

THE EVACUATION OF MALAYAN SURVEY DEPARTMENT MILITARY MAPS AND MAPPING MATERIAL FROM SINGAPORE TO AUSTRALIA FEBRUARY 1942.

INTRODUCTION.

At the outbreak of World War II in 1939, Malaya was possibly the best mapped, topographically speaking, of all the overseas territories controlled by the Colonial Office. First rate quality one inch to one mile maps had been published for practically the whole of the West Coast, which included the main centres of population and they were drawn and printed in the Headquarters of the Survey Department in Kuala Lumpur.

These maps had considerable military value particularly in view of the dense vegetation which covers most of the country and hinders both sight and movement. I have seen captured Japanese Army maps used during the invasion of December 1941 which were, in fact, our own maps overprinted with Japanese characters.

H.Q. Malaya Command, based on Singapore, had no military mapping unit, and they, as well as the R.A.F., depended solely on the civil Malayan Survey Service for their map requirements of Malaya and certain parts of British North Borneo.

Until early in 1941 no attempt had been made to prepare and disperse material which would enable reproduction of these vitally important maps in the event of Malaya being overrun. This fact may come as no surprise to students of the history of pre-war military preparations in Malaya. In 1941 a serious attempt was made to prepare for such dispersal, but it could not be completed because, in addition to a sudden demand for over 100,000 maps by Malaya Command, the civil Government required the Survey Department to produce large quantities of low denomination currency notes, bonds and stamps, and staff was not available to cope with everything.

When the Japanese invaded Malaya in December 1941, their very rapid advance south through the country made it necessary to do three things in the Survey Department Map production Unit : -

- (a) to supply Malaya Command with all their immediate map requirements.
- (b) to prepare duplicate map reproduction material for dispersal outside Malaya.
- (c) to evacuate all the actual map material, much of it being unique, first to Java and then to Australia.

The Report which follows, was written by me in Australia in March 1942 for the information of the Colonial office, and shows how those three tasks were undertaken.

REPORT

By C. Noble, Malayan Survey Service, covering the period 9th December 1941 to 28th February 1942.

1. On the outbreak of the Pacific War I was on leave with my wife and two children in Tasmania and our third child was born there on Pearl Harbour day. My leave expired on 28 November but my air passage back to Malaya had been postponed by QANTAS Airways to 12 December.

2. I had been informed that owing to the military situation it was unlikely that I should be able to get any passage back to Malaya, but on 9 December I left my family in Hobart and flew to Melbourne. Using a letter of introduction provided by the Surveyor-General Malaya (Bridges) I went to Army H.Q. in Melbourne to inspect certain equipment in which we were interested. I had a long conversation there with Major Gillespie (D.A.D.S.) during which he told me that I should have great difficulty in returning to Malaya and he offered me an appointment in the Australian Cartographical Section if Malaya agreed. I said that it was my duty to return to Malaya if at all possible, but that if, on arrival in Sydney, I found all means of transport barred, I would cable Bridges for instructions.

3. I went to Sydney, found no transport difficulties and finally reached Singapore on 14 December where I reported to the Malayan Establishment Officer. I was instructed to go to Kuala Lumpur which I reached on 16 December. Here I was attached to the Map Production Section with instructions to assume executive charge of the Photo-Lithographic Branch under the Assistant Surveyor-General (Cobon).

4. At this time the Section was wholly occupied with the printing of maps for H.Q. III Indian Corps in accordance with programmes prepared at the request of the latter. The Surveyor-General went to Singapore on 16 December to arrange for the setting-up of a map reproduction unit there if it should later become necessary to evacuate Kuala Lumpur.

5. Having ceased security printing we were able to concentrate the whole of the staff on the running of the three map printing machines, i.e., Quad Crown Rotary Offset, Quad Crown Flatbed and Double Demy Flatbed and it was possible to run one or two of them 24 hours a day. The December output of maps must have been enormous.

6. On 26 December there occurred the first of several Japanese bombing raids intended to demoralise the population. It was an unfortunate event for the Department because practically the whole of the staff took shelter in the adjoining mosque and witnessed the killing of two members in the grounds. With the exception of three men (Chik, Mathew and Yacob Bux), the entire staff went home and did not return. They totalled 93.

7. Plans for evacuation to Singapore were put in hand and on Christmas day, Moir (Chief Draughtsman) and some of his drawing office staff went there. All offset negatives of Topographical sheets south of Latitude 3 degree North went with him. Mathew and Yacob Bux followed a day or two later and I was left with one man (Chik) to run the machines.

8. About this time European Officers of the Survey department in States overrun by the Japanese in the north, started arriving in Kuala Lumpur. Some of them moved south to Singapore and others were drafted to help in Headquarters. One of their jobs was to help dismantle and pack a new Quad Crown Rotary Offset machine which had only recently been delivered to us from London. The idea was to transfer it to Singapore. Jerram, who had escaped from Trengganu on the East Coast by walking over a mountain range to Pahang, had no knowledge of printing, but he and I, acting under instructions from Che Chik, managed to print 3500 maps in the last week before evacuation from Kuala Lumpur.

