

Ron of Rubicon.

(Contributed).

Many people in the Alexandra district will remember with affection a young man who lived amongst us for about two years during 1935-6 and 7. The death in 1943 in a prison camp in Burma was reported in 1944, and from his brother, recently returned P.O.W., comes the story of how he kept the faith.

His name was Ronald Selwyn Hovenden, but he will be always remembered by the sobriquet he liked best—"Ron of Rubicon." He came as Secretary and Welfare Officer to the Unemployed Boys' Camp established by the Forestry Commission in the Rubicon forest. He had suffered discouragement during the depression, for after qualifying in various branches of Applied Art he was unable to find a job. The Boys' Camp offered little scope for his artistic talent; but proved to be one of those tough assignments which either make or break a man. Conspicuous in any company by reason of his spontaneous friendliness and bubbling gaiety

ous friendliness and bubbling gaiety he possessed nevertheless a character of staunch uprightness, and his shining Christian faith permeated all his activities.

Each Sunday evening the rough mess hut became a House of Worship. Undaunted by the lack of proper atmosphere, Ron carried on, week after week conducting Divine Service, leading the singing of the hymns—sometime with his mouth organ,—praying and preaching. He had an undeniable gift of telling a story, and his telling of the Gospel stories will be long remembered by those who were privileged to hear him. One of his greatest delights was the Sunday School which he began at Rubicon. Sitting on petrol cases under the gum trees on Sunday mornings, a little group of enthralled children could be seen gathered round Ron. In his spare time, he rode his bicycle for miles round the district, once travelling as far as Yarck to take the Church service in the minister's absence. In the Yarck Presbyterian Church can be seen a sample of his artistic work in the beautifully illuminated text above the pulpit. It was at Rubicon that he seemed to find himself and to realise that his gift for teaching could be combined

for teaching could be combined with his dexterity in Manual Arts, for he sought and gained admission to the Teachers' Training College in 1937, and from there he went to Korumburra High School as Manual Arts teacher. He returned each year subsequently to his beloved Rubicon during the school holidays until he enlisted in the A.I.F.

He was in the Syrian campaign with the 2/2 Pioneers, and realised one of his life's ambitions in following in the Footsteps of the Master in Palestine. Wherever he was his first thoughts were for the welfare of others, never sparing himself. When the 2/2 Pioneers Battalion were taken by the Japanese in Java, Ron and his brother Bern were among them. From his brother we learn that through all the difficulties, pain and hardship, Ron not only spent himself in rendering all possible spiritual cheer to his comrades—conducting services, reading burial services—but he was never heard to utter a word in bitterness or hate against his captors. As long as he had strength he kept up his work, and even when he was too weak to get about, he remained bright and cheery. His death from malaria and other

remained bright and cheery. His death, from malaria and other causes, means a great loss to us all, and our sympathy goes out to his parents and brothers and sister. The words quoted by his brother seemed singularly appropriate to Ron—"He has achieved success who lived well, laughed often and loved much; who has gained the respect of intelligent men and the love of little children; who has left the world a better place than he found it."

[Note.—A book entitled "Ron of Rubicon," written by a friend of his, Jack Draper, is in preparation and will be available early this year. It will contain many photographs, quotations from letters and reproductions of sketches. It is sure to be of great interest, especially to those who knew Ron.]
