

CHAPLAIN ON THE RIVER KWAI

The Story of a Prisoner of War



By Chaim Nussbaum
Illustrations by Ronald Searle

Chaplain On The River Kwai: Story of a Prisoner Of War



by
Chaim Nussbaum

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*Dedicated to
those who perished in resignation
and
those who survived and remember*

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War Sails In
1942

War Sails In

*February 26, 1942
Bandung, Java*

The city is full of rumors.

Today's major rumor: The Japanese are on their way. Several people reported viewing small dark shifting spots in the mountains. An officer of the local Dutch Navy headquarters claims that our navy is locked tight and holding back any offensive Japanese naval movement.

Maybe.

February 28

I sit in the living room of our temporary home in this cool, pleasant, mountain city Bandung. We came here for a short time from Jakarta. All the lamps are dimmed, but the veranda facing the street is wide open, as if war did not exist; and I can hear the smallest noise.

I hear a female voice sputtering from an unknown radio station. At first, what she is saying doesn't register. Her voice is but part of the sounds that fill the Java night. Her frenzy finally attracts my attention. I listen to the fast-changing, short dialogue:

"Two-three, two-three, please come in. Two-three, two-three, please come in...."

Silence.

The radio operator tries several other numbers. None respond. These must be code numbers for sight observers manning positions close to Java's shore, I reason.

"Six-four, six-four, please come in."

An uneasy feeling crawls up my back as I pick up on the despair in her voice.

"Six-four, six-four, please come in."

The short-wave radio emits shrieks as I wait — as uneasily as, I suspect, she waits. I shift to the edge of my chair and sit heavily on my hands to stop their trembling. I hate the inaccessibility of sound waves to touch.

Then: "Six-four reporting," a voice that seems to come from deep within the short-wave radio spits out.

"What do you see?" Her voice stutters in the night air and grates against my ears.

"I see water, lots of it," a low male voice replies.

"What else?" There is authority in her question and also urgency.

"There are lots of...dots...in the water."

"Six-four." Her voice trails off for several minutes, then reappears. "Move to the next hideout."

I listen as if I am sitting beside two strangers in a dark fog, an invisible witness to their talk of possible destruction.

"Don't wait." Her voice trails off for a moment, then it reappears. "Call back from your next position. Go now."

"I'll move."

"Then call in."

"I'll call in." I sense tiredness in the male voice of six-four.

Click off, pause.

She begins again, with desperate searching strength, "Please come in — two-three, two-three..."

Rocking in my chair, I feel the pain of sorry sickness in the depth of my stomach. Although I am a trained physicist and a rabbi, and I am used to the new and unexpected, what I feel, listening in on this dialogue, has an unreal air about it. Finally, I rock myself to sleep.

At three in the morning, the now-familiar voice wakes me.

"Two-three, two-three, please come in."

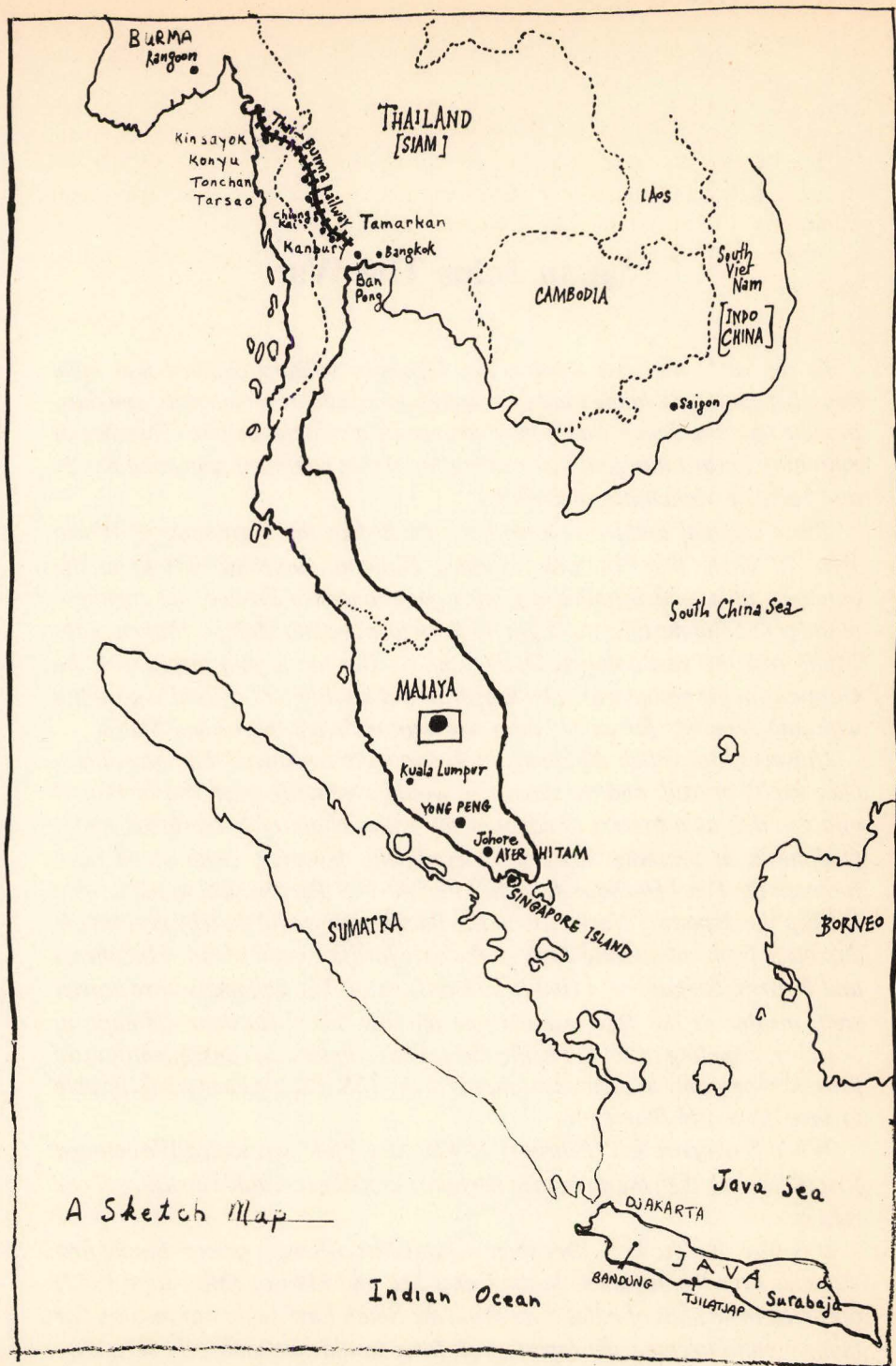
All night, it is the same. Always her frantic voice calling out code numbers — but an increasing number of sputtering silences follow her plea. He does not answer. Not once. Always her voice...and the sharp loneliness.

Although I want to get up to go to the comfort of my bed, some force compels me to stay, to learn more of the sightings of the Japanese. It is not a rumor any more. I sense it here in my living room.

I know that last night the Japanese began their invasion of Java.

What happened to number two-three? Bombed into silence? Overrun? Bayoneted? I feel as if segments of iron were going to melt together to form an impenetrable ring that would eventually trap us.

From the north, perhaps also from the south, the Japanese are closing in....



Sketch Map of Java, Sumatra and Thailand and Thai-Burma Railway

Japan Joins The War

In the early nineteen thirties, the Japanese military claimed that their densely populated islands were extremely poor in vital raw materials, and thus, in their opinion, Japan would have to become a colonial empire. They began marching toward this goal by invading the Asian continent, annexing Korea and parts of Manchuria and China.

Their colonial ambitions were not curtailed by the beginnings of World War II. Once the Germans occupied Holland, subjected Britain to the bombing Blitz, and installed a puppet government in France, the Japanese military felt that the time was right for them to move into Malaya, French Indo-China and the vast colonial Dutch empire. But not to join forces with the Germans in the global war. The Emperor and his advisers refused to go along with any demands for entry into a war that included the United States.

However, the Dutch diplomats in Tokyo were convinced that the military clan would prevail, and the Japanese would eventually enter World War II and use that as a pretext to conquer the entire chain of Netherlands Indies (Indonesia at present). They were confident, however, (who could have foreseen the Pearl Harbour debacle?) that the U.S. Pacific Fleet would be able to keep the Japanese Navy busy in the Pacific and would thereby prevent the Japanese from conquering Java — the only fortified main island of Indonesia and Fortress Singapore, a vital British possession. The diplomats were proven right insofar as the Japanese did join the war. Pearl Harbour did happen, however, crippling the U.S. Pacific Fleet. Those diplomats, consequently, were proven wrong only in their assurance that the U.S. Pacific Fleet would be able to save Java and Singapore.

When Singapore fell (February 1942), Java's fate was sealed. We counted first the weeks, then the days, then the hours until the inevitable invasion of our refuge.

It is true that the U.S. fleet soon regained its offensive power. But its first victories over the Japanese in the Coral Sea and Midway (May-June 1942) occurred thousands of miles away from the South East Asian war theatre. For many months to come, the Japanese air force would monopolize the skies over Java, Singapore and Thailand.

Becoming Prisoners of War

Becoming Prisoners of War

Back to Earlier Years

I was born in 1909 in a small town close to Auschwitz, at that time, the Austrian border town with Germany. When I was five years old, my family moved. I will always be grateful to my parents for having chosen Scheveningen, the seaside resort suburb of The Hague. It meant that I was able to grow up in clean, well-ordered, civilized Holland and I was fortunate to receive an excellent comprehensive education.

It also meant that day and night, the untamed North Sea waves were breaking against the black granite piers, and its foam splashed me incessantly; the white peaceful sand dunes tired down my feet as I climbed them; and the hard-blowing fall and winter winds blocked my breath, forcing me to walk backward.

Yes, I lived my formative years in genuine freedom and unquestioning tolerance, and in the beauty of nature and the arts. I have never forgotten the words of Psalm 90: *Satiate us in the morning (of our lives) with Your kindness, so that we may sing and be joyous all our days.* Indeed, no disappointing experiences of later life would be able to destroy my joy in life or my faith in man's inherent love for the good and the just.

After graduating from high school, I continued my Talmudic studies (begun at age ten) at the world-renowned Rabbinical College in Telshe, Lithuania. I was also drawn to the study of mathematical physics, which explores the tools that help describe the reality of an elusive nature-in-flux.

The unrest caused by the rapid ascent of Nazism interrupted my work on a doctoral thesis at Holland's Leiden University.

I married Rachel in January 1936 in The Hague. She told me then, "I will go with you anywhere if it will make you happy. Your dreams and fulfillments are mine."

Shortly afterward, I accepted an urgent call to head a training institute in Dutch Enschede, close to the German border, where German-Jewish pioneers prepared for a farmers' life in Palestine.

Our first child, Mottie, was born in Enschede. He was the love, the mascot, of the *chalutzim* (pioneers) there.

In October 1937, we traveled again, across Germany to Telshe in Lithuania, where I had been invited to head the Hebrew studies division of Yavne Teachers' College. Our decision to relocate had been based largely on geography — I would be able to continue my postgraduate Talmudic studies, and it was an opportunity to fulfill a part of my dream — to be mightily involved in the education of the next-generation educators.

Moving is always difficult — goodbye is sad, hello is apprehensive, and everything in between feels ungrounded.

In 1939, finally, I realized we had been both wise and fortunate to have left Holland. When World War II broke out, the Russians occupied Lithuania (1939). At first, we felt encouraged by their friendly attitude toward religious institutions. Their attitude gradually changed. The army sequestered the college buildings; and by the end of 1940, the Rabbinical College was split up into small units scattered over various towns, and the Teachers' College was closed down.

Into this mire, I had brought my Rachel. Unforgivable. I asked her forgiveness, I apologized. Unnecessarily, she said.

Our daughter Brenda was born in 1938. We left Telshe in September 1940 for Japan. Our trans-Siberian journey brought us first to Moscow, which had become friendly to Westerners (its future Allies), for a three-day sightseeing visit and then we headed for Vladivostok via the Soviet Jewish homeland of Birobidzhan. The officers and engineers on our train were jovial, continually conversing with us.

We arrived in Japan. Rachel loved Tokyo. She seemed to want to embrace the warm bright colors, the soft voices and gracious manners. We walked in the streets, and she would have one hand out perpetually, saying hello everywhere. We were settled in a fine Japanese hotel overlooking Yokohama's beaches crowded with Japanese navy vessels.

We moved to Kobe and waited for departure connections to Canada or Curacao (the Dutch Caribbean island across from Venezuela). Our friendly

Dutch Consul informed us that science teachers were in great demand in Java. And since they had been cut off from occupied Holland, the Jewish population of Java was without spiritual leadership. Would I consider Java as our next home? I did, of course, excitedly. I longed to see Java's mystery, its beauty.

Rachel? Rachel longed for peace. I knew that. But I thought we might at least discuss it. Java was scrupulously protected, unassailable, I told her. I thought it was. The Consul told me it was. And there were no rabbis in the entire area, I explained.

"Java is supposed to be fine and very beautiful," I added.

"Java is fine," she said.

In Kobe, Rachel miscarried. We lost the baby. The strain, the physical pressures, were just too great. We should have waited. Time and time has passed, and when I think of those happenings, I still explode into sharp pieces of confusion, anger and sadness. Rachel hid her sadness from me.

I suggested strongly, painfully, to reroute back to the original plan.

"No. If you allow tragedy to change the direction of your life, your life will be a hand over two eyes, in the position of grief," she replied.

So we began our move toward Java.

In this way, I became both a teacher in Jakarta Teachers' College and rabbi of the Jewish communities of Jakarta and Bandung (seventy-five miles south of Jakarta).

When we left Europe, we thought we had escaped the war, but there was a yet-unrecognized threat of war looming over us in Java. In Jakarta, I volunteered for the Home Guard, which eventually led to Rachel, the children and my being interned as prisoners of war (POWs).

The war came and swallowed Java; we were trapped.

March 2, 1942

Bandung

Our planes have either left or been shot down. Either way, they are gone. Japanese aircraft have the sky to themselves.

Sitting under the large oak table, Rachel and I and our children saw three of them today. If a bomb were to drop on top of the table, we would all be destroyed instantly. But the oak protects us from falling objects of despair and broken life. Long after the planes had passed, the children were still playing

happily under the table — this is just adult business to them.

And my heroic wife? Rachel is calm. Today, the war birds, our steel enemies, were polite; they didn't scream. But I felt them. They dropped their bombs on what I guessed to be the area of the airport. Our heavens have been stolen; they have been captured by the invincible Japanese. Invincible? Japan's victory against Russia in 1905 shocked the Japanese into a certain proud defiant invincibility — that has lasted.

Anxiety sits heavily on my mind; I cannot lift it off.

I remember an incident two months ago when the Japanese were still fighting in Malaya. My Home Guard battalion was assigned to Batavia's airport. The pilots were still trying to fight. Their courage was startling. Eight of them prepared to lift off; two left the ground only a minute after the warning siren rang — late! They were gunned down and burned to death.

The first to get off was a friend of mine, a young pilot. He managed to raise his plane a few hundred feet up. The firing came, and then the fall. He was incinerated. We turned the plane inside out — even its lining — but could find no recognizable part of him.

He had come to war a tall, blond, seventeen-year-old boy loving the emptiness of the open sky, crisscrossing it at will. He boasted to me that none of us manning our posts around the small airport was as safe as he. Could he not take off at any time? And he asked with a shy laugh, had they not promised him that the Air Force would move to Australia as soon as the Japanese would come too close?

Powerlessness. This frustration and anger. Why did the sirens sing so slowly? Because we are slow. We are weak, thin intellectuals with glasses over tired eyes, pretending to be athletes fighting athletes.

The Dutch Consul back in Kobe told me that Java would never fall. But it is falling. It is all, of course, because of Pearl Harbor. Could the good Consul or anyone else have foreseen Pearl Harbour? Now Singapore has fallen, and two mighty British battleships off the Malayan coast have been sunk, shamefully undefended.

The Consul was wrong; Java is just a painted circle on a target ring, waiting to be hit.

March 3

There is talk of capitulation, of waving the white flag.

I went to headquarters in Bandung and found only one officer behind the numerous desks.

"I want to rejoin my battalion," I said. I had left it in Jakarta two weeks ago to come to Bandung for a minor operation.

The officer informed me that my unit had left Jakarta and was expected here in a few days. He wasn't too keen on my staying in Java, and suggested that my family and I leave immediately for Australia.

"I may be able to get you space on one of the planes still scheduled to depart," he said. "But we have to act fast and forcefully. You are newcomers, your wife is pregnant, and you are a rabbi. I managed to convince them to let me and my wife leave. We are going today," he added with a smile.

When I left, he followed me, calling out, "Don't wait, you hear? Today means today and not tomorrow."

The humanity of this man impressed me. He appeared to be sincere — no boaster. I would leave the decision up to Rachel. We had fled Lithuania to escape Hitler. Were we to run again?

"The Japanese will soon take over," I told her when I got home, and then I asked her if she wanted to take the children to comparative freedom in Australia.

"Will you come too?" she asked.

"No." I shook my head. I knew that she understood and fully agreed. A Jew is doubly involved in this war. I will not run. I have volunteered to serve our troops as chaplain. Soldiers, especially, want a man of religion fighting alongside them against Death. A liaison with Heaven. A protector.

Rachel shook her head.

That's it, then. She and the children will stay in Java.

March 5

Yesterday, my company arrived from Jakarta (Batavia). I reported to the commanding officer.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, his head bent over a pile of papers. "Go back to your wife."



Formulier Nr. 11

STICHTING
BLOEDTRANSFUSIEDIENST
van het Nederl.-Indische Roode Kruis

Rayon: Stadsgemeente

Plaats: Batavia

Identificatie-bloedgroepkaart van:
Mevr. Rachel Nussbaum.

Dagadres: _____

Huisadres: Bandoengweg 3, Tl. W. 2368

Beroep: _____

Bloedgever voor vredestijd
oorlogstijd

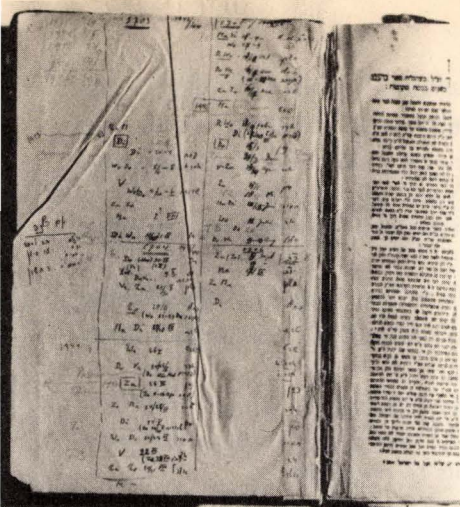
GROEP: **A**



Rachel Nussbaum, 1941

Rachel Nussbaum, 1942

Red Cross Blood Transfusion Card of Rachel Nussbaum



Religious calendar from Passover 1943 to Yom Kippur 1945, prepared by author for Yits Lisser; left column – beginning Passover 20/4/43 (5703), ending 20/8/44; right column – beginning Rosh Hashanah 9/44 (5705), ending Yom Kippur 17/9/45

Diary cover illustrated by the author; *A Diary in the form of a long letter: To Rachel, my beloved wife, Eternally yours, Chaim*

The CO did not receive me with enthusiasm. "You were in the hospital here in Bandung, and we didn't know when or if you would return to us. You aren't a military man. Why should you come back? Why do you? There must be many more pleasant things for which you might volunteer.

"Anyway," he added, looking down at his papers, "we removed your name from our list." He nodded goodbye.

Chastened by his curt dismissal and with an uneasy feeling crowding my being, I left. The world war had moved into Java, and I was walking away because I had been told I was not wanted.

Outside near our house, guilt-pins punched small holes in my heart. I saw old men, women, children. Where would I fit in if I did not rejoin our men? This was not the time to entertain thoughts of rejection.

I returned to the CO.

"Here I am," I saluted. "And I will stay."

Without looking up, he nodded and shrugged his shoulders, as though my being the chaplain was of little importance to him, or because all this was new to him and he didn't know how to respond.

March 7

Capitulation

At 11 a.m., the last radio announcement in Dutch. We are told to report to our respective companies. The solemn Dutch national anthem, *Wilhelmus*, is played; its farewell performance, its bow. I have loved it ever since I was a schoolchild in Holland.

Without having made one march against the enemy or attended to the needs of a soldier in battle, I am a prisoner of war and even as a rabbi, a Jewish chaplain, I will henceforth be classified as a POW.

That afternoon, we moved our quarters into a public high school — a beautiful building with its own red ribbon: a library with thousands of books all properly ordered and shelved. My unit, mainly teachers, intellectuals, government officials, instantaneously performed its first strategic invasion: We surrounded and captured books and then returned to the non-quiet non-privacy of separate rooms and words.

In the evening, we went into the mountain city Bandung. It was cool and dry, and quite snobbish regarding the war — refusing to acknowledge it. The streets were decorated with men in military uniforms. Especially crowded was Braga, the main street, where soldiers and civilians and proud women filled the cafes, sitting, leaning, relaxing on the broad warm terraces — all of it a masquerade party of peace.

The child of any storm: relief. It was so unreal. People behaved as though

there were no war. But there is a reality: The fighting is over for now. We Dutch have surrendered to the Japanese.

What disturbs me, though, is the unnecessary bravado — the way our men quickly turn away when Japanese officers pass. We are, by order, required to salute. Are they clinging to their faith in white superiority? The Japanese do not seem to notice — or perhaps their Far Eastern dignity makes them pretend not to.

Many insist we will not be mistreated because of our usefulness — the Japanese will want these blessed islands to produce at maximum for the war effort. How will they keep the economy going without us? This archipelago is rich in basic raw materials, and the white man(ager) is irreplaceable and crucial to its development. We are too necessary to be packed into storage...into prisoner-of-war camps.

We hear of Dutch executives and professionals who have agreed to work for the Japanese. Apparently, they maintain that refusal to accommodate the Japanese cannot possibly help a war being fought and decided in Europe and North Africa.

But I wonder about our supposed indispensability.

March 8

The Japanese do not appear to be utilizing our knowledge and skills. I had carefully and microscopically considered the relief that came with our defeat...the jubilation surrounding our surrogate peace. I questioned then its durability; I question it again as it thins and pales.

The Japanese appear convinced of their superiority. Their amazing victories strengthened their egos. And our captors are so polite. What surprises us most is the freedom they permit us — not only the white women and senior male civilians but even the POWs. The Japanese overlook even the arrogance of some of our youngsters. These children have a silly, dangerous habit of staring at a Japanese soldier or officer, then breaking out in uncontrollable laughter and quickly running away.

It is an uneasy truce that cannot last long. This very afternoon, we heard a rumor — that may prove that their patience has come to an end — that a rubber planter who was supposedly called back to his prewar position a few weeks ago actually died in prison.

It is difficult to determine what is truth these days.

March 9

We have left the high school. We were there for only a short time. But the books within that building's library were panacea while we had them. We went reluctantly, surrounding, herding and restationing the books back into their assigned positions on the shelves. Some men questioned the wisdom of our actions. But we were hesitant and unwilling to dismantle the collection of thought and heart that consumed decades of effort by our Dutch colleagues. And we must demonstrate our expectations that we fully expect the schools to reopen. Further, we have no justifiable right to assist in the destruction of existent society.

Our internment begins. All the military and paramilitary are under strict orders from the Japanese to report to POW camps. Women, children and senior males remain in their homes. Although POWs have been permitted to visit family and friends in the city, our relatives (among them a surprising number of pregnant women) crowd the campgrounds today.

This is not what we had expected.

However, after months of tension, of sensing the approaching and inevitable defeat, this surrender ironically brings relaxation into the depths of our souls.

But our new "calm" is disturbed: There are those who claim to have totally reliable "inside" information, leaked by a Singapore Chinese sailor, that the worst is yet to come.

We settle into our first POW camp. This was built by the KNIL (Royal Netherlands Indies Army), unaware that they were building what would one day become living facilities for Dutch POWs.

The physical facilities are not intolerable: The barracks consist of long huts comprising of rows of small private rooms with clean, cold floors and plenty of showers. Running along the campground fence are paved covered walks that provide protection against the heavy tropical rains and offer a view of soft, peaceful, rich green hills. At the edge of the camp, almost like an afterthought, stands a stark building — a large and lonely "entertainment" hall where the POWs stage plays and otherwise try to fill the empty hours.

Outside the compound are clusters of native huts from where curious eyes constantly watch us. They peer in through the camp gate. Oddly enough, it is guarded by our men. At this moment, it is our window to the outside world — the only exit from a relatively relaxed prison to the relative freedom of a semi-captive city.

March 13

Rachel is nine months pregnant. Her first two pregnancies went quite smoothly. The third ended in miscarriage at the end of the long, arduous journey through Siberia to Japan in 1940. Thus, we have gone through this, our present pregnancy, carefully and prayerfully!

I am a POW, but I must take care of my wife and children; their welfare, and that of our unborn child, is constantly on my mind. I decided we must reduce, as much as possible, the risk of any harm that might be caused to my family by the bombings and the growing tensions in town. Three weeks ago, Rachel agreed to go farther up the mountains to neighboring Pengalongan, more than six thousand feet above sea level, where there is a gentle wind and a mild climate. It reminded her of Holland, she said. But when the darkness grew too loud — marching feet and gunshot wounds — Rachel felt too far removed from me and she returned to Bandung.

Yesterday, I discovered the existence of a safely sheltered underground telephone station in our POW camp, which actually was an antiaircraft artillery camp.

There is always a line of men outside it. While waiting for my turn, it occurs to me that we are somewhat unsure of our identity. Although many of the men locked behind those walls own businesses a few miles from our camp, business relationships have become meaningless — the only ties left are those with family. No wonder the lineup of men waiting to make a call is so long.

Can a POW, unsure of his new identity, of his place in society, control his need to talk to his own family? Irritation grows. Even after a homesick husband has covered all the big and small points that he had written down on a list while waiting for his turn, he is still unwilling to stop talking: "Yes, what else is new?...Nothing?...What else is new?"

Keep the line open. Don't stop talking. Don't cut us off.

March 14

Rachel and the children are now living in Bandung with the Rappaports, old friends from Holland and the parents of Eddie, who is here with us in the camp. Rachel is grateful, as she did not yet trust our recently-hired *Bahboo* (maidservant) and *Djongos* (houseboy) sufficiently to leave the children with them.

March 15

This morning, I phoned Rachel. Mrs. Rappaport answered, her voice full of excitement: "Rachel has just left for the hospital."

Using a traditional Yiddish expression, *in a mazeldige sho'oh* (in a lucky hour), she wished her and the unborn baby good luck.

I phoned the hospital several times. Each time, the same nurse told me that Rachel had not yet given birth. She angrily asked me to space my calls, so I exercised control and watched the clock for three long hours. Then I called again. When she was abrupt with me, I couldn't control my emotions.

"I am locked in a prisoner-of-war camp," I snapped. "Can't you understand that?"

She apologized.

Five-thirty p.m. I was crowned: proud father to a brand new baby girl.

"Thank you," I exclaimed to the nurse.

"Congratulations," she said.

March 16

POW Babies

I phoned the hospital this morning to prepare Rachel for my visit.

The hospital is filled with an air of serenity and peace. The halls are clean and quiet. The nurses, dedicated and selfless nuns, glide soundlessly over spotless floors.

I was given our infant daughter to hold. Like our older children, she was born all new, all beautiful.

Rachel smiled at me shyly — then her eyes darkened. She whispered to me of the other women's displeasure at this visit.

"They're jealous," Rachel explained. "Their husbands are imprisoned in out-of-town camps. You remind them of their loneliness, the strangeness of celebrating a shared event alone..."

There was no response to my "good day" as I left. In their eyes no kindness, but also no hatred. When I turned around once more, I saw the young mother next to Rachel. She cried, then lifted up her beautiful apple-faced baby girl, nodded, and nodded again. It was as if, for a moment, her husband had been there. She cried again, and was still holding the baby when I left.

Then I saw Rachel crying with her.

How fine it was to see my Rachel and my daughter. Still...those other women. It is not just jealousy. It is not only the loneliness — no father receiving and admiring their new baby. It is the sudden change, the upheaval, war brings. I understand.

Boom Boom

March 23

No more phone conversations. Our secret telephone station was discovered by the Japanese several days ago.

Rachel returned to the Rappaports. Somehow, I must see her and the children before Passover.

For the first time, they will celebrate (or attempt to) the holiday alone. But it is very difficult now to leave the compound. Visiting days for relatives have become limited, and passes can be obtained only from the Japanese camp commandant, but only if you can prove that you are doing necessary chores for the camp.

I still have the Dutch commandant's pass from last week. I will use that. Our own commandant can no longer issue us passes into the city; we must have a Japanese signature now to leave, and only for camp work purposes will we receive the exquisite miniature picture-script on the exit tickets. I must go now because soon they will have our camp fully cut off, amputated from the city.

There was no problem getting out of the camp, and it was a joy to see my family. There is great pride in our new baby girl. We named her Shifra — "the beautiful one." But I am anxious about her future. When will food supplies diminish? How near is this crisis? She has courage, the little one, coming to us now.

As usual, Rachel is not deeply worried. She accepts life and its vicissitudes.

I drove back to camp along clean, tree-lined streets, in a cart driven by a Javanese. On the large, open verandas, Dutch women, children and senior citizens silently stared at us. They are curious probably, tired, resigned.

Carts were stopped in a small circular space near the flowers inside the crescent, and I learned that Japanese soldiers were inspecting the papers of all passengers in uniform.

I suggested to the driver that we take a right turn into a side street. He reacted initially as if I were still his *Tuahn Besar*, his white "Big Master." He began to move onto the next radial road to circumvent the park. Then he looked back at me and grinned widely. He must have realized that these days, there is a higher power than Caucasian blood.

I suspect that this thought gave him excessive pleasure. Do they hate us so much that even a war inside their homes is worth our subjugation? Or am I unduly suspicious?

The carts moved forward slowly. My turn came and some unnamed strength with it. I gave my pass, signed by the Dutch commandant (which was obviously different from the new, Japanese passes), to the soldier. He gave it back to me with an irritated movement of his hand; it was not good. But I refused to take it.

Suddenly, out of the tropical white-blue sky, there emerged a Japanese plane, slowly moving in our direction. I don't know what prompted me, what invisible guardian arm nudged me down on one knee; but there I was, pretending to shoot at the plane, making gunshot noises with my adult mouth! (Our childhood often returns, doesn't it, to rescue us.)

"Boom, boom, boom!"

The Japanese soldier didn't like it. His throat created threatening guttural noises. Had I failed? Lunacy took possession of me. I turned actor. My ecstatic "boom-booms" now competed with the best guns for accuracy — or at least, for loudness.

Then I leaned forward (my courage was insane) and grabbed the pass out of his hand. Triumphant, I pointed to the letterhead on my pass — my finger moving from letter to letter of the two Dutch words, *Luchtdoel Artillerie* (Antiaircraft Artillery). The soldier became attentive. Again I was on one knee, aiming at the plane, shooting it down with mental accuracy.

I didn't understand what I was doing. Did I mean to tell him that I was a gunner, or that I had shot down numerous Japanese planes? Or was I reacting to a submerged fear that I would not see my family again?

For a moment, the soldier was intensely curious. Then he grabbed the pass from my hand and moved his thumb from letter to letter. While he was doing this, I was still on my knees boom-booming the aircraft. When the guard looked up and saw me, he began to laugh. Finally, throwing his head back and emitting raucous laughter, his stomach contracting and expanding spasmodically, he waved me on.

Once the Japanese relax and laugh, it can mean one of two things: either

they will wave you forward or bayonet you into quite a terminal standstill.
I was fortunate.

Prisoners of the Japanese here in Bandung are placed in small cells; they must sit straight constantly, their backs to the open cell-doors, and if they slip or lean at all, they are knocked awake by rifle-butts. Most prisoners eventually die in their rooms. I must be more careful now. I can no longer rely on luck. My Dutch pass was taken away from me — for my own safety — by the Dutch officer at the gate, who heard my story and stared at me as if I had been resurrected from the dead.

March 26

We are still allowed to roam freely over the large and open camp grounds here on the outskirts of Bandung. But although the gates of the camp are still guarded by our men, two weeks ago they were shut by the Japanese.

We are trapped. I am a prisoner...of war. Mortality is no longer just an existential anxiety that we share...it is a practical constant poke in our bruised sides.

March 28

Rachel sends me *kosher* meals regularly with the *Djongos*. The Japanese have forbidden delivery of food to POWs by outsiders. So we made a hole in the camp's back fence. Notes arrive with the food. Replies are sent home with the houseboys. Sometimes, wives deliver the food personally. They then wait to see us by the small space where hands can touch. It is a busy place.

Women and children still move freely about the city, as do citizens of the Axis countries. This includes a number of Eastern European Jews who, because of the recent expansion of the Russian border, are considered neutrals (Russian citizens) and therefore not at war with Japan.

This morning, I paid two and a half guilders to a young Dutch marine for permitting me to take over his duty of pushing an empty cart into the city to pick up a load of rice for the camp kitchens.

Then I sent the happy message to Rachel, "I will have rice duty today."

Women and children lined the streets. At the first stop on this daily route stood a cart with Rachel and our little family. Her face shone, lit up by the shy half-smile that she wears always, like a soft velvet halo. There was no possibility of contact here, but the driver took her to the final stop. The Japanese guards, perhaps remembering their own families at home, did not intervene when the children approached their daddies. My little son, Mottie, brought me bananas and eggs.

I looked at Rachel. Our eyes moved quickly, trying to pull in steady memories, a few words. Then Time put out a long hooked arm to pull me away from them, from my family. The visit was a happy one for me, even though it left me inexpressibly sad.

March 29

Our rear-fence freedom has been stolen away from us, and thus, the out-of-camp visits we now attempt are less frequent, harder to arrange and harder to bear. My emotions are slow — tired from so much running.

Rachel wrote that she was happy to see me, although she cried at home, remembering how I had pushed such a heavy load. (The carts were almost empty.) I looked pale, she said.

Well, where is it anyway these days, where is the sun?

In order to keep our minds occupied, we have organized lectures in the camp. I agreed to speak on *Visible and Invisible Rays* — it's an obscure title, I know, and meant to be intriguing. We are sensitive to the mystical, here in our Far Eastern prisoner-of-war camps.

The large lecture room in the *vrouwenloods*' (women's hall) was crowded. Because I arrived late and because of the large crowd, I had to be passed toward the stage, over the heads of the people. I was surprised by the crush of POWs until I realized that these men need something to fill in the relative emptiness of the long hours of each day.

I assured my audience that this would not be a lesson in atomic physics. Just a talk to prisoners who wonder about man and his relationship to nature. I wanted my friends to realize that although the visible light rays represent only a minimal range of an overwhelmingly wide spectrum, those invisible rays are not mysterious black arrows that burn souls. On the contrary, they open up the sky to our eyes. To us, locked-up and shut-in human beings, these invisible rays represent an infinite wealth of possibilities in technology and medicine. A potential world full of blessings. Perhaps for everyone of us too.

Did I succeed in injecting hope into the hearts of those hundreds of shaken human beings? The hunger for hope and faith in their eyes overwhelmed me; somehow, it aided in winging my words throughout the darkened hall.

March 31

This afternoon, a number of my friends were given a special assignment — house cleaning. Many people had fled the city before the invasion, leaving their homes unsupervised. The Japanese wanted the condition of these homes checked because they need residences for their officers. I volunteered to join this group in order to get a message to Rachel. We returned quite late, and I was tired. I just wanted to think, to sleep.

April 5

Soon it will be time for *Pesach* (Passover).

Reverend Elburg, the other rabbi in Java, entered our camp. We spoke. He was worried about getting *matzos* (the Passover “bread”).

I have seconds, just firecracker sparks of breathholding beauty, when I am not worried about anything: seeing Reverend Elburg, listening to his concerns about the *matzos*, I felt that floating calm.

A one-time ritual slaughterer for the Jewish congregations of Jakarta and Bandung, Reverend Elburg had also been ritual slaughterer and cantor in Zaltbommel, a small town in the southern part of Holland. In May 1940, however, he became just another man running from Hitler; he escaped to England with his wife. In London, tired, confused and homeless, he was pressured into going to Java. Now they live in the mountain city of Bandung. Once a week, he comes to Batavia to teach a few Jewish children and to slaughter chickens.

Could anyone have foreseen Java's fall — foreseen that the Elburgs, and other elderly people like them, would run from Hitler and Europe...only to wind up locked in the steel embrace of Japanese captivity? Maybe the London advisory board believed (as did our Dutch Consul in Kobe) that Java and Singapore could be defended...against anything, against anyone.

Reverend Elburg has already spoken to Jan de Bakker, who had not been called up for military service and is now a free civilian. He bakes for the European population and for the Japanese officers. He has agreed to prepare *matzos* for us. Tomorrow, we will discuss the prescriptions in accordance with which he must bake the in-demand unleavened bread.

April 6

I left the camp without a pass, using my old friend the back-fence hole, which can now only be used with great caution.

Reverend Elburg was waiting for me outside with a cart that took us to the outskirts of the city. When we arrived at the bakery, I saw a Japanese officer getting out of a car and striding toward the gate. My first wish was to become invisible, to disappear. Instead, I saluted the little officer, and he saluted back. For a moment, I was stiff and unmoving, still in fear of being caught. But Jan smilingly grabbed me around the shoulder, as if he knew me well, and helped me walk up an old staircase to his office. The officer turned and walked away.

I felt sad. We grow up and continue to play the same pretend games we played as children. Only now it isn't fun to play.

We shall have *matzos* for Passover. Jan, with the Dutch respect for religious tradition, knows how much this means to us. He agreed to bake them in accordance with our strict, fastidious rules.

Bless mankind.

April 22

POW Passover — a Festival of Liberation

We are planning the Passover services. There are fewer than thirty Jewish boys here, but the large hall will be full, since non-Jewish soldiers have also requested permission to attend.

Our boys would have liked some quiet privacy while praying, but the gentiles are desperate for a touch of something beyond dirt and boots. Something majestic. I cannot refuse them.

I promised our Jewish boys that the actual *Seder* (the Passover supper) will be kept small. They begged for some semblance of home, family, warmth. I understand, because I crave these myself.

The Seder: Twenty of our boys and I sat on a platform behind drawn curtains, before tables laid with white cloths and silver candelabra — lent kindly to us by friends last visiting day. There were, and even now I hold my breath at the wondrous beauty of it all, a *matzah* plate, real *matzah*, sweet wine, the roasted shank bone, the roasted egg, honest *charoseth* made with nuts and wine and love, sent to us by my good, dear Rachel.

There were more than three hundred men at the Service. Some of the Jewish soldiers told me afterwards that they were uncomfortable praying among so many non-Jews in a language that must have sounded to the uninitiated ear like a primitive tribal chant.

“The words were sweet to them,” I explained. “Many of them told me they were extremely comfortable with our prayers and the intriguing rhythms of the Hebrew language.”

I had adapted my sermon to the mixed audience and spoke about something we could all understand — slavery. In Egypt, I said, physical bondage led to spiritual chaos — the tighter the chains, the looser the faith. Despair and hopelessness were most oppressive during the last eighty years. There were no signs of relief; when the Jewish people looked up to see where they were carrying their heavy burden, they saw not the promised mountaintop but only a long, steep, never-ending climb.

Soon, they stopped looking up for any peak at all. And they began sinking, spiritually sinking. Moses came to them and spoke of redemption, but their excitement was short-lived. They were not willing to hope for anything they could not actually touch, and they ran to recover the familiarity of an enslaved-bound consciousness — slaves even to slavery.

But redemption came. As it always does. To lift them to freedom.

When our freedom is announced, I said, then even those who fear it will be carried away on its shoulders, cheering. Do not lose hope, I ordered the men quietly. Freedom will come for us.

Tightening the Noose

May 14

The Japanese have begun sending us the message that the “honeymoon of politeness” is over. A few weeks ago came the surprising order: all POWs must shave their heads — time limit: evening.

The officers were sure that the order did not — could not — apply to them. The Japanese, however, made sure that POW officers realize they are not a privileged class.

Toward evening, our officers decided not to anger the Japanese and complied with the order. However, the optimists, the believers in the vital importance of the POWs to the Japanese war effort, were the last to sit down for the shave.

That night, most of us went to sleep early — silent, resigned. Some sensed in the order a desire to shame us. The Japanese argued that it was meant to safeguard POWs against head lice and a possible deterioration of hygienic conditions.

It was clear that the refusal to salute them on Braga had upset our Japanese captors.

The second message came this morning when all of us, including the officers, were ordered to line up on the periphery of the camp grounds close to the native huts.

Three of our toughies — Robert, “Houdini” and Adrian, a nineteen-year-old boy — had sneaked out sometime late yesterday evening, spent the night in the nearby village with native girls, returned before dawn, and were apprehended as they scaled the fence.

Our men sneak out and return frequently. If they are caught, they are beaten. Sometimes, they are beaten once, allowed to rest, and then beaten again. It seemed, until today, almost a game of challenge between our soldiers and the Japanese guards.

This time, there was more than a beating involved.

Robert once told me that violence will destroy the world — first morally, then strategically.

Houdini was a navy man, who earned his name because of his ability to escape from seemingly impossible situations. Even when a group he was with fell into enemy hands, somehow he found his way past any trouble, back into his bed. He was only caught once — today.

While on top of the fence, Adrian saw the back of a Japanese guard. In an attempt to speed up his descent, he dropped down hard. The loud thud attracted the attention of the guard, who turned around shouting, his bayonet pointing at the three of them who stood there, pale, in correct saluting position.

Adrian must have been badly agitated — he was too steady to trip over anything. I used to watch him exercise — runs, push-ups, stretches. Why did he go with them? He was a brooding, silent, intense boy who spoke of peace. His friends would listen to his short, almost staccato, sentences and his soft deliberate voice. He said once, fiercely, that war fragmentizes the mind into confused, dissonant, dismembered particles that race and leap and jab each other. He cried that war covers everyone's eyes with storm clouds so that no one can see anything except the immediate fearful future. Violence burns out love, he would say, and nature. And...me.

I remember that word *me* as the quietest crying I have ever heard.

Why did he go? Energy and will are more than strengths, they are our virtues, he used to tell us.

The Japanese officers wore impassive expressions this morning when they informed us that we would have to attend the sentencing.

"In one hour," they told us.

When?

"One hour."

Why?

"It is an order," they said.

We feared the worst.

"One hour," they told us, this time with smiles cutting across their smooth faces.

When we assembled, we had another hour of standing — staring at those three surprised young soldiers tied to the fencing.

The youngest, Adrian, looked bewildered. He would smile nervously, suddenly stop, then smile again. I think he was waiting to hear that his school friends had staged the entire war just to reach this moment of an uproarious joke, and they would laugh to see his relief when they finally untied him, and all the actors went home.

Even Houdini seemed surprised. What was going to happen didn't rhyme with life as he knew it. He was going to have to pay the ultimate price for a small moment of pleasure! Death is decisive! His repeated looks at the Japanese and then at his two friends tied to the fence seemed to express his wonderment. How did death fit into their little fun game? Murder to punish harmless pleasure?

He bent his head slightly downward and closed his eyes before the blindfold came close to his face. He refused the blindfold. Houdini liked to see where he was going.

Robert looked past all of us. He was seeing only storm clouds before they covered his eyes.

The Japanese officer asked for volunteers from among the lineup of a dozen soldiers to perform the execution. All of them stepped forward excitedly. Three Japanese soldiers were chosen.

No bullets. Bayoneting is an Eastern martial form of art, it seems.

Screeches of excitement broke into my mind even though I covered my ears and attempted to close my eyes.

Those screeches and raw screams, seemingly co-ordinated and horrifying, were followed by the sound of three pairs of feet jumping up and down on the dry earth...and then back they jumped to a position of rest.

Again the screeches; and through the haze of a tight squint, I saw three arms aiming bayonets and thrusting, and I heard the raw mind-drilling screams of the POWs.

Then a third piercing of unarmed bodies roped to the fence. These last screams I did not hear, my ears plugged with horror, by now, my head down.

One of our captains, a schoolteacher, fainted. He was dragged by two Japanese guards through soft, loose earth to the fence, so that when he regained consciousness, he was staring at the empty bodies of his former comrades.

When the Japanese were finished with the execution, we prisoners were marched in a single line past the corpses. To see them. The bodies were straight, pinned up by the ties that had bound them so that they couldn't run, so that they had to stand and be murdered; and their heads were down.

This evening, the fence was cleaned and the debris thrown away and buried.

Are Jews Eurasians?

June 1

We are all still in a state of shock over the execution of the three boys. Escape is uppermost in the minds of many. Escape with "honor" for the Jews is wildly festering in the mind of Caun, our interpreter.

Orphaned in Holland when he was very young, this young Jew shows no visible anger toward a world that had been unkind to him; but he is shy and often silent instead. With his black hair falling limply over his head and his right shoulder leaning forward, he fits easily into any place and only becomes visible when he wants to promote some ingeniously planned improvement in conditions around him. He has come up with an intriguing suggestion that might free the Jews from this camp. (His mind is filled with bright magic colors and shining fancies.)

Caun's suggestion came the other day after a rumor started that Indos and whites were going to be separated: the Eurasians would be transferred to Tjimahi, a camp outside Bandung, and then allowed their freedom. (In our camp, the Indos and the whites live together peacefully.) Caun told me that he has close contact with some Japanese senior officers, and he gathered from them that the Japanese do not really feel they need the white professionals. He suspects quite strongly that natives and Eurasians would soon be sent back to their families.

Now, this was his plan: If the Jews would claim to be descendants of an Asian (Semitic) race, they would be registered as Eurasians and would thereby qualify for release.

Would the Japanese ever accept the thesis that white Jews, citizens of the colonial empires, were actually Eurasian? Would Jewish POWs be willing to accept Eurasian status?

The overwhelming majority of the newcomers to Java have spoken in

favor of Caun's "wild" idea. Their deepest concern is their wives and children, unprotected against vandals and sex maniacs. If only they could be reunited with them, help protect them, feed them and offer them love. Any possibility of a reunion must be considered seriously.

Several white Jewish businessmen who possess neutral citizenship maintain open stores and businesses in the city. Could we not attempt the same? Our resident realists shake their heads sadly. It is impossible, they say. The Japanese are allies of the Germans. They will not provoke them by accepting this kind of naive camouflage.

I want to look up Pete Trom, a former government official and a non-Jew, although I could guess his opinion without even asking him.

I first met him in Jakarta (Batavia), in the hotel run by Yits Lisser. I was told that he was suspected of sympathies with the Dutch Nazis. At the time, I told him I was favorably impressed with a number of my Eurasian students in the Women's Teachers' College. These students were sturdy and eager to learn, and apparently possessed the native adaptability to the hardships of the tropical climate, combined with the physical build and drive of the white man.

Pete had remained silent for awhile. I had touched on racial problems that deeply affected him. He must have decided that it would be better for him not to appear as a believer in racism.

"It is typically Jewish," he said, "to speak so lightly of a merger, a strain of two races. To you it is just a question of religion...actually of conversion."

He spoke with clipped words and rising syllables. He told me that many of these first generation Indo-Europeans, or Indos, as the Eurasians were called in Java, were fathered by visiting navy men, soldiers and other transients. A white idealist believed he would help those children by blessing them with names borrowed from white nobility, suggesting that they had been fathered by European aristocrats.

"It is true, ours is not an actual colonial society," he said. "The islands have become part of the Netherlands Empire. It was decolonialized decades ago by the creation of a *Volksraad* (local parliament). Still, within our homes, we pray and act for racial purity. Personally speaking, stripes of both colors blind me, disgust me, paralyze me."

When I told him today about Caun's idea, he cynically responded, "It isn't really Caun's 'great idea.' I believe that the Indos are using Caun to convince the Japanese that because of their Asian blood component, they should be sent home free. However, the Japanese who are very nationalistic will never go out of their way to help people who are proud of being part-European; and the nationalistic natives do not want the Eurasians."

Finally, I wondered what the opinion of my authentic Eurasian friend

would be. I talked to Jan; his wife is white. She proudly advised him to accept Eurasian status if necessary. If he is invited to leave the prisoner camp, he should.

"I want to be a member of the Eurasian society," she told him. "If I cared about color, would I have married you?"

Jan suggested to me that his wife is like a person on a boat for the first time. The lack of boundaries on the seas means uninhibited freedom to her — but she cannot see the often unbearable limitations of a rail enclosing the deck.

Jan is a government official; he told me that all members of the native aristocracy speak to him politely concerning all business matters.

"Socially, though," he declared, "I barely exist."

How sensitive we have become to social status.

"I cannot listen graciously," he said, "when my Dutch assistants report on visits to the homes of pure-blood Javanese aristocrats, because I am rarely invited to those homes."

He concluded, "I would rather share the suffering of POWs for five or ten years than drown in a Eurasian ghetto. I would rather miss my family than watch my babies gasp for free air."

Frank Rotenberg, the Jewish socialist lawyer who had accused me of misusing science for religious propaganda (at my lecture on *Visible and Invisible Rays*), is suggesting now that Caun and I, two newcomers, do not know the land or the people sufficiently to represent the Jews of this place.

Caun laughed. "I wanted to help all of us," he told Rotenberg, "You make the simple so difficult."

The "realists" won.

June 17, 1942

For a while now, there have been rumors that we are to be moved to another camp. Today, the air is feverish with speculation that we may be leaving before dark.

I managed again to buy a "place" on the *corvee* (work force), which is going to the freight railway station this morning, and I have sent a message ahead to Rachel. I received a note from her telling me that the city is full of the same rumors about our imminent departure.

Our duty was to unload freight cars near the Bandung freight station. The guards there seemed nervous and stiff, and stared fiercely (as if afraid to miss

the first breath of a large scale, five-man rebellion) until we began to work. Then they relaxed, and our children, waiting at the side of the road, came toward us.

The Japanese soldiers are lonely — I sense it now; they have no families here. They are just men busy with war and death, not life. I see their faces soften in sad pleasure when the children run toward us. Mottie and Brenda (my own children) brought over yellow cake with colored icing and small dents in the sides, from their tight protective hold.

We sat on the grass, talking and eating. The guards grew nervous. We didn't know they were expecting the arrival of their officers within minutes. Suddenly, tension was whipping us, scaring away our pleasure. The soldiers began shouting, chasing away wives and children.

We will leave tonight, won't we? Our exodus...but to where, to what?

This seemed to be a last meeting with my family. I couldn't let my children go. I held them. I tried to prolong the sensation of love and closeness — to memorize it, to steal enough of it to use as oxygen later when hate and killing might threaten suffocation.

One of the guards saw this; like one afraid of violent reactions yet controlled by them, he hit me in the hip with his rifle butt, then walked on.

Mottie put one small hand over his open mouth and blinked. Four Japanese officers walked by. Mottie tried to stop them with an imperious tone in his voice.

He demanded, "Halt! Where is he? Find him. Where is the man who hit my father?"

They didn't seem to hear him. They didn't even look. The officers marched through and left. In different circumstances, I would have laughed with Rachel at his giant pose. He stood so perfectly in his tight miniature way. This time, I was scared for him.

With the officers gone, wives and children moved near again. So little time.

Rachel and I talked. She gave me more cake and sandwiches. When we left the site, the children were waving. Rachel looked down. For Rachel, I was already too far away. She did not wave. I am sure, though, that I heard a soft whisper — *goodbye*.

Tonight, she will think of me. And I will think of her — how she looked, what she said. How quiet her face — closing and dark — remembering that a stranger wanted to hurt me. And did.

On The Move

On the Move

To Tjilatjap

June 19

Dear Rachel,

Since we are now separated, this, then, is my first "letter" to you (and the children). Your rumor has been proven correct: They woke us at midnight.

"Take knapsacks," they said. "Just essentials."

Outside, it was raining. The window, frosted and crying, prophesied discomfort. We shivered. Group after group left. We did not all leave together; my turn came in the early morning after a night of restless waiting.

Our train traveled through the mountainous regions of central Java. The air was mountain-fresh and the green grass-covered heights reminded me of the old Europe, of the Belgian Ardennes. By noon, we had already sat for six hours in the train; but most of the time was spent waiting at small railway stations while other trains passed us by, since we were not high priority and therefore of little importance to the Japanese war effort.

I wonder. We are thousands of miles off the nearest battlefield. How war-urgent can these trains be?

One train that moved alongside ours had a luxurious diner in which two Japanese generals sat across from two well-dressed Caucasian women. It seemed to me that the officers merely acted out civilized manners while the ladies attempted to outsmile their cavaliers.

We POWs have assumed that our wives are safe because the Japanese forbid their soldiers to fraternize with white women. Now I wonder, in which camp do those officers keep the husbands of these women with whom they obviously fraternize?

Finally, at the end of a twelve-hour trip in the dark, we arrived at our destination.

Tjilatjap is a small port city in the south of central Java, facing the Indian Ocean. We marched along clean, two-lane roads. From some distance, we saw large warehouses along the seashore — many of them bombed. We were close to our new home at last. Ahead, we saw a narrow gate and behind it, a wooden guardhouse.

We were tired, but we were not invited to sleep, which was all we wanted to do. They marched us, four thousand, into the camp's square that was formed by rows of small one-story houses (built by the Dutch for the families of their NCOs).

Actually, we felt relieved. Rumors had made us afraid that we were being sent to the prison-island of malaria and entrapment, across from these port facilities. Relief, however, was a short pleasure soon replaced by a Japanese lieutenant shouting and gesturing, with a Dutch translator beside him.

"The first order," he indicated with a chop at his own wrist, "is that anyone caught stealing will have his hand cut off."

He continued in full volume, "Any transgression of camp rules is punishable in that same way." He threw his hands into the air as if they would thus disconnect dramatically for illustrative purposes.

Were we to believe this sudden, grotesque reality? We began to talk — all of us at once, as if it were theatre intermission and we were trying excitedly, nervously, to comprehend Art. We turned to our neighbors; there was an explosive discharge of pent up inner tension. The lieutenant yelled out that we were not being polite, and therefore he was not being respected. This only heightened our tension and resulted in a further bout of screaming. This time, his face grew stretched and red; and even in the poor light of the lanterns and through the rain, we saw his face shining. We were first admonished like schoolchildren for misbehavior; then threatened like the Enemy — threatened with punishment (limb loss) should we ever break his rules again.

Countless, countless rules and rules. How to run, how to walk, how to salute every Japanese private. How to breathe in a steady rhythm.

An order was given in Japanese without subsequent translation, and suddenly, Japanese soldiers were racing between the lines around and through us, suggestive of wild weaving, with bayonets pointing out in front of them.

"If anyone crosses his arms behind the back or over the chest, his hands will be cut off," the POW translator finally shouted at us, trying to match the lieutenant's anger and, I thought, his own uncontrolled frustration and fear.

The pharmacist beside me struck furiously at my hands crossed behind my back. He was nervous. I? I was thinking in my regular, vertical thought-position about human equality and superiority.

Rachel, we should not have complained in Bandung — at least there we had our dignity. We have no use for dignity here. But we must pray to keep our hands.

Vakarimashta

June 21

Tjilatjap

I signed a paper written in Japanese, swearing obedience to camp rules and to every Japanese command. I promised not to attempt escape. I gave them my signature because they ordered me to sign. Sabbath would be starting soon, and I would then be forbidden to write, so I signed quickly. What is a signature worth in these days of dishonor? It becomes a certain compilation of letters.

My heartbeat is my truer name now — and that, I will not give them.

I welcomed the Sabbath and hosted her as well as I could. At last, I went to sleep.

A roll call came close to midnight. Several of our officers had refused to sign the statement, insisting that it violated a certain code of the Geneva Convention: namely, it is the duty of every prisoner of war to use any possible opportunity to escape and rejoin his own army. Those few who had withheld their signatures had been cuffed by the guards. And the authorities' anger, like any good disease, was spreading to include all of us now. The demands of injustice.

The passageways between the NCOs' crowded, small, two-bedroom houses, through which we ran to reach the Main Square, are so narrow that, with all of us there and pushing forward, movement was hampered and finally

stopped. But...it is against direct orders to stop on the way to roll call or even to walk, so our knees pumped up and down while we ran nowhere for five minutes until we could go on again.

We lined up eight rows thick around three sides of the square. I counted numbers — what else was there to do? Our shoulders, man to man, touched. That was the sole comfort we allowed ourselves. We did not speak.

One, two, three, four... I counted. What else was there to do? Numbers, loud monotony, decreases the urgency of words.

A Japanese officer, his feet standing hard, his legs straight, shouted in front of us. Veritable lengths of roars and screams. Our senior officer and his adjutant, surrounded by Japanese guards and their raised bayonets, faced us, conveying fright. For ten minutes, there were no human sounds — just the screaming. Our interpreter managed to translate between tirades, and we learned that our two senior officers would be imprisoned until every single officer had signed the statement. I felt too aware of war and I fought anger at it as they marched the two men to prison cells.

