

Ex 1644

Evidentiary Document No. 5377.

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IN THE MATTER of War Crimes and IN THE MATTER of the condition and treatment of Australian and Dutch PW by the Japanese on board the 'RASHIN MARU' on a voyage from Singapore to Moji, Japan.

United Nations War Crimes Commission. Reference.....

I, John Lawrence HANDS of Commonwealth Bank, Forrest Place, PERTH in the State of Western Australia, formerly WX3335 Capt. J.L. HANDS of 2/3 Machine Gun Battalion, make oath and say:

1. I was captured in Java on the 9th March, 1942, and after being in numerous PW camps I was eventually embarked at Singapore for Japan in June, 1944, on the 'Rashin Maru'. The 'Rashin Maru' was a tramp steamer of about five to six thousand tons. It was staffed by Japanese civilians and sailors and in my opinion was part of the Japanese mercantile marine. It had either been bombed or had a fire aboard sometime previously because the bridge had been completely burnt out and amidships the ship gave the appearance of a collection of iron plates. There was a temporary bridge rigged aft. The main structure of the ship had been damaged by this bombing or fire and it was supported by two steel girders running down either side of the ship forward to aft. I saw in the engine room of the ship a plate showing that the ship had been built at Montreal, Canada, about 1914.

2. There were approximately 1000 PW embarked at Singapore on or about the 3rd. June, 1944, and it took about 8 or 9 hours to embark the PW. There were about 750 Australians and about 250 Dutch. There were three holds in the ship and the PW were accommodated in these three holds. The centre hold had no top to it and it had been badly damaged either by a bomb or fire. The top consisted of loose iron plates which freely let in the rain. I myself was in the forward hold with about 300 other PW. After all the men had embarked they were so crowded in these holds that there was not sufficient room for more than approximately 40 percent to lie in a prone position at the one time. All holds were infested with vermin; lice and bugs. During the journey to Japan I frequently visited other holds and conditions there were similar to conditions in the forward hold. A few straw mats were provided but these were insufficient and for the most part the men were lying on the steel floor, no other bed accommodation whatsoever being supplied.

3. The journey from Singapore to Japan took 70 days. During the journey we called at Miri in Borneo and for approximately two and a half weeks were in Manila Harbour but at no time were any of the PW allowed to disembark, and they all stayed on the vessel until

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it reached Japan. At night time those who were not able to get into a prone position had to sleep squatting down or even standing. It was impossible for all the men to get sleep at one time owing to the extremely crowded way they had been herded into the holds and they used to take turns of getting some sleep during the night and some during the day. On rare occasions a portion of the men were allowed to sleep on deck. The occasions however were very rare and regarded as a great privilege. Permission was only granted on 10 or 12 days of the 70 day voyage for men to sleep up on deck. The PW however used frequently to go up on their own accord in the darkness but were generally located on deck by the Japanese guards who would then administer beatings and herd them below again. Whenever PW were discovered on deck without authority from the Japanese, the Japanese after beating the men and herding them below again would then call out the PW officers and administer a severe beating to them. I myself was beaten 17 times on the voyage, approximately 6 of which beatings were administered to me because some of my men had been found on deck without authority. The PW officers made no attempt at all to stop the men going up on deck. The plight of the men in the holds was so pitiful that it was just beyond human feeling to order them to stop below or to try to stop their getting the benefit of a little fresh air.

4. The other beatings I received from the Japanese guards were mainly because I refused to give them food out of the PW rations. I was Quartermaster for the PW party and frequently the Japanese guards would ask me for sugar or other foodstuffs out of the PW rations. I invariably refused and would be given a beating by a Japanese guard. I was beaten with rifle butts, sticks, wooden clogs belonging to the guards and on three occasions with my own clogs. On one occasion when beaten with my own clogs I was knocked unconscious.

