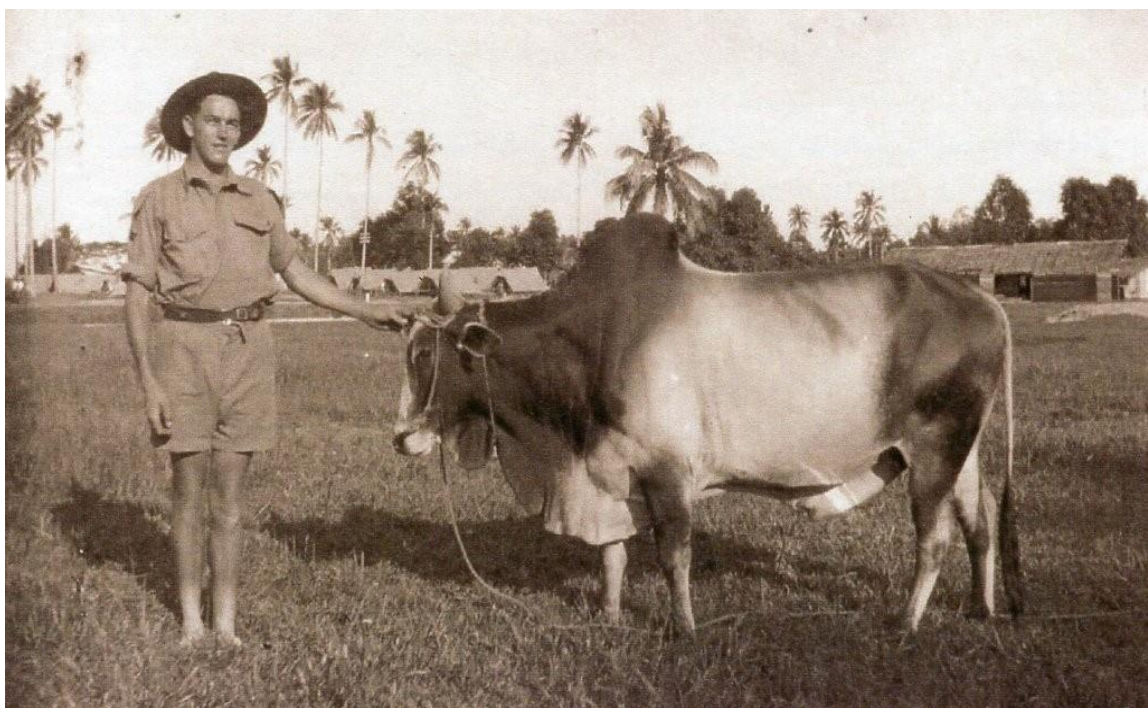


Victor William Chalmers (1919 - 1999)



Born:	Woodford Qld
Parents:	James and Alice (Fletcher) Chalmers
Schooling:	Woodford State School
Occupation:	Labourer
Status:	Single
Lived:	Woodford
Service:	Australian Army
Service Number:	QX14980
Conflict:	Second World War 1939-1945
Enlisted:	Kelvin Grove - 18 July 1940
Unit:	2/26 Battalion Infantry Battalion, 8 th Division, AIF
Rank:	Private
Embarked:	Melbourne - HMT "EE", 30 July 1941
Disembarked	Singapore, 15 August 1941
POW:	Yes - Changi Gaol and Burma Railway
Recovered:	Adam Park POW Camp, Singapore - 5 September 1945

After the British surrender of Singapore on 15 February 1942, the 2/26th spent the next 3½ years as prisoners of war.

Initially, men from the battalion were detained at Changi Goal until May 1942 where they were used as labour for work parties.

Then, they were dispersed to different locations throughout the Pacific - Burma, Thailand, Borneo and Japan - where they were used as slave labour.

Victor Chalmers' POW group - F Force - was sent to work on the infamous Burma railway - built to support the Japanese forces in their Burma campaign.

F Force was a mixed Allied force including 3,662 Australians. They left Changi by train for Thailand but had to march the last 180 odd miles to their worksites along rough jungle tracks.

Conditions at the staging camps were appalling. The monsoonal season had started; little to no overhead cover was provided; the majority of men had no boots; food and water supplies were poor; and, disease was rampant.

The railway was completed on 16 October 1943, and the surviving troops were returned to Singapore or other work locations.

Japan surrendered on 14 August 1945.

Victor Chalmers was recovered from the Japanese at Adam Park POW Camp, Singapore on 5 September 1945; sent home on the *Largs Bay* arriving in Brisbane on 7 October 1945; and, discharged from the Australian Army on 16 January 1946.

The war did not end in 1945 for Victor, for he continued to have bouts of malaria that he had contracted in Singapore, together with nightmares about his time as a POW.