All of our men, thousands of us, shared one beaten silence — we were united then into a single small defeated cell of impotence. Our senior officers are no longer respected (the rest of us have been quite irrelevant to the Japanese for some time).

Several soldiers near the gate house began to push back suddenly. I saw a young man hugging himself as if to keep from splitting — hugging with both arms and crying. The prisoners, it was whispered through the rows, the message catching quickly, like a fire, are being beaten.

I suspected rumor-mood: the POWs on the parade-ground were being twisted and turned by the screams of our Japanese commandant, and their imagination was contributing to feelings of fear until the men were dizzy and able to understand only volume and exaggeration.

One imagined hearing the officers' voices calling out to us for help: desperate shouts, no meaning in them, only agony. Our quiet was thick and uncomfortable. I think many were praying then, automatically, like the neighbor to my right, moving his lips over and over, "Our Heavenly Father, please, please..."

And in the midst of the prayers, a whisper, "Two funerals in the morning."

His voice was cold and shaking, but confident. He knew. There would be two funerals in the morning.

I have often wished a long night over, and I did then; but let me miss tomorrow too.

A Japanese colonel came into the yard, seemingly running on air, kicking men's bare shins as he passed. There were outcries. (From where I stood, I saw a vision: a small thin oriental bird flying in a walking position.)

Sadly watching this, I remembered hearing that the Japanese refuse to consider their barbaric violence unjust.

"We use it on you, and we use it on our own. It is quite fair."

He continued to race along the front rows, then stopped suddenly and said to all of us (through our frightened translator), "You are spoiled. You are not even hardened enough to receive a light kick without crying out loud."

With that, he used the sharp front of this boot to kick one prisoner especially hard on his exposed shin. Then he was still, concentrating on his aim, smiling with excitement. The young man, bless his angry spirit, stood like a statue and was kicked three more times until the colonel, with something closer to fright and fury than I have ever before seen, hit him across the head with a solid fist, again and again, until the man fell.

In victory, I insist; he fell in victory.

"You lost the war without a fight," the colonel continued, scornfully looking around for another victim. "You are no soldiers. Our soldiers can be hit without falling. We, Nippon, are army."

There was a wild animal-like quality about the colonel in the moonlight. I watched him, shaking, my teeth running on the spot. My greatest fear has always been those men you cannot reason with, cannot talk to — the animal kingdom of our own. Here it was before me. Our lives are fine glass in irresponsible children's bloodstained hands.

Finally, the colonel left, and we were ordered to straighten our rows. Suddenly, there were screams from the guards who, shouting in their high-pitched voices, raced between our lines, their bayonets straight out in front of them. How frightened we were by now. A guard flew by behind me. The screaming, the ground sending up groans as it was pounded by the runners, then the flash of passing metal.

My legs wanted to move, but I was restraining them with all the force I had, begging obedience from my body — and then that flash of metal. I was afraid. Not of their intentions, but of a chance error.

It was now two hours past midnight. The inhuman howling never ends. What is happening here on this dream island, Java? Why can't obscenity find itself a more congenial location? More villainous victims? How is this possible?

The translating began again — another Japanese officer was speaking to us.

"You are bad," he said, "ungrateful to your captors. How could any of you refuse to sign, to disobey the great Emperor's orders? The Emperor is kind, understanding and forgiving. Just go down on the pavement and face northeast."

Then, with an unexpected change to a fatherly tone, he said, "He will forgive you."

We refused to move.

The officer again shouted at us, the interpreter translating every word. None of us budged. Surprised? Unbelieving? We wondered if this was real.

Then the renewed screaming and the gestures. Finally, we understood the message. We had been given a "strict" order.

Suddenly, thousands of men were on the ground, like folding chairs. We prostrated ourselves. I lowered myself — my knees not touching the ground. We were told to rise. We looked at each other. How could we? What next? Why should I be upset by this fictional debasement of my human dignity? Still, how could I?

"Now apologize," the Japanese officer said. He smiled and licked his lips. "We did it for your good, didn't we? We did," he told us. "So, say it: — *Vakarimashita* (I understand, I agree). Say it! Yell at the top of your voice — jump as high as your life power allows you, again and again, until I command you: 'Enough, the Emperor has forgiven you!' "

I looked around...I felt hammered down. My colleagues — teachers, bankers, government officials, successful business leaders — all of them — were jumping up, jumping down, higher and lower, frenzied, shouting out of wide-open mouths and gaping frightened eyes that word, that monstrous five-syllable, hammer-word — *Vakarimashita*.

My neighbor was stretching his long body, left and right, shouting without pause, without any perceptible range or change of tone, his glasses moving up and down on his nose, and tears rolling along his sad face, down his neck and away to an oblivion our sadness will share.

Now my neighbor to the rear punched me hard, warning me to jump, to scream. There was an infectious madness about this ritual — the straining, the waving, elbows bent, fists balled tight, arms up. But most of the faces just looked surprised.

When the Japanese officer was satisfied with our cries, we were dismissed.

What has happened to us? We joined so enthusiastically in our own debasement. I saw Death looking in my window. But I was not going to allow him in my home. Not yet.

Rachel, tonight, after the exploding anger and loud panic, I lie on my blanket in silence...no salutations, no goodnights.

I feel like I do on the night of *Tishah B'Av* (the ninth day of the Hebrew month of *Av*) when I mourn the loss of Jerusalem. I say the *Lamentations* in my mind.

I mourn the loss of human freedom. And I mourn my loneliness.

The Ego-antenna

June 24

The unbearable noise of tens of sledgehammers and the un pitying heat of the tropical sun threatened to destroy our already anaemic self-awareness. Since early morning, we worked at this bombed-out warehouse of which only a weird skeleton of bent steel remained. Our men incessantly banged against bolts that did not budge. When the noon break arrived, we sat down in the shadow of a few trees across the road. It took some time until our ears, which seemed to have lost a number of hearing decibels, became accustomed to the sudden quiet.

Hans, the German-born Dutch refugee, sat next to me. He looked devastated. He wore a piece of a woven straw mat over his head.

"My tortured brain has been softened up by the cruel sun; then the deafening noise of the sledgehammers crushed the cells in my brain. Now it feels as if the brain mass is smeared out inside my skull," he said, his face drawn into a weak and doubtful smile.

"Hans, you mean to say that you've lost the awareness of still being a person?" I asked.

He looked surprised. He didn't realize the meaning of his statement.

Interestingly, I realized this morning that none of the side effects of our POW existence could be more tragic than the complete or even partial loss of personality. Still, *Rachel*, I was convinced that my person would not be fatally affected, not even by the large crowds of suppressed individuals. After all, the Japanese have been squeezing us in for already a year.

Hans, visibly irritated, interrupted me. "No one, not even you, Nuss, can be his own self when surrounded by an avalanche of voices, words, noises and personality clashes."

With even greater bitterness, he continued, "I know that you're able to invent illusions. You do indeed possess a good portion of uncanny imagination."

Putting my hand on his sagging shoulder, I said, "Hans, you were, and still are, a practical man. Did you ever realize why a radio without an antenna does not produce words or songs?"

"Because there is a frightening mixture of voices, words, songs — each on a wavelength of its own — and they destroy each other's individuality," Hans replied triumphantly.

"But, Hans, you forget that I am an antenna," I told him. "Antennas have an uncanny way of selecting the one wavelength we seek and leaving the multitude of other wavelengths out."

"So, Hans, if the result of tuning is a clear and distinct reception of the melodies and words carried by the selected wavelength, doesn't that mean that all those neighboring wavelengths do not affect the purity, the individuality, of the one wavelength we have chosen?"

If I believed I had already gotten through to Hans, I was mistaken.

"I sometimes get sick of your unrealistic analogies," he countered. "You may be an antenna, but I am not a radio wave superimposed upon all other persons' waves in this camp!"

Despite his apparent annoyance, I couldn't help laughing.

"You see, Hans, we view all matter and energy, all action, as wave energy, or wave packages," I said. "Waves are always superimposed when crowded in, consequently separable because they do not destroy or change each other's nature. Once we regain privacy, we will be able to extricate ourselves from the effects of the deafening noises we are exposed to."

For the first time in this discussion, Hans appeared to accept my view. He was silent for some time while eating his handful of rice.

Then he said cautiously and with a calm voice, "It is an interesting idea. Our own type of vibration is not affected by the rhythms and vibrations of others. Yes, it appears to sound convincingly true."

He was silent for some time while all around us was the constant reminder of the loss of privacy. Then he continued, "Silence for some may have beneficial consequences."

He sat with his eyes shut tight, a handful of rice suspended before his lips. When he spoke again, it was with a sadness that seemed to begin from deep within him.

"For me it may have come too late..." He chewed on the too-dry rice, then added slowly, "Actually, it *has* come too late. My ego-image has already dimmed. It gets dimmer all the time."

The Hans beside me was remote. I think he is approaching the end — death. This year.

Before I had a chance to say a word that would ease his mind, a fierce whistle announcing the end of our lunch break brought home the lack of privacy enforced upon us.

June 26

Tjilatjap

It is not easy to live in a hermetically shut-off camp without news. Especially since the news items spread by the natives are unreliable. Many of them talk of the Allies' devastating defeats while others assure our contact persons that the Americans have landed in Java and are fighting only forty to fifty miles to the north.

It is obvious that these rumors are absurd. How can Americans — thousands of miles from their closest bases — keep up a minor war in the heartland of the enemies' territory? As it is, we know that the Americans have barely started their counteroffensive in the distant Pacific areas. Some of our officers maintain that an iron-fisted captain of the Netherlands army, who defied the order to surrender, has kept his Dutch and native troops and is fighting and running, hiding and emerging in certain areas of Java.

To keep the rumors down and to acquire some semblance of truth, obtaining a radio of our own has become a matter of first priority.

An airplane, destroyed by the Dutch themselves, sits on the grounds close to the bombed-out warehouses in the port area. Three of our mechanics undertake to remove vital parts from this plane. Busy workers cover the movements of the mechanics and enable them to remove the short-wave radio. The most critical part of the plan involves moving the radio (reduced to minimum size) past the guard control at the gate without being detected.

The assembly of these conduits with the outside world must be kept secret not only from our captors but also from the vast majority of POWs. Soon, the radios are producing news. But this is not passed on too soon to the men. Not only because of fear that the guards would find out but also because much of the news is bad. Giving this information out to POWs who live on the edge of hope would cause only gloom. One could, in those weeks, report only Allied defeats in Russia and North Africa.

One of the "heroes" who had smuggled in those precious electronic parts

was caught (by the guards at the gate) attempting to smuggle in medical supplies and food.

All men present in the camp at that time were called to the large exercise field and lined up six-rows thick. We were forced to witness the exemplary punishment of this alleged "criminal." The sergeant "stole" a negligible quantity of food tins from a box in the huge warehouse that had belonged to Dutch importers!

After the usual ugly, throaty noises, which apparently added up to a long "masterful" speech meant for all of us and translated in bits by our interpreter, the POW was addressed with an unintelligible harangue. This was followed by kicks at the man's head. Each attack was crueler than its preceding one and threw the POW some distance back. After each kick, the victim showed a degree of pride and strength by soon returning to his erect position.

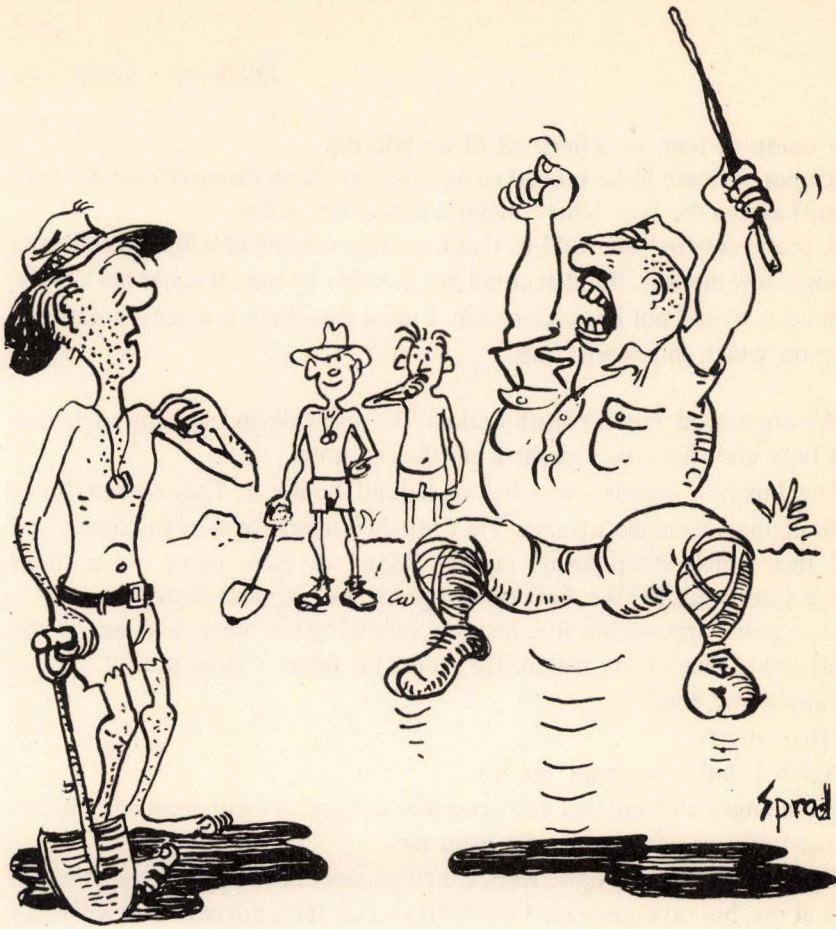
Much to our mounting horror, this bravery worked against him. The guard became infuriated and switched his target from the man's head to his groin. He laced into his helpless victim, aiming the iron spurs of his heavy boots at the most vulnerable parts of his victim's body. Attempting to protect himself, the POW was maltreated with a fury that caused him to fall onto the ground, his body in a cramped and ugly curvature.

Even then the guard did not cease inflicting the punishment. When the POW was finally thrown back close to the rear wall of the field, even the avenging fury of the mouth-foaming sadist was not able to raise him. The battered sergeant was now an entanglement of body, limbs, and blood seeping sickly from many wounds.

Only at this point did the guard appear to come to his senses. Seemingly relaxed, he pointed to two POWs, whose hands were visibly trembling, and ordered them to take the sergeant to the "hospital" hut at the front end of the field.

We were then ordered to walk back to our quarters — we did so as mourners who had just buried a dear relative. The man did not die. Doctors and orderlies worked hard to repair the battered sergeant.

However, this sadistic guard walks around ostentatiously smiling as though he wants to remind us that he is experienced in whipping a man, any man, almost to the point of death — bringing home to us the fact that much more than loss of privacy is now our lot.



WHO ? ME ?

Who? Me? In this typical Sprod drawing, George Sprod expresses the adult POW's regression to a child's primitive defensive attitude when facing a punitive teacher.

July 1
Tjilatjap — Camp Two

The camp of fear — where all of us will die

Rumor: We are to be moved to the *Kust Artillerie Camp* (Coast Artillery Camp) across the bay, where malaria grows like a fire.

A professional soldier told us that the Japanese intend to bury us all there within a few months. But that could not possibly be true. It could not happen because it would not be accountable. I insist that there is at least a minimal logic on which this world runs.

We are moved, but not deathmarked. We just walk and walk through trees that bow and shade us, not far from the seashore.

The Japanese guards scurry before, behind, beside us. They seem to hurry without any noticeable advance. They rub their hands together frequently and nod their small sharp heads rapidly. Many of them carry out business transactions with POWs, between jagged steps here and there.

One guard approaches me, his eyes following the sun as it shines off the small round face of my watch. He points his finger. "How much?"

I shake my head.

"How much?"

Again I shake my head, no, no.

He is angry and agitated and grumbles a chain of incoherent complaints, scissor-stepping sideways across from me.

The neighbor to my right, Kees Huizinga, does not stop walking, does not look at me, but says quietly in Dutch, "If you say it is a gift of love, it will be all right."

Now walking alongside of me, the little Japanese leans toward me and puts out his hand, intending to take the watch.

"It's old," I begin telling him, but my good neighbor shakes his head and points to his heart. So I stop, look straight at the guard, embrace myself with ardor, point at my watch and kiss the back of my hand. "This watch, my Rachel gave me."

He laughs.

I am surprised at the whiteness of his tiny, even teeth and the wideness of his smile. But he moves away from me and doesn't look at my watch again.

Instead, he begins to dance around my steps, pointing with a long sharp finger toward the large gate, which we now can see at some distance. It is the entrance to our new camp.

"*Samooah matti*," he shouts, insinuating that all of us will die there. Half smiling and half curious, he looks at our faces.

Are we impressed? Then, he repeats in a quieter tone, his hands swinging, "*Samooah matti.*"

He continues to shout those words like gravel onto glass, out of the farthest corner of his throat. Why were these spoiled, white cowards not trembling more? Now he runs a finger across his throat, shaping his mouth into a rectangle, seemingly like a coffin-box, so that all his teeth are in the picture. Then he lifts his rifle and rests the barrel loosely, playfully, on my nose. The knot at the end of the barrel scratches my skin as he keeps this up while we are still walking.

I point past him to the camp. I do not want to stare at him.

"Is that our camp?...Good, I am tired. I must sleep." I put my fingers around the gun, push it away from my face, and watch as it falls. Nodding to those closest to me, I march ahead.

Kees Huizinga is shocked at my actions. Later, he takes me aside. Kees is a quiet, steady man. When there is no war, he works as a government official in the Bureau of Japanese Affairs.

"The Japanese are disciplined," he tells me. "Does it come from within them? I don't know, but they are trained from birth, and they maintain their tight hold even though what is happening beneath the reins is unclear. It creates a fierce need for the order they desire, *just* as they plan it. You dismissed that guard's need. You didn't even allow him the satisfaction of your fear."

He remains silent for a few seconds, and a puzzled look spreads over his face. "What made you drop his rifle like that? You hit his leg! You didn't see his face, but I did, and there was murder there."

I tell him that I am angry in a dull, exhausted way, with no energy for caution.

"So," Kees continues, "You're short-sighted. You saved your watch simply because he wouldn't take it by force. Apparently, he feared that he would upset his officers. But he will have his revenge. He will hit at you and hit at you until you are reduced, until you plead and cry for him to have your watch."

I hid the watch in my luggage. Not having it on my wrist, how could he recognize me? We must appear as similar to one another as the Japanese do to us.

The next day, Kees informed me that my guard was assigned a post somewhere in the north. "But remember this lesson for your future safety," he said.

July 2

The grounds of this second Tjilatjap camp are wide open. There are no trees. I imagine that I can smell the sea with a memory that is developing strong muscles and aggression. *Rachel*, the sea is not as close as the smell I experience so pleasurably. But many of the men have expressed similar surprise at the strength and sensual clarity of their nostalgia. I breathe deeply and I smile all the way through me. The roads are clean, and the house blocks are much larger than I am used to.

But my euphoria was soon spoiled. Several POWs who have lived in this camp for some months sent quiet, stark messages to us. The sadistic commandant collects animals and tortures them slowly. It seems he has his men watching for any slight misperformance, any deviance on the part of the newly arrived.

Suddenly, standing in our "home," the large ward looked too clean and empty. The ceilings are high, but they dip low at many points. Sometimes the top wooden bunk almost touches the ceiling. The taller men walk with a bend, rubbing their bruised heads.

A young Japanese guard stepped in through the door. The senior POW, who is our hut commandant, shouted for silence first and then, apparently worried, shouted: "Attention!"

We have all seen the hunger in Japanese eyes for supremacy. They would never accommodate any defiance, however accidental. We were not ready. However, such was our fear of the untold rules that we froze; not a man, not a limb, not a breath moved the air. We stood frozen, everyone in his spot, heads in all directions, backs straight and curved in weird forms; we stood where we were. It was painful for tired men to remain standing that way. But most painful was the sight of the young, dumb-faced guard with empty insensible eyes suddenly laughing at us, loudly and hilariously.

The horror of our present shame. The first shame, our shaved heads in Bandung, caused feelings of indignity and anger. But this, just here, just now, this was devastating because this shame was ours.

His laughter penetrated our bent backs, invaded our inflamed minds. This bowed and cowed submission blinded us; we had to close our eyes...plug our ears somehow.

But thank the Almighty, the laughter stopped. I looked at the Japanese boy — truly, he is a boy playing dress-up, enjoying the laughable submission of the proud white superiority of yesterday.

We now despise ourselves. We no longer know who we are. Indeed,

without our props, who are we? We are not trained soldiers, yet look how desperately we attempt military orderliness. Is it not pathetic and incongruous that we try to maintain our standards here? Brave prisoners die by their own hands, the Japanese love to tell us. And our experience teaches us that fearful prisoners die slowly, from the heart out.

July 5

We call our new home "Alva's camp" because we named our Japanese commandant after the Spanish general Alva who was sent by Phillip II in 1568 to fight the Dutch Protestant rebels resisting Spanish oppression. This he did with unrestrained and diabolical cruelty. (Do you still remember your Dutch history, *Rachel*?)

Our Alva's first big order is to the kitchen staff: the prisoners are to be served only the huge quantities of rice that has just recently been discovered in a bombed and ashen warehouse. Because of the rains and the broken roofs, the rice is damp and rotting — it smells like death.

"No," we tell the guards, "we cannot eat that."

They laugh. It is a punishment, they explain to us through the interpreter. This is the whip that will convince us finally that ours are the backs that suffer the blows, and theirs are the hands that hold the whips.

Despite the laughter and the constant smile on their faces, the Japanese are angry that we have not assumed our role of head-benders and solemn saluters. We are not disciplined cowards; we are not frightened or desperate enough. So the rice is here on a will-breaking mission.

In the end, most of us eat the rice — there is little choice. It will be depleted within a week. We have been assured that our punishment will last as long as the rice, not longer. What crime did we commit? It is all a pretext. The rice rotted because the Japanese had not protected it against rain. But it must be eaten by the POWs so there will be no reminder of the negligence. As soon as it is all eaten, our presumed crime will be forgiven. I have not been able to eat much because it is only partially threshed. I try to break the hard hulks away, but the decay I see and smell smacks a hard fist to my hunger.

July 10

I feel weak, but I salute every guard I glimpse because that is a lesson my mind repeats: I have seen too much pain. I have seen too much pain.

But yesterday, one of the guards wasn't satisfied with my salute.

"Salute!" he yelled at me.

I complied.

He pushed his bayonet sharply into my navel. He was smiling, frozen. I think he began to wonder where he would go from there. He stared as if he were waiting for me to show fear. My impulse was to look away because he was ugly, like evil that laughs, and because I wanted to avoid seeing the restless moving of his pupils, fearing the loss of the hoped-for fun.

I didn't move.

He glared at me. My eyes, fearless, looked back, attempting to bore into his.

Suddenly, he smiled like a person in the audience of a humorous play. I even thought he might shake my hand — he seemed that pleased. He pulled back the bayonet and left.

Not everyone is that lucky.

Today, in the central square, I watched two men stand in the fire of the sun and salute up and down to nobody, while a guard looked on.

One of them was a grey-haired lieutenant, a kind and civilized but absentminded and puzzled man. It broke my heart to observe him. The other, a young NCO, looked tired and frightened, and seemed to salute the sun — his head went up with his straight hand, which he pushed upward, to salute. When the movements slowed down from complete exhaustion, the guard produced a frightening yell, and his dazed, perspiration-bathed victims somehow accelerated their salutes.

When I arrived, I was told that this torture had already been going on for more than three quarters of an hour. And there on the veranda of the guardhouse, a guard lazily watched, a broad smile spread over his wide, flat face.

Where and when did these guards learn so much evil? What hybrid horror-species produced that smiling man on the porch?

I forget about the existence of an appreciable percentage of human beings — deviants — who are driven by destructive, sadistic passions. If only we could find ways to diagnose early, treat and remedy these potentially dangerous, anti-social members of society, then we might be able to prevent violence and war.

After ten minutes, the two men were dismissed. We ran to hold them up, to walk them. Nobody spoke, there was nothing to say. Their immediate needs — water and sleep — were provided.

Ironically, it was the persistent movement of the bare-headed men that must have saved their lives. The incessant motion drew enough torrents of perspiration to prevent sunstroke or the total burning of their skin.

The Japanese want to unman us: they derive immense pleasure in witnessing the robotization of human faculties. As with others in possession of unbridled power, they don't recognize it as a threat against themselves — a frightening turn ricocheting upon themselves.

August 10

Last week, I volunteered for outside duties. In this manner, I would "earn" extra nutrition by searching out tins of condensed milk in the dark corners of the bombed-out warehouse, where the Dutch had stored them.

We had to load two-gallon tins of paint onto the flat bottoms of a freighter train, loading under an extra hot sun that was emitting blinding white rays.

Our skins were taught from exposure to the fierce and steady sun, and our bodies ached from the constant swinging of cans from the ground up overhead. Yet despite my repeated admonishments that we POWs were expected to minimize the benefits of our work to the enemy, Pete Trom, the son of a Dutch fisherman, drove himself and his team to work without a moment of relaxation. (He had been dismissed by the government because of his Nazi sympathies.)

At the end of an hour, he was utterly exhausted. Together, he and the other members of our two teams sat down on top of piled-up tins for a one-minute break. At the moment Pete and I got up to start again, a guard emerged at the end of the rows of tins.

He was angry. He called Pete down, furiously yelling, "*gurrah gurrah!*" (hurry, hurry!)

Despite Pete's suntan, I could see his face was flushed a deep red by the verbal onslaught. I realized Pete was disappointed that he, who despised laziness on the job, should have been caught, red-handed, shirking.

His stiffening body apparently rebelled at whatever the guard wanted him to do. Still, he wisely decided to turn around and obey the order. His tempo of walking, however, was slow.

This provoked the guard into a further series of *gurrachs*. Something in Pete snapped. To the surprise of all onlookers, he started running toward the nervous guard.

Whatever Pete intended to do, he didn't consciously know, he told us later; but the guard did not hesitate to act. He accompanied a volley of *gurrahs* with vicious slaps on both sides of Pete's face.

Pete was not even given a second to react to the violent tactic. The guard swung his body (and his right arm in particular) backward. Then, after jumping in the air, his forth-swinging hand chopped full force onto Pete's head.

For a moment, I thought of extricating myself from this repulsive situation by mingling with other groups of workers. But somehow, this pitiful sight of a teammate unfairly selected for punishment kept me in my place.

The guard turned around and pointed first in my direction and then at Pete. By nodding, I confirmed his assumption that I was a teammate.

While the guard had been hitting Pete I decided that if the guard were to call on me, I would attempt neither to cringe nor bend my head or body under the impact of his onslaught.

Still, when my head experienced the devastating power of the first chopping onslaught, my good intentions evaporated. My straw hat fell down and so did my head; and to my utter dismay, I heard myself utter an audible "aaa-oooh."

A humanlike smile of satisfaction appeared on his animal-like face. Quite surprisingly (was it because of sheer despair?), when the second assault arrived, I managed to retain my upright posture and even to fix my eyes in a stare that looked straight into those cruel eyes.

His second chop was less devastating. Was this because he now enjoyed the satisfaction of my accepting, without protest, his calculated "hits," or was it because he felt somewhat embarrassed at facing seemingly fearless eyes? I do not know, but this cruel guard hesitated. When he moved backward again in preparation for a third assault, he hesitated again and surprisingly turned his head toward Pete. Although still visibly nervous, Pete did not cringe conspicuously this time.

Deciding Pete was a better victim, the guard hit him a sixth time with sadistic joy, then followed up with the seventh and final assault — a blow which arrived rather softly.

When the guard left us, Pete did not answer his friend's questions. He did not look in my direction.

At the time, I wondered if he expected to be told by *me* that he should not have exhausted himself.

That night, he went to sleep without supper.

Both of us suffered from a brain concussion. For a day or two, a step on an uneven surface hurt badly. It took another two days before I saw Pete performing light duties in the camp.

When I told him it wasn't fair that I had received a much lighter punishment for sitting down with him on those tins of paint, he became embarrassed (or offended?) and retorted that he did not "resent" me at all.

Though there was bitterness in his voice, he said, "Your parents are Jewish, but not fanatical believers in never ever shirking painful responsibilities ordained by Providence."

After a second or so of heavy silence, he continued, his eyes looking downward, his voice softer and slightly trembling, "I know you are the Old Testament — my father's love. I realize I actually hate myself for having hated my father so intensely. While that Japanese monster battered me inhumanly, my vision was hazy. Yet through the drops of perspiration, perhaps also tears, I did not see the guard. Instead, I saw my father, tall and angry, a leather whip in his hand, standing over me...yelling at me, 'Didn't I tell you, never, ever relax before you have completed your job.' "

I was aghast. How little I understood what was going on in the mind of this fisherman from Scheveningen. Now I believe I understand him, his silence, stubbornness, reservedness: he is an uprooted authoritarian personality who has never become part of the flexible, tropical society.

But I lack the courage to open up his faith-tested mind. I cannot comprehend how to substitute for the unquestioning discipline in which he has been brought up. His readiness to give up all expectations of receiving a heavenly or worldly reward for good conduct is not part of my faith.

It is not hard to upset and shake the religious values, rational or irrational, of a committed fellowman — even a disillusioned POW — but it is not easy to later help rebuild his faith.

Had Pete not said it himself? I would not be able to help him.

September 8

The Queen and the Dutch Anthem

We are tired of the tortures. Their complexity frightens us. We must do something to take our minds off Alva and what he is doing to us.

How it started, I do not know. But the rumor sent shock waves through the camp. On Queen Wilhelmina's sixty-second birthday, we would have an assembly without having obtained permission from Alva — and close with the singing of the Dutch anthem.

We realized this infraction of Alva's rule might set him off on another terror campaign.

With the rumor came a spreading determination to put the plan into action. It would be an act of rebellion against the horrors we had experienced in Alva's camp of terror.

Some of the POWs were worried that the guards would make life in this camp an even greater hell on earth. These men assured us, however, that while they would not attend, they would at least help by remaining inside the barracks, since totally empty barracks would certainly arouse the guards' suspicions.

We assembled in a quiet, treed corner of the camp where religious services were often held.

In my address, I spoke of a queen who had been lonely as a young girl because of her father's tragic illness. (*Rachel*, you always truly respected her.) The people, who loved their devout and principled queen, were sad about the loneliness she must have experienced later in her marriage to a German prince consort. It was true, nonetheless, that her only child Juliana, the vivacious, bike-riding crown princess, had brought a measure of life into the solemnity of the palace. But when the enemy invaded Holland, Queen Wilhelmina had dutifully refused to stay in her country as a captive queen. She had defied the murderous air attacks on London, sharing loneliness and isolation with her captive people both in Holland and here in Indonesia.

As I spoke, one of our worried men walked up to me from the door of his barrack and whispered that two guards were walking in our direction. Some men seated nearby shifted nervously.

But our chairman rose, ordering all to stay seated. He called out to the "worriers" who were viewing the ceremony from their huts to control their curiosity and return to the comfort and safety of their bamboo beds.

Meanwhile, the guards had come closer. The younger of the two appeared to be agitated, pointing excitedly at our assembly. When they appeared from behind the closest hut, the older man, a sergeant, stopped to listen.

Thinking fast, the chairman motioned with his hands, his eyes, and his head. The assembly rose. All bowed.

The guard saluted and made us sit down.

I continued to speak of the queen spending her day in prayer. If the guards did understand some Dutch, they would have to assume that I was talking religion. When I stopped speaking, the guards saluted, the assembly again rose and the guards left. There was an audible sigh of relief and the audience sat down.

We sang the anthem, and the barracks emptied out.

September 15

Finally, after six weeks of unspeakable monstrosities — just when we were about to abandon all hope — Alva left, too soon for him to respond to our religious service and the singing of the Dutch national anthem. It seems we are constantly being saved from our own pessimism just as it bends us down and down.

His replacement is a round, elderly gentleman major who appears concerned and seems always to have tears at the edges of his small, sad eyes.

November 26

Jew Roosevelt, Jew Churchill

The new commandant is full of amiability. We have nicknamed him *Opa* (grandfather in Dutch). His adjutant shares the same mellow disposition. So, Alva's hell has been replaced by Opa and his own sort of relative paradise.

Now, *Rachel*, we have much leisure. No more large work groups. No heavy work.

I understand that when the men have nothing to do, they have a great need of lectures, entertainment and especially of their chaplain.

In this relaxed atmosphere of restored human dignity — perhaps, in part, because of it — we have begun organizing our plans and preparations for *Chanukah*, the Festival of Light and Victory. For several days, Louis de Vries, a twenty-five-year-old escapee from Holland, has been carving — transforming — a piece of wood into a *menorah*, a clumsy but legitimate and somehow friendly-looking, eight-armed candelabra. Not content with this achievement, Louis has also carved a *Magen David* (a Star of David) which already hangs above his bed.

But this morning, our peace of mind was jolted. The lieutenant-adjutant, on inspection duty, saw the *Magen David* and exploded into black anger.

He knew the symbol. He shouted, "It is the sign of the *Jodaidjo*, the Jews....They wanted this war against Japan...those Jews...Jew Roosevelt, Jew Churchill!"

This officer had apparently listened to the broadcasts of German propaganda specials and swallowed those notorious lies. We were apprehensive; but after this frightening outburst, the lieutenant calmed and seemed to forget the subject of Jews.

This evening, the Dutch authorities in the camp announced a new rule instructing all Jews to remove Jewish symbols from visibility. The Dutch commandant is afraid that the adjutant's performance might be repeated and the Jewish prisoners harmed.

So is this the end of our *Chanukah*? Some of our boys are afraid. I must consider this. I have assumed responsibility to avoid risks. I am optimistic, I know.

I have asked Louis to bring the *imprisoned candelabra* to my barracks so that I can set it where it will not be seen by the Japanese except, perhaps, in that one half-hour when it is lit and shining. We will post some friends at the entrance to warn us of approaching guards.

This first interference with our religion reminds me of the whole meaning of *Chanukah*: the Hellenistic fight against us, against our monotheism and our ethics.

And then our victory...our victory over the hatred of many of our host nations past.

December 4

The first night of *Chanukah*. This evening had all of the festival's warmth and charm. Our celebration went so well that there is no reason to stop. We shall continue kindling the lights for as long as possible.

For us, tonight, the third blessing was especially significant:

*Blessed art Thou...
Who hath kept us alive
and sustained us
and permitted us
to reach this season.*

An honest, achingly grateful *Blessed-art-Thou*.

To still be alive. To exist now. To have *Chanukah* 5703 (1942) in a Japanese POW camp, here in Tjilatjap.

It is a remarkable thing.

The *menorah* stands on a table (my bedboard playing a useful role) inside our room to the right of the entrance, but noticeable — to fulfill the entire commandment. Our light was made from coconut oil — a *Chanukah* gift donated by our chief cook, a devout Protestant. The flame was small and the smoke looked blue. The *menorah* shone in its own light.

We have publicized the miracle of continuity. And our own present miracle.

Ten Jewish boys came. We sang the majestic song *Maoz Tsur* (Rock of Ages). Slowly, the room filled. Other friends came, stood and stared into the tiny flame as if all truth and explanation were there. They asked questions about the holiday, about Jews.

"You have a lot at stake in this war, haven't you?" someone asked, an abruptness in his voice.

I looked at him. "Don't *you*?" I asked.

He thought for a long while before answering. When he did, his voice was low and soft. "We all do," he said, then buried his face in his hands, turned and left the *menorah*.

December 11

As the number of candles that we light grows, so does the number of Jewish boys who come to observe them. We each get a part of the fire caught in us.

Tonight was the last night of *Chanukah*. Almost everyone was here. Even the Japanese guards came. They watched silently as all eight lights were lit.

The hand-carved *menorah* looked fine and strong and proud. It was at its best and it seemed almost to be listening approvingly while I finished telling the story of the *Maccabean* rebellion, which I had begun on the very first night.

Celebrating *Chanukah* was a fine challenge; and we were able to meet it successfully. A good part of a bad whole. But what of next year? Will we still be able to repeat the third blessing, *Shehecheyanu* (Who hath kept us alive)?

December 24

For a number of weeks, we have been working, planting peanuts on a large plot of land near the camp grounds.

This is Opa's special project. He assured us that if we work diligently, we will be able to eat the fruit of our labor — peanuts, which will help restore our health.

We have no reason to disbelieve his promise. Still, we take no risks. We are in desperate need of anything that will help rejuvenate us. Therefore, for each peanut we put into the earth, we eat one.

Many of us wonder whether this pleasant "Opa camp" is meant to last until the end of the war. The answer lies in a rumor that started to circulate yesterday: We are going to leave Tjilatjap soon.

Opa told us today that we are to be moved to Thailand where our services are needed — just for a few months — to help finish the railway that will connect Bangkok in Thailand with Rangoon in Burma. This project, which the British had "spoken" of often in the past, has been taken over by the engineers of the Japanese Imperial Army.

"It is a great undertaking that will help to unite the people of Burma, Thailand, Malaya and all of Indochina," he said.

It will give the Japanese a better network for shipping troops and supplies! He did not say this, of course.

December 27
Jakarta

We left Tjilatjap and were taken via Bandung to the Tenth Battalion Camp in Jakarta, on Java's northern shore. Opa had sent us off with good wishes and plenty of food. Our train made only a few short stops. No more waiting for trains that have war-connected priorities.

Has the war retreated from this area? Or has our status as prisoners of war been redefined?

It doesn't take long for us to understand why we are being fattened up. In this transit camp, thousands of POWs wait nervously for boats to take them to work for the Japanese.

Destination? Rumors mention Rangoon, Singapore, Bangkok, Saigon, Timor, Formosa (Taiwan) and Japan. (Opa told us in Tjilatjap that our destination was Singapore.) Dates of departure for the various groups are constantly being announced and changed all the time. We understand that many of these boats, especially those in the Java and Singapore-Sumatra seas, were torpedoed.

Until we get our sailing order we sit in this camp, which is dirty and disorganized. It consists of nothing but huts filled with POWs. Still, there are no work duties for the transit people, food is plentiful, and we are permitted to send notes and messages to relatives and friends in the city. Therefore, we, like the POWs who have been here for weeks, pray that the arrival of boats that will take us away from Java will continue to be postponed until the day of liberation.

We have been here now for three days. Every day, one discovers friends who provide information about conditions in other camps and the well-being of friends and relatives.

With no camp duties to keep us occupied, we turn to games. The boys in our small houses play bridge all day and through part of the night. It is almost like home again where friends and neighbors gather for an evening of cards and gambling.

Hans Hollaender, the proud businessman from Berlin and recently, Arnhem, plays here only occasionally. He is not swallowed up by the game.

Moses Grunwald, the salesman, does not even have the patience to sit there kibitzing. His head is constantly busy, searching for ways to make money.

Yits Lisser, however, is completely absorbed by cards. I asked Yits if the constant playing has begun to bore him. He said that the war is limbo time for him; he cannot consider it real life. What fulfills and satisfies him now would only hinder and annoy him if he were trying to live constructively under more normal circumstances. I imagine it is a welcome outlet for him — the intense use of brain energy. It seems, at times, to almost eliminate body awareness and emotional suffering.

"It may sound surprising," he admitted, "but I play cards to fill an intellectual need!"

I gasped.

Yits grew up in Amsterdam in a traditional family of diamond cutters. He is a kind and gentle man; there is both intelligence and sadness in his eyes...almost searchlights. He has not had much luck. To begin with, Yits left high school during the years of the world economic crisis in the early thirties when there was no work for diamond cutters. He fell in love with a lively healthy girl with apple-round cheeks. He wanted so much to marry her that he decided to give up his old love, Amsterdam, for his new love. He went to Java alone to investigate a livelihood, began a jewelry business, then sent to Amsterdam for the girl he would marry.

He once told me, "I am still lonely for my old home...there was some honest, heavenward religion there. But a man must follow his responsibilities where they lead him. Isn't that right, Rabbi?"

The small Jewish congregation in Batavia in which he served as cantor helped him rent a guest house, which both Yits and his wife managed. The hotel flourished. Its rooms were constantly occupied. In just a few years, he would be able to pay off his loans. Except, the war broke out.

When Rachel and the children and I had arrived in Jarkata, Java, we lived in his guest house for the first month and enjoyed the friendly, loving atmosphere that permeated the Lisser Hotel. It was then that I discovered Yits' burning soul, his devoutness. When he sang the Friday evening prayer, I sensed his whole being enwrapped in holiness. He almost fell forward, pushing himself into his prayers.

After the service, Yits told me, very matter-of-factly, that when he prays, his Creator hears him. I must have looked somewhat surprised that Yits would believe this.

"You don't believe that?" he asked me, shocked, as if his mind had been pulled tight and forward and then snapped back.

"It is a great thing. The person who feels that the Creator always hears him and heeds him is fortunate," I responded.

That evening, Yits came to me, unhappy, the spirit of our earlier conversation dissipated.

"Rabbi," he said, "perhaps I am wrong about the Almighty hearing me."

I was devastated. Had I caused doubts? How could I have wounded the cantor so deeply?

There is a story of an orphan boy who has only a prayer book left to remind him that he was born of a Jewish woman. But he had never learned to read the strange words. The first time he carries the book into a synagogue, he is overwhelmed by his ignorance, ashamed, frustrated.

He lifts the book high over his head, crying: "All the words in this book, I give to You, the Almighty."

This prayer, Chassidim tell us, was accepted above.

I assured him that our Creator is indeed close to those who cry to Him.

Yits wants to have this communication with his Creator and burns for a chance to sing; instead, he will have to work for the Japanese war effort.

"Prayer creates faith," he said.

This is true.

1943

1943

Exit From Java

*January 12, 1943
Jakarta (Batavia)*

In two days, we may leave Jakarta for Singapore and from there, go to Thailand.

One of our cooks was killed by a Japanese guard. Violently, unreasonably. The cook, a large, friendly, hard-working, frightened middle-aged man had been walking from the kitchen to his quarters in the still dark hours of early morning when he passed a short, square guard walking up and down outside the fence, bored.

We all know this guard and avoid him in the dark — he likes to play certain power games with our soldiers, like the guard at Alva's camp who wasn't satisfied with my salute. He jabs and sometimes he hurts. Yesterday, he murdered.

He plunged his bayonet through our cook's stomach. Several times, several ways. The cook died an hour later in the camp hospital.

We asked about it, all day, all night, on-record, off-record — no report was made. One of the Japanese, his oriental eyes down, his voice low and angry, said the cook resisted the guard. Another said the cook died of an illness in his stomach. *Foreign matter. Steel and purposelessness.* There will be no further mention of or public mourning for the cook, in this place.

Do they ever intend to kill? Or are they men — boys — who crave the crucial apprehension of self? Power?

The cook was a victim of war and its confusions.

January 14

Some of the men are experiencing waves of acute fear and they have never been so uncomfortable as they are when the feeling washes over them. Fear of death, many call it. They are clutched by it.

Each one of us knows that when we step on the boat for our next trip, we may not return. Each one of us must cast aside the fear and prepare for this eventuality.

Many of us write letters home.

I think some of us demand courage from ourselves, a deliberate turning away from fear, in order to survive.

It seems I was born rather unafraid.

I remember one cold day in Holland's beautiful Scheveningen when I was five years old and had just started my formal education (which was sufficient enough trauma for such a prodigiously accomplished freedom-explorer), the older boys told me to come to the classroom of our small Cheder (school) early the next morning to fill the stove with snow. Thus, the classroom would be warm when lessons began, the floor close to the stove wet, and the air full of vapor.

And so there I was early the next morning, marching from the yard to the stove, back and forth, back and forth, carrying awfully small loads of freezing cold snow. I can still feel the sting in my hands now, with memory. Then, some time after the lesson had started, my self-appointed leaders put pieces of sackcloth into the fire, which burned with an awful smoke and smell.

They blamed the nasty trick on the little fellow who filled the stove early that morning. I never denied it.

This poses the question, To what extent does one's upbringing influence how he behaves in a prisoner-of-war camp?

Last night, there was a storm in my mind. I could not lie still. Thoughts, words, pictures were striking each other. Death, pain, tragedy — conceptual phantoms — were dancing frantic circles around me. I saw them everywhere. I couldn't see past them. I was sucked into a vacuum of fear. I reflected on death...but not my own. It was part of the composite whirl — mortality, pain, infinity. My terror, the panic in my mind, the constraining hopelessness, lasted an hour.

Then I went to sleep in the room I share with two other people. Strangely enough, I slept well, without dreams, and I woke this morning vaguely disturbed, but otherwise fine.

The dive into the very abyss of fear had apparently immunized me against panic. I feel that all my potential fears have been moved by last night's torments into a corner of my mind, leaving adequate space for courage and growth to breathe. I have been granted a degree of catharsis.

I feel free to write the all-important letter to Rachel.

January 15, 1943

Dear Rachel,

The boat will leave tomorrow...and I with it. I am thinking in circles, in parallel lines that will never meet. What will you do if I don't return?

I am full of hope. I tell you with faith that I will survive and come home to you. But if not, what then? You have told me time and again that once married is quite enough. Stop smiling now, Rachel, it is time to be serious.

I ask you in this time of impermanence and dread to listen to me carefully and clearly. If I die, my soul will not rest — I will have no peace — if you do not remarry. It is an appeal, Rachel. Please. As soon as possible. If I die. And if he makes you happy, he will be a good husband and a good father.

Our old friend Alex Goodrid, a successful businessman, has procured a neutral citizenship that protects him everywhere he goes, and leaves him immune to Japanese and German tempers. He is still able to do business openly in Batavia. I have asked him to lend me, you actually, three hundred guilders. I had to do that because of my stupid decision to return my last pay checks, government monies, to the school in Batavia. I had earned it honestly before the invasion. I wonder now why the principal accepted my check. (By the way, the school closed down.) That was your money.

I reassure myself, though, that you are still in your home in Bandung and not completely without funds, potential funds anyway. I think we were wise to sell our cash at the start of the war for gold pieces. You can resell the gold with precious forethought once Mr. Goodrid's loan is depleted. I have paid someone to take a note to him to deliver this letter and the loan to you.

I do not assume that the Japanese here in Batavia will retain a list of prisoner-passengers embarking on the ship to Singapore until the end of the war. If this is so, and if the boat is bombed and I die, who will ever know? How will it ever be confirmed?

If I am not officially declared dead, you will be an Agunah, unable to remarry. Such loneliness chaining and choking you. I could not bear it. I have enclosed a signed note to you and one to Goodrid in my letter to him, stating that if twelve months after the war has ended, I have not been discovered—heard of or seen—then I should be considered quite dead.

I declare, I promise...it is an oath really: If I do survive all of this, I will not wait a day after liberation to make contact somewhere, to prove my existence, to find you.

I realize that rabbis can use this information only as circumstantial evidence. I could suffer amnesia or insanity, technically be alive, and still be your husband. But Rachel, you could submit this small document as an

additional bit of evidence, combined with other "proofs," to free yourself.

This letter is important; please do not destroy or misplace it. Keep it as a record, remember it exists, but do not concentrate on what it tells you. Concentrate on what I tell you now: I love you, Rachel.

Shelach Lanetsach, yours forever, in uninterrupted love,

Chaim

January 16

Tandjongpriok, port of Jakarta

I write this standing at the quay.

We are anxious because we know we will travel in the hold of a Japanese freighter. We have heard, of course, that the British are bombing these boats — and from where we will be, escape will be impossible.

I sold some of my things today for extra food. My bags are full. We were brought here by transport, so I am not tired because of a march but from the wait...it seems interminable. I breathe in the sea air deeply and swallow it with pleasure, but it is absentminded glory; beauty is not a viable distraction from war. I don't know why — two unrelated ends of reality perhaps.

The boat, a Japanese freighter, has docked. Birds fly to it and sit lazily on its steel. The sun is aggressive. I wish it would leave...it is overbearing.

We have stood for hours. My legs are numb, and I just heard that it will be another hour before the ladders are lowered and we are allowed onto the boat.

The ladders are down. The line ahead of me is moving slowly forward.

We are on board. We all know what we are doing here. We are slaves of the Japanese, being shipped to some work site.

January 20

Singapore Island

The three-day boat trip was difficult but not excruciating. It covered approximately one thousand miles, part of which is the sea-lane between the islands of Sumatra and Malaya. Despite the strength of the Japanese in this part of the world, this rather narrow sea passage is not quite safe.

The bottom of the freighter was dark, but there was light on the stairs, or

reflected there from above, so our eyes adjusted. Worse, much worse than the dark, though, was the heat. It was thick and relentless; there was no breeze. I felt sticky and swollen. My clothes irritated me, my eyes stung, my mouth was dry and stretched to occupy more than its normal space. I felt that anything that touched me would hurt.

We sat back to back, but it wasn't really contact, since there was no awareness of separate entities meeting — we melted into each other. Sometimes legs that had been bent and drawn up were stretched, and there were shouts of anger, groans, whispered anguish as the legs met a body that craved isolation above all else.

There was one redeeming factor, however: We had to go upstairs onto the deck to use the "public" washrooms. There were only two stalls, and sometimes ten minutes passed before one was available. Those minutes were filled, bursting, with air and vast sky and the soft blue movements of water — and the smell of it all! I breathed in so deeply, my eyes closed, that I thought I would be turned inside out or be consumed by the air with which I was trying to fill myself.

We planned this spare pleasure with quiet determination; everyone had his tiny holidays well spaced, so there would be no suspicions. There is a mighty physical need, a choking search for air: to observe the continuance of peace and routine, to watch sea birds move with a total unawareness of war in the world.

Up and down the stairs, in turns, we went. Accidental kicks and curses in the dark. The smell of sweat and tears. Apologies.

On the first day of our trip, we heard planes, and there was immediate silence, tension, from the deep hollow in the bottom of the boat.

Whose planes? we wondered. Theirs? Ours?

Their aircraft would laugh and wave and declare to our wardens, *Look, the sea and the sky are ours today; congratulate yourselves.*

Finally, we realized that the planes were Japanese when there was no commotion above our heads, no desperate feet running toward the artillery.

Each time we heard planes, we also heard soft laughter and knew that the Japanese wanted us to wonder, to be unsure, to be frightened.

We docked.

Singapore is more alive than Tandjongpriok in Jakarta. There are scattered old boats, rusty and dark; and the workers, slow-moving Malaysians, Indians and Chinese, stare curiously at us newcomers.



Letter Lane . Salisbury plain . June 1900 . Ernesto Steude .

Railroad of Death

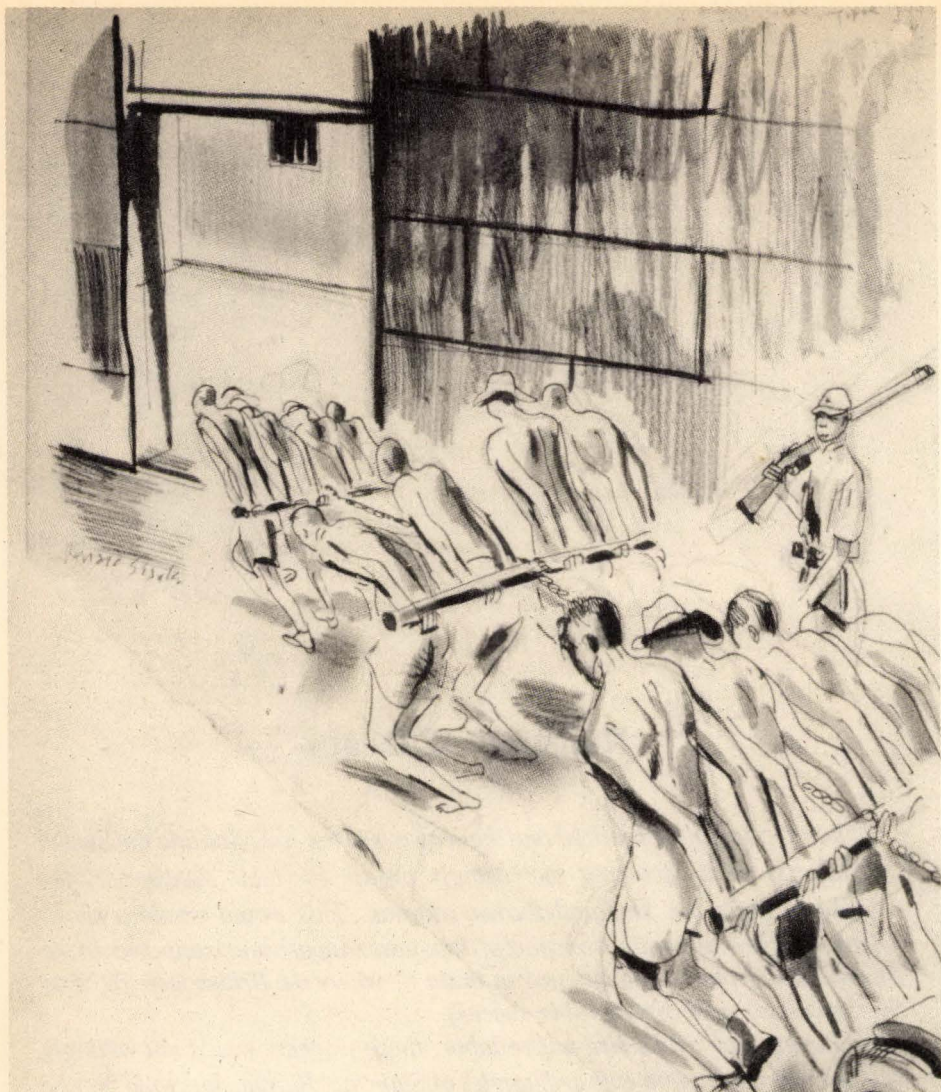
When the Japanese realized that the seaways in the Java Sea and the Straits of Malacca were becoming increasingly unsafe for their transports, they decided to build the Thailand-Burma railroad. This would create a short, relatively safe road for the transport of Japanese supplies and manpower to the Burma battlefield — the gateway to India — where the British were fighting the Japanese, with considerable success.

Although they could hire native labor, these workers would not willingly venture into the cholera-infested jungles of Siam and Burma, nor could they be relied upon to work hard. By using force, the Japanese finally succeeded in recruiting more than one hundred thousand native laborers.

Their solution: the British and Dutch POWs would be far more efficient workers than the Tamils. Once the decision was made, the Japanese saw nothing inhuman about exposing more than fifty thousand POWs to build a railroad that would harm the POWs' home armies.

With the decision came a determination: If the efficient POWs were pushed ruthlessly, the railroad could be made ahead of schedule.

We POWs — those of us who survive — would learn the rationale behind the schedule re-evaluation. We would discover to what extent our captors would go to force us to build their road of destruction.



Light Duties for sick men, Changi Gaol, July 1944 by Ronald Searle

To Changi

January 24

The part of Singapore we pass through is filled with low-profiled buildings on store-aligned streets. A sense of constraint and a slow tempo seem to dominate this hot and humid city that, before the war, hummed with activity. Now late-afternoon, Singapore is a war-scar, suffering from the partial paralysis of most occupied cities. Nothing, but nothing, would prove to me that this Asian metropolis breathes freely and is filled with the joy of its liberation from the claws of a white colonial empire. It is ironic that the well-paved roads and the perfectly green, straight trees belie the recent war on this island.

Our trucks sped us to Changi. I stood so that the breeze cooled my face, tossing my hair wildly. Our lives are so closely segmented: I marvelled at the contrast between the past few days of unbearable heat in an old boat's womb and this joy-ride in a freedom breeze which smelled of the peace of non-scarred nature.

Ahead of us to the right, I saw a modern complex of buildings, the Changi Gaol.

When we arrived at Changi POW camp, I felt that, after Batavia's crowded camp, Changi smiled at us. A young country, widely scattered, solid buildings, and British POWs who smiled at everything, even at tedium.

There were no Japanese there to greet us. Two British officers, with pips on their uniforms, received us formally, coolly, and off we went to our quarters for a small ration of rice and a hot cup of tea.

We lay down on iron beds with wire mattresses (or wooden boards) in large wards, each containing more than twenty beds. We slept well that night, unaware of bedbugs, and aided by the pleasant, cool breeze that drifted in

through large, open spaces in the walls.

In the morning, I looked out the window. Our camp has soft, sloping, bright green hills that remind me of gentleness and youth. The large buildings, built by the British before the war, are modern military barracks, different from the low-ceilinged row houses in the Java camps.

Do we always build our own prisons? The British did anyway, royally. They are sturdy and strong, made of concrete block and stone. Inside, they are antiseptic and steel. Except for the iron beds, there is no furniture. Just the wide gaping spaces where the walls were left open to send in sweet breezes on hot angry days and the rhythm of whistling breezes at night.

