



MAKING THE MOST OF IT

Following on from the November article introducing the work being undertaken at Adam Park in Singapore, Jon Cooper reveals the stories behind one of the PoW Camps that was set up after the fighting had stopped.

After the fall of Singapore the survivors of the unit that had fought so valiantly in the defence of the Adam Park estate in Singapore, the 1st Battalion Cambridgeshire Regiment, were taken to Changi prison on 19 February 1942. However two months after the British surrender, the Japanese, somewhat overwhelmed by the number of Allied prisoners they had captured, decided on dispersing their captives to various work camps around the island in an attempt to clean up the damage the fighting had caused. They also tasked 10,000 men to the building of a Shinto Shrine to honour the Japanese war dead on the banks of the MacRitchie Reservoir.

Some 2,000 Australians were first of the shrine workforce to arrive at Adam Park on 3 April 1942. They were ordered to make best use of the bombed out buildings for their accommodation. What they found was an appalling mess.

The colonial houses in this part of Singapore had been left to rot. The roofs and walls were perforated by the explosion of mortars and shells and the rooms were infested with mosquitoes. Bodies of soldiers and civilians lay unburied around the grounds. The drainage and sanitation were smashed up and the electricity had been cut. The interiors had been looted and left devoid of usable furniture.

As a result, for many of the PoWs their first night in Adam Park was spent on the concrete floors of the outhouses with little more than

what they carried to provide succour. In the morning the roll call was taken and the first of the daily work parties was marched out onto the nearby Singapore Island Country Club's golf course to start the process of building access roads to the new shrine.

Lieutenant Colonel Robert Oakes, formerly the commanding officer of the 2/26 Battalion AIF, was in overall command of the detachment and he was given a surprisingly free rein to set up the camp. Providing the required numbers of troops were available each morning for the work parties the Japanese commanders paid little attention as to what went on in the camp.

Oakes and his staff set about establishing a fully-functioning military barracks within the wreckage of the estate. All the facilities one might expect in a camp back home were set up.

The men were billeted in the houses around the periphery of the estate keeping as much as they could within their battalion structure with about 250 men in each house. They were to be found in every room, some even preferring to live under the bungalows or in the outhouses, garages and maids' quarters. The external kitchens at the back of each house were used for making the food and latrines were dug in the gardens. A few weeks after their arrival the men of 8 Division Signals used their familiarity with wiring to get the electricity working and the men of 2/5 Hygiene Section finally restored the sanitation and running water.

Somewhat belatedly, a thousand British troops, including men from the Gordon Highlanders the Leicestershire Regiment and the East Surrey Regiment, arrived the following month under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Madden RA. With most of the best accommodation now firmly allocated to the Australians, they found themselves relegated to the six abandoned houses in the neighbouring Watten Estate.

Oakes brought in a surgical team led by Major Hugh Rayson of 2/10 Field Ambulance. The unit promptly set up a hospital which included, remarkably, a laboratory to analyse various samples brought in from the neighbouring camps and a fully functioning dental surgery. The officers not assigned to command of the accommodation buildings were housed in what became known as the "Captain's House" and Oakes even established an orderly room and somewhat ironically a "prison".

Other houses were converted into a canteen (set up by the Japanese and manned by local Chinese to encourage official trading), a chapel housed in the upper floor of a bombed-out house above the canteen and

ABOVE:

The sloping lawn of No.18 Adam Park as it is today. Research undertaken by The Adam Park Project, TAPP, revealed that the wartime grave record cards indicated that of the eight men who died in the camp at Adam Park, at least five were buried "on sloping ground" in the garden of No.18. (All images courtesy of TAPP/ Jon Cooper, unless stated otherwise).



ABOVE:

Two of the PoWs who died whilst at Adam Park Camp, Driver Laurence Brown, of the 4 Reserve MT Company, and Stoker Frederick William Grey – seen here – from the a Bathurst-class corvette HMAS *Maryborough* died within a day of each and were buried side-by-side in the camp cemetery. Remarkably, before the war both men lived not more than a mile apart from each other in Footscray, Victoria.