5. Repeated requests were made to the Japanese authorities on the ship to allow the men to go up on deck for fresh air and to stretch their limbs but such requests were always met with an unequivocal 'No'. No reason was ever given as to why the men were not allowed up on deck.

6. Living conditions were indescribable. The lice and bugs cause great discomfort to the men and there were no means of getting rid of the vermin. When it rained the majority of the men could get shelter from the rain but a considerable number could not. It was a very wet trip and for the six weeks while we were going through the tropics it rained practically daily. When the men got wet there was no way of drying their clothes.

7. Sanitary facilities consisted of 6 wooden crates slung over the side of the ship. Six men could be accommodated at a time but as a big percentage were suffering from diarrhoea or dysentery, facilities were quite inadequate. The six crates were the only facilities for the PW during the journey. To reach the latrines the men would have to climb up out of the hold and get permission

from the Japanese guard before he could visit the latrines. Frequently of course the men were unable to get out of the holds in time because of dysentery or diarrhoea and had to make their stools in the holds.

8. The only form of washing available to the men was a hose-down from sea water about twice a week. About twice a week the Japanese on the ship would pump sea-water up and the men would be passed through a few at a time, about 20 at a time, and be hosed down by the Japanese in charge for about 30 seconds. This group would then move on and make room for the next group. This was the only washing facility ever made available to the men.

9. The food on this ship was simply shocking and was the worst of any of my experiences as a PW. The diet consisted mainly of rice and dried fish which had gone bad. A small quantity of green vegetables were made available for a few days after calling at a port. For the most part we were without vegetables. The men rapidly developed beri-beri, pellagra and the usual results of mal-nutrition. Their daily ration per man would be about 500 grammes of rice. The daily issue of fish for the 1000 PW was approximately 50 lbs. There was a daily allowance of a total of approximately 12 lbs of sugar for all the PW. We used to save the sugar supply for about 5 or 6 days when there was sufficient to give each man a spoonful each. Drinking water was made available in limited quantities and there was never enough to satisfy the thirst of the men.

10. Punishments, both illegal and excessive, were a daily occurrence. Beatings were administered particularly by the Japanese guards to the PW, sometimes without any reason and sometimes for coming out of the holds without permission. One of the main causes of beatings was failing to salute a Japanese civilian guard whether the PW was an officer, NCO or not. On one occasion one officer Lieutenant KUTHERFORD of a Queensland Artillery Regiment was very badly beaten up and as a consequence had to lie down for three days.

11. There was no RAP available for sick PW. The PW's doctor was Capt. PARKER of Sydney and he was allowed a small space on deck where he could treat men. There was a little space on deck where 8 or 9 of the worst cases were allowed to sleep. The other sick were forced to remain in the holds. Medical supplies were in such small quantities as to be considered almost negligible. Capt. PARKER made repeated requests for more medical supplies but without any result. Practically all PW were sick throughout the voyage. Approximately 90 percent had recurrent malaria and the majority for the greater part of the voyage were suffering from dysentery, beri-beri and pellagra. Every PW was suffering from malnutrition. About 3 or 4 of the PW died on the trip. Capt. PARKER estimated that if the voyage lasted another 2 weeks the deaths would have been very numerous. Two of the men died of

cardiac beri-beri and one died of pellagra. One died of cerebral malaria. My opinion was that we arrived in Japan only just in time to avert a very heavy death roll.

12. We arrived at KOJI, Japan, in September, 1944, and when we arrived the condition of the men was pitiful. Many of them had to be carried ashore on stretchers and a large number could hardly support themselves. They were all scare-crows to look at except for some 100 or 200 who were swollen with beri-beri. Apart from those who were suffering from beri-beri the men looked like skeletons with skin over them.

SWORN by the said John Lawrence HANDS)
at PERTH in the State of Western)
Australia this 12th day of September,) (Signed) J. L. HANDS
1946.

Before me: (Signed) ?

A Commissioner for taking affidavits
in the Supreme Court of Western Australia.