

Ex 1650

I, JOHN ROSS BERGE of 85 Nottingham Street, Karori, Wellington, do solemnly and sincerely declare

THAT I was born in New Zealand on the 8th January 1921, and I served in the Armed Forces of the Crown first as a member of the R.N.Z.A.F., and later as a member of the Fleet Air Arm with the rank of Lieutenant (A) until I was captured by the Japanese.

THAT on the 9th March 1944 while serving as a Lieutenant in the Fleet Air Arm I was a passenger on the merchant vessel M.V. "BEHAR" en route from New Zealand to Ceylon and was captured by a Japanese cruiser, which sunk the "Behar" with shell fire.

THAT with the other captured prisoners, I was taken to Batavia and imprisoned in the Naval Barracks there, where 35 of us were confined in a brick room with a tiled floor for a week. We were not supplied with any bedding during this week and apart from the fact that there was a Japanese guard at the door and that food-of-sorts was brought to us, no one took any notice of us. The food consisted of "left-overs" of rice from the tables of our Japanese captors, and some kind of slops. All of us were suffering from diarrhoea, and as there was only one lavatory and no washing conveniences, we soon got into a filthy condition as we were kept locked up during the night. The Naval Barracks in which we were imprisoned for this week was formerly known as the "K.L.M. Hotel" so I was informed.

THAT at the end of a week we were interrogated by an English speaking Japanese Naval officer. We were actually divided up into parties of six and taken to a private house for questioning by these English speaking Naval officers. They asked us all sorts of questions, but treated us well, made all sorts of promises to us and supplied us with cigarettes. I have no complaint to make regarding the treatment I received from them. We were kept at a private house for approximately six weeks while this questioning was going on, and the Japanese Naval Intelligence officer who interrogated me was named "TAKI".

THAT after six weeks of this relatively comfortable treatment we were taken back to the Naval Barracks where we were photographed and told that we were being taken to Japan for repatriation. We were then taken by train to SURABEYU in charge of Taki who was friendly and treated us well.

THAT at Surabaya we were imprisoned three in a cell in the old Dutch Naval Base and kept there for a month. We were not allowed outside the cell and had no exercise during that month apart from pacing up and down the cell which measures approximately 8 ft. by 5 ft. We were again questioned there and told that we had told lies to our captors in Batavia. This was, in fact, true as we did tell lies to our captors there.

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THAT we were then blindfolded and handcuffed and taken and placed aboard a troopship - a former cargo ship - and taken to Japan. This voyage lasted for 17 or 18 days and five other prisoners and myself were taken on this ship.

THAT the names and addresses of my fellow prisoners were:-

Lieutenant Samuel Parker (Navy) New Zealand
 Lieutenant James Godwin (Navy) New Zealand
 Captain Maurice Symons, 86 Beechwood Drive, Jordan Hill, Glasgow
 Captain Percy Green (Merchant Navy) C/-Putterfield and Swyre,
 Hong Kong.
 Chief Wireless Operator Arthur Walker

THAT during this trip to Japan we were kept handcuffed to the wall of the cabin except when we were released for some other form of ill-treatment. We were confined two in a cabin, but we were continually changed so that during the voyage I had as a cabin mate each of the above named men at one time or another during the voyage. The Disciplinary Officer in charge of us was a "two star" Petty Officer, and I think his number was 38263. He was a typical Jap in appearance and I do not know his name. For no reason at all he kept Captain Symons and myself standing on tiptoe, tied by our thumbs to the roof of the cabin for a period of five hours without a break, and during a rough sea. I was also forced to do "on hands and feet up and down exercises" with my hands handcuffed close together. We were all forced to do this exercise and if anyone could not keep going or allowed his body to touch the ground he was kicked by the Disciplinary Officer abovementioned. Another form of ill-treatment on this ship was that we were forced to kneel on a lattice type of seat for periods up to three quarters of an hour at a time with our faces towards the wall without moving. The guards behind us would beat our bare feet with a length of rope and give us cuffs on the side of the head, the idea being to get us to move or fall off the seat on to the floor where we would be kicked. I cannot identify the guards who were responsible for meting out this treatment to us.

