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THE DIARY OF DONALD LOMAS, ROYAL AIR FORCE

24 APRIL – 14 JULY 1945

STARTING FROM
HIS LAST DAYS AS A PRISONER OF WAR IN RANGOON JAIL, BURMA
UNTIL HIS RETURN TO ENGLAND NEARLY TWELVE WEEKS LATER

*Written in almost illegible light pencil on thin green paper
bearing the word "COPY" and the following letterhead inscription:*

"THE BENGAL BURMA STEAM NAVIGATION CO., LTD. RANGOON"



DON LOMAS (far left) with fellow airmen of 159 Squadron in front of Liberator BZ926 "P" for "Pegasus" (winged horse nose art partly visible) on 29 February 1944, hours before "Pegasus" was shot down over Rangoon. Four of the men in the photo were aboard "Pegasus" that night: Don, Tom O'Donohue (navigator, 4th from left), Edward Stanley (Don's pilot, 4th from right), and Jack King (rear gunner, 2nd from right). O'Donohue and Stanley were not seen baling out of the burning Liberator. King died in Rangoon Jail one month short of liberation. Others in the photo: Buster Fullerton (wireless operator, 2nd from left), Des Ryan (Australian, air gunner, 3rd from left), Johnny Falconer (pilot, 3rd from right), and Geoff Gowing (Australian, navigator), far right. (*Don Lomas*)

Royal Air Force Warrant Officer John Donald Lomas, serial number 1360083, flew as a wireless operator/air gunner aboard four engine B-24 Liberator bombers of 159 Squadron based at Salbani and then Digri, West Bengal, India. On the night of 29 February 1944 during his 27th bombing operation with 159 Squadron, his Liberator, BZ926 "P" for "Pegasus", was shot down over Rangoon by two Japanese Ki-63 "Oscar" night fighter planes working in cooperation with searchlights.

Don safely reached the ground by parachute, having barely missed colliding with one of the trailing Oscars moments after baling out of his stricken Lib. He twisted his ankle upon landing in a paddy field and was captured the following day.

Skipper (pilot) Edward Stanley, navigator Tom O'Donohue, and mid-upper gunner Stan Chalcraft died in the air combat. Missing, they are commemorated by name on the Singapore Memorial at Kranji War Cemetery, Singapore.

Don and his five surviving crewmates (2nd pilot Johannes Lentz, 1st wireless operator Johnnie Westermark, flight engineer Norman Davis, rear gunner Jack King, and beam gunner Jack Harris) were soon incarcerated in appalling conditions inside the New Law Courts lockup in the heart of Rangoon, where they stayed until 27 July 1944. At that time they were moved to Block 5, the solitary confinement compound, within the main Rangoon Central Jail complex nearby.

Johnnie Westermark succumbed to disease (and a beating, possibly) on 10 December 1944. His grave today is found in Plot 5.E.10 of Rangoon War Cemetery.

In mid-January 1945 the Pegasus crew survivors were released from Block 5 to join other air force prisoners in Block 8, where conditions were improved but still harsh.

Jack King died of beri beri in Don's arms on 31 March 1945. His grave marker in Plot 9.B.6 of Rangoon War Cemetery carries the notation "BURIED NEAR THIS SPOT"; his body was known to have been buried, but apparently identifiable remains were not discovered post-war.

In late April Don found scraps of paper and a pencil and began recording a secret diary. Five days later he was a free man. In July the diary entries concluded with Don's return to Liverpool harbor by ship.



Don's almost illegible diary, running from 24 April through 14 July 1945. Writing paper was hard to come by within the confines of Rangoon Jail. In his final days of incarceration Don found a pencil and suitable scraps of business paper bearing the name of *THE BENGAL BURMA STEAM NAVIGATION CO., LTD. RANGOON*. Still under the heel of the Japanese at that point, he risked harsh punishment if caught writing, but this threat soon passed. (*Don Lomas*)

PAGE ONE, SIDE ONE of the diary:

April 24th Something in the wind. Rumour that Japs are going to leave. This is it - also that they are going to take prisoners with them. Terrific explosions all day and night and fires in different parts of the city.

On the outside of the fortress-like prison, explosions hinted at Japanese efforts to destroy facilities and thus deny their uses to advancing Allied forces.

April 25th Paraded to discover who was considered “fit” who was unfit. I and rest of crew placed in latter category. All Japs wearing new kit - gave us large bundles of used clothes, shoes, etc. Boys from block 5 joined us in afternoon. Total of 70 (airmen). Total including boys from blocks 3 & 6 - 420? Party moved off at 1600 hours. Raining heavily - all very wet - a dismal spectacle. More explosions during night. Only 49 men left now in no. 8.

The Japanese took roughly 400 of the more able-bodied prisoners with them as they evacuated Rangoon and attempted to outrun the advancing British forces. The journey took them north out of Rangoon and then northeast to Pegu. From Pegu the trail would have swung south after crossing the Sittang River, with an ultimate destination being Siam or Malaya. However, near Pegu the Japanese, in their bid to save their own skins, simply released the bedraggled, slow-moving prisoners.

Those left behind in Rangoon Jail totaled 668 men, of whom 166 were American, British, or British Dominion personnel. Only 49 airmen remained in Block 8, including Don and his surviving crew: Johannes Lentz, Jack Harris, and Norman Davis.

As of mid-January 1945, the previously empty Block 8 exclusively held air force prisoners, almost all of whom had been captured after 27 November 1943. A smaller number of airmen caught prior to this date had been held with non-air force personnel in other prison compounds (3 and 6 Blocks).

Up to the end, new jail arrivals endured a breaking-in period in the solitary confinement Block 5 before joining prisoners in other compounds. In fact, at least two from Don's 159 Squadron were in Block 5 when chosen as fit to march: S/Ldr James Bradley DFC (pilot) and F/O Allan Jeffrey, his navigator. (Captured 1 February 1945, they were lucky to survive; three crew died in baling out, while four were beheaded on the 7th.)

