

Appendix 15: Experiences of Ptes Barnard and Walters in Batavia

On 11 February 1942, after an engagement with the enemy on the Jurong Road, the battalion was ordered to withdraw in an S.E. direction, this being carried out under fire. We came out on Reformatory Road, near Bukit Timah Railway Halt. We lost the unit and continued across country and came out near the Chinese High School, and proceeded along Bukit Timah Road in a southerly direction towards Newton Circus, where we were apprehended by a military police patrol who questioned us and took us by lorry to Biddidari Camp (M.R.C.)

This camp was being turned into either a C.C.S. or M.D.S., and the canteen was full of wounded. A Red Cross was being flown over it. The M.P. handed us over to an Officer who did not know where our Regiment was, and he told us the best thing to do was to hand in our arms and equipment and go to the docks.

We retained our arms and ammunition, and were sent with about 15 other N.C.Os and men to Keppel Harbour (this Officer recorded our regimental particulars in a notebook). Here we were directed to No. 1 Wharf where the 'Empire Star' was lying. Here, once again, our particulars were recorded by an R.A.S.C. Officer on duty at the gangway. He sent me on board, and Pte Walters was detailed off to go to the "Kedah" which was due in, and to report for Police Duty at the gangway. I went forward, and an R.A.F. Officer took my Tommy gun from me, and placed it in the general pool of arms and ammunition. I was then sent below, and that evening the boat pulled out into Keppel Roads and sailed.

Next morning, 12th February 1942, at about 09:00 hours we were attacked by nine Japanese bombers. The convoy consisted of five ships. The attack lasted about half hour, and the "Empire Star" received two hits, one amidships on the 1st Class cabins and one on the after-deck, and some casualties resulted. The ship proceeded under her own steam on to Batavia, and there was no further incident on the journey. (Pte Barnard's statement)

On being told to report to a Signal Section on the docks for Police Duty I went up and reported to Sgt. George and Sgt. Bentley (R.C. of S.) and was told to stay with their Section. We, the Section, were told that the "Kedah" was expected in at any time to take the remainder of the R.A.F. off. The "Kedah" actually came in about 0200 hours 12.2.42 and, when everyone were aboard, the Section I was attached to was ordered to embark,. This we did, and about 04:30 hours pulled out from Singapore and joined the rest of the convoy, which included the "Empire Star" and the cruiser H.M.S. Durban. During the air attack mentioned in the accompanying statement everyone was ordered on deck with a firearm, and we were all firing S.A.A. at planes at least 15,000 feet high.

On arrival at Batavia I was billeted at C.A.S. School with R.A.F. personnel. From this point onwards the accompanying statement is applicable to me. (Pte Walters statement).

On disembarkation at Batavia we were sent to emergency billets at the C.A.S. School, which mainly held R.A.F, R.A.A.F, and R.N.Z.A.F. personnel. Javanese workmen came into the school and put up double banks all made of bamboo, and we were issued with a rush mat and a mosquito net and, with these essentials, we waited for further orders to come from Lt. Col. Crafter of the East Surrey

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Regiment who was then Embarkation Staff Commander.

The ensuing fortnight was spent idly as, after cleaning up the billets and reporting to the camp orderly room for instructions, there was nothing to do. Leave was very limited, and we had to be back in billets by 21:30 hours.

Very near this school was a very fine Allied Canteen, where meals were obtainable at a very reasonable price.

Air raids were not very frequent at first, but after the fall of Singapore they increased daily and, when Pelambang (Sumatra) was captured, more R.A.F, R.A. and R.A.S.C. personnel were brought to this camp.

During our stay at this school we met Ptes Turner (Sigs), Cross and Pepper. They stayed at this camp for one day and then disappeared, and these men have not been seen on Java since. It is said that they went on to Australia. Pte Law of "A" Company was here, and he was employed as Lt. Col. Crafter's batman, and he moved off to a large Dutch barracks "Meester Cornelius" on the southern side of the city.

On or about 26th February we received orders through the Camp Adjutant to proceed to this "Meester Cornelius" camp. On our arrival we found the barracks large and airy, but rather crowded with more of all services, also Aussies and Dutch. We arrived at about 17:00 hours, and by 18:00 hours we had been fed with Dutch rations, supplied with beds and were giving in lists of clothing required. Very little in the clothing line was available, but we were issued with what they could give us and, next morning at about 12:00 hours, we received orders to proceed to Tjimahi (near Bandoeng). A convoy was formed of some 70 - 80 trucks, and was commanded by Capt. Harper-Holdcroft, who was Padre to the 6th H.A.A. Regiment. On this convoy we were about 150 N.C.Os and men who had been shipped off from Singapore.