THAT on arrival in Japan we were taken by train to OFUNA CAMP. This camp is not a listed or registered Prisoner-of-war Camp but a sort of interrogation camp. It was in the Tokio area and there were approximately about 60 prisoners there at one time with drafts coming and going to other P.O.W. Camps. The Medical Officer in Ofuna Camp was a vicious and sadistic type. We knew him as "Congo Joe". He belonged to the Tokio area, and he was an unusually tall and powerful man physically for a Japanese. He was about 5'11" in height with a powerful physique, pale complexion, and a square head. He was notorious for the manner he used in beating and bashing prisoners - using sticks or his fists. One of the prisoners in Ofuna was an American Lieutenant named William Harris, whose father was Major-General in charge of U.S. Marine Aviation. By studying the Japanese characters

(alphabet) on our identification tags Harris was able to translate the Japanese language into English and eventually was able to translate news from the Japanese newspapers. While he was so using one of the other prisoners kept guard and on one occasion Lieutenant Commander Boullard of the U. S. Navy was keeping guard. "Congo Joe" sneaked up and saw Harris through the window. The alarm was sounded and all prisoners were "fallen in" on the parade ground. Harris and Boullard were paraded in front and beaten by "Congo Joe" with a bamboo crutch. Harris was beaten about the head and back and buttocks for about 45 minutes. He became unconscious before the end of the beating but on the instructions of Congo Joe he was held up by other Japanese guards. Boullard was also beaten but as his "crime" was not so serious he did not get such a bad beating as Harris. I also got two severe beatings from "Congo Joe". At one time I had to clean out the Japanese guard room and as the prisoners were desperate for cigarettes I used to collect the cigarette butts left by the Japanese guards and take them back for the use of the prisoners. I was caught taking these cigarette butts so I was duly taken out before the parade with the full knowledge of the Camp Commandant and beaten by Congo Joe. He used a baseball bat - one that had been made by an American prisoner - and beat me for about 15 or 20 minutes on each occasion with this. I did not sustain any permanent injury from those beatings, but they were very painful at the time as the skin was broken and the flesh badly bruised. These beatings were daily occurrences by the guards at Ofuna Camp and there were always cuffs on the side of the head and lesser beatings with the butt of a rifle or a bayonet scabbard for some imaginary breach of camp discipline. For example one had to ask in Japanese when one desired to visit the latrine. If the guard thought the prisoner was not sufficiently servile, the prisoner would receive a blow from a rifle butt or a blow of the guard's fist on the side of the head, or such like. There were about 10 guards in Ofuna Camp and all of them took turns at bashing and beating the prisoners. Incidentally, "Congo Joe" was medical "Officer" in the Camp. He paraded with a tray of coloured ointments in jars and used one piece of rag for everything. A man being treated for a sore throat had the same rag used on his throat as the man who was treated for haemorrhoids. All the beatings and thrashings which were usually inflicted on the back and buttocks of the victims were given with the full knowledge and connivance of the Camp Commandant. I do not know the Commandant's name but he was a Warrant Officer and his photograph appears in the "Free Lance" of the 3/10/45 at page 28.

THAT I remained in Ofuna Camp until September 1944 and was then taken to OMORI CAMP - the Headquarters Camp in the Tokio Area. The Camp Disciplinarian at this Camp was Sergeant WATANABAE. He was a well educated Japanese, and he informed us that he had been educated at Tokio University; that his mother owned one of the few copper mines in Japan; and that he had been a newspaper reporter. Watanabae used to talk to us and treat us well some days, and on other days he got into a bad humour and bashed and cuffed everyone within reach. Some days he would rave with temper and swear that he was going to decapitate

someone. He sorted out former officers among the prisoners for special ill-treatment. I saw him parade all the officers in the parade ground and then start at the left of the parade and go right through cuffing and punching everyone on the parade. Sometimes he used a stick; sometime he used his fists; and on some occasions he used his sword scabbard. I have been beaten by him on these parades. On one occasion he broke some bones in his right hand while beating the prisoners and had it set by another prisoner Major Richardson of the United States Medical Corps - and he punched and cuffed Major Richardson with his scum hand while the injured one was being set. Watanabae was a sadistic type and seemed to get pleasure out of beatings. On one occasion he issued an instruction that no one was allowed to smoke in the camp. This instruction did not matter so much when there were no cigarettes, but we received some Red Cross parcels with cigarettes in them, and we smoked in defiance of the ban. Ensign Mead of the U. S. Aviation Corps - home address 2545 Monterey Avenue, San Marino, California, was caught smoking and beat insensible by Watanabae in front of the parade. Two other Americans whom I saw being beaten by Watanabae were Charles P. Samson, 2645 Arnold Way, Corvallis, Oregon, and Harold Van Warner, 71 Green Street, Battle Creek, Michigan, U.S.A.