April 26th New guards now in charge. Different types entirely - much more intellectual and sympathetic. Ration day - received more food than ever before. Allowed to fetch our own rations for first time. Went to block 3 (now empty) to scrounge chairs, mess tins, firewood, etc. M.O. from no. 6 came to visit us.

“M.O.” is the Medical Officer. Because the Japanese considered them the most despicable of all prisoners (for having carried out cowardly, criminal, and indiscriminate aerial bombing and strafing), Don and his aircrew prisoners in Block 8 (and in Block 5's solitary confinement and the New Law Courts lockup before that) had been denied visits from the British Army Medical Officers held in the other blocks.

The new guards were Japanese citizens in Rangoon who had been freshly recruited into the Army. Untrained for their new, but short-lived, jail responsibilities, they were ordered to replace the real guards who departed on 25 April.

April 27th Indian doctor allowed to come in and give us treatment. Moved into communal dining hall upstairs - very nice indeed.

April 28th Received more food, including very large amount of meat and sugar. Meals really excellent now - also receiving lots of cigars, charoots etc. etc. Lots of fires still raging. Had good sing-sing after lights out.

Given new guards who were reasonable men, the prisoners were able to eat well and to engage in singing – a activity which had been strictly forbidden by their former guards; those caught previously risked severe beatings.

PAGE ONE, SIDE TWO:

April 29th Good day again - good food, smokes, etc. etc. Bed 8.30. Very hot - couldn't sleep. Went out for walk. Commotion outside - Japs gone - 9. pm. (14 months exactly). Left notes for us. Stayed up most of night drinking tea - bags of sugar. Terrific explosions early morning.

The prisoners were left on their own as their replacement guards fled the city with retreating forces.

29 April at approximately 9 p.m. marked the 14 month anniversary of the date and time when Don was shot down on 29 February 1944. 29 April was also Emperor Hirohito's birthday.

Two notes, each dated 29 April and neatly written in English, were left behind by the departing Japanese; the latter was found on the main gate of the jail. The notes read:

Gentlemen, Bravely you have come here opening prison gate. We have gone, keeping your prisoner safely with Nipponese knightship. Afterwards, we may meet again at the front somewhere. Then let us fight bravely each other. (We had kept the gate's keys at the gate room).

– NIPPONESE ARMY

To the whole captured persons of Rangoon Jail. According to the Nippon military order, we hereby give you liberty and admit to leave this place at your own will. Regarding food and other materials kept in the compound, we give you permission to consume them, as far as your necessity is concerned. We hope that we shall have an opportunity to meet you again at battlefield of somewhere. We shall continue our war effort eternally to get the emancipation of all Asiatic Races.

– Haruo Ito, Chief Officer of Rangoon Branch Jail

Royal Australian Air Force Wing Commander Lionel Hudson was in charge of the ragtag Allied prisoners remaining in Rangoon Jail. He had discovered Haruo Ito's note affixed to the main gate. In April 1985 Hudson journeyed to Tokyo to meet Ito, a successful attorney, forty years to the month after finding Ito's note. Ito explained that the prison staff who appeared at Rangoon Jail after 25 April 1945 were late-war civilian conscripts; during March and April of that year all Japanese civilian men in Rangoon under 45 years of age were forced into uniform.

Don had noted in his 26 April diary entry that these new guards were obviously a different, and gentler, breed than the brutal regular Japanese Army guards who had departed Rangoon Jail with the force-marched POWs on the 25th.

April 30th Lovely breakfast - eggs, pancakes, chutney etc. etc. (ate too much). Down to office on guard duty. Burmen very friendly now - lots of cigs, food, etc. All eating in block 6 now.

Lionel Hudson ordered that the gates to the prison be kept closed – to protect them for the meantime from the chaos outside the walls.

The Union Jack – formerly used for burials – was hoisted over the jail on the 30th.

May 1st All quiet? I.N.A. came in prison to see W/C. Hudson. Lots of our a/c around - shooting up river etc. Painted signs on roof - JAPS GONE etc. Mosquito dropped bomb on prison wall - mistake? Heard that 400 prisoners (English) had been recaptured from the Japs at Pegu.

"I.N.A." was the Indian National Army. Formerly aligned with the Japanese, this group had changed allegiance and was now keen to jockey for position in the power struggle for post-war control of the region. Its chief rival was the similarly turncoat Burma Defence Army (BDA), led by General Aung San. Assassinated two years later, he was the father of 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, currently under house arrest in Rangoon for her leadership in opposing the current Burmese military regime.

Politicking with W/Cdr Hudson was part of the process for BDA and INA officials.

Still unsure as to whether Allied forces yet knew of the existence of Rangoon Jail, and feeling vulnerable in an active war zone, the ex-prisoners decided to paint messages to overflying aircraft on two pitches of Block 1's roof.

One sign read "JAPS GONE" while the other read "BRITISH HERE."

Despite the painted messages, an RAF Mosquito aircraft dropped a bomb on the outer perimeter wall, for reasons unclear to the men inside. Mad as hell, they climbed up onto the roof of Block 7 and, with paint running out, added the expression, "EXTRACT DIGIT."

This abbreviated form of the to-the-point vernacular expression "get your finger out" was proof positive to the Allied forces that British were, indeed, inside the jail, the perception being that such unique slang could not possibly have been a Japanese ploy.

On 1 May happy news about the fates of the prisoners force-marched from Rangoon Jail reached those left behind. What Don did not then know, apparently, was that the prisoners had been attacked by Allied fighter/bombers on 29 April, shortly after their Japanese captors, in their haste to flee advancing Allied forces, had abandoned them near Pegu, Burma.

