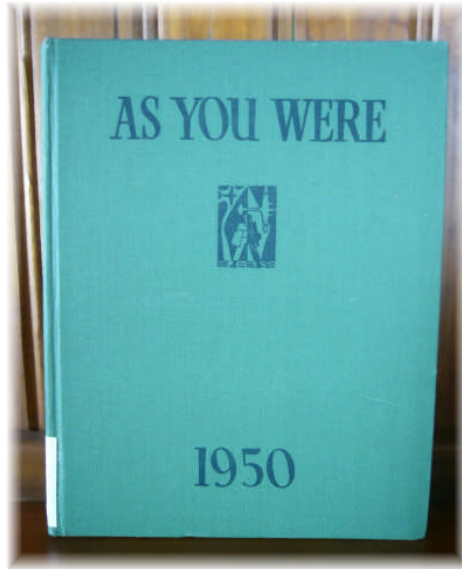


As You Were 1950

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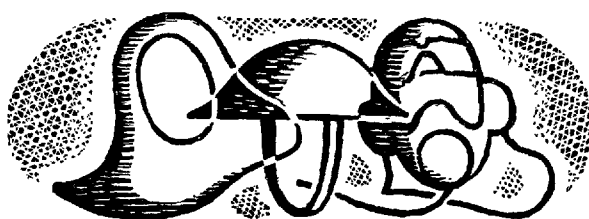
AS YOU WERE

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CHRISTMAS IN CHANGI

By "OPTIMIST"

THE word "morale" was given plenty of work during the war, but it *was* a feature of the imprisonment; it seemed that the longer the term of the sentence the higher it became. And it soared to its peak at Christmas.

To the free man living with his family surrounded by the pleasant amenities of modern life Christmas must always be a season associated with hand shakes, good wishes and the pleasure of giving and receiving. Good cheer is assisted by good food, good drink and a holiday from work.

Contrast a prisoner's lot. He is faced with making Christmas, as he made so many other things, from nothing. True his church stands waiting with its altar loaded with temple flowers and the occasional crosses and candlesticks that were saved from the wreck of Singapore; with the padre, surplice-clad, smiling a welcome at the gate.

But for the rest there is nothing. No word has been received from families for perhaps over a year. The prisoner can only hope they are alive. He cannot put on fresh clothes for he has none. He cannot give a present to his friend since there is nothing to buy. He cannot receive.

In the kitchen the cooks are making heroic efforts to provide Christmas dinner. The meal is amazing but the food is the same. Rice always tastes much like rice, leaves much like leaves, sun-dried fish like sun-dried fish. The titles on the menu—Changi plum pudding with sweet sauce, mixed grill of vegetables with gravy, fish rissoles, tea with sugar—these do not deceive the diners. Yet they are happy and eat with gusto. The meal, the day, the camp, all have been blessed with that indefinable thing, the spirit of Christmas, a product of the human consciousness more potent, more real when divorced from its fripperies and trappings.

Christmas in prison starts with speculation. "I wonder if the Nips will come good with anything at Christmas?"

"Sure to," says someone.

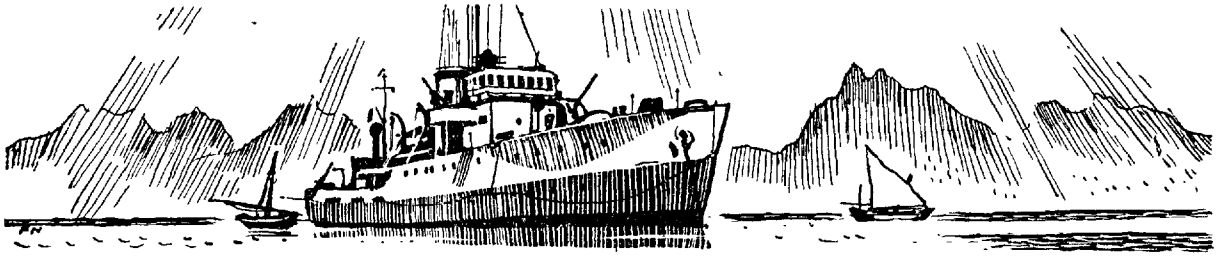
"Don't be stupid," says another, "Christmas ain't got anything to do with Shinto."

In 1942 the Christmas joke was to greet your friend with "Heard the latest about Christmas? The Nips are going to give us a bottle of beer per man and if we keep quiet it will be increased to two bottles next year." The laughter was quite uproarious. Two years later the pessimists were remembering this joke and it did not sound quite so funny. As a prisoner it is always your last Christmas behind the wire.

