

REPORT BY MAJOR W.A. TEBBUTT, A.I.F. ON PW
CAMPS BANKA ISLAND AND PALEMBANG

After being captured on Banka Island about 1 March 1942 I was taken to a labour assembly station at Muntok where I found A.I.F. officers and ORs as detailed later. Also present were 32 members of the Australian Nursing Service. Staff Nurse Bullwinkel was brought in the day after I was captured.

1. Nurses - These ladies were dressed in odd garments and some of them looked distressed, but all kept their spirits up. About 3rd March 1942 they, in company with British women, were sent to Palembang. After transfer of AIF personnel to Palembang some surreptitious communication was maintained with the Nurses until about August 1943. At the end of 1943 they were transferred back to Banka Island, and late in 1944 moved to S.E. Sumatra. Sister James was the Senior Sister. During the period we were at Palembang I wrote to Japanese authorities several times requesting permission to 'inspect' the Nurses for information; also, when officers' allowances were commenced I wrote pointing out that Nurses had status of officers under Australian Law and were entitled to an allowance. All letters were ignored. Arrangements also were made for the Nurses to carry information to Australia, should they be repatriated. From messages received and from observation the cheerfulness of these ladies despite efforts of the Japanese to punish and humiliate them, was admirable.

2. A.I.F. personnel - These men were moved from Muntok to Palembang on 12 March 1942 and remained in different schools and camps in that locality until the end of the war. The conduct of all ranks was highly satisfactory. They remained optimistic under trying experiences and their mental and physical health was definitely better than that of other PsOW. In addition to the AIF there were about 15 R.A.N. ratings under Lieut Commander Campey, and 2 R.A.A.F. personnel.

A general oversight was kept by me over the welfare of Australian Service personnel and also of about 6 Australian born officers serving with British and Malayan Forces. At times there were controversies with senior British and Dutch officers, mostly on questions of internal organisation and discipline, but I have no criticism to offer of a sufficiently serious character to warrant now remembering.

Detailed Australian medical histories were kept by Sgt Haines of RAAF (Haines' rank was air craftsman, but at my request he was promoted to A/Sgt (unpaid) on account of the important work he was doing as NCO i/c Hospital Orderlies, who included WOs and senior Dutch NCOs. I have given him a memo on the subject of his promotion for submission to the proper authority).

3. Living Conditions - The Australian Prisoners of War during the period that I was with them, 1 Mar 42 to 31 May 45, formed part of a camp of British and Dutch PsOW varying in number from 700 - 1500. The Senior British Officers were Comdr P.H.S. Reid, R.N. and Lt. Col. L. Hill, Indian Army (Formerly A.Q. Singapore Fortress Comd) and the senior Dutch Officer was Comdr (Kapitan Lieutenant der Zee) Meyer, Royal Netherlands Navy. These officers will doubtless make reports to their superiors.

The following are brief notes on specific conditions:-

Housing - We were shipped from Muntok to Palembang about 12 Mar 42 and some 700 men were quartered in a Chinese School (name unknown but referred to by troops as 'First China School'). The school was a two storey building of two wings in which men were crammed as tight as it was possible to get them. When we arrived a small warehouse building next door was included in the prison, and in the upstairs room the Australians and about 30 English troops were lodged. Sanitary conditions were quite hopeless, and efforts at digging latrines were rendered non effective as the water table was only about 12" below ground level. The yard was so small