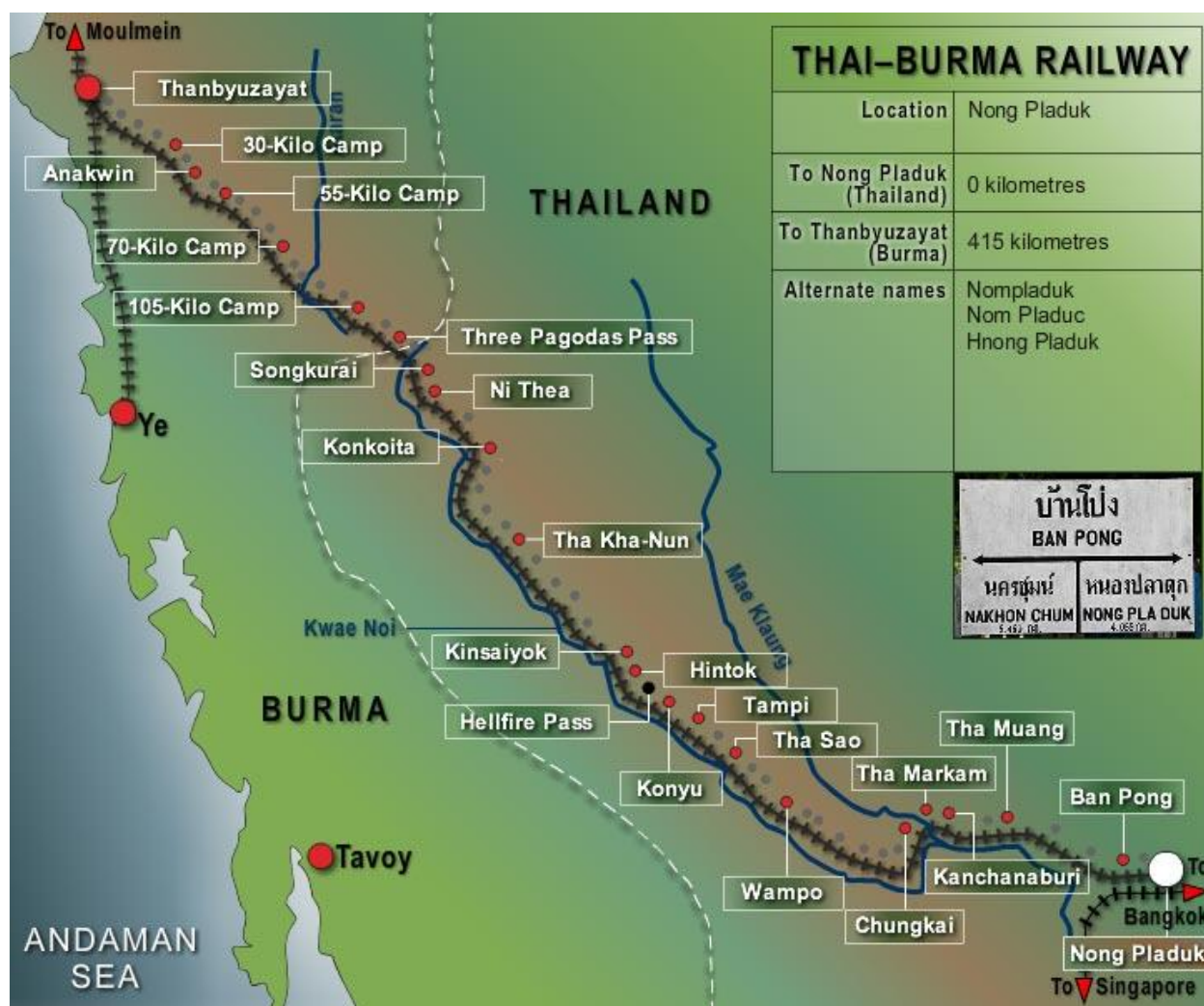


On the brighter side, Victor kept in touch with one of his fellow POWs, Harold George Churchward QX3497, who ended up marrying his younger sister, Mavis Margaret.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P00406.026



Singapore
20.9.45

Dear Peace.

Just a few lines to let you know that I am OK. I received a letter from Mum the other day dated Aug 22nd, also one from Malcolm. I was very pleased to get long letters again. I didn't hear from you while I was a P.O.W. I was looking forward to a letter too.

Well peace. There won't be a happier man in the world than me tomorrow. We board the boat for home early in the morning. (The large Bay). But it will be a happier day when I arrive home. I met Silvie Mountford the other day. He is in the same camp as me. Charge Tail, he cooks for our mess. He told me a bit of news, + local gossip about Woodford. I have a yarn to him every day. We had Japs working in our camp the other day. They got that rough a doing they didn't come back again. Well peace I am dying to get back to some of Mum's cooking again. I have missed it very much. Those parcels which were sent to me in 1942 all went astray except one came from Mum. You have no idea how the time has dragged the last 3½ years, ever since we were taken prisoner we said we would be home for Xmas, when we went by we would be sure it would be the next, but I am going to make up for the last four when I get home. Well peace I must close now. I love to be with you all very soon.

