

PART I

The WW2 Diaries

by Julie Lenora Parsons

dropped overboard, for fear the enemy would secure them!

Once the ship docked, the men on board were sent to southern Malaya, where they were trained in tropical warfare. Camouflage was introduced and they practised in the jungle with long camp-outs. Camouflage was something Raymond discovered he excelled at. His eye for colour and his inventiveness made him sought after as a problem solver.

NO STRANGER TO YEARS OF STARVATION and thirst, 18 year-old orphan Raymond Mout-Spiers had lived in seven foster homes in the UK before he entered a church migration scheme for youth (an Australian Government initiative).

At the time he was considered a child, and was sent to work on Captain Mercer's farm north of Bega NSW, where he reports he was *still* hungry. WW2 broke out and Raymond, aged twenty, aspiring to be a wireless gunner in the RAAF, made his way to Sydney to join up. However, the waiting list for wireless gunners was long and so instead he joined the Australian Army where he was fed well, trained well, and soon bulked up. A strong and fit 13 stone, 6'1" young man, he was the healthiest he had ever felt in his life. In early 1941, he set sail, not to the Middle East, but to Singapore.

Throughout the war Raymond kept diaries and made small paintings. These remarkable records were not uncovered and transcribed until 2019.

On the voyage to Singapore, Raymond celebrated his 21st birthday. He told historian and biographer Ron Mumford about the Hollywood war movies being shown for most of the voyage and how they were later bagged up, weighted and

This page:
Recipe for potted beef written in ink by Raymond Mout-Spiers on the back of one of his paintings in c 1943. 250 x 155 mm. Private Collection QLD.

Opposite top:
Twenty-year-old Raymond before he was sent to Singapore. Most of his training was in the new army camps set up in rural NSW (interestingly his records state he was also partly trained in tropical Queensland). According to his war record he was made a Corporal and a Provost in the military police. 1940 Mout-Spiers' Family Collection, QLD.

Opposite below:
Raymond's hardcover foolscap size war diary. Its cover is made of plywood and covered in timeworn army cloth (possibly an old shirt) hand stitched onto the thin plywood. The cover lists the 12 POW camps he was in. Raymond Mout-Spiers, 1942-1945. 340 x 250 x 40 mm. Private Collection QLD.

While stationed in Seremban, southern Malaya, the Australian army was housed in St. Paul's school for seven long months. During this time Raymond fell in love with an Indian Malay girl whom he wanted to marry. The girl fell pregnant, but she was betrothed and not free to marry him. This would be the first of his children to be raised by another man.

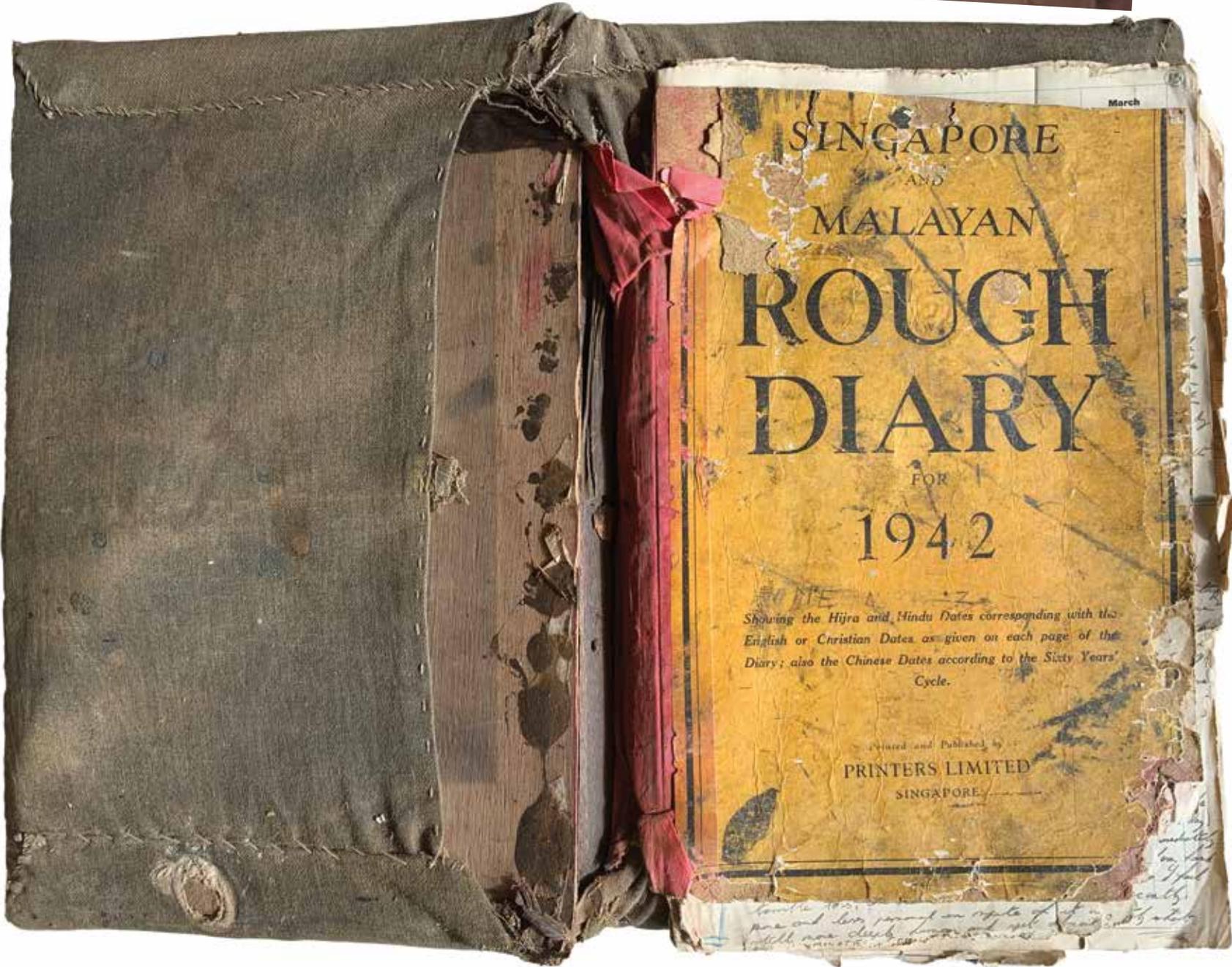
It was in Malaya that Raymond began to express his creative talents which would later be nurtured in Changi prison by the army itself.

