

HID TELL-TALE PICTURES IN BAMBOO WALKING-STICK



L./BDR. JOHN MENNIE — a self-portrait in captivity at Changi, Singapore, after the fall of Malaya.

Aberdeen Man's Record Of Far East Captivity

From Our Own Correspondent

DRAWINGS which might have cost him his life or stung his Japanese guards into brutal reprisals were safely concealed for over three years by an Aberdeen man during his ordeal of captivity in the Far East.

They constitute a unique record of the heroism and the horror of life for British prisoners-of-war captured at the fall of Singapore and forced to work on the notorious Burma-Siam railway.

Triumphing over disease and semi-starvation their author, L/Bdr. John Mennie, son of Mr and Mrs R. A. Mennie, 3 Springbank Place, Aberdeen, became a man with a mission—to bring back this faithful pictorial evidence of what the prisoners went through.

An artist by profession he did not need to depend on the forbidden camera.

For eight years before the war he had been working as a commercial artist in London and all his prison-camp comrades helped by contributing to his meagre stock of materials—pencil, paper, and even a Chinese box of child's water-colour paints came his way.

Actually, L/Bdr. Mennie did two sets of drawings—a documentary series exposing Jap. barbarity and the conditions endured by our prisoners-of-war—and a set of eighty sketch portraits of prison-camp comrades.

The first set, with its damning indictment of Jap. barbarity he kept in the hollow stem of a bamboo walking stick and it was never discovered by the enemy.

Three Times Searched

The portrait series he kept under a piece of three ply wood used as a rest for his mess tin and though they stripped his bed and searched his kit on three occasions the Japanese left these portrait drawings undisturbed.

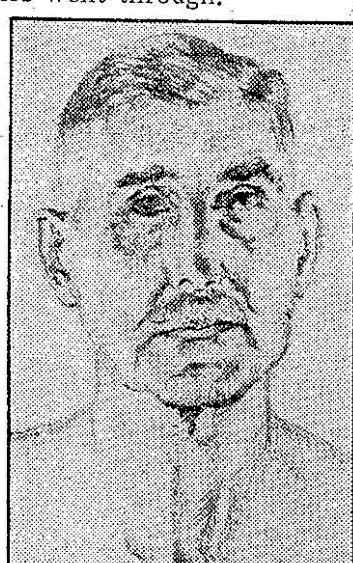
Thinking the Japs. must regard them as harmless, Mennie fashioned a little portfolio to hold these portraits and this with the contents was seized following a kit inspection at Nakomatan camp in January, 1945.

The Japs. declared they would "censor" the portraits and laid them aside in the camp office to be dealt with later.

Before leaving Nakomatan, however, Mennie managed to communicate with a comrade who was staying behind.

He told him where the drawings were and asked him to keep a look out and if the opportunity should ever arise to recover them.

It was more a counsel of hope than conviction. But just a little over a year later all eighty drawings were safely returned—through the post to the artist's home in Aberdeen.



ONE of eighty portrait sketches seized by the Japanese. The subject is a well-known Aberdeen man, Captain L. A. Blackhall, who won the M.C. with the Gordon Highlanders in the first world war, and before the fall of Malaya was a planter at Hendra Estate, Sungkai, Perak. The drawing was made at Nakomatan in 1943.

As a non-smoker, Mennie secured a precious addition to his equipment by bartering ten cigarettes for a tiny quill brush which was carried, as part of his kit, by an Artillery artificer.

With this, and with carefully hoarded scraps of paper—forms from Army files, fly-leaves from novels, the blank portions of pictorial machine-gun targets, he worked ceaselessly compiling his dossier of camp scenes.

Called up in September, 1940, L/Bdr. Mennie was posted after training to the 2nd Singapore and Hong-Kong R.A., reaching Singapore only nine days before the final collapse.

His pictorial history of internment began in the Changi cantonment at Singapore. He was present at the famous "Selarang Squeeze"

... scene ... crowded ... restricted space, intended to hold a single battalion, for four days while the Japanese attempted to coerce them into signing a document promising not to escape.

Two months later came the sequel. Large numbers of the prisoners at Changi were moved to Bampong in Siam by rail—a journey of five days, and four nights.

Terrible Journey

This was spent in constant travel. The men were packed into trucks, eight feet wide by twenty feet long—thirty men to a truck. The horror of that experience is vividly present in one of Mr Mennie's documentary drawings which shows the miserable mass of humanity crammed uneasily on the floor of a truck.

After this came the misery of a six-day trip up the River Maykon, in a barge to Kanu, a mere clearing in the jungle, which had to be transformed by the prisoners themselves into a camp.

Bamboo and palm leaves and creepers were the material out of which they had to fashion their living quarters. There were no building or carpentry implements. The fabric of their dwellings was woven like thatch or raffia, and after the camp was made there was the gruelling task of building a section of the six-metres-broad motor road from Kanhuri

SOLDIER-ACTOR PRAISED FOR BATAVIA SHOW

WHEN the order to cease fire was given in Burma last year, Major T. E. J. Carragher, 17 Great Western Place, Aberdeen, had no idea that soon afterwards he would become actor-manager for a successful musical revue presented in Batavia.

Lt-General Sir Montagu Stopford, G.C.C.-in-C. Allied Forces, Netherlands East Indies, recently congratulated him on presenting the best show he had seen since 1939.

"Trojicana" was the name of the musical revue which played to 5000 troops and former civilian internees in Batavia's opera house.

The show was written and devised by soldiers for soldiers.

Major Carragher joined the Territorial Army before the war and served with the 75th Field Regiment, R.A. He is now welfare officer for the 15th Indian Corps, stationed in the Netherlands East Indies to maintain law and order until a settlement between the Dutch and Indonesians is reached.

Communion Vessels For Kalimpong

Communion vessels which will be used at the mission station at Kalimpong, India, were presented to Dr Albert Craig, medical missionary, at the morning service in Melville Church, Aberdeen, on Sunday.

Dr Craig, who is returning to Kalimpong in about a year's time, will take the Communion plate with him.

The Rev. Dr W. M. R. Rusk presided at the service and called upon Mr Alexander MacGregor, a member of the kirk session, to present the gift.

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