

"ANGLO AMERICAN SOLIDARITY".

ICHIOKA P.O.W., HOSPITAL CAMP, JAPAN, APRIL 1944.

Our Nip guards decided upon a quaint and unique divergence in their daily tasks. Obviously they needed some kind of pastime to relieve them of the boredom of the monotonous routine of their daily beating up of the sick prisoners. Of course, this new idea of theirs required the active and willing participation of the sick and the lame.

In the hospital at this particular time, we had as patients a number of Chinese and Lascar merchant seamen. Eighteen of these people who had been torpedoed by a German armed raider and had been delivered to the Japanese authorities because of the inability of the raider to enter any German sea ports. This was on account of the heavy blockade by the Allied forces on these ports.

These people told us that on the day they were to be handed over to the Japs that the German captain of the raider mustered them all on the upper deck, shook hands with them and apologised for having to deliver them into the hands of the Nips.

The head man of the Lascars had a reputation among his crew that he was able to see into the future and to forecast not just days away but also into the far years that lay ahead and was continually to be seen to be reading the palms of his compatriots. This Seer was often approached by some of the staff and asked him, in his wisdom, when the war would end.

The Seer would go into deep meditation and after a while would give a tentative date of this happening. Some of the P.O.W.s would believe him but most of us, of course were quite sceptical of his forecasts.

He was never right in any of his prognostications and if he had been able to foresee events he would have known what the Japs were about to do and would have tried to escape or at least try and bleach his skin to a paler shade of brown and tried to lose himself among us Caucasians. I lost complete faith in this man however when Kenny Baggs asked him if his wife was behaving herself back in Plymouth whilst Ken was a guest of the Nips. The Seer after a lot of thought and pondering told Ken that his wife was behaving herself impeccably and was a model of chastity etc.,. Kenny was not even married. So when I see Russel Grant on T.V. I cannot bring myself to believe him. Can you? Who in the name of God could believe in anybody with the name of Russel anyway. Ugh. With apologies to Jane and Mary Russel of course.

Anyhow, the Nips on this particular day, set their brainwave in motion. Now these Chinese and Lascars sat at their own tables and in general kept to themselves and on this day when their head man went to collect the bucket of boiled rice from the galley to be shared out amongst them, the Japs had placed on the table, seventeen very small bowls and one really large one and Lofty, our sadistic guard, took the bucket of food from the head man and commenced to share the boiled rice into the bowls.

He crammed the large bowl till it was overflowing and placed just a few grains into each of the smaller ones. The other guard, "North and South", ushered all the Chinese and Lascars down to the far end of the corridor and began to explain to them exactly what they were to do. When I blow my whistle, he said, you are to race to the table and the first man to reach the large bowl of food will be the winner of this race and will be allowed to eat the whole of this bowl of rice as a first prize. There are no second or third prizes and also there are no holds barred

These men now began to argue amongst each other in divers tongues and began to jostle each other in a bid to get a vantage point. Blows were exchanged and things started to get out of hand and "Lofty" and "North and South" stepped into the melee and soon restored order with judicious whacks of their bamboo poles to all and sundry of the contestants. When sanity was restored, "Lofty" pointed with his pole in the direction of the glittering prize to be won, placed the whistle to his mouth and the poor men began to jostle once more. We simply looked on at this spectacle. The Jap mentality was beyond our comprehension.

Suddenly, when the surging of the runners was at its peak, the whistle was blown and the stampede began. The sick men galloped towards their goal. The corridor being extremely narrow, many were hurtled into the concrete columns which supported the roof of this building, causing many of the men to stumble and fall to the floor, became trampled underfoot and the chaos was unbelievable.

The golden prize was reached by one the men but before he could raise the winnings to his lips, he was borne to the ground by the rest of the men and a fierce struggle ensued for the trophy of rice. The bowl of rice scattered all over the floor and a mad scramble began as these poor starving wretches clawed at the now trampled and filthy grains of rice and fingered it into their mouths. It was a gruesome sight.

During this race the two Nips were doubled up with mirth and tears of merriment rolled from their slit eyes. They enjoyed this so much that this scene was reenacted for the next four or five days but this time the whole of the Nip staff were invited to come along and join in the fun.

We, that is, the rest of the sick and the staff, wondered when they would try this caper on us, but strange to say they never did. In the event of them asking us to do this run, we had decided that we would let one man be a gallant winner and we'd share out the rice equally in the usual manner amongst us. But, as I said we were never asked and I thought that was rather unkind of the bastards.

However the Nips tired of this game but rapidly thought of another. They lined up six each of the Chinese and Lascars and made them face each other across the width of the corridor. And there they stood, the Chinese facing the Lascars, a hands length away from each other. "Lofty" then bid them to punch each other in the face. First with one hand and then with the other hand. Then the first recipient of the punches was allowed to take his turn and punch the man facing him twice and the manœuvre to be repeated until told to stop.

At first the punches were quite mild but the two Nips soon altered that. They belaboured the men with the bamboo poles and "Lofty" gave a demonstration of how exactly he wanted the punches delivered and the correct amount of force to be used with each blow. He hustled the men back into formation and battle was again resumed.

Soon the participants became hostile to each other as they felt that their opposite number had struck them rather more forcibly than was warranted and soon the retaliatory punches got more telling and they began felling each other to the ground. Some also started to hit people they had no right to hit and a real and earnest battle commenced with everyone on the ground and sitting astride their opponet and trying to strangle each other.

The Nips once again were delighted with the show and urged the poor combatants to further endeavours, with the use of the bamboo poles of course. We just stood by as unwilling spectators. After about twenty or so minutes and when it was patent that the warriors strength was now evaporating, the Japs called a halt and the poor creatures were sent away to nurse their swollen faces.

Now it came our turn to provide the laughs. "Lofty" selected six Americans and six English and made us line up as had the former fighters and ordered the battle to start. But we twelve men had already made our minds up and to the consternation and rage of the Japs, we never moved a muscle. We faced each other, staring into each others eyes, scared but nevertheless completely resolved not to do these evil bastards bidding.

What would be the results of our folly. None of us cared. "North and South" rushed away and came back with two rifles and passed one to \*Lofty". Both of them pushed a bullet up the spout and shouted, as only Japs can shout, that if we didn't start striking each other they would shoot us.

One of the Yanks said "Fuck the bastards, we'd just as well be dead as put up with this bullshit. Fuck them". One of the Limeys told the Nips that we didn't do that kind of thing to ones friends. The two guards yelled and prodded us with their guns but we remained, thoroughly frightened out of our wits but steadfast and adamant. As the Yank said, "Fuck them".

There we stood, twelve pathetic, emaciated humans, ravaged and two and a half years into our period of starvation and degradation and a sorry sight we must have looked. But, twelve glorious and valiant people.

When the Japs realised that we were firm on our stance, they told us to scatter and they stalked out of the building. It was all over as suddenly as that. When the Japs vanished, we silently shook each by the hands and dispersed to our various tasks round the sick. Now thats what I call \*Anglo American Cooperation".

Until the end of the war from this date in our lives, these kind of tricks were never again tried on us by our captors. Strange that because I really thought those two Nip bastards had enjoyed things. But I suppose that no matter how enjoyable a thing is, that the time must come when you really get fed up with it. Look at sex now.

Till this day, I often wonder did those two Nip friends of ours, grudgingly admire the, dare I say it, magnificent stand taken up by we twelve men. I'd like to think so. Wouldn't you?