When the Japanese army entered the Malay peninsula, Raymond's 2/19th battalion was directed to stall any Japanese advance. The battalion was sent deep into the jungle, so close to the Japanese that camouflage was imperative. The Japanese travelled right past them into carefully laid traps, but the enemy were relentless, eventually sending in some 25,000 troops who simply kept on coming, even riding on bicycles. When the call to retreat to Singapore went out, Raymond's battalion was so far away that they were the last to reach the causeway between Malaya and Singapore. Their losses were great, but the greatest sorrow was that, to survive, the able-bodied soldiers had to leave their wounded comrades behind to be taken as prisoners of war. Unaware that the Japanese had not signed the International Conventions, their abandoned wounded mates were murdered in cold blood.

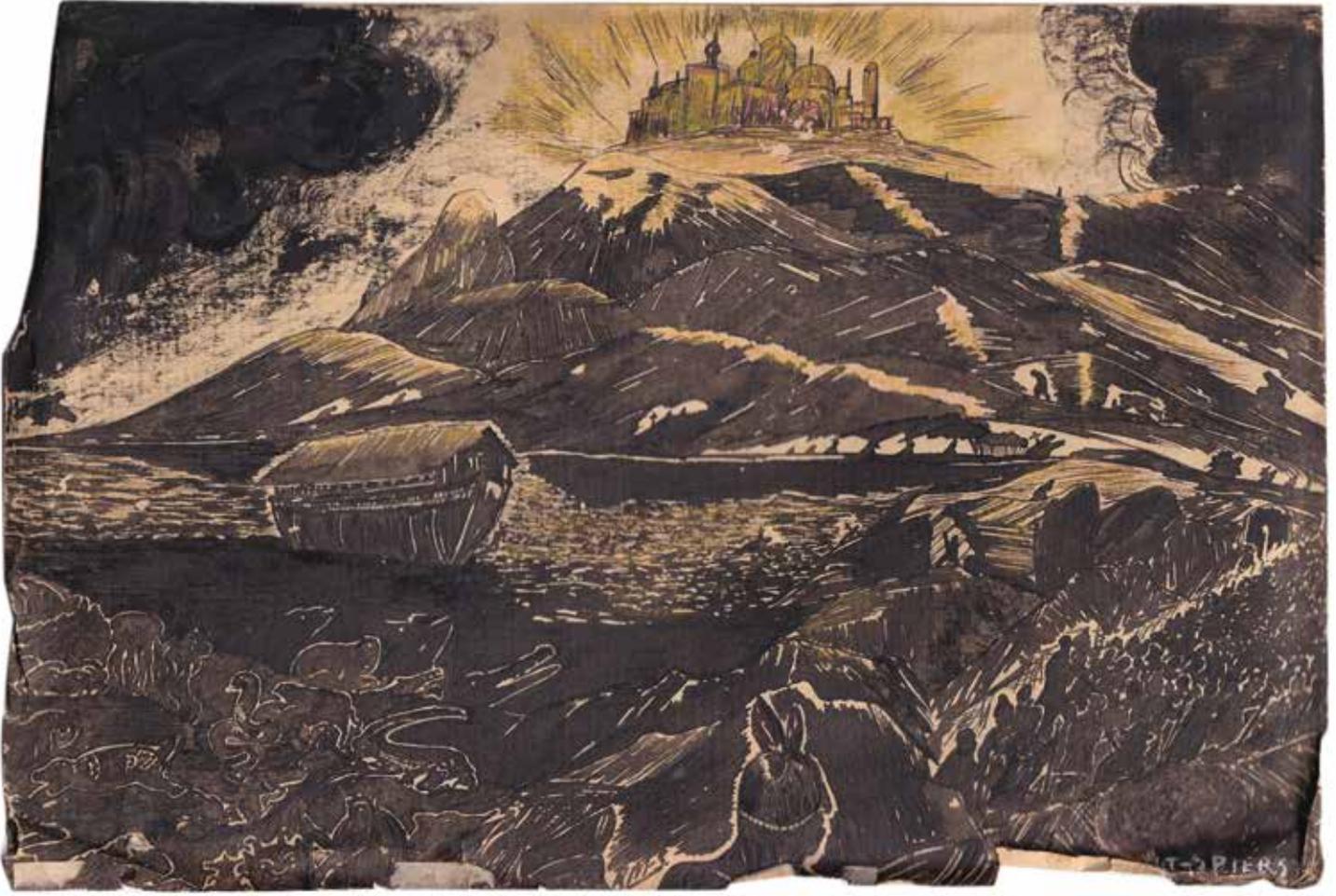
What was left of Raymond's battalion regrouped for the Battle of Muar, the last major battle in the Malayan campaign. Finally the Allies were ordered to flee for their lives through the dense jungle, across raging rivers and treacherous swamps in an endeavour to reach the British lines.

Back home in Australia, *The Argus* newspaper reported the battle, specifically citing the 2/19th Battalion, in the 8th Division, as "the most deadly jungle fighters in the world". From this we can deduce that Corporal Raymond Mout-Spiers was in the thick of the battle, amongst the best.

