at least one child – although it is not made clear whether this is a son or a daughter, or if they have any siblings. His family, therefore, are watching him deteriorate and survive on '32 pills a day'. And in this report, too, we find the first direct statement that Freeman's 'FEPOW experiences' were indeed troubling him: now, it says, he has 'occasional nightmares' (*Appeal Tribunal 79*). The early declaration of 'war repressions nil' haunts the narrative, too. In the next instalments of Freeman's body biography, the consumption of Guinness turns to Complan, a nutritional drink generally used by the elderly or infirm when they are unable to face food. Freeman, we read, is vomiting all solid foodstuffs. In February

1987, forty-one years post-liberation and aged 64, Freeman suffered a 'small gastric perforation' and a 'spontaneous oesophageal rupture' – the surgeries for which led to a diagnosis of carcinoma of the liver with a 'metastatic carcinoma of the kidneys also possible' (32). Two months later, on 19 April 1987, Freeman died.

Told through the repetitive fragments of these medical reports covering four decades, Freeman's body biography becomes increasingly bleak. His own words are few, his captivity on the Sumatra Railway is only briefly made present on paper, but it is never truly absent either. For this was a man continually returning to hospitals, consulting with physicians and undergoing physical examinations that inevitably failed to undo the original statement of 'war repressions nil'. The donation of this body biography to IWM signals, too, the wishes of a family placing on public record the aftermath of captivity, rather than the experiences of captivity itself. It is an act that supports Freeman's own stance when he wrote a short memoir – the purpose of which was to chronicle the impact of captivity and submit that as evidence towards the claim for compensation waged by former Far Eastern POWs against the Japanese Government in the decades immediately following liberation (*Memoir* n.pag.).

Freeman's memoir was a family endeavour. It was typed by his wife – we learn now that her name was Marie – and the memoir also includes letters that were written by Freeman to his parents from Singapore immediately after his liberation, and then in hospital at Bangalore in October 1945. The memoir ends with an addendum from one of his children, or perhaps his only child, telling of how Freeman and his wife had met in the hospital at RAF Cosford in June 1946. Marie was a member of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) and had suffered a dislocated knee for which she was receiving treatment when she met Freeman (*Memoir* 7). Their relationship then, from the start, had been forged through the care that the former POW's body required.

Likewise, the child's memory was impressed upon by the body of the former POW:

Dad had a rope burn round his upper arm where he struggled to climb up the ship [after the sinking of the *Junyo Maru*]. I remember hearing about the vicious Koreans and the Japanese who would peg out prisoners over quick growing bamboo so that it would grow through the man's body. Another torture was to force-feed the POW with water and jump on his full belly. (Freeman, *Memoir* 7)

The 'rope burn round his upper arm' offers Freeman's child a tangible mark of his captivity. The other stories are reminiscences that they just 'remember hearing about', but the burn is possessed, a mark that their father 'had' and that acted for them as a bodily signifier of his history. Freeman's collection comes together to show how the body of the former POW became, like the diaries and drawings I have presented throughout this thesis, what Hirsch refers to as a 'testimonial object': objects that 'carry memory traces from the past...but also embody the very process of its transmission'. They are objects that 'testify to the historical contexts and the daily qualities of the past moments in which they were produced and, also to the ways in which material objects carry memory traces from one generation to the next' (*Generation*, ch.7). Hirsch identifies that these objects comprise images, stories and artefacts that have been passed down to, or picked up by, the second generation in the search for the history of the camps. The remainder of this chapter will show that families have returned to the art and writings of former POWs to 'carry memory traces' across the generations, but the bodies of the POWs, and as a collected body of men gathering at reunions, were in themselves 'testimonial objects'. Freeman's body – and those of many thousands of former POWs – became an object to be scrutinised by medical professionals (not least through routine tropical disease assessments), and his skin became – to reflect Braddon – a 'parchment' for his child to read. It was a parchment that bore the burn marks of his experiences and the scars of ulcers. Those marks of captivity connected the transmission of tropical disease to a new transmission: that of postmemory.

The creation of the 'FEPOW'

Serving in the Royal Army Medical Corps, Stanley Cooper treated British troops following their liberation from Rangoon at the end of the Second World War. In a letter to his wife in September 1945, Cooper wrote that 'Belsen and its infamous companions will pale almost into insignificance' to stories from the Far East (S Cooper n.pag.). Liberators on the island of Sumatra made the same analogies: 'they look as if they will never be normal again, through the beatings and slow starvation. Some were even worse than those photos in Germany and when they were given food they could hardly eat' (Cobb n.pag.). The hyperbole that the concentration camps 'pale into insignificance', or that it was possible to measure whether some camps were 'even worse' than conditions experienced in Germany, is uncomfortable but it reflects the shock that was felt among the administrations who were tasked to organise the liberation of captives in the Far East and their

repatriation. It also shows that as early as September 1945, 'Holocaust consciousness' was influencing the representation of other areas of captivity from the same conflict (Rothberg 3). Cooper wrote that:

The things I have seen and heard, have not been propaganda – they have been the men themselves. And I say this without exaggeration – these things are almost beyond human comprehension. (S Cooper, private papers)

The repatriation of troops and civilians from the Far East was managed by the office for the Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees (RAPWI), established at the headquarters of Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten. As part of their remit, RAPWI personnel provided information on-board repatriation ships about the various aspects of support that would be available to them when they returned to Britain. One of these was the Civil Resettlement Units (CRUs), which all former POWs were invited to attend in order to help them 'get in shape for civvy street' (Figure 19).

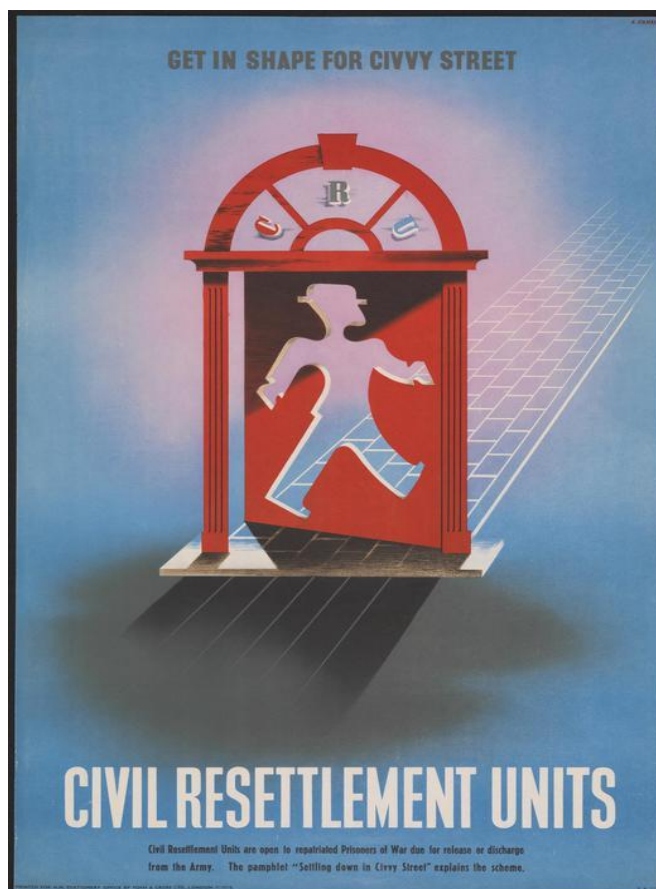


Figure 19: Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Poster for Civil Resettlement Units. IWM Art PST 2977

As early as 1944, based upon lessons learned during 1914 – 1918, remonstrations were being made to the government by medical professionals that provision needed to be put into place to cope with the large numbers of former POWs that would be returning from captivity. In response to this, a series of twenty CRUs were established across the country as a form of ‘decompression chamber’ in which to welcome and support former prisoners in their return to civilian life (Shephard, *War* 317).

CRUs involved a four-to-six week stay in the unit (but could be as long as three months), attending lectures about employment opportunities and the way in which different aspects of public life had changed in the intervening years, workshops to develop new skills, trips to local workplaces or employment centres, as well as social events and group discussions. For the latter, men were permitted to wear civilian clothes but for the remainder of the time were expected to wear uniform (War Office, *Settling Down*).¹⁸⁵ Men could receive medical treatment, and psychiatrists were involved, but any suggestions of seeking help for mental health issues were ‘deliberately played down’ (Shephard, *War* 317).

The CRU system was a success among POWs returning from the European camps – around sixty per cent of these men took up a place at a CRU and follow-up studies suggested that those that had done so had readjusted to civilian life more quickly due to the resocialisation experienced at the CRUs (Shephard, *War* 317 – 318). The system was not so appealing to repatriates from the Far East, with only twelve per cent of these troops attending CRUs (320). There were several reasons for this lack of appeal. In his history of veterans’ mental health care between 1914 and 1994, Shephard points to a lack of ‘public discussion’ regarding the ‘mentality’ of the Far Eastern POW and that medical professionals had wrongly assumed that this ‘mentality’ was likely to be more positive than that of their European counterparts – for three key reasons. Firstly, it was believed that there would be a unanimous animosity among the former Far Eastern POWs towards their captors, based mainly on racial epithets; that, secondly, men had not been entirely separated from their Officers in the Far East unlike in Europe; and thirdly, rather remarkably, it was determined that the weakest men had died as POWs and therefore the fittest and toughest men would be returning home (319). Indeed, the leaflet distributed to men on board their repatriation ships stated that, as a result of their experiences overseas, they would now see the world ‘through the eyes of a soldier instead of a civilian’ and have ‘a new outlook on civil life, a more developed

¹⁸⁵ For an example of the leaflet that was distributed to liberated POWs, see Pearce.

outlook and, quite possibly, a better one than before' (War Office, *Settling Down* n.pag.). There appeared to be little open consideration for how men returning home were not looking 'through the eyes of a soldier', but the eyes of a man who had, to use Goulding's words from chapter 4, viewed himself through the eyes of a 'savage' (Yasmé 62).