In a particularly cruel irony, the senior officer among the freed men, British Army Brigadier Clive Donald Hobson – a survivor of over three years of Japanese incarceration – was killed in this attack. His was the only death; hours earlier that day, upon learning from the Japanese Commandant that the march had been abandoned, Brigadier Hobson had declared to his men, "We are free, we are free!"

His remains rest in Rangoon War Cemetery, grave 3.C.14.

It is believed that several other stragglers on the difficult march were bayoneted or shot by the Japanese.

At least one bayoneting is confirmed in the memoir of RAF 355 Squadron wireless operator/air gunner Alan Bailes (captured 16 September 1944 after his 355 Squadron Liberator, EV902, collided with 356 Squadron Liberator EW114 over Burma). He witnessed the shocking, unexpected bayoneting death of a recently captured 22 Squadron Beaufighter pilot, S/Ldr Desmond Hugh Fenton, who had not risen to his feet quickly enough after a rest period on 28 April.

S/Ldr Fenton is buried in grave 3.D.20 in Rangoon War Cemetery. (The 3 May 1945 date of death on his grave marker, however, is off by five days; he died on the 28th.)



1 May 1945 aerial photo of Rangoon Jail, with north up. Barely visible on the roof of Block 1 is the "JAPS GONE" message; "BRITISH HERE" had not yet been added. The last of the three rooftop messages, "EXTRACT DIGIT", was added to Block 7 after an RAF Mosquito had skip-bombed an outer wall on 1 May, infuriating the men within the confines of the jail. They felt that the first two messages should have been clear enough to overhead Allied aircraft. The seven walled-in prison blocks were built like spokes in a wheel. Clockwise from Block 1, these compounds were numbered: 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8; there was no Block 4. Don Lomas was held in solitary confinement in Block 5 from 27 July 1944 until 14 January 1945, when he was moved to the relative freedom of Block 8. (U.S. National Archives)



This 1 May 1945 photo of the "JAPS GONE" message painted on a Block 1 roof, Rangoon Jail, was taken by an RAF 211 Squadron Beaufighter piloted by F/O Steve Catto. Catto waggled his wings to the delight of prisoners below. The main entrance to Rangoon Jail is left of center. (Atholl Sutherland Brown)

May 2nd Heavy air bombardment few miles away. On guard duty - rained heavily. Afternoon - went out as guard to attend meeting between W/C. Hudson and chiefs of I.N.A. and B.D.A. Very interesting and rather shaky?

With a battered rifle that barely held together and which certainly could not fire, Don accompanied W/Cdr Hudson and two others out of the jail to a nearby house for meetings between Hudson and each of the rival Burmese factions: the INA and the BDA.

W/Cdr Hudson was masterful in maintaining superiority over the INA and BDA by insisting that he, in his tattered uniform and long beard, acted as the official representative of Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in South East Asia. Don, far from healthy, was, in his own word, physically "shaky", yet still he acted as a guard at the meeting.

PAGE TWO, SIDE ONE:

May 2nd (continued) Arrived back in jail about 7. pm. Brought wireless equipment - tried to contact our forces - No good. Today W/C. Saunders landed at Mingaladon in Mosquito. Damaged A/C. Came down to jail. Went down river to try and contact navy who are down river somewhere.

The Commanding Officer of RAF 110 Squadron, W/Cdr Arthur Ernest Saunders OBE, and his navigator, F/Lt J.B. Stephens, risked their lives to investigate their hunch: that Rangoon was abandoned by the Japanese. Their Mosquito aircraft was unable to take off again due to damage caused by landing on the cratered runway of Mingaladon airfield (now the site of Rangoon's municipal airport). By luck, they had chosen the segment of runway that had not been mined by retreating Japanese forces.

Furthermore, their radio was malfunctioning. After meeting W/Cdr Hudson at the jail, W/Cdr Saunders and F/Lt Stephens commandeered a small boat, rode down the Rangoon River, and intercepted the Allied invasion fleet steaming northward.

The amphibious invasion of Rangoon was cancelled, and the Rangoon Jail lot were spared potential injury and death from a full-scale assault upon the city.

W/Cdr Saunders later died on 11 July 1945 on a non-operational flight. His body unrecovered, he is commemorated on the Singapore Memorial at Kranji War Cemetery, Singapore.

May 3rd (Liberation Day) Very quiet today. During afternoon three Liberators flew over jail 200 feet - dropped supplies - food, medicine etc. Two photographers arrived. 6. pm. - first fighting men arrived - two navy boys. More later. Had big feed of tinned foods, eggs, onions etc. that night (Stomach trouble.).

Don was rediscovering the joys of eating to his heart's content, but also suffering the consequences; his body was not used to such a wealth of food.

Skippered by P/O R. Lee, Liberator EV981 "D" of 159 Squadron – Don's squadron in India – was sent out from Digri, India on 3 May to drop food and medical supplies to the Rangoon Jail men. One 356 Squadron Liberator, EW175 "A" (piloted by Roy Collier), dropped 3000 pounds of supplies. The third Liberator, serial number unknown, was a 99 Squadron aircraft piloted by F/Lt Townsend.

Peter Jones was the second pilot on the Roy Collier crew, aboard Liberator EW175. Collier had volunteered to go. Their flight to Rangoon Jail is noted in Peter's diary, which is excerpted in the book "Signed With Their Honour" (published privately by the 355/356 Squadrons' Register):

3rd May

Took off from Salbani. Picked up supplies at Jessore and after being briefed set off for Rangoon.

. . . Once we got to Rangoon everything on the ground appeared quiet. The Burmese were carrying on their daily work. Two fighter strips were deserted.

We map read onto the target and made a very comfortable run in, dropping the supplies at a height of 500 ft and with an air speed of 135 mph. Everything dropped well, the parachutes opened and all the supplies landed within the walls.

