Experiences at Shamshuipo & Sendai Camps

by Cicero Rozario

Previously published in *Voz de Macaenses de Vancouver* in November, 2001 and in two issues of the Bulletin of Lusitano Club of California. The permission of the Lusitano Club to reproduce these articles is gratefully acknowledged.
Drawings by Cicero Rozario and A V Skvorzov, Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Force
Editorial comments are shown in square brackets [...– Ed] indicates those by the Editor of the Lusitano Club; all others are by HA d'Assumpção)

Shamshuipo Camp


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[After Hong Kong's surrender on December 25, 1941,] it took us twelve hours to reach Shamsuipo Prisoner-of-War Camp as there were over 10,000 men and only two ferries, so we had to walk all the way from Star Ferry, a distance of about two miles, lugging all our belongings.

We were put in Quonset huts with about 50 men in each hut. No. 6 Company personnel had their own hut, and No. 5 Company and Field Ambulance of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Force were next to us. In fact, the Volunteers were all in a row as we were under the command of the same sergeant major.

Besides the Volunteers, there were the Royal Scots and Middlesex Regiments, one Indian artillery regiment, one Chinese Field Ambulance Section, and the two Canadian Regiments – the Royal Rifles of Canada, and the Winnipeg Grenadiers. After the Chinese and Indians were later released, there was a rumour that we (the Portuguese) would also be released, but this never happened.

It was winter and very cold, and the windows and the doors of the huts had all been looted so we had to go scrounging (a polite word for stealing) for pieces of wood and corrugated metal sheets to fabricate our own with the help of the Royal Engineers.

POWs allowed to send only one letter a month

We were allowed to write one letter a month which was only sent out after being censored by the Japanese. What you could say: "Dear Mom, How are you? I'm well. Your loving son."

Father Green tended to our spiritual needs, saying mass every morning in one of the huts. Leonel Silva was his aide. (Leonel's father, Nado, was also in the camp). The Engineers built us a brick altar to give us quite a chapel. Father Green was badly beaten up by the Japanese one day, but I never found out why. [In his memoirs published here in Spring 1998 Luigi Ribeiro, who was also a POW, wrote:

"Fr. Green had reason to believe that the camp authorities had not spent all the money received from the Vatican. He had the brazen audacity of going to the Japanese to ask for an explanation in connection with the disbursement of the Vatican funds.

For his impudence, Fr. Green was given such a battering that he passed out completely and had to be revived by throwing water over his face." – Ed.]

We had a hospital and a mortuary, both of which had no proper windows or doors, so when we walked by these places we could watch the doctors and staff going about their business.

We also had a chicken farm, a pig farm and a football field, a garden full of tomatoes, melons and lots of greens, but they were only for hospital patients so there was no chance of scrounging, as there were guards all over the place – Japanese, and our own men.

The pigs in the farm were huge, like cows, which the Engineers killed by hitting them over the head with a wooden mallet. We once sat on the side of the field and watched this pig chanse the Engineers. More Engineers had to come out to help them.

POWs forced labour at Kai Tak, Aberdeen and Lai Chi-kok

We were put to work in Kai Tak Airflield, cleaning nullahs (large, open boxed culverts) and shovelling down a whole hill (quite a mountain) to enlarge the airport. A few soldiers died because of landslides, despite our futile efforts to dig them out.

We had a first-aid station under a tree and the sick could go there to rest and recuperate. On the first day, there were two or three of us. The next day, there were ten. Then everybody got into the act until the Japanese

sentries chased us away with fixed bayonets. Then it was back to normal, with two or three genuine patients, for the others preferred not to get "sick". Anyway, at Kai Tak, the grass was so long that you could go to sleep and the guards couldn't see you.

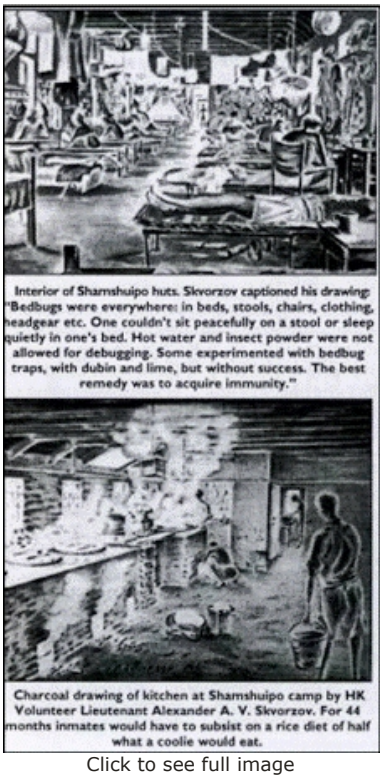
We also had to shift bombs from one godown to the other stacking and unstacking the 500 and 1,000 pound bombs.

The other big job was at Aberdeen. We had to take oil and kerosene drums down to the pier and then later load them on to a barge to be taken to Lai Chi-kok Socony (Standard Oil Company of New York) Installation. There were so many drums that it took us six months to clear the godowns.

We got up at 5:00 a.m., had breakfast, and waited on the parade ground to be counted. Then we were put on a barge which took over an hour to reach Aberdeen. Most of us slept on the barge and others chatted and read books. The Japanese brought in a lot of books giving us quite a good library. (The books were looted from private libraries in the Colony – Ed.)

Allies bomb targets in Hong Kong

While we were working on the drums, an Allied spotter plane flew over us every morning. The air-raid siren went and the Japanese guards ran up the hills, far away from the drums. We sat on the drums, and as we had our own spies, we knew the same spotter plane came over every morning. The American bombers never bombed the prison camp as if they knew where we worked.



Interior of Shamshuipo huts. Skvorzov captioned his drawing: "Bedbugs were everywhere: in beds, stools, chairs, clothing, headgear etc. One couldn't sit peacefully on a stool or sleep quietly in one's bed. Hot water and insect powder were not allowed for debugging. Some experimented with bedbug traps, with dubin and lime, but without success. The best remedy was to acquire immunity."

Charcoal drawing of kitchen at Shamshuipo camp by HK Volunteer Lieutenant Alexander A. V. Skvorzov. For 44 months inmates would have to subsist on a rice diet of half what a coolie would eat.