After speculation comes preparation. If a bumper meal is to be served a campaign of saving must begin. Thus the sugar ration is cut down and the balance placed in the Christmas reserve. Similar action is taken with rice, oil and vegetables. Some messes call for a cash contribution in the hope of being able to buy from the canteen some garlic or gula melaka. In 1944 a fresh pig was delivered to the camp of 10,000. A pound weight was sold at a sum equal to three months' wages or £20 if you had been able to cash a cheque in the black market.

The institution of Christmas cards was one of the most delightful aspects of a Changi Christmas. They ranged from simple greetings scrawled on an odd piece of paper to elaborate works of art, superior in inspiration and execution to the majority of Christmas cards on sale in peace time. The motifs of palms, prisons, Santa Claus and reindeers were the most usual. One showed a naked prisoner nailing his only article of clothing, a worn stocking, to the wall of his cell in Changi Gaol. The caption—"Just in case. You never know"—expressed in a line the undying optimism that characterizes the British race when faced with outrageous adversities.

The first Christmas was the most gay with Red Cross supplies and a reasonable standard of health. Parties were given, calls made and



ANCHORED AT KHOR KHUI

By J. S. McBRYDE, R.A.N.

AT the entrance to the Persian Gulf, on the Arabian side of the Strait of Ormuz, lies Khor Khui, a narrow crooked arm of the sea. It is bounded on one side by the mainland, with high rugged mountains of red rock entirely without vegetation, and on the other by a barren island whose high stony hills support sparse, stunted shrubs and thorny bushes.

Hemmed in thus it was in summer a veritable oven, truly a desolate and dreary place. Apparently destitute of all human habitation, it was without any other form of life than the birds of the sea, things that crawled, and that ever-present scavenger of the East, the "Bromley Kite".

This was the anchorage where escort vessels refuelled and spent their period of rest and leisure while waiting for a return convoy from Bandar Abbas to Aden or Bombay. Many from the Australian corvettes attached to the Eastern Fleet will remember it, and also remember that the monotony and boredom of a patrol in the Gulf of Oman was often to be preferred to a spell spent sweltering in that walled-in anchorage.

We of *Ipswich* made the best of things and even found a certain fascination in the place for, if the land was barren, the sea was not. The adjacent seas swarmed with fish of every description, the coral shallows of the coast were alive with crayfish, and the tidal rocks of the island were covered with the largest and finest oysters we had ever seen. It was on these oysters we concentrated. Every afternoon a foraging party from the wardroom landed and always returned with at least half a dozen pickle bottles full.

In spite of the desolation wandering Arabs, very filthy, would occasionally turn up from nowhere, bringing in their boats fish, young kids, fowls and eggs. They were desperately short of other foodstuffs and eagerly bartered their wares for anything they could get, especially sugar. These transactions were always a source of entertainment, particularly so when Wilkie, the Scots wardroom steward, bought the raw material for the officers' evening meal. Wilkie, after closely inspecting, prodding, and fingering two leggy and thin fowls would start the ball rolling with,

"How much?"

Arab (gesturing with his hands, fingers, and an empty jam tin): "Two rupee. Two tin sugar. One big piece rooti (bread)."

Wilkie: "You're daft! Naw, naw. One tin sugar, and that's too much."

Arab: "One rupee. Two tin sugar. One big piece rooti."

Wilkie: "One rupee. One tin sugar."

Arab: "One rupee. One tin sugar. One big piece rooti."

Wilkie: "One rupee. One tin sugar. One big piece rooti for twa skinny hens with as much meat on them as a Glasca sparrow! Naw! One rupee. One tin sugar. Finish."

Arab: "All ri. All ri. One rupee. One tin sugar. Baksheesh?"

Wilkie: "All right. All right. One rupee. One tin sugar. Baksheesh twa slice rooti."

Then the fowls would change hands, to the mutual satisfaction of both parties. The oyster and chicken dinner was a welcome recompense for the heat and monotony.

DAY OF LIBERATION

By IVAN CHAPMAN, SECOND A.I.F.

ANOTHER German winter was over. It was the beginning of spring but there was a biting wind and we were still cold. The guard at the main gate was playing with the key dangling from his neck and stamping his left leg in a vain attempt to keep warm. He limped as he walked because his other leg was an artificial one. The physical qualities of our sentries had gradually deteriorated over the years and most of them were emaciated dodderers by this April (1945) morning.