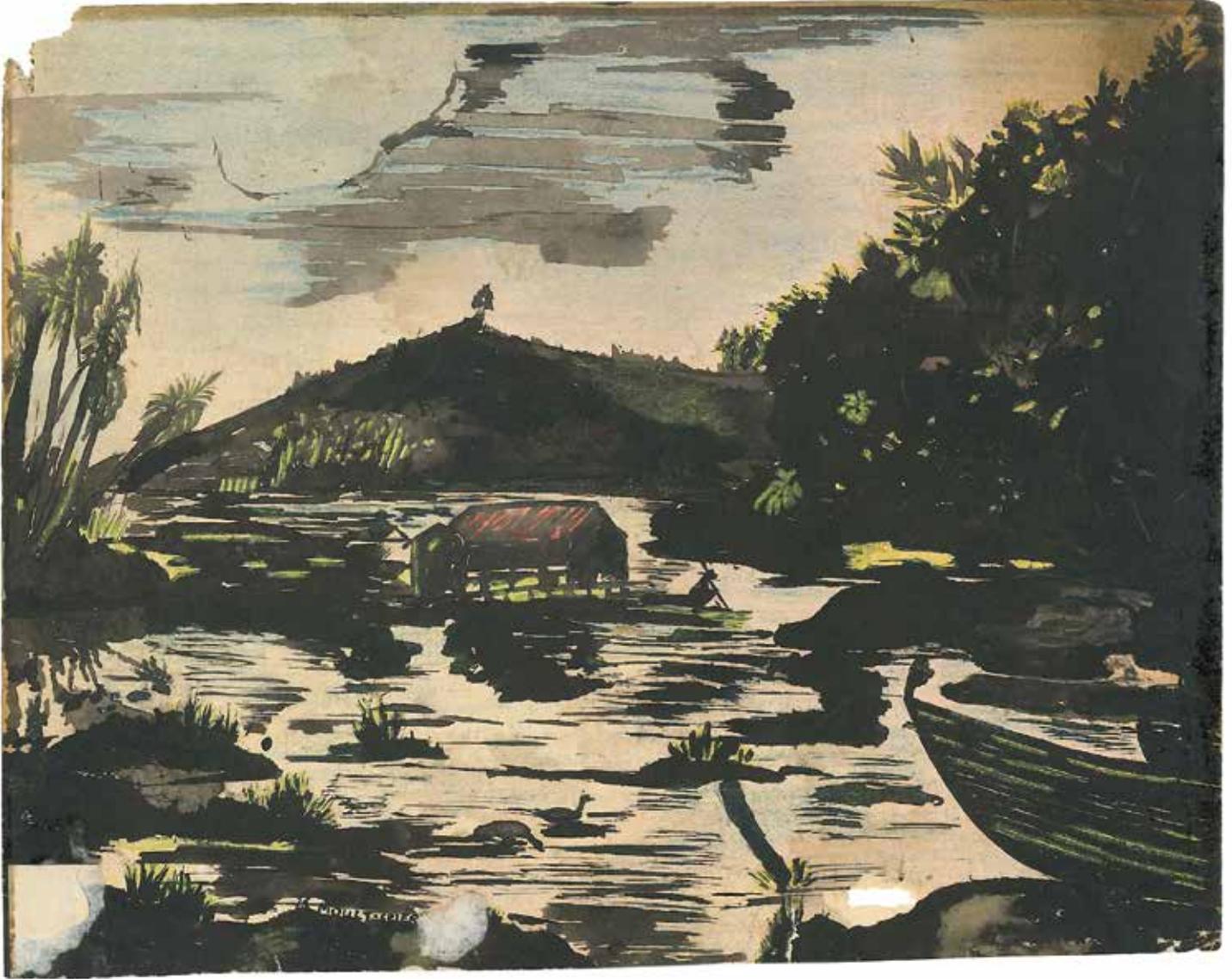
SURREALIST
ARTIST
RAYMOND
MOULT-SPIERS

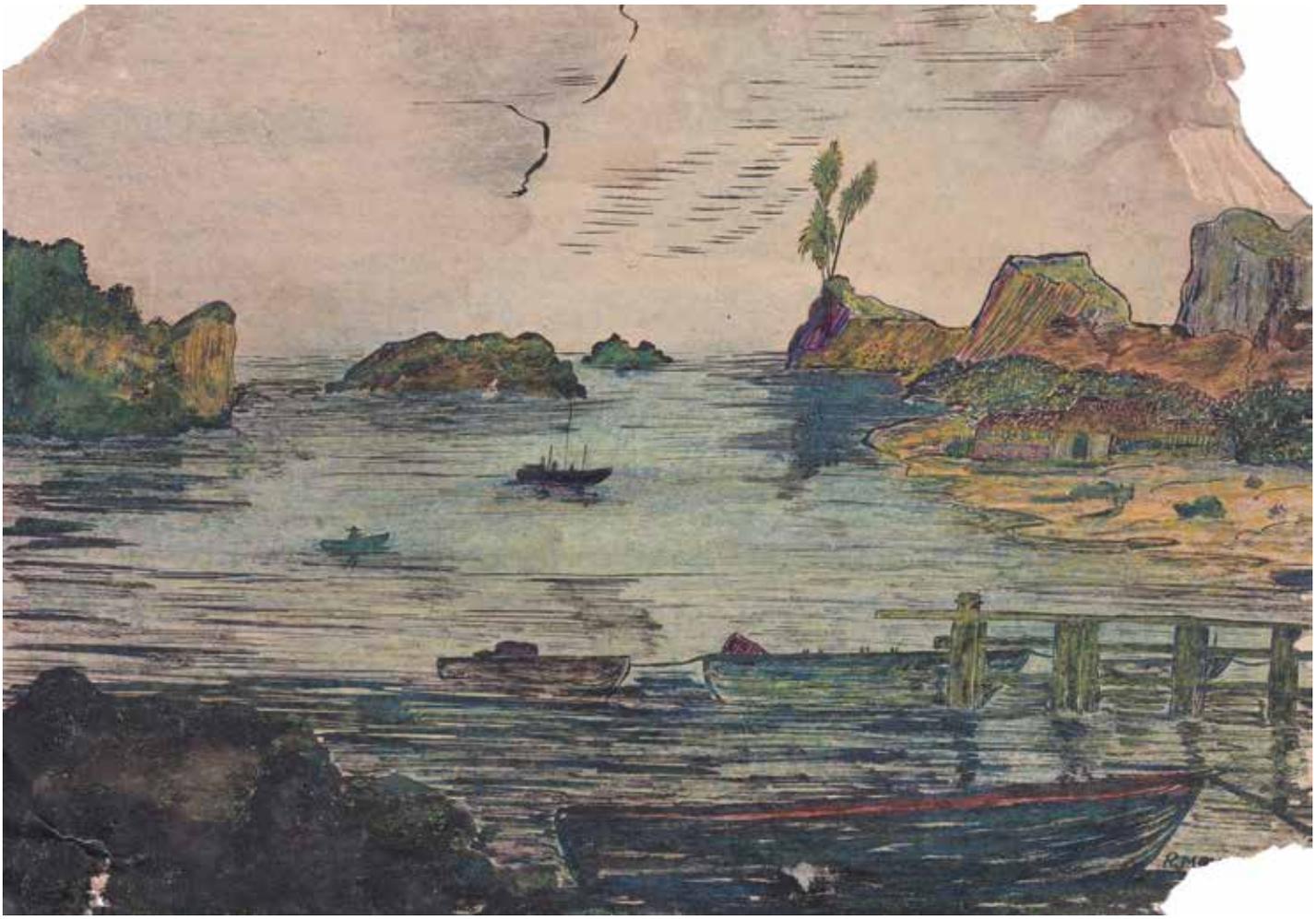


Golden Temple. Image showing a golden temple at sunrise on the long march through Thailand. Ink washes and yellow crayon on paper. c.1943. 160 x 240mm. Private Collection QLD.



Swamp. Painting showing the swampy landscape around Kranji, Singapore. Ink and crayon on paper. 1944, 160 x 210mm. Image held at www.austlii.edu.au, © Moults-Spiers family.





Untitled (possible view around Kranji Hospital Camp, Singapore).
Hand coloured ink drawing on paper. 1945c. 160 x 210mm.
Private Collection QLD.



Blue Moon at Nikki (Neeke). Painted from memory. In his recapture of his near death experience, the artist chose to make the focus blue flying-saucers! Watercolour on paper. A c. 1950. 180 x 220mm. Private Collection QLD.

Of more than 3,000 troops, Raymond was amongst the last of only 500 who made it to the causeway, the sole bridge to Singapore. Those who made it across understood they would be safe in this British stronghold. The causeway was blown up by the Allies. Despite the advance of the Japanese down the Malay peninsula, the British army believed the main attack would come by sea and had secured their big guns into immovable positions facing the ocean.

As a precaution, they sent largely untrained reinforcements newly arrived from Australia to take care of the back door. Many of these bright-eyed boys had, only weeks before, been inspired by stories in Australian publications such as the Australian Women's Weekly to defend Australia by joining the war in Britain's fortress, tropical Singapore.

The Japanese, of course had another plan, and were using small water craft to enter Singapore through the swamps around the causeway. Soldiers like those of Raymond's battalion who had survived slaughter in Malaya were sent with these untrained boys (some of whom had never fired a rifle) to defend this area of quagmires and swampy beaches.