Rachel, the British, to my mind, are a surprising lot. I begin to wonder if I am actually interned by the enemy here or just living under British army control — they are the government in this place. It appears that the Japanese were accepted as mastheads and then banished. I rarely see Japanese guards anywhere in this camp.

When I inquire of a long-time resident, I learn of the fierce battle of wills in Changi in the first months after the capitulation. This was a struggle between captors and captives for ultimate authority.

The British asserted their rights as prisoners of war by refusing to sign a statement that would forbid them to make escape attempts.

Those were difficult days; the Japanese crowded more than ten thousand men into quarters — like into too-small shoes. The POWs were kept hungry and thirsty and denied medical facilities for the ill. The Japanese warned them of epidemics, but still the British would not give in.

For their part, the Japanese correctly stated that they had not really signed the Geneva Convention. But they were deeply impressed by the determination and fearlessness of an enemy whom they had learned to think of as soft fighters. Still, they would not allow themselves to capitulate to a vanquished enemy even if it meant the death of thousands of POWs in those suffocating conditions.

Finally, the British accepted that the Japanese would not be moved by suffering. When the conditions became unbearable and life-threatening, they capitulated and gave up Geneva Convention POW privileges.

Their stand, however, had won them the respect of the Japanese, who put them in almost complete command of Changi Camp.

A moral victory.

We can breathe even within borders and limitations.

Yits Lisser is bored. We have been here three days, and he has not yet been out to see people or to discover things. Maybe it is because of the lack of food.

out to see people or to discover things. Maybe it is because of the lack of food. He certainly suffers from hunger.

Since we left Jakarta, food has been poor and scarce. The news he picked up from the people in our ward regarding food in this camp is not good. This island looks so green, but like neighboring Malaya to the north, it has to import staple foods.

Yits stood up, left his uncomfortable bed and said, "As it looks, we will have plenty of time on our hands here."

Then he brought a point up that he has mentioned a few times in the past six months: he is angry and desperate about his lack of deeper *Torah* knowledge.

"It is so late for me," he said. "The most I can hope for is substance, *Torah* essence, in an abridged version."

He seems to feel that the Jewishness in his world has been watered down badly and given to him to drink.

"I am not even a real soldier," I heard him mutter to himself.

He is uncomfortable and temperamental now from hunger. It seems to be the one struggle he cannot abide, or overcome. Why? Why is food so important to him? Food and prayer are equal passions — how is that?

"The physical exists," he tells me. "I will not apologize, even to you, for the Creator's decisions. Man is a body on earth *and* a skypiece of the Creator."

Which is exactly the difficulty, of course, when Yits Lisser aches to feed every part of himself to fullness. He believes it is his duty to maintain his body as the Creator wanted it to be.

January 26, 1943

Too much tension this last week. I am bothered by insecurity and a sense of unreality. Somehow our group has lost cohesion, or rather, a common space to breathe in. I do not see the proud, Berlin-born Hans and I feel I am losing Yits. There are several Jewish boys in this camp, of course. There must be an opportunity to organize services and Jewish community life. Why have I sat here now for days without making contacts?

I went out sightseeing. When I passed a low-ceilinged building named the Palladium, I paused to read the few bulletin boards on the wall. I started to read and then stopped, caught in the middle of a sentence. Is it

believable...news for POWs of the Jewish faith? Regular services on Saturday mornings for Jewish POWs?

"Are you interested in Sabbath services?" a passer-by saw me engrossed in reading the news items.

I nodded my excitement.

"They're organized by Sgt. Victor Blashki, an Australian NCO," he explained to me.

He is Alf Levy, a London boy, who has a young pleasant face and a warm voice. He finds Blashki to be a distinguished, intelligent, friendly man, somewhat British in style.

Alf took me to Blashki, who had just finished his lunch. He was excited. A rabbi entering Changi's Jewish community! I told him about Lisser, who served as cantor at the Friday evening services in Jakarta for many years. I told him that Yits prays with much fervor and I added, smiling, he believes the Almighty hears his prayers. Both Blashki and Alf were impressed.

"A rabbi and a cantor! This makes Changi Palladium (an entertainment center) an honest *shul* (synagogue), maybe the only genuine POW congregation in the world," exclaimed Blashki, with a full smile.

I went to find Yits. He had gone out for the first time since his arrival. I sat down on my bed, excited for the sake of the boys, for Lisser, and for myself.

I planned it all out. We will increase the number of services and organize lectures, courses and parties. I do not speak English too well yet, but this should not cause serious difficulties. And now, Yits will grow in stature here as a cantor, leading the services in the Western European traditional style, which should please the ears of the British and Australian boys.

When he arrived, I rushed Yits off to the Palladium where, in a loud voice, he read the announcement again and again. People turned their heads, smiling at this excited, small, round-bodied man who moves his glasses up and down his nose.

Let people smile, as long as the faith in his heart and mind remains whole.

January 28

The British do not want trouble: small thefts (common in POW camps), fighting, public displays of temper — none of these are allowed here. Were the Japanese to perceive any sign of disorder or lack of discipline, they would

immediately involve themselves in the details of camp management. The Japanese occupation officers realize, of course, that in view of the size of the camp population and the vastness of the camp area, it is to their benefit to let the British relieve them of a burdensome task.

February 5

Changi Camp is indeed large. It would take a one-hour walk just to tour all its units and installations. The camp is divided into a number of areas. To visit each area, especially the hospital complex, one must present a pass to the guard on the access road. In order to visit other camp areas at any time, I have obtained a permanent pass from our main camp office.

Because of the efficient British POW administration, I was able to obtain information regarding the Jewish hospital patients of all nationalities, as well as the Dutch non-Jewish patients from the Bandung and Tjilatjap camps.

Visiting the sick has become a time-consuming job. The number of cases has grown since I started and includes many temporary patients who have not been admitted to the hospital.

The work also proves to be extremely tiring. I have to walk daily for hours on a limited ration of food.

Walking means going up one hill and down another. It appears to me Providential that at the most unexpected moments, there emerge boys of the transport group who joyously offer me a ride. Those rides wipe out tiredness and doubts for the entire day.

February 7

Yits was excellent, his prayers insistent, his voice clearer and more beautiful than ever before.

"Your Creator heard you," I told him softly, praising his *kavana* (devotion).

"You are even more inside your worship. You are actually *it*."

February 8

His role as cantor doesn't appear to offer Yits full relief. He has lost too much weight. He doesn't look thin, he looks "semi." The hunger has grown into an unavoidable enemy.

"As if I am always looking for something," he said, but he wouldn't even take some of my lunch.

"There is a perpetual longing."

He is starving, I think, for a sweet, pleasant experience.

"It seems I am under water," he suggested today. "I feel that I must exhale finally, but the air inside me is blocked by water, and water rushes in to choke me — when all I need is air for mine to mix with."

I have generally been able to hold my breath for an adequately long enough time when necessary; but you Yits, hold on, Lisser.

I repeat my question, what is there in Yits' background that provokes this physical, mental and spiritual hunger?

February 10

The Japanese ran behind schedule and need more workers. Now they constantly ask for increasing numbers of POWs to be transported to Thailand as soon as trains become available. Yits tells me he has asked the officer in charge of the Dutch POW transports to be taken off the list of those scheduled to depart with the next transport to Thailand, even though our food rations are despairingly insufficient. He says that because he has no duties and much leisure time, he is able to visit his friends regularly, both the healthy and the sick. (After the initial days of loneliness in Changi, he has made new acquaintances daily.)

In addition, he is overjoyed with his frequent opportunities to sing the Sabbath services in the Palladium.

"The British and the Australians are warm," he told me. "They are different from those well-to-do Jakarta colonial Jews."

Indeed, the men here, POWs who come from active Jewish communities, respond warmly to his prayers.

Still, I am bothered by his ever-present hunger.

February 12

Yits informed me I can't leave for Thailand right now. He claims he needs me here in Changi to support his shaky self-confidence. He will definitely not stay behind alone. But he should, I tell him. He is satisfied here, and so are our Jewish boys. A few of our British members came to ask me to stay.

The truth is that I had already decided to stay with Yits. I told them that provided I am not ordered to leave now, I will not volunteer to leave. Those who do go ask for my services.

Here I am, miles and minds away from peace, with a fine group of Jews in need of a rabbi.

Only five Jewish Dutch POWs left for Thailand. I went to see them off. Although recent news from Thailand tells of plenty of food, freedom and camps that are not even fenced around, these boys want to be blessed before leaving.

I chose the blessing spoken by the *Kohanim* (priests) that promises Divine proximity, grace and peace: "*Yevarechacha Hashem...*"

I read the priests' blessing in Hebrew, then translated for those who had not studied the language.

These men are promised a return to Changi at the end of six months, yet they may not be looking forward to being returned to this free, well-ordered...ill-fed camp.

Izzi, a healthy-looking active young man from London, asked for a personal blessing. He wanted to ensure that he would survive "Choleraland."

February 16

I was told that Moses Grunwald, a Dutch salesman, came to Java with Reverend Elburg's group to escape the London blitz. When I met him in Changi, I was weak and unwell. I lay on my iron bed all day and all night. He came to our block, buying and selling miscellaneous articles. I had bought a good quantity of thin paper. He saw it and asked if he could purchase some from me. He would cut the sheets up and sell them as cigarette paper (most boys rolled their tobacco in pieces of newspaper).

"How do you know I don't smoke?" I asked him.

He smiled, and I liked his easy-going manner. "Do you?" he said, more as a statement than a question.

"No."

"In this time, in this place, comforts are all back home. The men who smoke treasure their paper and their tobacco because, as they tell me, smoking

is their last reminder of happiness. They actually claim that the smoke, if swallowed, makes them forget their hunger for many hours.

"The paper is so visible...a temptation. What do you do with it?" he asked me.

"I'm sorry, it was insensitive of me, I wasn't aware...I had hoped to use it as writing paper, but I see it is too soft," I admitted. "I cannot make meaningful notes on it and I'm not going into the cigarette-paper selling business."

I offered to sell it to him at the price I had paid. (For a moment, I sensed a breath of unfairness. I ought to have given it to him free of charge.)

He shook my hand joyously.

"My name is Moses Grunwald. Call me Mose, Rabbi. I am so very glad to meet an honest and decent fellow in this great pirates' den." He laughed, shaking my hand over and over again. "Might we be friends, do you think?"

Mose, a bachelor, is close to forty. He is tall and his long back bends forward at the neck, but his head is always straight and high. His nose is sloped and thin, his eyes open and guileless. He is well-liked. He would not make a good fighter, since peace is the lesson he has learned best.

Mose returned and sat on my bed to tell me a bit of his personal history. He said he must clear up some confusion. He was never in England. After the invasion, he crossed the Dutch-German border and went to Turkey where the British would not give him a visa to Palestine. In desperation, he thumped desk tops in the British Embassy — insisting that, as a Jew, he be allowed to go to the Jewish homeland. Finally, a desperate ambassador told him a state secret: The Germans might enter Palestine.

"The Dutch ambassador expedited my move to Java, beautifully timed to open the gates of a Japanese POW camp for me," he told me while we waited for food in Changi. His grin spread over the width of his bright face.

February 20

Rachel,

This is a peculiar state to be in. We are Japanese slaves at the behest of our Dutch commander who must put us on a list when the Japanese call for workers. Generally, this only happens when we volunteer for the trip. Until that happens or when it happens, there are no duties, and we wait for food three times a day, lie down, and talk to lazy neighbors, lazy officers. This

inactive life is corrupting.

There are men here who don't want to read. They are not accustomed to sharing a social life with their minds and they are actually growing ill from hopelessness. They are too sick to play cards, but not sick enough to be granted bed space in the hospital. They focus on nothing, and no one focuses on them. Not too slowly, they deteriorate.

In prewar society, our esteem had been indulged. I sense that the struggle between past ego and present non-ego is harder on pride than on muscle. Of course, the wound spreads as it does now, and it is the body catching disease from the ego. At this point in the chain reaction, self-induced.

I saw Hollaender in the "A" block before he saw me. He had been my roommate in Jakarta in 1942. He was lying straight, not moving (as if he were hiding and didn't want to be caught), staring at nothing I could see. He brings up the food he swallows and feels sick all the time. He must have lost half his being somewhere between then and now. He is a collection of inanimate parts now — a body, a head, eyes, ears.

It broke my heart. I couldn't find *him* anywhere, except perhaps in his red hair.

He looked at me when I said hello, then shut his eyes, his face down while I stood there and spoke. Sometimes he replied. His words were equivalent to a goodbye.

He is exhausted from a year of trying...to live without the material conveniences of a successful businessman, to feel self-assuredness with so much close-to-paranoid fear, to retain his combination of disdain and passion for life, with all the wrong props. He found no support for his act and therefore has apparently decided to close it.

"Nuss, there's no reason to stay here," he told me, "I'm disappearing. And what's the loss?" I sensed reproach.

Hans aches to die now.

I must understand this new despair of his. I must help him.

February 21

Hollaender was born in Berlin. His family, Jewish business people, were members of the "aristocracy." That much he had told me last year before the invasion of Java. I strongly suspected that there was a much larger component of the ordinary in his background and that his life had been based on a desire

to exploit his tenuous link with the aristocracy.

Peering across a wide window on the gloom of a low-roofed hut, I had said, "When one buys furniture, a certain kind is preferred; size matters, for example, and color. But if the construction is haphazard, if the material is synthetic, if it is hollow, it will not survive. Appearance deceives, but it does not survive."

I looked at his face, but there was no sign that he understood the level at which I was speaking. I pressed on.

"Only substance survives. This is true of people too, Hans."

Again I stopped, hoping that the frail body lying on the cot would respond. But Hans was motionless. Giving it one more try, I added, "Still, appearances can be worked on with considerable effort. The shell may be secured so as to become substantial...to contain substance...and then the emptiness is buried; it grows in the dark, but it is ignored — there is no awareness of it. The appearance has attached depth to itself."

This is basically what I had told him last year when what I said didn't seem so important to men living in a non-occupied Java. The Hans then was the Hans who *wanted* to live. Now he was giving up. It was most important that he come to grips with his roots so that he could learn how to survive.

Maybe I had reached him, because suddenly Hans was no longer motionless. First, it started in his face. Each muscle seemed to be engaged in a battle with his thinking. His forehead was creased with thin lines that somehow reached down his emaciated face. His eyes then narrowed into slits. His nostrils showed signs of deep breathing. His mouth was suddenly forced into a grimace.

When he spoke it was with an explosive force more powerful than the silence that had existed in the space between us.

"That is me!"

With that statement out of the way, his face and body relaxed. The old swagger took form. "You are being Rabbinic and ethical, aren't you?" he whispered at me.

He breathed deeply, slowly got up, stood straight, made a mocking bow and left the room with an easy kind of elegance.

The next day, it was a different Hans who spoke with me. As he eagerly pulled out photographs that he had hidden, he appeared more alive; for a moment or two, he even laughed as he told me the story of his life.

His wife had been an office girl in his factory, he said, and he held up a photograph of a round-faced, blonde girl who wore a gentle expression on her face. She was a German Protestant, he added, the vehicle, the advertisement

for his status, the knife he used to cut the last cord attaching him to any part of a past that he had disowned. He said he loved his wife deeply, which was a rare statement for him to make. He rarely said he loved anyone deeply.

Listening to him unfold the reasons why he had attempted to break with his origins and build a life on a flimsy connection with the aristocracy, I could see that he was not faithful to any conventionally accepted norms; he was faithful to his pursuits, perhaps, but that wasn't faith. The way he explained it, these pursuits were his life. That they gave him only transient satisfaction seemed fine for Hollaender. Before his status of a POW, despite his innate restlessness, he appeared rather happy with the life he had built. He was a pragmatist. Did he not have all he wanted? He might have been able to live with his dream world until his death except...for the war.

Even into the first months of the war on Java, he continued to have his women and to drink himself into surrealistic nightmares, because he believed that nothing was lasting. The dreams would walk offstage, refusing to play with so much rude and violent interruption. In those early months when the war was building up, his three children came to visit, and he smiled at them with surprising sincerity; but by then the youngest one looked at him as if he did not trust his smile. Hans had obviously been aware of all this long before the Japanese plunged him into a prisoner-of-war camp.

Surprisingly, once he had finished telling me all this, it was obvious that Hans was a changed man — even his voice had taken on a new shape with a different color.

Is he still a victim of his past even as he languishes here as a prisoner of war? I wonder.

How is one to understand necessity? It makes us bleed. It feeds us.

"I will see you tomorrow, Hans. Please believe me that you are not critically ill. Don't dare die tonight. We must speak. Explore. Discover. I have hope."

February 24

Rachel, I went back to visit Hollaender this morning.

"You may be surprised," he told me before I spoke at all, "but I have been thinking of that sermon of yours. The one you gave back in Java. I surmise you intended it to serve as a definition of me, didn't you?"

People have mentioned such things to me many times. Perhaps ideas are

germinated by specific encounters but, of course, it is the universal appeal of most sound knowledge to any thinking mind that causes the individual sensation of being a direct target in a line of speech.

"I was angry," he told me. "I still am. But, Nuss, you were right. That is me. I must be transparent."

He lay down again, exhausted. I waited. The happiness he had displayed while he shared his real-life story was missing. He shrugged and turned away. Closed his eyes.

"How do I look in there, inside?" he finally asked me. He sounded different now. Younger. Without the party clothes. Without the party. I smiled.

"You clash," I said. "You clash with what you've got on out here."

It is true that even the barrenness and the shapelessness of this society may offer a salesman like Mose a prewarlike structure in which he could build a temporary life for himself. But there was no way for Hans, who had, in the past, lived in dreamcastles of his own, to be able to project an adaptation of "normal" life into this POW world.

He used to care about fashion, insist on style. He had no education beyond high school, but he has developed a sort of expedient intelligence that has worked in his own strata. His experiences have acted as adequate professors in most of the social arts and sciences.

"Why are you so despondent?" I asked him.

March 1

Hans "pretends" that he believes he has a chance to survive the war despite the lean diet and lack of sufficient tobacco. But he is discouraged being one among so many, a particle in a man-heap.

"Nuss," he asked, an unconnected sound in the still air between us, "what is there to live for? I've watched my life like a movie in recent weeks, and there isn't anything there. It's over. Death is my trap-door." He smiled. He liked the metaphor. "It's my way out."

Hans spoke for some time.

"I don't even imagine these things any more. You know, the wine left my head soon after I drank it, the enjoyment was short. The women — a little longer. But they wouldn't come to me now. It was real then, it couldn't work now. No. At the beginning of all of this war and noble celibacy and refrainment, I decided to turn my head into a theatre and sit with the lights off and rerun old memories. There could be no monotony, I was sure. My pleasure faded into something very pale, though, in Tjilatjap. Tjilatjap — there was no leisure there, just straining hunger and straining work, that's all.

"I have time now and this wonderful iron bed to lie on for days, for weeks, for minutes...And that smell — trying so desperately to take the place of wine for me, pouring itself into me, filling me up with it. The smell of death. My memory has run from all of it. And how can I beg it back into this...bugs and disgust. Would it come? But if it would — I am still the vain, empty aristocrat. I still despise anyone, woman or man, who would be prepared to accept this.

"What is there here for any of us? I am suffocating, Nuss. We all are."

I had no response. Hesitantly, I mentioned his wife.

"It is true," he said, "she might try her best to cross the dreadful room to this bed."

But he said he would not want her or the children to see him — not while he was so thinned, greyed.

At one time, he had enjoyed the way his wife looked at him with gratitude, respect and a loyal amount of fear. He liked feeling generous for the time that he gave her, for the presents and occasional attention. She responded with appreciation, excessively sometimes, forgetting that she did not work for him any more and that those gifts were not expressions of praise or job appraisal.

"I would not want her to look at me with those grateful eyes. I ran from Berlin to Arnhem to Milano and ended up in Java. I had my factory, money, wine, women, a family. Everything I chose was handpicked for me, by me." His eyes opened like two small children jumping and calling for help to escape the prison of their cribs.

Then.

"*Aaahhhh*," the scream came from deep within. "*Aaahhhh*."

The sound was comparable in anguish and pain to that of a woman in labor.

I had my hand on his thin, embarrassed shoulder. "Hans?" I said.

He whispered after what seemed like years and years of minutes.

"Nuss, I worked to have money and so many other stupid things that cannot survive this camp. Or its bedbugs. Or illness. Or any change really. What happened to it all?"

He was falling into sleep.

March 2

When Hans saw me today, even before I reached his bed, he put his hands up, fingers straight, palms toward me — pushing the air to push me back and out the door again.

"You talk to people, you help them," he said. "Don't waste someone else for me. Go to anyone else, go to an important chance."

He turned away then, stared at the wall, and his voice reached me like the distant cousin of an echo. "You know, don't you, that I am dying."

I said quietly, "Hans, I'm not dying...I don't know what that feels like. Maybe you just want to lie here and sleep and not think or feel life at all. That is your decision. But I will come back again and again to talk to you. Unless you ask me not to, Hans."

He turned around and, smiling an old man's smile, said, "I want you to. You don't have the music of French wine but, lacking that, you are good entertainment."

We shook hands, and he thanked me. He looked serious again, but not as if he were trying to hold his head down to escape a falling sky.

March 3

When I came to his large ward this morning, Hans was not there. A friend of his, a lawyer, told me that Hans had gotten up yesterday afternoon and left quietly.

"After he returned, he looked like a much younger man and he told me that he had volunteered to go to Thailand. But I think this morning he was not so sure any more. Half an hour ago, he left. He was going to see you, to tell you."

I turned around, hurrying back to my place. Halfway back to my ward, I again turned around and saw Hans. He was running up the stairs to his ward as if the POW burden had fallen off him, never to return. I will go see him in the late afternoon.

My latent flu has become worse. The fever puts me to sleep — a deep sleep.

When I awoke, my neighbor told me that Hans had been to see me minutes before his group left.

"He said he hopes to see you soon."

Will I see him when I go up north? The idea occurred to me that Southeast Asia is such a vast vast realm....

March 8

Dear Rachel,

My mind grows restless...angry with too much spare time. I suspect I feel a need to justify my remaining behind in Changi, so I throw myself into work. I go to the hospital area daily, to any other place in the camp where there are Jewish soldiers. We have begun to link together, and the Sabbath services grow.

They are long and tiring trips — uphill, downhill, upstairs, downstairs — on an almost empty stomach. There are chaplains and ministers everywhere. I am, apparently, the only Jewish chaplain in the POW camps of this vast Southeast Asian region occupied by the Japanese. But we pray together in a language that speaks to our memories of parents and grandparents. We also trade Yiddish jokes and expressions, with enthusiasm.

I am also working constantly to improve my English. I sit and speak with the Australian and British boys.

My small English Bible is worn from reading.

Daily, as I make my rounds, I see many men who remain in their barracks without being officially sick, but they refuse to join the line outside the doctor's office.

"I cannot stand so long on lame feet and a hungry stomach," one of them said. "That would kill me. Is that what they want?"

March 9

Reg Warshavsky, the jolly, good-hearted London boy, came to me yesterday and asked me to visit his friend Michael. Reg said that Michael had tried to see the doctor several times, but will not go again.

"Perhaps you could convince him to stand in that pitiful line. He says he can't bear the fear, he feels that he is a bridge — always ready to collapse. But he must be treated."

Today, I visited Michael; his lips were cracked, his legs curved in an odd way. He agreed to join the lineup.

I told him to wait for me the next few mornings. One day, there would be fewer people in the lineup, and I would come for him.

Before I left, Michael told me of others like him; eventually, I will visit them all.

I am overdoing it, of course. There are too many inclines to battle. And against all this, the landscape — the view of tall, scattered trees. The Japanese cannot ration it. Just food.

March 10

Changi joy-ride

For several days, on my rounds, I met the transports delivering supplies. Today, the drivers, British and Australian, called me when they saw me walking. They detoured, ran to catch me and threw me into their wagon. They claimed that I was lighter than any of their other parcels. Laughing, the jolly play-riders accelerated with excitement so that I fell back onto the mattress of blankets and bags, and they took me for a complete tour of the camp. They are joyful; they do their work as though it were a festival. During their stops at the various buildings, I was able to visit a number of sick and convalescent men. The kitchen deliveries brought me into a number of camp kitchens where I met some of my Dutch gentile friends from Java, and Jewish Australian and British prisoners who attend our camp services and lectures.

The kitchen staff was kind, offering some personal extras to those riders who were still able and willing to down snacks. I refused the generous offers on the grounds that I do not perform "hard labor."

In the evening, a surprise. One of our Jewish boys from the Palladium services came over with a bag in his hand. (He is a member of the kitchen staff this morning.) He extended a few pieces of vegetables, which I refused. His face was the grip of disappointment, so I accepted it, but made him promise not to do it any more.

I feel good that I did not put up a show of self-righteousness. As he was leaving, I thanked him again.

We, my body and I, have grown accustomed to hunger.

March 13, 1943

Pre-Purim Week:

It is dark now, and the Sabbath is over. My sermon caught and held the listeners this morning. Satisfaction.

I spoke about the accompanying angel that the Almighty sends with the Jew into the diaspora — to fight intentions of his extinction. Hate is perhaps the mightiest exterminator: Why hasn't it destroyed the Jews? We have become target practice — the center bull's eye in circles of minorities.

Apparently, it is the will of the Almighty that we survive. That is the comfort I know. We are so confused and overwhelmed by Nazi Jew-hatred — we need our faith as strong and as sure as their lunacy.

I see him, the Jewhater. How unhappy he is all the time, by day and by night...a sick mind....His moments of joy?...hallucinating, ecstatically staring at "Jewish blood dripping from kitchen knives..." (Horst Wessel's *Lied*, "anthem" of Nazi youth).

I plan to tell the story of Haman, the arch anti-Semite, nightly, in installments and celebrate, with its recital, the mixture of logic and miracle so clearly discernible behind the dramatic developments.

March 23

Purim was the day before yesterday.

Mose, who could talk honey away from a hungry bear and leave the bear smiling, donated pudding. Lieutenant Levy and the British boys of the 18th Division were there; Levison, Reg Warshavsky and that warm-hearted and happy-looking Alf Levy, all from London; our good Australians, Blashki and Alf Rosenberg; our shy immigrant Polish businessman from Melbourne, Izzy Berman; and all the Jewish Dutchmen in Singapore joined the *Purim* party.

It was a gathering that laughed in the face of war — for one evening.

We sang and danced and talked.

I convinced Yits to speak. He spoke slowly, his sincerity showing through with the motions of his hands and the movements in his face. His face was shining. He spoke slowly (frequently using Dutch words and then translating them apologetically or forgetting to) of his longing to reach his Creator, of his search for happiness. He said he found his hope for a time with us because of

the frame we built by linking arms and forming a chain of compassion — an iron wall — to protect ourselves from possible denigration which war and internment in a POW camp can bring on.

"There are no quarrels, no jealousies here." He breathed excitedly as he said this. "Maybe it is possible, after all, for there to be a world without hatred. We are able to experience realms of empathy here. We are all caught in each other now."

When Yits finished, there was silence. Mose rose, his face flushed, and he said he was deeply touched by Yits' words in which he sensed the burning love of this uncomplicated friend for his Creator, for mankind and, above all, for peace.

Mose suggested that we should revive the Changi POW Charity Fund for the needy and sick. "I donate one hundred dollars," he added, smiling.

I then told the men that such a fund had recently been revived. The one responsible is a member of our group, David Marshall. He is a Singapore lawyer, a scion of an aristocratic family that had built a beautiful synagogue in Singapore.

Marshall was not assigned to the Thailand forces but, together with other local notables, to a G-force going to Japan. Those selected were nervous that they would not be transported to their destination in a safe rice- or cattle-train (like the Thailand work force). Thousands of miles of sea travel and exposure to Allied planes and U-boats left the G-force men with poor survival chances.

Following the tradition of his family, Marshall felt that it was especially appropriate to offer charity before leaving for an eventful trip. He apologized profusely for not offering a larger sum, as he was going to be cut off from his home island for who knows how long a time.

Sternfeld, the Dutch medical orderly from our Java forces, read the poem *Rosh Hashanah* (Jewish New Year) that he had written and first read to us last September in Tjilatjap, Java.

Purim did not react against being partnered with a *Rosh Hashanah* sentiment. It felt like a New Year celebration anyway, or a strong gratitude for whatever decree sealed our survival until now — a decree decided last September when we prayed and gave our prayers to Yits to send to Heaven.

Rachel, how I miss all of you. Still, I must admit that I would not have wanted to miss Purim in Changi.

April 2

Now, just past *Purim*, the great exodus has begun.

Thousands of POWs — Malayan command, the permanent core — have quite unexpectedly left Singapore and gone north. It is unlikely they will all return.

Dismemberment...parts off the whole...off our souls. We are losing each other again.

There are wide empty spaces in this camp now, cut by the accelerated exodus. It is much like trying to carry books in a storm: One loose paper flies away, you run to retrieve it; you lose another sheet...you chase and lose...and soon you have lost them all.

When will we meet again?

May 6

To Changi Hospital

To be sick in "A" block in the company of other patients and the many "red army brigades" (bedbugs) must make one even sicker. But to have a serious attack of dysentery makes life in that large wind- and rain-swept ward impossible to endure.

When I kept running to the dirty, smelly washrooms, suffering painful cramps during that first night of the illness, I did not suspect that I had become one more victim of the dysentery epidemic.

In the morning, a medical orderly was called in and he told me to pack my few things. I was moved to a POW hospital ward that was clean and bright, with proper beds and washrooms, in a condition that reminded me again of human dignity. Although the pains increased in intensity and frequency, my first day in the ward was bearable.

The doctor, a South African of German-Jewish descent, told me not to vomit or spit out the MMB tablets that he had prescribed for me.

"You're lucky," he said, "that they are extremely effective and still available in this hospital."

I had to be careful and manage to keep them in after swallowing them.

"It is also fortunate," he continued, "that you do not have the nasty type, amoebic dysentery, against which the MMB would be of no use."

I promised to behave.

My thoughts are with you, Rachel, and our little ones.

May 8

Long ago, at the start of this Singapore tryst, Yits decided we would stay and then he arranged our assignment to the "A" block, convincing me that the idea was sound.

Now Yits wants to move on. He is hungry. He asked the Dutch officer to be put on the list of the group departing soon.

But I am not ready to leave. I have asked him to wait at least a month because the doctor told me that by then, I might be well enough, after my present dysentery attack, to move my body long arduous distances.

The camp looks quite empty at present, however, and Yits is afraid there will be no more departures for Thailand after this one.

He is painfully, grievously cognizant of his stomach's aching, and I wouldn't try to change his mind. We have both heard the stories carried back to us by Thailand survivors (they filter through so infrequently that I worry — where are the rest?); they say that there are great quantities of food up there and light work duties. These stories have propelled many of the POWs to go north, even though it supposedly means eight weeks of constructing railroads and bridges.

This naked island — nothing of its own but its beauty — confuses us with its splendour. We are not fed well, but our eyes are full.

It is true that rumors constantly abound that Red Cross supplies are on the way — great quantities of them — but they do not arrive. Yits thinks our captors want to weaken us with disappointment. Some of the more cynical among our men have suggested that we are being starved into yearning for the north and its food so that we will ignore earlier reports about the menace of the labor there.

"Anyway," Yits concludes, "at present, soldiers are volunteering for work duty in Thailand as if they were reserving seats in a fine restaurant."

May 9

Captain Eugene Stern, a patient I just recently met, has set his mind to compel me to stay. He is a complex and startling man. He draws pictures of the world for me that I haven't yet seen. We are phenomena for each other. He has been in the hospital here for several months already — heart trouble — and he insists that I visit him daily.

Stern is the product of a Jewish Carpathian-Russian home and a further product of his estrangement from it.

He explained that his grandfather was so poor he was never able to buy another pair of shoes after the purchase of his wedding shoes that he wore until they fell off his feet, piece by piece. His grandfather walked barefoot in the summers for the rest of his life. In the winters, he wrapped rags around his feet. His father also worked and worked just to survive.

After Stern had served in the Austrian Army (1916-1918), he enrolled in medical school. From that day on, he became the hope of his family. Would he not raise them all to a class of luxury and reward?

"No," he told them, "a man hardened by his fight with hunger must not give away his life buying gifts for people, even for people he loves."

And so, he left them. To their own resources.

"How have they done?" I asked him.

"Some have died," he said, "many are poor."

My face apparently betrayed disapproval. He lowered his face. For a short moment, his eyes avoided mine. Then, as if absentminded, he spoke, "I am sorry for their suffering, and I send them money from time to time."

Stern is indeed a solitary, an adventurer who quietly left European Jewry. After he had completed his studies in Prague, he was not willing to begin the long upward struggle to earn status in a society he did not find at all congenial. Because Eugene wanted a position secure enough to support his remoteness, he answered an ad that requested medical army men.

He is an officer now, financially secure. He has never married. Regrets? None, he insists.

May 10

Yits came to see me today. "It is definite now," he said. "We depart tomorrow. I'm moving north," he added. "There is no food here and I've heard that eating is indeed a regular activity in Thailand. I wasn't assigned to the transport, but I signed the volunteer list. It will be railroad work and that's difficult, I know, but this hunger must be cured. We'll meet soon again, Nuss. It is just a matter of time — we're all being sent north. But I can't wait. This obsessive hunger for food frightens me. I must finally move my mind onto other, sounder subjects."

I nodded.

"Good," he said.

We shook hands — two hands, then four.

I begin to understand Yits Lissner's hunger. This is primarily a POW's obsession with despair.

Yits asked me to instruct him in the Jewish funeral laws. He wants a Jewish calendar as well. I must construct one for him. A Jewish calendar, with the holy days all in their places, is not an easy masterpiece to prepare in a POW camp.

May 11

I had been taught the necessary rules by an esoteric teacher from Poland. After applying all rules known to me, I was left with three options — three possible days on which Passover could begin. But consider the calendar rules: Passover cannot begin on a Monday, Wednesday or Friday. Even with that, two of the three options still worked. Thus, I had one question: Would Passover 1945 start on Tuesday or Thursday? I sat here almost all night, waiting for inspiration...and it came.

It was a sudden saving thought: Rabbi Yaakov of Emden (northwest Germany), late eighteenth century scholar, rationalist, Kabbalist, compiler of the prayer book — the only holy text I have with me. Did he not, in his mystical commentaries on the prayers, insert practical information specific to the construction of our Jewish calendar? Yes!

What is a miracle? A miracle is the answer that did not exist before the miracle occurred.

In this prayer book, there were answers. In writing that the Jewish month of *Teveth* (approximately January) cannot begin on a Friday or a Sabbath, he decided the issue for me. Passover would start on Thursday and not on a Tuesday.

I then continued working on my calendar with great enthusiasm, extending it all the way to August 1945, the end of the Jewish year 5705 when, I trusted, we would be free persons again. I completed the calendar and wrote it out on the inside cover of my prayer book.

I made a careful copy for Yits and enjoyed his rapture when he held it and pored over it. Then I saw the small round tears somersaulting down his face. I was confused.

"What...what is it, Yits?"

"Why?" he asked. "How can you anticipate such a thing as this? Do you honestly believe that we will have to stay in this prison two and a half more years? How can one survive even the thought of that?"

His hands were out to me with his heart in them, and there was excruciating pain in his gentle tortured face as he continued, "Six months...I prepared myself for that, and it's too long, but I *will* myself to endure. Two and a half years? No, I can't."

I had not meant to hurt Yits. It is true that I am prepared to sit for quite a wait, one arm around war's thin shoulders until liberation. Regardless, I apologized to Yits. I should not have depressed him with the length of my despair. Because of my enthusiasm to fill the gaps in the calendar, it did not occur to me that Lissers's heightened sensitivity would become unbearable with this assumption about the possible length of the war.

When I again apologized, he held my hand for a number of seconds, his eyes wet. Then he turned and left.

May 14

I was dismissed from the hospital yesterday. Today, I saw my name on a list of those to go north. I was told to visit a doctor first because only if I am certified as being fully recovered will I be allotted a space on the train. I did not expect to be certified, which would be fine because then I would be able to pursue my conversations with Eugene Stern for a few more weeks until I definitely leave for Thailand.

I decided not to go visit a medic, though. How the mood has changed in our camp in recent weeks! Now everyone goes to the doctors, pleading for a written excuse from Thailand duty.

Eugene begged me to stay. I will leave, I tell myself. I am well enough, I insist. Bittersweet decision, this.

I walked toward the hospital, working words in my head into a goodbye. I met Dr. Veenstra, who looked at me, shook his head and told me to come by and be examined. I explained that this would not be possible because I was heading north in a matter of hours. He laughed and said, "Rabbi, Rabbi," and walked away to the office to have my name removed from the list.

*May 19**Dear Rachel,*

A week has passed and I have been written onto another departure list; this time, three hundred men will be going. I am still weak, but continue to avoid Dr. Veenstra. I want to go; I think I should. I am not required here very much in my capacity as a chaplain. The "A" block is housing POWs (a mixture of nationalities and denominations) who are mostly dodgers of the early Thailand drafts, some of them lazy self-indulgent types. Most of them do not want to speak about hope; they are not hopeless. They do not want to discuss change; they are happy as they are. My old friends and roommates are working in Thailand now, and their spaces have been filled with newcomers who appear to have little need of my services.

Now I feel superfluous here.

May 20

The day I left the hospital, I saw Mose in one of the wards. I've heard that he was sick with dysentery. He told me to be prepared for changes outside of the hospital.

"Pirates have taken over our camp. They have lazy bones and insufficient nerve," he said angrily. (This obviously is an overstatement. Those who remain will have increased duties both inside and outside the camp.)

I said goodbye to Captain Stern; then I went to Mose's berth, but he was standing near the door, waiting for his release.

"You don't have to bid me farewell," he explained. "I am coming with you. I don't know the men who are left here well, but I know I could not share a picnic table in peacetime with them. May I join you, then?"

"But are you not on the sick list?"

"Yes," he said, but then, with his typical smile, "Oh, no...I was. The doctor at first refused. It was against the rules to take sick people with the departing men. But then, to stop the torrent of words and pleas I showered on him, he relented."

I wonder, we are not trained soldiers; so how are we worth all this effort to the Japanese? Transportation, food, fuel.... And in return? Two months of labor for them in Thailand on their railroad — unskilled labor. How does an

army in war justify such a great waste of time and material?

Mose patted my shoulder when I asked him if he understood the logic behind their policy.

"Logic?" he said. "The lies have no logic, and the truth is, I think we'll be there much longer than eight weeks and we'll work day and night. That is how they will profit from this miscalculated transaction."

"Oh, Mose," I said, "I hope you are a cynic and not a prophet."

There are not many British and Australian POWs left in Changi who are officially classified as physically fit to maintain a skeleton camp. But the Japanese still need more workers for Thailand. The number the Dutch have to provide is relatively small — only forty out of a total of three hundred. As there are close to forty other ranks available for departure, it was decided to send only four officers and thirty-six men.

"But as only a few privates were brought to the hospital," Mose said, glowing, "they gladly let me volunteer."

A crisis developed. Two of the four officers backed out. Then the dynamic, healthy engineer Captain van der Vecht and his friend Captain de Vries, a soft-spoken modest person, volunteered to take over the command of our Dutch unit despite recent reports that conditions in the railroad camps were poor, very poor.

Were working conditions up north on the railroad as bad as reports indicated? Mose and I would soon know.

May 22

We are among the last to move north. Singapore, you leave me with melancholy echoing memories of a certain strong resemblance you bear to near-normal life. A skeleton staff remains behind us...the ill, doctors, medical orderlies, some clergy. All the needs of war.

We sat in rows in the back hollow of a truck. In the distance, I saw the Changi Gaol, its walls high, with lookouts cut out of its straight sides. Faces were visible in the lookouts, and hands were waving desperately at us.

One of our men who had occasionally helped with the delivery of supplies explained that the entire female population of the white Singapore community has been interned in this Changi Gaol.

For many weeks now, these women have watched the male POWs being moved out of our complex in herds. The women do not, presumably, have very much to do (and they know the daily departure times), so they stand in the lookouts and wave the men goodbye. They watch us today. Apparently, some of their men are in our trucks. In one of the trucks ahead of us, I see arms going up frantically, waving above bodies jumping up again and again. Do the men get personal goodbyes from the window? Are they recognized? Hopefully.

Has Rachel gone into a window, behind time, to watch? What? The steps backward of civilization?

I saw you, Rachel, sharp and defined, larger and clearer than the other hazy shapes, waving as you had on the Bandung roads, but this time with such force and for so long that it didn't look like waving after awhile — it looked like something laboring and unnatural. I blinked, and you disappeared. Still, I cannot lose your eyes or the row of round, soft anonymous faces of the others moving like flowers in the hot wind.

Although there are some kindnesses within the war, the war is a cruelty itself — consummate.

The truck moved quickly. Most of us stood. The ride was smooth and swift, the wind cool and playing with our hair (we have not been convict-shaved since our arrival on Singapore Island). This cruel war has not affected the growth of tall trees and low grass: it is all life and cyclical perseverance.

It was a fine intermission, that ride.

Then we saw a rice train waiting on the track, just after the last turn. It was grey and tired-looking, and our elation, during the refreshing truck ride, evaporated. The future in the ugliness of our next transport loomed acutely ahead.

The Rice Train

May 23, 1943

There were too many of us in too small a space — twenty-seven people in our wagon: eight Australian officers, their leader Major Mackay and the rest of us, Dutch officers and other ranks.

My immediate neighbor was a surly, nervous marine of twenty-five, who appeared impeccably civilized and possessed angry, dark blue-black eyes. He had some kind of radar — an invisible antenna — and when I moved or shifted or sighed or when I even thought about stretching, this young man would turn his head so that his chin and mouth were hidden by a high collar, and order me with his stare to disappear. I began to feel that I should disappear, that any amount of floor space I filled was unfair to the squeezed souls who sat with mourning faces next to me.

I tried to move away from him slowly; I didn't want to offend him. I had attempted conversation with him several times, but the tiny distance between us seemed like an ocean. I don't think he heard me. His eyes were closed, looking either far ahead or behind me. I squirmed, turned a half circle and redesigned three inches of space, smiling hopefully at my new neighbor whom I expected to smile back at me. I looked at the marine, but there was no recognition in his eyes — he seemed to be looking at a stranger, and I recognized, from this new angle, an isolated, petrified boy.

Fifth day of the trip

It is dark now. I have been traveling for five days and have spent much of the time standing by the open, sliding doors, which is the entrance to our portable "latrine." The train moves at a slow tempo. Men step over the crossbar in the door opening, turn around, hang down holding on with both hands onto the crossbar.

I am annoyed with the long, slow train ride and I occasionally lean out with an arm tight around the balancing pole, trying to push the wagon faster, faster — twenty-five miles an hour. I want the world, the air and all its peaceable cohorts slapping me hard and stinging, full on my face. Despite its use as a public open-air latrine, that door is most precious to us; it is our luxury, the window offering the constant view, the constant inflow of clean fresh air.

Although my legs are tired, and my hunger speaks loudly, I stand there whenever I can.

It is fortunate that they must periodically rest the sluggish train. At each stopping station, there are long lineups for the washrooms. There was also a great quantity of food each time — bacon and pig soup (favorite food of the Chinese, in a land occupied by many Mohammedans), and eggs and fruit. I ate the eggs and fruit; nutrition is not scarce enough to have to borrow on the Jewish law's dispensations pertaining to *kosher* food obligations.

One night, we stopped in a port city. A fresh wind brought sea drops to my lips, reminding me of the salty North Sea drops in the cool fall nights of Holland's seashore. At every station, I delighted in this novel sensation that poured over me generously. It enthused me.

There was a tap, this time, giving cold water that I threw on my face and into my mouth with passion.

The Japanese ordered food for us at the small station restaurant (a last-moment wish to fatten us up — we white slave laborers?), and we bought personal supplies in a store that smelled of lemons. One of our young men, with red hair and a thin, long body, bought a postcard to send home — a souvenir of his trip to Thailand.

Tomorrow is our last day on the train before we reach Banpong. Late this afternoon, the tension in the wagon relaxed: our bodies softened, the stiffness left, and there seemed to be more space and energy between us.

I attempted conversation with the sullen marine, again.

"My name is Chaim."

"I heard you the first time," he said. His voice was hostile. "You were standing by the door, speaking to that tall man about the atom."

"How do you do?" I asked.

There was a pause, as though he was considering whether to talk with me. When he spoke, he wasn't calm.

"I'm Jimmy," he said. "I was surprised to hear you talking about science like that, so knowledgeably. I know you're a rabbi, and I think the clergy is dumb, strictly anti-intellectual...but you didn't sound like that."

He stopped, and I thought he was finished. When I was about to begin again, he stopped me.

"All the fellows here are stupid," he whispered, sarcasm edging his words. "Uneducated army men."

"I don't feel deprived of intelligent conversation," I told him simply.

"Did you know I was in medical school for two years?" he said.

He reached back with his hands in the air behind his head, as if he were reaching back for something. "I dreamed about being a doctor since I was eight years old, since I understood that rich people put poor people out with their trash."

I winced at the callousness of his statement.

"When I was in high school, I got a little brother and sister as gifts to block my dream, but my mother said if it meant that much to me to be a doctor, I should fight, I could do it," he continued.

"She was a warrior. She had six children, two died, but she always had dessert for us at supper. There's something good and sweet for everyone in this world, she told us. She was wrong.

My mother was a charwoman. She cleaned and she saved — she paid my university tuition the first year. Second year, I received a tuition scholarship. I would have been a good doctor, but I had no money for books or food."

His words came faster now. "My father lost his job and my mother was sick. I joined the National Socialist Movement in Holland and applied for marine medical service in Java...Holland's democratic system disgusts me."

"Why didn't you stay, work for a time and then return to school?"

"All the money would have been sucked into the family," he said. "I never would have finished."

"But your mother?"

"She told me to leave."

"What do you think about all the time?" I asked. "You never talk."

"There is nothing to discuss with all these ignorant professional colonial soldiers from Java. Most of them never finished high school. I stopped talking — now silence is a habit. I was meant to be a doctor — *that* is what I think about."

We spoke about medicine, the fascination of the biological sciences, the discoveries recorded in beautiful, richly illustrated books. Discussion, I suggested, was an untranscribed text and could be learned from. There is no actual need to attend university in order to become a learned man. He agreed and mellowed. We talked for several hours and then, abruptly, he closed.

"I will learn from conversation," he told me as he moved back to his dark corner, "but I won't become a rich doctor. That is what I was meant to be."

"You might possibly have been a poor doctor," I shouted at him, although the distance between us was only a few inches.

I want this war to end now, before we all fall apart.



Rinold Scharle
Singapore 1944 -

Tap field office

Thailand

May 29
Banpong

Dear Rachel,

Friday morning, we stopped at the last station, Banpong, Thailand, and disembarked.

Children fluttered and cluttered around us, pointing at our clothes, our shoes, asking, "How much? How much?"

This was my first contact with natives since we crossed the border — we had been ordered to maintain long, hollow distances. But the men here, some old friends from Singapore whom I greeted with exuberance, talked freely with the Siamese. Which is as it should be.

I believe the world has grown too large for friendliness — we color ourselves so carefully inside the lines.

Everyone walked in groups from the station. Mose and I walked alone. We met two well-built Dutch POWs who appeared very happy and satisfied with their work. They explained to us that theirs was a unique situation. Their good fortune, they said, came with their interpreter, Caun, the Jewish boy who has been with them since Bandung. He has also ingratiated himself with the Japanese-Thailand command and manages, consequently, to ensure pleasant jobs for the men in his outfit.

Our new acquaintances drive supply trucks from camp to camp along the railroad.

"We work hard," they said, "loading and unloading, but not like those poor railway builders, those exhausted wrecks."

Was this emphasis on hard work meant to be an apology for their vitality and good health?

"But you," they told us, "you are, at this moment, in a very special position. Where will your favors come from? No one will provide them, no one will rescue you. We can't help you," they said. "We're too busy working hard."

Mose looked surprised. POWs who do not help fellow prisoners in need? Incomprehensible.

Even though they were unwilling to help us, they did offer us some advice: "During the five or more days of marching, you will sleep by day. By night, you will walk. Your feet will be swollen. You'll be exhausted, unable to carry yourselves. You won't want any luggage. You'll throw off what you have. The Thais will stand along the roadside, like hyenas, waiting to grab the packages you drop. They may even reach for items to pull off you or from you when the Japanese guard is out of sight, because they know you are weak and unable to resist. Nothing, nothing you have, will remain with you."

My immediate response was to shake my head with refusal, denial. There was a caving-in of hope.

"What should we do?" Mose asked, and in his large, kind face I saw a child's fear and uncertainty.

"We could sell it for you," they both said. Then they climbed back into their truck. "We have no time, really, but you are Dutch and we are Dutch — allow us a low commission fee, and we'll dispose of your things on our work route and dispatch the money back to you."

I didn't like them; they laughed with deceit at our faith in honesty...in mankind.

Although he has been a salesman all his life, Mose never became rich. He loves the excitement of dealing, but he would never be mean and he often loses; in the end, with puzzled eyes, he realized suddenly that the game was over, and he had lost. Which is how he looked when the two men named their fee and reached for our bags.

He was humiliated.

"It was different when we shared a free country — Dutch people trusting Dutch compatriots. Wasn't it?" I asked them. "What do we share now but a fight for survival, and you fight ours for yours?"

I looked hard at their faces, trying to find some truth where maybe the masks had slipped.

"Goodbye," I said. There was nothing there.

Mose laughed, uncomfortable with the tension; he followed me back and said to them, "See, I cannot let him go alone, he would not make it."

Mose, you protect the world. You are my peace-loving friend.

Together, we continued on our way.

Master of the Universe, I cannot deny that although You have saints in Your world, You also have less-than-saints. And You have evil here. It comes from depths we cannot always fathom; it invades society or society may create it.

But Yours is the world that cultivates the great souls, the saints, the singers, the word-creators — men who search with holy insistence the secrets of the human mind; who penetrate the secrets of Your universe, the secrets of Your revealed Word...of Your veiled Omnipresence.

Rachel, I must keep remembering that this surfacing of ugliness must never obscure my eyes to the all-penetrating Sublime.

After a few more minutes of walking, we reached Thailand's base camp. This camp, consisting of a few large, poorly constructed huts, is a comparative festival — food to eat, food to buy. A contest of gluttony. I watched one man eat twenty hardboiled eggs in rapid succession.

Mose and I began to ask questions, to explore for explanations concerning our future situation.

One of the British soldiers, who is permanently stationed at this stop, laughed when I told him about the two men we had met.

"Your good Dutch friends," he said, "are among the most competent black marketeers in this region, in the world perhaps."

He explained that these two Dutchmen are rich. One is a professional soldier — sturdier, less breakable in wartime than the rest of us, but not necessarily more cruel or totally insensitive. The other, from Gelderland, a large Dutch province bordering Germany, is an employee at a plantation in Malaya. Because of his knowledge of this country — it has a common border with Malaya — he is an important man and enjoys privileges in the railroads' transportation service.

Our new British friend confirmed that the trip would be difficult. He said we would require certain supplies for comfort, but a heavy load could be defeating.

I understood. Because it is possible to barter along the way; money is a good featherweight commodity to take.

"But deal directly with the Thais, and not with middlemen," he added.

Mose and I found a quiet corner of ground and sat down, discussing finances. Mose did some business in Changi and had already exchanged Singapore dollars for Siamese tikols on the basis of one for one. I gave him a jacket and two shirts to sell.

He grew restless: we had forgotten to eat. As I sat with the packages, he went and came back with eggs, bananas, mangoes and tomatoes.

"Things are good here, but not up there." he said. "Hard work, little sustenance, sickness. We will have to purchase food here to take with us. They sell non-perishables — they know where we are going."

I think of Yits. He must have smiled hugely at the plentiful food here in Banpong. But upcountry, we hear, there is none — only starvation.

Yits, you withstood that disappointment, didn't you?

I took my larger luggage to the depot. It will be brought by truck to our next station, which is a convenience. Many of the men carry all their belongings; they do not trust this war or the loneliness it insists upon. They want no more separations. But I feel it is necessary to risk confidence in mankind for the continuance of it.

I think about the two Dutch men we met yesterday...they are rich. What were they after? There is neither empathy nor sympathy between people...at least, not for the losing. We receive privileges now such as this baggage pickup, the food and rest, but not because we are part of an officers' transport. It is true that Lt. Col. Humphries has put up a fight for the officers' privileges. Still, officers will have to work.

We are the hope for the vitally-important railway, he was informed. We must fill in its few still existing gaps. He appeared to have been promised, however, that the guards would relax their whip-cracking of officers. In order to be saved from those murderous nightmarches, we would be provided with trucks and train wagons — a privilege of life that singles out our work group and may prove to be a good omen for the fate of our group, in the coming critical weeks and months.

May 30

Soon, tonight probably, we will leave Banpong and begin our march to Kanbury. Along one path, it seems, we have trudged from the same place to the same place. I feel as though we have walked nowhere since this war began.

What has changed, then, Rachel?

We are older.

The Nightmarches

Since their heavy losses in the Pacific increased the pressure on their shipping, the Japanese lost all sense of humanity — they were blinded by their fanatical resolution to complete the railroad project at any cost in human lives.

Initially, they forced tens of thousands of ORs (Other Ranks) to dig deep into the jungle and lay down rail lines. Later, they added officers to the numbers of workers who toiled at this health-destroying task without the aid of proper tools, hygiene or food.

May 31

Dear Rachel,

We left last night. Just before I marched out, Mose tried to get me onto the list of those unable to walk. He is on it. He is still weak and needs to keep off his feet. But I didn't feel I needed to take up the space on a transport that a weaker man would need.

I had new army shoes and they should make walking easy. These new shoes excited me — newness in war is hardly believable. Five of us, whose shoes were badly worn, had received them in Banpong, and we were all as proud of them as if they had been awarded to us for noble achievement.

We walked now. I took easy, bouncy steps. I was experiencing anticipation in the form of fresh energy. A hike, I suggested, let us call it a hike...a walking tour! My suggestion was not cheered.

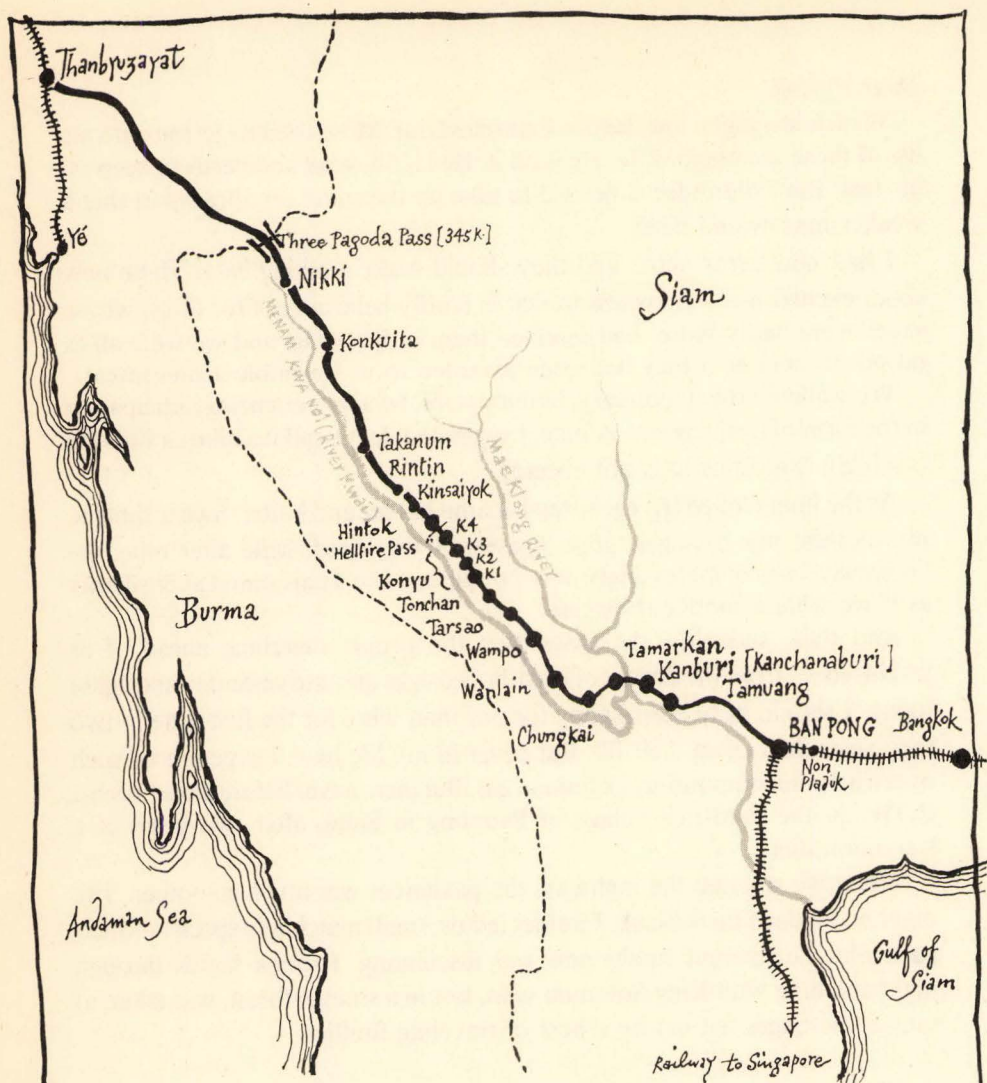
As the hours toiled by, each step became harder and hotter. Sweat clung to my clothes, my packages grew heavier. I was tired. Mile after mile, the "highway" was in increasingly poor condition. The Thais stared at us silently as if we were a mobile showcase.