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When all the drums were taken to Lai Chi-Kok, the spotter plane still came around as usual, and the siren went and everyone looked towards Lai Chi-Kok. On September 2, 1942, a heavy droning sound led us to believe that this was it. The huge tanks went up in a black mushroom cloud, and we could see the drums going up through the smoke followed by many fighter planes strafing the godowns until there was nothing left.

The fire in Lai Chi-Kok burned for a week. Every day, we took our bowl of rice at dinner time to the field and watched the huge fire, singing, "Over there, everywhere, the Yanks are coming". By the third day, the Japanese guards were also singing with us. If they found out what we were singing they would have set on us with bayonets.

The Americans also bombed Kai Tak and some shipping in the harbour. But they were gone by the time the air-raid sirens sounded the warning for the planes had glided in low over their targets, escaping early detection.

Later we went to Lai Chi-Kok to clean up and it was like No-Man's-Land, no trees, everything black for about a mile. The godown was all smashed up. We had to take the drums to our prison camp for storage. Each drum was riddled with over a hundred bullet holes.

We had other jobs besides, which was against the Geneva Convention (which Japan did not sign). One of the interpreters, who told this to the Japanese, was badly beaten up.

The ones who didn't go outside on forced labour had to remain and clean up the camp, do the gardening, and even tailoring. We also had to unload rice from the trucks when they came in. In those days, I could carry 250 lb. bags; now, I can't even lift a 20 lb. bag of manure.

In the beginning, the cook house was staffed by the Royal Engineers, but later on, it was mostly 'our boys', so we had to do the firewood, chopping up whole trees which were wet and knotty. Every time you took a chop at it, the axe would fly out and you were left with the handle. The Japanese gave us pick axes instead but the same thing happened. We dreaded this chopping business. Every hut had to have a man at the door doing guard duty in case the Japanese ever wanted to know how many people were inside. Everyone took turns for a two-hour guard duty and I always chose the 4:00 to 6:00 a.m. shift. At 4:00 a.m., someone would wake me up, and I'd say, "OK," and go back to sleep. I was never caught.

When we were doing guard duty at the doors of the hut, we sometimes got together for a chat to while away the time. One day, one of the *kwai-lohs* (British) tied a long string to a black piece of paper and dragged it behind him. Thinking it to be a little rat, we stamped on it. He turned round and laughed. He did this every day fooling a lot of people.

One day, while he as walking his 'little rat', a Japanese guard rounded the corner behind him. Thinking it to be a rat, he also stamped on it. The *kwai-loh* turned round, and his laughter froze when the guard didn't think it was funny. You can guess what happened next. We didn't see the 'little rat' any more.

You could be called on at any time to do some work, and while playing cards one day, we heard the sergeant-major call, "Sergeant, I need five men." All of us promptly jumped out of the window of the hut, so that when the sergeant looked in, he saw an empty hut. He then went to the waterfront, and collared those who were enjoying the walks and sightseeing. But when the sergeant came back, he was surprised to find a hut full of men.

But woe to you if you ever were assigned to do a hospital job. It was dysentery time and you had to wash the bed-pans. The moment you brought one in, they would give you another one until you hoped that they would all die.

Health problems

Some men did die of dysentery. When my uncle had it, he weighed only 40 lbs. I could have carried him on his stretcher by myself. The Japanese sent him to Queen Mary Hospital, and after three months, he returned. When I saw him, I said, "Uncle, I thought you were dead." He chased me around the room.

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In a primitive operating theatre, British Army doctors fought to save lives. Their instruments were razor blades and knifes; the drugs, salt and peanut oil. Even those were precious and zealously guarded. The Japanese had taken over enormous stores of medical supplies which they used only for their soldiery. Later, by bribing sentries, essential drugs were secured in minute quantities.To obtain money for this, men sold to the sentries, all they had including gold teeth. (A V Skvorzov)

When there was an infestation of bugs, flies and rats during the dysentery outbreak, the Japanese offered a packet of cigarettes for every 100 flies caught. Some of the prisoners went around with their drinking mugs to catch flies. If they caught a big fly they would break it in two; that way, they would earn their pack of cigarettes anyway as the Japanese didn't bother to count the pests.

Being afflicted with scabies was like having boils all over one's body. The treatment was having the patient hold on to a bar in front of him while the medic helper scrubbed his back with a brush with long bristles. This treatment would cause his back to bleed, and was so painful that he would faint after the second pass. This treatment would go on until the patient was cured, but that was impossible given the poor food we were getting.

When cases of diphtheria occurred soldiers were dying like flies because there was no serum for its treatment. Those who went into hospital, would die on the third day. Each time someone died, the bugler would blow his horn, but after ten men died in one day, the Japanese stopped this practice.

In the hospital, the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) tended to the sick and dying, but tended towards the dying for they were suspected of grabbing a patient's belongings when he eventually called it quits. The *kwai-lohs* cynically told us that RAMC also meant "Rob All My Comrades".

We had a Canadian dentist who was very thin and weak from malnutrition. When I had a toothache and couldn't eat I joined in the queue to see him. I told him, "I'm going to scream, but don't mind me, and keep pulling." He did just that, but he was so weak he literally had a foot on my chest, believe it or not, as he tugged. I screamed louder when he broke my tooth into three pieces, and then he had to do this all over again two more times.

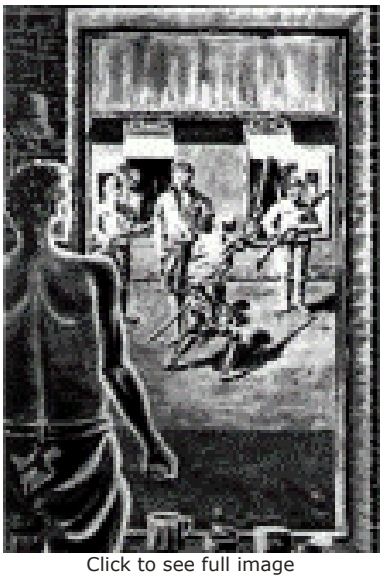
After a month or so, I had another bad tooth. This time, he got me out of the queue and said, "You first." He tugged and once again I screamed, only the screaming was no acting as my tooth was being pulled without any painkillers – we didn't have any.

