

DOC. 5089D

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SUBJECT:- REPORT ON THE ARMY MEDICAL STORE, SHAUKIWAN.
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To :- The Officer Commanding,
Military Hospital,
Bowen Road,
Hongkong.

From :- Corporal N.J. Leath, R.A.M.C.
No. 7262538

Sir,

At about 7.00 a.m. on the morning of the 19th December, 1941, just as the detachment were about to sit down for breakfast, Private R. Reid, R.A.M.C., who was on sentry duty from 6.00 a.m. to 8.00 a.m., came down to the Dining Hall and reported to Q.M.S. Buchan, M.M., R.A.M.C., that the building was surrounded by Japanese troops. Captain Banfell, R.C.A.M.C., Q.M.S. Buchan, Sgt. Watt and myself proceeded to the first floor of the building. Here we saw that Private Reid's statement had been perfectly correct and that Japanese troops were all around us, although at this stage none of them were making for the building. We all went back to the Dining Hall and Captain Banfell and Q.M.S. Buchan had a discussion on the subject and they then informed all the troops and the A.N.S., and St. John's Ambulance personnel that if the building were attacked, or looked as though it were likely to be attacked, the policy would be to surrender. Whilst these instructions were being given several of the personnel were keeping a look-out from the windows and one of them reported that a large number of Japanese were approaching the building with machine guns. A few moments later a banging was heard on the door and a lot of shouting in Japanese. Q.M.S. Buchan ordered Pte. Mohan to open the door. This order was carried out. We piled all our arms in the centre of the Dining Hall and went out of the building with our hands above our heads. We were greeted by about 100 Japanese troops, who shouted and prodded us into line. They then sent in a search party to see if any more people were left in the building. In the meantime one of the Japanese soldiers lay down in front of us with an automatic rifle on a tripod and 'ran it' around us. When the search party came back we were separated. The soldiers being pushed onto one side and the A.N.S. and St. John's Ambulance personnel onto the other. They then searched us and took all our belongings except watches, jewelery, etc. We were then instructed to take off our boots or shoes and tunics or shorts. We, the servicemen present, were then left with just a vest, trousers and socks. After doing a 'War Dance' the Japanese instructed us, by a wave of the hand, to march off onto the main road, this we did. Capt. Banfell remained behind. After proceeding up Island Road for about 200 yards we were halted, the ladies and nurses of the S.J.A.B. continued up the road, whilst the men were taken up a little path, which led into the hills. We carried on for about ten minutes and looking back we could see that they were taking all the females up to Lyemun Barracks. We were halted in a little valley about half a mile or so up the hillside. It was very well sheltered and could not be seen from the road. There were, I should estimate, about 1,000 Japanese troops present at this position. We were told to sit down and some Chinese civilians, who were with the troops, came down and removed our jewelery, i.e. finger rings, watches, etc. After remaining seated for a matter of several minutes we were ordered to get up and proceed down the hill. We eventually reached a small clearing on a level piece of ground which ran in a slight slope down to a nullah. We were halted and prodded into line facing the direction of the main road. This brought us facing away from the Japanese. We heard laughter from behind and then suddenly I heard a commotion and a loud moan from further down the line and looking along I saw that Sergeant E. Watt, R.A.M.C., had been bayoneted. He fell to the ground and was stabbed several times whilst lying there. I then felt a terrific hit on the back of the neck. The blow shot me into the air and spun me completely round and I fell to the ground face downwards. I lay in this position with blood pouring into my

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eyes, ears and mouth, and then as my brain cleared I could hear firing close at hand, and also a great deal of moaning going on around me. I could also hear the Japanese talking and laughing quite close at hand.

