

Welcome

I'm Jean Charlton,  
My father was Lt Col Thomas Hamilton - Dad was  
Head Surgeon in Malaya and on the Burma Railway

Dad had been in the army since the 1st World War.

He had been Superintendent of Newcastle Hospital  
from 1926-1929 & after as an Honorary Surgeon at  
the hospital.

I was 9 years old when he left and almost 15 when he  
returned.

I trained as an RN at the Royal from 1948-1952

# SLIDE 2

Press the button

Newcastle Hospital had 6 Dr's and 2 Snr Orderlies on the railway:

Capt. Dr Tom Brereton & Major Dr Carl Furner, Sgt Ray Cann & Sgt Charles Syme were with Dad in 2/4 Casualty Clearing Station (CCS) 8th Division AIF.

Dr's Peter Hendry ( Sadly, recently deceased at age 102 ) Capt. Dr Roy Mills, Lt Col. Dr Edward Mac Shepard were with 2/10th Field Ambulance - On the front line with 2/4 CCS behind them.

The 2/4 CCS had 8 Senior nurses working with them at this time.

Just before the fall of Singapore these nurses, and others, who wanted to stay with the men were given orders to return home. Sadly their ship was bombed, Of those who survived most were massacred at Banker Island and only one survived from 2/4 CCS.

# **SLIDE 3**

Press the button

## FALL OF SINGAPORE & the MALAYAN CAMPAIGN

22,000 AIF were sent to Singapore - but sadly over HALF - 13,000 - Did not return home.

Sir Winston Churchill had declared to our Prime Minister John Curtin that “ Singapore is Impregnable!” i.e. that it was totally safe.

He neglected to mention that his Defence force Generals had informed months earlier him that the Japanese could attack, by land, down the peninsula and not just by sea.

It turned out that the guns defending Singapore were pointing the wrong way, anticipating an attack from sea, not land.

In the two week Malayan campaign, there was only 1 battle fought against the Japanese. It was at GERMAS. Our troops won this battle.

Tom Brereton's son John ( Who has a room full of Malayan campaign information & is glad to share it ) said the Japanese had air support and 750 tanks rolling down the peninsula. This led to the fall of Singapore in a matter of weeks.

3,000 AIF were imprisoned in Changi on a rice diet and very little else for 3 months.

3,000 POW's were put on the 2 "hell ships" Celbres Maru & Toyahashi in the Singapore harbour and left for almost 3 days. Those on the Celebes Maru had no toilet facilities other than climbing a ladder out of the hold to relieve themselves into the harbour.

Wounded men, with dystentery, malaria and malnutrition, did not have the strength or ability to do this. They were forced to go where they lay. This led to an appalling situation and dreadful hygiene.

So hell started before the Burma Railway.

# **SLIDE 4**

Press the Button

## BURMA RAILWAY

Our men were part of A Force.

On disembarking at Tanbyuzat, Burma( Top of map ) our men were designated “A Force” by the Japanese. Some of the men had to walk a huge number of miles carrying the wounded and equipment. Then they had to build shelters and latrines on their arrival at the campsite.

Foot problems ( Army shoes were not designed for the jungle), Injuries, leg ulcers as well as the diseases & bashings from the guards, caused much anguish and many problems for the medicos who had very limited equipment and supplies. They had to perform hundreds of amputations with minimal pain relief.

The resilience of our men was legendary.



A couple of the men from the engineering group asked dad if he could have the discarded plaster casts.

He asked what they wanted them for.

They grinned, and said we have made an M&B stamp and are stamping out tablets that we are selling to the Japanese. ( M&B was the first of the antibiotics )

Some medical supplies were issued by the Japanese, but most were taken by Lt Col Nagatomo to feather his own nest sadly.

So, our men had to start with almost nothing...  
Think for a moment, WHAT WOULD YOU DO?...

Dr Roy Mill tells on p62 in his Diaries how they made I.V fluids and did infusions using Saline made of common salt & rain water.