9. Other European officers were meanwhile packing and loading vital records and machinery on railway trucks, which, after great difficulty, had been obtained from the R.T.O. We succeeded in loading the new machine mentioned above, plus a Double Crown Rotary Offset Machine, a lucigraph machine, air-conditioning units, all the remaining map negatives and a large stock of zinc plates and the trucks left Kuala Lumpur for Singapore on 5 January.

10. On 6 January all the remaining Europeans were instructed to live together in the Surveyor-General's house in Prince's Road where a temporary office was established. Cameron, Farrington and McVilly (all surveyors from overrun States) went to Singapore two days earlier leaving the following in Kuala Lumpur : - Husband (Deputy Surveyor-General), Leckie (Chief Surveyor Kelantan), Sworder (Chief Surveyor Topo), Irving (attached to HQ III Indian Corps), and myself. I have only a confused recollection of the passage of time at this stage as we were all working as coolies, but the following vital jobs were carried out : -

- (a) The packing and removal to Seremban of Irving's store of maps, less those taken by the Army for use.
- (b) The destruction of all remaining records in the Drawing Office which could not be removed to Singapore. At this stage it was impossible to obtain any transport from the Army.
- (c) The removal to Seremban of all the Selangor and Negri Sembilan 8 chain Revenue Survey Sheets.
- (d) The burning of all maps in the public Map Sales Office which were likely to be of use to the enemy.
- (e) The removal of vital parts from all machinery left in the Headquarters building.

11. The position on the morning of 7 January therefore was that anything likely to be of use to the enemy had been removed or destroyed. About 100 zinc plates were treated with caustic soda and remaining glass negatives were smashed. There was little or no law and order in the town and Husband's car was stolen from the office yard and the Instrument Repairer's store looted.

12. With regard to security work, 80 reams of partly printed 25 cent notes together with all the remaining proofs etc., were destroyed by fire and the printing plates scrubbed clean.

13. On 7 January, Husband, Leckie, Sworder and I left by car for Seremban, Irving had gone on ahead. We arrived at 3 pm. After sundry adventures including lying in ditches while enemy low-flying aircraft machine-gunned the road. We spent the night in the house of Williams (Chief Surveyor Negri Sembilan) where Irving had set up his map store in readiness for III Indian Corps demands. Sworder decided to stay a while to assist Irving while the rest of us (Husband, Leckie and I) went on to Johore Bahru where we arrived at 8 pm. The next morning we crossed the causeway to Singapore and dispersed to find our billets, mine being the ballroom of the Tanglin Club. For the next few days I was out of action as I had to nurse a torn arm muscle and a sprained ankle.

14. A portion of the Methodist Girls' School at Mt. Sophia had been requisitioned for our use in Singapore as Headquarters, but maps were being printed in the premises of the London and Eastern Printing Co. (L.E.P.) in Cantonment Road, two of their machines having been placed at our disposal. The original intention was to erect the machinery sent down from Kuala Lumpur in the Mt. Sophia premises, but we discovered that, to our horror,

the railway trucks on which we had so laboriously loaded those items, had been shunted on to the Tampin-Malacca line and had fallen into enemy hands.

15. After settling in, the Malayan establishment Office was informed of the new staff dispositions which were as follows : -

S.G. Bridges, who now became D.D. Svy at Army H.Q.

D.S.G. Husband, responsible for running what remained of the Department.

Map production – Cobon, Noble, Moir, Smith & Hiddleston.

Endean – machinery maintenance.

The rest of the European staff were all in one or other of the armed services, but many were only temporarily attached.

16. To enable our maps to be produced by the Survey of India in the event of our own section being unable to function, we had arranged to send to India black impressions or pulls of the plates of all our topographical maps and State maps, and the first batch had been despatched early in 1941, covering about 2/3rds of the whole. Faster progress was impossible owing to the current demands for maps by local army units. On 29 December however, I had prepared a statement showing what remained to be sent to India, and now in Singapore, after assessing the damage caused by the railway tragedy mentioned in para 14 above, I had to investigate the possibility of preparing prints from the negatives which we had in Singapore. I discovered that Kodak could supply bromide paper of suitable quality and size, so I set to work to prepare two bromide prints from each negative still outstanding on the India black impression schedule. The intention was to send one set by air and the other by sea as insurance.

17. The prints were made in the L.E.P. building in a makeshift darkroom which had to be shared with Hiddlestone who was preparing wet plates for the Southern Johore sheets still required by the Army. Despite the seriousness of the situation, it still had its amusing side. Hiddleston, a perfectionist, was endeavouring to produce first-class photographic wet plates while I was using an entirely different process for dry bromides using a different set of chemicals. Inevitably the chemicals got mixed with disastrous results and about the only item we could share was a bowl of potassium cyanide which we used to clean our hands.