Once again the Burmese on the ground took no notice and we could see the Indian prisoners standing about in the circular court, no opposition was encountered.

We climbed up and set a course for home, flying low below the clouds. We climbed through a clearing up to 10000 ft passing over Bassein. . . On our return we learned that Rangoon had fallen.

The 159 Squadron Operations Record Book noted details of the 3 May op to Rangoon by P/O Lee and crew:

3 . 5 . 45

A/C: Lib VI "D" EV981 Time Up: 10.10 Time Down: 19.20

Captain: P/O Lee R.

Target: - 1 Lib Mk. VI (a/c "D") was detailed to proceed to Jessore and be loaded. Crew were briefed by C.I.O. Strategic Air Force, at Jessore, to drop food and medical supplies to Allied P.O.W.s in Central Jail Rangoon.

Cameras: - The a/c carried one vertical F.L. 8" and one hand held oblique F.L. 14". Only oblique photographs were attempted results of which were of excellent quality showing Central Jail, waterfront, and Rangoon Town general.

Despite 10/10 CU. and ST. CU. based at 1,000' the target was easily recognised in daylight by usual landmarks. Light and visibility conditions were good. All containers landed intact in the courtyard of the jail as aimed and there was considerable activity amongst P.O.W.s in the jail, cheering and waving at the a/c. The town remained quiet. The P.O.W.s recovered the supplies as soon as they landed amidst much excitement. Inscriptions had been written on the roofs of the jail and on one of the roads such as "Japs Gone", "British Here", "Japs Evacuated", "Don't Prang Rangoon", "Extract Digit". Very considerable damage was observed in the area of the Central Station and along the Waterfront.

It is possible that the aerial photo or photos which follow were taken from EV981.



A 3 May 1945 oblique view of Rangoon Jail. The "BRITISH HERE" and "JAPS GONE" messages can be seen atop Block 1. The more irate expression "EXTRACT DIGIT", already painted by this date, is not visible on the hidden slope of a Block 7 roof. This photo was likely taken during one of the Liberator supply drops on the 3rd. (*Elwyn Jones*)



3 May 1945, prisoners tasting freedom around the front gate of Rangoon Jail. (*Elwyn Jones*)



The original caption to photograph P02491.065 in the collection of the Australian War Memorial reads as follows: Rangoon, Burma. 2 May 1945. Aerial view low over the jail in which the Japanese kept Allied prisoners of war (POWs), some of whom are in the courtyards and on the stairways. Warrant Officer L. A. Payne of Kilkenny, SA, was navigator in a RAF Liberator bomber aircraft which dropped food and medical supplies (right). He said POWs required aid until ground forces arrived. 'They started waving to us like mad and then began to pick up the parcels' he said. Pilots flying low over Rangoon, the capital of Burma, on D-Day, spotted a long red-roofed building with a message 'Japs Gone' painted on it in large white letters. Another message on another building reads, 'Extract Digit'. (*Australian War Memorial*)

The caption's date is incorrect and should be 3 May 1945, per numerous sources, including Don's diary and W/Cdr Lionel Hudson's book, "The Rats of Rangoon".

In the photo one can see three open parachutes descending above the long prison building pointing away from the camera in the upper right. The photo must have been taken by a Liberator dropping these supplies, since three Libs made supply drops that day, according to Don's diary.

Warrant Officer L.A. Payne of Kilkenny, South Australia is mentioned in the photo caption.

The Australian government website "World War II Nominal Roll" (<http://www.ww2roll.gov.au/>) reveals that this airman was Flying Officer (final rank) Lionel Arthur Payne of Adelaide, South Australia, service number 416990. Payne enlisted in the RAAF on 8 November 1941 and was discharged on 30 November 1945 while posted to 159 Squadron.

L.A. Payne shows up by name only once in the spotty 159 Squadron Operations Record Book, in a July 1945 monthly summary's list of personnel granted officers' commissions. He is identified as "A.416990 W/O Payne, L.A., Nav. B."

L.A. Payne, then, is linked with the 3 May 1945 Rangoon Jail operation (via the caption) and with 159 Squadron (via the 159 Squadron records and the Australian Internet site "World War II Nominal Roll").

Most likely he flew as P/O R. Lee's navigator aboard EV981 "D" on this date. When this evidence is coupled with the 159 Squadron ORB's mention of oblique aerial photos taken on the 3 May supply-dropping op, one can reasonably conclude that the low-level aerial image of the supply drop in progress was shot from Payne's Liberator "D". Very possibly the other two oblique images, above, were also taken from "D".

May 4th Up early - raining heavily. Walked down to river and boarded L/craft. This took us out to hospital ship. KARAPARA. Feeling happy but pretty lousy due to stomach being upset.

Evacuation of 251 of Rangoon Jail's prisoners, including Don and two of his crewmates (Johannes Lentz and Jack Harris), commenced at 0700 (Calcutta time) at Phoongyi Street Jetty on the waterfront. Embarkation was completed at 0830. Don's crewmate Norman Davis volunteered to stay behind with eight others as W/Cdr Hudson's staff. Among other things, they organized the repair of Mingaladon airfield's runways. They departed Rangoon by Dakota aircraft on 5 May, and Norman reunited with his crewmates in Calcutta.

A medical assessment of Don's health written on 4 May gave a diagnosis of "Malnutrition. History of mild beriberi + diarrhoea. General condition - fair. Has infected scabies."

Scabies were skin ulcers which could eat down to bone and kill.

By this time, Don's health had improved somewhat due to a better diet, starting in the latter days of his imprisonment. He did not think he would have survived too much longer under the harsh prison condition.

