

HOW I'VE SPENT THE LAST TEN MONTHS. (December, 1941 - October 1942.)

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"Good morning, Master, the Japanese are in Shameen'.' This was the greeting I received from my boy on the morning of Monday, 8th December.

Before I go further, I had better give you a bit of background. Shameen is a small Island in the River beside the town of Canton. Two-thirds of the Island is the British Concession and one-third the French Concession. It is connected to the city by two footbridges and on the island are all the houses and offices of the British and American firms. The British Concession is self-governing and has its own Police Force and, therefore, although the Japanese had occupied the city of Canton in October 1938 no Japanese military forces whatsoever were allowed inside the Concession. The very fact, therefore, that my boy greeted me with the news that the Japanese were on Shameen made it obvious to me that the war was on. There had been no firing as, though the courtesy of the Japanese Consul, the Police had been given ten minutes' warning to go off duty to prevent bloodshed.

Now, to get back to my story. My first impulse on hearing the news was to turn on the wireless and see if I could pick up anything, but, as I might have expected, the Japanese had switched off the electricity. Similarly the telephone lines had been cut so there I was, left on my own to await developments. After dressing and having breakfast, I decided to pack up all my possessions, putting aside the necessities of life in a kit bag and expecting at any moment that the Japanese Military would enter my house and take me off to an Internment Camp. Nothing happened till about 10.30 when an officer and about ten soldiers came in. I met them at the top of the stairs, wished the officer good morning and asked him what I could do for him. He was accompanied by an interpreter and turned out to be quite polite, at least as soon as he saw that I had no intention of being "nasty". I had a little difficulty in persuading him that I kept no firearms in the house, as he seemed to be under the impression that every Britisher must carry a gun.

Finally, however, he was persuaded and after he asked me to produce my wireless set, camera, field glasses, etc. which were confiscated, he told me he would

search the house. The search was cursory, but I was pleased I had packed all my things away as otherwise I feel certain the Japanese soldiery would have helped themselves. When we came to my bedroom where my trunks were packed the officer remarked, "You seem to be preparing to go away", to which I replied "Surely under the present circumstances that is up to you". They then turned out all the trunks I had so carefully packed, but this I did not mind as I was standing over them and could see that nothing was slipped into pockets, etc. They took nothing except some of my photographs, including all those of the bombing of Chungking, but for some unaccountable reason they forgot that if I had prints of photographs, I also probably had negatives. These latter were lying with my other possessions but they left them alone and I was able to bring most of them home.

My Chinese servants and myself were then taken under guard to the garden outside the British Consulate where we registered and where I found most of the other British residents of Shameen already assembled. After registration we were first harangued by a Japanese Colonel and then told that if we behaved ourselves we could continue to live in our houses and be free to walk about the island. In the afternoon I collected three bachelors whom I knew, and who had been living outside Shameen and had been brought in by the Japanese, with instructions to find accommodation on the island. This proved a God-send during the next four months, when otherwise I would have been living by myself. The island was blacked out at dusk so we all retired early after a rather harassing day.

Next morning we decided to put to the test the promise that we should be allowed freedom of the Island and, as we rather suspected, found it was not true. We had not gone fifty yards from our house before we were stopped by a sentry and hustled back to our compound with instructions that under no circumstances were we to leave our houses; so in our houses we remained until Christmas Day and would probably have remained there longer had it not been that I and one or two other members of the community were on quite friendly terms with one of the Japanese Colonels who was partly responsible for looking after us internees.

Approximately a week after the outbreak this Colonel called at my house bringing with him the Japanese interpreter who had previously been employed by our office. This man was also a decent fellow, having been educated in America. I believe he felt his position rather acutely and it was he who had really persuaded the Colonel to come and see me. The first ten minutes were rather embarrassing

as during this time Colonel Yamada told us of the greatness of Japan, the disaster of Pearl Harbour, etc. and ended by stating (which later proved correct) that Hong Kong would fall in December, Manila in January and Singapore in February. After this I thought it was my turn to talk so I told him that in spite of the Japanese promises that we would be given freedom to walk about, this order had been countermanded and we were stuck in our own houses and given no facilities for exercise. I told him it was not so bad for me who had a small garden in which to take exercise, but that many of the residents lived in flats and were therefore entirely shut up all day. As is usual with all Japanese he temporised but on my pressing, he promised to do what he could. I also asked him various questions, the most important of which was how we were to get money to feed ourselves. He told me then that the banks would be opened once a week and that we could draw limited amounts to look after our requirements. This promise was carried out fairly promptly and we were allowed to draw on our accounts until we left Canton in April. We were also allowed to keep our servants and they were allowed into the city daily to do the shopping.

