

FROM LUXURY TO INTERNMENT

A life of luxury at her 20-acre home, Irwellbank, Singapore, with a staff of native servants, 27 racehorses, polo ponies, 9 Alsatians, and four motor-cars, was no preparation for three years and eight months in a Japanese internment camp, from which Mrs F. L. Harding was recently released.

With her husband, Major Harding, RASC. Mrs Harding, who is at present in Melbourne, lived in Singapore for 20 years until three days before the Japanese occupation. Her husband remained there while she left for Batavia in a cruiser, which surrendered in Banka Strait. From here, with survivors of the Banka Island massacre, she was taken to an internment camp in Palembang, Sumatra.

Soon after her arrival there Mrs Harding became ill with malaria, and later with beri beri, and she spent almost the whole of her internment in hospital. Conditions in the hospital were bad, though the patients were under the care of nuns. Often Japanese, and sometimes German, doctors visited the camps.

After the occupation of Singapore her husband was sent to a POW camp in Thailand. One day in the internment camp she was given a pot of pepper rolled in a piece of the Straits Times, in which was a report of three races won by her own horses, raced by their Japanese owners!

After her release, Mrs Harding was sent to hospital in Singapore as a stretcher case, where she met her husband again and travelled to Australia with him. During their parents' captivity their son and daughter, Gerald and Antoinette, were at school in Australia.

Early next year the family will travel to England to place Gerald at Cambridge and Antoinette at finishing school in Switzerland. Then Major and Mrs Harding will return to their home in Singapore — "the

to their home in Singapore — "the only place on earth where I want to live"—Mrs Harding said.