No centrally organised attempt was made, at least initially, to identify and manage the particular problems facing the former Far Eastern POW: later, one man would write that 'ignorance of our positives' and 'the knowledge derived' from the experience of captivity was also 'the reason why the sinecure C.R.U.s failed with our real problems' (Barclay Miller n.pag.). The CRUs were also likely to be unattractive because POWs of the Japanese (unlike those from Europe), in receiving medical treatment abroad and then voyaging home over the course of several weeks, had already experienced a form of 'decompression chamber' – the repatriation ship. Medical treatment, dietary advice and the practical matters involved with returning home were discussed on board and Army, Navy, R.A.F. and Red Cross personnel were present on these voyages to help 'in every possible way towards complete recovery' ('Bringing Them Home' 3). The CRU was not, then, going to be an appealing proposition to men who were already desperate to return to their homes and families.¹⁸⁶ Unlikely to foster any change of mind, the CRU leaflet warned men not to 'spoil your future because you are impatient to get into a job right away'. And as if to dismiss any subsequent rebuttal that troops were 'impatient' to return home, rather than to 'a job', the leaflet closes with the cheery advice that 'a few weeks won't make much difference after all these years [but] good luck to you anyway' (War Office, *Settling Down* n.pag.). It is of no surprise, then, that relatively few liberated men from the Far East took up the offer of a place and that by June 1946, the CRUs had closed.

All of the written records referenced in this thesis relating to the Sumatra Railway begin at the moment of enlistment or capture, and finish either during the

¹⁸⁶ In the collection of one former POW from Sumatra I have uncovered some official acknowledgement, late in the repatriation process, that this leaflet did not address the specific issues faced by former Far Eastern POWs adequately. A letter dated 1 November 1945 from the War Office was preserved by John Sharples, a man who was incarcerated in the camps at Palembang on Sumatra. This letter was likely given to Sharples during his repatriation voyage and enclosed with it was the introductory leaflet about the CRUs. The letter adds a caveat to the leaflet by stating that due to consideration of a wide readership, the leaflet is 'written in rather a colourful style' but regardless of this, 'it is well worth attention' (War Office, 'Letter on "Posting" 1). Nonetheless, the letter reaffirms that the CRUs were focused on rehabilitation for employment rather than social or family life, alongside some 'medical arrangements', and having the opportunity to obtain help in 'straightening out any odds and ends of pay and administration which may be outstanding' (War Office, 'Letter on "Posting" 2).

voyage home ('Passed Aden in the morning' – Parsons 13 November 1945), when a man is reunited with his loved ones, 'I was home at last' (Boulter 165), and 'that was more or less it (Fitzgerald, *If You See* 87) or at his demobbing, which 'more or less completes the story' (Cuthbertson 73). As a free man, a man returning 'home at last' and discharged from service, the experience of war is presented as being over and the story 'complete'. Yet, the story was far from over. Although no precise data is available, Shephard documents suicides, accidental deaths, cirrhosis of the liver, and a 'good deal of depression' among returning Far Eastern POWs, with persistent problems related to loneliness, isolation and guilt (322). Neither were comprehensive studies carried out on early deaths among former POWs of the Japanese, although tentative research findings on mortality and autopsy results in the 1980s suggested an 'overall excess mortality' (Gill, *Mortality* 13). In particular, there was a 'marked increase' in cancers of the stomach, pancreas and liver, and in death due to rheumatic heart disease (13).

This was acknowledged in mid-1946 by the Chairman of the Returned British Prisoners of War Association (RBPOWA), who wrote in the Association's newsletter, *The Clarion*, an article about the problems of resettlement, which would become a recurring theme in later issues (Barclay Miller; Chapman). In this article, repatriates were described as being often 'physically weak, mentally sick, and socially maladjusted' and, crucially, unable in the turmoil of repatriation to consider – as were the ambitions of the CRUs – immediately reskilling, securing new employment and, in many cases, dealing with housing difficulties (Tarbat n.pag.).

To assist with the 'problems of resettlement', the RBPOWA attempted to create a unified organisation that included all former POWs, regardless of the theatre of captivity from which they had returned. *The Clarion* contained reports, book reviews and also requested contributions of reminiscences and anecdotes from former POWs themselves. Between the summer of 1946 and its final issue in Christmas 1952, thirty-four editions of the twelve-page *The Clarion* were printed, and submissions from former POWs were quickly dominated by the stories of men who had been incarcerated in the Far East. This caused a dissatisfaction among the RBPOWA's wider membership, namely those men who had been POWs in Europe, and that dissatisfaction spilled out onto the pages of *The Clarion* ('Future Clarions' n.pag.).¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ For an analysis of the immediate post-war bonds forged between former European POWs, compared to those forged between former Far Eastern POWs, see Makepeace, *For All* (forthcoming).

As the factions between the groups developed, former Far Eastern POWs started to create separate local clubs, and the earliest references to the Sumatra Railway appear in the sixteenth issue of *The Clarion*, in February 1949, as the journal reported on the development of these separate reunions of former Far Eastern POWs. One article writes somewhat contradictorily of 'the lesser-known but notorious Sumatra railway' ('Railroad of Dead Men' n.pag.), in another article in the same issue there is described 'work on the notorious Sumatra Railway' ('Boar or Python' n.pag). It was 1951 before the 'other railroad' received a dedicated article in *The Clarion* ('That Other Railroad' n.pag.) and by this stage, over sixty local Far Eastern Prisoner of War reunion clubs and associations had formed (Sharp, *Cuttings* n.pag). Having listened to discussions among these groups, on 19 September 1950, Lieutenant-General Arthur Percival held the first meeting of what became the RBPOWA's Sub-Committee for the Claim for Compensation. This Sub-Committee was formed to 'bring together representatives from all over the country to follow a common line of action' in terms of claiming compensation from the Japanese Government for violations against the Geneva Convention ('Minutes' 1). With parliamentary opinion split regarding the issue of compensation, it became necessary for the Sub-Committee to establish that POWs in the Far East had undergone experiences that were 'a separate class from those elsewhere' (Hansard, 13 June 1950, vol. 476, col. 179). This group of former POWs, already congregating separately in private, were now required to create a public representation of their experiences as being in 'a separate class': their experiences were now under scrutiny. Thus began a lengthy dialogue in the House of Commons¹⁸⁸ and across the national press (Sharp, *Cuttings*). Within these public debates, stories from 'the "Death Railway"' became a prominent feature, partly because of the numbers of men involved and also because a small portion of the compensation distributed to surviving men comprised the monies recovered by the UK Government following the sale of the Burma-Siam Railway to the Siamese administration.¹⁸⁹

In an act that negated the earlier warning not to divulge their experiences to the press, members of the local social clubs and associations were urged to 're-double your effort' in broadcasting the story, since 'we need a large body of public

188 See as examples, Hansard: 14 June 1950; 10 and 30 May 1951; 12 July 1951; 26 and 28 November 51; 30 July 1954; 23 July 1956.

189 In the sale of the Burma-Siam Railway, Siam paid £1.25million, with £170,000 being paid to the UK Government 'for servicemen forcibly employed', the rest being distributed to Malaya, Burma, the Netherlands East Indies for materials and labour (Braddon 'Men bearing the scars of the "Death Railway" discuss question that sears the heart: Do you atone with a fiver? – or buy forgiveness with flowers?' see Payne, private papers).

opinion behind us' (Howard, *Letter 1950*). It is clear, however, that the Sub-Committee members aimed to maintain their own control over what the story being broadcast should be: the public representation of 'Fepows', as the Committee started to refer to them, was orchestrated to appeal to the sympathy of the public. Members were told in two 'Claim for Compensation' pamphlets that they should 'stick to the facts as presented in our two pamphlets and [then] the same story is going over simultaneously everywhere' (Howard, *Letter 1950*). Indeed, following letters submitted to the press that did not coincide with the committee's 'facts as presented',¹⁹⁰ Howard sent a letter on 12 May 1951 to 'stress the inadvisability...of any individuals making statements to the press or their local members of parliament that do not coincide with the policies laid down by the national Fepow Claim Committee' (Howard, *Letter 1951*).