Colonel Yarrada's visits continued periodically during the next fortnight and each time he came I brought up the question of our being allowed out. Finally on Christmas Eve all residents were assembled and were told we could walk in the British Consulate garden (Approximately 75 yards square) from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Christmas Day and in future for two hours twice a week - Wednesdays and Sundays. In spite of efforts to increase the exercise periods, no extension was granted before we left. Such was our life, therefore, from December 3th until the end of March. There being four of us in my house we could play bridge, Mah-jong or amuse ourselves in the garden to while away the time.

By the middle of March the Japanese were getting worried as, naturally, individual accounts in the hank were getting low and they realised that shortly they would have to feed us. Neither party wanted this; they for reasons of expense and we for the quality of the food we would obtain. They, therefore, told us that at the end of March all British citizens, to cut expenditure, must go and live in the local hotel - a rather gloomy building which could just accommodate the community - men, women and children. We tried to persuade them to give us a block of houses of our own choosing where there were better rooms and gardens for the children to play in, but although they gave due consideration to our suggestions

they finally refused them. The prospect of concentration at the hotel filled us with gloom as at that time it looked as if we would be there for the duration, and the idea of crowded quarters, especially in the hot weather, for a long period was not a happy one. There was, however, obviously nothing to be done about it and in the middle of March we began to move. Everyone was allowed to take as much furniture from their houses as they wanted to furnish their own rooms and add to the furnishing of the public rooms. They were also given facilities for selling off any personal possessions which they could not take with them and reasonable prices were obtained. In my case this did not affect me as all the furniture in my house was the property of the company.

Just as all the furniture had been moved and we were ready to close our houses, the Japanese asked us individually whether we wanted to go home. This was a bombshell. We could not believe that there was a possibility of wholesale repatriation, especially for people of military age and we therefore hedged, thinking there must be some catch in this question or that in some way our answers would be used for propaganda purposes.

A few days later, however, just after we had finally moved in to the hotel, they told us that a boat would leave for Shanghai on April 11th and did we want to go by it. We were still doubtful, but it having been intimated to us that should we not go there was no guarantee as to what would happen to us as a community, we said "Yes, we want to go." After all the trouble, therefore, of moving to the hotel our stay there was exactly 11 days.

I shall here digress a moment. There was a Swiss Consul in Canton who did his best to help us in every way, but the Japanese did not want to recognise him, they limited very much his opportunities of seeing us and in general did all they could to prevent him interfering. It was, however, found possible for us before we left Canton to put in his hands personal possessions which we could not take with us - in some cases the keys of our houses, offices, etc. (those of us who had not had these taken by the Japanese). When we left our houses they were sealed by the Japanese Military, but later on we heard in Shanghai that there were many "Desirable Residences" to let in Shameen and by now I suppose they are all occupied by Japs and Chinese. Personal possessions, are however, I believe safe in the hands of the Swiss Consulate including one large packing case of mine.

The last few days before leaving Canton were chaos. Firstly we were told that we could only take as much luggage as we could carry, then that we could take no money, then that we could take all our luggage and as much money as we wanted. One person said this, one person said that, but finally through the Swiss Consulate we got it in writing that we could take 200 lbs of heavy luggage, plus hand luggage and money up to the equivalent of about £100. Most people found that 200 lbs of heavy luggage allowed them to take practically all their clothes after weeding out superfluous and worn-out garments.

Finally on the afternoon of April 11th we boarded a launch from the jetty at Shameen which took us about ten miles downriver to our ship for Shanghai. The numbers leaving Canton were approximately seventy Britishers including Consular Officials and twenty Americans. There was quite a crowd to see us off including about twenty Britishers and Americans who were to come on the next ship. The French turned out in force and there was even a sprinkling of old German residents whom most of us had known in days of peace.

