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INTERNATIONAL PROSECUTION SECTION

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JOHN MUNSLOW WILLIAMS.

*Exoneratory Document*

# 5033

I am NX 12296 Lieut-Col. John Munslow Williams. I am C.O. 2/2/Pioneer Battalion. I was captured in Java on 9 March 1942. I was then under the command of Brigadier Blackburn. After my capture I went to Garoet, Java, for a short time and then in April I went to 10 Battalion Barracks at Batavia, where I remained until 8 October.

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What happened in October? We were taken from the camp, put on a ship and taken to Singapore. In that party were 1500 officers and other ranks.

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Of that 1500 the majority were Australians, but there were some Dutch and some Americans. We reached Keppel Harbour Singapore on 11 October.

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When did you arrive at Moulmein? 23 October. From there we went by train 30 miles inland to Thanbuyazat. There I met Brigadier Varley. He had the headquarters of No.3 Group Thailand Prisoners of War Camp. The Japanese Commander there was Lt-Col. Nagatomo, and the Australian Commander, of course, was Brigadier Varley. We were there for two days and left on 29 October with 884 men and went to Tanyin. That force of 884 men was known as Williams Force. No.3 Group under Brigadier Varley comprised Anderson Force, Williams Force, Black Force, Ramsay Force, Green Force and two Dutch Camps. No.3 Group did the work on the Burma half of the railway line, later on being helped by No.5 Group. No.3 Group comprised about 10,000 men, the bulk of whom were Australians, with a few hundred British, Dutch and Americans. Brigadier Varley told me I was taking my men to do railway construction. I did this work with my men on railway construction.

After that line was completed, were you able to observe what traffic was passing on it? Yes, for about 12 months. The traffic on the line comprised Japanese troops, Japanese equipment, including guns and Japanese stores to be used in the forward area.

Which way were they moving? They were all moving north. The trains coming back were practically empty. Some of them had on a few Indian railway workers. Some wounded came back on the trains.

That was the position over the 12 months you observed it in operation? Yes.

BY HIS HONOUR: I suppose they were using the line against Lord Mountbatten? Yes, it was one of the main supply routes.

BY Lt-Col. STEPHENS: How long were you at Tanyin? From October 1942 to March 1943. Then we went back to 26 Kilo Camp and joined up with Anderson Force. We then became known as No.1 Mobile Camp, and remained as such until December 1943.

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Were you present when any complaints were made to Lt-Col. Nagatomo? Yes. We had a conference in Tanyin Camp and another conference in base camp. Quite a lot of complaints were put to him, but I do not remember one case in which he did anything or rectified any matter that we complained of.

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What about food? It was mostly rice and the issue was about 1 1/2 lbs per man. We would get some meat. Sometimes it would be fresh meat and sometimes it would be spiced meat or dried meat. In each case it was definitely inadequate. Our vegetables consisted mostly of paddy melons, a few sweet potatoes and leaves we collected from the jungle. Sometimes they would give us bamboo shoots. Very little sugar was issued, little salt and on rare occasions we had some tea and a little oil. The oil consisted of 5 gallons for 800 men for three weeks.

Did the Japanese prescribe a ration scale for the prisoners of war? Yes.

Did you get rations in accordance with that scale? No, they were always short. We complained many times about the short rations and they said we were getting full rations. It was impossible for us to prove that we were getting short rations, because we had no scales. That was the answer we got.

Did the Japanese have the same food as your men? No. If we got one cow into the camp, they would get half of it. Our strength at that time was about 1500 men and their strength was about 30. They would cut the cow in half and they would get the hind quarters and we would get the forequarters. They would take the brains and tail and such things.

Have you personally seen a beast cut up in that way? Yes, on numerous occasions.

BY HIS HONOUR: What would be the size of the beast? They were very small. In Burma the cattle are very small and weigh about 100 to 150 lbs. Sometimes they dress like sheep.

BY LT-COL. STEPHENS: Was that food sufficient? No, my men were hungry all the time. I was always hungry. We would dream about food. That was the main topic of conversation.

What ration would sick men receive? Their rations were reduced. I think they got about 50 to 75 per cent of our ration. In actual practice we gave them whatever we could. They had the same, if not more than we did.

Did you ever have to eat bad meat? Yes, many times.

