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Ordinary men in another world: British other ranks
in captivity in Asia during the Second World War.

D.Phil Thesis

David J. Boyne

University of Sussex

(i)

I hereby declare that this thesis has not and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

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(ii)

University of Sussex

David J. Boyne D.Phil Thesis

Ordinary men in another world: British other ranks in captivity in Asia during the
Second World War.

Summary.

The Second World War was a time of increased contacts for ordinary Britons with peoples of different race, ethnicity and nationality. This thesis explores these novel interactions primarily through the eyes of the other ranks of the 18th Division, who set sail from Britain in the latter part of 1941 and arrived in Singapore shortly before it was overwhelmed by the Japanese Imperial Army, in February 1942. They subsequently endured three and a half years in captivity, the severity of which was such that a quarter of them never returned. The harsh nature of their captivity meant that an unusually large number of them were inspired to make a record of their experiences, and it is the holdings of these accounts at the Imperial War Museum which provide the pivotal source for this project.

Previous British studies of the prisoners of the Japanese have tended to describe aspects of the experience of the officer corps. In this thesis the focus is on the other ranks, and specifically those recently recruited to the services, whose previous overseas travels were at best, limited. It examines their attitudes towards the variety of peoples with whom they came into contact, in the categories of civilians, allied and enemy personnel. These contacts occurred in a variety of emotional settings, ranging from the relatively care free journey east, to the more fraught conditions of combat and captivity. It examines how these perspectives were formed and could change over time, and in what way they informed relations with these various groups.

In the process new light is shone upon the experiences of these unfortunate men during the war, and how the former POWs mediated their captivity in the post-war period.

Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations

ABDA	American- British-Dutch-Australian Command
AWM	Australian War Memorial
BCFG	Burma Campaign Fellowship Group
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
BOR	British other rank
CO	Commanding officer
CP	Communist Party
FEPOW	Far Eastern prisoner of war
GI	General Infantryman (US Army)
IMTFE	International Military Tribunal for the Far East
INA	Indian National Army
IWM	Imperial War Museum
JLCSA	Japanese Labour Camp Survivors' Association
KNIL	Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger (Royal Netherlands East Indies Army)
MO	Medical officer
NCO	Non Commissioned Officer.
NEI	Netherlands East Indies (Indonesia)
NFFCA	Far East Prisoner of War Clubs and Associations
OR	Other rank
POW	Prisoner of war
RA	Royal Artillery
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
RAOC	Royal Army Ordnance Corps

(x)

RAPWI	Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees
RASC	Royal Army Service Corps
RCS	Royal Corps of Signals
RE	Royal Engineers
SEAC	South East Asia Command
SSVF	Straits Settlements Volunteer Force
STC	Singapore Technical Corps
TA	Territorial Army
UKNA	United Kingdom National Archive
WCIT	War Crimes Investigation Team
WD	War Department

Introduction.

0.1. Background

The Second World War was a pivotal point in the history of white global hegemony, signalling a change in the colonial order that had developed over the previous 500 years. The British Empire had reached its greatest territorial extent after the First World War, with the addition of the mandated territories, both to Britain itself and by proxy to its white dominions, at a time when its relative economic power had been on the wane for some decades. Defending this empire after the fall of France in 1940, when Britain stood alone in Europe against the all-conquering German forces, would prove problematic. This was particularly so in Asia, where the imperial ambitions of the increasingly militaristic government of Japan had already taken that nation to war with China, and seen it occupy the French Vichy colonies in South East Asia. Churchill's attempts to appease the Japanese, by withdrawing troops from Shanghai and closing the supply road from Rangoon to China, were successful for only a limited time. In early December 1941 Japanese forces simultaneously attacked British, American and Dutch territories, in a rapid advance that saw them sweep through the mainland and archipelagos of South East Asia and the Pacific. The attack on Pearl Harbor and the capture in rapid succession of Hong Kong, Malaya, the Netherlands East Indies, the Philippines and most of Burma shattered the myth of white invincibility in the region.

The most stunning defeat of all, the fall of Singapore on the 15th of February 1942, after a week of fighting on the island, was a crushing blow to Britain's imperial prestige, both at home and abroad. Winston Churchill referred to it as 'the worst disaster and largest capitulation in British history',¹ a description no doubt informed by the fact that it had been inflicted by a non-European power. There had been a number of resounding defeats inflicted on British arms

¹ Churchill, W.S. (1951) *The Second World War: Volume IV: The Hinge of Fate*. Cassell, London. p 81

in the 19th century in colonial settings by the resistance of non-European local populations, including the disastrous retreat from Kabul in 1842, a near thirty year war with the Maoris in New Zealand, and at Isandlwana at the hands of the Zulus in South Africa in 1879. Even in Churchill's agile mind, the last of these events when he was just four years old, would be a faint and distant memory.

For most of the population, including the younger men who went into captivity and who had known nothing but British imperial superiority, such a reversal of the established order must have seemed unimaginable. Furthermore there had been a series of resounding defeats in the current conflict in Europe, from Norway and the BEF in France to Greece and Crete, with large scale surrenders, at St Valery in France and shortly to follow at Tobruk. But these had been at the hands of European neighbours, and none had the impact of that at Singapore, inflicted by an Asian nation. Paul Rich has suggested that:

The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 ushered in the beginnings of a new era in British race relations which was to culminate in the relinquishing of the colonial empire in the 1950s and early 60s.²

The beginning of the end for empire would come several years later with the fall of Singapore, a defeat that accelerated the desire for independence across Asia. One consequence of the Japanese campaign would be to expose a much larger proportion of the British public to people of a different race,³ either as servicemen in Asia, or back home in Britain, where by June 1944 there would be 130,000 black GIs widely dispersed around the country.⁴

² Rich, Paul B. (1986; 2nd edn 1990) *Race and Empire in British Politics*. CUP. p145.

³ Race was used with several contemporary meanings, including national and religious contexts, as well as in relation to physiological difference. In this thesis, unless otherwise specified, it is the latter interpretation that is intended.

⁴ Reynolds, David. (1995) *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1942-1945*. HarperCollins, London. p303.

0.2. Race, Class and National Identity.

In Britain, despite (or because of) its control of a large proportion of the globe's population, there was little visible indication of those peoples in the metropole prior to the 1940s. Small communities were clustered around the seaports of Liverpool, Cardiff and the East End of London, and there were a fewer number of students, largely from colonial elites, at educational establishments, a population estimated to be around eight thousand.⁵ Contacts with ordinary Britons were few and far between, unless the Briton concerned had been overseas as part of the imperial diaspora that regulated the empire, often in the armed services. This isolation would change significantly with the advent of war, initially as workers were recruited from the Caribbean colonies to work in an assortment of industries and services, and then with America's formal entry into the conflict, due to the arrival of large numbers of black GIs who carried out support roles in the segregated US Army. Their arrival to support the war effort was widely welcomed and there was much sympathy from the public at large for the difficulties they experienced as a result of the segregation of the US Army, and their treatment at the prejudiced hands of many of their white colleagues. This isolation would also end for many servicemen sent to fight in Africa and Asia in what was a significantly more global war than its predecessor.

There was however a tension between the oft claimed tolerance and belief in equality in white Britain, and the reality of the imposition of a white racial hegemony in the colonial setting. This had already burst into conflict at home after the First World War in the port riots of 1919, and simmered through the inter-war years, finding legislative expression in the Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order of 1925, as well as in a wide application of the 'Colour Bar'.⁶ This tension became more clearly drawn when increasing numbers of settlers

⁵ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p303.

⁶ The 1925 Order was an instrument that changed the documentary proof required from black seamen as proof of their British identity, potentially resulting in denial of entry or deportation. At a local level the authorities would apply it zealously against the black population, regardless of British status or

started arriving from Asia, the Caribbean and Africa in the UK in the post 1945 period, challenging the notion of the British as a fair and tolerant people. Whilst much has been assumed and asserted regarding the attitudes of ordinary Britons to race and difference in the period before and during the war, there has been little concrete study. Tony Kushner's attempt to recover such details from the Mass-Observation archive represents the most comprehensive attempt at such an analysis, and reflects upon changes in outlooks as the war progressed.⁷

One of the two aims of this thesis is to view the accounts of the prisoners of war (POWs) in Asia through the lens of social history, by examining their attitudes to the issues of race, class and identity, and thus add to the existing body of literature on such wider British perspectives in this field.

The men of the 18th Division, and the RAF ground-crew who left Britain with them in convoy, initially heading for Egypt, and then in response to events further east redirecting to Asia, offer a near unique cohort in this respect. Most had been no further overseas than the hinterland of Dunkirk in 1940, if at all, and they left Britain on the eve of the USA joining the war, before the arrival of the GIs. After journeying half way round the world they had a few weeks of freedom, such as it could be in a chaotic war-zone, and then went into captivity, with little time to be influenced by the prejudicial colonial tropes and mores of service in the empire. Thus by elucidating their outlooks to the novel situations that they found themselves in, a greater understanding can be gained of the nature and the prevalence of racialized thinking and the validity of assumptions regarding the sources of such thinking, be that in a domestic context or in a colonial setting, can be examined.

occupation. See: Tabili, Laura. (1994) *"We ask for British Justice": Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain*. Cornell University Press, London, pp113-134. See also: Hiro, Dilip. (1971) *Black British White British*. Eyre and Spottiswoode, London.

⁷ Kushner, Tony. (2004) *We Europeans: Mass-Observation, 'Race' and British Identity in the Twentieth Century*. Ashgate, Aldershot.

The British other ranks (BORs) were also members of a profoundly hierarchical structure, particularly those in the army. Writing before the start of the war Lewis Clive had highlighted the financial and institutional barriers to entry to the commissioned ranks, and the resultant exclusion of those from the working class. He cites a statement in Parliament that only 4% of officers had come through the ranks, and that most of these were 'gentleman rankers.' Duff Cooper, the Secretary of State for War reported to the House that 'even in the ranks the most valuable asset if you are hoping for a commission is a public school accent.'⁸ What Jeremy Crang has described as a 'distant and in many senses a feudal' relationship between the officers and men at the start of the war did improve slowly, as a more meritocratic system of selection was developed and implemented.⁹ Geoffrey Field has similarly noted how the pressures of the war and the need to commission an extra 200,000 officers led to a dramatic change in the social make-up of the officer corps.¹⁰ Such developments however came about after the men of the 18th Division shipped out, and they remained locked into a military system in captivity that was largely still grounded in the old ways. Of course not all of the other ranks should be seen as working class, and although there were few in their number that had the public school accent required for officer training, there would have been a larger number from what was termed the commercial class, as well as a considerably higher level of education than one might find in a regular peacetime unit.

Interwoven into the themes of race and class is that of national identity. Linda Colley has proposed that British identity was initially constructed in the late early modern period in opposition to a French and Catholic other.¹¹ With the French suitably subdued during the long 19th century conceptions of Britishness took on a more imperial hue, and this, along with a

⁸ Clive, Lewis. (1938) *The People's Army*. Victor Gollancz Ltd, London. pp118-124.

⁹ Crang, Jeremy A. (2000) *The British army and the People's War: 1939-1945*. MUP, Manchester. p58.

¹⁰ Field, Geoffrey.G. (2011) *Blood, Sweat and Toil: Remaking the British Working Class, 1939-1945*. OUP. p261.

¹¹ Colley, Linda. (1992) *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*. Yale University Press. London. pp 367-368.

resurgent patriotism and virtuous manhood, became core elements of the soldier hero as a role model for the male half of the population. In this construction Graham Dawson suggests that war was 'its ultimate test and opportunity.'¹² Failing this test in the imperially laden context of the fall of Singapore would have varying psychological repercussions on how the BORs saw themselves, and how they were affected on a more physical plane by the attempts of officers to redeem their dented pride.

Sonya Rose, in her study of identity in Britain during the war has pointed to a variety of forces being at work, with issues of race, class and gender forestalling attempts to generate a homogenous state of citizenship. She does however allow herself to define a British 'national character', based on the hegemonic masculinity that melded elements of the soldier-hero with a more temperate and tolerant disposition that had developed in the inter-war years.¹³ Even in 1940 such templates had their critics, as Hamilton Fyfe demonstrated in a passage following a deconstruction of previous historical givens.

Yet, seeing that most ancient ideas now seem to us to be foolish, what reason is there to suppose that our ideas will appear to future ages to have been any truer? One of them, at any rate, which will be laughed at, I am sure, is the illusion of national character. Or more probably, it will be looked back on, not with amusement, but scorn.¹⁴

Paul Addison has argued that the main conflict over identity during wartime was a contest between an 'Anglican Deep England of deference and hierarchy' and a 'radical-populist Britain fuelled by dissent.'¹⁵ Men from both of these groups would find themselves side by side in captivity.

¹² Dawson, Graham. (1994) *Soldier Heroes: British adventure, empire and the imagining of masculinities*. Routledge, London. p1.

¹³ Rose, Sonya O. (2003) *Which People's War: National Identity and Citizenship in Britain 1939-1945*. OUP. p287.

¹⁴ Fyfe, Hamilton. (1940) *The Illusion of National Character*. Watts and Co, London. pp4-5. Fyfe had previously edited the *Daily Mirror*, the *Morning Advertiser* and the *Daily Herald*.

¹⁵ Addison, Paul. (2004) "Book Review: Which People's War: National Identity and Citizenship in Britain 1939-1945, by Sonya O. Rose." *The English Historical Review*, Vol 119, p1367.

In the context of the Asian location of the camps, and the European origins of most of their fellow prisoners, issues of wider Anglo-Saxon and western identities also have a role in how the POWs could define themselves. As Edward Said has asserted; ‘the orient has helped to define Europe (or the west) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.’¹⁶

Elements from each of these aspects of identity, together with their associated perspectives on race and class, will be considered in relation to how the Far Eastern Prisoners of War (FEPOWs) interpreted their experiences, and attempted to reconstruct their sense of self, both during captivity and as they tried to rebuild their lives in the post-war period.

0.3. British Other Ranks (BORs) and the FEPOW Narrative.

The second major aim of this thesis is to recover and reassess certain aspects of the Far Eastern Prisoner of War (FEPOW) experience, particularly in respect of the BORs. Penny Summerfield has written that the popular memory of the Second World War ‘is the outcome of a competitive and sometimes conflictual process by which some representations of the past achieve social and cultural centrality while others are eclipsed and marginalised.’¹⁷ In respect of the prisoners in Asia there has been little evidence of this process at work in the popular narrative, and where there has been some limited discussion in the historical literature it has focussed on the relative role of different categories of officers in the camps. In one of the first books on this captivity to be published in the post-war period, Lt Coast noted in his introduction:

I apologise to the Other Ranks. They had a worse time than the Officers and I very much hope that some of them will write a history from their viewpoint. Though always sympathetic to, and aware of the O.R.s’ more wretched position, this book can but remain the work of a Subaltern and an individualist.¹⁸

¹⁶ Said, Edward (1978; 2003 edn) *Orientalism*. Penguin Classics, London. pp1-2.

¹⁷ Summerfield, Penny. (2010) “Dunkirk and the Popular Memory of Britain at War, 1940-58.” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol 45. p790.

¹⁸ Coast, John. (1946; 2014 edn) *Railroad of Death*. Myrmidon, Newcastle upon Tyne. p.xlvii.

Whilst there have been numerous accounts, published and unpublished, by the other ranks in the intervening 70 years, there has been no academic attempt at a synthesis that focusses specifically on captivity from their viewpoint. This thesis aims to start to redress this lacuna and recover their history.

The dominant FEPOW narrative in the post-war period has been one that focuses on the suffering and hardships endured, with a particular focus on the time spent on the Burma-Thailand Railway (the Railway). This is not surprising given the fact that around a quarter of the men would die in captivity before the end of the war from the mutually reinforcing trinity of malnutrition, illness and overwork, many of them during the construction of the Railway, and that more than half of all British POWs were involved at this particularly harsh location of captivity. The Railway ran for a length of 415kms from Ban Pong in Thailand to Thanbyuzyat in Burma, connecting the Singapore to Bangkok line with that from Ye on the Burmese coast to Rangoon.¹⁹

Whilst the Railway was atypical of overall captivity in terms of the severe circumstances that could be endured and the consequent high mortality rates, it was in many ways representative of the overall nature of prison life. It was not the singular experience that it has often been portrayed as. Conditions could vary considerably depending on issues of location, time and both allied and Japanese agency. Those men in the camps in the remote middle stretches of the line suffered far more than their colleagues who had the better fortune to be based closer to the respective termini, particularly in Thailand, where facilities were more developed and supplies easier to deliver. The most exacting times on the Railway were the *speedo* periods, when the Japanese demanded extra effort to meet local construction deadlines, the worst of which coincided with the arrival of the monsoon and a cholera epidemic in the middle of 1943. As will be seen the outlooks and approaches of the camp command structures, both Japanese

¹⁹ Kinvig, Clifford. (1973) *Death Railway*. Pan/Ballantine, London. p24.

and POW, could also vary considerably between locations and over time, again lending considerable heterogeneity to the situation on the ground.

Such factors were at work all across the Asian POW diaspora, and there were many other locations and times when conditions could be just as severe, or, as in the case of Changi, far easier. A few were even worse. Whilst it would be facile to deny the importance of these factors in the POW experience, and this thesis makes no attempt to do so, the process of analysing their outlooks does however offer a fresh perspective on other less familiar aspects of their situation, in the brief period before captivity, in the camps, and in the post-war years.

0.4. Structure and Chapter Layout.

The variety of contacts made by the FEPOWs were organised into a tripartite categorisation based upon combatant status; allied, enemy and civilian. A potential benefit of this classification is that it allows for a consideration as to whether such status had any effect of how the different populations were viewed.

As with any such socially constructed taxonomy there are potential complications as to where people belong. The Japanese were encountered both in the sense of enemy combatants, on the battlefield or as captors, and as civilians. Encounters with Japanese civilians were varied and not unusual in Japan during transit and at work, on route to Japan where they met seamen, and in the form of railway engineers in Burma and Thailand. Even more complex was the situation in regard to Indians, who could fall into all three categories. They could be allies from the Indian Army, as well as enemy combatants, either as guards in the camps and/or as members of the Indian National Army (INA), and they could be civilians, both at home or as that part of the diaspora in Malaya, many of whom ended up labouring on the Railway in close proximity to the POWs. Indians do appear briefly in the sections on allied personnel, largely

before captivity, at which point they were separated by the Japanese with a view to their recruitment into the INA, and occasionally as camp guards working for the Japanese in Singapore and elsewhere. The main focus is however on civilian Indians, both before and during captivity. Such examples of multiple category occupation allow for further testing of the importance (if any) of combatant status upon outlooks.

The selection of the various nationalities and ethnicities, which are the focus in the respective categories and chapters, has been informed primarily by the weight of evidence available in the POW accounts, and only rarely in association with a view to intrinsically elaborating upon a specific aspect of the men's worldview. Issues of allocation, selection and focus are discussed more fully, where appropriate, within each chapter.

The first chapter considers the period between departing from Britain in late 1941 and entering captivity in early 1942. It offers a snapshot of the attitudes of the men towards the local civilian populations that they encountered on their journey to Asia, which stopped off in the contrasting imperial locations of South Africa and India. This theme is developed upon arrival in Singapore, where responses to the city's multi-ethnic population are considered, at a time of increasing tension and concerns over a local fifth column movement. The desperate attempts by some to escape the fall of Singapore, in both official and unofficial evacuations, offer a further opportunity to trace their outlooks to the local communities at a time of considerable stress. Finally, the ritualised marches of shame to the prison camps, designed by the Japanese to humiliate their prisoners and demonstrate the new order to the local populaces, offer a further lens onto the perceptions of the now defeated British POWs, in relation to the civilian crowds through which they had to proceed.

In Chapter Two the pre December 1941 and war-time attitudes to their enemy captors are assessed, primarily focussing on the Japanese. The press has been suggested as a prime source of pre-war Japanese characterisations, but a detailed examination finds little evidence to

support such a claim, indeed the press were largely neutral in their frequently parochial coverage of events in China in the late 1930s. An examination of existing BOR outlooks prior to combat finds little evidence of any specific antagonism towards the Japanese, the POW accounts pointing to the development of an antipathy towards the Japanese which was largely based upon their experience of captivity.

Chapter Three looks at associations with their allied colleagues in captivity, with particular focus on the oft cited less than harmonious relations with the “Dutch”, whose numbers included a large number of Eurasian troops. Whilst this antagonism had a number of sources, including issues of a lack of co-operation and fighting spirit prior to the surrender and assorted jealousies over resources in camps, it is argued that a major cause of such antipathy, among the minority of men who stated it, was the racial difference of their Dutch colleagues.

The frequently antipathetic views of the BORs as to their officers form the focus of Chapter Four. The vicissitudes of the military caste system are considered from the convoys east to the POW camps, with specific reference to the prime cause of antagonism, the differing conditions enjoyed by most of the officers in captivity. Whilst this factor and the consequent wide variation in the mortality rates suffered by the officers and the men have been the subject of study in other national histories of captivity, it has been largely absent in the British literature. A first attempt to quantify such effects in the British context is presented, along with a more qualitative evaluation of mutual relations, which also investigates the effects of military hierarchy within the other ranks.

In Chapter Five the effects of the othering of local populations and the landscape, reputedly held by the men during captivity but informed by previous conditioning, are considered in two contexts. The first is in respect to the popularly perceived impossibility of escape. Examples of successful attempts are presented that challenge the ubiquity of such assumptions, and the situation in Asia is compared to the European theatre, where a much more positive, though

equally inaccurate escape discourse has developed. In a parallel section the BOR perceptions of the Tamil workforce on the Burma-Thailand Railway are considered, with an emphasis on the racially and colonially informed perspectives that dominated the British narrative.

Particular focus is on the period of the cholera epidemic which raged down the line in 1943, and how the BORs responded to the terrible situation that the Tamils found themselves in.

The final chapter looks at the evolution of post-war attitudes of the former POWs to the Japanese, where a surprising amount of reconciliation is to be found. This is in contrast to the established popular narrative, as presented by the mass media and in particular the popular and published press and the cinema, which has persisted in perpetuating a largely unchanging and unforgiving outlook. It is in this context that the popular memory of captivity and the reality of the POWs' perspectives are at their greatest divergence, somewhat ironically given the continued prevalence of notions of tolerance in the construction of British identity.

0.5. Methodology and Sources.

The analytical focus of this study is on the attitudes of "ordinary" Britons, which in the military context is taken to mean the other ranks as opposed to their officers. In order to maintain the novelty which their new surroundings and contacts provided, and avoid the influence of previous colonial-military encounters, the majority of cases scrutinised were members of the 18th Division of the British Army. This unit was raised in September 1939, as a second line Territorial Army Division, recruiting its infantry contingents primarily among the East Anglian county regiments, with the addition of a battalion of Sherwood Foresters, one from the Northumberland Fusiliers and with the Lancashire based Loyal Regiment, also territorials, providing the reconnaissance battalion. The considerable number of support troops, including the complements of artillery, engineers, signallers and service corps personnel were of a wider geographical provenance, although some of these units had a strong regional affiliation, such

as the 125th Anti-Tank Regiment, which was mainly recruited from the Sunderland area.

Whilst most of the men in this study come from the 18th Division, some other servicemen, mostly new to the flag, particularly from the other ranks of the RAF, have also been included where they inform and add to the discussion.

The majority of sources for this study have come from the holdings at the Imperial War Museum (IWM) which feature an unusually large proportion of accounts by members of the other ranks, reflecting the extraordinary nature of their wartime experience. The IWM was founded in 1917 to record the experiences of all sections of society, civilian and military, during the then ongoing First World War. Moving to its current location at the former Bethlem Royal Hospital in 1936, it has continued to document the story of Britain at war into the 21st century and commemorate and record the sacrifices of previous generations.

As well as a substantial collection of documentary holdings, the museum has a large and growing oral history archive. Initially started in 1972 to record the reminiscences of the by then ageing veterans of the First War, it has continued to capture the testimony of those involved in subsequent conflicts and peacetime service. By the early 1980s the former POWs of the Second World War were being interviewed, a process that has continued into the present century. The importance of the holdings at the IWM in the research for this thesis cannot be overstated; without them the legitimacy of the reconstructions that follow would at best be severely diminished, if not impossible to develop.

In pursuing this investigation the full range of individual life history accounts has been utilised, ranging from contemporary diaries to post-war memoirs and interviews. This holistic approach has been partially conditioned by the longitudinal nature of the project, extending as it does into the post-war period. It is also a reflection of the relative merits of the types of source to inform the analysis, each having its own intrinsic advantages and drawbacks, and their availability.

Some scholars prefer to utilise only contemporary sources in the search for the raw unmediated reality of the period under study, precluding the clouding of this authenticity by the effects of failing and, perhaps more dangerously, discursively influenced memory. Sonya Rose adopts such an approach in her study of citizenship and the construction of identity in Britain during the war, infusing herself almost entirely into contemporary material to better understand her subjects, free from the post-hoc distractions of subsequent reconstructions.²⁰ Whilst there are sound methodological reasons for adopting such a constrained approach to mining the ore of research, in this particular situation there are stronger reasons to seek a wider base.

The logistics of diary writing, including the sourcing of the materials required within the often limited camp economy, prioritising their purchase over that of more essential items, and the need for safe storage spaces, all combined to reduce the material available to the historian. Whilst there were ten manuscript diarists in the group under consideration, their illicit writings were undoubtedly constrained by the risk of them being discovered by their captors, a scenario that could involve severe punishment and the threat of death. Thus while they may (and indeed do) offer some useful insights into relations with other prisoners and civilians, references to the Japanese are few and far between, and the distance of these rare jottings from the reality of their feelings is probably greater still. Another constraint on the utility of the diaries is that the content often reflected the immediate thoughts of the authors, which in the poor nutritional environment of the camps meant that deliberations about food frequently overshadowed everything else. Remco Raben, a Dutch historian of captivity in Asia, has observed this factor. 'The camp diaries deal with an extremely limited number of themes. Food, particularly the lack thereof, is the main issue.'²¹ Despite such shortcomings diaries have

²⁰ Rose, *Which People's War*, pp25-26.

²¹ Raben, Remco. (ed) (1999) *Representing the Japanese Occupation of Indonesia: Personal Testimonies and Public Images in Indonesia, Japan and the Netherlands*. Netherlands Institute for War Documentation, Amsterdam. Waanders Publishers, Zwolle. p165.

some utility, particularly when seeking outlooks that are unmediated by subsequent changes in racial and cultural norms, as will be demonstrated in a later chapter.

There are several accounts that might be termed near contemporary, composed in the immediate aftermath of the events they describe. Such sources include the report scripted by several members of the Intelligence Corps on arrival in India after successfully evacuating from Singapore in 1942, and two accounts by liberated POWs written in 1945 and 1946, shortly after the end of the war.

Most of the post-war memoirs started appearing in the late 1970s, as the veterans reached the reflective years of their retirement. These vary in length from a few pages to one detailed account that spans three volumes and around 600 pages.²² While some of these accounts provide a cradle to retirement chronology, most at least cover the period under scrutiny, that is from their departure from the UK in 1941, through the end of the war, and up to the time of writing some thirty or more years later. Attached to such sources are the implicit dangers of such long term recall, including accuracy, collective accretion, and the reinforcement, rehearsal and selection of memory. Whilst such pitfalls also attach to the use of the archive of interviews, a drawback specific to written memoirs is the result of the writing process itself, the process of consideration, re-scripting and editing potentially magnifying the effects of the aforementioned provisos. However, the nature of the information being sought in this study, usually at something of a tangent to the considered focus of the authors, mitigates some of the issues of memory outlined.

The interviews were primarily examined for specific post-war attitudes to the Japanese, this being a regular question near the end of each collection. However, on occasions during this process detail would come to light that informed other aspects of the project. In contrast to the measured ruminations that usually accompany the writing process, interviews give the

²² In one case it was quite literally the back of a cigarette packet. IWM: Crawley. N. (Docs 1132)

subject less time to formulate an “acceptable” answer, and can sometimes be heard as providing a more spontaneous response. Such answers may not be as unrehearsed as they first appear however, particularly if the respondent is retelling a frequently recounted narrative, one that has undergone the process of what Graham Dawson has described as subjective composure.²³ Again, the oblique nature of the material being sought acts to mitigate some of the danger inherent in this factor. Of more specific concern to both written and verbal post-hoc sources are changes in individual and societal outlooks since the war, that may impact upon what the individual feels is appropriate and acceptable to mention in their later years. The changing use of linguistic idioms is of particular interest in this context, in both public and private settings, and examples of such variations provide evidence of evolution in societal norms and the mutability of individual perspectives, and will be discussed as they appear in the course of the text.

A total of thirteen contemporary accounts (mainly diaries, but including a report made in 1943 by a successful evacuee from Singapore, and two accounts written in 1946 by former POWs) and seven memoirs submitted to the IWM between 1975 and 1997 form the core group of written records studied, and a further 40 interviews with BORs were reviewed. All were selected on the basis of relevant prompts from the catalogue descriptions, in the written sources relating to relations with other groups of people, and in the interviews by the search term ‘attitudes to the Japanese.’ The 60 cases scrutinised are only a tiny proportion of the 50,000 men who were prisoners of the Japanese, and thus this study can only provide indicative as opposed to conclusive outcomes. The full list of all the men considered, including name, rank, unit, source type and archive number appears in the bibliography.

²³ Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p22-23. For a discussion on the use of oral testimony and the ‘production of memory’ see: Summerfield, Penny. (1998) *Reconstructing women’s wartime lives: Discourse and subjectivity in oral histories of the Second World War*. Manchester University Press. pp9-22.

A further source of material is to be found in the many published accounts of the POWs. To the caveats already noted above regarding the use of post-hoc archival materials should be added the pressures applied directly and indirectly to the authors by the publishers. Indicative of such publishing demands is Terence Kelly's nuanced account of his captivity, most of it spent in what he considered to be a reasonable camp in Japan, working alongside similarly equitable Japanese civilians, originally published as *Living With Japanese*. The back matter noted that this was 'no hackneyed story of the enemy's brutality and inhumanity. It shows the Japanese in a broader light than most books by prisoners of war.'²⁴ It was reprinted some years later by Pen and Sword Military under the title *By Hellship to Hiroshima*, the focus of the cover matter now on the 'squalid native prison' that he was initially held in, and the conditions on board the ship that transported him to Japan which were 'so appalling that many men died'.²⁵ The text of the book was completely unaltered. Given these caveats only occasional use is made of such publications where they serve as an aid to illustrating the subject under discussion, as in the case of the published diaries of several of the medical officers (MOs).

Whilst the focus of this thesis is on the attitudes of the BORs, the sources were also scanned for further accounts to give a comparative view, in particular from the British officers. Eight diaries, two accounts written after release in 1945, and five memoirs written between 1982 and 1995 were scrutinised at the IWM in this respect. Published literature was also used to elucidate Australian, Dutch, American, local civilian and Japanese perspectives.

Linda Colley, in her study of British prisoners in foreign lands during earlier times, neatly summarises the pitfalls and the benefits of captivity narratives:

They are imperfect, idiosyncratic, and sometimes violently slanted texts. They are also astonishingly rich and revealing, both about the British themselves, and about the mixed fortunes and complexities of their dealings with other peoples.²⁶

²⁴ Kelly, Terence. (1997; 1998 edn) *Living With Japanese*. Chivers Press, Bath.

²⁵ Kelly, Terence. (2006) *By Hellship to Hiroshima*. Pen and Sword Military, Barnsley.

²⁶ Colley, Linda. (2002) *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600-1850*. Jonathan Cape, London. p15.

The range of accounts utilised in this study share the same characteristics, and with careful reading (and in this more technologically advanced era, listening) they can be as informative now as they were then.

Additional holdings were scrutinised at The National Archive, where the Japanese card index system, an almost complete record of individual POWs, is held.²⁷ The cards give some basic biographical information about the prisoners in English, next of kin, date of birth and home address, as well as some details regarding their captivity in Japanese. Around a quarter of them have a thick red line or saltire drawn across them, indicating death in captivity. In parallel to this are a near complete set of exit questionnaires filled in by the survivors at the end of the war. The other ranks usually had little to say in these although they do provide a useful record of their location as they moved from camp to camp, and thus a means of verification for veracity of the source accounts. Post-war holdings of documents relating to War Crimes Investigation Teams (WCIT) and other similar reports provided additional information, particularly in relation to the use of Asian labourers on the Railway.

A range of national and regional newspapers and publications were also surveyed in sections that examined their role in the formation of outlooks; titles scrutinised were the *Daily Mirror*, *Manchester Guardian*, *The Times*, the *Daily Express*, the *Evening Standard*, the *Daily Mail*, *The Independent*, the *Yorkshire Post* and the *Picture Post*.

0.6. Historiography.

In a general review of publications on prisoners of war, historian Neville Wylie writes that there is 'a raft of memoir literature and academic studies already published on the fate of the

²⁷ This was a rare item to survive the widespread destruction of records relating to captivity by the Japanese at the end of the war.

far east [sic] POWs'.²⁸ Whilst there is a plethora of memoirs published by the former prisoners of the Japanese, there has been considerably less scholarship regarding their time in captivity. This was a trend that was first signalled with the publication of the *Official History* in 1969, which relegated the experiences of three full army divisions' worth of British servicemen, over three and a half years, to the ten pages of appendix 30 in the final volume of five.²⁹ This particular historiographical field would lie fallow for a long period after the war, until professional interest started to germinate in the 1990s, both among scholars and authors with a family or vocational interest.

Clifford Kinvig's interest had been stimulated during his post-war military service that took him to the region, and his *River Kwai Railway* was an attempt to synthesise individual accounts into a comprehensive history of that location of captivity. His predominant use of officers' accounts, particularly as a source of unpublished material, together with his army background, frequently give the text the feel of a campaign history, with little sense of the other ranks' experience, although his use of Japanese sources, and in particular his coverage of the local labour forces working in parallel to the POWs, does lend a sense of wider perspective to his analysis.³⁰

The officer based focus is also evident in the chapters for various anthologies written by Sybilla Jane Flower, who, in the absence of any dedicated academics, has become the default contributor to such edited collections on matters relating to the British POWs. In her first published contribution she argued that the 'prevailing interpretation has been to disparage officers as a caste', and that the aim of her chapter was 'to correct the obvious distortions that

²⁸ Wylie, Neville. (2006) "Prisoners of War in the Era of Total War." *War in History*, Vol 13, p229.

²⁹ Kirby, Maj-Gen S. Woodburn. (1969; 2004 edn) *The War Against Japan: Volume V: The Surrender of Japan*. The Naval and Military Press Ltd, Uckfield. pp 532-541.

³⁰ Kinvig, Clifford (1992) *River Kwai Railway: The True Story of the Burma-Siam Railroad*. Brassey's, London.

pervade both the popular and scholarly literature on the subject.³¹ By the time of her latest outing in print her thesis continued to include the importance of the closeness of the officers to their men, particularly in the case of Territorial Army units such as the 9th Northumberland Fusiliers, commanded by Lt. Col. H.S. Flower.³² Whilst well researched and presented, Flower's deliberate and selective focus on restoring the reputation of (part of) the officer corps leaves little room for the story of the BORs.

So pervasive in the literature were Flower's articles that it was perhaps not surprising that, in the review of her existing work for the latter collection, she was incorrectly attributed as having contributed a chapter in the first major edited collection focussing purely on POWs in Asia.³³ Some of the essays in *Japanese Prisoners of War* were a rare attempt to specifically examine the issue of race and cultural difference in the context of the Asian camps, from a historical standpoint, particularly from the Japanese perspective.³⁴ Given the small and tight knit community of researchers in the field, it is no surprise that Kinvig reprised his earlier work in this book, and Kent Fedorowich, the joint editor of the first anthology, also contributed a chapter.

Robert Havers previewed his research on the camp at Changi in the same volume, and the full monograph was published in 2003.³⁵ This was an important work as it belayed the myth of a universally ruthless captivity, and the specific picture of Changi that had come to be associated in popular thought with the worst locations on the Railway. In so doing it demonstrated that the Japanese response to the prisoners was by no means consistently harsh, and that under

³¹ Flower, Sybilla Jane. (1996) "Captors and Captives on the Burma-Thailand Railway." in Moore, Bob, and Fedorowich, Kent (eds) *Prisoners of War and their Captors in World War II*. Berg, Oxford. p 227.

³² Flower, Sybilla Jane. (2008) "Memory and the prisoner of war experience: The United Kingdom." In Hack, Karl, and Blackburn, Kevin. (eds) *Forgotten Captives in Japanese Occupied Asia*. Routledge, London. p 59.

³³ Hack and Blackburn, *Forgotten Captives*, pxi.

³⁴ Towle, Philip., Kosuge, Margaret., and Kibata, Yoichi. (2000) *Japanese Prisoners of War*. Hambledon and London, London.

³⁵ Havers, R.P.W. (2003) *Re-assessing the Japanese Prisoner of War Experience: The Changi POW Camp, Singapore, 1942-5*. RoutledgeCurzon, London.

the right circumstances life could be organised to a level of relative comfort. Havers also liberally uses the unpublished accounts of the other ranks, including some of those used in this thesis, alongside those of the officers, at least in the early days. That they disappeared from his account after the first few chapters is no surprise, as most of them were transported off in work parties. Notwithstanding such inclusions however, this is very much again a story focussed on the commissioned levels of the military system, including some of their own internecine tensions, and one that does not delve too deeply into the issue of the selective Japanese application of some of those parts of the Geneva Convention that applied to the officer corps. The issue of race is also quickly touched upon, but not developed with any substance, and equally briskly moved on from.

Parallel to the scholarship on the POWs there has been increased interest in the experience of the civilians interned by the Japanese. Bernice Archer adopted a trans-national approach to the study of internees, weaving issues of race, class and gender into her '*Patchwork of Internment*', as an integral part of her research.³⁶ She concluded that intra-cohort conceptions of national identity, race and class were frequently subsumed and re-directed at the external suppressor, the Japanese. More recently, in the last few years, Felicia Yap has published a number of articles that reflect upon similar issues. Her article on the marginal position of Eurasians during the occupation demonstrates the precarious existence that had to be negotiated in the space between the new Japanese rulers and the interned British establishment, frequently suffering the distrust of, and denigration by, both parties.³⁷ In a subsequent article she makes a comparative study of the experiences of officers, other ranks

³⁶ Archer, Bernice. (2004; 2008 edn) *The Internment of Western Civilians under the Japanese, 1941-1945: A Patchwork of Internment*. Hong Kong University Press.

³⁷ Yap, Felicia. (2011) "Eurasians in British Asia during the Second World War." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol 21, pp 486-505.

and civilian internees, primarily at Kuching Camp in Borneo, where all three cohorts were in separate parts of the same camp.³⁸

International contributions to the literature, particularly from Australia, had made an earlier appearance in the 1980s. The POWs constituted a much larger part of Australia's war, both in numbers and mortality, than did the British captives. Despite this fact, a similar inertia had hold of scholarship and public interest. This was broken by the broadcasting of a series of documentaries about the POWs and the parallel publication of the accompanying book by Hank Nelson.³⁹ This was followed by an exposure of the relative mortality rates of officers and other ranks amongst the Australian prisoners in Ambon and Hainan, researched by Joan Beaumont.⁴⁰ Nelson went on to edit a collection of essays about the Burma-Thailand Railway with Gavan McCormack, which added to the Australian voices perspectives from Japanese and Korean participants in the episode. It also included a chapter on the civilian labourers on the line, by one of the Japanese scholars who had taken an interest in recovering the memory of that group.⁴¹

In contrast to the British literature, that from Australia adopted a much more egalitarian approach, frequently considering the experience of the other ranks. The only book focussing on the commissioned ranks in the Australian canon is the recent publication by Rosalind Hearder which, being an account of the role of Australian doctors in captivity, would naturally focus on officers.⁴² The historiography of the Australians and the internees offers a more all-inclusive and trans-national approach than much of the British work on POWs, where a similar direction is sometimes suggested but only rarely delivered. On this latter point Hearder has

³⁸ Yap, Felicia (2012) "Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees of the Japanese in British Asia: The Similarities and Contrasts of Experience." *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol 47, pp 317-346.

³⁹ Nelson, Hank (1985) *POW: Prisoners of War: Australians under Nippon*. ABC Enterprises, Sydney.

⁴⁰ Beaumont, Joan. (1988) *Gull Force: Survival and Leadership in Captivity 1941-1945*. Allen and Unwin, Sydney.

⁴¹ McCormack, Gavin, and Nelson, Hank. (1993) *The Burma-Thailand Railway: memory and history*. Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, NSW.

⁴² Hearder, Rosalind. (2010) *Keep The Men Alive: Australian POW doctors in captivity*. Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW.

written of the 'lack of broad scholarship in cross-cultural aspects of captivity between the various allied forces'⁴³, and it is the intention of this thesis to expand and widen this theme, utilising the voices of the other ranks.

In so doing a variety of strands of historiography will be introduced where appropriate to assist in the development of each chapter. Two particular areas with regard to race are worth introducing at this point, both geographically defined. The issue of race in the context of the Asia-Pacific War has been the subject of scrutiny at a number of levels. At the meta-political level Christopher Thorne has noted how it pervaded the ongoing relationships between Britain and America during the war years.⁴⁴ At a more parochial political level, Louis Allen, a former intelligence officer with the 14th Army in Burma, dedicated a chapter in his history of the fall of Singapore to *The Factor of Race*, highlighting the reluctance of the British authorities to utilise the local population.⁴⁵ Gerald Horne has examined the impact of British imperial and colonial racism in the context of the war, with specific focus on such effects in Hong Kong.⁴⁶ Adopting a wider lens on western hegemony, John Dower has written about the influence of pre-existing racial antipathy as the cause of the brutalised nature of the war.⁴⁷ In contrast to this thesis, Tarak Barkawi has argued that the brutality in the Burma theatre was not pre-ordained, but was the result of the experience of fighting itself, and developed in situ.⁴⁸

With regard to Britain itself, there is a limited literature that reflects upon British outlooks, both before and during the war, and particularly around the reception that the Black GIs

⁴³ Hearder, Rosalind. (2013) "Memory, methodology, and myth: some of the challenges of writing Australian prisoner of war history." *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*. Accessed online: <https://www.awm.gov.au/journal/j40/hearder.asp>

⁴⁴ Thorne, Christopher. (1978) *Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain and the war against Japan, 1941-1945*. Hamish Hamilton, London.

⁴⁵ Allen, Louis. (1977) *Singapore 1941-1942*. Davis-Poynter, London.

⁴⁶ Horne, Gerald. (2004) *Race War: White Supremacy and the Japanese Attack on the British Empire*. New York University Press.

⁴⁷ Dower, John (1986) *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*. Random House, New York.

⁴⁸ Barkawi, Tarak. (2004) "Peoples, Homelands, and Wars? Ethnicity, the Military and Battle among British Imperial Forces in the War against Japan." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol 46, pp 134-163.

received, and these works provide useful home comparators for the cohort that went to Asia. Two key works in this respect are the studies of the American “occupation” that started in 1942, by Graham Smith⁴⁹ and David Reynolds⁵⁰. Both authors relate how the British public were largely receptive to the black visitors, although Reynolds indicates that the relationship grew less cordial as the war progressed. In the most comprehensive survey to date of contemporary British attitudes to race and difference, Tony Kushner’s analysis of the Mass Observation archives reveals a more nuanced position, and he argues that there was a greater complexity and mutability in outlooks.⁵¹

In the article referred to at the start of this section, Wylie suggested that in relation to the POW literature, ‘we have probably reached the stage where claims for originality, on the basis of historiographical lacunae, can no longer be sustained.’⁵² This thesis argues that there is just such a lacuna regarding the experience of the BORs in captivity in Asia during the Second World War, and that in starting to address it a further contribution can be made to the growing understanding of the attitudes to difference of ordinary Britons during this period.

⁴⁹ Smith, Graham. (1987) *When Jim Crow Met John Bull: Black American Soldiers in World War II Britain*. I.B.Taurus and Co, London.

⁵⁰ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*.

⁵¹ Kushner, *We Europeans*.

⁵² Wylie, “Prisoners of War.” p229.

Chapter 1. The Journey East and into Captivity .

1.1. Introduction.

On their journey east via South Africa and India, and upon arrival in Singapore, the BORs would find themselves in the midst of a variety of local populations, including the Chinese and Indian diasporas, Malays, Thais, Burmese, Indonesians and Eurasians. Notwithstanding their proximity, contacts could be surprisingly limited, as first colonial and then Japanese imposed segregation worked to keep them separate. Despite their often limited nature, such contacts as there were offer the opportunity to elucidate the outlooks of the servicemen to the peoples whom they encountered. Some initial perspectives would be signalled during the journey east, and amplified once in theatre, and this chapter seeks to examine those nascent views and provide a wider insight into such sentiments.

One approach to structuring this chapter would be to adopt a classification based along national and ethnic lines. Such an approach would however be simplistic and remove the focus from the BORs who are the subject of this study. By examining their responses to a variety of civilians, in a range of settings through time, a much richer picture of their outlooks, their complexity and mutability, and the factors that informed and developed them, can be elucidated. This is not to ignore the fact that there were important factors that applied to specific nationalities and the BOR's impressions of them, and these will be considered in the text as they occur.

The civilians were theoretically neutral, and thus might be expected to offer truer insights into the ethno-racial mind-sets of the ordinary Briton, largely untainted by the potential for bias that could be introduced in the consideration of allied or enemy combatant status. In reality however the situation was somewhat more complex and local populations would nearly always be seen through a prism of partiality, be it supportive or unhelpful, positive or

derogatory, sometimes dependent upon the situation that the serviceman found himself in and the response of the civilian to that situation. Frequently the soldier's view of a civilian would be intrinsically linked to the view which he thought that the civilian held of him; thus while suspicion of civilians was usually accompanied by an assumed antipathy in return, a grateful POW was likely to see the civilian as being sympathetic. Such a binary feedback relationship is not unexpected, indeed it would be a surprise were it otherwise, and forms the basis for the analysis of outlooks in this chapter, where antipathy and sympathy follow a consistent and traceable path through the first-hand accounts.

In this chapter contacts with and outlooks upon the civilian populations will be assessed in four largely consecutive contexts. An initial section examines the journey east, as the men were sent overseas by convoy, disembarking in South Africa and Bombay on the way. This provides an initial snapshot as to the men's outlooks, as they witness the segregation of South Africa, and the deprivation of India. The next section, upon arrival in what was by now the war-zone of Singapore, examines the naiveté of the men to their new surroundings, considering first impressions upon landing in Singapore, the apparent ubiquity of the enemy lurking within the local population in the form of the 5th column, and difficulties in differentiating ethnicity. This is followed by a consideration of the often desperate attempts made by some of the men to avoid capture during the flight from Singapore, and their responses to the local communities through which they passed. The final section examines the reactions of the men during the post surrender marches into captivity, intended by the victorious Japanese to humiliate the demoralised POWs, along roads lined by the local populace.

1.2. The Journey East.

For most of the other ranks the journey to South East Asia at the end of 1941 was, with the exception for some of a brief sojourn in France the previous year, their first experience of going overseas. This journey would bring them into contact with a range of contrasting cultural landscapes en route, including that of their American hosts on the first convoy, and particularly at the points of disembarkation, at Cape Town and Durban in South Africa, and Bombay.

Most of the subjects of this study went overseas on two main convoys. The first, containing most of the 18th Division, departed from Liverpool (27-30/10/41) and from Gourock on the Clyde (31/10/41). After three days sailing under the protection of the Royal Navy, it was met in mid-Atlantic by a U.S. Navy flotilla and proceeded under American escort to Halifax (Nova Scotia). There the men were transferred to six converted American liners, the United States Ships *West Point*, *Wakefield*, *Mount Vernon*, *Orizabe*, *Dickson* and *Leonard Wood*, the main body embarking on 8/11/41.

Their route took them down to Trinidad for resupplying, before crossing the Atlantic again, and docking at Cape Town on the 9th and 10th of December, just after the outbreak of hostilities in the Far East. After several days in port the convoy departed for Bombay on the 14th, where most of the ships arrived at the end of December, and the men disembarked for several weeks of land based training at Ahmednagar in central India. They departed on the 20th and 21st of January for Singapore, reaching their final destination at the end of January, just two weeks before the capitulation. The Bombay landfall was not made by the USS *Mount Vernon*, which was diverted to Mombasa in time for Christmas Day, and thence went straight to Singapore arriving in mid-January, giving its unfortunate passengers the opportunity to take part in the retreat down the Malayan peninsula.

A further convoy, with a large RAF presence, left Gourock on 7/12/41, this time taking a more direct route to the Far East, via Freetown (21/12/41 – 25/12/41), Cape Town (5/1/42) and Durban (10/1/42-14/1/42), where the men were allowed to disembark. Their journey then took some of them straight to Singapore, arriving about a week before the fall, whilst others were diverted to Batavia on Java.

The other ranks exhibited a range of responses to their first opportunity for shore leave, after nearly six weeks at sea. Having left Britain at the onset of winter, in the throes of rationing and bombing, disembarking at Cape Town during the southern hemispheric summer, with its abundance of familiar and exotic foodstuffs and a relatively large and welcoming English speaking white population, must have been a revelation and cause for celebration amongst many of the ship bound soldiers. A typical example of such a reaction is contained in the diary of Private Caldwell: '9/12/41 Granted shore leave. Reception from S. African population was outstanding. 13/12/41 Departed with heavy hearts from Cape Town.'⁵³

Private Carpenter had similar memories, when he recalled that '... those four days were, well, no words of mine can express them ... four wonderful days.'⁵⁴ Bombardier Parry noted on the 30/10/41 that in Cape Town '... the people are falling over themselves to look after us', and four days later he wrote: 'Left Cape Town and some of the kindest people you could ever wish to meet.'⁵⁵

Intelligence Corps member L.Cpl. Taylor offered a more nuanced view, as he noted that 'The chief impressions of Cape Town were the overflowing hospitality of the inhabitants, and the atmosphere of wealth and abundance which was apparent...', whilst however observing that on the way to zoo that 'we noticed the reverse side of Cape Town in the hovels occupied by the African population.' At the zoo he drew a parallel with the wider political developments in

⁵³ IWM: Caldwell, E.J. (Docs 11092) p3.

⁵⁴ IWM: Carpenter, C.W. (Docs 1484) p6.

⁵⁵ IWM: Parry, E.W. (Docs 2729) 30/10/41; 4/11/41.

South Africa: 'The lions anyhow were on their own territory, and had only exchanged a wider liberty for permanent economic security.'⁵⁶

Some of the other ranks similarly noted and recalled what they saw beyond the luxurious white lifestyle, the concomitant conditions for the less fortunate residents. One area that was repeatedly mentioned by the ORs in this respect was District Six, situated near to the docks, where:

... coloured and white Afrikaner rural migrants rubbed shoulders with Jewish and Indian shopkeepers; West Indians introduced the language and ideas of African America; and St Helenans lived cheek by jowl with Cape Muslims and the descendants of Filipino fishermen.⁵⁷

Prior to letting the men ashore, an on-board briefing was routinely given by the officers. This was a standard mechanism by which the military communicated what they assumed the troops needed to know about the location they were about to visit, and in the case of Cape Town this largely meant advising them to steer clear of District Six, which it was claimed, contrary to the reality outlined above, was a no whites zone. Despite the admonitions of his officers, Private Houghton found himself in District Six:

I saw the other side of town, where the natives live, their quarters are squalid – dirt roads, tin houses. Somehow we had got into District 6, a forbidden zone for whites. This is my first sight of poverty, downright poverty, up to now thought this could never happen – told later we were lucky to come away without some injury or other.⁵⁸

Gunner Pitfield's diary entry suggests that he had attended such a briefing and had fully absorbed such warnings; '... stopped for 4 days terrific welcome, District Six very deadly for troops many stabbed and killed by natives Cape Town a very beautiful spot ...'⁵⁹

⁵⁶ IWM: Taylor (Taylor) (Docs 841) Ch 14.

⁵⁷ Bickford-Smith, Vivian; van Heyningen, Elizabeth, and Worden, Nigel (1999) *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century: An illustrated social history*. David Philip Publishers, Claremont, South Africa. p71.

⁵⁸ IWM: Houghton, J.R. (Docs 2258) 10/12/41.

⁵⁹ IWM: Pitfield, T.W. (Docs 6398) p1.

Other accounts suggest that District Six was more welcoming than the official line would have it, including that of Private Dixon who recalled marching through Cape Town:

In our platoon we had one black person named Al Binney who used to be a fairground boxer and came from Sheffield. He joined us as we left England. As the band approached the coloured quarters, named District Six, it always struck up 'Way down the Swanee River'. You can imagine the rapturous applause we got when they spotted our black Al Binney amongst us. As far as I know he was the only coloured in the whole division.⁶⁰

The same Al Binney would later, in captivity, drag an unconscious Dixon back to his hut after a severe beating at the hands of the Japanese. Presumably Al Binney was not living in Brixton in 1969, when Dixon wrote that 'our coloured neighbours were making our lives unbearable so we thought it best to move and we did.'⁶¹

Private Henderson, an active Communist Party member, sought a more political (and perhaps less patronising) means of mediating the BOR/District Six interface as he recalled the subject of 'Section Six' [sic] coming up in a meeting with the local Cape Town party secretary. On board ship they had been told that an Australian had been killed, and that men in British uniforms were decidedly unpopular there. His local comrade said that there had been an incident involving a group of drunken Australians, who had run away from the police after attempting to rob a brewer's dray, and ended up in District Six.

The drunks had pestered a couple of women, evidently labouring under the false concept that as they were coloured women they were sexually available. A number of male residents of the section, becoming aware of the situation, had gone to the

⁶⁰ IWM: Dixon, H. (Docs 13003) p33. There was at least one other black man serving in the 18th Division. Sgt Manley de Roux, in his mid 30s, had worked his passage from Jamaica to volunteer in 1940, and enlisted in the Northumberland Fusiliers, where he was rapidly promoted. Held in high regard by his comrades both before and during captivity, he volunteered to stay behind to help with the wounded POWs after the war, and died in a plane crash near Saigon in 1945 whilst on these duties. IWM: Eva, O.V. (Docs 2381) pp 35-37. His deployment to the Northumberland Fusiliers, a battalion of which had rioted in Kingston, and marched through the centre of the Jamaican capital singing 'We've got the wind up the wogs' a few years before, was an interesting choice. See Bousquet, Ben, and Douglas, Colin. (1991) *West Indian Women at war: British Racism in World War II*. Lawrence and Wishart, London. pp 31-34.

⁶¹ IWM: Dixon; p153.

assistance of the women, and a fight had broken out. One Australian had ended up in hospital but our informant said “I’ve heard nothing about any one being killed. Had there been a death I would have heard about it. We have members in Section Six.”

Henderson was taken by his host to see District Six for himself.

The scene was one of Victorian gentility with soberly dressed men strolling along the pavements with their wives on their arms, often accompanied by their children who all seemed to be dressed as if for a Whit-Sunday parade. As we passed with our guide hats were raised in courteous greeting and no exception at all was taken to our uniforms.

Our guide told us that these people were ... strongly anti-fascist although some regarded the war as a white man’s affair and wanted none of it.⁶²

Henderson’s description appears to be somewhat at odds with that given by Houghton, as, not for the last time in this survey, very different perspectives influenced perceptions of the same location. Their situations were however different. Houghton had got lost in the company of some of his similarly culturally inexperienced fellow soldiers, in completely unfamiliar territory. Henderson, however, informed by a more rounded worldview and more numerous positive contacts with people of other races, questioned the official guidance and had deliberately set out to investigate. In this matter he was being guided by a trusted local comrade, who was also respected in the community. Henderson’s account sees through the poverty and into the humanity of District Six, and is so glowing that it might seem at odds with even local accounts of the area, until one considers that it appears he visited on a Sunday.