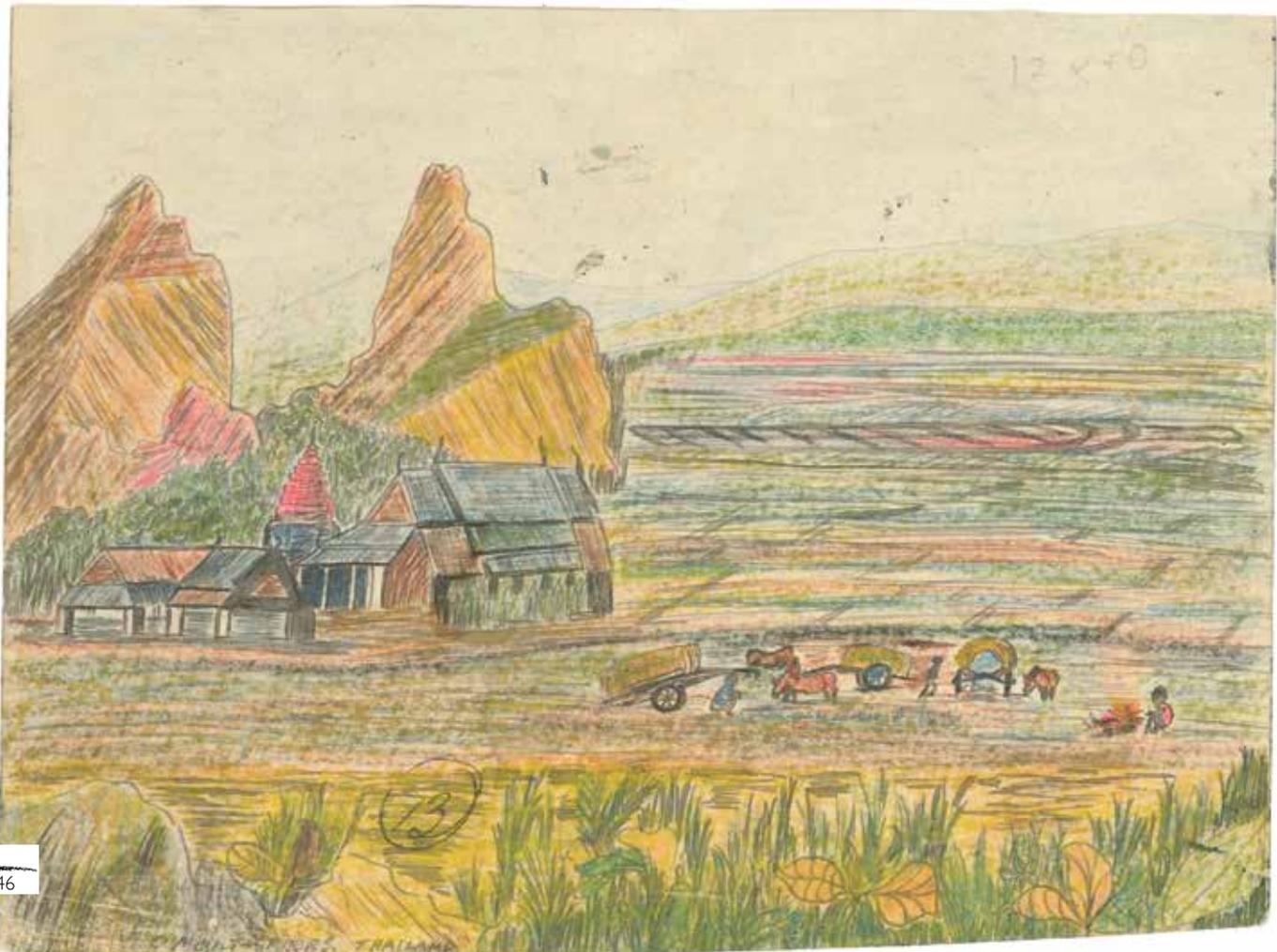
Thai Village: Hand coloured with crayon over ink on paper. c. 1943. 150 x 200mm. Image held at www.austlit.edu.au, © Moults-Spiers family.

The Allies were over-run and Singapore fell to the Japanese in early February 1942. The Japanese, with 50,000+ prisoners of war, held the largest number of POWs in all the war. The prisoners were herded into a part of Singapore called Changi, a small area on a peninsula which the British had previously begun to transform into their military barracks.

Despite being prisoners, the Australians continued with their own line of command. Japanese guards were rarely seen, and the Australians eventually put up their own barbed wire fences to maintain control over their men. They made the best of the situation, growing food, manufacturing, and even setting up education units to keep the men mentally stimulated.

Raymond elected to study French and the arts. His first war diary had been lost in the early days of internment, so he was careful to keep his later diaries safe. These diaries are dotted with French phrases, lists of books, philosophy, prose, poetry and paintings. Most surprising of all are the recipes for dishes no-one was ever likely to eat. He says that by writing and contemplating recipes his hunger was lessened.

Raymond was a risk-taker, stealing what he could from the Japanese. His diary reports acquiring his ink this way, and even selling his paintings to the Japanese to get money to buy extra food.



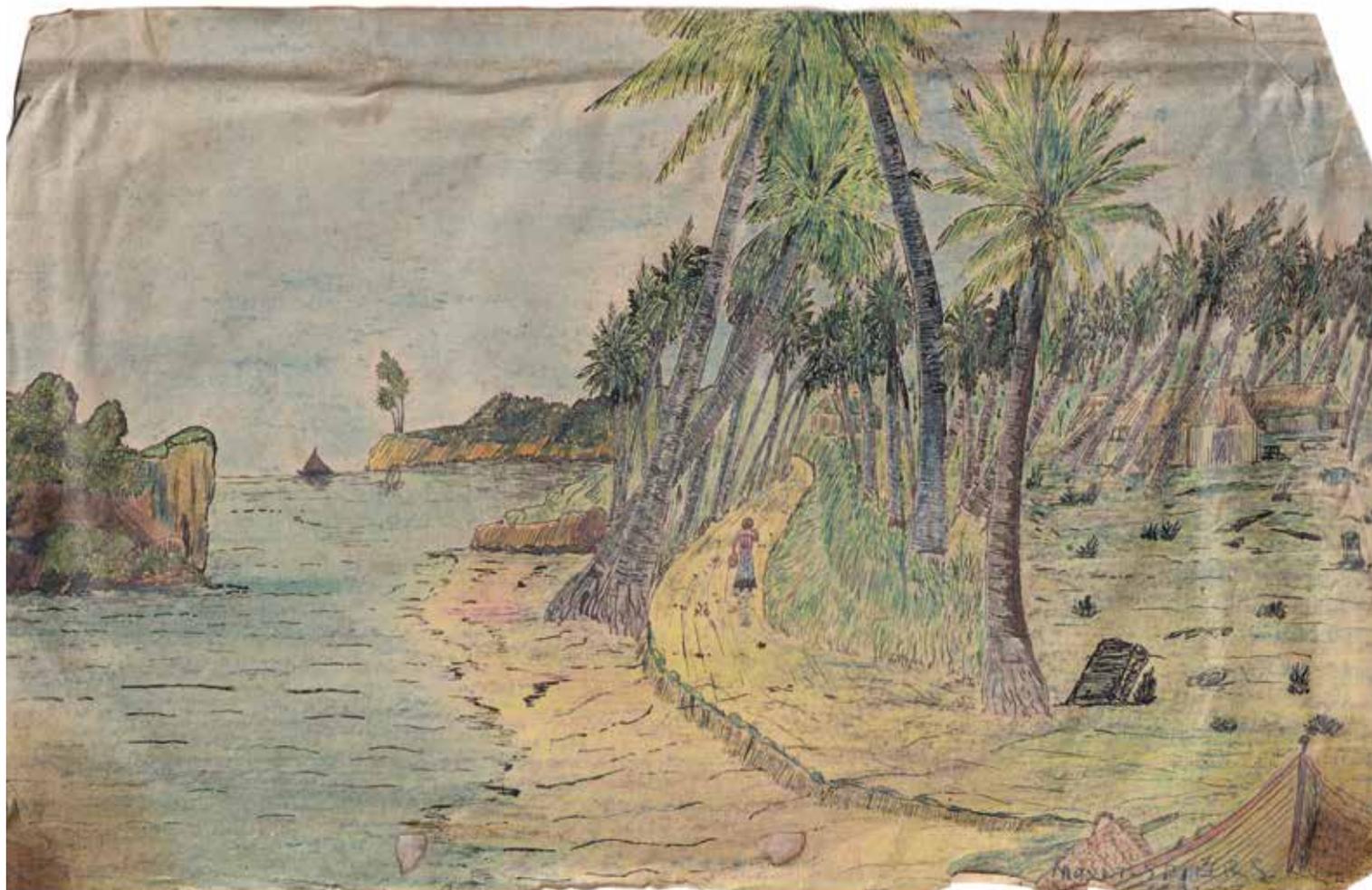
Remarkably, he kept his main diary secret throughout the entirety of his horrific Burma Railway POW days. If discovered it may have cost him his life. Even more remarkable, this was not a small pocket book, but a large, foolscap, hardcover book. Just how he managed to hide this went to the grave with him when he died in 1995.