And then, suddenly, the gases...that the people marching ahead of us produced — from the dozens of hard-boiled eggs they ate yesterday and again today. I should have been happy for our men who, for the first time in two long years, had eaten their fill. But never in my life have I experienced such overwhelming outpourings of human gas. But then, never before have I been a POW...in the food-rich village of Banpong in Siam, after two years of a starvation diet.

When we reached the highway, the pavement was much smoother. The night was a deep thick black. Fireflies led us, small matchlight specks — their patternless, exuberant suddenness was fascinating. I shook hands through night and time with King Solomon who, lost in a strange forest, was taken to safety (the Sages tell us) by a host of traveling fireflies.

After several hours of plodding along, the bounce in my step wilted, and I began to regret wearing my new boots. They were beginning to rub away the naked thin skin over my thin bones. Before many more hours had passed, I began to despair of ever being able to suffer the shoes. Every step screamed at the next.

The other men with new shoes also looked as if they would cry. We came together and sat at the side of the road, hoping for a truck to come. Our Japanese guard, a patient man, looked back and saw us waiting. He approached us and encouraged us to walk on despite the anguish. We had ten more kilometers to walk.



Where the drawings were made

The Route of the Siam-Burma Railway

A sketch map

Ban Pong, Siam, to Thanbyzayat, Burma. 415 kilometres of mountainous and virtually virgin jungle. Inhospitable country, to say the least.

"Trucks are scarce, and there are a multitude of possible evils that will surely kill us, alone and unprotected in an unfamiliar wilderness," he added, shaking his head apologetically.

We marched on, a few hundred steps, eyes shouting to the sky for release. Then I spoke to my four fellow captives in excruciating new-boot pain, and we agreed to stop and wait at any risk. We simply could not walk. We could not go on.

We were saved by two men who came out from between the trees and welcomed us. Our guard had been mistaken. This was our stopping station — apparently somewhere halfway between Banpong and Kanbury. We were helped into the clearing; there was food waiting for us, and the frame of a real building, and bamboo mats. Most of the men were sleeping already.

I loosened my shoes and removed them slowly, my feet screaming insults at me, but I was a long way past despair. The doctor said that he would have to assign us to a truck transport for the next march.

"You must break those shoes in slowly," he said. "They fight back."

I have ten hours ahead of me for rest. I am assigned a place on the truck which will depart at 11 a.m. for Kanbury, transporting our luggage and those who are unfit to walk.

I realize how strongly every pleasure affects me. I am looking into cracks for crumbs of peace, because the larger room is war.

June 2
Kanbury

This camp, *Rachel*, is not far from the river. It is quite large, built many months ago (one year, someone said, but it still smells new) by some of the first prisoner groups to arrive here. They were to stay and build the railroad. But this railroad is being made in chapters by the lives of the men it weakens and wounds, sends away and replaces, over and over. In the end, this track, this mechanical function, will be complete; but there will be a chunk bitten out of humanity, and it will be an injury more permanent than this railroad's good health.

Just before our truck arrived here, a NCO was discovered dead from the heat of the sun. There were not enough tents for everyone. Apparently, he began his sleep in the shade, but of course the sun moved and covered him as a roof should have. Seven hours after he collapsed into sleep, exhausted from the night's march, he was pronounced dead.

War is in the business of death, but I have not reconciled myself yet to it; death is breathtakingly sad, but murder is an unforgivable act.

We slept carefully, taking turns staying awake and watching the sun so that the group could be awakened and moved into the shade as necessary.

When I fully awoke, it was dark. I said my evening prayers and counted: Today is the 43rd day of the *Omer* (the forty-nine day period counted from the second day of Passover until *Shavuoth* (Pentecost).

It is ironic that my obligation to count these forty-nine days serves me as a calendar...a reminder of the day of the week. Every night — for more than three weeks — I have not forgotten to count. In a way, it makes me feel good that I possess an anchor which guarantees full control over life and time. I only hope and pray that for the remainder of the *Omer* period, up to the fiftieth day, the *Shavuoth* Festival, I will keep counting regularly.

Still, I feel confused tonight about numbers and dates. Daysleeping and nightmarching, sunstroke death and indigestion, boggle my mind and litter its order.

June 3

We have been injected against cholera. Not receiving injections is close to fatal. Is the danger of poisoning as realistic? The Japanese do not want us to die; they are already behind schedule for the completion of the railroad.

Rachel, some of our soldiers believed they were smart in squeezing the injections out with blood, or in changing their places in line — so they were never inoculated. The Japanese want to poison us, they explained.

How can I convince the NCO who keeps moving around in our line? For just a split second, I recognize in his half-suppressed smile, the happiness of playing a game — of being able to boast later to friends how he had time and again escaped that needle. Unfortunately, it seems to be the actor in us that makes many of our decisions.

My argument with the NCO slowed the tempo of his evasive movements just a second too long, and he protested loudly that the needle had caught him. He looked angrily at me.

When the injections were over, we had to continue the travels. Not on blistered feet, however; this time, we had a train.

They kept their promise. There they were. Train wagons? Not quite — just boards on wheels. These afford us no protection against wind or rain; there are no walls or guard rails. We are protected by our choicelessness.

But it is much better than walking, especially on my new-boots-blistered feet. The train-platforms will run on the completed track, drawn by a small truck, until we reach the gap.

Then we will continue building more tracks, and constructing bridges. Good luck to us.

*June 4
Tarsao*

The ride on our hard, thin board was beautiful but perilous — narrow roadbeds along the mountainside. It was as if the heavens' sigh could topple us to our deaths. It was *that* open and precarious; but it felt amazingly like freedom. We were not afraid, not once. The mountains, a deep majestic blue, and the sky, a lighter, more delicate blue, looked incredibly peaceful.

After a ten-hour ride, we reached Tarsao, the present terminal of the traveled railroad. It was evening. The station consisted of a small hut for storage, without roofs or canopies for protection against heavy rains.

The moment we reached the terminal, the rain began — a genuine tropical rain.

Then the walking began again. We walked for the next two hours on a road that was buried in water and mud. We sank and dragged our heavy legs and shoes as neighbor splashed neighbor.

Mose cut two branches so that we each had a blind man's cane which we used to search the area in front of us for holes, thick mud and other natural obstacles. Despite my protests, Mose forcibly took half the load off my back.

There are tents in the camp. I crawled into one and put a thin blanket over me. Our friends then made a fire, and I was given a hot drink; I thanked the men — and Heaven — many times.

At this moment, I am no longer a Talmudist or a physicist or a philosopher; I am a wet, cold, hungry, tired man. A hot drink, shelter and rest are everything to me.

We adapt our needs to our losses.

A Japanese officer came to our tents, seeking bargains from POWs desperate enough to give away valuable items for a few tikols.

I offered him the delicate leather shoes that I wore to work, to the school in Java, in the last weeks before the war.

He touched, with light pleasure, the soft sides and the thick, strong soles. They are beautifully crafted; still, of what use are they to me here? They serve the function of art, something exquisite, but I cannot afford that luxury now.

The officer placed twenty tikols in his small yellow palm and held it halfway out to me. He looked ashamed.

I shook my head.

For a moment, we stared at each other appraisingly, as if we had shared in the glory of something, kept something from the war. He bowed and left.

So I wasn't successful in my business, but still, I rub my hands together, smiling.

These shoes were the last pair that you, Rachel, bought for me a few weeks before the mobilization. Somehow, it is worthwhile carrying that token of home with me.

The March of the Masked Corpses

June 5

In the morning, after a restful sleep, we are given to understand that we are in Tarsao, and that we should give up all illusions about the fun of an easy train ride. What lies ahead of us is marching — “the plain old-fashioned way of any army’s infantry,” we are told.

We are also told by an orderly of the neighboring camp that Tarsao is ironically called “hospital town.”

“Patients who are mere survivors come down to our poor hospital wards from many of the illness- and death-riddled camps. They cannot work any more, but have not managed to die. We give them lots of hot drinks, aspirin, an egg every day and — what may be most important to them — relaxation and plain rest. After a few weeks, the not-quite-dead workers have improved, are declared fit again and are returned to their work camps, where they go through the final cycle — getting tired, exhausted, hungry and ill from meaningless, painfully cruel labour, then promptly dying and ceasing to be a burden to anyone’s command.”

All this sounds desolate indeed. I understand that we are now facing the real challenge — survival or a dismal end. To be of any use to our men, I realize that I will have to remember, through all that will come, that little spark inside me that decides whether I continue or cease to be a person. I must constantly seek and find a definitive purpose in this life of continuous, discouraging disappointment.

Rachel, how grateful I am to Providence that you and the children do not share these inhumane experiences with me.

In the meantime, the sun has broken through the clouds, and the country looks too clean and lush for wartime and the oppressing sadness which has gripped our men.

We are offered hot water to drink, a few cups if we want, and rice, as many bowlfuls as we like. The reality of sunshine and plenty of food and drink has a more calming effect, even on Eddie Rappaport, than my words of encouragement to those who appeared most affected by the sad bits of information we had obtained this morning.

9 a.m.

The sun has disappeared. We start to march in a light drizzle for a half-hour. Conditions soon change for the worse. We continue our march along a steadily rising uphill road. My feet now move more slowly and with greater difficulty. Although the rains now come infrequently, the roads are not dry and the mud is thick and hungry. Mose and I use our sticks. As we push, time and again, some of the jungle growth aside, we discuss the possibility of staying behind, re-routing backward. We could. On the jungle-bordering road, nobody would stop us, but we decide to remain with our group.

The guards do not watch us. They are looking where we look, stepping over the sharp rocks and wading through the black mud.

Suddenly, we are invaded by a large group of downhill marchers descending from the railroad labor sites to the hospital camp. These are human forms with life sucked out of them, blown up and moving by empty air. They are yellowed skeletons with their heads down. When their eyes look up, they seem to be staring blankly at nothing. We feel sick.

I feel compelled to speak with these men who march through our lines. Tremulously, I ask one of them, an aged-looking boy, if the journey was not worth the rest and recovery.

"No," he tells me hoarsely. "I wish I had died up there. Soon I will, but first, I will have to walk down and then up again, killing myself slowly."

He looks at me sadly when I mention the hospital.

"They will fill me with aspirin and eggs, and send me north again. Death is my only blessing."

June 6

The Lost Sabbath

It is a sorrowful story, but if you have time...To whom am I speaking? Rachel, I am beginning to lose you. My mind cannot focus on your specialness. This despair does not open its door to your serenity, your calm hope.

March. March. March. Two. Three. Four hours. Will there be no end to this road, the rains, the mud?



Ronald Searle -

Waiting - Thai-Burma Railway.

Thai-Burma Railway by Ronald Searle

It began raining heavily, with such a tropical intensity that we could hardly see. Movement was difficult because of the heaviness in our tired minds, our tired bones, our wet clothes. I heard the sounds of dragging, marching men around me, but except within a distance of three feet, I saw nothing that didn't resemble the outlines of fog and ghosts.

And Death. Death was everywhere.

You could smell it with your eyes, see it with your fingers, touch it with your breath, every time you inhaled.

Walking British skeletons kept passing us, moving south toward Tarsao. As they went by, I saw dead, yellow faces and deep-sleeping eyes. Maybe there is life somewhere beneath those masks.

Ahead of me, one of the older men, an officer, suddenly fell, face first into the black puddles of dirt and rain. The soldier who had been walking behind him did not see him and stepped on the officer's body, falling and gashing his forehead.

I cried out. The scene was so full of repellent pain.

A British officer, a thin, weak-looking man, lifted the fallen soldier and carried him off over his shoulder. Two POWs, barely able to move themselves, lifted the collapsed officer out of the puddle and dragged him somehow between them. It happened all so quickly. They helped each other as though they had fought side by side. A spark of humanity. I felt less hopeless.

Is this what the march of the corpses is all about?

Rachel, what is the answer?

Finally, the rain stopped and the sun came out. I walked, leaning heavily on the stick Mose had cut for me. With all the time to think, I saw only the men's faces. I saw inside my mind — I didn't think; I only felt the anguish and waited for the moment when we could stop.

Guards and prisoners both achieved a despairing equality, so that when the next camp was first spotted and the Japanese guard nodded — exhausted but with the semblance of a smile stretching across his tight lips — I clapped the shoulder of this tired man holding his rifle so low beside me.

Then suddenly, even before we reached the camp, we saw the river with its arms out to us, and we ran — tired men with a purpose at last — and lay at its edge and drank out of our hands, breathing hard and swallowing.

Men from the camp came running quickly to us. They were shouting, but we couldn't focus the words. We continued lapping happily at the water until they got close enough for us to hear their words:

"It's cholera-infested," they were shouting, "don't drink, don't drink!"

Cholera!

Was there not a good life in the next minute, in the next hour, that I must not jeopardize? Stupidly, I bent and I took one more drink. (Had I not eagerly swallowed five cupped handfuls of cholera already? Will the sixth make a difference?)

Then I experienced a sharp burning rage at myself for having drunk the sixth handful of this death-dealing river water. What happened to my sense of responsibility as husband and father, in that critical moment?

One of the camp's Japanese guards came down to the river and told us with a smile that the march was over, that we now must build ourselves some huts — our permanent living accommodations.

The contrast between the looks of horrified concern on the faces of our fellow "slaves" and the smiles on the Japanese guard's face did not hit me at that moment.

But it dawned on me as I began to help transport materials to build the hut that some of the men entertained the silly suspicion that the Japanese guards were happy that we had drunk of the cholera-infested water.

But there was no time to dwell on that. Building the huts was of more importance. It was a work of love. After three hours, we rested on bamboo platforms and cheered our own success.

Then that grinning guard came back.

"Sorry, the huts are for the Tamils who will soon arrive," he said, a despicable smile now spreading over his face.

The Tamils are part of the tens of thousands of Indians who were rounded up by the Japanese and forced to become "volunteer" workers on the "Great" Railway. They were promised, of course, plenty of food and high pay. The truth: Food is scarce and the pay low; there are no medical officers, only sickness and death.

Within ten minutes, they had us on our feet again. Some men were crying; Mose cursed a world able to tolerate such evil.

The Dutch sergeant major, a professional soldier, could not contain his anger. Refusing at first to march again, he burst out, "We have been slaves of the lowest slaves today. These are the first Tamils in history, I'm sure, who have had white people working for them. Imagine, we are workhorses for those low-class Indians!"

Major Mackay admonished him: "The fate of the Tamils is much worse than ours has ever been. They don't even have doctors. The Japanese lock them up together with their cholera, and they agonize and die by the thousands."

With that, the sergeant major lowered his head, his face still angry, grumbling unintelligibly. Some of his friends joined in with his grumbling. Everyone took up his few belongings and lined up for the march.

We walked some distance until the guards led us to an open area and told us to rest. The sun was still shining. I went to work — found four bamboo rods, pressed them into the black earth, and lay my precious mosquito netting across them. I stood near my white-roofed shelter and stretched, taking in and surprisingly being able to enjoy the apparent peaceful sight around me — the resting men, the green pressed land, the yawning sun in the west, and the mountains to the north — not black or blue, just soft grey. There is almost no dusk in this part of the world; night follows sunset quickly.

Suddenly, I realized that I had not recited my prayers this morning. I thought, I must do it now — the Sabbath will arrive soon. I put on my light but worn and discolored prayer shawl. When I took out the *Tefilin* (phylacteries), which I must not put on during prayers on Saturdays (the very Sabbath day itself is a reminder of the Creator and His creation), my faithful hands surprisingly refused to act. Why? Then a light flashed in my mind.

“Is it Friday?” I asked my neighbor.

“Friday?” he laughed, the sound wheezing horribly in his parched throat. “No, not all. It is Monday. Did you sleep the last three days?”

“Ridiculous, it’s still Thursday,” someone rasped out, and I knew that it was less of a statement than a despairing hope. “You skipped one day.”

As tired as I was, I had to get this right. Was my counting the *Omer* evening after evening not more reliable than the contradicting answers of these three officers? I called over a Dutch professional soldier and asked him what day it was.

He opened his sergeant major’s diary, and after examining it carefully, said with a full sergeant major’s authority, “It is Saturday. Here, you can see my daily entries. Saturday. None are missing.”

Everyone was awake now, suffering silent embarrassment. It was as if the enemy had already won yesterday. We feel no more accountability for our lives, just a vast panicked loss of control.

Are we not defeated?

The loss of a day from the calendar is an especially grievous loss.

My dear Rachel, I feel frightened.

Have I fallen from our people’s frame of time? Is this the beginning of a kind of premature senility in a thirty-three-year-old POW? Must I expect still deeper lows in awareness in the coming months of our life in the jungle?

The sun was reddening, reminding me of approaching night. I returned the weekdays’ phylacteries to their satin bag, and while the sun set in a festival of color that highlighted the last hour of the Sabbath, I wrapped myself in my prayer shawl and recited the jubilant prayers of the Sabbath.

The “lost Sabbath” had come to life, resurrected victoriously in its closing hour.

Beyond Bad Luck

June 8

I met an English POW tonight; in him I met the "entire" country. He is John McCaully, an editor from London.

"I have been experiencing emptiness for seven months," he said. "For seven months, I have been working on the tracks, and now, all I see in my mind are trains and tracks."

John's skin is yellow, and his eyes are so large that they seem to consume his face, yet they testify to life inside the shell. He speaks extremely slowly, in a monotone of apathy, as if he expects to be interrupted by dismissal at any time. He is thirty-four years old; he is an old man. I shook him slightly because I wanted him to feel urgency, energy.

"Eight weeks left, John," I said, "and the railroad will be completed. You will be sent to Tarsao for some time. You won't have to work the north again."

"Yes, certainly," he replied. "There are just gaps left to fill, a few small bridges to complete. The railway will definitely be finished in two months."

"Then," I said, albeit hesitatingly, "you and your exhausted friends will sit here for some more weeks, stopping the constant leakage of life's fluids from your bodies until..."

He looked at me, silent and unmoving. I grew uncomfortable, and cold.

Finally, he said, "It's too late. Bad Luck. The cholera season has begun, and the work here isn't finished yet."

"But the injections?" I asked him.

"We came a long time ago; they didn't think to preserve us. Maybe they expected the completion sooner, or maybe they knew we were dying anyway, from the first step we took on our march into Thailand."

He saw the look of horror on my face.

"They didn't inject you?" I asked.

"Good friend," he said, "maybe the cholera won't visit Tonchin this year. You look frightened. Don't worry." (For my own health? I had injections already.)

The comfort confused me. It had grown silent, all silent inside me. Is this not greatness — Death comforting Life?

It is, Rachel.

He rejoined his group, slowly dragging his tired, heavy feet through the mud, back to his camp further down across the road. I watched him until Mose came back to get me.

"What are you watching, Nuss?" he asked.

"I don't know," I said. I was too much in fear of what new plague might visit us, in our deathmarch, to worry Mose. We all had enough to worry about without taking on projected worries.

"I pray for John McCauly, whose fate is sealed," I said.

We are resting here for a few moments. The walk back to the camp is short, but I have experienced a hurting quality of compassion since I watched John's tired resignation. I am determined to win and to help others to win, in spite of every possible erosion of spirit here.

Resignation. That word haunts me. It is going through John like a poison. It seems to prevail over that entire group of tired British men who look as if the war were a party for which they had dressed wrongly and at which they could never be accepted or feel comfortable. In the coming days, I must visit John and talk to him and his friends.

I sit here, the thought of cholera contrasting disturbingly with the savage, eternal beauty of the mountains. I wonder, Did I make matters uglier for John by appearing halfway healthy?

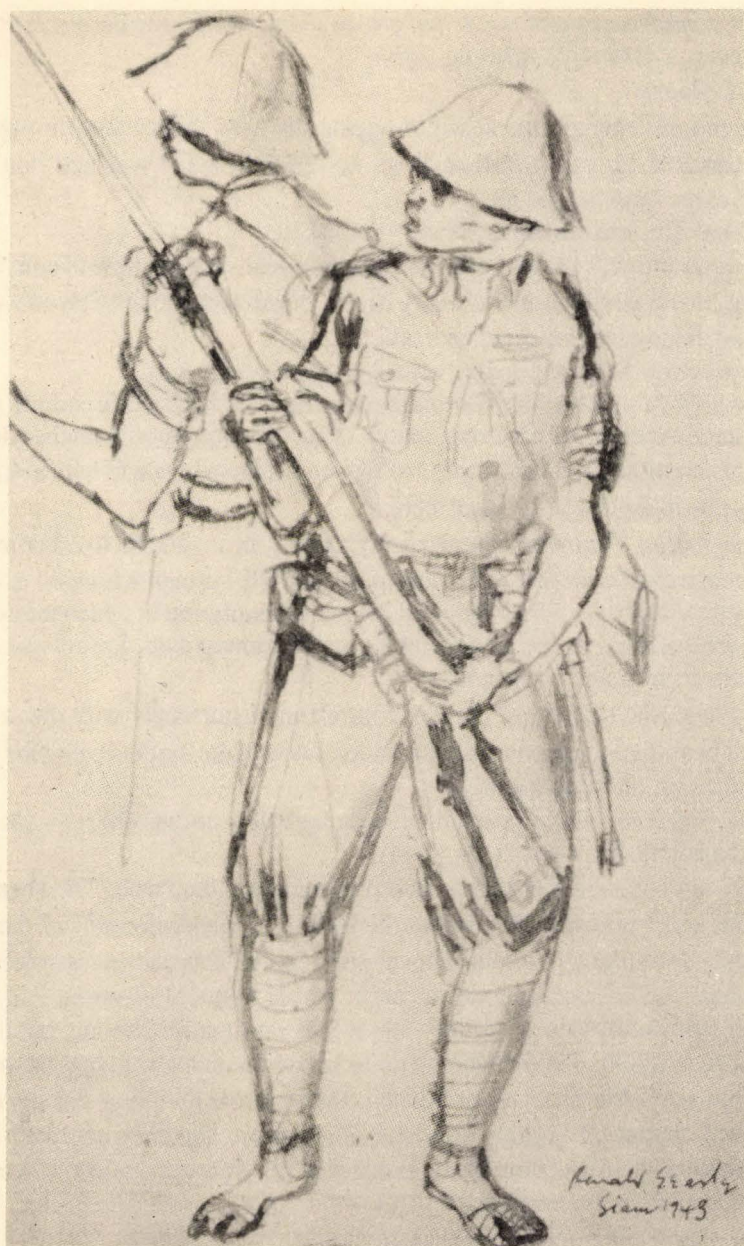
I am overcome with irrational self-reproach. It is not sensible to want to be dangerously ill for the sake of others.

This nasty cholera: I was a young boy living in Holland when I first heard of cholera, and I was sure then it was the Hebrew expression *choli-rah* (an evil sickness). I still think of it in a Biblical perspective. This sickness is indeed *rah* (evil) and vicious: death by dehydration within hours of its onset. It is not a typical tropical disease. Centuries ago it was rampant in Europe, but it was fought successfully. People who claim to know Thailand well, suggest that up to recent years, the Thais never noticed cholera more than they did any other temporal change. It became almost a fifth season, and they accepted it.

If cholera were to come close and I was not injected against it, would I accept it as fate, as sealed fate?

No, I have no tropical blood in my veins.

Because cholera is such an un pitying killer, hunger so nagging, and the Japanese so cruel, the British have learned to accept the undeniable power of fate. But they now realize that they have been caught in the trap of sealed fate. The tortured bodies and minds of these Britishers have passed the critical point. Their bad luck has developed into sealed fate. There is a *Death-Row Company* for which no one has attempted a last appeal to the executioners to at least postpone the fatal date of their execution.



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Cholera 1944, Waterpump made of bamboo tubes invented by the Javanese doctor; by Dutch artist Otto Cramer, who died in Holland in 1980

Strangulation of Death

*Thursday evening, June 10
The end of Shavuoth*

I cannot see well in the moonlight; still, I write about what excites me so much since noon yesterday. I can feel the experience at this moment.

I am among those assigned unimportant tasks because I am not considered physically fit, even according to present standards.

For days now, we have been cutting branches for firewood, in the jungle just beyond the Tamil camp. I use a light ax. I have not been able to cut down an entire tree, just pieces of it hanging at elbow or shoulder height. Then I gather and tie the scraps together and carry them back to the barracks.

The sun is high and fat, and remote blue mountains are visible through the opening cut out at the end of this small jungle. The air that slid, laughing, down the mountainside smells fine from where I stand. But it comes and goes quickly and quite mysteriously. My anxieties are not quelled by these short, fresh breezes — an odor of decay fills this space.

Since we cut enough firewood for the camp, and no one is pushing us now, we can take some time to sit and talk and think. And because it is *Yom Tov*, the holiday of *Shavuoth*, I am not cutting, just collecting loose branches from the ground...to minimize the desecration of the holiday.

I sit alone on a thin, fallen tree, bewildered suddenly by the rage of wild growth all around me. The constant smell of decay, which irritated me for several days, has become even more oppressive. It contrasts sharply with the immense, incessantly sprouting life I now watch.

I realize what has had me mesmerized with both fascination and despair during those days when I have come to this area to collect wood for the tea kitchen. The trunks of these trees are stems really — they are so thin and high.

With my head back, my face lying parallel to the sky, and my vision stretching, I still cannot follow its growth into the heavens.

But somewhere along its body there is disease: death — yellow vines clinging to the green life. It is a crazy uncontrollable growth that fills up even the smallest open spots and all possible passages between the trees; sick leaves leaning on healthy companions and then hoisted with their climb onto the shoulders and backs of the breathing greenery, unaware of their own slow death and not interfering at all in the process of continued existence.

The dead vines seem to be softening, losing spine and muscle, waiting for the tiny push down that will allow them prostration and decent burial. But the new growth is rapid and aggressive — climbing over and around the decay, packing it tighter and tighter so that, without holding, it is being held.

Death is strangled and caught. I am horrified by this cruelty. The jungle doesn't allow its victims dignified death or burial. What was new and green a few weeks ago has been suffocated by mightier life and is now not even allowed comfortable rest under leaves.

Still, I have never before experienced this existential pitying of death!

I am a prisoner of this war and I feel close to the spectacle of death: embarrassed, cheated, tangled and imprisoned. Perhaps it is frustration; I am seized by the idea of action. What if I were to stand and stretch to free each of those corpses, climbing higher and higher to rescue them...? What are they to me? I am not, intrinsically, such a hero.

How can anyone challenge this jungle? It is not just the exasperating multitudinousness of this place but also the variety of forms. Insect life: a configuration of disproportionately multi-limbed imagery; any combination of legs, bodies, wings; ugly, horror-inspiring creations — visions of deep color and movement. It is all here.

I am fascinated, I am overwhelmed by the millions of living things here. The vegetation seems to grow in a rage, intent upon filling every crack, every opening, with its presence. Every kind of mold and fungus appears on the dampness. It is nature, it is *Art*, and it is deadly.

Life seems to be irrepressible and so overwhelming. Death creeps in and races to catch up. The race is very close — they overlap.

Is this truly laughable or the first symptom of my own disintegration? Am I losing my sense of proportion — equating the decay of vegetation with human loss?

No. It is just a gentle game. Nothing serious. Not yet.

I once watched as my Eurasian friend searched around, chose a few choice rods, branches and cordlike plants, and in less than two minutes, assembled a strong carrying yoke. He loaded it, lifted it onto his shoulders and with light fast steps, walked, barefoot, out of the jungle into the camp.

It was smooth, but it seemed to lack power. Can dynamism be expected from tropical man?

Nature provides him with all his needs. European man cannot fathom this. Nature is so abundant here, it's wasteful. Tools are not even necessary; they are an inherent part of the gift...branches and leaves make very sturdy yokes.

But must this mean a life of virtual passivity for tropical man? Will he ever make use of nature for more than his basic requirements?

I hope I have not lost a friend, but I approached Amir, a native Javanese aristocrat, educated at Holland's Leiden University and said, "Listen, Amir, despite the progress of the last century, effected by the colonial empires, what the tropical regions need more than anything else is technology. Not the limited amounts that colonial Big Business is prepared to export to these lands, but real powerful technological tools."

When I spoke of the colonial powers, Amir raised his head again, looking me in the eye, ready to reject my ideas.

I raised my voice slightly, putting emphasis on each word, "It is true, machines are black, grey and ugly, potentially harmful. But they are consistent and productive. They stand firmly in their place and accomplish their tasks. Tropical nature, however, appears delinquent, unreliable; and tropical man seems to be incapable of taming the growth-craze of the jungle."

I quickly discovered a visible change of color in my friend's cheeks, and anger in his eyes. Standing up, he pushed words through pressed-together lips, "Who needs tractors here? Can you compare them with these intelligent, majestic elephants? It is true the jungle and the forests are not antiseptic. European-American type organized unions and production lines may never come to real life in the steaming dampness of the fascinating jungles and forests of Thailand and Burma."

This time, I did not react — I wanted to hear Amir baring his soul. He seemed silent at first and then he spoke, as if he were pitying me, "I cannot blame you. Your European eyes are not capable of sensing the intriguing harmony in this confusing chaos."

He was right. I am a newcomer to this part of the world. I do not know his world. In fact, I forgot that in oriental society, one does not continue arguing and debating if your friend has indicated that your opinions do not please him. I realized I must apologize to him without delay. But before I managed to do so, he had risen and with a silent nod, left.

Amir returned very soon and sat down again, near me on the thick roots of a heavy tree outside our tent.

He said, "We must not quarrel."

Then silence fell. I had to break it. I responded, "It may be important for us — an authentic son of this region and a newcomer from the Motherland — to discuss these ideas in order to understand them better."

No response. I offered my point of view, "As soon as equatorial man discovers the dynamics of fighting the jungle in all its forms — freeing death from the strangulating embrace of untamed growth — he will have emancipated himself from colonialism. Actually, colonialism will have fulfilled itself historically by then."

Now Amir smiled his soft, philosophical smile. "How interesting," he said. "My views have changed since I entered POW life; I have moved in the opposite direction, however. As the Japanese succeeded in breaking the master-spirit of the Dutch, they broke mine also. Was I not part of the Belanda (Dutch) class, European in my upbringing and thinking? This pride and awareness of superiority died in me even faster than in you. What remained intact within you Dutchmen is the hope of a new future back home. What remained in me is the hope to return to my home, to this untamed tropical world, which must never be diluted by the smelly, suffocating smokestacks and the horizon-darkening, crowding-in chimneys."

How sure he was of himself now. He added that he may make a pilgrimage to Gandhi to study his spinning wheel — no smoke, no noise, no unpleasant smells...no colonial technology.

It is obvious that Amir does not love debating to the end. It seems that he is not prepared to borrow now on promises for the future. He is willing to compromise, rather, with present reality.

June 11

The horror of cholera...creeping up on us

It is strange that after so many months the Sabbath has finally penetrated, moving inside me, dancing there. I have never misplaced the seventh day...I have never performed work on the Sabbath in the Thailand camps...except once, a week ago, when I helped to build the huts that were given to the Tamils, but then I believed it to be Friday.

Still, on all those Sabbath days, holiness could not find a place to stand in the camp around me (blood and mud and tragedy are huge, ungainly things) and certainly not inside me, with all the questions and worries filling more than their warranted space. Until last Tuesday on the eve of this *Shavuoth* holiday. I had the holiness, the tiny, sacred searing spark inside me then. Rest and happiness in my soul lasted all night, until noon of the second day of the festival of the Sinai.

I was then walking very slowly, almost shuffling, back to camp because my mind was engaged in thoughts of this holiday — in thoughts of *Torah* — and I could not spend the time or effort to instruct my legs and feet in movement.

My reverie was interrupted by the sound of agonizing, long, thin screams thrown out of the Tamil, thatched hut facing me. I walked closer and looked inside.

Like snakes wriggling, winding, writhing, and turning, there were bodies on the floor of the hut, crying the small sharp cries that bullets cry in passage. There was no doctor, no medical orderly. At the far end of the tent lay a sick boy, his hair wet. While I looked at him, he convulsively swung his face around, his mouth biting the dirty dust, swallowing it — a mouthful. I pulled the tent wide open now, carefully lifting my left foot so as not to kick the wailing elderly Tamil whose head blocked the entrance. The other Tamils were outside, busily talking, apparently unconcerned. Are they beyond caring? Fate?

We were not allowed any kind of communication with the Tamils, but between the lines that rules are written on is an entirely orderless world. I moved the curtain and bent to enter. For some reason I looked back first and saw a Japanese guard moving toward me. My mind moved again to the boundaries the war had drawn, and I left the hut and returned to camp. I took the suffering with me.

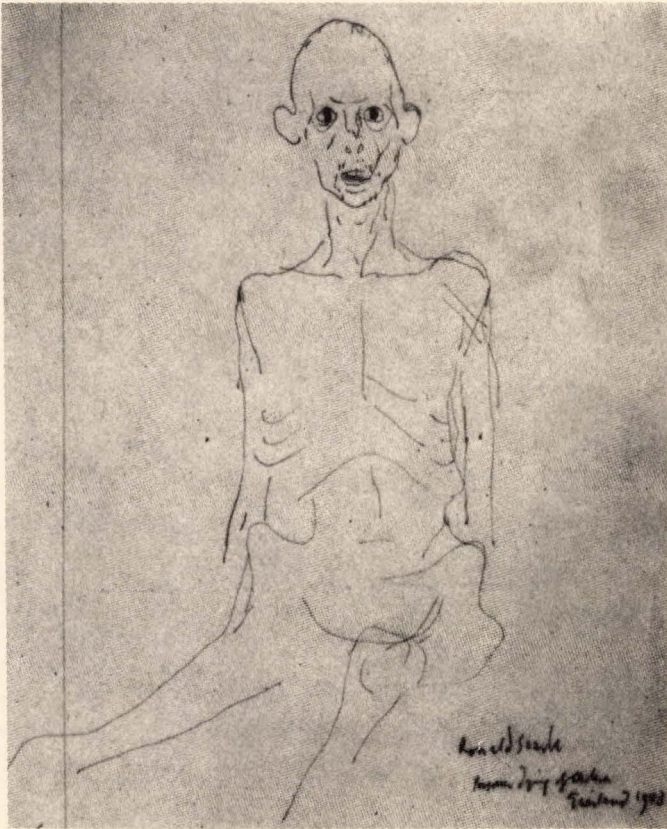
They were building high fences around our camp. More fences, I thought with bitterness.

Was I a coward not to climb them? I soon found out that they were building fences not so much to keep us inside as to keep the Tamils and their cholera outside.

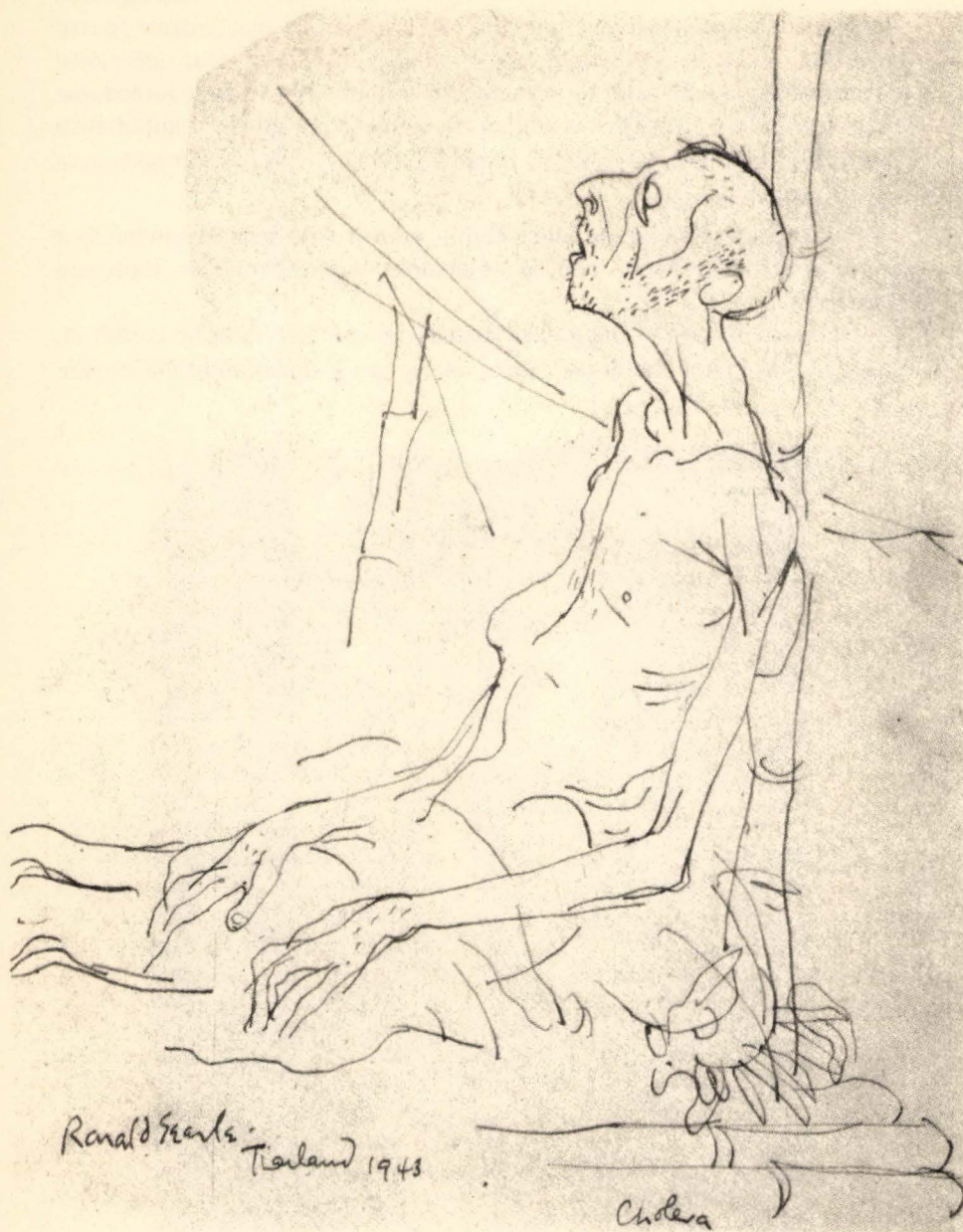
As I looked at the tents gradually being shrouded by the encroaching fence, a feeling of disquiet swept over me. If it had not been for that Japanese guard appearing suddenly, I would have entered the tent, and attempted unrealistically to help calm those wriggling bodies. I would have turned that still-not-dead face upside down with my bare fingers, emptying vomit-cholera from a distorted mouth. And I...I might have swallowed a good portion of vicious cholera myself.

Amir, that boy and all the other Tamils who will be dead within the next few days are desperately in need of doctors, medical supplies, tools and technology.

I suggested to one of our Dutch doctors to volunteer, but he is shut in, fenced in. He joined me at the fence, staring in the direction of the cholera tents.



Siamese Jungle, 1943, Prisoner dying of Cholera by Ronald Searle



| Cholera: Man dying of cholera by Ronald Searle

June 13

It is in the air. We are afraid to touch anything — the disease is everywhere. Men sit very still, as if it would not notice them unless they moved.

Cholera has arrived. We are still quarantined within the high fences surrounding our camp.

I have just received news that one hundred and thirty British soldiers in the camp across the road died yesterday (John was not a survivor, of course). The cholera only hastened the end for those deathmasked men. Dehydration, in a black coat, is taking the victims painfully away.

Our Dutch doctor is employing a primitive method here. He plunges a bamboo tube through skin and muscle (I am told the pain is excruciating). At one end, a sharply pointed, thin tube fits into a wider tube containing the saving water; higher up, an ingenious bamboo-tube pump pushes the water through the triangulated, sharply cut bamboo into the suffering bodies. The thinness and porosity of those yellowed skins softens the piercing pain and the pumping pressure.

Will these bamboo tubes win the race against the flood of body fluids pouring out in diarrhea and vomiting?

The cholera hut has been isolated and fenced around. There, the Dutch doctor, the angel Raphael sent down from Heaven, and his assistants pump indefatigably. And indeed, they do appear to be winning the battle. This has lessened the frightening version of *choli-rah*.

Does this not confirm life's indestructability?

Of our group, only two men have died. It is rumored that they avoided the injections the Japanese had offered us in Kanbury. They died of suspicion, really.

June 14

There are close to ten Jews in this "slave" camp and they demand a chaplain's full day. I also give my attention to a number of non-Jews who approach me. Still, I feel that I ought to undertake some additional responsibilities in a camp where most of the people work so hard. I undertook to overlook the supply of wood for the vitally important hot-water kitchen. I kept this up until diarrhea started to trouble me last week.

On Thursday, I had to visit the latrines repeatedly. I suspected dysentery, and this was confirmed by the doctor, who comforted me saying that although it was a painful attack, it was neither cholera nor the tough amoebic dysentery. MMB tablets promptly clear up bacterial dysentery, but there are no such drugs in the camp. And because of cholera, the Thai and Chinese black marketeers do not come up with their boats any more to sell stolen drugs. Still, this dysentery may go away with rest and a careful diet.

Additional latrines are needed, but there are no men available to dig more trenches. In daytime, we must wait even more patiently for a free spot at the latrines. Unfortunately, this kind of patience is beyond the power of many sufferers. Unable to contain themselves, they soil the ground around the latrines — until workers manage to clean up the mess or rather, cover it with sand.

During the nights, one does not have to join queues. Still, because of my frequent trips, the first nights of my dysentery illness became unbearable, especially during the hours of moonless nights. I relied upon my loyal stick to reach the latrines.

I moved first between the huts, then past the hospital and the Tamils noisily chattering and gambling long past midnight. Finally, I reached the sandy area of the latrines. My stick served me loyally most of the time when my feet sank into a marshy spot or bumped against an elevation in the treed area, but the pain shot through my sick bowels and my tired brain.

When I finally arrived, I found open spaces. But spread all around were sick bodies. Their need to relieve themselves became so frequent (every ten or twenty minutes) that these POWs had decided to stay nearby while attempting to sleep.

I then proceeded cautiously toward the rim of the latrine, groping for the large bamboo beam left over the open trench for support.

Rachel, two days ago, an exhausted dysentery sufferer fell into the deep ditch. A number of convalescent patients pulled him out, and he was brought to the hospital-hut where he may die any day.

Traveling became easier during subsequent nights. First, the number of moon hours increased, and my stick managed to memorize all low marshy and raised bumpy spots along the road.

Once, when it was almost morning, our latrine sessions were interrupted by the “fly-delicacies” work group. This group came with a large shovel and some buckets to pick up a few loads of fat flies to be thoroughly washed and cooked in the kitchen.

These fly delicacies are distributed mostly to the Dutch who are so eager to add protein to their meager diet that they overcome their revulsion.

After the workers left with their full buckets, I was curious about those masses of flies that had not been shoveled out. Unconcerned with the fate of their removed, less fortunate competitors, they continued to fatten themselves on excrement.

Rachel, our state is so rich in contradictions: Mose claims it is ironic that those flies feeding on the products of dysentery patients should have been left down there this morning to become still fatter and richer donors of protein health for the very men on whose excrement they now feed.

Laughing at Bad Luck

June 17

The latrines are always crowded now. We stand in groups and wait for a vacancy. Most of the time, the poor boys suffering the most active stage of dysentery do not give up their places, so we wait longer; but we understand.

Today, I stood near the end of the line, and often when it was my turn to move forward, I stayed back because I am on my way out of this disease and I remember the urgency of the sickness. I moved backward allowing some of the men to go ahead of me.

I became aware of an odd, annoyingly persistent smell near me; I looked past several heads and saw a man in a small circle of loneliness. (People are not actually cruel here, but we tend to protect ourselves mightily from pain.)

I recognized him; it was John Cole.

I think the men move away from John because they are overridden with misery. As soon as they are reminded — with a hint, a move of a finger — that they are hurting him, they move back. John knows...he is not hurt...he is one of them.

"I would move away from myself if I could," he told me today, with that gentle smile and forgiving nod.

I met John once in Changi — a tall, congenial, energetic man. Today, when I saw him, I recognized his face but I could not attach a name to it because he is not tall any more. He is curved, his body S-shaped, and he has ulcers all over him and bandages over the sores. The bandages have been cut from prisoner-

of-war uniforms, and their centers are faded and yellow from the discharge.

I went to him because our glances collided and held, and he was smiling.

"John," he told me, "John Cole. Do you remember now?"

I nodded slowly, hesitant about admitting so openly that his illness had changed his appearance to the extent that he was not recognizable; but we both knew.

"Don't stand too close," he said. "These damn flies were here first. They reserved the space."

His smile infuriated me. It looked gruesome, fixed. Why are you smiling? I wanted to ask him. But then I realized what it was — the persistently brave humor of British acceptance.

"I realize my scent does not give the impression of perfume," he said.

He noticed that I was leaning back on one leg and then to the side on my other leg, trying with motion to create some wind force, to veer the smell away from me. It shot like pure alcohol at my eyes, into my nose, into my mouth. I wanted to speak with John, but I could not concentrate.

"You will find this difficult to believe," he told me, "but I don't notice the aroma any more. My nose has been mercifully paralyzed."

He laughed, dry short abrupt sounds, "But you, Rabbi, you must stand back and talk louder, or the agony on your face will totally divert my attention."

"I am sorry, John, truly sorry."

He shook his head and waved his hand to push the words away; a bandage fell off his wrist. He bent over, so straight — a perfect right angle — lifted the bandage out of the dirt, cleaned it stiffly with his other hand and replaced it.

"No, John," I said quickly, involuntarily reaching to pull the unsanitary cloth back.

"Do they still come in white?" he asked me. He wasn't smiling, and his eyes looked pierced. "I didn't realize — all of mine are made out of stains and dirt."

I apologized again and again through the afternoon. Why do we always pull people down with us when we stumble?

Despite John's apparent patience, his anger is waiting to leap from a furious clenched crouch, and he directs it, all of it, at the flies that torment him, that sit on his sores, reminding him that he is open to such indignity.

I have watched the dying. I have seen cholera and dysentery draining, dragging, squeezing life from boys. But John — looking at John — pulls my stomach into my throat.

I ask an old question that annoys my conscience, but I ask it without choice, Is John not created in the Almighty's image? Yes. Then, where and when did he "drop out" of it?

I stared at this disfigurement of human life and thought, this is horror! This

is all the horror in the definition of war.

But John is so British — all I have to do is look at his eyes. There is peace in them, almost a catatonic calm. And at the end of a typically civilized conversation, he would invariably say to the sky, in a rapt monotone, “It is a pity to suffer so endlessly. Some are lucky, some are not.”

John is not a philosopher; he laughed when I asked him if he was. He simply follows a pattern of behavior.

“I learned how to live when I was a child and except for the changes time has forced on me, I have been faithful to my education.”

Then slowly, with some difficulty, he said, “I know myself. Believe me, experience has taught me that I can live like this for three months, and I have heard from reliable sources that this war will end in thirteen weeks. So everything will be fine. But I cannot live much longer with these atrocities biting at me, or with the smell I see reflected in the disgust in my neighbor’s eyes. I am certain to embarrass myself should I lose control over pain. Do *you* think victory will reach us in three months?”

His eyes were suddenly hungry eyes, and I had to feed them, him, something large — a feast.

“Of course,” I said. “Certainly.”

He nodded, pleased. “Thirteen weeks, who will not survive that?”

He swung and smacked, left, right, at the bothersome bandages heavy with flies that sang a single note — *zzzzzz* — that mixed into an unutterable thick ugliness and swarmed around and settled on the pus-soaked bandages.

“Excuse my dance,” he told me. “I support these small beings; without me they would starve...but they are heartless. They take advantage of my goodness. They never rest, so I don’t.” His smile stared, he shook his head back and forth, “I despair sometimes, I do. It is nasty.”

A space opened at the latrines, and selflessly, John said, “Fast, Rabbi, a gift. Go, and bless you.”

“Bless *you*,” I whispered.

June 20

The half-cubic-meter hole is the POW’s grave

“If a miracle will not occur really soon, the work on this part of the embankment will kill us all,” said Pete, the fisherman’s son whom I had known from elementary school in Scheveningen.

He had been working now for two weeks, not showing any signs of exhaustion. But late yesterday evening, after a full day's work, he was brought to the tent for serious bleeding dysentery cases.

He told me that the night before, he had spent most of his time at the latrines; still, he had gone to work this morning. He hated complaining to the doctor when the work was waiting out there. I reminded him of the brain concussion he suffered, back in Tjilatjap, for working too hard on the heavy tins of paint.

Half asleep, he whispered, "My father, tall and broad-shouldered, always told me one never lets a piece of work go unfinished." (He had apparently made peace with his father and did not seem to hate him any more.)

As Pete slept, I filled his mug with water. I told him that because of his Dad-compulsion, his condition had become so much more serious. But he did not hear....

June 22

Pete was quite talkative today. He looked out at the workers lining up, looking just a little less tired himself this morning than they were when they went to sleep.

"Yesterday morning, I still felt it was only fair that I go out to work. This morning, I saw it differently. I now hate it. It is murderous. The question of fairness doesn't come up any more," he told me.

"Since you haven't been out there, Nuss, you can't imagine what it really is. Each morning, when we arrive at this site, we are shown a one-square-meter spot. We must dig a hole one meter deep and carry the dug-up earth up the embankment. Every day, we are told that we will not go home for supper and a night's sleep before the dirt of a one-cubic-meter hole is moved up there."

Because his friend had difficulty climbing a ladder and at the same time carrying loads, Pete dug all the time and carried the loads.

"Not that the loads are so heavy — no carts, no large containers."

Now for the first time he smiled, "If they had those, they would not have needed us to come and finish the railways!"

I realized that Pete should not get excited, but he had to vent his bitterness and disappointment. He fell silent, holding his stomach with both his hands. His face was now badly distorted by a moment of intense pain. I attempted to

stop him from talking, but he became irritated.

"You see, what hurts most is fear... fear of that beastly guard who suddenly emerges at the top of the hole, hitting me with his heavy bamboo stock, causing me to fall back into the hole and lose my load."

Pete fell silent, then panicked. Awkwardly, he rose and ran to the latrines, losing bits of fluid along the way.

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The Tamil and His Death Tree

June 25

Dysentery does not cause me much trouble now. This afternoon, I decided I could go straight from the latrines to the road. There I watched the traffic, which appeared to be quite heavy. There was a large crowd of Tamils apparently enjoying a break.

It was like a market, no one looking at anyone, everyone going about his own business. The Japanese guards in fire-fighter hats (it was the first time that I had seen this comical sight) walked briskly, their hands held like curved roofs over their eyes as they searched the grass for bodies left by cholera. The British POWs who were recruited to bury the dead walked slowly, with deliberate steps, carrying their dead on makeshift bamboo stretchers.

One of the younger British soldiers, solemn and tree-like, discovered a body sleeping an early death in the grass. He used his long pole to roll the body over and over, down to the river (but not too near the water), to a place where all the dead lie together so that contamination can be centralized and contained.

He was joined by another sickly British boy, full-eyed and sad, and they covered the body with listless lifts and drops of black circles of earth. A veteran informed me that men will come later, in the dark, and burn the poison away.



Singapore, 1944.
A member of the
Kempei-tai.



Dawn Parade after a rainy night of three hours sleep by Ronald Searle



Siam-Burma Railway Prisoners cutting into the mountain near Konyu,
about June 1943 by Ronald Searle

Amid all of this, Tamils were running, talking and gesturing, then stopping suddenly in sporadic unison to rest. They are in a separate world, and I wonder if they realize that we are all here because there is a war.

The Tamils are a distraction. They talk as they walk, talk with their arms, with their hands, and I have seen even their feet talking...their entire bodies. Their language is so fast and so apparently overlapped and interwoven that I wonder if they understand each other. They stopped to rest and eat, but the short, sharp sound of their speech continued, persisted.

A strange thing just then — the group was standing in a cluster, as they usually do, and one young Tamil stayed behind. He moved to a tree, smoothing the grass in front of the trunk. He patted it down, felt the bark, and tore off certain prickly parts of it. Then he returned for an old man who was folded still in a resting spot. I hadn't noticed him; he was so quiet and yellow.

The young Tamil carried the older man to his tree and leaned him against it. He moved branches and leaves to block the light and heat of the sun. Then he took food from his bag and arranged it nearby. He left a flask of something, water probably. When the old man seemed to be falling, the boy took a shirt from his pack and shifted it around the thin body. Every movement was gentle and firm.

A father and son? The Tamils accept death...treat it as a necessary expectation; but there was too much sadness and tenderness in this lingering goodbye. Yes, perhaps a father and son.

The Tamils started to move, and some of them turned around and called back to the young Tamil, motioning with their arms, loud anger in their voices. The young man looked at them as they moved around a corner, and then he stood and stared at the old man. It seemed to me, but I was not physically close enough to be a reliable witness, that the old man stared back in unemotional acceptance of what was happening.

Suddenly, the young man was gone. He had run after his group, and there was no actual goodbye. The old man put an arm out and then it fell back.

How are we to understand this? Was he just a young man doing his duty? Or was there aching tenderness and a very deliberately lingering farewell? Or was it all intermingled and hidden deep in their minds?

The old Tamil was left there to die.

Every man is born to die; the old man is waiting, unconcerned, looking around, embedding his bent back closer against the hollowing bent of the trunk of his own very special death tree.

I must return now to the camp. But like it or not, lonely old man, you will not die alone. You are in my mind.

June 30

Because of the ingenious water-injection apparatus that the Dutch doctor invented, cholera is now mostly controlled and is no longer a major threat to our survival.

Still, by this time, the Japanese are extremely nervous. The epidemic has slowed the final phase of the railway work. The deadline for its completion is coming closer; and since the Japanese engineers expect to be heavily punished if they don't maintain the schedule, they punish us now. This is a privileged officers' camp, and so far, we have not been assigned real sweat labor. But in recent weeks, the Japanese railway engineers have set a daily minimum of ninety men to work the railway site — including patients who are able to walk.

Most of the sick POWs were instructed to attend roll call. One of my fellow dysentery patients and I have been selected to join the work group.

The doctor said, "No. They will dirty themselves, over and over. They are sick."

The Japanese did not even look at us as he motioned us into the lineup.

"No!" said the lieutenant colonel, a British Indian who was in charge today and standing in front of us.

The Japanese guard was angry and began to growl and spit. He stepped forward, but our defender put his arms out and said again, "No, they are sick!"

Then the lieutenant colonel began to act "military." His eyes ignoring the guard, he called us to attention and ordered us to turn around and march.

We promptly obeyed his orders and hurried to our huts — a rare display of military discipline in this unmilitary camp.

It worked. No Japanese followed us — there was no more shouting.

Eighty-eight men worked the railway today. The Japanese certainly respect a show of authority. (Today, they did not call dysentery patients to roll call.)

The Unfinished Bridge

July 6

These last weeks have been unusually difficult for the workers. Measurements were miscalculated by the Japanese engineers, and there were gaping holes where tracks should have met. (The engineers blamed it all on faulty construction — actually, POW sabotage!) The main problem was the one unfinished bridge.

The guards' nervousness did nothing to speed up the work. They hit the workers' heads just as they climbed out of the pits, carrying the sand they had dug out painstakingly, most of which then fell back down.

Because of their growing nervousness, the Japanese counted and recounted the men each morning and generally made no end of mistakes. First, there was one man too many, then one man too few; thus the men began each day exhausted from the endless standing while the guards ran nervously up and down the lineup, constantly mumbling numbers. In the evening, it was the same thing again, the never-ending count...when what all the men wanted was supper and sleep.

Torrential rain came down night after night. The tent roofs leaked in many spots; consequently, when the men finally lay down for their six-hour sleep, the heavy raindrops woke them. They then decided to sit the rain out with their sheets wrapped around them and their heads tucked down low between their wet knees, trying to catch some sleep.

Sometimes, I wake up and see them — pitiable figures huddled together. They look like small children trying to stay warm and comforted in a pitiless, vengeful world.

Which will come first, relief or death?