Given the numerous references to District Six in the BOR accounts of Cape Town, it is something of a surprise that none appear from any of the officers. The nearest to such to be found is an official sounding statement from Captain Merrett, referring to the Cape Flats, some distance away from the main port and from District Six: ‘The native district in Cape Town on the edge of Cape Flats is forbidden to troops & only poor whites live there the police patrol in pairs.’ It would perhaps have been surprising had Merrett not found space in his journal for

⁶² IWM: Henderson, E.S. (Docs 8225) p121-122.

such an entry, given his wide ranging review of the racial politics in South Africa and the Cape, including the 'Indian problem' of the 1920s, the growing Boer population, and a visit to Muizenberg, 'called Jewsenberg for quite obvious reasons.'⁶³

Conversely, given that some, at least, of the BORs had described with sympathy their encounter with District Six, it is interesting that only one of them had commented about the segregated nature of the US Navy. Cape Town had not been so welcoming to the black crew members of the American ships, as they disembarked from Jim Crow ships on to a land that embraced a system of embryonic apartheid. These men, and some Filipinos, were recruited solely into ancillary roles in the US Navy, and served as waiters and servants to the officers on board. Lance Corporal Boyd noted that the 'position of the U.S. negroes must have been delicate, as the colour bar is rigid in C.T. and signs saying EUROPEANS ONLY/BLANKES ALLEEN were everywhere.'⁶⁴ The impact of segregation onshore for the American crew was one that was also noted by one officer, Captain de Cayley of the 5th Suffolks, who recalled that:

Our negro waiters were horrified by the colour bar, and we were warned that some white girls hanging around the dock entrance were classified as coloured and were tabu [sic]. We asked how you could tell and were told that they had no half-moons on their nails.⁶⁵

Whilst it is questionable as to whether the sailors would have been much surprised at facing more segregation when they landed, these statements suggest a certain empathy on the part of those that made them, and de Cayley's statement goes on to harpoon one of the issues of racial categorisation that plagues any such social system. Private Henderson, who had been characteristically open to new horizons on the West Point, struck up a friendship with a radio operator who was of Italian origin, as were, in his opinion, most of the crew.⁶⁶ Given that the black stewards on board were reserved for serving the officers, their paths probably never

⁶³ IWM: Merrett, F.M. (Docs 1293) p10.

⁶⁴ IWM: Taylor, J.D. (Boyd) Chapter 13.

⁶⁵ IWM: de Cayley, F.E. (Docs 7888) p12.

⁶⁶ IWM: Henderson; p112.

crossed. With regard to the officers and District Six a similar explanation seems plausible, in that to venture anywhere near such an area (especially given the picture painted by their colleagues for the men) was an anathema to them.

Further evidence of broader outlooks is to be found in the accounts of servicemen whose journey took them via Durban, as part of the second convoy. Private Strong's diary entry displays his enjoyment of, and receptiveness to, a new environment; 'Many things combined to make this first walk in a new country strange and delightful, the large numbers of natives in the streets, the rickshaw men who were doing a roaring trade...'.⁶⁷ Aircraftman 2nd Class Gregory remembered discussing his appreciation for the role of General Smuts in world affairs with his hosts:

They stopped me in mid stream and, while sharing my enthusiasm for their leader, expressed their utmost certainty that, whatever the outcome of the war, there would be grave changes in the direction of South African affairs. They explicitly forecast the coming of apartheid and accurately named three or four politicians who would, they feared, bring about this evil change in the direction of their lives.⁶⁸

A small cohort of 188 mixed army and RAF other ranks would extend their stay in Durban, as military prisoners, following a revolt over the insanitary conditions on the ship they were due to board, the *City of Canterbury*, for the final leg of their journey to Singapore. The senior officer in the local Natal Command had visited the ship and agreed that the situation was unsatisfactory, noting the poor ventilation, unusable lifebelts, infestations, and, 'horror of horrors – the Other Ranks latrines were also being used by the coloured crew members. He immediately ordered that the latrines be reserved for white troops.'⁶⁹ Despite his report, the situation in Singapore was desperate, and the ship set sail without some of its passengers.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ IWM: Strong, G. (Docs 6838) p6; 8/1/42.

⁶⁸ IWM: Gregory, D.L. (Docs 8105) p6.

⁶⁹ Rubin, Gerry R. (1992) *Durban 1942: A British Troopship Revolt*. The Hambledon Press, London. p 39.

⁷⁰ There had also been a mutiny of sorts on the first convoy at Halifax. Conditions on board the *Sobiesky* were such that the men were refusing to re-board her. The Kings Regulations Mutiny Act was read out to the recalcitrant men, accompanied by loud jeering and communal renditions of *The Red Flag*. The

The next stop for most of those on the first convoy would be Bombay, something of a contrast to Cape Town, as recorded in the verses of the poem, *Wasted Journey*, attributed to an anonymous [Sherwood] 'Forrester', in the diary of Sapper Coates:

Verse 11.

We all know the tales of the marvellous days,
We were all entertained in a hundred ways,
By inhabitants of our Empire Pearl,
Hospitality set our heads awhirl,

12.

Mountain drives in someone's car,
Pleasures, where money was no bar,
To these Empire people I'm justly proud,
And shall always ring their praises loud.

13.

But like all good things it came to end,
Back on our boat, we our journey wend,
This time India our destination,
So adventure had continuation.

14.

.....

15.

Star of the east recall the day,
Our boat was harboured at Bombay,
Pestered by merchants in little boats,
On muddy waters where all filth floats.

16.

Contrast with the last port of call,
There's nothing to compare at all,
Beggars, insanitation and rot,
A few days shore leave, best forgot.⁷¹

This somewhat unfavourable comparison was echoed by Caldwell: 'Arrived at Bombay (India).

Granted one day's leave. What a filthy place!!'⁷² Disembarking on the same day was

appearance of the converted American liners in harbour ended the disturbances and the men embarked. (IWM: Dixon; p 31.)

⁷¹ IWM: Coates, N.H. (Docs 6651)

⁷² IWM: Caldwell; 30/12/41.

Houghton, who noted that: 'Though we are weathered veterans, the sights and stench of Bombay streets, betel nut spit on walls/pavements, everywhere caused us to toy with our food for days.'⁷³

Some of the men, however, took a more analytical view, again noting the inequalities of what they saw as typified by Corporal Fello's entry for 29/12/41:

... Extreme poverty of great numbers of community. Fires for cooking on pavement, people changing clothes in street. Whole families sleeping on pavements. On other hand – wealth of certain classes. ... Native parts of the city – the buildings here contrast strongly to magnificent buildings in European quarters. ... Hard working people in canteens. ... Compare with Cape Town.⁷⁴

He provides a more sympathetic outlook on those suffering from the poverty of Bombay, whilst still drawing the comparison with Cape Town. The penury in Bombay was made all the more visible, in the absence of a sizeable and distracting European population to entertain them.

Henderson provides another rich seam of material in this location, drawing comparisons with more familiar sites back home. 'We picked our way through the waterside debris typical of all dock areas ...' and then, while walking through the more commercial parts of the city, remembering how 'The shops were brilliantly lit and were just such as one would see in Oxford Street or Tottenham Court Road.'⁷⁵ Again Henderson had questioned the official briefing before leaving the ship, given by Colonel Thomas:

At one point, Thomas addressed us very seriously, almost wagging an admonitory finger in the direction of the audience. "Never," said the Colonel, "Never let an Indian address you without giving you the proper title of 'Sahib'. This word means 'White Lord'. It doesn't matter who the native is, he must address you as 'Sahib'".⁷⁶

⁷³ IWM: Houghton; p40; 30/12/41.

⁷⁴ IWM: Fello, F.E.L. (Docs 3662) 29/12/41.

⁷⁵ IWM: Henderson; p147; p152.

⁷⁶ IWM: Henderson; p140.

As a member of *The League Against Imperialism* and *The India League* Henderson felt aptly qualified to take the Colonel to task over the utility of his briefing. His views were made even more explicit during an incident on the train to Ahmednager, a training depot inland. He recalls an

incident of coin throwing to kids following train and “calling out such things as “Fight for that one you black bastards.” Some of the epithets called out were worse than that and I lost my temper. I seized the man who appeared to be the ring-leader and pulled him bodily into the carriage; he was one of the old sweats who on more occasions than one I had heard talking to the younger men in the company about the Indian boy prostitutes he had bought for the price of a cheap packet of cigarettes. I flung him away from me and returned to the disgraceful scene outside. The lads in my section shut up when they saw me. I quietened them all down and cleared the platform. Back in the carriage I told them what I thought of their behaviour. These men I knew to be decent fellows. Some were married men with children. I was dismayed that they could so easily be brought down to this despicable level. “You can see for yourselves the terrible plight these people are in.” I said. “If members of your own family were only half as thin as most of these villagers you were making fun of you would be worried sick. How can you make fun of such suffering? We are at war with a political system that behaves in the way you were behaving just now. Haven’t you got standards of your own about how to treat your fellow men? Do you follow the lead of that miserable heap of shit over there in the corner? ... How would you feel if the fascists win this war and you are brought down to the level of these poor devils in India. It could happen?.”

I returned to my seat and sat there in the silence that prevailed in the carriage. I felt utterly miserable at what I had just witnessed. Then Auger sat down beside me. “Sorry Stan.” he said. “You’re right in what you said.”⁷⁷

This passage not only makes explicit Henderson’s position, but also offers further insights into the minds of those around him. The throwing of money has echoes of similar incidents off Freetown, where coins were thrown for local boys to dive into the water for, and although unrecorded there may well have been accompanying racial remarks. This was however a much more direct encounter, far less innocent on the part of the soldiers, and apparently more desperately needed by the recipients. That the old regular should have been acting in such a

⁷⁷ IWM: Henderson; p161-162.

way came as no surprise to Henderson, what disappointed him profoundly was the ease with which he managed to lead his section astray.

However, Henderson was himself aware of his own imperfections, as when he writes of the time at Ahmednagger that he awoke to find himself being shaved:

I have to plead guilty to having awakened in some alarm. ... but to awaken suddenly and find oneself staring into the face of a man who has an open razor in one hand and features made familiar to us by such films as 'The Bengal Lancers' is another. The man's smile and greetings of "Good morning Sahib" helped to allay my fears.⁷⁸

This passage is interesting in that it demonstrates that there are other factors than his religious belief in equality, in this case films, which influence his thinking, even if only at the sub-conscious, half asleep level. Furthermore, the irony of the barber's use of the word 'Sahib' helping to allay his fears was surely not lost upon him, although this anecdote was probably not repeated to Colonel Thomas.

The BORs exhibited a range of responses to the various legs of the journey to Singapore. The brief time in South Africa was something akin to a holiday. There were a few who saw beyond the veneer of white prosperity to the poverty that sustained it, and they were the same people who looked upon India in a more positive and understanding light. For those who had unquestioningly enjoyed white hospitality in Cape Town, Bombay was contrasted unfavourably. Some of the men demonstrated a certain insularity at best when confronted by difference, at worst they displayed derogatory prejudice. Others were receptive to the new situations they found themselves in, and exhibited an empathy or sympathy for those that they met and saw. As they neared their destination they came under attack from Japanese planes, and the relatively relaxed days of their voyage were soon behind them.

⁷⁸ IWM: Henderson; p164.

1.3. First Impressions and Fifth Columnists.

On arrival in Singapore the men would find some of their pre-existing conceptions of race found wanting in the light of experience, whilst for others they would be confirmed. They were largely newcomers to Asia, its peoples and its cultures, although a couple had some service with Indian Army divisions. This section will examine their responses to this novel situation, and assess to what extent and how their naiveté conditioned those responses.

First impressions of Singapore itself were largely subsumed in the accounts by the threat, or the reality for the later arrivals, of Japanese attacks, but a few make reference to their new surroundings. For Private Parry Singapore must have seemed like a colonially informed hybrid of his impressions of Cape Town and Bombay. He described it as ‘a large town with quite modern buildings and parks near the centre, then you step off the main street into all the filth of the East, Chinese, Malays and Indians are mucked in together – “smell em boyo”’.⁷⁹ To him a modern and westernised core was surrounded by Asia’s teeming and olfactarily unpleasant masses, ethnically specified although in his contemporary thinking they seemed an amorphous group. Despite being nominally in the 9th Indian Division, his recent arrival mitigates any suggestion that he had absorbed his cultural prejudices through prior service.

L.Cpl Taylor of the Intelligence Corps drew different conclusions from what he saw of civic conditions. In his eyes ‘the standard of cleanliness was high, especially when compared with other eastern cities. For once European administration had provided the oriental with good results.’⁸⁰ At a more local level, whilst searching Chinese houses on the waterfront for snipers, L.Bdr Grafton echoed such sentiments, as he noted: ‘We were surprised at the general standard of cleanliness and comfort in evidence, as this was the first time any of us had seen

⁷⁹ IWM: Parry; 5/12/41.

⁸⁰ IWM: Taylor; Chapter 21.

the inside of a home in Singapore. Although by our standards poor, it was clear that these people were clean and industrious.’⁸¹

Standards of cleanliness are identified in all three of these statements as a key factor in defining how the BORs looked upon the local populations, and will recur as a topic, particularly in relation to conditions on the Burma-Thailand Railway. Both Taylor and Grafton exhibited some surprise at what they saw, suggesting that they had carried some misconceptions ashore with them, and, although their observations were qualified by comparisons, implicitly and explicitly, with conditions at home, these serve to strengthen the impression of the modification of their views. Furthermore, whilst Taylor displays a certain cynicism about the received benefits of colonialism, and thus might be expected to have a more open-minded attitude, Grafton’s sense of revision is enhanced by the novelty of his contact, the first time he (and his colleagues) had come into such close proximity with the citizens of Singapore in their domestic environment.

Given the disjunction of the military and civilian communities at this level, it is not surprising that such a contact would occur in the context of the search for fifth columnists. That this search was being conducted in the Chinese community, which had been very largely supportive of the now ten year long struggle in their homeland against Japanese aggression, and which because of this would suffer terribly under the post surrender occupation, gives some indication of the chaos and confusion that informed military thinking at all levels with regard to the issue of the fifth column.⁸² Indeed, after the surrender it would be the Chinese

⁸¹ IWM: Grafton A.W.F. (Docs 6466) p3.

⁸² The British largely ignored Chinese requests to fight against the Japanese, preferring to recruit them into civil defence roles such as the ARP and first aid. See Allen, *Singapore*, pp 248-252. Despite this, because of their independent support for China as many as 50,000 civilians died in Singapore in what has come to be known as the Sook Ching massacre, during the first few weeks after Percival’s surrender. Smith, Colin. (2005) *Singapore Burning: Heroism and Surrender in World War II*. Viking, London, pp556-559.

Western historiography has also largely ignored this episode, for a rare contribution see; Blackburn, Kevin. (2000) “The Collective Memory of the Sook Ching Massacre and the Creation of the Civilian War Memorial of Singapore.” *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 73, p71-90.

community that would suffer the worst consequences of such treacherous activities, as tens of thousands died during the occupation, a number that was probably only slightly mitigated by the payment of \$40 million of what was essentially protection money to the Japanese administration.⁸³

The term “fifth column” had been coined during the Spanish Civil War, to describe a military practice that dated back to the Trojan Wars and no doubt beyond, whereby advancing armies were assisted by supporters behind the front line. In the Malayan campaign it was a pejorative term, used to describe those thought to be assisting the Japanese, whilst the hastily organised British forces left behind the lines were termed “stay-behind parties”, or, to adopt a term from an earlier conflict in Spain, guerrillas, if organised by the Malayan Communist Party. For those recently arrived in the theatre this would not have been the first encounter with the concept of the fifth column. As Hitler’s blitzkrieg attack on Western Europe was unleashed in 1940, a campaign in the popular press for the internment of enemy aliens was taken up at the official level. This was a shameful episode that saw Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria, incarcerated in squalid camps with middle aged Italian restaurateurs, and then herded on to ships at bayonet point by British soldiers who had already robbed them.⁸⁴ Hundreds died before some semblance of humanity and common sense took hold. Unaware of the nature of treatment meted out to these mostly innocent internees, and conditioned by the wave of publicity that had preceded this dark chapter, it was perhaps no surprise that some of the men in Singapore and Malaya saw a fifth columnist round every corner and behind every rubber tree.

See also Modder, Ralph. (2004) *“Sook Ching”: The Singapore Chinese Massacre; 18 February to 4 March 1942*. Horizon Books, Singapore.

⁸³ Modder; *“Sook Ching”*; p40.

⁸⁴ Lafitte, F. (1940) *The Internment of Aliens*. Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.p168.

The fifth column had a diverse membership, ranging from the Japanese military through the local civilian population and even into the British forces. Whilst most of the Japanese population had either been withdrawn or were rounded up at the start of hostilities, to endure an uncertain future in internment in India, some had eluded the net.⁸⁵ Private Houghton was one of many to report that the former head waiter at Raffles had appeared after the surrender in the uniform of a Japanese Major.⁸⁶ Whilst the ubiquity of this oft quoted appearance acts as much as a caveat to, as it does in support of, its validity, there is no doubt that there were Japanese soldiers who would get in front of the main forces, sometimes in civilian clothing, taking advantage of the inability of the European troops to differentiate between the Japanese and the local communities.

Such was the confusion in this respect that one unit actually shot several members of a Gurkha platoon that had the misfortune to cross its path.⁸⁷ Similarly, Gunner Pitfield, who claimed to have shot a Japanese infiltrator dressed in civilian clothes, also recalled his unit killing Chinese civilians who had been mistaken for Japanese.⁸⁸ Such cases of mistaken identity were not the sole province of the British troops. During the battle for Singapore the recently formed 44th Indian Brigade had a skirmish with the neighbouring members of a Dalforce company, composed of Chinese volunteers who took to the frontline wearing little but a white headband to distinguish their civilian clothes. Both sides thought the other was the Japanese, and whilst such episodes are not uncommon in the confusion of combat, the inexperience of each unit

⁸⁵ The treatment that these internees received was frequently harsh. One locked railway wagon full of detainees was left unattended on a siding in Kuala Lumpur, where it remained unopened until its now dead occupants were discovered by Japanese soldiers who subsequently went on a rampage. Elphick, Peter. (1997) *Far Eastern File: The Intelligence War in the Far East, 1930-1945*. Hodder & Stoughton, London. p 328.

⁸⁶ IWM: Houghton; 17/2/42.

⁸⁷ IWM: Carpenter; p15.

⁸⁸ IWM: Pitfield; p2.

and the lack of identifying uniform, compounded by the Indian unit's inability to distinguish between Chinese and Japanese, contributed to the misunderstanding.⁸⁹

At the other extreme of the fifth column diaspora was Captain Patrick Heenan, an Indian Army officer seconded to a unit liaising with the RAF, who was blamed for a number of successful Japanese air raids that destroyed many planes on the ground. On the basis of what appeared to be a radio transmitter that was found in a communion set in his kit, he was tried at a secret court martial and executed by a military policeman with a shot to the back of the head. Colin Smith suggests that 'Heenan may have been as innocent as many of them [Asian civilians who were shot] were', and intimates that other factors may have been working against him, including his preference for the company of Indian officers, Asian civilians and White Russian women. Perhaps his 'markedly olive' complexion (his Irish father had been born in India and was possibly of Eurasian heritage) had played a role in the story.⁹⁰

Most of the allegations of fifth column activities would however fall upon the local communities in Malaya and Singapore. As the Japanese Army advanced rapidly down the Malayan peninsula, preceded by frequently effective air strikes on RAF bases and other military infrastructure, such allegations of treacherous behaviour multiplied. The reality that much of the intelligence groundwork for the attacks had been carried out before the war was largely ignored and to a certain extent largely eluded much of the British command, which was seeking to absolve its own inability to match the opposing forces. On arrival in Singapore in January 1942, L.Cpl Taylor of the Intelligence Corps had been briefed by his CO that 'Malaya was honeycombed with enemy agents.'⁹¹ Fear and distrust of the unknown rapidly fed down the ranks to some of the men on the ground, nourished by a mixture of naiveté and some pre-

⁸⁹ Bhargava, K. D., Sastri, K. N. V. and Prasad, B. (1960) *Official History of the Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War 1939–45: Campaigns in South-East Asia*. Combined Inter-Services Historical Section, New Delhi. pp322-323.

⁹⁰ Smith, *Singapore Burning*. pp 161-163.

⁹¹ IWM: Taylor; Chapter 23.

existing xenophobia. One regular, his sentiments perhaps informed by several years of pre-war service in India, described the fifth column as being 'made up mostly of natives of the places occupied by the Japs. These b-----s were selling us down the river for a handful of dollars. Who, before the Japs came were calling the white man master.'⁹²

It would seem that not all of the men were so convinced of the threat posed by this enemy within however. Private Dixon recalled an occasion in the last week before the surrender, when a Royal Navy lorry had disgorged 'about 20 Malay alleged 5th columnists' into his care, just as another air raid occurred. 'You can imagine the scramble as they made their escape, me being in charge of them with one rifle which I fired aimlessly at them wounding a couple but with so much panic all escaped.'⁹³ Although 40 years in the telling, the candour of Dixon's account, frequently to the point of self-incrimination, suggests that he was unconvinced as to the veracity of the status of the detainees, a surmisal supported by his half-hearted attempts at preventing their escape. Given his own service and life experiences it is also possible that he was not unsympathetic to their circumstances.

Perhaps the most reliable account of fifth column activities within the subject group comes from L.Cpl. Taylor and his colleagues, L.Cpl. O'Shea and L.Cpl. Boyd, in the Intelligence Corps, whose specific task was to deal with such matters of field security. Written in India in the second half of 1942, after they had successfully escaped on the official evacuation, it paints a mixed picture of false alarms leavened with occasional evidence of genuinely suspicious activity. Outside of his small cohort he found most of his section to be ill-equipped for their task. 'An air of Gestapo mystery overhung their doings, of local language knowledge they were happily ignorant.' After discovering that an alleged heliograph on a roof turned out to be workmen's tools, and 'that a tremendous white patch on the ground turned out later to be the

⁹² IWM: Carpenter; p15.

⁹³ IWM: Dixon; p41.

result of several dhobis united effort!', it was perhaps not surprising that L.Cpl. O'Shea made more mention of 'red herrings' in his chapter than he does of '5th columnists'.

L.Cpl. Boyd recalled a similar red herring the night when a blinking light was seen signalling to enemy aircraft during an air-raid: 'For hours they lay on their bellies, hardly daring to breathe, while this light went on and off. On closing in they found it to be the brilliantly lit house of the Australian Officer Commanding.' Not all the incidents were so benign however, and Boyd recalled removing large amounts of suspicious materials from a railway track near a Divisional HQ, shortly before a group of Japanese planes arrived, who circled at low altitude for 30 minutes before departing, unable to locate their target.⁹⁴

This section has served to illustrate some of the difficulties that resulted from the inability to differentiate not only who was friend or foe, but also between the different communities. Private Henderson recalled that on arriving in Singapore at the end of January that while most of the people on the quayside were Europeans, (evidence suggestive of another racialized evacuation, similar to that from Penang some six weeks previously) there were also 'skins of every shade of brown. It was to take us quite a long time to be able to accurately distinguish between Chinese and Malays and later between Chinese and Japanese.' He was however able to identify the Tamils, and not surprisingly there was a class dimension – they were used 'as general dog's bodies.'⁹⁵ Henderson's unusually international outlook and his contacts with non-Europeans in the pre-war period, lends significance to his initial inability to distinguish between some of the ethnic and national groups. If he was having difficulties, it seems

⁹⁴ IWM: Taylor; Chapters 23-28.

⁹⁵ IWM: Henderson; p179. The British command had ordered an evacuation of Europeans only from Penang on the 16th/17th of December, in an operation described as 'surreptitious and ignominious' by Bayley and Harper: Bayly, Christopher and Harper, Tim. (2005) *Forgotten Armies: Britain's Asian Empire and the war with Japan*. Penguin, London. p120. Due to the effects of this selective flight on Asian morale across all communities, the Governor of The Straits Settlements, Sir Shenton Thomas had promised the Legislative Council that there would be no racially defined evacuation from Singapore. Smith, *Singapore Burning*, p432.

reasonable to suggest that the majority of his less worldly wise colleagues would have been in a similar position.

Support for this assumption can be found in a 1980 interview with 2nd Lt Harold Payne. Whilst discussing the retreat down Malaya he was asked “Did you actually see any Japanese during this action?” His response demonstrated that officers could be just as naive as the ranks when it came to their new surroundings.

You’ll never believe this, but it was very difficult to know what a Jap looked like quite frankly, because you had Malays, Chinese, Japanese... we had only just come out of England and we weren’t be able to be filmed [sic] and told what the characteristics of these people were.

He goes on to discuss his active role in suppressing fifth column activity, but becomes concerned that he has been referring to the Chinese too much in this respect.

I should make it very clear, and I apologise if I have over emphasised the Chinese, I would say natives, or erm locals, whether they’re Chinese, Malays, Tamils, anything under the sun, as I say, it was very difficult in the heat of the war to know chalk from cheese, I could tell somebody who was er, er, er, white colour, but there were a lot of them were these yellow, um, tinted, and also we had a lot of Indian regiments out there as well, which um, one can always tell the Indian regiments, and the Ghurkas we had out there as well, so there were many many different er nationalities . . . no doubt a lot of them were wayward Thais or Siamese that had come over the border.⁹⁶

This passage is an example of a man consciously struggling to bridge the gap traversing the changing semantics and nomenclature of race, a battle he gives up on by the end with his referral to both Thais and Siamese. The frequent ers and ums that punctuate the passage are indicative of such attempts as he seeks, largely unsuccessfully, to find words that will carry a less pejorative meaning. Locals and natives, be they yellow or tinted, may have been difficult for him to differentiate between, but they were easily distinguishable from the British and Australian troops, and the Indian soldiers in uniform. His problem was not it seems one of telling chalk from cheese, it was more an issue of distinguishing what type of cheese.

⁹⁶ IWM: Payne, H.L. (Sound 4748) Reel 1.

An exception to this pattern can be found in the Taylor account that offers an exposition of the diversity of Singapore, which, despite his sense of imperial cynicism, is strongly informed by essentialised colonial tropes.

The people were as varied as could be imagined. Chinese were everywhere, and very attractive because of their cleanliness, smartness, intelligence and courtesy. There were young Europeanised Chinamen (these in many respects seemed to us the best element in the population; it was they who filled the ARP, first aid jobs etc.) . . . In addition there were meek Tamils, in closely wound sheets and their older offspring in European clothes and heavily oiled hair; as well as noble Sikhs, and attractive Malays, with here and there a fat, rather gone to seed looking Tuan. . . . all smiling, helpful, pleasant, merely because we were a yellowish – brown – white in tincture.⁹⁷

On the surface Taylor's ethnic demography of Singapore's residents relies very much on colonial stereotypes; the well-mannered and intelligent Chinese, the 'meek Tamils' and 'noble Sikhs', 'attractive Malays' and overweight and no doubt red-nosed Tuans all conform to established imperial characterisations. There is also an evolutionary element to his descriptions, with the generational change in the clothing of the young Chinese and Tamils demonstrating their acculturation to western standards. By the same token he suggests that the "whiteness" of his fellow Europeans is not as clearly defined as they may have thought, reflecting the effects of even their short time in the tropics. In this racial melting pot the Asians were becoming more European, and the Europeans more Asian, as the effects of cultural contacts and climate combined in his own reiteration of Darwinian development. His differentiation of the Chinese and Tamil youth can also be seen as subconsciously reflecting contemporary European racial models, the lighter skinned, more intelligent Chinese conforming to northern Europeans, the darker complexion and the oiled hair of the Tamils fitting a more Mediterranean typography.

The responses of the BORs to first contacts in Singapore display a range of outlooks, pre-existing negative expectations were commonplace, but not immutable. Some of the men

⁹⁷ IWM: Taylor; Chapter 21.

reassessed their perspectives, particularly with regard to the Chinese population, as a result of their experience. The differentiation of the local populations, both internally and in comparison to the enemy would prove to be problematic for most of the new arrivals. In the absence of a uniform making a distinction between friend and foe would be difficult, not only for the British troops, but also as seen for other cohorts of the allied forces. This became an even bigger problem when some of the BORs, fed by the “aliens” scare of 1940 back home and a pre-existing sense of racial mistrust, started looking upon the civilian population as a whole as a source of fifth columnists. Whilst in this context contacts with civilians could be a matter of life and death for the local populations, the irrepressible Japanese advance would again change the dynamic of such relations, placing the lives of the British servicemen very much in the hands of the locals for their salvation.

1.4. The Flight from Singapore.

The retreat down Malaya and the fall of Singapore was only the largest and most humiliating in a series of chaotic and ignominious withdrawals and defeats that the men of the British Army endured in the early years of the war. Similar episodes in France, Norway, Greece, Crete and the western desert all preceded it. It would be followed by similar scenarios in Burma and again in the western desert, all of which, even the morale sapping capitulations of Hong Kong, Singapore and subsequently at Tobruk, have tended to be overshadowed by the memory of the “miracle of deliverance” that was Dunkirk. The other attempts to evacuate and avoid surrender were sometimes decidedly less heroic, and have largely been forgotten, particularly the disasters that befell the British forces in Asia.

The withdrawal from Burma, by land, sea and air, which followed the Malayan campaign was characterised by racially constructed pathways that favoured the Europeans. Whilst most of the army and the European civilians managed to struggle back to India in the official retreat,

tens of thousands of Indians were less fortunate and died trying to escape, many of them not allowed to cross the border into India. 'It seemed scarcely possible for the British reputation in Asia to fall lower, but it did.'⁹⁸ This retreat was preceded by an attempted flight from Singapore, which although smaller in scale was perhaps even more damaging to British standing among the communities who had the misfortune to be in its path. By the time of the Japanese attack on Singapore, its unfortunate defenders had 'run out of land.'⁹⁹ This did not entirely preclude the possibility of evading capture however, primarily utilising a sea route that island hopped to Sumatra, from which it was hoped to obtain a passage from Padang on the west coast to allied territory in Ceylon, some 1500 miles distant across the Indian Ocean.

There were two distinct military cohorts in this flight; the first was an official evacuation of the lucky few men supposedly considered to be essential to the further conduct of the war, who left prior to the surrender. The second group was a less organised free for all, generally utilising smaller vessels, that ensued in the days leading up to and after the capitulation, the frequently ignoble progress of which has received little attention once it had moved away from the wider visibility of the wharves and godowns (warehouses) of Keppel Harbour, and moved out of British colonial territory into that of the Dutch.¹⁰⁰ In the midst of these service personnel were a large number of civilians who had left it, or been left, to the last moment to try and evacuate. Many of them would die as the last official convoy out of Singapore, just before the fall, provided an easy target for Japanese aircraft and naval vessels. Over forty of its forty-four ships went down, and only a quarter of the 5,000 passengers ever made it to India or Australia.¹⁰¹ In the chaos that ensued members of all three cohorts could find themselves

⁹⁸ Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten Armies*, pp186-187. The British evacuation of Penang in mid-December 1941 was criticised for an even more overt Europeans only policy. Bayly and Harper: *Forgotten Armies*; pp119-121.

⁹⁹ IWM: Parry; 16/2/42.

¹⁰⁰ Geoffrey Brooke, a survivor of the sinking of the *Prince of Wales*, who eventually made it to Ceylon after an epic journey that started on the official evacuation, suggests that there were 1,800 on the official list, and some 3,000 'who needed no official spur'. In: *Singapore's Dunkirk: The Aftermath of the Fall*. (1989: 2003 edn) Leo Cooper, Barnsley. p106.

¹⁰¹ Smith, *Singapore Burning*, p 529.

amalgamated in fluid groups of varying size as circumstances changed. A few officers on the official list courageously attempted to maintain order at key points along the route, jeopardising their own chances of escape in the process.

One of the lucky recipients of the official order to leave was L.Cpl. Taylor of the Intelligence Corps, who along with three of his colleagues embarked on a small steamship for the east coast of Sumatra, from where they made their way to Padang and boarded a destroyer to Colombo. At all stages of their journey they found the many Malays that they met to be helpful and friendly, selling them supplies and caring for the wounded. Even when their boat crashed into the customs pier and demolished it, on reaching Sumatra at the mouth of the Prigi Raja River, the local customs officials were still obliging and offered useful advice. There is no doubt that this voyage benefitted, as did the relations with the civilians along the way, from being relatively well resourced, both in terms of finance and by virtue of having a reliable boat. Thus were two major potential sources of friction with the local population removed, and the journey became something akin to a tourist adventure, where 'manning the lifeboat and pulling away to some green and wooded islet to buy food and fuel were comparable with buccaneering exploits and treated as such.'¹⁰²

Within a few days Taylor's description of 'buccaneering exploits' would take on a less innocent meaning, as the initially unsanctioned exodus of allied troops washed through the region, bringing with it a tide of piracy, murder and pillage that whilst brief in longevity could be violent in its intensity. The opening phase of this flight, from the dockside of Singapore is relatively well recorded, particularly in respect of the Australian soldiers who had forced their way onto waiting civilian evacuation ships. Indeed, a large party of Australians had already preceded Taylor's group, 'looting and causing great disorder', prior to their arrest by the Dutch

¹⁰² IWM: Taylor; Summary of Rest of Journey. The term Malay is used in his account in an ethnic sense, referring to the indigenous population of the Indonesian archipelago, as opposed to just that of the Malayan States.

authorities.¹⁰³ Some were later captured by the Japanese and sent to work on the Burma Railway, where they were known amongst their fellow Australian POWs as the *Empire Star Group*, a reference to their boarding of one of the last ships out of Singapore, allegedly forcing women and children off in the process.¹⁰⁴ Despite popular memory in the United Kingdom, this was not an exclusively antipodean episode, and several records provide insights into the brutality of the responses of British servicemen to the desperate circumstances they found themselves in during the flight from Singapore, and how such acts were interpreted by their comrades.

The accounts of Wireless Operator Oakley and L.Bdr Grafton are at first glance remarkably similar, having fled Singapore within days of each other (13th February and 15th February respectively), and then, having followed very similar routes, arriving at Padang around the 10th of March, a few days after Taylor had departed for Ceylon. Oakley had left Singapore on an official vessel that was promptly sunk by the Japanese, and it was a week before his party were able to commandeer two passing junks, the Chinese crew of which 'became very distraught as they realised that their ships were not only being pirated but their spoils of war were being thrown over the side.' In the absence of the Chinese captain, who had been knocked half conscious and dumped overboard whilst attempting to regain control, the junks beached and eventually sank on the coast of Sumatra. From here they made their way inland and upriver in a couple of stolen rowing boats, to a village where the local shopkeeper was reluctant to donate supplies to the hungry men. His reticence would cost him dearly.

Incoherently mouthing Scottish epithets, Jock pulled his bayonet and with unbelievable ferocity ran him through impaling him to his own front door. We were all astounded at the swiftness and single-mindedness [sic] of Jock's action yet simultaneously horrified by the man writhing in agony at our feet. Calmly Jock pulled him away from the door and stuffed a rag into the dying man's mouth, effectively stifling his screams.

¹⁰³ IWM: Taylor; Summary of Rest of Journey.

¹⁰⁴ Uren, Tom. "Journeys in Captivity." in: McCormack, G, and Nelson, H. (eds) (1993) *The Burma-Thailand Railway: memory and history*. Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, NSW. p53.

The shopkeeper died overnight, and the group departed the following morning, their boats now laden with the commandeered supplies. Over the next few days they would often see villagers up ahead crossing the river in a hurry. 'Perhaps the word about our earlier acts of pillaging, murder, and other forms of depredation had reached their ears.' Further looting occurred as the 'grim threatening band of not so merry men' came across settlements that had the misfortune to lie on their path, before a train finally carried them to Padang, leaving the local communities to await the next troop of brigands in uniform.¹⁰⁵

Grafton's evasion travelogue is similarly illustrated with examples of misfortune and piracy, which started when the junk that had been carefully guarded in Singapore, grounded on rocks shortly after departure. Unable to find room on the lifeboat to which some officers (including his C.O., Major Rowley Conwy) had decanted, some of the ORs swam for it to a nearby island, where their fortunes changed and they were given a boat by a leper colony. On the next island they came across an 'unfriendly and threatening' group of inhabitants loading oil on a boat. In the absence of any other form of communication, the language of *force majeure* sufficed. 'Only by showing them our one grenade did we convince them that we were leaving when they did.' On another island a motor launch was discovered. It belonged to a Chinese man who had taken pity on them and offered the hungry men food for their journey. A heated discussion ensued, with one of the more visceral members of the group, Ginger Sussex, suggesting that their benefactor be murdered for his boat. Fortunately for him it was discovered that the engine was missing before threatening words were turned into murderous deeds.¹⁰⁶

Despite another incident with unfriendly islanders near Sumatra, most of the contacts Grafton refers to were positive, with food and support being given freely and free of charge by Malay, Chinese and Indian communities along the way, presumably at no small risk to themselves given the rapidly encroaching Japanese forces, both on land and at sea. Whilst Grafton's own

¹⁰⁵ IWM: Oakley, V.F.T. (Docs 8278) pp15-33.

¹⁰⁶ IWM: Grafton; pp5-28.

words in the grenade incident indicate a sense of his active ownership of (if indeed not his involvement in) some of the less savoury episodes, he was far more sympathetic to the lot of, and grateful for the assistance rendered from, the local populations. Within his own group he was able to distinguish his outlook from that of less open-minded colleagues, as he recalled on the occasion when a Chinese trader had fed them and arranged a guide for the next stage of their voyage. 'Sussex was convinced that every native was in league with the Japanese, whilst I was convinced that they were just as frightened of reprisals from them for harbouring enemy soldiers.'¹⁰⁷

Whilst Oakley was by no means the feral alpha male that Ginger Sussex was, that role being occupied in his group by Jock, nevertheless he certainly seems to have shared his innate suspicion of anyone who wasn't British. On only one occasion on his journey did he recall any assistance being given voluntarily to his 'grim threatening band', everything else was taken by force, with little sense of remorse. Having left the Chinese seamen (minus their previously decanted Captain) with their now sinking junks, he recalled that 'As our mental state was singularly attuned to self-preservation . . . we were untroubled with guilty feelings that we were leaving the Chinese crew to solve alone a terrible predicament of our making.'¹⁰⁸

There are several possible explanations for the difference in the responses of the local populations recorded in these accounts, informed in turn by the positive and negative mind-sets of the authors. It is possible that Grafton's group did actually experience greater hospitality than Oakley's. This may have been down to pure chance, but it may also have reflected a more positive reaction to less aggressive behaviour on the part of the servicemen involved. The belligerent attitude of Ginger Sussex had less support and was not allowed to dominate the group psyche in the Grafton party, and threats were used only once, and as a last resort. In comparison Jock's activities, whilst shocking to Oakley, were not condemned,

¹⁰⁷ IWM: Grafton; pp11-12.

¹⁰⁸ IWM: Oakley; p27.

and such behaviour seems to have been adopted as the group norm from its very beginnings. It is not hard to imagine that a friendly introduction was more likely to beget greater sympathy in return, even if only to get rid of the transients as fast as possible and return to some form of normality before the Japanese arrived. Alternatively, an approach based on hostility and belligerence was always likely to generate fear and loathing.

Perceptions of hostility from local populations were not necessarily a precursor to acts of piracy however. The account of Rohan Rivett, an Australian journalist who was evacuated from Singapore on the 12th of February, contains abundant praise for the support given by the Chinese and Malay communities that aided his party after their ship was bombed out of commission at Banka Island several days later. This did not preclude them from stealing a couple of Chinese boats to get away from Banka, and Rivett noted that ‘... the Chinese ... would not have been unduly pleased with our proceedings. But we were in no frame of mind to consider the rights and wrongs of annexation.’¹⁰⁹

Such acts were frequently the subject of heated discussions amongst the small groups hastily thrown together by circumstances. Rivett’s heterogeneous group, comprising a mixture of nationalities, service arms and ranks, twice debated the wisdom of hijacking local trading vessels in better condition than their now overloaded craft. On both occasions, to Rivett’s dismay, the majority favoured the status quo and the traders continued on their way undisturbed. These democratically arrived at decisions were not however as altruistic as they might first appear, the majority voting on the more self-serving premise that they feared the response from the traders’ friends once they realised what had happened.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Rivett, Rohan. (1946) *Behind Bamboo: An Inside Story of the Japanese Prison Camps*. Angus and Robertson, Sydney. p45. The similarity between Rivett’s words and those subsequently written by Oakley (see fn 108 above) may reflect a similarity of circumstance, but there is also the possibility that they may not be entirely co-incidental. Rivett’s book was one of the few to appear in the immediate post-war period, lending it a wider audience and potentially informing subsequent accounts.

¹¹⁰ Rivett, *Behind Bamboo*, p70.

Officers were by no means immune to such behaviour, as Colonel Dillon, who had selflessly remained on the route to maintain order, described. 'I soon found that the worst-behaved were not necessarily the deserters or Other Ranks ... There was a distinct air of *sauve qui peut* abroad among some civilians, some men and some officers ...'.¹¹¹ One such officer may have been Grafton's Battery Commander, Major Rowley-Conwy, who crossed swords with Dillon at Rengat on the Indragiri River, over the latter's insistence that he would have to wait his turn on the route to Padang. Despite pleading that he was an escaped POW and not on the official evacuation, Rowley-Conwy was instructed to join the queue. His response to Dillon's order was blunt: 'I don't remember seeing anything in King's Regulations about escaping by numbers.'¹¹² This wasn't the first occasion when he had disobeyed instructions. He had already walked out of a conference to discuss the surrender in the early hours of the 15th of February, despite the adjutant insisting that he stayed.

He had already requisitioned a junk some days before, renaming it the *Conwy Castle*, and cast off (with Grafton on board) early on the 16th having repelled unwanted boarders at gunpoint.¹¹³ Justification for his actions (and those of many others) was apparently contained in Wavell's last order to Percival, agreeing to the surrender. This contained the caveat that 'Just before final cessation of fighting, opportunity should be given to any determined bodies of men or individuals to try and effect escape by any means possible.'¹¹⁴ Geoffrey Brooke has suggested that Percival would have had little time to communicate this message, and is perhaps seeking to provide some post-hoc validation for such actions when he says that the order 'changed deserters ... into bona fide escapees whose duty it was to get away.'¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Brooke, *Singapore's Dunkirk*, p65. '*Sauve qui peut*' translates as 'every man for himself'.

¹¹² Skidmore, Ian. (1974) *Escape from the Rising Sun: The incredible voyage of the 'Sederhana Djohanis*. Futura Publications, Aylesbury. p87. Rowley-Conwy's assertion that he was an escaped POW is questionable, as he had never been taken prisoner and hadn't waited to surrender.

¹¹³ Skidmore, *Escape*, p32.

¹¹⁴ Wigmore, Lionel. (1957) *Australia in the War of 1939-1945. Series 1 – Army: Vol IV – The Japanese Thrust*. Australian War Memorial. p378.

¹¹⁵ Brooke, *Singapore's Dunkirk*, p106.

Following the junk's truncated voyage, Rowley-Conwy set off to try and find help for his marooned gunners, and on several trips in requisitioned boats around the islands he rescued a number of stranded evacuees, but failed to locate most of his own men. At one point, a recalcitrant Malay pilot, disturbed by the appearance of Rowley 'in his torn khaki drill, his green hat pulled piratically over his eyes and a Thompson sub-machine gun slung over his shoulder' and who had visibly dropped his hand to his revolver holster, required strong words from the local Dutch controller before he would, albeit unwillingly, act as a guide.¹¹⁶ Rowley-Conwy, having by-passed Colonel Dillon's queue at Rengat, eventually arrived at Padang on the 5th of March. Unable to find a berth on the last ship out, he was fortunate to be given a place on a sailing boat that had been stashed up the coast by the CO in Padang, on which he, and Geoffrey Brooke, eventually reached Colombo.¹¹⁷

The flight from Singapore was typified by many small but diverse bands being thrown together by chance. Within these groups their responses to their fraught circumstances, and to the local populations, were often mediated through group discussions. All were the recipients of help and assistance from the communities through which they passed, and none of them would have got as far as they did without it. Where such help was not forthcoming, and driven by desperation, most of the men were capable of acting in a piratical manner, although the extreme antipathy demonstrated by a few was frequently mitigated by the internal dynamics of the groups they were a part of. Taylor, benefitting from an early and trouble free departure, and Rowley-Conwy and Brooke, the fortunate recipients of a place on a secreted vessel, were lucky and got away to Ceylon. Many others were less fortunate and, like Rivett, Oakley and Grafton, were made to march into captivity.

¹¹⁶ Skidmore, *Escape*, p61.

¹¹⁷ Skidmore, *Escape*, pp93-95.

1.5. The March into Captivity.

The shock of defeat by Japan, and the perception of an ignominious capitulation to an Asian enemy, led to a number of the men referencing a sense of shame, over and above that which might be expected from a defeated army, and in particular at how their surrender would be viewed at home. In addition to immediately expressed impressions of shame, feelings of guilt could also manifest themselves indirectly as a result of the capitulation, or be stimulated or amplified retrospectively on returning home after the war. As news of the surrender came through, Pte Henderson reflected ironically on the first two verses of an old imperial poem remembered from his school days, *The Private of the Buffs*:

Last night among his fellow roughs,
He jested, quaffed and swore,
A drunken private of the Buffs,
Who never looked before.
Today beneath the foeman's frown,
He stands in Elgin's place,
Ambassador from Britain's crown,
And type of all of her race.

Poor, reckless, rude, lowborn, untaught,
Bewildered and alone,
A heart with English instinct fraught,
He yet can call his own.
Aye, tear his body limb from limb,
Bring axe or cord or flame, [sic]
He only knows that not through him,
Shall England come to shame.¹¹⁸

Whilst he went on to suggest that any shame that had accrued was the responsibility of the generals, he did internalise some remorse of his own, generated by the sense that he had trusted those same officers, and by implication the mantra of imperialistic superiority, to hold

¹¹⁸ IWM: Henderson; p260. Written in 1860 by Sir Francis Doyle, the poem was based on the alleged decapitation of a British private captured by the Chinese in the Second Opium War, for refusing to prostrate himself before his captors. When writing his account in the 1970s, Henderson appears to be quoting the lines from memory, hence the variation of verse 2, line 6, which should read; 'Bring cord, or axe, or flame'

out and win the day: 'The bitter part of my amusement however was caused by the thought that I, a Communist, had really believed that here in Singapore the thin red line would hold out. Was there no public schoolboy here "to rally the ranks" with the cry "play up, play up and play the game?"'¹¹⁹ The issue of the shame of defeat was echoed in another account: 'We all knew that in England, people who did not understand, thought we had shamed our nation and our flag.'¹²⁰ This post-war assertion, whilst perhaps informed by, and in response to, unfavourable reactions on returning to the UK, is indicative that the issue of shame continued to resonate strongly with the former POWs.

Such feelings were reinforced in a more immediate manner by the Japanese policy of making their prisoners march into captivity, through streets filled with the local populations who until recently had usually been the erstwhile subjects of the British Empire.¹²¹ Such marches took place all over the newly conquered zone of Japanese occupation, and would be repeated subsequently when cohorts of POWs were relocated to meet the victor's labour requirements. These events, and the responses of the civilians lining the routes, were frequently recorded by the newly captured servicemen, and serve to illustrate both the outlooks of the prisoners and their impressions of those who were watching them.

Accounts of the fourteen mile march from Singapore city to Changi contain a mixed and frequently ethnically defined set of attitudes that were perceived as being displayed by the local populations. One soldier writing of his experiences immediately after the war recalled that there were 'streets of weeping Chinese, Malays, Indians, and all the rest of the conglomeration of nations which go to make the population of Singapore.'¹²² This somewhat romanticised view of universally distraught colonial subjects, whilst not suffering from the

¹¹⁹ IWM: Henderson; p261.

¹²⁰ IWM: Carpenter; p41.

¹²¹ Gerald Horne accurately describes such an event in Hong Kong as a "March of Humiliation"; Horne, *Race War!* p81.

¹²² IWM: Holden, E. (Docs 2510); p3.

effects of time on the memory, may have been influenced by the more immediate afterglow of freedom and the restoration of British imperial authority.

A more ethnically differentiated civilian response is remembered by others, in defeat it seems that the local populations had become more easily identifiable. The Chinese were widely seen as being supportive, whilst the Malay and Indian populations exhibited more variable reactions. Pte Carpenter saw the Chinese as friendly, whilst 'some of the Malaysians and Indians gave hoots of derision on seeing us.' Despite such a, for him, uncharacteristically even handed description, he went on to describe how the streets were packed with civilians, 'obviously to greet the conquerors of the mighty British. Yes this was their day, poor ignorant bloody fools.'¹²³ Whilst not a few may well have gathered to greet the Japanese, and conversely, as many may have been there to deride the newly humbled British, his own intolerance rises to the surface again when he collectively ascribes such perspectives to the whole crowd of 'poor ignorant bloody fools'. With a similar, but less judgemental, pattern of ethnic distinction, Pte Bailey recounted that the Chinese were sullen to the Japanese, whilst some of the Indians demonstrated deference to their new overlords, and others 'were actually welcoming.'¹²⁴ These latter accounts seem more realistic, reflecting Chinese apprehensions (soon to be confirmed) of their precarious new circumstances, and some overt Indian and Malay resentment of British colonialism. This is not to suggest that the Chinese were necessarily contented subjects of the British Empire, and once the binding effect of the common Japanese enemy had been removed, it would be members of the Chinese community who would lead the post-war fight for independence in Malaysia.

Only rarely did any antipathy from the crowd take a non-verbal form, although it could still be oral in its provenance, as when a group of 'arab traders' spat at one officer as he walked past

¹²³ IWM: Carpenter; p43.

¹²⁴ IWM: Bailey, C. (Sound 4647); Reel 3.

them.¹²⁵ Gunner Whitehead, captured in Hong Kong, recalled hearing that 'some locals jeered and threw stones' at passing POWs, but that his experience was that bystanders had 'looked on impassively' with 'dour stoicism'.¹²⁶ More common were reports of many 'native children along our route, who apparently taking pity on our very unhappy condition, were holding tins of water to quench our thirst if we needed them.'¹²⁷

Just over a month later at Padang on Sumatra, the later arrivals on the route from Singapore went through a similarly public display of their new status, as they were marched through the streets from the Chinese School where they had been staying, to a Dutch army barracks to begin their captivity. Among their number were Grafton and Oakley, and their divergent accounts of the same journey clearly demonstrate their differing racial mind-sets, how these conditioned their responses to the local people, and how they perceived the locals to be responding to them.

On arriving at Padang, Oakley's account pre-emptes the official march into captivity, as he recalls 'shuffling through streets lined with curious and sullen natives' on his way to the accommodation at the Chinese school. En route to the school he notes with a sense of jealousy that a Ghurkha and two Sikhs had managed to disappear into the crowd, 'their brown skins allowing them to blend in easily with a sympathetic and friendly segment of the local native population.' Britain's military past would also resonate in his mind as he disparagingly referred to Colonel Warren, the escape route organiser, as someone seeking to perpetuate 'the thin red line syndrome of yesteryear.' He also claimed that he had become a prisoner of the Dutch and was prevented from leaving the school, although this had not precluded some naval personnel from managing to get out to reconnoitre the port.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ IWM: de Cavley; p13.

¹²⁶ Whitehead, John S. and Bennett, George B. (1990) *Escape to Fight on: With 204 Military Mission in China*. Robert Hale, London. p40.

¹²⁷ IWM: Strong; p13.

¹²⁸ IWM: Oakley; pp34-38.

Grafton seems to have enjoyed a more amenable week in Padang, mostly spent at another camp at the Malay School, and having received a few guilders in pay, he was able to go into town for a haircut and a meal.¹²⁹ Furthermore he was also able to take out a book on loan from the Seaman's Mission, and buy the latest Sax Rohmer novel from a bookshop he was browsing in.¹³⁰ Whilst in town he had come across members of his battery, who described a 'state of near rebellion' on their journey that had resulted from the perceived incompetence of their officers. Presumably it was during this contact that he learned that his Battery Commander (Rowly-Conwy) had already left.¹³¹

Towards the end of the week Grafton must have been transferred to the Chinese School as he was there at the surrender, and his account briefly converges with that of Oakley, as they both describe a Japanese officer destroying a picture of Chang Kai Chek that had been hanging on the wall. Even at this apparently convergent moment there is a discernable difference in how the event was remembered. Oakley recalled that the officer 'pointed and screamed at a fading picture of Chang Kai Chek. This was dragged off the wall and viciously hacked to pieces'.¹³² Grafton noted a slightly more measured action: 'He ordered it to be taken down and it was jumped on a few times.'¹³³

The differences in their outlooks and perceptions were even more explicitly displayed on the march to the Dutch army camp and into captivity, through streets lined with civilians. Oakley described the situation with typical negativity: 'Lining both sides of the street were jeering crowds of natives who hurled jibes and solid objects in our direction.'¹³⁴ His view, unsurprisingly, was in stark contrast to that of Grafton, who saw that the 'local population was

¹²⁹ Colonel Warren had dispensed funds to provide each officer with an eight guilder allowance, and five for the men. Brooke, *Singapore's Dunkirk*, p75.

¹³⁰ Ironically this book would have been *The Island of Fu Manchu*, published by Cassell, London, in 1941.

¹³¹ IWM: Grafton; pp28-29.

¹³² IWM: Oakley; p39.

¹³³ IWM: Grafton; p30.

¹³⁴ IWM: Oakley; p40.

for the most part sympathetically inclined, and showed it whenever possible by passing us food. This of course did not please the Japs and there were some nasty beatings.’¹³⁵

These accounts are not necessarily irreconcilable. The regime (and the financial allowances) may have been different in the Chinese School from those pertaining at the Malay School. Grafton noted that there was a restriction on going into town at a later point in the week, and this may have coincided with his transfer to join Oakley in the Chinese School. Similarly, on the Japanese march to captivity, it may have been the people hurling abuse and more substantial objects at Oakley who constituted the residual “lesser part” of the crowd that Grafton remembered.¹³⁶ The one event that it can be said with certainty where both were present was the destruction of the picture of Chang Kai Chek. This is instructive as it clearly contrasts Oakley’s tendency to dramatic reconstruction with Grafton’s more measured approach.

Furthermore, regardless of the possible reconciliation of the differing accounts, their actual content reveals divergent outlooks. Oakley exhibits an almost entirely pessimistic perspective on all aspects of the time at Padang, and chooses to record events in a negative fashion. It seems unlikely that he would not have seen the gifts being given by the sympathetic locals lining the route, or the beatings that they received for their kindness. Such acts however did not fit with his narrative of negativity, so he chose instead to record the slights (whether in reality or through misinterpretation) that he perceived. An intrinsic element of his negativity is directed at anyone who is not British, with special reference in this context to those with ‘brown skins’, regardless of whether they are erstwhile comrades in arms like the Gurkhas and Sikhs, or the members of the local community.¹³⁷ Written over fifty years after the liberation his account reveals that the intervening years have done little or nothing to soften his world-view, and the racialized perspectives that inform it.

¹³⁵ IWM: Grafton; p31.

¹³⁶ It is indeed possible, given the different outlooks of the men, that the objects hurled at Oakley and the items of food passed to Grafton were one and the same thing.

¹³⁷ The Dutch were also a considerable object of his antipathy, as will be considered in a later chapter.

The more balanced nature of Grafton's narrative and its lack of dramatization lend it a greater cogency, and intuitively it seems to be a more accurate representation of the events in Padang. It has a greater sense of objectivity, unencumbered by the baggage of essentialised perspectives. Of course, it is possible that his own views had moderated and changed by the time of writing in the mid-1980s, but this seems unlikely given the nature of the memories that he retained from the war.

The march into captivity added a final chapter to the emotional rollercoaster that the men had experienced since they had shipped out from Britain a few months before. As in the previous sections, their mental outlook informed how they related to the civilians around them. In their newly straitened circumstances they were mostly appreciative of the unsolicited support frequently given to them by those who they passed. Common humanity usually outweighed any post-colonial antipathy on the part of the local populations, and the men were largely grateful for it. Few could have imagined the ordeal that awaited them as they entered the camps and became prisoners of the Japanese.

Chapter 2. Sources of Anglo-Japanese Antipathy.

2.1. Introduction.

Few opponents in the long history of British warfare have generated as much antipathy as did the Japanese during the Second World War. Only 25 years previously Japan had been a valued ally during the First World War, patrolling the Indian and Pacific Oceans as well as providing crucial naval support to the Mediterranean Fleet, occupying German possessions in Asia and helping to suppress a mutiny by elements of the Indian garrison in Singapore in 1915.¹³⁸

Following the armistice in 1918, Japanese diplomacy suffered several reverses, at Versailles in 1919 and at the Washington Naval Conference in 1921, which set it on the road, via Manchuria and China, to its belated (or from a Chinese perspective, early) entry into the Second World War.¹³⁹

In the combat zones of this conflict little quarter was given or expected, in a particularly brutal series of campaigns. Whilst the taking of prisoners would prove problematic at times to both sides in the supposedly more civilised war being fought in Western Europe, in Asia and the

¹³⁸ Gow, Ian. "The Royal Navy and Japan, 1900-1920: Strategic Re-Evaluation of the Imperial Japanese Navy." p 46; and Hiram, Yoichi. "The Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the First World War." pp57-58. Both in Gow, Ian, Hiram, Yoichi, and Chapman, John, (eds) (2003) *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1600-2000. Volume III: The Military Dimension*. Palgrave Macmillan. Basingstoke. Hiram relates how, exactly 27 years before the surrender of Singapore in 1942, a group of Indian Army soldiers attacked a camp on the island holding German POWs, killed the British officers and released the prisoners. The rebellion was eventually suppressed by a scratch force of European and Japanese civilian volunteers, around 200 British regulars, 85 men from the Sultan of Johore's private army, an assortment of Russian and French seamen, and around 150 Japanese military personnel.