ORD. DIET	
H. M. H. S. KARAPARA	
No.	1360083 F/SGT.
Name	LOMAS. J. D.
Unit	159 SQDN RAF.
Overseas Unit	REPAT POW. 29-2-44
Depot in India	REL. METH. AGE 28
Embarked at	Rangoon on 14-5-45
Ward & Bed No.	C.
DIAGNOSIS	
MALNUTRITION	
CATEGORY	

SPECIAL REPORT	
History of mild beriberi + diarrhoea	
General Condition - fair	
Has infected scabies	
J. D. Lomas	

(Don Lomas)



His Majesty's Hospital Ship Karapara in an undated photograph. (P&O Collection)



4 May 1945. In the center, facing the camera, Don Lomas stands at dockside in Rangoon with other ex-prisoners. They await their turn to board a landing craft which will ferry them out to HMHS KARAPARA, the hospital ship which will transport them to Calcutta. Framing Don (and each facing left) are Ralph W. Stephens (left of Don) and the taller Alan Sammons (right). Stephens – obviously happy in the photo – was an RAF navigator captured on 16 September 1944 after his 355 Squadron Liberator, EV902, collided with 356 Squadron Liberator EW114 over their central Burma target. Sammons was an RAF 20 Squadron Hurricane fighter pilot shot down on 24 Feb 1944 near Akyab, Burma. (Don Lomas)



A reunion of two RAF prisoners of Rangoon Jail: Don Lomas, left, and Alan Sammons, right, meet again in September 1994 at Alan's home in Solihull, UK. They had last seen one another in 1945. (Matt Poole)

May 5th Started voyage back to India. Good quarters, food etc. Piano on board O.K.

Don immediately scoped out the piano and tickled the ivories for the first time in fourteen months. He was well known for his piano talents back at 159 Squadron in India.

May 6th Feeling rather better now. Stomach almost O.K.

May 7th Weather cleared up now. Changed course and headed for Calcutta instead of Chittagong. Heard that boys were O.K. (Weighed 8. stone!)

Don was rejoicing in the fact that he had been putting on weight in the latter stages of his Rangoon Jail ordeal and then aboard the Karapara.

PAGE TWO, SIDE TWO:

May 8th (Steering gear U/S). Great news - heard on wireless that Germany had capitulated - unconditional surrender. Had good sing-sing on board.

The news from Europe added to the positive mood. "Steering gear U/S" refers to mechanical difficulty in the Karapara's steering equipment.

May 9th Docked in Calcutta about 3. pm. - great reception. Two bands, lots of brass hats, governor and wife etc. waiting to meet us. Red Cross comforts etc. etc. Went in ambulances to 119 hospital (Army).

May 10th Sent R.F.M. home. Good food here. Lots of gifts from Red Cross, R.A.F. W.V.S. etc. Drew kit from Army stores.

An "R.F.M." was a telegram. "W.V.S." was the Women's Voluntary Service. The general feeling of happiness continued.

"Drew kit from Army stores" means that Don collected much-needed items of clothing, etc, from the Army supplies made available to him.

May 11th Jock Flemming (and Copp F/LT) came to visit us. Very interesting to hear about old Squadron members. Many gone. Rang Digri & spoke to Smithy.

Don and his surviving crew received a visit from two men who had been on 159 Squadron with them in 1943 and into 1944.

One of them, F/Lt Bruce Copp, was a close friend of Bernard Clifton, who had been killed in the aerial action when Don was shot down, but aboard BZ962 D / Daring Diana - a second 159 Squadron Liberator lost that night. No doubt Bruce learned on 11 May that Bernard was not among the known Rangoon Jail survivors.

"Smithy" was Fred Smith, Don's friend and fellow airman on 159 Squadron.

Smithy had flown a full tour of ops with 159 Squadron in 1943 and 1944. He began his second tour in late 1944 on 99 Squadron Liberators and then returned to fly again with 159 Squadron in April 1945.

Smithy's logbook proves that he was at Digri on May 11th, confirming Don's diary entry.

May 12th Moved today to R.A.F. Dental centre. Pretty good.

May 13th Impression for new tooth. Stayed in hospital. Not feeling too good - bad cold. Food good.

PAGE THREE, SIDE ONE:

May 14th Went out to Belvedere with Jack and few of boys. Had dinner and saw cinema show. Few drinks after. O.K.

"Jack" was probably Don's crewmate, air gunner Jack Harris.



Don Lomas with two of his three surviving crewmates and a nurse, following their liberation from Rangoon Jail and return to India in May 1945. From left: Norman Davis, unidentified nurse, Jack Harris, and Don. (*Don Lomas*)



Don Lomas, Norman Davis, and Jack Harris in India, May 1945. Jack's bandaged leg – probably a skin disease or tropical ulcer – can still be seen underneath his sock. (*Don Lomas*)



Don Lomas, right, with fellow ex-prisoners in India. Center: Don's crewmate Norman Davis. The only other identified face is second from right: Canadian Hubert "Wilbur" Reekes, an RAF 215 Squadron ball turret gunner who became a prisoner through a horrible miscommunication. During a 8 January 1945 op to attack Burma-Siam Railway targets south of Thanbyuzayat, Burma, his Liberator, EW176 "G", suddenly suffered complete loss of engine power minutes before reaching its target. The aircraft began to drop rapidly. Bombs were immediately jettisoned, and a warning to prepare for baleout was given by the skipper, F/O D.F. "Dizzy" Neville. When engines were eventually restarted, a crewman gave a thumbs-up signal to Reekes, positioned by the rear floor escape hatch. The signal was meant to say all was OK again, but in the confusion Reekes misinterpreted it as the signal to jump. He landed safely, was captured, and then was sent northward to Rangoon Jail by rail, surviving a strafing attack of the train en route! After his POW liberation, he was not punished by his superiors for his errant jump. (*Don Lomas*)

15th Went out to Ballygunge golf club with members of W.V.S. Lovely place. Excellent tea etc. Back 7. pm. Met KEN JONES - (old skipper/very pleased indeed). Dinner at Christies. Walked back. Ken stayed at hospital (Ken now F/LT. Finished 2nd tour).