Within the two pamphlets produced by the compensation claim committee a clear image of 'the FEPOW' or 'the ex-FEPOW' was first introduced. The 'FEPOW' was an individual 'reluctant to remind others of the sensational and horrific aspects' of captivity – even though their representing committee were telling them to do so (Select Committee, *Pamphlet 2 1-4*) but often, 'the FEPOW' was still bearing 'physical signs of their maltreatment and sufferings':

The mental scars are less apparent to the casual onlooker...Otherwise they are ordinary members of the community occupied with the usual daily routine of family matters, personal interests, and earning a living... They are not a complaining lot – self-pity was never the attribute of those who became inured to hardships and hazards. One thing they have in common: a spirit of comradeship and solidarity that is still very much alive. (Select Committee, *Pamphlet 2 6*)

The 'spirit of comradeship' was a message that became embedded in the campaign. The pamphlets both had a print-run of 4000 copies, and the efforts of the

190 For example, one former POW wrote to the *Daily Mail*, 'I was a prisoner in the hands of the Japanese, but I can see no reason whatever why I should be "compensated" for any hardships which I have had to endure. We were soldiers and we were captured and we paid the penalty...Surely you establish a very dubious precedent if you attempt to "compensate" combatant troops for being taken prisoner or for the treatment they receive as prisoners?...By all means let us get all we can out of the Japanese: certainly make them pay...but give the money to the dependents of who never got home, if you like (I read the burial service for quite a few of them)'. (Cramsie,n.pag.)

committee culminated in an all-party meeting at the House of Commons on 7 March 1951 ('Minutes' 3). In May 1951, a motion was carried in the House of Commons to request Government to consider the claim for compensation (Hansard, 10 May 1951, vol. 487, col. 2219-77), and former Far Eastern POWs eventually received £75 each under Articles 14 and 16 of the Treaty of Peace signed between Japan and the Allied Powers 1951.¹⁹¹ This amount came in several instalments, the initial payment of £15 being made available in November 1952.

As the positive outcomes of the campaign started to emerge, in late 1951 the Co-ordinating Secretary of the Claim Committee used the pages of *The Clarion* to once more invoke the 'spirit' of former Far Eastern POWs to suggest that 'you should not allow that spirit of cooperation to lapse' once the campaign ended, but 'that a strong and widespread FEPOW organisation can be a great power for good' (Faithfull n.pag.). That 'spirit' of 'comradeship' and 'cooperation' that began as the *kongsi* in the Far Eastern camps led to the establishment of the National Federation of the Far Eastern Prisoner of War Clubs and Associations (NFFCA) in July 1952 to oversee the 68 local clubs and associations that were set up – 67 across the United Kingdom and 1 in Hong Kong (Sharp n.pag.). Emphasising the haunting of that 'spirit' in the post-war remembrance of 'the FEPOW', the NFFCA bore the motto 'to keep going the spirit that kept us going' (Payne, *A Part of the Life* 10). It worked to support the welfare of former POWs and their dependents (including of those who died in captivity), to 'preserve the sacred memory' of those who did not survive, and to co-ordinate information and communications between the groups 'and such kindred organisations' that were of 'value to FEPOWs' (Payne, *Reception* n.pag.). The annual reunion for the NFFCA, held at St-Martin-in-the-Fields typically included, alongside an address and reminiscences, The Last Post, the National Anthem, the Lord's Prayer, Reveille and 'The FEPOW Prayer':

And we that are left grow old with the years
Remembering the heartache, the pain and the tears.
Hoping and praying that never again
Man will sink to such sorrow and shame
The price that was pride we will always remember
Every day, every month, not just November.

¹⁹¹ A further £10,000 payment was made available by the British Government to former Far Eastern POWs or their widows from 2000.

We will remember them.
(Ogden and Merrett)

'FEPOW', the term that originated during the compensation claim, remained a distinctive part of their collective remembrance. Indeed, it is a term that has now become commonplace in critical and cultural examinations of captivity in the Far East.¹⁹² Yet, it is rare that the 'FEPOW' acronym will appear in a memoir written by a former POW, and where it does appear this will be in reference to the collective group of men rather than any individual 'FEPOW' referring to himself in such a way.¹⁹³ Neither will 'FEPOW' appear in unedited versions of contemporary camp diaries, since its usage was only coined several years after liberated troops had returned from the Far East. The 'FEPOW' acronym appears in *The Clarion* for the first time in October 1949, and it was used as a collective term, adopted by the newsletter to differentiate between 'the Kriegie' (the former European POW) and 'the F.E.P.o.W' ('Future "Clarions"' n.pag.). Notably 'the Kriegie'¹⁹⁴ is not a term that is then perpetuated throughout future issues, but news items for 'F.E.Ps.O.W' and 'F.E.P.O.Ws' are headed as such. The 'FEPOW Forum' – the newsletter for the London Association – and newsletters for other local clubs, then adopted 'FEPOW' as a standard collective term.¹⁹⁵ There is no term for POWs from other theatres of captivity that has been so widely adopted by families, media outlets, popular audiences and scholars in the way that 'FEPOW' has been accepted.¹⁹⁶ By retaining the public figure of the 'FEPOW' in their reunions even after the compensation claim committee had ceased its activity, the social clubs and associations (and the NFFCA) also retained the 'sociality of the body' of men who were brought together through the comradeship of the *kongsi*.¹⁹⁷

192 In his history of captivity in the Far East, Brian Macarthur writes of 'Fepows' and it is adopted throughout the writings of the postmemorial generation, historians and researchers.

193 For example, 'many books have been produced about the life and times of Far East Prisoners of War (FEPOWs)' (Fitzgerald, *If You See 1*);

194 Derived from Kriegsgefangenen, the German term for 'Prisoners of War'.

195 Each local social club or association developed a newsletter, such as 'The FEPOW Forum', which was the newsletter for the London FEPOW Association; 'FEPOW Fanfare', the newsletter for the Duchy of Cornwall FEPOW Association; and 'FEPOW Focus', the newsletter for the Manchester and District FEPOW Association.

196 A recent but unsuccessful petition to government from some relatives of former Far Eastern POWs called for the establishment of 15 August as a national 'FEPOW Remembrance Day'; see: www.fepow-day.org, accessed 27 January 2014.

197 'The only time I ever saw my Dad completely relaxed and at ease was when he was with fellow FEPOWs – it's only now that I can truly appreciate the bond that existed between them' (██████, *Interview*).

The postmemorial generation of 'the FEPOW'

By the time of liberation, privations on the home front meant that former POWs who were changed dramatically by their experiences were entering into a domesticity that had also altered immeasurably. In the grips of a postwar depression, families did not have the time, energy or inclination to reminisce about the recent conflict (Haggith 2011: 237-238). The publication of first-hand accounts, memoirs and diaries immediately after the Second World War was therefore rare, relative to the corresponding period following the Great War. For example, the IWM library holds just over one hundred and seventy memoirs and first-hand accounts that were published in 1945 – 1950 (averaging 28 per year), compared to the 302 published 1918 – 1922 (averaging just over 60 per year). The story changes, however, four decades later with a striking average of nearly eighty Second World War memoirs published per year during the 1980s and 1990s (Haggith 241).

The publication of Far Eastern POW and civilian internee memoirs followed the same pattern. For his six-volume work on the postal history of POWs and civilian internees in the Far East, historian David Tett amassed an extensive research library including popular as well as rare accounts of captivity under the Japanese. This library was catalogued when Tett came to sell much of this collection, and an interrogation of that library reveals the predominance of published works relating to captivity in the Far East from the 1980s and 1990s, compared with those from the 1950s and 1960s – 397 versus 101 respectively (Tett, *Research Catalogue*). These figures do not take into account the unpublished private papers of former Far Eastern captives that are held at IWM, of which it is estimated that there are nearly 2,000.¹⁹⁸

The common perception, therefore, of men who did not speak about their experiences – 'we were all told he didn't talk about it' (████████ Interview) – is somewhat difficult to reconcile with a group of men who formed social clubs and annual reunions, contributed to a national compensation claim that was played out heavily in the press, wrote memoirs, contributed oral histories and donated materials from the camps to public archives. It is, I think, more accurate to state that the men did speak – or write – about their experiences, but that they chose not to do so within domestic spaces. As ██████████ refers to the need to have been

¹⁹⁸ Email correspondence with Stephen Walton, Senior Curator, IWM, 31 January 2014. This estimated figure also includes collections related to the experiences of civilian internees in the Far East. There is no way of identifying the exact number of Far Eastern POW collections held at IWM, many of which are yet to be entered onto the publicly searchable catalogue.

'braver' to ask questions of her father – ask permission, perhaps, from her elders to do so – the men themselves appear to have relied upon the wider body of either the *kongsi*, or the institutional archive, in order to tell their stories. The support of the *kongsi* and the authority of a public archive granted permission to no longer 'guard' their tongues. Further, if there was an inability or a lack of desire to speak privately, this was compounded by – as I have identified elsewhere throughout this thesis – an inability to hear: friends and relatives had been advised to 'refrain from mentioning anything about camp to us' (Barclay Miller n.pag.; also ██████████, *Interview*; Hadoke, *Interview*).