The diaries show that he was good at bartering and that he took care of his mates who were not as adept. It seems he likewise had an eye for precious objects, and managed to amass a collection. This was a burden when the men were told to get their packs ready in order to head off to a "new and better camp" in Burma. Raymond wrote that, in April 1943, the 2/19th Battalion was to be part of "F Force", the last group to leave Changi for a promised better place. These courageous men were to experience the worst of what was to come on the Burma Railway.

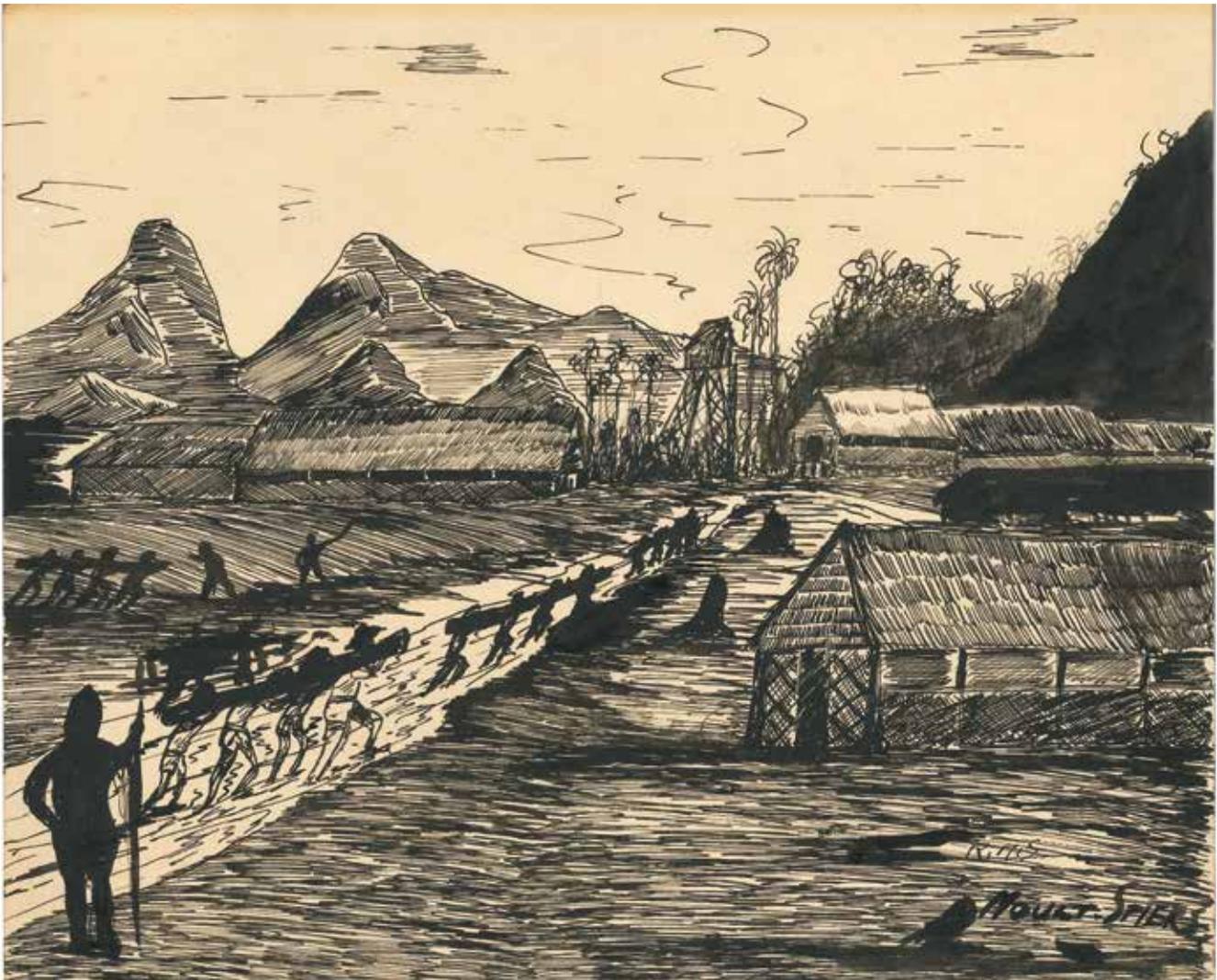
Jungle combat had left many men with some dreadful illnesses, and although most were not fit to work, they

Right: Muda Malayu Prempuan. (Muda Melayu Perempuan: Young Malay Women). Ink drawing on paper, hand coloured with crayon. c.1942. 270 x 200mm. Private Collection, QLD

Below: Untitled, (possible view of woman on path around Kranji Hospital Camp, Singapore). On the reverse is a recipe for Potted Beef. Hand coloured with crayon over ink drawing on paper: c 1943. 250 x 155 mm. Private Collection OLD.



