

An Epic Of Bad Luck

"Twice Their Prisoner," by Walter Irvine Summons.—Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

FEW soldiers in any war can have been as unlucky as Lieutenant Walter Summons. In this book he tells of his grim adventures, first as a prisoner of the Vichy French—he was captured in Syria—then in the infinitely more brutal hands of the Japanese, who took him in Java, and sent him, with so many other unfortunate Australians, to the horrors of the Burma-Thailand railway.

Even the Japanese surrender has not brought release to young Wally Summons (his father, also Walter, is a well-known Melbourne doctor who was a Brigadier in the A.I.F.).

Only in one of the last brief paragraphs does he indicate the fact that the book was written from a hospital bed where he was fighting disease with the same practical bravery

that he showed against human enemies.

He tells it tersely: "I decided to get married, but was recalled to hospital, so my delights have been postponed once more, and again I have a weary wait to endure. I was in a mood of furious resentment when first told. I was filled with impotent anger against everything, but this has passed, and now I have accepted my fate with patience, as here it is so different, so kindly, so civilised, and humane, that my illness seems of little importance, for I'm alive again and no longer merely existing."

This is not the book of a practised writer. Its lack of skill is at times tantalising, because there was such a wonderful and inspiring story of courage to be told, but at other times its very simplicity lends it strength.

The excellent maps which form its end-papers show vividly the writer's fantastic journeyings as a prisoner from Syria by air to Greece, up to Germany, and down to Marseilles (Belgrade, Marburg, Salzburg, Mulhouse, Lyons) by train, then back by

ship to Syria, and freedom, because these prisoners had been flown out after the French had signed their armistice with the Allies.

He tells how, in the two months of this captive journey, his 21-year-old mind altered with thinking, worrying. "I saw other chaps wandering round with a concentrated look on their faces, yet really thinking of nothing concrete, and I know I did it myself . . . I did know one thing, that never again did I want to be a prisoner of war."



THIS was the state of mind of the lad whose unit, the 2/2 Pioneer Battalion, was sent soon afterwards from the Middle East to the hopeless mess of Java. There Wally Summons was chosen as Brigade Intelligence Officer of the Australian forces—Black Force. Its commander, Brigadier A. S. Blackburn, V.C., tells in a foreword of the remarkable work Summons did during the short Java campaign.

Then captivity again. Brigadier

Blackburn says of the writer: "Not for one moment did he let his outward appearance of courage and good humour relax. He laboured without respite to check the growth among the men of that feeling of bitterness against fate and hopelessness as to the future which can do so much to destroy the morale of prisoners . . . from reports which I have received from senior officers in the different prison camps on that 'Via Dolorosa,' the Burma Thailand railway line, I know that he continued throughout all the years of imprisonment to work unceasingly in his efforts to alleviate the feelings of his fellow prisoners.

"Surely never in the history of the sufferings and agonies of mankind have there been shown a more magnificent courage in adversity, unselfishness to fellow sufferers and refusal to lose hope than were shown by those men."

The book is well illustrated with photographs and drawings by prisoner-artists.

—H.A.S.

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