So where, and when, did families learn about, and acknowledge, the experiences of captivity in the Far East? The answer requires a return to the body biography and the art of the former POW. Although it is not possible to isolate data from the families of former POWs from the Sumatra Railway alone, in tracing the emergence of postmemory from the Far Eastern camps as a whole, I have examined the visitor books for the post-war exhibition of the artist Charles Thrale, whose 'Executed for no apparent reason' is reproduced at the end of chapter 3 and was a part of that exhibition. Thrale was a POW on the Burma-Siam Railway and in Changi, Singapore, and as such, the exhibition does contribute to this dominant narrative of Far Eastern captivity. However, in the souvenir catalogue that was produced for the exhibition, Thrale wrote that he viewed his work as 'an exhibition of the heart' – a means by which he could pay 'tribute' to the 'courage of every prisoner in Jap hands' (*Valleys of the Shadow of Death* 2). The story of the exhibition, Thrale claimed, represented 'the story of us all' despite the divergent experiences, circumstances and conditions found within each Japanese POW camp (Thrale, *Valleys of the Shadow of Death* 8). This 'story' that Thrale was attempting to tell through his exhibition, then, was the story-truth of Far Eastern captivity, rather than the happening-truth of a specific camp. It was an exhibition 'of the heart', and therefore of the affective response to that story-truth.

Despite the problems of this approach (the story-truth of 'us all' is not possible to represent from across such a vast territory of incarceration) Thrale's aim to acknowledge the experience of 'every prisoner in Jap hands' was, overall, received positively by former Far Eastern POWs who attended his exhibition. His pictures rekindled the memories of those who had been incarcerated throughout the wartime Japanese Empire, including Borneo, Java and Sumatra. 'I was there', they wrote – even if the 'there' that a former POW remembered was many hundreds of miles away from the 'there' that Thrale had painted.

Like the other POW artists I considered in chapter 4, Thrale painted throughout his period of incarceration. Upon his repatriation, he arranged over one-hundred of those pictures into a narrative sequence, providing a pictorial diary of his captivity, to be exhibited across Britain for eighteen years between 1946 and 1964. It is an unusual example of one former POW very publicly telling his personal story, for a sustained period of time, almost from the moment that he returned. The value for my thesis is not in the pictures, *per se*, but in the comments that they engendered from the public. As extraordinary as the timing, and duration, of Thrale's travelling exhibition are the thirteen visitor comments books that were maintained throughout those years and deposited – with the surviving paintings – into IWM archives.

Each of the thirteen hard-backed ruled ledgers holds approximately one-hundred-and-fifty pages, with around five entries written by exhibition visitors per page. This means that each book contains near seven-hundred comments, offering a unique record of the reactions of former POWs and ex-servicemen, their families and members of the public to the stories of Far Eastern captivity. Those choosing to leave comments included men, women, and children; former POWs themselves, and their parents, wives and siblings; individuals from Britain, Australia, the United States and even Japan.

What this tells us is that the survivors of the camps and the second generation were together in the same venues, reading and responding to Thrale's story-truth of the Far Eastern camps simultaneously. Reflecting this, the visitor books were a medium through which former POWs stated that their story was 'true', whilst relatives also used them to say that they could accept what they saw – even when such open and frank admissions remained unspoken at home (Thrale, 1955 – 1961 n.pag.). Several of Thrale's visitors write that 'I have read the "Naked Island"' – the early memoir of Russell Braddon that I discussed in chapter 4 – but they also admit that: 'it never seemed to me that it could possibly have happened'. The Far East was too exotic, the tales too 'horrifying' to believe. 'I have listened, I have heard', says one visitor in Leeds, 'now I believe'. As if to counteract the doubt within families, POWs validated the story that Thrale's paintings were telling: 'As an ex P.O.W. I would like to state that Mr. Thrale has made an absolutely true set of pictures of the horrors that went on in the P.O.W. camps' (Thrale, 1951a n.pag.). So in the same way that former POWs affirmed that Thrale's exhibition was 'all true', the images in the exhibition helped their relatives or friends to 'now believe after seeing' (Thrale, 1961 – 1963 n.pag.). The books highlighted the need for the former POWs to assert their story-truth, whilst the second generation needed to confirm

the authenticity of that story-truth, before they could start the lengthy process of discovering the detail, and understanding the formative influence, of their family's past.

This is not to say that all of the reactions to the exhibition were welcoming. There is evidence of an increasing uneasiness among viewers that the exhibition encouraged animosity towards 'these little yellow slit eyed sadistic bastards' [sic] (Thrale, 1961 – 1963 n.pag.). Some criticism was levelled at Thrale by exhibition-goers, including former Far Eastern POWs, that the display was 'designed to stir up more hatred' (Thrale, 1953 – 1955 n.pag.) and that 'a little less exhortation to continued hatred might nowadays be more helpful & appropriate' (Thrale, 1958 – 1960 n.pag.). Such unease reflects that the period of the exhibition, 1946-1964, was not just a crucial moment for the post-war narrative of the Far Eastern POW in terms of their claim for compensation, but was a key time, too, in considering what concepts of 'memory' and 'survival' meant across Western societies.¹⁹⁹ This is a critical point in understanding the trajectory of postmemory. Rather than taking place decades later, as has been considered by Hirsch, the Thrale books indicate that members of the second generation were already attempting to understand the history and impact of their fathers' captivity in the immediate post-war period. It was not against the background of the fortieth and fiftieth anniversaries of captivity in the Second World War, as discourses on memory would have been in the 1980s, but a response prompted by the immediate fallout at the end of the war. Consequently, viewers assessed Thrale's pictures against their own perceptions of the conflicts and captivities that had occurred around them – before, after, and simultaneously to that in the Far East. This 'connective' basis to postmemory is reflected in requests from visitors during the final years of the exhibition to 'remember Nagasaki and Hiroshima' and for the organisers to display the narratives of survivors from those atrocities alongside the pictures from the POW camps (Thrale, 1961 – 1963 n.pag.). And so, not only is postmemory revealed as having emerged early, but the connective, 'multidirectional' nature of that memory is emphasised here again too – that is, the act of cross-referencing apparently divergent histories (and fundamentally for my research, divergent histories of captivity) to inform our understanding and reading of each (Rothberg).

¹⁹⁹ Most notably in 1961, the testimonies of over one-hundred individuals were given as evidence during the trial of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann. The wider cultural impact of that testimony led to an increasing 'Holocaust consciousness' among the general public, and a deepening debate of what it meant to be the survivor of a traumatic history (Rothberg 3).

Michael Rothberg's presentation of multidirectional memory creates a dialogue between and across captivities that took place decades apart – most prominently between those of the concentration camps of the Second World War, and the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century histories of slavery in the United States. In the Thrale visitor books, this multidirectionality is found in the meditations that were written by visitors on 'the atrocities for the British Government in India in 1942' (Thrale, 1952 – 1953 n.pag.), the concentration camps ('why was Belsen talked about so much') as well as Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These reflections were joined by those of individuals who began to evaluate their own captivity as Allied POWs in Europe: 'Thank God I was only the guest of Hitler for 5 years' (Thrale, 1952 – 1953 n.pag.). And as peace movements developed throughout the West during the 1950s and 1960s, other conflicts began across the East (Carter 1992). The commencement of the Korean War in 1950 had introduced a new tranche of 'Far Eastern POWs' into public consciousness remarkably soon after those from the Second World War had returned home: 'let us hope the same is not happening in Korea' (Thrale, 1953 – 1957 n.pag.). A comparative focus for the remembrance of captivity, then, was already at work.

Common discourses of remembrance are echoed throughout the visitor books, as we read of 'man's inhumanity to man' and 'lest we forget'. Yet resting among these popular modes of collective remembrance are the individual names of men who died in camp, and the deeply personal notes from the relatives of the missing – 'can anyone give me any information please'. Their distress is palpable, and the workings of postmemory are clear: here are the attempts by relatives to fill in the gaps of their knowledge, and to understand the impact of their fathers' captivity on their own lives: 'now I know', writes one visitor, 'why Dad never came back' (Thrale, 1952 – 1953 n.pag.). By enabling relatives to forge connections between Thrale's paintings and their own family histories, the exhibition was deemed an 'astounding revelation' (Thrale, 1951b n.pag.).

That revelation caused new marks to be made upon paper, within the pages of the visitor books, connecting Thrale's survival in the camps and his story-truth of the exhibition, to the responses of his audiences. The comments in the books are, in the main, written in pencil and some are now too faint to read. Sporadically interspersed throughout the pencil entries are those written in blue ballpoint pen or occasionally pinks and reds. The coloured script is rendered all the more vibrant by the otherwise monochrome and fading pages. Anecdotes, letters and commemorations appear, with entries ranging in size and length. The script of one might be tiny cursive letters, whilst the next is large, jagged and raw – frustratingly

at times, both styles are illegible. One entry will comprise only a few words: 'Truly a revelation' (Thrale, 1951*b* n.pag.), whilst others run to an entire page. And so where the physicality of captivity emanates from Thrale's pictures, the postmemorial affect exudes from his viewers: 'it made me sick' writes one child of a former POW, 'I dread to think what it would do to him' (Thrale, 1955 – 1961 n.pag.). 'I feel as though I have lived a few [minutes] with my husband he died a Jap POW' (sic), writes one widow, whereas the wife of a former POW says, 'I feel too bitter' to forgive (Thrale, 1952 – 1953 n.pag.). These responses to grief, anger and shock are evident in the imprint left on the following pages, by the pressure with which the pen or pencil of the writer made contact with the book. The affective response is a bodily response – 'it made me sick' – but also a response made with the body: the decision to pick up a pencil, and write onto the pages of a book.