THAT at one stage a number of the prisoners were employed in the leather shop making water bottle covers for the Japanese army. We were given a quota to fulfil daily, but we seldom fulfilled our quota. For this we were beaten on parade. I was beaten on a number of occasions for not fulfilling my quota - with sticks, sword scabbards, once by a chair, and with Watanabae's fists. In March 1944 the air raids by the Allies started, and Watanabae consistently cuffed and beat us during air-raids. We organised our own A.R.P. system among the prisoners, but Watanabae assumed command of us and issued orders with the customary blows, cuffs and kicks. On one occasion during a raid Watanabae was on leave and the Camp Commandant instructed us to remain in bed. Watanabae came back unexpectedly and ordered us out to our A.R.P. stations. There was a lot of commotion and noise during the raid and we were nearly shot by the armed guards who thought that we had rioted. They thought that we were in our quarters and did not know that Watanabae had forced us out. The Camp Commandant countermanded Watanabae's orders and sent us all back to bed. The date was the 12th December 1944. The next day Watanabae vented his ill-humour on everyone within reach and practically everyone in camp sustained a black eye from Watanabae. Watanabae was such a tyrant and bully that the lives of all the prisoners were controlled by his whims. Everyone was suffering from nerves and everyone was in a panic when he approached - even the other Japanese guards. The Camp Commandant was weak - he could have stopped Watanabae's bullying if he had so desired. The Colonel-in-Charge of the Tokio Prisoner-of-War Area must also have known all about Watanabae's behavior, because he had an office in our camp. One of the Japanese guards was named "KANO". He was good to us, and frequently warned us when Watanabae was around and in a bullying mood. Where we were guilty of minor

breaches of camp discipline KANO arranged for us to be brought in front of the Camp Commandant instead of Watanabae so that our punishment was not accompanied by thrashings and beatings. "Kano" used to go to such lengths on our behalf that he himself suffered beatings at the hands of Watanabae. On the 23rd December 1944 Watanabae was transferred from OMORI together with the Camp Commandant and we had a comparatively good time in OMORI after their departure. The new Camp Commandant was Sergeant Major Ogori and I had a reasonably easy time there until March 1945 when I was transferred to a branch camp at NAOETSU. The Camp Commandant at this new camp was the old commandant from OMORI and his assistant was Watanabae. There were nearly 200 Australians in this camp and conditions were, if anything, worse than in OMORI, insofar as beatings were concerned. Watanabae beat, punched, cuffed and kicked everyone within reach and his presence made life a hell for the prisoners.

THAT we were housed in an old warehouse building which had had a dividing floor put in. The accommodation for the 200 prisoners there was definitely overcrowded, but conditions became worse on 3 June 1945 when another 400 American prisoners from a bombed out camp at Osaka were brought in. Conditions became filthy as there were only 15 latrines for nearly 700 men - the lavatories were troughs in the ground floor of the building, and the stench was indescribable. There were no washing facilities and clothing and bodies were infested with lice and fleas. Prior to the arrival of the Americans from Ofuna we were employed unloading a coal ship for about 3 weeks, and we were constantly under the threat of Watanabae's fists, stick, sword scabbard or feet. We were constantly cuffed and bullied by him, or were receiving blows from sticks or rifle butts, or being kicked. I was frequently cuffed and kicked during the unloading of this coal ship. It was dangerous to fall down while being bashed or cuffed, because if one fell to the ground Watanabae would use his boots and he was not particular where he kicked a prisoner - on the face, ribs, groin, or anywhere. After unloading the coal ship I was sent with a working party to a 3 acre vegetable camp about 10 kilometres from the camp where we worked from approximately 7.30 a.m. to 6.30 p.m. or 7 p.m. daily.

THAT in June 1945 Watanabae left this camp and a Japanese soldier named "KONO" was interpreter. He was a "3 badge private" and he cuffed, kicked, and beat the prisoners the same as Watanabae had done. He was about 5' in height, slight build with very thin face and sunken cheeks, about 24 years of age and he wore glasses. I cannot definitely now name anyone who was beaten by KONO but I received cuffs and blows from him.

THAT I remained in this camp until 15th August 1945 and left Japan on the 5th September 1945 on the Dutch Hospital Ship "TJITJALENGKA" arriving at Auckland on the 3rd October 1945. At the time of my capture I was approximately 13½ stone in weight and when I was released my weight was approximately 7 stone.

AND I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing the same to be true, and by virtue of the Justices of the Peace Act 1927.

(Signed) JOHN R. BERGE
Lt.(A) R.N.Z.N.V.R.

Declared at Wellington this eleventh day of April 1946 before me

(Signed) A. MUGGERIDGE
Justice of the Peace

Certified true copy of original
I.N. EVANS
Flight Lieutenant Royal New Zealand Air Force