We passed through some very strong looking defence areas, and some of the tank ditches stretched for miles, in fact as far as the eye could see. Japanese bombers flew over us and went on towards Batavia. Although we did not hear the A.A. fire, a magnificent barrage was put up for we could see the shell bursts, and for the first time I saw the Japs break up their formations. I have learned since that most of the barrage came from ships lying in the docks, these included U.S.S. Houston, H.M.A.S Perth, H.M.S. Exeter, H.M.S. Dragon, an Indian Navy sloop, and several other Naval ships. A large oil fire was started. We reached Tjimahi about 19:00 hours, and we went into the 4th Infantry Battalion (Dutch) barracks. These were built the same as the "Meester Cornelius" barracks, and here once again we were settled in very quickly.

Of the men came from Batavia, there were 42 put into a platoon under the command of Lt. Montgomery Campbell of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders,, and we were attached to the 6th Heavy A.A. Regiment as an infantry platoon. In this platoon were Ptes Cattermole, Hibbert and Hillyard of the East Surreys, and about 18 N.C.Os and men of the A. and S.H.. As a platoon we were supposed to be used to round up 'paratroops'. We were armed with four Brens, and each man

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received a Ross rifle and 50 rounds, and the Tommy gun with a fair amount of ammunition. We also had four carriers but no trained drivers.

We then learned that the Japs had made a number of landings on the North of the island. Air raids now became rather more intense, and at one time there were more than 80 planes over Bandoeng. On this particular day we had been out on a scheme (a demonstration to N.C.Os of the 6th Heavy) and were on the Old Racecourse which was near the barracks, and were watching the air fighting with interest when, from one of the fighters, a small stream of black smoke appeared and grew bigger and bigger and then, as the plane began to nose dive towards one of the hills, out came the pilot. It was not possible to distinguish whose plane it was, or who the parachutist was, so a section was sent off under the command of R.S.M. Colvin, A.& S.H., and they captured a British Pilot Sgt!

Roadblocks existed every two or three miles ,and consisted of carts placed on opposite sides of the road and these were filled with heavy rocks.

On 6th March 1942 we left in convoy for an unknown destination. The convoy stretched about 5 to 7 miles and was a fine target for a lone dive bomber who chose a very open piece of the country to attack us in, dropping three bombs and several bursts of M.G. fire, and succeeded in hitting two truckloads of ammunition and setting them on fire. The total casualties were 12. The road was very quickly repaired, and the convoy moved off again. Late that night we arrived at Tasikmalaya and were dispersed around the town.

Several times during that day the aerodrome was raided, and our vehicles were either unobserved or not worried about. We rested during the day and about 0200 hours the next morning we pulled out for another unknown destination. All that night we travelled as fast as possible, and arrived at Garost early next day.

Here once again we were dispersed around the town, and our particular section of the convoy was placed opposite a Dutch police station. After breakfast we saw numbers of "hand wachs" or Home Guard entering the police station and hand in their arms and ammunition, and we were told that the island had capitulated.

Later that morning our platoon was addressed by Lt. Gall R.A. who told us that the Dutch had capitulated, and that we had to make our way, if possible, to the south coast, where there would be some Naval craft waiting to take us off, and there was a possibility of an attack on the convoy by the Nips. In the event of this sort of trouble we were to act as a rearguard to the convoy.

In this preparation we prepared our Brens, checked over the magazines and primed large numbers of bakelite bombs, and sat down to wait for the convoy to move off. About 15:00 hours Padre Harper-Holcroft told us that the convoy was not going to move, but if any wished to try and make on the coast on their own they could. Gathering up what kit I had, I strapped it on the back of my motorbike and ,with Pte Walters on the pillion, we started for the coast. For the first 20 miles there was nothing but trucks, lorries and staff cars. Gradually the convoy sorted itself out, and I

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caught up Pte Cattermole who had also decided to take a chance and headed for the coast, so we have three started on again after a meal.