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They came over towards where I lay and I heard them loading, presumably, a revolver. There was a single shot fired and then a moan, which had been very close to me, ceased. The Japanese then moved away and I heard several shots fired at varying intervals and after each shot the moaning lessened. I lay still for some time and later when I ventured to lift up my head to look around I saw that all the troops had moved off but that four Japanese sentries remained behind to guard the spot. I noticed that Private Reid was lying across the bottom of my legs, and from his wounds it was obvious that he was dead. Private McFarquhar lay to the left of me and it was also obvious that he too was dead. I pushed myself clear from the obstruction around me and then rolled down the slope into the nullah. I lay here for several minutes quite exhausted. I also saw that Q.M.S., Buchan and Private Williams were lying in the nullah and from their wounds it was only too obvious that they too were dead. I then commenced to crawl down the nullah in the direction of the Medical Store. Water was running down the nullah and I was getting very wet and was also shivering a great deal. On the way down I passed a body lying in the nullah floor and after I had got a few feet past I heard a low whistle. I looked around and saw that it was Lieut. Thomas, H.K.V.D.C., (Field Ambulance), who had been attached to the Collecting Post in the same building as the Army Medical Store. He stated that he intended to stay where he was until nightfall and then try to get away. I told him that I did not intend to do the same but was all for getting down to the bottom of the hill as soon as possible and looking around whilst it was still light. I then carried on down the hill and after about half an hour I reached the part of the nullah which overlooked the store. I could see from here that the Japanese were in occupation of the building and so I moved further down and hid in an improvised shelter which had been built by the Salesian Father in residence as an air raid shelter. I remained here all night and on the following morning I crept out to have a look around. There were no Japanese in the actual vicinity of the store although a large number of cavalry were housed on the other side of Island Road. I made my way down to the football pitch which was situated behind the building and from here I proceeded to carefully approach the store. As I got closer I noticed that there were several Japanese in the kitchen. I decided that it was unsafe to remain near the store so I returned to the hills. As I passed the front of the store I noticed that several cars and lorries were parked in the compound. I decided that it was quite useless to attempt to gain an admittance to the building so commenced to move off up the hill with the object of eventually reaching Taikoo. I was now in a state of complete exhaustion; and was obliged to rest frequently. I carried on at a snails pace for several hours and then had to lie down for about half an hour or so. It was impossible to me to carry on any further. However, I eventually dragged myself to my feet and carried on. At about four o'clock in the evening I had reached the block of houses which overlook Taikoo Docks and Sugar Factory. I realized that it was physically impossible for me to carry on any further this day so I entered one of the houses and sat down on the floor for a while. These houses had all been smashed and looted, presumably by the Chinese; furniture was broken and burnt and strawn all over the place. I found that the settee of a suite of furniture had been left intact so I dragged this into an alcove of the room in which it stood. I sat down and found out that I had a fairly good view of the two paths which led up to the house. I fell fast asleep soon after I sat down. It was early next morning when I awoke and taking advantage of the dim light outside I went scouting for food and water, all the taps in the house had been smashed to pieces and the water turned off. I searched the houses in the vicinity but could find no food or water. There were a large number of dead bodies of troops, mainly Indian, and empty cartridge cases and field telephones. I then returned to the house and sat down again. After a short while I heard footsteps and voices below and looking down I saw that three Japanese were entering the

house via the kitchen, which was directly below where I was situated. As soon as I heard them coming up the stairs I quietly opened the window and climbed through and dropped the ten or so feet to the ground beneath. I crept round the side of the house and lay low in some bushes. I saw the Japanese emerge from the house and go off down the hillside again. I went back into the house to think things over. Less than half an hour later I again heard footsteps and voices and looking down I saw yet another four Japanese approaching the house. I repeated my performance of the time before and when they departed I returned to the house. I had by this time decided that it was stupid for me to remain in the main part of the house any longer.

