

# P.O.W.'s Unusual Adventures

"Twice Their Prisoner," by Walter L. Summons. (Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 12/6).

When he enlisted in a pioneer battalion at the beginning of the war, Walter Summons never for a moment, he says, dreamed that in few short months he would have experi-

**L**ITTLE did he think that he would soon become the prisoner of war of a nation—France that at the outset was an active ally, and, a few months after that, the captive of another nation—Japan—then a strict neutral!

Yet Lieut Summons achieved all this and by March, 1942, was one of the very few who had qualified for the POW and Bar, as he describes it, by becoming a prisoner of the Japanese.

He sailed for the Middle East in the famous "Queen Ship" convoy early in 1941, and was astonished, like many others, soon to find himself fighting French troops—and his unit suffering very severe casualties—in Syria.

With the survivors of his platoon, Lieut Summons was captured by a Vichy tank and, in defiance of Armistice conditions, was sent to Greece. From there he had an astonishing trip through Europe, including Germany, and eventually reached the South of France. The Vichytes having been brought to heel, he was shipped with others to Haifa and rejoined his battalion with thanksgiving.

His battalion was then detailed as part of "Blackforce"—Brigadier Blackburn's group—and was landed in Java to resist the Japanese.

After some skirmishing this body had no option but to surrender, and, after having been given a comparatively free time in Java by in October, 1942, and from there to the grim Siam railway.

The author's account of the railway ordeal scarcely differs from those of other narrators—it is a tale that has now become familiar, but Lieut. Summons fervently exclaims that on that account it should never be forgotten.

Starvation, overwork, the onset of a dozen different diseases, utter lack of medical care or medical supplies, a cranky, cruel, perverted and spiteful enemy—that is one side, the dark side, of the picture.

Happily, there was another side, and it can be fairly called a glorious side. The firm courage and dignity of the prisoners which, except in the rarest instances, never broke under the worst indignities and hardships, the saving grace of humor and the desire to assist one another displayed by all, and, not the least, the heroism and amazing skill of the doctors, notably Colonel Dunlop, who were always able to

professional miracles with hopelessly inadequate equipment—this was the finer side of it all.

The author does not dwell on the horrors, he wisely leaves the reader to fill in the blanks for himself. His narrative gains much strength by this.

This modest, well-written account of a most unusual and highly adventurous army career deserves recognition.

There are numerous illustrations—and some sketches, good and grim—of prison camp scenes.

Brigadier Blackburn contributes a lively foreword to the book.



The gateway of a POW camp. (Illustration from "Twice Their Prisoner").