This caused a negative reaction for patients, so then they started to filter the rainwater in beer bottles, then boiled it & stored in 300cc ampoules.

The stethoscope tubing was cut & soaked in Iodine for a week( a dentist had a bottle of it ) then it was joined with a cut thermometer case to a needle with a bamboo cannula.

The orderlies and volunteers were superb in looking after patients - The needle had to be held in the arm of the patients for many hours.

Many of these were cholera patients and their dehydration had to be seen to be believed, as described in Roy Mills' diaries.

Another of the Snr orderlies with 2/4 CCS told me this - Matt Harris diagnosed correctly a Japanese soldier with appendicitis and sent out for dad to return to operate and a result, they managed to get a lot of contraband out of the dispensary from him. Luckily when a search was carried out the contraband wasn't discovered, however the Japanese soldier was still sent home in disgrace.

Later, Dad was demoted by the Japanese in 1945 for organising and having an Anzac Day service.

He was sent to a punishment camp and had a turn at pulling wagons. The scars on his back were with him his whole life.

The POW camp was moved next to the ammunition dump which was bombed by our own planes. The casualties were soul destroying for the troops.

The Japanese Commandant told Dad that he had been issued orders to kill all prisoners in the event that Lord Mountbatten landed his troops on the peninsula.

“Nevermind” Said the Commandant” “ If necessary, I will kill you myself” offering Dad an honourable exit.

Happily, this didn't happen, The sword came home with Dad and my son Cam now has the Commandant's sword!

The Atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima & Nagasaki in August 1945.  
Freedom at last!

The effect of those at home in Australia was no less stressful during these dreadful events.

3 days after Singapore fell, the Army, who had a searchlight battery next door at Strezlecki lookout, told us we had to vacate our house in 3 weeks.

Mum with 4 of us, the youngest, only 1yo, had to relocate to the bottom of Terrace street, Newcastle.

We didn't hear whether dad was alive for 18 months.  
Mrs Brereton didn't hear word about Tom for 2 years.

Dr Peter Hendry & Roy Mills worked together the rest of their working lives at the RNH in Newcastle.

Peter became the president of World pathology organisation and Roy, a top thoracic Physician.

They never spoke to one another about their Burma experiences.

Roy's Diaries, which were lost, were printed 40 years later.

Dr Tom Brereton regained a lot of his sight. He even got a car license, to the joy of all at the RNH.

Dr Carl Furner became an honorary Physician at the RNH

Ray Cann went to private Xray in Newcastle

Dad went on to become an Honorary Surgeon at RNH

# **SLIDE 5**

Press the button

Dad, On returning home had breakfast one morning,  
One of the eggs was rotten, smelling of sulphur. I  
said, I will get another... dad asked, what are you  
going to do with that one? I replied, I am going to  
throw it out.

You cant do that - He Said.

That would've kept me alive for a week!

If I can get it past my nose - I can eat it.

And he did!

Guess what? He lived till he was 90.

Later,

Dad was asked “ Do you hate the Japanese?”

He replied - NO, Hate destroys the hater!

and apparently Tom Brereton felt the same.

To one helpful Japanese doctor who was suffering  
from the atom bomb, Tom who was almost blinded  
by Beri Beri, returned assistance to him by forwarding  
him a food parcel.

# **SLIDE 6**

Press the Button

## SUMMARY

22,000 AIF sent - 13,000 lost their lives and did not return home.

On top of this, On the Burma Railway

6,500 British soldiers died

2,800 Dutch soldiers died

Well over 100,000 asian coolies died with 250,000 taken as POW

2,700 AIF soldiers died

Sadly the Malayan campaign is now seen as a defeat. Medals are not allowed to be awarded - SHAME

What was Gallipoli, Crete, Vietnam?

Last Anzac Day the 8th division was referred to by the ABC as “ the Unfortunate 8th Division “.

Many lives were saved by these 43 doctors on the Burma railway. Including these Newcastle Hospital medicos.

Lest we forget,  
And we WILL remember them.

Thank you.