

Treatment of Prisoners of War, employed
at the Asano Cement Works,
Kamiiso, Hakodate, Japan

Arriving at the Hakodate Main Camp on 11.6.1943, 100 of us were allotted to the Cement Works. From this time, until 2.10.1943, we travelled to and from the works daily, on an open barge in all kinds of weather, across the bay, a journey of approximately one hour and 15 minutes! On 2.10.1943 we moved to a new camp erected by the works in the factory grounds. Prior to moving the High Commandant assured us that our treatment would be the same as that at the main camp. This was not so, for although treatment was bad at Hakodate, it proved to be much worse at Kamiiso. The camp itself was not completed, there was no ceiling in and the ends of the buildings were open, slits were noticed in the walls and through these the wind howled. These slits were eventually sealed by us by means of strips of brown paper.

Drinking water was unobtainable in the Camp, the only water was obtained by means of a hand pump and this, at times, gave off an unpleasant odour, and, when boiled, became red in colour. This was remedied to some extent later on but the installation of a filter by the Doctor, which eliminated the red scum and when boiled and chlorinated was drinkable.

As all the water had to be pumped through this solitary pump and the Cookhouse had first option, this, combined with the constant lack of soap, made washing, at times, extremely difficult.

At work we were divided into five parties, as follows: No.1 was an odd job party. No.2 worked on coal, half of the party working in the open loading trucks with approximately 10 cwt of coal, each man loading and pushing out 40 of these trucks per day singlehanded. The other half pushed the trucks along the top of the furnaces and tipped them where required. No.3 party worked in pairs on Coke furnaces, each pair drawing 5 each day. The great heat thrown off by the Coke was responsible to a large degree for the loss of weight and health of many men. No.4 party handled the cement from the filling of 50 kilo bags on the machine, loading and pushing of trucks down and along the pier and the loading of barges. This party was roughly 20 strong and loaded some 5000 or 6000 bags daily. No.5 party were employed as Engineers' labourers – doing all the heavy lifting and carrying – and in the moulders shop.

Our first few months at Kamiiso were miserable. At work we were beaten and humiliated at the slightest provocation and often for no reason at all. On return to camp, we sat around and shivered whilst waiting for the evening meal and Roll Call so that we would get into bed and warm up during this period too; we were still clad in tropical clothing some men only having shorts. To give them some measure of warmth, the works management kindly gave them some dirty old cement sacks to wrap around their legs.

The Camp Staff at this time consisted of a Warrant Officer named Sato who was Camp Commandant and who, in the opinion of every man in the camp was a madman. He delighted in drilling the whole camp to Japanese words of command and would double us to work through two foot of snow and trip some unfortunate up into a drift. The other two members of the staff were Army employed civilians, one, a one armed ex soldier named Myoni and the other an English speaking one named Kitagawa (pronounced Stengwa). These performed the duties of Orderly N.C.O. on alternate days, and, although their medical knowledge was no nil, they held Sick Parade and decided who should go to work and who

shouldn't. The only illness they understood was an open wound or burn. The American W.O. and later on the British RAMC Sergeant who were our medical staff were helpless. We were supposed to be under the works doctor, a Japanese named Yaseda who visited the camp about twice a week for a rapid examination. He was ruthless in his use of a knife and ordinary scissors in boils and wounds and even the workers at the factory were scared of him and sympathised with us. As a result of this, men were sent to work suffering from numerous illnesses. Then because a man was unable to perform his allotted task due to his illness and low body resistance the, at times, bitter cold and insufficient clothing the work leader would beat him up with fist and stick. Should a man for example report sick with bad feet, these two would give him a pair of straw boots, so large that they often fitted over his normal footwear, and send him to work even in the snow! One man reported one morning complaining of pains in the pit of his stomach and around the base of his spine; to which Kitagawa asked "Do you partake in masturbation?" He went to work. Several cases of Bronchitis and Pneumonia occurred and our first death took place at 2155 hrs on 5.11.1943 after a four days illness. Apart from a few powders, bandages, ointments and Iodine supplied by Yaseda there was nothing to give to patients. Yaseda examined Spr. Brown at 1800 hrs and 5.11.1943, but sent no medicine into him, neither did he return when the condition became critical. When he did arrive at 1100 hrs next day, he merely stated that he didn't think that he would die. The first snow of the year fell on Nov. 7th and on the 8th we were allowed fires – one small coke brazier between 50 men.