As we came alongside our ship, our hearts sank to our boots. She was a dirty old coastal tramp. The first-class accommodation consisted of four cabins each containing two berths, the second-class consisted of eight cabins with three berths each and the third-class consisted of five cabins containing twin berths. We all piled on board and the first and second-class accommodation was allocated to the women and children and one or two of the senior Consular Officers; the rest of us installed ourselves in the third-class accommodation. I was one of ten in a cabin 12ft. long by 3ft. wide by 8ft. high. Two storied berths were arranged all round the sides and what little room remained in the middle was piled with our luggage. There were three wash rooms in the whole ship each containing one basin, and the less said about the other sanitary arrangements the better.

We sailed that night for Swatow and arrived there after 35 hours. (We stayed there three days while the ship's cargo of rice was unloaded). We had been told we would only take on a few consular officials at Swatow, but instead the whole community was put on board - an addition of about fifty persons. There was no cabin accommodation for them, but they had been warned to bring camp beds or mattresses and they slept in the hold - men, women and children all together. A further two days brought us to Amoy where we feared another large contingent would join us. Eventually, however, only about twenty people came on - the

balance of the community being told to await the second ship. By that time, therefore, we were nearly 150 persons. After a further four days steaming we arrived in Shanghai where we were greeted with the news that we had to remain at anchor for forty-eight hours - quarantine for cholera.

Luckily the sea was fairly smooth for the whole trip so only a very few suffered from seasickness. What a rough passage would have been like I dread to think. Food was the worst problem. We were given breakfast, porridge, bread and jam. Lunch consisted of cabbage water soup, stew and curry; dinner the same as lunch. We had come prepared for poor food so we could regale ourselves with corned beef, biscuits, etc. when we felt particularly hungry. Those with children had all brought milk and although we were not allowed off the ship at Swatow or Amoy, we could buy fruit over the side at these ports. Black-out was enforced all the way which did not add to the comfort of the voyage, and by the time we arrived alongside the wharf at Shanghai it was exactly twelve days since we had left Canton. It was really a most unpleasant trip but we soon forgot about it and were able to laugh at our discomforts and the many amusing incidents that took place during the trip. I will just mention one here. A rumour went round after Amoy that they were not any longer boiling the drinking water. The senior Consul on board therefore interviewed the Captain. He explained his mission and the Captain called the Chief Steward and asked him if it was true. The Steward replied as follows: "What, not boiling the drinking water, of course not, we haven't done so since we left Canton." We decided that as we had survived a week on unboiled water it was unnecessary to pursue the matter further.

None of us had any idea what lay in store for us in Shanghai so the excitement was intense as we drew alongside the wharf. We were met by Japanese officials, a member of the Consulate and to our amazement, a Britisher, representative of the Shanghai Residents' Association. The last-named was immediately besieged with questions such as "Where are we going?" "Are we going to an Internment Camp?" "Are we going to be locked up?" To which questions he seemed equally amazed as we were to see him there at all. He told us that the Japanese had put the question of our accommodation in the hands of the British Residents' Association in Shanghai and he was in charge. It took us some time to digest this, to us, incredible statement, but meanwhile our luggage was being unloaded and

we were told buses were awaiting us to take us to the American School which had been taken over as a dispersal centre.

We arrived at the school about 5 o'clock in the afternoon and after going through various formalities, filling in countless forms, etc. were told that hot water and baths were awaiting us, beds were available in a dormitory and dinner would be at 7.30.

The arrangements were excellent and the joy of getting under a hot shower and putting on clean clothes after twelve days aboard our ship was wonderful. We finally sat down to a superb meal of soup, roast beef, Yorkshire pudding and vegetables ad lib, and I have seldom seen a meal so appreciated. The next day we were told of our billets. I went to live with a married couple in "Shell" in one of the Company's houses and there I remained, living in complete comfort, until the end of July. As I have said, we were allowed to bring money from Canton but as we had been turned out of our place of residence the Japanese agreed to give us a daily allowance to cover board and lodging until our ship for home left. I may say here that it was not until we reached Shanghai that we believed we were really en route home.

Here I think I should give you some idea of the conditions in Shanghai as they were when we arrived and I believe little change has taken place since.