¹³⁹ At both conferences there were gains as well as losses made by Japan. In 1919 the disappointment at losing the insertion of a racial equality clause into the League of Nations Covenant was partially offset by the consolidation of economic and territorial gains from Germany in the region. Similarly at Washington, whilst the end of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was a source of some regret, there were also benefits arising from the treaties signed there, particularly with regard to the ratios of certain naval vessels that were agreed upon. These provided the Japanese with a potentially superior permitted tonnage in the Pacific compared to that of the US and UK Navies, both of which had a wider geographical fleet dispersal. See Murashima, Shigeru. "The Opening of the Twentieth Century and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, 1895-1923.", and Steeds, David. "Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1902-23: a Marriage of Convenience." Both in; Nish, Ian, and Yoichi, Kibata. (eds) (2000) *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations. Volume I: The Political-Diplomatic Dimension, 1600-1930*. MacMillan Press, Basingstoke.

Pacific such practices were widespread and near endemic. It is perhaps then ironic in this context that the major source of anti-Japanese sentiment would arise from their treatment of the tens of thousands of British POWs who fell into their hands in Singapore and elsewhere at the start of the war, many of whom would not survive the incarceration of three and a half years. This chapter will seek to trace the development of such negative sentiments amongst the POWs and examine the validity of some potential explanations, contrasting the societal antagonism espoused by John Dower¹⁴⁰ against Tarak Barkawi's model of antipathy gained as a result of direct contacts in the combat context.¹⁴¹

There is a relative abundance of material regarding the views held by the BORs in respect to the Japanese, initially as opponents and then subsequently as captors. This richness of records continues into the post-war period and allows for a longitudinal survey of British attitudes, before, during and after the war. In addition there is also a rich seam of historiography, much of it prompted by the perceived need to restore good relations between the two nations after 1945. This chapter will focus on the period up to repatriation by the end of 1945, whilst the post-war period will be considered in a subsequent section.

It is worth clarifying who is included in the group labelled "Japanese". Many of the enemy personnel that the POWs came into contact with were not Japanese, but had been recruited from within its Empire and from conquered territories. The Japanese colonies of Korea and Formosa supplied the majority of the guards in camps across Asia, as exemplified by the 1,280 Korean guards on the Burma-Thai Railway who considerably outnumbered the 125 Japanese officers and NCOs who were guarding them as construction commenced.¹⁴² Formosans in Borneo and the Pacific archipelagos, Indonesians, some recruited from the Dutch colonial

¹⁴⁰ Dower, *War Without Mercy*.

¹⁴¹ Barkawi, Tarak. (2004) "Peoples, Homelands, and Wars? Ethnicity, the Military and Battle among British Imperial Forces in the War against Japan." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol 46, pp134-163.

¹⁴² Flower, "Captors and Captives", in: Moore and Fedorowich, *Prisoners of War*, p236. There were additional Japanese troops in the Railway Regiments, but their role was on the Railway itself, not in the camps.

forces, and in Singapore many of the Sikhs who had previously policed the island, found themselves guarding allied POWs. Whilst complaints about these guards and their actions were frequent, particularly in the case of the Koreans under whose constraint many of the British found themselves on the Burma-Thailand Railway, they were usually seen as acting at the direction of their colonial masters, the Japanese, upon whom the ultimate blame lay.¹⁴³ For this reason the focus of this chapter is on the attitudes of the POWs to the Japanese, both before and during the war in the east. The prisoners would come into contact with a range of Japanese subjects, not all of whom were enemy combatants, including soldiers, sailors and engineers, as well as, for those who were sent to Japan, work supervisors and civilians at large. The primary aim of this section is to examine the relationship with what might be termed institutional Japan.

In this chapter the development of attitudes to the Japanese prior to captivity is examined with specific reference to the role of the popular media. The importance posited by some POWs and academics of caricatures and other racial stereotyping in the media is investigated, as is the changing editorial position that the press took towards Japan. On arrival in Asia official briefings acted to compound such caricatures of the enemy and fed into the rumour mill that operated during the Malayan Campaign and the battle for Singapore. The deterioration in relations during the period of captivity is then considered and assessed in the context of theories of combat motivation that have been developed to account for the brutality of the war in the Asia-Pacific region.

¹⁴³ Henderson, like many of his colleagues, noted that the Koreans often 'outdid the Japanese themselves in acts of brutality against the prisoners of war.' p545.

2.2. Early antipathy: Essentialised caricatures in the press.

For a few of the men an antagonism towards the Japanese was evident from the start of their time in Asia, with diary entries referring to ‘yellow bastards’, despite the fact that none of them had as yet had any direct contacts. Whilst such epithets are perhaps not surprising, particularly in the context of the impending hostilities and the experience of being bombed, the responses from some of the British troops to the Japanese soldiers when they first came face to face with them are suggestive of a deeper seated pre-existing antipathy. Until the fall of Singapore most of the men had not seen a Japanese, apart from inanimately at a distance in planes. Even those who thought they had met them in combat were often confused as to the identities of those ranged against them, as demonstrated in the preceding chapter.

Writing about the surrender many years later, some of the men remarked on the appearance of the Japanese, emerging out of the jungle after ten weeks of combat, by saying that they resembled the caricatures drawn in the press. As one soldier wrote: ‘I was rather taken aback to see that the Japs looked the very personification of the caricatures usually drawn in newspapers. The reputation as fearless fighters that had preceded them down the Malayan peninsula now seemed almost laughable.’¹⁴⁴ Another recalled that ‘they all filled the caricature Jap I led [sic] to expect.’¹⁴⁵ A more explicitly racialized representation was drawn in the diaries of several soldiers : ‘They are swarthy little men, overgrown monkeys, clad in jungle green, festooned in leaves and twigs ... They would gutterally grunt, they speak so rapidly.’¹⁴⁶ Diminutive size, the jungle location and visual appearance were accompanied by a simian soundtrack in these contemporary essentialised images of the Japanese. ‘Bloody lot of monkeys all of them’ was how one newly interned private described a gathering of senior

¹⁴⁴ IWM: Grafton:(Docs 6466) p30.

¹⁴⁵ IWM: Dixon; p52.

¹⁴⁶ IWM: Houghton; 17/2/42.

Japanese officers.¹⁴⁷ John Dower has asserted that 'the simian image had already become ... integral to Western thinking by this time', although he cites little evidence in the lead up to hostilities to suggest that the British press were responsible.¹⁴⁸ Such views suggest that essentialised images should be easy to locate in the newspapers of the period, and that such representations might have at the least played a part in the development and sustenance of such attitudes.

The importance of the popular press in attitude formation has been suggested by Jon Pardoe, who wrote that 'ordinary men and women read mainly newspapers, and more of them than ever before. Serious reading took up little time. The cinema was the essential social habit, with newsreels part of every programme.'¹⁴⁹ In order to assess the role of the press in influencing public opinion and developing the stereotypes outlined above, a number of publications were surveyed. The main focus was on the *Daily Mirror*, which had been re-positioned from right to left during the 1930s, growing its circulation in the process to 1.4 million by 1939. The *Mirror* was selected for its relevance to the subject group, claiming to speak for the ordinary Briton and serviceman during the war. In addition the *Daily Express*, the *Picture Post*, the *Evening Standard*, *The Times*, the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Yorkshire Post* were also scrutinised. Whilst the main focus of this section is on the press, the *Pathé Archive* was also surveyed to assess the potential impact of newsreels during this period, and a brief examination of the potential impact of popular literature is made.

Despite the contemporary simian references outlined above, and the post-hoc attribution of such representations to caricatures in the press, there is little evidence to be found of such allusions, either in writing or graphically, in the period prior to the start of hostilities in Asia. A search of the *Mirror* revealed just two articles that featured both Japan and one of a variety of

¹⁴⁷ IWM: Parry; 26/2/42.

¹⁴⁸ Dower, *War Without Mercy*, p84.

¹⁴⁹ Pardoe, Jon. "British Writing on Contemporary Japan, 1924-1941:' Newspapers, Books, Reviews and Propaganda.'" In: Daniels, Gordon, and Tsuzuki, Chushichi (eds). (2002) *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations 1600-2000: Volume 5: Social and Cultural Perspectives*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke. p281.

simian references, between the start of 1937 and the end of November, 1941. The first was in response to a swelling mailbag protesting the Japanese attack on Shanghai, and contained the by-line; 'Greed is the "General" of Japan's armed baboons.'¹⁵⁰ This choice of wording was unique for the period in question, and may well have been inspired as a sop to the strength of feeling and the use of such language by the *Mirror's* readers in their letters. The only other simian reference would appear in an article that mentioned Japan over a year later, in a *Cassandra* column that drew attention to an intimidating monkey at Regents Park, who 'by fighting, bullying, maltreating and general terrorism, he raised himself to be the leader. ... He is the supreme leader of cowed and beaten totalitarian Monkey Hill.' However the story's punch line revealed a comparator somewhat closer to home than Japan: 'EIN VOLK! EIN REICH! EIN FUHRER!'¹⁵¹

The *Picture Post* was first published in October 1938, and within months its popular graphic format had gained a circulation of over one million copies. It reported regularly on the situation in China, particularly where British interests had been affected, with a partisan voice, although only once did it utilise simian representations. A double page spread featuring 'JAPAN'S PRO-AXIS CABINET' was immediately followed by another with a similar layout, with pictures of chimpanzees giving 'A LESSON IN POLITICS'. The article advised readers to 'let no out of date ideas of honour, civilisation, or concerns for individuals stand in your way. Learn from the apes. They know.' One of the chimp cabinet members went on to state: 'Our invincible simian army, urged on by our glorious ape leaders, will ensure that no human foot shall ever be set within our bars! We proclaim the invincible right of apes to dominate the earth.'¹⁵² This strident comparison of the Japanese cabinet with a group of apes was not lost on the respondent who sent in a letter of 'Simian Protest' for a subsequent edition. 'An ape

¹⁵⁰ *Daily Mirror*: 25/9/1937; p13.

¹⁵¹ *Daily Mirror*: 14/11/1938; p13.

¹⁵² *Picture Post*: 26/10/1940; pp26-29.

has instructed me to protest at the juxtaposition of two pages of portraits of the Japanese Cabinet, and two of portraits of Apes (Oct 26).'¹⁵³

The work of New Zealander David Low, for the London *Evening Standard*, provided the only other simian references prior to the outbreak of hostilities in the east, as well as being the only British source cited by Dower preceding the conflict¹⁵⁴. It took him some time to evolve the simian characteristics; a Japanese soldier emerging from the jungle, to disturb two western sailors sat on a bench, utilised an ape like posture and style of movement, but as yet deployed no direct physiological resemblance. By July 1941 however he shows Japan as a monkey armed with a knife, swinging from a palm tree, unable to decide whether to attack the western allies or the USSR. Some months later he drew simian Japanese admirals boarding their flag-ship, which was crewed by human ratings.¹⁵⁵ These examples stand out not only for the explicit nature of the images they contained, but also by virtue of their rarity.

It was not until the Japanese directly attacked western territory in Asia and the Pacific that the popular press started to make simian representations on a regular basis. Low revisited the theme soon after, with an image of three monkeys sat eating on a beach in Malaya whilst casting covetous eyes on the distant island of Singapore, somewhat optimistically captioned: 'The next course doesn't come so easily'. However, he would only explicitly use the simian reference again once, several months later in March 1942, as a monkey swinging from a palm was straining to carry the coconuts of conquest that it had gathered. Despite drawing more

¹⁵³ *Picture Post*: 9/11/1940; p3.

¹⁵⁴ Dower, *War Without Mercy*, p87. Low had frequently lampooned the assorted dictators of the time, but perhaps saved sharpest criticism for the vacillating democracies.

¹⁵⁵ *Evening Standard*; 26/9/1940; 7/7/1941; 20/10/1941. Sourced from:
[http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/browse/cartoon_item/anytext=david%20low?subjects_text\[\]=Japan&publication=Evening%20Standard&page=112](http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/browse/cartoon_item/anytext=david%20low?subjects_text[]=Japan&publication=Evening%20Standard&page=112)
[http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/browse/cartoon_item/anytext=david%20low?subjects_text\[\]=Japan&publication=Evening%20Standard&page=124](http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/browse/cartoon_item/anytext=david%20low?subjects_text[]=Japan&publication=Evening%20Standard&page=124)
[http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/browse/cartoon_item/anytext=david%20low?subjects_text\[\]=Japan&publication=Evening%20Standard&page=130](http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/browse/cartoon_item/anytext=david%20low?subjects_text[]=Japan&publication=Evening%20Standard&page=130)

than fifty further cartoons about Japan during the war, only two would make similar, although less clearly illustrated references. POWs rescued from a torpedoed Japanese transport in early 1944 brought further news of the situation that they were enduring in captivity, and Low depicted a clearly human Japanese guard, albeit one with an ape like posture and hairy arms, at the gate of a camp. A similar image was used just before the end of the war, as a loin cloth wearing man was surrounded by the destruction of Japan, entitled 'Interminable Finale'.¹⁵⁶

The Jane cartoon strip in the *Mirror* had her parents topically evacuating from Hong Kong at the end of November 1941. They returned with a Chinese servant and a pet monkey, leading to opportunities for the strip to conflate East Asian characters with monkeys. The cartoon was also able to respond swiftly to developments in the wider world, as the villain of the storyline evolved from being a 'NAZI' on the 6th of December, to the clearly more orientalist 'COUNT ZERO' two weeks later.¹⁵⁷

It would however take the arrival in mid-January 1942 of the first news of Japanese atrocities at the fall of Hong Kong, before the popular papers fully went to war with their racialized depictions. The *Mirror* published a cartoon picturing a gorilla in a crate on a table, bearing the legend 'URGENT – TROUBLE: PRODUCE OF MALAYA', facing an empty chair with 'CHURCHILL' written on it. The caption read 'Waiting for Master!'.¹⁵⁸ On the same day the *Picture Post* devoted its whole issue to a lengthy and unfavourable analysis of Japan and the Japanese, including some graphic photographs of atrocities from previous campaigns in China. The 'JAPAN: SPECIAL' also illustrated the 'THE DOUBLE FACE OF A TWO FACED COUNTRY' with

¹⁵⁶ *Evening Standard*: 11/12/1941; 24/3/1942; 31/1/1944; 14/8/1945. Sourced from:
[http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/browse/cartoon_item/anytext=david%20low?subjects_text\[\]=Japan&publication=Evening%20Standard&page=134](http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/browse/cartoon_item/anytext=david%20low?subjects_text[]=Japan&publication=Evening%20Standard&page=134)
[http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/browse/cartoon_item/anytext=david%20low?subjects_text\[\]=Japan&publication=Evening%20Standard&page=146](http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/browse/cartoon_item/anytext=david%20low?subjects_text[]=Japan&publication=Evening%20Standard&page=146)
[http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/browse/cartoon_item/anytext=david%20low?subjects_text\[\]=Japan&publication=Evening%20Standard&page=175](http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/browse/cartoon_item/anytext=david%20low?subjects_text[]=Japan&publication=Evening%20Standard&page=175)
[http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/browse/cartoon_item/anytext=david%20low?subjects_text\[\]=Japan&publication=Evening%20Standard&page=200](http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/browse/cartoon_item/anytext=david%20low?subjects_text[]=Japan&publication=Evening%20Standard&page=200)

¹⁵⁷ *Daily Mirror*: 6/12/1941; p2; 20/12/1941; p2.

¹⁵⁸ *Daily Mirror*: 17/1/1942; p3.

pictures of Hirohito in traditional and western dress, and related how the 'Japanese are born into a land of perpetual and incalculable violence ... this natural background is reflected in the character of the people.'¹⁵⁹

One week later the *Mirror* returned to the simian theme in its main cartoon, which featured three adjacent cages, containing the British lion, the Australian kangaroo, and a Japanese ape. The ape is breaking through the wall separating it from the kangaroo, who is shouting with some urgency at the sleeping British lion on the other side, "Hey! – Mr Lion!"¹⁶⁰ Whilst the rapid adoption of such pejorative representations is not surprising given the outbreak of hostilities, their significance in the context of the POWs lies in their timing. The men captured at Singapore and elsewhere in Asia would not have been able to see these post hostility newspapers and thus have been influenced by them.

This does not however preclude the possibility of some influence from the rare pre-war representations. Grafton and Dixon, the soldiers that referred to caricatures in the press in their post-hoc memoirs, were both Londoners and it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that they may have been influenced by Low's cartoons in the *Evening Standard*, either directly by seeing the relevant editions, or indirectly, at that time or indeed later, by talking with people who had seen them. The likelihood of them seeing the papers first hand is however mitigated by the fact that Dixon enlisted in October 1939 and would thus have needed to be on leave in London at the right time to have seen a copy of the *Standard*, whilst Grafton joined in May 1941, and thus would similarly have missed two of the three cartoons, assuming that either of them read the paper.

¹⁵⁹ *Picture Post*: 17/1/1942; p7.

¹⁶⁰ *Daily Mirror*: 24/1/1942; p3. The Australian government was by now becoming increasingly concerned at the speed of the Japanese advance; a month later, his resolution no doubt increased by the Japanese bombing raid on Darwin on the 19th of February, the Prime Minister John Curtin insisted that the Australian Corps returning from the Middle East should come straight home, and not, as Churchill requested, be diverted to Rangoon. Schofield, Victoria. (2006; 2010 edn) *Wavell: Soldier and Statesman*. Pen and Sword Military, Barnsley. p248.

Houghton (from Gateshead) and Parry (Chorley, Lancashire) both drew their contemporaneous simian portraits without the benefit of hindsight or access to Low's cartoons, although the national popular press would have been available to them for most of the time. Their more directly derogatory references are suggestive of a wider level of prejudice operating amongst a significant segment of the population at a societal level, and it is possible that had Grafton and Dixon been writing at the same time they might have used similar terminology, instead of employing the more acceptable 'caricatures' in a euphemistic sense in the post-war period.

2.3. The press and the Sino-Japanese War.

In order to gain a clearer insight into the apparently equivocal nature of the press regarding the Japanese, and its role in reflecting or influencing attitudes towards them, two contemporary themes of the pre-war period were investigated. There were two significant and overlapping threads to the press coverage of the new Japanese aggression in China in 1937 and 1938. The first was in response to the initial hostilities and in particular the impact of air warfare on civilian populations. This led to a global campaign in the latter part of 1937 for a boycott of Japanese goods. The subsequent attack on Nanking, and more particularly the brutal aftermath of its occupation, would provide a second focus for the newspapers. An examination of these episodes and how they were reported will help to elucidate the role, if any, of the press in shaping attitudes of ordinary Britons to the Japanese in the immediate pre-war period, as well as providing potential insights to that mind-set. In addition a brief consideration will be given to contemporary newsreels and popular literature in the 1930s.

2.3.1. The boycott of Japanese goods, 1937-1938.

The onset of the Second Sino-Japanese War in July of 1937, and the associated indiscriminate aerial bombing of civilians, particularly in the ten week long Battle of Shanghai that raged from mid-August to the end of November, has been identified by numerous authors as contributing

to and reinforcing anti-Japanese feeling amongst the British public at that time.¹⁶¹ The first mention of a boycott was recorded in the *Manchester Guardian* at the start of September, and referred to an unofficial mass movement by the Chinese community in Malaya, that was estimated to be costing Japanese business around £50,000 per week.¹⁶²

Apart from this one report, for most of September the subject of a boycott disappeared from the pages of the press. It had however gained a great deal of traction amongst the general public, and this groundswell of opinion was noted at the end of the month. The *Daily Mirror* dedicated a whole page to its 'Live Letter Box' column, in response to a large postbag regarding the situation in China. The paper noted that 'the civilised world stands by and calmly stomachs the slaughter of the innocents in China ... "Live Letter Box" is packed to-day with the infuriated protests of our readers...'. From the hundreds of letters received, the *Mirror* selected three which allowed it to present its own position through its responses, which were effectively that 'a boycott would hurt the ordinary Japanese, not the warlords'; 'that China can take it'; and that Britain needed to be prepared in the eventuality that it was itself the target of aerial bombing.¹⁶³ Some ten days later the *Mirror* returned to the theme of the potential damage to the 'ordinary Japanese', in an editorial that attacked a resolution to the Labour Party conference presented by Hugh Dalton, calling for a boycott of Japanese goods.¹⁶⁴ This sympathetic and differentiated tone was somewhat at odds with that of the letter writers, who expressed less polite references to 'those yellow swine – the Japs', and to a 'short, thick lipped, slit eyed Japanese Prince'. The third letter was a little more conciliatory, albeit bearing a more subtly presented simian reference, enquiring 'how can we expect the Orientals to be

¹⁶¹ See: Daniels, Gordon. "Elites, Government and Citizens: Some British Perceptions of Japan, 1850-2000." p12; Daniels, G., and Charrier, Philip. "Nation Shall Speak Peace Unto Nation." The BBC and Japan, 1929-1939. p259; and Pardoe, J., "British Writing", p285; all in Daniels, and Tsuzuki, *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations*.

¹⁶² *Manchester Guardian*: 1/9/1937; p4. This figure was an estimate provided by Reuters in Singapore.

¹⁶³ *Daily Mirror*: 25/9/1937; p13.

¹⁶⁴ *Daily Mirror*: 5/10/1937; p13.

calmed by the preachings of the West, whose warlike methods they have so successfully aped.¹⁶⁵

The high-water mark of the boycott movement in the UK was reached in mid-October 1937, with a series of rallies in major cities. Ten thousand people attended a rally in London according to the *Guardian* (although *The Times* correspondent only saw several thousand), whilst there were reputed to be three thousand at a meeting in Manchester, and two thousand in Liverpool.¹⁶⁶ Those commercial interests which had little to gain from restraints on Japanese trade had already started to lobby, and after the TUC announced its unanimous support for a National Council for Labour resolution calling for a boycott on the same day as the rallies, it was largely downhill for the movement, both on the ground and in the press. A range of institutional reasoning was deployed to deflect support; the *Mirror* cited the effects on ordinary Japanese; the Government (and the opposition) suggested that any action taken would need to be in co-operation with the USA¹⁶⁷; the Co-operative Wholesale Society claimed it could not act based purely on the wishes of a vocal minority of members¹⁶⁸; and by August of 1938 the TUC had declared that whilst it supported a boycott in principle, the net effect would be to benefit Nazi Germany as the principal alternative supplier.¹⁶⁹

There had been an attempt to gauge British public opinion towards different nationalities, religious and racial groups in this period, by the Mass Observation organisation. It had asked its respondents to rank in 'order of preference ... which of the following races you would prefer the British nation to collaborate and associate with.' The ten categories were (in the respondents' order of preference); USA, Scandinavia, France, Russia, Ireland, Jewish, Polish, Italian, Asiatic and Negro. Whilst indicative of a generalised racial hierarchy (and giving a clear perspective on where most of the Empire's subjects lay within it) the survey offers little more

¹⁶⁵ *Daily Mirror*: 25/9/1937; p13.

¹⁶⁶ *Manchester Guardian*: 18/10/1937; pp11-12; *The Times*: 18/10/1937; p16.

¹⁶⁷ *Manchester Guardian*: 20/12/1937; p8.

¹⁶⁸ *Daily Express*: 7/6/1938; p2.

¹⁶⁹ *Daily Express*: 22/8/1938; p9.

than anecdotal evidence in relation to Anglo-Japanese relations, hidden as they are within the 'Asiatic' category, one that encompassed over half of the world's population in a wide variety of ethnicities.¹⁷⁰

The lack of enthusiasm from institutional and establishment Britain for the boycott on Japanese goods is shown in sharp relief when contrasted with the efforts elsewhere. Figures comparing the first six months of 1938 with those for the same period in 1937 show the effect of the campaign globally:¹⁷¹

Table 1. Effects of the boycott on Japanese goods, 1937-1938.

	% decrease in value of imports from Japan (Jan-June 1937 : Jan-June 1938)
Straits Settlements	-75%
British Malaya	-66%
Netherlands East Indies	-62%
United States	-48%
Philippines	-34%
Canada	-28%
India	-27%
South Africa	-24%
United Kingdom	-9%

Whilst it is unfair to compare the British performance with that of the Chinese community of the Malayan Peninsula, who were unsurprisingly strident in their support for their homeland, the boycott in Britain looks particularly ineffective when seen alongside the fall in trade with Japan exhibited by a range of other nations and colonies bordering the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Even allowing for differences in the portfolios of imports, including those resulting from economies of scale and distance, the boycott was singularly unsuccessful in real terms in the United Kingdom.

¹⁷⁰ Mass Observation: Directive on Race; June 1939. Rank ordering based on a sample of 5% of 447 responses.

¹⁷¹ *Manchester Guardian*: 23/11/1938; p6. Figures compiled by the Geneva Office of the International Peace Campaign using the Monthly Summary of Foreign Trade of the Department of Finance in Tokyo.

The boycott movement in the UK arose quickly and independently of the press, popular or broadsheet, from across a wide spectrum of society. However, once the newspapers caught up with it, its days were numbered as most of them, and the establishment they were a part of, found a variety of reasons not to support it. By December 1937, the campaign had sunk almost as quickly as it had risen, with a timing that was particularly and cruelly ironic, given the events that were then unfolding in Nanking.

2.3.2. Press coverage of the Nanking Atrocity.¹⁷²

The capture of Nanking, then the capital city of China, on the 13th December 1937, was followed by six weeks of murder, rape and looting on a scale that defied the comprehension of most western commentators. The International Military Tribunal at Tokyo estimated that between 100,000-200,000 Chinese were killed, including captured soldiers in a systematic slaughter of POWs, and civilians in the less structured anarchy that reigned in the city and its suburbs during the period. It was also stated that 20,000 women were raped.¹⁷³ Harold Timperley, an Australian journalist working for the *Manchester Guardian* who was in the city at the time, estimated that the death toll 'within and near the walls of Nanking' was around

¹⁷² There has been much historiographical debate on this subject over the past 45 years. This has extended to its title. In common western discourse it is usually referred to as the "Rape of Nanking"; many historians refer to it as "The Nanking Massacre" (see: Fogel, Joshua A. (ed) (2000) *The Nanking Massacre in History and Historiography*. Univ of California Press, London.). The use of the term "The Nanking Incident" by right-wing writers in Japan has been criticised by many as an attempt to mitigate these events, although one author has cautioned that whilst the Japanese word *jiken* translates as incident, its meaning is 'more commonly used to denote serious crimes, including mass murder (see; Penney, Matthew. (2008) "Far from Oblivion: The Nanking Massacre in Japanese Historical Writing for Children and Young Adults." *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Vol 22, p47.). The use of the term "Atrocity" has been suggested as being appropriate as it encompasses both the rapes and the massacres that took place, and I have followed this terminology. See; Wakabatashi, Bob Tadashi. (ed) (2007: 2008 edn) *The Nanking Atrocity, 1937-38: Complicating the Picture*. Berghahn Books, London. p ix.

¹⁷³ IMTFE; Judgment, Chapter X: Verdicts, p. 1180; cited in Sedgewick, James Burnham. (2009) "Memory on Trial: Constructing and Contesting the 'Rape of Nanking' at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, 1946-1948." *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol 43, p1239. This top end of this figure has been used by authors in the post-war period, both in Britain (see; Lord Russel of Liverpool. (1958) *The Knights of Bushido: A Short History of Japanese War Crimes*. Cassell, London. pp41-42.) and Japan (see; Inoue, Kiyoshi. (1966) *Nihon no rekishi. (History of Japan) Vol. 2*. Iwanami Shoten, Tokyo. p192).

40,000, based on evidence from the Red Swastika Society¹⁷⁴. The death-toll would have been considerably higher had not many thousands of civilians found refuge in the Nanking Safety Zone set up by the international community, to which the westerners were themselves largely confined.

As the Japanese soldiers continued their campaign of rape and pillage into January of 1938, attempts by a few senior officers and officials to regain control of the rampaging army were largely unsuccessful. It would be February before some semblance of order was restored, following the arrival of an emissary from the Emperor, and the unprecedented recall of three of the most senior commanders on the ground.

It has been suggested that their return to Japan was prompted less by the carnage that occurred under their command and more by the fact that unfavourable reports of these activities were appearing in the world's press. The reality of this proposition, certainly as far as the British newspapers were concerned, was considerably more nuanced. For the entire period most of the British press was reporting on Nanking from a parochial viewpoint, the outrages that they were headlining being those that were carried out on western interests. In the immediate aftermath of the city's fall it was the attacks on the Royal Navy vessels HMS *Ladybird* and HMS *Bee*, as well as that on the USS *Panay*, that were the focus of attention, and this was reflected at the governmental level as official notes of protest were exchanged with the Japanese Government. By January the story had moved onshore, as Japanese soldiers, having already pillaged most of Nanking, sought fresh rapine in the relatively undisturbed landscape of the Safety Zone, and western property.

In mid-January John Allison, the US Consul, had complained of Japanese soldiers removing goods from American owned buildings; by the end of the month it was the Chinese women

¹⁷⁴ Timperley, Harold. (1938) *What War Means: The Japanese Terror in China; A Documentary Record*. Gollancz, London. p59. This figure didn't include numbers from the more distant suburbs. The Red Swastika Society was a Chinese charitable aid organisation that buried most of the dead in Nanking.

who were sheltering within their walls who had become the target. *The Times* reported that Allison was slapped by a guard when investigating 'the removal by Japanese soldiers from the American owned Nanking University of a Chinese woman whom they were alleged to have raped'.¹⁷⁵ After more than six weeks of industrial scale depravity *The Times* had made its first report on the suffering of the local population: one alleged rape. On the same day, the *Daily Mirror* ran a piece headlined 'ARMED JAPANESE RAID BRITON'S HOME', which described how the raiders came to rob not the British owner, but his Chinese servants. The article went on to report the slapping incident, whilst also giving space for the Japanese 'version of the affair'.¹⁷⁶ The *Mirror* had previously noted Allison's concerns over abducted women several days before, the first reference to hint at a wider scale of outrage, in a report on MPs in the Japanese Parliament attempting to control the Army, headlined 'WAR-WEARY MPS OF JAPAN TRY TO HOLD UP ARMY VOTE'.¹⁷⁷

The narrative that the Army was operating outside the remit of more reasonable home elements, in the Government and the Imperial Palace, was also endorsed by both *The Times* and the *Guardian*. *The Times* noted the dressing down given by General Matsui to his officers over the indiscipline, and stated that 'the frankness of their Commander-in-Chief in admonishing them will be widely recognised'.¹⁷⁸ On the General's recall to Japan, the *Guardian* reported in an editorial that this 'shows the Government is determined to control the military extremists and that it has the power to exercise its authority'.¹⁷⁹ That the reporting in this period was so parochial was not surprising, given the inherent editorial bias and the readership's assumed primary interest in Britons abroad. Furthermore, quite apart from their problems in the comprehension of such large scale carnage, those reporting back from the scene faced major logistical difficulties in both identifying what was going on outside their

¹⁷⁵ *The Times*: 29/1/1938; p 12.

¹⁷⁶ *Daily Mirror*: 28/1/1938; p3.

¹⁷⁷ *Daily Mirror*: 24/1/1938; p3.

¹⁷⁸ *The Times*: 8/2/1938; p13.

¹⁷⁹ *Manchester Guardian*: 25/2/1938; p10.

restricted horizons and then relaying that information back home, filtered through the Japanese censors.

Censorship was however a selective tool, only applied where reports were considered too unfavourable, and only one newspaper appeared to suffer. The *Guardian* had hinted on Boxing Day that reports 'were slowly leaking through from Nanking that Japanese soldiers took a terrible revenge for the outrages of 1927.'¹⁸⁰ Some weeks after in late January 1938 the paper ran several stories complaining that cables from their correspondent, Harold Timperley, had been suppressed. He had attempted to send details of a report from the *China Daily News* Christmas Day edition, which had detailed 'the scenes of horror perpetrated in Nanking after the occupation of the Japanese forces', and estimated that more than 10,000 people had been killed thus far, including civilians.¹⁸¹ A week later it reported that officers had taken part in the looting and that 'in many cases young girls were raped in broad daylight while others looked on in terror. Earlier reports that Japanese soldiers poured gasoline over civilians and set them on fire have also been substantiated.'¹⁸² Over the next few days further details of mass rapes and young children being bayoneted, 'all attested by foreigners whose evidence is indisputable' were published, but only in the *Guardian*.¹⁸³

In the rest of the press the story of the brutality was largely ignored, and this self-censorship was tacitly acknowledged when *The Times* referred to 'Nanking during the days when incidents occurred which are still unknown to the public here', in an article about the recall of the army commanders to Japan.¹⁸⁴ As already noted, Harold Timperley's account of the episode published in July 1938, included estimates that 40,000 were killed, of whom 30% were

¹⁸⁰ *Manchester Guardian*: 26/12/1937; p12. In March and April of 1927 the consulates of foreign governments in Nanking, including Britain, America and Japan were attacked and looted by Chinese Nationalist troops, during which a number of foreign civilians were killed.

¹⁸¹ *Manchester Guardian*: 29/1/1938; p11.

¹⁸² *Manchester Guardian*: 5/2/1938; p15.

¹⁸³ *Manchester Guardian*: 7/2/1938; p10. The greater reliability placed on (western) 'foreigners' as a source of information, as opposed to the local Asian populations, is a theme that will recur in a subsequent chapter examining the cholera outbreak on the Burma-Thailand Railway during 1943.

¹⁸⁴ *The Times*: 24/2/1938; p12.

civilians.¹⁸⁵ Apart from the *Guardian*, this book (although not the shocking figures) was only reviewed in *The Times*, and generated minimal column inches anywhere else.¹⁸⁶ It would take some time before the popular press would start sharing the details of Nanking with their readership. The *Mirror* mentioned the notorious case of Subaltern Noya, and his contest with a fellow officer as to who could kill the most people with a sword, in early 1940,¹⁸⁷ and in an editorial the following year concerning China, Timperley's figure of 40,000 dead was quoted, alongside the rape of 85% of women aged between 14 and 62.¹⁸⁸

However it would not be until March 1942, and the statement in the House of Commons by Anthony Eden regarding the atrocities at the fall of Hong Kong, that the issue of Nanking was laid bare before the British public. Speaking in Parliament, Eden referred to the accounts given by the few that had escaped from Hong Kong: 'Their testimony establishes the fact that the Japanese Army perpetrated against their helpless military prisoners and the civil population, without distinction of race or colour, the same kind of barbarities which aroused the horror of the civilised world at the time of the Nanking massacre of 1937.'¹⁸⁹

His speech removed the official wall of silence that had surrounded the affair and had the effect of galvanising the popular press into informing their readership of the events at Nanking, albeit in a fashion still riddled with inconsistency and inaccuracy. The *Express* reported that 'a week of massacre followed' the capture of the city, in which '20,000 men

¹⁸⁵ Timperley, *What War Means*, p59.

¹⁸⁶ *The Times*: 19/7/1938; p19. The reviewer appeared to justify the lack of figures when noting that: 'The danger of such a book ... is that we should lose sight of the fundamental issue [Japan's waging war in China] in a natural horror of the details.'

¹⁸⁷ *Daily Mirror*: 26/2/1940; p15. This episode was first recorded in two stories in the *Japan Advertiser* on the 7th and 14th of December 1937. Timperley reproduced these articles in Appendix F of *What War Means* (pp284-285). The two men concerned were executed following hearings at the Nanking Military Tribunal. In a detailed analysis one author has suggested that the story was a 'fictive' account, created by a journalist for patriotic reasons. Wakabayashi, Bob Tadashi. (2000) "The Nanking 100-Man Killing Contest Debate: War Guilt amid Fabricated Illusions, 1971-75." *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 26, p366.

¹⁸⁸ *Daily Mirror*: 9/7/1941; p2.

¹⁸⁹ *Daily Mirror*: 11/3/1942; p3.

women and children were killed.’¹⁹⁰ The *Mirror* also foreshortened the episode, as being immediately after the fall. It cited Chiang Kai-shek, who claimed that ‘200,000 civilians were murdered in a week’.¹⁹¹ Whilst the latter figure would prove in time to be more realistic as far as the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) was concerned, the deaths were spread over a longer period, and thus both Chiang and the *Mirror* were using it for propaganda purposes. The detail in the *Express* story and the previous publication in the *Mirror*, indicate that both papers were aware of Timperley’s account. Whilst the *Mirror*’s inflated figure can be explained for the reasons given above, it is less easy to understand why the *Express* chose to present a reduced timescale for the atrocity and halve Timperley’s overall estimate of 1938, although this inaccuracy was consistent with the reluctance of the popular press to engage with the story as it emerged after the fact. Iris Chang has written that ‘The Rape of Nanking was front page news across the world, and yet most of the world stood by and did nothing while an entire city was butchered.’¹⁹² In Britain, with the honourable exception of the *Manchester Guardian*, it was the newspapers themselves that kept the full story off the front, or any other, pages.

The newspapers generally regarded the Army as being unrepresentative of the Japanese people as a whole, both at the institutional and the individual levels, and hoped that more reasonable elements might prevail. The first papers to break ranks with this differentiated perspective were the *Guardian* and the *Yorkshire Post* at the end of December 1941, a few days after the fall of Hong Kong, the accompanying atrocities attached to which were still unknown, but stimulated more by the bombing of Manila. A *Guardian* editorial cited a speech by the former isolationist Senator Wheeler who stated that ‘The Japanese are an inhuman and

¹⁹⁰ *Daily Express*: 11/3/1942; p3.

¹⁹¹ *Daily Mirror*: 11/3/1942; p3.

¹⁹² Chang, Iris. (1997) *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*. Penguin Books, London. p221.

half civilised race, and in future will have to be treated as such.’¹⁹³ The *Yorkshire Post* editorial on the same day repeated and amplified the theme of a singular Japanese character:

The Japanese aim is evidently to destroy whatever bears the name of an enemy. It is an aim which fits in well with the Japanese philosophy, a philosophy which ascribes a kind of divinity, diffused through each and all of its members, to the Japanese race. Intoxicated by such a doctrine a Japanese airman may believe that he has every right to contribute to victory by the extermination of anything living on the enemy's side without asking if his victims are of any military significance.¹⁹⁴

Indiscriminate brutality had now become a defining characteristic ascribable to every member of ‘the Japanese race’, and would remain so in the press for the duration.

There was also the issue of self-censorship, which had been so clearly evinced during the abdication crisis, and the possibility of Governmental influence on how and what was reported. Official censorship was certainly applied before the war to the colonial press in Hong Kong, where Chinese language papers were proscribed from using epithets for the Japanese such as ‘dwarf pirates’ and ‘shrimp barbarians’.¹⁹⁵ This was one small part of what Colin Smith described as ‘the most blatant appeasement’ of Japan, which continued from Chamberlain’s and into Churchill’s premierships, and included an embargo on military shipments to the Chinese through Hong Kong from 1939, the closure in 1940 of the Burma Road and the withdrawal of most of the troops stationed in Shanghai and North China.¹⁹⁶ Given the solitary and desperate nature of Britain’s position by mid-1940 Smith’s analysis seems a little harsh, although such actions only served to increase perceptions of its imperial weakness and encouraged those Japanese pushing for further expansion.

Whilst the Government was no doubt keen to mitigate the potentially harmful effects of unfavourable press reports on its diplomacy with Japan in the pre-war period, there is little evidence to support any such overt influences. The *Mirror* and the *Picture Post* would both find

¹⁹³ *Manchester Guardian*: 29/12/1941; p6

¹⁹⁴ *Yorkshire Post*: 29/12/1941; p2.

¹⁹⁵ Snow, Philip. (2003) *The Fall of Hong Kong*. Yale University Press, London. p31.

¹⁹⁶ Smith, *Singapore Burning*, p27.

themselves in conflict with the wartime Government over certain issues, so it seems improbable that they would be likely to be cowed in peacetime. Even the Government's attempts to keep the lid on the publication of reports from the fall of Hong Kong, whilst negotiations were on-going about the exchange of diplomats, were only partially successful and were eventually swept away, albeit primarily by reports in the American press.

2.3.3. Newsreels.

In addition to the popular press, the British public were informed about the world through the medium of the cinema newsreels. Whilst the names of *Gaumont*, *British Movietone* and *Empire Newsreel* have faded with time, that of *British Pathé* has survived in an online archive.¹⁹⁷ A search using the term "Japanese" between 1937 and 1940 generated 172 film clips, mostly regarding the war in China, but also including a number of more pacific pursuits from civilian life. The tone of these newsreels followed a similar trajectory to that found in the press, even handed with regard to the Sino-Japanese conflict until the attacks on Pearl Harbour and Malaya, at which juncture the visual discourse took on a far more partisan and anti-Japanese outlook.

Typical of the pre 1941 output is a collection of clips that report on the war as 'a great conflict between Oriental powers.' No side is taken as the newsreels relate developments in China, frequently using film supplied by the Japanese military. There is considerable focus on western parochial interests, and the armed forces of Britain and America that are seen to be protecting them, particularly with regard to the International Zone in Shanghai, where Chinese civilians were searched to make sure they are not smuggling arms into the zone. This approach is encapsulated in the Editor's Note that introduces one of the clips: "Editor's Note: Further

¹⁹⁷ The National Lottery funded digitisation of its entire archive of over 90,000 clips in 2002.

fighting around Shanghai and on the Yangtse River leads great powers to take joint action for protection of nationals in danger zones while they seek to end conflict in the Far East."¹⁹⁸

Once the western powers became directly involved in the war the commentary takes on a strongly vituperative tone against the Japanese. The American commentator on a 'March of Time' reel entitled 'China Fights Back' talks of how "Hitler's ally", the Japanese Army led by "Tokyo's cocky militarists ... raped and ravaged" across China, earning the "contempt of the civilised world." At several points in the film the Japanese are represented in cartoon form as monstrous apes (one of which is wearing a sign saying 'Axis Powers'), and in contrast to the earlier films great emphasis is put on the heroic Chiang Kai-shek and his brave Chinese forces, and their need for heavy weapons from America so that they might better fight the enemy, the Japanese.¹⁹⁹

A British voiced clip titled "VENGEANCE! NOTHING LESS" from 1942 is even more strident in its message. The viewer is instructed to "Look closely at this man. He is the Emperor of Japan, whose forces have committed the appalling atrocities against British, Empire and Chinese troops and civilians, men and women, in Hong Kong", as an image of Hirohito on horseback is shown. As the action moves on to Japanese troops advancing, the narrator, his voice steadily increasing in anger, exhorts the audience that "these are the swine who bound and bayoneted our helpless soldiers in their hands... let the cry be vengeance! Bloody vengeance!"²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/world-faces-crisis-as-japan-and-china-clash-in-far/query/Japanese>

¹⁹⁹ <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/march-of-time-china-fights-back/query/Japanese>

This clip is archived as being from 1940 – this is clearly an error in the archiving process, perhaps understandable in the context of having digitised so many items in such a short space of time. In one shot of the film American officers are seen studying casualty figures up to June 1941, and the content and its tone clearly suggest a provenance that is post 7th December 1941.

²⁰⁰ <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/vengeance-nothing-less/query/vengeance+nothing+less>

2.3.4. Popular literature.

The working class consumption of books was increased during the 1930s by the advent of the 'twopenny libraries', the first of which was opened in Harlesden by Ray Smith in 1930. These institutions lent out books, primarily works of popular fiction, for 2d with no deposit or subscription required. By the end of the decade such institutions had become commonplace in working class areas and beyond, often as an adjunct to pre-existing businesses and shops. Their rapid growth has been described as 'an event of some significance in the history of reading.'²⁰¹

In the context of this study, popular fiction of the period and the historiography of race most frequently intersect in the work of Sax Rohmer, and in particular his Fu Manchu detective series, often seen as a significant contributor to the idea of a 'Yellow Peril.'²⁰² After a hiatus of fourteen years he resurrected the character in 1931, as the twopenny libraries started their rapid expansion, and published seven new volumes up to 1941, including *The Drums of Fu Manchu* in 1939²⁰³ and *The Island of Fu Manchu* in 1941.²⁰⁴ These works featured the highly essentialised Chinese arch-villain himself, ably supported by a variety of menacing characters, usually of Asian origins and orientalised construction. Indian Thugs, Burmese dacoits, Mongolian and Sumatran strong arm men and a West Dyak from Borneo were all recruited into Rohmer's pan-Asian gang of evildoers, occasionally supplemented by rogues from the Andaman Islands and Haiti.

Whilst there is no doubt that such stereotypical imagery, amplified in cinematic versions, could contribute to a sense of general antipathy to Asians, there are reasons for suggesting that, in

²⁰¹ Hilliard, Christopher. (2014) "The Twopenny Library: The Book Trade, Working-Class Readers, and 'Middlebrow' Novels in Britain, 1930–42." *Twentieth Century British History*. Vol. 25, pp200,211. In an example of class based paternalism he cites the concerns of the City of Westminster's Library Committee, that it would not be fulfilling its remit if 'readers of low cultural equipment' were to be abandoned to the new outlets. p212.

²⁰² See Clegg, Jenny. (1994) *Fu Manchu and the 'Yellow Peril': The Making of a Racist Myth*. Trentham Books, Stoke-on-Trent.

²⁰³ Rohmer, Sax (1939) *The Drums of Fu Manchu*. Cassell, London.

²⁰⁴ Rohmer, Sax (1941) *The Island of Fu Manchu*. Cassell, London.

respect of the BORs' outlooks on the Japanese, the effects may have been more limited.²⁰⁵

Despite Fu Manchu casting his recruitment net widely across the continent, Japanese members are notably absent from his gang. Indeed in *The Drums of Fu Manchu* the only character from Japan is Mr Osaki, a scientist who has come to Britain to gain weapons technology for his government, and is assassinated by the doctor.

A second factor that suggests Rohmer's influence was on the wane was provided by an article in the *Daily Mirror* in 1934, which reported on the growing twopenny library phenomenon. The head librarian at Ray Smith's original premises in Harlesden stated that the 'rising generation has very definite and different ideas about literature.' They want 'quick-fire storytelling about real things.' He continued to say that 'they don't even get thrilled by the Chinamen and dope dens that Sax Rohmer wrote about.'²⁰⁶ In this context Sax Rohmer's upper class heroes, bringing their colonial experience and patrician attitudes to bear upon the natives of Harlesden and Essex in his storylines, were of little interest to the twopenny library borrowers. After all, they were the natives of Harlesden and Essex themselves and evidently they had little interest in tales of interlopers from Belgravia. Whilst such works were no doubt part of the palette of influences that could contribute to the formation of views in the wider public that were now consuming them, in the context of the Japanese there is little evidence to suggest such a specific impact.

2.3.5. The Press and the Sino-Japanese War: Summary.

Given the grave nature of events in China, the popular media had the opportunity to denigrate Japanese actions on many occasions. Whilst the bombing of cities, and particularly Shanghai, received some fairly neutral coverage, most of the press was guilty by omission with regard to their lack of reporting of the outrages at Nanking. Following the attacks on Malaya and Pearl

²⁰⁵ The Chinese Government in the 1930s was so concerned by the unfavourable stereotyping that it attempted to get Hollywood film versions cancelled. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; Ward, Arthur Henry (pseud: Sax Rohmer) <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/view/article/39472>

²⁰⁶ *Daily Mirror*: 9/11/1934, p12.

Harbour the pendulum of press propagandising swung against Japan, and more vituperative and racialized representations became the norm. However, by that time the ill-fated 18th Division was already in convoy to Asia, their next information regarding the Japanese would come from their own officers.

2.4. Official Briefings and Informal Rumours.

Whilst the foregoing analysis suggests that press were unlikely as the major source of early antipathy and racialized characterisations, evidence from the papers suggests that such views were held by a sizeable part of the population. Such impressions were no doubt compounded in such men, and developed fresh in others, by the military briefings given on board the troopships by their officers, before arriving in Singapore. These sessions were widely reported by the soldiers and were consistent in their downplaying of the threat posed by the enemy, based upon a range of defects that afflicted the Japanese nation as a whole and were thus assumed to affect the ability of its individual fighting men. Sapper Coates provided a compact summary of such received wisdom in his poem, *Sam at War*:

23.

So we continued our half world trip,
Till one evening we had the tip,
That this time it was going to be the Jap,
They gave us the lowdown on this chap.

24.

No good at this, No good at that,
Very poor shots & as blind as a bat,
No good by day and worse by night,
Show him a bayonet, he'll run with fright.²⁰⁷

Such views were expressed, in part at least, in an ultimately misguided attempt to boost the confidence of the troops according to Cpl Henderson, who had the rare confidence to question

²⁰⁷ IWM: Coates.

the standard characterisations being presented and warn of their dangers.²⁰⁸ The briefings also reflected a wider sense of what John Ferris has referred to as ‘military ethno-centrism adulterated with racism’ that was prevalent within significant sections of the military hierarchy.²⁰⁹ This was implicitly recognised in a 1945 War Office booklet about “The Japanese Soldier”, which noted that: ‘Before the war started he was classified as a rather fine type of almost human ape, imitative, brave, but without originality, capable of fighting according to the set exercises of the book and easily beaten by the superior resources and initiative of the white races.’²¹⁰ However, even this post-hoc assessment, with some reference to essentialised national characteristics, seems more accurate than that actually given to the troops heading east in 1941. The War Office was perhaps at this time still unable to admit that it had misjudged the situation so badly, and was thus keen to provide what reads more like a contemporary (1945) description of the Japanese Soldier, in order to lay a smokescreen around their previous failings.

Such views were not however ubiquitous, nor were all briefings so erroneous and misleading. Brigadier Simson of the Royal Engineers was sent out by ship to Singapore in mid-1941, to take up the post of Chief Engineer at Malaya Command, with instructions from the War Office to stiffen the defences.

As senior officer on board I arranged lectures for the Army and RAF personnel. Among the reinforcements for Malaya were several British officers who were going out as Japanese interpreters. They knew much about the military, naval and air potential of Japan, and confirmed that we would find the Japanese a powerful, resourceful and aggressive opponent, if war started.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ IWM: Henderson; pp174-177.

²⁰⁹ Ferris, John. (1993) ““Worthy of Some Better Enemy?” The British Estimate of the Imperial Japanese Army, 1919-1941, and the Fall of Singapore.” *Canadian Journal of History*, Vol 28, p240.

²¹⁰ UKNA: WO 208/1447: “The Japanese Soldier.”

²¹¹ Simson, Ivan. (1970) *Singapore: too little, too late: Some aspects of the Malayan disaster in 1942*. Leo Cooper, London. p26.

Unfortunately for the men of the 18th Division who were sent out to Singapore later that year, such realistic and accurate appraisals were neither widespread nor provided, and Simson's subsequent attempts to bolster the defensive capabilities of the theatre were to flounder under the combined weight of institutional apathy, military inertia and poor communications. The last words of Cpl Henderson to his Captain regarding the misleading lectures had been to warn that 'once such a ploy is exposed, the men may never trust their leaders again.'²¹² The accuracy of this prediction would be found in the account of Private Carpenter. He noted with some vitriol the painful realisation that 'the truth as we discovered later was the opposite of what they had so glibly told us. Those two had either got loose from a loony house or they were the World's champion LIARS. They could not have been more wrong.'²¹³

As, contrary to most official expectations, the Japanese tide continued to flow down Malaya towards Singapore, the British imperial forces were in a usually chaotic retreat. Such confusion provided a fertile ground for the spreading of rumours regarding Japanese behaviour, in Hong Kong, Malaya, and then finally in Singapore itself. Whilst still on board the *USS Mount Vernon*, somewhere between Mombasa and Singapore, and several days after the fall of Hong Kong, Carpenter described the Japanese as 'murdering, raping, looting as they advanced and worst of all taking no prisoners.'²¹⁴ Whilst it is probable that this account may have benefitted from some hindsight, the strength of the rumour mill is given greater credence by the words of Henderson, who recalled the 'horror stories concerning the Japanese' on the retreat to Singapore. One of the platoons of the 5th Beds/Herts was rumoured to have eventually surrendered after hand to hand fighting:

The story as I heard it was that the Japs had tied their prisoners to the trees and then bayoneted them to death. ... At the time I dismissed this and the other stories we were hearing, as the kind of rubbish we could expect to find being peddled around in a tight situation such as the one we were in.²¹⁵

²¹² IWM: Henderson; p177.

²¹³ IWM: Carpenter; p12.

²¹⁴ IWM: Carpenter; 29/12/1941.

²¹⁵ IWM: Henderson; p250.

Rumour could also inform decisions as to whether to stay or try to escape from Singapore. L. Bdr. Grafton and his comrades 'took into consideration the uncivilised reputation that preceded the Japs from the very start of the war on December 6th. Stories of atrocities which tended to be believed, took on credence when we had been confronted by the massacre at Alexandra Hospital.'²¹⁶

This range of responses to the official briefings and informal rumours offer an insight into the mind-sets and attitudes of the troops. There were those, typified by Carpenter, who had initially accepted largely without question the information that they were receiving, and for some of whom this would have been re-enforcing pre-existing prejudices. As Grafton suggests, such reports had a fairly widespread traction amongst the men, and there were only a minority who would actively challenge the established narrative. Henderson typifies this latter group, his left-wing background no doubt helping to inform his suspicions as to the accuracy of the establishment line. In his account there are several acknowledgements of occasions where his analysis would subsequently prove incorrect, as in the reports of brutality that he had questioned on the retreat, and his honesty on such occasions lends credibility to the overall veracity of his memoir.

Henderson was not alone in his initial reticence to believe everything that was said about the Japanese and in this respect, somewhat ironically, the popular press had played a more demonstrable role than in the case of the caricatures, albeit over twenty years previously. Reports of German atrocities in 1914 had received wide circulation in the papers and the *Daily Mirror* was no exception. Headlines such as 'HUNS MASSACRE 80 CHILDREN' and 'MORE PICTORIAL EVIDENCE OF THE "GERM-HUNS" BRUTALITY' introduced readers to stories that

²¹⁶ IWM: Grafton; p3.

detailed events such as one where ‘Even women with tiny babies were brutally treated by the Kaiser’s Huns.’²¹⁷

In the 1920s such reports had come to be discredited as was confirmed by Private Dawson, a journalist in civilian life and a self-proclaimed socialist. Writing his memoir soon after the liberation he noted that ‘we were inclined to regard the stories we heard about their cruelty as being in the same category as the atrocity stories told of the Germans in the 1914-18 war.’²¹⁸ The ubiquity of such views would be amply demonstrated on the home front in early 1944, as the Government sought to publicise the conditions under which the POWs were suffering, and in which it had considerable difficulty in overcoming public scepticism.²¹⁹ Given that the men who surrendered in 1941 were not even born in 1914, and would have been young children in the 1920s, the persistence and reproduction of this memory (accurate or otherwise) demonstrates the power of inherited societal consciousness to pass seamlessly, if not always immutably, through the generations.

2.5. The Experience of Captivity.

Dawson’s initial forbearance towards his captors would eventually evaporate in the heat of the jungle, as he, like many others, suffered his Japanese epiphany on the Burma-Thailand

Railway:

We wanted to be fair. We persuaded ourselves that ours was the dispassionate view. That we were being sensible. But it is hard to remain either dispassionate or sensible when one is being continually beaten for failing to accomplish tasks which are entirely

²¹⁷ *Daily Mirror*; 15/9/1914; p2; 12/9/1914; p7.

²¹⁸ IWM: Dawson, S. (Docs 3156) p37. More recently John Ramsden has written of such accounts of German brutality that ‘while these were exaggerated, they were not entirely fanciful.’ Ramsden, John. (2006; 2007 edn) *Don’t Mention The War: The British and the Germans since 1890*. Abacus, London. p111. See also Horne, John, and Kramer, Alan. (2002) *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial*. Yale University Press, New Haven.

²¹⁹ Kraljic, Tatjana. (2005) *Forgotten Armies: British and American Troops in Southeast Asia and the Brutalisation of Warfare, 1942-45*. Doctoral Thesis; London School of Economics and Political Science. pp70-72.

beyond one's strength. And so our opinions changed. We found the stories told of Japanese kicking Chinese women to death in the streets of Singapore the day after we had capitulated more easy to believe. We had always disliked the Japanese but had argued that it was born of misunderstanding. Now we began to hate them. And hate once developed grew rapidly until we hated the whole race. And we shall continue to hate them. That day decided us. From being misunderstood fellow humans they became, as we flung ourselves wearily to rest that night, what we always regarded them as being afterwards – "little yellow bastards".²²⁰

As with Grafton, bitter experience had acted to confirm earlier rumours and undermine his previous attempts to equitably rationalise his situation. In this passage, the sentiments of which he repeats several times elsewhere in his account, Dawson seems to be exhibiting a sense of liberal guilt regarding his earlier judgement of the Japanese, and is attempting to exorcise it. Despite his earlier more nuanced perspectives, he is now asserting that 'we always disliked the Japanese'. In responding to the anger that he feels as a result of his previous naivety, he has re-directed it with interest at the nearest target, the object of his misconceptions, the Japanese. In a further attempt to mitigate his own personal sense of responsibility he uses the first person plural, more in an effort to share the sense of culpability than as an acknowledgement of any widespread distribution of his initially tolerant outlook.