After all that screaming, the guys in the queue ran away. That's why I was always first whenever the dentist saw me. I had six more teeth extracted in the camp, and shuddered each time. I was a brave man then. Not anymore. After the war I had all my teeth pulled out (with injections of anaesthetic course). Now I have two sets of pearly white teeth and no

more toothache. When I was sent to Japan, a friend told me that the dentist had died in camp.

Everything was tasteless. As it was, most of the time we just had half a mess tin of rice, and a bowl of hot water, twice a day. Sometimes we had vegetables. The same stuff for six months – chrysanthemum leaves, chili water, etc. The English engineers threw out the *pei-tan* (preserved black eggs) because they looked "rotten".

Fights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Most of the guys in the camp were already hot-tempered, and as we were given chili water many fights occurred among us. I remember one fight where one of our boys was beating up this other guy, and he turned to us and said in Macanese, "Stop the fight. I'm out of breath." We stopped the fight and called it a draw to save face for the *kwai-loh*.

One of the prisoners was a bully who kept picking on small and sickly people. One time, he picked on a tall American seaman who also happened to be a boxer. They sparred until the American hit the bully on the mouth knocking out his false teeth, stopping the fight. Everyone helped look for his teeth, and when these were found, the fight continued. But eventually we had to stop it as it was too one-sided. After that the bully was very careful who he picked on.

Escapes

With outside help there were a few escapes from the camp. Whenever there was an escape the whole camp had to parade on the football field as punishment for as long as twelve hours, and sometimes in the rain. We would have to miss a meal. Eventually barbed wire was placed in the nullahs (open drainage channels) to deter escapes. The Japanese also made us sign a paper saying we would not escape.

The Japanese would search the huts and confiscate a cart full of electric wires, and stamp flat all our frying pans. You had to pay three cigarettes for another frying pan. These were made by the engineers by welding a handle to a sweet (candy) or biscuit tin. The engineers also made clogs when your shoes wore out. They made a lot of cigarettes as the shoe straps would get old, and would snap when wet. You felt like a woman walking around with a shoe with a broken high heel.

Whenever something the Japanese considered negative happened in camp, such as an escape or a prohibited radio found, visitors from outside would know because the POWs had to squat and wait for hours until the Japanese would come, and tell them "No parcels today."

After some prisoners had escaped, the barbed wire fence around the camp was electrified, and turned on at night. In the morning, the guards would switch off the electricity. One morning they forgot. A prisoner who was sweeping the ground near the fence, accidentally touched it and was electrocuted. The people working with him, seeing what had happened, ran to the guard house to tell the guards to switch off the current, but when they returned, the poor blighter was already dead. I forget his name, although he was a good friend. I think he worked with Alex Azedo in Optorg & Co.

In camp, we learned to make our own beds. There was Japanese inspection every morning. We cooked a lot of stuff but mostly with oil and soy sauce in our *chow-fan* (fried rice). We hammered nails to hold our clog straps, and we darned socks, and sewed on buttons. The smart woman will marry an ex-prisoner-of-war. (With servants, my wife had nothing to do; so she learned to play mahjong, and now she is fully occupied).

Whenever we washed our clothes, we hung them on the wire, got a chair and a good book, and waited until they dried. If not, someone might come knocking, trying to sell you your own pair of pants or shirt that you had just washed! If your clothes were too old for them to steal to sell, the advice was to wait for rain and hang them on the line. Later the sun would come out and dry them.

The latrine was about half a mile away from the huts and we complained to the authorities about the long walk at night and especially in the winter. For once, the Japanese understood, and allowed us to each have a tin. We would pass water, put the tin under our tatami, and then take them to the latrine in the morning. Like hell we did. We emptied them out the window.

One night, one of the POWs filled his tin and threw it out of his neighbour's window. But the window was closed and the urine splashed over this neighbour. The perpetrator pretended to be asleep when he heard his neighbour mutter, "My, it's raining. Funny, the windows are closed – the ceiling must be leaking." The neighbour put a bucket next to his head and went back to sleep.

The Japanese brought in a lot of sports equipment for the prisoners to use in their spare time. We played baseball, soccer, hockey, tennis, volleyball and even lawn-bowls, but the bowls didn't last very long as we were playing on sand. The little grass was reserved for smokers who weren't to know until two decades later that they were also smoking grass. We were just prisoners. Some of the boys also learned bridge and chess.

One day, the Japanese challenged us to play baseball. We fielded a good team. When a certain Japanese came up to bat, a lot of voices shouted, "Come on, get this guy." He put down the bat and asked, "Who said that?" Nobody answered. But we struck him out.

This guy's nickname was "Slap-Happy". A Japanese-Canadian, he who went about slapping people for no reason at all. He was hanged after the war, and was very arrogant at the trial, but he was no match for Marcus da Silva who was the prosecutor.

In those days almost everyone smoked. "No Smoking" signs were rare. Cigarettes such as Camels, Lucky Strikes, Capstan, etc., were popular. But as the war progressed these imported smokes were increasingly rare in camp and were prized. Cigarettes were bartered for other desired commodities. In fact we smoked any cigarette – pine needles, tea leaves, grass – you name it.

We also had Japanese cigarettes which were very strong. One puff got you dizzy. We called them "killers" and "cow dung". In offering someone one of these Japanese cigarettes, we would say, "Here have a cow dung."

One of the *kwai-lohs* in the camp would often come up to you when you were smoking and say, "Give us a light, chum." Then you'd see your cigarette getting shorter and shorter. This guy had a hollow piece of paper and was smoking your cigarette. We got mad but also wise to this trick.

Nanelli Baptista, an artist and chain-smoker at Christmas, would make a greeting card for three cigarettes. (I traded a pair of knitted gloves for five cigarettes). Naneli had so many orders that I had to help him, and almost became a chain-smoker myself.

Every Christmas, we wished each other and hoped to see everyone outside by the following Christmas. As two more Christmases in camp went, our hopes waned.

Trading outside the camp fence

Despite the grimness of camp life, there were lighter moments. We used to buy some provisions from outside. In the beginning, we were buying Chinese cakes for a dollar, but later the cakes shrank from a five inch diameter to one inch so that they could fit through the fence when only a few guards were around. You would take the cake in a "one-two-three" grab as the seller outside would take the money simultaneously.

