

The following two letters are reproduced from a collection of letters sent by Capt. T C Eaton of the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn., The Royal Norfolk Regiment to his parents shortly after liberation from Japanese captivity in August, 1945.

Wednesday 12th Sept 1945

Dear Mummie & Daddy

In continuation of my previous letter, I was fortunate in remaining at Changi for the whole period as a P.O.W. Changi started by being the only P.O.W. Camp on the Island and at the beginning there were as many as 50,000 P.O.W. in the Camp. The numbers were far too large for the Jap to handle and so from the beginning we pretty well ran our own show; Officers remained with their Troops and Div: Bde: and Bn: organizations were retained and within the camp the Supply, Maintenance & Repair Services continued to cope with our needs and whilst dependent on the Jap for rations, drugs &c within the Camp we were our own masters. As Changi is normally one of the chief military areas of Singapore we moved to a place where there was a great deal of military stores, workshops etc and these together with what was brought in to the Camp on the capitulation and what was later scrounged on the innumerable - Working Parties had to meet our needs for the next 3½ years. For the Nip supplied nothing. In assessing ones welfare during the past years one has to acknowledge that in Changi at any rate, and we were, I believe one of the few camps the Nips were prepared to show off, the barracks were perhaps the most modern and well planned of any in the World and that therefore the majority of the men & Officers did live in well constructed buildings even though they did have to sleep on the floor or on improvised beds of wire netting, boarding, rice sacks and such like and too, of course, as the months went by all buildings and kit got more and more riddled with bugs, though fortunately, as far as Changi was concerned we kept clear of lice, except when working parties returned from Thailand and the debugging of ones bedding kit etc became a weekly if not a daily occurrence. Then too we did have a good water supply thanks to British engineering and our own staffs. We never lacked for water and as a rule one could rely on getting regularly two showers a day morning & evening. Again we I were of course dependent on the Nip for the maintenance of the supply from Singapore and this frequently broke down but all in all we never had to worry unduly, and whilst owing to the large numbers of people in a small area we could never be lavish in its use, generally speaking there was always enough for all reasonable needs, particularly washing and this made a great difference to morale. Another good fortune was that for the last three years we always had electric light and power and whilst the same remarks apply to this as to water it did mean that everyone could read & play cards &c at night as well as produce and watch plays, variety shows and attend lectures, study if they could get the books and amuse themselves in any other way they could by means of electric light. Needless to say it was a Godsend in the Hospital and in the last months when rations got low and wood was scarce and the sale of personal possessions to obtain money for buying food either at the Canteens where prices were rising weekly or in the Black Market where they were higher still became the rule rather than the exception; then it was that Electric heaters multiplied and private "Douivering" -(Cooking) became the order of the day. Yes we might have been considerably worse off and indeed most other Camps were. Considering matters objectively we had- as a result

of our own efforts and through no fault of the Nip (a) Adequate Water (b) Electricity (c) Reasonable living conditions (d) A daily news service (e) a magnificent camp repair and factory services (f) a good Hospital and medical organization, if starved of drugs and medical supplies by the Japanese (g) our own gardens which were an absolute Godsend in very many ways (h) Excellent entertainments and a first rate Camp constructed theatre until the Nips stopped all entertainments and ordered the theatre to be pulled down in April of this year. (i) Many good book which were brought into the Camp at the beginning by individuals and units and which, supplemented early this year by some American Red X books kept us going in reading material. I never really lacked for a good book to read, though few were new and many were out of date. Again, the Japanese were not interested in supplying us with more.

There are many more things which I can say & which I will write about in later letters, but speaking only for myself I feel that conditions could have been (and in other camps were) very much worse; life has not been too bad and we have not had to worry about keeping warm. I have been more or less my own master within the Camp and for days on end I might not see a Nip except on Roll Call. As I say I have been lucky but most others have not been and my good fortune in being in a well run camp in no way excuses the neglect of many matters of Welfare by the Nip. At no time was the I.J.A. ration to P.O.W above Beri-Beri level and it was only by a deduction, monthly from Officers pay for the benefit of the whole Camp that the standard of health was maintained above this level by the purchase of vitamin containing foods such as Rice Polishings, Towgay &c.

With love and good wishes to all,

Ever Your Son

Tom

Sunday September 16th 1945

Dear Mummie and Daddy,

In one of my previous letters I mentioned the good fortune we have had in having good workshops & repair and maintenance services. If ever the maxim "Necessity is the mother of invention" was proved true, it has been in this Camp. I suppose there is hardly anything that has not been made during the past years. The following are some of these things.