In a similar vein Henderson attempted to rationalise the behaviour of the guards, particularly as it grew steadily worse on the Railway:

A general response to this increased violence from our troops was to put it down to national characteristics; to be Japanese was to be sadistic. I and the remainder of my comrades opposed this mindless thinking at every opportunity but in doing so we had to be careful not to become apologists for the Japanese whose behaviour certainly needed some explaining.²²¹

For Henderson, as a communist, the human race was 'biologically indivisible', and thus 'national characteristics' were a gross generalisation and an anathema to both him and his fellow party members in the camps. However, even he would hint at national traits when he

²²⁰ IWM: Dawson; pp147-148.

²²¹ IWM: Henderson; p359.

noted in a Montesquieuan fashion that 'people who are the products of widely different environments will have adapted to these environments both physically and mentally.'²²² Whilst he exemplified the physiological differences with his reference to the varying incidence of melanin in skin, he made no attempt to ascribe a resulting effect on mentality and hence avoided contradicting and questioning his core beliefs, in the search for a solution to such an intractable problem. It was an exercise that challenged even his well-developed sense of reason and his considerable ability to rationalise the situation he found himself in.

I have to admit that although my personal belief in our common heritage has never been shaken, the behaviour of the Japanese did take some understanding. In the discussions that were constantly going on in the camp I was often hard-pressed to counter the argument that the Japanese were of different origins from the remainder of the human race.²²³

An indication of just how hard pressed he was in arguing his position is to be found in the subsequent paragraph, where he details the dietary based analysis of one of his colleagues, who was known for his sense of repartee. Whilst acknowledging that the Japanese were 'human like the rest of us', George Haywood blamed thousands of years of eating rice and their captors implicit jealousy of the POWs' previous consumption of 'real food like potatoes and cabbage and beef and steamed apple puddings', for the treatment being meted out. 'We're the first proper eaters they've had in their power. No wonder they take every opportunity to kick the living shit out of us.'²²⁴

It is telling that Dawson and Henderson, two of the most initially equitable of the men, found their experience of the Railway so challenging to their sense of tolerance. If even they found themselves undergoing such changes in outlook, it is not surprising that the rest of the cohort would have had such a Japanophobic perspective. It is also worth noting that despite the fact that many of the men, like Dawson, developed a profound antipathy against the Japanese,

²²² For a discussion of Montesquieu's theory that climate and physical conditions could determine human behaviour see; Richter, Melvin. (1976) "An Introduction to Montesquieu's 'An Essay on the Causes That May Affect Men's Minds and Characters'." *Political Theory*, Vol 4, pp132-138.

²²³ IWM: Henderson; p373.

²²⁴ IWM: Henderson; p373.

most of them, like Dawson, also recorded at least one example of 'that rare phenomenon – a decent Japanese.' Indeed he noted that he had come across several such 'exceptions to the rule' during his captivity, indicating that such figures were perhaps not quite as exceptional as he initially suggested.²²⁵

Another example of sympathetic Japanese behaviour comes from Sgt E. Davies, who having avoided the Railway, was eventually shipped to Japan. In Muroran Camp in the Hakodate area he initially suffered 'constant beatings, kickings and bashings.' The arrival of Lt Col. Emoto to take command of the Hakodate camps led to a complete change of regime: 'He speaks fluent English and seems to be pro-British. Does all in his power to help us. Gets us more rice, canteens and clothing & looks into any request that we ask of him. He stops beatings and slappings by guards and honchos.' Not surprisingly, given Emoto's addressing of the twin issues of food and brutality, the POW officers commanding the camps sent him a letter at the end of hostilities thanking him for his 'exemplary treatment of our personnel ... [and] the numerous kindnesses' that he had shown to the men.²²⁶ Such good Japanese were frequently viewed through a lens of western religious or cultural affinity; Dawson refers to one of his favoured guards as 'a Christian', whilst Davies records that Emoto spoke fluent English. Dawson refers to another of his reasonable guards, a Japanese-American mini-cab driver who had the misfortune to be in Japan on holiday when the war started, as having 'much sympathy with our western way of our life'.²²⁷

For those POWs who were shipped to Japan there were also contacts with Japanese out of uniform. In this context it is instructive to return to the cases of Parry and Houghton, the diarists who exhibited early antipathy towards the Japanese military, and whose negative perspectives had only been enhanced by their experiences of captivity. They both commented

²²⁵ IWM Dawson; p187; p195-196.

²²⁶ IWM: Davies E.W. (Docs 3656) November 43; March 44.

²²⁷ IWM: Dawson; p132.

favourably regarding the men crewing the ships that transported them. For Parry, on board the *Hakasoka Maru*, 'The crew as far as Nips went, were an agreeable crowd ... [and] were by far and away the most sympathetic and decent Japs we ever came across.'²²⁸

When arriving in Japan they received a similarly unexpected sympathetic response from the civilian population. On disembarking at Suimonseri, Houghton noted that the 'people [are] so courteous though examining us in a shy sort of way.'²²⁹ Similarly, in transit to his new camp at Sendai, Parry recorded that 'Japs and women stood up for us in Tokyo's overhead railway.'²³⁰ Whilst pre-war Japanese society had a reputation for politeness, such acts must have seemed a profound contradiction to the behaviour of its military in the camps. Such sympathy was reciprocated by Houghton and Parry, who, in common with many of their comrades, noted that the allied blockade was having a widespread effect on civilians, who were visibly suffering the effects of hunger.

Of course not all civilian contacts were so civil, as Clifford Bailey recalled from a stopover in Tokyo in October 1944. Lined up for a propaganda photograph, his group were abused and spat at whilst children threw stones at them. Even in this situation he demonstrated some sense of empathy, suggesting that such behaviour was "understandable given the air raids", although at this time the Strategic Air Campaign was in its infancy, and small in scale compared to the devastation that would occur the following year.²³¹ Such negative experiences with the Japanese non-combatants were however rare, and the presence of more positive reports and the people that they came from, are indicative of a more nuanced outlook on the "Japanese" as a whole people than the established narrative, and indeed many of the individual accounts, would present on an initial reading.

²²⁸ IWM: Parry; The *Hakasoka Maru*; pp3-6. For many the journey would prove far less amenable, and the ships were the second largest source of fatalities in captivity, mostly as a result of drowning after Allied submarine and air attacks sank the vessels; see MacArthur, Brian. (2005) *Surviving the Sword: Prisoners of the Japanese 1942-1945*. Time Warner, London. pp325-343.

²²⁹ IWM: Houghton; 28/6/1944.

²³⁰ IWM: Parry; 9/8/1944.

²³¹ IWM: Bailey; Reel6.

Whilst the preceding section has served to highlight some of the complexities of the POWs' experience, and to question the validity of assumptions as to its uniformity, the generality of a negative attitude towards the Japanese, fed by frequent hunger, overwork and low level (as well as in some cases more harsh) brutality is undeniable. Under such circumstances it is no surprise that eventually even the most tolerant of servicemen would be affected by a sense of antipathy to their captors. For some this reflected pre-existing attitudes, whilst for others it would be as a result of the transformative experience of captivity. Whilst there has been little historiographical discussion of such effects within the POW discourse, there are some parallels to be found in the field of research into the brutalisation of warfare and combat motivation, in which the relative importance of pre-existing societal prejudice as the source of antipathy is contrasted with that of the transformative power of the experience of war and of military service. Craig Cameron typifies the former school of thought. When writing about the First Marine Division in the Pacific War, he suggests that the American troops were already imbued with 'sweeping stereotypes of the Japanese character akin to those prevalent in pre-war American society as a whole', and that such racist images 'were as basic to most marines as their rifles.'²³² Such pre-determined outlooks are asserted to have underpinned the ability of these marines to indulge in the brutality of what John Dower referred to as *War Without Mercy*.²³³

Whilst such theory may possess some explanatory power in such a binary situation, where historically specific racialised relations exist, it becomes more problematic in an equally violent theatre like that in Burma, where pre-existing racial animosities were largely absent. The multi-national nature of the British imperial forces in the 14th Army, and the religious and caste differentiations within its largest component, the Indian Army, mitigate any suggestion of a

²³² Cameron, Craig M. (1994) *American Samurai: Myth, Imagination and the Conduct of Battle in the First Marine Division, 1941-1951*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. p125.

²³³ Dower, *War Without Mercy*. For an example of such an approach in the European theatre, see: Bartov, Omer. (1985) *The Eastern Front, 1941-1945: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare*. MacMillan, Basingstoke.

universally held antecedent antipathy. In this context Tarak Barkawi has argued against the primacy of ethnicity as an explanation for combat violence, proposing that for the troops in Burma the process of identity construction occurred only once they had arrived in the army, and it was re-enforced through combat, 'rather than being pre-given by civilian society.' For him 'ethnic relations were shaped and conditioned by military organisation and wartime experience.'²³⁴ With specific reference to British troops in Burma, Barkawi uses the assessments of the War Staff at the India Office to suggest that: 'Before the sudden entry of Japan into the war, the average British soldier knew little or nothing of the Japanese', and that it was only after contact in combat that they developed 'significant animosity' towards them.²³⁵

At first glance it would appear that there is evidence to suggest that both mechanisms were at work in the prison camps. Despite a total lack of previous contacts, some of the men exhibited an early antipathy towards the Japanese, indicative of pre-existing societal sources for such antagonism, evidence of which has been demonstrated to be in the popular press, if not of it, in the pre-war period. Both schools of thought utilise the issue of homogeneity, or lack of it, as a part of their rationale, Cameron asserting that the racial binary of the war in the Pacific was a cause of brutality, whilst Barkawi argues that the multi-cultural scenario in Burma precludes antecedent racism as a factor. The men of the 18th Division were largely (although not exclusively) drawn from East Anglia, making them ethnically a considerably more uniform population than Cameron's marines, and thus theoretically even more susceptible to his concept of societal stereotyping. There are however weaknesses in such a simplistic approach as applied to this situation. Early antipathy was by no means ubiquitous, and even amongst those who demonstrated it there was a large proportion who were writing after the war, and thus potentially informed by the negative experiences of captivity.

²³⁴ Barkawi, "Peoples, "Homelands, and Wars?", p149; p162:

For a similar analysis of British and American forces in Burma see also Kraljic, "Forgotten Armies:"

²³⁵ Barkawi; "Peoples, Homelands and Wars", p158.

Barkawi's model for the development of antipathy in combat troops bears closer comparison to that of the POWs. Initially the men exhibited a near total ignorance of the Japanese, apart from a loose sense of colonial and orientalist racial superiority amongst some that may be suggested from their contemporary and post hoc writings. Their first major education as to their opponents would be the 'morale boosting' military lectures that they received before reaching Singapore. The second lesson, in contradiction to those briefings, followed rapidly in the days and weeks leading to the surrender, and although there was some fertile ground in which rumours could develop, much of the antipathy from this episode was directed at their officers. It would be the experience of captivity that would prove to be the primary cause of anti-Japanese attitudes, an experience that would eventually test even the most politically or religiously open-minded prisoners to the limits of their tolerance.

2.6. Redemption and the Resumption of Western Hegemony.

As their ordeal ended, in August (and for some in remote locations, September) of 1945, many of the men would attempt to rediscover a sense of this tolerance. As relief supplies were air-dropped to the eagerly waiting former prisoners, some loads missed their target and landed outside the camps, and needed to be retrieved from the civilian populations, who were in many locations, including Japan, in almost as bad a situation as the men themselves. Supplies of food and clothes that were surplus to requirements were frequently shared with the locals, and even with those few guards that remained. L. Bdr Toze, whose war ended in Korea, noted in his diary that women and children were mobbing the lads for cigarettes and gum and that 'we are loathe to accept money for purchases.' A Japanese guard was caught trying to steal some of the parachute material: having been put in the cells for ten minutes and then made to

carry water buckets for two hours, the astonished guard was then 'given a big meal and as much parachute as he wanted. They can't understand that sort of treatment.'²³⁶

For a few of the POWs at the end of captivity such magnanimity was narrated through, and indeed was seen as a result of, a reversion to the seemingly redemptive and orientalist visions of western cultural superiority. Carpenter, on a train to a transit camp in Bangkok, recalled coming upon a group of bedraggled Japanese POWs who were being used to load wood for trains. Some of them were suffering from dysentery and too weak to move, they lay in their own waste, a situation that would no doubt have held some resonance for the now liberated British who gave them food, water and cigarettes.

We had suffered 3 ½ years of this ourselves, but unlike the Japs we showed compassion to our former enemies. That is the difference between civilised Christians and inhuman heathens.... All the terrible things we had dreamed of doing to our captors if we ever had the chance, well here was our chance, but not a single one of us thought about revenge. That is compassion!²³⁷

Although this story occurs in a number of accounts at differing times, and thus, not for the first time in Carpenter's account, may be somewhat apocryphal, this does not detract from its use in this context as an indicator of the power of resurgent western values, linked again in this example to the civilising influence of Christianity. What tends to lend its message of moral superiority less substance in this particular case is the fact that the same author offers a somewhat conflicting account of allied compassion at Camp Tamuan at the surrender. Here several British paratroopers entered the camp, having been covertly observing it with a view to organising resistance to any attempts to kill the prisoners. Despite their instructions forbidding any reprisals on the guards, the senior officer of the rescue party, on seeing the condition of the prisoners, is alleged to have given them a half hours grace 'and turned a blind eye to the proceedings. I suppose this will be frowned upon by the do gooders and they will call us animals. My answer is simple – they should have been there.' Whilst still awaiting departure

²³⁶ IWM: Toze, A.V. (Docs1133) 3/9/1945; 10/9/1945.

²³⁷ IWM: Carpenter; p67.

orders at Tamuan some three weeks later, a group of prisoners were brought back to the camp from a jungle work party, their beatings by the Korean guards a sign that this group were unaware of the end of hostilities. 'The Korean guards ... never stood a chance' before order was restored by the paratroopers.²³⁸

Wirless Operater Oakley, awaiting repatriation from Singapore, experienced conflicting emotions on a visit to the harbour. Walking with a fellow POW they paused 'to watch with uncontrolled glee some Jap soldiers being made to work clearing debris at the rate they previously demanded of us.' An Australian guard wandered over, and offered to turn his back if they wanted to exact some revenge. When they both declined his offer, the guard knocked a Japanese prisoner unconscious with his rifle butt regardless. For Oakley, who had been happy to enjoy the reversal of roles in the context of work, this was a disturbing step too far: 'Although we had witnessed similar Jap viciousness on a regular basis, we both found it most unsettling that our side could be just as depraved.'²³⁹

Whilst there was undoubtedly revenge and retaliation in a number of locations, frequently involving the victorious allied troops and their new Japanese prisoners, for most of the POWs survival outweighed any immediate passion for vengeance. One of the main emotions was relief, often joyful, as Private Dixon remembered; 'this to me was not the time to retaliate but to rejoice.'²⁴⁰ At other places the relief was more subdued, expressed with a mute sense of numbness. 'The truck pulled out of camp. We watched it go in silence. From our men came no shouts of anger, no threats of violence, no demonstration of anti-Japanese feeling. ... The silence said it all.'²⁴¹

Many of the accounts also went silent upon repatriation, as the former prisoners attempted to re-adjust to freedom and civilian life again. It would be some time before ex-POWs,

²³⁸ IWM: Carpenter; p66.

²³⁹ IWM: Oakley; pp50-51.

²⁴⁰ IWM: Dixon; p135.

²⁴¹ IWM: Henderson; p580.

individually through their memoirs and collectively in the associations that sprang up in the post-war period, would find their voice again.

2.7. Conclusions.

The widespread antipathy of British POWs for their Japanese captors was not a uniform condition, and varied in both its development and its origins. For some a pre-existing sense of racial superiority and antagonism was present from the start, whilst in others the development of enmity would be the result of their bitter experience of captivity.

Those servicemen who exhibited early antipathy did so through the use of racialized epithets and imagery, with some suggesting that the press were a source of such images. Detailed scrutiny of the newspapers of the period found only a little evidence to support such a connection. Indeed, when examined in the context of two substantial opportunities to denigrate Japan, the widespread movement to boycott Japanese goods and the Nanking Atrocity, the press was neutral to a degree that verged on being sympathetic to that nation's cause. It was not until the attack on the Allies in 1941 that the press propaganda machine swung into action against the new enemy, by which time its opportunity to influence the men on convoy to their new destination in Singapore had largely passed.

The pages of the newspapers, whilst not leading anti-Japanese feeling in the pre-war period, did however on rare occasions reflect it. The letters sent to the *Daily Mirror* in response to the attack on Shanghai in 1937 shine a bright light through a narrow window onto the selected views of its ordinary readership. The double page spread featuring the 'ape cabinet' in the *Picture Post* was a more explicit, if equally rare opportunity for a reader's response to indicate the acceptance that such ideas had with elements of the public at large. A further confirmation of the widespread traction of this imagery was its more common usage as soon as hostilities

opened. The use of simian and other racialised cartoons and tropes in the Jane strip, and those that followed it into the war of print, indicate that the press knew that such images would be readily received and understood by their readerships. Whilst the men of the 18th Division were not exposed to the newly antagonistic pages of the British press, they were subjected to similarly essentialised and thus far more dangerous misrepresentations of their awaiting foe, the Japanese serviceman.

Not all of the men were taken in by such evocations however, with some, particularly those with a left of centre outlook, questioning not only such imagery but also the briefings and the rumours that followed them into combat. Such tolerant perspectives would eventually be tested to their limits and succumb to the harsh reality that most faced in captivity. This experiential development of antipathy offers some parallels to the process of combat motivation and antagonism, as suggested by authors such as Barkawi and Kraljic for the 14th Army in the Burma theatre of operations.

Whilst the continuum between early and later developing antipathy provides a useful model for tracking the trajectory of negative attitudes to the Japanese, there are very human contradictions and complexities contained within it, and there is a danger that in oversimplifying the situation, it becomes an entirely singular experience. Whilst this chapter has focussed on the development of antipathy and some of its causes, it is important to recognise that there were a wide variety of POW experiences, not all of them negative.

One of the major paradoxes involves an oft stated hatred for all Japanese, in accounts that had frequent positive references to both civilians and servicemen that would seem to contradict such all-encompassing assertions. Even the most vitriolic accounts contain some such sympathetic expression, the cases of Houghton and Parry being rich and remarkable examples of just such varied responses. Some of the more cerebral accounts even acknowledge the intellectual inconsistency of such a position, whilst continuing to adopt it. In Dawson's account

the strength of feeling generated by the worst aspects of the experience of captivity served to overpower the not uncommon more positive incidents.

Before the war the press had portrayed a differentiated Japanese population, separating the militarists from the rest of society, including the Emperor, Parliament and the civilian masses. Even the officers were separated from the ordinary soldiers. Once hostilities commenced the whole Japanese population became one amorphous entity, to be defeated. For many of the POWs the “Japanese” were similarly amalgamated, regardless of the better elements that they came across and the variety of conditions encountered, and became an ordeal to be survived. It was the Japanese command structure that held ultimate power over the multi-national force of men that guarded them, and thus these few men came to represent Japan as a whole in many of their eyes.

Much of the received version of how the POWs viewed their world of captivity has been informed by the development of a post-war discourse that has come to be defined by a largely singular memory of that incarceration. The final chapter will examine the post-war period, through the often divergent strands of individual reconciliation and mass media representations of captivity.

Chapter 3. 'Allies of a kind?'²⁴²

3.1 Introduction.

The group with whom the BORs would have most contact during captivity were their fellow prisoners of war. Whilst the respective allied commands would try to keep them apart for organisational reasons, the different nationalities were frequently sharing the same camps and work parties. In this chapter the relations between the British POWs and their former comrades-in-arms will be examined to see how international relations fared under the stresses and strains of incarceration. Such inter-communal relations have been posited by Australian historian Rosalind Hearder as a gap in the existing literature:

There is a lack of broad scholarship in cross-cultural aspects of captivity between the various allied forces. Major studies tend to follow national lines, with relationships between the Allied groups only mentioned occasionally, and usually perpetuate stereotypes about the behaviours and motivations of various groups, without regard to differences of location or camp, standards of health, or leadership.²⁴³

This chapter seeks to make a small start in addressing this lacuna, whilst providing further insights in to the mind-sets of the British prisoners.

In general the different nationalities rubbed along together, the needs of prison life and the shared antipathy to the Japanese providing the common bond that linked them together. Contained within the accounts and the literature there was however one major exception to this picture of allied harmony, the Dutch. Such antipathy was by no means ubiquitous; there were as many men who had good things to say as there were those whose perspectives were negative, but whatever the outlook, this particular location of antagonism was widely recognised. It is the British outlooks on the Dutch that provide the focus of this chapter, and a variety of reasons for the tensions between them are identified, including a perceived lack of

²⁴² Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*.

²⁴³ Hearder, "Memory, methodology, and myth."

fighting spirit, linguistic difference and the problematic locations of food and work. I propose however that the most common source of antipathy, where it was expressed, was racial difference, a factor that could also lie submerged below some of the other reasons that were articulated. The majority of Dutch prisoners were Eurasian, and it was this aspect that was a key factor for many of those BORs who expressed negative attitudes towards them.

Following this introduction a back-ground survey is provided of the overall allied POW situation, including the non-European servicemen captured at the various allied surrenders in Asia during the early months of the war. British relations with their English speaking allies, from Australia, Canada and the USA are briefly considered, before a lengthier analysis of those with the Dutch POWs. The definition of being Dutch in the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) at that time, and the demographics of the Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger (KNIL), the Dutch Colonial Army, are clarified as the starting point in elucidating why race was the single most common factor in a persistent antipathy from some of the BORs towards the Dutch during captivity. The lesser factors of pre-captivity obstructiveness and fighting spirit, and those of post surrender jealousies in the camps are then considered before the concluding remarks.

3.2. Prisoners of War: A General Survey.

Between the fall of Hong Kong in late December 1941 and the surrender on the Bataan peninsula in the Philippines in early April of 1942, the Japanese had captured large swathes of territory as well as over 280,000 allied servicemen, including around 140,000 colonial troops. There had been two main thrusts, the first down the Malayan peninsula and thence into the western zone of the NEI, whilst the other had conquered the Philippine archipelago en-route to the eastern part of the NEI and the Pacific island chains. The thrusts down the Malayan peninsula and into the NEI were responsible for the vast majority of British and all of the Dutch

and Australian captives, as well as a much smaller number of Americans, most of who were captured during the campaign in the Philippines. A lesser number of British in Burma, and British and Canadians in Hong Kong, also entered captivity. After these initial successes, with the exception of some unfortunate airmen, there would be few further prisoners to be taken as the momentum of the war quickly turned against the Japanese following the crucial naval and air encounters, in the Coral Sea and at Midway in May and June of 1942. Despite the swift halting of the Japanese juggernaut, it would take three and a half years and two atomic bombs before the men taken prisoner in those early days would be released from captivity. As Table 2 shows, many of them never came back.

*Table 2. "Western" POW numbers and mortality, 1941-1945.*²⁴⁴

	Prisoners of War		Total Deaths		Death Rate (%)	
British	50,016	(50,016)	12,433	(12,433)	25	(25)
Dutch	42,233	(37,000)	8,500	(8,500)	20	(23)
American	25,600	(21,580)	10,650	(7,107)	41	(33)
Australian	22,376	(21,726)	8,031	(7,412)	36	(34)
Canadian	1,684	(1,691)	267	(273)	16	(16)
Total	141,909	(132,134)	39,881	(35,756)	28	(27)

(Figures in brackets are from the Tokyo War Crimes Trial.)

²⁴⁴ Hack, Carl, and Blackburn, Kevin, "Japanese-occupied Asia from 1941 to 1945: one occupier, many captivities and memories." in Hack and Blackburn, *Forgotten Captives*, p4. This table represents a modification of the figures presented in the Tokyo War Crimes Trial record, in that it includes the later upward revisions to the national figures of; Dutch POWs by de Jong, L. (2002) *The Collapse of a Colonial Society: The Dutch in Indonesia during the Second World War*. KITLV, Leiden. p272; American POWs by Kerr, E. Bartlett. (1985) *Surrender and Survival: The Experience of American POWs in the Pacific 1941-1945*. William Morrow, New York. p339; Australian POWs by McCormack and Nelson, "The Bridge on the River Kwai and King Rat", in; McCormack and Nelson, *The Burma-Thailand Railway*, p162; Canadian POWs in Johnson, Gregory A. "The Canadian Experience of the Pacific War: Betrayal and forgotten captivity." in Hack and Blackburn, *Forgotten Captives*, p133.

3.2.1. Differences in mortality.

There has been little analysis of the differences in mortality rates experienced by the POWs of the different allied nations in Asia. This is perhaps not a surprise given the national focus of most authors and the consequent dearth of comparative studies that bridge such boundaries. At some specific locations, where the relative figures are available, attempts have been made to identify the causes of national variations. An example of this is "F" Force, the 7,062 men sent to the Railway from Changi in April of 1943, consisting of 3,662 Australians and 3,400 Britons. Within a year 1,060 of the Australians and 2,036 of the British had died, 29% and 60% respectively. McCormack ascribes this difference to the fact that the British authorities had believed the Japanese when they stated that this was a posting that required no work or marching, and thus selected men who were already sick. The Australians were less trusting and picked the fittest men they could find.²⁴⁵ This variation of mortality rates, contradicting those at the population level, was it seems to do with the specific criteria for selection as opposed to any intrinsic national characteristics. At the Burma end of the Railway, in the No5 Group of prisoners, the demographics of mortality were also in contrast to the overall figures, with the "Asian Dutch" troops suffering 28% losses, compared to 21% of Americans and only 14% of Australians.²⁴⁶

Such examples demonstrate the complexities introduced by situational factors into any attempt to rationalise the theatre wide figures. A more useful approach, although one still fraught with issues of numerical accuracy, is to identify the key general locations of mortality and there were two of these. The Burma-Thailand Railway was the final resting place for at least 12,399 prisoners, and probably several thousand more.²⁴⁷ The other major source of mortality was the Japanese transport ships used to move the POW labour forces to new

²⁴⁵ McCormack, Gavan. "Apportioning the blame: Australian trials for railway crimes." In; McCormack and Nelson, *The Burma-Thailand Railway*, pp100-101.

²⁴⁶ Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p166.

²⁴⁷ Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p198.

workplaces. Whilst there were a considerable number of men who died due to the poor conditions on board, the large majority of deaths occurred when the “hellships” were sunk by the Allies. Exact numbers are again elusive, the figures ranging from a Japanese estimate of 10,800 (out of 50,000 so transported)²⁴⁸ to the 22,001 claimed by Van Waterford.²⁴⁹

Notwithstanding the lack of precision in the statistics, it is reasonable to assume that around two thirds of the POW deaths in Asia occurred at these locations. These figures suggest at least a partial explanation for the national cohort with the lowest mortality rates. The Canadians, captured at Hong Kong, benefitted from not working on the Railway and from the fact that the four ships that took them to Japan made that shorter journey successfully.²⁵⁰

Less clear cut is why the Dutch suffered relatively less overall than the other allies (excepting the Canadians), having experienced both the Railway and the hellships.²⁵¹ This has been attributed to their greater resistance to tropical diseases, supposedly inherent in those of local descent, and accumulated by those of European origin during their time in the Indies. Whilst there is some validity in this argument with regard to the benefits of local ecological knowledge in providing extra food sources and the utility of prior experience of tropical medicine, as well as the systematic vaccination against some conditions, there are however a number of factors that mitigate the validity of such a blanket assertion. As already noted, the “Asian Dutch” had the highest mortality rate on the Burma end of the Railway, despite their prior vaccinations and greater botanical knowledge.

²⁴⁸ Daws, Gavan. (1994: 2005 edn) *Prisoners of the Japanese*. Simon and Schuster, London.p297.

²⁴⁹ Waterford, Van. (1994) *Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II: Statistical History, Personal Narratives and Memorials Concerning POWs in Camps and on Hellships, Civilian Internees, Asian Slave Laborers and Others Captured in the Pacific Theater*. McFarland and Company, Jefferson, North Carolina. p168. Of this number at least 4,120 were Javanese labourers on board the *Junyo Maru*, sunk off Sumatra in September 1944. 1,520, mostly Dutch, POWs also perished after *HMS Tradewind* torpedoed the ship. Waterford was himself one of the few survivors.

²⁵⁰ Roland, Charles G. (2001) *Long Night's Journey into Day: Prisoners of War in Hong Kong and Japan, 1941-1945*. Wilfred Laurier Univ Press., pp209-215.

²⁵¹ Dutch losses on the Railway of 3,100, and a further 4,000 on the ships are suggested in: de Jong, L. (2002) *The Collapse of a Colonial Society: The Dutch in Indonesia during the Second World War*. KITLV, Leiden. p376.

Even more problematic in this respect is the primary assumption that local people were innately better equipped to deal with tropical diseases. One of the main inconsistencies in this assumption is to be found on the railroads. On the Burma-Thailand Railway a much larger proportion of locally recruited labourers died than did POWs²⁵². On the less well known, but equally deadly, Paken Baroe Railway in Sumatra, the ratio of civilian deaths was even higher. Of the 22,000 Indonesian labourers (*romusha*) who made it to the railway (thousands had already died when the *Jonyu Maru* was sunk), only 5,000 survived, a mortality rate of around 77%, as compared to that for the POWs of 14%.²⁵³ Whilst the *romusha* certainly died in their thousands of the same combination of disease, malnutrition and overwork as did the POWs, meaningful comparisons are again rendered problematic by the differing conditions that the two groups found themselves in. The limited camp organisation and medical care that was available to the POWs gave them a far better chance of survival than their civilian counterparts, who were treated with even less consideration by the Japanese. Local populations, including the NEI Dutch, were intrinsically no more immune to disease than their western counterparts.

Whilst the Americans were only present on the Railway in small numbers, their initial period of captivity on the Philippines was more testing than that experienced by most of their allies. The Bataan Death March was followed by an extremely harsh first few months at Camp O'Donnell, where one officer calculated that 17% of the Americans who survived the death march perished between the end of April and the start of July, 1942.²⁵⁴ Their losses on the transport ships were almost certainly greater than those suffered by the other allies, as a higher proportion of their POWs were sent to Japan.²⁵⁵ Similar specific locations of mortality helped

²⁵² See Chapter 5 for a more detailed exposition of the condition of Asian Labourers on the Railway.

²⁵³ de Jong, *The Collapse*, p385

²⁵⁴ Olson, John E. (1985) *O'Donnell: Andersonville of the Pacific*. Lake Quivara, KS: pp1-6. Cited in U.S. Prisoners of War and Civilian American Citizens Captured and Interned by Japan in World War II: The Issue of Compensation by Japan. Congressional Research Service Report for Congress.

http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/usprisoners_japancomp.htm#the

²⁵⁵ Waterford, *Prisoners*, pp153-168.

to inflate figures of Australian mortality; Hank Nelson estimated that 35% of those who died did so on the Railway, 23% in Borneo (the location of the Sandakan Death March at the end of the war), 20% at sea, 9% on Ambon and 13% at other locations.²⁵⁶

Such specific additional locations offer some explanation for the higher losses incurred by both nations as compared to the British, but such factors can be at best only indicative. Qualitative and quantitative issues await any historian brave enough to attempt a treatment of this subject. The difficulty in ascertaining precise causes of death in many locations, and the identification of differing logistical and organisational conditions, both geographically and temporally, make theatre wide international comparisons problematic. There is a very large (but far from complete) set of data regarding different sites and causes of mortality, in need of integration into a, if not fully comprehensive, then at least a more comprehensible corpus. These constraints go some way to explaining the lack of comparative studies to be found in the academic literature.

3.2.2. Colonial POWs and Japanese segregation.

In addition to the 140,000 Western prisoners, the Japanese also captured a similar number of soldiers serving in the colonial armies of Britain, the USA and the NEI. The Japanese promptly separated the British and Dutch prisoners from their white officers, and adopted a carrot and stick approach to redirecting their loyalties. The Indian Army had provided around half of the British rank and file in Malaya and Singapore and shortly after the surrender most of its 60,000 captured soldiers were gathered together at Farrer Park in Singapore and urged to join the Indian National Army.²⁵⁷ There are differing estimates as to how successful such inducements were; numbers ranging from 20,000 to 30,000 men have been suggested.²⁵⁸ For those who did

²⁵⁶ Nelson, Hank. "Measuring the railway." In McCormack and Nelson, *The Burma-Thailand Railway*, p20.

²⁵⁷ Douds, G.J. "Indian POWs in the Pacific, 1941-45." In Hack and Blackburn, *Forgotten Captives*, p60.

²⁵⁸ Douds (p60) suggests 20,000, based on wartime British government documents, which would be a third of his overall total. In contrast, Peter Stanley has proposed that 30,000 were recruited, and constituted three quarters of a total of 40,000 Indian prisoners. Stanley, Peter. (2002) "Great in

not take the Emperor's yen, an uncertain future awaited. Many of those who chose not to sign up found themselves sent to the outer reaches of the Japanese domain, primarily to New Guinea, New Britain and Bougainville, where towards the end of the war some of them became the victims of Japanese cannibalism, as the allied stranglehold on shipping left outlying enemy garrisons in a state of starvation.²⁵⁹

Some 23,000 non-European Dutch troops went through the same process of separation and around 15,000 were recruited to Japanese forces, in this case as *heiho*, in auxiliary units formed to support the Japanese military.²⁶⁰ It has been suggested that 50% of these men died as a result of the conditions that they endured.²⁶¹ The majority of these "volunteers" initially came from the Javanese contingent, as the Japanese were reticent to recruit the Christian Ambonese and Manadonese who were perceived as more loyal to the Dutch cause. The latter would eventually be subject to such conscription, with many choosing to remain in captivity, whilst others used their new degree of freedom to escape to Australia or to join guerrilla forces in the Philippines.²⁶²

The initial treatment of the large number of Filipino troops captured on the Bataan peninsula was considerably more severe than that experienced by the members of the Indian Army and the KNIL. Of the 62,100 Filipinos taken prisoner, it has been estimated that between 5,000 and 10,000 died on the Death March to Camp O'Donnell.²⁶³ Their ordeal continued in the desperate conditions at that camp for several months, with 334 dying on the worst day of their

adversity": Indian prisoners of war in New Guinea." *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, No 37.

<http://www.awm.gov.au/journal/j37/indians.asp>

²⁵⁹ Tanaka, Yuki. (1996) *Hidden Horrors: Japanese War Crimes in World War II*. Westview Press, Oxford. pp 120-124. Australians, local civilians and Formosan auxiliaries were also victims of such acts. pp111-134.

²⁶⁰ Hack and Blackburn, "Japanese-occupied Asia"; in Hack and Blackburn, *Forgotten Captives*, p14.

²⁶¹ De Jong, *The Collapse*, p307.

²⁶² A party of 47 Ambonese *heiho* escaped from the Tanimbar Islands; 22 made it to Australia, whilst 20 died at sea and 5 were recaptured and executed. In the Philippines a group of 10 Manadonese *heiho* joined a guerrilla band in August 1943; in; de Jong, *The Collapse*, p307.

²⁶³ Falk, Stanley L. (1962) *Bataan: The March of Death*. Norton, New York. pp196-198. Falk suggests that around 650 out of the 9,921 American prisoners died on the march.

captivity at O'Donnell.²⁶⁴ Eventually the Japanese screened and released most of the Filipino troops, recruiting some into the Philippine Constabulary.²⁶⁵ There has been little discussion of the continued captivity and suffering of the Filipinos in the American literature or of the reasons why they were held for much longer than their Indian and Indonesian counterparts before being offered their parole.²⁶⁶ It seems possible that this was a response to the longer and stiffer resistance put up by a force that was, unusually in the context of the initial encounters of the war, largely made up of Asian colonial troops.²⁶⁷ The Japanese may well have been attempting to punish the Filipinos for their continued resistance, and to emphatically demonstrate who was now in charge.

With most of the Asian prisoners released or recruited into Japanese auxiliary formations, and those members of the Indian Army who had refused to join the INA being kept apart from the rest of the POWs, contacts between them and the BORs would be very rare. More frequent were those with their European and Western allies.

²⁶⁴ Hack and Blackburn, "Japanese-occupied Asia"; in Hack and Blackburn, *Forgotten Captives*, p10.

²⁶⁵ One young prisoner who had joined the Constabulary was selected by the Japanese to be one of a party of 27 Filipino *pensionados*, young scholars sent to Japan to be trained as future leaders of a Japanese controlled Philippines. Whilst there he had an interview with General Masaharu Homma, the commander of the Japanese forces in the Bataan campaign. De Asis, Leocadio. (1979) *From Bataan to Tokyo: Diary of a Filipino Student in Wartime Japan, 1943-1944*. The University of Kansas. pp143-146.

²⁶⁶ In an example of this approach that elides the continued months of suffering for the Filipino prisoners, one historian bluntly notes that after the march from Bataan: 'Most Filipino POWs were then paroled.' In; Corbett, P. Scott. "In the eye of a hurricane: Americans in Japanese custody during World War II."; in Hack and Blackburn, *Forgotten Captives*, p114.

²⁶⁷ In his diary entry regarding the meeting with General Homma, de Asis noted that the Filipinos 'were bearing practically the whole brunt of the fight in Bataan' and that they had suffered 50,000 deaths. Given the thousands that died after the surrender this may not be an unrealistic estimate. De Asis, *From Bataan*, p145.

3.3. Relations with Australian, American and Canadian POWs.

Contacts with fellow allied prisoners of differing nationality were contingent upon the place of capture and the subsequent movements ordered by the Japanese to meet labour requirements. Those that were captured in the NEI, had close experience, both before and after capitulation, of the Dutch. This continued and incorporated those Britons captured in Malaya and Singapore, as many were sent through Changi and up to the Railway. These locations were shared with the majority of Australians who had surrendered at the fall of Singapore. Contacts with Americans were initially rare, but increased as the fittest of the survivors of the Railway were transported to Japan upon its completion, and joined the large number of US POWs who had already been shipped there from the Philippines. It was also in Japan that the BORs came into limited contact with the smaller numbers of Canadian other ranks that had been taken prisoner in Hong Kong, where their officers had remained.²⁶⁸

Most references to their English speaking fellow prisoners (including the Dutch of European origins) are positive, if on occasion a little stereotyped. Typical of many were the views expressed by one NCO, Percy Mutimer: "The Aussies were the best people in the world ... their nature, their happy go [lucky] style, their derision for the Japanese, their toughness, and they had a terrific sense of humour." The Americans he met were also "a great bunch, although a little raw", not having seen any action. Unused to bombing raids, they would dive to the floor if someone made the sound of a plane, much to the amusement of the BORs. Mutimer recalled with regret that his outlooks were also coloured by a sense of chauvinistic superiority; "Proud of being British and all of that rubbish – I'm not proud of it looking back on it."²⁶⁹ In a similar vein Bdr Parry described the Canadians he met in Japan in the last year of the war as 'a fine crowd', although he qualified his view regarding their ability to take the punishing work regime

²⁶⁸ The Canadians mostly shared camps with US prisoners in Japan.

²⁶⁹ IWM: Mutimer, P.J. (Sound 4801) Reel2.

at Sendai Camp: 'Don't think the Canadians will stick the mine as well as our boys have done.'²⁷⁰

There were of course exceptions to this harmonious picture, jealousies arose over American Red Cross parcels and catering rackets in some of the camps in Japan, and finally after the war as Americans were repatriated before the British and the Australians.²⁷¹ But these were largely seen for the exceptional events that they were, and have been consigned as uncharacteristic and unrepresentative of the relations between the prisoners of the Anglo-Saxon world. For the Dutch, and in particular those of Eurasian heritage, the record has been less tolerant.

3.4. Relations with Dutch POWs.

In stark contrast to the lack of remarks, particularly those of an unfavourable nature, regarding their English speaking allies, the Dutch drew a number of comments, positive and negative in equal measure, from twelve of the twenty documentary records that constituted the core case studies for this project. These accounts confirm Hearder's assertion that the Dutch were 'usually the whipping boys of Allied descriptions of behaviour in captivity.'²⁷² Even the fraternal brotherhood of freemasonry was not immune from these Anglo-Dutch tensions, as when at Changi, in 'another part of the camp Dutch Freemasons meeting under the Grand Orient of the Netherlands, actually initiated a candidate, though British and Australian Masons refused to acknowledge its regularity.'²⁷³ Max Hastings has written of a near ubiquitous tension in camps which the Dutch were sharing with other allied prisoners, suggesting that 'selfishness on behalf

²⁷⁰ IWM: Parry; 19/5/1945; 25/5/1945.

²⁷¹ Many of the Dutch were still languishing in Thailand in late 1946 as the British prevaricated over allowing them back to the NEI, then in a state of civil unrest. See Ooms, Arno. "The Dutch Community in Thailand, 1945-46." In Hack and Blackburn, *Forgotten Captives*. pp278-302.

²⁷² Hearder, "Memory, methodology, and myth."

²⁷³ Flynn, Keith. (1998) *Behind the Wire: An account of Masonic activity by Prisoners of War*. PrintXPress, Cardiff. p59.

of their own people' was responsible.²⁷⁴ Whilst some of the antipathy expressed by the BORs in this study falls under such a heading, it does not satisfactorily explain a more underlying sense of antagonism present in most of the negative accounts. The factor of race becomes more explicit in some of the sound records at the IWM, where the pervasiveness of the anti-Dutch narrative frequently leads the interviewer to ask about attitudes to the Dutch, usually prompted by a reference to shared camps from the interviewee.²⁷⁵ Before analysing race as a source of antagonism, it is useful to more clearly define who "the Dutch" were.

3.4.1. The racial demographics of the KNIL.

The effects of more than 300 years of colonial rule and the attempts by the authorities to rationalise and regulate the social, racial, political and economic hierarchies that developed during this time, left what was at first view a complex and often contradictory set of rules and categorisations. In order to clarify this situation and understand the responses of the BORs to their Dutch fellow captives, it is necessary to first comprehend something of the racial constitution of the colonial army of the NEI, the KNIL, and that of the wider population that it was recruited from.

Unlike the more recent colonial arrival in the region of the British, French and Americans, the Dutch had a longer history of settlement that dated back to the late 16th century. In common with the other imperial powers this had led to the problem of how to classify the offspring from relationships between the white colonisers and the local Asian populations, but on a much larger scale given the longer time scales involved. In 1892 the authorities decided to grant Dutch nationality (and hence European legal status) to these children, on condition that

²⁷⁴ Hastings, Max. (2007) *Nemesis: The Battle for Japan, 1944-45*. Harper Perennial, London. pp378-379.

²⁷⁵ Whilst not as prevalent or pre-ordained in the interview plan as the standard question at the end regarding 'attitudes to the Japanese', the regularity of its occurrence endorses the notion that this location of tension is a standard part of the FEPOW narrative. Some BORs actually raise the subject in response to the widespread notions of Anglo-Dutch antipathy, stating their more favourable outlooks in an attempt to redress the balance; see; IWM: Henderson, p490.

they were recognised by their (white) father.²⁷⁶ Concerned by an increasing number of white women taking Indonesian husbands, a patriarchal mixed marriage law was introduced in 1898 that stipulated that the (white) wife, and any offspring, would not be classed as European.²⁷⁷

In a further less formal classification of those holding European status and being of Dutch nationality, new arrivals from Holland were termed *totoks*, whilst those Dutch of European origins, but born in the Indies, and those European Dutch of mixed descent, were grouped together as *Indisch*, in more of a cultural categorisation.²⁷⁸ Stoler has suggested that in 1900 the *Indisch* population accounted for around 75% of the European category,²⁷⁹ whilst at the 1930 census, 74% of those with Dutch nationality were *Indisch* and 26% were *totoks*. Thus in a population of 60.7 million in 1930, there were 158,000 Dutch nationals born in the NEI, and 56,000 who were born in Holland.²⁸⁰ De Jong has estimated that at the start of hostilities in Asia the number holding Dutch nationality in the NEI was 360,000, of whom 80,000 were white Dutch, and 280,000 were Eurasian Dutch.²⁸¹

The KNIL recruited around two thirds of its membership from the Dutch nationals and the remainder from local Indonesians, primarily in Java, Ambon and Manado. At the start of

²⁷⁶ Kemperman, Jeroen. "Introduction." In de Jong, *The Collapse*, p11. There were two other categories in this colonial classification, 'Natives' (Indonesians) and 'Foreign Orientals'. Japanese, Filipinos, Thais and Egyptians would be granted 'European' status in the early 20th century.

²⁷⁷ Stoler, Anne Laura. "Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia." In; Cooper, Frederick, and Stoler, Anne Laura. (1997) *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in Bourgeois World*. University of California Press, London. p217.

²⁷⁸ *Totok* is derived from a Javanese word for new. The category of *Indisch* is subject to a range of definitional variations, some adopting a more specific Eurasian ethnic basis, others a wider pan-ethnic cultural basis. See; Houben, Vincent J.H. "Boundaries of Race." in Fischer-Tine, Harald., and Gehrman, Susanne. (2009) *Empires and Boundaries: Rethinking Race, Class and Gender in Colonial Settings*. Routledge, London. pp69-70.

²⁷⁹ Stoler, "Sexual Affronts", in; Cooper and Stoler, *Tensions*, p 198-99.

²⁸⁰ Van Imhoff, Evert, and Beets, Gijs. (2004) "A Demographic History of the Indo-Dutch Population, 1930-2001." *Journal of Population Research*. Vol 21, p54.

²⁸¹ De Jong, *The Collapse*, p509. Naturally, given the uncertainty attached to quantitative issues in most aspects of the study of POWs in Asia, there are alternative figures. Raben proposes that 260,000 out of 290,000 Europeans at that time were Dutch, most of whom were Dutch Eurasians. Raben, Remco. "Dutch memories of captivity in the Pacific War." in: Hack and Blackburn, *Forgotten Captives*, p94. Van Imhoff and Beets suggest that there would have been 305,000 holding European status; in; van Imhoff and Beets, "A Demographic History", p55.

hostilities in 1941 there were around 65,000 serving in the KNIL²⁸², roughly two thirds of whom were Dutch nationals (the majority being Eurasians) and one third Indonesians.²⁸³ As already noted, most of the Indonesians had been detached from the Dutch nationals early in captivity, and in most locations the latter group were treated as a homogenous cohort by the Japanese.

There was one location where there was a further separation based along racial lines, and that was in the selection of prisoners to be sent to Japan after the Railway had been completed.

Here it has been suggested that the Japanese selected only the white Dutch to make the journey, possibly reflecting issues of adjustment to the Japanese climate or a wider political desire not to be contradicting the concept of pan-Asian solidarity in front of the home population.²⁸⁴ In contradiction to this assertion are photographs from camps in Japan in which Dutch Eurasians are clearly visible.²⁸⁵ The explanation for this apparent incongruity is to be found in a working party sent to Japan from Java in October 1942, when the Dutch commander at Cimahi Camp was ordered to select a group of 700 men with some technical knowledge. The Dutch CO used the opportunity to rid himself of what he considered to be undesirable elements of his command, and along with around 100 British, Australian and American troops, he deliberately chose 600 Dutch Eurasian lower ranks. In a statement shortly after his liberation one Dutch officer described the process in terms that echoed standard colonial tropes of the social effects of miscegenation and the problematic nature of its resultant offspring:

It would appear that in this selection procedure ... the worst elements were singled out ... The majority of this contingent of prisoners of war comprised individuals from the city and from the lower echelons of Indonesian society. Incited and informed by troublemakers ... this group of POWs was virtually a military gang. ... All authority other than that of the Japanese was denied. This attitude was also often noticeable among the more educated. ... A large number of these Dutch Eurasians ... were opposed to the

²⁸² De Jong, *The Collapse*, p283.

²⁸³ Ooms, "The Dutch community" in; Hack and Blackburn, *Forgotten Captives*. p 278.

²⁸⁴ Ooms, "The Dutch Community", in; Hack and Blackburn, *Forgotten Captives*, pp278,297.

²⁸⁵ For example see: Raben, *Representing*, p180. As will be seen, there were also references in British accounts that contradict the ubiquity of this selection process.

full-blooded Europeans and saw nothing but good ... in a collaboration with an enduring domination by Japan.²⁸⁶

This supposedly troublesome and untrustworthy group of assorted city slickers, lower class layabouts and those who, despite their education, remained ungrateful for everything the colonial regime had done for them, were sent to Japan before official Japanese policy regarding the importation of labour to the home islands had crystallised. By the time of the completion of the Railway a year later, this racial parameter had been established.

There was also a differential policy in the treatment of Dutch civilians and their internment. The Japanese could be as concerned by racial mixing as their colonial predecessors, and were similarly troubled when it came to issues of categorisation and definition. They developed a classification of Eurasians for the NEI that had eight sub-divisions, including one which proscribed those born in the Indies whose parents were both *totoks*.²⁸⁷ Despite such a complex system, for political, practical and no doubt logistical reasons, the majority of internees were white Dutch, and if proof were provided of an Indonesian grandparent the civilian usually remained, initially at least, at liberty.²⁸⁸ Even with the greater part of the Dutch national population remaining at large, over 105,000 were still interned, men, women and children in roughly equal numbers, a figure far in excess of the 25,000 other nationals interned by the Japanese. Around 13% of them died, again a number far in excess of that of the other internees, of whom around 5% did not survive.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁶ Cited in; de Jong, *The Collapse*, p348.

²⁸⁷ De Jong, *The Collapse*, p513.

²⁸⁸ Such an arbitrary categorization was not foolproof, as the case of the de Rochemont family demonstrated. Whilst her Eurasian husband Eddij, a sergeant in the KNIL, went into captivity, his Dutch born wife Nettij, with their two children, managed to escape internment by convincing the Japanese that she too had been born locally and was of mixed descent. Kok, Rene. "Sedan de Luxe". In; Raben, *Representing*, pp181-182.

²⁸⁹ Hack and Blackburn, "Japanese-occupied Asia", in; Hack and Blackburn, *Forgotten Captives*, pp5-6.

Thus whilst in the civilian camps Dutch of European origin were the larger part of those Dutch nationals interned, in the POW camps it was Dutch Eurasians that constituted the majority of those Dutch with whom the BORs would come into contact with.

3.4.2. Race as a source of antipathy.

In order to identify race as a factor in attitudes to the Dutch, it is necessary to step back and consider the prevalence of such thinking at a general level amongst the BORs.²⁹⁰ In order to get some general idea of this the diaries were scrutinised for the use of racial epithets, and whilst there were several in use, by far the most widespread was the term “wog”.²⁹¹ Half of the twelve diarists used this term, several of them with considerable frequency.²⁹² It was employed as a derogatory expression for a variety of local peoples, including the Javanese, Tamils and Koreans.²⁹³ Its use was by no means ubiquitous however, with other diarists consciously using the then less racially loaded term ‘natives’ as a descriptor of local populations, indicating that whilst racialized outlooks were quite common, they were by no means all-pervasive.²⁹⁴ Tony Kushner reached a similar conclusion in his study of the responses

²⁹⁰ Race is considered in this context as visible physiological difference, as opposed to more loosely used meanings current at the time where it could also be used in the context of nationality and religion. Angus Calder critiqued Mass Observation for their confusing admixture of the terms ‘race’ and ‘nation’ in their June 1939 Race Directive, although such connotations were a common practice at the time. Calder, Angus. “Mass Observation: 1937-1949”, in: Bulmer, Martin (ed) (1985) *Essays on the History of British Sociological Research*. CUP. pp133-135.

²⁹¹ In this survey post hoc memoirs (none of which contained such epithets apart from those specifically aimed at the Japanese) were discounted due to the effects of; changes over time in what was deemed socially acceptable language, and those that might result from a more public audience for the document concerned. Diaries, written at the time, and with a much reduced audience scope provided a more realistic lens through which contemporary thinking could be gauged. An example of the mutability of such linguistic terminology is to be found in the published version of Rose’s diaries, where he states: ‘The locals stopped accepting Japanese paper money.’ Rose, William C. (2002) *You Shook My Hand: Once Upon A Wartime 12. Extracts from the diaries of Sergeant William C. Rose R.A.F.V.R. Japanese P.O.W.* Barny Books, Hough on the Hill, Grantham. p24. The original manuscript entry read: ‘WOGS WOULD NOT ACCEPT JAP PAPER MONEY.’ IWM: Rose, 3/5/1942.

²⁹² See: IWM: Houghton; Parry; Pitfield and Rose.

²⁹³ Gavan Daws suggested that the term had a much wider applicability when used by the POWs. He wrote that: ‘For the British, in their own famous phrase, Wogs (meaning lesser breeds with a touch of the tar brush) began at Calais.’ Daws, *Prisoners*, pp21-22. Despite this strident turn of phrase, as part an explanation that he intends to use the prisoners’ own words, unconditioned by any present day conceptions of political correctness, in the text he only uses the word once, in a non-quoted reference to tobacco. See p115.

²⁹⁴ See: IWM: Ffello; Holden and Strong.

to the Mass Observation directives on race, suggesting that ‘anti-black racism was far from universally accepted in Britain’ at that time.²⁹⁵

Kushner’s research was focussed on attitudes in Britain itself, where the majority of the population were lacking direct contacts with people of colour, and whilst still acknowledging the importance of the colonial discourse he identified a much wider set of factors that influenced racial thinking at home.²⁹⁶ In contrast, the prisoners in Asia had found themselves directly exposed to the discursive effects of empire, both on the journey to Asia and upon arrival. Sheila Patterson, examining racialized attitudes in South London in the 1950s found that such effects could have a profound, although again not a universal, impact.

This is the sort of temporary “white man boss” situation that arises when British troops or technicians are stationed in colonial territories or when British sailors go ashore in Middle East or Asian ports. Such contacts are usually superficial, transient, and unrepresentative, but they produce vivid and often derogatory impressions which are the more difficult to correct because they are gained at first hand. Indeed, in South London the only people, apart from a pathologically prejudiced handful, who displayed uncompromising verbal hostility towards the coloured newcomers seemed to be those who had had such first-hand contacts with coloured people overseas during the war. This “wog complex” was not evident in all who had served overseas, but it was reasonably widespread, and of course tended to influence the views of others to some extent.²⁹⁷

Such colonially informed notions would continue to persist in captivity, despite the temporary hiatus in the imperial hegemony that had generated them, and they were sharpened in the minds of some of the men by the close proximity of their Dutch colleagues, with whom they could now be living cheek by jowl. Felicia Yap has summarised this novel situation in the context of civilian internees;

²⁹⁵ Kushner, *We Europeans*, p227.

²⁹⁶ In particular he identifies the influence of American media projections and the subsequent arrival of Black GIs and their treatment by their white colleagues. Kushner, *We Europeans*, pp 124-127; 133-134.

²⁹⁷ Patterson, Sheila. (1963; 1965 edn) *Dark Strangers: A study of West Indians in London*. Pelican, London. p212.

... internment effectively placed many Europeans into unaccustomed and uncontrolled intimacy with the “undomesticated bodies” of Eurasians for the first time, and that the bodily traumas of incarceration were aggravated by an underlying racial dimension.²⁹⁸

Before examining the ‘racial dimension’, it is necessary to clarify one final aspect of the situation regarding Anglo-Dutch relations, which is the range of descriptions that the BORs used in describing their KNIL colleagues. As Ooms notes; ‘Due to different colonial practices many English-speaking POWs did not consider these men to be Dutch, but described them as Javanese, Indonesian, Black Dutch or Eurasian.’²⁹⁹ Further variations on this theme included Colonial Dutch, Dutch Colonials and Coloured Dutch. Such terminology needs careful reading, even more so when it is absent and the generic term Dutch is used. During his voyage to Japan Sgt Rose uses the terms Dutch Javanese, Dutch, Dutch Colonials and Dutch again to interchangeably refer to the same group of KNIL prisoners before they disembarked.³⁰⁰

Whilst no record has been found of the Dutch prisoners being referred to as “wogs”, possibly reflecting an acknowledgement of the presence of European blood that had lifted the Eurasian men one step up in the contemporary perceptions of racial hierarchy, such a derogatory meaning is implicit in many of the other descriptions outlined above.³⁰¹ Sgt Rose, on board the *Tofuku Maru* bound for Japan, along with the aforementioned 600 Eurasian “troublemakers” from Cimahi Camp, noted that: ‘NATURALLY THE ENGLISH LADS DO NOT GO MUCH ON THE DUTCH COLONIALS & THEIR HABITS.’ Three weeks later his outlook had not improved, as his diary makes clear. ‘RUMOUR HAS IT THAT WE MAY SOON DOCK AT AN ISLAND SOUTH OF JAPAN ON EITHER MON. OR TUES. NEXT & THERE LEAVE THE DUTCH!!’³⁰² In a similarly

²⁹⁸ Yap, “Eurasians”, p504.

²⁹⁹ Ooms, “The Dutch Community”, in: Hack and Blackburn, *Forgotten Captives*, p278.