Once a POW tore a dollar bill in half and bought a bag of sugar this way. The prisoner had the sugar and the Chinese outside the fence got cheated with half a dollar. The POW had a good laugh. The next day he went hunting again with the other half of his dollar. But this time the Chinese seller with the sugar was disguised, and when "one-two-three" was called, they grabbed simultaneously. The seller now had the other half of his dollar, but the POW got his comeuppance with only a packet of sand!

One day my Mom sent me a papaya and since the following day was Sunday I saved it for a Sunday treat with a few friends. Fearing foraging rats, I tied the ends of the papaya with a long string to nails on both sides of the room, dangling it in the middle of the room. How could I have guessed that this little (or big) rat was a wire-walker. In the morning, I found a neat hole bitten through the papaya. No matter. I cut around the hole and shared the dessert with others.

In our hut, for a while, there was this chomp-chomp sound on the roof every night. It didn't bother us, but this particular mama's boy complained to the padre that he thought the hut was haunted, so the padre brought in some holy water, and blessed the hut. But the chomp-chomp continued. One night, there was the usual noise, and bingo, a huge rat fell out from a hole in the ceiling, but it ran out of the hut, too fast for us to catch it.

The married and older POWs constantly worried about their wives and children on the outside. We, the younger people between 20 years and 30 years old, did our best to help these married people, joking and telling them funny stories. Thank heavens they listened and joined in.

Morale boosters

Morale of the man in camp was boosted by music and stage shows produced by the camp inmates. The late Johnny Fonseca who was very popular in camp, and well known even to the English and Canadian POWs, did a lot for our boys with his guitar. He accompanied us while we sang with some *kwai-lohs* joining in.

We also had concerts for which full credit must be given to Nanelli Baptista, his helpers and the Royal Engineers crew for the stage setting, to Eli Alves, Reinaldo Gutierrez and [Mario Francisco] Alarcon for their very sweet violin music; to the "girls" – Sonny Castro (who dressed as Carmen Miranda), Eddie and Gussy Noronha, Robert Pereira and a few more. (You couldn't say they were not girls unless you disrobed them!)

The Japanese camp commandant, his entourage, and some outside friends usually came to these events, occupying the first three rows in the improvised theatre, arriving in limousines, while we looked at them the way movie fans ogle the stars when they arrive for the Oscar awards in Hollywood.

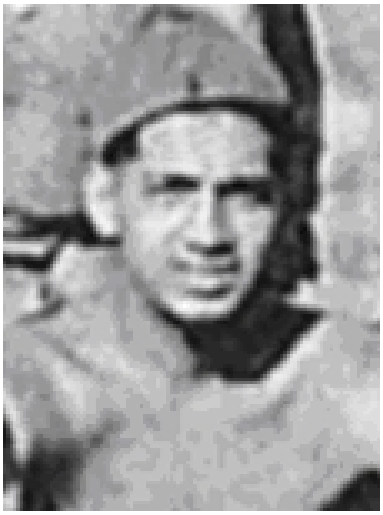
Before I say something about George Ainslie [Private 2841], a good friend who at 18 or 19 was our youngest POW at Shamshuipo, I must digress: he and I (and others) used to dive together at the old Victoria Recreation Club (V.R.C.) on the Hong Kong waterfront. At first, we were diving from the lower one-metre board, then the three-metre board, and then from the verandah into the pool. We couldn't go any higher so we dove from the window in the clubhouse into the sea. Finally, we ended up on the roof of the building, and looked down. All we could say was, "Jeepers", so we climbed down, but one of the guys slipped and fell into the sea. It was then that we saw the huge crowd on the waterfront having a free show. But the show must go on.

The height was scary; about seven storeys high, and to add to the danger, the water below was relatively shallow, being at low tide. Our hearts must have stopped as we took the plunge which, seemingly took a long time to reach the water. But all of us: Eddie (Monkey) Roza, Lionel Roza-Pereira, Peter Rull, Manaelly Roza, Hugo Ribeiro and a guy called Pullen [William P, Gunner DR284], took the plunge. I had a stiff neck for a week. Now back to Shamshuipo camp.

George Ainslie died of diphtheria in the prison camp and Pullen died in the war. David Hutchinson [Private 3552] was the fellow with the scabies, and fainted when they scrubbed his back. He was very friendly with our boys as he was a member of the VRC and the Colony's 100-yard swimming champion. (After the war, he went to Australia, married an Australian Catholic girl, became a Catholic himself, and went to mass every day. I'm quite sure a lot of us don't go to mass every day – not yours truly anyway – but if you say there is a mahjong game at 6.00 a.m. I bet a lot of us will get up at 5.00 a.m.).

Drafted to go to Japan

One fine day (in August, 1944) we went out on a working party, and on returning (to Shamshuipo) at 6:00 PM., the Japanese camp commandant and a few dignitaries were waiting for us at the football field. They were there to pick the fitter men to go to Japan. They made us walk around the field, couldn't make up their minds, and finally said, "All go."



Cicero Laertes Rozario from a group photo taken in 1945 in Sendai

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We were put on one side of the camp, separated from the other prisoners by barbed wire. We made a hole in the barbed stuff and came out to chat with our friends and returned at night to sleep. One chap almost got caught by the Japanese sentry. He ran and jumped over the fence. The guard fired but missed. This was Zinho Gosano.

The Japanese doctors and specialists were there every day to give us injections, swabs and other tests. I think there were about 20 in all. You would have to stand in line whether your turn was today or tomorrow. One chap objected to having a small glass rod inserted in his back-side to extract a stool sample by passing gas at the critical moment. The medic got the full blast, and showed this chap that he was really mad. It's a wonder he survived the beating.

An earlier ship that left our camp with soldiers for Japan in September 27 1942, mostly men from the Royal Scots and Middlesex Regiments, were on the Lisbon Maru which was sunk by an American submarine, the U.S.S. Grouper, with the loss of some 1,000 Allied POWs. Most were machine-gunned by the Japanese when, trapped in the hold of the sinking ship, the prisoners attempted to come up on deck to save themselves. [For the definitive source, see: "The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru: Britain's Forgotten Wartime Tragedy" by Tony Banham, Hong Kong University Press, 2006 – Ed]

We were going to see another country and we were not unhappy as we had only traveled only as far as Macau previously. Danger at this juncture never crossed our minds.