18. On 8 February I completed my series and the air mail set was duly handed over to Capt. Fisher of Malaya Command for despatch. Leckie, who was at a loose end, came in to assist in any way possible and, at the earnest request of Darville (Manager of L.E.P.), was appointed air-raid spotter on the roof. His efficiency in this capacity was excellent and he undoubtedly saved the lives of all of us on 30 January. He gave us warning of a particularly heavy air raid on that day in sufficient time to allow us to take shelter in the basement. A heavy bomb hit the roof, exploded and demolished the end of the building, completely destroying our stock of chemicals and doing enormous damage in the drawing office. My coat, which had been hanging in that office disappeared without trace.

19. It was becoming impossible to work properly owing to the frequency of heavy air raids, as many as nine a day, so Cobon went to Java on 6 February to discuss with S.W. Pacific Command a proposal that the Map production Unit should move there. Cobon was a very sick man and the events of the last few weeks had not improved his health, but he was a good organiser and capable of arranging a transfer to Java it became necessary. In anticipation of the move we therefore started to pack all the essential map reproduction material. 39 wooden crates, each contain six glass negatives a yard e were sent to Java on the S.S. Darvel, the remainder being held back as they were in use. I must here point out that the printing of the maps for Malaya Command went on up to the evening of 10 February in spite of the fact that the Japanese were established on Singapore Island, but all these maps were burnt on the morning of 11 February.

20. On 8 February, after completing the task outlined in para 18, I started to prepare the bromide prints in readiness for ultimate despatch to Java. The Chief Surveyor Singapore had in custody a set of black impressions of no less than 86 sheets, and by using these and also raiding the duplicate bromides I had prepared for India, I only needed to make bromides of about 20 sheets in order to complete a full set for Java. The intention was to have a complete set of originals in triplicate so that the chances of survival on the journey to Java would be improved.

21. I completed the job and on 10 February I delivered to Capt. Fisher at Fort Canning the following parcels : -

(a) A final set of bromides and impressions of the Singapore 1/25000 series for India by air.

(b) A set of duplicates for India by sea.

(c) A set of bromides and impressions, which, together with the case of black impressions already obtained from the Chief Surveyor Singapore, formed a complete set of all our maps. These were for Java by air.

(d) A miscellaneous set of impressions and bromides for despatch to Java by sea.

22. Having handed the above to Capt. Fisher together with covering letters of explanation, I returned to the office. The remaining negatives and fair-sheets (which had been in constant use until then) were also crated and Capt. Fisher arranged to have them shipped on the S.S. Gorgon which was due to sail south that evening. I then went to Mt. Sophia and found Mesdames Husband, Moir and Endean who had arrived there with a few belongings. They reported that owing to heavy shelling it was quite impossible for them to live in their quarters at Mt. Pleasant. Rooms were found for them in the Cathay Building.

23. None of us at this time had any idea that Singapore would fall. We had not been told of the seriousness of the military situation and such information as was available from newspapers and the radio led us to believe that the Japanese would soon be thrown off the island. Against the advice of others, I decided to make a run for my temporary quarters at the 6th mile Bukit Timah Road in order to pick up a change of clothing etc. Although I had been warned to expect shell-fire and machine-gunning from the air, I reached the house without incident and found the area to be the front line with troops erecting barbed wire in the garden. I hastily gathered together a few clothes and drove back to Mt. Sophia where I spent the night on the floor. At midnight Bridges turned up together with the Field Survey Coy. He said he had spent hours looking for his wife (actually she was on the S.S. Gorgon) and had ordered the Field Survey Coy to Mt. Sophia owing to heavy shelling of their camp.

24. I now come to that eventful day, the 11th February. At 9 am., Bridges, who was then in the uniform of a Colonel R.E., called together all the available Europeans of the Department in Mt. Sophia. Having ordered the clerical staff out of the room, he said the news was very grave indeed and that nothing but a miracle could save Singapore. This news came as a very severe shock to all of us, being the first time we had heard the true state of affairs. He then gave general instructions on the following lines : -
The duty of officers who had their wives with them was to get the latter away at once on any available ship. The Survey Company, under the command of Booth, would be disbanded at midnight. All maps at Fort Canning (Malaya Command HQ) were to be brought to Mt. Sophia immediately for burning. All lithographic printing machinery etc. at the L.E.P. and Prints Ltd., were to be damaged beyond repair in the afternoon.

