**WW2 experience from Kelvin Stephen Terry of 2/40 Battalion. Number TX3436 Australian Infantry Battalion.**

Kelvin Stephen Terry was born in Burnie, Tasmania in 1922 where he was brought up on a Farm (A street in Burnie is now called Terry Lands St) where the farm was before it was developed into Housing. He married Queenie Williams in 1946 and had 3 children. One Daughter Sandra, and two sons Kelvin and Graeme. He moved to Melbourne in 1958 after sadly losing the farm from the Terry family after his father passed away and stepmum inherited the farm.

Kelvin Jnr was 8 years old at the time they moved to Melbourne. Upon moving to Melbourne, he received a job as a Builders Labourer and later ran his own business KS Terry and Son with Kelvin Jnr before retiring in 1982. He lived in Nunawading with Queenie in the house he built with Kelvin Jnr and ran a Strawberry and Raspberry small business on a few acres on his son’s property in Wandin North.

Kelvin had 9 grandchildren, 3 girls and 6 boys. As one of his grand-daughters I have very fond memories of helping him prepare and sell the strawberries in his red Kombi. He was a lovely kind, Poppa.

**His experience in his words…**

I served full time war service in the Australian Imperial forces from 19th June 1940 to 19th June 1946, a total of two thousand, one hundred and ninety-two days, which included active service in Australia for 238 day and outside Australia for 1417 days.

When war broke out, I was working as a panel beater, as time went on, most people were joining up so I thought I would enlist. I went for a fitness test. I had to tell a lie as I was only eighteen and you were supposed to be 20 years old.

We went by train to Brighton, near Hobart, Tasmania. We arrived around ten o’clock at night. All they had ready for us was a cold stew. Only half built huts. We nearly all caught the flu and mumps. We stayed there for four months, with hard training. We were then all put on a boat for Bonegilla in Victoria for a two month stay. We were then put on a train to Adelaide. We were marooned here for three weeks.

The railroad was washed out to Alice Springs, we eventually arrived in Alice Springs then on to Katherine by truck. I stayed here for two months training. We were issued with army clothing. I received a long overcoat, but in the morning when I woke someone had swapped it with a much shorter one. I never got another one either. We had a mattress; they were just hessian bags filled with straw.

We used to have friendly fights with these. Mine ended up the thinnest of the lot. Our Sergeant used to pick on new recruits, he played polka with them just to get their money. We were given weekend leave. We were allowed to leave camp at five o’clock Friday night and be back in camp by ten o’clock Sunday. Tired out we just wanted to sleep but early morning we were woken to go on a march of 15 miles.

We spent hours fitting gas masks on our faces, we had to learn to do it quickly. We also spent quite a long time taking our machine guns to pieces and putting them back together again. We had to train on a rifle range with our march guns. One day we had to March 100 miles in three days we had to run a lot too, to keep fit and healthy if possible.

Everyone used to hate getting detailed for kitchen duty, we had to peel bags of potatoes. There were church services every Sunday. If we did not go, we would have to do all the dirty jobs around the camp. After the two months training, we went to Daly River in Darwin. At this stage Japan declared war.

I was sent to Simon, where the Dutch had a camp. The only thing wrong, it was too close to the aerodrome, so they shifted us into tents further away. The Japanese came over regularly every morning to machine gun us. We were very disappointed with the Americans. They used to come over our way at night on their way to Singapore. They made sure they weren’t there when the Japanese arrived to bomb everything there.

One day I hid behind some cases, to my surprise the brand on the cases were marked gelignite, I sure made a quick getaway. Then we received word that Japanese had landed Para troops further up. At his time the English Aircrafts landed some guns and gunners. They were a great help to us; they were very good gunners. Then we went up toward the Japanese Para troops.

We couldn’t understand why we were not receiving any food. When we arrived at the village, we found out it had been bombed, and all the troops had fled. Further up we encountered Aero troopers. Our leader said, “There’s a machine gun nest over the hill,’ and told us to get rid of it. He sent thirty of us up. We did not know there were 700 Japanese there. We sure made a quick withdrawal with quite a few casualties.

The leader had a talk and decided to bomb it with everything we had, and send the whole Battalion over, we wiped most of them out. During this action I received a machine gun blast. I was wounded but I managed to get into a truck which was in a convoy. We moved up the road and stopped for the night. The next morning before we could move off the Japanese had landed a force of approximately 20,000 men which came up behind us.