We were the second lot to get shipped out. [The latest research shows that it was the fourth of five contingents of POWs sent to Japan as slave laborers – Ed] The first lot was sent to the docks in Toyama, Japan, earlier in the year.

The list, below, of Macanese men in the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps who were sent to the coal mines in Japan: [We've updated the author's list with information from a website maintained by the "Center for Research, Allied POWS Under the Japanese for the Detailed Study of Guam and all Allied POWS used as Slaves by the Japanese in World War II" and other sites – Ed.]

HONG KONG MACANESE VOLUNTEER POWS AT SENDAI CAMP, 1944-45

Ablong, RA, Spr
Alves, DCS, Pvt
Azedo, Caita M, Pvt
Baleros, JP "Pepe", Pvt
Baptista, Manuel Alberto, CQMS
Barnes, RJ, Pvt
Barretto, Antonio CM, Pvt
Basto, Arthur José de C, Cpl
Campos, Leo R, Pvt
Castilho, Thomas M, Pvt
Carvalho, Antonio B, Pvt
Cruz, Arthur Richard S, Pvt
Cruz, Alberto Reinaldo, Pvt
Cruz, George A, Pvt
Cruz, Turibio José, Pvt
Demee, BEM, Pvt [David EM Demee]
Fernandes, Eddie M (died 12/44)
Ferreira, NG, Pvt
Figuereido, Eduardo J, LCpl
Fonseca, João Carlos, Cpl
Franco, "Bico" Albert V, Pvt
Franco, EM, Pvt, (died1/29/45)
Garcia, Hugo A, Gnr [Hugo Albert Garcia]
Garcia, William Alec, LCpl
Gosano, J "Zinho" M, Pvt
Jesus, JM, Pvt [José Maria Jesus]
Jorge, Achilles, Pvt [Achilles Vicente Jorge]
Larcina, "Mimi" H, LSgt [Hermilio Maria L Larcina, Royal Navy]
Marçal, BA, Gnr
Marques, Emmanuel S, Pvt
Marques, "Joe" A, Pvt
Mathias, Harry A, Gnr [Henrique A Matthias]
Neves, Antonio C, Pvt
Noronha, Antonio "Butter" F, Pvt
Noronha, Eduardo "Dickie" A, Pvt
Noronha, Hermie "Ariri," Cpl [Henrique António de Noronha]
Prata, Alfred JM, Pvt
Pereira, "Jeje" A, Pvt
Reis, FW, Pvt
Remedios, CF, Cpl
Remedios, EAV, Pvt
Remedios, LAR, Gnr
Remedios, Jimmy D dos, Sgt
Remedios, JC, Sgt
Ribeiro, CAJ V, Cpl
Ribeiro, Henrique A, Pvt [Henrique Augusto Vieira Ribeiro]
Ribeiro, Hugo Jesus, Pvt
Ribeiro, João FV, Pvt
Ribeiro, Luigi Gonzaga V, Gnr
Reis, Francis William, Pvt
Rocha, Freddy L, Gnr

Rocha, Cezar L, "Sonny(?)" Gnr. [Carlos 'Sonny' Rocha]
Roza, ML da, Sgt
Rozario, Cicero Laertes, Pvt
Sequeira, CM, Pvt
Sequeira, VAC, Pvt
Silva, Marciano CM da, LCpl
Silva, Roberto Maximo da, LCpl
Silva,"Rocky" RM, Pvt
Silva, R Darius, Pvt [Ricardo Domingos Silva?]
Soares, CE, Cpl
Souza, HA, Pvt [Henrique António Souza]
Souza, Leo A, Pvt
Souza, Robert A, Pvt
Wilkinson, William RJ, Pvt
Xavier, Andrew C, Pvt
Xavier, A "Smokey" M, Pvt
Xavier, AP "Chunky" Pvt
Xavier, JH, Pvt [José Hilario Xavier]
Xavier, Louis Augusto, LBdr

Some of our boys will also remember these fellow POWs: Carlos Arnulphy, Tadeusz A. Jolandovsky, Jojo Lapsky, T.R.Ingram, Dave, Norm and Stanley Leonard, Reggie Rictson, Constantine M. Wolosh, Stanley George Poole, and others in the same group.

The ship finally came in to take us to Japan. All the injections, swabs and other tests were finally completed, and we were ready to go, taking all our belonging and the ten packets of cigarettes given to each of us by the Japanese authorities. We were paraded and inspected by the camp commandant. Our friends came to say goodbye to us.

We were ferried to the ship anchored in mid-harbour. It was a small cargo ship which you might call a tramp steamer. As we sailed out of Hong Kong, we gazed back forlornly because we didn't expect to be back – at least for a while. We felt this was our last look at our home.

At first, we were escorted by three Japanese destroyers, but after three days, they left. I kept thinking about the American submarines.

Travel steerage class

Then we were sent down to the hold to our quarters. The place was full of flies as the ship was also carrying a cargo of pungent Chinese condiments (the likes of *min-see* and *tau-see*).

Then the shocker came; our sleeping quarters were up against the sides of the ship about four feet above the waterline. You had to sleep side-by-side with your knees bent as you only had three feet from your head to your toe.

I was sleeping between (two well-built chaps) David and Stanley Leonard, and if I moved a little, their fists would automatically fall on my chest. It was torture sleeping in our cramped space. But when we weren't sleeping, we whiled away the time playing cards for cigarettes.

When dinner time came, one hand was used to shoo the flies from the mess tin, while the other hand held the spoon. It didn't matter if you chewed up a few flies as well. You would have to be a magician to shoo all them away. Still, the meals were better than in Shamshuipo camp, both in quality and quantity, as David Leonard worked in the galley and brought back a lot of extra food for me.

We were allowed on deck from where we could observe schools of porpoises and flying fish escorting our ship. One night, I had to go to the toilet and as I got up to the deck, I saw the huge waves – literally 30 feet high – crashing down on the ship. It was so frightening that I ran back down and forgot what I had originally gone up for.

I climbed up on one of the *min-see* buckets to get back to bed, but alas, the lid broke, and I found one of my feet in the bucket. I found some newsprint and cleaned my foot, went up and squeezed into my confined space between the two Leonards. After a while, I heard sniffing from both sides of me, and heard them say, "Must be Rozario," while their huge fists came down on my chest.