25. The ladies at Mt. Sophia (Mesdames Husband, Moir and Endean) immediately left with their husbands for the dock area to try to find a departing ship. Bridges asked me to go also to assist a Mrs. Roche who had just arrived at Mt. Sophia in a state of great distress. He added that he himself was leaving to get in touch with the wives of other Survey officers (Mesdames Gildersleeves, Fendall and Bruce). Having arrived at the dock area we found only one ship the S.S. Empire Star, about to depart. The ladies of our party were put on board but were immediately ordered off again by the Chief Officer who said that he would not allow anyone on board without a special permit for his ship. He added that he had already sent off about 40 women and children for that reason. Husband at once set off to the shipping agent's office in town to try to get permits, but could not get them and he returned to the wharf very distressed. In the meantime I had decided to go further afield for another ship and at the far end of the West Wharf I finally found the S.S. Ipoh in process of coaling. I spoke to the Captain, who appeared to be alone on his ship, and he said he had no objection to taking women and children aboard without permits, but he would not say where he was bound. Conditions were far from pleasant owing to almost continuous air raids and shelling on the docks area and there was no time to lose.

26. I rushed back to the S.S. Empire Star wharf to announce my good news and within the hour all the ladies of the party were safely put on board the Ipoh. Our Survey lorry, which was laden with some of our crates of negatives etc (see para 22) which Capt. Fisher had been unable to put on the S.S. Gorgon, followed us to the S.S. Ipoh and, permission having been given by the Captain, we proceeded to load the crates on the ship. There was no time to stow them away properly so we put them on top of the forward hatch. The lorry then returned to Fort Canning for more crates and in the meantime we assisted in coaling the ship from a coal dump behind the warehouse by means of baskets. Not a single Asian citizen could be seen, all labour was European. Bridges himself came down at 1 pm to see what was going on and half-an-hour later we had loaded the last of the crates.

27. The work of loading and coaling was considerably hindered by air raids and shelling and on many occasions we had to take cover. Enemy planes were flying very low and the roar of the battle at Bukit Timah and Passir Panjang was terrific. Blast from bombs and shells exploding on Blakang Mati shook the ship frequently. The ship escaped damage beyond a few bullet holes just below the bridge, but one shell struck the wharf 100 yards west and started a fire.

28. As the last of the crates were being loaded, Capt. Fisher took me aside and said that my orders were to hide on board if necessary and travel with the ship when she sailed. He said, in response to my query, that Messrs Moir and Smith had been similarly instructed. Moir was on board and confirmed the order, and although I knew, from conversation with Cobon (now in Java) that in the event of the Map production Unit moving to Java, I should go with it, I felt that I could not accept Capt. Fisher's instructions on so important a matter without

confirmation. I therefore took Moir with me and drove back to Mt. Sophia where I met Bridges. He confirmed the order and said that he had not issued a general instruction in similar terms to others because he did not wish to jeopardise the chances of women and children and our vitally important map reproduction material. He thought the Captain of the S.S. Ipoh would take women and children only, so any men would have to hide until the ship had left.

29. The difficulties of confronting Bridges in the absence of reliable information regarding shipping, and in the light of the Governor's orders (which we junior officers knew nothing about), are obvious. Actually my original query to the Captain of the S.S. Ipoh was whether he would take women and children and our mapping material. The idea of travelling ourselves never entered our heads. The tragedy is that, from the point of view of the Captain of the ship, there was no objection to anyone travelling and the ship could have taken the whole Department with ease. There seemed to be no naval control and no permits were necessary either to enter the wharf area or to board the ship. The original ship's crew had deserted and the Captain, on being approached by Europeans of the Hume Pipe Co., agreed to navigate the ship to Batavia if the former would act as crew, and coal and provision the ship. The terms were gladly accepted and when I first found the Ipoh in the morning, she was being coaled by Hume Pipe Co. Europeans. We did not know the above facts until after the ship sailed, and when she left the wharf we actually concealed ourselves until we were well out to sea.

30. Bridges told me that if we managed to reach Java and if Cobon were fit enough to assume control, I could consider myself free to join an army cartographic unit. But I must find Cobon and hand over our mapping material and he gave me certain departmental confidential files. What Bridges did not know was that Cobon was seriously ill in a Bandoeng hospital. Bridges said that he thought Singapore would fall the next day (12th) and that he had not yet considered his own position, but he intended to get out of uniform that night (having worn it for twelve hours only!) so as to consider himself a free agent. I later learned that he left Singapore on 13 February and eventually reached Padang in Sumatra, nothing reliable being known about what happened after that.

31. After leaving Bridges, Moir and I returned to the ship taking with us a few shirts etc. from Mt. Sophia. We had about \$40 between us. On the way we had to stop and take shelter owing to the enemy shelling the junction of Anson and Tanjong Pagar Roads. One shell exploded only 20 yards from us so we took cover in Keppel Police Station. We finally decided to make a dash for it dodging pot-holes, broken trolley-bus wires and burning cars and on arrival at the ship I abandoned my car on the wharf and we went on board where we found Leckie, Smith and Endean all in hiding. At 3-30 pm, about 300 R.A.F. personnel arrived and after embarking them the ship left without warning at 4 pm.