Everybody, British and Americans alike, had continued since the beginning of the war to live in their own houses. Those employed by Public Utility Companies and Municipal Offices continued to do their job under Japanese direction and to draw their salaries. Most business men still went to their offices, not to sell, as all their stocks had been taken over, but to wind up their businesses under direction of a Japanese supervisor usually known as a "stupifier". These business men were also paid salaries by the Japanese, but the maximum monthly wage was limited to £20.

All motor cars had been confiscated by the Japanese so everyone went to office on bicycles. The price of these had, at the time I got there, risen to exorbitant levels and it was never safe to leave a bicycle unattended for a moment in the street.

It was amusing to see people tying their bicycles with chains or other apparatus to lamp posts, etc. before entering a shop. If you had no bicycle, you had to walk or travel in dirty trams. Up to the time of my departure, wireless sets had not yet been confiscated and everyone listened to London news nightly, but it looked as if

these were in the process of going. All sets had to be registered before the end of August and once registered I am sure the next step will be confiscation.

Food supplies in Shanghai were getting more and more difficult to obtain, prices were soaring and money becoming scarcer daily, so I fear that conditions in Shanghai by this winter will not be anything like so pleasant as when I was there.

Now, to get back to my own story. As I have said, I lived in real comfort in Shanghai, but time hung heavily on my hands. Cinemas were open, but, of course, all the films were old and it was difficult to employ one's time. There was, however, complete freedom of movement and although one could not go out of the town, much of my time was spent walking around in the outskirts.

From the day we landed to the day we left, there were continual rumours about our departure. When we first arrived in Shanghai there were rumours that the boat would sail sometime in May, then came a rumour that the whole exchange was off, and then that it was only delayed. Many of the rumours had no basis and were manufactured I believe in the clubs and bars of Shanghai. We were, nevertheless, all the time on tenterhooks, but after the departure of the two American evacuation ships about the middle of June, we really believed that eventually we also would get away. Finally in the middle of July a list of the civilians who were travelling was published and they were advised to go and live at the American Country Club which was run by the British Residents' Association, but all expenses paid for by the Japanese. I moved there on July 20th and remained there till our eventual departure on August 4th.

That day dawned hot and sunny. The whole Club was seething with expectancy. Women were running around after their children who seemed to be doing their best to get lost, people were packing up and labelling their luggage, officials were rushing in and out giving orders and countermanding them and such like. Finally, however, we were told to be ready to board buses to take us to the wharf at 11.30 a.m. 11.30 came and went, the buses were standing outside in the broiling sun but we were not allowed to board them. Finally at 12.30 embarkation to buses commenced. Our luggage had all been sent ahead so we had nothing to look after but ourselves. We were all checked through a Japanese official, each person wearing a rosette and giving as he passed his or her repatriation number (mine was 1023).

We boarded the buses, the temperature of which was now well over 100 degrees F., but when everyone had embarked, it was found that two Indians were missing. This meant a further half-hour's delay in the broiling sun in the hot buses. Eventually, however, we started and arrived at the wharf shortly after one-thirty. Again a wait in the buses, another half hour, and then on to the landing stage. This was quite airy and harassed mothers, etc. began to cool off slightly. Finally our tender came alongside and we left for down river where we had already seen the crack Japanese liner Tatsuta Maru awaiting us. Our trials were, however, not quite at an end. We had to file through (six hundred of us) a corrugated iron warehouse, the temperature of which I dread to think of. By the time we got on board some of the women and children were literally nearly in a state of collapse but had only one object in view and that was to stick it till they got on board. We were all finally on board by 4 o'clock and the boat was to sail at 6. During the next two hours we somehow got ourselves sorted out, collected our luggage which was heaped up in any vacant place which could be found for it; some people had a long and exhausting search but eventually everyone collected all their belongings. I heard afterwards that the maximum shade temperature in Shanghai that day was 106 degrees F.

We found on board the whole of the British Diplomatic and civilian, population from Japan (about 250 persons all told). I understand that no British resident except a few married to Japanese remained behind, so that about 850 persons sailed.