We bathed ourselves every day by hosing ourselves with sea water. One day it rained and we all came up on deck to feel some real fresh water, and have a good shower. We managed to soap ourselves, but before we finished, the rain stopped. We had to hose the soap away with seawater.

Our ship made a stop at a port in Taiwan, a Japanese possession at the time, for loading and unloading. After the cargo was unloaded, the ship was reloaded with machinery and it got even harder to sleep as they made a lot of noise in the night. We were about one month at sea, the ship zig-zagging all the way (to confuse American submarines).

Arrival in Japan

We arrived on an island in Southern Japan, and had to be ferried to the mainland. When we landed, each one of us was sprayed all over with germicide. Then the authorities took away our cigarettes – the card-losers had the last laugh.

The Japanese put us on a train where we were seated for the next 48 hours where there was no space to lie down. Whenever we approached a station, we had to put the blinds down to allow us to continue to sleep. *Beri-beri*, from malnutrition, which plagued half the group, got worse, making our ankles swell to double their normal size, and making it very tiring whenever we walked.

The toilet was at the back of the last coach. You had to squat and hang on to two handles. You could not go to the lavatory when nearing a station because when the train braked, you went flying. We learned that the hard way.

The captain of the guards gave us a pep talk. Among other things, he said, "If you try to escape, you will be shot-ted to death." We preferred not to escape for there was no place to escape to.

When we arrived somewhere in Northern Japan, we had to walk through an underground route for about five miles, I believe, before coming out into the open. Then we had to climb a hill to get up to the two huts, one of

which was to house the Hong Kong Volunteers, and the Canadians and British Army regulars in the other. Later, ten American servicemen joined the Canadians.

We arrived at 2:00 A.M. when it was already bright and sunny. We were given a hot bowl of soup and a bun, after which we fell asleep, exhausted, and dead to the world for 12 to 15 hours.

After resting for two days, the Japanese supplied us with very good underwear and a pair of 'tubes' (rubber shoes with the big toe separated from the other toes).

We learned to count in Japanese and learned a few Japanese words to make it easier for us to understand them. I regret now that I never learned Japanese.

Improved nutrition for miners

Yoshima Coal Mine, Kyushu, Japan, where Allied POWs were forced into slave labor

Click to see full image

We had better meals and larger portions, compared to what we had in Hong Kong – barley cooked with Japanese rice, a little horsemeat, a slab of horse blood pudding, and a piece of *gyko* (salted and pickled turnip). You also get a bun if you went down to the coal mine and you could trade a tin of corned beef for six buns, but then go without buns for six days until your debt was paid off; and then you'd trade another six buns for a tin of something else – usually SPAM, paté or more corned beef. People who didn't go down to the mines did not get any buns. We also got paid 10 sen a day for working in the coal mine, but as there was nothing to buy, we used the money for gambling.

The first time we went down to this condemned mine it was dim and eerie. Pneumatic drills made a lot of noise – real scary for the first week. We had to learn to cut and chop different sizes of wood to prop up the ceiling, and the sides as we went deeper. Many men were hit on the head by falling rocks because of improper shoring. We also had to extend the rails for the coal trucks (wagons).

In the beginning, we went down the mines in the coal trucks but they often derailed, causing many minor injuries, so we went down on foot, half-a-mile every day instead. We would run down the rail tracks and shout "*buraco*" (hole) when we jumped over a pot-hole, to warn the others behind. After a while, the Japanese were calling out "*buraco*" too.

Depending on its size, five men usually worked as a team on a phase, or more or less. We drilled the coals down and then shovelled them into small trucks which were towed up and unloaded by Japanese girls up top. Then the empties were sent down for our men to pick up, and delivered back to the phases.

A gang of five, would have a driller (operating a 70 lb. pneumatic drill), shovellers loading the coal on the coal trucks which would be emptied of their contents at the other end where the regular transport trucks were located. Two men at the other end shoveled the coal into the big trucks – usually four coal truck loads to a transport truck. If it snowed heavily, fewer empty coal trucks would come down as the cable house and machinery would be surrounded with snow.

HONG KONG FILHOMACAU VOLUNTEERS AT SENDAI P.O.W. CAMP NO. 2 AUGUST 28, 1945 almost two weeks after the Japanese surrender

Top Row: AP (Chunky) Xavier, HA (Ariri) Noronha, EA (Dicky) Noronha, Arthur Basto, Robert A Souza, LA Souza, AJM Prata, EJ (Turibio) Cruz, JM Jesus, George Ablong
4th Row: Marciano Silva, Benny Marçal, FW Reis, Toning Sequeira, TM Castilho [Tommy M], Caetano Azedo, JFD Ribeiro [Johnny], DC Alves, JA Marques, Pepe Baleros
3rd Row: Carlos 'Sluggo' Soares, David Leonard, EAV Remedios, Norman Leonard, Henrique Ribbeiro, Richard Silva, Harry Mathias, AF Noronha, Freddy Rocha, Robbie Rocha [Carlos 'Sonny' Rocha], CA Roza, (Hugo or William?) Garcia, EJ Figuereido, Gussy Sequeira
2nd Row: Leo R Campos (standing); CAJ Ribeiro (standing, and the rest sitting): Luiz Xavier, AC Neves, Zinho Gosano, CF dos Remedios, AM Baptista, Dr Patrick M Cmeyla (US Army); JC Remedios, António C 'Tony' Barretto, RJ (Bob) Barnes, A Cruz (Macau), Luzito Remedios
Front Row: MA Larcina, Roberto Silva, GS Edwards, (Alichey) Ribeiro, ES Marques, Roque Silva, A (Archilles) Jorge, Hugo Ribeiro, Henry Souza, Cicero Rozario, AB (Tony) Carvalho, Billy Wilkinson (squatting) AM (Smokey) Xavier (kneeling)
This was one of several photos was taken by remaining Japanese civilian mining operatives in exchange for much-desired American cigarettes received from the US air-drops of relief supplies.

My Mother

by Cicero Laertes Rozario
My mother as an angel fair
With darksome eyes
and silken hair,
Though silver threads
and grey are there,
And her brow is
furrowed with worry
and care.
Care for the boy she
holds so dear
For whom she now
sheds many a tear.