32. I shall never forget the appalling sight of Singapore as the ship slowly moved out of the harbour and passed round the protective minefield. The city itself seemed to be covered in smoke and was dominated by a colossal plume of smoke from the burning oil tanks at the Naval Base. Nor shall I ever forget the voyage. The ship was grossly overcrowded on deck and as the holds were empty and the bunkers nearly so, there was a serious list. This list was corrected periodically by the movement of the troops from one side to the other which continued throughout the voyage of three days. On the second day we decided to lower our crates into the hold, so we put 32 of them below by hand. There was also a serious shortage of water and the tinned food put aboard originally, although sufficient for the number of passengers first considered, was totally inadequate now that 300 troops had been added. For three days therefore we had practically nothing to eat.

3. The following extract from a despatch by the Bombay correspondent of the Daily Telegraph gives an account of what other passengers said about the voyage of the S.S. Ipoh : -

"Percy Floyd, auxiliary fireman, who had been a colliery employee, got aboard a 3000 ton Straits steamer on which were some R.A.F. personnel. Passing through Banka Strait they were bombed continuously for 5 hours. The R.A.F. set a dozen machine guns on the decks and drove off low level attacks. The ship was not hit though constantly enveloped in water-spouts, while the Captain, an old Singapore pilot, zig-zagged to dodge the bombs. Douglas Endean, an Australian instrument repairer, escaped as an amateur stoker in a ship carrying his wife and 23 month old son. Endean said "The ship was a small coastal steamer which had been holed by bomb splinters. She was listing heavily and her native crew had deserted. I volunteered as a stoker and a scratch crew was formed by other civilians. When we put to sea there were also 300 R.A.F. personnel on board. The pumps were working continuously and the passengers had to be shifted from time to time to correct the list. Three or four formations of Japanese planes came over reconnoitring, then two groups began bombing us and other shipping. A merchantman about a mile away was set on fire and blew up, but we were not hit. We picked up her casualties and crawled on and eventually reached Batavia."

34. At noon on 14 February the ship was greeted by a British destroyer which escorted us to Batavia which we reached two hours later. On arrival I saw the Embarkation Officer who agreed to handle our crates the next

day. We sent them to the S.S. Plancius which had been turned into a floating hotel to accommodate all evacuated Britishers. Here we spent the night, the ladies occupying cabins while we slept on deck. We had our first real meal for four days.

35. The next day (15th) Leckie, Smith and I went to the British Consulate. The Consul had not heard of Cobon but said he had just received a cable about us from Singapore authorising an advance of \$20,000 for Map production purposes. We returned to the docks and I put through a telephone call to Bandoeng in the hope of obtaining news of Cobon. While waiting for this call we walked outside and found Cobon on the wharf! He had heard of our arrival and had left a sick-bed to join us. We all then returned to the S.S. Plancius where we found Gildersleeves and Hiddleston who had travelled on the S.S. Empire Star. In view of my remarks in para 25, I could not understand how they managed to travel on that ship.

36. After a long conference, Cobon made the following decision : - Messrs Leckie, Gildersleeves and Endean, together with the ladies, were to travel on the S.S. Plancius to Colombo. Messrs Cobon, Moir, Smith, Hiddleston and myself were to stay in Java. We thereupon removed our belongings from the S.S. Plancius and returned to town, later catching the 5 pm train to Bandoeng where we stayed at the Hotel Preanger.

37. The next day (16th), Cobon and I called on Col. Bomford who was D.D. Survey at GHQ S.W. Pacific Command. Moir and Smith in the meantime inspected the local Javanese civil map production unit. Cobon explained that the Malayan Section had been sent to Java to set up a unit for the production of Malayan maps and that funds were available for that purpose. Bomford said that Malayan maps were obviously not necessary now that Singapore had fallen, but that maps of Java were urgently required. He said he needed certain maps within a month, but the local civil unit could not supply them without our assistance. Cobon pointed out however that even if we stayed in Bandoeng to assist we could do nothing as Moir and Smith had just now reported that local methods were antiquated and extremely slow and nothing we or they could do could improve matters in so short a time. Bomford realized this only too well, because he next suggested that our Malayan records should in any case go to Australia in charge of Smith, leaving Moir as adviser to the local cartographic office. He offered commissions as Major and Captain respectively to Cobon and myself on his staff, but admitted that these posts were temporary only as officers to fill them were already on their way from India.

38. We returned to the hotel and carefully considered the position in conference. The following facts emerged : -

- (a) That the fall of Singapore and Palembang meant that the closing of the Sunda and Bali Straits was a matter of days only and therefore the immediate re-shipping of our records to Australia was a matter of extreme urgency.
- (b) If we succeeded in getting our records to Australia but retained any key men in Java until it was too late for evacuation, the value of those records would be diminished.
- (c) That we could do nothing in Java to be of any real help as far as the production of Dutch maps was concerned. What was needed was a complete revolution in methods and there was not enough time for that.
- (d) That if Bomford could send three printed copies of any Indies maps he required, to Australia, they could be reproduced in Melbourne.