None of us walking around the compound took much notice when the sirens down in the town started wailing to greet the first wave of Fortresses. We automatically looked up, but without any great interest. For the past two years it had become an almost daily performance. They weren't very high and seemed to be taking things easy. Way up top, almost out of sight, the packs of escorting Lightnings ambled along keeping an eye on things. Lines of condensation trailed behind them and we assumed Leipzig was due for some more attention. Or perhaps it would be Dresden or Chemnitz. Germany was fast dwindling in size and some of the hitherto neglected cities of Saxony were at last beginning to feel the weight of the Allies' might in the air.

This grim picture didn't even worry our Kommandant, Major Rudolf Kühn. His home was somewhere in the shattered mess that had once been Bremen and it pleased him to know that these high-talking Saxons were finally beginning to understand there was a war on. But it was a different story when those fifty odd Mustangs appeared out of the blue and proceeded to churn up the convoy of army trucks on the road that passed no more than thirty yards from the outside wire of our pen. Then they picked out the two ammunition trains stranded on the line near the town. There was a lot of noise. The German gunners on the trains threw up some vicious but wildly-aimed ack-ack but the money was easy. Some

terrific explosions shook the camp. The Mustangs dived over us and waved their wings in recognition. Higher up the Forts carried peacefully on, unmolested. It was a lovely day and I felt good. It was the day of our liberation and each hour had its story.

9 a.m. Tom Goddard returns his miniature radio to its hiding place in the chimney and reads the forbidden London news to some forty men behind the barrack near the camp cemetery. Standing on the edge of the group I see Tony de Malo, the tough little Yankee Wop from Boston. He is weeping unashamedly. Tom has told us Roosevelt is dead. Patton's famous Third has taken Erfurt and Weimar which is only eighty miles away. It's all happening too easily. I still don't think the Jerries will let us go as easily as all this.

10 a.m. The padre conducts two quick funerals—an American and a Sikh. The graves are filled in and Len Stanford cheekily waves the Union Jack to three fighters that have strafed the Wehrmacht stragglers on the fringe of the forest. The Germans love to be correct and let us have a Union Jack for funerals. Some of the soldiers on the road are killed and we hear women screaming. I feel unsafe and write a last note to my family just in case something goes wrong.

11 a.m. Ten S.S. men emerge from the trees, escorting a lone man whose hands are tied behind his back. Every few steps the S.S. officer hits the shuffling man on the back of the neck with a revolver butt. They go behind some bushes and there is a volley of shots. The S.S. come back. When they see some of us watching, they get into step and start singing. They sing beautifully.

Noon. The Forts are still passing over and more fighters machine-gun the road. Some Jewesses come by the camp. Their guards are

IN A REPATRIATION HOSPITAL

BY "STANDBY" (R. S. PORTEOUS, FIRST A.I.F.)

THE ward is dark, peaceful and silent except for the faint snoring of one or two patients. A man at the far end of the ward starts to cough—a hacking, rasping bark, obviously a cigarette cough. The sound produces a tickling in my own throat and I try unsuccessfully to stifle the wretched cough.

Half-heartedly I tell myself I'll cut out smoking. I'll give it up tomorrow. I won't, of course. Cigarettes are plentiful here, thanks to the Red Cross and the hospital canteen. We all smoke too much, principally, I suppose, because there is so little else to do.

The door at the end of the ward opens and the light from a torch gleams along the polished floor. The Night Sister is coming along to investigate. The powerful beam flickers across a few beds and comes to rest on my face, dazzling me with the fierce white glare of a destroyer's searchlight. I shut my solitary eye and curse silently at such treatment. The previous Night Sister used a small torch and always covered the beam with her hand so that only a faint illumination escaped. This one carries a torch that must be fully two feet long and she flashes its blinding beam around with reckless abandon. She is a big girl, generously proportioned and obviously bush bred, although she stoutly denies all knowledge of the primitive outback. There is nothing subtle or sweetly soothing about her but she is efficient, always cheerful, and as big-hearted as they come. We rag her unmercifully for, as the boys say, "she comes in every time". But we all love her. At daylight she'll have the entire ward in a boisterous good humour.

"Why aren't you asleep?" she asks, bending over me, still blinding me with the torch.

"How the devil can a man sleep with that blasted searchlight shining in his face?" I ask irritably. "For heaven's sake turn the thing off, Sister."

"Your bandage is slipping," she announces cheerfully. Deftly she readjusts it, ignoring my rudeness. "Pain worrying you tonight?"

"A bit," I admit.

"I'll get you something to ease it. Would you like a cup of tea, too?"