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I went down past the kitchen and into the basement. I stayed here for the rest of the day. By this time my wound was extremely painful and I was beginning to feel the pangs of hunger and thirst. I eventually fell asleep and slept right through until the next morning. I again went up onto the first floor and straight away bumped into three Chinese civilians. They spoke to me and appeared to be quite sympathetic until one of them asked me if I had any money. I replied that I had not but they did not appear to believe me. One of them then commenced to try to search me. I naturally resented this and pushed him away. He and one of his comrades then went outside the door and came back with a gardening fork each and commenced to rush at me. I staved them off with a piece of broken chair, but was eventually hit in the side by one of the forks, it did not penetrate into my flesh very deeply but it was sufficient to draw blood. This apparently satisfied them for they went off and appeared to be quite pleased with themselves. I went back into the basement again and remained there for the rest of the day. I found that in the front of the house there was a fountain and that the tap running into this contained water, although it was somewhat dirty. I drank about a pint and a few hours later I had terrible pains in the stomach. However, these pains went and I was more or less alright again. I remained in the house until the 26th of December, although I of course did not know that this was the date then. During this period I had nothing to drink only the pint of water which I have mentioned above and nothing whatsoever to eat. It was only on very rare occasions that I came up into the house for a look around. I might have mentioned earlier that when I first arrived at Taikoo the Japanese forces were landing at the Taikoo Sugar Factory Pier in large numbers and were proceeding along Kings Road and up Mount Parker Road and this of course meant that I was trapped in behind the Japanese lines with little or no chance of getting out. Thus my enforced stay in the vicinity. However on the evening of the 26th I decided that I could not go on any longer without some form of dressing for my wound or without water or food so I ventured out into the grounds once again. I had not gone more than a few yards when I met four Japanese walking towards me. They looked me over and grunted and pointed for me to go on down the pathway onto Kings Road. This I did, any moment expecting to get a shot from behind. I went on for about 25 yards and then looked around and was astonished and pleasantly surprised to find that the Japanese had disappeared from my view. I continued on down to the main road and then walked in the direction of Causeway Bay. I met several Japanese sentries and they just looked me over and pushed or prodded me on my way, mostly with the end of a rifle. After about half an hour I arrived at the North Point Internment Camp. Here a Japanese with a Red Cross Pennant in his hand led me into the camp. He sat me down on a chair and went away in search of someone. Meanwhile several European people, both male and female came up to me and led me into one of the huts. Two A.N.S., nurses commenced to attend to my wounds when a Mr. Stewart arrived on the scene and after informing me that he was ex-R.A.M.C., continued with the cleaning up and dressing of my wound. I was very well treated by these people and they lay me down on a camp bed after the dressing was finished and gave me a mugful of baked beans. Several members of the R.A.C.C., were already interned and they were most anxious to hear what had happened to me. A Japanese officer then came along and gave me a clean shirt and a pair of flannels and informed me that if I changed into these clean clothes he would attempt to get me admitted to either the Queen Mary Hospital or the French Convent Hospital. He said that he did not know if those hospitals were accepting military casualties and it would be better if I went in civilian

clothing. He gave me a chit of paper with Japanese written all over it and told me to show it to anyone who stopped me. I was then picked up and carried outside the gate and placed in a waiting car, which turned out to be the property of Dr. Selwyn Clarke. This gentleman himself came out and got in and we commenced our journey. We arrived at the French Hospital but it was full up so we proceeded from there to the Queen Mary Hospital and I was admitted into this hospital. I remained there until the January when Corporal Thompson R.A.M.C., came from Bowen Road and brought me to the Military Hospital, Bowen Road. I was operated upon on the morning of the 6th January, 1942, and was discharged hospital on 26th March, 1942.

I am, Sir,

Your Obedient Servant.

N. J. Leath.

(Indorsed on Margin on each page)

THIS IS THE EXHIBIT MARKED 'D' REFERRED TO IN THE AFFIDAVIT OF LIEUTENANT-COLONEL CEDRIC OVERTON SHACKLETON SWORN THIS ELEVENTH DAY OF DECEMBER 1945 BEFORE ME.

(SIGNED) A.A.T. HUNT, Captain Legal Staff.

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