It was therefore decided that we should remove our records and ourselves to Australia as soon as possible. Cobon returned to his sick-bed in Bandoeng, but would be ready to travel in a day or two. I had an open letter of introduction from Bomford addressed to all and sundry as follows : -

“Please admit Mr. C. Noble, F.M.S. Survey Department to the Batavia docks to attend to the unloading, sorting and re-shipping of cases of glass negatives, survey records and maps ex S.S. Darvel and S.S. Ipoh, and please give him necessary assistance in handling the cases and opening them if required.

G. Bomford, Col.

D.D. Survey, GHQ S.W. Pacific Cmd.

16 Feb. 1942

How well I used that letter (which is shown as an appendix to this report)(will become apparent from the next few paragraphs.

40. I went to the British Consulate in Batavia, having arrived there by train with Moir and Smith at 9 am. On 17 February, where I obtained 600 guilders to cover shipping expenses, and we three then went to the docks. Here I asked Moir and Smith to go to Warehouse No. 3 where the crates from the Ipoh were stored whilst I went to trace the 39 crates of negatives ex S.S. Darvel (see para 19). I had already seen the Port Superintendent (a Mr.

Simonse) who agreed to permit us to ship the crates of fair-sheets ex Ipoh on a KPM steamer leaving for Australia in 2 or 3 days' time, the crates of negatives ex Darvel to follow on an unspecified steamer a week later. The idea was to segregate fair-sheets and negatives to provide two chances of survival. Moir and Smith, armed with nails and tools were to open up the dozen cases of maps consigned by Malaya Command to D.D. Military Intelligence Batavia and extract 3 printed copies of each map for use in Australia, the balance being retained in the warehouse for H.Q. S.W. Pacific Command.

41. I went to the S.S. Darvel to ascertain where our crates had been taken, but no one knew anything except that army lorries had removed them. I finally found them in the Army Mixed Store and checked them over. Then by very good fortune I met the Wharf Superintendent of Messrs MacLaine, Watson & Co. and when I mentioned my mission, he strongly advised me to ship everything on the S.S. Charon which was due to sail for Fremantle at 4 pm that day. He said there was no KPM steamer leaving for Australia and that unless prompt action were taken I should find it too late to ship anything at all.

42. So I went back to Simonse who could give me no information at all beyond showing me a circular from the British Consul which strongly advised all British subjects to leave at once by one of the following steamers :

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- (a) S.S. Charon leaving for Fremantle that day.
- (b) a steamer leaving for Calcutta on 19 February.
- (c) a steamer leaving for unspecified destination on 20 Feb.

The statement added that any further steamer was unlikely.

43. I therefore sent off a telegram to Cobon saying what I was doing and asking him to return by the evening train. Next I went to the R.T.O. to ask for a lorry (only military lorries were Available). He was out, but I finally got hold of him at his hotel and he gave me a lorry and a driver. We took this lorry to the Mixed Store at 2 pm. But found the entrance blocked by an R.A.F. lorry loading stores. I persuaded the latter to move and with the aid of two coolies, we loaded 16 cases on our lorry and dashed off to the Charon. The Chief Officer of the ship would not accept the cargo saying he was due to leave port shortly. However, I ran to the Port Office of MacLaine, Watson and after a short but tense interview with the Agent during which I told him that my crates were being shipped by General Wavell (producing Bomford's letter in support), he finally gave me an authority to load.

44. We then loaded the 16 crates and returned for the balance of 23. I "pressed" 6 coolies from the S.S. Charon to help and bribed the head stevedore to ensure careful loading and stowage on board. That completed the Darvel's cargo, so I then took the lorry to Warehouse No. 3 where Moir and Smith were at work. The time was then 5-15 pm and the S.S. Charon should have sailed at 4 pm. I found Moir and Smith outside on the wharf. They reported that the Ipoh had only started to discharge our crates at noon. There was no steam on board and wharf cranes had to be used. After unloading the crates were put in the warehouse where Moir & Smith started to open them. At 5 pm they were turned out as it was closing time and they had only managed to open 3 crates.

45. After some argument I got the warehouse reopened and then tried to bring my lorry in but was met with a firm refusal from the guard backed by a fixed bayonet. In desperation I went back to Simonse and asked him for a military escort which he eventually provided. This gave us entry to the warehouse. The remaining crates were put on to the lorry and duly transferred to the S.S. Charon. It was then too late for the latter to put to sea and her departure was postponed to the next day which was extremely fortunate for us as it now meant that we should be able to load a few remaining cases of standard sheets and put ourselves on board the next day. I must have been heartily cursed by the S.S. Charon's officers and passengers just as I in turn had cursed everybody all day.