(1) Artificial limbs for the limbless with proper knee joints made out of odd bits of metal (2) All brooms & brushes including tooth brushes used in the Camp from Palm fronds (3) Paper for use either as stationery or other uses made by processing Lalang grass (4) Washing Soap made from Wood ash collected from the Cookhouses and as by products of this Tooth powder and magnesia powder for stomach troubles (5) Nails for all the Japanese needs on the island from barbed wire. (6) Rubber factory for manufacture of rubber soles made from latex & latente for repair of shoes. Also Rubber sandals made from sheet rubber which became almost the standard footwear of the Camp in lieu of boots. (7) Bookbinding by use of Latex and any old canvas (old tentage etc) (9) Pottery including rubber cups and cups for collecting Toddy which was used as a means of providing Vitamin B for serious Beri-Beri cases. The same factory also produced clay pipes (10) Green leaf extract factory Machinery for which was first made and then used for drying & crushing Hibiscus Leaf & Lalang grass & Tapioca Root leaves which were then made into an extract to be drunk by people suffering from Vit B deficiency such as Scrotal Dermatitis, Pellagra, Eye trouble etc. (11)

Innumerable cooking containers Ladles, Mugs Mess Tins & practically every conceivable article you can think of welded from steel lockers which were part of the Barrack equipment of Selarang & Roberts Barracks in peacetime. (12) Axe Heads & Chunghels forged in our own Blacksmith shops as well as wheelbarrows etc. (13) A thread machine which was first made and then used for unthreading old socks & other woollen & cotton U/S clothing, this thread was then used by the Tailors for repairing old clothing and making fresh shorts out of old scraps. In addition Wells were sunk for an emergency water supply. We had our own Forestry team which cut fuel wood (Rubber) for the Camp & which was brought into Camp anything up to 4 miles on Trailers which were hauled by 20 men or officers & depending on Labour problems, this was a daily occurrence and for the first year twice daily though naturally as it was our own fatigue you did not go on it every day.

Clothing & boots became an increasing problem, as the Nips supplied little and we had to rely on what we brought into Camp originally & what came through on the meagre Red Cross Supplies. One never wore a shirt during the day & seldom a hat, People like myself used to get almost as dark as Tamils but as it was only sun brown & not weathering, a week indoors and one had relapsed to a dirty yellow. For days on end men on Working Parties on the Aerodrome often wore no more than G strings. The only skin trouble any-one had was caused by Vitamin Deficiency. The same with Ulcers in the eyes. My eyes have remained all right and usually the only time I wore sunglasses was when I was in charge of a Working Party on the Aerodrome where the surface was sand and there was no shade on the wide open spaces, so the glare was often bad. There was a large black market in clothing, particularly in Red Cross as food money & smokes as supplied by the Nips were perpetually inadequate. Most of us, however ill clothed during the day always managed to be clean, tidy and reasonably clothed in the evening. I was always able to wear a shirt & long slacks during the evening. Drink was always inevitably Tea without Milk or Sugar and occasionally, when funds allowed, Coffee ditto. We were never short of Tea. Palm Oil & occasionally Coconut Oil was our basic frying fat. We had to saw & cut all our own wood and we ran our own Gardens. Crops grown in varying quantities of which the greatest was always greenstuff, because of its Vit B content were Ceylon Spinach, Red Amaranth, Green Byam, Sweet Potatoes, Kang Kong, Brinjals, Papayas, Gourds, Tapioca Root & minor quantities (for the hospital) of Tomatoes, Guavas & such like. I am gradually getting acquainted of home news by means of old papers. I was sorry to see Dr Liversey had died but greatly cheered by the magnificent War Record of the Norfolk Regt. I am glad to hear that Stewart Hornor is OK but sorry to hear of Freddie Fitch being killed. We were all surprised at the result of the Election and sorry for Churchill, but I feel that a change of Govt may be no bad thing. It looks as if things are going to be pretty tight if not critical for England during the next five years but I feel confident that providing everyone realises the position and we put our backs into it as we did during the War we shall pull through & together with the Empire retain our position in the World, I am not pessimistic, and look forward to getting embroiled in all the various problems before the year is out. I see that two old Stoics are M.P.s & that two others failed to get in. I badly want to study the considered programmes of both Conservative and Labour Parties, until I have read & considered them I am not prepared to place my allegiance with one or the other. Please give Michael Chittock my congratulations on his M.C. From your postcards & from the

papers it would not appear that there are many of my contemporaries either Male or Female who are unmarried.

I am now on full Army Rations and rapidly putting on weight being once again over 10 stone. I remain well and the stomach has stood up well to the change of diet. My Batman is still with me and keeping very well. I reckon that the Bn Casualties (Killed i/a & D.O.I.) will be approx of  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the Bn. I have pretty well up to date records of all except those in Thailand.

I have been fitted out with a certain amount of new kit and today I got my first advance payment of £5. I do not think I have ever seen a more striking personality than Lord Louis Mountbatten, he is absolutely terrific the nearest approach I have seen is Lord Ironside. We are taking a suppressive Malaria course of atepirin, universal with all troop in the Far East.

Morale remains high whilst we patiently wait for a ship. I look forward to Christmas at home and may just beat the "Four" years away. Love & best wishes to all. How does Margaret like Nursing?

Did you know Julian Taylor at U.C.H.? He was the saviour of many lives in the hospital here.

Ever your Son, Tom