July 8

The Japanese made a horrifying announcement after work yesterday: Today there will be nonstop labor and no sleep until the fueling tunnels around the bridge are completed.

I feel guilty because I have the good fortune of still having dysentery.

I watched the workers marching out this morning, some looking afraid, some resigned, a few even angry, but most of them expressionless. They are just empty, collapsible frames now.

We had heard from a few of the workers who returned to pick up "supper" for their co-workers, that the officers/slaves were going to work through the night and the following day. They whispered to us that the guards continue to strike them, trying to wake them from their sleepworking. With unseeing eyes, I imagine those shaky frames being whipped on their heads and backs like human workhorses.

We tried to speak to these messengers, to help them eat, but the men wanted only to sleep. They opened their eyes as though to accept our offers of help and then closed them again, tightly. It took more than ten minutes to rouse them from this deathlike sleep.



Roll-Call with Beating-up by Ronald Searle

Exit from Tonchin

July 12

Dear Rachel,

How life sometimes turns from the worst to the best within a short time. The moment the work on the railroad was officially declared finished, the Japanese guards and engineers in our camps became relaxed and friendly, as if they have pity for all the human wrecks they have driven unmercifully. Are they half military machine, half man? When not under orders, are they human again, loving children, having pity?

The cholera season has also come to an end, allowing us to enjoy the luxury of drinking water. Besides, there are, at present, enough people to cut wood for boiling the water. We now wonder how we survived on a ration of two mugs of water daily for drinking and washing. One had to be an acrobat to be able to wash hands and tins, and have enough left for drinking from the water contained in a small mug. Because of the water shortage, our skin problems have spread rapidly.

But I can't help wondering about the irony of the situation. The very rain that caused so much suffering to the workers filled the mess-tins of the sick. Even patients who were not able to leave their tents could place their tins under one of the larger holes in the roof. Ironical or tragic?

The Thais, eager to sell their produce, have returned with their boats. The Dutch officers have demonstrated generosity in financing a special canteen which supplies their men with good food for a minimal price. Our POW administration showed good business sense when they bought four cows from the Thais. The men built a fence to protect the animals, and now meat is served three times a day.

The health of the men who only a few weeks ago had given up all hope for survival improves daily. Dignity has also returned to those who were deeply ashamed about their skin troubles. The Thais sold chunks of sulphur, and the men spend many hours of the day breaking minor and major pus boils, then treating them with the miracle drug. When, a few days later, powdered sulphur became available, many of the sufferers ceased to suffer from bad odors and dehumanizing appearance.

July 13

Last night, we had visitors from Caun's camp — "Caun's boys" they call themselves. Caun, still a POW interpreter, was boiling over with creative ideas.

In Bandung, he had shown initiative with his suggestion (albeit unsuccessful) that the Jewish POWs declare themselves Eurasians. After arriving in Thailand, he had managed to implant himself as supervisor of vehicles, rail tracks and the distribution of medical supplies to the camps. His men never suffered hunger.

What might surprise people most is that Caun, although he is exposed to almost irresistible temptation, has a reputation of being scrupulously honest. (Still, we saw that some of his men, whom we met in Banpong on the morning we arrived in Thailand, were black marketeers.)

He accomplished his primary aim — promoting the welfare of his men — when he managed to ingratiate himself with the Japanese-Thai Command.

What he meant to his people was conveyed to us by Vredevoogd, the former head of entertainment in Bandung, who was on an overnight visit in Tonchin delivering medical supplies from Caun's camp to our hospital. He had taken his guitar along, and we had a pleasant evening of music, song and recitation.

At the end, he answered questions about his camp.

There was a sudden silence after he told us that since their first day as prisoners in Bandung, they had not had even one burial.

"We are all there, and we hope that when we go home, we will still all be there."

He broke the silence, adding, "This is what Caun, the so-called Bohemian, means to us."

One of the boys wonders if we should not volunteer to stay in Tonchin. The answer is negative. In spite of good (fresh) food and leisure, we are impatient to leave the sad memories of Tonchin. Maybe we are afraid that the Japanese will find last-minute repairs to be done by us on the railroad. Just a few hours ago, they requested twenty men from our unit to go to Spring Camp to do some repair work there. Once again, Captain van der Vecht intervened and refused to provide volunteers. True to his character, however, he himself volunteered — as he had done last year in Changi — though his health is no longer good.

July 15

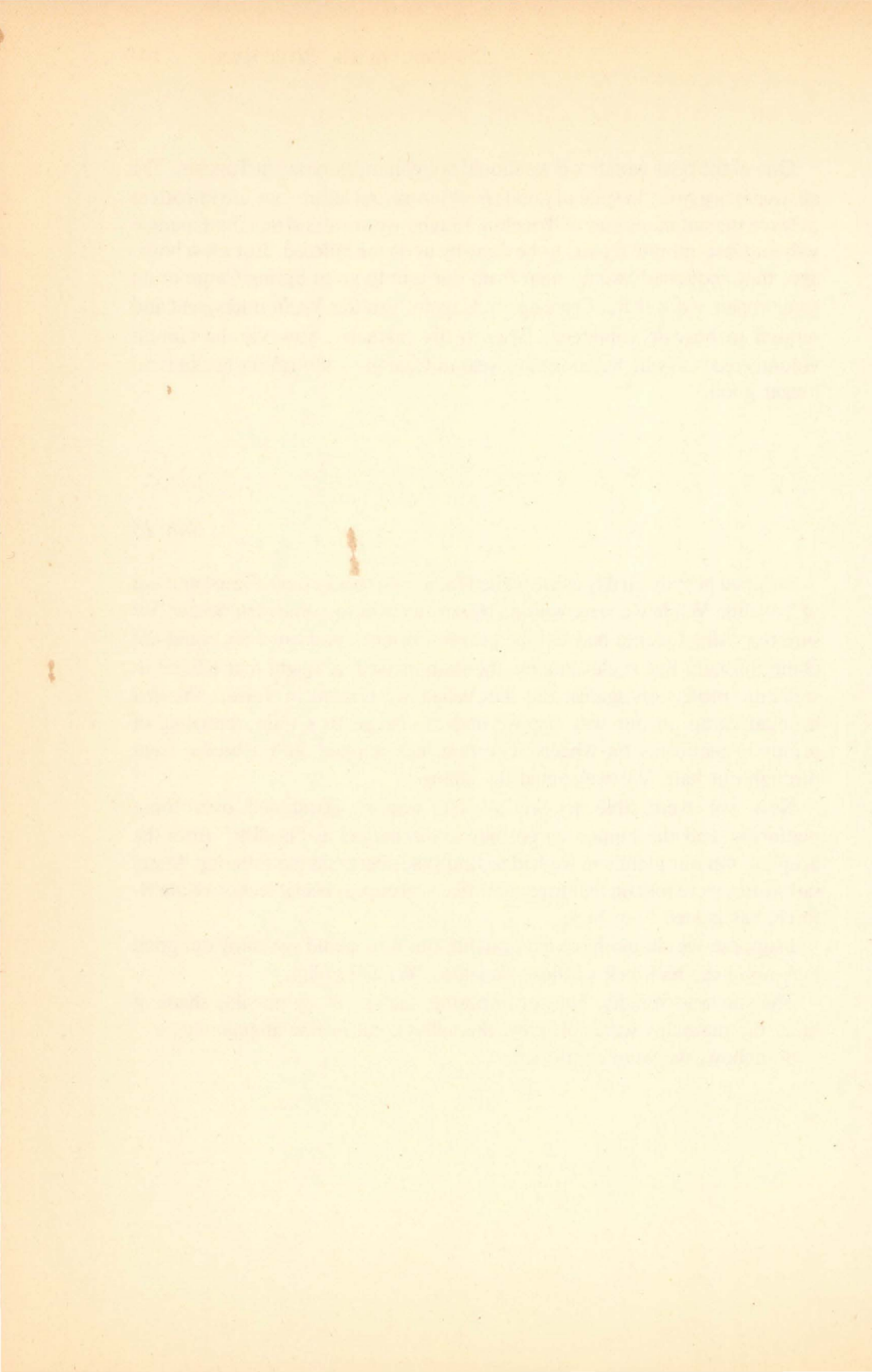
It rained heavily all day as we waited for a train to take our officers' unit out of Tonchin. While we were waiting rumors were born: some men "knew" for sure that Allied planes had bombed several bridges, and our train could not come through. But at eleven a.m., the train arrived, a freight that offered us welcome protection against the rain. When we arrived in Tarsao, the first hospital camp on our way up, we had to change to a train consisting of primitive platforms on wheels. The rain had stopped, and a breeze went through our hair. We welcomed the change.

Now we were able to see all the wagons positioned over those platforms...and the human cargo, newly discharged as "healthy" from the hospital. On our platform, we had to find space between the suffering. Many sad stories were told on that trip; our officers' group, a special section of the H-force, has indeed been lucky.

I suppose we should have felt grateful, but how could we enjoy our good luck amid the bad luck of those skeletons. We felt guilty.

The sun was friendly, but not imposing, the sky every possible shade of blue...the mountains were soft grey, the valleys, cut in fine angular shapes.

Somehow, we were comforted.



The Tamarkan Bridge Camp

The Tamarkan Bridge Camp

July 17, 1943

Dear Rachel,

We had traveled close to fifty miles before we disembarked. When we arrived, it was dark. From a distance, I saw the large, lighted gate attached to a high fence, and I stopped breathing for a few seconds. Although we had lived in constant fear of death these last months, at least we had not been obviously caged in. But in truth, fences are a sign of civilization, and the jungle is also an impenetrable barrier — thus, we were actually locked inside our previous camps too.

At the gate, they stopped us, and we were sprayed with disinfectant. The men we meet radiate health and enthusiasm, and we hear laughter. There are no hungry thin eyes, no empty begging hands. True, it is a closed camp, but there is civilization here.

Our commandant is a born leader. He seems to be steady and ethical and he attempts to maintain a level of comfort and emotional balance. It is said (a gross exaggeration, of course) that there is little reason to die in this camp if you have not arrived here with a mind set to die. If only you reach here, you will be safe.

The canteen is full — cigarettes, drinks, food — none of it spoiled or waiting under dust. Most everyone here walks as if he is proud of something...stepping to a mind-music. In the previous camps, we had moved to the absence of sound — with an emptiness of spirit, slow and dragging.

During our first night here, we began to scratch. Lice...all over our bodies. Always some strong hand to smack elation down. Through the night, it became worse, progressively more unbearable to those of us who had never had lice in our camps before (although bedbugs were everywhere).

The camp is close to immaculate, with large and well-ordered huts, but it seems that with every new contingency, some germ is carried in that must be quelled. Because of our lice, we must leave all of our clothes in a huge pot of boiling water, at the other end of the camp.

Our hut has been completely emptied, and we washed every bamboo stick with boiling hot water (an unbelievable luxury in a Japanese POW camp). I wait now to receive my ferociously boiled clothes, after having scrubbed my head and body intensely. I wait to feel better, but then I hear from camp veterans that the lice will return — in about four to six weeks.

July 19

Exit Yits

Sergeant Major Wouters, a professional soldier with a soft heart, came up to me, greeting me like a lost friend.

"I liked Lisser from the first day I met him in Bandung. We all tried, we all did. So many died in that camp of horrors. But his death touched me, touched all of us. You see, Lisser was a pious man, a saint, a real saint," he said, without any introduction. "He never hurt a soul....Maybe he should have. But he could not take it any more, watching our men stealing the eggs from their sick neighbors."

I shook my head, trying to absorb what he was telling me.

"True, he would yell, call for the orderlies. But before one would arrive, the eggs would be swallowed in a fearful hurry."

Eggs, eggs. What's all this about eggs...and my friend, Yits Lisser?

"Also, you see, he was always hungry."

Was? Not is? Was!

"He could not take it — seeing the trembling hands and the tears of someone even hungrier than he."

I was silent, as if paralyzed — body and soul. Vaguely, I became aware of a man racing toward us from some distance. It was Sol Sternfeld, the man who had read his two poems to us on a relaxed Jewish New Year's day in Tjilatjap and later again at the *Purim* party in Changi.

With both hands stretched out, he shouted, "Thank the Almighty, you are alive!" He shook my hand, then sensed the mood and quietly began to tell me about Yits.

The two of them had left Changi together for the railroad work gangs, but Sol had come down to Tamarkan Camp alone.

"It just got worse after we came north," he said quietly. "Yits wasn't able to accept those dehumanizing conditions. And his dream of food ever-flowing here proved to be a false dream.

"On our first day in Thailand, we were able to buy plenty of food. But further north along the river, it was scarce. So he suffered. We were not a train transport. We walked. True, only nights. Yits carried his shoes when his feet hurt; then I saw his hands growing tired from the extra weight and I took his shoes. He wasn't a man who said very much, was he? But he looked at me then with the most vividly articulate appreciation."

Sol was trying to comfort me, but I could tell the effort of telling me about Yits was bearing down on him, forcing him not only to face the loss of a friend but also to look inward at the physical pain he himself had endured.

"We were ordered onward," he continued, "and told we must march that night to Kin Sayouk, not to make many stops and not to go too slowly. We arrived at our final destination, fatigued in every limb, in every cell."

Rachel, I know that what I tell you now is painful, but I cannot remain silent when it concerns Yits.

"Yits was weak and deeply, deeply disappointed. 'There isn't any food after all,' he whispered.

"Fifteen, twenty times, he murmured that same thing. He acted as if someone he loved had broken a great promise to him."

I winced when Sol said that.

He continued, "Yits had been so sensitive to the screams of the Japanese, so afraid of their bayonets and bombers. 'They could drop something on my head,' he said once. 'Isn't it possible to be, by errored choice, standing in the worst possible place for that specific moment in your life? *Bad luck?* Which means, of course, *no luck*. No, I prefer to call it *bad choosing*.' "

The difference? Yits refused to blame his Creator.

"I left Lisser to himself, at first. I felt embarrassed, inadequate, when I was with him. An orderly does not have the power to comfort as Lisser wanted comfort — verbally, profoundly. He asked for answers, not for bandages to cover the wounds, the cuts questions can make in a man.

"Yits was a magnet — he made us all care.

"He was hungry," Sol continued, "and he developed a skin disease. He was hospitalized and began to help the medical orderlies — to spend his time more valuably, he said. He was very troubled by his appearance...because he disliked hurting people's sensitivities with his illness.

"One day, all patients were told to leave the hospital wards — they were distributed and camouflaged among the healthy. But they were not received in a pleasant mood by their new neighbors. They were treated as intruders and ignored. As a rule, their health food was stolen, especially their eggs.

"Lisser saw this, and he became bitter, then desperate, then quiet. He told me more than once, 'I don't sense the Almighty's love.'

"And I would ask him, 'The Almighty? Who thinks of Him here?'

"My response seemed to anger him, to frustrate him."

Yits, you were sure the men would have been kinder if they remembered their Creator. That is probable. But did you always have to fight with Reality?

"Lisser saw the dignity of man dwindling," Sol continued, "as if each of us had accepted the possibility of murdering or of being murdered.

"Yits reached a stage of the illness that the doctors at the time could not understand, but which has become common among our men recently: a kind of dysentery — the body runs empty, without pain, without refilling.

"Then the worst came, and Yits wasn't able to contain himself any more. He would lie on the bamboo mattress and dirty it constantly. I tried to keep him clean, and it caused a constraint. Unlike the others, he couldn't get accustomed to his degradation. Yits had never been an easy learner when it came to human dignity."

Sol Sternfeld spoke softly now. "Lisser grew weak, grew silent, staring out of large dark eyes that were dying."

Yits did not have an opportunity to use the information on Jewish funeral laws that I had taught him in Changi hospital. But he had taught it all to Sol. So Sol said *Kaddish* (the mourner's prayer) for Yits Lisser, and buried him in mosquito netting together with the pages of the *Siddur* (prayer book), the Passover *Haggadah* (which Lou de Vries had copied in Tjilatjap), and the piece of paper that I had given Yits when he left Changi — written in Hebrew on it were the words: *Bittachon* (Faith) *YITS*.

Rachel, What can I do about this thought that torments me? I could have forced Yits...actually forced him...to stay in Changi until I would be capable of leaving with him. Our group has had that bit of good luck — almost no nightmarches and better medical supplies. But who could have known which transport would be better?

I have been sitting here in this place for hours. It is only proper. Do I not owe Yits a kind of symbolic *shivah* (period of mourning)? There are no Lisser children to ever mourn him.

I arranged for late afternoon *Minchah* services. We managed to have the minimum requirement of ten participants. I recited *Kaddish* for Yits, *The Kelme Kaddish*.

July 20

Tamarkan was a camp where the ill had a good chance to recover because of the plentiful food, swimming and entertainment. But not everyone survived; and this fact was not so visible because those POWs who arrived seriously or critically ill were not put together with the general patients, but were hurried off to the "hospital" – the fenced-off rear half of the camp, accessible only to those who had good reason for visiting those wards.

I found Captain de Bie, a school principal from Semarang, a northern port of Java, in Hut #3 of the non-serious dysentery patients. He was earnestly interested in cultural matters, and as soon as he arrived, he was appointed to O & O (Recreation and Education). He was now temporarily bed-bound and unable to continue his work with his usual enthusiasm.

When he saw me standing at the entrance, he called out excitedly. "Nuss, you survived? I was afraid you wouldn't live through it all, Nuss. You're so slight, but you have muscles in your mind."

His first question was could I help him in his job.

"Of course I could," I told him.

His second question was could I tell about my experiences in Russia.

He did arrange for me to speak the very next day. It is exhilarating to lecture again. It activates my mind in a way that gives new impetus to thinking.

I enjoyed reviving dear memories of the soul-satiated town of Telshe, its Talmudic and teachers' colleges. I described Russia's gradually deteriorating attitude toward Jewish religious institutions. I mentioned that Stalin, realizing he would need the goodwill of his own Christians and those of his future Allies, the Western Powers, had returned to the seven-day week with Sunday as a permanent feature (instead of the earlier Communist six-day week with a rotating day of rest). Some of the patients lost their enthusiasm when I spoke of Moscow's synagogue and its president, forced upon the people by the NKVD (Soviet Secret Service) and openly mistrusted by the congregants.

Captain de Bie asked about the reliability of the workers. I could only speak about the corruption of NKVD confidants, which will assuredly undermine the reliability and effectiveness of our new allies' war effort. I told of the "open" corruption of the supervisor of the well-stocked "Diner" – usually a NKVD apprentice – who was busy selling part of the Diners' car food reserves to black marketeers who entered the Diner empty-handed and left fully loaded — at every stop all through Siberia.

De Bie also wished to know if I had met with intellectuals and professionals. I told of our pleasant co-passengers, college teachers and military engineers who were on their way to Chabarowsk, the next to last city on the Trans-Siberian railway, to teach at the military academy. Some of them were critical of the regime in personal discussions. Since Russia had, in the meantime, become our Ally, the audience showed a deep interest in this lecture. (I repeated this speech a few times in the hospital huts.)

July 23

Is it Satan's war?

In my last diary entries, I spoke of the Tamarkan Bridge Camp. But while it is beautiful and well organized, it suffers from that one major imperfection – lice. We constantly try to eradicate them.

Before we could determine whether our efforts were successful, tragedy struck. In the middle of the night's heavy rains, the roof of the large hospital hut collapsed.

The hospital was crammed with seriously-ill dysentery patients who had recently come down from the up-river camps. In the frightening confusion caused by the cries of the patients buried under the long roof, and by the noises of cracking and breaking beams and attap roofing, officers, medical orderlies and all fit men emerged from their huts and went into action.

They were carrying patients on shoulders and stretchers, crawling under the collapsed roof and cautiously moving terrified patients out and taking them into a newly-built hut.

Captain Newhouse, an intelligence officer, was one of those in the hospital. Although the roof had not collapsed onto his bed, he was horrified. Since he was not an emergency case, I took him into our hut until a permanent place could be found for him.

At first, the captain, sitting cross-legged on the cot, stared at me without

saying a word. He did not respond to any of my questions. For awhile, I was fearful that he was in shock. Finally, his eyes refocused and he said, "Chaplain, this night's terror and serious threat to our lives was no doing of the Japs. That it happened is proof that we are cursed."

His words stung the air and appeared to hang there while he gathered his thoughts together to continue. When he did so, he said with some force, "This is Satan's doing."

I was astonished at this remark and concerned for his inner turmoil. "What makes you believe that Satan would be interested in hurting you, just you, and me and the others here?"

His eyes followed me as I picked up the searching-out for lice again. There was no appeal in his gaze, only resignation.

"When we arrived here in this blessed river camp, you, Nuss, were convinced that our Creator had decided to save us from the hands of the enemy. So who is our enemy tonight? Who is now scaring us? Obviously not the Japanese. Did they threaten our tortured lives?"

I was glad that I did not have to go into an argument with him about the function of Satan. I told him simply that, as far as I knew, no one was killed or fatally wounded.

"And," I added, "the orderlies have arrived to take you to a safe and clean hut."

Next day, the lice campaign was interrupted, and we began rebuilding the hospital.

When I saw Captain Newhouse again, he was embarrassed at first. He apologized for having ascribed to Satan that much power and such evil intentions.

"I know, Nuss, that your Jewish Satan is a messenger of the Almighty, just as any other angel, and not a man hater. To you this is not Satan's war."

Some of our men are beginning to have doubts. It is bad enough to have our bodies racked by war, but to have our souls racked by doubt...

July 25

Dear Rachel,

Today, we walked through the gates of the camp, down to the Kwai River to swim...

We went in groups of two and three, in inexpressibly wonderful confusion. First, we walked for hundreds of yards along narrow paths between the heavy green of tall trees. Then, we reached a picnic-like area from which the river appeared peaceful and free. But almost all the walkers stopped at primitive wooden tables where native women sold drinks, rice, candies and cigarettes.

Among the customers were members of an earlier group, hungry and thirsty, who had come up from the river, wearing neither robes nor towels. What a world of contrasts we live in: naked men dealing with seemingly prudish women wrapped in long dresses reaching to the soles of their feet. So many colliding images...crisscrossing sensations.

I swam in that beautiful clear bluish water. Nothing was ever going to cool the excitement of water-starved POWs. There was nothing old about the water, it was fresh and new, but it had the undying quality of eternity.

The men swam with the fury of regained freedom. I was taken up in wonder at the rage of water lifting my body up, pulling my legs down. I moved under the bridge, but the current was stronger there, and what had initially been an exciting struggle against the elements became too much of a rugged battle for a poor swimmer.

The water was slapping against me and over me, and there were beams latticed just under the surface that were becoming difficult to avoid. I was pulled down and shot upward.

Freedom, I thought, is a temptress. There is no vaster enslavement than the one into which freedom can lead you. Over and over, the irony laughed.

In the end, the beams saved me. When I could not navigate them any more, I felt a sharp pain in my leg, then my shoulder, then my head as cross-beams held me. And a thought shot through my brain: I am apparently supposed to survive this war! I felt an irrepressible surge of peace.

Then, hand over hand along the posts, I moved back to join the other men laughing and floating in the sun, calling out jokes, shouting hellos to the women on the shore.

I went once again into the blue, gentle water to remember, alone, while the memory settled.

When I emerged from the river, there were no more crowds around the tables. I bought a drink. Just before noon, I returned to the reality of camp and I realized that the world, after the swim, looked different.

July 27

The Singapore camp theater, comprised of a group of POWs who have been kept together (by the British camp office), is here and is being revived by great demand, because there are so many men with nothing to do while they wait for the inevitable call to join the slave gangs on the Japanese rail-building and bridge-building crews.

The theater troupe, however, has been much reduced in number due to beri-beri and cholera.

"We have performed too many eulogies since the war started," one of the young actors told me.

Still, the troupe is full of enthusiasm and they say they are relieved to play for an audience that remembers how and when to laugh.

Tonight, they performed *Journey's End*, a saddening play about a young officer during World War I who arrives as a novice on the front in France. Enthusiastically, he pioneers a new bond of equality between officers and privates, and he dies in a mood of melancholy in the evening of that very first day in the command bunker.

The audience is grateful and deeply touched, apparently identifying with this soldier's story.

The Japanese officers came, despite their not being able to understand English. They must be bored in this jungle world, especially since they are now relieved from the unbearable pressure of the final deadline set for finishing the railway.

August 1

I met John Cole again — he of the foul-smelling ulcers. He looked tall and straight and clean, and he smiled widely when he saw me.

"The war did not leave, but my friends — the flies — did, and that is fine."

I stared at him. There were no physical reminders of the ulcers (except for some scars). The sores were gone, and in their place was health.

"You look like a miracle, John," I said. "I am a sentimental man, and a miracle in this black time rejuvenates me."

We shook hands. We hadn't been able to do that before.

He mentioned dates again — he was sure the war could not live more than another ten months. The civil service in Singapore at the time of mobilization

had guaranteed his government postal assignment back.

"There may be no place for a white foreigner in Singapore's governmental services," he said with a low voice, as though he wasn't sure whether it was true. "The British Empire is big enough. They will send me somewhere else that is agreeable."

He laughed as he spread his arms wide and became confident again. "Anywhere in the British Empire is agreeable."

He was ready to go for a swim in the Kwai.

"The current pulls strong," I told him.

"And I pull stronger," he said. "Good luck travels as quickly as bad luck. In my case, it outran bad luck and pulled me with it. Now I feel immortal. We will survive, Rabbi," he told me, with a hand on my head. "We are blessed."

It was the last time I saw him. He was racing time and destiny into the water of the Kwai and stopped to wave back to me.

August 2

Rachel,

Do you remember Armand?

In the semi-darkness of the crowded dysentery hut, I saw a thin arm swinging upward signalling for attention. When I came closer, I recognized a nose, slightly bent to the right, protruding from a yellow-skinned tired face. This is Armand now, a close friend of Hans Hollaender. Both had shared a room with me in the Jakarta barracks in the first weeks of the war.

I now hear his weak hoarse voice calling excitedly, "Nuss, Nuss, I knew you would be here..."

My surprised look elicits a semblance of a smile on his face.

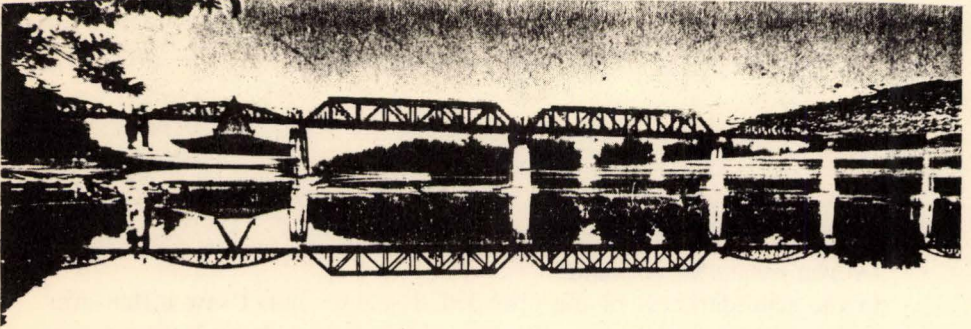
"Because I have a letter from Hans for you and I promised him I would hand it over to you." He points a shaking hand over a rough sheet of brown wrapping paper.

The "letter" is written with a trembling hand, the first part rather legible:

Dear Nuss,

I was not able to say goodbye to you before I left Changi. I left a message that I would meet you up here. This sad disappointment. This Thailand cheat! I am not sure we will meet again.

I want you to know that I try hard, actually try very hard, to follow your advice. I am not going to give up, or to lie down and die. I am alive and going to stay alive.



Bridge Over The River Kwai: The severed steel bridge, the poles, beams, boards under the bridge which saved the author's life.

The following lines were apparently written at a later date:

It is hard, so hard to keep fighting, hoping....

Then again, a later entry:

No use deceiving myself. I am defeated. This morning, I could not get up any more. Completely paralyzing exhaustion.

More lines, even less legible:

For a week now, I "rest" on my back all day, my bamboo-rod mattress hurting my tired back badly. I remember Heinrich Heine, the Jewish poet, speaking of his "mattress grave" that served him for many years. I also remember that, in his last years, Heine was full of nostalgia for his Jewish past. He repented and sang about Judaism and created a beautiful story of a saintly rabbi. I also repent. But I wonder whether there is enough left of me, the Berliner assimilationist, that could actually repent.

It is true, I am not a poet or a story writer, but I gained an intimate awareness of being a Jew again. I am disturbed by the loss of an actual awareness that I am still human, a man.

See Nuss, now I really miss you. I want very much to meet someone here in the jungle who could tell me whether it is possible for a non-man to be Jewish. I am too confused to know the answer. Do you?

I had much trouble reading this last section of that letter to the end. Armand, who had attentively followed the movements of my eyes, helped out here and there. He apparently had read and reread his friend's letter until he knew it all by heart. Armand took over reading the last lines. This time, I watched his lips carefully. He read Hans' last request to me:

Don't ever reveal to my wife and children, whom I now love more than ever, the sad ending of my life.

There was no signature at the end of this letter!

Armand was now alert. Turning to face me, he admitted, "Hans died two days after he had written down these last lines. We buried him according to Jewish traditions. A Dutch Jew Sam Onderwyzer said the *Kaddish* prayer at the grave, in accordance with Hans' last request."

Armand, exhausted, closed his eyes. I returned to my ward.

Hans is dead. The reality of war is that men die, sometimes quickly, sometimes lingeringly for days or weeks or months. Some of the men you

barely know other than as a recognizable mop of hair, a slant of an eyebrow, a

squint, or a particular facial expression. Some you do not know, and their passing occurs unnoticed by you. You hear of their deaths and you are hurt. Some are friends. The hurt then is worse.

Hans was my friend. Just putting those words down on paper is painful. I am unable to relax. I keep lying down and getting up, again and again.

August 3

Armand and I talked today in the early afternoon. He claimed that because he is a bachelor and has lived the empty life of a commercial traveler roaming through many cities and countries (which were in a state of constant upheaval), there had been nothing to tempt him to hold onto life...to permanence. But he had held on until he was able to pass on his only friend's message, which actually contained some image of continuity, of future.

His malaria attack, which returned this very week, was his last. It destroyed what had been left of life in this exhausted victim of a prolonged dysentery. Armand, thus, became another example of a crazed era in the history of man.

August 6

Dear Rachel,

"Die, I shall," Tom decided. And he did.

The weeks have sighed and walked slowly past me, like tired old people who miss something. But these days, my services are much in demand. I have been quite busy visiting the sick boys, especially those in the hospital unit.

Tom is a young Dutchman, perhaps twenty-four years old, who has been frustrating me into knots and tangles. He was in the navy. Now he lies on his stretcher bed and spends his time dying.

He has lost so much weight that his body seems to be visibly shrinking — his shoulders are disproportionately broad, while his muscle tissue dissolves. He won't eat, won't talk — he just stares. The medical orderlies managed to force some liquids down, and that is all they can do.

Tom's skin hugs his skeleton closer and closer. His lips are pressed together all the time. Dark eyes in a white face. His face is angry, defiant, but I do not know what he is fighting. It is like watching a man drown by inches.

He was stationed in Java for several years (a child-soldier really), and the men who knew him tell me that he retreated quickly into himself when he realized that the white people would not accept him as a member of their elite society, and the native people would not recognize him at all. He had also cut off ties with his home in the Roman Catholic south of Holland because he was not a believer.

I sit with him; sometimes I talk. I find myself talking about my life, about Rachel and the children, about physics and philosophy. I tell him of my hopes for the future.

Why do I persist? One must not throw away life easily. And I feel, for some moments, that I reach him.

Several times he has turned his head and looked directly at me with large fallen eyes. But he has not said anything, not one word. I speak to him in Dutch, occasionally in English.

I have started to sit across the room and watch him from other men's beds. Maybe, if my visits mean anything to him, he will summon me back. But he doesn't. He wants to die. No, he doesn't want anything any more — he does not even make the effort that suicide requires. That alone would demand too much life. He wants nothing. Of course, his body does not agree; it cannot reject its own purpose — to function — and this seems to be his last fight against his own being.

Here in this hope-generating camp, staring at Death's persistence, the sick men fight for any small semblance of life. But Tom doesn't want it. It is too heavy for him.

I met a chaplain at Tom's bed staring at him intently. This man, his dark hair surrounding a young, sincere face, said, "It is not that Tom is working hard at dying — he died weeks, maybe months, ago. Just his anger and his blunt stubbornness stay on, vegetating."

Tommy completed his death the next day. From his point of view, it was the first victory he won with painful perseverance in a life of frustrating obedience and discipline.

It is possible that he started dying with his first rejection in childhood.

August 10

The jungle soldier — our Political Kommissar

We were certainly fortunate to have a British camp commandant. A man of rare human and leadership qualities, Lt. Col. Toosey was an excellent organizer and a person who, because of his courage, commanded the respect of both his men and the Japanese authorities.

We, nine hundred Dutch POWs, were not fortunate to have Captain Tielema as the senior Dutch officer. Nicknamed "The Tiger," he was an unusual man who possessed the inflexible character of the hardened colonial officer. We were told that he had resisted the order to surrender in March '42, and for a number of months had continued fighting the Japanese with his battalion of fanatical native soldiers, whom he had trained with an iron fist.

Apparently, he lives under the illusion that the fight is still on. Unfortunately, this means that he is in a state of war with his own officers and men.

One of these is Captain de Vries, a reserve officer, who before the war was an agricultural researcher for the N.E.I. government. He is a soft-hearted decent man who had volunteered in Changi to join our group as the second in command.

In Tonchin, he had contracted skin trouble. In recent months, perhaps because of his skin trouble or his need to convince himself of his masculinity as an officer and leader, he had grown a beard; but Tielema was against beards in the army.

However, he did not send for the bearded captain to tell him of his displeasure, but rather he sent his adjutant over with an order to shave the beard off — without delay.

Despite his peaceful character, Captain de Vries was angry and felt offended. He sent back a message that he wished to discuss the matter with the commandant.

A few minutes later, the adjutant returned. The senior Dutch officer wanted Captain de Vries to know that if he insisted on seeing him, the senior Dutch officer could not refuse. But he again advised him strongly to shave his beard *without delay*, and suggested that de Vries withdraw the request for a personal interview, as the results of the interview would turn out to be extremely unpleasant for both of them.

Not being the fighting type and having been advised by friends not to get into difficulties with a man who still burned to "go out and fight" the enemy, the face of the humiliated officer was completely shaven within a few minutes.

His colleagues were extremely upset over a Dutch commandant's disregard

of an officer's honor at a time when the Japanese had forced them to do slave labor side by side with the Other Ranks. What could those officers do? Tielema was their superior until an officer of higher rank would take over the command.

However, from that day on, the humiliated Captain de Vries withdrew into himself. He had hoped to at least win this internal battle, he told me, so as to convince himself that the degradation caused by the enemy ought not to affect his self-respect.

The wild-eyed Tielema knocked me over by his method of shaving beards of fellow POW officers. In this case, the blow crushed the last vestiges of an officer's self-respect.

Another victim of a crazy war which enables one captain to destroy a "subordinate colleague" of equal rank.

August 12

There was surprise on the faces of the officers in our hut and deep worry on Captain de Vries' face when an adjutant arrived to tell me that Captain Tielema wanted to see me at 3 p.m. in his office. Why the call? None of us could figure it out. Capt. de Vries looked me over. Was this the way I always dressed? His eyes looked for any variation of the standard dress for a non-officer. If not my dress, then maybe my behavior? Had I, in my distraction, failed to salute the commandant in passing him? I shook my head. To the best of my recollection, in my daily tours of the camp, acting in the capacity of a chaplain, I had not once failed to give the Dutch commandant his official respect. Others in the hut suggested that my being a non-officer with a privileged status in the camp may have disturbed this ultra-militaristic career officer.

What bothered them did not bother me. I saw the order as a means by which I might have an exchange of opinions with this man over his handling of de Vries' case.

When I reported at 3 p.m., I did not meet a tiger. I saluted and stood before a man who, I realized, was serious because he was incapable of looking friendly. Somehow, he didn't appear to be concerned with me personally.

There was an intent look on his face as he studied me for some while. I was prepared for any questions concerning the efficiency and the need of my work. If only I would have the opportunity to indulge in a conversation about

the way he had treated his fellow officer.

His question startled me. With a frown on his face, he asked, "What did you tell our men about the Russians?"

The Russians? Captain Tielema was not concerned with my work! Instead, he wanted to know what I had communicated in a lecture to his Dutch POWs! In two hours of guessing, no one had thought of our commandant playing the role of a "Political Kommissar" in our camp.

I informed him that I had had interesting experiences in Russia. I also stated that most of what I had told our men I had published in 1941 in a series of articles in the daily *Batavia's Nieuwsblad*, the government's mouthpiece.

He nodded, apparently satisfied. I said, furthermore, that although I had made some critical remarks about Russian efficiency, I was not the first to do so.

"I do not intend to make propaganda speeches, neither negative nor positive, and what I tell is definitely the truth, as I have seen it," I said.

There was another nod — this time one accompanied by the merest hint of a smile — and I was dismissed. However, not having the opportunity to make any comment about the way he treated his fellow officers disappointed me. Moreover, I was not given a chance to get to know this unusual soldier.

When I met my friends, they were eager to learn why I had been summoned. My report was brief, to the point.

With a quiet tone of voice that sent a chill running through each one of us, one of them said, "The captain just sent us a message: 'You men do not need a Political Kommissar, because I, the 'Tiger,' am here watching.' "

Are We Born To Be Free?

August 14

Dear Rachel,

Recovering my diary from memory would be difficult were it not for the help I receive. At times, friends prompt me about events and dates and conversations. And my years of memory training produce reliable results. For example, I recall rather clearly my lecture *We are Born to be Free*, which elicited a much stronger response than was anticipated by the cultural committee.

They were unprepared for the large number of POWs that turned up. The men gathered around the centrally placed, wooden platform. A good number of them brought along the products of their ingenuity — seats of all shapes and materials, albeit often mechanically shaky. But the majority sat down on the ground or lay on their backs on coco mats or the flimsy raincoats that afforded little protection from the torrential rains that happened to fall solidly at a moment's notice.

The subject was one which could have caused me problems. Talking about "free choice" to a group of prisoners of war might seem like heavy-handed irony. But what gave me courage to tackle the problem in some depth was the surprising fact that these people situated themselves so as to look directly at the speaker.

My problem? My chairman had warned me repeatedly not to bore the people with abstract concepts. I agreed in principle. I countered, however, that in this audience there were also thinking people and academics who would be bored if the speaker did *not* offer some challenging food for thought.

While waiting for the men to settle, I thought about how to begin the lecture and I tried to determine the mood of the audience before venturing into my half-prepared speech. It seemed best to spend only a minute or so explaining the main concept of determinism — the view that the individual has no freedom of will because inherited and environmental factors do not allow him a free choice. Then, I wanted to sketch out my view that free choice is *at least a possibility* for any human being — even for a POW.

The men showed a deep interest from the start — this concept is bound up with our state of dependence and lack of freedom.

After I had begun, an Australian from one of the makeshift seats in the front called out, "Is this just an illusion that you would like us to believe in order to make us feel good?"

My audience stiffened up, waiting for my response to this open challenge.

"When you consider an escape," I replied, "you are weighing all the pros and cons. Do you not, in the end, actually *feel* that it is *you* who made the final decision?"

That question prompted a hot debate. One of my friends, a scientist, smiling, remarked, "I did not expect such non-scientific reasoning to come from you."

I now felt that I had to explain myself. I spoke of new discoveries indicating that we have been brainwashed into believing that *every* move in nature is quantitatively as well as qualitatively *predictable*.

We were even made to believe that there can be only one predictable way for our brain to function and to arrive at our decisions.

"*Made to believe?* Is this not actually true?" a Dutchman called out.

"No," I replied. "The truth is that we can only predict probabilities like the statistics of the life insurance tables — which do *not* predict the actual survival of any *individual* in any year of his life. In the same way, an electron, while entering an extremely refined cameralike box, alters its direction in an apparently arbitrary way. Actually, each individual electron moves on an unpredictable path. Only the overwhelming majority of electrons proceed along the straight path."

"So what does this scientific knowledge mean to us prisoners of arbitrary captors, arbitrary in their emotions and judgments?" a voice called out.

I countered, "It actually means that just as natural law does not provide predictability, so also the reactions of a person's mind should not be expected to be completely predictable."

Looking down on those hundreds of faces, many sunburnt, most yellow from fever, I observed some apprehension and concern.

"Does this leave us in a world of arbitrariness?" again my Dutch friend objected while some of the men looked at him with a measure of awe.

I said that we are, of course, subjected to a basic law of cause and effect. However, since we are able to assume only a statistical type of causality, some freedom to inject elements such as conviction and will into the process of decisionmaking cannot be definitely ruled out by the scientist.

After the lecture had ended, there were many questioners (not only intellectuals) who showed a surprising interest in the idea of freedom of choice.

Dr. de Ruyter, a wise and insightful doctor from Java, was not surprised at all over those lively discussions. He stated that those whom we consider to be unphilosophical people are often wise. Many of them observe life in a more detached manner than intellectuals would like to assume, and they also attempt to make sense of their experiences.

August 15

The topic of free will inspires much heated discussion. At my seminar today, my Dutch friend, already angry at the outset, injected a personal element into the issue. He was surprised that a religious speaker should not believe in the absolute truth of pure causality.

My reply was obvious. When I report on the state of contemporary science, I am not reporting on my personal views.

"I see," he responded with a sarcastic smile, "that you are backing out. You were just feeding us fancy arguments to defend your faith in free will."

My Dutch friend is obviously angry — his small dark face and nervous hands start activating their muscles. He turns to me, "Your belief that man is unable to obtain precise data from observing nature is all sick. Within ten years, we scientists of the 'old school' will discover new methods of precise observation; then your statistical causality will be thrown onto the ash heap where, for centuries past, all other concepts of the limitations of science are piling up."

I calmly answered, "No one can stop you from believing that at some future time, the statistical view will be rejected. If you attempt, however, to force us to reject the overwhelmingly convincing power of modern science because it conflicts with your faith in determinism, you will find yourself in a vulnerable position."

I concluded that since many components enter the process of decisionmaking — chemical, biological, environmental and so on — each of which is dominated by statistical causality — then one ought not to assume that decisionmaking would be deterministic and quantitatively predictable.

Rachel, do I believe that one can explain freedom of will in such simple terms? Of course not. But do I honestly believe freedom of will to be scientifically out of the question? Certainly not. It was this that I felt I should tell our disheartened, doubt-ridden POWs, especially those who do not accept the religious view.

The Black Market in Tamarkan Bridge Camp

August 16

A POW community appears, basically, to be subject to the same forces that govern free society. For example, our medical orderlies are hard workers, receive modest pay and often have some privileges in the hospital kitchens. Since conditions in Tamarkan have become relatively easy, appetites have begun to grow beyond actual needs. Certainly, the greed for money has become obvious. A steadily growing number of individuals having access to drugs are believed to be selling quinine to outside black marketeers — despite the fact that quinine is a life-preserving drug for hundreds of malaria patients whose fevers recur with the regularity of a menstrual cycle.

One may assume that most of these orderlies still remember the frightening, yellowed, deathmasked faces of their many dead friends. Does the sale of quinine not come close to unforgivable capital crime? When these sales were discovered, the scandal was treated by our British administration as an internal matter, which did not involve the Japanese.

British military police, too, have joined those who wish to make money, but not at the expense of patients and drugs. On a day when most of the Japanese guards had left their posts and gone to Bangkok on some national Japanese holiday, the MPs closed a big deal with the outside black marketeers, delivering a large load of *patjols* (digging tools) to them. It was obvious that such a wholesale theft would soon be discovered.

Apparently, the MPs thought the Japanese would aid in the cover-up because of their negligence (leaving the camp almost unguarded) and because many guards and their superiors share in the profits of our camp's black market dealers.

And the guards apparently helped this time. When the theft was discovered — unlike previous experiences — the entire camp population was not called out to be collectively punished. Only the guilty were taken to the camp guardhouse.

Those of us who were off duty stood far back from the Japanese office. But we were still able to hear the horrible shouting of the *Kempetai*, the Japanese military police, who had decided to take the matter into their own hands. From time to time, we also heard spine-shattering cries of the MPs being tortured by their inquisitors.

Some of the onlookers were angry not so much with the Japanese as with the thieves. They believed that, in the end, the Japanese would punish the entire camp and cause the privileges and freedoms we all enjoyed to be abrogated.

A Sumatra planter disagreed. He couldn't control his laughter and spat with derision at those who objected to the MPs' stealing from the Japanese warehouse.

Why not steal from the Japanese warehouse? he wondered. He admitted that these MPs did not mean to rob the enemy of a number of tools for everyone's benefit, but to enrich themselves; yet he continued to maintain his argument that it was proper to steal tools from the enemy.

Some former Singapore businessmen claim that the guilty MPs gave a large part of their profits to the canteen. This provides patients with health food and drugs which, ironically, were purchased from the very traders who bought the tools.

After this incident, the Japanese asked the Dutch to take over the MP entirely. Previously, it had consisted of one-third Dutch and two-thirds British members. The Dutch did not like to bear full responsibility, so the proportion became one-half Dutch and one-half British.

Certainly, the idyll came to a sad end for the MPs. Although they were not executed (as had been feared), they were sentenced to eight years in prison. Don't the Japanese expect the war to end soon? It was hoped they would survive up to two years of prison. Then they would go home as free men.

"Greeted at homecoming as heroes," added the planter, laughing.

Regardless of what is right or wrong, after the *Kempetai* left, it was business again as usual.

On August 31, the Dutch again arranged an assembly in honor of Queen Wilhelmina's birthday — quite openly. The Japanese soccer teams continued playing against the British (who won most of the games).

September 20, 1943

The Tamarkan affair is over, just a few days before *Rosh Hashanah*.

It sometimes happens that new beginnings accompany each other: We were told to pack and take the road to Singapore.

I had my belongings out on the grass and was packing neatly, methodically. The men of the *Kempetai* came through; I saw them, saw what they were doing, and was paralyzed. They were confiscating all hand-written material! My lecture notes, all of my philosophy papers, were taken. My diary, written between two hard imprinted covers, must have given the impression of a published book, and it was left. I wanted to hide it, but I didn't dare move. I let it sit with the guns at its heart, until a second inspector came along and took it away.

It is gone! One more death.

I have nothing but imperfect memory to help me rewrite it all. These diaries are not only the record of my stay in POW camps but also a collection of my long letters to Rachel — sometimes letters like these are all that enable a POW to hold onto his sanity.

I began to rewrite my diary/letters in my mind as I marched to a new camp. But will I ever have the endurance to sit down and write again about what has happened in the past, especially since the *Kempetai* may take them away from me again?

This time, there was no need of a flat platform on wheels. We arrived, after a relatively short march, at one of the Kanbury camps along the banks of the River Kwai, situated alongside the railroad.

September 1943

Despite the growing threat of Allied bombing, Germany's war industry would not be vulnerable if it could control the oil wells in Iraq and Iran. In 1942, Germany attempted a two-pronged attack on these oil wells in the Middle East. One prong emanated out of South-East Russia. The other prong, aimed at Baghdad, Iraq (where pro-German Arabs would facilitate a German conquest), was an extension by the German North African armies, which had already brought them stunning victories.

A year ago, within weeks of each other, both German war fronts collapsed. The fall of Stalingrad had a close-to-fatal effect upon the German efforts in Russia. And to compound their devastation, General Rommel's North African army was fatally defeated by Field Marshall Montgomery's British 8th Army at Alamein, Egypt.

Ironically, while the Germans were suffering heavy losses in Europe and Africa, in Asia we POWs were receiving excessively cruel treatment at the hands of Germany's ally — Japan.

Not until the Japanese realize that the war has turned away from their favor may they relax their harsh treatment of us.

September 26
Kanbury

Dear Rachel,

We arrived at the camp in the afternoon. Because there was a shortage of medical orderlies, I volunteered for the midnight shift in our barrack.

The first night after our arrival, when I was ready to go from bamboo platform to bamboo platform as soon as the sick would call for an orderly, heavy rains flooded the back half of the camp, which was close to the railway embankment.

At midnight, I heard a subdued call coming from the very back of the barrack for an orderly. With a lamp and a bamboo tube cut to serve as a bedpan in my hands, I waded through the water to the caller. After a while, I stepped out into the heavy tropical rain, splashing through still deeper waters to the latrine where I intended to empty the contents of the bamboo tube.

A number of patients called for me. In my attempt to hurry, I slipped from the water-covered path leading to the latrine, fell, and spilled the contents of the tube. I rose, my shoes heavy with water, my knees shaking. Worst of all, I was angry at myself for having spilled the unhealthy contents of the tube. All the while, the calls for the orderly were multiplying.

At half past two, my body was soaked from the torrential rain, and my tired legs refused to follow up calls any more. Then the three o'clock "shift" came by — fortunately a half hour early — took my lamp and placed himself ready for the next call.

My shoes lost some of the water, and my shorts stuck to my numb skin. I then lowered myself onto my bamboo bed and fell asleep before my head reached the bamboo-rod pillow.

September 27

Alf Levy is here in Kanbury. Reg Warsharsky, a close friend of his, and also a Londoner, led me to Alf's hut. Like the rest of the huts in the camp, this one was ugly, long and awkward — about 20 x 110 feet — with bamboo walls and ceilings, and bamboo platforms for "beds."

When I had met him six months ago in the Changi camp, he was a young man with an open, friendly face. Now, although there were exhausted faces everywhere, Alf's appearance was so startling that it took me by surprise. His

face is long, hanging its chin lower on his body than is proportionately correct. His mouth is so cracked by beri-beri that he speaks with a constant echo of agony; the dark circles around his eyes are shadows of pain.

But when he saw me, he managed something of a smile. "Now," he said softly, "I'm assured a proper Jewish funeral." He looked forcefully into my eyes, "And you'll recite the prayers."

Why was he staring at me like that, as if I were an answer to a prayer? Not that, please. I am just another *pray-er*.

Although as a chaplain I tend to the sick all the time, some incidents affect me more than others. I was still getting over the loss of my friend Yits, as well as other POW friends, but the sight of Alf brought the war home to me in a stark way. He was a victim-person, with pieces torn off and hanging by threads. My mind was so cold, stripped and shaken that all I had for him was some truth, a little hope: "I sent back your prayer book, which you lent me before you left Singapore, with Eddy Rappaport." There was no reaction. "Did you receive it?"

A slight nod and a light smile. Somehow, I had reached deep down. Hope welled up in me.

"You can use it soon. *Rosh Hashanah* is coming in a few days."

This was the only strength I could think of to hand him — a chance at something masterful, something to reach for.

We send our hearts to heaven — through clouds and sky — for life.

Reg and I left the hut soon after. He told me there was a possibility of getting MMB, the wondrous sulfa drug, a miracle aid used to combat dysentery. This total drainage, this emptying of Alf's body, must be stopped.

Reg sold one of his extra shirts. He gave me the money and I bought six MMB tablets with it from the black market. *Black* — so dark that it's hard to focus the faces behind the transactions. Supplies that never reached us? How did the Chinese get them? Stolen from the Red Cross? The medical orderlies sometimes sell precious pharmaceuticals for cigarettes.

The doctor has just told me, with a mourner's finality, that MMB is no longer going to be of any help to Alf, that what he needs now are the vitamins necessary to fight beri-beri. A remote chance at chance. Diarrhea is not the main problem any more. Death is the problem.

The doctors prescribe eggs as a source of vitamins. Each patient is entitled to one egg a day. Alf had some, but he couldn't eat them. Often, in such cases, the less-immobilized will steal them, taking advantage of his neighbor's semi-conscious state to gain an extra delicacy. But Reg has appointed himself as Alf's guard. He has occupied the bed next to Alf's and lies there guarding Alf's eggs. So the eggs are saved and wasted.

I went to Alf and attempted to help him eat. He tried to bite, to chew, to swallow...small steps, with sweat and pain, up a straight mountain. When I left, mentally exhausted, Alf had consumed approximately two-thirds of one egg. But the effort was such a strain that he seemed to have spent his new energy before he even gained it.

September 28

One more *Shabbos* with mother and then joyous death.

I would like to get Alf some kind of headrest or a slanting berth so that he wouldn't have to strain his heart (and mine) when he eats. I have asked around, and nothing is available.

"I want to be home one more time," he says, looking at me with the belief of a child offered three wishes by faith, "once more for *Shabbos*, for my mother's Sabbath cooking.

"I know what you're thinking," he tells me. "You think that if I do get one Sabbath at home after war's end, I would want to live on and on and I would keep asking for more Sabbath days at home."

He suddenly stops and seems to consider his thought. Sadness comes down, grey and tired over his face, and I cannot see my old friend Alf shining through.

"No," he continues, "I promise you I wouldn't ask for more. Just one Sabbath, please, one more time at home with my mother, that's all I want."

And then, as if arranging a bargain with me, he adds, "I'll die, I'll gratefully die."

Whom was he bargaining with? Me?

"Alf, yes. After all, The New Year is upon us and our prayers pray for you. So maybe," I say quietly.

He hears. For a moment, his shoulders seem to straighten at attention; then, he closes his eyes. I wait, but he is sleeping. I leave, feeling guilty for my lack of belief.

The Eve of the Jewish New Year

Alf was receptive this evening. I feel extremely happy. I want any kind of human funnel and tangibility to everything, so I can pour the strength and challenge and celebration directly into Alf's veins. Although we spoke for a long time, I am not tired.

Creator of life, Who loves life, please give Alf a chance at it. Please.

I am not above a good loud beg.

The End of Sabbath

I am on medical-orderly night duty. It's quiet and I have time to think. Before I go to sleep (at 2 a.m.), I will record some of the *Rosh Hashanah* experience.

I went to Alf on Thursday, the first day of *Rosh Hashanah*, and told him about our services: The evening before, we had joined together at one of the small platforms built between the huts. I began the prayers, in full volume. The spirituality gained an intensity forceful enough to shut the death smell and the leeching mosquitoes, out behind the protective shield of other-worldliness. We were sure that we were about to experience change, with the change in the celestial calendar.

"How much we were thinking about you, Alf! You were there, one of us, praying together with all of us."

Alf looked up, and I saw a smile struggling through the rigidity of his *beriberi* face.

I told him how eager the boys had been to do anything to be granted a better future. They prayed for the gathering of all our supplications. Strength in numbers. But they could not bear the intensity the insects were achieving — their force diminished ours. Toward the end of the services, I became more selective, choosing only some of the prayers left; and only the strongest, most mournful tunes were sung. Finally, we disbanded and returned to our quarters, joining those who had left us earlier.

Alf shook his head, disappointed with the shortcut in the prayers. He had been hoping for a complete service, as if it were a doctor striving to cure him.

On the second day of New Year he looked happier and rested. "*Rosh Hashanah* is still with us," I said, "bringing hope and health and peace on its shoulders, for all."

But his face seemed to be arguing with itself whether or not to accept my assurances. In my despair, I started praying for Alf in front of him, softly, singing a *Rosh Hashanah* dirge. Did I imagine it? He again looked happy, and rested.

Yesterday was the Sabbath of Repentance, or rather the Sabbath of Return (*Shuvah*) to Our Father in Heaven. Alf was eating better, trying harder. The latrine is his one complaint. Only ulcer patients get bedpans, and Alf has no ulcer. His struggle to stand and walk takes so much time that he rarely accomplishes his goal. He is now, in every way, completely vulnerable.

"It is getting so hard to remain optimistic," he tells me quietly. His words float up like small round bubbles that I can't touch without destroying. "This tiredness, this exhaustion, this feeling of running empty..."

Sunday

Alf died early this morning.

I had gone to sleep at 3 a.m., following night duty. A few hours later, Reg shook me into wakefulness to tell me about Alf, and without any thought that I remember, I cried. My tears must have been leaning heavily against a door — this news pushed them through.

Quietly, Reg told me that Alf woke up early to go to the latrine. He took a wrong step. He fell. And he died — a victim of the impossible bureaucratic machine that didn't allow Alf to call for help because he had no ulcer.

Although it is the day of *Fast for Gedalyah* (the Jewish governor who had been appointed by the Babylonians, and later murdered), and I had not intended to keep this fast (a week before the *Yom Kippur* fast), I resolved not to eat until after Alf was buried.

They had already placed Alf outside on a stretcher, his body partly wrapped in his ground sheet. The sun was up, and I resented its intrusion. It should be black and cold today. I tried to move the stretcher into the shade, but some small, sane voice inside me said, "Stop, let things be."

I wanted to give Alf an unabbreviated Jewish burial. But Samuelson, an Australian teacher, tried to persuade me against the idea. He reasoned that with mortality lying everywhere like dust, it wasn't wise to spotlight one particular death.

Generally, the dead are carried away quickly, one corpse at a time, between two thin bodies, on shoulders eroded by exhaustion and hopelessness; the men transport them, taking the first few steps with them to Heaven, then bury them.

