

Ex. 1642-A

IN THE MATTER OF JAPANESE WAR CRIMES AND IN
THE MATTER OF THE ILL-TREATMENT OF BRITISH
PRISONERS OF WAR ON A SEA VOYAGE FROM AMBON
ISLAND TO SOURABAYA IN THE "MAROS MARU"
DURING SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER 1944.

A F F I D A V I T

I, No. 87163 Flight Lieutenant William Manning Blackwood, R.A.F., with permanent home address at 11, Lyon Road, Harrow-on-the-Hill, Middlesex, make oath and say as follows:-

1. In early September 1944 I was in the prisoner of war camp at WEIJAMI on Ambon Island. It was about that time that allied aircraft visited Ambon town and did terrific damage there. Shortly after that raid the Japanese decided to move the prisoners and on 17 September I found myself the senior British officer in charge of a small draft of British and Dutch prisoners of war who were to go on board the 500 ton Dutch ferry boat "MARON MARU".

2. On the morning of embarkation it rained for the first time for many days. My party marched bare foot or using wooden sandals in a glutiness sea of liquid mud which covered the sharp coral of the road surface. With guards harrassing us to hurry, the beri-beri crippled being pushed and bullied, and the stretcher bearers being goaded into a shambling trot, we made the jetty in about half an hour. There the stretchers were laid in the mud fully exposed to the pitiless rain, although a series of hutments were at hand by the roadside. After everybody was soaked through a few straw mats were produced and these were draped over the sicker men whose bewildered whimpers fell without response on the ears of the guards.

3. After nearly three hours wait, barges were brought alongside and we were ferried across the creek to where our transport lay at anchor. When we drew alongside I could scarcely believe that all 500 of us were expected to get aboard. When I realised that the holds were full and battened down, and that they were to travel as deck passengers, I was staggered. First of all the baggage was dumped on the hatch covers and an attempt was made to distribute the fit men, walking patients, and stretcher cases in the gangways and narrow deck spaces. The effect was like a London tube train in the rush hour. No level space could be found for the stretchers, and the sick men were subjected to acute discomfort and an ordeal which it was at once obvious they could not sustain for a

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long sea passage. On protest the baggage was removed from the hatch covers. Settling into this terribly cramped space with sodden kit bags was almost impossible. Worse was to come. Firewood for the cookhouse fires on voyage was brought alongside. Picture a small ferry boat, not more than thirty feet in maximum beam and with perhaps forty five feet from the after bulkhead of the fo'castle to just abaft the midship as the limit of our allowed space, the remainder of the main deck and all deck works and housings out of bounds, and some indication of crowding is given. When the firewood was stacked all the deck space was full to the gunwale and the hapless men draped about in a sitting or squatting position. Two wooden boxes slung over the ship's sides were all the latrine accommodation provided. Into these boxes the palsied men had to drag themselves after a journey over piles of firewood fraught with difficulty for a fit man, let alone a sick one who could not walk on a tiled floor. We sailed that night.

4. During the sleepless night many men walked about miserably trying to find place to lie down without treading on someone else, which was impossible. During the night waves shipped through a sea door on one side of the ship and swept across the deck with each roll of the vessel, sweeping helpless stretcher cases about like flotsam. The men took advantage of daylight to try and settle themselves a little better. One man who had been brought aboard very sick died during the night, and was buried at sea.

5. About ten a. m. a meal of unflavoured rice porridge was served. This with only occasional additions of sweet potatoes, dried seaweed and water-lily roots, with another meal at night, was our staple diet for all the sixty-eight days of the voyage. At one or two islands cocoanuts and mangoes were bought through the Korean guard in charge of the cookhouse at monstrous prices, but for the most part the diet can be said to be plain rice and nothing else at all.