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ACCOMMODATION: Deal with accommodation generally speaking over the whole period? During the whole period we were in bamboo and atap huts. Most of the huts were built in wrong places and during the wet season quite a number of the huts were covered in mud. The ground itself was covered in mud. There was a platform in each hut to sleep on, with the exception of some huts which were used as cattle huts for the housing of cattle. In these huts the floors were covered with manure trampled into the mud. We had to build sleeping platforms in these huts. Sometimes we would have rivers of water running right through the huts. Our camps were always right on the bank or very close to the river. We had to build all our own kitchens. Very rarely we found kitchens built. We were travelling from camp to camp and each time we had to build a new kitchen.

Were you given any equipment by the Japanese to enable you to build? No, nothing in the way of bamboo or atap.



Or tools? No, very few tools. The tools we had we stole or bought from the natives.

Give an example of the overcrowding? At 131 Kilo Camp in a space 13 feet by 9 feet 23 O.A.R.'s or 21 Officers had to be housed. When we first got there we had to sit up all night and there was no roof. They produced some ataaap later on and we put a roof on it, but we still had to build bunks in that space to get the men in. We were not allowed to use the men to do that, but had to do it in our spare time. We were not given any tools. That was one bay.

Were other bays in the same camp occupied by Japanese? Yes, the Japanese had the same size bays and they had three in each bay. They complained about the overcrowding in their huts, but they had only three in the space where we were compelled to put 23. They said they could not give us any more room and they were overcrowded too

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BY HIS HONOUR: What was the hygiene like? Terrible. We had to dig our own latrines. In one camp in the wet season you would go down five or six inches and you would strike water. In some cases we had to build them up higher than the ground. In some camps it was impossible to dig or do anything at all. The men knew they would be there only a few days and they went into the jungle. You could not see the ground to dig; it was just mud or water. Nothing was ever given to us in the way of tools.

BY Lt-Col. STEPHENS: How did the wet season affect the clothing of the men? From about May to October they never had an opportunity to dry themselves. In some instances they were working for 36 hours without a break and then the break would be one of five or six hours only. They would get three meals in the 36 hours.

BY HIS HONOUR: Did you ever hear of a 72 hours stretch of work? No, 36 hours was the longest I remember.

What was the reason given for working the men 36 hours? A bridge washed away and they said it had to be fixed. That was not the reason. They simply kept them out there on the job. They could have finished it a lot quicker than they did if they had worked themselves. They simply took them out one morning and kept them out all the time. It was normal to get up at 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning, that is, Japanese time, and they would not get home before midnight. They would then get three or four hours sleep and be out again. The break they got was not enough to catch up. The men were coming in too exhausted to keep going. At roll call in the morning you would find three or four dead in their huts.

BY Lt-Col. STEPHENS: What was the position in respect of boots in the wet season? They had very few boots. The only boots issued wore out in no time or were too small for them.

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Did you get an issue of blankets? We did get some thin Japanese blankets that did not last any time. Quoting from my diary, we got an issue of 265 blankets for 884 men on 11 January 1943.

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Deal with the medical situation? According to my diary, on 18 January 1943 our strength was then 778 men. At that stage none had died in the jungle. The difference in the numbers represented the men who had been evacuated back to Thanbuyazat. The bad time so far as the health of the men was concerned started when the wet season commenced in approximately May 1943. On 9 May we were at 60 Kilo Camp. We were ordered there to occupy huts from which dead natives were being carried away.

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On 27 May one of Colonel Anderson's men died. On 29 May the Japanese doctors diagnosed cholera. .... At that stage it was raining daily. From that time on we had numerous deaths.

Would you give the figures, showing the final result in December 1943? My clerk checked up on the number of deaths - casualties on the line - and found that 23 per cent of our 884 had died, or a little over 200. At that stage the Japanese ordered the sick to Manburi. Out of the original 884 they left 35 men. Some of those remaining were in hospital at the time.

What did those men die of? Malaria, cholera, dysentery, tropical ulcers and malnutrition.

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BY LT-COL. STEPHENS: What was the general situation with respect to medical supplies? Totally inadequate. We could never get enough medical supplies to treat the men in hospital. They gave us a little quinine, but that ran out in June, I think.

Did they give you dressings for the ulcers? No, very few. Some ulcers were very bad and stretched from the knee right down to the feet. At the 84 Kilo Camp Major Brantz performed an operation on Pte. Brodribb, whose ulcer was so bad that it was necessary to amputate the leg. The only instrument he had at the time was a hacksaw taken from the railway and a jack knife.

BY HIS HONOUR: Did he have anaesthetic? He had a local anaesthetic - a little ether. Most of the operations on that line were done at 55 Kilo Hospital. It was a jungle hospital. They were done by Colonel Coats, who was at Nakompaton Hospital the last I heard.