ABOVE RIGHT:

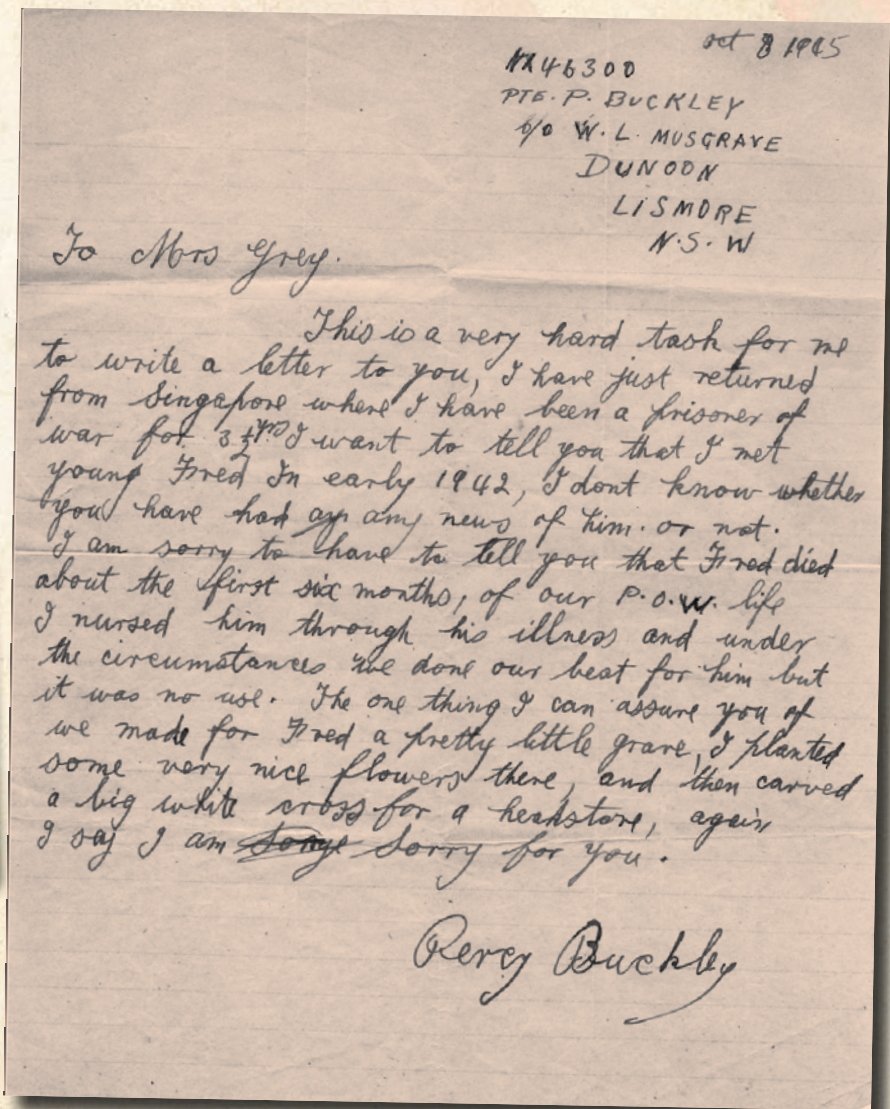
The TAPP team have managed to locate Stoker Frederick Grey's niece who still retains this moving letter written by Private Percy Buckley 2/10 Field Artillery who after his return to Australia after the war recalled the stoker's death and burial at No.18 Adam Park. Why Grey had come to be left in Singapore remains a mystery.

BELOW RIGHT:

Two of the PoWs, Private Lloyd Ellerman and Harold Fischer, shared a billet under the floor of No.3 Adam Park. Fischer was an excellent scrounger and between them the two men constructed a twelve-valve wireless set with headphones. To hid this, a hole was dug in the concrete floor, over which an old ice box with a false bottom was placed. In turn, books were piled up on top of it. In recent interviews Ellerman claims they seldom missed the BBC midnight news. As this image testifies, the filled-in whole is still visible today.

a theatre, The Tivoli, which in its heyday boasted an orchestra of over sixty musicians performing on a stage built into a double garage. The Japanese took over another house as their guard room but at this time there were few guards around the camp.

By mid-way through their stay the prisoners were asked to guard themselves, having to post sentries at various points with the remit to limit movement around the camp. In fact for the first few months there was little to stop prisoners walking down to town to trade what little items and money they had. A barbed-wire perimeter fence was not installed until May 1942.