The Women's Voluntary Service girls (and other women) Don met during his initial recuperation in India helped him tremendously, in his own words, to "begin rejoining the real world" following his ordeal in Rangoon.

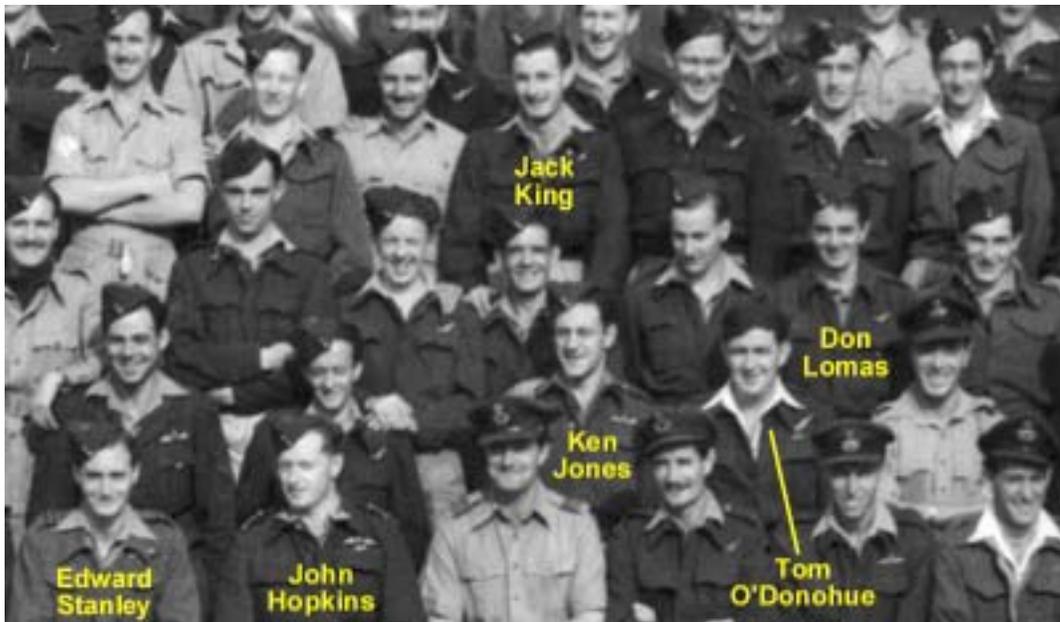
Ken Jones had piloted Don's Liberator from England to India in 1943, but Don was not able to be crewed with him on 159 Squadron. After completing his tour of ops on 159, Jones flew a second tour with 358 Squadron, also aboard Liberators, on exacting, highly dangerous Special Duties agent and supply-dropping operations ranging as far away as French Indo-China. He was known as an exceptional and outstandingly popular skipper – one of the most experienced Liberator pilots in the Far East, in fact.

No doubt Ken was shocked to learn of his former crewmates' suffering, especially that of his close friend, Jack King, who died one month short of freedom.

Less than two months after visiting Don in hospital, F/Lt Kenneth Warren Jones DFC died of a self-inflicted gunshot on 10 July after completing his tour of ops with 358 Squadron. Don heard that it may have had something to do with a woman. Jones is buried in Plot 3.C.2 at Chittagong War Cemetery.



Don Lomas (center) and four of his Liberator crew on a tourist break in Egypt, April 1943, during their transit from the UK to India. Tom O'Donohue (navigator, killed 29 February 1944) is at far left. To Don's left is Ken Jones, then their skipper, who in May 1945 visited the Pegasus survivors in Calcutta, two months before committing suicide. On the far right is Jack King, who died in Don's arms in Rangoon Jail on 31 March 1945. (*Jack O'Donohue*)



27 January 1944. In a 159 Squadron A Flight group photo Don Lomas is second from right, third row. Three of his 29 February crewmates are identified: Edward Stanley (pilot, died 29 Feb), Jack King (rear gunner, died in Rangoon Jail), and Tom O'Donohue (navigator, died 29 Feb). The ribbon signifying O'Donohue's Distinguished Flying Medal (DFM) is visible sewn below his half-winged observer's (navigator's) brevet. To O'Donohue's right is Ken Jones (pilot's wings visible), who visited the liberated Pegasus survivors in Calcutta. 159's Commanding Officer, W/Cdr John "Hoppy" Hopkins, is next to Stanley. His Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) ribbon can be seen. (*Dr. Tom Hopkins*)

16th Had lunch at Firpo's with Ken and boys. He caught train 2.10. Met party at 2.30. Went with Red Cross women to cinema (MURDER MY SWEET) GOOD and then to tea at restaurant. Afterwards went out to home of one of these people. Very pleasant indeed. (Teeth ready now - rather large.)

Firpo's, on Chowringhee Road, was a popular gathering point for personnel on leave in Calcutta.

Don's mention of "teeth" refers to a new set of dentures being made for him.

Starring Dick Powell as private eye Philip Marlowe, 1944's "Murder My Sweet" was a popular Hollywood adaptation of the Raymond Chandler novel "Farewell My Lovely".



In the background is Firpo's Restaurant on Chowringhee Road in Calcutta. An American talks to an Indian at center, while on the right a British officer walks toward the camera. (<http://web.ncf.ca/kharagpurdiaspora>)

17th Shopping in afternoon. Night - went to Firpo's and met many of the boys come down from Shillong - all looking fit and well! Afterwards went to Garrison Theatre to see ENSA show - good.

Similar to the American USO, England's Entertainment National Service Association was dedicated to the well-being of uniformed personnel.

