

Ex. 1503

Evidentiary Document #5045.

Evidence taken before Mr. Justice MANSFIELD in Sydney on Friday, 16th November 1945.

[NX33886 Cpl. CROFT, George Alexander, AAOC, attached 2/30 Bn, being duly sworn gives the following evidence;

I am NX33886 Cpl. CROFT, George Alexander, AAOC, attached 2/30 Bn. On 23 January 1942 I was in St. Patrick's Hospital with tinea. I was boarded for home; however, Major Hunt came in for volunteers to relieve the sick men and I volunteered to go. We were in the skin section at St. Patrick's and we were taken to the main hospital at Katonga. We were put into two trucks which had the Red Cross on the bonnets. The first truck went out and was immediately followed by the second in which I was travelling. We had not gone very far when the first truck pulled up, spun round, and went back past us. We attempted to turn, got half-way round on the road, and a machine gun opened fire on us. The truck was hit and it stopped across the road. A few of those in the back of the truck got out and ran and got away. We, however, were surrounded and taken by the Japanese, who made us sit down so we could not escape.

An Australian officer from the Con Depot came up, arguing the point with the Japanese and asking that we be taken back as we were sick men. Actually, we were supposed to be going to the Con Depot in Singapore. The Japanese would not listen. One chap who was hit through the knee with a machine gun bullet was allowed to go but not the rest.

They marched us along the road level with the machine gun post and turned right away from Katong. We were taken about three miles by road and placed in native huts. There were nine Australians. In the room there were civilians - Europeans and Tamils. We were made to sit on the floor where we could get in and were not questioned at all.

We were there so long and the Japanese guard came in and took out three men with their hands tied together. We thought they were being taken out for questioning; it was not long before three shots rang out and left no doubt as to what had happened. They kept coming in and going out, taking three each time and then there would be more shots.

I was in the last three to go. We were taken to the front room and made to sit down and then blindfolded. We were then led outside, still tied together, and made to sit down not far from the house. It was not long before something crashed into me and I was knocked back. I was caught by the heel and thrown into a drain. I knew what would happen if I moved so I just lay there. Later I slipped the blindfold and had a look. I couldn't see anyone about and it was getting right on dark then and so I untied myself, slipped off my boots and crawled out of the drain. I got through a double barbed wire fence, my idea being to go back to Katong Hospital. I was wounded a bullet having entered the left side of my head about the cheekbone and out on the right side of the back of my neck. I was spitting blood, and there was blood everywhere. I sat down under a tree to rest. It was dark and I

No. 1503

was in a rubber plantation. I went to sleep and never woke till dawn. I started off and started to get weaker and weaker and I was getting bushed. I did not know then that capitulation had taken place the night before and natives I met would not have anything to do with me. Then I discovered I could not speak.

I wandered round and round and finally came to a place where Portuguese people, a man and his wife and a few children, lived. The woman wanted to wash me as soon as she saw me. They spoke English, but this chap told her not to interfere with me as it might do me more harm than good. They gave me a cup of coffee and it ran out the side of my neck. He took me down the road and put me on the track through the bush leading to the hospital. A little Chinese girl ran ahead to the hospital and two orderlies came out and met me. They were Australian orderlies from the A.G.H. and they took me into the hospital from there. I was six months in hospital.

I could not identify the men who fired on the ambulance and later did the shooting, but most of them were big bushy beards; they were in uniform.

I have difficulty in speaking. I get a cold easily and cannot swallow food correctly. If I get anything hot I slobber and I also get bad cramps from the side of my face down to the throat. The bullet cut the back of my tongue. I never spoke from February to November, and I had to be fed through a tube. I spent the rest of the period in Changi as a prisoner of war. I was in charge of the bootmaking branch and had 32 bootmakers under me. I was servicing everyone's boots - Italian, Dutch, British, Australian, Japanese and Koreans.

When the Japanese sent their boots to be mended in most cases they sent material with them. We had a Korean quartermaster at the store all the time and they had their own material locked up in a locker. When we wanted to mend Australian and English boots we used motor tyre and also had some stuff manufactured out of raw latex. They also supplied us with a bit of yakla which was not much good. Old kit bags were cut up for uppers. We did 70, 80, 100 repairs a day and had two shifts running for a long while. We used to work from 8 or 9 in the morning to 5 p.m. and then the other shift would come on and work to 10.30 at night. I wore wooden clogs which I made for myself or any old pair of boots at all.

I had no trouble with the Japanese as regards bashings.

Quite a few Japanese officers came in and also Japanese and Korean soldiers. I spent quite a lot of time making sword belts for them also. The Korean quartermaster was Oyama Debushi, who was a good type as they go.

We had no boot repairing equipment. In the later stages, after we had struggled along for about two years, they brought out from town about a dozen pairs of pinchers, which were useless.

Evidentiary Document # 5045

3.

The Japanese had their own army boot shop at Singapore but I never saw it. They had machinery there. The reason they took their boots to us instead of taking them there was that they were getting a better job from us than from their own people. The Chinese did an excellent job but they were also getting an excellent price at that time and they were getting it done from us for nothing.

I was in the Selarang Square incident. I know a chap who has photos of it and I will try to get some for the Commission.

I certify that this evidence is true and correct.

Taken before me at Sydney)
)
on Friday 16th November 1944)
)
(Signed) A.J. MANSFIELD.)
Commissioner.)

(Signed) G.A. CROFT.