Ten day shifts

It was a ten-day morning shift and a ten-day night shift, with a holiday after the tenth day. But it was no "holiday" as drills, inspections, and searches, usually to about 3:00 P.M. took up most of the time. We would end our "holiday" with Smoky Xavier leading our prayers, and Johnny Remedios leading us and the choir with a few hymns. The men from each of the two huts alternated between day and night shift, each shift working 12 hours, unless there were air raids or heavy snowfalls.

The gang bosses were civilian Japanese and expert miners, and they were less ferocious

Tears from those
brown eyes so clear
In my mind's eye I
still can see her.
My mother gave me
all the best
Of the good at her
behest,
Nourished me at her
snowy breast,
Comforted me when
sore distressed.
Tired she tucked me
in my bed.
Sick, she soothed my
acing head,
When in trouble to
her I fled.
Oh! How her breast
for me she has bled.
She supplied my
every need,
Sowed in me my
manhood's seed,
Taught me her own
noble creed,
Love thy neighbour,
know no greed.
When I think of all
she's done for me:
Given me life and
made me free.
Blest must she ever
be
By/in Him who lived
by Galilee.
And my heart within
me burned
With shame for the
paltry mean returns,
That from her grown-
up son she hears,
And late in the day
has discerned.
Oh mother forgive thy
wayward son,
And if, before the
time is done,
I leave this prison
cell, I'll come
And try to equalize
the sum.

In camp Cicero Rozario composed this poem to his mother. Prisoners-of-war constantly thought of their

than the military guards. They were very sensitive, and didn't report you to the higher authorities for fear of losing face. We took advantage of that.

Every day, we bargained with the gang boss over our work. He usually started with the target of 20 truckloads, and we would offer him 10, but in the end we compromised at 15 loads. He went crying to Mario Roza, who was our spokesman because he knew more of the Japanese language. Mario said, "Come on, he's a good guy. Give him a few more trucks." I replied, "Mario, the Americans say a good Jap is a dead Jap." He mumbled something like "No use talking to you," and he walked away.

The Japanese took this gang boss from us the following day, and substituted a slave driver from the other shift to take his place. Unfortunately for this chap, it snowed heavily up top, and only a few empty trucks came down to the coal face. Grabbing two trucks, the Japanese slave driver, Marciano Silva, and I started filling the two trucks, but the gang boss was actually doing all the work while Marciano and I threw up a lot of dust but hardly any coal. He finally got suspicious when he saw Marciano giggling. He chased us round the truck with his spade.

The other gang bosses were furious because of his grabbing the empties, and they told him so. In the end, he only got two trucks and we got our old gang boss back. He was all smiles, and said we "have brains."

Usually when we came down there would be three or four coal trucks from the previous shift, not yet hauled up. We would throw their tags away, and put our own on, so we would have three or four coal trucks before starting. The Japanese were puzzled but never caught on.

After a day's work, most of us came up covered with coal dust from head to toe. We looked just like the Minstrels. In the washroom, we washed away the soot with water from wooden buckets, and then jumped into the clean water pools. These were about ten feet square; one was filled with hot water and the other, cold water. In winter, we had to run across the snow-covered parade ground to get to the washroom, to minimize heat loss.

loved ones, their home, familiar places, as well as an uncertain future.

Every morning, we had one hour of P.T. on the parade ground, when we had to strip down to our underwear, even in the snow, while the Japanese guards had their overcoats on. Afterwards, we were each issued with a wooden lunch box, usually filled with the barley, horsemeat-blood combo. This was followed by an inspection before we went down to the mines, by the camp commandant and his aide, a Jap with glasses who loved to slap people. We called him our Four-Eyed Jack.

During one inspection, Four-Eyed Jack took David Leonard's box, thought it was too light. and asked David to open the box, which was empty; David had eaten his lunch before going down which was a "no-no." The following day, David's lunch box was very heavy. When he was told to open it, it was full of sand. This aide conked David on the head with the box, and drew a little blood. David's face turned red with anger but he believed in discretion, promising he'd get this guy after the war.

We were not allowed to smoke down in the mines but somehow everyone had cigarettes, despite the inspection and searches. One of the chaps was so nervous during the inspection that he dropped his OXO tin full of cigarettes, but the guard just made him pick it up, and allowed Dave to get away with it.

We also brought down bits of cotton wool. We would scrape the coating off the electric wires, and tip them together to create a spark to light up the cotton wool for lighting our cigarettes. It was dangerous causing many short circuits. We could rest while the special squad looked after the problem.

One prisoner didn't have to go down to the mines as he was suffering from night-blindness; but we found out that he was practicing shorthand at night. Another chap drilled his toe to avoid going down, and got a few rest days.

Earthquakes

Earthquakes are very common in Northern Japan, typically occurring about once a month, and lasting about five minutes. [In 2011 Sendai was devastated by a huge earthquake and the consequent tsunami which swept 10km inland.] At first it was scary as the hut rocks from side to side, but later we got used to it, and it didn't bother us or our bridge games anymore.

We also got our first taste of snow in Japan since being in Hong Kong all our lives, we had never seen the stuff before. It was beautiful, and not unlike what we saw in pictures and in the movies. The problem was coming down the slippery hill, sliding down on our behinds. The gentlemanly ones who preferred to walk down, ended up in the hospital with twisted or sprained ankles.

We also received Red Cross parcels in Japan. At first, it was a box each and, as usual, there was a lot of trading, benefitting the non-smokers mostly; but we smokers enjoyed the Camels and Luckies which we hadn't tasted for over three years. However, later when we ran out of supplies it came down to one box for two men.

There were two brothers in the camp who had to share everything fastidiously so much so that everyone sat around them to watch them divide their Red Cross parcel contents. The powdered milk was poured out and divided spoon by spoon. It was the first time I heard of a bigger half and a smaller half. The raisins were also poured out and sorted into large, medium, and small fruits. Then it was, "one for you, and one for me." It took them three hours to divvy up a parcel! One day, one brother went down the mines and the other took sick. The sick guy had a field day on his brother's goods, and the two of them had a big fight when the other returned.

Each of us was allowed one bottle and one tin, but we couldn't help it if they multiplied, so on inspection days we hid the extras outside the wooden sliding windows. When the guards opened the windows, voila! all these bottles and tins dropped out as each window was opened. As punishment, the guards put us on half-rations for a few days.