With the mismatch of sizes and styles, colours and tones, and affective responses of both the grieving and the grateful, the pages of comments are documents offering an impression not of collective but 'collected memory' (Young, *Texture* xi). Like that found by James Young in his examination of Holocaust memorials, the visitor books are a forceful example of 'the many discrete memories that are gathered into common memorial spaces' (xi). As they responded to Thrale's paintings, exhibition visitors created multidirectional remembrances, engaging with other events of the Second World War, the post-war narrative of the Far Eastern POW and the start of new conflicts around the world. Yet, this was the very time when those histories were still in the process of being transmitted from former POWs to the second generation. The 'effects'/affects 'on the descendants' of captivity can be found in the immediate aftermath of the war, whilst the silent dynamics of the domestic sphere were being negotiated in the public spaces of exhibition and book.

For tracing the legacy of captivity in the aftermath of war, the Thrale collection is unparalleled. In his extensive review of the history of 'trench art', for example, Nicholas Saunders examines works produced by POWs from the Napoleonic era onwards and does not uncover a 'detailed account of how [veterans] reacted to or thought about' the art produced or viewed as a souvenir of conflict and captivity (N Saunders 154). Images drawn by POWs in the camps offered the opportunity for relatives to discover the material, textural connection with the history of captivity that I discussed in chapter 4, precisely through its presence preserved in Thrale's artwork – and the postmemorial response can be found in the archive of that exhibition.

Between the attic and the archive: 'handing over' captivity narratives to the future

Throughout this project, I have been in correspondence with the relatives of former Far Eastern POWs; some of these individuals agreed to participate in interviews to help inform this research directly, others I met at conferences, or were more at ease to talk without the formalised process of an interview. Due to the relatively small number of British men who were held captive on the Sumatra Railway compared to other camps in the Far East, and the little-known nature of its history, it can be difficult to identify the relatives of men from this theatre of captivity. Many do not know whether their relatives were on the Sumatra Railway. However, two that I met (██████████) were the children of men who had laboured on the Sumatra Railway, a third was the cousin of a former POW who had been in camps on Java, Haroeke and the Sumatra Railway, and the uncle of a fourth, Terry Hadoke, died during the torpedoing of the *Van Waerwijk* as he was being transported by the Japanese to Pakanbaroe. I have also interviewed, and corresponded with, the relatives of men who spent their captivity experiencing events other than the construction of the Burma-Siam Railway, and who therefore have researched histories that are alternative to the dominant narrative of captivity from the Far East.

Nearly every story that I have heard from the relatives of former POWs has started with the (re)discovery of an object or document that holds an intrinsic connection to the camps – papers, postcards, and letters found in attics or other closed-away spaces.

You can imagine my surprise and excitement when my sister told me just before I left for Java that she'd recently emptied her attic and found a plastic bag full labelled "WWII Communications". (XXXX, *Interview*)

Even if they had not started with an object, all of my interviewees were, in some way, creating their own archives. ██████████ was compiling all the references that she could find about her father. She was doing so, in part, so that she could pass the story on to her children 'whether they were interested or not' (██████████, *Interview*); another had commissioned a typist to produce a reformatted version of the notes compiled from his father's reminiscences of his time on Sumatra; one man was writing up a book of his father's captivity, whilst Terry Hadoke was compiling a file of all the documentation and references that he had

found about his uncle's experiences. ██████████, whose father was a POW in Hong Kong, had started to digitise and circulate within her family the poetry anthologies, letters and drawings that her father had retained from his time as a POW. Indeed, ██████████'s father was interested in ensuring that the story of his fellow POWs, as well as his wider family history, was recorded, collected and archived whilst he was still alive: 'he was very keen that people knew the truth about things' (██████████, *Interview*). As such, ██████████'s father had arranged for his documents to be deposited in IWM archives, and his daughter may add some paintings to that collection as a result of the conversations that we shared. Another interviewee, on the other hand, is keen to view artwork that is held in IWM archives, to help create his own 'picture' of his father's experience (Anon, *Interview*).

What we see here, are the attempts of the second generation to create new archives, a body of materials through which the haunting phantoms of postmemory can 'speak' (Derrida 62). The origin of the word archive, traced by Derrida to the Greek *arkhē*, means 'commencement' or 'commandment' (i). The archive offers the means through which a search for information can begin (commencement), and public confidence in the authoritativeness of that information, since it has been deemed worthy of preservation (a commandment of that history). Simultaneously, the second generation can – in their research and their journeys – take control (command) of the affective impact of that history upon them, and begin (commence) a new archive. Hence, the archive in general terms – with its nod to the future as well as the past – can be regarded, I think, as a postmemorial object. However, the *postmemorial archive* specifically – that is, an archive created by members of the second generation – is an archive in which ancestral history is acknowledged, but, and this is the crucial difference, in which the affective response to that history (rather than curatorial judgement of its validity) determines how the materials within that archive are categorised and preserved. For Derrida it is the very 'force and authority' – the commanding power – of transgenerational memory, that makes that memory 'irrepressible' (35). The creation of an archive through which the haunting phantom of memory is able to 'speak' is not, therefore, about 'dealing with the past' but about confronting 'the question of a response' and a 'responsibility for tomorrow' (36). This need to provoke and preserve 'a response' to history, whilst creating a record of the story 'for tomorrow', has been reflected in the conversations I have held with the relatives of former POWs. It is, once again, the response to a narrative that substantiates its story-truth.

It's too late to find out anything about Uncle Oz first hand but if I can find out what sort of life he lived, what went on...that helps to bring it alive. (Hadoke, *Interview*)

Patrick Hadoke²⁰⁰ was thirty-one years old when he died in the sinking of the *Van Waerwijk*, en route to the Sumatra Railway. Having gained a degree in Forestry he had travelled to Malaya and, like John Parsons whose diary I described in chapter 2, Hadoke had been working as a planter in Malaya at the outbreak of war in the Far East. His nephew Terry was born three weeks before he died, but the family were not able to tell Terry about Patrick's history: 'whenever I asked the family what happened, I got nothing' (Hadoke, *Interview*). A chance enquiry from a researcher who specialises in the histories of the Malayan Volunteer forces started Terry Hadoke's search for 'what happened' to Patrick – known affectionately as his 'Uncle Oz'.

My conversation with Hadoke centred on the contents of a blue ring binder that he had brought with him on the day that we met. In this file, Hadoke had collated all of the information that he had so far discovered about the life of planters in Malaya, the fall of Singapore, the camps in which 'Oz' was a POW and the sinking of the *Van Waerwijk*. The researcher of the Malayan Volunteers had sent Hadoke some reports from former POWs who had inhabited the same areas as 'Oz', and Hadoke 'started picking out every name, every reference to something tangible' that he was then able to follow up and 'gradually through the internet...I began to learn more' (Hadoke, *Interview*). This included relevant accounts from former prisoners obtained via the files available at the National Archives in Kew, and printed copies of POW art – what turned out to be my grandfather's sketches, produced in Gloegoer. For Hadoke, the pictures are an important link to postmemory because they 'so much bring to life day-to-day life in the camps – situations, routines and events that Uncle Oz would have seen, and which would have been part of his life' (Hadoke, *Correspondence*). Not only did the pictures give him an impression of 'stuff that was going on, but equally importantly they give you an idea...of how they dealt with it...with a lot of humour. There aren't sketches of guards beating POWs, there aren't sketches of overcrowding or people being desperately ill, but they're amusing pictures, which tells me...about the people there' (Hadoke, *Interview*).

200 Private Patrick Hadoke, captured 2 May 1942; died 26 June 1944 in the sinking of the *Van Waerwijk*.

Just as Imogen Holmes had wanted to 'get a feel' for what her father experienced when she travelled to Sumatra, Hadoke's search is focussed on finding out 'what [his uncle] went through, and where, and how... I want to know as much as I can about him because otherwise he's lost...you can't just forget him'.²⁰¹

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[We] carry generational baggage that most of us don't even realise ...and I think I've come to realise that baggage is on multiple levels; there's a kind of emotional level ...the way my dad parented me was obviously influenced by his experiences and his ability or lack of ability to express emotions...but I think there's probably a deeper spiritual level as well. (Anon, *Interview*)

These silent 'spirits' between the generations were officially acknowledged fifty-three years after the NFFCA was established, with the developing movement of relatives researching the histories of the camps. The charity, Children of Far Eastern Prisoners of War (COFEPOW) was established in 1997, after its founder, Carol Cooper, recovered the diary that her father had maintained as a POW on the Burma-Siam Railway. Cooper's father died whilst in captivity, when Cooper was a young child. It was only in 1994 – at least fifty years following her father's death – that Cooper read in a local newspaper that a POW diary had been sold at auction and she realised that it must have been her father's. An offer to purchase the diary from its new owner was turned down, and Cooper read the contents once the diary had been lodged with a regimental museum. Cooper's story was picked up by a local television reporter and a documentary was made, filming both her eventual success in purchasing the diary, and her own journey along the route of the Burma-Siam Railway (C Cooper n.pag.). Following the television of the documentary, Cooper received many letters and books written by former Far Eastern POWs,

²⁰¹ This was reflected again in conversation with the son of a man who had been imprisoned at Changi, 'I want to understand more of what the actual experience was that he went through, because at the moment there are so many unknowns' (Anon, *Interview*).

telling of their experiences. They were books that Cooper felt 'endorsed' the history that she had learned on her trip to Thailand (C Cooper n.pag.). In 1997, Cooper convened the inaugural meeting of the charity Children of Far East Prisoners of War (COFEPOW).