³⁰⁰ IWM: Rose; 18/10/1942-23/11/1942.

³⁰¹ There may also be an element of differentiating the military from the civilian in this context. Sgt Rose, who invariably referred to Javanese civilians as ‘wogs’, noted that a ‘LARGE NUMBER OF JAVANESE TROOPS RELEASED BY JAPS.’ IWM: Rose; 24/5/42. There may also have been a reason closer to home; his wife’s maiden name was Khan, and had she been in Asia under the Japanese occupation rules she would have possibly escaped internment, given that her grandfather was from Afghanistan.

³⁰² IWM: Rose; 1/11/1942.; 21/11/1942.

dismissive vein, Pte Holden recalled the arrival of a Dutch contingent at Nombrudai Camp on the Railway: 'We had our first contact with the Dutch prisoners here and were not impressed.'³⁰³ Another BOR recalled a bombing raid at Nom Pladuk in September 1944, by which time most of the white Dutch prisoners would have been sent to Japan: 'I must mention that the Dutch casualties exceeded ours immensely because these people can NOT keep their heads in an emergency.'³⁰⁴ Whilst the reactions of other nationalities to bombing raids were the source of some comment by the BORs, who had already experienced the German raids at home, they were never as disparaging or loaded with the racial imputation of 'these people'.

The officers, despite their greater degree of separation from the lower ranks, were not immune to such pronouncements. In a letter home just after the war had ended, Lt Hines wrote:

Despite there being no love lost between ourselves and our gallant allies (Dutch), we had a terrific party yesterday in celebration of Queen Wilhelmina of Holland's birthday. They are terrific boys for Royal Family birthday celebrations. As individuals they are very charming but as a community they are perfectly poisonous.³⁰⁵

This passage confirms that Dutch antagonism transcended the boundaries of military hierarchy and provides a somewhat dismissive reference to 'our [not so] gallant allies'; however it is the final sentence that is most instructive in the present context. Whether the charming individuals are the fellow (white) officers with whom he would have been likely to have had the closest contacts is unclear; less disputable is the fact that the poisonous community to which he refers would have been primarily Eurasian.

Although the Dutch officers were predominantly white, there were a few Eurasians who had managed to scale the colonial military hierarchy. This could be a source of surprise and discomfort to their British colleagues as Lt Steeds recalled, when the new doctor arrived at his camp near the Higashimizome coal mine in Japan.

³⁰³ IWM: Holden; p9.

³⁰⁴ IWM: Caldwell; 7/9/1944.

³⁰⁵ IWM: Hines, D.V. (Docs 463) 31/8/1945.

We were a little disappointed at first that he should be our new doctor, but later on he proved to be a great asset. Dr Klerks was a small man, with Javanese blood showing prominently in his physique and in his temperament. ... He was a solitary man and seldom came into our rooms at other times; no doubt his oriental outlook and the need to speak in English kept him apart.³⁰⁶

Steeds employs a standard racial device in his assessment of Dr de Klerks, ascribing his personality to his mixed racial background. In explaining the doctor's lack of socialisation, Steeds plays on the established negative Dutch tropes of aloofness and language difference. Yet Klerks was a capable linguist, able to speak not only English but also Japanese.³⁰⁷ Language is sometimes cited as a reason for Dutch isolation, but given that even more accounts stress that most Dutch of European origin spoke English this may reflect a further element of racial tensions dressed up this time in linguistic clothing. Presumably by the time that the British officers realised what an asset his medical experience was, the initial cold reception had made him realise that he was never really welcome outside of the surgery.

Although these documentary records are suggestive of a racially constructed antipathy on the part of the authors, the most conclusive evidence of such perspectives is to be found in several of the oral accounts at the IWM. Sgt Baynes was perhaps a little confused as to the origins of the mixed race Dutch group put on his working party, believing them to be Sumatran and Javanese civilians who had donned uniforms as they thought life would be easier in the POW camps. He was much clearer regarding the apportionment of racial characteristics to the different elements of the Dutch contingent: "The full Dutch were mostly alright and mostly spoke English – the half-castes were bone idle" and claimed they "no speak English."³⁰⁸ More personally ambivalent towards the Dutch was another BOR, but he also recalled that there was no love lost between them and the English. When prompted for the reason for this he suggested that "they were a pretty hard and rough lot [and] there were lots of ex-criminals" in

³⁰⁶ IWM: Steeds, A.J. (Docs 8398) p189.

³⁰⁷ Steeds would return to this theme in his account, as he recalled at Motoyama Camp that: 'The Dutch troops were bound to stick completely by themselves on account of the language difficulties.' p214.

³⁰⁸ IWM: Baynes, L.L. (Sound 23226) Reel10.

their ranks, before racially qualifying his statement by adding that “the [white] planters were nice people.”³⁰⁹

Another NCO reiterated the sense of racially differentiated antipathy towards the KNIL members: “None of us liked the Dutch, not the European Dutch, they’re a different race entirely, but the East Indies Dutch we found quite different.”³¹⁰ He returned to this theme later in the interview, repeating the colour coded distinction, before adding by way of explanation for his attitudes a textbook statement of the dangers of miscegenation, demonstrating in the process the power of scientific racism to persist into the post-war period.

Where you have three different nationalities [British, Australian and American] and they all cordially detest the fourth [Dutch], they can’t all be wrong ... not the European Dutch for whom I have a tremendous respect, but the East Indies Dutch - since there’s no colour bar - nothing against them, but they seem to have inherited the vices of both races and the virtues of neither, which is often the case with mixed breeds.³¹¹

What Yap has referred to as ‘pre-war colonial discourses which had frequently interpreted Eurasians as a form of degeneration, transgression, adulteration and impurity’ had evidently been nourished in the POW camps, and in this case survived well into the post-war period.³¹²

There is little in the way of reciprocal evidence to be found regarding the views of those on the receiving end of such racialized outlooks in the camps. A rare, if only partial, exception to this is the account of Lionel de Rosario, a member of D (Eurasian) Company of the 2nd Battalion of

³⁰⁹ IWM: Mutimer, P.J. (Sound 4801) Reel10.

³¹⁰ IWM: Woodhouse, T.F. (Sound 6184) Reel2.

³¹¹ IWM: Woodhouse, Reel4. Houben writes that stereotypes of Indisch-ness ‘were grounded in an ideology of supremacy of the White race, arguing that through mixing the bad qualities of both White and brown would become prevalent.’ Houben, “Boundaries”, in Fischer-Tine and Gehrman, *Empires and Boundaries*, pp71-72.

³¹² Yap, “Eurasians”, p497. There was an alternative school of thought at this time that saw “racial crossing” as a means to improving the national character of a nation. Christopher Thorne writes of President Roosevelt ‘burbling away in his hare-brained fashion’ about breeding out the delinquency of the Japanese. Apparently he thought that the Dutch-Japanese crossings were a good example of what could be achieved. Thorne, *Allies*, pp8,167.

the Singapore Volunteer Corps, which had entered captivity at the surrender.³¹³ At Songkurai Camp on the Railway he recalled that he got into an argument with a BOR who had called a fellow Eurasian volunteer a 'black bastard'. The offending soldier was told to desist, but he then sneered at de Rosario; 'Get off my back, you black bastard.' This was too much, so de Rosario knocked him down, knelt on his chest and warned him to 'Never dare to call me or any of my colleagues a black bastard again. If you do I'll smash your big mouth!'³¹⁴

Whilst he must have been cognisant of many other examples of prejudice being expressed during his time as a POW, this was the only one that was in the book, and he was if anything more annoyed with the 'bastard' part of the phrase.³¹⁵ Having earlier resisted the exhortations of his fellow Eurasians that they should stick together on the Railway and that he should not follow the advice of a white mentor who had known his father, de Rosario straddled the boundaries of race and the expectations of those on either side. His story demonstrates some of the complexities of Eurasian identity and the danger of making generalised assumptions that ignore individual agency, but unfortunately provides only a fleeting view of what the BOR accounts suggest was a wider issue surrounding race.

3.4.3. Pre-captivity sources of antipathy.

The earliest complaints about the Dutch came in the context of their lack of support in the attempt to evade the Japanese through Sumatra. On reaching the port of Padang on the west coast on the 10th of March 1942, L.Bdr Grafton and his fellow travellers were met by Col Warren who had been organising the escape route, and 'a fat Dutchman'³¹⁶, who ordered

³¹³ Most of the other volunteer units had been disbanded prior to the surrender, but many of these men would be identified and executed in the *Sook Ching* episode and other Japanese sweeps, including de Rosario's brother.

³¹⁴ De Rosario, Lionel. (1995) *Nippon Slaves*. Janus Publishing Company, London. pp129-130. Apparently nearby Australians were urging him to 'teach the Pommie bastard a good lesson.'

³¹⁵ This in itself may reflect issues surrounding mixed race parentage in the colonial setting.

³¹⁶ The 'fat Dutchman' was at this time a trope used by the English in South Africa against the Boer population.

them to give up their arms as Padang had now been declared an open city. This was an unpopular decision:

It made a very bad start to the relationship between the British and the Dutch colonial troops, who had not so far, when encountered been inclined to be helpful. Over the next few days we made endless plans [to escape] each of which was quickly abandoned. Always we came up against the Dutch authorities' obstructive attitude.³¹⁷

Similar sentiments were expressed at this location by Wireless Operator Oakley, whose sixty page memoir describes in florid detail his own private war with the Dutch right up to and beyond the Japanese surrender.

Contemplating our position, we felt much anger at the local Dutch authorities for not providing any medical attention, nor keeping us aware of the current military situation, and being treated as an enemy with our freedom expressly denied.³¹⁸

Meanwhile on Java a similar fog of recrimination was settling over the failure to mount a successful defence against the Japanese invasion, and the reliability of the Dutch as allies. Aircraftman 2nd Class Gregory recalled that the Javanese 'may perhaps have felt that they were uninvolved in any quarrel between Japan and the Dutch. However the Dutch to whom I spoke gave the same impression of being equally uninvolved.'³¹⁹ To Lt Hobbs 'it was clear from the start that the Dutch didn't mean to fight, they were not at all helpful to us.'³²⁰ Oakley was of a similar outlook, concluding that 'the Dutch had surrendered without firing a single bullet.'³²¹

The recriminations were however mutual, particularly in respect of the British failures in Malaya and Singapore that had made the Japanese advance to the NEI so much easier. Oakley recalled a predictably obstructive Dutch MO 'who explained that as we British did not defend Singapore successfully their way of life had been upset and, therefore, we had to pay the

³¹⁷ IWM: Grafton; pp27-30.

³¹⁸ IWM: Oakley; p38.

³¹⁹ IWM: Gregory; p8.

³²⁰ IWM: Hobbs; p13.

³²¹ IWM: Oakley; p42.

price.³²² Loet Velmans, A Dutch Jew who had escaped from Holland with his parents before shipping out to the NEI where he joined the KNIL, shared a similar disappointment. He recalled that: 'When Singapore fell ... I lost all respect for the British. I had counted on them to have better defences than ours.'³²³ By the end of February, the hastily constructed American-British-Dutch-Australian Command (ABDA) had been equally rapidly dissolved, giving many Dutch the impression that the British had left them 'in the lurch.'³²⁴ This view was amplified by another KNIL prisoner, Cornelius Evers, who on hearing that General Wavell had flown off to India, felt that "'we" had already been given up even before the Japanese made their landings.'³²⁵

At a more local level there is plenty of evidence of Dutch forces performing their duties, and indeed being upset by the surrender order. The English banker, Sgt Baker, of the Surabaya Home Guard recalled that they were 'pretty disgusted and refused to lay down their arms.'³²⁶ Scholte has suggested that in some areas of Java the British forces fled for the hills when the Japanese invaded, using the Dutch to do the fighting as their outer defences.³²⁷ This assertion is supported by the description of the situation in which Lauren van der Post's Special Mission 43 found itself, in late April (some 5 weeks after the surrender on Java), when camped on the upper slopes of a mountain, and protected by an 'early warning trench system manned by Dutch territorials.'³²⁸

Casualty figures for the Java and Sumatra campaigns in 1942 would seem to indicate that the British Army did not see a great deal of action, losing 9 killed and 1 wounded, whilst 5,716

³²² IWM: Oakley; p42.

³²³ Velmans, Loet. (2003) *Long Way Back to the River Kwai: Memories of World War II*. Arcade, New York. p66.

³²⁴ Scholte, Jan Aart. "Imperial Allies? Relations between British and Dutch armed forces in Asia, 1941-1946." In Foot, M.R.D. (ed) (1990) *Holland at War Against Hitler: Anglo-Dutch relations 1940-1945*. Frank Cass, London. p 58.

³²⁵ Evers, Cornelius B. (1993) *Death Railway*. Craftsman Press, Bangkok. p24.

³²⁶ IWM: Baker: (Docs 1439) p105.

³²⁷ Scholte, "Imperial Allies?", p 66.

³²⁸ Jones, J.D.F. (2001) *Storyteller: The Many Lives of Laurens van der Post*. Scribner, London.

were recorded as missing and POWs. The post-war peacekeeping operation would prove far more costly, resulting in 655 killed and over 1,600 wounded.³²⁹ In contrast the KNIL lost around 800 men killed during the Japanese invasion.³³⁰ Lt Steeds (6th HAA RA) had also been stationed in Sumatra, where he had made the following observation:

We made the acquaintance of some pleasant Hollanders. They were inclined to be contemptuous of the British effort in Malaya. What we did not know and could scarcely have anticipated was the appalling lack of co-operation between Netherlands and British forces, leading to a mutual distrust which made the later tragedies a matter of sequence.³³¹

The 'later tragedies' to which Steeds referred were the defeats by the Japanese in the NEI and the ordeals that would befall the troops of both nations in captivity, where the fraught conditions could frequently add to the tensions between the Dutch and the British.

3.4.4. Antipathy in captivity.

As the servicemen entered captivity in the NEI a new potential source of tension came clearly into view. It was perhaps unsurprising that the Dutch officers, imprisoned in their own camps, were at the surrender quite well placed with regard to their surroundings. It was equally unsurprising that Grafton, with possibly little more than the shirt on his back and the books he had purchased in Padang to his name, was less than impressed.

Most of the buildings were already occupied by Dutch troops. The European Dutch troops watched our humiliating progress across the green to our allocated accommodation as they lounged in their easy chairs on the verandas in great comfort, smoking large cigars and sipping cool drinks served by their batmen. They still had all their possessions and a great deal of money.³³²

Oakley must have got to the camp a few minutes before, as when he arrived there were 'Picnic tables covered in bananas, melons, and other assorted snacks were being casually nibbled by

³²⁹ Kirby, *The War Against Japan*, pp 542-544.

³³⁰ De Jong, *The Collapse*, p283.

³³¹ IWM: Steeds; p118.

³³² IWM: Grafton; p31.

the Dutch as they lounged easily.³³³ Whilst these complaints might have some class based resonance amongst the BORs with regard to their own officers, in this particular location the class basis for such privileges was subsumed beneath a veneer of national jealousy. Perhaps surprisingly given what had gone before, it is only once in captivity that Oakley saw the genesis of the Anglo-Dutch antipathy.

They resented our independence of thought and action, and continuous refusal to acknowledge their perceived overriding authority. Thus began the British-Dutch enmity that would last for the duration.³³⁴

Not all Dutch POWs were able to enjoy such a privileged lifestyle however. Cornelius Evers was only able to take a little money with him into captivity, and this small sum did not last very long.³³⁵ Nor were all Dutchmen reticent in sharing their good fortune, as Gregory, despite his earlier misgivings about the fighting spirit of the KNIL, recalled at his first POW camp at Tjilatjap: 'Our Dutch friends, who still had guilders in their pockets, were very generous to us, enabling us to supplement our rice ration with sundry additions, which spelt relative luxury to us.'³³⁶

Whilst the differing circumstances experienced in the NEI, both before and after capitulation, may have some possible explanatory power as to the varying attitudes towards the Dutch, particularly the privileged classes, they are less useful in explaining the antipathy that continued in new locations as KNIL POWs were transported to Changi, the Railway and beyond. Indeed for some of the many British troops arriving at Changi for the first time from the NEI, it must have been a familiar experience to arrive in a camp where a group of officers were already very comfortably ensconced and concerned by the new arrivals, or the "Java Rabble" as they became known.

³³³ IWM: Oakley; p41.

³³⁴ IWM: Oakley; p43.

³³⁵ Evers, *Death Railway*, p26.

³³⁶ IWM: Gregory; p25.

Jealousies over food would continue into captivity, with canteens and cookhouses being perennial sites of mistrust, regardless of who ran them. Similarly to the class issues mentioned above, the situational factor could be translated into one of nationality. Despite the ubiquity of such practices, catering became a site of anti-Dutch sentiments at some camps. Bdr Parry at Sendai Camp in Japan noted that: 'Before long the Dutch will be out of the cookhouse, they have swindled us all along, and at last something is being done about it.'³³⁷ Sgt Rose found himself on the other side of the serving counter at Mitsushima Camp in the early part of 1943. Here, temporarily separated from any Dutch contacts, he had found a new source of complaint in the form of the multiracial Singapore Technical Corps (STC).³³⁸ His diary reveals that the STC were less than happy with his messing arrangements, 'complaining about the way I had arranged for the rice to be distributed. The STC lads would lean over the dishes to check there was the same amount in each bowl. I am not popular with the STC.'³³⁹

There were some places however where the cooks did very well with limited resources. The café that briefly flourished at Changi, before its Dutch proprietor Loet Velmans was sent up country, was one example of such creativity.³⁴⁰ Perhaps some of his staff were sent to Wampu Camp on the Railway, where Cpl Fello noted that 'The Dutch seem to be taking over the administration of Wompu Camp. They have set up a marvellous canteen there, the best effort I have seen since being a POW.'³⁴¹ Given the culinary disasters that were attached to the British cooks' early acquaintance with rice, it might with hindsight have seemed preferable to leave its preparation in the hands of those with local knowledge.

³³⁷ IWM: Parry; 19/5/1995.

³³⁸ The STC was an RAF support unit, which like the Eurasian company of the SSVF, had entered captivity at the fall of Singapore.

³³⁹ IWM: Rose; 1/4/1943.

³⁴⁰ Havers, *Reappraising*, pp97-98. Havers suggests that the café was responsible for breaking down some of the 'more immediate prejudices' of its white customers.

³⁴¹ IWM: Fello; 25/4/1943.

The workplace occasionally featured as a site of tension, as noted by Rose when he had been reunited with a largely Dutch-Japanese contingent at Kanose Camp in Japan. The new arrivals were initially something of a logistical problem.

We managed to squeeze them in somehow but it wasn't a good situation. Living too close to your neighbours can cause tension and bad tempers and we certainly didn't want that added to our other problems.³⁴²

However he may have been warming to his new neighbours, as after making a reference to the lazy Dutch in his working party, within in a couple of days he was able to record that there had been 'more improvement in Dutch lads cooperation.'³⁴³

British working practices were also the source of some Dutch criticism. Velmans recalled that at Hellfire Pass on the Railway, British and Australian troops would indulge their rivalry by seeing who could work hardest and drill the most holes. He compared this to the 'lacksadaisical Dutch, working at the slowest pace they could' and thus saving their energy for the fight to stay alive. He suggests that this factor did not go unnoticed by the Japanese, who ranked the POWs in descending order of endurance; Australians, British, Americans and the Dutch in last place.³⁴⁴

At the end of the war, Cornelius Evers, shortly to serve in the British Army as an acting Major, investigating war crimes, recalled another incident. Some POWs of both nations had been working for the Japanese and Korean guards on domestic duties during their captivity. After the Japanese capitulation, Evers consulted with his MOs and NCOs, and an order was issued for Dutch POWs to stop providing such services immediately. They were surprised the next morning, when lined up for roll call, to see the British water carriers still carrying out their duties for the guards.

³⁴² IWM: Rose; 5/6/1945.

³⁴³ IWM: Rose; 14/6/1945; 17/6/1945.

³⁴⁴ Velmans, *Long Way Back*, pp6;138.

The group of British water carriers for the bath of the Japanese and Korean (ex-) guards, passed the Dutch lines under a hail of “boos” from their allies! The situation became dangerously tense ... At my insistence the catcalls were not repeated during the following days but the difference in our attitude in this matter gave us something to think about.³⁴⁵

Whilst the foregoing analysis has focussed on the tensions of captivity, there were many examples of co-operation, from the sharing of botanical knowledge in the search for vital extra nutrition to the understated general collaboration of daily camp life. One example from the end of the war highlights the mutual support and assistance that could be given, even in the most fraught of situations. Sgt E.W. Davies recorded the occasion when a search at Nisi Asi Betu Camp in Japan had turned up a diary in the possession of Pte Allen, a British prisoner. It contained all the details of camp treatment and of news items received from one of the Dutch prisoners who had a secret radio. Allen was locked in the guardroom and told that he would get no food until he gave up the name the Japanese wanted. Davies noted the selflessness of the Dutchman concerned, his fellow KNIL prisoners and of the British POWs:

Jongsmeyer offers to give himself up to save Allen. Put to the vote by English and turned down. Dutch promise to save Allen by smuggling food into guardroom at night. They do this. Allen officially without food for four days 11th-15th.³⁴⁶

Whilst it was perhaps fortunate for Allen that this was the month of August 1945, neither he, nor his English or Dutch comrades were in a position to know how close they were to the end of the war, and to avoiding an almost certain death sentence, given the nature of the contents of the diary. Such altruistic behaviour, by both groups of POWs after three and a half years in captivity, provides an illustration of a greater complexity and depth to Anglo-Dutch relations than that suggested by some of the accounts.

³⁴⁵ Evers, *Death Railway*, p80.

³⁴⁶ IWM: Davies, E.W. IWM: (Docs 3656) 8/45.

3.5. Conclusions.

The Japanese conquests of western imperial territories during the opening months of the war in Asia and the Pacific saw over 280,000 allied servicemen captured. Around half of this number were colonial troops who within a few months were mostly paroled or recruited into Japanese auxiliary formations, with the remainder enduring wartime captivity segregated from their white colleagues. The major exception to this racially based separation were the Dutch nationals of Eurasian descent, who made up the larger part of the KNIL in captivity, and a much smaller cohort of British subjects of similarly mixed origins.

Reflecting their initial location of surrender and subsequent Japanese labour deployments, British prisoners would have frequent contact during the early years of captivity with the Australian and Dutch cohorts in South East Asia, and in the latter part of the war they also had wider associations with the Americans in Japan. Relations with their fellow suffering Australian and American prisoners were usually cordial, the accounts of the men reflecting occasional spats, but on the whole they were seen almost universally in a positive light.

The major exception to this picture of allied harmony was a more frequently stated aversion to their Dutch colleagues that was found in around 25% of the cases scrutinised. This was by no means universal, indeed a similar number of accounts demonstrating a positive outlook were found, frequently stimulated by an awareness of this antipathetic discourse. Those men of a less sympathetic outlook often cited a variety of reasons, ranging from a lack of co-operation in the combat period to an assortment of camp based resentments over facilities in captivity. In all of these categories such factors could at times be ascribed to each of the nations, before and during captivity, including the British themselves. Their persistent application to the Dutch is suggestive of a more fundamental issue at play. Language difference was also cited on occasions, but in contradiction to this as an element of tension were the more numerous positive references, including the fact that the white Dutch could usually speak English well.

This linguistically differentiated approach to the Dutch contingent suggests that difference itself may have been as much a factor as language.

There was a common, although by no means ubiquitous, feeling of white superiority amongst the British population at large at the start of the war, overlapping with a more specific national chauvinism, that was particularly prevalent amongst those with overseas service. This could be seen in the language used by some of the diarists. Close contact with the Dutch Eurasians led to a number of the men describing them in a specifically derogatory fashion, with others disguising a fundamentally racialized assessment behind general situational issues. This colour coded approach to the Dutch was made explicit in several of the oral records, by men who were either active contributors to such a narrative or merely recording their observations.

Whilst not all of the anti-Dutch comments had a racial foundation, a considerable number of them did, but even then these men were still a minority in the overall population of British POWs. They represented no larger a proportion of the prisoners than those who had something positive to say about their Dutch allies. The persistence of the story of Dutch antipathy in the POW discourse is a reflection of a historical reality as experienced and witnessed by many in the camps (and before). Unbalanced considerations of the subject, which ignore the many positive records and attribute those tensions that there were to issues of Dutch chauvinism, are a less justifiable proposition.

Chapter 4. 'Here if anywhere, men should have been equal.'³⁴⁷

4.1. Introduction.

Whilst the BORs managed to get along to a greater or, in the case of the Dutch, a lesser degree with their fellow allied prisoners of war of differing nationality, there was one cohort that was a frequent source of criticism, the British officers. Such complaints were found in most of the accounts; only rarely would there be no negative views expressed. One of the most persistent and eloquent in such comments was Private Dawson, his bitterness clearly visible and still fresh in his mind as he wrote shortly after the war:

Here, if anywhere, men should have been equal. That we were not was the reason why relations between officers and men were often strained. Strained? There were times when we hated the officers and applied to them epithets which ought perhaps to have been reserved for the Japanese.

It rankled with all the men that, right from the start, one of the few international agreements which the Japanese observed was that the officers should receive their pay. Or at any rate such a proportion of it as meant that they never suffered to the extent that the rest of the men did.

They lived comfortably and rarely worked, apart from a few of them, their task, so long as they were with us, being to supervise the working parties and see that the rest of us did the work which the Japanese wanted doing. They could not under such circumstances hope to be popular.³⁴⁸

The relations between the officers and men of the British Army were the cause for some official concern in the early part of the war, as the new influx of often better educated soldiers filled the ranks. They came with a different set of expectations of army life and conditions and Dawson, a journalist by profession, was such a man. Jeremy Crang suggests that whilst 'comforts and privileges accorded to officers were generally accepted if they were the result of military necessity, those for which there seemed to be little justification ... were resented by

³⁴⁷ IWM: Dawson; p46.

³⁴⁸ IWM: Dawson; p46.

many of the soldiers.' He goes on to suggest that 'the restrictions of wartime did serve to narrow differences in the day-to-day standard of living between officers and men.'³⁴⁹

Whilst this may have been true for that part of the army still actively pursuing the war, the men who went into captivity in Asia in 1942 would remain part of a service that was largely frozen into the military caste system of the early days of the conflict, if not the pre-war era. The concept of the military necessity for privilege would become increasingly questionable to most of the men, as the differential conditions of captivity served to considerably increase the relative contrasts in the day-to-day standard of living between, and indeed the respective life chances of, the men and their officers. The men were at a disadvantage due to the inter-related factors of having to endure hard labour whilst having less financial sway in the economy of the camps, and thus less able to compete with the officers in the market for food to supplement their meagre rations. The impact of these factors on their health was the cause of a considerable variation in the relative mortality rates of the BORs and their officers, as well as the source of many complaints.

This chapter commences with a rank based analysis of the POW mortality rates, and examines the causes for the variations found. The key mortality factors of nutrition, money and work are reviewed, with specific reference to calorific intakes and pay scales, and how the BORs responded to inequities in these areas. Issues of hierarchy within the other ranks are also examined through the same analytic lens of mortality and its causes. Finally both positive and negative connotations in regard to the contentious issues of discipline and officers representing the men with the Japanese are considered as further locations of tension between the BORs and their commissioned colleagues.

³⁴⁹ Crang, *The British Army*, p4.

4.2. Rank Based Differential Mortality.

Charles Roland has suggested that 'sheer survival is perhaps the most fundamental measure' of the effects of these differential conditions between the ranks. He cites the mortality rates of POWs of the Royal Australian Navy, excluding those who were executed, of 2.9% of officers and 35% [sic 32%] for the men.³⁵⁰ He also calculated figures for the Canadian POWs captured at Hong Kong; 5.6% of officers and 16% of the men died in captivity.³⁵¹ In a similar analysis Joan Beaumont provides figures for that part of the Australian Gull Force imprisoned on Hainan. Whilst no officers died, the mortality rate for NCOs was 14% and that for privates was 27%. For those sent to Ambon the situation was far worse, but still favourable to the officers, of whom 19% died. The respective rates for NCOs and privates were 62% and 75%.³⁵² At Camp O'Donnell in the Philippines, Major Michael Zarate of the US Marine Corps found that only 3.8% of those who died were officers, a proportion far below the 15% of the camp's population that they constituted.³⁵³

Similar studies have not been made of the figures for British prisoners. The record made by Lt Hobbs at the end of the war contains the only such data found that offers a comparison between the BORs and their officers, in a note copied from an Australian intelligence report detailing the shocking figures for the men of "B" Force sent to Borneo. Of the party of 838 officers and men that arrived in Jesselton in October 1942, 'only 30 officers and 2 ORs are alive today.'³⁵⁴ Hidden within these bare figures is the fact that of the original number of 838, the vast majority would have been ORs. This was however an exceptional location of captivity; life

³⁵⁰ The cited calculation for the ratings was 109/338 (=32.25%).

³⁵¹ Roland, *Long Night's Journey*, p78.

³⁵² Beaumont, Gull Force, p212. Gull Force was an Australian unit taken prisoner on Ambon in the NEI in 1942.

³⁵³ Zarate, Michael A. (1991) "American Prisoners of Japan: Did rank have its privileges?" Master of Military Art and Science Thesis. OCLC No: 41405940: Naval War College, Newport RI 02841. p79.

<http://cgsc.cdmhost.com/cdm/singleitem/collection/p4013coll2/id/1329>

³⁵⁴ IWM: Hobbs, T.W. (Docs 845)

had been very hard from the start for the men in this part of Borneo, and most of the surviving other ranks were killed on the Sandakan death marches just before the war ended.

In order to gain a more representative picture of relative British mortality two sources were surveyed; at the macro level a sample of the Japanese card index of (most) British POWs was made, whilst at the regimental level, records of the 125th Anti-Tank Regiment, part of the 18th Division, were examined.³⁵⁵

The results of the card index sample are presented in Table 3.

*Table 3: Mortality rates in captivity: BORs v British Officers.*³⁵⁶

Box No	BOR Names	BOR Mortality Rate	Officer Names	Officer Mortality Rate
WO 345/4	Barwell, R. – Bassett, J.	10/30	Base, J. – Beavon, J.A.D.	1/30
WO 345/14	Davies, A. – Davies, D.E.	8/30	Davies, D. – Dawson, H.U.	1/30
WO 345/24	Hatch, A.R. – Hatton, G.E.	9/30	Haward – Heard, H.	5/30
WO 345/34	McMoreland, R. – McNeil, T.	4/30	McMorine, J. – Makepeace, A.	0/30
WO 345/44	Roach, J.E. – Roberts, A.E.	6/30	Roach, J.P.R. – Robinson, J.F.	2/30
WO 345/54	Walpole, H.T. – Walsh, T.	8/30	Walsh, G.G. – Waters, M.E.	2/30
TOTAL		45/180 (25%)		11/180 (6.1%)

³⁵⁵ The card index is held at The National Archive. UKNA: 345 Series. This collection of 55 boxes contains the record cards for the vast majority of POWs, and those who never returned are identified by a red cross over the card. Six boxes were selected at regular intervals to mitigate the possibility of any regionalized or alphabetical bias. From each of the boxes the first 30 other ranks and the first 30 officers (all army in both groups) were recorded, with the attendant mortality rate.

The records of the 125th A-T Regt were collated from a number of sources; A contemporary typed breakdown of mortalities in the camps by date, cause, location and rank is held in: IWM: Wylie, J. (Docs 6872). Contained at the end of a history of the regiment is a Roll of Honour, listing by rank those who died as well as those who survived: IWM: 125th Anti-Tank Regiment, Royal Artillery. 1939-1945. Copy Number 79/1170. A similar listing, also providing place of burial (where known) is to be found in the Registers of War Dead for the regiment, on the COFEPOW website:

http://www.cofepow.org.uk/pages/armedforces_125th.html

³⁵⁶ UKNA: WO 345 series. Japanese Index Cards of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees, Second World War.

The major conclusion from these figures is that there was indeed a considerable difference in the relative mortality rates of the ORs (25%) and their officers (6.1%), the officers being over four times more likely to survive, a ratio in keeping with the international figures already considered. A comparison is frequently made between the mortality rates of British POWs in Germany (5.1%)³⁵⁷ and that in Asia (25%), and ascribing the difference to the harshness of the conditions imposed by the Japanese. This survey demonstrates that as far as the officer corps was concerned, the survival rates were little different whether you were an officer captured by the Japanese or a prisoner of the Germans.³⁵⁸

The records of the 125th Anti-Tank Regiment, a Territorial Army unit that was initially recruited from the Sunderland area, allow for a comprehensive review of mortality by rank and show a similar, if slightly elevated, pattern.

³⁵⁷ Mackenzie, S.P. (1994) "The Treatment of Prisoners of War in World War II." *The Journal of Modern History*. Vol. 66, p510.

³⁵⁸ It should be noted however that the 5.1% figure for Germany is a consolidated figure, that if broken down into its structural components may reveal a similar pattern of variance.

*Table 4: 125th Anti-Tank Regiment: Mortality in captivity by rank.*³⁵⁹

Rank	Mortality in captivity (died/total captured)	Mortality
Officers	4/31	13%
Warrant Officers	2/11	18%
Other Ranks	171/545	31%
Sergeant	9/36	25%
Lance Sergeant	5/19	26%
Bombardier	12/48	25%
Lance Bombardier	16/52	31%
Gunner	129/390	33%

These figures demonstrate in more detail the hierarchical nature of mortality in captivity, including the continuation of rank based stratification within the ORs themselves. Whilst particular aspects of these numbers are reviewed during the course of this chapter, it is worth noting at this stage the above average rates of mortality at all levels for the 125th. This is a reflection of the fact that they were sent off in early working parties from Singapore, in October 1942, to locations that would prove to be among the more testing. One battery was sent to Formosa and suffered towards the end of the war, losing twelve men, mostly to beriberi, as the effects of malnutrition migrated from morbidity to mortality. The other three batteries were sent up-country to the Railway and were dispersed along its length, where 97 of their number died, mostly between June and December of 1943, from dysentery (22), cholera

³⁵⁹ Figures arrived at by amalgamating the information in all three sources (see fn354; p150) for deaths, removing those caused before captivity or as a result of wounds sustained in combat; for total establishment the mortality figures were added to the numbers who were repatriated according to the Roll of Honour (see fn354 above). There is some contradiction contained in the unofficial regimental history as it states in the text that 25 officers and 400 men had gone into River Valley Camp in Singapore in April 1942. (IWM: History of the 125th Anti-Tank Regt; p21). This may be because some officers and men had been left in Changi due to illness.

(17), beriberi (12) and amoebic dysentery (7), as well as a number of other conditions. A further seventeen were lost at sea, having survived the Railway but not the allied attacks on shipping bound for Japan.³⁶⁰ Whilst such losses at sea and those in allied air-raids were usually a matter of bad luck, the deaths in the camps were the result of a more selective process that worked to the detriment of the lower ranks, reflecting their relative lack of status in the economy of captivity.³⁶¹

4.3. The Camp Economy/ Causes of Mortality.

Central to the health and survival chances of the POWs, in comparison with the officers, was the trinity of inter-related factors around which the camp economy and the health of the men centred; food, money and work.

4.3.1. Nutrition.

For the POWs life in captivity was subject to a finely balanced calorific and nutritional equation. If the inputs of food were exceeded by the calories expended then fairly rapidly the prisoners would become vulnerable to diseases associated with malnutrition, as well as being more susceptible in their weakened state to the wide range of potentially life threatening but always debilitating illnesses that abounded in the camps, particularly in the tropics. Whilst

³⁶⁰ The particularly high rate for officers in the 125th is primarily a reflection of the fact that all of the them went with their men and were thus unable to enjoy the more amenable and less life threatening conditions pertaining at Changi for the duration. A large number of officers who had served in the Indian Army or the Volunteer Forces no longer had units to which they were attached, and they, along with those of the Malaya Command, were less thus likely to find themselves sent on working parties. A party of 300 such officers would eventually be sent to the Railway as part of "H" Force.

³⁶¹ There were however instances where the officers were allowed to sleep on the decks of ships, giving them a greater chance of survival than the men in the holds, which were sometimes locked. See; IWM: Steeds; 21/10/1942. Not all officers were happy at such inequitable arrangements. See; IWM: Eva; p46. A similar example of differentiated travelling arrangements was noted by Pte Houghton on the train to Thailand, when officers had ridden on top of the metal cars whilst the men sweated it out below: 'Officers getting off their lofty perches, to the growls of envy within our steel boxes.' IWM: Houghton; 21/3/1943.

under normal circumstances the men would have been getting 3-4,000 calories a day,³⁶² captivity brought a sharp decrease in intake. Food supplies varied through time and location, but it is possible to trace a general downward trajectory during captivity in the medical literature.

At Bandoeng Camp on Java it was estimated that the men were getting 2,000 calories a day in September 1942,³⁶³ whilst in Hong Kong it was around 1,800 at that time.³⁶⁴ By 1944 at camps in Japan the figure had fallen to 1,500 calories a day, and down to as low as 1,000 in 1945.³⁶⁵ Quality of diet was also an issue, as the usual staple ration of polished rice was as monotonous to the taste buds as it was deficient in nutrients. Fat, protein and most importantly vitamins were severely lacking in the diet.³⁶⁶ This led to the appearance of a variety of vitamin deficiency conditions including pellagra and beriberi, which were compounded by the frequent gastric illnesses that limited the absorption of the few nutrients that were in the diet. With weakened immune systems and decreasing levels of overall health many of the POWs experienced repeated bouts of dysentery and malaria, in a vicious cycle of disease for which they often had inadequate treatment and little, if any, time for convalescence.³⁶⁷ This was the context in which food became of crucial importance to survival, and the acquisition of additional calories to supplement the inadequate ration scales was vital to maintain health.

³⁶² Whitfield, R.G.S. (1947) "Anomalous Manifestations of Malnutrition in Japanese Prison Camps." *British Medical Journal*. Vol 2, No 4517, p164.

³⁶³ Dunlop, E.E. (1946) "Medical Experiences in Japanese Captivity." *British Medical Journal*. Vol2, No 4474, p481.

³⁶⁴ Whitfield, "Anomalous Manifestations", p164.

³⁶⁵ Roland, Charles G., and Shannon, Harry S. (1991) "Prisoners of the Japanese: Hunger, Weight Loss and Deficiency Diseases in two Camps." *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*. Vol 46, p71.

³⁶⁶ Whitfield, a RNVR Surgeon captured in Hong Kong, calculated that in 1942 the men were getting less than half of their normal fat, protein and Vitamin C requirements. In the case of the B vitamins similar shortfalls were experienced for Thiamine and Riboflavin, whilst they only got one hundredth of the required Niacin. In; Whitfield, "Anomalous Manifestations", p164.

³⁶⁷ Gupta, L.M. (1946) "Malnutrition in Recovered Prisoners of War and Internees." *British Medical Journal*. Vol 1, No 4451, p646.

4.3.2. Food and money.

Even while the men were still in convoy on their way east there had been grumbling about the fare on offer. On the American troopships the lack of a licensed bar was more than compensated for in most cases by the abundance and quality of meals provided. On one ship the Brigadier felt that the men were having too much of a good thing and ordered British cooks into the kitchen to prepare reduced portions, leading one soldier to note; 'speaking for myself and I am sure for most of the lower ranks, we were fed up with our sparse diet, the food was terrible, and very little of it.'³⁶⁸ Meanwhile on the upper decks it was a different culinary experience, as one officer recalled: 'Food was excellent. Chateaubriand steaks, tournedos of beef, Sole, with chicken & Duck at least once a day. The cheese of which I rarely partook was also excellent.' Despite eating in the First Class Dining Room, his waiter was 'one of the worst', and there was, with the ship just over halfway to Cape Town, only one wine left in the cellar to accompany the otherwise 'superb' Christmas dinner.³⁶⁹

John Colville, taking a sabbatical from being Winston Churchill's Assistant Private Secretary to serve as a pilot in the RAF during the mid-war years, was taken aback by the contrasting cuisine on board a ship to Cape Town, in which he was sharing the lower decks with 3,000 other ranks. 'The menus for the five-course dinners for the commissioned ranks were handed round on the mess-decks while we were fed on our unsavoury rations.'³⁷⁰ Geoffrey Field has suggested that 'In few places ... was the gulf between officers and men more glaring than on the overcrowded ships that took thousands of troops from England around the Cape to Suez or the Far East.'³⁷¹ In the eyes of many of the men who made that journey, that gulf would widen in captivity.

³⁶⁸ IWM: Carpenter; p4.

³⁶⁹ IWM: Merrett; pp3-5.

³⁷⁰ Colville, J. (1985) *The Fringes of Power: 10 Downing Street diaries 1939-55*. W.W.Norton and Company, London. pp451-452. He would go on to be Private Secretary to Princess Elizabeth between 1947 and 1949.

³⁷¹ Field, *Blood, Sweat and Toil*, pp265-265.

On paper such perceptions seem at odds with the fact that the Japanese would normally issue rations based on total camp strength, with no differentiation on the grounds of rank. There were however occasions where such apparent equity was not the case with supplies provided by the captors. Charles Roland assessed the debriefing of an officer who had escaped from Hong Kong in 1944, who had stated that 'the Japanese gave POWs a regular monthly supply of tooth powder, washing soap and toilet paper' as well as toothbrushes and face towels. Roland suggests that there is a certain duplicity contained in Goodwin's account:

This must have been while Goodwin was in Argyle Street Camp, where officers unquestionably were better supplied than were the men in Sham Shui Po. Again, the unconscious arrogance of the officers appears; the phrase "gave POWs" obviously is capable of being read as "all POWs" rather than "POW officers," though the latter is what is meant.³⁷²

Similar examples of officers drawing what might be termed false equivalences, in an attempt to conflate their experiences with those of the men, are to be found in a number of the ensuing accounts in specific reference to the issues of food and work. Although no food, or only half rations, would be issued to those too sick to work (and it was usually the other ranks that were required to work) such shortfalls could sometimes be distributed among the whole camp population.³⁷³ However the officers were much better placed to purchase much needed extra food, either through official canteens or less licitly on the black market, due to their greater wealth.

Initially this would have been from funds taken by them into captivity. Thus while Cpl Fello was noting after a month in captivity the 'loud complaints' of the BORs at Changi at having to eat "limed rice"³⁷⁴, Lt Steeds in a camp on Java recalled that he and his fellow officers had been

³⁷² Roland, *Long Night's Journey*, p84.

³⁷³ This was not always the case; it has been suggested that men wouldn't go sick in a case study of camps in Japan, as the men didn't want to go on half rations. Roland and Shannon: "Prisoners", p81.

³⁷⁴ IWM: Fello; 21/3/1942. The Japanese, unprepared for the large numbers of prisoners taken at Singapore, had issued the next year's planting seed that had been preserved in sulphur. Fello was also

able to purchase 'some attractive food, tinned asparagus, lobster, salmon, bottles of excellent Swiss jam and so forth. We had chicken nearly every day.' Not only was the fare excellent, but the service was good as well. 'The Mess was also improved by John's new batman, Lewington. ... [He] had been either a butler or a "gentleman's gentleman", and his expert hand as a waiter was very welcome.'³⁷⁵ Captain Inglefield at Changi recalled enjoying a similarly good table, although perhaps it was not quite as good as that at Divisional HQ, where the General had his own special chef, rumoured to have been at The Berkeley Hotel: 'We prided ourselves on our cuisine though the men, who had a separate cookhouse, did almost better.'³⁷⁶ Cpl Fello and his colleagues were not in agreement with this comparison.

By December of 1942 Fello was on the Railway at Tarsao and registering the disappointment of the men, when the promised egg and sweet potato for Christmas dinner failed to appear. He was in no doubt as to where the responsibility for this lay: 'It really makes one very bitter against the Army and those in charge.'³⁷⁷ Meanwhile over on Borneo Lt Hobbs related how the separation of officers from the men had led to a profound improvement in his conditions. Whilst he describes how the men were now dying at the rate of two or three a day, and that sixty had already died due to a lack of medical facilities, in the next paragraph of his account he goes on to recall the more amenable situation at the officers' camp.

Xmas day 42 ... we were lucky to have a first class cook in the officers' camp and he cooked us a real Xmas dinner. We bought 30 chickens and some beef and lots of other food. The Jap commander lent us 100 dollars which was good of him. In the evening we had party games and a concert. The mess was very well decorated, it was hard to believe we were inside a prison camp. When we were separated from the men, the officers stopped going on working parties, so we had a life of leisure, reading and playing cards.³⁷⁸

not impressed by the response of the officers and sergeants, who refused to discuss the complaints, and who in his eyes had kept the good rice for themselves.

³⁷⁵ IWM: Steeds; p139.

³⁷⁶ IWM: Inglefield, G. (Docs 1478) p28.

³⁷⁷ IWM: Fello; 25/12/42.

³⁷⁸ IWM: Hobbs; pp34-35.

By December of 1942 the Japanese had started paying the officers although they weren't usually required to work, and this would prove to be the most persistent source of a pecuniary advantage that they enjoyed until the end of the war. The other ranks had received pay from June of that year, when they worked. The rates of pay as of February 1943 are displayed in Table 5.

*Table 5: Pay scales by rank: February 1943.*³⁷⁹

Rank	Day rate	Per month ³⁸⁰
Lieutenant Colonel		\$220
Lieutenant		\$85
Warrant Officers	40 cents	\$11
NCOs	30 cents	\$8.25
Privates	25 cents	\$6.88

These basic figures do not reflect what the officers actually got, as the Japanese made large deductions, for accommodation and food, and also for a savings scheme, the funds of which would supposedly be held until their release.³⁸¹ In many locations (although by no means all) the officers also made a further deduction for hospital funds to enable the purchase of extra food and, where available, medicines.

³⁷⁹ From: Flower, "Captors and Captives." In; Moore and Fedorowich, *Prisoners of War*, p243.

³⁸⁰ Figures are Straits dollars equivalent. For daily paid labour I have calculated the monthly figure by multiplying the day rate by 27.5, which assumes about three *yasumi* days (rest days) per month. During the *speedo* period such days would have been less frequent, if they occurred at all.

³⁸¹ The "savings" were never seen again.

There were also local variations in rates, deductions and pay received. Dr Robert Hardie, at Kanchanaburi in November 1942, noted in his diary that the officers all got 70 ticals per month regardless of rank. Of this 45 ticals were deducted for board and lodgings, a further 15 ticals went into the savings account, and 2 ticals were deducted to buy extra food for the men, leaving only about eight ticals a month (or 25 cents a day) in his hand.³⁸² It should be noted that at this time the daily rate for privates was only 10 cents, and thus Hardie was in receipt of substantially more than them, even after the various deductions. By the time the privates had their pay increase in 1943, the account of another MO demonstrates the continued differentials on the Railway. At Chungkai he recalled that the officers got 30 baht, the NCOs received 20 baht and the privates 10 baht per month.³⁸³ Even after 10 baht was deducted from the officers for the hospital fund (a larger amount than that “taxed” from the NCOs and privates) they still had considerably greater purchasing power.

To give these numbers some meaning in the context of the camp economy, at Kanchanaburi in November 1942 an egg cost 7.5 cents, and a bunch of bananas was 15 cents.³⁸⁴ At Tonchan South Camp in June 1943 25 cents was usually enough to buy one egg and four cigarettes.³⁸⁵ The price and availability of items would fluctuate with location and time, often placing them out of the reach of those on the lower rungs of the financial hierarchy, which, with the exception of a few men involved in trading operations, meant the other ranks generally, and the privates in particular. One private summarised this situation when he stated that

³⁸² Hardie, Robert. (1983) *Burma-Siam Railway: The secret diary of Dr Robert Hardie 1942-45*. Imperial War Museum. London. p50. The term *tical* was an anglicized version of the unit of Thai currency, the *baht*. At the time of the Japanese attack 1 tical = 1s.10d. (*The Times*; 23/4/43, p9.) In January 1942 the Straits dollar was worth 2s.4d. (*The Times*; 10/1/42, p7.)

³⁸³ IWM: de Cayley, p16. The officers donated 10 baht to the hospital fund at this camp.

³⁸⁴ Hardie, *Burma-Siam Railway*, p50. Eggs, and duck eggs in particular, were a key source of extra nutrition on the Railway. In an indication of how inflation was an integral part of the camp economy, by 1945 at the Kanchanaburi Officers Camp, an egg cost 30 to 40 ticals. Summers, Julie. (2005) *The Colonel of Tamarkan: Philip Toosey and The Bridge on the River Kwai*. Pocket Books, London. p263.

³⁸⁵ Flower, “Captors and Captives”, p243.

There was considerable dissatisfaction because the officers, who had more money, were able to buy six times as much as the men. Some of the officers did, in fact, complain to the British commandant that the system was unfair.³⁸⁶

By paying the officers more than the men the Japanese were complying in part with the Geneva Convention of 1929, drafted by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).³⁸⁷ Article 4 contained the foundation for differential conditions found in the rest of the document. It stated that: 'Differences of treatment between prisoners are permissible only if such differences are based on the military rank, the state of physical or mental health, the professional abilities, or the sex of those who benefit from them.'³⁸⁸ Article 23 confirms the position regarding officers' pay, when it stipulates that 'officers and persons of equivalent status who are prisoners of war shall receive from the detaining Power the same pay as officers of corresponding rank in the armed forces of that Power...'.³⁸⁹

For most of the other ranks the fact of this selective employment of international agreements was rarely recognised, although the effects of such implementations were, as has been described, the source of considerable tensions. Ignorance of this partial application would continue to persist in the post-war period, as demonstrated in the account of one ex-prisoner, recalling his time at Bandoeng Camp on Java. 'Our Japanese masters, their hands as yet untied by the conditions of the Geneva Convention, threw together in this gathering of allied prisoners of war men of all races and ranks...'.³⁹⁰

A more immediately recognisable dimension of the ICRC was the source of further food based tensions in the camps, as Red Cross parcels started arriving during 1943. Amongst some of the

³⁸⁶ IWM: Dawson; pp191-192.

³⁸⁷ Whilst the Japanese government had been a party to the Convention, the *Diet* had not ratified it, allowing for a selective implementation of those parts that were considered expedient.

³⁸⁸ <https://www.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/305> Article 4.

³⁸⁹ <https://www.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/305> Article 23.

³⁹⁰ IWM: Gregory; p26. Article 9 of the Convention had specified that: 'Belligerents shall as far as possible avoid bringing together in the same camp prisoners of different races or nationalities.' For a detailed analysis of the origins of this clause, see: Schroer, Timothy L. (2013) "The Emergence and Early Demise of Codified Racial Segregation of Prisoners of War under the Geneva Conventions of 1929 and 1949." *Journal of the History of International Law*. Vol 15, pp53-76.

BORs there was a perception that they were being inequitably distributed. Whilst encamped in Japan Sgt Rose (RAF) noted that there was 'Much bitter feeling amongst lads. Officers now have Red Cross foodstuffs in their billet.'³⁹¹ He would later reflect in a published version of his diary: 'Perhaps that was why they weren't arguing for better rations for the men.'³⁹² The bitter feeling spilt over into formal protest at Jinsen in Korea, during the 'Great Bully Controversy', as noted in the diary of L. Bombardier Toze:

First it was discovered that the officers were being issued with 2ozs, Red Cross bulk bully per man per day. Indignation, why not men? A formal written protest made by squad leaders to Japs regarding unfairness. Japs very annoyed by letter, say that officers have lost most weight as they have sloppy rice (at own request!) so get bully. ... Good scathing speech by Major Watkins of Loyals to Loyals NCOs telling 'em they were a rotten shower etc. Present state of affairs no bully stew to date only, no rice balls and no more Red Cross issue until dispute settled. The whole affair stinks.³⁹³

The same NCOs who got bawled out included some who in the preceding few months had been carrying out officially sanctioned punishment beatings on men for stealing food from Japanese stores. It would seem that their loyalty to the command structure was being tested to its limits by the inequitable distribution of food. In both cases it is not entirely clear whether the Japanese had issued Red Cross items specifically to the officers, or whether they had passed them on for general distribution and the officers had themselves been slow or selective in their distribution. Whilst the 'bully controversy' episode suggests that the Japanese had selectively issued the bully, the officers had accepted this offering and in so doing assented to what to the eyes of the men looked like preferential treatment.

³⁹¹ IWM: Rose; 18-20/9/1943.

³⁹² Rose, *You Shook My Hand*, p65.

³⁹³ IWM: Toze; 7/3/1943.

4.3.3. Work.

The requirement for the other ranks to work was the other crucial factor in determining the general health and survival chances of the POWs. Whilst across the globe captured other ranks were usually required to work during the war, for those in Japanese hands it was usually under much harsher conditions than those experienced by axis prisoners in western captivity.³⁹⁴ For the BORs in Asia, existing on subsistence rations at best, the energy expenditure involved in the frequently heavy labour would push their calorific account into the negative, with serious and often fatal implications for their overall health. Frequently they were made to work whilst ill, even if they were in one of the makeshift hospitals.

In very visible contrast the officers were not normally expected to work alongside the men. Again this was an example of selective implementation of the Geneva Convention. Article 27 stated that: 'Belligerents may employ as workmen prisoners of war who are physically fit, other than officers and persons of equivalent status, according to their rank [sic] and their ability.'³⁹⁵ The Japanese did not follow this paragraph to the letter by any means, and on occasion officers were made to work, but such lapses were far less frequent than the repeated occasions when sick and unfit members of the other ranks were forced out to work. Cpl. Henderson (along with Dawson) was one of the few men who recognised that certain aspects of the Convention were being applied, and saw such implementation, and indeed the treaty as a whole, as a continuation of class based solidarities that transgressed international boundaries.

This was in my opinion just another aspect of the class situation in which the officers of opposing nations tacitly admitted that they had more in common with each other than they had with the common privates of their own country.³⁹⁶

³⁹⁴ Notable exceptions to this were German and Russian POWs captured on the Eastern Front in Europe, whose mortality rates far exceeded those of the allied prisoners in Asia. As noted in Chapter 2 allied treatment of Japanese surrendered personnel after the war could on occasions be rough.

³⁹⁵ <https://www.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/305> Article 27.

³⁹⁶ IWM: Henderson; pp419-420.

Whilst there were rare occasions when the officers had to perform heavy labour, in times of intense activity like the *speedo* period on the Railway or as a punishment, they were usually camp based, attending to administrative duties or camp upkeep and gardening.³⁹⁷ There were also those who chose not to involve themselves in any such activities, and the diaries of the overworked MOs are not surprisingly critical of such types. Robert Hardie noted on the Railway that there 'are quite a number of good officers among the British troops from home, but also a surprising number who do not show much sense of responsibility, and unless forced to do some job simply lie back and contribute nothing to the general welfare.'³⁹⁸ There were similar problems in getting some officers to contribute to welfare funds. Sybilla Flower cites the example of a senior Regular Army officer at Tarsao who refused to contribute to the hospital fund, although she suggests that such attitudes were much rarer amongst the TA officers, where there were closer links in civilian life to the men under them.³⁹⁹ At Bandoeng Camp on Java the British officers got a better press from "Weary" Dunlop, who noted that 'some English officers think they should give more than suggested' towards the Regimental Fund, whilst being 'disgusted at the light in which Australian officers had been shown.'⁴⁰⁰ A group of the Australian officers under his command were pleading poverty in an attempt to maintain their advantageous position.

The subject of work was perhaps that part of their privileged position that the officers could be most defensive about. Here again some of the officers' own accounts draw on a narrative of equivalence and a sense of selflessness in an attempt to justify, mitigate and explain their easier circumstances. One officer attempted to conflate the relative working conditions of officers and men at Motoyama camp in Japan. He states that the men working in the mine

³⁹⁷ Despite his criticisms of the officer corps as a whole, Henderson did express concern for the older officers who were made to work; some of the Battalion officers 'tended to be men well past the first bloom of youth.' p420.

³⁹⁸ Hardie, *Burma-Siam Railway*, p50.

³⁹⁹ Flower, "Captors and Captives", in Hack and Blackburn, *Forgotten Captives*. p 244.

⁴⁰⁰ Dunlop, Sir Edward E.(1986; 2009 edn) *The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop: Japan and the Burma-Thailand Railway, 1942-1945*. Penguin, London.pp116,117.

