

POW's REMARKABLE ESCAPES IN NAGASAKI

Suffered Only Minor Injuries From Atomic Bomb

From AXEL OLSEN

MANILA

When an atomic bomb fell on Nagasaki 24 Australians who were in a prison camp there had remarkable escapes. Although they were buried in the wreckage of buildings or hurled to the ground in the fierce blast, their injuries were only minor, consisting of cuts, slight burns, and a pain in the chest as though hit by a great weight.

Some of the Australians, who are now waiting in Manila for return to Australia, are Pte W. C. Reed, of Bendigo; Pte Les Prendergast, of Rochester; Pte P. J. Smythe, of Mil-dura; Cpl Ernest Snowden, of New-castle, NSW; Driver Charles Erick-son, of Dee Why, Sydney; Pte Morrie Banks, of Launceston, Tas; Pte Colin Gleeson, of Yolla, Tas; Pte Ted Howard, of Tas; Pte Gordon Ross, of East Fremantle; and Cpl Charles Parkins, of Perth.

Their long saga of repeated escapes from death began in Java, where they were put in a prison camp after having been captured in either Java or Timor. In June, 1944, they were placed on a small ship and de-spached to Japan.

When only a few miles off the coast of Japan the ship was torpedoed, and the 772 prisoners aboard were ordered to jump overboard. Some were naked, others wearing only a few clothes in which they had been sleeping. From midnight until nearly noon next day they clung to wreckage or tried to swim ashore. Little attempt was made to rescue them, and in several instances when prisoners were picked up by Jap-aneese ships they were thrown back into the water when the Japanese saw they were white men.

AUSTRALIAN LEFT TO DROWN

One Australian, when ordered to jump back into the water, told the

jump back into the water, told the Japanese that he could not swim, but despite his pleas he was forced into the sea and drowned.

Of 195 Australians on the ship there were only 72 survivors. They were placed in a prison camp in Nagasaki, where they suffered in-credible hardships, being made to work 12 hours a day on food that usually consisted of a bowl of watery soup and a meagre portion of barley or salted fish.

When the atomic bomb fell nobody in the camp realised what it was. Pte Morrie Banks, of Launceston, and Pte Gordon Ross, of East Fre-mantle, were outside the barracks

building when they heard a strange sound of something falling. They both fell flat on their faces and were immediately enveloped in what seemed to be a sheet of flame. They considered they were saved by being near a building which checked the force of the blast.

Banks had small blisters on his chest and stomach, although there was no sign of burns in the coat he was wearing.

Near by however, Japanese, who were apparently more exposed to the fire, were burned to death. Other Australians inside the buildings, which were made of wood and roofed with tiles, were buried in the wreck-age.

Cpl Charles Parkins, of Perth, who was in hospital with a poisoned foot, was bathing the wound when the whole place seemed to be ripped apart. Seconds later the only thing left standing was one brick wall.

Pte Ted Howard, of Tasmania, re-members seeing a blue flash as the buildings disintegrated. He struggled from the wreckage, and helped Pte W. C. Reed, of Bendigo, whose eye and back were cut.

PRISONERS RESCUED MATE

PRISONERS RESCUED MATES

The prisoners, when they had rescued as many mates as possible, made for the hills. The whole town was burning, and even green pine trees on the hills were singed and torn into fantastic shapes.

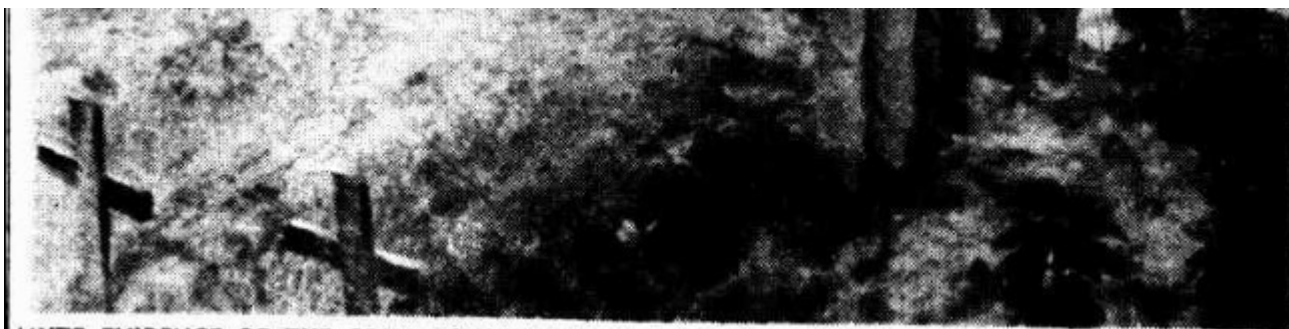
The prisoners stayed in the hills that night and next morning returned to camp. All over the town bodies of Japanese were burned beyond recognition, while everywhere was the horrible stench of death. The Japanese did not attempt to organise any rescue parties or fight the fires for three or four days. All the time fires were slowly eating into what was left of the city.

When they did begin rescue work prisoners were put to work carrying stretchers a five-mile up-hill trip, being kept at work all day and well into the night with nothing to eat. Some of the Japanese carried on stretchers were uninjured. The interpreter, Yamamoto, who was always especially cruel, was carried five miles, but as soon as he heard the air raid alert he jumped to the ground and ran wildly to shelter.

When news of the surrender reached camp the prisoners appropriated a first class compartment on a train and travelled to Yokohama.

Australians now in Manila are due to leave for home in about a week.





MUTE EVIDENCE OF THE GRIM CONDITIONS of the POW camp at Kuching, Borneo, is afforded by these graves of 580 men who died of malnutrition, disease, and cruelty. (RAAF Official photo.)