For other theatres of captivity in the Second World War, institutions have been created to continue collecting the testimony of survivors and witnesses (such as the *Shoah Foundation* in California), but COFEPOW was founded upon the principles of what was later established by Hirsch as postmemory. Developed explicitly from the relationships between history and the 'causes and consequences' of that history that circulate among 'future generations', at the core of COFEPOW – and as its very name professes – is the telling and remembering of the stories of the Far Eastern camps by members of the next generation (COFEPOW, *Appeal* n.pag.).

Originally, the charity aimed to deliver a 'functional project' – a project that would 'enlighten and teach children and people of today and the generation of tomorrow' (COFEPOW, *Charity* n.pag.). That first project was to raise funds to establish a permanent 'cultural and memorial' building that holds an exhibition of 'The FEPOW Story' and preserves materials donated by former POWs and their families. The timber-framed building stands at the National Arboretum in Alrewas, Staffordshire and is designed to evoke the atap huts constructed by Far Eastern POWs. Furthermore, through the construction of the building, the links between the work of COFEPOW and that of the wartime experiences of their forbears were made explicit.

Fundraising activities for the memorial building began on 15 February 2002: the sixtieth anniversary of the fall of Singapore. The deadline for the opening of the building was set for 17 August 2005: the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the war in the Far East, and the liberation of the camps.

The FEPOWs spent three and a half years being beaten, worked, starved and humiliated in barbaric and pitiless conditions.

We spent three and a half years raising money to build a place in their honour and everlasting memory to ensure that future generations understand the horrors so many endured and reflect upon its causes and consequences. (COFEPOW, *Appeal* n.pag.)

For the founding members of COFEPOW, then, postmemory offered an immediate and 'functional' purpose to the memorialisation of the Far Eastern camps. This was to 'educate' visitors to the building, 'to ensure' the story was told to younger generations and that this part of history was preserved so that people were able to 'understand the horrors' and 'reflect upon its causes and consequences'. But the establishment of COFEPOW itself, and the decision to place the 'future generations' at the heart of its remit, also indicates a need for those members to create a space for their own place in that history. In doing so, a direct connection was made between the formation of the 'FEPOW' identity and the development of 'COFEPOW': the tenth anniversary of the building's opening will be the seventieth anniversary of the liberation of the men. The memorial work of the future generation is connected, quite explicitly, to the construction work of those forced into labour by the Japanese.

The postmemorial connections between the 'FEPOW' and the 'COFEPOW' were reinforced during the opening ceremony for the building, when on 15 August 2005, the Far East Prisoner of War Memorial Building was officially opened. On the same day, the NFFCA closed and an official handing-over ceremony took place, transferring the functions of the NFFCA to COFEPOW and the National FEPOW Fellowship Welfare and Remembrance Association (FEPOW Fellowship n.pag.). That handing-over was a literal and symbolic act that acknowledged the passing of history from one generation to the next. It also acknowledged that the support provided by the *kongsi* in the camps, and perpetuated by the social clubs upon repatriation, was to be continued by the children and other relatives of former Far Eastern POWs:

Essentially our aim is to be a point of contact for those Clubs and Associations which continue to exist, but more importantly to remain in contact with individual FEPOWs as their Clubs now close. By issuing newsletters and arranging social events we wish to try to continue with some of the work of the now former National Federation, in keeping FEPOWs in touch with each other and "To keep going the Spirit that kept them going". (FEPOW Fellowship n.pag.)

The *kongsi* of the FEPOW has transferred into the community of COFEPOW. The 'spirit' that had 'kept us going' and that had haunted families, would now 'keep going' in the guise of COFEPOW.²⁰² The body biography, the 'sociality of the body' that developed in the camp through the *kongsi*, remains integral to the story-truth and remembrance of Far Eastern captivity.

As such, the members of COFEPOW, along with bodies such as the Researching FEPOW History Group and the online 'FEPOW Community', support one another in terms of the dissemination of information, fundraising for memorials and organising pilgrimages to the Far East, and in sharing stories of their fathers, 'the way they were treated...how they coped and did adjust' – 'the prevailing culture of not talking', and 'not to question them too much':

I understand more about how difficult it would have been after all the horror to just come back and pretend that everything was ok, that life was normal. (██████████, *Interview*)

In helping each other to discover these histories, the smallest details are essential – one relative whom I interviewed was determined to make sure that all of the routes that his father took to the Far East were plotted accurately, and that the ship on which he voyaged was identified correctly (Anon, *Interview*); Terry Hadoke found that he 'could not let go' of the search for information once he had received the initial reports from another researcher about his uncle's whereabouts (Hadoke, *Interview*).

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These relatives display what Derrida termed 'archive fever' – a 'passion' for the stories for which they 'burn':

It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away...It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to

²⁰² Such transferences occurred in private spaces too. As her father, a former POW on Java, was dying, Parkes felt that 'it seemed as though he wanted to "hand over"' and she has since transcribed and published two edited volumes of his POW diaries (*Notify* 68).

the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement. (Derrida 91)

The postmemorial archive offers the second generation a documentary 'return' in the same way as the pilgrimage to Sumatra offers a bodily return – 'a desire to return to the origin', a 'return' that Nancy Miller says will lead to 'where the story got lost' (*What They Saved* 229). The postmemorial archive preserves the happening-truth of Sumatra through the story-truths that the second generation begin to create for themselves in the spaces where 'the story got lost'. Those 'blanks' that the second generation need to fill in, and their desire 'to know as much as I can' drives the beginning of the postmemorial archive (its commencement), whilst it develops with the authority of history (the commandment). The postmemorial archive is 'compulsive, repetitive', dominated by a continual searching for references, and the need to identify the most intricate of details. And the postmemorial archive is connective – between past and present and generations to come – because the 'archivist', the second-generation collector of stories, 'produces more archive'. Yet at the same time, and as Hirsch suggests, postmemory can also offer a 'framework' for working with this 'connective' approach to memory (*Generation*, Introduction).

The passing on of the archive to the third generation enables the pursuit of postmemory to continue to open 'out of the future' (Derrida 68). That future, for the archives of which I write, is transferring to a new 'hinge generation' – a third generation, which is a generation that finds itself reflecting on the role and the impact of postmemory. My interviewees were aware that their children were 'watching [the research] with a little bit of bemusement...which is why I want to write it down, so that they can pick it up in twenty years' time' (Anon, *Interview*); another makes sure that she tells her children the stories that she discovers, 'whether they are interested or not' (██████, *Interview*). This third generation – 'whether they are interested or not' – hear the stories of their parents' parents, and watch 'with a little bit of bemusement' as their parents trace history obsessively in order to understand their present. But if, as Hoffman suggests the past 'is transmitted into history or into myth' through the actions of that second generation, what happens if that generation – in encountering the phantoms they allow to speak through their new archives – are unable, still, to apprehend the story-truth 'in all its affective and moral complexity'? (Hoffman 198). And if the second generation 'speaks' through its postmemorial archive, how does the third generation then respond? Perhaps, now,

any discourse on postmemory needs to include the narratives of the generation that has watched postmemory at work.

From a search of the lists that my grandfather had created, of his fellow campmates in Gloegoer, I had been able to confirm Uncle Oz's whereabouts to Terry. It seemed to be the smallest snippet of information to offer, but in the correspondence that followed, it was a piece of information that had turned out to serve as 'validation' for Terry's decision to search for information (Hadoke, *Correspondence*). By offering 'validation' for a search, enabling opportunities to consider the reasons for those searches (Anon, *Interview*; ██████, *Interview*), and giving fresh encouragement to digitise and circulate items within the postmemorial archive (█████, *Interview*), a role for the third generation emerges. It is a role that assists still in establishing the happening-truth of familial pasts, and that 'validates' the telling of the story-truths beyond them. But those truths may not be as 'connective' as Hirsch envisages, and so the third generation may continue to use the framework of postmemory to connect with the past, whilst beginning to consider the impact of postmemory itself, too.

Conclusion

I began this thesis with my own 'return' to the story-truth, of my grandfather's diaries. It, too, is a story that has been lost. First it was destroyed, quite literally, following the confiscation of Russell's personal papers, after a search camp guards in Gloeger in 1943. These lost diaries covered 1941 – 1943, detailing his service in the Royal Signals managing communications Dispatch Riders in Singapore, the events leading up to the Fall of Singapore, his escape to Sumatra and his captivity. Despite the anxiety that he would be punished for the contents in the confiscated papers, Russell, on the same day as the search took place, began writing another diary. It was a continuation of the lost story, as well as the commencement of something new.

