

Ronald Ole Raaen (1917 - 2011)



Photograph courtesy of Kilcoy District Historical Society Inc.

Born:	Villeneuve Qld
Parents:	Ollie (Willie) Raaen and Amy Eveline Eaton
Occupation:	Sawmill Labourer
Status:	Single
Lived:	Villeneuve, Kilcoy and Woodford
Service:	Australian Army
Service Number:	QX17031
Conflict:	Second World War 1939-1945
Enlisted:	Kelvin Grove - 19 July 1940
Unit:	2/26 Battalion Infantry Battalion, Signal Platoon
Rank:	Private
Embarked:	Melbourne - HMT "EE", 30 July 1941
Disembarked:	Singapore, 15 August 1941
POW:	Yes - Changi
Recovered:	Changi POW Camp - 5 September 1945

My Story



"I was one of twins born 28th January 1917 at Villeneuve. Until September 1920 I lived on the family dairy farm, then I moved to Woodford where my father had purchased a mixed business.

I attended Woodford State School until 1931 when I went to work in the shop, where I worked until late 1939. After this I worked in a saw mill in which my father had an interest.

After father accepted an offer to sell the saw mill in June 1940, I decided to enlist in the Army.

I went into Grovely Camp, which was still under construction on 19th July 1940, and during a morning parade it was announced that a Signal Platoon would soon be formed. I decided it sounded more interesting than being an ordinary footslogger, so applied and was accepted for training in Morse code, the use of heliograph, learning to send signals by flag lamps and to read by sound.

After the 2/26th Battalion was formed in November 1940, and along with most of the officers, NCO's and specialists I moved into an area formerly occupied by 2/25th Battalion.

After training at Grovely, Redbank and Bathurst, I was given pre-embarkation leave from 16th - 24th July 1941, and learnt on my return that the Battalion would be leaving at the end of the month for Melbourne.

On the 29th we were on the train on route to Melbourne, where we arrived next morning. The train went on to the wharf and it was off the train and on to the ship. - Marnix Sint Van Algedonde. I was looking forward to my first voyage on an ocean going liner. We ate and slept in the one compartment, which had hammocks slung above the mess tables.

To avoid the chance of attack by Japanese submarines we travelled south to latitude 40 degrees before turning west, thus passing through the roaring forties, where the swells were so big that when we were down in the troughs we could only see the masts of the other ships in our convoy. I was pleased to find that I was a very good sailor and did not get seasick.

Berthing at Freemantle on the morning of 7th August we were given leave until midnight, and I together with a few others caught a train to Perth, where we had a good look around the city and finished the day with a good Australian dinner, not knowing when we would get the next one.

We left on 8th August and arrived in Singapore on 15th, when we were taken to Wavell Camp near Changi Village. The Battalion moved to Malacca, then to the east coast of Jahore. The Japs bombed Singapore on the 8th December, and so the time to put our training into operation had arrived. We returned to Malacca to relieve the 2/30th Battalion, which had been holding up the Japanese advances.

The Battalion was ordered to withdraw, so we started our ordered withdrawals which saw us on Singapore Island in late January. It was in the evening of the 15th February that we were told that Singapore had surrendered, and so began my 3½ years as a Prisoner of War.

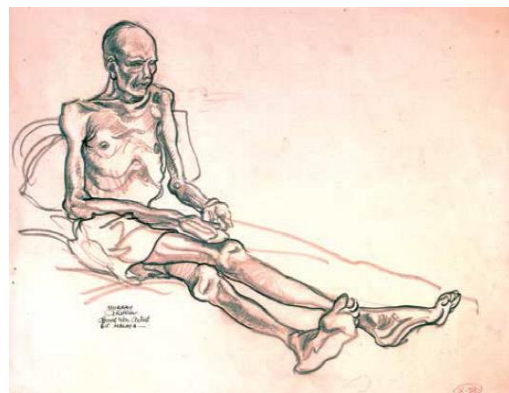


As a Prisoner of War I was sent from Changi to camp at the Great World while working on the wharves.