Once when Arthur Basto forgot to hide his diary and was found out The camp commandant made the interpreter translate the entries. Unfortunately, Arthur wasn't very complimentary about this guy who slapped him, and put him in jail with half-rations. But the cookhouse staff compressed a full portion of his rice down to half a bowl. We visited Arthur, as the Lord said we should, and found him quite happily having a fencing match with the guard – the guard with his bayonet, and Arthur with a ruler!

We had a Japanese interpreter who was not the so-called 'Dead Jap,' but was Harvard-educated. He discreetly gave us news every day so we knew when we were winning the war, and when we were losing. In fact, he was on our side, for the Allies. He told us about the dropping of the A-bomb and the fire-bombing by the American B-29s on all the Japanese towns, resulting in heavy casualties. He said it would all be over soon.

Going home

On our last holiday, we were called to attention as the camp was going to make a speech. He said, "I have good news for you. The war is over and soon you will be united with your loved ones."

We all shouted "Hooray," embracing and congratulating each other. The first thing we did was to break down the huge camp door, allowing us to leave the camp, and roam the area for miles. We felt like birds being let out of a cage. We went to the shops to get some souvenirs, but there was nothing to buy that mattered.

The Four-Eyed one disappeared as he sensed that he was a wanted man. Anyway, the War Crimes Commission eventually caught up with him, and hanged him. The Camp Commandant got 'life'.

We went to Tokyo by train. The city, except for a few chimney stacks, had been flattened by B-29 bombing. After an American doctor examined each one of us for our health, we were issued with G.I. uniforms, and then sent on to Manila on an American destroyer for rest and recreation.

The previous lot of POWs formerly from Shamshuipo who were sent to Toyama Docks, returned by a bomber requisitioned and converted for transporting personnel, but its bomb bays accidentally opened, causing ten or more prisoners to tragically fall through it into the sea.

Our good friend, Doxford, who taught us karate and self-defense, was one of those who became a victim after enduring the almost four years of deprivation as a POW.

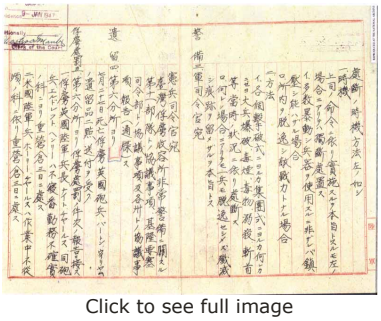
In Manila, we had tents for our group, free drinks, and cookies in the canteen, cigarettes and cigars. Our camp was located in the outskirts of the city. But at a certain time in the morning or afternoon, we could get transportation to town where we commandeered the dance hall and canteen where we spent most of our time. We met a few ex-Hong Kong people we knew including Consuelo Garcia, Cynthia Garcia, Margie Gardner and a few others I can't remember now.

After two weeks in Manila, we came back to Hong Kong to be with our families. A few who went directly to England and never came back were David [EM] Denée, Arthur Cruz, Arthur Basto, Gerry [Gerado Francisco] and Cosmo [Donald] Castro, Gino [Eugénio E dos] Remedios, Tony [António Herculano] Gill and others.

The original text and the translation of "Exhibit O" (the Japanese order to kill all prisoners-of-war)from the US National Archives and Records Administration files on Japanese War Crimes

The Japanese interpreter told me that had the U.S. forces invaded Japan, all the prisoners-of-war would die first, followed by at least 30% of the American forces.

The first-of-kin of all the POWs who died for their country would receive letters from the Government informing them that they were entitled to a MEDAL Thanks for the Atom Bomb!



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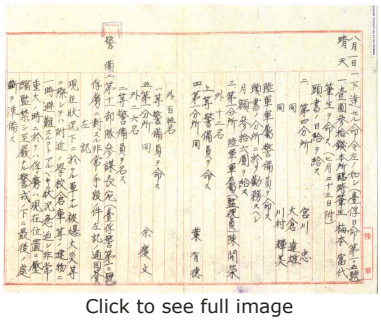

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The following translation was found in File 2015, designated as Document No. 2
certified as Exhibit "O" in Doc. No.2687. NARA, RG 238 Box 2015
Special Note: In RG 238 Box 2012 is a request "for suggestions on how to dispo
all internees."

22-1-9 17 [penciled in] E2015 [pencil

Document No. 2701
(Certified as Exhibit "O" in Doc. No. 2687)

From the Journal of the Taiwan POW Camp H.Q. in Taihoku,
entry 1 August 1944

1. (entries about money, promotions of Formosans at Branch camps, including promotion of Yo Yu-toku to 1st Cl Keibiin - 5 entries)
2. The following answer about the extreme measures for POW's was sent to the Chief of Staff of the 11th Unit (Formosa POW Security No. 10).

"Under the present situation if there were a mere explosion or fire a shelter for the time being could be had in nearby buildings such as the school, a warehouse, or the like. However, at such time as the situation became urgent and it be extremely important, the POW's will be concentrated and confined in their present location and under heavy guard the preparation for the final disposition will be made.

The time and method of the disposition are as follows:

1. The Time.

Although the basic aim is to act under superior orders, Individual disposition may be made in the following circumstances:

a. When an uprising of large numbers cannot be suppressed without the use of firearms.
b. When escapees from the camp may turn into a hostile Fighting force.

2. The Methods.

a. Whether they are destroyed individually or in groups, or however it is done, with mass bombing, poisonous smoke, poisons, drowning, decapitation, or what, dispose of them as the situation dictates.
b. **In any case it is the aim not to allow the escape of a single one, to annihilate them all, and not to leave any traces.**

3. To: The Commanding General
The Commanding General of Military Police

Reported matters conferred on with the 11th Unit, the Kiirun Fortified Area H.Q., and each prefecture concerning the extreme security in Taiwan POW Camps."

3. (The next entry concerns the will of a deceased POW).

I hereby certify that this is a true translation from the Journal of the Taiwan POW in Taiwan, entry 1 August 1944.

Signed: Stephen H. C

Click to see full image

[We thank Margie Rozario, Cicero's widow, and their daughter Anna Herron for providing us with these memoirs, sketches and photographs. – Ed.]

Site updated on 15 Jul 2025