18th Had a visit from Jock Stuart (F/O). Looks very well - almost finished 2nd tour. Night - went to cinema. Walked back to hospital.

Like Ken Jones, J.C. Stuart was a veteran 159 and 358 Squadron Liberator pilot who knew Don and some of his crewmates quite well. Jock had been Don's skipper in April 1942 when they delivered a Wellington bomber to the beleaguered island of Malta and then continued onward as passengers to Egypt. From there they were transported aboard an Imperial Airways flying boat to Lagos, Nigeria, where they spent at least a month of inactivity, awaiting further orders.

Finally, after a journey to Freetown, Sierra Leone, they sailed back to the UK on a swift New Zealand container ship, accompanied by refrigerated lamb carcasses. To keep busy aboard ship, Don manned an antiaircraft gun.

He was separated from Jock Stuart at some point after their return from Africa, but they were reunited in India and flew in 159 Squadron's A Flight at the same time in 1943 and into 1944.

PAGE THREE, SIDE TWO:

NOTE: Don's first entry on page three, side two is dated 18 May, the same as the last, separate, entry on page three, side one. Details cross-referenced to other sources so far prove only that the dates of Don's diary entries are correct through 4 May. After that date no evidence has yet been found to corroborate or refute dates of entries in Don's diary.

18th May Off 7. am to Alipore A/Drome. Got aboard D.C. 3. Took off 9. am. Land Nagpur for lunch. Off again. Had to return due to carburetor trouble (very bumpy). Stayed night in sick quarters. Met medical orderly from 159 sqn.

Alipore was an RAF airfield in the Calcutta area.

The aborted DC-3 airplane shuttle of ex-prisoners to Bombay was Don's first flying since being shot down over Rangoon. When mechanical trouble was encountered on this turbulent flight, Don feared that he might have survived Rangoon Jail only to die with fellow ex-prisoners in an accident.

He later chose to return by ship to the UK, rather than fly.

19th Off 7.30. am. Good trip - landed Bombay 10.30. Went to no 2. S.S.Q. Lovely place - situated on sea front. Camp cinema: Wake Island. (Quite a good piano here).

One day after a shaky flight, Don and his fellow ex-POWs successfully made the trip from Alipore to Bombay.

The identity of "no. 2. S.S.Q." has not been established.

The plot line for the 1942 war movie "Wake Island" (nominated for four Oscars): "December, 1941. With no hope of relief or re-supply, a small band of United States Marines tries to keep the Japanese Navy from capturing their island base."

Because of his ordeal at the hands of the Japanese, Don probably viewed this movie in a much different mindset than the majority of the theatergoers.

20th Very nice here - good food etc. Camp cinema at night not bad (Trip to Marseilles).

The movie was the 1944 drama "Passage to Marseilles" starring Humphrey Bogart.

21st Feeling much better here. Wrote two letters - one to Cedric - one to Norah. Camp cinema at night, good. Dance band on roof gave concerts. Very nice. (Beer).

Cedric was Don's brother. Not sure who Norah was.

22nd Bags of new kit from stores. Met Jock Drinnon (pianist). (Weight now 9 st. 3. dressed). Down to Bombay in afternoon. To committee of adjustments. Traced all kit etc. bought clothes, over to accounts. Everything very well organised. Metro cinema after. "Bathing Beauties"? Not bad. Taxi back to camp. Walked round to mess afterwards. Bed 11.30.

The RAF Committee of Adjustment was the organization which dealt with the personal property of deceased and missing airmen. An inventory of Don's personal possessions had been made following his disappearance on 29 February 1944, and now, having survived, Don was able to trace his belongings and arrange for their return.

After two straight war-themed movies, Don viewed the 1944 Hollywood musical comedy "Bathing Beauty", starring Red Skelton and "America's mermaid", the luscious Esther Williams.

23rd Dance on roof. Lots of women. Free drinks etc. very nice indeed. Quite day. Nothing much doing.

24th Quite day. Across to permanent staff mess. New piano there - good.

A CORNER OF THE DIARY IS RIPPED AND MISSING FROM THE FINAL TWO PAGES.

PAGE FOUR, SIDE ONE:

(Missing. . .Probably read: 25th Bomba) y. Shopping etc.

(Missing. . .Probably read: 26th Bomba) y. Wrote to Jock Fleming.

(Missing. . .Probably read: 27th Bombay.) Wrote to Norah and Cedric.

(Missing. . .Probably read: 28th) Bombay. C. of Adjustment. Bought suit. Pay a/c. received Rs. 935. F/SGT Hill - W.A.A.F. - night out - O.K. Bed 1. am.

Don collected some back pay owed to him and went out with a Women's Auxiliary Air Force lady friend in the evening.

29th Bombay afternoon. Met Winnie. Night. Drinks. Up Malabar Hill. Very pleasant indeed. Bed 1.30.

Don's night out with a woman named Winnie included a climb up Bombay's Malabar Hill.

30th Bombay shopping. Back 7. pm. Two cables - Norah and Cedric. Over to P/S Mess. Lots of beer - sing sing etc. Tight. Bed 3. am.

"P/S Mess" is the permanent staff mess Don mentioned on the 24th. "Tight" refers to his overindulgence in alcohol.

31st P/S mess for lunch & drinks O.K. Over there at night. Bed 12.00.

June 1st - 4th Quiet.

One month after his Liberation from Rangoon Jail, Don's time was spent relaxing without fanfare.

June 5th Taffy's birthday (21). P/mess - drinks. Taffey tight.

June 6th Some of boys away by air.

June 7th - 9th Lots of mail from home - all O.K.

June 10th Taffy & Tom away - myself unfit to fly.?

June 15th Party at No 2. V. good - tight.

June 16th Dance at P/mess. O.K. (Moved up to billets today - not too good.)