Work was regular and tedious, the pace slow and laboured as both Japanese and Allied troops worked hard to get just enough done to keep their senior offices happy. Beatings were common, though, and the deaths of a number of men could be put down to the after-effects of serious punishment. However, at this stage of the war it would seem that on the whole the relationship between captors and captives was one of working to the mutual benefit of the other.

The biggest killer proved to be the poor diet and tropical climate. Men in the camp were initially given a daily rice ration of 22oz which, whilst reasonably substantial, lacked essential vitamins. The doctors worked tirelessly combating diseases brought on

the lack of a balanced diet and continually attempted to obtain other sources of valuable vitamins and anti-malarial drugs. The medical staff arranged for diverse excursions in search of food supplements; polished rice was brought in from the mills in Johor and malt and yeast obtained from various visits to the local Tiger Beer breweries. However men still fell ill and although only eight were reported as having died at Adam Park – all of whom were buried in the camp cemetery – many more were moved back to Changi with life-threatening illnesses.

By October 1942 the shrine had been completed and the men were not required to work as hard. For a few weeks boredom became the main worry. However in late



BRITAIN AT WAR

RIGHT:

Private Robert Mitchell passed his time in Adam Park by sketching. Having graduated from the 'Changi University' art class the previous month and keen to continue his work, he scrounged paper, pencils and paints and drew scenes from around the camp. That sketch book remained with Robert for the rest of the war tucked into a false bottom of his haversack and made it safely back to Australia. One of his earliest sketches, this drawing was important to the TAPP team. A study of a bombed-out building in the camp, which could be one of five similar homes on the estate including No.12, it has been annotated with a title that says the canteen and chapel were housed within. (Courtesy of Gordon & Suzanne Alexander, via TAPP)

BELOW:

No.12 Adam Park today. Private Robert Mitchell went onto sketch the chapel interior and from diaries and accounts it is clear that the Chapel house may still be upstanding and the chapel murals may still be hidden behind the layers of paintwork and plaster. The TAPP team are now busy raising sponsorship to be able to carry the necessary surveys in order to find the chapel and hopefully reveal the missing murals. For more information, or to support the project, contact Jon Cooper, TAPP Project Manager, at: jonacooper@googlemail.com

October the first party of 650 British were taken out of the camp and sent to Thailand, another eighty followed the next day. The remaining Australians were moved that November into the recently vacated accommodation in the Sime Road Camp or back to Changi. They too were destined to eventually leave for the infamous Burma Railway, the work camps in Borneo or to factories in Japan. Soon the relatively comfortable existence in Adam Park was all but forgotten and a new hell prevailed.

Despite the departure of so many men, Adam Park was not totally stripped of prisoners. The majority of the houses were rebuilt and re-let in 1943 to the Japanese hierarchy. However five houses were not restored and in 1945, Allied forces engaged



in the surrender of the Japanese found over 200 Australian prisoners still incarcerated in the Adam Park camp. These men were the survivors from the work on the Burma Railway who had been brought back to Singapore to help prepare the island's defences for the impending Allied invasion. These "Tunnelling Parties" were responsible for the construction of miles of underground labyrinths that honeycombed the centre of the island.

As of the time of writing, The Adam Park Project, TAPP, had undertaken five metal detector surveys on the estate concentrating on areas of known fighting and looking for evidence of specific events and features.

Two of these surveys were carried out as a response to requests from tenants wishing to build swimming pools and gazebos in areas they suspected as containing battlefield relics. To date, over 1,000m² have been surveyed and over 500 artefacts

recovered – of which approximately one third are believed to relate to the war. Over 100 bullets and cartridges alone have been unearthed. However there are a number of items that have been unquestionably from the PoW occupation. ■

BELOW:

TAPP's survey work at No.18 Adam Park revealed a selection of metal shards and waste clippings. In turn a worked piece of metal, a name plaque was unearthed which, once cleaned, revealed the inscription "AFH Lenz". It was initially thought that this was a grave marker but research revealed that Private Alan Francis Lenz, a member of Rayson's 2/10 Field Ambulance detachment, had survived his incarceration and returned safely to his hometown of Mortlake, NSW. Though Alan passed away in 2001, TAPP's researchers followed a trail that led them to other 2/10 survivors, one of whom served with Alan.

