WITH POW'S ON THE WAY HOME

From WO T. C. DICKSON, Mining Editor of THE ARGUS at the time of enlistment, who was a POW in Siam.

HMT Moreton Bay, Entering Fremantle

Sgt —, three and a half years prisoner of the Japanese, lay back in the sun on the *Moreton Bay's* deck as she rose and fell to the long Indian Ocean swell, heading for Fremantle at a steady 15 knots.

"That son of mine," he remarked to half a dozen sunbathing companions, "fifteen years old when I left—a whippersnapper!

"Now he's 19½ . . . 5ft 10½in in height . . . weighs 11 stone. Been boss of the house four and a half years. . . . Huh!

"Well—I'm going to be boss again now. First thing I do when I hit Melbourne next week will be to let him know it. A clip under the ear straight away, and he'll have no doubt where he stands!"

Only one of Sgt —'s companions bothered to put his thoughts into words.

"That's what you think," he commented dryly. "You'll probably wake up next morning with a dislocated jaw."

Sgt —, veteran of two world wars, took another look at the photograph of his 19½-year-old son received with his mail when he reached Singapore from Bangkok, and decided it might be advisable to adopt a more diplomatic approach to the "whippersnapper," grown to manhood in his absence.

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Yes, they're back in Australia, 1,100 of them, to regain their place in the home they left four or five years ago. Lighthearted as schoolboys, they're eagerly anticipating the greatest day in their lives.

Greater even than when, just over two months ago, they learned that they were free men again, will be the day when they are reunited with their own people.

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On the long run from Singapore, up Malacca Strait and round the northern end of Sumatra, to escape possible mines on the more direct Sunda Strait route, a carefree atmosphere prevailed aboard *Moreton Bay*.

First day out the captain explained that the old ship was "but a shadow of her former self." In 1939 she was pulled to pieces for conversion into an armed merchantman. Again in 1941 she was pulled to pieces to become a troopship.

Comforts and amenities of passenger ship were gone. But the weather was kind, food good, ship clean and not crowded, her personnel bent on doing everything possible for the comfort and well-being of the homecoming men and her bows headed for home—so why should anyone worry?

Lighter side of the last three and a half years' experiences was remembered on the voyage. Rarely was heard any mention of the less happy incidents.

On the long run from Singapore, up