

Adamthwaites in Uniform - recollections of War

The following newspaper clipping was passed to us some years ago. It appeared in the Willesden Chronicle on Friday 2nd November 1945 and concerns Private William Adamthwaite (1914-1983), son of Charles Frederick Adamthwaite and Florence (Woodrooffe) (YELLOW LINE).



Here is the full transcript of the article:

Service News

Camps and Railways Built for Japs

Kensal Green Ex-Prisoner Tells His Story

After three and a half years in a Jap prison camp, Pte. William Adamthwaite of the East Surrey Regiment has returned to his home at 66 Greyhound Road Kensal Green. While he was a prisoner his family received but four postcards from him, and at one time, heard nothing for over two years. He received only two letters from his family. He told a reporter, "The only thing that kept me going was from time to time to pull out my photographs of home, which I managed to keep from the Japs!"

Pte. Adamthwaite, who has lived in the district since he was two, was educated at Chamberlayne Road Schools, and was employed as a dairyman by the London Co-operative Society Ltd. At the outbreak of war he was called up and was drafted to Malaya in January 1941. Then he fell ill and was taken to hospital in Singapore. He was recuperating there when the Japs captured Singapore in February 1943.

GOOD MEMORY

From his extraordinary retentive memory, Pte. Adamthwaite gave an almost day to day account of his experiences. He has been in prison camps in Caunkai, Kamchambury, Bankow, Tarso, Taknoon, River Valley Road, Saigon, Phume and Pnon Pen and has worked on building prison camps, railways and an aerodrome as well as on clearings in the jungle and quarries.

Conditions varied from camp to camp but obtaining water was the main difficulty. The Japs treated their prisoners as they did their own soldiers. For example, if a man were fit and could work he deserved food.; if he were sick and unable to work, food was the last consideration.

When the Jap guards and prison administrators fell sick, British P.O.W. doctors had to treat them as no Jap doctors were provided.

Cholera broke out at one camp, but Pte. Adamthwaite did not catch it, although he developed dysentery later. No medical supplies from the Red Cross reached them and ulcers and lacerated bare feet were covered with banana skins for bandages. Amputations because of ulcers were carried out with table knives and hack saw blades.

ONLY A LOINCLOTH ! Once the clothes he was captured in wore out he had only a loincloth and was barefooted. At Tarso an up-country camp, there was no accommodation at all for the men and they were forced to construct shelters for themselves from bamboo and leaves, as well as sleeping platforms. These conditions existed for three days when the inside non-weatherproof portions of British Army tents were supplied. Secret radios were maintained by the officers and from them news of victory was learned.

When freed, Pte. Adamthwaite was flown to Rangoon where he spent 12 days in a recuperative camp. There the Red Cross gave the ex prisoners a good time and made up for all the benefits and parcels that had not reached us.

While he was at Rangoon his family was informed of his safety. Pte. Adamthwaite has been overwhelmed with congratulations since his homecoming.

"I wish to thank the Red Cross and Social Services in Rangoon for all they did for me" he said. "Naturally, I am pleased to be home, and am glad that I am not Broken in any way. I think the chief reason for cruelty from Japs arose from misunderstandings due to lack of knowledge of the respective languages".

Pte Adamthwaite's nephew Bob tells us:

"He was a very quiet unassuming man, and I regret that I never got him to talk of his time in the Army. I remember him laughing at the memory of the Japanese officers who were very short and had large swords which touched the ground. They had small wheels attached to the sword scabbard to prevent it scraping along the earth. The prisoners had to hide their amusement as the swords were used for beheadings which we now know were carried out to prove the officers' dedication to the Emperor of Japan.

I remember his home-coming party and Uncle Bill lying on a sofa covered with blankets as he had a malaria attack and couldn't get warm. The party went on around him and all I could see was the floor going up and down as the knees up continued. I was glued to the wall for fear of ending up downstairs when the floor gave way which of course it never did! I was ten or eleven at the time."