‘were away from the camp at least twelve hours, and sometimes for as much as sixteen!’ Not to be outdone, the officers would regularly put in three hours in the camp garden. ‘It was extremely hot on that exposed piece of land, and the three hours sometimes seemed very long indeed.’⁴⁰¹

In another example, Lt Hines, recalling his time on the Railway, provided a multi-layered exposition which employed most of the methodologies of mitigation and conflation in an attempt to vindicate his situation:

At first the Japanese put great pressure on both men and officers to put roads through the jungle. This was when most of the “savage” treatment referred to in the press was inflicted. As the work got under way the officers ceased work much to the relief of the other ranks who did not like to see them under the discipline of the Japanese guards. Some stayed in the jungle to look after the men, including a number of RAMC officers, others were moved to the rest camps. Conditions began to be much improved. When the men left Thailand No 4 Camp was near to Bangpong and conditions were very satisfactory.⁴⁰²

He starts by suggesting that not only were all ranks in it together, but that this was also the time when ‘great pressure’ and ‘most of the ‘savage” treatment’ were (jointly) suffered. Not only does he imply that things got easier for the men as the officers stopped work (just as the work was actually beginning) but also that the men were grateful when this happened. Of course they did not all depart and leave the men to it, ‘some’ stayed to ‘look after’ the men, whilst ‘others’ went to the rest camps. It might be more accurate to suggest that a few very overworked MOs and administrative staff stayed with the men, whilst most of the officers departed for the rest camps. The key part of the statement is contained in the last sentence, in that once the officers were away from the men life became ‘very satisfactory’.

One group of BORs who would remain in close proximity to their officers were their batmen, soldiers who worked as their servants. This was another example of Japanese hierarchical

⁴⁰¹ IWM: Steeds; p217.

⁴⁰² IWM: Hines, Report on conditions in No4 POW Camp in Thailand.

partiality in their treatment of the officers, and even on the Railway such duties were enshrined in the regulations laid down by their captors. Some prisoners were required 'to serve the commissioned officers ... at the rate of one for 4 officers.'⁴⁰³ One officer recalled that near the end of the war, at Kanchanaburi Officers Camp, this ratio had fallen considerably. There were only three men to look after each hut of 200 officers, 'so they barely managed to wash more than a couple of bits of clothing for us a week.'⁴⁰⁴

For the batmen themselves, particularly those who were not professional servants, such employment may not have been what they signed up for. This may have been the case when, much to his dismay and bemusement, Lt Steeds' batman resigned just before the capitulation.

At this inopportune moment my batman, Taylor, decided to pack the job up; at such a stage volunteers were scarce and I had to take on one Gunner Harris, a harum-scarum youth with a tremendous stutter; he proved to be of very little use, and I only had him for a couple of weeks. I was sorry to lose Taylor who was a likeable man of sturdy character, and I never could find out exactly why he chunked his hand in.⁴⁰⁵

Taylor at least had the chance to jump. The batman who did for Captain Barratt was pushed after he didn't bring his officer's kit with him when the Japanese ordered them to leave their accommodation.⁴⁰⁶ Lt Steeds had to look after himself for a while in Japan, but normal military service of a sort was resumed in 1944 when the Japanese announced that the officers were to

⁴⁰³ Kratoska, Paul H. (2006) *The Thailand-Burma Railway, 1942-1946: Documents and Selected Writings. Volume III: POW Labour: Allied Prisoners of War on the Railway*. Routledge, London., p11.

⁴⁰⁴ Coast, *Railroad*, p232. Similarly at Changi there had been concern at the decline in the pool of suitable candidates as the net for ORs to go up-country was widened, including some of their batmen, and the proportion of officers to men increased; in: Havers, *Re-appraising*, p85.

⁴⁰⁵ IWM: Steeds; p136.

⁴⁰⁶ IWM: Barratt, J.A.L. (Docs 1771) p11. Whilst there were no doubt some tensions involved in these relationships, they never fell to the point reached at Colditz where the other ranks went on strike in 1941. One orderly, Alec Ross, was even precluded by his officer, Douglas Bader, from returning home as part of a prisoner exchange. On being told by the German commandant that he would be going home, Bader intervened: "'No he's bloody not. He came here as my lackey and he'll stay as my lackey.'" MacKenzie, S.P. (2006; online edn 2011) *The Colditz Myth: British and Commonwealth Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany*. OUP. pp145-146.

have one man as a servant. Their first incumbent had injured his wrist in a mining accident.

'While he recuperated he looked after us.'⁴⁰⁷

As in normal military life, in captivity the batmen occupied an ill-defined space, somewhere between the officers' mess and the normal life of the other ranks, to whom they were largely peripheral. They appear only fleetingly in the accounts of the men, at the margins of OR identity. Grafton and Oakley were in rare agreement in their representation of batmen as an integral part of the privileged conditions of the Dutch officers when they entered captivity in the NEI, although their concerns were more influenced by national antagonism than by issues of class.⁴⁰⁸ In the British context attempts to improve the diet of their officers were a source of some tensions, Henderson recalling with disapproval that he had heard an officer instruct his man to go to the other ranks cookhouse to see if he could find some butter.⁴⁰⁹ Toze recalled the 'uproar' in his camp in Korea when a batman who was caught trying to steal Red Cross supplies, was given only a light punishment.⁴¹⁰

On occasion batmen could be perceived as occupying a rare feminine place in the wider more masculine landscape that the prisoners were attempting to reconstruct from the ashes of defeat, surrender and imprisonment, as evoked by Pte Dixon on a march between camps on the Railway.⁴¹¹

My heart went out to one of the officer's batman, named by us as Clare. A nicer fellow you could not ask for and who I knew so well. He was devastated and cried like a baby as I beckoned him on. He was gay and I knew his chance of survival was nil, which I learnt later was the case.⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁷ IWM: Steeds; p198.

⁴⁰⁸ IWM: Grafton; p42; IWM: Oakley; p30.

⁴⁰⁹ IWM: Henderson; p282.

⁴¹⁰ IWM: Toze; 18/2/1943.

⁴¹¹ The position of medical orderlies, assisting the doctors and caring for their patients, might be an area for further research with regard to constructions of masculinity on the Railway.

⁴¹² IWM: Dixon; p91.

Whilst the language used by Dixon when referring to the man's sexuality has obviously evolved somewhat from the then contemporary terminology, the underlying assumptions attached to it have not, and it is implicit in this statement that because he was gay (or feminine) he was not man enough to survive. This is rare example of a batman being seen in a sympathetic light, more commonly they were perceived as vicariously enjoying some of the same privileges of the officers they were serving.

Whilst this section has painted a fairly negative picture of the outlooks of the men with regard to the officers in general, there were notable exceptions to such perceptions. Of particular note in this regard were those officers who stayed with the men, some of whom were greatly respected for the work they did in maintaining health as best as was possible under such difficult circumstances. Medical officers (and their orderlies) were the subject of universal praise as they struggled both physically and psychologically to come to terms with what were for most new clinical horizons with extremely limited resources, frequently having to use their ingenuity and not a little courage in fighting to provide for the men in their care and keep them off working parties.

Pte Dawson, who otherwise had nothing of positive note to say about officers, selected them for specific praise, recalling that the hospitals on the Railway were 'a tribute to the work of the medical officers – British, Dutch and Australian.'⁴¹³ In addition some of the officers who went with the men were equally well regarded for their work in attempting to look after those in their charge, putting themselves in the front line of the battle for survival, a more detailed survey of whom is contained in an ensuing section. It is no surprise that such praise fell on the few that were most clearly visible to the other ranks and were seen to be putting themselves out for them; conversely the rarely seen majority, and those in clear view who were less supportive, became the target of considerable resentment.

⁴¹³ IWM: Dawson; pp70-71.

4.3.4. Differential mortality rates within the British other ranks.

Thus far the binary relationship between the BORs and their officers has been considered.

Whilst there is considerable merit in such a basic comparative model, particularly in the context of this thesis, there is evidence to suggest that it is possible to offer a more detailed structural analysis, which segments the BORs into the two categories of NCOs (sergeants, lance sergeants, bombardiers and lance bombardiers)⁴¹⁴ on the one hand, and the privates on the other. The records of the 125th A-T Regt reveal a difference between these groups in terms of mortality, the senior NCOs at 27% and the lowest ranks at 33%, corroborating the earlier results from Joan Beaumont's research on the Australians in Gull Force.⁴¹⁵ Further evidence of such stratification has been suggested by Roland and Shannon, who examined the weight changes of American POWs at Oeyama Camp in Japan in the last year of the war, a time when ration scales were at their lowest. They found that NCOs '(corporals, sergeants, etc) suffered less weight loss than did privates.'⁴¹⁶

Whilst the differences in mortality within the other ranks are not as clear cut as those with the officers, it is possible to suggest that the same factors of food, work and money were responsible. The NCOs held an economic advantage over the privates by a factor of 25% to 100% at varying locations, giving them greater purchasing power in the market for extra food and thus greater access to nutritional supplements.

What Joan Beaumont has described as 'a somewhat ambivalent respect for rank' by the Japanese could be reproduced in the other ranks of the POWs, with NCOs being allocated less strenuous supervisory roles.⁴¹⁷ When Henderson was working at the Singapore docks shortly after the surrender, he recalled being told by a guard that, as he was a corporal, his role was to

⁴¹⁴ Bombardier is the Royal Artillery equivalent of a corporal.

⁴¹⁵ The figure for NCOs, without the lowest ranking lance bombardiers (who had a higher mortality than the other NCOs), is 25%.

⁴¹⁶ Roland and Shannon, "Patterns of Disease", p76.

⁴¹⁷ Beaumont, Joan. (1983) "Rank, Privilege and Prisoners of War." *War and Society*, Vol 1, p78.

supervise the work of the privates. With the separation of the officers from the men in the last year of captivity, a considerable amount of administrative work would have fallen on the shoulders of the senior NCOs, again taking them off the factory floor at a time when nutritional deficiencies were at their greatest. Lighter work could also act to reduce illness, as well as making it easier to work when sick, an important factor when wages were only paid to, and rations issued for, the other ranks if they worked.

The cookhouse was for obvious reasons a highly desirable location of employment. The work was generally less strenuous than heavy labouring, and the proximity of the cookhouse precluded the often lengthy marches to the workplace. Of course the main advantage was the opportunity to climb a little higher on the camp pecking order. It was not uncommon that rank would play a part in who worked in the cookhouses, as Cpl Henderson recalled when he had been lucky enough to get work in a Japanese kitchen, where 'sometimes the working part of the group was made up entirely of sergeants, ordinary "squaddies" not standing much chance of getting on it.'⁴¹⁸

There was a common belief that the catering staff took advantage of the opportunities that were not available to less fortunately employed workers. There was a common joke that you knew when rations were getting really short when even the cooks had beriberi. Pte Dawson typified this attitude when he recalled: 'We always took it for granted that that the cooks and the officers were getting more than their fair share – suspicions which were often well founded.'⁴¹⁹ Confirmation of such misgivings is to be found in the diary of Cpl Fello, who had the good fortune to find himself in charge of the coffee stall in the canteen at Tamarkan, following 'somewhat of a scandal regarding funds' involving his predecessor. Here he had 'a very enjoyable stay in the canteen and formed many valuable friends. ... Began to get quite fat with all the good living I was enjoying and also because I was not having as much exercise as I

⁴¹⁸ IWM: Henderson; p378.

⁴¹⁹ IWM: Dawson; p106.

had been.⁴²⁰ Ffello, despite his previous complaints, now found himself in a more privileged position and he benefitted on both the income and expenditure sides of the nutritional balance sheet, even without resorting to the creative accounting of the previous incumbent.

Thus whilst there large inequities in the camp economy, as defined by food, money and work, between the officers and the BORs, it was at their respective extremes, the senior officers and the privates, that the relative gaps were largest in what was a continuous rank based hierarchy, that also operated within the other ranks.

4.4. Other Sources of BOR Antipathy.

4.4.1. Discipline.

One of the earliest points of friction was the continuation of military discipline in captivity. At the capitulation of Singapore its erstwhile defenders were marched off to Changi, where the Japanese left the prisoners to get on with organising themselves. General Percival 's Malaya Command structure was thus superimposed onto its new location, where it would be largely free from Japanese interference for most of the war. Here the King's Regulations were strictly enforced, and indeed sometimes exceeded.

British Officers later maintained that they were free, in order to maintain discipline, to go beyond those regulations when they believed them to be too lenient for Prisoner of War life. Perhaps it was for our own good. But we could be forgiven at times for forgetting that we were prisoners of the Japanese.⁴²¹

This regimented structure came as something of a culture shock for the POWs arriving from Java, the "Java rabble" as some of the Changi officers referred to them, where conditions had not been so organised. This was keenly observed by some American artillery men who had been transferred to Changi.

⁴²⁰ IWM: Ffello; 10/7/43, 17/9/43.

⁴²¹ IWM: Dawson; p40.

The Americans were not amused at the British officers. They acted as if they had not lost the war. They went strutting around with swagger sticks, demanding military courtesy and formal salutes. They even had their own men doing pack drill for punishment. In a Japanese prison camp. The Americans could not believe it. The British officers treated their own enlisted men like dirt, and in their loftiness they assumed they could treat the Americans in the same way. ... At Changi everyone was a double prisoner, of the British as well as the Japanese.⁴²²

Some officers were also moved to comment upon this situation, Captain Merrett (RAOC) noting in his diary in September 1942 that 'We arrived in poorish order at Changi to find British Army comic opera still functioning & so called "staff" still messing things up.'⁴²³ The imposition of military discipline was not without its risks, particularly to some of its enforcers at the interface between the officers and the men. One warrant officer who was considered by his men to be adhering over zealously to the "bull and blanco" of normal army life had his kit sunk in the bottom of the latrine trench with the desired result: 'Without his Sam Browne he was completely lost and he got the message.' He was perhaps more fortunate than the Sergeant-Major in the same unit who it is claimed was the victim of an assassination attempt. A large block of concrete was dropped on his bed, but fortunately for him he was sleeping the wrong way round underneath the mosquito net, and after returning from the Medical Officer 'he hobbled into our barrack-room on two pieces of stick saying, "allright lads, the war is over for us we are now all in the same boat so let's call it a day." With loud jeers from all he made a hasty exit.'⁴²⁴

Whilst at Changi discipline was the subject of much resentment, at other locations it can be argued that it was a positive factor. Julie Summers, in an objective and convincing study of her grandfather, Lt Col Philip Toosey, has suggested that for 'those prisoners who ended up in

⁴²² Daws, *Prisoners of the Japanese*, p175. Mackenzie has suggested in the European context that the attempts to maintain military discipline in POW camps may have been motivated by a sense of inadequacy on the part of the officers at their having surrendered. Such feelings would have been stronger after Singapore, having been defeated by an Asian enemy in full view of the local population. In: MacKenzie, *The Colditz Myth*, p140.

⁴²³ IWM: Merrett; p21. 22/9/42.

⁴²⁴ IWM: Dixon; p58-60.

camps where their senior officers were prepared to take charge and organise the camps efficiently this was a great benefit.⁴²⁵ The Railway camp at Tamarkan was commanded by Toosey, who maintained tight control over the men in his charge through a committee of selected officers. Corporal punishments were imposed for more extreme breaches of his camp discipline, and whilst the level of “spit and polish” was not to everyone’s satisfaction, such factors, including rigorous hygiene regulations, were balanced and even respected in the eyes of the men by virtue of the positive benefits that accrued from the regime. One MO described Tamarkan as ‘a paradise to men who had known the filth, slush and disease of the jungle line camps.’⁴²⁶ Perhaps the most important single factor at Tamarkan was Toosey’s insistence that officers should sleep in the same quarters as the men, and eat the same food in the same canteen as the men.⁴²⁷

The importance of this integrative approach was made clear by Gunner Jack Chalker, who recalled the arrival of a party of officers who held a more detached outlook during his time on the Railway.

Relations with our own officers were mixed. In November 1942, a large body of officers, including some of high rank, arrived by barge at Kanyu, bringing a vast amount of personal kit. They segregated themselves carefully in a camp nearby, apprehensive of our diseased and unhappy condition. They had no idea of our problems, nor any desire to comprehend them. In our camp there were six or seven officers, two of whom were from my own regiment, all of whom had been with us since Singapore. On the arrival of the newcomers they were ordered summarily to move into the officers’ camp. Our officers refused to leave us and I understand that they were then threatened with court-martials and other ludicrous punishments. Later, much to our delight, our Japanese Commandant ordered a party of officers from the neighbouring camp to work on the railway. The squabbling and use of rank to avoid working was particularly nauseating and drew appropriate comments from our guards. We honoured those few gallant men who continued to stand by us.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁵ Summers, *The Colonel of Tamarkan*. p129. Lt Col Toosey was the officer who occupied the fictionalised role played by Alec Guinness in *The Bridge on the River Kwai*.

⁴²⁶ Richards, Rowley, and McEwan, Marcia. (1989) *The Survival Factor*. Costello, Tunbridge Wells. p124.

⁴²⁷ Summers, *The Colonel of Tamarkan*. p146.

⁴²⁸ Chalker, Jack. (2007) *Burma Railway: Images of War – The Original War Drawings of Japanese POW Jack Chalker*. Mercer Books. UK. p66.

This passage highlights the respect in which the men could hold those officers who were directly attached to them and who shared to some extent their difficult living conditions. In contrast the disdain with which they viewed the new influx, reciprocated by the officers' party in their turn, is clearly drawn. Their arrival by barge with an abundance of gear, when the men would have had to slog it by foot and the attempts to discipline those officers already on site with the men, were seen in an equally dim light. So much so that when they were made to work, contrary to the views espoused by Lt Hines, it was the cause of celebration in the other ranks.

In contrast to Chalker's views on the new arrivals at Kanyu, Toosey's respect was such that he was also able to impose a tax on external "trading", along with a levy of the officers pay that would rise from 30% to 60%, which went to the hospital fund.⁴²⁹ Whilst it might be expected that the author would seek to show affairs at Tamarkan in a favourable light, the very low mortality rate at this location does suggest that such organisation was a major positive factor for the men. A similarly redemptive approach is followed by Sybilla Jane Flower, who suggests that, alongside a greater adaptability of TA soldiers, the maintenance of the command structure in Lt Col Flower's 9th Royal Northumberland Fusiliers was a key reason why the unit suffered less deaths than the regular unit, the 1st Manchester Regiment.⁴³⁰

The ability to impose some control in the camps would also be of importance later in the war, particularly as more British POWs were moved to camps shared with US servicemen in Japan, some of whom were particularly ardent in their application of the principles of free enterprise. In some of these camps the local economy had become sophisticated enough to have a futures market, primarily for rice and cigarettes. An extra portion of rice at supper could be traded in return for two portions to be repaid in the near future, a commerce that put some already desperate POWs that much closer to outright starvation. One enterprising rice trader, who

⁴²⁹ Summers, *The Colonel of Tamarkan*, p198.

⁴³⁰ Flower, "Memory", in Hack and Blackburn, *Forgotten Captives*, p58.

arrived at a camp in northern Honshu with a draft of Americans, sought to globalise his business into the British lines, but he received short shrift from the senior British officer present.⁴³¹

There were rare occasions when a soldier might incorrectly ascribe his unhappy condition to the 'British Army comic opera', when in fact it was a result of a Japanese initiative. An example of this can be found at the start of 1944 when Cpl Fello complained that he and his comrades were being split up and transferred back into their original units and regiments:

The red tape in our Btn is increasing to such a pitch now that it is becoming almost unbearable. We are divided into sections and I have even had to move my bed from among my friends so as to sleep with my section – much to my disgust as can be imagined.⁴³²

What Fello, from his restricted vantage-point, was unaware of was that this was part of a theatre wide reorganization that had been initiated at the behest of the Japanese authorities.

Sometimes the machinery of camp discipline would shoot itself in the foot, to the amusement of the lower ranks. One such event was recalled by Cpl Henderson at a camp on the Railway, where he and some of his Communist Party comrades had been upsetting elements of the administration by ignoring an order to stop holding their 'subversive meetings'. Sgt Major Goodwin and his squad of camp police duly swooped on what they thought was a proscribed gathering of left wing radicals, only to get 'a right bollocking' from two colonels who were present at the meeting of the camp's Literary Society which they had in fact burst into.⁴³³

The response of the men to the issue of discipline was mixed, and following Crang's classification cited at the start of this chapter, it could be supportive where it was seen as a necessity, as at Tamarkan, and less so when it was considered to be unjustifiable "bull and

⁴³¹ Daws, *Prisoners*, pp308-309.

⁴³² IWM: Fello; 20/1/1944.

⁴³³ IWM: Henderson; pp504-505. He suggests that there were around 30 left-wing soldiers in the 5th Beds and Herts, a higher proportion he concluded than that to be found in the UK population as a whole.(p173).

blanco”, as at Changi. Even at Tamarkan however, it remains questionable as to how much of the success that Toosey’s regime achieved was due to “spit and polish”, as opposed to the likely more inspiring effect of equitably shared facilities and conditions.⁴³⁴

4.4.2. Standing up for the men.

A major contributory factor to the esteem in which some officers could be held was their representation of the men in the face of Japanese intransigence by “standing up” for them. A typical assessment in this respect is contained in the account of one private, describing a major at one of the camps on the railway: ‘He was a very good officer and stood up against the Japanese, not being the case of the majority of officers as self-preservation seemed to be their order of the day.’⁴³⁵ In his eyes this officer was exceptional in selflessly representing the interests of the BORs, and stood out from the rest of his peers as being something of a rarity. Whilst it might be suggested that as this major was leading from the front, his junior officers would naturally play a lesser role in such matters at this specific location, the absence of any such favourable comments from the other camps at which Dixon was based points to this major as being atypical of his peer group.

Even when they did stand up to the Japanese such actions could be re-interpreted and seen from a less than charitable perspective. Dawson recalled how some officers had complained about the men having to carry rations with them on a march, for which a Japanese guard had hit them on the head with the flat of a sword.

The officers were not hurt, except in their dignity, and they made the complaint, which they made many times afterwards, that they could not be expected to maintain discipline if they were to be reprimanded in this way in front of the men of whom they were in charge.’⁴³⁶

⁴³⁴ For a discussion of the relative merits of social privilege and leading by example in maintaining discipline see: Beaumont, “Rank, Privilege and Prisoners”, p85.

⁴³⁵ IWM: Dixon; p66.

⁴³⁶ IWM: Dawson; pp76-77.

Whilst Dawson dismissed the physical aspect of such an act and ignored the considerable psychological harm that no doubt accrued when a Japanese soldier approaches one's head with the sword he is holding, he used the passage to elaborate on a wider context, that of officers seeking to mitigate personal attacks by appealing to the Japanese sense of hierarchy.

Sometimes diplomacy was seen by those in command as the best way to improve the lot of their men and such frequently unseen actions could be liable to misinterpretation by the men when genuine, whilst also being misrepresented by officers when used for less altruistic motives. Such actions, whether positive or negative in origin, could frequently gain momentum on the camp grapevine, as demonstrated in the diary entries of two other ranks at Tarsao during Christmas and New Year's Eve of 1942. Private Parry noted that 'Mackellar [an officer] was drinking with Tiger [a Japanese guard] all night, and never even wished us well.'⁴³⁷ A week later Pitfield noted: 'Heard some of our officers actually spent New Year with the Japs drinking the rats.'⁴³⁸ Whilst these may be two separate examples of officer(s) socialising with the guards, benignly or otherwise, it is plausible that the specifics as noted by Parry had done the rounds of the camp and been amplified by the time the story reached Pitfield the following week.

These examples, whilst open to interpretation, demonstrate how the other ranks reproduced them in a negative context. Of more direct significance were the interventions, or lack of them, that could occur in relation to the work parties. Dawson recalled an occasion when the Japanese engineers were short of labour for that day's work detail, and men from the sick bay were enlisted from their beds. He expressed the view of the other ranks that the officers should have put up more of an argument, and that the lack of such was a source of friction between them.⁴³⁹ Henderson recorded a similar perception when the cooks had overslept one

⁴³⁷ IWM: Parry; 25/12/1942.

⁴³⁸ IWM: Pitfield; 1/1/1943.

⁴³⁹ IWM: Dawson; p186.

morning, meaning that the work party was expected to go out without breakfast. He led the men in making a stand against going out until they had been fed, in the face of strong opposition from the officers and sergeants who were urging them out in the fear that the Japanese would 'cut up rough.' The men stood their ground, and when the Japanese turned up they agreed that the men should be fed. Henderson wrote that 'this confirmed me in my long-held belief that in general we did not stand up to the Japanese sufficiently.'⁴⁴⁰

All of these incidents are capable of a variety of subjective interpretations, depending on which side of the hierarchy one stood. There were no doubt officers who had to do things they did not like with the best of intentions. Conversely some of them had ulterior motives. In the eyes of many of the men it was usually those in the latter category who were in the ascendancy, with less honourable aims and motivations.

4.5. Conclusions.

Little has been written of the relations between the British officers and the BORs in the POW camps of Asia in the Second World War, and nothing at all about the wide disparities in their mortality rates. This is in stark contrast to the literature of captivity in other allied nations, particularly Australia, but also in Canada and the United States, which has examined such relations and quantified the rank based effects of differing conditions. Analysis of existing sources at both the population and the regimental levels shows that the British other ranks, like their Australian, American and Canadian allies, were far more likely to die in captivity than were their officers. In the areas of food, work and finance the other ranks were three time losers in the camp economy, with profound implications for their morbidity and mortality.

⁴⁴⁰ IWM: Henderson; p352.

This was primarily the result of a Japanese partiality towards the officers, usually expressed through the selective application of those articles of the Geneva Convention that prescribed differential treatment for those holding a commissioned rank. Such hierarchical advantages were not however the sole purview of the officers, and they operated at all levels of the military hierarchy, decreasing in benefit as the ranks descended. Thus, even some of the most vociferous complainants of officer privilege, such as Cpls Henderson and Fello, could find themselves in advantageous positions, despite their lowly rank.

In addition to the trinity of health factors, issues surrounding the maintenance of military discipline and the representation of the men were the source of frequently cited tensions, and although in both areas there were some very positive responses to the actions of some officers, on the whole the view of the men was largely a negative one. The chain of command also involved the senior NCOs, who were the source of some unfavourable comments, but who were, like the Korean guards in the context of the captors, seen as less culpable than their superiors in the overall scheme of things.

The issue of class is intrinsic to this subject, the British officers at this time having been primarily drawn from the public school cohort, changes in the thinking behind official recruitment policies not having taken effect by the time the men went into captivity. There are however some caveats to drawing class based conclusions on the specific events in the camps in Asia. For one the other ranks were not as homogenous a working class cohort as could be found in the Regular Army. Many of the prisoners, and particularly the men of the 18th Division, who formed the core of this study, were in Territorial units recently recruited from a variety of backgrounds to fight the war.

It should also be noted that the mortality figures for the other allied nations displayed similar rank based variations, despite claims of their having a much more informal and less class-based attitude in their services. This suggests that the specific context of mortality was a

reflection of military hierarchy and the Japanese tolerance and encouragement of it amongst the POWs.

Having said that, it was the class system in Britain which defined who would go in to such privileged positions, and as the accounts of many of the officers surveyed suggest, they expected such a state of affairs to continue in captivity. Australian historian Hank Nelson has written that:

As prisoners the officers had choices denied to the other ranks, and in the exercise of these choices they had acted in ways which made them the most praised and the most abused prisoners.⁴⁴¹

In the eyes of many of the BORs in Asian captivity, a large proportion of the British officers made the wrong choices. Unlike the camps in Europe, where there was a strict separation of the military castes, in Asia, no matter how hard many of them tried, the officers were usually in some sort of sight of the other ranks, who could plainly see the differing conditions under which they were living. 'They could not under such circumstances hope to be popular.'⁴⁴²

⁴⁴¹ Nelson, *POW*, p61.

⁴⁴² IWM: Dawson; p46.

Chapter 5. Fear of the unknown.

5.1. Introduction.

Preceding chapters have described how the responses of the other ranks towards local populations, both in the civilian and military context, could be conditioned by pre-existing colonially and racially informed influences. In this chapter the prevalence of such outlooks, and their ability to influence the actions, perspectives and recollections of the men, will be examined in two specific contexts in regard to civilian populations. The perceived hostility of local civilians (and the landscape they inhabited) is often cited as one of the issues that precluded escape attempts, and the first part of this chapter will assess the validity of such assumptions, making a comparison with the situation of those Britons in captivity in Europe. The second section will focus more specifically on attitudes to the Tamil labourers, their assumed role in the cholera epidemic that spread down the Burma-Thailand Railway in 1943, and how established colonial mores and a sense of racial distance could impact on the way they were viewed.

5.2. Escaping from Captivity.

There are two major topics which contrast the popular memory of British POW experiences in Asia and Europe during the Second World War, the issues of mortality and escape. The increased risk of mortality in Asia, specifically for the other ranks, has been demonstrated in the previous chapter. In this section the apparent difference in the situations regarding escape from captivity is examined, with specific focus on the purported causes of such variations. The reasons for the relative dearth of escape attempts by the prisoners of the Japanese are examined, with particular reference in the context of this study to the sense of difference

attached to the local populations and the landscape. Comparisons are drawn with the situation in Europe which suggest that there were as many similarities as differences.

In the popular discourse, whilst the prisoners in Europe seemingly dedicated their lives to completing a successful “home run” back to Britain, those in Asia, so far from home, were too busy trying just to survive to have time for such missions. Both of these standpoints were strongly reinforced in the public’s perceptions by the cinematic representations of the respective theatres.⁴⁴³ Such sweeping generalisations however do not accurately portray the reality of the situations and ignore some striking similarities between them. Recent scholarship has started to question such simplistic perspectives, particularly in the European context, and writing about the situation in Germany Mackenzie has asserted that: ‘One of the great myths surrounding British POWs in the Second World War is that planning and carrying out daring escapes dominated every waking hour.’⁴⁴⁴

The figures for successful escapes by POWs back to allied lines make interesting reading.

Mackenzie has suggested that around 180 prisoners made successful home runs from Germany,⁴⁴⁵ whilst Aiden Crawley states that only 30 RAF and Commonwealth aircrew took the same route during the war.⁴⁴⁶ Charles Rollings indicates that in Italy in the period prior to the armistice, out of 602 escapees, only two made it to the Alps, Switzerland and safety.⁴⁴⁷ Whilst there has been no systematic survey of British servicemen escaping from Japanese camps, there are two published sources that confirm at least 27 successful attempts in the early days

⁴⁴³ For representations of the European experience see; *The Wooden Horse* (1950), *The Colditz Story* (1955), *The Great Escape* (1963) and *Von Ryan’s Express* (1965). For Asia see; *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), *King Rat* (1965), *To End all Wars* (2001) and *The Railway Man* (2013).

⁴⁴⁴ MacKenzie, S.P. (2006; online edn 2011) *The Colditz Myth: British and Commonwealth Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany*. OUP.p319.

⁴⁴⁵ MacKenzie, *The Colditz Myth*, p 345. Mackenzie states that around 60 home runs from the Greater Reich utilised passenger trains, and that these accounted for roughly a third of the overall total, suggesting a figure of about 180.

⁴⁴⁶ Crawley, Aidan. (1956: 1957 edn) *Escape From Germany*. Popular Book Club, London. p 20. This figure includes the three successful members of the *Great Escape*, two Norwegians and a Dutchman, who were serving in the RAF.

⁴⁴⁷ Rollings, Charles. (2008) *Prisoner of War: Voices from Behind the Wire in the Second World War*. Ebury Press, London. p273.

of captivity; 24 of these were from Hong Kong, through occupied China and into allied territory.⁴⁴⁸ The remarkable account of Charles McCormac, detailing a mass breakout by 17 prisoners from Pasir Panjang Camp on Singapore Island, provides the other three completions, including two who made it all the way to Australia, and a third man who got no further than the southern end of Sumatra, where he married a local girl and assimilated into a small fishing community.⁴⁴⁹ Furthermore there were at least three successful escapes from camps on the Railway in late 1944, as prisoners took advantage of the confusion created by allied bombing raids to make their getaway.⁴⁵⁰

In addition to these escapes from the camps there were also several men who successfully evaded the Japanese after the sinking of the transport ship the *Lisbon Maru*, in October 1942, again through China, and a number of successful evasions by British air crews in Burma and Sumatra.⁴⁵¹ Furthermore there were at least two successful civilian escapes from Lunghwe Internment Camp near Shanghai, in 1943 and 1944, the latter involving five people who made a six week journey overland to the allied lines.⁴⁵² Whilst this is by no means a comprehensive survey, it does suggest that successful escape was not impossible in the Asian theatre, particularly in the early days and through China, but also at other times and locations. The numbers in Asia require a more comprehensive analysis, but it is reasonable to suggest that the biggest difference pro rata between the theatres was in the number of escapes attempted, with far more occurring in Europe.

⁴⁴⁸ Ride, Edwin. (1981) *BAAG: Hong Kong Resistance, 1942-1945*. OUP. p328.

⁴⁴⁹ McCormac, Charles. (1954; 2005 edn) *You'll Die in Singapore*. Monsoon Books, Singapore. Two men were killed in the camp breakout, another seven in a skirmish with a Japanese patrol the following day, and a further four after an attack on their boat in the Straits of Malacca. The remaining four men traversed the length of Sumatra, before one died of dysentery on the southern shore opposite Java.

⁴⁵⁰ UKNA: H1/62. Siamese contacts; Jedburghs; Siamese air force; D Division; operation ROBERT; E Group; prisoners of war; interviews with Balankura.

⁴⁵¹ For the *Lisbon Maru* survivors see Ride, *BAAG*, p 101. For an example from Burma, see Lyman, Robert. (2011) *Japan's Last Bid For Victory: The invasion of India 1944*. The Praetorian Press, Barnsley. pp 160-162. For Sumatra; see McCormac, *You'll Die*, p 180.

⁴⁵² IWM: Scott R.F. (Docs 1049)

There are a number of factors that have been suggested as contributing to this difference in Asia, including the fear of retribution and execution, and physical and mental fitness. Most relevant in the context of relations with the local populations were perceptions of hostility in both the human and the physical landscapes, and the profound sense of difference from and unfamiliarity with them. This is not to suggest that such factors were absent in Europe; as will be demonstrated there were remarkable similarities as well as differences, but they were usually taken as having had considerably more impact on the prisoners of the Japanese.

5.2.1. Execution and retribution.

There were several early attempts at escape in Singapore and these were dealt with by executions, carried out by Sikh firing squads whose inability to dispose of their victims efficiently became something of a legend. The three gunners who were shot in March, after being caught in town wearing civilian clothes, may have just been unfortunate in being caught whilst conducting business (or pleasure). The four other ranks shot on the 2nd September 1942 had been trying to escape, and met their end on the beach at Changi, in another bungled execution.⁴⁵³ The news of this event spread rapidly through the POWs, who were at the time crowded onto the parade ground at Selarang Barracks whilst their commanders held out against Japanese demands that the men sign a no escape clause.⁴⁵⁴

The “Selarang Incident” ended a few days later, as with disease spreading through the crowded lines and threatening to reach epidemic proportions, Lt Col. Holmes ordered the POWs to sign under duress and on his responsibility. The lack of an immediate preventative

⁴⁵³ MacArthur, *Surviving the Sword*, pp29, 48.

⁴⁵⁴ Among the many POWs who were aware of the botched execution were Gunner Notley (IWM: Sound: 16670; Reel 2) and Private Pitfield (IWM: Pitfield; p3-4.) The importance of the no escape clause to the Japanese (and to the men who had to sign it) can be seen in an official document regarding POW regulations: ‘In the case of war prisoners who have submitted such declaration and try to escape, they will be punished strictly under the Military Law and if necessary they will be shot dead on the spot.’ (House Rules for War Prisoners: No 3 Branch Office of Thai War Prisoners’ Camp at Thanbyuzyat., Article 5.) In: Kratoska, Paul H. (2006) *The Thailand-Burma Railway, 1942-1946: Documents and Selected Writings. Volume III: POW Labour: Allied Prisoners of War on the Railway*. Routledge, London. p9.

effect of the no escape clause on the POWs can be measured by his needing to respond to 'anxious enquiries from the men . . . that they would not lose pay, pensions or allowances.'⁴⁵⁵ Of far more impact was the associated threat of execution. Such acts were not unknown in the European theatre, the most famous of which, but by no means the only, was the killing of 50 officers who had been recaptured after the "Great Escape", which had a similar 'salutary effect on potential escapers.'⁴⁵⁶ A rare stay of execution was granted to the four survivors of a failed attempt to traverse the 50 miles from Songkurai on the Burma-Thai Railway to Ye on the Burmese coast, in recognition of their courage and after considerable and skilled advocacy from the senior British officer in the camp.⁴⁵⁷

For some escapers it was the fear of death itself, through execution or otherwise, that pushed them into making their escapes attempts. Charles McCormac, in a camp with an ever decreasing number of inmates who had been identified by the Japanese as being 'specially dangerous', knew that it was a matter of time before his turn would come. This drove him on in his plans: 'Logic was reduced to very simple terms. ... It was escape or die.'⁴⁵⁸ Conditions on the Railway would motivate a number of attempts, such as the one noted by Private Ablett (5th Bed/Herts) at Leinkhan Camp, where an Australian prisoner had been caught stealing. 'The torture and beatings was [sic] too great for him. So he escaped.'⁴⁵⁹ Whether he was successful is not clear, although there is no record of him being brought back to the camp prior to execution, which was a common method of deterrence used by the Japanese. In another example, an RAF pilot was shot down in his Hurricane over Burma in 1943, and captured by the

⁴⁵⁵ MacArthur, *Surviving the Sword*, p50.

⁴⁵⁶ Gilbert, Adrian. (2006; 2007 edn) *POW: Allied Prisoners in Europe, 1939-1945*. John Murray, London. p272.

⁴⁵⁷ MacArthur, *Surviving the Sword*, p136-137. MacArthur suggests that these were the only POWs to survive an escape attempt in Thailand during the war; several other such cases will be detailed in this section.

⁴⁵⁸ McCormac, *You'll Die*, pp 64, 65.

⁴⁵⁹ UKNA: WO 344/361/1 Aaron-Alesbrook; Ablett, R.J.

Japanese. The threat of execution whilst being interrogated focussed his mind considerably, and despite a bullet wound incurred when his plane was shot down he successfully escaped.⁴⁶⁰

There is little evidence of large scale specific retribution being taken on prisoners still in the camps after escapes, although given their rarity this is perhaps not a surprise. When such reprisals did occur they were usually associated with external events, such as the uncovering of the Hong Kong spy ring or the commando raid on Japanese shipping in Singapore harbour. The fear of execution was however a considerable deterrent, particularly in the early days of captivity when some men were fit enough to have harboured thoughts of escape.

5.2.2. Malnutrition and morale.

In many respects the Japanese approach to escape was that prevention was better than cure. The ration scales that they set for the POWs, even on the rare occasions that they met them, were certainly debilitating, particularly for the other ranks who frequently had to carry out hard labour. Whilst the unexpectedly large number of mouths that they had to feed in the early days, and the increasingly less reliable supply networks during the latter part of the war, contributed to the Japanese difficulty in maintaining provisions to the camps, malnutrition, and the resultant poor physical health, were seen as key tools in physically controlling the prisoners in the camps and limiting their horizons outside of them.⁴⁶¹ It was health factors that finally led to Cpl Henderson giving up on any hopes of escaping. He had kept hold of a W.D. oil compass at the surrender, with the intention of escaping when a suitable opportunity presented itself. Two years later it was 'evident that continued sickness made me ineligible for

⁴⁶⁰ Brown, G.A. (1983) *Those who dared: A comprehensive list of World War II Allied Escapers*. Battleline Books, Langley, BC. p 60.

⁴⁶¹ The importance of this factor in lowering morale and the will to escape was noted in an official guide produced by South East Asia Command and given to combat personnel involved in the retaking of Burma in July 1944, on what to do if captured. This stated that: 'It is therefore up to you to make an EARLY attempt to escape.' IWM: K98/173: *Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage*.

such a venture', and he passed the compass on to a group thinking of an attempt from Chungkai.⁴⁶²

Further evidence of the health effects on the POWs is contained in a letter to the British Army Aid Group (BAAG) in December 1942. Captain Ford at Sham Shui Po, the other ranks camp in Hong Kong, assessed the fitness of his men with regard to possible escape. Of around 3,300 prisoners just over a third were considered fit enough to walk 40 miles, and only 20% of these were in his view capable of making any real effort. 'Rest assured that the spirit here is willing and the morale is high but the troops are in a *shocking condition*. It has to be seen to be believed. Total deaths to date, 196.'⁴⁶³

Whilst Ford's assessment of the men's physical state pulled no punches, it is possible to question that of their mental condition. Morale and spirit in this context have subtly different connotations; even if morale had been reasonably strong, it did not necessarily follow that the spirit to escape would have been willing. Aidan Crawley recalled from his time in German camps that more often than not what precluded escape attempts was not fear, but a sense of inertia.⁴⁶⁴ A prime example of such inertia was seen at the Sulmono Camp in Italy shortly after the armistice in September 1943. Confusion reigned during the period between the Italian surrender and the German re-occupation, not least in MI9, whose London office had issued a "stay put" order, whilst their Mediterranean Command had set up "A Force", a unit to assist in escapes.

Captain McKee of A Force arrived at the camp to find about a thousand POWs milling around aimlessly, and despite threatening them with his revolver, only 23 men accompanied him on the short but ephemeral route back to allied lines, before the window of opportunity was

⁴⁶² UKNA: WO 344/381/2. Henderson was the only member of the cohort studied who indicated any thought of escaping on the exit questionnaires at the end of the war.

⁴⁶³ Ride, *BAAG*, p149.

⁴⁶⁴ Crawley, *Escape*, p16.

closed by the influx of German forces. Similar lethargy was found at camps in Chieti and Modena, and Gilbert suggests that whilst the stay put order played a role in such inaction, 'at the same time the force of inertia also seemed to hold them as firmly in place as the barbed wire and the Italian guards.'⁴⁶⁵ After the drama, shock and emotion of the initial months of the war in Asia and the adaptation to defeat and captivity, it appears probable that there would be an element of such inertia, particularly once a routine had been established in the better organised camps such as Changi. In this context it seems fair to suggest that Captain Ford was putting something of a brave face on the situation and seeking to maintain his own morale as much as reporting on that of the men.

5.2.3. 'Foreign landscapes, foreign faces. It's all as alien as a different planet.'⁴⁶⁶

Deterrence and health were considerable restraints on potential escapees. Of no less reality in the minds of the FEPOWs were the self-perceptions of difference, and the presumed hostility of both the local inhabitants and the physical environment, as encapsulated by a BOR who successfully escaped from Hong Kong.

Many men considering escape in the early days of captivity had hesitated because they feared the unknown beyond the wire, the endless miles of toil through vast Chinese wastelands, and the possible anti-British attitude of the local people.⁴⁶⁷

Such perceptions have been reproduced and amplified in the literature. In the following passage Clifford Kinvig has summarised most of the features of this narrative of perceived hostility, and his comprehensive exposition makes it worth including at length.

There was a world of difference from making an escape attempt in the European theatre where, uniforms apart, a soldier from one of the Allied armies could look much like a man from the other side. In South East Asia a European was immediately recognisable and had little chance of passing himself off as one of the locals. In addition the Thai and Burmese populations were generally disinclined to help European fugitives. However ill-treated they themselves were by the Japanese, the impoverished [sic] and social disorganisation they were suffering were as much the consequence of the Allies' failure to defend their territories in the region as the result

⁴⁶⁵ Gilbert, *POW*, pp282-287.

⁴⁶⁶ Orwell, George. (1934; 2009 edn) *Burmese Days*. Penguin Classics, London. p 186.

⁴⁶⁷ Whitehead and Bennett, *Escape to Fight on*, p 108.

of Japanese actions. Certainly this is what the occupiers' propaganda claimed; the Japanese were after all, freeing the locals from European domination. What was more, there was generally a cash reward for the capture of allied POWs, and with inflation and shortages gripping most of the occupied territories, the price on the head of a prisoner was always worth receiving.⁴⁶⁸

Whilst there is obvious merit in Kinvig's observation that European prisoners would be conspicuous amongst Asian populations, it does not tell the whole story, either in Asia or in Europe.

5.1.3 (a) Standing out.

There are numerous accounts of how exposure to the tropical sun, in partnership with other factors, could provide some level of cover within the local populations. Australian nurse Betty Jeffrey, a survivor of flight from Singapore, was astonished as she entered captivity and walked past a Malay woman who said to her: "A bit haughty today, aren't you old thing."⁴⁶⁹ The "Malay" woman was one of her former colleagues, now well-tanned and dressed in a local fashion. Bernice Archer has written of how such transformative effects could prove problematic for the psychology of male civilian internees, and suggests that 'as they shrank, shuffled and changed colour with the sun and illness, perhaps they feared that they, too, were becoming inferior, little yellow men.'⁴⁷⁰

For some servicemen such transformations would allow them to pass muster as locals in the eyes of the Japanese. Charles McCormac actually signed on for a Japanese working party in Sumatra, claiming to be Eurasian, in order to raise funds for his ongoing escape bid. He told the Japanese soldier in charge that his blue eyes were an inheritance from his German father,

⁴⁶⁸ Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p142. For a similar synopsis including white conspicuousness, unfriendly natives and impenetrable jungle see Rollings, *Prisoner of War*, p281.

⁴⁶⁹ Jeffrey, Betty. (1954: 1960 edn) *White Coolies*. Hamilton and Co, London. p22.

⁴⁷⁰ Archer, *The Internment*, p76.

whilst his now 'mahogany brown' complexion and his ability to speak Malay lent credence to his claimed maternal Malay ancestry.⁴⁷¹

Spencer Chapman, an officer who famously evaded the Japanese whilst fighting as a guerrilla in Malaya for most of the war, demonstrates the persistence of self-perceptions of conspicuousness, despite the reality of his own experience. Early in his account he states that 'whereas an Englishman or a Pole may hope to escape detection in any country from Norway to the Balkans, no European can live for a day in an Asiatic country without being recognised as a white man.' Despite such misgivings he would survive close contacts with the Japanese, utilising a mixture of Tamil dress and a strong solution of potassium permanganate mixed with coffee to darken his complexion. 'I do not know what the genuine Tamils thought about it, but I am convinced the Chinese and Malays, and certainly the Japs, were taken in by our disguise.'⁴⁷²

One of the rare if only partially successful stories of escape from the Railway involved Cpl R.A.S. (Ras) Pagani, the son of an English father of Italian descent and a French mother. A member of the 5th Loyals, he had been part of the island hop to Sumatra, where, unable to get a passage away, he had been picked up by the Japanese. Sent to work on the northern end of the Railway, he bided his time before making his escape near Thanbyuzayat, heading north and deeper into Burma, wearing nothing but a loincloth, a good growth of beard and a *pugri* around his head. His attempts to blend with the local population were not just restricted to his clothing however: 'During my stay in the East I found that a European could always be detected, no matter how good his disguise, by his walk, due to the lack of sway in his posterior.' Whilst a POW he had perfected this sway, and by wearing no footwear his feet

⁴⁷¹ McCormac, *You'll Die*, p. 171-172.

⁴⁷² Chapman, F. Spencer. (1949) *The Jungle is Neutral*. Chatto and Windus, London. pp. 10, 72-75. Chapman was himself an escapee, having been captured for a brief time; when unaware of a nearby Japanese soldier he identified himself to local tribesmen. He escaped the following day. pp 289-294. An officer who was parachuted in to join his group later in the war thought Chapman was Chinese, due to his yellow skin. p 367.

became suitably hardened for the journey ahead. The final element in his cultural transformation would come with the adoption of an even more basic custom when he saw a party of four Japanese guards in a town one day. In their sight he went through a gateway and proceeded to squat in the hedge as if 'spending a penny'. After they passed he got up and swayed away on a journey that would take him across Burma.⁴⁷³

A similar adoption of local mannerisms helped Rohan Rivett and his party negotiate their local fishing boat through a large Japanese convoy in the Sunda Strait, during the invasion of Java in 1942. The two most sunburnt men took the oars, whilst another, 'who by this time looked like a Malay', took the tiller. With 'the oarsmen rowing native-fashion and pushing the oar against the rollock instead of pulling it towards them', the Japanese Navy thought they were just fishermen returning home and ignored them.⁴⁷⁴

These accounts demonstrate that with some careful thought and an open mind, it was possible to mitigate obvious physiological differences in Asia. Furthermore such physical and cultural challenges were not unknown in Europe, where escape attempts would have gained from Pagani's attention to detail and willingness to adapt.

An officer on the run in Italy was bemused by the fact that the locals knew straight away that he was British. It was explained to him that 'his hair was parted in the wrong way, that he walked and sat in the wrong way, and that "anyone as scruffy as you wouldn't have glasses in Italy."' As Gilbert observed in the European context, 'the British officer class did not make good social chameleons.'⁴⁷⁵ It was not just appearances that could give the game away.

Cultural ignorance did for a couple of prisoners in Germany, who had succeeded in putting

⁴⁷³ Morrison, Ian. (1947) *Grandfather Longlegs: The Life and Gallant Death of Major H.P. Seagrim. G.C., D.S.O., M.B.E.* Faber and Faber, London. pp204-205. For a similar episode involving the adoption of regional cultural practices with regard to urination see: Nichol, John and Rennell, Tony. (2007) *Home Run: Escape from Nazi Europe.* Viking, London. pp230-231. In this example an American airman has to forgo his usual modesty and relieve himself openly in public, as per the French custom.

⁴⁷⁴ Rivett, *Behind Bamboo*, p 72.

⁴⁷⁵ Gilbert, *POW*, p274, p280.

some mileage behind them before they were picked up for walking down the central reservation on the autobahn. The Britain they were trying to find their way back to had no such motorways and they were thus unaware of such restrictions.⁴⁷⁶

5.2.3 (b) Foreign faces.

If Kinvig's views on the distinctiveness of Europeans had some foundation, his analysis, repeating the now established narrative, of the unfavourable attitudes of the Thai and Burmese populations is more questionable on a number of grounds. The generalised assertion that the respective populations were reluctant to aid escapers is a simplistic one that fails to recognise significant differences both between and within them. Burma was a patchwork collection of different ethnic groups, including the hill tribes of Nagas, Karens, Shans, Chins and Kachins as well as the plains dwelling Burman people themselves, all leavened with a large imperial diaspora from India.⁴⁷⁷ The Burmans had little inclination to assist their erstwhile colonial masters, and indeed, far from blaming the British for their new situation, the Burma Independence Army (BIA) was not only alongside the Japanese invaders, but was seeking to get ahead of them in the race to "liberate" Burma. The minority communities, who supplied most of the recruits to the British colonial defence force the Burma Rifles, were less keen to see the Japanese arrive, fearing the implications of a new Burman hegemony.

It was these communities that assisted Pagani in his escape, as first several Indians and then a Kachin guided him to Karen country, where 'all the villagers were friendly and willing to help'. Here he joined a group of Karen guerrillas led by a British Major and some Indian Army NCOs, and spent some months fighting with them against the Japanese and Burmese armies. Eventually, together with one of the Indian NCOs, he attempted to traverse Burma to reach the British lines, and assisted by a Buddhist priest he nearly made it, but was captured by a

⁴⁷⁶ Crawley, *Escape*, p44.

⁴⁷⁷ The term Burmese refers to all of the ethnic groups in Burma, of whom the Burmans were the most numerous.

group of Burmans, probably inspired as much by nationalism and colonial antipathy as by the promise of money, whilst trying to cross the Irrawaddy River. In order to avoid likely execution, he at this point reached into his diverse repertoire of ethnic characters and surfaced as a downed American pilot, and spent the rest of the war in Rangoon prison with his “fellow” US airmen.⁴⁷⁸

The distinction between the Burmans and the hill tribes was not lost on Private Dixon, who had been tipped off by a friendly Japanese guard that an officer of the Sherwood Foresters had been spotted using binoculars, in preparation for an escape. He duly passed on the warning and noted that ‘the [Burman] plainsmen had no love for the British at that time and to be caught meant certain death.’⁴⁷⁹ Less sensitive to the nuances of the ethnic demographics of Burma was Private Carpenter, in a passage where his distrust of all Burmese was broadened out into a more holistic antipathy to Asians in general. ‘During the Japanese occupation of these various Far Eastern countries, with one or two genuine exceptions, most of these people would have sold us down the country if anyone had tried to escape. It would have been worse to be taken by them than by the Japs themselves.’ He continued to say that ‘We could not trust these bastards and even to this very day I would not trust them. They would shake your hand and smile then stab you in the back, still smiling.’⁴⁸⁰ Given that Carpenter, like the majority of British prisoners including Dixon, did no time on the Burmese side of the border, it would seem that such antipathy had a more historical basis, perhaps rooted in his service in India as a regular soldier, and in the colonial outlooks he would have picked up.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁸ Morrison, *Grandfather*, pp205-211. For his former camp-mates, unaware of his recapture, this was seen as a successful attempt; as one of them noted on his post-war exit questionnaire: ‘Cpl Pegarny [sic] of Recce Corps 18th Divn left 18 Kilo Camp Dec 1942 and was never heard of. Was said to have got through.’ UKNA: WO 344/361/1 Aaron-Alesbrook; Adamson J.T.

⁴⁷⁹ IWM; Dixon; pp124-125.

⁴⁸⁰ IWM: Carpenter; p67. Financial inducements could work both ways, as Captain Carmichael, the aforementioned Hurricane pilot shot down over Burma, found to his salvation. On offering a reward a local villager looked after him and guided him to safety. In Brown, *Those who dared*, p 60.

⁴⁸¹ UKNA: WO 345/9: Carpenter, C.W. and WO 344/368/1: Carpenter, C.W.; WO345/9: Dixon, H. and WO 344/368/1: Dixon, H. The post captivity RAPWI interviews contained a record of the camps and their

The argument that the Thais were equally disinclined to help potential British fugitives has even more shortcomings to it, not least the absence of an overtly colonial past. Whilst there had been some European (and Chinese) economic intrusions, Thailand, uniquely in South East Asia, had enjoyed a singularly long history of independence from foreign rule and western occupation. The colonial factor that lay at the heart of Burman antipathy to the British was thus largely absent, save among a few pan-Asian intellectuals.

There are frequent mentions in the POW accounts of the gifts made by Thais to those desperate soldiers without the wherewithal to trade, as they passed through their districts. Such actions do not appear to represent a popular antipathy to the British, or an impoverished population so gripped by shortages that were always going to turn an escaper in. Indeed, by the end of 1944 the Thai population, in both individual and official capacities were providing widespread assistance to the three privates who escaped the Railway during the bombing raids. Such was the generosity of the local population that they started to avoid the villages because of the overwhelming hospitality on offer and the delays caused by accepting it. For several months they enjoyed the goodwill and support of the many Thais they met, some Javanese and even a seminary of Italians in Bangkok. On their escape route they were assisted by train guards, all levels of the Thai police from Constables to a General, and finally a flight of Thai Air Force bombers.⁴⁸² Whilst there is no doubt that the direction the war was taking might have moderated the views of some officials, particularly those further up the hierarchy, and that by this stage the resistance network had grown considerably from its very modest beginnings, these factors do not detract from the strength of the largely supportive response from the Thai people to the POWs.

British COs at which the POWs had been kept. The nearest Carpenter got to Burma was Takunun camp, some 80kms south of the border, whilst Dixon got a little closer when he was at Taimonta camp some 25 kms from Burma.

⁴⁸² UKNA: H1/62.

In some cases local communities would not only support the prisoners, they would also adopt them. Private Dawson recalled one colleague who whilst driving a lorry had made contact with local Thais, who encouraged him to abscond and join them. One day he mingled with his new friends as his Japanese guard returned to the main convoy, and he 'threw in his lot with the Thais completely and never returned and after capitulation when official returns were made he was listed as "missing"'.⁴⁸³ Whilst those espousing a more paranoid perspective on the hospitality of the local people might suggest that the POW was being lured away precisely to cash him in with the Japanese, and this indeed may have been possible, it seems unlikely in the context of the foregoing analysis. Certainly to Dawson it seemed clear that the driver had made a successful home run, although his new domicile was a lot closer to home than his old one.

Such immersions into a sympathetic local community were not unknown in Europe, and were thought to be the destination of a considerable number of the 2,000 POWs in Italy who remained unaccounted for after the war.⁴⁸⁴ However despite such hospitality, and notwithstanding the issue of conspicuity, the human landscape through which an escapee had to travel in Europe was in actuality frequently more hostile than that which had to be negotiated by fugitives in Asia. The vast majority of the camps were in enemy as opposed to occupied territory, and as Gilbert states, 'the prime obstacle facing escapers was the transit of a hostile and very alert Germany.'⁴⁸⁵

In addition to a population at large that was every bit as unfriendly as that on the worst parts of the plains of Burma, the escaper had a much more powerful array of state security branches to evade. Everyone from the Gestapo to the Hitler Youth, including the considerable civilian and military police forces, the armed services and the Volksturm home guard units, could be

⁴⁸³ IWM: Dawson; p98.

⁴⁸⁴ Gilbert: *POW*; p288.

⁴⁸⁵ Gilbert: *POW*; p273.

mobilised to track down escaped prisoners, a mission in which they were usually successful. To get beyond the borders of the Reich was no guarantee of success either, as there was no way of knowing who would be sympathetic and who would turn you in. One runaway made it all the way to a farmhouse in Normandy before he was given up by the owner, and the skippers of Swedish ships had been known to return to port in Germany if a prisoner was found stowing away whilst at sea.⁴⁸⁶

5.2.3 (c) Foreign landscapes.