Would I like a cup of tea! What man wouldn't when he finds himself unable to sleep at about 2 a.m.? And who wouldn't have a soft spot in his heart for the woman who offers to make it for him? I swallow the tablets, sip the tea gratefully and settle off to sleep.

It seems only a matter of minutes before a bright light wakes me again. This time it comes from no single torch but from the combined glare of all the lights in the ward. The Night Sister and an orderly are bustling around in feverish, noisy energy as they prepare to wash the bed patients and square the ward up for the day staff. It is morning—official hospital morning—although not the faintest glimmer of dawn shows through the eastern windows. I try to ignore the lights, to settle off to sleep again although I know it's hopeless. A rumble of wheels and a rattle of cups announce the arrival of the morning tea trolley, pushed by one of the patients.

"Cupper tea, mate? Milk and sugar?"

I recognize the voice. Alf is on the job this morning despite the fact that his right arm is extended on the level of his shoulder, held aloft by a clumsy "aeroplane splint". Alf is one of the Old Diggers who once rose to the rank of corporal but lost his stripes through "taking a crack at a military jack in a little estaminet outside Amiens". He claims that the provosts picked on him when he was stone-cold sober but, knowing Alf, we are rather doubtful about that.

The man in the bed opposite mine rises, yawning. He's a youngish man who was a major in Tobruk. A shell splinter has ren-

AN AUSTRALIAN OVER THE MOHNE DAM

By "AILERON"

THE Australian belongs to a ubiquitous clan, and there were few actions in World War II, from the *Bismarck* hunt to Burmese bombardments and Murmansk convoys, in which the country was not represented.

On 16 May '43, at midnight of a clear moonlit evening on the Scampton 'drome near Lincoln, in England, some one hundred and thirty men filed into the briefing room. There was little laughter or pretence—the two months' intensive training and close secrecy surrounding their operation had left no illusions as to its hazard—and, soberly keen to hear the worst, they ranged themselves round the map-papered room.

Among them was Pilot Officer Anthony Burcher, R.A.A.F., wireless air gunner, and one of the Australians to be selected by bomber ace Guy Gibson as one of this hand-picked bunch to lather the Mohne Dam in the Ruhr; he was, as well, to be the sole survivor from the crews of the eight Lancasters downed on the critical operation.

The briefing officer laid a pointer on a large scale map of that dynamo of industry, the Ruhr. Those behind craned forward to read the black letters of the name under the stick. With it still on the map the officer half-turned and, as casually as if he were naming a bus route, told the waiting airmen:

"Gentlemen, your target for tonight is the Mohne Dam."

There it was; short and snappy. They'd been guessing and probing and wondering long enough; now they knew.

Burcher moved with the rest up to a table on which, ribbed in clay, the contours of the target area were shown. As he listened one part of his mind was independently busy on the target: they had guessed it would be a dam. For two and a half months the eighteen pepped-up Lancs had roared in low over dams in England, then at low level bombed parts

of the Wash in East Anglia into a riven desert. Five hours' day practice, five hours at night it went on, and when you weren't flying you were pumping thousands of rounds of machine-gun ammo into moving targets, or bomb aiming, or map reading, and copping a blast for the slightest mistake.

All of which—that two and a half months' training period was probably the most intensive in R.A.F. history—augured something pretty big. It was: the Mohne Dam, at the head of its river, dammed back through hills and valleys millions of gallons of pressured water which, fed with disciplined force into the power house turbines, electrified scores of factories and heavy industries patterning the valley below. Eighteen Lancasters would hardly dent that area; the waters of the Mohne Dam, behind the thick retaining wall, servile and useful, would, if released, expend their pent-up energy in a pressure-pounding flail of destruction.

The briefing officer was introducing a civilian. "This gentleman is the scientist who has been working on the special bomb you will carry for tonight's job."

Then the scientist told them how he and his colleagues had been working since 1940 on a secret explosive which, detonating under water, would make of the surrounding liquid a well-nigh solid force thrusting against the base of the wall containing it; how the bomb looked like a giant depth charge (as in effect it was), weighing 6½ tons, that its explosive was nothing like the ordinary well-known disruptives, and, revealing what it was, warned them that it was still very much on the secret list.

There remained nothing but the flight order in which planes would form up. Gibson, of course, would lead. Number two plane going, as it obviously would be, into a stirred hornets' nest, had often been toasted in the mess. Burcher looked at the flight board and a sudden

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All of this and more may be available in a seemingly mundane book such as a directory. Learn much of the background of life at the time, even if your ancestor is not listed there.