46. We returned to Batavia at 7 pm happy, but completely tired out, having had neither food nor drink for over 12 hours. We managed to get a room at the Savoy Hotel. Smith met the train from Bandoeng but Cobon was not on board and we discovered that telegrams were taking up to two days for delivery. I telephoned Cobon late that night and he duly arrived at 9 am the next morning (18th) and together we went to the Consulate. Here Cobon obtained from Nightingale (Malayan Liaison Officer) a cheque for 1000 guilders while I got from him a letter of introduction to Messrs MacLaine, Watson & Co. requesting priority passage for the four of us. I gave this passage ticket to Smith with instructions to proceed to the ship and put all our joint belongings on board. Cobon and I then went to the bank, where we obtained cash for the cheque, then to the Exchange Control where we got a permit for a letter of credit, then to another bank where, the premises having been kept specially open for us (3 pm), we got one letter of credit in Cobon's name for £150 and one in my name for £75. We then returned to the docks.

47. But Fate had not finished with us yet. We met Smith on the wharf near the S.S. Charon who told us that our passage ticket was not for the S.S. Charon but for the S.S. Whang Pu, a point we had all missed in the rush. The S.S. Whang Pu was out in the roads and no one knew when she should sail, but she had apparently been pressed into service to take the overflow of passengers from the S.S. Charon. While Cobon went back to town to try to get the ticket altered to the S.S. Charon, Moir and Smith returned to Warehouse No. 3 to prepare the last few cases of standard sheets ready for loading, and I went for a lorry. I could not get one from the Transport Officer however, so I went round the corner and managed to induce Tommy to "borrow" one for an hour or so. The last lot of cases was loaded on the S.S. Charon by 3 pm and the latter then at once left port for Fremantle. Cobon returned with the information that the S.S. Charon was full and that we should have to travel on the S.S. Whang Pu. This was just as well for me at least as I am sure the officers and passengers on the S.S. Charon would have made my life miserable as I alone was responsible for the delay of 24 hours in sailing.

48. We left in the Warehouse only the few cases of printed maps required by S.W. Pacific Command as arranged with Bomford. I had already delivered to the latter the package referred to in (a) and (b) of para. 21, and the package mentioned in (c) and (d) remained with me as my personal baggage. We had the satisfaction of knowing that we had safely removed from Singapore, and now from Java, the following original Malayan mapping material : -

- (a) all fair-sheets.
- (b) all negatives.
- (c) Johore and Singapore standard sheets.
- (d) a precision stereoscope.

A total of 71 packing cases weighing about 8 tons. Most of the cases contained fragile glass negatives which were useless if broken. As a matter of interest, when the crates were later opened in Australia, less than 1% of the glass was broken. It would be impossible to place a cash value on these items. The military maps were invaluable for future operations and the fair-sheets from which they were printed represented millions of dollars of work. The Singapore standard sheets were irreplaceable and if they had been lost the post-war business development of Singapore would have been very seriously handicapped.

48a Note on reverse of previous page : -

When Moir and Smith were at work in Warehouse No. 3 in Batavia, they discovered that some of the crates held the Johore and Singapore Cadastral Survey Sheets. These sheets contained the survey records of land alienation etc. in those territories and had no military value whatever. They should never have left Malaya and I do not know who was responsible for crating them and sending them to the wharf in Singapore for loading on the Ipoh. Bridges would never have ordered such a move and I certainly knew nothing of it. These sheets were of such importance and value that even in peace time they were always locked away every evening in fireproof concrete strong rooms. The discovery of their presence in Batavia was a most unpleasant shock and I had to make strenuous effort to remove them to safety on the final day as described in para 47. Had they remained they would have been irretrievably lost in the holocaust which followed the Japanese invasion of Java.

49. We found the S.S. Whang Pu at the coaling wharf and spent the night aboard. I know I slept the clock round in our 4-berth cabin. I felt I ought to let my wife know I was on my way home, so in order to avoid breaking censorship regulations, I simply sent her a cable with one word "Coming" knowing that she would guess from the origin "Batavia" that I had left Singapore. The next day was an easy one for all of us. Looking round the dock area I saw the Dutch cruisers Java and De Ruyter fuelling at the wharf, but neither I nor anyone else realised then that both those fine warships together with H.M.S. Exeter, H.M.A.S. Perth, U.S.S. Houston and four destroyers would shortly set sail and be sunk by superior Japanese forces in Javanese waters.