The physical locations in which these foreign faces lived were equally different to many British eyes. The jungle in particular would prove to be a site of fear, incomprehension and assumed hostility for the POWs. Like the ex-pats in Forster's *A Passage to India*, 'they realised that they were thousands of miles from any scenery that they understood.'⁴⁸⁷ Spencer Chapman summarised his view of the private soldier's outlook thus: 'To them the jungle seemed predominantly hostile, being full of man-eating tigers, deadly fevers, venomous snakes and scorpions, natives with poisoned darts, and a host of half-imagined nameless terrors.' Having spent over three years living in and around it, he concluded that 'the truth is that the jungle is neutral.'⁴⁸⁸

Such neutrality was not widely perceived in British eyes however, as fed by a combination of racialized suppositions and the search for explanations for the series of resounding defeats in the early months of hostilities, it was commonly assumed that the Japanese were in their natural element when fighting in the jungle.⁴⁸⁹ These assumptions were prevalent at the highest levels, as demonstrated by Churchill's advice to the Chiefs of Staff that 'Going into

⁴⁸⁶ MacKenzie, *The Colditz Myth*, p342.

⁴⁸⁷ Forster, E.M. (1924; 1984 edn) *A Passage to India*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York. p200.

⁴⁸⁸ Chapman, *The Jungle is Neutral*, p 125.

⁴⁸⁹ This was despite the fact that the Home Islands of Japan were in a temperate climatic zone, and that all of their fighting prior to the Malayan campaign had been in northern China, an unlikely region to find jungle ecosystems.

swampy jungles to fight the Japanese is like going into the water to fight a shark.⁴⁹⁰ These views were not specifically British, but were part of a wider occidental narrative, as exemplified in the words of an American reporter embedded with the US Marines on Guadalcanal, who described a jungle patrol:

On the way up to the front, we had come through patches of jungle, and it had seemed alien, almost poisonous. ... Each time we came out into the light of the grassy knolls, we breathed deeply and more easily. These open spaces were our natural terrain. They were American; the jungle was Jap.⁴⁹¹

The physical environment in Europe, whilst familiar, may also have been no less intimidating, particularly in the winter. The Pyrenees and the Alps, two of the most favoured routes to freedom, would have been challenging to weary escapees with guides in the summer, and more so for those who tried unaided to traverse the peaks through the snow that enveloped them for much of the year. Yet the jungles of Asia have retained a special place as a hostile location that is purported to have precluded even the thought of escape. As one former POW recalled, 'it was folly – you can't escape from a jungle.'⁴⁹² An officer at Takelin Camp on the Railway had tried to dissuade a group of BORs from attempting an escape, citing the dangers of going 'hundreds of miles into unknown jungle.' They were recaptured and were believed to have been shot, although they had survived for about a month.⁴⁹³ Similarly in the literature Clifford Kinvig refers to 'malarial jungles' and 'mighty rivers' as being 'a prospect to daunt even the most reckless and desperate potential escaper',⁴⁹⁴ whilst Rollings describes the landscape of the Far East as 'vast and often thick with impenetrable jungle.'⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹⁰ Gilbert, Martin. (1986) *Road to Victory: Winston S. Churchill 1941-1945*. William Heinemann Ltd, London. p 399.

⁴⁹¹ Hersey, John. (1943) *Into the Valley*. Hodder and Stoughton, London. p 34-35.

⁴⁹² IWM: Wade, J.D. (Sound 9957)

⁴⁹³ TNA: WO 344/361/1 Aaron-Alesbrook: Addy, K.C.

⁴⁹⁴ Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p143.

⁴⁹⁵ Rollings, *Prisoner of War*, p281.

Such words might have been taken from the erroneous assessments made of the terrain by the British Command, prior to the disastrous Malayan campaign, in which the Japanese forces had had no problems in feeding not just battalions of infantry but also columns of tanks through the 'impenetrable jungle'.⁴⁹⁶ Whilst much of Malaya was plantation as opposed to the more virgin jungle that could be found on the remoter reaches of the Railway, there was a British naiveté in matters of tropical ecology that would travel with the prisoners on the journey "up-country". In the mentality of the prisoners it is easy to imagine this new and unknown environment, along with the novel experience of captivity and a sense of racial and colonial inversion, playing its part in contributing to a sense of profound displacement and disorientation.

There are however factors which can be suggested that mitigate the thesis of the impenetrability of the natural surroundings. Even in the tropical regions that have become the focus of this narrative, there were a variety of landscapes, some less forbidding than others, particularly where the hand of man had been involved. There were also the instances where the landscape had been successfully negotiated. As already discussed, Ras Pagani had effectively avoided much of the jungle by utilising roads and paths that ran through it. Perhaps the most remarkable tale of traversing hostile terrain occurred during the early days of hostilities, when a group of 24 British civilians fled Bangkok as the Japanese army occupied Thailand. The group contained an assortment of businessmen and bankers, along with two women and a sixty year old man. They followed what would become a very familiar route several years later for the POWs working on the Railway, although this party travelled in boats crewed by friendly Thais.

⁴⁹⁶ As late as 1944 the British Army could still be myopic in this regard. Lt Gen Scoones considered the jungle to the north east of Imphal to be impenetrable, despite the fact that his own engineers had just constructed a jeep track through part of it. It came as a considerable surprise when Lt Gen Mutaguchi sent a large force through from this direction, utilising the newly constructed track. Lyman, Robert. (2011) *Japan's Last Bid For Victory: The invasion of India 1944*. The Praetorian Press, Barnsley. p 51.

They travelled from Ban Pong to Kanburi and thence to Three Pagodas Pass, all the while staying one step ahead of the pursuing Japanese army, which had been alerted to their movements. By Three Pagodas Pass the Japanese had headed them off and it was decided to cut across country to get to Tavoy in the still British controlled Burma. This was a route that even the friendly police in Kanchanaburi had thought was mad, and would result in their imminent mortality. It was decided to send an advance guard travelling light to cut through to the coast and then send back a relief party to collect the others who were behind them. With no guide for all but the first day, they reached Tavoy in six days, their route having taken them through a variety of landscapes. They had spent two days cutting a path through thick bamboo jungle, two days walking along stream beds and then traversed two 4/5,000 foot mountains before reaching their destination. A rescue party was sent back to bring out the rest of the group, who duly appeared several days later, 'battered, but all fit and well.' It had been a tough, but not insurmountable challenge, a point reinforced by one of the advance party who said that 'after 10 years luxurious living in Bangkok this was really hard going.'⁴⁹⁷ On a much larger scale a contemporary assessment of the Burma evacuation had made a similar point: 'The trek of thousands of men, women and children from Burma to India is sufficient evidence that the intervening mountains are not impenetrable.'⁴⁹⁸

5.2.4. Summary.

Despite the widely diverging popular narratives of escape involving the POWs in Asia and Europe, this analysis has suggested that there was a considerable convergence in many aspects of their experiences. The key difference was one of degree. The factors of fear of retribution, poor health and hostile environments were found to apply in both theatres, but were more persistent and pervasive for the prisoners of the Japanese. Whilst the number of successful

⁴⁹⁷ Gilchrist, Andrew. (1970) *Bangkok Top Secret: Being the experiences of a British officer in the Siam Country Section of Force 136*. Hutchinson, London. pp209-212.

⁴⁹⁸ Hendershot, Clarence (1942) "Burma's Value to the Japanese." *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol 11, p 177.

escapes may prove to be surprisingly comparable once a systematic analysis of the Asian theatre has been conducted, the wide variance in the frequency of attempts remains irrefutable.

For the other ranks in captivity in Asia, any thoughts of escape would usually be subsumed in the fight for survival. The fear of execution and their physical debilitation acted as considerable constraints in any such attempts. In some cases these factors were supplemented by their racially and colonially informed fear of the unknown environment, both human and physical, that they found themselves in. It is however possible to suggest that the perils of these environmental factors, informed by pre-existing and persistent notions of difference, have been overstated. With ingenuity, opportunity and considerable bravery, a number of men surmounted these perceived obstacles and gained their freedom.

5.3. Tamil Labourers and the Cholera Epidemic of 1943.

For the majority of the imprisoned other ranks their most frequent contacts with civilians would be through work. There were many locations at which such associations existed, from the mines and furnaces of Japan, Korea and Formosa, to the construction projects in the Netherlands East Indies and the Pacific islands. Such experiences served to reinforce their impression that they were now at the bottom of the new, and for them inverted, colonial order. In one location, however, despite their own desperate condition, the prisoners would clearly see that they were not at the base of the Japanese imperial hierarchy, during their time on the Burma-Thailand Railway. Here in their perceptions they were replaced at the bottom by the Tamil labourers, whose misfortune it was to occupy the lowest steps on the ladders of race and class in that part of South East Asia, regardless of who occupied the top rung.

On the Railway the Tamils, already struggling due to a lack of food, basic facilities and medical support, would suffer a new nadir, as a wave of cholera swept down river through their encampments, carrying large numbers of the labourers and their families to their deaths. Whilst such pitiful circumstances generated a good deal of sympathy from many of the prisoners, it was frequently tinged with a sense of culpability on the part of the Tamils. One POW wrote: 'They had no conception of elementary hygiene and it was very likely true, as we all believed, that they had done much, despite our precautions, to contaminate water supplies. But they suffered more than we.'⁴⁹⁹ Their poor sanitation and lack of organisation are frequently cited in both the first-hand accounts and the subsequent literature as contributing to the desperate conditions in which they found themselves. In this section, following some background on both the Tamils and the cholera that awaited them, the prevalence of such views will be examined, and the validity of the common assumptions regarding sanitation will be assessed.

5.3.1. The Tamil labourers.

The Tamils were a relatively small part of the civilian labour force of millions of *romusha* whom the Japanese recruited through a mixture of inducement, requisition and abduction, to work across its Asian territories.⁵⁰⁰ Hundreds of thousands never returned home, many of whom died at their workplaces throughout the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Paul Kratoska has written: 'Theirs is a story of death and dislocation of holocaust proportions, and remarkably it is a story that has received little attention from historians.'⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁹ IWM: Dawson: p 22.

⁵⁰⁰ Romusha is a collective name given to the Asian labour force, sometimes more specifically applied to those conscripted from the Netherlands East Indies.

⁵⁰¹ Kratoska, Paul.H. (ed) (2005) *Asian Labor in the Wartime Japanese Empire: Unknown Histories*. M.E.Sharpe, Armonk, New York. p.xv.

Whilst the historical silence of these workers is frequently attributed to issues of literacy and publishing in the developing world (as opposed to the silence of historians in the developed world), there remains sufficient source material from which to attempt to recreate their situation on the Railway. Official reports commissioned by the British Government immediately after the war frequently contain the voices of the labourers, even if the records of the interviews themselves have disappeared. Asian historians have in a number of areas put together local wartime histories, a trend enhanced in the case of the Railway by local and Japanese studies that have sought out survivors of the episode and recorded their oral histories. Finally, and no less important in the context of this study, are the accounts and responses of the POWs themselves.

At its commencement the railway construction project had initially utilised Burmese and Thai labourers on their respective sides of the border, supplemented in stages with around 60,000 POWs. However the proximity of this local labour force to their homes led to increasingly large desertions from these cohorts, as the situation on the line worsened. As word spread of the appalling conditions, recruitment locally became problematic. These factors, coupled with the Japanese need to maintain some sort of cordial relations with their titular allies in Burma and Thailand, and a newly foreshortened construction period, meant that a new source of labour was required, particularly for the remoter central sections of the line.⁵⁰²

The Tamil plantation workers in Malaya, underemployed since the economic dislocation of the Japanese occupation, seemed like an ideal solution. Pre-war conditions in Malaya had been mixed with respect to health, welfare and wages, and a repatriation law that has been described as treating 'the plantation workforce as dispensable livestock to be herded back and

⁵⁰² An attempt to offset the bad reputation that the Railway was getting in Burma can be seen in the Japanese orders for new recruitment in March 1943. As well as a doctor for every 1,000 workers, the document specified that: '1. Corps members shall not be treated as common laborers, as in the past. The term coolie shall be strictly prohibited.' In; Trager, Frank N. (ed) (1971) *Burma: Japanese Military Administration, Selected Documents, 1941-1945*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia. pp233-234.

forth as required'.⁵⁰³ Despite such shortcomings, plantation life was in some ways better than where they had come from, and would prove to be considerably healthier than where they were going.

Whilst there were lesser numbers of Chinese and ethnic Malays sent up country, it was from the Tamil population of Malaya that the main body of men (and some women and children) were enlisted and conscripted. Similarly to the *Sook Ching* episode, exact numbers are chimeric and even approximations prove problematic. In the aftermath of surrender in 1945 some Japanese officials would claim that records were not required to be kept of civilian workers, others that they had been burnt prior to the surrender. Notwithstanding the difficulties that the latter factors may have caused in the extrapolation of such numbers, War Crimes Investigation Team (WCIT) No 10 was given Japanese figures that 78,204 Malaysians (largely Tamils, but including some Telegus, indigenous Malays and Chinese) had been employed, of whom 29,634 had died, and 24,620 had deserted. The WCIT estimated that many of the so-called deserters had in fact died, and whilst still using the Japanese figure for those employed, arrived at a total of more than 40,000 deaths, over 50% of the cohort.⁵⁰⁴ This figure was considerably higher than that suffered by the POWs working on the line, of whom around 20% died in its construction.⁵⁰⁵

Also of note in the WCIT document is the Japanese acknowledgement that a large proportion of the Tamil deaths took place after the completion of the Railway, a period which for those POWs who remained on the line would be considerably easier and one of recovery, and had a

⁵⁰³ Thomas, Martin. (2012) *Violence and Colonial Order: Police, Workers, and Protest in the European Colonial Empires, 1918-40*. Cambridge University Press. p302.

⁵⁰⁴ UKNA: WO 325/56: Report on Coolie Camp Conditions on the Burma-Siam Railway During the Period November 1943- August 1945. p75.

⁵⁰⁵ Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p198. A total of 61,806 POWs were sent to the Railway, and 12,399 died there. The death toll included 6,904 Britons, 2,815 Australians, more than 2,000 Dutch and 337 Americans.

much lower mortality associated with it.⁵⁰⁶ This post completion contrast is made sharper by the fact that the healthiest POWs had been selected for transport on work parties to Japan, leaving behind those who were, in the less than sympathetic medical eyes of the Japanese, considered to be too ill to make the journey.

Whilst many post-war historians have based their assessments of Tamil mortality on the WCIT figures, David Boggett has suggested that the numbers employed and dying on the Railway may have been considerably higher.⁵⁰⁷ He cites a report sent to the Colonial Office, shortly after the war had ended, by Major Crawford, the former CO of the POW medical unit known as “K” force.⁵⁰⁸ This contained anecdotal accounts suggesting that as many as 250,000 “Malayans” had been employed in Thailand, with 100,000 or more dying on the Railway.⁵⁰⁹ Further support for this higher mortality is provided by the change in population figures for Malaya between 1941 and 1947. Whilst the (ethnic) Malay population increased during this period by 11.5%, and that of the Chinese by 10%, the Indian figure fell by nearly 20%, from 744,202 to 599,616.⁵¹⁰

There were a number of causes of this mortality, including debilitating diseases and conditions such as dysentery, malaria, beriberi, pneumonia, ulcers, all fed by the effects of poor diet and overwork. Such afflictions would usually take some time before the victim finally succumbed.

⁵⁰⁶ WO 325/56: The figures contained in this respect indicate Japanese officers seeking to mitigate their responsibility for the deaths. Colonel Watanabe, in charge during the building of the railway, suggested that 10,000 died during construction and 20,000 after, whilst Major General Adachi, the commander after the line had been completed, claimed 22,000 died during construction and 11,000 after. These figures no doubt reflect their relative responsibilities at the times concerned, and the impending War Crimes Trials. Major Tsuneshi was careful not to fall out with either of his more senior colleagues, and only gave a combined figure, of 30,000, for both periods.

⁵⁰⁷ Boggett, David. (2003) “Notes on the Thai-Burma Railway: Part VI: The Background to Indian Labour in Southeast Asia.” *The Journal of Kyoto Seika University*, No 24, pp26-27.

⁵⁰⁸ “K” Force was a team of 30 medical officers and 200 orderlies sent from Changi to the Railway in late June 1943, raised by the Japanese in response to the cholera epidemic, in an attempt to rectify the total lack of medical care available to the civilian labourers. “L” Force, comprised of 15 medical officers and 100 orderlies followed them in late August 1943. Kratoska, Paul H. (2006) *The Thailand-Burma Railway, 1942-1946: Documents and Selected Writings. Volume IV: Asian Labour*. Routledge, London. pp 90,118.

⁵⁰⁹ UKNA: CO 273/678/1 Report on Malayan Labour on Bangkok-Moulmein Railway.

⁵¹⁰ Paul H. Kratoska. (1998) *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya: A Social and Economic History*. Hurst and Company, London. p 317.

Accidents and suicides also made a more immediate contribution to the death toll, but it was the sudden onset of cholera that would generate the greatest medical fear on the Railway.

5.3.2. Cholera.

The 1943 cholera epidemic coincided with the arrival of both the Tamil and POW labour forces in the middle reaches of the Railway, and the onset of the monsoon. This remote region had little or no infrastructure to support the workforce, both in terms of communications networks to travel to and supply the camps, and the basic, if any, facilities that greeted them when they arrived. Furthermore the region was sparsely populated, reducing the possibility of trading for food with the local population, a need that became more pressing as the arrival of supplies became increasingly intermittent, due to the effects of the monsoon on both river transport and the jungle paths. In such circumstances, with the rain filled latrines, where they existed, overflowing across the camps, the conditions were ideal for the spread of disease.

Cholera was endemic to this area, and the first report of an occurrence during the construction period was upriver in Burma at the end of 1942.⁵¹¹ The Japanese Southern Army disease prevention unit had notified its members that a further outbreak had started on the Burmese side in March of 1943, and was slowly working its way downriver.⁵¹² As far south as Konyu camp, only 160 kilometres from Bangkok, orders to take preventative measures were issued in early March.⁵¹³ By the middle of May the disease had taken hold in the more northerly camps on the Thai side of the border, including Songkurai and Nike, and a week later had reached Takunan, some 70 kilometres to the south.⁵¹⁴ In mid-June cholera cases were recorded in the

⁵¹¹ UKNA: WO 325/56, p60.

⁵¹² Corporal Tatsuo Morohoshi. (2005) Cholera., in Kazuo Tamayama, (ed). (2005) *Railwaymen in the War: Tales by Japanese Railway Soldiers in Burma and Thailand 1941-47*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke. p119.

⁵¹³ Dunlop, *The War Diaries*, p209.

⁵¹⁴ Hardie, *The Burma-Siam Railway*, p94.

cluster of camps at Hintok, Konyu and Tarsao further south, although for the POWs beyond this cluster, the outbreak diminished in potency at the southern end of the line.⁵¹⁵

When cholera struck, the victim would rapidly decline, as bodily fluids were ejected by vomiting and the characteristic “rice-water” diarrhoea, accompanied by severe weight loss due to dehydration and for most, a rapid death within a day or so if untreated. The bacteria were usually transmitted through the faecal contamination of water supplies, often as a result of poor sanitary conditions, aided by the favourable alkaline geology through which the Kwa Noi River flowed. Prevention through improved sanitation, and cure, by means of rehydration therapies, were under normal circumstances very effective in controlling the disease. For the POWs, who had some limited clinical support, such measures could, through the ingenuity and dedication of their medical teams, prove helpful; for the Tamil labourers, totally lacking in such support, they would be impossible, with fatal consequences.

Japanese sources suggest that between 6,800 and 10,000 Tamils perished in the outbreak, although given the caveats outlined previously, such figures may represent a considerable underestimate.⁵¹⁶ The mortality rate for Tamils who caught the disease was 90%, as compared to that for the POWs, who had some rudimentary health care, of 50%.⁵¹⁷ Within the prisoner statistics there were significant rank based and geographical variations. In one camp in the cholera zone, at 205 kilometres, only one of two hundred officers was admitted to the “hospital”. In comparison the other ranks were 25 times more likely to catch the disease, with a total of 172 out of 1,400 falling victim. The mortality rate was 58%.⁵¹⁸ The greater impact of cholera in the middle section of the line is illustrated by the POW death tolls. Of the 7,000

⁵¹⁵ Dunlop, *War Diaries*, p 281.

⁵¹⁶ Nakahara Michiko. (1993) “Asian Laborers Along the Burma-Thailand Railroad.” *Waseda Journal of Asian Studies*. Vol 15, p97. The figure of 10,000 comes from a Japanese history of the Railway, whilst 6,800 was the figure quoted by Japanese medical authorities to WCIT 10 and quoted in UKNA: WO 325/56. The latter report noted that the Japanese figures appeared conservative.

⁵¹⁷ UKNA: CO 273/678/1; p17.

⁵¹⁸ Captain H.E. de Wardener, RAMC. (1946) “Cholera epidemic among prisoners-of-war in Siam.” *The Lancet*, Vol 247, Issue 6401, p638.

unfortunate men of “F” Force, sent to the Songkurai area in May 1943, around 3,100 died, nearly half their number. In comparison with other diseases, cholera was the ‘worst killer’, accounting for 750 deaths.⁵¹⁹ At Chungkai hospital, near the Thai terminus of the railroad and further away from the remote epicentre of the epidemic, cholera had a lesser impact on overall mortality. Here dysentery was the cause of most deaths, although the 40% mortality rate of the relatively fewer cholera cases still fed the fear of the disease and contributed to its fearsome reputation.⁵²⁰

Cholera came with its own longstanding mythology and racialized assumptions. Indian standards of hygiene and ignorance of disease were already the source of widespread disdain at all levels of white colonial society at the turn of the twentieth century.⁵²¹ The origin of the disease in north east India made it ‘a convenient symbol for much that the west despised about a society so different from its own.’⁵²² Such tropes fed into and nourished some already well-established narratives among the western prisoners regarding the sanitary habits and disorganisation of their Tamil co-workers.

At the extreme end of this spectrum was a belief that the Tamils were the source of cholera and had brought the disease with them. One officer hinted at this when he recalled that the camps upcountry ‘had cholera and all other things when they brought up a lot of the Tamils’.⁵²³ In a similar vein historian Gavan Daws claims ‘it was the romusha who brought cholera to the railroad’, due to a lack of any planned programme of inoculation by the Japanese.⁵²⁴ The point was made more explicitly post-war by WCIT 10, in their investigation into an outbreak at Ikeda

⁵¹⁹ Gavan McCormack. (1993) “Apportioning the blame: Australian trials for railway crimes.” In McCormack and Nelson, *The Burma-Thailand Railway*. p101.

⁵²⁰ Dunlop, E.E. (1946) “Medical Experiences in Japanese Captivity.” *The British Medical Journal*, Vol 2, No 4474. p482.

⁵²¹ J.A. Sharrock. (1910) *South Indian Missions: Containing glimpses into the lives and customs of the Tamil People*. Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, London. p264.

⁵²² David Arnold. (1986) Cholera and Colonialism in British India. *Past and Present*. No 113, p138.

⁵²³ IWM: Payne; Reel 2.

⁵²⁴ Daws, *Prisoners*, p209. The lack of inoculation would have made the *romusha* more vulnerable to cholera on arrival in Thailand, as opposed to Daw’s implication that they brought it with them.

Han camp in Thailand during 1945, which according to the Japanese CO killed fifteen of the thirty Tamil victims (the Tamil claim of 150 deaths was discounted as an exaggeration by the author of the report). The Japanese attributed the cause as being either one of their units that had recently passed through the camp, or a nearby Thai village. The WCIT however gave more weight to another source: 'One intelligent witness (who was not however, in the camp) states that the disease began after the arrival of a trainload of coolies from Malaya.' The mystery informant claimed that the starving Tamils had gorged themselves on rice, leading to an outbreak of diarrhoea that then fouled the camp. He also claimed that 150 of them had died, although this carried less weight with the pre-set minds of the WCIT.⁵²⁵

In most accounts it was however the spread of the disease that was widely attributed to the Indian labour force, due to their still inherent characteristics of poor sanitation and the lack of organisation. As one POW recalled, it was 'the Tamils who may have been largely responsible for the spread of cholera.'⁵²⁶

5.3.3. Sanitation.

There was a pre-existing and widespread opinion among the troops that Asians were unhygienic, and as has already been demonstrated this conception was both reinforced, and in some cases mitigated, by close contacts before captivity. In the cholera ridden and monsoon sodden quagmire of the jungle camps on the Railway such perceptions became legion, and have been reproduced in most of the subsequent literature.

One of the first locations where such allegations appeared was at the Ban Pong camp, the initial transit depot in Thailand for those being transported from Singapore and Malaya to work on the Railway. Clifford Kinvig describes the arrival of "F" Force in April of 1943, when the camp 'was now a squalid mess from overuse, poor sanitation facilities and previous occupancy by native labour gangs from Malaya.' The following month he cites the 'blunt' reaction of an

⁵²⁵ UKNA: WO 325/56, p61.

⁵²⁶ IWM: Dawson; p22.

Australian POW who arrived at Ban Pong with “H” Force, who described it as ‘littered with excrement, seething with flies and in that condition of unspeakable filth which only Asiatics can attain.’⁵²⁷ Regardless of the recent occupation by “F” Force, the POW automatically blamed the Asian labourers, and such assumptions would be replicated all along the Railway. Despite the blame falling on the Tamil cohorts, who had only started transiting through Ban Pong in April 1943, the insanitary conditions at the camp had a longer history which indicates that more architectural and meteorological causes were responsible. The first wave of POWs had passed through from Singapore at the end of June 1942, and by the following month the conditions at the camp were described by Dr Robert Hardie, of the Malayan Volunteer Field Ambulance Service, as a scene of ‘squalid huts knee-deep in mud and floodwater and sewage.’⁵²⁸ He identified the cause as the totally insufficient provision of latrines, both in number and capacity, their unhygienic construction, and their location adjacent to the flimsy huts where the men slept. Even before the rains came and flooded the defective toilets, he noted that ‘the bottom ends of the huts are nearly uninhabitable owing to the stench and the clouds of flies and bluebottles. But the huts are so crowded that the bottom ends cannot be evacuated.’⁵²⁹ Requests for materials to resolve this problem were ignored by the Japanese, and thus, as a POW in the second major wave sent upcountry from Changi in November 1942 recalled, in the rainy season the water came up to their beds, carrying with it an armada of the insanitary contents flushed from the inadequate latrines.⁵³⁰

⁵²⁷ Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p122, p125. The Australian POW was Russell Braddon; see *The Naked Island*, p 170. “F” and “H” Forces were sent from Changi, along with the Tamils, to construct the remote middle sections of the Railway.

⁵²⁸ Hardie, *The Burma-Siam Railway*, p 92.

⁵²⁹ Hardie, *The Burma-Siam Railway*, p29. In the context of the allegations that the Tamils carried cholera with them into Thailand, it is interesting to note that Hardie suggests that POWs brought malaria with them to Ban Pong, an area previously untroubled by the disease (p30).

⁵³⁰ IWM: Dawson; p75.

Such unhygienic scenarios were replicated at many locations on the Railway, and were the subject of numerous complaints from the civilian labour force themselves, as the WCIT 10 noted:

Coolie statements are full of complaints as to the condition of latrines which in most cases are open trenches in close proximity to the huts, without roofs and with no provision for privacy! In wet weather these overflowed all over the camp site. ... No wonder that in such conditions infectious diseases like cholera and dysentery spread like wild fire.⁵³¹

This statement, in a report that frequently adopts an unsympathetic attitude to the Tamil labourers, provides clear evidence that contradicts the assertion that they were intrinsically unhygienic, and their complaints mirror those made by Dr Hardie.⁵³² Attending to daily bodily functions in a sanitary fashion would become impossible in such situations.

These conditions, and the unsanitary situations that they generated, were not restricted to the civilian camps, as one MO recorded shortly after the war. He had noted that 'the camps, immediately after the coolies had passed through were filthy', but then went on to describe similar circumstances, for the same reasons, at the POW camp at 205 kilometres.

Latrines (shallow trench) were totally inadequate, and fouling of the ground all over the camp was very prevalent both before and after the onset of the epidemic. It was not until the onset of the epidemic that the Japanese would permit any men to dig deep trench latrines; up to that time all available men were employed on the railway.⁵³³

In another camp at Hintok in April 1943, before the onset of the epidemic, Australian doctor "Weary" Dunlop had noted comparable concerns with regard to 'the lethargy of troops, who frequently offend by defecating in the bushes about the camp'. He added the caveat that 'the

⁵³¹ UKNA: WO 325/56, p40.

⁵³² The report by WCIT No 10 is liberally littered with statements of a derogatory and racist nature. Rotation of the labour force on the Railway was hindered by, amongst other things, 'the stubborn unreasonableness of coolies.' (p16). Damned with the faintest of racially informed praise was one Japanese formation: 'In short, the 10 Spec. Rly. Trt. Unit is the "whitest" of all the units employing coolies on the Burma-Siam Railway.' (p21). In reference to the selection of levies from the rubber estates it opines: 'Naturally, human nature being what it is, they [the estates] contributed the worst half, the unruly element who were always gambling, drinking and whoring.' (p13).

⁵³³ De Wardener, "Epidemic", p 637.

lack of personal cleanliness of hands and mess tins is perhaps comprehensible considering their exhausted state.’⁵³⁴

Another Australian medical officer noted in an official report, on his return to Changi, that the combination of exhaustion, poor facilities and living conditions meant that ‘personal cleanliness and hygiene were insurmountable problems.’⁵³⁵ In the same report he noted that ‘the wide prevalence of dysentery and diarrhoea led to constant and almost uncontrollable fouling of approaches and environs.’⁵³⁶ Dysentery, and subsequently cholera, would only add to the problems of sanitation, both in the camps and at work. A Japanese railway officer recalled the problem presented at his work site by the rapid bowel movements of the prisoners, who would avail themselves of the nearest bush, unable to reach the toilets in time. ‘We made simple toilets ... but we could not stop the scattering of loose faeces and the foul odour, a miserable situation.’⁵³⁷

In many camps further up the line there were no latrines at all when the civilian labour force (and the POWs) moved in, and no opportunity to construct them as everyone was driven out to work each day.⁵³⁸ Some of these camps had been fabricated by the POWs specifically for the Tamils, one such featuring a row of sleeping shelves one foot off the ground, with another above it at four feet. No latrines were constructed.⁵³⁹ The implications of such an arrangement for debilitated workers, particularly those on the lower shelf, with near endemic dysentery afflicting many, are unpleasant to even imagine, much less endure.

Many of the problems derived from the pollution of water supplies. Whilst the Japanese authorities would often delineate where water should be drawn from, with themselves furthest upstream, and ‘Coolies and Prisoners of War’ below, they sometimes allowed the

⁵³⁴ Dunlop, *War Diaries*, p 238.

⁵³⁵ “H” Force in Thailand – medical report. in: Kratoska, *Thailand-Burma Railway*, Vol IV, p 278.

⁵³⁶ “H” Force in Thailand – medical report. in: Kratoska, *Thailand-Burma Railway*, Vol IV, p275.

⁵³⁷ 2nd Lt Juji Tarumoto. ‘Matoma, the hardest time of all’, in: Tamayama, *Railwaymen*, p140.

⁵³⁸ Hardie, *The Burma-Siam Railway*, p106.

⁵³⁹ Coast, *Railroad*, pp129-130.

prisoners (or more precisely the officers) to impose their own hierarchy upon water resources. Thus at Taimonta camp in northern Thailand the officers instituted a system whereby 'the higher portion was not to be used except for drawing water for the cook-house, the middle portion was to be used by British and Dutch troops and the lower portion by the Tamils. In that way it was hoped to lessen the dangers of infection.'⁵⁴⁰ This may possibly have reduced the dangers of infection for the prisoners, but it now left the Tamils using water for all purposes, including cooking and drinking, that had been used by the prisoners upstream as at best both a bath and a laundry, and at worst a latrine. Such indifference to those lower down the colonial ladder is encapsulated in another insanitary reproduction of western superiority, as related by an officer imprisoned on Java.

We used a stream which flowed through the native hutments, and which they seemed to use equally as a water supply and the main drain. We traced the stream up for a couple of miles and found no other village contaminating the water which we used for all purposes, still having a water cart for sterilization. We officers finally had a very posh lavatory constructed over a fast moving little rivulet. Higher up we used the same stream for our washing and bathing, enjoying the soft rainwater which usually ran quite clear.⁵⁴¹

Race and class combine in this unconscious fluvial allegory for the British Empire in Asia. Such arrangements were a continuation of long-standing colonial practices, as highlighted by Vijay Prashad in his study of the hierarchy of sanitation arrangements in imperial Delhi, where 'the colonial regime built the unequal treatment of the native and colonial areas into the sanitation system itself as spatial domination functioned as the everyday metaphor for colonial domination.'⁵⁴² The continuation of such stratified arrangements, even in captivity, serves to demonstrate the persistence and the strength of an inherent sense of racial superiority and difference, as well as giving lie to the claim that the POWs were now at the bottom of the heap.

⁵⁴⁰ IWM: Dawson; p19.

⁵⁴¹ IWM: Steeds; p136.

⁵⁴² Prashad, Vijay. (2001) "The Technology of Sanitation in Colonial Delhi." *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 35, p125.

Water could still prove problematic, even for those Tamils fortunate enough to have survived the camps and the journey down the line to the base Hospital at Kanchanaburi.⁵⁴³ At one stage, due to problems with transport, water had to be drawn from the filter pump by the river and carried by hand to the hospital by the medical staff, and the labourers' portion was only sufficient for cooking purposes. This meant that 'no drinking water was issued to the coolies.' Col Benson, in charge of "L" Force, reported that initially those who could get down to the river would illicitly slake their thirst and bring back bottles for those unable to make the journey, receiving beatings from the Japanese if caught. Once the guards stopped even this source thirst became a killer, and in desperation after rain storms the patients would 'rush out to the dirty rain pools in the camp and in the adjacent fields to obtain drinking water.' Another medical officer in the same location noted that when the pumps broke down the labourers could go four days without water, by which time 'they were nearly mad with thirst.'⁵⁴⁴

Such desperation was not the sole purview of the Tamils, as a British officer noted in the diary he kept during his captivity in a camp in Formosa. As survivors of the Railway started to transit to Japan the story of the episode and the associated mortality spread with them, and Captain Davies wrote:

It is of great interest to note the few officer casualties, despite the fact that they all endured precisely the same conditions. In my opinion this is due solely to the better self-discipline of the educated, in respect particularly of water-holes, streams etc. How well I know how impossible it is to stop men drinking when and where they shouldn't.⁵⁴⁵

Whilst Davies was obviously misinformed regarding the equivalence of the conditions endured by the men and their officers, and the role of education in conditioning their actions, he was correct in identifying the fact that the men had to sometimes drink from unsuitable sources.

⁵⁴³ The patients were crammed 65 to a railroad truck for the journey down the line, more than twice the density that the "fit" POWs had endured on their way up-country from Singapore. Report of History of "L" Force P.O.W. Thailand, in, Kratoska, *The Thailand-Burma Railway, Volume IV*: p140.

⁵⁴⁴ Report of History of "L" Force; in, Kratoska, *The Thailand-Burma Railway; Volume IV*: pp142, 154.

⁵⁴⁵ IWM: Davies, G.P (Docs 448) 27/10/1944.

BORs, Tamils, and even officers could be driven by severe dehydration to utilise otherwise unpotable water. In such circumstances desperation trumped self-discipline and education. As Ira Klein has suggested in the context of a similar story of cholera, transport links and polluted water in 19th century India, 'banning contaminated sources was as effective as outlawing human thirst.'⁵⁴⁶

Of particular significance in respect of sanitation was the perception of indiscipline in Tamil toileting habits, and a common opinion that the 'principle of "defaecating on the doorsteps" was almost universal.'⁵⁴⁷ Whilst it is still common today in many of the poorer parts of the world, where toilets do not exist, to find open defecation practised, in such situations "defecating on the doorstep" is seen as being the most unhygienic and least desirable option.⁵⁴⁸ Such assumptions as to the habits of the labourers also ignore the fact that they had come from organised plantations in Malaya, where some sort of rudimentary toileting facilities were provided. The Tamils had become accustomed to their use, as their numerous complaints regarding the lack of such facilities in the camps demonstrated.

Poor hygiene practices were caused to a large extent by the lack of facilities, the inability to construct them due to the labour demands and the lack of consideration in these matters by the Japanese, compounded by debilitation and inclement weather. In these respects the POWs were frequently in much the same position, and suffered similarly, as noted by the same prisoner cited previously who had suggested Tamil culpability.

We often passed the Tamil camp and commented on its filthy state. Our British arrogance – a quality of which the Japanese were intensely aware and which they resented more than anything else about us – often failed to appreciate that, through no fault of ours, our own camp must often have been in little better state. The smell from the Tamil camp offended us and yet there were tents in our camp housing men

⁵⁴⁶ Klein, Ira. (1994) "Imperialism, ecology and disease: Cholera in India, 1850-1950." *Indian Economic Social History Review*, Vol 31, p510.

⁵⁴⁷ Report on AIF "K" Force: in; Kratoska, *The Thailand-Burma Railway; Volume IV*: Routledge, London. p95.

⁵⁴⁸ <http://riceinstitute.org/wordpress/2014/07/31/purity-latrine-use-and-religion/>

who were too ill to wash themselves and which doubtless would have been just as offensive to an unaccustomed nose.⁵⁴⁹

In one further respect the POWs had an advantage over the Tamils. There are a number of accounts of dying Tamils being buried or burned alive, including several in the cases under study. One prisoner recalled having to work on such a burial detail.

As I and others entered these quarters it was a pathetic sight to see them lying in the mud, hands outstretched just begging for water. Their precautions were nil as they writhed on the ground in agony with no help from anyone. What could we do? To touch in any way would no doubt give you the disease so we started to dig a very large square hole. After many hours of toiling we shoveled [sic] the dead onto sacks and put them in the hole. Those that were dying I am sorry to say ended up in the same way. We had no alternative. The stench was unbearable as we hastily filled in the hole with the occasional hands appearing through the earth, but I suppose it was now life or death for all of us as cholera spreads so rapidly.⁵⁵⁰

Pity, helplessness and a reference to the Tamil's lack of 'precautions' are combined in this dreadful situation, one which officers also took part in as the Japanese resorted to any means necessary and all available labour to control the epidemic. Another prisoner told of how similar prophylactic measures were carried out by an officer at a labourers' camp; if he did not think they would last the day he would hit them on the head with a hammer, after which they were buried or burnt. He prefaced this statement with a description of how the appalling conditions were amplified by the poor sanitation and sense of resignation of the Tamils.⁵⁵¹

As well as fellow labourers, Asian medical parties could also find themselves on the horns of a terrible dilemma. Former medical student Tan Choon Keng had been recruited by the Japanese to serve as an orderly on the Railway, and whilst he had become aware of the ill-treatment of

⁵⁴⁹ IWM: Dawson; p23.

⁵⁵⁰ IWM: Dixon; p98.

⁵⁵¹ IWM: Long, J. (Sound 15350) Reel 14.

captives on the line, 'it was beyond his wildest expectation that he himself would perpetrate this insanity.'⁵⁵² He set fire to a hospital hut; no one had the strength to get out.

Not everyone complied with the Japanese orders; Dr Hardie noted in his diary that the guards tried to get some British POWs to bury still extant Tamils.

On one occasion they forced them at the point of loaded rifles to lay them in shallow graves; but the British (they were only a handful of other ranks, no officers) steadfastly refused to do any more... the Japanese themselves covered the bodies.⁵⁵³

On one occasion a POW was the intended victim. Edward Dunlop described this rare occurrence, noting how a Japanese guard felled the soldier by hitting him with sticks and shovels and then pushed him into a hole. 'The soldiers with the party refused to comply with the burial order and many were struck. Eventually the "corpse" was rescued.'⁵⁵⁴

Joanna Bourke, a historian who has spent some time examining the frequently overlooked less pleasant aspects of what people have to do in the prosecution of a war, and the difficulties of those returning to civilian life afterwards, has suggested that servicemen who have been involved in such brutality need to find 'a legitimate narrative that can "place" the self in a way that is both coherent and convincing'. It is possible that the Tamil sanitation narrative has been adopted as a part of this process, as those who witnessed their suffering tried to rationalise the previously unimaginable horrors they had witnessed, and in some cases, had to participate in.⁵⁵⁵ In this context pre-existing colonial tropes could be adapted to the new situation caused by the negligent attitude of the Japanese to their Asian labourers.

⁵⁵² Goh Chor Boon. (1999) *Living Hell: Story of a WWII Survivor at the Death Railway*. Asiapac Books Pte Ltd, Singapore. p80.

⁵⁵³ Hardie, *The Burma-Siam Railway*. 4/8/1943. p109.

⁵⁵⁴ Dunlop, *The War Diaries*, 27/6/1943. p289.

⁵⁵⁵ Bourke, Joanna. (2004) "Introduction: 'Remembering' War." *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol 39, p480.

5.3.5. Summary.

The cholera epidemic of 1943 brought fear and death to many on the Burma-Thailand Railway, but no community suffered as much as did the Tamil labourers. Whilst their condition engendered widespread sympathy amongst the POWs, this was frequently accompanied by a sense of culpability due to imputations of poor hygiene and organisation. Such conceptions frequently had a prior colonial and racial provenance, and would persist into the post-war period. Despite their continued prevalence in most of the literature, this section has questioned the applicability of such notions with regard to the situation on the Railway.

The blame for conditions in the camps lay squarely with the Japanese. It was they who sent the labourers up the line with little or no provision of basic facilities, food or medical care. It was the Japanese who refused to stop movements on the line during the epidemic, thus facilitating its spread, and it was they whose 'only epidemic control was to throw the sick on the fire.'⁵⁵⁶

5.4. Conclusions.

The two contexts considered in this chapter share a common thread with regard to how the POWs' perceptions of their difference from the local populations could influence their outlooks and actions. In both cases there is a persistent and pervasive post-war narrative that has represented the peoples of Asia as being a threat, whether through the perceived hostility to escapees or as the cause of the cholera epidemic on the Railway. Whilst there is some foundation for such assumptions to be found in the primary sources, the foregoing analysis suggests that such views were by no means ubiquitous, or indeed were necessarily an accurate representation. The realities of the situations were more complex and nuanced.

⁵⁵⁶ Gor Chor Boon, *Living Hell*, p81.

The threat posed by local inhabitants (and the physical environment) to escaping prisoners was not as clear as the literature suggests, and is indeed contradicted by many of the cases examined. Similarly, it can be argued that the blame apportioned to the Tamils for the cholera epidemic has been overstated, and whilst the fear of their camps is entirely understandable, the causes of the prevalent conditions at those locations are less easily ascribed to the unfortunate occupants, if at all. Of course the realities of situations are frequently different to how they are perceived, and these cases were no exception to this rule. The BORs adopted a wide variety of responses across a spectrum that ranged from the sympathetic to the antipathetic, sometimes, particularly in the cholera epidemic, displaying both at the same time.

Pre-existing notions of difference, informed by the colonial and racial conceptualisations of white superiority, could find fertile ground in such alien surroundings and fraught situations. These could in turn be fed by the views of some of the officers, whose words would continue to have considerable traction and credence with a section of the men, despite their frequent unpopularity and some of the previous inaccuracies that had contributed to the low esteem in which they were often held.

These outlooks could provide an additional constraint to thoughts of escape, and influence assertions of culpability, and more, with regard to the cholera epidemic. Towards the other end of the spectrum were those men who adopted or possessed a more open outlook, were less intimidated by their new surroundings, and less swift to rush to judgements about the people in whose midst they found themselves. Such prisoners could utilise this more positive perspective to at least harbour some ambition to escape, and to display considerable empathy for the suffering of those around them. As on any spectrum, there was a considerable amount of space between these two positions, and a complexity that could be dictated by changing circumstances. Escapes, particularly successful ones, usually required a strong mental attitude,

although in some instances they were driven by a less positive sense of desperation. Similarly, even the most sympathetic of perspectives on Tamil suffering could be conditional on an element of their culpability.

The local people themselves often endured worse conditions and less consideration under the Japanese occupation than did the POWs, particularly when used in labour forces. Those who avoided such horrors and struggled to continue their lives, despite the dislocation of the war, were frequently supportive towards the prisoners, despite the appreciable risks involved if caught doing so. In this respect the situation was different from that experienced by prisoners in Europe, most of whom found themselves captive in enemy homelands as opposed to occupied territories. Despite this factor, post-war narratives have continued to stress the less favourable nature of Asian captivity, and whilst there are valid reasons for so doing, the response of local civilians to the POWs is not usually one of them.

Chapter 6. The Journey West.

6.1. Introduction.

If the popular memory of the FEPOWs' time in captivity has been one of a largely singular nature, fed by mass media constructions that relied heavily on the experience of suffering on the Burma-Thailand Railway, such conditions were by no means ubiquitous. Furthermore, whilst the persistence of the theme of continued antipathetic attitudes towards the Japanese, encapsulated in the mantra of neither forgiving nor forgetting, was a cornerstone of this storyline, close scrutiny of individual case studies reveals that many, although not all of the POWs, would find some degree of reconciliation after the war. This would occur at differing times and for a variety of reasons, but it represents a continuous thread that is all the more remarkable given the internal battle of many to come to terms with the memory of what they had been through, and their external fights, with the respective governments of Japan, over an appropriate apology, and of Britain in the search for adequate compensation.

This chapter will seek to elucidate both the development of post war attitudes to the Japanese and the construction of the often contradictory popular narrative of captivity in the Asian theatre. The trajectory of individual reconciliation will be tracked through the accounts of the former prisoners, primarily from the IWM holdings. The second section examines the selective development of published (newspapers and books) and cinematic representations and their influence on wider public perceptions of the captivity experience.

6.2. Individual Reconciliation.

Around half of the documentary case studies allow for scrutiny of attitudes to the Japanese since 1945, mainly through post-hoc memoirs but also including two contemporary diaries that had some accompanying post-war thoughts attached when they were deposited in the collections. Of particular importance in ascertaining such post-war views were the interviews in the sound archive at the IWM, which were systematically surveyed for the standard reference, usually at the end of the accompanying interview notes, to 'attitudes to the Japanese'.

There were a total of forty such oral records for the other ranks, which when combined with the documentary sources reveal that around a third of the men still held unswerving and strongly antagonistic attitudes towards the Japanese, unmediated by the passage of time. Conversely about two thirds of the veterans expressed varying degrees of reconciliation with the Japanese as a people, with many finding some sense of conciliation with their former captors, although not surprisingly the vast majority could not, and would not forget. These accounts provide insights into both the mutability (and the persistence) of attitudes in the post-war period, revealing a range of factors which influenced the varying degrees of *rapprochement* that were achieved, including belief systems, family and social contacts, and the healing power of time itself.

For a few their core beliefs, including religion but also among those holding more radical political outlooks, were the source of an early accommodation with the Japanese after liberation.⁵⁵⁷ Paul Addison's factions of 'Anglican Deep England' and 'radical-populist Britain' had something in common perhaps.⁵⁵⁸ For many in this category the war was seen as a historically specific location of antipathy, which ended with its passing. Christian faith had

⁵⁵⁷ Such beliefs were often given as a reason for survival in the camps.

⁵⁵⁸ Addison, "Book Review", p1367.

conditioned Lawrence Smith, formerly a private in the RAMC, to follow the road to reconciliation, as he recalled when asked for his views on the Japanese some forty years later: “I don’t feel any bitterness at all. It would have contradicted my Christian path, I would show hospitality to any Japanese I met.”⁵⁵⁹

Ernie Henderson, a lifelong communist, demonstrated a parallel, although more politically derived belief in the brotherhood of man. ‘I have to end with a word about the Japanese. I am not anti-Japanese although I condemn the behaviour of the Japanese as I experienced it in those dark years of 1942-1945.’⁵⁶⁰ Similarly, Arthur Mendelsohn said that he was “not conscious of carrying the scars around with me”, when making an explicit link between his tolerance and his “radical political opinions”. When asked if the experience had changed his attitudes to the Japanese, he responded; “not really ... I didn’t know any Japanese before the war”, before commenting that he had met a lot of young Japanese, who were in his eyes “not guilty for the crimes of their fathers”. Unsurprisingly he expressed “suspicions of some Japanese of my generation” that he had met, wondering if they might have been guards in the camps.⁵⁶¹ Although highly unlikely in reality, such caveats were not uncommon with regard to their Japanese peer group, a reflection of the persistence of bad memories even amongst the most tolerant of the FEPOWs.

This feeling of generational misgiving was a feature of around a quarter of those interviewees who had more positive things to say about the Japanese, frequently stated as a caveat to an otherwise more amenable outlook. Such statements were also frequently made in parallel, as above, with references to younger Japanese, the new generations coming through of whom many knew nothing of what had occurred and thus couldn’t be held responsible for the actions of their predecessors.

⁵⁵⁹ IWM: Smith, L (Sound 9497) Reel4.

⁵⁶⁰ IWM: Henderson; p544.

⁵⁶¹ IWM: Mendelsohn, A. (Sound 6801) Reel4.

The sense of generational progress, enhanced by post-war contacts, was echoed by Arthur Morley, who stated during an interview that: “Now I have nothing to say against the Japanese, today’s generation are innocent of the deeds of World War Two.” The evolution of Morley’s perspectives was no doubt influenced by an intake of Japanese students at the college where he worked in the 1980s, one of whom, “a nice chap”, he got to know quite well. The student was unaware of what had happened to the POWs during the war, and for this mistreatment he “most humbly apologised” to Morley.⁵⁶²

The response of another interviewee, Clifford Bailey, when asked about his views on the Japanese in 1980, contained similar evidence of mediation through post-war contacts, whilst revealing the still extant seeds of suspicion for the wartime generation.

I’ve not any strong feelings at all. I haven’t any feelings of hatred – don’t think about them much – I wouldn’t go out of my way to seek their company, but on the other hand I would offer them no anything [sic] to offend them. I live quite near to a Japanese family, I’ve sat next to the wife and the children on the bus and conversed with them and I’ve felt no feelings of hatred against them, although the parents would possibly have been school children in the war.⁵⁶³

Whilst the aforementioned cases offer anecdotal evidence of how contacts had helped to influence the attitudes of the POWs, for a couple of the cohort, who had held strongly antipathetic views, a specific family event can be identified as the catalyst for changing perceptions. William Rose was one of those who claimed that his core beliefs, in this case his Christianity, had kept him going in the camps and influenced his outlook afterwards. In the published edition of his wartime diaries he wrote that:

Being a PoW was a very testing time but I got through it with prayer and a resolve to overcome. I have often been asked what I thought of the Japanese people. My reply was always that not all of the Japanese people were responsible for the atrocities.⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶² IWM: Morley, A.J. (Sound 9767) Reel3.

⁵⁶³ IWM: Bailey; Reel11.

⁵⁶⁴ Rose, *You Shook My Hand*, pp3-4

This apparently tolerant perspective represents one of several developments from the content of his original contemporary manuscript diaries, which were a litany of derogatory references to both fellow POWs and their captors, and he was no doubt influenced by the marriage of his son to a Japanese woman. Describing meeting his daughter in law Takako Rose for the first time, he wrote that 'I would never have thought such a thing would have brought us so much happiness. ... This was the first Japanese person I had met since the war.' Encouraged by his Damascus road encounter with Takako, Rose and his wife visited Japan on a journey of reconciliation. He would subsequently become an active member of the Burma Campaign Society until his death in 2011. This mainly officer based group, formed from the remnants of the Burma Campaign Fellowship Group in 2002, includes both veterans of the 14th Army and the prison camps, and seeks to develop reconciliation through providing 'a bilateral forum ... for non-recriminatory discussion of war related issues'.⁵⁶⁵

The file of E.W. Parry offers a similar, though less explicit example of familial Japanese contacts, with a post-war attachment noting that both his daughter and son in law were fluent in Japanese. Whilst this note does not clearly state that his son in law is Japanese, the fact that he notes both were fluent in that language indicates regular contacts at the very least, and may well have influenced the decision by Parry and his wife to visit the mine at Sendai in Japan, where he worked for the last year of the war. On this trip he describes that an 'elderly taxi driver took them to the area of the mine ... and he was somewhat embarrassed about the affair'.⁵⁶⁶

Interviewed more than fifty years after his liberation, Eric Bouch reflected on how the passage of time, and the generations, had mellowed his outlook in his later years:

After all this time you cannot hate the Japanese people of today, because they know nothing about it ... the only people that I really hate, if you use the word hate, are the few Japanese I was with on the railway and then Japan itself, my generation – but the

⁵⁶⁵ <http://www.perkins-smart.com/burmacampaignsociety/aboutus/index.html>

⁵⁶⁶ IWM: Parry; Notes attached to manuscript diary.

future generations from then, well you can't hate them - you'll never forget what happened, whatever you try and do and think, but hate cannot go on can it? Not after all these years.⁵⁶⁷

So powerful is the exposition of Bouch on this topic that the mask of impartiality slips from the interviewer, the normally imperturbable Conrad Wood, and he reflexively responds to the question posed at the end, with an assenting "no".

In several interviews the subjects demonstrate the complexities inherent in the consideration of their opinions. Jim Long reflected on the question of his perspectives on the Japanese:

I've hated them all, I hate anything Japanese, but now I'm getting older I sometimes sit around and ask myself, do I really hate them or is it just prejudice? Is it not time to forgive and forget? I usually come up with the answer, maybe forgive but I can never forget, I generally don't want anything to do with them.⁵⁶⁸

In a similarly reflexive mood was Percy Mutimer, who had spent several years in hospital once back in Britain, as a result of his experiences in captivity. His response encapsulates many of the themes of the post-war discourse regarding the Japanese, as well as offering a vision of more mundane, but no less painful reality of daily life in captivity.

It's very strange, it's taken a long time to wear off, but I've met Japanese since, several times we had a crowd come round where I work and whether it was because I was working at the time and they were a crowd talking, I suddenly felt as though I was a prisoner again and I felt violent, and I was driving a fork lift truck and if one had got in the way I could have killed him. That's the only time. I was out with my brother one day and we stopped to give a young girl a lift, a nice looking girl and she was Japanese. I spoke to her in Japanese quite a lot ... she asked me: "Where did you learn?" ... I told her ... She said "Ah, I hope your feelings aren't too bad for the Japanese because of that." I said I can't take it out of a girl like you ... it wasn't you. ... It was a long long time of boredom, humiliation, filth, dirt and disease, a lot of sickness and illness, and whether one should forgive and forget I don't know, it's impossible really to forget it.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁷ IWM: Bouch, E.W. (Sound 19102) Reel4.

⁵⁶⁸ IWM: Long, J. (Sound 15350) Reel16.

⁵⁶⁹ IWM: Mutimer; Reel4.

Both Mutimer and Long, in common with many of the interviewees, seem to be offering less rehearsed and composed responses on this particular question, drifting from thought to thought as they related their replies. Whilst there is still a considerable sense of antipathy present, the distance of time has eroded the conviction with which it is held.

For a few of the IWM cohort there would be no sense of reconciliation or forgiveness, although even the previously strident Stanley Dawson, writing in 1946, would hint at the power of time as an aid to numbing the memory, if not to entirely forgetting the past. 'It seems strange looking back to find that deep hatred of the Japanese has passed into a mere lack of interest. ... now one is little more interested in the Japanese than is the average person.'⁵⁷⁰ The process of editing his papers did however reignite a less tolerant perspective in Dawson, as he concludes that:

One will always think of the Japanese as sadistic and heartless – in spite of having known men like Watanabe and having been impressed by the writings of such a Christian as Toyohiko Kagawa and being conscious that among millions of Japanese one did not meet there must have been many more of high character.⁵⁷¹

More persistent antipathy is demonstrated in the interviews of two former prisoners who were both held in Saigon. Walter Cleveland continued to "hate every one of them", and had sworn at tourists outside Buckingham Palace.⁵⁷² James Gregory suggested that "it would need a bigger Christian than me to forgive, and I will never forget." He had been visited by Special Branch detectives in the run up to a visit by Emperor Hirohito, and wrote several letters of complaint to the Japanese Ambassador.⁵⁷³ Interestingly both of these men expressed regret at the fact that only two atom bombs had been dropped on Japan, the only such expressions

⁵⁷⁰ IWM: Dawson; p199.

⁵⁷¹ IWM: Dawson; p201.

⁵⁷² IWM: Cleveland, W.S. (Sound 17348) Reel3.

⁵⁷³ IWM: Gregory, J.R. (Sound 6011) Reel4. In contrast to Gregory's actions, one former prisoner said that he had written to the Emperor to apologise for the rude reception he had received in Britain. He had described the Japanese as he saw them in the war as "quite likeable little fellows in some ways and horrible little buggers in other ways." Docketty, F.J. (Sound 4822) Reel5.

found in the interview survey, although there is no evidence to confirm that they had either met in Saigon or, had they done so, if they had kept in touch afterwards.