With much love to you all
Your loving Brother
Victor x

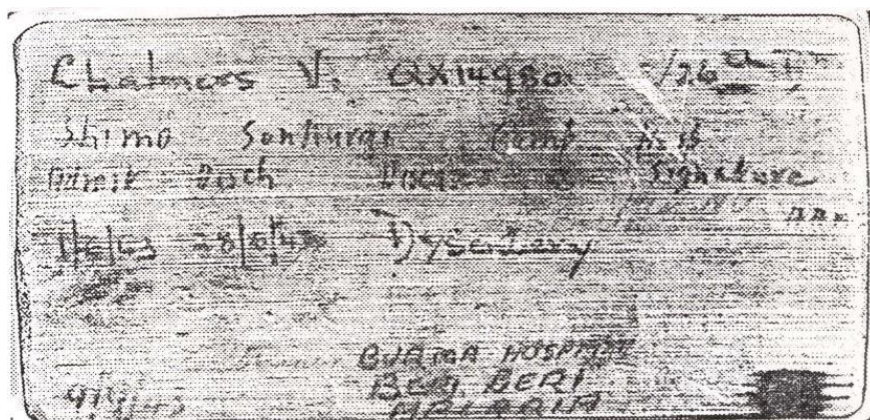


Vic ran into Sylvester 'Silvie' Mountford from Stony Creek at Changi Goal where he was cooking for Vic's mess.

Silvie enlisted in the CMF from 14 December 1941 to 23 April 1943 and was stationed in New Guinea.

Whilst in New Guinea, he enlisted in the 2nd AIF, first in 5 Australian Division Signals and then transferred to cooking and catering, where he reached the rank of Corporal.

He was in Malaya from 21 August 1945 to 6 November 1945.



The piece of bamboo . . . worth a pension increase

Vic's piece of bamboo worth some smackeroo

MEMBERS of veterans review boards usually have a lot of difficulty when former prisoners of the Japanese come before them seeking pension increases.

While they are sympathetic towards the old Diggers, they often cannot reach a decision because the Japanese did not allow prisoners to keep medical records. They often have to tell applicants reluctantly: "We're sorry, but without records you cannot establish your case."

But former 2/26th Battalion Digger Vic Chalmers, 73, of Caloundra, was ready when he appeared before a tribunal last week.

When questioned about his medical records while he slaved as a prisoner on the infamous Burma railway, he promptly produced them — written on a piece of bamboo and signed in the best regimental style by an Army medical officer.

The tribunal accepted the official-but-fading record on the bamboo piece as official evidence

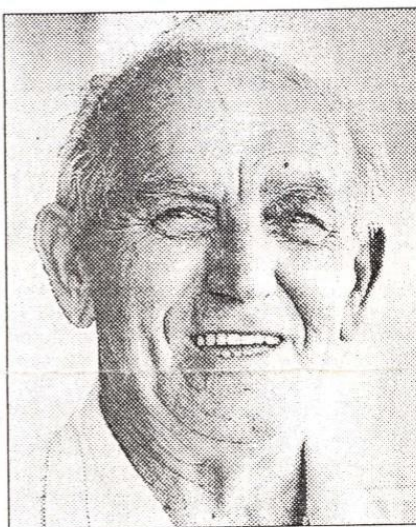
that he had had beriberi on the railway in 1943 — and granted him a pension increase.

"That piece of bamboo was the only thing I brought back with me from the prison camps," Vic said later.

"The record was written on it by an Australian doctor named Major Bruce Hunt, who was one of the finest men I have met.

"We weren't supposed to keep records of any sort. But he wrote them on these chips of bamboo and signed them.

"The punishment if the Japanese caught you with written records was severe.



Vic Chalmers . . . had his medical evidence ready

"I don't know of any other POWs who brought their records back.

Mr Rex Crane, 66, of Wynnum North, who lived with his parents in Malaya and was taken prisoner by the Japanese as a volunteer soldier when he was only 15, acted as Vic's advocate at the tribunal.

"I was as surprised as the members of the tribunal when he produced his record," he said.

Tribunal members asked Rex to see whether the writing on the bamboo could be copied so that they would have a permanent record of it.

A more pleasant postscript to Victor's war record — he apparently applied for a pension increase around 1963, due to Beriberi suffered during his captivity by the Japanese.

It seems that the review tribunal were sympathetic but could do nothing without some evidence.

In one of those court room scenes worthy of the best TV drama, Victor then produced his medical record on a piece of bamboo complete with the signature of the camp medical officer back in 1943.

This was accepted by the tribunal, and Victor was granted his increase.