

A F F I D A V I T

Shanghai, China
20th May, 1946

My name is John Owen Edwards, Warrant Officer Class 1, Royal Corps of Signals. I was the N.C.O. in charge of the Signal Section attached to the 155th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, 11th (Indian) Division, in Northern Malaya based at Sungai Patani. I was captured at Singapore on the surrender of the garrison on the 15th February, 1942.

In October, 1942, with about 1,200 men of the 80th Anti Tank Regiment, R.A., 155th Field Regiment, R.A., 5th Field Regiment, R.A. and 11th (Indian) Divisional Signals, R.C.S., I was put on board the 'England Maru' at Singapore Docks. We were supposed to be what the Japanese asked for - "a party of not necessarily fit men for light work". The 'England Maru' was an old cargo ship of 5,000 tons, built in 1905, according to the maker's record plates. It was filthy, verminous, and the hold I was confined in had evidently been used to carry horses or cattle before. There was dried excreta on the walls and floor. For three days we lay in Singapore Harbour. I was in a hold about 30 yards by 20 yards crammed in with 257 other men. Our food consisted of a watery soup with a few vegetables floating on top (about half-a-pint), and some rice twice per day - morning and evening. At mid-day a small meal of rice only was provided. The only drinking water was salty, it seemed to me like steamed sea-water. The thirst was maddening. We were confined in the holds and could not get at the water tank. Latrine facilities were abominable, at first only 4 deck latrines for 1,200 men, this was later increased to 8. They were wooden troughs always heaped up with excreta and in a filthy condition and flies abounded. Men were allowed to the latrines only one at a time, as diarrhoea and dysentery was rife this was sheer torture to men this affected. There were no washing facilities, after the voyage started we were allowed on deck for approximately 1 hour per day. 3 men actually died on the journey from the terrible conditions.

On arrival at Kiirun, Formosa, we entrained to Zeiho (that is the contingent from the 155th Field Regiment and 80th Anti-Tank) here we had a horrible five hour march up a rough road, in pouring rain, to Kinkasaki. We were exposed

to the ridicule of the population all the way, beaten and kicked by our guards, men dropped and were forced on, one of my pals, Griffiths, of my signal section had to be half carried. He died next day. In the following two months more men died. I maintain that ten of these men died as a direct result of this march.

Conditions in the camp at Kinkaseki were good as regards housing facilities, but the treatment was terrible. Every day was one mad round of beatings and brutalities, everyone was struck on the slightest provocation. I was struck myself 9 times in two days. There seemed to be a "policy of hate" in our camp for this period. I have not men from all camps in Formosa, this policy was general in all camps.

We commenced work in the Kinkaseki Copper Mine on December 22nd 1942. The conditions in the mine have to be seen to be believed. The workings were unbearably hot, in some places men could only work for three minutes, the whole place was a death trap, unshored and dangerous. Blastings took place with no warnings, our carbide lamps were blown out, we were not allowed matches and many accidents were caused through this.

I can safely say that every man that worked in that mine has scars to show. I was injured on several occasions; at one time my leg was caught under a fall and I still carry the scars. Hot acid-water dripped from the low roofs, chutes and holes in the ground were unguarded, many men fell into the chutes resulting in two men having broken spines and many others having broken limbs.

Our equipment was fairly good at first, a cardboard mining hat, carbide lamp and rubber "jikka tabis" (rubber shoes). The tabis lasted about a month, the hats soon were away soaked with acid-water. There were no replacements of either for months on end. We were forced to go to work in soft hats or bare-headed, in bare-feet, or with rags tied round our feet. To get to our workings we left camp at 7 o'clock, marched over the top and down the other side of a hill, about 813 stairs, walked about 1½ miles underground through a dangerous tunnel (often flooded to your knees in parts). Then down another 800 steps roughly hewn from the rocky built in narrow unshored tunnels to the workings. We commenced work at 9 o'clock, had one hour for lunch which consisted of a cold box of rice and some cold vegetable tops. We worked from 1 pm. until 3 pm. and then we turned up that terrible climb to the camp. After searching and

checking we were dismissed about 6 o'clock. Then we had to fill our lamps for morning, wash, and have our evening meal, which consisted of half-pint of watery vegetable soup and rice. Then evening roll-call at 8 o'clock, lights out at 9 o'clock. These times did improve in late 1944 when the new tunnel was sunk from the camp, avoiding the outside stairs, this enabled us to return to camp by 4:30 pm.

