

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 Mayklong 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 Kanburi to Burma which had to be completed before the Burma-Siam railroad was laid down.

Dawn Till Dusk

The working day began at dawn and ended at sundown with a fifteen minutes' break in the course of the morning and two similar breaks in the afternoon.

Each man was given a pick, a shovel and a basket, and kept moving—for twelve hours.

With overwork and malnutrition the health of the prisoners deteriorated with appalling rapidity—dysentery, malaria, and finally, in June, July, and August 1942, cholera resulted.

The artist—never himself free of dysentery, and nine times a malaria victim—carried on with his recording task. He drew the construction of the railway itself, the camp cookhouse, the primitive Presbyterian and Catholic churches, the camp cemeteries.

In June, 1943, he was moved to the base camp at Tasso, in August to Chungkai, and in the following May to Nakompatan.

Sound of Pipes

In May, 1943, came an incident which provided material for one of his weirdest pictures. A sensation swept the Kanu River camp one hot afternoon when for the first time since the fall of Singapore its inmates heard the sound of the pipes.

The thought that flashed through every mind was—"Can it be relief at last?"

An old piper led a detachment of the Gordons and Argylls along the road towards Burma. But alongside strode the Japanese guards, keeping step to a pipe march, as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

Last scene of all in this sombre sequence is perhaps the most moving—it shows an emaciated Lieut.-Colonel raising the battered flags of the Allies over Pratchi, on the Siam-Indo-China border in token of the surrender of the "Sons of Heaven" and their baleful empire.