

Dvt. A. Berg's Experiences As P.O.W.

Dvt. Arnold Berg, son of Mr. and Mrs. A. Berg, of Kielpa, returned to Adelaide on September 21, after being a prisoner of war in Japanese hands at Singapore and Thailand for three years and seven months. After the capitulation of Singapore members of 8th Division formed a perimeter round some military barracks known as Tanglin Barracks in the centre of the island. Two days later they marched 17 miles with what clothing, food and tobacco they could carry to Changi Camp, which was the Japanese administrative headquarters for prisoners of war. While there they lived in damaged military barracks, some of which had no roofs. All water for the camp had to be carted for the first week. During this period they existed on the food they had carried out from Tanglin. After about a week the Japs gave them their first meal of rice and dried fish. Working parties commenced leaving Changi early in 1942 for Siam and Borneo. The majority left Singapore in April, 1943, to work on the Thailand-Burma railway. They were taken to Thailand in steel rice trucks—30 men and all their equipment to a truck. The trucks were so crowded that no man could lay down

crowded that no man could lay down for sleep or rest. The journey took three days and nights, the only rations being meals of rice and a bottle of water. On arrival at the rail-head they were informed that they had to march 192 miles through jungle. They marched by night and rested by day. The marching was very hard and trying as the monsoonal rains had just commenced. On the march they carried their own sick. They arrived at the first camp on the 17th May. The camp was of bamboo huts minus roofs, which were left like this for over a fortnight. Work commenced on the railroad the day after arrival. The work consisted of building embankments and cuttings, and reclaiming swamp ground. All material was carried in small baskets. Numerous bridges were also built over fast flowing rivers. No steel was used, wooden wedges taking the place of bolts. Rations were very meagre, the main diet being rice and fish, with a few sweet potatoes. At these camps diseases broke out (cholera, dysentery, typhus and malaria). The main force was engaged on this line for 10 months. They returned to the rail-head in Thailand via the newly built railway. The conditions and atrocities were such that their only cry was to get back to Singapore. On return to Changi they started work on a new airport, also digging tun-

on a new airport, also digging tunnels and trenches for the Japanese defence of Singapore. They were in touch with the outside world with wirelesses which were built and hidden in the camp. They possibly knew before the Japanese soldier that Japan was going to accept the Allied peace terms. Knowing this and still having to work under the same brutality tried every man's nerve and temper. The first R.P.W.I. landed by parachute at Changi airport on August 1. They immediately commenced administration for the liberation of prisoners of war. The first Australian boys left Singapore by Catalina flying boat on 12th September, reaching Sydney on the evening of 16th September. They were welcomed by thousands of people and entertained by the Red Cross. From Sydney they travelled to Melbourne and on to Adelaide by a hospital train. They received an enthusiastic welcome in Adelaide. The boys of the 8th Division pay a glowing tribute to the work of the Red Cross.