I had some heavy days, especially when working twenty-four hours straight through. I had a few days off as I had contracted Dengue Fever.

I arrived back at Changi, had a medical check and when I mentioned my eyes were giving me trouble, was sent to the eye clinic where I was put on "no duty" and given vegemite, rice polishings and yeast.

Because of my eyes I missed out on being sent away with the men of "F" Force, and at Changi I was put on light duty and did odd days at the gardens, and also worked regularly at Changi aerodrome cutting up and carting away coconut trees.





I left Singapore on 22nd September 1945 aboard the Hospital Ship "Oranje" and arrived back in Brisbane on the 26th and spent the next few weeks meeting father, most of the family and friends. During the voyage home I had gained 13 pounds due to the excellent food served onboard.

Father and I purchased a pineapple farm in the middle of 1946 which I worked until father's death in 1966, after which his properties were sold.

Next followed a short spell from work, then I was offered the job as salesman for a local garage where I continued working until my retirement at 60 years of age.

After paying rent for some time I spoke to one of my brothers, about getting together to purchase a house. We found a house suitable to both of us and moved in May 1980. My brother passed away in 1993."

Diary of QX17031 Private Ronald Ole Raaen
2/26 Battalion AIF
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"APRIL 1944

Sunday 16th. During the past three weeks we have been quite busy shifting around, moving from House 158 which we'd occupied about one hundred yards to an atap hut. After a few days we shifted about fifty yards into a forestry house and two days later moved back into the house occupied by Div HQ and opposite the house we first tenanted. On Tuesday 4th I went into AGH with a relapse. After putting in three days in the house, on Tuesday afternoon I was so sick, I was carried over on a stretcher after check parade. Was discharged on Saturday 8th and given treatment. Three days ago men without a blanket were issued with one, I being one of them.

Thursday 20th. Have settled down in the new house. Tucker not as good as old 'C' group. Last night was brought into hospital with malaria. Had a bad afternoon and did a lot of vomiting. Am feeling fairly good this morning. I was weighed in hospital and went just over nine stone. A drop of nine pounds since last weighing when I had my first dose of fever. Before starting work on the aerodrome last year I was as high as 12 stone 4 pounds.



Sunday 30th. Came out of hospital on Tuesday 25th and finished treatment on 26th. We were told on parade that night that we would be moving into Changi goal next month. The remainder of the men left at Kanburi has arrived back here. They came in two trains. The first arrived Friday morning and the second yesterday morning. Saw Wesley Kerridge on Friday night and he looks well. Yesterday I saw Victor Chalmers and he also looks well. Vic told me of Jack Boon's death. Jack died of cholera about a month after arriving in Thailand with H Force (27.05.43).

I also met Roy Nugent and he gave me Alex Ford's wallet, knowing that I came from Woodford and may be able to get it home and hand it to his family. Alex died at 1315 hours on 16.12.43 from dysentery and malnutrition."

LEST WE FORGET

(from the Diary of QX 17031 Private Ronald Ole Raaen)

Dauntless deeds of courage
By which Australia's known.
Shall flourish on forever,
A new seed is sown
By a soldier in the AIF
Who face to face with God
Pleaded for his comrade
Before a traitor's firing squad
But the pleading of this noble man
Beneath the sunlight sky,
Was unavailing as he stood
And showed them how to die
The old slouch hat was battered
With its dinted rising sun
And an angel gently murmured
"Duty Nobly Done"

Greater love hath no man,
These words are old but true
And in the distant future
They'll bring back memories to you
Of an Aussie comrade
Bright-eyed and calmly bore
Himself to a greater sacrifice
On the sands of Singapore.
Now he's resting 'neath a palm tree,
But his is no lonely grace,
For he's with the other comrades
And the boy he tried to save,
Angels stand there guarding
And like us their eyes are dim,
So each evening at Retreat, my friends
Let us remember him.