We reached Tjikadjang and we were directed along the wrong road, and we climbed up into the mountains, round the most nerve-wracking hairpin bends I have yet travelled, and eventually the road came on to a second-class road and, after travelling very slowly down this for about half a mile, we came to a convoy of the Texas Artillery, part of the American Force which landed on Java. As we found it impossible to pass owing to the extreme narrowness of the track, we started to turn back and we were stopped by a U.S. Officer of the Texas Artillery, and he wanted to know who we were and what we wanted, he said he didn't trust "any God dam stranger around these blasted parts". Later I was told he was Col. Searle U.S. Army. After establishing our identity we moved off again, and it was soon dark and, owing to the state of the road, we decided to stay the night in the mountains, and we came on a small shelter, open on one side. After parking the bikes off the road, we got down to sleep and during the night it became really cold. At dawn we were woken up by an enterprising Malay who had brought a kettle of hot tea and some biscuits, and then continued on our journey.

We again reached Tjikadjang and, this time, the right road, and made for the coast. The roads were clear for miles and we were able to get along at a fair speed, and only an odd staff car or civilian car passed us either way. Towards noon we again struck the convoy, of which most was parked off the road, and we were signalled to pass through. Later that afternoon we came to the end of the road, and came on a landing ground. We went along a track on the S.E. side of the field and came to a very small dock. As there were no ships in sight we decided we should stay in a place where, if any did come in, we should be on hand to get out to them.

Next morning, as the tires of our motorcycles had burst, Cattermole went off to try and locate a workshop or L.A.D., but was not successful and, as he came back, he met a truck and on board were Ptes Hibbert and Hillyard.

We joined the party on the lorry and headed along the West Road. This ran along the foreshore for several miles and came to the end of the road,. We went on towards the beach. On reaching the shore we struck off westwards and came to a very small kampong ,and here we met a Dutch lieutenant and three Dutch officer cadets who were staying in a disused mosque. They invited us to stay with them. On the truck we had a fair amount of rations, and the Lt. engaged a large number of coolies to carry it down for us ,and this was stacked up in one room.

No ships were seen and, as we had several requests from officers who came down to the beaches to go back to the main body, Pte Walters and I finally started on the journey to rejoin the main body. We went to the village and found a truck which was running a ferry service to Tjikadjang where most of the main body had gathered. In the truck with us were six Australians and Bombardier Barnett of the 48th L.A.A.

We were directed along a side road, and came to Trogong where the 21st L.A.A. were staying,. We saw a Japanese outpost just close by, and were directed by a British officer to proceed along past

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the outpost for about 2 miles, where we would find R. H.Q. 6 H.A.A.

The Japs allowed us to pass, and we went in search of our H.Q. We did not find it, but we picked up a Japanese convoy. We eventually got back to Batavia where we were taken to a Japanese H.Q., and our names were taken. Next we proceeded to a civilian jail which was in the "Meester Cornelius" district, this was March 18th 1942. We were put into with some American sailors who were survivors of the U.S.S. Houston. Next morning we were told we were not allowed to shave, and our razors and blades were taken from us, also scissors, knives, files - in fact anything that might be of use as a weapon.

We were fed twice a day on rice and stew and a very small white loaf. Coffee was served early in the morning, and the tea with both meals. Although not locked in the cells by day, we were kept inside a small compound and did nothing all day except washing clothing etc. About sunset we were checked over by the Japanese guards. A new Japanese officer took over command of the jail, and he believed in sports, and every afternoon we were turned out for football, races, handball and any other game he couldn't think of. This new commander ordered us to shave, and gave us 10 razors and blades for 57 men.

After about 21 days in jail we were gathered together and told to get ready to move to a military camp. We marched through the outskirts of Batavia and, after marching 2 miles, came to "Bicycle Camp". Here we were put in blocks that were wired off, and were issued with two sandbags for use as bedding. The majority of this camp were Australians. That evening we had a really large meal of rice and stew and, after the small meals we had received in the jail, it was very welcome.

After a day or so we were sorted out, and all English, American and Australian prisoners were put in separate blocks. We were eventually moved and were taken to the cooly lines at Tanjong Priok. Here life took on a new aspect, as we were divided up into sub-camps, each sub-camp being run separately.

A church was in the process of being built, a football league was started, sea bathing was allowed and daily work parties all help to pass the time very quickly. The Church being completed, a dedication service was held and named the Church of St George. Padre Harper-Holcroft was Chaplain to the Forces, and Padre Phillips was his assistant.

The Japanese sent a paper around to be signed by everyone promising to obey the orders of the Japanese. At first there was a spot of bother over it, and all sorts of things were promised if we did not sign it, but at last a letter signed by the General Sitwell was produced, and we were ordered to sign it.

On Sunday, 13th September there were no working parties for Camps 7 and 8. Next morning we paraded early, and were marched off to the docks. We embarked and found the accommodation not too good but better than expected. After an uneventful journey we reached Singapore, and proceeded to Changi P.O.W. camp.