Most of the Consular and Diplomatic people obtained good accommodation and this could hardly be objected to inasmuch as it was a Diplomatic exchange and we civilians were only put on to fill the ship. My own accommodation consisted of what became to be known as the "horse boxes". One of the large smoke rooms had been fitted up with about 150 wooden beds in lines two high. Each bed consisted of a wooden frame with a straw mattress, sheet and blanket provided. The beds were contiguous and the only method of ingress and egress was from the end. We were, however, on C. deck which was fairly airy and I think the worst accommodation was the women's' and children's' who were on D and E deck in cabins of eight to ten, each usually having a compliment of about six women and four children, the latter of whom, I understand, arranged their nightly concerts at different hours.

Food was European style and under the circumstances quite good. Owing to the big passenger list and shortage of space for storing water, fresh water was only turned on for an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening during which time, as well as washing oneself, one had to wash one's own clothes. The resultant crush can be imagined. We were, however, on our way home and nobody much cared. We spent our time playing bridge and deck games, relating to each other our varied experiences and so on.

On the voyage to Lourenco Marques we called firstly at Saigon in French Indo-China to pick up Diplomats and Officials from Slam and Indo-China (about 100 all told) and then made a call at Singapore for water and oil. We did not, however, go into the harbour at Singapore but lay outside where nothing at all could be seen. From there a fourteen-day journey brought us to Lourenco Marques where we arrived on August 27th.

As soon as we arrived there we were allowed ashore. The ship bringing the Japanese repatriates had not arrived and everyone was free to live ashore or on board our evacuation ship as they preferred. I was lucky as the Shell Company Officials there asked me to stay with them and so I had the real comfort of continuous hot water and a comfortable bed. The great excitement at Lourenco, of course, was mail, the first news we had had of our families for nine months. The Shell Company representative brought my cable of greeting from the family on board just two hours after our arrival.

We stayed in Lourenco in all seventeen days. Firstly we had to await the second ship from Shanghai which sailed ten days after we did, then the British repatriates had to be split up into those heading for Australia, India, South Africa and England. Finally on September 13th we sailed on board the P. & O. Liner (Narcunda) for home. The ship's passenger list had changed considerably from that of our first ship and we were now about 1,000 (700 Britishers and 300 others consisting of Dutch, Poles, Czechs, Norwegians, Free French and Belgians) all from the Far East. There was not accommodation in cabins for all the passengers and about 400 of us slept in hammocks in spaces which had previously been cabin accommodation but had been converted to Mess Decks for troop purposes. It was a real relief to get on a British ship with British personnel, British cooking, eat

excellent British food and such like, and no one minded any small discomfort. We had, of course had Japanese Officers and Stewards on board the Tatsuta Maru and these under the circumstances, were quite reasonable, but naturally were not people we had any desire to travel with more than we could help.

From Lourenco Marques we had a week's voyage to Capetown where we anchored for twenty-four hours and were allowed ashore. Again Shell Company came to my assistance, drove me round the countryside and provided me with funds to make up deficiencies in my wardrobe. On the voyage from Capetown to Liverpool we called for a few hours at St. Vincent in the Cape Verde Islands off Dakar, skirted the Azores and finally dropped anchor in the Mersey on Friday, October 9th. We lay in the stream there for the whole day, came alongside the wharf on Saturday but by the time formalities had been completed it was 11 o'clock on Sunday morning before we finally set foot on British soil. I telegraphed and rang up home and reached Overdale on the morning of Monday, October 12th, where my unexpected and almost unbelievable reunion with the family awaited me.

During the whole voyage from Shanghai to Liverpool our ships were lit up at night and there was no black-out. The Japanese ship was decorated with white illuminated crosses and the British ship with Illuminated Union Jacks. We had no alarms and as far as enemy activity was concerned the voyage was uneventful.

N.B. The above has been written for private circulation. There is no reason why it should not be shown to friends if they are interested but I do not want any part of it to become public for various reasons.

It will also probably interest you to know that there are still about 10,000 Britishers in China, about 800 in Manila and a further 3/4,000 civilians in Hong Kong quite apart from Military, and an unknown number in Singapore. It is therefore quite impossible for me to know or know of more than a very small number, and so it is unlikely that I shall be able to tell your friends about any of their relatives who may be unluckily stranded out there.