This new diary went on to fill five exercise books and covered daily accounts of his remaining time as a POW from April 1943 until August 1945, his hospital treatment and recuperation in Bangalore, his voyage home and (rarely, for an account from the Far East) his initial post-war experiences, too, running through until mid-December 1945. Russell's diary is as detailed as that maintained by Parsons and is accompanied by nearly thirty letters dated 1941 – 1945 that were written to Russell from his mother, one of his brothers and other relatives. Furthermore, twelve letters survive from several of his former campmates with whom Russell stayed in touch until at least the early 1950s. The Russell archive also includes forty-one postcards written to Russell – from his mother and his sweetheart between 1943 and 1945 – and four that Russell wrote to his mother from Sumatra (and that were received at home between 1943 and 1944).²⁰³ In addition, fourteen telegrams document Russell's liberation and repatriation between September and November 1945, and an array of drawings, poetry and transcriptions of Greek and Latin show the ways in which Russell passed the time as a POW, mentally persevered, earned extra money for food and recorded his experiences in captivity. They are fragile documents containing tiny pencil scrawl crammed between the lines of the exercise books, and the paper of the pages are now yellow and thinning with the corners torn and bent.

As I have found with other materials throughout this thesis, the books and papers create a physical, textural connection to the materiality of the camps on

²⁰³ In his postal history of Far Eastern POWs and civilian internees, David Tett notes that 'mail to the POWs in Sumatra is rare' (*Dutch East Indies* 196) and that mail 'from the POWs in Sumatra is scarce' (225).

Sumatra. The handwriting and sketches on those fragile pieces of paper provide a connection for the second and third generations of Russell's family, to Russell as a man, a father and – albeit in absentia – a grandfather. In doing so the collection creates a link between the life-writing of the former POW (chapter 2), the language he used (chapter 3), the material culture of the camps (chapter 4), and its postmemory (chapter 5). When transcribed, the diaries comprise over three-hundred typed pages detailing life in Gloegoer, road-building in Atjeh, the eighty-mile forced march down to the jungle in November 1944, and finally constructing the railway. Daily rations and work tasks were recorded meticulously by Russell, along with the pay that he received, the sicknesses suffered by him and his campmates, the dates, locations and causes of POW deaths and the various incidents and observations that Russell chose to write about each day.

He sustained severe leg injuries having been beaten by guards and was critically ill in camp 2 – the hospital camp – when the war ended. Russell worked as a schoolmaster and with his wife, raised five children – four sons and a daughter, my mother. Following Russell's death, his diaries were bundled into a box, and placed at the back of a shelf in what was known as the 'back bedroom' of my grandmother's house. That box, an archive of Russell's POW life, would become a central spectre in the life of an increasingly disconnected family. For the next forty years that cupboard is, as far as I am aware, where the box remained. When my grandmother's health deteriorated she was moved into a residential home and at this point her house was cleared. Just like the stories that I heard from my interviewees, the box that was hidden in the cupboard – the testimonial object – was (re)discovered.

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Central to this thesis are the story-truths that were created from the happening-truth, stories of and by men who carried out 'monotonous work...exhausting back-breaking work [in] stifling humidity and [with] starving bellies' (Robson 62). I have found that in their narratives, their words are as repetitive as the work itself, saying over again that men toiled sleeper-by-sleeper out of a sheer will to survive. There was no let-up except for snatches of rest and, for the few who could muster the energy, a talk around a fire in the evening and perhaps a daydream of food. A moment or two was taken to record the day using the tiniest pencil scribbles on scraps of paper, to sketch a memory, or to note the name and address of a fallen comrade as a reminder to visit his family when the war was over.

The happening-truth of the Sumatra Railway tells the reader about what happened to a group of men, all with designated tasks, who were forced to carry and lay sleepers and rails to construct a railway track that ran for 140 miles across jungle, swamp and river. Checking camp and medical reports, MI9 statements and POW Liberation Questionnaires enables a researcher to corroborate in a systematic manner the happening-truth that POWs built and managed a series of camps. Some of these camps served additional functions such as 'hospital' or

'storage yard'. It is a happening-truth in which, often, nothing much happened: the days were monotonous and routine was paramount. The happening-truth saw the 'lifting party' spend hours carrying and dropping rails with the relentless, involuntary response of human bodies to the commands, screams and threats that they heard down the railway line. The happening-truth of the Sumatra Railway confirms that many men suffered from, and indeed died as a result of, tropical diseases and that they all existed on meagre rations predominantly made up of rice and, where available, vegetables and scant portions of meat.

The story-truth of the Sumatra Railway, narrated through the different life-writing genres adopted by POWs and former POWs, conveys to its readers the affective impact of those facts. It reveals that the work of building a railway was done by 'tired sagging bodies', which were operating with a 'numbed sense of movement'; that the hunger caused by meagre rations created a 'gnawing painful hole' left only momentarily abated by sharp hits of tobacco; that to do the required jobs so as to avoid being hit with a 'a fist, a piece of wood, a rifle' jarred with the wish not to contribute to the enemy's war effort; that the effort to avoid physical pain was, at times, 'in spite of ourselves' (Robson 50). It is the story-truth that tells us how the happening-truth of building a railway was made coherent by the men who were there. And it is that 'how' upon which I have focused.

It may not be expected that narratives by men who are not writers by trade will be much more than cluttered or disjointed memories tied together, perhaps more akin to stream-of-consciousness writings than tightly structured narratives. Quite the opposite of the planned, edited and revised book-length narratives that I have worked with, and opposite to the meticulous descriptions of camps, lists of camp inhabitants, deaths (and causes), illnesses, pay rates and rations that are available within them. There is a prevailing impression within popular memory that the Sumatra Railway – and even that of the Far Eastern POW experience more widely – was a story never told, or that these were men who did not speak when they returned home. Undoubtedly, many repatriated men suffered an extreme reluctance to talk to their loved ones about their experiences, and the warnings that were distributed post-liberation to 'guard' their tongues only served to increase their reticence. But my work with the collections held at IWM principally, and in other archives, shows that in public or social environments – with the support of their *kongsi* – many men did record their stories, even if the residue of self-censorship remained.

The very production of those narratives, the act of recording them onto paper and tape is evidence in itself of 'efforts either to hold on' to a story 'in danger of

being forgotten, or to influence the retrospective judgements of posterity' (Cubitt 29). There was a desire among former POWs to be heard, for their story to be recorded, and – by donating their life-writing to public archives – for their part in history to be remembered publically. The materials that I have brought together within this thesis demonstrate that these men *did* speak: perhaps not all immediately or at the same time, nor in the same way – but they have spoken, and the stories have been told. Thus I have learned that the story of the POW of the Japanese, including that of the Sumatra Railway, is better described as one that has gone unheard, rather than untold.

In a critique of the narratives emerging from the Second World War, suggestion has been made that those who 'didn't tell their stories...had no war stories to tell, because they had quit the war' (Hynes, *War* 258). When focusing his attention on the plight of POWs and other 'victims' of war, Samuel Hynes has suggested that silent prisoners 'quit the war' because they were the ones 'who didn't oppose' – and the only way to oppose, for Hynes, was to remember and 'testify' (258). Hynes's conclusions about those who did tell their stories of captivity are drawn from a very short list of popular, published narratives and artworks from the Burma-Siam Railway: those by Eric Lomax, Ronald Searle and Robert Hardie. Crucially, Hynes does not consider, as I have, unpublished documents. As diaries, drawings and memoirs continue to be found, the story of Far Eastern POWs – and in particular those in territories outlying from Burma, Thailand and Singapore – emerges very differently to the one of men 'who didn't tell their stories...[or] had no war stories to tell'. Although I acknowledge that some amount of confusion or lack of recall is inevitable among writers who are recounting distressing experiences (often from many decades previously), there is still much clarity and cohesion conveyed within their neatly-organised manuscripts. In their presentation and in the footnoted, referenced citations, their memoirs in particular demonstrate a commitment to ensuring their record of the happening-truth, as well as the story-truth, of the Sumatra Railway was as accurate as possible.

It is the regimented and routine nature of life on the Sumatra Railway that has become a fundamental trope in its representation. The monotony and repetition in these captivity narratives recalls the life and toil of the prisoner, the compulsive nature of traumatic memory, and the 'working through' of that trauma within men's narratives. In my analysis of the forms and functions of the different life-writing genres employed by POWs and former POWs, I have found that these writers tell the happening-truth of imprisonment, but by blurring the boundaries of those genres they are able to gain perspective on their captivity (as per Parsons's 'mini-memoir'),

imagine an escape (Tait) or record for posterity the history of their confinement and its memory (such as Williams, Fitzgerald and Saunders). In telling the story of impossible physical escape from harsh and inexorable conditions, the mixing of autobiographical genres was used within POW narratives from the Far East, at least metaphorically, to push beyond the physical boundaries that captivity imposed upon the men who experienced it.

Life-writing, and literacy more generally, was essential to the men whilst incarcerated, and in their post-war remembrances. The chance for escapism through literature was a valuable gift for a group of men who had no hope of carrying out escapes from captivity in real terms. The ability to read and write the story of captivity was a means of rejecting the total control of the captor: a psychological fight that helped the captive resist physical subjugation. Reading (letters, books) offered imaginative sustenance away from the realities of captivity, which was vital to sustaining morale; whilst writing (diaries, memoirs) provided a freedom both within and after captivity for an individual (and their collectives) to express the experience and its affect upon them.