POWs Carrying Logs. Ink on paper. Artist: Raymond Moulit-Spiers, c. 1943. 200 x 260mm.
Image held at www.austlii.edu.au, © Moulit-Spiers' family.



War pays a Visit. Ink on paper. Artist: Raymond Moulit-Spiers, c. 1943. 160 x 200mm.
Image held at www.austlii.edu.au, © Moulit-Spiers' family.



were trucked out on thirteen trains. The carriages were unventilated metal trucks with standing room only for thirty men in each. The metal heated up during the day to scorching hot temperatures and then fell to bitterly cold at night. With little food and water, the five-day journey to Ban Pong was cruel, especially for those with dysentery. As if that journey was not enough, the men were then forced to march 200 miles into the Thai jungle towards Burma.

At the start of this move Raymond, who always called his camp home, the only home he had, carried possessions on his back and in hand held pillowcases. Of all the soldier's packs, his was by far the biggest. He was a keen observer (no doubt a survival tactic learnt during his childhood), and would choose the safest time to barter with the natives. He would buy food and water on behalf of his uncertain mates who feared the guards' reprisals.

During the horrendous 200-mile march, much of it undertaken at night, Raymond penned a poem, the words when recited, alerted the men to the sharp blades of the bamboo stumps hidden in the mud through which they

marched in darkness. One phrase in the poem, and an ink and wash drawing, contrasts trudging through a flood of black, stinking and filthy mud at night with daybreak, and seeing a gleaming temple atop a bare hill.

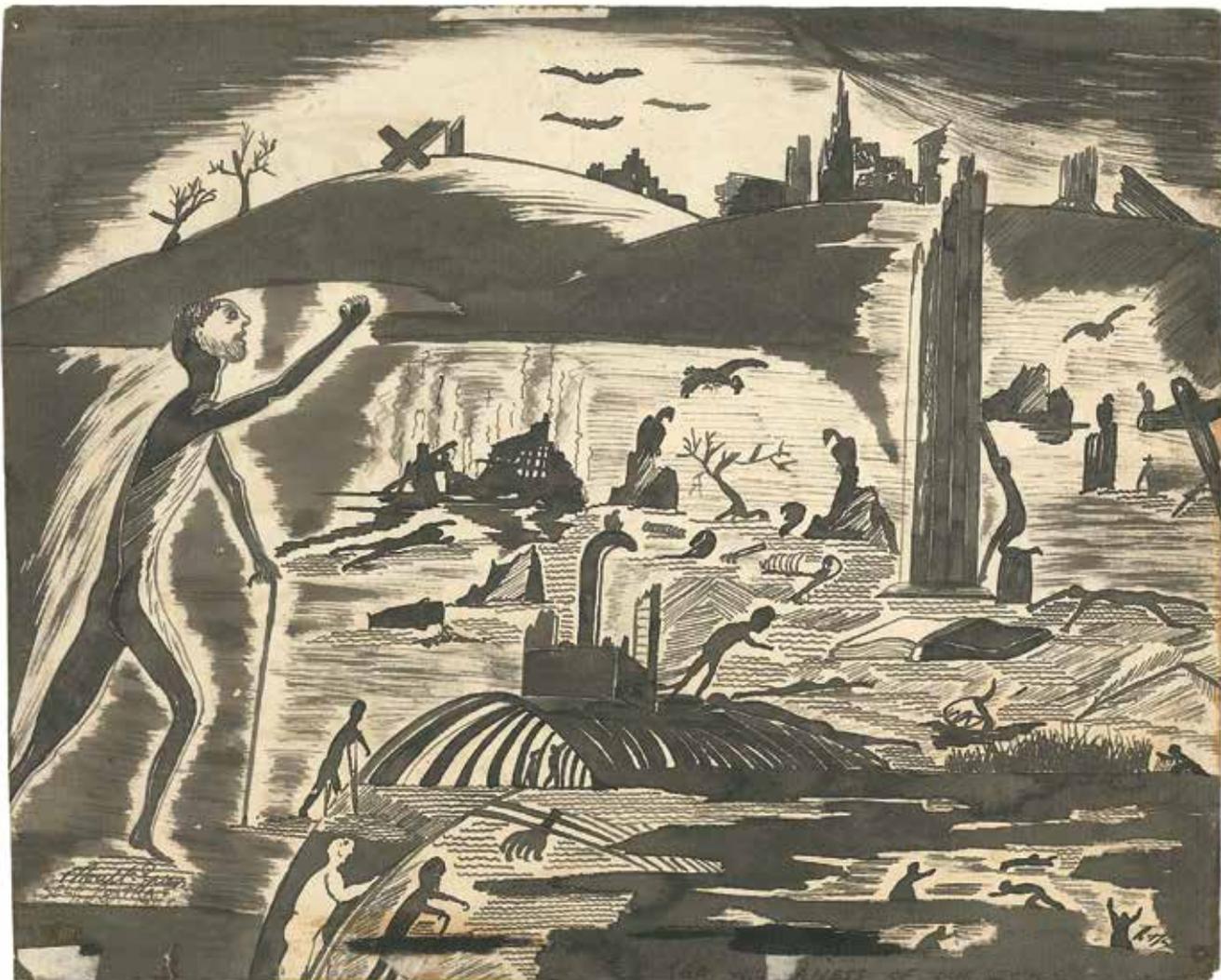
In an endeavor to record the injustices, the Moults-Spiers diaries recount many incidents during the march. He would relate an incident several times, each time adding more detail.

