

VICTIM OF THE KEMPEITAI

SURVIVOR'S ACCOUNT OF JAPANESE BRUTALITIES

TORTURE AND STARVATION IN SINGAPORE

By R. H. Scott

The following dispatch from Colombo has been telegraphed to "The Times" by Mr. R. H. Scott, who was Far Eastern representative of the Ministry of Information from 1939 to 1942 and a member of the Singapore War Council in January-February, 1942. Until this dispatch was received the absence of all information of Mr. Scott's whereabouts had given rise to anxiety ever since the fall of Singapore.

The Ministry of Information continued to function in Singapore until a few days before the capitulation on February 15, 1942. Most of the staff had already been sent to Chungking, India, and Java in accordance with prearranged plans.

On February 11 it was decided to evacuate the remaining staff. With nine members I boarded H.M.S. *Giang Bee*, a 30-year-old Chinese-owned coaster taken over by the Admiralty. On Friday, February 13, having survived six bombing attacks, she was halted by Japanese destroyers in the Banka Straits. The captain directed an officer, myself, and two other men to take a dinghy and row to the destroyers to tell the Japanese that we had only two serviceable lifeboats and more than 300 passengers and crew, including many women and children. For two hours we rowed desperately in a heavy sea and came close to the destroyers. They then opened fire on the *Giang Bee*, sank her, and steamed on. We rowed back, but could find only two survivors. Without compass, map, food, or water we then rowed for 48 hours until we reached the coast of Sumatra, north of the Palembang River.

IN ENEMY HANDS

After four more days of rowing we reached a village six miles from Palembang, only to learn that the Japanese had landed four days before. The Japanese were threatening with dire penalties all Malays who harboured Europeans. It was hardly surprising that the village headman, after supplying us liberally with food, slipped into Palembang and told the Japanese of our whereabouts. We were confined to the village for two weeks and were then moved to a prisoner-of-war camp in Palembang.

Meanwhile from Singapore the Japanese *Kempeitai* (military secret police or *Gestapo*) had circulated a black list of wanted men. In May I was identified, taken back to Singapore handcuffed and under armed escort, and put in solitary confinement. Six weeks of cross-examination followed, sometimes lasting for 14 hours a day, with no torture, but with much bluster, bluff, and shouting. From the outset it was clear that the Japanese confused the Ministry of Information with a Ministry of Intelligence. Whether this was due to the words being identical in the Japanese language or to the fact that Japanese propagandists are usually spies I do not know. To them I was not only a spy but a master spy, the man who (they continually told me) had "turned the peoples of Asia against Japan" and was "more dangerous to Imperial Nippon than a division of the British Army"; and such like extravagant nonsense.

For the next seven months I was kept in strict solitary confinement at Changi civilian internment camp. I was never once allowed into the open air for exercise or for any other purpose. I had no bedding and slept on concrete. I was allowed no books or reading matter. I fell ill, but no doctor was allowed to visit me for five months. Throughout this time, however, I was able to follow at least the headlines of the news. One enterprising internee who drove a truck past my cell used to sing the news to the tune of "Tipperary." Mysterious notes turned up inside my rice and in the stopper of my waterbottle. Finally, in February, 1943, I was released to the paradise of ordinary internment, working as a gardener and barber, attending lectures, learning Dutch, and going to camp concerts and games. It was heaven.

CAMP NEWS

After my first relief at finding myself "free" I began to take an interest in some of the camp's less lawful activities. These included the exchange of letters between internees and their relatives and friends in the town and in other camps; smuggling money in for camp purposes and out to buy supplies unobtainable in the camp; getting in news of the outside world; and operating short-wave radio sets. There were several short-wave sets in the camp—no one knew how many. They had been smuggled into the camp in pieces and built with extraordinary ingenuity into stools, chairs, and boxes of foodstuffs. One result of this lack of coordination was that the camp buzzed with rumours. They were often contradictory, and the morale of the camp suffered. There was a general feeling that something ought to be done about it, and I was asked to tackle the job. It was done, if not with complete success—for some radio owners refused to fall into line—at least with highly satisfactory results from the standpoint of camp morale.

On September 27 six oil tankers in Singapore Harbour were set on fire by sabotage. On October 10—all internees and civilians in Singapore know it as the "double tenth"—the camp was raided

by a large force of *Kempeitai* and troops. About 12 internees, including myself, were arrested. One radio set was found and the operator was identified. He was tortured into revealing the names of his colleagues, including mine, after which he was allowed to rot in a cell till he died of dysentery three months later. Further arrests followed not only among internees but among townspeople, chiefly Chinese and Eurasians.

I wish here to pay tribute to the magnificent help given us by the people outside. At great risk to themselves they subscribed and smuggled in hundreds of thousands of dollars, sent us food, clothing, and news, and for our sakes many suffered imprisonment, torture, disease, and death.