The development of a camp discourse, too, enabled POWs to forge identities for themselves within the camps. The demarcation of languages to specific aspects of POW life created a means by which the POWs could navigate the diverse relationships and geographies with which they were forced to contend. The POW camp on Sumatra was, by its nature, a polyglot community, bringing English, Dutch, Malay and Japanese into common parlance. However, Malay terms designated domestic routines, whilst the Japanese language was used in relation to working parties and labour routines only. The nuances contained within this camp discourse offers a myriad of worlds that lie within the words that POWs and former POWs adopt within their life-writing: worlds that remain inaccessible to readers who did not experience the bond of the *kongsi*. The 'untranslatable' words of a community committed to safeguarding their tongues make it difficult for readers to 'unlock' the experience. Former POWs have had to 'translate struggles' through a discourse foreign to relatives and historians alike. The role of the camp interpreter, as mediator between the dominant and the 'anti-language', symbolises, too, the requirement for future generations to translate and mediate between the languages of their stories. When included in the memoir of former POWs, the translated and 'untranslatable' words have two effects: for the former POWs there is a sense of inclusivity, of referring to that which they knew, the words infused with the context of their original use. For the second generation, this discourse begins to formulate the words of the 'phantom' for which their postmemorial archives speak.

The post-war narrative of the Far Eastern POW has included nightmares and outbursts of anger, repeated bouts of malaria and the need to be assessed and treated for tropical diseases for many years following liberation. These were the bodily signals of the story-truth that they did not tell at home. In the camps, the physical privations were represented through the artwork of POWs, and whereas the repetitive reproduction of images of suffering and starvation have dominated the post-war representation of Far Eastern captivity, I have shown how out of the grotesqueness of that experience also came the carnivalesque – the laughter – through which the men forged bonds, dissipated the suffering and resisted, as with their life-writing, the subjugation of the captive experience. Artwork from the Sumatra Railway is exceptionally rare; neither is artwork from Sumatra, more widely, easy to locate. But this thesis presents the cartoons and sketches of Stanley Russell used to portray short but illuminating narratives, of the experience of camp life at Medan. I argue that since the captivity narratives from the Far East are dominated by images and the imagery of the body, there is a need for younger generations to look to the ‘body biography’ of the former POW to help locate the aspects of captivity that are ‘untranslatable’ through their words.

My research has identified that in the early post-war period, individual affective responses to the life-writing and the artwork of the POW experience were shaped by, and in turn came to shape, successive audiences’ memories of other aspects of the Second World War: namely Allied captivity in Europe, the Nazi concentration camps and the dropping of the atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Furthermore, world events following on from the Second World War – particularly new conflicts in Korea – informed readings of POW narratives. Critically, archival sources indicate that the beginnings of postmemory did not emerge, as the studies of second-generation Holocaust writers suggest, during the 1980s, but through an increasing public consciousness of, and comparative reaction to, other events that occurred during or immediately following the Second World War.

That postmemory has gathered momentum via a literal ‘handing over’ of the support of the *kongsi* from the associations and social clubs to the Children of Far Eastern Prisoners of War (COFEPOW). By bringing together ‘textural’, ‘connected’, ‘connective’ and ‘multidirectional’ forms of memory into one space, the postmemorial archive records the happening-truth and the story-truth of history but also, crucially, it is an archive that is determined and shaped by the affective response of the second generation to those truths. But members of the second generation appear to be preparing for a new handover, mindful of the 70th anniversary of liberation in August 2015, to the third generation. Being separated

from the original narratives of incarceration in the Far East both temporally and genealogically, the third generation may discover an accessible means of illuminating and mediating the affects of those narratives on their parents' generation – and, inevitably, their own. At this point in my work, I – as a member of that third generation – have found that postmemory is not always as 'connective' or as 'reparative' as Hirsch, and other second-generation writers like her, convey (*Generation*, Introduction). Indeed, the pursuit of postmemory risks disconnecting families as much as it can connect histories. Looking beyond the collected memories of the postmemorial archive, there remains the unspoken affect of postmemory itself on even younger generations, and so a space emerges for a discourse on postmemory that reflects upon its impact, as well as the outcomes of its use.

I end with an image to which I have found myself returning throughout this work: my grandfather's 'Prisoner of War'. It was drawn – like his other sketches – in Gloegoer camp at Medan. In it, as in Geoffrey Hamilton's post-war painting of 'Hope', the figure of the POW is framed by the barred window. He is confined, but his condition is not, at this point, dire. He is clothed fully, and there is muscle definition at his shoulders, in the middle of his back, and down his legs. He is, like POWs in other sketches, faceless: a member of the collective body that would support each other through the years of incarceration, and beyond liberation as they adjusted – or not – to post-war life. The nameless, faceless 'Prisoner of War' looks out, beyond his confinement to the beautiful landscape in which their degradation took place, a landscape in which many men would find solace.

But if there is hope in Russell's drawing, there is loneliness too. He is disconnected from his home and his family, his status as 'Prisoner of War' is ambiguous – a military man without the arms or the freedom to fight – and the behaviour of his captors is unpredictable and extreme. In becoming a member of the collective group of POWs, his own face, his individual story-truth, is lost. The hope of looking outwards through the bars to the future is mixed with the fear of uncertainty and the unknown. The 'Hope' and 'Fear' that POWs transmitted through their life-writing and their artwork resonate strongly with the postmemorial archive now, as it rests on the 'hinge' of a third generation. Within that archive, the story-truths open to the future: but among the narratives that have been heard, there are others that remain silenced, too; indeed, they have become disconnected as a direct result of attempts to mediate the story between the second and third generations. The 'handing over' of a postmemorial archive without mutual

cooperation between those generations – a stark echo of the warning to guard one’s tongue – prompts questions as to how, or even if, this third generation will enable the phantoms that have been created by postmemory to speak, too.

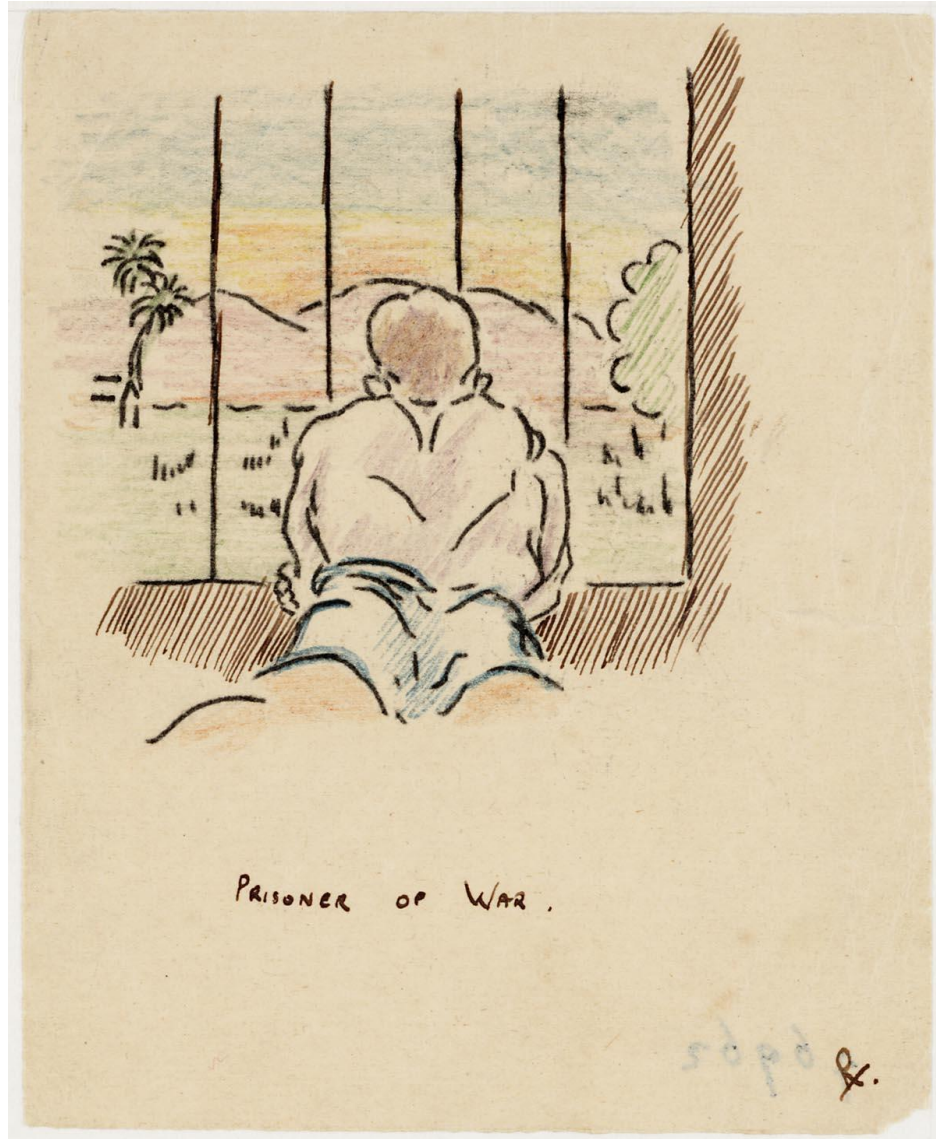


Figure 20: Stanley Russell. 'Prisoner of War'. 1943. MUSE01:11480

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