At Hakodate we had been issued with a tablet of soap similar in size to Palmolive or Lux on 27/6 and one razor blade between four men on 17/7. Thinking we should have a regular supply of soap, we washed our clothes as well as our bodies with it, but the next issue was not until Nov. 14th. By this time Cement dust had caked on perspiring bodies and heads and mere water alone would not remove it.

On the 29th Nov. we were eventually issued with our first suit which was nothing more or less than a thin sackcloth effort which was in effect out working overalls. Around this period Sato held one of his drill parades on our rest day, and, on parade with a temperature of 102° was a Pte. Fallowes. A few days after, on Dec. 3rd he died of Pneumonia. Being an exceptionally tall man with large feet, he had, on his boots wearing out, been sent to work in wooden sandals and, in the snow, in straw boots.

With the death of Fallowes we had a brief improvement in rations and we were issued with cotton socks, cotton gloves and a quite warm winter suit which was to wear in camp only. At Christmas however, some British Red Cross foodstuffs arrived. Parcels ran to 1 between 5 men, and, on issue from the Office, two were found to have been opened and such items as Toffees, Chocolates, etc. removed. Two 100 lbs sacks of sugar had also been tampered with and approximately 20 lbs removed from the first and 30 lbs from the other. Some Cocoa had also gone and the Office Staff were known to be drinking Cocoa some two months later.

Rations at this period consisted of a pint mug filled with Rice, which, at different periods had of the following cooked in with it according to the season; Beans, Potatoes – often rotten – Dikon and Fuki. The side dish was usually a very watery stew with occasionally a variation, one of these being a dried, salted herring, frequently "off" and maggoty with some raw chopped cabbage.

Another 50 P.O.W. had joined us from Hakodate and accommodation became very cramped. I cannot remember the amount of rice issued as a whole during this period, but other items

word on an average:- Vegetables 60 kg, Miso paste 7 kg, Salt 1 kg, Soy Sauce 6 pints, Flour* 3.5 kg and Dried Herrings* 5 kg. Note:- * These were not daily issues. These rations were for 150 men. The guards in the camp were civilian employees of the works, and, at night, on the Cookhouse being locked, the Cooks handed the keys into the Guard Room. Frequently during the night these Guards were seen by our men on Night Guard to enter the Cookhouse and steal our rations. This was, as frequently reported, but Kitagawa just laughed and took the Guards' word before ours and said, "The Japanese never steal."

With the camp becoming so crowded, lice began to make an appearance due to the men's inability to wash their clothes properly owing to the shortage of soap, and it was only through the efforts of Captain Bumgarner U.S.M.C., that we were able to eliminate them.

Early in Feb. 1944 American Red Cross supplies arrived and certain articles of heavy clothing were retained by Kitagawa. These were badly needed by some of the men at the time and it wasn't until Lt. Col. S. Emoto took command that these items were handed over and the blankets taken into use on the hospital. Arrival of Red Cross was always an excuse to stop soap issues, and, on 2 occasions we had one issue in three months and once, one in four months. Kitagawa too, took it upon himself to ration the Red Cross Medical Supplies at one time.

Instances of cruelty by work leaders were frequent. One N.C.O. suffering from Beri-beri and Tropical Ulcers in both legs was detailed by his work leader to push trucks up and down the pier. On trying to explain his inability to do this job and asking for a change his leader, one Moriama by name, flew into rage struck, him with his fist, and finding that had insufficient effect, struck him several times over the head with a heavy stick till he knocked the N.C.O. unconscious. On recovering the N.C.O. found Moriama standing over him and lashing out with both feet. He forced this N.C.O. to carry on pushing trucks for the rest of the day. On return to Camp the matter was reported to Kitagawa who seemed to find the matter a great joke and said, "The Hancho has a very excitable nature but he is sorry for what happened." This was but one incident of this particular leader, every day would bring some new tale of his devilry.