I was kept in a cell at the *Kempeitai* headquarters in the old Y.M.C.A. building for three weeks before being asked a single question. Then I was cross-examined for 15 hours from 2.15 p.m. till nearly 6 a.m. They said they had planted informers in the camp, and charged me with being the head of a big spy, sabotage, and anti-Japanese organization in Malaya, directed from the camp and in wireless communication with India. They had, they said, all the evidence they required, but, according to Japanese law, the accused had to sign a confession before he was tried. If I refused to confess "other methods would be used." If I died in the process, "according to Imperial Nipponese law, no responsibility would attach to the investigating officers."

Next day only one question was put: "What did the camp news committee discuss on September 23?" (They wanted me to say we had planned to sabotage the tankers.) The first interview lasted 15 hours, the second 15 seconds. Then for the next three months I mouldered in a cell, in semi-starvation, with no bedding, no clothes but those I was wearing, no soap, and no toothbrush. Meanwhile the torture and cross-examination of the others continued. About 50 internees had been arrested and about the same number of townspeople. Some died of torture, others of disease; one committed suicide; one was executed. Some broke down and signed true confessions; others broke down and signed false confessions.

PROLONGED TORTURES

By February, 1944, the *Kempeitai* considered that they had enough evidence, and they started on me in earnest. This time there were no preliminary courtesies. Before being asked a single question I was forced to kneel on a rack on the floor with one hand tied to the top of the window. As a result of this, for three months I could not use two fingers. For days the cross-examination continued. For one week I was not allowed to sleep, lie down, or relax in any form: I had to squat Japanese style in front of a sentry night and day except when I was called up for questioning. Questioning meant hours of kneeling on sticks, beating, flogging, shouting, slapping, and the usual Japanese third-degree methods. For the first four days I was on half rations, but for the last 75 hours I had nothing whatsoever to eat or drink. This was the longest continuous period of strain. I was sentenced to death, made to write a farewell letter to my wife, reprieved, and the examination went on.

Finally—they just stopped. They had collected too much evidence, and much of it, extracted under torture, was conflicting and, indeed, was quite fictitious. So they dropped the questioning. Then I contracted dysentery and was sent to the *Kempeitai* ward in the local hospital. Thence I was sent to prison, and finally, on November 7 I was court-martialled, convicted of anti-Japanese propaganda and operating short-wave sets (the only charges I had ever admitted, and then only after making certain they knew all about it already) and sentenced to six years' rigorous imprisonment.

Back in prison, I contracted dysentery again, beriberi, scabies, eye trouble, mouth sores, and dizziness. Following the usual practice with sick prisoners, the Japanese guards cut my food, but forced me to continue working until, at the end of February, 1945, I collapsed one morning when carting planks. As the Japanese preferred to have prisoners die in the civilian internment camp hospital, I was transferred there, and found the first letters from my wife I had had for three years. I had lost 100lb. in weight, was suffering from many diseases, and was thought to have small chance of pulling through. But I survived, even though until the war ended there was the continuous fear of being taken back to prison to continue the sentence.

That is all over now. The hospital ship sails to-morrow. Already the *Kempeitai* and their brutalities are receding into the background.

JAPANESE ATROCITIES

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—Readers of *The Times* seem surprised and shocked at the reported treatment of British and American prisoners in the internment camps. This astonishment is due to the ignorance of the British and the American people concerning the nature of Japanese civilization, an ignorance that persists in spite of all that the writers of both nations have done in the past 50 years to dispel it. During the 22 years that I lived in Japan, in university work, I acted as correspondent of leading British and American journals, and, by the time I left Japan in 1935, I supposed that most of my fellow countrymen had some clear idea of what Japanese civilization was like.

Among the phases of social progress in Japan that I sought to point out was the backwardness of the moral and spiritual conceptions of the masses of the people in that country. In many ways their ideas are still akin to our own in the Middle Ages. Our ancestors flocked to see people burned at the stake, or tortured to death on the rack, or by other inhuman means,

and we are amazed now to find that the Japanese still deal with the extraction of evidence in this cruel manner. We expect them to treat our people better than they treat their own. It was because we feared they would treat our people as they did their own, that we insisted on establishing consular courts in Japan before allowing her to enter the comity of nations; it is only about 50 years since these foreign law courts were withdrawn and foreigners in Japan put under native law.

It has to be admitted, however, that resort to torture even in Japan; the courts of Japan observe the law, and instances of torture are dealt with, though not severely; but the Japanese police, and especially the *Kempeitai* or *Gestapo*, have frequently inflicted torture to obtain evidence—even on foreigners—only a short time before the war. I write simply to point out that the Japanese lower officials have not dealt with our prisoners more severely than they do with their own, which, of course, does not excuse the higher officers from seeing that international law and the laws of war are observed.

Yours, &c., J. INGRAM BRYAN.
Milton Ernest Vicarage, Bedford, Sept. 11.