50. At 4 pm on 19 February we sailed in a convoy of ten ships escorted by a cruiser and a destroyer. We passed through the Sunda Strait at night when our escort left us. We passed close to the volcano Krakatoa at 10 am the next morning and shortly after, while Cobon and I were sitting on deck, he shouted that we were going to be torpedoed. We saw the fatal torpedo track coming straight for our starboard beam. I remember thinking that perhaps this was IT, but fortunately the torpedo passed under us. The S.S. Whang Pu was a peculiar ship built for trade on Chinese rivers. She was of about 1000 tons, drew only 7 feet of water and had a flat bottom. She was not intended for open sea work and she let us know this fact during the next ten days. We remained in convoy as far as Lat 8 South Long 104 East, when the other nine ships left us to sail North West for Colombo while we turned South alone. Our crew consisted of officers from the Canadian Pacific liner Empress of Asia which had been sunk in Singapore a few days earlier. The ship was overcrowded and both food and water were rationed. We arrived off Fremantle at midnight on 28 February, but in spite of a remark by the pilot who met us that we appeared to be "a ruddy raft with a roof on it", we were kept rolling at anchor until 8 am on 2 March when we moved into harbour.

51. On arrival in Perth the Army took charge of all our precious records which had been discharged from the S.S. Charon and they were duly transferred to Army Survey HQ in Bendigo where the crates were carefully unpacked. Cobon and Smith left for Melbourne by train on 5 March and Moir and I followed two days later. Just before leaving I met Wilton and Williams on the station platform. They told me they had escaped from Singapore on 15 February and that Bridges, Husband and several others who left two days earlier, had been shipwrecked.

That ends the saga. Looking back over the years since I wrote it I feel that only Divine Providence got us safely through. Others who left Singapore at the same time were not so fortunate. Why I was not arrested in Batavia on 17 or 18 February and summarily disposed of I do not know.

I wrote my report immediately after arrival in Australia and sent it to the High Commission for the U.K. through the Malayan Agent in Sydney, for transmission to the Colonial Office. I had kept a documentary diary throughout, but my report naturally omitted irrelevant detail, which, although of possible interest to story-loving laymen, was out of place in what is, after all, a technical report.

I joined the Royal Australian Air Force a month or two later and just two years after that I received a letter from the High Commissioner's Office, as follows : -

13 July 1944

Dear Sir,

I am directed by the High Commissioner to inform you that he has been requested by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to say that your report on the circumstances connected with the evacuation of the Malayan Map records to Australia has been received by the Colonial Office and read with great interest.

Colonel Stanley has asked the High Commissioner to convey to you the expression of his appreciation of the resourcefulness and determination which you displayed in the prosecution of your mission to get these records safely through to Australia.

Yours faithfully
XYX
Official Secretary.

What had happened to my report during the intervening two years I do not know – it may have been filed away by someone and forgotten. But that same month (July) I was released from the Air Force and, as a civilian, went to Army Survey HQ in Bendigo where I combed thoroughly through all the records and compiled a typewritten report an inch thick. In October 1944 I flew to London with that report and discussed it in detail with the Director of Military Survey at the War Office. Subsequent action is not germane to this account.

The Malayan Survey Department should never have been placed in the position it was in 1941 and have to evacuate tons of very fragile glass etc of priceless value. But at the same time they were our Lares et Penates. The Army too, was to blame also and should have taken steps to disperse mapping material long before hostilities began. After the war, of course, steps were taken to see that never again would such evacuation be necessary.

Long after the war when I became Surveyor-General Malaya, I felt that Malaya owed a debt of gratitude to the subordinate officers referred to in paras 6 and 7 of my report for their loyalty during a period of great stress. Chik had retired at the end of the war, and Yacob Bux was on the point of retirement, but it was my proud privilege to obtain for the other, Mathew, a 2-year scholarship tenable at the London School of Printing and Graphic Arts. He did very well there and is now a Division 1 officer in the Department. I had lunch in London with him one day last year (1968) while he was in U.K. on business, and I get frequent letters from him, as indeed I do from many others in the Department.

As for the many European officers I have mentioned in the report, I am afraid that most of them have passed on. No less than twelve of them were victims of the Japanese either in trying to escape, or on the Siam death railway or in internment in Singapore.

There remains but one item to round off this record – our return to Malaya. On 9 September 1945 the liberation of Malaya began i.e., Operation Zipper as planned by the C-in-C Admiral Mountbatten. That morning at 5 am., troops of 25 Indian Division assault-landed overt the beach at Morib on the west coast. The Japanese having surrendered, the landing was unopposed. At that time I was S.O. 1 Civil Affairs on H.Q. Staff of 34 Indian Corps and the following morning, Col. Spanton (G.S.O.1 of 25 Indian Division) and I set off in his jeep ahead of the troops and travelled to Kuala Lumpur. In company with two Signals Officers, who were to examine the

telephone exchange, we were the first Europeans to enter the capital. After a general tour of the town, during which we were given an incredibly warm welcome, we spent some time at the Survey office. The reception here from all my old friends who crowded around – the handshakes, the smiles and the unashamed tears – was an experience I shall never forget. My earnest wish to be first back after being the last to leave nearly four years earlier, had been fulfilled.

(Bodleian Library, RH Mss.Ind. Ocn. S.199)

FINIS