"I am a cynic, a skeptic," Samuelson said, "but did you know that I have often tried to touch the men when they return to camp from the cemetery, hoping that some of the magic of peace and eternity of death will come to me?"

I like Samuelson. He is an angry man, but he is angry at hope for deserting us, for sending apparitions in its place to tease us. Such anger is justified.

He told me darkly, with unrestrained violent confusion, about yesterday's sacrilege, "Yesterday, there were two corpses to bury, only two, but none of us had the time to respect them. Men looked directly at the death procession; but nobody moved to let it pass through, and the poor tired pallbearers had to walk around that mass of lazy broken beings sitting in a ragged circle playing cards. Those two dead boys left this world as if they were never here, as if nobody ever knew or noticed them...No, actually one of our young Australians who had been a friend of theirs, I believe, stood for a moment

when the first corpse passed, then looked ashamed, looked at the dirt and his unconcerned card-playing friends, and sat down heavily again. Sentimentality here? Not allowed."

His voice lowered, he spoke to himself, "The second corpse waiting was so quiet, so patient, lying in the sun, listening for his turn."

He raised his voice, "The dead are a polite race, aren't they?"

With his hands out, then pressed together, he said, "Today, there are many corpses. I saw them lying at the doors of the huts. The funeral walk will be more tedious for everyone — so much sadness to have to knock away, to ignore. And then, how will we explain the sudden ceremony, the prayers and public mourning for our one Jewish soldier who has died? There will be too much antagonism."

I know it is a legitimate worry, but I cannot agree with Samuelson. Life must be celebrated in this camp — survival is central to our purpose here. We must be encouraged to fight to stay alive. Sickness should be booed and kicked. But Death, when it comes, is the other side of Life, the still part of its dignity. The end of a good fight, the end of a good fighter — we must recognize the valor.

Besides, I cannot ignore Alf's request: *Now I'm assured of a proper Jewish funeral. And you'll recite the prayers.*

I walked by the doctor, who was busy cooking on a makeshift fire outside his tent. He apologized for not having come to check Alf's body "for signs of death."

"He's dead," I told him. "You don't have to check."

"I know that, I saw. He was actually diagnosed dead several weeks ago, and I am not even a minor prophet."

I looked at this officer, wondering at the heaviness of his burden. These days, he has the additional onus of helping to decide an issue being argued currently in camp: Should the MMB tablets and available eggs be withheld from the dying and saved for those more likely to survive?

I wonder who has been cheapened most by the River Kwai — the living or the dead?

Rachel, this seems hard to write down in my diary, but it is difficult to understand the extent to which man will go. Outside the fence of our POW camp, Chinese traders exchange cigarettes for blankets stolen during the night from the corpses that had been placed on the stretchers — ready for burial.

Without this thin piece of covering, these men would be exposed to the elements and the eyes of whoever would want to look at them. The bodies are then naked, yellow-skinned corpses on makeshift stretchers.

Fortunately, several nights ago, an order was issued forcing decency and respect: all corpses are to be wrapped in their ground sheets for burial. The Chinese will not, of course, pay anything for the sheets.

With so little regard for our dead heroes, I resolved to give Alf a full burial.

Yes, Samuelson, you wonder what explanation you can give to the living. But I wonder what explanation I can give to the dead. I felt guilty because of those bodies watching Alf's solemn funeral service. But I know that this is their service, too.

Ten of us, a *minyan*, lined up on both sides of the stretcher placed on the bamboo platform. Using Alf's soldier's prayer book, I chanted the text to a majestic, melancholy tune that I had learned in the Lithuanian Talmudic Yeshiva of Telshe.

There was silence, like a black velvet blanket, over all of us. People passing at the other end of the ward stopped to listen to the service. Possibly, neither the Hebrew text nor the strange melody drew their attention — only the ceremony itself. It was the final irony: in a prisoner-of-war camp, with death and dying everywhere, people were standing, waiting to watch a funeral service, with interest, as if it were a parade. Dressed in sorrow.

My eulogy was stark. I spoke of Isaiah's order to the people going into exile to erect signposts along the road. We too erect signposts along the way — tiny isolated graves. Thus, the path becomes familiar, marked — we will not be lost.

More than fifty officers marched, step by solemn step, suffering swollen grief for Alf, as well as for six non-Jews whom the camp chaplain was burying; these soldiers had come in just yesterday, some of them dying, some dead already.

We moved forward, past the signposts. Alf will be one of them now, left here in this strange and angry yet beautiful place — a guide for us between peace and war, and peace again.

Finally, Alf was carried by four of his friends. I marched ahead of them. Five more friends followed behind the stretcher. One of them, Michael Singer, a short, thin, dark-haired London tailor who had malaria, insisted on going along when a Jewish boy was buried.

"Is it not a *mitzvah*," he shouted, "one of the greatest religious duties, to attend a funeral?"

The Japanese guards didn't object to the procession. They did, however, seem surprised.

This was a different experience. They saw seven men being carried with human movements of grief. It was the first funeral at which officers marched in a dignified manner; and when Alf's body passed, the Japanese guards

jumped out of their comfortable chairs and saluted with fervor. Because Alf was last. Or because Alf's friends were crying, carrying him carefully, with love and friendship. Because it was the loneliest sight and the loudest goodbye.

I watched as the first six corpses were buried — a collective service — across the road. It was difficult for the chaplain, and his goodbye was abrupt. (In recent weeks, he buried almost one hundred soldiers that the open rail wagons brought here.)

He threw handfuls of sand over the six graves and said, "Dust to dust, ashes to ashes," in the same moderate tone, six times. He looked at me then as if to suggest that I do as he had, and we would both be finished quickly.

"I can't," I told him. "Complete your service first, Chaplain, and then I'll proceed with mine. Because Alf will be difficult to leave, it will take some time."

Alf's farewell was longer — prayers and words and tears — because he was difficult to say goodbye to, and because he asked for a complete service; and I promised.

We laid Alf in the shallow grave; Mose, with a gentle hand under Alf's head, tenderly placed his head down. The sun was low, mixing with the shadows passing over the men's faces. Searching, tired, confused, ageless faces of mourning. Many of them cried.

The Psalms were easy and comforting to say after that. Then Reg and Mose and I and Alf's other friends threw our three shovelfuls of earth onto the open grave. I said the *Kaddish*, the mind and heartlifting mourner's prayer, with the special intonation that a revered Talmudic Sage from Kelme had taught me — except that at the end, as I cried, the intonations were mine.

Alf, we performed every one of the traditional customs. But you will not have that one Shabbos in your mother's home. Remember the services in Changi camp in Singapore? You said the Kaddish tune is a salute and farewell. I sang it like that today.

Salute and farewell.

October 7

The day before yesterday, Michael Singer's malaria invaded his brain. One more case of cerebral malaria in our camp. When I visited him, he constantly moved around his room in an agitated manner.

Michael was noisy, quarrelsome and, from time to time, irrational.

He talked to me of his wife and their three children back in London. Their home had been bombed out, and Michael was worried about where they were living.

"You see, Rabbi, they need me," he said, as a medical orderly helped him around the room. "They want me to come home soon. She, that thin, good woman has no money and poor health." He began to cry. "She never had a good day in all her life."

"Michael, you will see all of them when the war is over," I said, trying to calm him.

He turned around and began limping toward me with a threatening look on his face. All of a sudden, a few feet from me, he stopped, bewildered. With an emotionally laden, trembling voice, he implored, "You also have doubts? Just give me a blessing to make me feel better."

He didn't wait for any blessing from me, but began his threatening walk again, shouting, "This would be all unfair. Wrong!"

The pitch in his voice rose, and his eyes were fixed on me in a stare. "Impossible that I won't see them any more. What an assumption!"

The orderly attempted to calm him, putting his arm around Michael's chest, but leaving him enough room to move freely within the embrace, and he said soothingly, "Who would make such an unfair assumption? Certainly not your Rabbi."

Michael's belligerent mood switched as quickly as he had become threatening before, "Please pray for me so you won't need to bury me, like you buried Alf."

I sensed that his appeal for my prayer had brought me close to the limits of my own emotional self control. I had to leave before I, too, broke down. "Have a good Sabbath," I called out as I left.

Dear *Rachel*, walking back to my hut, I thought of Singer's wife and in my emotionally exhausted state, I imagined a woman, tired out from six long days of hard work as a charwoman, dressed up for the Sabbath, both her hands covering her eyes so as not to see the two Sabbath candles while she was intently and tearfully praying for the life of Michael, her husband, the POW.

He died this morning, the only POW on the daily list of the dead.

I tried to afford his burial the same dignity as was given to Alf, but the sky was not clear, the air was suffocatingly sticky, and the angry sun rays were hidden by vengeful whitened clouds.

Only the *Kaddish* prayer sounded today as majestic as last week.

October 10

Although Eddie's skin was all covered by small pus boils, he did not have an ulcer. So in view of the shortage of medical orderlies, he had to look after himself. As he could not reach the spots on his back, I cut a fine smooth-edged bamboo "knife" and scratched as much pus off his body as I could. The kitchen people gave me a mugful of hot water to wash off the remainder of the oozing matter from his back.

Yesterday, I entered the kitchen and picked up a mug of hot water. This time, a new sergeant was in charge. When he saw me, he shouted, "Who gave you permission to enter the kitchen?"

He was obviously in a rage, so I said as quietly as possible, "I need the water for three of my boys."

He hesitated, and I saw him look at my shoulder, probably to determine if there were any officer pips on them. When he saw there were none, he hit the mug out of my hand.

I did not move, which infuriated him. He yelled and pushed me wildly toward the exit with so much force on my frail body, I lost my equilibrium and fell in the direction of the cooking fire.

Eddie, who had just arrived, saw what had happened and pulled me away from the fierce blaze as quickly as possible. But since I fell only a few feet from the fire, my skin was burned slightly around the elbow, and I sensed the odor of singed hair.

The sergeant fled in panic.

"He was in tears," Eddie told me as I stood there still dazed at the ferocity of the attack. "This was a narrow escape from death," he said. "Aren't you afraid?"

I shook my head no, wondering why I was not angry with the sergeant. Why was there need of fear or anger? I did not feel I was going to die right at that moment.

The officer apologized on behalf of the sergeant who had become hysterical (he claimed) because of personal reasons; in fact, he even gave up his job in the kitchen, but Eddie has not yet been able to recuperate. He was grateful to the Almighty that he had been instrumental in saving me from what he believed to have been sure death. He did not agree that it would do no good to report the sergeant to the authorities.

For the next few days, I made sure I would not go to the kitchen more than twice a day.

Today, I heard the sergeant call me when I passed through the sick ward. He was crying. He told me that being an officer's "boy" means good food. But

he decided to give up this job that demands he jump at each whim of his officer. He is waiting for a regular job as a medical orderly. He won't have to wait long, I told him.

October 11

Despite better hygiene, food and drugs, patients are still dying daily in the Dysentery huts of the fenced-off hospital. These are actually people whose vital functions had already been damaged beyond a chance of repair when they arrived here.

Tonight, I found a young British officer conducting an exciting quiz in the second dysentery ward of our hospital. He had found himself a spot on the bamboo platform, to the right of the entrance, which had become vacant when its former occupant died this morning.

The lights and the voices were kept low, so as not to disturb those who were asleep or semi-conscious. This officer, with deep-seated, intelligent eyes, must have been practicing this game for many nights.

Still, he was unexpectedly placed before a surprising dilemma. Toward the end of the quiz, when the men had already started to guess who would win the prize (a strong flashlight), the well-known gargling sound of an expiring human being was suddenly heard.

The officer did not finish his last sentence. All men turned their eyes to the spot, about fifteen feet down the platform, where a skeleton British soldier whimpered, and then...*silence*.

The officer did not wait very long. After hesitating two seconds, he decided for life — not death. He repeated his last unfinished question, as if nothing had happened. Someone answered it, and a few minutes later the prize was given to that very man.

I was impressed by the insight of this officer. One could easily see that this experience was a first for him and that this frighteningly audible act of dying affected him strongly. Still, his decision was immediate and without reservation.

But then, somewhere deep in my heart, I was no longer sure. Not to pay respect to the termination of life must badly affect the living. Could life, being irreplaceable, become so cheap that it has no value when it is lost?

I could not help but see two emaciated faces among the participants. Out of heroic defiance of death that was sneaking up on them, destined to reach them within a matter of days, they attempted to participate tonight in that exciting quiz.

Was I imagining it? These two men were looking down along their own emaciated bodies while apparently anticipating that in a few days, it would be the turn of their own bodies to whimper...and to die. And the others — their healthy-looking friends — would again *not* stop, but continue to play their game.

Should one not conclude that in cheapening the meaning of dying, one actually cheapens the meaning of life?

I arose and went close to the deceased, who had remained alone. No doctor, no orderly. His face had a schoolboy's innocence and peace, which suggested that he had not been concerned with that game prior to his expiring.

My apologies to an intelligent officer? Still, I am not sure....

October 12

A few weeks ago, when I first met Robert Jackson, a darkhaired, tall Scotch corporal, he appeared quite healthy, despite trouble with his stomach and bowels. (The camp he came from, Spring Camp, has a high percentage of sick and dying.)

Last week, he suddenly became listless, rejecting the eggs and gradually, all food. I asked our orderly, Paul van Saitema — a blackhaired Indo (Eurasian) musician, whose soft voice sounds like a plea for favors all the time — to help Robert with his eating.

Paul prepares soft, tasty omelets which Robert promptly refuses. Paul climbs upon the bamboo platform and in a way which must remind Robert of his loving mother, talks him into eating. Paul comes down, smiling happily. He is not growing tired of seasoning the food with some Java herbs he has saved up, and although Robert still loses weight rapidly, one should be able to keep him alive with this minimum food intake.

Yesterday, two orderlies from the ward for serious patients came in to transfer him to their hut. When they put him on the stretcher and started to move him, he looked around helplessly for Paul.

I followed the orderlies and told Robert that Paul would bring him his special food every day. The sergeant apparently overheard my remarks. He angrily threw in, "We look after our patients here. There is no need for outsiders."

"I am the Jewish Chaplain," I said.

Then triumphantly, he raised his voice: "But Robert is not Jewish, or have you converted him?" I did not respond.

Then whipping his head in my direction, he concluded, to make it all final, "Robert is also not Dutch." (He did not sound as if he loved the Dutch.)

During this heated "debate," Robert stared straight ahead, seemingly unaware of his new orderlies' irritation.

When I told Paul, he was not discouraged. "Are you surprised that there are many angry people around here? Once he gets his anger off his chest, he will change his mind and be happy that some outsiders are willing to help lighten his burden."

Paul entered the dysentery hut with his omelet still steaming in its juice. The sergeant happened to sit rather close to the entrance. As if his legs were painfully bitten, he jumped up, blocking the way to Paul. When Paul explained that he had looked after Robert in his own ward, the sergeant responded that the doctor had ordered him to take charge of him. Bitingly, he added, "I told your Rabbi already, Robert is not Jewish."

Paul smilingly lifted his right shoulder, "Neither am I. I happen to be an Indo-European musician from Bandung, and what they call a good Christian."

"But not only are you Dutch, you're also just a volunteer orderly. I don't want you practicing your dilettante art in my ward."

Without more ado the medical sergeant practically pushed him out of the ward. Then when Paul was already past the door, the sergeant called out, "Come to think of it, you sell these tasty omelets to the patients. How much will you charge me for this one?"

Paul got into such a rage that he spat out on the ground and raising his voice, shouted, "Our food is never for sale. But I would never give it to a professional misanthrope," and he walked out.

I went to see the doctor, who told me that it was not wise to get this medical orderly angry. He was a hardboiled egg but an efficient and strict administrator. When he sensed my disappointment, the doctor explained himself. The few food crumbs Paul would make him swallow would not make a difference any more. Medically speaking, Robert is not just dying, he is actually dead already.

The doctor was right, of course. When I saw him today, Robert barely recognized me. His bony feet looked so wide, the bone-knuckles protruding, his buttocks seemingly non-existent. His arms were curved, thin bone constructs, a skeleton's wired-up arms. How did he lose all his flesh so soon? He not only refrained from taking in food but while stubbornly fasting his bowels appeared to be constantly running empty.

Paul visited Robert yesterday evening, when the sergeant was off duty. He believed he perceived a glimmer of recognition in Robert's tired eyes.

I found his place empty when I visited this morning. He was buried an hour ago, the sergeant said, and turned away.

October 18

Joe Taylor speaks English poorly and with a strong foreigner's accent. In the late nineteen thirties, he arrived in Australia as a refugee from Rumania. He was actually born in the Hungary that had been a tolerant and culturally interesting country under the Hapsburgs, but which had turned anti-semitic between the two World Wars.

It was true that their anti-semitism was still of the old- fashioned kind, not racial but religious. Since Joe Taylor was prepared to undergo the formal act of baptism, he succeeded in being admitted to the university of his choice, despite the *numerus clausus* which limited the admission of Jews to a few percent of the total student population. When he found out that in his country there would be no career even for a baptized Jew, he applied to a university in Rumania, undergoing baptism for a second time. In 1939, he emigrated to Australia. Again he interrupted his studies when in 1941, he volunteered for the army to partake in mankind's fight against Nazism.

When Eddie asked him how he could have decided to deceive the church authorities, he laughed his loud laughter.

"Yes, I did act like a chameleon, changing colors each time the environment demanded it. The church people, Eddie? How could they not be aware of my deception, when so many accepted baptism?"

Joe now asked Eddie whether he has heard of a great, popular nineteenth century poet who converted.

"Yes," Eddie said. "Heinrich Heine, the poet whose song 'The Lorelei' was so popular in Germany that the Nazis could not omit it from their anthologies and printed it as a poem created by an unknown poet."

Joe, again laughing his shrill laughter, said, "Do you realize that he followed my example? He converted twice (like me) to be accepted as a professor (not like me), and it was all in vain (like me)."

Eddie, still not happy, insisted, "And what religion do you, a circumcised Jew, embrace at present?"

"In Australia," Joe responded, "all decent non-Jews are circumcised. If you see an uncircumcised Australian under the showers, you may safely assume that he is a Jew!"

By now, Joe was laughing, his entire body shaking.

Yesterday, Joe Taylor met Eddie again and said to him, "I still owe you the rest of the story of my conversions. When I arrived in Australia, a rabbi in Sydney told me, to my surprise, that I did not have to go through another ceremony of (re)conversion to Judaism!"

Poor Eddie seemed a bit confused. I now said, "Eddie, Joe wants to constantly compete with Mose in making our members laugh."

Joe Taylor seems to have adopted me. He brought me semicrushed hulks of rice, which he washed thoroughly and freed it as far as possible from rotten parts and bad smells. He assured me that in his kitchen workshop, there was a surplus of this source of vitamins that, unfortunately, was not much in demand. In this camp, one is no longer willing to swallow smelly and prickly non-food which may cause pierced bowels.

Like many humorists, Joe was a man without real hope for a successful future. He was close to forty, unmarried, without final degrees, and despite his readiness to change religious labels, he was not prepared to marry out of the Jewish faith.

What made things especially hard for him was that not many Jewish girls were willing to marry someone who changed his religion like coat labels.

It occurred to me that Mose and Joe had so much in common. Both, old bachelors, good hearted, always ready to help people, both possessing a sense of cynically colored humor. Both of them grew up in a world of economic insecurity and political crises.

How did Joe formulate it? "Building a family on socio-economic quicksand."

Hypnotist of Compassion

October 20

Rachel,

As I have implied several times in my diary, I believe that each prisoner of war is more than a number, more than a military rank; he is a product of his environment.

Lt. Elze is a good example of this. He arrived in Java from Amsterdam as a young six-year-old boy and was immediately attracted to oriental people. His first decision as an adult was to serve the struggling farmers in the role of agricultural consultant. Most of his time was spent in villages and small towns. His second decision was not to go back to Holland to find himself a wife, which was what a white bachelor used to do. One would take a sleep-in *bahboo*, whom he would discard the day his Dutch bride arrived in Java.

Elze married a beautiful Javanese girl, the daughter of a farmer who had given her no Western education beyond the elementary school level.

Elze's interest in Javanese culture, in the world of Hinduism (though he never adopted its polytheism), forged a bond between him and his wife's family. When she bore him a boy, he felt that he had been reborn into a universal society. What would happen to him in peace or war did not matter. He existed in his handsome, intelligent child.

Some Dutch officers did not respect him because of his marriage to a native girl, and most of the British officers in the camp resented his having offered to serve as an interpreter, despite his poor knowledge of Japanese (he had learned it only recently). The Japanese commandant, because of misunderstandings, often lost his temper and slapped Elze publicly. Each time it occurred, the British officers blamed him for bringing disrespect to the class of officer.

When Elze moved to our present camp in Kanbury, his services as interpreter were no longer in demand. In a way, he was disappointed; despite the beatings, he was convinced that a poor interpreter was better for the camp than none.

Because Elze was also a hypnotist, he found a broad range of activities in Kanbury. Hundreds of ill POWs, many of them with badly ulcered legs, suffered pain and could not sleep well. He was convinced he had the gift of bringing sleep and relief from pain, through hypnosis. He was soon busy attempting to help the sick.

Edwin Orenstein, an Englishman, sick with ulcers, showed me what he had written about Elze, the man capable of healing with sheer goodness:

...They say about Lieutenant Elze, a Dutch hypnotist, "...he will soon put your leg straight...he sends men to sleep; they're using him at operations as an anaesthetist..."

I honestly doubt it.

Elze came into the hut a day or two later, and I saw the serious cases following him with their eyes — hungry. I saw him...a slim figure with a pedagogic stoop, short-sighted eyes in thick glasses, a sensitive mouth, and thin, expressive soft hands. He walked shyly past men disfigured with scabies, wrapped in the smell of ulcers. Others hurry through with averted eyes and exhaling nostrils, speaking of the "Chamber of Horrors." But Elze walked slowly, with reverence, as if this were the "Hall of Heroes" in Valhalla. To him, it was the privilege of giving.

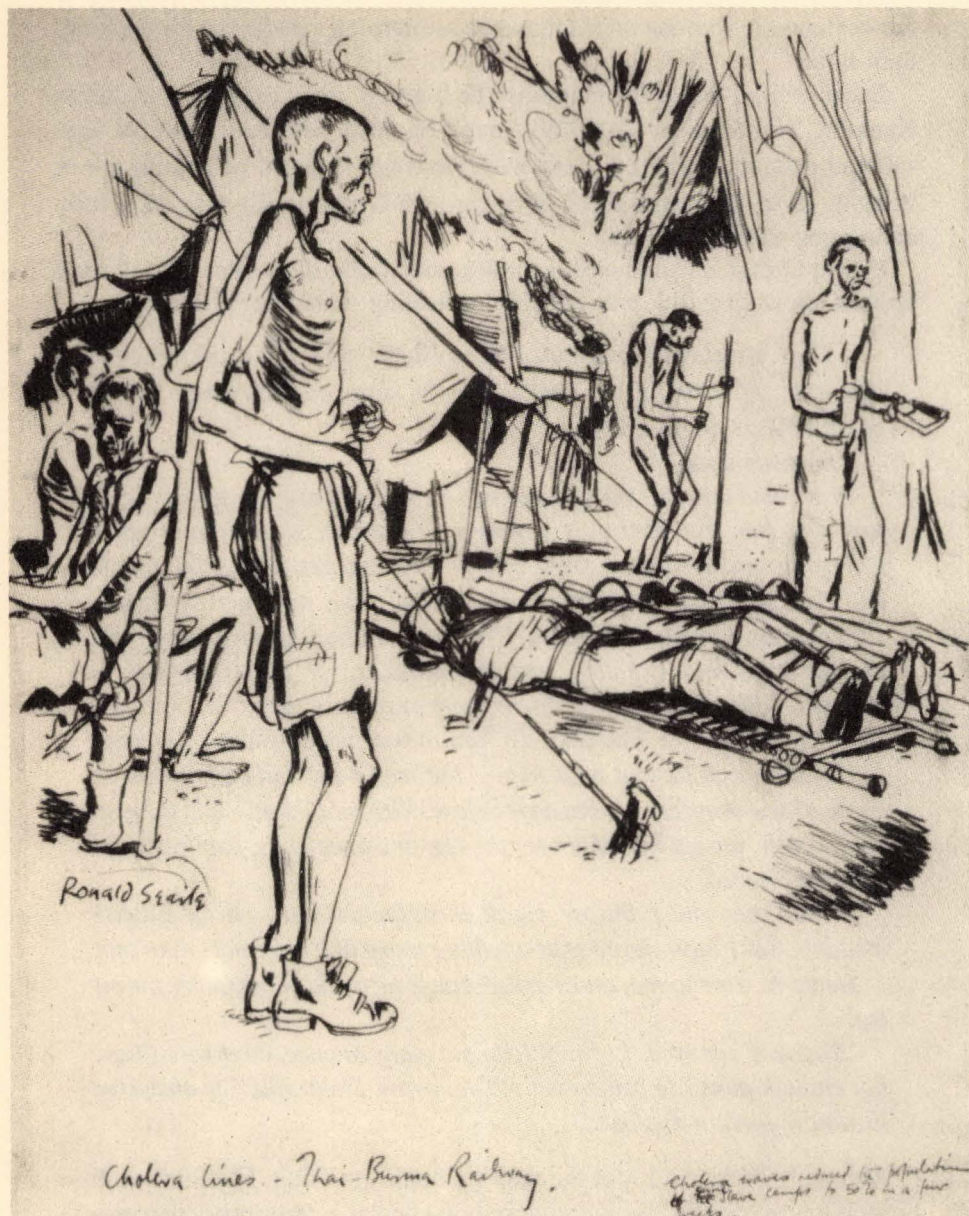
He came to a patient near me — the man's leg had stiffened at an angle of sixty degrees several days before. Elze spoke softly, laid the man back gently, passed his hand over the leg; and obediently, painlessly, the leg straightened.

I have seen the primrose break through the snow on an English meadow, yet I have never seen anything more like a miracle than this.

He came over to me, and I asked him if he could do anything for my leg.

"Today, I am tired. I cannot help too many at once, otherwise I have not enough power to help anyone. Tomorrow, I help you," he answered in simple foreign English."

Although Orenstein is not the only rationalist to doubt Elze's talent, Elze himself has no doubts. He is convinced that he has extra-sensory perception. He told me he has written a few times to his relatives in Holland about tragic events which would occur in their family. He usually senses, he claims, when a member of his family or a close friend is about to die, or dies.



Cholera, Thai-Burma Railway by Ronald Searle

Sime Road Camp

Sime Road Camp

November 15

Dear Rachel,

The commandant of H-Force Lt. Col. Humphries and the senior chaplain in our camp returned yesterday in time to accompany us on our return trip to Singapore.

As conditions in our camp had been extremely bad in the first weeks with the daily influx of the ill and dying, and the lack of drugs and medical orderlies, Dr. Kevin Fagan worked indefatigably, reducing the number of ulcer patients. Lt. Elze, the hypnotist, reduced pain and sleeplessness.

The well-supplied canteens made life in the camp quite bearable. But a shortage of money became a serious problem to some people. I sold my last disposable clothing and was left with money to last me for some time. As long as Mose was here he shared his earnings generously with the fund. But since he left with a work group, I must find new sources to replenish the charity fund.

Eddie has been planning to create a pancake factory! He would charge one tikol per piece. Eddie would make them and his pal Bill would sell them. They needed someone to help with the financial matters — the accounts, and the

purchase of needed materials from the canteen and the Chinese. Would I fill this third position? I agreed, of course. Did I object to making my berth the official address of the factory and its warehouse? No. My berth is conveniently situated at the central entrance of our ward and thus offers some extra space for the business.

The pancakes actually sold well, and my fund grew. It made me uncomfortable to have become a visible symbol of money-making. I made it known to all my friends and customers that the chaplain had not gone into "business." My share of the profits is going to the charity fund. But was that the full truth? Did I not benefit from our trade in an indirect way? A number of the pancakes would abort in the process of their birth, and those we shared and ate ourselves. I also felt uncomfortable being seen eating flopped pancakes while taking money from customers who came directly to the factory!

I told Eddie that I have to quit. A few days later, Eddie also decided to quit; he wanted a more relaxed POW existence. We now have more than eighty tikols in our charity fund.

We are heartened by the steady flow of good news, over our clandestine short-wave radio, from the battlefronts. This continuous stream of good news — the Italian surrender, successes in Russia in the year following the critical German defeat in Stalingrad, the successes in the Pacific (the Aleutians, New Guinea, the Gilbert Islands) — has been cautiously passed from mouth to ear, for months, without the Japanese having discovered the radio. The guards may have sensed that we have some way of determining what is happening on the war fronts. We must have indicated a growing self-confidence — we are not so subdued now and do not "jump" hurriedly when saluting the guards. In mid-November, Lt. Col. Humphries and the Protestant chaplain — not busy any more with daily burials — were picked up for interrogation by the *Kempetai*. There were, of course, those who were sure that they would never see these officers again. Apparently because of the situation on all three war fronts, the senior officers in our camp were not pessimistic regarding the treatment and the ultimate fate of the commandant and the chaplain.

However, we are all convinced that one of these days they are going to join us, safe and well, on the first stage of our return trip home.

*December 10**Dear Rachel,*

The trip from Kanbury to this camp in the northeastern part of Singapore Island was no easier than our trip north, six months ago; but we were in a better mood now. The war, we heard on our radio, has definitely turned in our favor. But there is always the physical reality that a POW has to deal with, and while what we learned about the outside world was good, we still have to face life in our camps. For us, getting away from Thailand was the best news possible. This meant we were further removed from the immediate prospects of death.

We were again twenty-seven persons to each wagon, but this time we had quite a number of convalescent and sick men with us. Because these people could not tolerate the insufferable heat and the cramped space for four long days, two volunteers were required to serve as medical orderlies. I felt it was part of my duty, so I volunteered. I had moments of despair, of sheer exhaustion — the patients needed to talk and to be talked to during the dark hours of the night. And I was forced to stand with no space for more than just my feet.

Sime Road Camp, which we have entered, is much smaller than Changi, but it is cozy and beautiful. We are told that it had never belonged to the military, but was used as a golf course. Its low hills smooth down into small valleys, all clean and clothed in green, with new-looking huts and wards. Friends who have arrived here in recent weeks are quick to tell us that food is scarce. But it is a restful camp that provides us with a feeling of privacy.

December 17

The prisoners who were here when we arrived were not exaggerating when they said food was in short supply. Our captors give us soybeans — bushels and bushels of soybeans. They claim that their army is so healthy because the main staple of their diet is the vitamin-saturated soybean. But the bean is hard, and our stomachs are bruised and sore. Our cooks say it will take eighteen hours of boiling to make them soft enough for our sore stomachs.

A cook's discovery: The soybeans grow a yeasty mold that after several days gives them a multicolored ugliness and a soft cake texture that leaves them quite edible and digestible.

December 25

Dear Rachel

Our non-Jewish POWs celebrate Christmas without the prewar-time commercial overtones. We celebrate *Chanukah* joyfully. *Rachel*, I wonder if you are in possession of the *menorahs*.

The *Chanukah* party was a success. The senior Dutch officer had initially withheld permission for a celebration—he remembers Tjilatjap, two years ago, and the fury that our *menorah* ignited. But Major McKay, the camp commandant who had been in command at Alf's funeral in Kanbury, said we should be discreet but loyal to our traditions, or what have we left of ourselves.

On the periphery of the camp, he located a charmingly demolished concert platform. We held our service there and lit candles. The soybean *latkes* (pancakes) were prepared in real oil, and the boys sang and danced.

It seems to me that *Chanukah* always manages to ignore the war, to stand its own massive miracle up to block some of this tragic dreariness.

Since the party, I have heard all the positive rumors this camp could possibly endure; men are speaking of liberation, of futures, even of furniture in their homes that they want rearranged or reupholstered!

It is a pleasant change. I go to visit the sick, who are also relaxed. They all have contributed money for the cost of the oil and the *latkes* that we have eaten for four days, and will eat, we hope, for four more days.

Most of the men insist they are feeling better, and there is a joke among the Christians in the ward that this mysterious *Dr. Chanukah* will bring a state of mentally induced good health for eight days, and then disappear.

1944

1944

January 1, 1944

Dear Rachel,

It is the first of January 1944: No noise, no fireworks in the camp. Stillness. The regained pride and dignity of the camp community may surprise students of the Sime Road Camp. The unquenchable thirst for knowledge and a growing willingness to attend a great variety of courses in all parts of our camp did not cease to surprise me. Our Jewish programs in Bible and Jewish history, religious customs and contemporary problems, attracted both Jewish and non-Jewish students. It may be appropriate at this point to speak about the generous attitude of our camp office towards the Jews in this camp. The help I have been offered (an "acting" chaplain to the Dutch and other Jews) was heartening.

Lt. Waite, our camp's interpreter and a former missionary in Japan, showed a special interest in the Hebrew language; this interest led to our close friendship. It was of course difficult to teach a language, without proper teaching tools, in sixty hours. To the devout missionary, Hebrew was the holy language of the Bible, and he spent much of his time reviewing our lessons. These lessons led quite naturally to frequent discussions of theological concepts. He encouraged a number of his friends to join my lectures. His former colleague, Lt. Elze, whom I had known only casually in Kanbury, began to take an active interest in the life of the Jewish community.

January 28

Dear Rachel,

What I have discovered since that awful day when we were separated is that tension, fear, and wholesale death of friends tend to turn POWs' minds to religion; on the other hand, they may turn them away from cultural interests. Many teachers and avid readers seem to lose all interest in reading, thinking or attending lectures as soon as conditions get tough, or food becomes scarce.

For example, as soon as we reached Tjilatjap's harsh camps, I became, overnight, a close to disposable nuisance. But as soon as conditions in the camps improved, I could see the emergence of matters of the mind. Lectures and courses were well attended in Tamarkan. After the hardships of the Kanbury camps and since our arrival in the nerve-calming atmosphere of Sime Road, there has been a noticeable thirst for cultural matters.

In fact, the men crave intellectual stimulation. I had to repeat in English a course in basic and philosophical concepts of higher mathematics that I had given in Dutch. I also met an interesting linguist, a specialist in Chinese literature and history, Lt. Hulsewe, who volunteered to translate my course *Description of Nature* from Dutch into English.

In the shadow of heavily foliated trees, we sit five mornings each week and translate and discuss.

The other day, an Oxford student of philosophy, Lt. Hare, brought me his essay *Rhythms*, his intended doctoral dissertation. We immediately made it the subject of a fascinating discussion. The fact that he was earnestly working on a concrete project for the future and interested in discussing it was characteristic of the change in the mood of this camp.

I was also intrigued by the lectures given by Professor Roberts to a group of British officers, concerning the future of the British Empire. I had expected that his devastating and pitiless criticism of British society and government (including the royal house) would elicit a good measure of irritation, if not anger, from a body of British officers who had been fighting for the well-being and future success of that very empire.

But when Roberts, a humorist, a short clowning man and an active Communist, had finished his lecture, one of the officers turned to his neighbor and asked, "Do you think that we are all that bad, George?"

"I must say, I actually wonder."

Although some discussion followed, Roberts clearly sensed that both his enthusiastic and cynical lecture had not impressed his apparently unexcitable British audience.

But what is important for me, dear Rachel, is the fact that now the men are thinking and evaluating intellectual matters, after having existed merely as extensions of the Japanese desire for a Railroad-of-Death.

There have also been some surprises. It turns out that Edwin Orenstein, whose body is still bone-thin and whose legs, despite Elze's hypnotizing exercises, are still partly curved, is a great lover of English literature; I am intrigued by his comprehensive knowledge of British authors and London publishers.

It is true, of course, that there is nothing unique about such interests in a life without the reality of war. But recording the up-and-down flow of mental curiosity in the POW camps (especially in the perspective of the steadily growing religious yearnings) brings me to a truer understanding of the intriguing POW reality.

January 30

Dear Rachel,

Some of our POW cooks here are fat, whereas the men are stick-thin and empty. It is a strange picture, like a child's book of opposites illustrating contrasts in extremes for clarity.

Reg is working in the kitchen, growing fat, and becoming quarrelsome. He has always been a friendly, generous boy, and we worry now about him. Since Alf died in Kanbury, Reg's face is sad and distant, and puffy like a cloud full of rain. He eats while he labors, eating and eating to push away the still recent memory of razor-cutting hunger — both physical and emotional. But I think he is feeling guilty and growing angry at our thinness. He is not allowed to take food out of the kitchen. He often feels sick; he persistently holds his stomach. An unhealthy combination of guilt and prison food is transforming our poor Reg.

Most times when I try to speak to him, he appears nervous and repeats over and over that he must return to the kitchen. Today, he agreed to sit down and talk. Although I wondered beforehand how he would respond when I suggested that his acute moral sensitivity is causing him anguish, he turned out to be most agreeable. I said we were all happy for him when he received orders for kitchen duty. Someone had to work there, and we were glad it was one of our most deserving, hungriest boys. He laughed at my jokes and relaxed appreciably.

Then, after some hesitation, I decided to take the risk of spoiling everything that might have been accomplished. Half seriously and half jokingly, I told him that he is not an endless storage space, that he is a "limited area" and shouldn't think he is able to carry an overflow. He was not hurt at all by my "fatherly" comments.

Lying on his cot in the hospital, Edwin Orenstein says he prefers death to life, that it must be better than what he endures now. He insists. He is a fastidious man, intelligent, critical and an avid reader. He is emaciated from beri-beri; his badly-curved legs have lost almost all their muscle. No wonder he can hardly stand, and his face contorts itself with pain and vanishing control.

Unfortunately, he is not a man who struggles mightily against darkness, but he rages at the light for deserting him. And now he claims there is no light in the world pretty enough to fight for.

Often, Orenstein and I cannot seem to find a level where we can speak honestly without my hurting him by seemingly innocent remarks. But I have learned something — not to force my ego on the lives of other people.

I have decided to reduce the number of visits (three times a week instead of daily) and to end them the moment we get into a debate concerning religion or politics.

There is another young man in the ward who worries me: William Herman is a tall, broad Australian boy of twenty-two, with transparent blue eyes, who has a skin disease which has spread without any kindness to his shame-drenched face. I don't know him very well — we have spoken several times — but he repeats certain subjects over and over. Much of his conversation is an attempt to run his mind dizzy — to move it away from any coherent focus on his appearance, on his illness.

Today, he was frantic. He could not sit still. He showed me a letter from his girlfriend. "Almost my wife," he said.

They sound alike. She repeats herself, too. She wrote over and over about their future together, about the uniqueness of their love.

"I don't understand," I told him. "What is upsetting you?"

"Look," he said, "look at that!" And he pointed to a small sentence, like the first star in a not-quite-dark sky, barely white. It was the mention of an American G.I. she had met and spent an enjoyable evening with.

"She is on the way to leaving me. She is trying to tell me kindly, but kindness does not break a fall," he said, his chin and lips stiffening, his voice angry.

"But what about her dreams of a shared future? That doesn't sound as though she wants to break up with you."

"Don't protect me," he shouted. "It is hopeless, anyway. She hasn't seen me, my ugly face. She doesn't realize the monstrosity I have become."

He showed me a picture of the girl — she has beautiful features — but she is not the kind of beauty Herman believes her to be. She is the daughter of aristocratic, non-Jewish Australian blood.

When he mentioned that she wasn't Jewish, I looked at him. There was no judgment in my glance, but he must have interpreted it that way, for he said quickly, "I have never felt Jewish. Maybe I am being punished, because now I am nothing but a monster. I am not a Jew. I am not even a man."

I refrained from commenting on the implications of what he had just said, for there was no reason to go into his apparent assumption that Jew and man are essentially non-identifiable concepts. We could deal with that later, if he was ready to do so. At that moment, his major concern was his girlfriend. *Rachel, POWs seem to be concerned exclusively with immediate reality.*

Of course, unless the girl is as special as he believes her to be, Herman read the letter correctly. He is so buried deep under sores and sickness that she may not want to remain with him.

This is a common fear of prisoners of war.

While I was reflecting on my conversation with Herman, I was interrupted by Reg, who told me that Herman quit his assignment in the kitchen. He said that even with diminished guilt and a better controlled appetite, he cannot bear the job. He appeared amazingly exuberant for a man who has just given up a feast.

February 15

I plan for the future because that is what sustains me. It is much like carrying a heavy parcel up the stairs — you never concentrate on each separate step, but as you move you think only of the last step.

I attempt full use of my mind, and there are always topics waiting in reserve — plans, hopes, goals. I wonder how I can replace this time and all that I have lost in this semi-reality of POW life. The time is misplaced. There is only room in each second for one second. Can we replace this time?

The artificiality of non-active-war inside active-war is wasting our lives.

February 22

I am thinking of you, *Rachel*. I crave the warmth, the connecting hearts that tie us to real life. I stare and stare at the children in the picture I have of them, with its white paper frame and their still, small beings. I must plan for my family's future; I sit, my head heavy in restless hands, envisioning my children's development...the fighting they will have to do. I combat decay and disintegration indefatigably — I am a pioneer, fighting the chaos in this world so my children can live with fortune.

I feel the creative drive to chronicle, to consider, to pinpoint myself and all

the dimensions and dilemmas...and, most especially, my relationship with my Creator, with the *Torah*...and with mankind.

I must revive the dead diary, the cremated one. The *Kempetai* confiscated the pages from me. But I, fortunately, have a second copy in my past, and that is in my mind...and I have ten good fingers to hold pen and paper with.

And I insist that at least by thought, by mental recall and re-creation, we shall not miss a second of our lives.

February 24

Dear Rachel,

You are keeping silent. No letters, no postcards, no signs.

How fortunate I am to feel happiness seeing others, like Gabel, the quiet and homesick family man, receiving mail from home. But sometimes, especially now, it doesn't help me. It is only a surrogate happiness and has no comfort. I worry about you. What we should be sharing, you are doing alone. Three children.

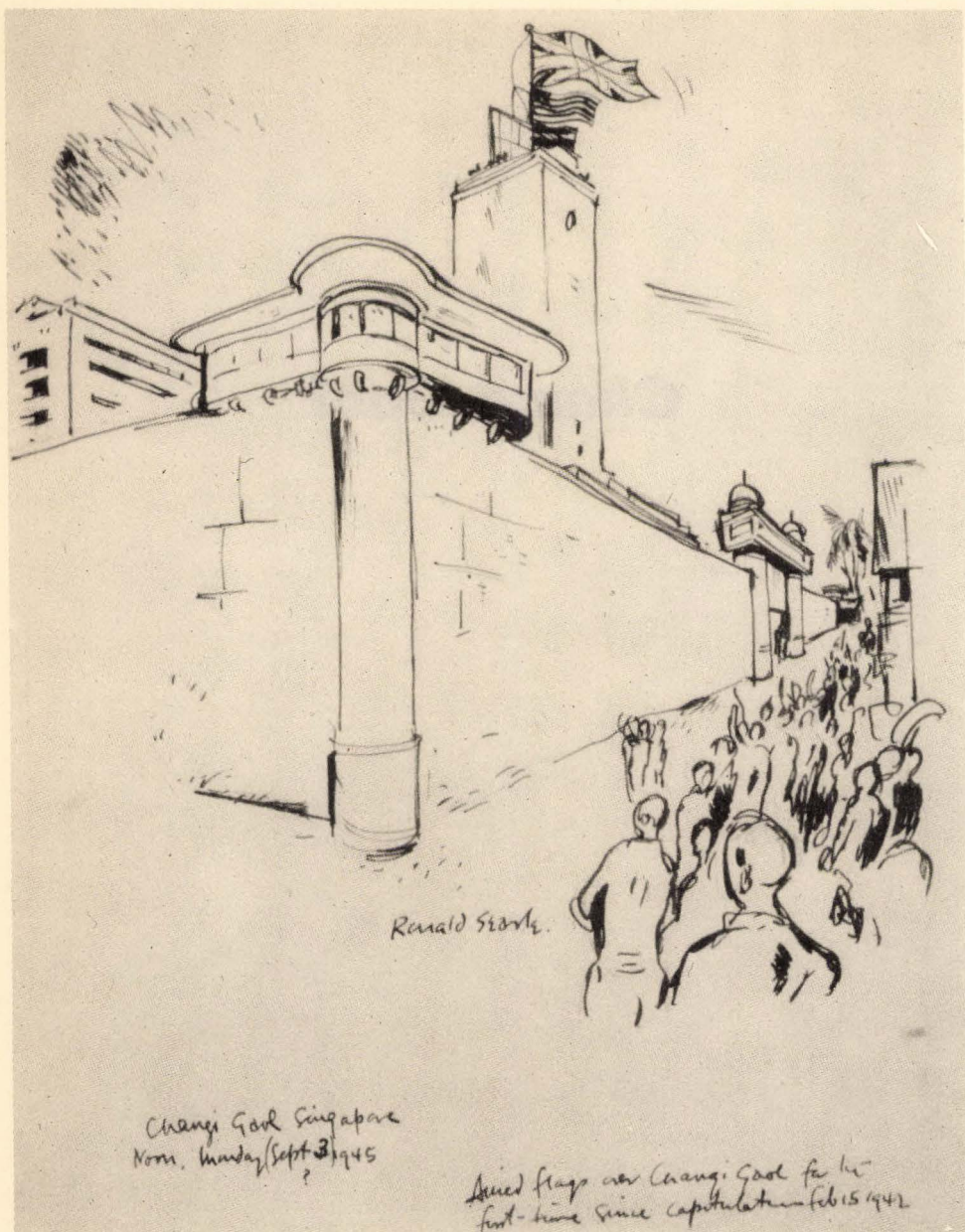
But it is precisely when responsibilities gather enough pressure and actually crush you that you become strong; your nerves relax and you grow muscles everywhere — mind, heart, soul.

April 5

For weeks, we are a camp without rumors. Actually, we do not need a radio very much now. The Japanese, apparently realizing that they cannot permanently suppress the thirst for news, decided to publish a news magazine in English for civilian internees — “neutral” foreigners in occupied regions — and made it available to the POWs. It is, of course, written in a way that reduces the importance and extent of recent American and British victories. To us, however, even the mention of Japanese counterattacks and bombings informs us about the advancing Allied forces. Ironically, these news items from Japanese official sources revived old rumors about the advances of the Allied forces in all war theaters — including our own.

We are to be moved to Changi Gaol. Sime Road is such a pleasant place and the jail is just a tall thick asbestos prison compound where the fat sun sits and sits. Singapore's women and children who have been interned for years in the jail will take our places in Sime Road Camp. We certainly do not begrudge them their long overdue relief.

Changi Gaol



We came out of our cells
to see Allied flags flying
over Changi Gaol again.

Changi Gaol

The Changi Miracle

April 10, 1944

Dear Rachel,

The Changi Gaol is filled beyond capacity. It was not built to house more than a few hundred inmates. It could accommodate the Singapore civilian internees, women, children and a few men (who at present enjoy the beauty and comfort of the Sime Road Camp). But not the large numbers of POWs who have been poured into its cell blocks.

What will happen to us...the capacities of the plumbing and kitchen facilities are utterly insufficient. I fear that soon we will have a return of a dysentery epidemic and skin trouble.

In Tamarkan Bridge Camp, we had witnessed an intelligent leadership producing wonders. Elze now assured us that our Changi camp officers were determined to use every pint of ingenuity and technical know-how to transform our camp into a model for other POW camps.

It is true the Japanese had succeeded in crippling the bodies and minds of many thousands of Railroad-of-Death survivors. But the miracle of rebirth of will power in many of those prisoners in Tamarkan Bridge Camp could be repeated here.

In view of the presence of a number of "plantation" workers from Malaya and Sumatra, it was not difficult to create small and large gardens in every corner of Changi Camp. Each time a new one was dug, it gave all of us an uplift. The sight of an area designated for growth suggests a future and brings us closer to the day when we will be working away in our own gardens.

Also, the engineers and mechanics, who had been employed in these tropical regions before the war, were experienced in working under such primitive conditions. It did not take them long to build washrooms and showers and even to furnish the much-needed utensils for our overly burdened kitchen.

Furthermore, the well-stocked old jail library has been reopened, attracting a great number of readers.

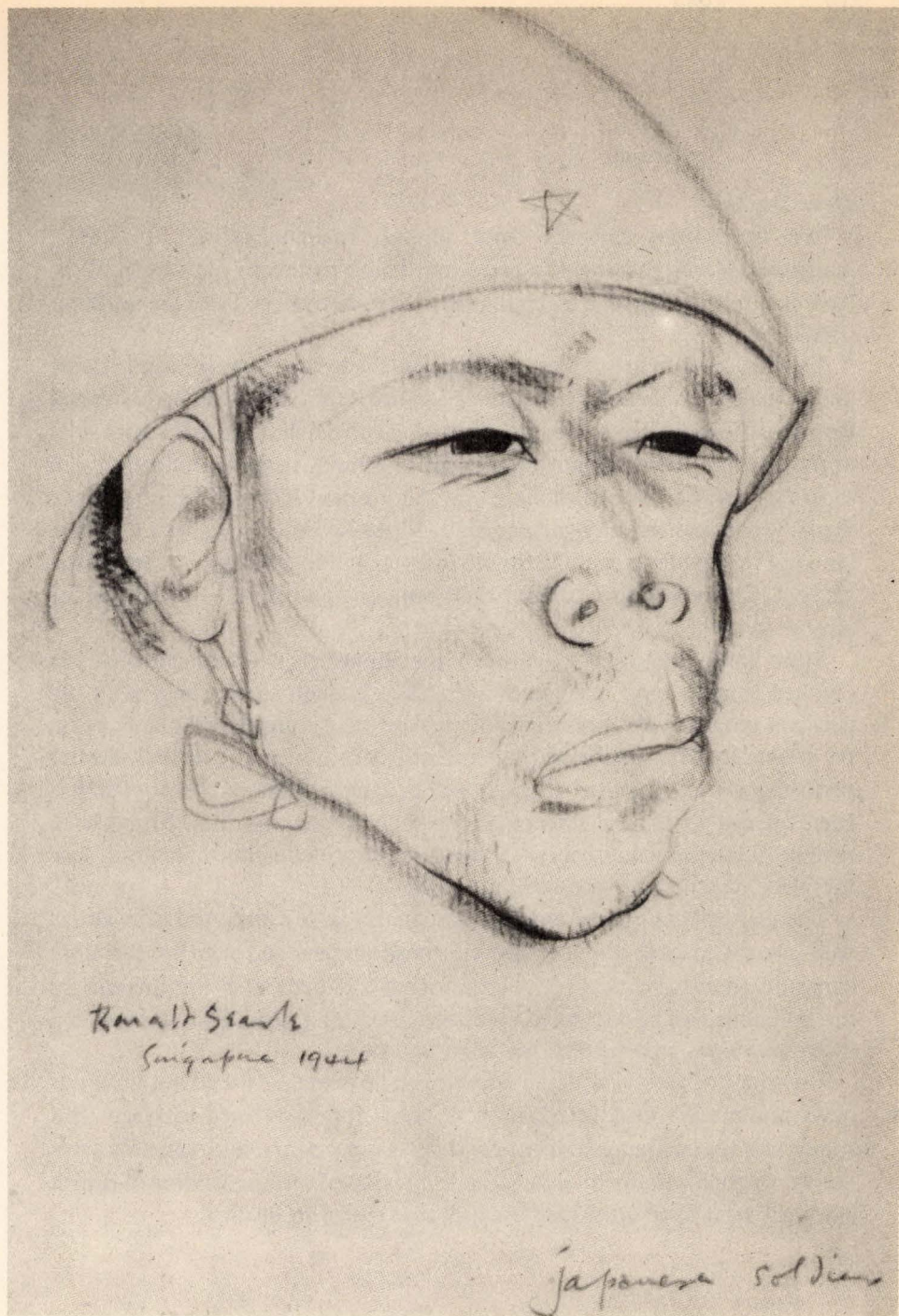
It did not take long before the "inmates" started building Houses of Prayer for the various religious communities.

Thanks to the efforts of Lt. Waite, our Jewish community will be among the first to benefit from the feverish building activities.

We finally found a suitable place for our services — two tents in the woodyard in the jail gardens. The logs of wood and the trestles offer pleasant seats. Prayers among the woodblocks.

I expected something to go wrong with our tent shul...the location is actually out of bounds to our men. Then last Friday, the wood came in late, so our services could not go on. In a POW camp, wood has high priority. In the meantime, we hold services in a half-finished hut of the convalescent depot. A small group of praying men in the emptiness of a large hut.

Rachel, the regained pride and dignity of the Changi POW community may surprise future students of our camp experience. The thirst for knowledge and a growing willingness to attend a great variety of courses does not really surprise me. Our *Ohel Jacob* programs in Bible, Jewish history, customs and contemporary problems, attract both Jewish and non-Jewish students. The help I am offered as acting chaplain is heartening.



Japanese Kempetai by Ronald Searle

April 15, 1944

Dear Rachel

We have been gathered from several Thailand camps to Changi, dangerously overcrowding this place, and I have met many old friends. Some have just returned from Thailand; others have been back from the north for some time.

The height of these buildings is imposing, the cells are immaculately clean, and in the center of each is a concrete platform. One of the three men assigned to each cell uses this as a bed; the others sleep on the floor, flanking both sides of the platform. So we rotate the pleasure of genuine sleep. The officers live in separate barracks next to the jail, and the hospital barracks lie adjacent to theirs. It is an old sleeping volcano here — there is little excitement. The men are kept busy with expanding the facilities (plumbing, toilets and fuel) of the camp. Occasionally, groups leave the compound and travel — usually to the airport to work.

More hustle than usual, as if one of the puppeteers over our show has just awoken from a long misplaced sleep. The kitchen staff is busy with the constant transport of supplies in and out. And there is much repair work going on: prayer facilities are being built and also a hall for music recitals, theater performances and lectures. Courses will be taught in the old library that has been opened to us, and thus offers me such familiar warmth. I have been reading extensively, hungrily — through most of the nights. I gratefully lose my place in time and space to the words.

There are, of course, secret radios here in this large camp. And there are, as well, men who have connections with headquarters and who are therefore constantly being approached by their friends for “authentic” information, or for assurance and hope. I have no direct access to a radio, but my friend the interpreter does, and he tells me what he knows.

One must be careful with the knowledge, however — we do not want our news announcers discovered, so it is better for fewer men to know. But sometimes the encouragement of good news is necessary, and sometimes it is crucial to quell rumors by telling the truth. (Based on false rumors of British landings, men have attempted escapes that ended in death.)

April 30

This morning an Australian officer on a work detail at the airport slapped a Japanese guard for dealing violently with a young English soldier.

They are back in camp now, and we have heard that the Japanese will use the Australian as an example to us all. The Japanese intend to show that a rebellious, disrespectful POW will still be punished despite the recent successes of the Allies.

2 a.m.

It was rumored that the Japanese intended to kill the officer. As with most rumors in a camp filled with prisoners, it was whispered from "hut to hut," picking up a momentum of its own until there was not one POW who did not know what was planned. We fretted all night.

Just as was the case with the earlier rumor, "anxiety" rumors are followed by "wishful thinking" rumors. The new ones spread rapidly through the camp:

"The Allies are getting close," came the first rumor.

"The Japanese are scared," came the second.

The last "explained" why our fears, however warranted in this case, were unfounded.

"The Japanese aren't going to touch the Australian."

But could we who had lived in constant fear for three years believe this?

The fact remains that a POW had struck a Japanese guard, and nothing has been done to punish the act. This was so out of character for the Japanese that, while we were overjoyed at our new status of being honorable POWs, we were more than a little unsure of what lies ahead. To compound it all, the old strut of our captors has disappeared overnight. We are tempted to believe that the Japanese are visibly afraid.

Now we learn of our Allies' painfully slow but progressively growing advances — the Russians in Poland, the Americans in the Marshall and Admiralty Islands. With the war in a state of limbo, it is still difficult for the POW to know his chances for personal survival. This is where depression may come in. It can kill as easily as cholera and almost as fast as a Japanese clubbing.

The body may take longer to die away, but the spirit can plunge overnight.

Canadian War Amputee

May 2

Some prisoners of war may become depressed because they are forcibly pulled away from their families; others, because their promising careers are cut short. However, in the case of David Birnbaum, it was only with his entry into war that his life took on any meaning for him.

Dave, a Canadian, is a patient in the long ward. He has only one leg. The other was shot off in the last moments of a battle that from the start had seemed meaningless. The British surrendered Singapore to the Japanese as David surrendered his leg.

Some of Dave's Jewish friends have asked me to speak with him. They are concerned for his Jewishness because he stayed in a hut together with a number of patients who had come under the influence of Paul, a handicapped soldier who attempted to create a community of believers prepared to accept a strict discipline of intense religiosity.

Paul shared prayers and the Messianic revelations in the *New Testament* with his friends.

