

AIF COLONEL TORTURED BY JAPS

**Interrogated on
Australia's Defences**

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How Australian officers captured after the surrender of Java were submitted to torture during 30 days of interrogation in gaol in Batavia was told yesterday by NX12296 Lieut-Colonel J. A. C. M. Williams, of Proctor pde, Sefton, near Bankstown, NSW, who was commander of the 2/2nd Pioneers. He was flown from Rangoon to Kandy on Wednesday. Colonel Williams looks well and fit. He is only 10lb below normal weight, despite his ordeal in gaol and on jungle railway construction in Burma and Thailand.

A brigade, comprising Pioneers, 2/3rd Machinegunners, Australian reinforcements in Java, and escapees from Singapore, under the command of Brigadier Arthur Blackburn, VC, were fighting in Western Java when surrender came. Their three battalions held up five Japanese divisions while Dutch forces were evacuated from Batavia. The Australians stored food in the hills, and would have gone on fighting, but additional British forces arrived and the food and ammunition stocks were too small. Surrender was ordered after a withdrawal toward Bandoeng.

STARVED FOR DAYS

With 12 other officers Colonel Williams was thrown into a cell in Batavia gaol. The 13 officers were interrogated singly on the defences of Australia and the topography around ports. The officers refused information, and were tortured. For the first five days Colonel Williams was starved, then a table loaded with food and beer was placed before him, and he was told that if he would

and he was told that if he would speak he would get food. The Japanese Gestapo then held him down and poured water into his lungs until he vomited. Then he was blindfolded and tied to a chair, which his captors buffeted about the room. Later his feet were twisted inward until he passed out with the pain.

When these methods failed he was taken outside, blindfolded, and two Japanese armed with pistols stood over him and said it was his last chance to speak or be shot. "I told them to go ahead. Shooting would be a relief," said Colonel Williams.

Another officer had his fingers held together while a pencil was inserted and pulled up and down until it cut through to the bone.

EXPERIENCES IN BURMA

Colonel Williams was sent to Burma, where he was in charge of a force of prisoners working on the construction of the Burma-Thailand railway. Their captors subjected them to conditions of "organised brutality." Officers and men alike worked with pick and shovel. The only difference was that officers were paid 70 bhats (worth 1/7) a month, while the men were paid one bhat.

Prisoners were forced to sell their valuables in a manner which was actually looting by brutality. Captors stood over the seller. One bargained while another beat the Australian until agreement was reached. Then the lucky purchaser flung a few worthless coins on the ground beside the bleeding vendor and walked off with the valuables.

Colonel Williams explained that any disobedience resulted in instant beating with anything guards chose to use. Rifle butts and sticks were frequently employed.

Prisoners were always wet. They worked 36-hour stretches. Guards taught them rail-laying by beating them with steel rods. "I saw a prisoner bend a spike that he was driving," Colonel Williams said. "The guard bashed him on the jaw with a rifle butt."

Prisoners were not allowed to laugh or sing. Orders were that no prisoner was to be allowed to be happy. If three were caught talking, they were beaten on the assumption that they were planning to escape.

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