HAYLOCK Wilfred Herbert

Name: **Wilfred Herbert Haylock**

Born: **25 March 1914**

Rank: **Leading Air Craftman**

Service Number: **LAC1173197**

Unit/Regiment: **Royal Airforce**

Died: **2001**

Pre-War:

Wilfred was born in Dorset, son of a gamekeeper, and had decided to follow in his father's footsteps and make game keeping his career. In 1939 he was an under keeper on the Bladen Estate of the Debenham Family and had recently got engaged to Connie Brown.

Wartime experience:

Wilfred entered the RAF when he was called up and did basic training and a specialist course in Radio Operating. He was initially in 152 Squadron and after serving in several air stations he transferred to 605 Squadron in October 1941.
In December of that year he was in a convoy of ships which set out from the Clyde bound for the Far East.
The following is Wilfred's own account of his war:-

I joined 605 Squadron (City of Birmingham) which was a Hurricane squadron in October 1941. I was posted to an airfield near Kenilworth in Warwickshire where we were kitted out with tropical gear. We had no fixed job but did Guard Duty at Homlea. I had a few weeks at Baginton near Coventry and saw at first hand the devastation of Coventry which had been blitzed earlier and was just a ghost town. I had embarkation leave and spent a few precious days at Milborne Wood with Con. We said our fond farewells and little did I realise that I would not see her again for three and a half years.

A couple of weeks later we were aroused in the middle of the night and taken to a little station, called Berkswell, where we boarded a special train. We travelled through the night and eventually ended up at Gourock on the Clyde. We set sail from the Clyde on a cold December day, with snow on the hills, some thirty ships - liners, troopships, transports - and moved out into the Atlantic.

I was lucky to be on a luxury liner, the Warwick Castle, one of the liners which plied between Southampton and the Cape. Food and accommodation were five star. Eventually we arrived in Freetown, Sierra Leone, it was very hot, and we had our Christmas dinner there, turkey, plum pudding, the lot. From there we sailed on to Cape Town where we spent a wonderful time. Their hospitality was unbelievable and South Africa is a wonderful country. We set sail again after a week in Cape Town and into the Indian Ocean. Our convoy split at Durban, some going on to the Middle East, while we headed elsewhere. Our destination was unknown, but we assumed it was Singapore which was correct, except that it was invaded while we were still en route. The convoy was diverted to Java and we disembarked at Batavia (now called Jakarta).

The fall of Singapore had upset the whole plan for us. In any case we would have needed a month or two to become operational and the whole strategy became chaos. Three squadrons of Hurricanes had left the Clyde with about one hundred planes, half of these were sunk by enemy action on the way and the remainder, well, we never saw them.

605 Squadron had been split up on arrival at Batavia, some had remained there to try and assemble Hurricanes at the docks. We were a party of about forty with a few officers who were going on to P1 (the airstrip for Palembang) to try and organise something for the arrival of the squadron planes.

From Batavia we went by train en route for Sumatra. Java was a beautiful island, so lush in vegetation and rich in wildlife. Everything seemed to grow there - rubber, castor oil plants, coconuts, palms, bananas, oranges, mangoes, plus spices - nutmegs, chillies, peppers. The flowers were brilliant and exotic. The temperature was 100 degrees plus.

We arrived at a small port and were ferried across to Sumatra. We were told we were going to march the rest of the way to Palembang, through the jungle in the night. We set off with our Malay guides through jungle paths and on mud roads. The Sumatran jungle was unbelievable and at night was full of noise - hundreds of bullfrogs croaking, monkeys and apes, flying foxes, parrots and the whole scene lit by thousands of fireflies - I have never experienced anything like it in my life.

We marched through the night with stops for rest and as daylight came we reached Palembang and were billeted in a school. Palembang was a typical Asian town - mixed culture, Chinese, Malay, Javanese and reasonably prosperous owing to the oil wells at Pleydoe, close by. Most of the restaurants and night clubs were run by Chinese and it presented a very interesting scene. The main airfield was P1 about ten miles out, plus a secondary one at P2. Both of these airfields were cut out of the jungle and P2 was never found by the Japanese. There was no accommodation at P1 and we travelled up each day by lorry.

