

**REPORT BY CAPTAIN J W SMITH, RA, ON INCIDENT
MONDAY 5TH NOVEMBER 1945 AT BENKOLEN**

A party consisting of Captain J Mockler, I.A.M.C, Captain J W Smith, R A Driver Mechanic Jackson, Lincs – Regt, and Mr Treveroe, ex British Civilian Internee, left Palembang on Saturday, 3rd November 45 proceeding by road in two cars to Lahat and Benkolen for inspection of hospitals and medical stores, and also for me to collect and escort RAPWI personnel at Benkolen to Palembang.

We left Palembang at 1200 hours on Saturday 3rd Nov and travelled to Lahat by road, arriving at 2230 hours and spent the night at the Residency. The journey was entirely without incident. On the morning of the 4th we arranged to have all medical stores laid out for inspection on return journey in a few days. We left Lahat at 1015 hours making our way by road to Loeboek Linggau, where we arrived without incident and collected personal belongings of a party of ex Internees who came from there two days previously. We continued our journey and en route from Loeboek Linggau to Benkolen Captain Mockler's car broke a half-shaft and was left with Jackson at KEPALATIOEROEP 69 kilos from Benkolen. Captain Mockler, Mr Treveroe and myself continued the journey in my car reaching Benkolen 2220 hours without incident. On the morning of the 5th Captain Mockler saw the Director of Jap Medical Services and I saw the Jap Military Officers, advising of them of our intentions to round up an evacuate RAWPI in that area to Palembang. Some RAPWI families were in hospital and there was a rumour that another two Eurasian families were in the vicinity of Benkolen.

At 1000 hours on the 5th we left Benkolen to investigate and if possible to collect these families for evacuation. We proceeded quite slowly in a Northerly direction and about two miles out of town we ran into a large road block with about 100 natives. I pulled up at the road block and as I stopped Mr Treveroe got out to talk to the natives. At the same time Captain Mockler seemed also to have opened his door and left the car and then turned back, presumably to pick up cigarettes or something, I was still in driving seat and the first indication that I had that anything was wrong was when the Doc suddenly yelled 'Oh Jesus', I turned in my seat and saw him turn away from the car with a spear in his back. I got out my gun but immediately my thumb was cut to the bone by a knife which caused me to drop the gun. I fought my way against the spears and left the car by the near-side door. As I left the car the Doc went down with the natives still thrusting at him. I fought my way round to the front of the car where Treveroe was making his stand but by the time I reached him he also was dead. I was now completely ringed with spears and decided there was no future in remaining so made a break for it. I succeeded in getting so close to the natives that their spears and knives were useless because they were so densely packed. I managed to break through the ring and then dashed in amongst the native houses. I reached the sea and ran into it for about 70 yards until the water was up to my chin. The natives gathered on the shore and used my exposed head as target for my own gun. I remained there for about ten minutes undecided whether to swim to Benkolen or return in case the Doc was not dead. The natives seemed calmer by this time so I risked coming out of the sea.

I was immediately seized, my arms bound in front of me and all my personal belongings were stripped and I was then led up the road to the scene of the fighting. The bodies of Captain Mockler and Mr Treveroe had been pulled into the side of road and completely stripped. The natives surrounded me with spears and the leader came up to me and shouted Nica straight into my face. The remainder immediately took up the call and kept shouting Nica, Nica. I shouted back just as loud 'I am not you B B'. I then asked if anyone spoke English. After standing in the middle of the road, bound for about ten or fifteen minutes, a car approached from the direction of Benkolen and a native who seemed to have some authority came out of the car and approached me. I immediately said do you speak English, he said yes, so I asked that he free my hands and take me back to Benkolen to the so called Indonesian Resident Tjaija. He gave no reply but walked on to where the leader of the gang was standing. He then proceeded to argue, pointing to the bodies and then to me and then came back towards me. I asked him again to release me. His reply was to point to the bodies and say 'This must be kept quiet' I then said you are a bigger B.... fool than you look. He went. I was then led back to the beach and the remainder of the rope, about 20 ft long, was wrapped round and round me to ensure I was securely bound. Fortunately they only bound the upper part of my body and by straining against the rope while being bound I managed to keep it reasonably slack. When they had finished this I was held by a native holding the end of the rope, about a yard long, and was guarded by eight spearsmen. They then started to dig my grave on the beach and about the same moment a middle aged native appeared with a short sword and started walking towards me. Once again I decided it was case of now or never, so bowled the native holding the end of the rope against the nearest spearsman and escaped into the sea. This time I did not hesitate but diversified myself of the rope and my clothes and started swimming to Benkolen, a distance of approximately 2 miles.

After swimming for about half an hour, nearly half way, an outrigger made upon me whereupon I surfaced dived and swam under the water for as long as possible, this was repeated three times and then the last time I surfaced I came under bows of a second boat of whose approach I was not aware. In it were two Indonesian policeman who invited me to come aboard. I was extremely dubious of this and insisted on hanging on to the outrigger only. They seemed harmless on closer inspection and eventually I climbed on to the stern of the boat. They invited me to the middle of the boat but I refused. I then insisted that they take me to Benkolen which they agreed to do in the end and I was handed over to Mr Ating, Indonesian Commissioner of Police under the old Dutch Regime.

I was then put into the hands of a Jap doctor and a Chinese doctor Lee who found I had ten wounds from spears and knives, they dressed them and made me comfortable.

While my wounds were having preliminary dressing at the Police Station the Indonesian Resident Tjaija came in and I demanded the return of all our personal belongings, including the car, and also asked him to accompany the police for the recovery of the bodies. None of our personal belongings were returned.

6th Nov 45.

(Sgd) Captain RA