6. Already weakened by fifteen months of back breaking work, grievously sick from malnutrition and ill treatment, the rice diet soon produced its inevitable effect. Beri beri broke out almost universally. The sick, lying on the hatch, were given no shade, and in spite of repeated requests, no awning of any sort was provided until about thirty men had died from thirst and exposure. The water allowance was less than half a pint a day per man, and on several occasions after we reached MAKASSAR, the dying men on the hatch were treated to the spectacle of their guards bathing themselves in the drums of drinking water. En route to BONTAIN, one man crawling weakly

over the side into the latrine, fell overboard. The ship put about and the man was picked up. All officers were then lined up and lashed with a rope's end by KASIAMA, an English speaking Korean guard, as an example for not controlling our men.

7. Deaths were occurring daily by this time, and sacks full of sand were provided by the Japanese to attach to the legs of the corpses. Burial was only allowed when the ship was in motion, and any man who died during a period at anchor before MAKASSAR had to be bound up in his blanket and slung to the awning of the winch house until such time as we were again under way.

8. An atmosphere of horror was being built up on the ship which did not help the efforts of anyone to stay alive, and soon the number of dead began to increase. Then one day at Rahat on the island of MOENA a Japanese junk came alongside with about one hundred and fifty men who had left AMBON in August under the charge of Capt. VAN DER LOOT, one of the HAROEKOE draft Dutch officers. These men had been shot up on their ship by a Liberator, which sank them after it had set their ship on fire.

9. On my ship, already overcrowded with rapidly sickening men, the arrival of this extra number created undescrivable confusion. Hardly a man could even sit down properly, let alone lie down, and the new arrivals had left earlier than we because they were more sick. Their condition now, after a crowded journey, poor food and the added strain of being thrown into the sea unable to fend for themselves as they drifted away from their burning ship, was appalling to witness. Many of these were crippled beri-beri, several were raving, and all were pitifully weak. Somehow or other they were packed on board mingling inextricably with the four hundred and eighty odd that were left in my draft. There was no shade on the deck and the gangways and there was only room for a few of the very worst cases on the hatch. All the men lay spread out on the uneven bundles of firewood, blistering horribly in the tropical sun. Tongues began to blacken, raw shirtless shoulders to bleed, and all vestige of sanity deserted many. The night was filled with the yells and screams of the dying, the curses of the tired-out who tried to sleep, and the perpetual hiccoughing that afflicts a man about to die from beri-beri.

10. Scenes of indescribable horror became commonplace. Picking their way through the tangled mass of humanity lying about on the narrow ship, orderlies carried the naked, wasted bodies of the dead to the ship's side, where unheard, except by those present, the burial service for those who die at sea was read before casting the body with its weight sack, overboard. One youngster, maddened with sunstroke, shouted the thoughts of his disordered brain for thirty hours before he became too weak to talk any more. Just before he died, he snatched a full tin that was being used as a bed pan, and drank the contents greedily, thinking it was water, before he could be prevented.

11. Until we reached MAKASSAR, about the 7th October, smoking was prohibited because the holds were full of petrol and ammunition. At MAKASSAR, the few men who could work were pressed into service to unload the ship and some of the ammunition. The remaining boxes were levelled off, and men were allowed down the holds. Although still impossible crowded this was a slight improvement as the men could get out of the sun.

12. After the cargo was unloaded some mangoes were brought aboard and bought out of money from the profits of the HAROEKOE camp canteen. Water was taken aboard but the Korean in charge of the galley drew a pencil line at the full water line of the open drums threatening dire punishment to all on board in the way of ration cuts if the level went down at all during the night. He also kicked any man who had crawled under leaks in the hosepipes, and were trying to collect a few drops of the precious fluid.

13. When more stores had been taken aboard we set sail again. All were tremendously relieved, feeling that the back of the frightful journey had been broken. This, however, was not to be. For forty days we stood off a small island near MAKASSAR making occasional returns to the harbour. This was a tremendous blow to many of the sick who had keyed themselves up for the remaining journey and were now faced with day after day of idleness. By the time we eventually set sail again, nearly two hundred and fifty corpses had been thrown over the side.

14. When the survivors from the other ship were taken aboard, Lt. KURASHIMA, Sgt. MORI and KASIAMA (the English speaking Korean) all three of whom were at KAROEKOE throughout the occupation of that camp aboard as well. They had escaped in one of the ship's boats. The Lieutenant, true to his previous showing, did absolutely nothing at all to help us. Neither,

of course, did his sergeant or the interpreter KASIAMA. One accident is worthy of mention at this point.