When they arrived at their destination, camp no. 1 (Shimo-Songkurai) in mid May 1943, they were set up in roofless huts and put to work on the railway. The monsoon had begun and conditions deteriorated further when cholera broke out. As a Provost, it was Raymond's job to remove and dispose of the dead by burning on Cholera Hill. He was finally relieved of duties when he came down with malaria.

In late June he reported that of the 2000 men in his camp, 1400 were hospitalised in roughly built huts and tents. The Japanese then threatened to stop their rations of three spoonfuls of rice per meal (in contrast, working party men were allowed three-quarters of a cup).

Below: Desolation: The Wilderness of our Souls, Self-portrait as POW. Ink washes on paper. 1945, 160 x 210mm approx. Image held at www.austlit.edu.au, © Moults-Spiers family.

Diary entry June 22nd 1943: *I was one that was allotted the job of tree felling to repair a bridge. Our first tree was just about halfway through when the Japs in charge reassembled*



the whole gang and put us sawing up logs about ¼ mile up the road and carrying them back to the bridge. Perhaps events would have taken a different course had not the Japs started their bullying tactics but with most of the men like myself recently discharged from hospital and in a very weak condition - men were openly crying with pain due to the weight of the logs and where normally there would have been 12 men there were only 6. One fellow was kicked in the lower abdomen. Many were kicked, slapped, pushed over in the mud and beaten with bamboo sticks. A party of five men carrying a huge load, the middleman was a six-footer and could not straighten his back. He too was crying. A Jap came up and laid into him with a stick then swung himself onto the end of log and jerked it about so much that it was injuring the shoulders of the men (men just out from the malaria wards and living on three mugs of rice a day). The Jap then got a bamboo stick and started beating the last man of the carrying party. It was absolutely inhuman treatment. Later a series of beatings were in place by the bridge. It got so intense that the Sergeant in Charge (Gordon McKnight) rushed in and took the stick from the Jap and threw it away. The Jap immediately went for an axe to chop the Sergeant's finger off, but when it arrived he lost courage and resorted to the old method of punishment. As far as I was concerned in all this the first log I helped carry was about 15-foot-long,

about one foot through. Everyone was straining his utmost, with the threat of a stick behind us. We only just got it there but were immediately sent back for another. This time only two of us were detailed to carry a log of almost the same dimensions as the previous one. I, being the biggest of the two, took the big end. About half way back, tears were being forced out of my eyes, the pain in my body was unbearable but within striking distance of the bridge when ... I yelled for help ... as soon the weight on my body decreased ... I broke. My whole body and soul were broken and down I went ... covered in mud, and carried home when the ration party went back.

After this horrendous episode of superhuman endurance, Raymond spent several days in hospital, but was soon sent back to work. Towards the end of August and early September, the hours increased, as did the deaths. Gangrene was becoming more prevalent amongst the men as ulcers took hold, and limbs were lost. Although Raymond still had dysentery and was passing blood, he was put to work as an orderly. By October he had beriberi, but was quietly making plans for his future. A small farm perhaps?

At one stage in anticipation of his imminent death, Moultspiers was given his last rites by the Padre. However, that night the cosmos conspired to keep him alive with the manifestation of a once-in-a-lifetime Blue Moon. At 2 am

From the Hill. Colour (medium unknown) over ink on paper. c 1945. 160 x 210mm approx. Image held at www.austlit.edu.au, © Moultspiers family.



the call went out and Moults-Spiers, scarcely alive, was carried out to see it. In spite of his near-death experience, the vision of splendour revived his spirit, and he survived the first of two encounters with death. His fascination and joy over the miracles and wonders of the world kept him in it.

Hope was his life-long companion, held near and dear. He was brought back to Changi via a barge -- a shattered pile of bones, scarcely able to walk, but a mate was there, and with all Moults-Spiers had, he reached out. His stomach was now a major health concern. He could no longer eat his meagre rations, but could eat a morsel they called a doover, a little ball of rice encasing whatever was available. Together he and his mate shared their meals so that Raymond had all the doovers while his mate cleaned up the rest.

Once back in Changi, he was permitted to access the art facilities; his life saver. Among the materials still available appear to be small booklets of paper and a few crayons. Back in the jungle, Moults-Spiers made his applicators from bamboo tufted with human hair and pigment from red and yellow clay. He managed to keep his stolen block of ink with him throughout the whole war.

Raymond was soon transferred to a hospital at Kranji, and although he struggled with separation from his mates, he had the good fortune to meet a lay preacher who believed in the biblical proportions of the power of love. Sharing a love of life was an undercover operation, with meetings with like-minded POWs held in the blacked-out X-ray room. After years of cruelty and without the certainty a family provides, Raymond found solace with this group. With carnal expression long expired, the force of love ignited the urge to connect with some of his fellow POWs on surprisingly deep levels, the intensity of which was almost too much. He hid in the sanctuary of his hospital bed.

To keep his soul alive, he practised painting scenes from countries he had never seen (not shown here). To keep his heart, he wrote of love, appreciation and gratitude. To keep his mind, he read philosophy and practised his French. To keep his body, he scribbled recipes to feed his hunger and scoured the grounds for wood for the kitchen crew to cook his food. In this way Raymond Moults-Spiers kept up his hope.

Part II will be published in the next issue of OZ ARTS
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<http://www.julieparsons.net.au>

The diaries were discovered in the possession of Raymond's daughter who proudly continues her father's legacy by marching with his medals every ANZAC Day. She is accompanied by his grandchildren and great grandchildren.

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