The tunnel had its sinister side, there was a steel door at the top and bottom of it. Since I returned to Formosa we have seen prove that in the event of an invasion we were to have been locked in there and killed. Nitric acid from the mine had been reserved for this purpose.

Beatings in the mine were regular and severe, on not working hard enough or not completing the appointed task. Men were lined up at 3 o'clock, those who had failed to complete their task were beaten. They were made to hold a pipe over their heads which was attached to the tunnel roof, stripped of their clothes and were then beaten. We were flogged with hammers, the shaft being used, this was generally about 3 feet long and about 1½ inches thick. The floggings were brutal and totally unwarranted, the amount of work asked was impossible even if we had been fit. But in our state of health it was a physical impossibility. I personally witnessed many brutal floggings and have myself been beaten. I have seen men beaten unconscious and kicked on the ground. I was once struck twice on the head with a hammer handle. These blows were severe enough to knock me to the ground and temporarily daze me. I still do not know what that was for, all of these beatings were done by Japanese and Formosan Civilian Foremen, employed by the mine.

The treatment, the long walk and climb, changing temperatures, bad and little food, all attributed to the sickness amongst us. There were 87 deaths at Kinkaseki. Eight men were killed in the mine and one died later of a broken spine through falling in a chute. The actual number of men that mine has killed and maimed will not be known for a long time, I can safely say that men are still dying in England as a direct result of the filth, dust and dirt and hard work at that time. There were many cases of T.B. and many men are now being treated for this in England.

Medicine and drugs at all times were very short, that issued by the Japanese military was totally inadequate to deal with the large numbers of sick men. American Red Cross supplies of medicine were received only twice during

the whole period of imprisonment. The British Officers in the camp offered to buy medical supplies, when drugs ran short, this was granted. But they were very inferior.

The Japanese medical staff were brutal and also uninterested in the sick men. All they seemed to be concerned with was how long a man could work before he collapsed and became a hospital case. No first aid or medical orderlies were allowed in the mine until April 1944, then two medical orderlies armed with scanty equipment accompanied a working party of approximately 600 men. Before this, injured men had to remain in the mine, their broken limbs and wounds unattended, sometimes for hours, and in some cases till the work party returned at 3 pm.

All the beatings, conditions of work etc. were known to the two Camp Commandants and must have been known to the highest military authorities on Formosa. The policy was changing parties of sick men unable to work long in the mine, for fit men of other camps. Thus the conditions of the Copper Mine were known to all prisoners on Formosa. I was able to talk with men from every camp in Formosa. Conditions at all camps were bad, Heito No. 3 camp being in a malaria zone, many men died there from fever.

In May 1945 with invasion being imminent the mine was closed and our camp moved in three moves to Kokutsu. This was 8 miles up a rough jungle track from the rail head at Shinton not far from Taihoku. Conditions here were terrible, food reached the lowest at 280 gms of dry rice plus dried potatoes per day. Everything to build this camp, trees, bamboo and grass for roofs had to be man handled from the surrounding jungle. All things needed, food, material, etc. had to be carried by now very sick men, up that 8 mile track daily. We were pushed to our limits, worked from daybreak to sunset, harassed, beaten, kicked, and worked to get the camp finished by a certain date. When the camp (at least the huts) were finished a mad plan to cultivate thousands of sweet potatoes was started, a huge area had to be cleared and planted, again by a time limit. Due to the war at that time going against Japan, the heavy bombings, the general shortage of food, the attitude of our guards got more antagonistic every day. Aided and abetted by the camp officers' they beat and maltreated us daily. One man Cpl. Flynn of the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders, was beaten so hard on the head with a sickle handle, he went crazy. By the time our lives ended at this camp due to the terrible treatment here the majority of men were mentally deranged. Two men died here, all were sick and lost weight, my weight at the end was 7 st. 4 lbs. my normal weight is 10 st. 6 lbs.

We left Kokutsu for Taihoku on August 27th 1945. Although the war was now over no provision was made to carry our sick. We had to carry them ourselves on bamboo stretchers. This terrible journey back down the jungle path carrying those who could not walk, in the blazing sun was a nightmare. That journey killed another two men, they died that night after arrival at Matsuyama. Their deaths hastened by the horrible journey. Our last "bitter pill" took place on August 28th when three men were killed, five severely and 16 slightly injured, by an air drop of Red Cross Supplies. On September 5th, I with the others was rescued by the American Navy and taken to Manila. I returned to my home in Cardiff in November 1945.

I plead on behalf of my comrades dead and alive that the men responsible for the above atrocities be brought to justice, and their punishment be such that it will stand as a warning, to others, that such crimes may never again be committed against mankind.