15. As a sick Dutchman was dying one night, he started to hiccough very loudly and at close intervals Sgt. MORI appeared on the bridge and threatened to beat all the sick men unless the man was given an injection to make him sleep. This was done, but in half an hour he was awake again, Sgt. MORI repeated his threat, and another injection was given. After an hour the man woke again and started hiccoughing once more. Yelling at the top of his voice the Japanese sergeant insisted the man be given a third injection or else he would come down and lay about him with a stick among the stretcher cases. A third injection was given, and this time the wretched sick man was not heard again. He was dead.

16. The close packing of the sick, and the lack of room to move, made the conditions insanitary to an appalling degree. Try as they would (and they did try magnificently) the volunteer orderlies could only clean the immediate space vacated by a dead man before bringing up the next very sick man to take his place. Any attempt at washing thoroughly with sea water was impossible as there was nowhere to move the surrounding patients to keep them dry. Each man had about two feet of space and that was all. The result of this was caked excreta everywhere, lice and crabs all over the ship. No relief was available for bites. Men lay miserably scratching until they were raw. The whole ship smelt sour and disgusting.

17. At night the orderlies had a fearsome task, tiptoeing about the crowded hatches carrying stool tins and urine pots over the recumbent frames of men so rotten with beri-beri that they screamed aloud if merely brushed gently with the foot. The orderlies worked really hard at a thankless, heartbreaking task. The Dutch Doctor, Captain SPRINGER, who had done magnificent work at HAROEKOE, continued his tireless efforts on the mens' behalf, sparing himself not at all. F/Lt. PHILLIPS, another HAROEKOE doctor also worked splendidly doing all that was possible for the sick. Moving about the ship was difficult enough, but the Korean in charge of the cookhouse, KANIOKA, forbade the use of the aft gangway athwartships after some alleged theft of stores. This made movement very difficult indeed especially for the lame and the orderlies on dark moonless nights.

18. Eventually, after several false starts, we left MAKASSAR, with half our number dead and thrown into the sea. Apart from the ghastly conditions aboard the ship itself, there was, while we were at MAKASSAR, the added strain of several visitations by Allied aircraft who bombed the town and area. Aware of what had happened to the other ship, the survivors we had taken on suffered agonies of nervous conjecture, knowing that if they again had to take to the water, this time they would be too weak to swim and would sink like stones to their graves. On one such occasion, a small nose cap fell on board but nobody was hurt. We were extremely lucky in this respect for nothing else fell near us and no aircraft paid any attention to our small craft.

19. Crossing the straits of MAKASSAR just north of BARI BARI, we came down the East coast of BORNEO and eventually reached SOURABAYA after sixty-eight days at sea. Of six hundred and thirty men who had been aboard, only three hundred and twenty-five remained alive, and these were for the most part feeble, shambling wrecks, unwashed for two months and crawling with vermin. From SOURABAYA we left by train for BATAVIA.

20. Throughout this experience I never met with any attitude on the part of the Japanese commanders other than brutish cruelty, cynical indifference, unbelievable stupidity and utter incompetence. Those who would appear to be responsible were Lieutenant KURISHIMA who was ostensibly in charge of the PW on board, Sgt. MORI who was the Japanese N.C.O., in charge of us, KASIAMA who was the interpreter, KANOIKA who was in charge of the cook-house, and the remainder of the Korean Guard.

SWORN by the said WILLIAM MANNING BLACKWOOD)
 at 6, Spring Gardens in the City of Westminster,)
 this 7th day of March 1946)
 (Signed) W.M. BLACKWOOD.

BEFORE ME: (Signed) A.M. BELL-MACDONALD.
 Major Legal Staff,
 Office of the Judge Advocate General,
 LONDON, S.W. I.

CERTIFIED TRUE COPY OF THE ORIGINAL AFFIDAVIT.

18th April 1946

(Signed) R. S. Lambe, Lt. Colonel
 AAG War Crimes HQ, ACFSEA.