They had orders to bomb us at ten o’clock if we hadn’t surrendered, and on the move back, negotiations were slow. Ten o’clock came around. The Japanese dropped their bombs on their own army as well as us. Quite a few Japanese were killed. We lost quite a few.

We surrendered to the Japanese as we had to many men wounded. We were then taken to the main port. I was operated on by our own doctor and temporarily patched up with very little water and antiseptic.

Medical conditions were shocking. The doctors had nothing to work with. Some of them had to take legs and arms off the wounded boys. Tropical ulcers were shocking. The doctors could not teat these as they knew nothing about them. They were that bad, they ate into their legs and arms.

The fit men were put to work loading boats. Later, we were put on a prison ship for Java. We stopped at Dilly, a Portuguese colony. While we were in their harbour, an Austrian bomber came over and dropped some bombs but missed us. We continued to the south of Java and was put to work unloading ships.

Late on we were put on a train for Jakarta. My 21st birthday occurred on this train. We arrived at Jakarta and were put in jails. Six to a cell with a mad camp commander. He was executed after the War.

We were put to work growing caster-oil trees, they used this to run their planes. Later, we were on a ship for Changi, Singapore. The condition was shocking in this camp. Later we were put on a paddle steamer to go up the river to Sumatra. We built a railroad to get the coal back through the jungle to the wharves.

The work on the railroad was very hard, Japanese guards would stand over us. We had no hope of resting at all. If we did, they would kick us and make us go back to work. Men were dying everywhere. We used to have to bury quite a lot of our mates after work of a night, they were that weak through lack of good food.

As the railroad was built camps were also built for us. There was a lot of sickness, malaria etc. The Japanese even made the sick work.

All we had to eat was tapioca for breakfast and rice for tea. They used to allow us one Buffalo a month. We were lucky to get a square inch each. We had to share snakes mostly Pythons. We also ate the tips of ferns. The rice that we had still had the husks on it. The natives used to be very good to us. They would sneak duck egg in for us. These natives were quite often caught and shot by the Japanese. Sometimes we got tobacco, but we couldn’t roll it. The Dutch could roll it well, so we were just chewing it really.

We were all very weak on rations. We still had to build their railroads. Some mornings they would be flattened by herds of elephants.

The climate was very hot and steamy, plenty of swamps and leeches, also snakes. Nearly everyone had malaria most were very sick. There were also plenty of panthers. There were very dangerous. We had to keep a fire going at night to keep dangerous animals away, plenty of monkeys to. We used to try and catch them, but they would climb up trees. Most of our men were very weak but still had to work for the Japanese.

Most of the material that was used had New South Wales on it. It must have been brought over before the war. One good thing is that the Japanese would never punch us. They used to kick us and use their open hand. After we finished our work, we would have to bury our dead mates. The conditions were still shocking, it’s a wonder any of us survived. In time we moved back to the camp base.

Rumours were heard around the camp, that the war was over. There was no way that we could find out for sure. They were still working us. I found an old tin in the bush. I thought it would be handy to get water from the well in the camp. I lined up with the tin. The guard reckoned it was one of there’s and that I’d pinched it. He flew into a rage and gave me a good hiding. This all took place after the war was over officially. I always thought that I was the last one to get a hiding.

The next day one of our search planes found our camp. The next day they came back and dropped medical supplies, food, and cigarettes. Then they changed the guards to Indians. Then we fixed the old aerodrome up.

The feeling amongst the men at that time was, we couldn’t believe it. We were all so weak and sick, also very fuzzy in the head. We couldn’t really feel joy at all. All we wanted to do was go home and have some decent food. We didn’t know if any of our families were dead or not.

The first person to come and see us was Mrs Mountbatten. She came to cheer us up. I was lucky I was taken out by plane, most of the others were taken by boat to Singapore.

I only weighed six stone, originally, I weighed 12.5 stone. We were not allowed to eat too much. We have to get back to normal food gradually. A nurse said to me I’d have to put a lot of weight on. I had a tooth out at hospital. I was determined to not let the Japanese take it out. After this, we were put on a hospital ship for three weeks to build us up. They didn’t want the people to see us so thin and miserable as there would have been an outcry. We were all very thin. Even some died after the war ended. Just to weak to worry about receptions.

From there I went to Melbourne, then back to Tasmania. I spent six months in and out of hospital to have my wounds attended to. I also suffered malaria and other complaints. I received $160.00 compensation for the Burma Railroad in Japan. Finally, I was discharged from the Army, exactly six years to the hour form the day I enlisted.