Dave's hello was hesitant and quiet, and he didn't look at me when he asked if the Jewish people love the Almighty as they used to, and if He loves them as He once claimed to.

"I don't know what my Jewishness means," he said.

I found an English translation of the Jewish Bible for him, which he is now reading diligently. One hour every second day, we study the Hebrew language, and his Jewish friends review the lessons with him. He is joyful that the Hebrew language is not an excruciatingly difficult endeavour for him. As a boy, he had studied Hebrew in a large religious school in Toronto. His rabbi's long silver beard and soft eyes are clear, close memories. And so are the magical stories.

We discuss *Aggadic* concepts (Rabbinic-ethical maxims) because they seem to locate the emotional distress spots in him and comfort the religious dilemmas there.

Dave has decided that if he survives the war, he will move to Palestine to a *kibbutz* (an agricultural commune), where his handicap will surely be forgiven and where some useful manual craft will be found for him. He hopes that there he will find the happiness he chanced on when he entered the military and arrived in Singapore.

Rachel, when Dave was eleven, his father left the garment factory where he worked, left the city of Toronto, and abandoned his family. Dave's mother decided to stay in the small apartment in her husband's city with her son because Toronto was a clean, quiet and secure place. She impressed on Dave that returning to her family in England would be a sign of defeat.

But she could not find steady employment. Many days, they went without food, and Dave became very thin. His father's family remained aloof while his mother's family back in London shouted pleas and insults across an ocean, filling her ears with accusations. At last, tired of being lonely, of having little money, she accepted the offer of her brother to pay for their journey back to London, England.

"I never felt comfortable in my uncle's home," he said, "and I resented my mother for having failed to hold onto my father."

His mother eventually found work and for her son's sake, rented a small, dingy apartment in the city.

"But I had to find part-time work just so that we could pay the bills," he explained. Consequently, his studies suffered. (He had not resumed Jewish studies after he left Toronto).

"When the war broke out, the British army shipped me off to Singapore, and I knew my drab life was over," he said. "I came alive in Singapore. The exotic sights, Chinese stores, beggars, rickshaws; and the rich spectre of colors, shapes, faces, excited me."

He used to sit around in hotel lounges (actually out of bounds for the military) and observe the comings and goings of a great international business community. He forgot the feeling of boredom. Leeds had bored him until it hurt. Singapore fascinated him insatiably; he walked and walked through it.

"After my miserable childhood, I was suddenly alive," he said.

He was on the island when the Japanese attacked. He awoke and saw white all around him. He was in the hospital...he felt one leg and it was heavy.

Now he is here in Changi, a prisoner of war with only one leg. He listens to Paul, he told me, because he thought he'd had his chance at being Jewish when he was young, in Toronto, and lost it.

"When I was a child, I even began to learn Talmud," he told me, "but all those years of darkness in London — dark mornings delivering papers, dark days without school friends, dark evenings in a house where I was ignored — and all the soullessness, and then the war, pushed me away from my Jewishness. I was sure too much time, too much life, had left me. I was going to settle, to adapt. I needed roots, religion, and I was beginning to find them in Singapore. But this..." he said, pointing to his leg.

He was so tired, and before he fell into sleep, he spoke of his mother. He had learned from relatives in London that it was his mother who had pressured his father to leave. Dave had resented her fiercely, and had been glad when he left her for the army. But he felt that now that she was alone and helpless, he couldn't do much to help her. (Feelings of guilt?)

I'm writing this down as I look at Dave sleeping. He does not fit clean or neat definitions. He is neither happy nor unhappy.

Life has not smiled upon him. Or has he never seen it when it has?

Rachel, a strange mood grips me. I look outside and the night is so much darker now.

May 5

My dear Rachel, do the wives realize the anger and shame of their POW husbands?

Charles suffers from depression, insomnia and disturbing nightmares. He is a friend of Captain Morrison, who asked me to see the man.

Morrison was confident that I would be able to reach this man who as recently as two months ago appeared to be healthy and happy. Charles arrived the following day in the late afternoon.

We sat at a spot at the top of a downgrade, our legs lazily hanging down from a broken-down veranda, the setting sun's rays playing shadow games on our faces.

He is a major — tall, with dark blond hair and grey eyes. Is he shy or just uncomfortable — an Australian blue-blood opening up to a Jewish chaplain?

He finally took a deep breath and started talking about Australia, where he had been manager of a central office in a large national agricultural corporation. In 1941, when he volunteered for the army, his assistant took over as acting manager, with the understanding that as soon as Charles returned home he would be reinstated in his position.

Some inflections in his voice made me curious. "Was your assistant a close friend of yours?"

"He *is*," he said emphatically.

"Unquestionably loyal?"

"Absolutely loyal."

I might have irritated my visitor by my insistence, because he went on a tangent. "I wish I could trust my wife as much as I trust him."

Maybe he thought I was shocked, because he hastened to add, "You see, before I was locked up by these cursed Japs, I kept writing my assistant, phoning him, offering him advice on how to handle the difficulties I knew he would have to face in those complicated war conditions."

"You must have good reasons to doubt your wife's loyalty, considering you compare it to your assistant's," I said cautiously.

Yes, he *had* good reasons.

"First, her beauty. She's an attractive woman. The man's a fool who isn't drawn toward her. Second, the American officers. They are lazy fixtures in the over-staffed offices of their headquarters. My wife's letters go on and on lauding the charm of those cursed Americans and their efforts to make the lives of the wives of POWs less lonely."

"Have you received letters from her?"

Carefully, he took a neatly folded letter from his wallet. A lovely letter radiating warmth, love, encouragement, was handed over to me. Slanting the letter away from the setting sun and out of the deepening shadow that was enveloping our hut, I read the letter.

"I see no mention of Americans in this letter," I said, as though talking to myself.

"I am sure she stays home looking after our boy," he said, unsureness edging his voice.

"What then is the problem?"

"We promised each other — no mistakes, no lighthearted games with temptation." Then, lowering his head slightly, he added almost inaudibly, "At my end, the promise has been kept. During those months before the invasion and even during those first wild days after the capitulation, my friends laughed at me. They called me *the saint*."

He sat there at the edge of the hut. Because of the tension that had taken hold of the two of us, I could no longer swing my legs on that veranda. To do so would have violated whatever range of emotions were racing through his head.

"How I hate them," he said softly. "I hate my worthy colleagues most of the time."

When I suggested that he apparently did not doubt his wife, he said, "It's my dreams, you see! They make no sense. But they upset me no end. They make me so red hot angry."

"Why anger?"

"I feel that I am going to drown in a pool of shame. Deep down, I know that I'll have to face her, admit that I doubted her loyalty to me."

Had he ever before been angry at her?

"No, never before and not now. But I *am* angry at those American parasites sitting in *our* country, eating *our* food, drinking, gambling and entertaining *our* wives — the wives of the greatest suckers of this impossible war."

Rachel, what could I have truly said to him? His fear is one that lurks in the minds of many prisoners. All I could do was to agree with him and by so doing, allow him to come to peace with himself. If he didn't, the anger would eat up his nerve energy — the energy that each one of us needs, sometimes desperately, just to survive life in a POW camp.

"You are so right," I told him. "Being a POW means being angry most of the time, and being ashamed all the time."

He nodded.

"First anger and then shame," I said, throwing his comments back at him. "Anger at an enemy who herds us like sheep into fenced-off compounds. And then that crushing shame that the enemy should have defeated the furiously fighting Australians."

He looked at me. "I am angry," he said, as though justifying himself. "Not angry at the enemies who did their duty, but at those American parasites. And I feel ashamed, not because of a well-deserved defeat but because of my silly suspicions."

Most POWs do not know where their anger comes from. Most do not realize that they project their repressed feelings not on the enemy but on those they love.

I brought Charles back to his business. His face darkened. Being a man who likes to stay in control, he did not like the sudden switch.

"Did your assistant want the advice?"

"I don't know," he replied, scratching his head as though the question had never arisen in his mind. "Come to think of it, he never once thanked me."

Charles, now quite disturbed, stepped down from the veranda. I got down too and suggested we meet here tomorrow, at the same time. He barely nodded and hurried off.

Today, he was already there when I arrived, his legs swinging one over the other in a slow rhythm. He talked hesitatingly about last night's dream that he felt was the worst he had experienced in a long time. He dreamed that he was locked in that rice train which crawled endlessly from Siam to Singapore. The wagon had stopped, shunted onto a dead-end rail. Suddenly, there were masses of angry termites eating away at the woodwork of the wagon. Even

more frightening were the bolts. Some of them were so rusted that they broke off in a crazy set order. The wagon then fell apart, the floor completely eaten away, and he slipped to the ground. The termites now encircled him. Yet surprisingly, he realized there were no termites, and the tracks under the wagon were leading back to the open tracks. Then he awoke.

When he finished telling me this, he straightened his head, and his legs came to rest. Bitterness and disappointment had altered the shape of his face. It looked oblong, his mouth pressed tight.

"I remember now," he then said, "my deputy's speech at my farewell party. He said he was proud of me to have volunteered, like other brave Australian men, to fight the Devil. At the end, he promised that he would not disappoint me, that I would be able to continue managing a well-looked-after branch of the business when I returned *alive* and in *good health*."

Charles was silent. Then words started falling from his tightly pressed lips, "That despicable character!"

He spat at the memory of his deputy somewhere beyond a certain spot on the remote horizon. Deeply embarrassed, he continued, "How my 'loyal' deputy has managed to take me in, with his mouth full of that beaming smile."

His face pale except near his eyes, Charles looked at me as if in a dream.

Slowly he rose, his body dark against the dark green of Changi behind him, wine-red rays playing over his hair. His head was still slightly shaking, his right hand trembling.

"It was not my wife I suspected of disloyalty. I only thought I did. Nor the Americans. It is that manager of the army of termites, that spreader of rust that I feared all the time without realizing it. Rabbi, my one-time assistant has masked himself well in my dreams. First, behind my wife's image and again, behind those American officers."

Turning and facing me — unusual for him — he added, "I will not be ashamed to face my wife when I return home."

He lightly touched my stretched-out hand and left hurriedly.

May 12

Dear Rachel,

Morrison was in a happy mood when I saw him the next day. His friend Charles felt relieved, he told me. But when we met again today, I asked him why Charles had not come to see me for almost a week. Morrison was surprised and could not answer.

Yesterday, I saw Charles at a distance. He entered his hut in a hurry. He indeed tries to avoid me. Chaplains in POW camps are used to imprisoned men becoming embarrassed...he had revealed his confused emotions. Charles has been relieved from a typical POW worry. He has his wife back again for himself, untouched and untouchable. But he is still greatly embarrassed over having doubted her and having discussed it with me.

After all, as a POW, he is ashamed (of his weakness) and angry (at his deputy).

May 13

When we were in the Kwai camps, our fears were visible, naked to the emotions of whomever we met. They emanated in the way we looked at each other, the way we hesitantly walked, our manner of looking furtively around when we sat with our bowls of thin soup in our hands, or during the nights when we would whimper in our sleep. At other times, the fears are half-hidden. At present, the fears have seemingly gone underground, especially in the past week when Allied planes return more and more frequently to Singapore. We cannot easily admit that we suffer from serious doubts and anxiety, but we hear that airports and bridges where POWs are put to work are favored targets. Rumors reaching us from camps in Thailand tell of the loss of hundreds of POWs in such air attacks.

What if *we* are killed by our own side?

More recently, rumors are circulating regarding forced marches ordered by the Japanese as soon as Allied forces come close to POW camps. Only a minority of the displaced POWs survive those long-distance marches, during which each straggler is shot dead.

Who is our friend? Must we POWs fear both sides?

Eddie Rappaport, who cannot wait to return to Bandung to help his old father rebuild his business, is usually the harbinger of the most pessimistic rumors. He quoted a "reliable source" stating that none of us will survive. He said with a voice of authority that our guards had received strict orders to kill all POWs and then kill themselves when they see that they are about to be captured by the Allies. While one does not take this last rumor seriously, the fact that it is circulating proves how fear and insecurity dominate the minds of many of our campmates. People appear to view themselves as though they are proceeding through a long tunnel, the end of which gradually grows darker until it is finally sealed off completely...the moment the end is reached.

May 15

At present, our work groups labor hard but under quite favorable conditions. They usually return after a few weeks or so and appear unconcerned over being chosen for those outside duties.

My assumption that feelings of insecurity and fear are nevertheless present is proven to be correct in light of the men's renewed interest in their chaplain's formal blessing in the very last hour before they leave.

After the last count of heads in the lineup between the double walls surrounding the jail, no one, not even a chaplain, is supposed to mingle with the men.

Yet some of our boys do not want a farewell blessing in the intimacy of a synagogue, but rather in the lineup. Practical, Liverpool-bred Jack Greenberg claims that at moments of departure, the feelings of worry and fear are more real, and a person's mind is wide open to the Creator's blessing.

The morning that Jack was marked down for the work detail, there were more guards than usual supervising the last count; they were running around noisily and nervously. When I hurried through one of the doors of the inner wall to meet Jack, I bumped into a guard, who started the usual mumblings and rumblings and, by habit, quite ominously swung his right arm backward, ready to strike. My repeated expression of "sorry" and a self-assured smile seemed to remind him of the new, more respectful attitude accorded the POWs. With a semi-salute and a deep grumble, he hurried away.

I proceeded to where I saw Jack anxiously moving around, apparently waiting for me. As I reached him, the guard returned, now furious, yelling, threatening me with his rifle and bayonet.

I now tried the proven method of unaffected calm. I took out my prayer book and started to read a blessing in Hebrew.

When I recited the English translation of these appropriate words "The Almighty will guard your leaving and your returning (safely) from now and forever," non-Jewish POWs nearby, some removing their caps, listened intently.

I continued the priestly blessing, "...bless and guard you...turn to you His brightening countenance...and bring peace to you."

A loud amen followed.

The guard, as often is the case — nonplussed when placed before a *fait accompli* — hesitated for a moment and turned around.

Jack looked fully assured and completely relieved. He took my hand with a happy smile and said, "How anxious I was. Your not coming was a bad omen to me that I might not return home. But your Supreme Source of Life wants both of us to live," and half-smiling, he added, "to survive."

Not wanting to risk any further disappointment or challenging tests of this man's faith, I hurried away.

July 5

For a number of weeks, tall, aristocratic, soft-spoken Jimmy Bines has been hesitantly gravitating toward our group. He finally overcame his shyness and asked me whether I would accept him as a convert to Judaism.

Conversion? Here and now? I told him I have had requests by three men in this camp to prepare them for conversion. And I declined for the simple reason that one should not make such a vital decision in the state of non-freedom in a POW camp.

Many of our men, shaken in their faith in the existing social order that has led to tragedy and the anomaly of imprisonment, look for some substitute faith to fill the frightening vacuum in their minds.

I wondered aloud what brought Jim to me.

"My father is a German Protestant, but my mother is an English Jewess," he said as a way of explanation.

We sat in almost the same positions that I had occupied with Charles a few days before; only it was earlier, and the sun beat down on our already burnt-brown backs. There was no need of cover – we had become used to the heat, the stickiness and the buzzing insects that settled on our bodies at will. We sat there, swinging our legs, shaking off the insects, thinking, until Jimmy was ready to continue.

"I grew up in England," he said with a start, "and moved to the U.S. before the war."

He was silent again, and I wondered if he wanted me to lead the conversation – to elicit with questions whatever was bothering him. This is often the case when men come to see me. But I need not have bothered. He was more than ready.

"I married a Roman Catholic girl who didn't practice her faith."

Unsure of what he really wanted, I asked, "Do you have children?"

Jimmy hit at some insect on his leg before shaking his head. "My wife specializes in radioactivity research. Because of an accident in the laboratory, there won't be any children."

At first, in a POW camp, we constantly fill in possible periods of silence with chatter, questions, laughter. After a while, we respect a man's silence. We know from our own experience, of dealing day to day with a reality that has no end in sight, that silence is often the harbinger of truth.

Then he continued, "What has brought me to you? The answer is simple, I have an unquenchable thirst for religion."

Again, before continuing, he rubbed his legs and his arms, and he was nervous and embarrassed.

"For more than ten years, I searched for a church that would give me happiness. First, I joined my father's Lutheran Church. I stayed with them for a number of years. One day, I had the peculiar sensation of facing a wall, which forced me to turn back. There was no reason for me to stay with them after that. Again I felt this spiritual emptiness inside of me.

"After my marriage, I joined my wife's church, but she rarely went with me. At first, I was impressed. I was quickly convinced that I had found what my soul was looking for. But then came the moment when I felt I was – despite the wealth of color, music and ceremony – a stranger in this church."

I was intrigued by the simplicity of Jim's exposure of the inner complexity of his soul; I was now able to read it as an open book.

"But you did not try your mother's religion until you came here. Was that because you sensed the loneliness and detachment of the Jew in prewar society?" I asked.

Jimmy closed his eyes, thinking.

"Not quite," he then said. "I always felt that I belonged to my mother's widely-branched family where I sensed emotional inclusiveness, joyous acceptance and the embrace of generosity. But I could not free myself from the suspicion that the intensity of this all-embracing love in our Jewish family was the response to the rejection of the Jew in the early-Nazi era. Besides," he added as an afterthought, "no one in our family of my mother's generation practiced the Jewish religion."

"And now you found us here in Changi?" I remarked, surprisingly enough, as if it were a joke.

"Yes. I recognized the typical emotional love that I had found in my mother's family, at your services, in a religious setting."

"Listen, Jim," I said, "anyone born of a Jewish mother is automatically a Jew. I'm happy, of course, that an estranged Jew finds his home here in our small Jewish community. And because you wish to be accepted as a full member of our group, I assure you that you are very welcome in our modest home in Changi."

Jim, visibly relaxed, responded, "You tell me that despite my paternal ancestry, I am legally a Jew. But I am so ignorant, I can't read the holy language; at present, I'm barely able to recognize the Hebrew alphabet."

Jim's sincerity and unhappiness over his lack of Jewish knowledge pained me.

Still, I chose to smile and spoke lightly, "You didn't confide in me earlier and you didn't wait for me to reveal that you are truly a full Jew and *not* in need of conversion. You attended our services and lectures on your own. Did you ever meet with rejection?"

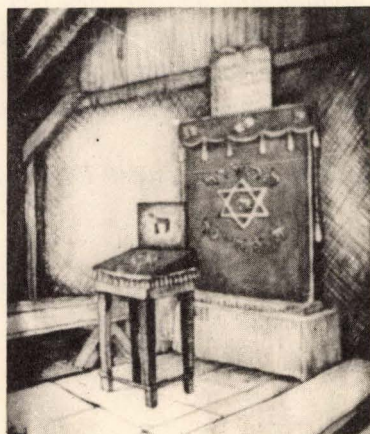
He also rose, and I expected the conversation to end, but instead he said, "The services have impressed me in a way I had never experienced before. Could it be that the sound of the Hebrew language induces old memories in my soul from a previous incarnation? And the melodies our good cantor Joe Bernstein sings. And the Creator-seeking, Creator-thirsty *Kelme Kaddish*, which you spoke about a few weeks ago. All this has reached the deep recesses of my soul."

He dropped down to the ground and, with a tip of his fingers to his forehead, left me musing on the platform.

For two years
 Simple Imprisonment
 Total Europeans
 NATIVES
 Penitentiary Grade
 Short Sentence
 Simple Imprisonment
 SENTENCES—
 Two years and under
 Over two years
 Simple Imprisonment
 Condemned
 Total NATIVES
 PRISON
 CIVIL AND CRIMINAL PRISONS

CHANGI GAOL POW Camp
 FRIDAY-EVENING
 SERVICE

מי כמוכה באלים יקוק מי כמוכה נאדר בקודש נורא
 תגלות עושה פלא: מלכותך ראו בנך ביוקע ים לפני עשה: זה
 אלך ענו ואמרו: יקוק ימור לעולם ועד: ונאמר כי פדה יקוק
 את יעקב וגילו מד חוק גמנו: ברוך אתה יקוק: גאל
 ישראל.
 השפיענו יקוק אלקינו שלום. והעמידנו מלכנו לחיים ולשלום.
 ופרוש עלינו ספת שלומך. ותקנו בעצה טובה מלפניך.
 והושיענו למצן שמך. והגן בעדנו. והלך מעלינו אויב. דבר
 וחרב ורעב וגון והלך שטן מלפנינו ומאחרינו. ובצל כנפך
 תסבירנו. כי אל שומרנו ומצילנו אלה. כי אל עזר חנון
 ורחום אלה. ושומר צאתנו וכווננו: חיים ולשלום מעתה ועד
 עולם: ופרוס עלינו ספת שלומך: ברוך אתה יקוק. הפורם
 ספת שלום עלינו. ועל כל עמו ישראל. ועל ירושלים:
 תמחר בני ישראל את השבת לעשות את השבת לדורות ברת
 עולם: בתי ובני בני ישראל את היא לעולם. כי ששת ימים עשה
 יקוק את השמים ואת הארץ. ויום השביעי שבת וינפש.



Hebrew Prayer sheets, Friday Evening Services, prepared by a Dutch prisoner

Invitation to Dedication Service of Ohel Jacob Synagogue — Drawings by George Sprod

Dedication Service

Our camp commandant, the Assistant Chaplain-General of South Asia, the interpreter and other senior officers have received written invitations to the Dedication Service, and they are all here.

One of the high officers forgot his hat, but a replacement was found, about three sizes too small.

Joe Bernstein, the soft-souled young man from Glasgow, Scotland, sings extremely well.

Nuss speaks...grips the audience.

...abnormally warm temperature in the shul...the officer with the small hat perspires heavily...

Our shul has been dedicated.

Now we have our shul, a small hut, next to a medical unit, which we have named Ohel Jacob (Tent of Jacob). The Scottish Highlanders built it ahead of a number of other planned Houses of Worship. This is most likely the only synagogue built in any World War II POW camp.

The New Year is approaching and the men feel a desire to adorn our synagogue. Otto Cramer, a non-Jewish Dutch painter, has drawn a fine picture of the world resting upon the three pillars of Torah, Devotion and Charity. Morry planted flowers around the building and erected a palm-leaf gate at its entrance.

[Reprinted from Habeemah, Changi Jewish Forum, December 1944]

September 21, 1944

Dear Rachel,

The Jewish New Year again and I am still not home.

1939, Riga (Latvia). 1940, Yokohama (Japan). 1941, Jakarta (Java). 1942, Tjilatjap (Java). 1943, Kanbury (Thailand).

1944, here in Changi, Singapore Island.

In my sermon, I stressed the fact that on our New Year, we view our personal fate as part of that of the universe. This may assist us in overcoming the narrowing of our vision in this POW constriction.

Rachel, I miss the warmth radiating from your prayerful eyes after you have kindled the *Yom Tov Rosh Hashanah* candles.

September 27

Elze prays with great devotion. He is progressing surprisingly well in his study of the Hebrew language. So deeply does he feel the awesome history of each Hebrew word, he told me, that during the *Rosh Hashanah* prayers, he imagines hearing his ancestors pleading for their lives and his.

October 1

It is Yom Kippur Eve.

So different from home, no *Torah* scrolls, no prayer shawls (except mine), no white robes. But when Joe Bernstein began to sing *Kol Nidreh*, it was the same prayer — apology, plea, hope — that rose with mind-elevating melodies from synagogues everywhere in the world, fighting its way to the heavenly gates.

I felt tired.

In my sermon, words do not always come to me when I call them. My throat was sore. Still, I had to bring a message of life to these life-hungry people. I began:

“Regeneration is a basic feature in nature. As soon as poisons or foreign bodies enter our body, counterattacks of antitoxins go into action, attempting to remove the threat to health and life. This means that repentance, forgiveness and Divine renewal, the special *Yom Kippur* features, are built into nature’s fabric...”

On *Yom Kippur* afternoon, I felt tired, weak...Joe had to take over the *Minchah* service.

While I sat, I watched the one-legged Dave Birnbaum, who is fascinated with and grabs at Judaism; Lou Velmans, who comes from socialist-assimilationist background, but enjoys this religious experience; Jimmy Bines from the midwest United States, who six months ago did not dare intrude on Judaism because his father was a gentile.

Today, they looked comfortable and happy in our *Ohel Jacob*.

Twenty-five men fasted (no food, no drink, for twenty-five hours), and even more attended the four services throughout the day.

October 8, 1944

We had a rather pleasant *Succoth*. I had wished, however, that I would be able to make this "last" Festival of Tabernacles in wartime expressive of our hope for peace in our days for all nations.

The Prophets of old call upon all nations to come to Jerusalem for a *Succoth* Thanksgiving; and the Talmud suggests that the Jewish people bring seventy sacrifices on *Succoth* to the Holy Sanctuary in Jerusalem, for the well-being of all the nations.

It is a pity that my post-*Yom Kippur* state of health sapped much of my usually available energies. I pray that my future activities for the remainder of my imprisonment will not suffer as well.

October 14

Rachel, are the Japanese actually scared?

I already wrote you that the days of decisive Allied successes were also the days of the most cruel treatment of POWs in this century by a civilized nation. This insensitive attitude of sophisticated Japan bodes ill for our fate at the time when the Japanese themselves will meet hard times in this war.

Our fears in this respect appear to be exaggerated, however. When their navy had been crippled in the Pacific War, even the *Kempetai* adopted less cruel tactics. Neither the radio offenses in Kanbury nor the mass thefts in Tamarkan nor the public slapping of a Japanese guard by an Australian had serious repercussions.

October 20

Dear Rachel,

I am concerned about my friend Elze. He is losing so much weight. When he arrived in Changi, with its comparatively excellent hospital services, Elze was once again superfluous. There was no more need for hypnotism. He was deeply disappointed, but not devastated. He made good use of the library (still there from prewar time) and looked me up quite frequently. After a number of weeks, he also started to attend the lecture series on Judaism and regularly attended the services in our camp synagogue.

He asked me to introduce him to *Kabbalah*, Jewish mysticism. I tried in vain to convince him that in order to reach lofty spheres, one must start to climb the ladder from the bottom rung up – the study of *this* world's reality in the Bible and Talmud.

He was eager and understanding, but apt to misconceive because of some seemingly similar concepts in Indian mysticism. I warned him not to expect me to show him a road to magic and miracles.

He began to read Biblical and *Aggadic* sources diligently and found, most interestingly, his own approach to prayer.

In his first lecture given to our Jewish group, Elze spoke of his personal life. He described his search for meaning and his final discovery of it in a POW camp, where he regained a true sense of freedom.

October 26

Elze is in our Changi hospital, on the critical list, with blackwater fever. He has been given a blood transfusion.

October 28

Elze seems better...persist, persist!

October 30

Elze has double pneumonia and has had a second blood transfusion. The doctor tells us to expect death momentarily. Concern is jagged and painful among us all. We prayed for him tonight at our Tuesday meeting, and after the prayers, no one spoke much; then we prayed again and sat.

October 31

Elze will recover.

He was unconscious most of the day and night, but when I came to see him and spoke with him, it was as if the strongest drive in him – his need to reach out to another human, to link human to human – persisted. He said my name and held my hand. But he was a skeleton. He looked so bare.

November 1

Since Elze has become ill, some of his dreams disturb him. The day before yesterday, he dreamed that he would never see his wife and son again because they had recently died (a projection in reverse?). He was greatly distressed because in the past, he believed that his dreams revealed tragic happenings in the family circle. He recorded this dream. It represents, actually, the last entry in his diary (October 5). Yesterday, he told me he dreamed of two boys who were executed, and he was compelled to attend the ceremony.

November 2

I visit Elze frequently, sometimes four or five times a day. The doctors are patient. They say that he wants me to come as often as I can.

November 3

Elze is conscious; he speaks, occasionally he laughs. He has had a third blood transfusion. The doctors are optimistic.

November 8

Elze now has another serious complication – pleurisy. Late this evening, he ran a high fever. Elze, you worked too hard, too much, too long, for everyone. Now what will you do for yourself? Work. Work for yourself.

November 10

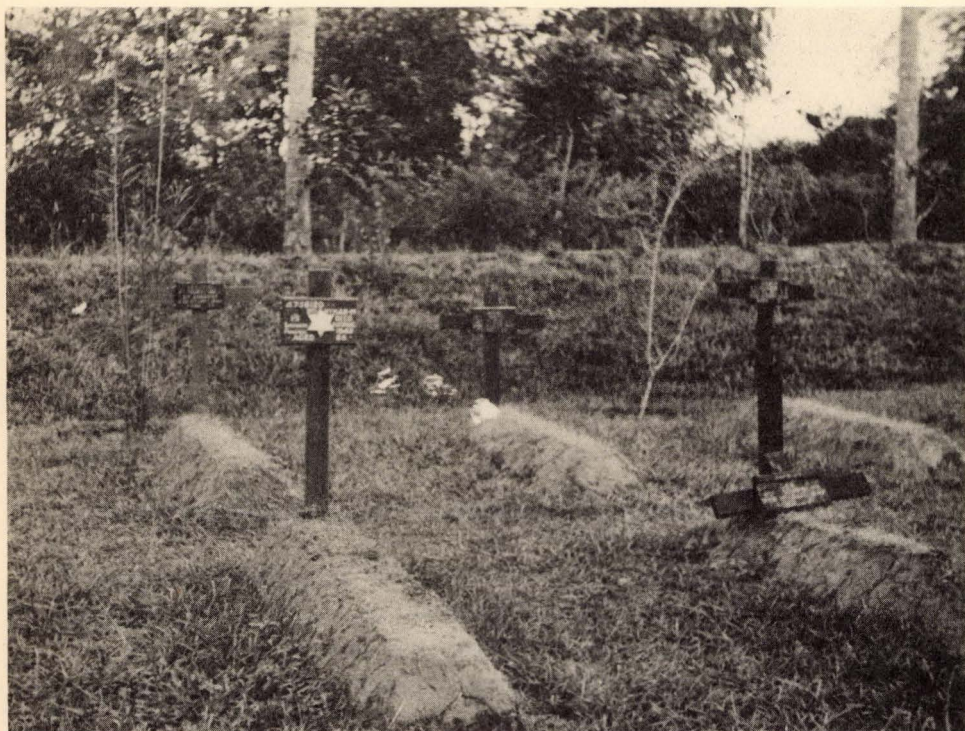
Over, finished. I came too late to the officer's block. An orderly told me that Elze was unconscious all day.

"Perhaps he will hear me," I said. "Last time he did, he said my name."

"Elze is dead," the orderly said, grief all over his face. As if apologizing (but to whom? for what?), he added, "He died ten minutes ago."

I went in. Elze was still. With the oxygen apparatus off, he looked like a boy of fifteen, his head lying to one side.

I cannot find comfort.



Lt. Elze's Grave; to the right — Changi POW Cemetery

Eulogy for Elze

His creed: "I help you."...any man, if the man suffered.

"Il suffit qu'il soit homme et qu'il soit malheureux," he might have said with Voltaire.

...the compulsion of loving...he could have started a hypnotism racket for money, but he worked in the cause of need; he received no pay, often no thanks. Sometimes, he did not achieve success and was cast down by the smallest failure. But he carried on. If he had any reward, it was the satisfaction of his own generous longings. He did not spare himself. I remember he came after lights-out once to a bed-neighbor of mine who had just had an operation and could not sleep with the pain. In the dark, Elze crouched on the bamboo bench beside the suffering man and whispered low, like a mother, until he had lullabyed my neighbor to rest. Then he came back again, after midnight, and soothed him some more.

I am not convinced of his hypnotism. I believe he healed by a little auto-suggestion and a lot of sympathy. That does not take away one jot of fineness from the man. Remember him because he lived unselfishly. With both hands, he took what he thought Nature had given to him, and with both hands he gave it away. Perhaps there was not enough left to help himself.

He has died. One cannot hope that those who have loved him will not grieve."

Edwin Orenstein

[Reprinted from *Habeemah*, December 1944]

Elze's Funeral

It was probably the largest, most mournful funeral ever seen in Changi. The whole Jewish community came, and one hundred Dutch officers, and all the others. I had not known how Elze touched everyone...everyone.

Four Jewish Dutch boys carried him onto the trailer; there were flowers to put on the coffin. Then the march began.

Nuss took the head of the cortege...

We walked along a narrow road...through gardens, fresh with the sunshine of life...the shaded, still cemetery...virgin soil...

The cortege stopped, and Nuss recited Psalm 90, Yoshev Besaither, in a clear, warm voice.

The Dutch senior officer spoke of everyone's appreciation for the "man" Elze; a civil engineer spoke of the difficult work Elze had done before the war; three spadefuls of earth were thrown upon the coffin by his closest friends.

Nuss said the Kaddish, (the Mourner's prayer) for a friend who had found meaning, in the last months of his life...

[Excerpted from Lou Velman's report in Habeemah, December 1944]

The Last Year of Imprisonment

In view of the developments on the war fronts, it was obvious that I should have at most one more POW diary-year. Besides, as the camp was functioning well, there were no great events to record except, perhaps, the illness and death of individuals.

Toward the end, when the Japanese began preparing feverishly for the expected amphibious landings by the British, they did not rely upon hired labor outside the camp, but on the POWs – who were thus exposed to potential attacks from their own side at the railroad stations and the airports. The Japanese may even have prepared for the mass slaughter of POWs as soon as the battlefield would come close.

The greatest surprise of the postliberation days was the fact that not even one of the boasting “heroic” Japanese soldiers and, most surprisingly, none of their senior officers in this part of the world, committed hara-kiri. Their general made it possible for his victors to sentence him to die a shameful death instead of the glorious death of honor, the hara-kiri.

November 18, 1944

Dear Rachel,

We have a well-structured Jewish congregation by now, with regular services, lectures, lessons, visitation of the sick and a modest fund to supplement food items and medical necessities for the sick. It occurred to me that the publication of a camp magazine may prove to possess not only a cultural but also a therapeutic, mind-liberating value. In such a magazine, we would be able to express ourselves and our problems as Jewish POWs.

A while ago, I spoke with Lou Velmans and Edwin Orenstein about the magazine. They were both enthusiastic.

Lou is editor, contributor, translator (from Dutch) and typist. Edwin is fiction and copy editor, and contributor. All our members have been asked to contribute. Our camp inherited a number of typewriters from the old Gaol office, and I have been given one by the British Command. I decided that the Hebrew name *Habeemah*, the stage on which cultural and personal matters are expressed in public, would be a fitting name for our “forum.”

Habeemah has become the central project of our group. We have even obtained the co-operation of four artists: Ronald Searle (Britain), George Sprod (Australia), Kees van Willigen and Otto Cramer (Holland) – non-Jews who refused to accept remuneration (not even a few packages of cigarettes). Van Loveren and Otto Cramer created the decorations for *Ohel Jacob*.

In our first meeting of the editorial board, Lou suggested an English version of *Habeemah*, *Changi Jewish Forum*. I liked his suggestion. The first *Habeemah* will be completed in December for *Chanukah*.

I was pleased to be given a share in the paper mine which was discovered in the vaults of the prewar jail office. At first, I used the precious sheets of paper for my lecture notes; then I was offered a large hardcover book in which, before the war, all goods distributed to the prison inmates were recorded.

My new diary. I decorated the cover with Hebrew script.

November 19

Dear Rachel,

Jim Bines attends lectures, works hard, reads a lot. (He now feels part of the core of our Congregation.) When I encouraged our men to contribute to our magazine, he promised to write an article about his experiences as a POW.

November 20

While we would like to get our magazine to the boys as soon as possible, there are other pressing matters for me as chaplain to work on. Visiting the sick remains uppermost in my mind.

It doesn't matter where the Allies are — geographically, in the Japanese mind, or in our hopes — the medical wards have *not* changed. We are still not receiving the medical supplies that the Red Cross send to us. And the incidence of death among our tuberculosis patients rises.

Sam Baker, when I met him, was still mobile. That was several months ago. Now we know that he has TB, and his condition is going quickly downhill. His younger brother, Benny, is with him constantly; there is nothing he will not do for Sam. Remarkably, Benny's health is excellent.

The Baker boys are the sons of a British couple who had been managing an import/export business in Singapore for many years, when war broke out. Both boys are typical of upper-class youth raised in the effete social climate of Singapore. Soft, dreamy types, inclined to follow the mystical, or rather the magical.

Sam is twenty, Benny, nineteen. They hardly speak of their family. The boys are very close to each other. One day, Benny said he could not bear Sam's unending suffering. He asked me if I could help him send a cable to Australia – maybe his rich uncle would send drugs or money via merchants of neutral nationality in Singapore.

Weeks of effort and disappointment passed while I claimed urgency, emergency, a life-plea. I could not reach even a first promising contact in Singapore. Promises and promises have ended with emptiness because we have no large funds. I was told that every secret agent's first question has been, "What is there in it for me besides the risk for freedom and life?"

Sam is a bed patient now and calls on me constantly. He wants "religious protection," he says. But since I have never wished to offer a place for magic in theology, I am experiencing difficulty in my attempts to comfort him the way he would like to be.

Benny is a depressingly quiet boy. He does not tell me how he feels, or what Sam tells him when they talk, but he is always near, near me or Sam. I hope I offer him some solace. I care about him, but it is difficult to know if we share a language.

We divide the nights into two and rotate our watch by Sam's bed; and when we shake hands as we pass in the quiet, untroubled dark, I feel as if we reach each other.

November 30

Sam Baker is unusually worrisome. He begs me to protect my immunity. I do not sit on his bed; and if I sit near or crouch by his head to help him drink some water, his hands fly, and his eyes water and close.

"The lanky, stooped doctor is constantly with patients. He is frustrated by the climate, the lack of supplies and by his own helplessness. But he keeps moving among his patients. Although he is exhausted, hungry, thirsty, parched, the doctor does not die. And neither will we, Benny and I," I tell Sam repeatedly.

Sam still worries, of course.

He is so weak that he hardly talks. I speak of magic and of Eastern mysticism to revive him, but even the doctor stops only to put a large hand on the young head, the light hair.

"Nothing to do," he says into the infected air and goes by.

Sam has told Benny to stop coming; it is too dangerous and too much to bear.

"You are now their only child. How much can we cry. How many goodbyes can we take."

I fell asleep tonight after having watched Sam for a long time. Benny woke me at 3 a.m. by shaking my shoulder. Tearfully, he said, "The doctor called me."

Sam looks small and transparent. His eyes are closed tight with more strength than he appears capable of. It seems he was fighting not to see; but when Benny cries too loudly, Sam's eyes open quickly.

"Benny, please," he says. "Go home. Be a good boy."

Where is he? Where has his mind taken him?

At 4 a.m., his body relaxes as only the body of a scrawny, sick POW who has endured the agonies of life with Japanese captors can relax.

Sam is dead.

I say the *Shemoth* (the last prayer of the dying).

Benny will take Sam's things back to the grief and longing of their parents. He is inconsolable. He waits for his older brother to comfort him.

December 4

Habeemah progresses.

We have many good contributions. Lou translates from Dutch to English, Edwin corrects. Reg types during entire afternoons. The artists have begun to create their illustrations. It all looks promising. Lectures and lessons have increased.

December 8

The publication of *Habeemah*, *Changi's Jewish Forum* is a unique event. It is a typewritten book full of stories and articles written by Changi inmates, richly illustrated by excellent artists.

Some of the paper was obtained as an exchange item for cigarettes, which the non-smokers (Lou, Mose, myself...) had sacrificed for the good cause. Still,

there is a limit to the availability and affordability of paper and manpower. Also, we make plans for a Passover issue so we can only produce one copy of this *Chanukah* magazine.

We have to be very careful about whom we can trust with this precious document and we must try to keep it away from those who might sacrifice parts of it on the altar of "incense." Consequently, only a limited number of persons in our huge camp did read or see *Habeemah*. We rationalize that we will publish our magazine as soon as we are free so that all who are interested will be able to read it.

December 10

Not surprisingly, our modest Jim Bines is happy about his article which, because of its simplicity and honesty, has brought him genuine compliments.

December 21

Dear Rachel,

Eddie Rappaport received his first letter from home – dated June 1943. It arrived a few weeks ago. Another letter arrived yesterday. In June 1944, his mother wrote that Eddie's father had died in Bandung on May 25, 1944.

I happened to have met the deceased in Scheveningen when I was twelve years old. He used to visit his children, Eddie and Dorothy, who went to school in Holland. It was he who had kindled the love for Java in my heart (the love which back in Kobe 1940 helped me decide that I would live in Java and not Curacao). With his death, a connecting link with this family broke, touching me personally.

As his father had died seven months ago, the seven-day *shivah* was reduced to a symbolic one hour of mourning. Eddie took off his shoes and sat down on the earth. It was a difficult hour, with tears and convulsive movements. This was the first breach of a total cut-off that the war had caused in his family.

His mother wrote that it was his father's last wish that Eddie say the mourner's prayer during the first year of mourning. He will say *Kaddish* at each prayer service in our synagogue. It appeared to Eddie a Providential act that this letter should have reached him within a year of its dispatch, enabling him to fulfill his father's last wish. Who knows, he might be able to say *Kaddish* at his father's grave in Java at the time of the first *yohrtsayt* (anniversary of his father's death).

Chanukah 1944

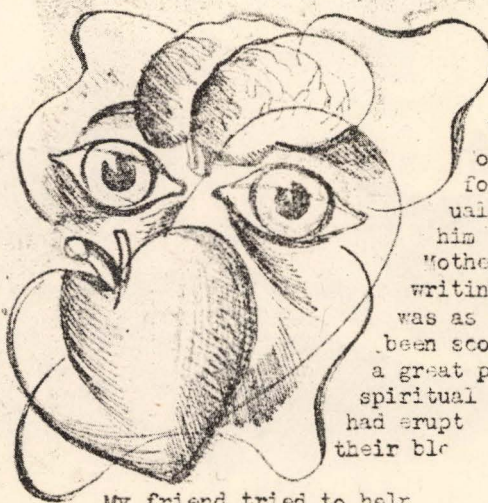
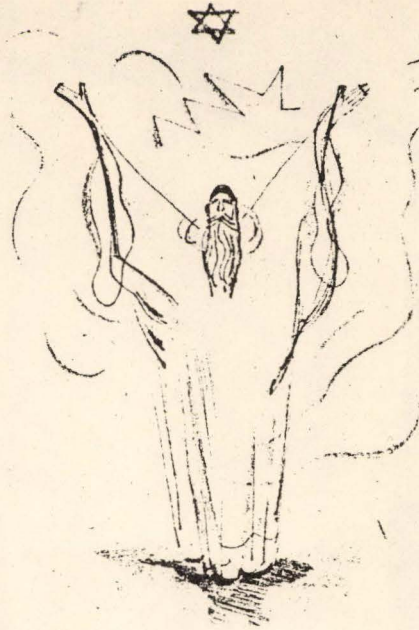
Maccabeans against Syrians: A fanatical fight of the few against the entire Hellenist culture must have seemed a senseless undertaking then...but 2,108 years ago, when Greek idols had been removed from Jerusalem's Holy Sanctuary, the first historically known religious persecution had failed.

And continues to fail.

Excerpted from *Habeemah*

December 28

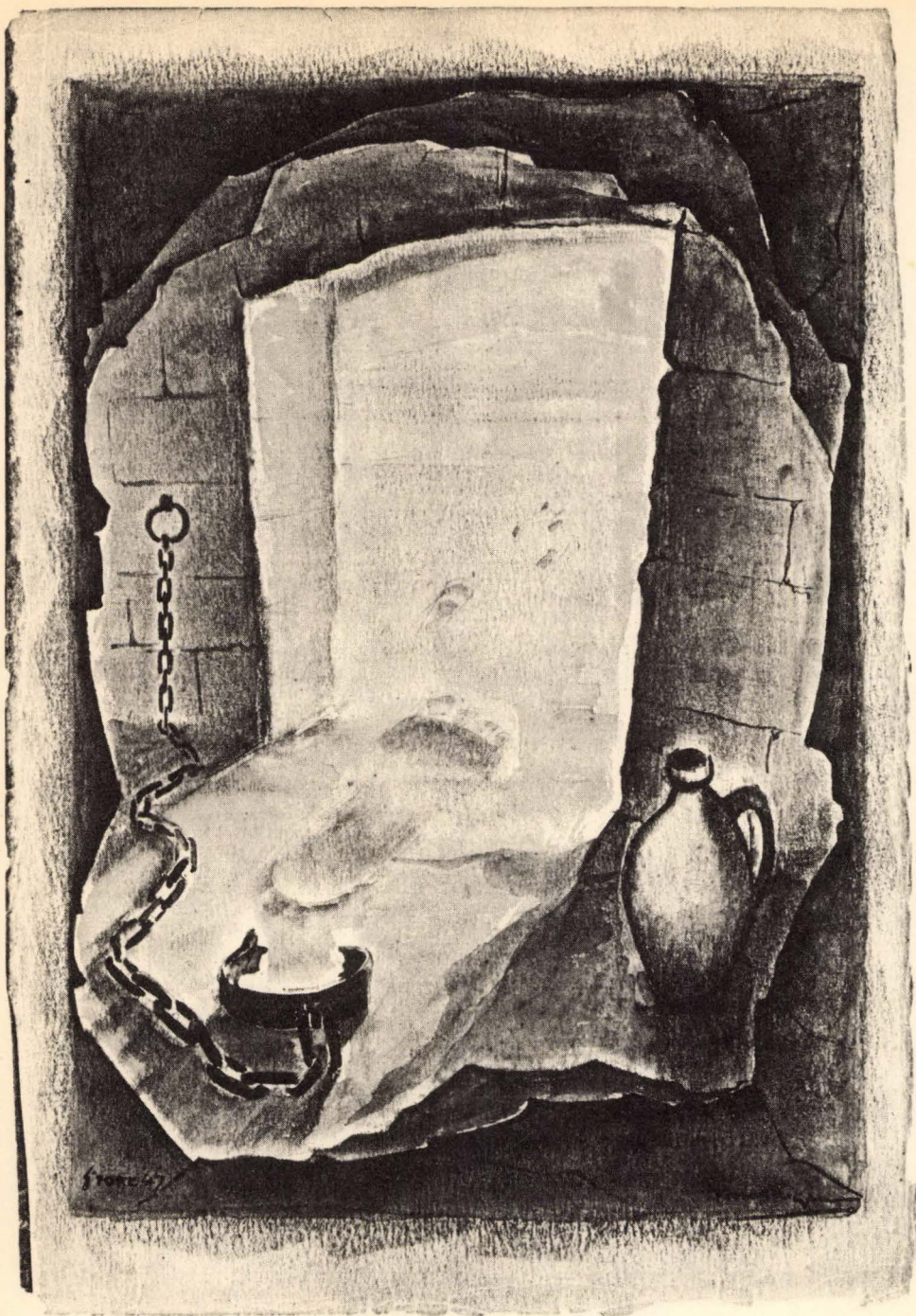
George Sprod, our Australian illustrator, is in the hospital... he is still doing most of our art work and decorations where needed.



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Story of an Ego written by the author, published in *Habeemah*,
 illustration by Ronald Searle



Liberation – Frontispiece of *Habeemah*, April 1945, by Dutch artist Kees Van Willigen

1945

1945

January 11, 1945

Cyril Wernick has had a fever. Finally, it was confirmed that the active secretary of our Changi Congregation has tuberculosis.

Last Tuesday, a week ago, I found him in the TB hut, a long, narrow, low, dark structure outside the jail. He has his own bed and mattress: gifts of the illness. And richer food than the rest of us receive. And a doctor who visits and sits with him several times a day.

Beri-beri, dysentery and skin diseases are common, but mostly under control here. Tuberculosis, however, is different. In peacetime, TB can be held back, restrained, if not cured. But in this tight little thin-lipped war-world of ours, it is fatal. And abhorrent. And greedy. So many victims. And final.

Cyril accepts this. He apparently has learned from the British to avoid overt expressions of emotion. Control, though, seems to cause an explosion inside him. I have read his poetry — it tells it all.

Cyril is an East Londoner, a handsome aristocratic type with distinguished manners and a taste for good literature.

Now that he is bedridden, he is easily irritated by contradictions or criticism. It may take me days to adapt my way of discussing things freely to his heightened sensitivity. When we spoke together initially, I was aware that I hurt him sometimes with the directness of a question or with a point of disagreement between us. We are learning, both of us, about each other — and it is worth the effort.

February 5

Cyril lies on his bed, with his writing materials close to him and a picture of his wife facing whichever side of the bed he chooses to lie on.

He claims he has found a sort of peace. He has transformed the reality here into some kind of horrific permanence. Home, he calls it kindly. He hates the dirt, the illness and the lack of humanity in this place.

"I survive it all," he says, "by ignoring it."

That isn't the truth, I think. Cyril's poems and stories are true. And they contradict him.

He is now completely absorbed by the past.

Much of our conversation is reminiscent. He speaks of his past, I speak of mine. Somehow it exhausts me. How can I help him turn his face to the future? Perhaps I can involve him in someone else's future?

So I tell him about the blueprints my mind, my imagination, have drawn for my future.

"Somewhere out there waiting for me, for us, is a free and civilized society. I am sure," I tell him.

He smiles. He seems to enjoy dreams, as if listening to a storyteller and escaping his dreariness a little.

Today, for the first time, he said, floating and relaxed, "You know, Nuss, I would like to meet my people back home again."

That's as close an utterance to future hope as I have heard from him. But said with such restraint that I wanted to hold him by his arms and shake him, "Complain, complain!"

The doctor is good to him, comes to visit twice a day, but Cyril believes that it is not so much medical attention as it is attention from a frustrated, helpless medical man who is kind and has recently discovered that he himself had contracted this tragic illness.

Does Cyril think he has a chance? His conclusion: "I don't think I have a beggar's chance at the throne."

But to give in, to just lie supine and grave. If we were on a battlefield, that would be unthinkable, wouldn't it? Wouldn't Cyril challenge Death to a duel?

He says it is against his nature to fight.

Prisoners of Death

February 15

A few days ago, Cyril's observant eyes discovered a change on a prisoner's food plate. This plate didn't contain any "extras." Cyril realized that the drawn-out debate among the doctors, concerning special drugs and additional food given to the "hopeless" cases, had finally come to an end. The decision to distribute the available extras was made on the basis of a patient's reasonable chance of survival.

Cyril's food ration has not yet been reduced. He asked me if he should eat the extra egg he now gets every day, which he assumed was taken away from a "hopeless" case.

"I refused it today. What about tomorrow?" he asked.

I laughed his question off. "How are you so sure that this extra egg is not the result of a prosperous black market deal?"

I advised him to look carefully next time at his neighbor's food plate.

Not only was the usual egg again there but even an extra egg.

All of a sudden, there was a sparkling smile in Cyril's eyes. "I understand. These are charity eggs, of course. But this private channeling of supplies does not really help decide the perplexing moral responsibility," Cyril concluded thoughtfully.

He is right. Since warfare means playing Providence over His creatures, kill or let live, we must expect moral perplexity to emerge.

In his mind, during the years of the debate, Cyril had voted for the "rational" decision. One should not offer sacrifices of Life to the Angel of Death.

"This smacks of idolatry," he used to exclaim.

Since we now anticipate liberation to come within the year, such a decision

made sense. One could now easily select all patients who could survive six to twelve months under the present conditions, and give them as much life-power as could be made available.

When Cyril himself witnessed such a selection, he realized that the problem was painfully complicated.

"Will doctors, basing themselves on little more than superficial testing, be able to arrive at the same and the right conclusion?" he asked.

To put a dying patient's partition around him, as is done in hospitals, does not seem to be right in this case. His neighbor is still fully conscious and may live for weeks with a "hopeless" label, which might add so much anguish to another loser in our war.

March 10

We all believe that Japan does not intend to stop fighting after Germany is defeated (quite soon we suspect). In the meantime, our sick are still struggling. Will Cyril win the race of peace against death? Will the emaciated who still sell part of their insufficient rations for cigarettes survive?

A few weeks ago, this sad phenomenon affected our small community. It was all the more surprising because the man involved, Danny, was popular, good-hearted and a generous member of our Jewish community.

Danny loves our small synagogue, *Ohel Jacob*. He is a thirty-two-year-old Australian, married, and father of two children whom he loves dearly. Whenever possible, he produces photos of them and his healthy and happy-looking wife.

He himself appears well fed. But he also spends money generously on friends, the ill, and the undernourished. I like Danny's happy mood, which usually affects the people he meets. However, I do not like his dealing on the black market. Or rather, the way he boasts of his strange adventures in the field.

It started in 1942 when he became part of a working group assigned to clean up bombed warehouses in Surabaya, Java's northeastern port. They found many tins of milk there, some of which they drank, some they sold to friends.

He hit the jackpot, as he expressed it, when his group was assigned to bury a great number of partly decayed corpses of anti-Japanese, wealthy Chinese businessmen. Mack Doyle, in charge of the group, had two shovels. He

insisted that the corpses be deposited in orderly fashion, one next to the other. One of the boys down at the bottom of the grave discovered gold caps in the mouth of a corpse. He jumped out of the grave and whispered about it to Mack, who told the workers that if they would keep it secret, he would remove the gold from the teeth of all the victims.

At first, Mack and his pal George tried to remove the gold in a more or less neat way, as a surgeon would do. But as the Japanese guards could be expected to emerge soon, there was no time for playing the role of respectful dentist. When the caps resisted the soft treatment, Mack and George used sharp ends of the shovels to break out the bits together with the gold.

As Danny told us this tale, Lou interrupted and asked, "Did you ever break a tooth yourself?"

"No, I was too much of a coward," Danny said.

"A coward?" Eddie angrily interjected.

"Yes, that's what Mack called me," Dan said, continuing as though he had not understood Eddie's disgust or was not bothered by it.

"Actually, the fun with the gold mine did not last. Mack was told that a few Chinese who had been hiding in the underbrush had taken pictures of our group, so this was the end of our first "fundraising event."

Apparently realizing our distress at what he was relating, Danny was silent for a number of seconds. Then, in a small voice, he said, "Now, after three years of a POW life of inhumanity and doing business with the Chinese, I'm not a softy, although I may still not be ready to do what the others did at the time."

There fell an uncomfortable silence that I broke by getting up and going to my cell. Sleep did not come until long after midnight.

March 18

A week has passed since that unpleasant evening. I had intended to have a personal talk with Danny. I preferred to wait a few weeks, however. But things like to push you when you shove them aside. Danny sat there again last Sunday boasting about the busy trade in the items our campmates decided to sell (watches, purses, even rings), and how the Chinese black marketeers cheated the POWs. At the end, he took out a bundle of Malayan dollars, showing them on the table in my direction.

"See, Rabbi, you can use this money for your Charity Fund."

I waited a few seconds, looking at Danny, everyone around silent. Then I shoved the money (more than four hundred Singapore dollars) back across the table to Eddie, our treasurer. Danny was surprised. He knew that I administered the larger gifts to the Charity Fund personally.

March 21

Danny told us that when he realized he was on his way to becoming addicted, he decided to stop smoking. Now, almost half a year has passed, and he still sells all his cigarettes. While he looked in my direction he repeated, "All my cigarettes, yes, all of them."

As if under compulsion to say something he found very funny, he said, "Since John, one of my cellmates, has sold everything my Chinese contacts were prepared to buy, he's run out of money. Now he wants me to sell him cigarettes for part of his food rations. I said no. I gave him a few cigarettes. But he wanted more and more, so I finally agreed.

"For more than a month now he wraps himself in smoke, lying on his back all day – the poor chap becomes thinner and thinner. You see, don't you? I don't grow thinner and thinner, ha, ha..."

Silence. Then consternation on the men's faces.

"Danny, just now I had a strange vision," I said, heaving a deep sigh. "I see you a year and a half from now, sitting with your good wife and your cute children at the table in your home. It is a party, your thirty-third birthday. While they all sing 'happy birthday' — your first birthday after the liberation — a haggard woman suddenly knocks on your window, hysterically crying, 'There he sits, that fat, happy survivor, who murdered my John. *You* did, I found out. *You* let him starve to death..."

"Then curse follows curse. Your children run upstairs, crying, followed by your wife."

This lighthearted easy-living Danny now wondered at the devastating effect of his laughing. I wasn't sure if he was frightened or annoyed or both.

"Is this a curse, Rabbi?" There were tears in his eyes (none of us had seen him crying before). He turned to everyone present. "Do I deserve this?"

I suspected I had gone too far. Danny is primitive, superstitious.

"No, Danny," I said. "This is not a curse — I do not curse you; you do so much good for people. I wish I could bless you. Go back to that sick cellmate, feed him, feed him to health. Let him become fatter and fatter, and you will be blessed by Him, Who created both of you."

Danny ran to the door. He turned around, shouting in a hoarse voice, "This is crazy! I never learned *Torah*, Rabbi. It is beyond me. As soon as I leave our cell, John will sell the food I give him. Yes, precious food, to those unpitiful bloodsuckers!" And he ran out.