We were awaiting the Hurricanes which were being assembled in Batavia but only about six came and were taken over by another squadron. We did odd jobs on the airfield - digging slit trenches and the like. We were armed but eventually the Dutch took over our Lee Enfield Rifles.

We had not been trained in jungle warfare or combat, so, it was assumed that it would be more suitable for them to have the arms.

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The Japanese had started invading Sumatra, mostly up rivers, as there were hardly any roads, and the few planes we had operating on P1 and P2 inflicted terrible casualties on them. Thousands of Japs were killed. Had we had a few more bombers and a couple of squadrons of fighter aircraft Sumatra would not have fallen.

On 14 February 1942 we arrived at P1 as usual at dawn. A little later an air raid developed - many bombs were dropped and about 7.00 a.m. a force of Japanese paratroops were dropped around and on P1. Things became a bit hectic for a while, as the paratroops were mostly in the treetops and were sniping at us. The Dutch ground troops eliminated some and things grew a bit quieter. The officer in charge called us together and it was decided that we should evacuate, as we could be of no further use there, so we set off for Palembang on the one exit road in two Bedford trucks. About a mile out of P1 the road was blocked by paratroops and we came under sniper fire, so we dived for the jungle and remained under cover. We had had some casualties on P1 and these were in a lorry in front of us. At the roadblock some paratroops entered the back of the lorry and shot them all.

Terence Kelly in his book 'Hurricane over the Jungle' gives a pilot's observations about events at P1 on 14 February, and mentions some of these events.

The ambush was eventually wiped out, but we realised that we could not get to Palembang by road. We re-grouped and with a few guides and a few armed Javanese soldiers we set off through the jungle. We encountered a few more paratroops but the native troops got rid of them and we pressed on. It was early afternoon, with the usual monsoon weather - torrential rain, thunderstorms, and tropical heat. We crossed rivers up to our necks, swamps, and were all the time in thick jungle. Night was falling and the jungle came to life with the sound of the frogs and monkeys, and the flickering of thousands of fireflies. We were bitten by every insect imaginable - leeches, scorpions, ants and hordes of mosquitoes but these things are trivial when survival is the goal.

The guide wanted to get to Palembang by daybreak and we pressed on through the night. We were well out of the parachute drop zone and so progress was easier. We passed through native kampongs and villages and the people viewed us with some curiosity. We had no food but the natives gave us coffee and some fruit so this helped us on our way.

As dawn approached, we reached the outskirts of Palembang, not knowing whether it had been taken or not. Everywhere was chaos, but we met up with a few other air force personnel and were told that we must evacuate the town. We grabbed a bite to eat and got on a lorry heading for Oosthaven where there was a small harbour which served the short sea crossing to Java. We boarded the ferry and duly arrived at Merak in Java. Merak was in chaos too. The Dutch didn't seem to know what to do but eventually some order prevailed, and it was decided to board a train and make our way to Batavia. This journey was something of a nightmare - open trucks, a wood-burning engine (driven by a native and stoked by a Royal Marine), no signals working.