Equally vituperative post-war statements are to be found in the memoir of Henry Dixon, contained in a 'Letter of Reflection' that had been printed in the London FEPOW newsletter, shortly after the visit of Emperor Akihito, Hirohito's son, in 1998. He wrote that:

We are all now in our twilight days and for many still remain the horrific years which we spent under the barbaric Japanese, as their prisoners-of-war. How can anyone forget the starvation, brutality and depravity under their hands without thought for the suffering they were inflicting? ... For me, I'm afraid I could never bring myself to seek reconciliation and make friends with an enemy who was so barbaric and will not accept his brutal and cruel treatment of P.o.W.s under his jurisdiction with no apology.⁵⁷⁴

The reference to the apology resonates with the contemporary struggle by the ex-prisoners in the 1990s to gain compensation, for which a suitable Japanese expression of contrition was seen as an integral pre-requisite. Dixon, in common with many of his colleagues, felt that a number of such gestures made by individuals and official representatives of the government of Japan were unsatisfactory, and he instead focused in his letter on the unsympathetic words of a Japanese engineer who had served on the Railway, as reproduced in the *Daily Mail*, who had accused the POWs of being lazy and responsible for their own situation.

Some of Dixon's greatest antipathy was expressed against Keiko Holmes, and those FEPOWs and relatives who had taken part in the group visits to Japan that she organized. Holmes was the Japanese wife of a British businessman who had been inspired to set up an organization called Agape, in order to reconcile the former prisoners and their Japanese captors. Her interest had been stimulated following a visit to a POW grave site at the Iruka copper mine which had been maintained by the local miners and their families. For this work she had been awarded an O.B.E. by the Queen, just before Akihito's visit in 1998. It took some persuasion

⁵⁷⁴ IWM: Dixon, pp187-189.

(and probably not a little personal courage) to attend her first FEPOW Association conference in 1991 and start to deliver her message of conciliation. Given the post-war power of direct contacts with Japanese citizens to stimulate improved relations, Dixon was under no illusions as to the threat such activities could pose to the strength of his antipathy and that of some of his less resolute colleagues.

Now it seems for many a cheap holiday in Japan under Keiko Holmes is all that is required to not only forget but also to forgive, coming back from these trips telling everyone what wonderful people the Japanese are and so friendly.⁵⁷⁵

Whilst those who travelled to Japan would have been a relatively small proportion of the POW population, the effects of Holmes' project can be found in the archives. Jack Hughieson had survived the sinking of the Japanese transport ship *Lisbon Maru*, three and a half years of captivity, and the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima. In 1945 he had hated the Japanese, a feeling that would persist long after the war.⁵⁷⁶ Many years later he was asked by some Japanese tourists to take their photograph at Hampton Court, a request he refused until his wife reminded him that as part of his treatment (for psychological problems stemming from captivity) he should do so. After persistent contacts from Keiko Holmes (and out of a growing respect for the courage she had displayed in attempting to spread her message of reconciliation at FEPOW reunions) he finally agreed to go with a party of former prisoners to Japan.

At Heathrow I was still undecided, and when I saw the Japanese writing on the plane I didn't want to go on board ... once we arrived there was a crowd of children waving Union Jacks ... it was marvellous all the way they treated us very well ... At the leaving dinner I made a speech ... It's a completely different Japan from the one I left in 1945 and thank you for seeing the other side of Japan.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁵ IWM: Dixon; p188.

⁵⁷⁶ For one prisoner at Nagasaki witnessing the destruction of the bomb and clearing up afterwards alongside a Japanese soldier would prove to be a cathartic experience of reconciliation. "I said to the Japanese guard, what have we done to you? He replied, what have we done to each other? Everything that had happened over the past three and a half years was neutralised." IWM: Lawrence, S. (Sound 9706) Reel4.

⁵⁷⁷ IWM: Hughieson, J. (Sound 28639) Reels7-8.

Hughieson also spoke of how Holmes had been inspired by her mother, who at the end of the war had disinterred the bodies of 600 POWs from a mass grave at Iruka, reburying them in individual graves, and sending their identification to the respective authorities in each country. He told of how Holmes had since been dedicated to getting the government of Japan to acknowledge what had happened to the prisoners during the war.

Bill Notley had a similarly transformational experience when he visited Iruka with Keiko Holmes. Until that point his hatred of the Japanese had been un-mitigated, but his contacts with Keiko and the “very kind” Japanese that he met on his return led to a profound re-appraisal in his outlook. “I have forgiven, but I will never forget.”⁵⁷⁸

The cases presented reveal a spectrum of reconciliation ranging from an immediate *rapprochement* to a persistent and continuing antipathy. The majority of those studied demonstrated some form of conciliation at different times and to varying degrees. Whilst this was a comprehensive survey of the sound archives at the IWM, it should be reiterated that this represented only a very small cohort of the total population of BORs in captivity, and thus the conclusions provided should be seen as only indicative of the overall perspectives.

6.3. Selective Representation of the FEPOW Experience.

The popular narrative of captivity in Asia has largely been created by the selective reproduction of a narrow range of accounts that have dominated the representations provided by the mass media of the newspaper, book publishing and film industries. Each will be examined in turn, to outline the operation and the impact of this filtering process on how the FEPOW experience has been consumed by the public.

⁵⁷⁸ IWM: Notley, W.R. (Sound 16670) Reel7.

6.3.1. The press.

Recollections of time spent on the Railway would resonate large in the sporadic coverage of captivity in Asia in post war newspapers. In order to track the development of editorial positions through the period I have focussed (although not exclusively) on the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Mail*. The *Mirror* was selected to represent the red tops as it had claimed to epitomise the views of the ordinary civilians and servicemen and women during the war, and unlike some of its rivals it was a mass market publication from the war through to the present day. In the middlebrow sector the *Mail*, providing a similarly persistent presence, was chosen due to it having the largest circulation during most of the period under scrutiny.

Their coverage was largely associated with concurrent stories regarding the Japanese royal family, and offers useful insights into the evolution of both the post war agenda of the former prisoners and that of the popular narrative that grew around their story. The issues of compensation and the associated demands for an apology from Japan would take some time to develop and fully attract the attention of the papers, and royal visits were, if not catalysts, certainly accelerants for such clusters of coverage. The state visits by Emperor Hirohito in 1971 and his son, Emperor Akihito, in 1998 were two such occasions, separated by British royal attendance at Hirohito's funeral in 1989 and the coronation of Akihito in 1990.

There are some consistent themes that recur around these moments, including the involvement of members of the British Royal Family, protests against the Japanese monarchy, and the expressions of editorial, public and FEPOW opinions in the newspapers. The tabloid *Daily Mirror* adopted a dual editorial position at these times, unsure whether to move onwards into a new era of post war international collaboration or to feed on (and into) the growing public narrative of repugnance and abhorrence at the events in the camps. In the end it would face both ways, as somewhat paradoxically its journalists and commentators wrote articles that focussed on the horrors of captivity as a justification for recompense, whilst the majority

of the POWs whose views it featured were finding some degree of reconciliation. The *Daily Mail*, while making limited and largely forward looking comments in the early years, joined in the compensation frenzy that occurred in 1998.

Hirohito's state visit in 1971, to receive the Order of the Garter, was the first to the UK by a reigning Japanese emperor. On the home front all seemed quiet, a tranquillity that was reflected by the Special Branch, which was looking for threats from the east in their security preparations: 'All Orientals arriving in Britain are being carefully checked in case they are Japanese extremists.'⁵⁷⁹ While the *Mirror* had stirred up a response by printing a letter from Yoko Ono outlining the Emperor's pacific nature,⁵⁸⁰ the *Mail* displayed a largely sympathetic, if low key, outlook, only really showing any interest in the attempts by Lord Mountbatten to avoid meetings with Hirohito. The only part of its coverage that strayed from this line was the quote attributed to the former SEAC commander: 'It is hard to express how much we, who had fought the Japanese, came to loathe them.'⁵⁸¹

Hirohito was largely greeted in silence by the thin crowd as he drove down The Mall on his way to Buckingham Palace. One 27 year old man, who claimed to have a grievance against Hirohito, threw his coat at the carriage carrying the royal party, and was promptly despatched to hospital for a psychiatric report.⁵⁸² The following day there were several incidents involving similarly young men; one who had shouted abuse at the Emperor outside Claridges claimed that his father had been killed by the Japanese, whilst another had been questioned over the felling of a tree that had been planted in a ceremony at Kew Gardens. Both were released without charge.⁵⁸³

⁵⁷⁹ *Daily Mirror*: 1/10/1971; p2.

⁵⁸⁰ *Daily Mirror*: 7/8/1971; p6.

⁵⁸¹ *Daily Mail*: 8/10/1971; p6.

⁵⁸² *Daily Mirror*: 6/10/1971; p1.

⁵⁸³ *The Times*: 8/8/1971; p1.

Whilst the response in the UK had been fairly muted, the reception on the continent would prove much livelier. A young Belgian student had been arrested for throwing an egg at the Emperor's car,⁵⁸⁴ a tactic that would be repeated by a young man in The Hague, with a rock that smashed the windscreen.⁵⁸⁵ After a particularly widespread and hostile reaction in Holland, he must have been pleasantly surprised to receive cheers from a crowd gathered at Bonn Airport to welcome him to Germany. Away from the controlled environment of the airport however his reception was different, and he was welcomed into the city by a crowd of jeering and whistling students, and a banner that read 'Out with the war criminal Hirohito.'⁵⁸⁶ In Europe, as in the UK, it was the younger generation that had gained much of the publicity through their physical interventions, some motivated through family connections, others, particularly on the continent, no doubt still in the anti-fascist afterglow of the sixties student movements. The war veterans themselves, particularly in the UK, had been more restrained in their responses, perhaps exhibiting the sense of responsibility attached to their middle aged time of life. By the time of Hirohito's death some 18 years later this would change.

The former prisoners were by the start of 1989 starting to collect their pensions, but some of them weren't going to retire quietly. Hirohito's state funeral in Japan was beyond the reach of protesting FEPOWs, so they focussed their attention on the nearest target of opportunity, which happened to be the British Royal Family and the unfortunate Prince Philip, who had been designated to attend as the Queen's representative. One veteran even went to the high court in an unsuccessful attempt to get Philip charged with treason, but undeterred the persistent litigant was reported to be trying to sell his Rover to pay for an appeal.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁴ *Daily Mirror*: 1/10/1971; p2.

⁵⁸⁵ *Daily Mirror*: 9/10/1971; p2.

⁵⁸⁶ *Daily Mirror*: 12/10/1971; p13.

⁵⁸⁷ *Daily Mirror*: 10/2/1989; p11.

George Webber, a journalist on the *Mirror*, wrote a particularly strong piece for a page titled 'WE POWS CAN NEVER FORGIVE NOR FORGET'. He recalled an Australian prisoner he had met just after the war ended:

His hands were bandaged in splints held across his chest, yet he too wore a soft smile of satisfaction. I was told that on the day his POW camp was liberated he sought out the prison guard who had made his life a living hell. He then battered him to death with his bare fists so violently that he broke many of the bones in his own hands. Ask him if he will attend the funeral of Hirohito.⁵⁸⁸

Whilst this article provides anecdotal evidence against the ubiquity of the oft cited magnanimity displayed by the POWs at the end of their captivity, its inclusion in the *Mirror* at this time is a prime example of the Japanophobic side of the paper's bi-polar coverage. The *Mail* was a little more restrained in the one article that strayed from its still establishment attitude: 'Alas, until Hirohito's generation gracefully accept their own guilt, Britons of Prince Philip's generation can never, gracefully, forgive.'⁵⁸⁹

As was protocol at such events, Prince Philip was required to bow to the Emperors, old and new. It is easy to imagine that this was not an action that he relished, and this was reflected in the fact that his bows were so restrained that they were described variously by the *Mirror* as 'a polite little nod' and a 'brief nod' on successive pages of their three page spread on the funeral. Notwithstanding the readily acknowledged diminutive nature of the respects paid, this coverage was introduced on the front page with the large banner headline 'FURY AS PHILIP TAKES A BOW'.⁵⁹⁰ The *Mail's* correspondent respectfully noted: 'NO he did NOT bow. He did not even nod curtly.'⁵⁹¹

Despite the attacks on Prince Philip, the main focus of antipathy in this episode, as for the state visit in 1971, had been Japan's wartime leader Hirohito. There was some hope that with

⁵⁸⁸ *Daily Mirror*: 9/1/1989; p5.

⁵⁸⁹ *Daily Mail*: 25/2/1989; p1.

⁵⁹⁰ *Daily Mirror*: 25/2/1989; pp1-3.

⁵⁹¹ *Daily Mail*: 25/2/1989; p1.

his passing there could be new era of relations that moved on from the past and looked to the future, a view espoused both editorially and on the letters page of the *Mirror*. Ex-prisoner and author Geoffrey Adams had himself proposed such an approach, suggesting saving any royal representation for the crowning of Akihito, 'which would have signalled a new beginning.'⁵⁹² Almost unnoticed, the last word on the subject in the *Mirror* went to Dame Vera Lynn, who wrote a letter seeking donations for surviving prisoners and their families. In it she contrasted the £76 compensation that the POWs had received 'for their years of barbarous treatment' with the £46 million cost of Hirohito's funeral, the first time that the subject of compensation had been broached for many years.⁵⁹³ It was a seed that would take some time to germinate, but when it did, it would grow rapidly.

Coverage of the coronation of Emperor Akihito the following year might appear to have suggested that there had indeed been a 'new beginning'. With the exception of one small letter of protest there was hardly any negative coverage of either the ceremony or of the presence of the British Royal Family in the *Mirror*. The only reference to protests was to those carried out by the significant number of Japanese who were opposed to the ceremony as representing a throwback to Japan's military past. These followed on from demonstrations by progressives at Hirohito's funeral, and despite their anti-militarist beliefs, thousands of demonstrators battled with over 37,000 police in the centre of Tokyo, sent two religious shrines up in flames, and launched a rocket attack on the imperial palace, in front of which 'one fanatic ... tried to commit ritual suicide.'⁵⁹⁴

Given that the coronation took place in November, the day after Remembrance Day, it might have been expected that there would be a flurry of complaints about the royal presence. Instead, because the British Royal Family had deployed their marketing trump card, the next

⁵⁹² *Daily Mirror*: 23/2/1989; p6.

⁵⁹³ *Daily Mirror*: 10/3/1989; p36.

⁵⁹⁴ *Daily Mirror*: 13/11/1990; p3.

generation as represented by Charles and Diana, the *Mirror's* coverage of the visit turned into a week-long fashion review. The royal couple visited a commonwealth war graves site at Yokohama on the 11th, where, in a break with the established protocol 'Diana raised eyebrows by wearing a French Chanel outfit for the ceremony.'⁵⁹⁵ At the coronation the headline news was that 'DI'S £100 HAT STEALS THE SHOW.'⁵⁹⁶ The power of the Diana factor was so strong that at a garden party later in the week she could wear a hat based on the Japanese national flag, white with a red sun on it, generating only one comment in the *Mirror*, which described it simply as 'a topping new idea'.⁵⁹⁷ The *Mail* was neither interested in the coronation nor impressed by the fashion. It ran one story all week, in which it observed: 'The Princess [Diana] may have realised that her "interesting" hat – a puckered veil hanging from a headband, was, on reflection, a mistake.'⁵⁹⁸

The state visit of Emperor Akihito in 1998 would see the largest protests, in terms of column inches, of the post war period. The interlinked aims of an apology and compensation had been stimulated by financial settlements in Canada, the USA and Hong Kong, and political and public pressure was being brought to bear on Tony Blair's British government. This time the tabloid press was joined by its more middle brow cousins in adopting a more lurid approach to reporting the issues around the visit.

The *Mirror* exhibited a range of responses to the visit and to the wider issues involved. The tone of the veterans that it used for sound-bites was less vituperative than previously. Arthur Titherington of the Japanese Labour Camp Survivors Association (JLCSA) was frequently cited as a representative of the POWs in both the *Mirror* and the *Mail*, and whilst he was ardent in his pursuit of an apology and recompense (he had spat on the stairs of the Japanese Diet following an unsuccessful court case in Tokyo), he was keen to stress that he held 'no

⁵⁹⁵ *Daily Mirror*: 12/11/1990; p9.

⁵⁹⁶ *Daily Mirror*: 13/11/1990; p3.

⁵⁹⁷ *Daily Mirror*: 14/11/1990; p3.

⁵⁹⁸ *Daily Mail*: 13/11/1990; p24.

animosity towards the modern Japanese. He said: "This is not about revenge. There is no hatred."⁵⁹⁹ A similar spirit of reconciliation was to be found in the *Mirror's* serialisation of excerpts from Eric Lomax's account of captivity, *The Railway Man*,⁶⁰⁰ albeit the reader had to traverse through a litany of suffering and brutality to get to it. Much of the contemporary criticism from the POWs was being levelled at the British Government over its soft pedal approaches to the Japanese Government on the matter of the apology, and its tardiness in dealing with the issue of compensation.

In the *Mirror* it was the journalists who were reporting in a fashion that was in many ways at least ten, if not twenty, years behind the trajectory of the narrative as espoused by the former captives that were being featured in the paper. Brian Sewell drew a direct comparison between the holocaust and the Japanese treatment of the men who;

... they starved and beat and worked to death as, in their oriental beastliness, callous disregard for Western sensibilities and brutal scorn for the vanquished, they built the Burma-Siam Railway at the cost of 120,000 lives.⁶⁰¹

The fact that over 100,000 of those deaths were suffered by Asian labourers apparently offered no contradiction to Sewell's highly orientalist view of events. A more reasoned piece from Tony Parsons, which he presaged with the qualification that his wife was Japanese and that he had always found Japanese people very warm and friendly, arrived at a similar conclusion. 'I would never ask the men who were POWs in the Japanese camps to forgive and forget. How can they? Some things can never be forgiven. Some things can never be forgotten.'⁶⁰²

⁵⁹⁹ *Daily Mirror*: 26/5/1998; p4. Titherington, who had spent most of his captivity at Kinkaseki Camp on Formosa, had set up the JLSCA in response to a perceived privileging of the Railway in the FEPOW discourse, and to apply further pressure on the claim for compensation and an apology. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/military-obituaries/army-obituaries/8047048/Signalman-Arthur-Titherington.html> 6/10/2010.

⁶⁰⁰ Lomax, Eric. (1995) *The Railway Man*. Jonathon Cape, London.

⁶⁰¹ *Daily Mirror*: 26/5/1998; p6.

⁶⁰² *Daily Mirror*: 18/5/1998; p10.

The mantra of 'never forgive, never forget' had taken a strong hold on the public discourse at this time. Tony Blair, who had misjudged public opinion with an ill-advised call for Akihito to be welcomed, found himself having to use the sandbags of such semantics to staunch the flood of criticism that his statement had created. From the floor of the House of Commons he asserted: "We must never - and will never - forget, or indeed forgive, the suffering of those people."⁶⁰³ The *Mail*, having awoken to the public interest in the story, showed significantly more interest in this visit than it had done on previous occasions, and did so from a much more negative editorial position. Even one of its more nuanced contributions, from Cambridge historian John Casey, reiterated the unforgiving theme, whilst elaborating on the need for progress.

Certainly we should not forget the past, and those who grievously suffered should not be expected to forgive. But in the end, it becomes morbid and irrational for a nation to be frozen in the attitudes and memories of fifty years ago.⁶⁰⁴

Casey's article provided the standard press response on the issue of reconciliation, but it did serve to highlight the unusually persistent and rigid interpretation of the FEPOW narrative. Whereas Summerfield has written of the widespread contestation of differing memories of the war, the story of the prisoners in Asia had remained frozen into one of unremitting horror and unrelenting antipathy, at least in the reproductions of the media.⁶⁰⁵

A rare voice that questioned the mob mentality prevalent in the press at the time came in an editorial in *The Independent*, which referred to the 'raucous xenophobia of the tabloid press.' Whilst taking aim at the *Sun* and the *Mail*, its primary target was the coverage in the *Daily Mirror*.

Before the visit of Emperor Akihito of Japan, we characterised in these pages the public mood which tends to be stoked by the tabloid press whenever past crimes are raked over. So it came to pass. The *Mirror* devoted two pages to stories of Japanese torture more than 50 years ago under the headline "What price our heroes Tony?"

⁶⁰³ *The Independent*: 31/5/1998: p4.

⁶⁰⁴ *Daily Mail*: 14/5/1998; p4.

⁶⁰⁵ Summerfield, "*Dunkirk*", p790.

When the Emperor was awarded the Order of the Garter, it thundered: "Today we are all being asked to put money before pride." The Prime Minister had insulted the veterans by asking them to be nice to the Emperor for the sake of our yen earnings. And the Emperor had delivered "A Final Kick in the Teeth" by brushing aside the protests of Jack Caplan, 83, quoted on the front page as saying: "I watched my friends beheaded, their bodies squirming on the ground. I've come here for them."⁶⁰⁶

In a lengthy and balanced treatment of the wider issues involved, which included a discussion of the semantics of apology, the leader writer was critical of certain aspects of the official Japanese outlook, particularly with regard to compensation and the teaching of history in Japan. It was however far more critical of the role of the British press, and was one of the few papers that questioned the ubiquity of the passions that were being reported (and stimulated) by its fellow publications.

It is true that some of the former prisoners of war are properly indignant at their government's failure to extract fuller apologies and reparations from Japan, and were mortally offended by the pomp and courtesy with which the Emperor was received. But the larger truth is that the vast majority of former prisoners of the Japanese were probably embarrassed by the displays of public rudeness and flag-burning.⁶⁰⁷

As *The Independent* suggested, many of the former prisoners, and particularly those the *Mirror* quoted, were now in a more forgiving mode, certainly as far as the present day Japanese population was concerned. Most of their anger was by now focussed on what they saw as the continued obfuscation of their own Government over the compensation issue, in which the UK was now out of line with most of the former western allies. It would be several years before the survivors would finally receive a £10,000 settlement, with the Royal British Legion having helped to box Prime Minister Tony Blair into a very public corner from which he was unable to escape. After this time there would be minimal coverage in the tabloids of the POW story, as, with compensation having been fought for and won, the semantics of the apology faded from the agenda of most, although not all, of the surviving FEPOWs.

⁶⁰⁶ *The Independent*: 31/5/1998: p4.

⁶⁰⁷ *The Independent*: 31/5/1998: p4.

6.3.2. Published books.

Whilst the press can have a significant immediate impact on public opinion and help to shape longer term perspectives, an individual article or newspaper has only a limited lifespan before it is reduced to an artefact that is only viewed by researchers. Books (and films) can have a much longer shelf life and thus can provide a more persistent vector for the transmission and construction of popular memory.

Philip Towle, one of the rare British academics in the FEPOW field, has perhaps somewhat exuberantly likened the POW canon to the literature generated in the trenches of the First World War, and claimed that it represents the largest extant record of 'a slave experience ever written by the slaves themselves.' Whilst such equivalences might be debatable, he is certainly correct in identifying the unusually large number of memoirs written and compiled by the ordinary servicemen and the reticence of publishers to get involved with scripts that contain insufficient drama on their pages.⁶⁰⁸

In this section a limited selection of such publications is considered in order to illuminate the publishing barriers that faced potential authors, and how these operated to reproduce a selective representation of the FEPOW experience. This filtering process would often privilege the accounts of those officers who had served on the Railway and in particular the few who had roused the interest of publishers by virtue of having experienced the sharper end of Anglo-Japanese relations in so doing. Educational background could also make them more likely to have the required skill set and confidence to write, as well as providing networks that facilitated such efforts. The effects of this filtration become even more apparent when the limited canon of filmed representations is considered. In common with the preceding sections, a trajectory of reconciliation can also be traced over time, albeit one tinged with a sense of the superiority and the ultimate victory of western values.

⁶⁰⁸ Towle, Philip. (2006) *From Ally to Enemy: Anglo-Japanese Military Relations, 1900-45*. Global Oriental, Folkestone. pp135-137.

Publishers, perhaps more so than newspaper proprietors, are in the business to make money. This has obvious implications for what they put into print, in the hope and expectation that the public will buy it. The mundane and the ordinary are not usually at the top of the bestseller lists. Former POW Harry Berry discovered this as he tried to commit his collection of letters home to his wife and the diaries he kept in captivity to print. His accurate portrayal of the tedium of camp life as he experienced it proved too dull for the industry, as his daughter explained in the introduction to the eventually self-published edition.

He wanted to get it published but conventional publishers requested it to be edited: the exciting, the dramatic and the brutal to be highlighted, the tedious to be cut out. Harry said, "No, that's how it was for me and is exactly what I wrote at the time. It's all or nothing."⁶⁰⁹

In fairness to the publishers, Berry's account is hardly a page turner, and features a thrice daily review of catering arrangements, both before and after he was captured. To the historian it is however an accurate representation of the mundanity of much of camp life, and is closer to the truth by virtue of its lack of commercial modifications.

One author who did take the publisher's shilling was Lord Russell of Liverpool, who had served as a legal adviser to the war crimes trials at the end of the war.⁶¹⁰ His original intention had been to produce a multi-volume academic account of the Japanese trials, but this held little appeal for his publisher, who wanted a punchy follow up to his previous best seller, *The Scourge of the Swastika: A Short History of Nazi War Crimes*.⁶¹¹ Cassell got their way, and the single volume came out with a similarly snappy title, *The Knights of Bushido: A Short History of Japanese War Crimes*.⁶¹²

⁶⁰⁹ Berry, Harry (2004) *My Darling Wife: The true wartime letters and diaries of Harry Berry to Gwen, 1940-1945*. Authors Online, Hertford. pvi.

⁶¹⁰ Flower, "Memory", in; Hack and Blackburn, *Forgotten Captives*, p69.

⁶¹¹ Lord Russell of Liverpool (1954) *The Scourge of the Swastika: A Short History of Nazi War Crimes*. Cassell and Company, London.

⁶¹² Lord Russell of Liverpool. (1958) *The Knights of Bushido: A Short History of Japanese War Crimes*. Cassell, London.

It was not always such a one way process however, as is demonstrated by *No Time for Geishas*, the account of Lt. Geoffrey “Pharaoh” Adams captivity. ‘I make no apology for recounting that not all our Japanese captors were the devil incarnate, nor every Allied serviceman an angel’, he writes early on in an unusually balanced and informative account, for which he took the highly unusual step of actually seeking the assistance of some of his captors in the editorial process.⁶¹³ He had a comparatively undemanding time at Sime Rd Camp, even by the generally benign standards of Singapore, and enjoyed a relatively comfortable Railway where he was a livestock drover for much of the time. His good run would end in the latter part of the war, when he was shipped to Japan to a camp where a particularly corrupt group of US POWs had taken control, with the connivance of the commandant.

A book that also featured American criminality, but against a more feral background featuring the widespread provenance of such behaviour, is James Clavell’s novel *King Rat*.⁶¹⁴ This located sufficient suffering and misery at Changi to preclude the need to go up-country to the setting of the Railway. Clavell, who after arriving from Java spent most of his captivity at Changi, paints a stark fictionalised picture of desperation and survival which bears little resemblance to the relatively comfortable reality of the camp. Despite this he paints a picture of camp life that has some resonance with actual accounts, albeit in different locations. His cast of characters runs the gamut of some of the worst camp stereotypes, particularly when it comes to his fellow officers. British colonels are top slicing the rations by using tampered weights, a padre trades his tobacco ration to hungry men for their food, and the issue of class is never far from the surface, albeit in comparison with the laissez-faire Americans and Australians with whom his main character associates. The inaccurate representation of Changi was amplified by the cover material on a later edition, which stated that ‘only one man in

⁶¹³ Adams, Geoffrey Pharaoh. (1973) *No Time for Geishas*. Corgi Books, London. p15.

⁶¹⁴ Clavell, James. (1962) *King Rat*. Hodder and Stoughton, London.

fifteen had the strength, the luck, the cleverness to survive'.⁶¹⁵ In reality less than 1% of those who passed through Changi died there, a small proportion in comparison to the much higher average figure of 25% across Asia, and considerably less even than the oft cited figure of around 5% for British POWs in Europe. This was presumably a sales pitch from the publisher, as Clavell himself only refers to a few deaths occurring during the time period in question.

King Rat is unusual in the literature as it has been the subject of some historiographical discussion. Sybilla Jane Flower, one of the most widely published of the British historians of FEPOW captivity commends Clavell, saying that he 'wrote convincingly of the anarchic conditions in Changi Jail in the last months of the war, after the Japanese had destroyed the successful command structure put in place by the British and Australian generals in 1942'.⁶¹⁶ In her keenness to promulgate her primary thesis, that of the crucial importance of the command structure and the consequent restoration in the reputation of the officer corps, Flower has perhaps not met her usually meticulous research thresholds. Not only were the most criminally and morally reprehensible characters in the book senior British officers, but they had been short changing the food supply for several years, not just the final months as she proposes. The Australian historian Kevin Blackburn saw the book differently and suggested that Clavell was trying to work through and mitigate his own sense of guilt at having escaped the horrors of the Railway, by transposing them to Changi.⁶¹⁷

In a more redemptive and reconciliatory approach, although still resonating with common themes of extreme pain and suffering, Lt. Ernest Gordon recalled how his Christianity and the support of friends helped him to recover from the cumulative effects of beri beri, malaria and diphtheria, which nearly cost him his life at Chungkai Camp. His friends had created a small private shed for him so that he could be moved out of the Death House, as the camp hospital

⁶¹⁵ Clavell, James. (1962: 1985 edn) *King Rat*. Hodder and Stoughton, London.

⁶¹⁶ Flower, "Memory", in: Hack and Blackburn (eds) *Forgotten Captives*. p58.

⁶¹⁷ Blackburn, Kevin.(2000) "Commemorating and commodifying the prisoner of war experience in south east Asia: the creation of the Changi Prison Museum." *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*. Issue 33. para 21. Accessed online at: <http://www.awm.gov.au/journal/j33/blackburn/>

was known, which in effect was a waiting room for the morgue. His doctors had given him a couple more days, but despite everything he pulled through and was able to witness the parallel development of a sense of community spirit and healing in the camp, no doubt partly stimulated by a period of more relaxed conditions after the completion of the Railway.⁶¹⁸

Initially less forgiving was Lt. Eric Lomax, who had the misfortune to be the only signaller in the hut at Kanchanaburi where a radio was found. His bad luck was compounded by the discovery of a map of the Railway in his belongings, and no amount of pleading his genuine interest in train-spotting would mitigate his torture at the hands of the Japanese secret police, the *Kempetai*. Although he survived this ordeal, it would scar him, both physically and psychologically for many years afterwards. His hatred burned deepest for the diminutive NCO who acted as interpreter for his torturers, and long after the war he still harboured a very strong desire for revenge against him. By chance many years later, in 1989, he came across an article in the *Japan Times* about an interpreter, Nagase Takashi, who had assisted in the location of graves on the Railway in the immediate post-war period. Despite the passage of over 45 years, Lomax recognised his interpreter and sought to locate him, initially intent on revenge. A letter of profound apology from Nagase, and the realisation of the scale of his penitence, would change everything however, and the pair eventually met and reconciled in Thailand in 1993.⁶¹⁹

In a feedback loop characteristic of much of the FEPOW experience, Nagase Takashi would come to feature in later editions of Gordon's book, subsequently republished as *To End All Wars*, to accompany the film of the same name that was released in 2001. The only difference from the original edition is the inclusion of a four page introduction, that contains a description of a scene shot for the film (which required several takes) where Nagase and Gordon meet in Kanchanaburi Cemetery, and a formal apology is made for the atrocities that

⁶¹⁸ Gordon, Ernest. (1963) *Miracle on the River Kwai*. The Quality Book Club, London.

⁶¹⁹ Lomax, Eric. (1995) *The Railway Man*. Jonathon Cape, London.

the POWs suffered. Gordon's choice of the words 'I acknowledge his apology' instead of the more obvious 'accept' seems like a deliberate choice, although whether this reflects his still unresolved acceptance, or that of his wider anticipated audience is unclear.⁶²⁰ Whether the film-makers picked up on Nagase's self-appointed role as apologist for Japanese brutality through Lomax's book, or indeed through the two documentaries that followed it, is unclear. It is a role that was reprised in the 2013 film version of *The Railway Man*, although not by Nagase himself, as he passed away in 2011.

The most recent addition to this canon of literature is a novel by Australian author Richard Flanagan, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, winner of the *Man Booker Prize 2014*.⁶²¹ The character of surgeon Dorrigo Evans, a former POW who became a national hero in Australia after the war has echoes of Edward "Weary" Dunlop about him, although it is probably safe to say that Evans' sexual adventures were not informed from the same source. The scenes in captivity again focus on the Railway and depict a standard portrayal of appalling conditions. A not untypical passage describes the conditions:

As he came close to the ulcer hut, Dorrigo was enveloped by the stench. The stink of foul meat was so bad that Jimmy Bigelow – who accompanied Evans on his rounds outside of the cholera compound to help as an orderly nurse – would on occasion have to leave, go outside and vomit.⁶²²

The problem with such representations is not that they are inaccurate, there were many scenes of an even worse nature, but that they are unrepresentative of the overall experience of captivity. It was not always as bad as the way it has been melodramatically portrayed. The routine of boredom, illness, hunger and overwork was no less damaging to the health, but was mostly considerably less dramatic than the portrayals in the media that focus on the worst

⁶²⁰ Gordon, Ernest (2002) *To End All Wars*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Mi. p vi.

⁶²¹ Flanagan, Richard. (2013; 2014 edn) *The Narrow Road to the North*. Chatto and Windus, London.

⁶²² Flanagan, *The Narrow Road*, pp265-266.

aspects of prison life, giving consumers of such products a false impression that these circumstances were the norm throughout captivity.

The foregoing titles serve to highlight the selective nature of the publishing industry, which sought to filter out any accounts which did not meet its demand for brutality and horror. This meant that the public at large received a generally singular and narrow view of what life was like in the camps, particularly for a small section of the officer corps, to the preclusion of the many less dramatic accounts. This survey of POW literature has in itself been somewhat selective in the publications considered, and has focussed primarily on a few accounts written by such officers. Whilst this is not necessarily representative of the overall balance of authorship, it is more so in terms of actual readership and exposure. These titles were amongst the best-selling accounts of captivity, and received a wider audience through the other arms of the mass media, whether in the press, or as the next section will consider on film.⁶²³ None of the accounts by the other ranks have made it onto either the big or the small screen.

6.3.3. Filmed representations.

The public reach of even a best-seller is likely to be less than that which even a moderately successful film might achieve (particularly when replayed on television), or indeed in a more immediate sense the readership of a national newspaper. Making the jump into the 20th (and 21st) century instruments of mass media consumption would be beyond the scope of most of the books that were published. Only a select few would break through the celluloid ceiling, which gave them a power to influence the post-war narrative that went way beyond their historical merits or the overall relevance of their representations.

⁶²³ Sales of *The Railway Man* would have received a boost from its serialisation in the *Daily Mirror*, and were certainly lifted with the release of the film. Through January and February of 2014 more than 100 copies a day were being purchased from the UK arm of Amazon alone (as tracked by author on <http://www.novelrank.com>).

The initial post-war hiatus in cinematic representations was broken by two films that told the story of women internees, whose stories of struggle and survival were perhaps more acceptable to the film makers and the public at large than those of the conquered and emasculated prisoners of war. *Three Came Home* (1950)⁶²⁴ was based on the autobiographical account of internment on Borneo by Agnes Keith, the American wife of a British colonial official.⁶²⁵ Keith's nationality no doubt helped the book to make it onto the screen, and there was a similarly international partnership in the 1956 film of Nevil Shute's *A Town Like Alice*,⁶²⁶ where a British woman survives internment to meet an Australian she had met briefly in captivity.⁶²⁷

The first releases that represented the POW experience directly were based on fictionalised accounts constructed by authors who had been in the camps of Asia. Given the proximity of these early releases to the events they described, it is perhaps unsurprising that the novel was the chosen source format, screening the identity (real or imagined) of the allied prisoners. *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, (1957),⁶²⁸ was based on a novel of life on the Railway by the French author Pierre Boulle. He had spent a little time in the camps following his capture by Vichy troops in French Indochina, and he used this experience, and his knowledge of several collaborating French officers, to construct his best-seller. Whilst both the book and the film caused uproar amongst many veterans, particularly in Britain, for its portrayal of the collaborating Colonel Nicholson character and of FEPOWs generally, it was also indicative of some of the tensions of class and military structural relations that beleaguered the British military in many locations, although again ironically enough, not this one. *King Rat*, released in 1965, offered a similarly brutalised and fictionalised account that whilst offering some insights

⁶²⁴ *Three Came Home* (1950) Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.

⁶²⁵ Keith, Agnes. (1947) *Three Came Home*. Little Brown and Company, Boston.

⁶²⁶ *A Town Like Alice*. (1956) Rank Organisation/Vic Films Productions.

⁶²⁷ Shute, Nevil (1950) *A Town Like Alice*. William Heinemann, London.

⁶²⁸ *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. (1957) Columbia Pictures Corporation/Horizon Pictures (II)

into the social dimensions of camp life, is open to particular accusations of inaccuracy at the specific location it was situated in at Changi.⁶²⁹

The film portrayal of the American lead character, the King, was a sanitised and romanticised representation considerably at odds not only with Clavell's original, but also with that small section of US prisoners that were encountered by the British, particularly later in the war in Japan, who adopted a commercial approach to the business of survival that would have impressed the most notorious of crime families. Such a disinfected depiction should not be surprising given the source of funding and the potential markets for the film, and a similar characterisation would recur in *Empire of the Sun* (1987) over twenty years later.⁶³⁰ The impact of these early films on the post war narrative was compounded by the lack of any further representations on screen until the early 1980s.

It would be 1981 before the captivity story returned to the screen, with the television serial *Tenko*, a dramatization over three seasons of the experience of women internees.⁶³¹ This was a series that had to fight its own battles, not just through the celluloid ceiling, but also through the glass ceiling of procurement at the male dominated BBC. As a television series, and thus freed from the constraints of immediacy required in a big screen production, the directors had a much larger canvas of screen time upon which to paint a more realistic representation of the pace of daily life in captivity.

After a further cinematic hiatus it would not be until the new millennium that films about the FEPOW experience returned to the cinema, with the release of *To End All Wars* in 2001,⁶³² a film based on Ernest Gordon's book, *Miracle on the River Kwai*, which provided the first cinematic representation that focussed on the horrors of the Railway since the somewhat

⁶²⁹ *King Rat*. (1965) Coleytown.

⁶³⁰ *Empire of the Sun*. (1987) Amblin Entertainment/Warner Bros.

⁶³¹ *Tenko*. (1981-1984) BBC/ABC.

⁶³² *To End All Wars*. (2001) Argyll Film Partners/Gumshoe Productions/ Integrity Partners/Pray For Rain Pictures Inc.

glossy portrayal in *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, albeit leavened with a portion of western and Christian redemption and reconciliation. In a similar vein, the film of Eric Lomax's *The Railway Man*, released in 2013, recounts the horrors of torture by the Japanese while he was on the Railway, before concluding with an act of reconciliation and forgiveness with the Japanese soldier, Nagase Takashi, who had acted as translator for his torturers.⁶³³

The screenwriter made numerous amendments to the original text, and there were two in particular that diverge from the book and present the viewer with a somewhat different picture from that it provided. The first is the result of a director's perceived need to compress the story into an, if not in this context entertaining, at least a compelling narrative. In the film the scenes during the war are condensed to focus on the torture that Lomax suffered. Whilst this is typical of virtually any film, in this case it leaves the viewer with a very singular impression of the experience of captivity. In the original account Lomax wrote that prior to February 1943 he had 'never seen any prisoner threatened with assault'.⁶³⁴ His own tribulations started at the end of September 1943, the worst of which were the several weeks of torture that followed. Around two months later he was sent down to Singapore's Outram Rd Jail, one of the more unpleasant sites operated by the Japanese and reserved for what they considered to be problem prisoners. Here he would remain (with the exception of times when he was sent to Changi Hospital) until he returned to Changi five months before the end of the war. It should be stressed that the period of the torture that provided the most memorable scenes in the film was untypical of most of even Lomax's exceptional experience in captivity. Yet that is what most people who see *The Railway Man* will take away from it, an unrepresentative image that in the absence of any other insights creates the false impression that conditions were always like that.

⁶³³ *The Railway Man* (2013) Archer Street Productions/Latitude Media/Lionsgate/Pictures in Paradise/Silver Reel/ Thai Occidental Productions.

⁶³⁴ Lomax, *The Railway Man*, p94.

The second rewrite that has implications for the overall meaning of the film involves how the Japanese interpreter, Nagase Takashi, is portrayed, and how the meeting of reconciliation is staged. The scene of reconciliation between Gordon and Nagase in *To End All Wars* is actually much closer to the reality of the Lomax meeting than the completely fictionalised dramatic denouement in *The Railway Man*. John Nunnely suggested, in the context of the then ongoing discussions over suitable apologies and compensation, that there was a danger of triumphalism arising out of the extraction of such an apology, that could preclude any meaningful sense of reconciliation.⁶³⁵ Such dramatized reconstructions of acts of conciliation are in danger of spreading conceptions of triumphalism beyond the FEPOW community who Nunnely was referring to and into the wider viewing public.

The distillation of the FEPOW experience, already filtered through the net of publishing, becomes even clearer when the cinematic canon is considered, feeding largely from a select few titles. Whilst reconciliation has come to play a role in some of the accounts that have successfully quenched the thirst of publishers and filmmakers for harsh and exceptional brutality, the latter themes remain of fundamental importance.

6.4. Conclusions.

A dominant theme in the post-war outlooks of the FEPOWs towards the Japanese people has been one of reconciliation. The paths to reconciliation have been varied and occurred throughout the period, informed by political and religious beliefs, life events and contacts, chance and time. Whilst very few could forget their experiences, many came to find a level of conciliation that is a remarkable testament to the power of human nature to overcome such bitter conditions as those that the prisoners endured. This finding is also somewhat at odds

⁶³⁵ Cunningham, Michael. (2004) "Prisoners of the Japanese and the Politics of Apology: A Battle over History and Memory." *Journal of Contemporary History*. Vol 39(4), p563.

with the persistent antipathetic popular memory of the episode, which has been informed by the frequently commercial approach to mass media depictions.

Such accounts frequently resorted to and constructed a standard narrative which focussed on the worst moments and elements of camp life, usually as seen through the eyes of those officers who found themselves on the Railway. In such extreme circumstances these officers were more likely to find themselves at the sharp end of Anglo-Japanese contacts, although for most of their colleagues, either in Changi or at other camps where they were imprisoned, their circumstances were usually considerably less taxing than those of the other ranks. The story of most of the officers was probably as unattractive to the entertainment industry as it was contradictory to the national imaginings of soldier-heroes, but such factors should not preclude their story being told, as part of a balanced overall representation. The more mundane and less exciting stories of the BORs and their longer term, less immediate suffering due to overwork, illness and hunger, would find it difficult to reach a mass audience. Wulf Kansteiner has written of the potential for the marginalisation of those without access to the means of communication:

Small groups whose members have directly experienced such traumatic events (veterans' or survivors' groups) only have a chance to shape the national memory if they command the means to express their visions, and if their visions meet with compatible social or political objectives and inclinations among other important social groups.⁶³⁶

Despite the occasional congruence with the former prisoners, as at the time of the compensation issue, the vested interests of those 'important social groups' who command the vectors of mass communication have limited the opportunities for the former BORs to present their experiences. This has led to an unbalanced representation of captivity in Asia that has privileged the reproduction of a small and select group of those who were there.

⁶³⁶ Kansteiner, Wulf. (2002) "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies." *History and Theory*, Vol 41, pp187-188.

This discrepancy between the experiences of a section of the officer corps and the main body of the other ranks, and the privileging of the former in the media, offers an explanation for the divergence of the popular narrative from the reconciliation experienced by many of the BORs. Despite the widespread examples of conciliation, popular perceptions have been slow to recognise them and media gatekeepers have remained reluctant to stray from their established storyline.

There is a certain irony to this as the post-war reconciliation achieved by many would seem to be a textbook example of British self-perceptions of tolerance and worthy of greater exposure. There is a limited acknowledgment of this in some of the representations examined. However such reconstructions are frequently reproduced in such a way as to qualify this tolerance as being conditional on the inevitable victory of superior western cultural values, a triumph over the bestiality of those less civilised than ourselves. It doesn't take too much digging at the IWM to unearth evidence that contradicts such hegemonic assumptions, but such examples don't sit easily with either our own perceptions of self or with the identity that is constructed for us and reproduced in the mass media. They don't sell newspapers, books or cinema seats either.

One former prisoner of the Japanese asserted on the last page of his book that 'remembering is not enough, if it simply hardens the hate.'⁶³⁷ Unfortunately the organisations and industries that have marketed and reproduced his story have frequently had less noble objectives.

⁶³⁷ Lomax, *The Railway Man*, p276.

Conclusions.

Few people will undergo the kaleidoscope of emotions that the servicemen sent out to Asia in 1941 experienced within a few short months. After leaving war-torn Britain, mostly for the first time, they sampled the wildly contrasting locations of an empire that was unbeknown to them nearing its end, a demise that they would soon play a role in. Welcomed to Singapore by the now familiar sound of bombing, they experienced the tension of being in a combat zone before, contrary to all they had believed possible, they suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands an Asian enemy. After their shame had been publicly paraded for all the local populations to see, they entered into another totally new experience, that of a captivity that would occupy, for those who survived it, the next three and a half years of their lives. Here they would remain near hermetically sealed off from home, and from the changes taking place in the wider world.

Whilst some of their officers set about trying rebuild their ravaged self-image, from the shattered remains of the imagined soldier-heroes they had left behind on the battlefields of Hong Kong, Malaya and Singapore, the men, their sense of identity equally bruised, suffered the further indignity of being made to work like “coolies”, with rations to match. For some, the children of the inter-war depression years, such hardship was not entirely new, food had been poor, and work, if you could get it, was frequently tough. But even that upbringing could not have prepared them for what was to come.

Divisions of class, which had been so visible on the convoys out, now became more clearly drawn, as whilst conditions got worse for everyone, the weight of the effects of poor nutrition, work and illness fell heaviest on those at the bottom of the military ladder, as demonstrated explicitly by the mortality figures presented. Whilst in Britain the whole of society was supposedly pulling together, it seemed to many in the camps that the divisions were becoming wider. As with any society, it was never quite as simple as an “us and them” situation, with the

privileges of rank operating on every step of the ladder. This aspect of FEPOW experience has largely been lost from view as the post-war British establishment, recovering from the exertions of a long and debilitating conflict, largely chose to forget about the hostilities in Asia, the defeat in Singapore and those taken prisoner.

British attitudes to race could also be delineated in Asia, made all the clearer by virtue of being in the midst of so many new and different peoples. Whilst there was evidence of fairly widespread racialized language, this rarely translated into outright bigotry. The closest contact with men of another race was with the Eurasian Dutch, and given that the camp environment was so conducive to the stimulation of tensions, it is perhaps a little surprising, given the oft stated assumptions of a common British racism at that time, that only a minority of the BORs felt any real sense of antipathy towards them. Just as many of the men had a positive opinion of their Dutch colleagues. Less surprising is the fact that such antagonism, where it existed, was often hidden from plain sight.

In plainer sight has been the use of racialized assumptions with regard to post-war narratives that have grown around the themes of escape and the 1943 cholera epidemic. In both topics it is possible to suggest that such assertions were not as clear cut as the subsequent expositions would have us believe. In these cases it is possible to suggest that there were other factors at work, and that racial tropes have been employed to mitigate inaction in the matter of escape and a sense of guilt regarding the Tamils on the Railway.

Views on the Japanese are harder to evaluate, because of the obvious distortions created by the regime that the prisoners were subjected to. Yet despite what they went through, remarkably a majority of the BORs could find some degree of reconciliation in the post-war period. It would be interesting in this context to compare the outlooks of the FEPOWs, who had to live with the Japanese as captors for three and a half years, with those of the men of the 14th Army who were conditioned to kill them, a task they carried out with great success in

Burma during the latter years of the war. Unfortunately the 14th Army has left far fewer records at the IWM, particularly among the other ranks, and the distance of time probably now precludes such an analysis.

The predominance of colonialism in the formation of British attitudes to race has been questioned by Tony Kushner, who has suggested that popular culture was of particular importance in how Britons viewed the black GIs. The evidence from this survey is mixed; certainly film was a frequently cited source of how the men identified those they met, civilian or military, although the reality was sometimes not surprisingly a little different. With regard to the colonial influence the evidence is less clear. Certainly around half of the subjects used “colonial” language in their diaries with regard to local civilians, but where this originated from is debatable. It could have been prevalent at home and thus they brought it with them, or they could have become rapidly acculturated to their new surroundings. It is noteworthy that an equal number of them chose not to use such epithets.

Kushner also points to a mutability in outlooks, which is largely absent among the diarists, suggesting a greater rigidity in attitudes, although the number of cases is too small to make any significant judgements. The interviews and memoirs that made up the bulk of the cohort are not much use in this context, as they provide only a snapshot of the views at the time they were recorded, although several of the men recalled how first contacts could sometimes change their preformed opinions.

British, imperial and western identities could often overlap, particularly when defined by the parameter of race. For many of the other ranks “POW” was how they saw themselves, and where unit discipline was less strict many small groups of assorted nationalities could coalesce, and it could be a source of some irritation if they were ordered back into regimental and national huts. Whilst some might suggest that there was a sense of Anglo-Saxon solidarity against the Dutch, the evidence of this survey suggests that this took a wider European or

western sense, encompassing the white and usually English-speaking Dutch and was constructed against the Dutch Eurasian other, although as discussed, such attitudes were far from hegemonic.

In the post-war period the establishment has been accused of largely ignoring the FEPOW community, be it through the failure of the *Official History* to tell their story, the lack of much needed support or the paltry compensation figure originally paid to them. The embarrassment of the establishment at the failure in Singapore had in turn created similar failings closer to home. Under such circumstances it is perhaps not surprising that the narrative of captivity in Asia has been frozen in time. This process has been enhanced by the continued narrow representation of that experience by the media, in a way has privileged the voices of an unrepresentative few in what has largely been a search for profits. With the passing of the war generation their voices will become even more muted, but fortunately they can still be recovered from records such as those held at the Imperial War Museum.

This thesis has adopted a social history methodological approach to sources that are more commonly associated with military matters. In so doing it has revealed a rich seam of evidence that can inform understandings of race, class and identity in a wider national context. The archives of the Imperial War Museum contain the source material for many similar avenues of research. Whilst a deeper examination of the 14th Army in Burma may not have been possible, there are many other plausible avenues of investigation. Comparisons on similar (or a variety of other) topics as covered here could be made with troops stationed in India and elsewhere, and through different time periods. The travelling researcher could make trans-national comparative studies utilising archival sources in Australia, the United States and the Netherlands.

The final word must go to the men who have been a major part of my life over the past few years. They have frequently confounded my expectations, while confirming a few. Reading and

listening to their accounts rarely fails to generate an emotional response, and yet despite the grim nature of their experience I have also found myself laughing with them a surprising number of times, an indication of their spirit in adversity. An overall picture has formed of a group of ordinary men, with the virtues and faults that are common to the human condition, who struggled to come to terms, not only with the extraordinary circumstances that fate decreed upon them during the war, but also with their memories and the persistent psychological and physical damage that captivity bestowed upon many of them. It is a story worth telling.

Primary Sources.Sources: Imperial War Museum – Documents Archive

NAME	IWM Cat. No.	Rank	Regiment
Caldwell, E.J.	11092 (ts diary)	Pte	RAOC
Carpenter, C.	1484 (ts memoir)	Pte	5 th Norfolks
Coates, N.H.	6651 (ms diary)	Sapper	251 Fd Park Coy, RE
Davies, E.W	3656 (ms diary)	Sgt	RCS
Dawson, S.	3156 (ts memoir)	Pte	RAOC
Dixon, H.	13003 (ts memoir)	Pte	RASC
Flello, F.E.L.	3662 (ms diary)	Cpl	5 th Beds/Herts
Grafton, A.W.F.	6466 (ts memoir)	L Bdr	3 rd HAA Regt, RA
Gregory, D.L.	8105 (ts memoir)	Aircraftman	RAF
Henderson, E.S.	8225 (ts memoir)	Cpl	5 th Beds/Herts
Holden, E.	2510 (ts memoir)	Pte	RAOC
Houghton, J.R.	2258 (ms diary)	Pte	5 th Loyals
Oakley, V.F.T.	8278 (ts memoir)	Wireless Operator	RAF
Parry, E.W.	2729 (ms diary)	Bdr	88 Field Regt, RA
Pitfield, T.W.	6398 (ms diary)	Gnr	118 Field Regt, RA
Rose, W.C.	[05/58/1] (ms diary)	Sgt	RAF
Street, G.A.	1683 (ms diary)	NCO	2 nd Cambs
Strong, G.	6838 (ms diary)	Pte	RAOC
Taylor, J.D.	841 (ts report, 1943)	Cpl	Intelligence Corps
Toze, A.V.	1133 (ms diary)	L Bdr	122 Field Regt, RA
Barratt, J.A.L.	1771 (ts memoir)	Cap	4 th Norfolks
Crawley, N.	1132 (cig packet)	Lt Col	118 Field Regt, RA
Davies, G.P.	448 (ms diary)	Cap	2 nd Loyals
De Cayley, F.E.	7888 (ts memoir)	Cap	5 th Suffolks
Eva, O.V.	2381 (ts memoir)	Lt	9 th Northd Fusiliers
Hines, D.V.E.	463 (ms diary)	Lt	3/17 Dogras (IA)
Hobbs, T.W.	845 (ts/ms diary)	Lt	21 LAA Regt, RA
Inglefield, G.	1478 (ts memoir)	Cap	1 Sherwood Foresters
Merrett, F.M.	1293 (ts memoir)	Cap	RAOC
Steeds, A.J.	8398 (ts diary)	Lt	6 HAA Regt, RA
Wylie, J.	6872 (assorted)	Maj	125 th Anti-Tank Regt
Baker, C.H.	1439 (ts memoir)	Liaison Officer	ABDA Command
Scott, R.F.	1049 (ms diary)	Internee	Shanghai

ts - typescript

ms - manuscript

Sources: Imperial War Museum – Sound Archive

NAME	IWM Cat. No.	Rank	Regiment
Anckhorn, F.G	22926	Gnr	118 Field Regt, RA
Aspinall, J.	10707	Gnr	5 th Searchlight Regt
Bailey, C.	4647	NCO	5 th Loyals
Baynes, L.L.	23226	Sgt	1st Cambs
Bennington, L.B.	19092	Pte	2nd Cambs
Blackham, H.J.	10980	NCO	RCS
Bouch, E.W.	19102	Pte	2 nd Cambs
Cleveland, W.S.	17348	Pte	1 st Suffolks
Docketty, F.J.	4822	Gnr	30 th Searchlight Regt
Flegehen, R.	32218	Pte	RAMC
Frasier, D.M.	8302	Spr	36 th Fortress Regt
Furbear, P.	29063	NCO	135 Field Regt, RA
Goulding, H.B.	4808	NCO	35 LAA Regt, RA
Gregory, J.R.	6011	NCO	6 th Norfolks
Griffiths, W.	4749	Aircraftman	RAF
Gwillam, R.	10789	Gnr	155 Field Regt, RA
Harrison, G.W.	10750	Gnr	5 Field Regt, RA
Hawkins, R.A.	18480	Pte	5 th Suffolks
Hughieson, J.	28639	Seaman	Royal Navy
Jones, T.J.	4890	Gnr	77 HAA Regt, RA
Kirkwood, J.	4793	Aircraftman	RAF
Lane, A.	10295	Drummer	2 nd Manics
Larkin, C.J.	6126	NCO	RCS
Lawrence, S.	9706	Aircraftman	RAF
Long, J.	15350	Pte	RASC
Marchant, G.E.	10308	Spr	287 Field Coy, RE
McGuire, F.	6374	NCO	RCS
Mendelsohn, A.	6801	Pte	5 th Beds/Herts
Morley, A.J.	9767	NCO	1 st Cambs
Mutimer, P.J.	4801	NCO	5 th Searchlight Regt
Notley, W.R.	16670	Gnr	155 Field Regt, RA
Payne, H.	4748	Gnr	137 Field Regt, RA
Roberts, B.	4796	Signalman	RCS
Roberts, J.	6058	NCO	RAMC
Smith, J.	10705	Pte	5 th Loyals
Smith, L.	9497	Pte	RAMC
Wade, J.D.	9957	Pte	2 nd Suffolks.
Wills, G.	9498	Gnr	5 th Searchlight Regt
Woodhouse, T.F.	6184	NCO	RCS
Wyatt, J.A.	4814	NCO	2 nd East Surreys
Yerbury, F.	18290	Pte	RAMC

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