Around this period too, many accidents took place due to the dilapidated and unprotected machinery. In one Dept. particularly, where coal was ground into a fine dust, explosions frequently occurred at least three British P.O.W. were seriously burned. One is still bedridden and is likely to remain so for some considerable time requiring a plastic operation. One of the workmen on any breakdown occurring had at habit of spitting in the P.O.W. face as though he were responsible.

On Lt. Col. S. Emoto taking over the post of High Commandant conditions improved considerably and he at once stamped out all beatings, both at work and in Camp and treated us more like human beings. Our Doctor was given a free hand and Yaseda vanquished. He was, as a result, very unpopular with the Japanese and the work leaders told us he was a spy.

The Camp Staff was increased at this time by the addition of one other civilian named Yamamoto. We had been changed over to Army rations and he was appointed Storeman. He was never responsible for any beatings, but, he did take a considerable amount of our rations out of the Camp. Every third night when he was Orderly N.C.O. he would fill a rucksack in the Stores and send one of the Guards off to his home with it. Daily too, he would fill a Klim

tin with sugar and take it into the Office so that they would have sweet tea. Naturally we suffered for it.

With the arrival of March 1945, however, conditions began to slip back again and beating started. Men were placed in the Guard Room on the slightest pretext on half a rice ration and no stew, no extra clothing and no blankets. Work leaders seemed intent on making up for lost time and would report a man for something, which very often he had not done. One, named Takahashi was asked by a P.O.W. if he could go to the lavatory. Takahashi refused permission, but, pointing to a straw mat, told him to do it there. Knowing the man would refuse, he took the refusal as an excuse to administer a severe beating with a stick. Another work leader, normally in charge of a party of Koreans, was put in charge of one of our parties for about two months. During this time he made himself hated by one and all, an example being – one party under him were given a job to do in a certain time. At 3.00 p.m., seeing that it was impossible to finish the job that day, one of the N.C.O.s asked him for the customary rest period. He at once flew into a violent temper, threw the N.C.O. to the ground and commenced to strike him on the back of the head with pieces of Coke until he knocked him unconscious. The head work leader named Kanaka, was a cold, sneering individual who seemingly encouraged the beatings for he was plentiful in his own administerings.

It was with thankful hearts that we eventually left Kamiiso, for, during our stay there, we came to the opinion that, had it not been for the benefit of Lt. Col. Emoto's administration during his year of office, the combined effect of poor food, bad working conditions with the perpetual cement dust affecting men's chests and stomachs, bad living conditions in Camp and the depressing effect of the factory on our spirits, the death toll would have been steadily increased. All this made every man hate and loathe the very name of the country together with all of its inhabitants.

 Canteen Sales

| | | Sen. |
|------------|-------------------|------|
| 11.10.1943 | 6 Cigarettes | 15 |
| 11.10.1943 | 10 Cigarettes | 15 |
| | 10 Biscuits | 15 |
| 14.10.1943 | 4 Cigarettes | 10 |
| 16.10.1943 | 1 Razor blade | 10 |
| 22.10.1943 | 10 Cigarettes | 15 |
| 24.10.1943 | 5 Cigarettes | 7 ½ |
| 30.10.1943 | 10 Cigarettes | 10 ½ |
| 5.11.1943 | 5 Cigarettes | 7 ½ |
| 7.11.1943 | 10 Cig. | 15 |
| | Green Pea Popcorn | 40 |
| 17.11.1943 | 10 Cigarettes | 15 |
| 19.11.1943 | 5 Cigarettes | 7 ½ |
| 21.11.1943 | 10 Cigarettes | 15 |
| 30.11.1943 | 10 Cigarettes | 15 |
| | 20 Biscuits | 10 |

Note: These biscuits were small ovals about one inch long 1/8 inch thick