Eventually we got there - a motley collection of Dutch, British, Javanese and anyone who came along for the ride.
605 Squadron was very much fragmented, but we found a section trying to get a few Hurricanes working at Batavia Airport and joined them. It was obvious to us that the Dutch had no intention of defending their country and had sunk into apathy. If we had had time to organise an early warning system, observer corps and radio network, plus a strong fighter presence Java would not have been lost. After a day or two, we were informed that a ship was waiting in the port of Tjilatjap in South Java and would evacuate us. We set off in convoy and after a harrowing journey by day and night came within sight of Tjilatjap. The town and docks were ablaze and we were informed that the whole place had been destroyed and there were no ships.
We retraced our steps inland and stopped at a rubber plantation, deciding we would stay there. We had plenty of food crates of bully beef etc. and there were good supplies of fruit and vegetables available. It was now mid-March and we were living in the most wonderful countryside imaginable with mountains, valleys and streams. The war was far away and I cannot think of a more wonderful place to spend our last weeks of freedom, because that was what it was. After a few weeks a column of Japanese soldiers arrived and, after a parley with our officers through an interpreter, we were told we must march to the nearest railhead which was a place called Garoet. This was the first time I had seen the enemy in quantity and they seemed more frightened of us than vice versa. We marched some miles and boarded a train and after crossing Java again arrived at Batavia. We formed up again and marched through the streets of Batavia until we were ordered to halt outside an awesome looking building (Boiglodok) which had previously been the native prison. There was a stack of makeshift coffins piled up outside and the thought came to me of the inscription on the outside of Sing Sing prison in America which said 'Abandon hope all ye who enter'. We were pushed through the main gateway and the gates clanged shut. We were POWs and it was my birthday - 25 March, 1942.

CAPTIVITY

I have decided not to write much about my captivity, at least not in any detail. It was a time of much physical and mental anguish, inadequate food and sickness: malaria, beri-beri, dysentery, ulcers and the like were to be our companions throughout our captivity.
Boiglodok was about the worst camp and it was overcrowded, mosquito and fly infested, to say nothing of bugs, and the sanitation was awful. My health began to suffer after a few months and my limbs began to swell with water which was one of the symptoms of beri-beri. My eyesight also showed signs of deterioration.
After some months in Boiglodok, we were moved to Tanjanpriok. This was more open and after Glodok was really good. It was here that I first encountered an earthquake tremor and it is a very strange feeling when the ground under you starts to move. After a while I moved to another camp called Adek, which was really a camp for those who were unfit for work.

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My weight had dropped to seven and a half stone and my limbs were swollen with fluid owing to too much rice and not much else. In the meantime I had met a Scot called Andy McIlwraith who was an armourer in the RAF but not with 605 Squadron. We instantly formed a lasting friendship and were inseparable. We talked of our families, our girlfriends and everything. He had, amongst other things, that gift of getting you out of depressions and he had a big part in my survival. I shall mention him again before the end of this narrative.

My next camp was Macassa, a large open type with long bamboo buildings with attap roofs. I went on one working party from Macassa to a large mansion which had belonged to a Dutch planter. I was in a party of about twelve with a couple of guards. We worked in the gardens and it was a nice job. After a day or so we discovered we were working for the Tempitei, the equivalent to the Gestapo. There were several Japanese officers and they used to come out and talk to us. Some of them had been educated at Oxford University and spoke perfect English. It was an interrogation centre and they had the power of torture and extermination if they thought fit. Strangely enough they were among the very few Japanese who showed us any kindness, giving us cigarettes, coffee and food, and when the place was closed they came and shook hands with all of us and wished us well. I mention this little interlude to demonstrate the unpredictability of the oriental mind.

It was at Macassa that I spent the major part of my captivity and it was, as prison camps went, tolerable. The Japanese Commandant was a Lt. Tanmaka, a young officer, and reasonable in his approach to us. All the camps were run in a similar pattern: Japanese Commandant, a few admin staff plus guards. Most of the day-to-day running was by POWs - carting wood for the cookhouse, sanitation, etc. Each camp had a British Officer of higher rank, usually Lt. Col, who was in charge and answerable to the Jap Commandant, one of our own doctors (with few treatment facilities) and a Padre.

From Macassa we could see the volcano at Krakatoa with smoke rising from its crater. I believe it erupted violently in the 1800s and formed an island in the sea. I have no dates to tell me how long I spent in the various camps but I imagine I spent the longest time at Macassa.

It would be late in 1944 that I moved camp again and it was to be for the last time. We moved to the cycle camp in Batavia which had been a POW camp for years and was well run. The Commandant was a Lt. Sonja - we called him 'Sonny' because he was such a horrible character. He spoke some English and always told us we would never return home. Incidentally, he was tried for war crimes and was executed before I left Java. During the past year I had lost contact with Andrew McIlwraith who had gone on a draft to Japan. I had had a card from home and although it was a brief and set message it had given me some joy and hope. My health had improved somewhat and though I was much underweight, the beri-beri was not so acute and I managed to get out of camp on working parties and had the chance to get a little extra food.