BY LT-COL. STEPHENS: What was the normal treatment for tropical ulcers? The treatment of the bulk of the ulcers was to scrape the ulcer out with a spoon. We had a little sulphanilamide only.

BY HIS HONOUR: Did you use anything on them? No.

You never saw salt being used? No, I do not remember seeing it used. It may have been. We tried putting blow flies and maggots into the ulcers to eat up the rotten flesh. That was successful in some cases, but not in all.

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BY HIS HONOUR: Did you make any representations to the Japanese about the state of your medical supplies? Yes, many times, with no result whatever.

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Were sick men made to work? Yes. The Japanese would hold a sick parade and force the sick men out to work.

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Were steps taken by the guards and engineers to speed up the rate of work? Yes. It was mainly done by beatings with bamboo rods and pieces of timber or steel rods. They taught us by this means how to lay the line.

What did they do with the steel rods? Beat the men over the backs. For instance, one man drove in a spike crooked and he had his jaw broken. He was a chap named Mills. That happened in my camp. He was brought in and I saw him with a broken jaw.

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BY LT-COL. STEPHENS: Do you know of any other cases of men suffering physical injury from beatings? It is hard to recall, as it is so long ago, but we did have men coming in from the job badly beaten with shovels and in one instance a man was hit with a three pound hammer. He was hit on the side of the head because he made some little mistake or error in the building of a bridge. He was put into hospital and eventually recovered.

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Will you give several examples of disciplinary measures taken against you particularly? One was in October 1943, when I refused to allow the sick to unload the train. One Japanese guard attacked me with his bayonet and rifle and beat me up and later on I was taken to the headquarters and beaten up again. On another occasion I had to stand outside the guard house. I do not know the reason for that, but I think it was because I would not apologise for something I did not do. I stood there for 26 hours.

Did you receive any food or water over that period? No. I started at 11 o'clock that night and went through that night and through the next day and through to the next morning. I was only released because I had to move the Camp to another site. I was told I would have to stand there until I apologised.

Apart from that, did you receive any other beatings? Yes, numerous beatings right through the whole period. They were beatings mostly with bamboo and rifle butts and fists. The beatings were mainly administered by Korean guards. I could not give their names, but could give the nick names we had for most of them. I could identify them quite easily.

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Did you see any men beaten while they were sick? Yes, on several occasions the guards walked through the Hospital and everybody who did not stand up and salute were belted while lying on their beds. On one occasion I witnessed a beating of a patient lying on his bed and the man died within two days of that beating. Pte. Ori, the one called the Stomach Trooper, administered that beating.

BY HIS HONOUR: What did the beating consist of? With bamboo, and they would pick up anything that was handy and belt a man. That instance I mentioned happened in 84 Kilo Camp during a search. The man happened to be lying on a piece of wire and Pte. Ori was searching and he said that the man was trying to hide the piece of wire. He belted him there and then. The man was in a very low condition at the time and I am sure that hastened his death, because he



was a very fine lad and a good fighter.

Did you protest? Protests went in on every occasion, with no result. The protests would go to Lieut. Matsuzaki, but all he would say was that he saw the British sinking Red Cross ships. On every occasion a report went in to Brigadier Varley. 2i/c Major Mearns, was told on numerous occasions that he was not to take in reports to Brigadier Varley and on one occasion they made one of the officers swear that he would not take in reports to the headquarters when he went in. They carried that just the same. There were no written reports. He could always prove that we sent nothing in in writing, but the report went in verbally by Major Mearns, who put it in writing when he got in there. He was searched when he went in to ensure that he had no papers of any description.

BY LT-COL STEPHENS: Have you been with Brigadier Varley on occasions when he complained to Colonel Nagatomo? Yes - and in some instances I have the answers. On one occasion Colonel Nagatomo came to our camp and Brigadier Varley put up quite a lot of the complaints I had put to him, but he got no satisfaction. Every time we complained of a beating he would tell us that he had issued orders that there were to be no beatings, but the next thing would be a beating for reporting it.

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INTERNATIONAL PROSECUTION SECTION

REQUEST FORM

1946

INCIDENT - ACCUSED

JUDGE ALBERT WILLIAMS

The undersigned requests the consideration of Document # 5033  
(describe):

**Excerpts from record of evidence of Lt. Col. John Munslow  
Williams - Burma-Thailand Ry.  
(Original of record also herewith)**

for introduction in evidence (specify purpose) **As to treatment of  
POW - Class B Offense**

*R. J. Davis*

Staff Attorney

*2 May*

1946

7 MAY 1946

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The above document has been approved for processing by you  
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*Albert Williams*

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