I did not look at any of my friends here. Saddened and somehow defeated, without a "good night," I left to a sleepless bed.

April 6

For the last two weeks, Danny has not shown his face in *Ohel Jacob*. When he came in today, he seemed to be very uncomfortable and left soon after. I knew he would be back for the Passover services. He needs the friends here and, above all, he feels the need to justify himself.

April 8

Danny came in with John, who does not look as thin as Danny had made us believe. He was caught in awkwardness. He went up to me.

"This is John, my cellmate." Then pointing to me, he said, "This is our Rabbi."

He turned to me and said, "John has seen you, has heard you speaking at..."

Suddenly, he interrupted himself. "See John, these are my friends, real friends."

I wanted to welcome John, but within seconds Danny and John had left.

April 15

As I sat writing, Danny came in, showed me a little picture of his children, made by an artist friend.

With a certain degree of shrillness in his voice, he said, "I paid him the full asking price, plus," — a moment of silence — "plus a nice amount; believe me, a real nice, extra amount."

April 25

Dear Rachel,

The conditions in the camp are now more or less stable. Food is still scarce, people still keep dying despite our well-functioning Changi hospital and our devoted doctors. Work parties are going out to labor at the airport and at other projects, but only the healthy are involved.

The news, except for short interruptions, streams into the camp from our secret well-functioning wireless sets and it is exciting.

The Russians are already in Poland and will soon cross the German border. Our men are impatient, expecting the end any day. The Japanese grow more and more forgiving in regard to breaches of discipline. Still, while the mood in the camp generally appears relaxed, one wonders whether the individual POW is confident that he will soon return home. On the basis of my experience with those who come to me for help, I have serious doubts.

A Hundred Years War?

When Italy quit fighting, the morale of the Japanese was more visibly affected than by the Stalingrad and El Alamein defeats, which only the war-wise could evaluate. Italy's surrender meant the crumbling of the Axis, which the Japanese had joined with great hopes.

Still, the Italians in the First World War created the precedent of betraying their war allies, and they were generally assumed to be poor fighters. But when the invincible senior partner in the Axis was going down, the Japanese had been left out in the cold. While the U.S. naval and air forces were coming closer and closer to invading Japan proper, the British forces were able to mass all their power (joined by the Australians, Dutch and Free French) against Malaya and Burma; and the Chinese would receive all the support they need to drive the Japanese out of China.

Did the Japanese military, even the extreme war fanatics, not see the writing on the wall?

They may believe that the victorious Allied governments will get tired of prolonging a war they had already won. The Allies can afford to be generous at a peace conference. The Japanese people, however, are fighting for their Fatherland, for their honor, Emperor and traditions. They have to be prepared to fight a prolonged war even if it should last one hundred years.

We, their POWs, are inclined to take their intention to continue fighting, seriously, if not for a full hundred years, then at least for a number of years. It is true they have not tired of prolonged wars in the Asian Continent. But while they, the Japanese, may still have endurance, patience and willingness to continue the war game, we POWs have none left.

What gives us hope, however, is the fact that one senses a growing tiredness in our guards, a stronger yearning for their families, children, and a growing disillusionment. They had been made to believe that Western men are not good as soldiers, and Nippon is number one. And now for many months, we have perceived the possible caving-in of their military faith.

Are the Japanese war enthusiasts by nature? From what I have seen of the Japanese people in the streets during our stay in Tokyo, Yokohama and Kobe, I doubt it. (Except, of course, when these thoroughly conditioned people are called to fight for their Emperor.)

Victory in Sight

May 5

The success of the Allied landings in Normandy last year convinced us that the end of the war in Europe was imminent.

It is true that many here were close to a panic state when we heard of the seemingly successful German counteroffensive in Belgium last winter. But the British POWs stuck to their formula of "Bad luck soon to be over."

Who would have believed a year ago that news of Germany's capitulation would cause no real stir in the camp?

What the news elicited in most of our minds were the questions, How will the Japanese take it? Are they going to capitulate as well?

We received the answers soon enough.

"Europeans, no good," the Japanese guards told us. "Italians, poor soldiers. Cowards. Germans cowards, afraid of dying, of being killed. Japanese number one. Number one soldiers. Never afraid. Japan have many peoples. Pacific Ocean big, very big. War going on long, very long time."

We realize that the war may drag on.

June 15

It seems to me that an appreciable number of POWs do not feel secure at all. We do expect the end of the war, but we worry that it will also mean the end for us personally. I cannot help being reminded of a tunnel that progressively seals off the closer one comes to its end.

The frequent rumors that our workers in Thailand have many casualties as

a result of intensified Allied bombings are not encouraging. And the even more recent rumors about deathmarches, ordered by the Japanese as soon as Allied troops come close to the gates of the POW camps, are the cause of near panic for many.

Who can forget how stragglers were unpityingly shot by the guards?

July 2

These are interesting days and weeks, with sensational developments on all war fronts. There are also many activities within the camp: concerts, shows, lectures, publications, and reading in our well-stocked library (filled with many valuable books in philosophy and psychology).

I am reading avidly and recording my views and insights acquired in these last POW years.

August 8

Dear Rachel,

Today, we heard the most sensational rumor of our camp life: The Americans dropped a large bomb on Japan that killed hundreds of thousands of people. No one, of course, really believes this – it seems so unlikely – that one bomb could do so much damage – and too cruel – if it is even true that the Allies have developed a bomb with such deadly force.

Yet our own wireless contacts confirm this rumor regarding the bomb (but not regarding the number of victims), and warn us to be extremely careful not to let our guards suspect that we know about it.

Ironically, it turns out to be a day of nervous tension instead of joy. We keep watching the faces of our guards and analyzing their movements. Are they such perfect actors? We are unable to discern any nervousness in their conduct.

August 9

The atom bomb is a reality.

We have now had sufficient wireless reports from Allied sources to confirm the first report. The bomb was large and it did kill hundreds of thousands of innocent people. We were actually aware of the atom bomb before our guards were told. Even so, the hara-kiri-spirited Japanese do not appear to be impressed. They have still not surrendered, and our worriers, especially Eddie, are panicking. They think the Japanese will threaten the Allies and retaliate by killing us, their helpless hostages. Pete, who still believes in making use of power, wonders why the Americans do not drop more atom bombs over Japanese cities.

August 10

Many of the men were out of their cells during most of last night.

Excitement spreads around the camp. Although there is no news of surrender, the Japanese are perceptibly kinder to us today. It is as if they know and accept their fate.

The short-wave radio is out in the open. Men who have often wondered where it was hidden smile excitedly when they see the small setup. They crowd around the operator, who has large earphones clamped to his head with a thick steel band that flattens the small bristles on his close-cropped hair.

The operator holds up one hand and with the other, scribbles down a message on a thin sheet of paper, torn, I suspect, from the camp record book.

We all try to peer over his shoulder.

The guards do not approach. They are keeping their distance.

A voice filled with bass that resonates in and around and among the men crowded in that small space reads, "An atom bomb..."

"The second," another voice calls out, "...has been dropped on Japan. The Emperor has agreed to unconditional surrender."

Cheers from freedom-starved throats drown out the rest of the speaker's voice. Men hug men. Some are crying, proudly allowing the tears to flow down their thin faces, over prominent cheek bones, and drip on thin chests.

It cannot be much longer before we are free.

There is an official announcement: *The war is over.*



*Planes Dropping Pamphlets Announcing the End of the War, Over
Changi Gaol August 1945, Ronald Searle*



Changi Aug. 31 1945
Ronald Searle

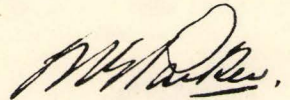
First Parachute Supplies Dropping near Changi Gaol by Ronald Searle

OFFICE OF THE REQUISITIONING OFFICER,
British Military Administration,
Supreme Court Building,
Singapore.

27th September, 1945.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

This is to certify that Mr. C. NUSSBAUM, Acting
Rabbi of the Magheim Aboth Synagogue, Waterloo Street, has
permission to re-occupy this Building for the purpose of
carrying out his religious duties.



W/CDR
(M. G. Parker)
REQUISITIONING OFFICER

Permission Document to reoccupy Maghen Aboth Synagogue,
Waterloo Street, Singapore

Liberation

August 1945

Changi

I had never actually envisioned liberation. I was always leaping directly over it to peace for mankind, to normalcy, to Rachel, and to my children. But here is liberation, and it surprises me.

It is a phenomenon to observe this transition of war into peace.

There are no Allies here, and the Japanese are not locked into cells. The machine guns sit in the sun; the ammunition is still piled in straight rows in their warehouses.

Reality: We are confined to our camp as free men — confined still, but free — an improvement over our recent reality. The Japanese serve us, guard us now from chaos and confrontations with the fanatical Malayan nationalists outside the camp.

What has changed? The Japanese stand guard; they did before, they do now. They smile. Eddie thinks they will mass murder us and then commit their glorious and redeeming hara-kiri. How many times have we heard them insist that the Japanese soldier knows either victory or death?

Tomorrow's reality: I fear for some of my campmates. What awaits them in their homelands? How many will find their homes destroyed and their families split up — wives disloyal and children scattered? How many lives of loved ones will have been taken before our men arrive home? Chilling thoughts...but real fears.

The collective level of self-esteem is low. Many of the men are worried about being able to re-enter society — walking like everyone else, not crawling or creeping. For some POWs, the war over may usher in a period of suffering and unhappiness.

I pray that the men of *Ohel Jacob* have shared in a spiritual experience that will support them.

The Bomb: It is difficult for the men to speak about our redeemer, the Hiroshima bomb. There is inner turmoil over the justification for the bomb. Did the miracle of our liberation not come at the price of so many Hiroshima civilians?

However, many feel that there are killings done for the sake of killing, but Hiroshima killings were done for the sake of saving, saving not only us POWs — some hundred thousand semi-civilians — but also millions of Japanese civilians, in a war uselessly extended in a futile defence of their country.

Besides, whose blood is more red, more precious? It is all so confusing — frustrating our so long hoped-for joy.

It is a tragedy, however, that the bomb was necessary. The Talmudic Sages tell us that when the Egyptian army drowned in the Red Sea, the angels were going to join Moses and the Jewish people in their visionary victory song. The Creator of Jews and Egyptians then told His angels, the works of My hands are drowning in the sea; is it fitting that you join in the victory Song?

Thus, we may wonder how Moses and his people could sing of redemption and victory over injustice and evil. The answer: The Jews *ought* to have sung and danced — with intense involvement. It was *they* who had been enslaved, tortured and threatened with extinction.

However, the angels were observers from a heavenly perspective; their feelings of joy ought to be dampened by sadness and regret that the Creator's world is structured such that liberation (from slavery) and redemption had to come at the price of Egyptian lives.

We victims of this war must pray that the Hiroshima bomb shall not be a new beginning of escalating nuclear destruction, but rather the last tool of destruction in our pained generation.

Desolation: The other side of the earth suffered a different destruction. We must leave our isolation, recognize our new world. Someone must tell us the story.

In the meantime, John Taylor arrived from Australia. He cried and cried while he spoke about the destruction of European Jewry. Now we know the horror. I feel I will never be free of nightmares.

Will I ever be able to fit this horror into my optimistic world-view?

We sat all night together. No one seemed to move — the words stopped — time stopped.

Early this morning, light came into the room. We stared at one another — tired, lonely, old men.

I was confused; I didn't know what to do. I will stay in one more day, an inadequate expression of my profound mourning.

The Japanese War Criminals

The Japanese had despised us for years because, rather than commit suicide, we were prepared to suffer the shame of being prisoners of war. But now that the positions were reversed, there occurred no mass hara-kiri.

How can we explain this phenomenon? Perhaps simply, in defeat, the Japanese have lost their selves, their very selves, completely. Since their victory over the Russians in 1905 the Japanese have never suffered utter defeat. There is no reality for the Japanese beyond hara-kiri, beyond defeat. And Japan was not prepared for it. One hundred years of war, yes; defeat, no. Hara-kiri has been the mode of life fitting an existing empire in which sacrifice for the Emperor was expected, the ideal. But the Empire has disintegrated, and the Emperor has fallen from his illustrious, divine throne. The concept of the hara-kiri culture has sunk into the background of history, into the abyss of forgotten empires.

Thus it happened that the overwhelming majority of Japanese senior officers and army commanders appeared to love "life" more than their "faith."

In the last year, they — especially many of the cruel Korean guards — tried to change their way of treating us POWs by attempting to blot out the image of cruelty. But it was by then too late. Their leaders could not escape the victor's avenging sword when the war came to a close. Unlike the drawn-out proceedings against the Germans, the commandant of the Singapore camps, General Saito, was tried, judged guilty, and executed.

In Java, Lt. Sones, commandant of the Jakarta POW camps, the Tenth Battalion and the Women's camps, did wait for the trials and was promptly executed.

"OHEL JACOB"—IN A JAPANESE P.O.W. CAMP

*By the Rev. J. N. LEWIS BRYAN, Rector of Broughton, Hants.
Formerly Assistant Chaplain General to the Forces, Far East*

The furnishing and decoration presented some difficulty; but with all members pulling their weight, and the assistance of some non-Jews, an excellent interior was added to the attractive and typically tropical type of building put up by the Royal Engineers.

On September 26, the service of dedication was held. It was attended by the Representative Officer (British Command-

From first to last there was a magnificent spirit of generosity among the members. From their meagre and hard-earned working pay, money was willingly subscribed to help those who, because of illness, were incapable of work, and, on that account, unable to earn.

The fourth anniversary of the founding of the prison synagogue at the notorious Changi gaol, at Singapore, falls this week-end. It was in this gaol, built to accommodate 1,200 persons, that the Japanese imprisoned 8,000 British, Australian, and Dutch prisoners of war who included a small number of Jews.

buildings could be obtained. With the arrival of the first Dutch parties from Java, in 1942, came two men who were destined to play a tremendous part in the life of their community—Pte. Lisser, who before the war had been an honorary cantor in Batavia, and Dr. Nussbaum, who was an honorary Rabbi in Java.

Both were sent up to the "Railroad of Death," in Thailand, and there Lisser died. Dr. Nussbaum managed to survive, and his work in the various camps was beyond all praise. He held services—sometimes alongside the bodies of men who had died and were awaiting burial or cremation, constantly visited the sick and dying, and buried his men with full Jewish rites.

Excerpt from The Jewish Chronicle, report from the former Assistant Chaplain General, Rev. Lewis Bryan, who had shown an interest in the Changi Jewish community. Quote from Rev. L. Bryan, "No section of the community was better or more faithfully tended. Wherever he (Nussbaum) is today, the good wishes and heartfelt thanks of his Jewish comrades go out to him."

The Jewish

THE ORGAN OF BRITISH JEWRY

One Hundred and Fourth Year

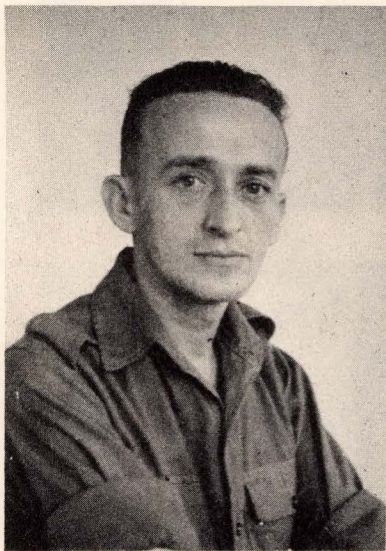


No. 3,995.
REGD. AS A NEWSPAPER

Friday, November 2, 1945

PRISONERS OF THE JAPS

The Story of Jewish P.O.W.s

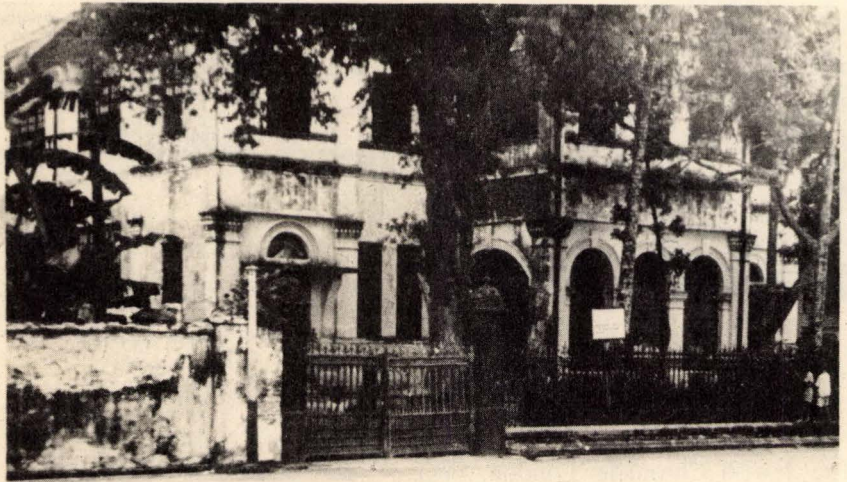


During his recent tour of India and Burma, the Senior Jewish Chaplain, Rabbi I. Brodie, was given a report of the activities of Jewish P.O.W.s and civilian internees in Singapore and Thailand. This historic document, extracts of which we publish below, was compiled by Chaim Nussbaum, an Acting Jewish Chaplain, formerly a Rabbi of the Jewish communities in Java, and subsequently a soldier and P.O.W. in various camps in Java and on the Peninsula. The lengthy manuscript was finally typed out for Rabbi Brodie by R.S.M. John J. Harris, R.A.M.C., whose home is in Darlington.

After the fall of Singapore the P.O.W.s had been concentrated in the Changi district, and several attempts were made to organise Jewish meetings.

The Jewish Chronicle, London, England: part of an extensive report compiled by the author and published by the late Chief Rabbi I. Brodie

Author, October 1945, Singapore, two months after liberation



Singapore Jewish Club, December 1945, British liberation forces (RAF) and local ex-POWs

Exterior of Maghen Aboth Synagogue, Singapore

21-45

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Hotel Tjibine

R. A. P. W. I. H.Q.

BATAVIA.

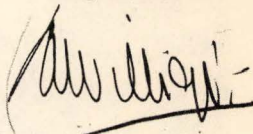
226

OFFICIAL TRAVEL AUTHORITY AND PASS

This is to certify that Mr. C. NUSSBAUM RABBI
 is officially authorized by above headquarters to travel to: Singapore
 by: Plane
 Report at: _____
 Reasons: Raport 1st 2nd Final Heliphen
 Date: 21-12-1945

For R.A.P.W.I.

H.Q.R.S., Batavia



A

R.A.F. Form No. 2767.

AIR MOVEMENT AUTHORITY

No 123993

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For duty at Medan

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Service Number	Rank	Name and Initials	Status, Branch of Service or Trade	Department, Parent Unit or Command	Passport or Identity Card Number	Weight of Baggage Allowed
		<u>Rabbi C. Nussbaum</u>				<u>65 lbs.</u>

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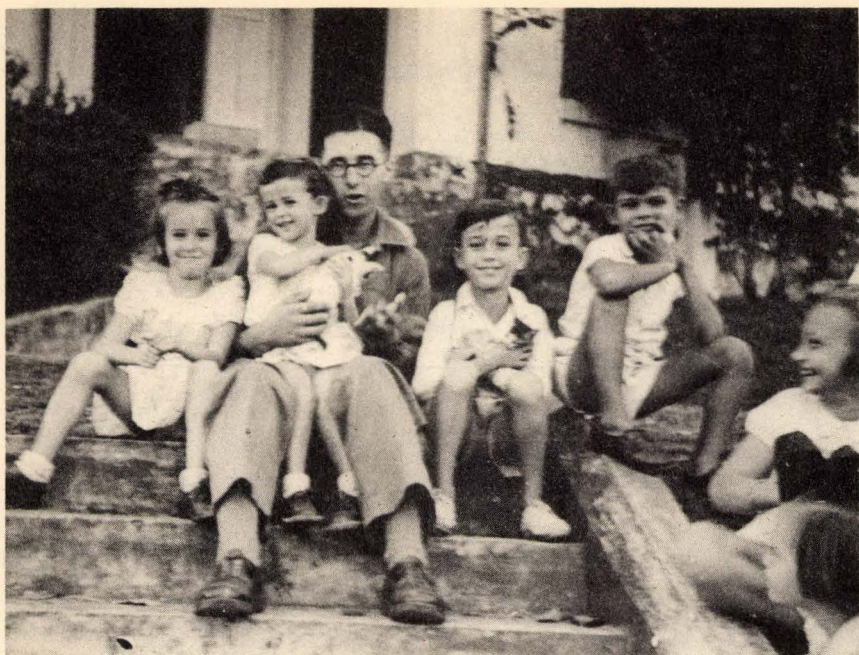
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Official Travel Authority Documents and Passes for RAPWI Rabbi,



Lt. Abrahams, RAF, October 1945, with Brenda, Shifra, Mottie, Wilhelmina Camp, Singapore



קמיעה פאר גוט
 אידן 1946.
SINGAPORE

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Mr. In New in Fuhrman

Rapport

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Teitler J.

F. Teitler Silberbach

H. Liliom Silberbach

G. Hammelburg

PARTY -
 15th of Shvat - Moshe of the Trees

Tu B'Shvat (New Year of the Trees) party; signatures of the majority of attending men and women



Singapore *Seder*, Passover 1946, Wilhelmina Camp — seated center, Rachel and author; to Rachel's right, Shifra; to author's left, Mottie, Brenda and Lt. Abrahams; behind author, Miss Bonewit (secretary), her fiancée and her mother.

Before Returning Home

The final stage of liberation for the prisoners of war was a slow, cumbersome process — especially for the Dutch. Even though Holland had been liberated, Dutch vessels were still used by the Allies in the wind-down of the war.

During this enforced stay, my status was changed to that of a RAPWI-rabbi — an organization responsible for the Rehabilitation of Allied ex-Prisoners of War and ex-Internees. It was a moving and exciting experience to meet the wives and children of survivors of Changi. It was so much more difficult, however, to face the widows and children who had not yet found their place in the society of the more fortunate survivors.

Transportation to Java soon became available to me. When I arrived at the Hotel des Indes in Jakarta, I found the city swarming with British Ghurkas. The Japanese, now themselves POWs, were employed by the British who were trying to keep Sukarno's restless Indonesian nationalists from disrupting their tenuous control over the island.

After three years of separation, I was finally reunited with Rachel and my three children — Mottie, Brenda and Shifra. They were still living in Adek (a camp for women, in Jakarta), crowded together on top of a bamboo platform.

Shortly thereafter, Rachel moved back to our first home on Bandungweg in Jakarta. Despite nightly shooting between the nationalists and the Ghurkas on that very street, Rachel encouraged me to visit the Sumatra and Java camps while she remained at home alone with the children.

Three weeks later, Rachel moved to the luxurious Wilhelmina Camp in one of Singapore's residential areas. I attempted to rebuild the local Jewish congregation. A number of British-Jewish military personnel were helpful in my work with the young, and we had a beautiful Passover Festival, *Seder* and all.

Returning Home

Rachel was five months pregnant when she and our children embarked on the Dutch hospital ship *Oranje*. Again we were separated. It took another two months before I was able to take the same journey — on the *New Amsterdam*, a luxurious passenger ship which had been rebuilt to serve as a transport vessel for the military. At sea, we were buffeted by heavy storms, although my secretary, Miss Bonewit, forgot her seasickness by furiously typing while I dictated the final report on my activities as a chaplain as well as my recent lectures. However, after every storm there is a brilliant sky; it was truly brilliant when I arrived in Holland.

Two months later, we were able to move from Rachel's brother's home to our home in Scheveningen, The Hague.

Thus, we had come full circle: this is where we had begun our marriage ten years earlier.

I am reminded of that first day in Bandung when I listened to the female wireless operator frantically calling out: "Two-three, two-three, please come in."

And I realized then that war had come to Java. Little did I know that one day I would become the Jewish chaplain for the camps on the Kwai.

A Word from the Author

After my return to Holland, I wrote, lectured, edited a cultural Jewish monthly and headed a summer camp in Switzerland.

It was a great joy, especially for one of the postwar generation, to be building a rapidly growing family (our next three were born in Holland and our seventh in Canada in 1953). But it was not without its price. In order to provide for my growing family, I took on responsibilities as an educator, principal, pedagogical consultant and university lecturer in various parts of the world. These expanding activities did not leave time for other important projects, among which was the intended publication of *Habeemah*, our POW magazine.

It was only after my early partial retirement at age sixty that I found the time to return at last to some of these projects. I published my first postwar book in Hebrew and turned to sorting through earlier notes and manuscripts. Among these were the records of my years as a prisoner of war: my notes and diary from 1942 to 1946. These included that part of the diary that I had reconstructed from memory in 1944-45 after the Japanese Secret Police had confiscated it in September of 1943.

Reading through this material, I saw that I had not dwelt exclusively – or even largely – on the horrors of our POW life but rather on the human perspectives, the interior reality of a prisoner's life: his insecurities, his doubts and his problems of identity. These concerns, I now realized, were not limited to the pressures and fears of a group of men in POW camps in Southeast Asia. They are an integral part of the human condition; they are concerns which we all share and which we all face.

It was then that I understood that my journal was much more than a record of my activities as a prisoner of war.

Thus was *Chaplain On The River Kwai: Story of a Prisoner Of War* brought into being.

— Chaim Nussbaum
Toronto
July 1, 1987

An Afterthought

I understood that in order not to infringe upon the privacy of some of my fellow prisoners, the true names and personal conditions of a number of those men had to be changed. I also had to consider whether such a document could still be deemed a genuine diary.

Actually, I prefer to regard this document as a POW journal rather than a POW diary. The story is true to fact – the persons and events are authentic. In making use of the privilege to freely adapt the dialogue, I was able to portray my fellow prisoners in depth, the way I had learned to perceive them in those years of sharing a common fate. Thus, the truth value of this journal has been enhanced and may actually be an underlying cause of the uniqueness of this human story.

Stories of a number of prisoners had to be left out. It is hoped, however, that when the camp magazine, *Habeemah*, is published and the planned television documentary becomes a reality, then those “omitted lives” will be reintegrated into our story.

Periscope

Periscope

Upon gentle prodding, I was given access by the author to his collection of postwar correspondence with former fellow prisoners. From these letters, I was able to cull a number of brief synopses of what has happened to some of the men since the end of the war. These appear on the following pages and also include a selection of excerpts which underline the role that the Rabbi served in the lives of these men.

Esther Posner, editor

The Four Artists

...Ronald Searle:

Ronald Searle, world famous cartoonist and satirist, came close to death in a camp near the Kwai River:

...I remember that there was nothing much of him...We thought he was dying and we...used to put him out on a ground sheet in the sun...He could barely move, he was covered in running sores...

Russell Braddon, *The Several Lives of Ronald Searle*

His war drawings would have been lost to the world of art had his friends not hid them from the Japanese Secret Police, under the very bodies of dying cholera patients.

Searle quickly rose to fame in the first years after the liberation. One series of his early books sold three quarters of a million copies. He has traveled extensively to major cultural centers to work and exhibit: London, Paris, Berlin, New York, Los Angeles.

In 1985, he presented to the Imperial War Museum four hundred drawings documenting his war experience. In 1986, he published *To the Kwai and Back: War Drawings 1939-1945*, his fiftieth book.

Searle is considered to be the father and master of generations of cartoonists and satirists in Europe and the United States:

...a lashing wit, and a touch of offbeat fantasy has marked him for a long time now as one of the most original humorists of our time and the finest graphic draughtsman of this century...he has always remained a survivor...

David Arkell, *Poetry Nation Review*, 1986

At present, Searle and his second wife live in Southern France at the foot of the Alps of Provence, where he is ever-perfecting his art.

It is evident that generosity has always been a part of his nature. A non-Jew, Searle gave selflessly of his time and energy to illustrate the Jewish camp magazine, *Habeemah*, in Changi. Two of those drawings are included in this book. He also gave the author, a fellow ex-POW, permission to select a number of his war drawings to illustrate this book.

Searle wrote to the author in 1986:

I am delighted that you are getting your diary in print. Quite a feat to have managed to write it, preserve it, and bring it back. I shall certainly look forward to reading it. I remember our encounters with pleasure...

It is extraordinary how we are able to resume contact at once. There is a bond of friendship through mutual experience that makes light of the decades...the fact that our POW experiences are somewhat outside the comprehension of those who were spared it, is probably a very good thing...

After the war, I made a point of going to Poland (in 1948) and seeing the Auschwitz extermination camp for myself. In 1961, I spent a month in Jerusalem attending the Eichmann trial. I wanted to understand...why it happened. It has helped to make me a better artist...

...Otto Cramer:

Otto Cramer, born in Surinam, Dutch Guiana (South America), grew up in Indonesia and Holland. After the liberation, he returned to Holland where he painted and taught art. An overview of his works was published in Holland in 1977. He died in 1980.

Cramer illustrated the cholera story in the Passover issue of *Habeemah*, and also assisted in decorating *Ohel Jacob*.

...George Sprod:

George Sprod, a talented artist, did the majority of the illustrations in the camp magazine. In the sixties and seventies, he worked as a cartoonist and writer on London's Fleet Street.

He returned to Australia after his divorce, where he now lives, still active in his craft. His war drawings are on permanent display in the Museum of Canberra, Australia.

...Kees van Willigen:

Kees van Willigen is one of the four non-Jewish artists who selflessly offered their talents in the prisoner-of-war camps.

After his return to Holland, he moved to Southern France; presently, he lives in Holland and suffers from poor health. His war drawings are on display in the Educational Museum in The Hague.

In 1981, he corresponded with the author:

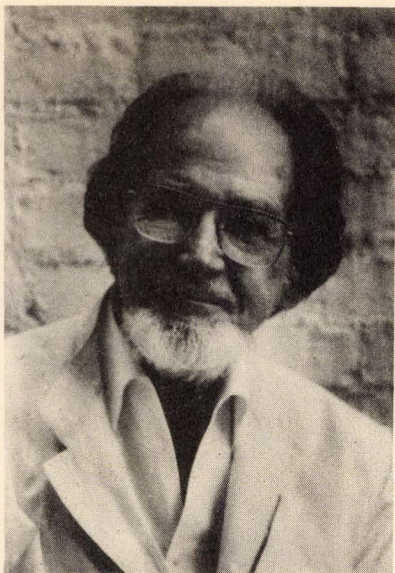
I remember with pleasure and gratitude that it was you who introduced me into the Jewish community in Changi camp, Singapore, and enabled me to spend many hours in the little shul there reading and drawing. I think I also did some drawings for the Habeemah. And then I also remember how we went on long walks in Singapore...right after the Japanese capitulation, talking about...what it really meant to us to be free again...

In July 1982, he wrote:

...As for me, well, I am still alive and I am still painting. After my repatriation in 1947, I left for the South of France...I spend as much time as I can on painting and trying to find out more about the sense and meaning of it. I still know very little about painting, but I still enjoy doing it...I handed over my own collection of camp drawings to the Educational Museum in The Hague.



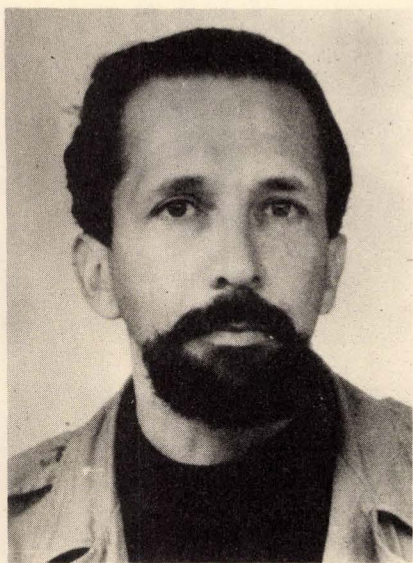
Self-portrait, aged 23, Ronald Searle



Ronald Searle



George Sprod, September 1982



Otto Cramer, 1954



Joe Bernstein 1942, Singapore Island

CHANGI

HOLY - DAYS - SERVICES .

ROSH HASHANA (New year)

Sunday 17-9 20.15 h. evening services.

Monday 18-9 9-11 h. morning- and Mussaf services

" " 20.15 h. evening service.

YOM KIPPUR (Day of Atonement)

Tuesday 26-9 20.00-21.30 h. KOL NIDRE Service

Wednesday 27-9

9-11.30 h. Morning- and Mussaf services

16-17 h. Mincha-service

19-20 h. N'eela-service

All services in the Synagogue "Ohel Jacob"

Holy Days Services announcement, September 1944, Changi

Former POWs

...David Arkush (RAMD):

Captain David Arkush organized the first religious services in Changi, which were available to all Jewish prisoners from 1942 until the liberation. He published a number of articles after the war describing his war experiences and reminiscing about "the *luach* (calendar) that proved to be remarkably correct until the end of the war."

In a letter of November 1986, he remembered:

I had a luach for 1942 and 1943, but then either Private Lisser or you sent me a luach for 1943-45, written on a packet of cigarette papers...I returned to Thailand five years ago and photographed Jewish graves in the Chungkai cemetery, including those of men I buried. One of these was a Dutch private...who had no Magen David on his grave. I took this up with the Dutch government, and a Magen David was later added to the stone; I felt very glad this was done.

In 1981, Arkush retired from his dental practice. He remains active in the affairs of ex-POWs and is proud to have led their parade at the fortieth anniversary ceremony in 1985.

The portrait of Arkush is one of the few paintings done in water color in a POW camp to survive the war.



David Marshall as POW in Japan 1943-45; Prime Minister of Singapore 1956; at present, ambassador of Singapore in Paris, France

David Arkush, water color done in Chunkai POW camp, 1944



Lou Velmans, left; author, Eddie Rappaport, September 21, 1945

A Prayer C. Wernick.

Written during a restless, sleepless night
of pain in the half light of a ward
in Roberto Hospital, Changi,
Singapore. — October, 1942.

Oh Sleep! Nocturnal Genius,
 Masking in black velvet Day's utter
 ugliness,

Painting, with dreamy colours
 the loveliness of a hundred happy
 yesterdays,

~~12 NOVEMBER (Yom Kippur Sunday)~~

Revealing, with living clarity
 the visions of a thousand glorious
 morrows,
 why hast thou forsaken me?

A Prayer, excerpt, written by Cyril Wernick, October 1942

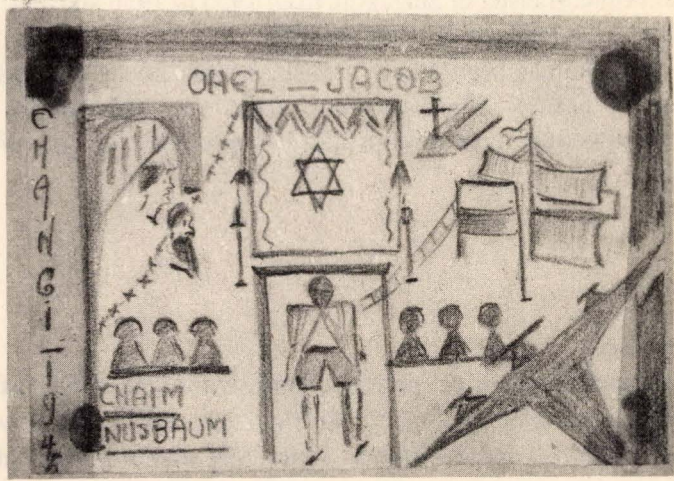


Illustration by Paul Franken, August 30, 1945, given to author;
 inscription on back: To commemorate our friendship and the pleasant mood
 that you created in our Changi camp

...Joe Bernstein:

Joe Bernstein was successful in organizing a choir in Changi. Throughout the camp, Jews and non-Jews alike were heard whistling Hebrew melodies sung by his popular choir.

When he returned to his hometown, he continued his involvement in music, conducting the Glasgow Jewish Male Voice Choir which gained a national reputation.

In August 1986, he wrote to the author:

We have sung in Israel, by invitation, after the 1967 War...also in London and other major cities – all proceeds to charity...part of the proceeds in the form of tree certificates in Israel...

Bernstein recently retired from a successful managerial position.

...David Marshall:

At the end of the war, David Marshall, scion of a prominent Singapore family, was sent from a prisoner-of-war camp to a hospital in Australia, where he recuperated from a serious illness.

He was Prime Minister of Singapore from 1955 to 1956 and a member of its Legislative Assembly from 1961 to 1963.

Since 1978, he has been living in Paris, serving as the Ambassador of Singapore to France. Marshall also served as chairman of various government-appointed commissions and has received a number of honors and medals.

...Lou Velmans:

Lou Velmans, an editor of *Habeemah* and author of a number of stories, contemplated becoming a journalist. After his return to Holland, he wrote the story *Yits*, published in the *Moriah* series (the author's first publishing venture).

Velmans is an international public relations executive living in the United States. He is presently preparing a book on his personal experiences with the Japanese over the past forty years.

...Eddie Rappaport:

After liberation, Eddie Rappaport returned to Holland. Subsequently, he moved to Israel and lived on a *kibbutz* for a number of years. At present, he lives with his wife and children in Houston, Texas.

...Dave Birnbaum (Goldstein):

After liberation, Dave left England and joined a *kibbutz* in Israel, where he married. He derived satisfaction from successfully translating Hebrew stories into English.

In 1956, he returned to England; life in Leeds did not smile favorably upon him and his wife. Their health deteriorated. When his wife died, Dave slid into a depression. Efforts made in recent years to locate him have failed.

Dave wrote in November 1958:

...something in my psychological makeup demands the soothing and calming effect of your magnetic personality...I don't know what happened to the patience you taught me to bear...

How you inspired me then, Chaim. How greatly I desired to learn the meaning of life from you. Another year with you in Changi, and I'm sure I would not be suffering such a tense, empty life today.

...William Herman:

In 1945, the author was told by one of Herman's Australian friends that after Herman was sent to a work camp, his condition improved somewhat. But after a month, he became melancholy. He refused food, stopped speaking and eventually resisted any form of communication. Finally, he closed his eyes and died (an overdose of pills, friends rumored).

...Cyril Wernick:

Wernick did outlive the war. After liberation, the author saw him being carried onto a hospital ship headed for India. He saw him last on a stretcher, smiling, and they shook hands. Shortly after Cyril arrived in Bombay, he died. The doctors could not heal his diphtheria.

...Paul Franken:

Paul Franken was born in Sumatra. During his years as a POW, he showed a deep interest in Jewish studies. He married in Holland in 1947; subsequently, he and his family moved to Montreal. He died in 1970. His son Louis, a teacher, lives in Toronto with his wife and five children.

...J. A. Van der Bent:

Van der Bent was imprisoned in Bandung (Tjilatjap One and Two). In 1944, he was transported to Pakan Baroe, Sumatra, in the face of torpedo attempts by the Americans.

Van der Bent reminisced in a series of letters to the author:

It is remarkable that while the images of other persons grew vaguer during the past decades, I still see you clearly before my eyes...your face...your way of walking...

I still remember how, at the Passover seder in 1942, you sat down at the table with your prayer shawl and the green military cap on your head...I will never forget my feelings when after the service, the curtain of the stage was closed (where the seder was held for the Jewish participants), and I felt as if I were in the Court of the Pagans...excluded from the "very special" — that which really counts — to be for a moment uplifted beyond yourself and then to be smacked down to raw reality...

One evening...you were teaching Psalm 130 (De Profundis); your way of treating the text fascinated me so that I could have spent hours standing and listening. Then I discovered what a Talmudic Sage was. In discussions with ministers, I describe your approach as an example of exegesis...

As a believing Christian, I am plagued by guilt feelings about the Jewish people. When my wife and I read verses regarding the peace of Jerusalem and the redemption of Israel, I cannot help but think of you. Whenever you read the Priests' Blessing (Numbers 6), please think of me, the outsider.

[translated from Dutch]

...Jack Greenberg:

The author remembers that Jack Greenberg was always an outgoing and cheery personality; recently, he was most helpful in providing information regarding surviving ex-POWs.

In 1983, he wrote to the author:

I'm retired now since 1981, having been with my firm for forty-nine years; the last sixteen as managerial director...I have the British Empire Medal (BEM) for my work in the cholera ward in Shimi Sonkane near the Burma border, and I'm alive to tell the tale! Remember you said a prayer for me on April 23, 1943, before I went up country?...I'm sixty-seven years old now, and fit and well.

I have tapes that I recorded from memory, of my life as a Japanese prisoner...and they are now in the Imperial War Museum. In 1969, I was the only man from the U.K. to attend a reunion of ex-POWs at Surfers Paradise in Queensland, Australia, and after service, I laid the wreath for the U.K....tears streamed down from my eyes...I flew to Singapore and went to have a look at Changi Gaol. I signed the visitors' book, but could not enter the blocks of cells. In 1980...to Singapore, Bangkok, Siam and Kanchanburi (Thailand) cemetery...we went to the bridge on the River Kwai...took a boat trip...

Greenberg twice visited Thailand and regularly attended ex-POW reunions in Britain and Australia. He intended to visit Toronto in 1984.

In a recent letter of 1987, his daughter wrote that in 1983, the very year in which Greenberg wrote his last letter with such confidence, her father became ill and is progressively becoming incapacitated with Alzheimer's. In March, his dream of becoming a grandfather would materialize. She prays that her father will live to enjoy his grandchild and to see this book published, in which he is shown to be the courageous man that he was.

...B. Tymstra:

Tymstra, a government lawyer in Java since 1931, suffered imprisonment in Bandung, Tjilatjap, Changi and other camps along the River Kwai. In 1956, he returned to Holland where he practiced law and represented many ex-POWs and ex-internees. He retired with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

In a letter to the author, Tymstra philosophized:

...in the past centuries we, the Dutch, have been friendly to the Japanese; but it has not helped us much in this last war...I don't blame President Truman for having permitted the dropping of the atom bomb...

...C.J. Stolk:

After the liberation, Stolk, a Dutch ex-POW, was trained by the British officers and sent to fight against the Indonesian nationalists in Bali, the renowned island east of Java where a number of his ex-POW friends were killed in battle.

Stolk returned to Holland after the liberation to become manager of a newspaper. His wife wrote a book in Dutch, *Bushido*, regarding the sufferings of the women internees under the Japanese occupation.

He wrote to the author:

...I remember it was you who, on December 25, 1942, in Tjilatjap, organized your Jewish fellow-believers to take over all inside sentry duties for us on that day...

I still admire you for always having a smile and a good word for others...

...Len Goldfarb:

Len Goldfarb, from Glasgow, wrote that in 1942, he had been unbelievably lucky when he worked in the kitchen of the Japanese.

He claimed that he was thus able, with their permission, to provide a traditional *seder*, as authentic as possible under the circumstances, for his fellow prisoners.

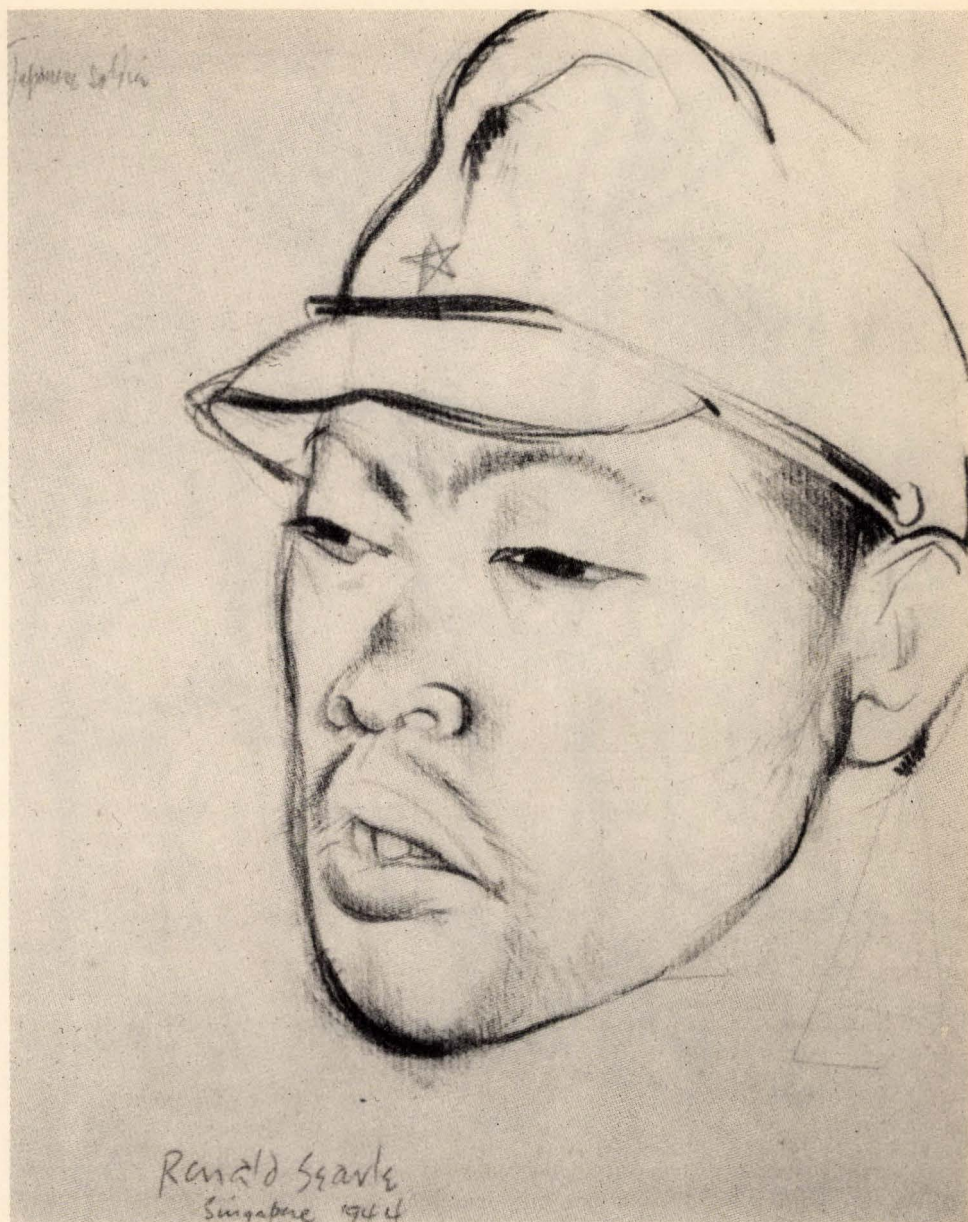
He has not been fortunate, however, since his return to England after the war. For many years, he has lived in and out of hospitals, and his health, until today, remains precarious.

...J. Glaser:

After the liberation, Glaser remained in military service with the Javanese government. He retired in 1965 with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

He prepared a study for the Dutch government, of the Jews in Indonesia before, during and after the Second World War.

Glaser lives in Holland; he is still active in Jewish community services and represents the interests of all ex-POWs.



Prison guard, Changi Gaol.
Better to be in his hands . . .

Or simply for amusement.



Beating Up a Chinese, by Ronald Searle, Singapore 1942



Ronald Searle
Changi Jail, Singapore Aug 1944.

Lionel Pearson & Son

Back to Reality, August 1944 by Ronald Searle

SALIENT EVENTS OF WORLD WAR II

OUR STORY

Europe and North Africa

Asia

1939

Aug.

Return from Holland to
Telshe, Lithuania.
Principal - Telshe
Hebrew Teachers'
College.
*Essays on Development
of Halacha*

Sept.

Germany invades
Poland.
Britain and France
declare war on Ger-
many.

Russia invades Lithu-
ania.
Founded Teachers'
College for Polish war
refugees.

1940

Apr.

Germany invades
Denmark and Norway.

May

Germany invades
Belgium, Netherlands,
Luxemburg, France.

Telshe Yeshiva scat-
tered and Teachers'
College closed down.
Obtained Russian exit
visas for Curacao.
To Vilna, the new
Lithuanian capital. Lost
personal correspon-
dence, diary, manu-
scripts.

June	Italy invades France.	
July	Beginning of twelve month Battle of Britain.	
Sept.		To Moscow, Birobidzhan (Siberia), Yokohama (Japan).
Oct.	Italy invades Greece.	From Kobe (Japan) to Jakarta (Java) – Yits Lissers' hotel.
Dec.	Britain commences campaign driving out the Italians from Ethiopia and East Africa in six months.	Teachers' College in Jakarta. Rabbi of Jakarta and Bandung.

1941

Apr.	Germany invades Yugoslavia and Greece.	
May	Germany invades Crete.	
June	Germany invades Russia.	
Dec.	Germans repulsed at gates of Moscow. British drive into Italian Libya.	Pearl Harbor – Japan attacks Hawaii, Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaya, Guam, Wake Island. Total mobilization in Java. Schools closed down.

1942

Jan.		Japanese invade Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) and Solomon Islands.	Joined Home Guard. Jakarta airport attacked.
Feb.		Singapore surrenders. Battle of the Java Sea, capture of Timor.	We move to Bandung.
Mar.		Japanese invade Burma and capture Rangoon. Conquest of Java completed.	Rejoined Home Guard. We enter POW camp. Birth of daughter Shifra. <i>Boom Boom</i> , narrow escape. Lecture: <i>Visible and Invisible Rays</i> .
Apr.	Germans reinforce Italians in Libya and commence six-month advance to El-Alamein.	Conquest of Bataan completed.	Jan de Bakker bakes <i>matzah</i> . <i>Passover seder</i> .
May	Germans commence six month advance to Stalingrad and the Caucasus.	Allied success in Battle of the Coral Sea.	Execution of marines.
June		Allied victory in Battle of Midway. Japanese occupy Attu and Kiska in the Aleutians.	To Tjilatjap. <i>Vakarimashta</i> . The Ego-antenna.
July		Major Chinese successes in Kiangsi Province.	Tjilatjap, Camp Two.
Aug.		Allied landings on Tulagi and Guadalcanal. Beginning of New Guinea campaign.	

- | | | |
|------|---|---|
| Oct. | British victory at El-Alamein. | |
| Nov. | Russian victory at Stalingrad.
Anglo-American conquest of Morocco-Algeria. | Naval battle of Solomon Islands. |
| Dec. | Intensified Anglo-American bombing of Germany. | Jew Roosevelt, Jew Churchill.
<i>Chanukah menorah.</i> |

1943

- | | | |
|------|---|--|
| Jan. | | Boat trip to Singapore.
In hospital for dysentery. |
| Feb. | Russians recapture Kharkov. | |
| Mar. | German spring advance re-takes Kharkov. | Allied encirclement of Rabaul.

F-force to Thailand.
Yits Lisser. Alf Levy.
Hans Hollaender. Mose.
Lou Velmans. Sgt. Blashki. Joe Taylor. Lt. Waite. Lt. Hulsewe. |
| Apr. | | G-force to Japan.
David Marshall. |
| May | Allied capture of Tunis ends Axis presence in Africa. | H-force to Thailand.
The Rice train.
Nightmarches: Death Masks. |

June			Kanbury. The Lost Sabbath. Sealed Fate. Thailand jungle: strangulation of Death. Cholera. The Tamil's Death Tree.
July	Allies invade Sicily. Mussolini forced to resign. Major battles at Orel and Kursk.	Concerted Allied offensive commences in South Pacific starting with capture of Rendova Island.	The Unfinished Bridge. Tamarkan Bridge Camp. Exit Yits. Swim in the Kwai.
Aug.	Russians recapture Kharkov and com- mence broad advance.	Allied recapture of Aleutians completed.	Lecture: <i>Freedom of Decisionmaking.</i> Armand and Hans. "Die I Shall." Political Kommisar. Black market scandal.
Sept.	Allies invade Italy. Italian Radoglio regime signs armistice, but Mussolini rescued by Germans and rein- stated as puppet. Salerno landing.		Confiscation of diary. Kanbury: rains. Alf's funeral.
Oct.			Elze, compassionate hypnotist.
Nov.		Allies recapture Gilbert Islands.	
Dec.			Return to Singapore. Sime Road Camp. Soybean diet. <i>Chanukah</i> party. Lecture series: <i>Des- cription of Nature.</i>

1944

Jan.	Anzio landing.	
Feb.	Russians reach Estonia and Poland.	Allied invasion of Marshall Islands.
Mar.		Allies land on Admiralty Islands.
May	Russians reach Rumania.	Return to Changi. Canadian war amputee. Changi Gaol vastly extended. Camp library.
June	Allies capture Rome. Normandy invasion.	Commencement of persistent bombing of Japan itself.
July		Allies capture Saipan in Marianas.
Aug.	Rumania surrenders. Allies invade France from South. French resistance takes Paris.	Recapture of Guam.
Sept.	Russians enter Bulgaria, then Yugoslavia. Allies take Brussels and enter Germany. Russians enter East Prussia.	Dedication of <i>Ohel Jacob</i> Synagogue in the camp.

Oct.	Russians enter Hungary.	Allies land on Leyte in Philippines. Second Battle of the Philippine Sea (Leyte Gulf).	
Nov.		Recapture of Rabaul commenced.	Elze's funeral.
Dec.	Battle of the Bulge.	Allied invasion of Mindoro and Luzon.	<i>Habeemah</i> , <i>Changi Jewish Forum</i> published for <i>Chanukah</i> .

1945

Jan.	Russians capture Warsaw.		Airport work groups.
Feb.	Major advances into Germany from East, and Yalta Conference.	Month-long battle on Iwo Jima begins.	Cultural programs.
Mar.		Manila recaptured.	Entertainment.
Apr.	American and Russian armies meet.	Two-month battle on Okinawa begins.	<i>Habeemah</i> , Passover edition.
May	Russians capture Berlin. Germany surrenders.	Allies invade Borneo.	
July		Naval bombardment of Japan itself.	

Aug.	First atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Russia declares war on Japan, and invades Manchuria. Second atomic bomb on Nagasaki. Japan surrenders.	Leaflets dropped on Changi. Liberation.
Sept.		RAPWI-Rabbi, re-opened <i>Maghen Aboth</i> Synagogue in Singapore. <i>Simchat Torah</i> services.
Dec.		Wilhelmina Camp in Singapore. Repatriation in full swing.
1946		<i>Tu B'shvat</i> party.
Jan.		Visit to Sumatra and Java camps.
April		Passover <i>Seder</i> in Wilhelmina Camp.
May		Rachel and children return to Holland on hospital ship <i>Oranje</i> .
June		I return to Holland on the <i>New Amsterdam</i>. Ten-year cycle closes. Periscope.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Naomi Rosensweig Hecht for her devotion and skillful adaptation of the translated manuscript; to Malcolm Jordan-Robinson and Esther Posner, who did not spare any efforts in the editing and preparation of this book; to typists and other friends who helped nurse the manuscript to its final completion; to Ronald Searle for permission to use his published war drawings; to Gary Levine, author of *Brushstrokes*, for his help and interest.

For valuable information and source material, special thanks to D. Dambie, representative of the Australian ex-POWs; the Netherlands government agencies; the editors of *Moesson*, the Dutch magazine of the Japanese ex-POWs; the Indonesian and Japanese representatives at the United Nations; Mr. Glaser from The Hague; and Dave Arkush and Jack Greenberg from London, England.

But perhaps the greatest acknowledgment should be given to my wife, Rachel, who is one of the heroines of this story. She shared with me the hardships of our odyssey from Holland to Lithuania to Japan and then to Java; and she suffered the privations of imprisonment with remarkable fortitude. She denied herself in order to ensure the survival of our three small children.

In recent years, Rachel has spent many long evenings in the security and warmth of our present home organizing the materials for this book, as well as for other manuscripts.

CHAPLAIN ON THE RIVER KWAI

CHAPLAIN ON THE RIVER KWAI is a riveting and sensitive portrait of life among Allied prisoners of war in Japanese camps.

The author, Rabbi Chaim Nussbaum, experienced the rigors of hunger, disease, and mistreatment as a chaplain in the notorious prison camps on the River Kwai between 1942 and 1945.

Written from his diary and recollections of this dark period in W.W.II's Pacific theater, CHAPLAIN ON THE RIVER KWAI is the saga of a rabbi's struggle to provide hope and comfort to men of all faiths in the face of inhuman treatment, despair and death.

This unique book features:

- A personalized historical record of the Allied war effort from the invasion of Java to the bombing of Hiroshima.
- Details of horrifying Death Marches and sadistic torture.
- A collection of published and unpublished POW sketches and paintings by British prisoner Ronald Searle, now England's foremost illustrator.
- Vignettes and selections from POW lectures, magazines and religious services organized in the Japanese camps.

The characters, impressions and illustrations in this impactful book are sure to be memorable.

CHAPLAIN ON THE RIVER KWAI helps to fill the significant gap in literature on the Pacific front of World War II.

Chaim Nussbaum is an ordained rabbi and a mathematical physicist. Born in Poland and raised in Holland, he served as an army chaplain in the Dutch East Indies, Singapore, Java and Thailand from 1941 through 1945.

He has authored six books and now lectures and writes on philosophy and education. He resides in Toronto, Canada.

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