The Chinese were good to us and would smuggle things to us when the guards weren't looking.

It was now mid-August 1945 and of course on the 15th the atomic bomb was dropped on Japan. About the 25th we noticed that the guards patrolling the camp seemed to be less vigilant than usual but we knew nothing of what had occurred. At this time I was suffering with a bout of malaria and felt quite ill. One morning I was visited by a young RAF doctor called Dr Tierney, an Irishman, who came to see how I was. He said that he did not have any drugs but had something better than that to give me. He looked at me as he sat on the bed and said 'This is a day you will remember for the rest of your life; the war is over, and you will be going home.' Whether it was an anti-climax or the fact that I was in a weak state I do not know, but I did not believe him.

Things began to move: rations had improved, the Japanese had been told that they must keep law and order until they were replaced by our own troops but the arrogance had gone out of them and they were no longer a threat to us.

We had some parachute drops of food and medical supplies on the camp. Luxuries of chocolate, meat, even loaves of bread which we had not seen for many a year, and tins of cigarettes. I think we made pigs of ourselves for a while. British Officers were parachuted in from England who lectured us about events in Europe (we had never heard of D-Day) and the surrender of the Japanese. They also briefed us about our repatriation to the UK and where we would go. I remember the mosquitoes almost devoured them - much to their dismay and our amusement.

Lady Mountbatten visited the camp and shook hands with all of the British POWs. She asked where I came from and on hearing Dorset she remarked that we were neighbours as she came from just up the road in Hampshire (Broadlands, of course). She said that Lord Louis would soon get us out. My health was improving with better food and conditions and the wonderful thoughts of going home. We had a big parade in the camp, which every one of every nationality there who was fit attended - British, Australian, New Zealanders, Dutch, Indians, etc. We were addressed by senior officers and the Japanese flag was taken down and the Union Jack took its place, amid great scenes of jubilation and emotion. To us it was freedom again.

In coming to the end of my years as a POW, I must mention that I have not written of the many incidents which happened every day in the camps, I would need a book on these alone, and after fifty years many of them have become distant and not too vivid in my memory, and it is best that they become so.

According to official reports 170,000 Japanese died from the two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. On the Thailand/Burma railway 103,000 POWs perished along with many thousands more throughout the Far East, so the atomic bomb had been our lifeline to the future as we had always been told that any invasion by the Allies would result in our destruction and this was confirmed by captured Japanese documents after the war.

I have been asked the question 'What is the formula for survival in these conditions?' but there is none. Lady Luck has to shine on you, to some faith plays a part, and the ability to rise out of mental and physical despair, memories of home and of those you care for also help.

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FREEDOM

Anyone who has been in captivity and is liberated will know the great joy of being free. The Union Jack which was a symbol of that freedom was barred from us except when the Japanese allowed it to drape the coffin of each POW when he died. So, it was good to see the British and Dutch flags flying again, in place of the 'fried egg', which is what we called the nippon version.

Around mid-September, we were told that we were being flown out of Java to Singapore and from there we would be shipped home.

Civilian life after return:

After the war Wilfred returned to Dorset and married his fiancé Connie and set up home in Milborne St. Andrew, Dorset. He did not feel that his health was good enough to return to his old job of game keeping so, instead he started a small market garden, growing soft fruit and vegetables. He enjoyed this work and as his health improved, he also did forestry work in the winter time.

With his wife he joined in with village life and was church warden at his local church for thirty years.

He kept in touch with his fellow POW Andy McIlwraith who lived in Glasgow for the rest of his life and they wrote to each other several times a year.

He did not dwell on the past and his philosophy was that after he stepped outside the POW camp every day was a bonus.

Sadly, Wilfred died in 2001 at the age of 87.

The above information and wording has been provided by Elizabeth Mott (daughter) and the word in blue are from Wilfred Haylocks account in his own words.