17th Birthday. BX. Bombay morning with Jock. Drinks etc. Cinema show - bed 1.

This was Don's 29th birthday. No doubt he thoroughly enjoyed the day's celebrations, so far removed from what he had endured on his 28th birthday at the brutal New Law Courts lockup in central Rangoon.

The meaning of BX (with the letter B underlined) is unknown.

PAGE FOUR, SIDE TWO:

June 18th Met W/O Wac (S.W.O.) (Further words on line missing).

19th Bombay - Winnie. O.K. Bed (Further words on line missing).

20th Quiet day. More mail.

21st Trunks away. Met "Paddy". Boat (Further words on line missing).

22nd Dave in dock. Down to Bombay. Winnie - last time.

23rd All fixed up. Dave O.K. Rang Winnie. Chinese restaurant for supper. Broke.

Despite having been issued back pay which had accumulated while he was a prisoner, Don's funds were depleted during his time in Calcutta and Bombay.

24th Embarked noon - "special accommodation" not forthcoming.

As an ex-prisoner of war, Don was hoping for some sort of reasonable special treatment aboard the ship transporting him back to England. He was wrong.

25th Sailed 8 am. Boat very crowded - sleeping on floor - food O.K.

**To
29th Pretty rough - lots sick. Very humid prickly heat etc.**

THERE IS NO MENTION OF JULY AS THE NEW MONTH'S ENTRIES BEGIN:

1st Played for church service.

Always keen on offering his musical talents to those around him, Don gladly played keyboard during this service aboard the ship.

2nd

3rd

4th Weather better - still hot.

5th Stopped at Suez to refuel etc. 500 more men on board.

6th Sailed through Suez Canal.

7th Weather very nice now. Cool. Passed Malta.

8th Played for church services. Passed Cape Bon-Bogerta.

9th Good weather.

10th Passed Gibraltar 9 am. Much cooler.

11th Started wearing blue today. Entered Bay - 17.00 hrs.

12th Weather quite good - calm sea. Sighted Lands End 16.00 hrs.

13th Entered Mersey - dropped anchor.

14th Still at anchor.

DON'S DIARY ENDS WITH THE RETURN OF HIS SHIP TO LIVERPOOL.



Don Lomas, 1996, with his survival kit hat from Rangoon Jail (Matt Poole)

On a sunny June day in 1996 Don Lomas could not resist once again trying on his wartime canvas hat-with-mosquito netting, an invaluable item in his RAF-issued survival kit. He carried this kit with him when he baled out of his stricken Liberator on 29 February 1944. Prior to the above photo being taken, he had silently disappeared into his house to rediscover the hat, long buried in deep storage. He admitted that this was the first time he had worn the hat since 1945. The smells baked into the material from fourteen horrid months as a POW in the tropics were still there. Because the odors triggered a flood of unpleasant memories for Don, his wife Joan washed the hat several days later.

He credits this hat, in part, for his POW survival. Despite Rangoon's tropical setting, conditions could become relatively chilly, such as at night and at times during the monsoon season. The jail's windows were nothing more than bars open to the weather; there were no coverings such as glass or screens. The prisoners were at the mercy of wind-blown rain, which added to their misery and no doubt contributed to the deaths of malnourished prisoners dressed, in some cases, only in tattered, rotting remnants of uniforms.

Don's canvas hat, then, was a godsend to him, as it retained precious heat during cooler conditions.

The hat's mosquito netting gave him another advantage over many of his fellow prisoners. Despite the ceaseless assault of mosquitoes, Don never caught malaria. His simple hat, with its netting and mossie-resistant canvas, kept the insects away from his face, neck, and head, allowing him a better chance at sleep – a much better quality sleep than those who were more exposed.

His heavier RAF-issue flying clothing, essential for bombing operations at altitude, also helped in the battle against insects and chill.

In contrast was the clothing of one of his solitary confinement cellmates (3 men per cell) in Block 5 of Rangoon Jail during three months in 1944. RAF F/Lt John Frederick Luing, a 211 Squadron Beaufighter pilot, had been shot down at low level on 8 March 1944 wearing only a summer-weight cotton sleeveless bush shirt and short-legged pants. Luing suffered horribly from the chill and the mosquitoes and eventually succumbed to disease on 24 October 1944, in his cell shared with Don and Don's flight engineer, Norman Davis. He is buried in Grave 6.H.10 within Rangoon War Cemetery.

Following the war Don returned to his home village of Mytholmroyd, West Yorkshire. In time, he fully recovered from his POW ordeal and raised a family of three children with Joan.

Don has outlived the seventeen other victims of 29 February 1944 – his eight crewmates aboard BZ926 (“Pegasus”) and nine squadronmates aboard the second downed Liberator, BZ962 (“Daring Diana”). One after another, the bombers had been caught by searchlights and then destroyed.

He also outlasted both of his one-time aerial foes – the two Japanese Ki-43 Hayabusa (code named “Oscar”) fighter pilots who had worked in tandem to shoot down “Pegasus” and “Daring Diana”.

One pilot, 9-kill ace Hiroshi Takiguchi, died in November 1944, falling to an American P-38 fighter in the Philippines.

The other, 19-kill ace Bunichi Yamaguchi, was the only pilot from their flying unit, the 204th Sentai, to have survived from its April 1942 inception until the war's end. Before his 1992 death, Yamaguchi offered his unique, insightful perspective on the demise of “Pegasus” and “Daring Diana” – and an apology. Don was intrigued with Yamaguchi's recollections and genuinely appreciative of his apology.

Don stepped down in his late 70s as partner in the Woollen Cloth Company, his family's textile accessories business. The firm passed from his grandfather to his father, to Don and his only sibling (the late Cedric Lomas), and finally to Geoffrey, Cedric's son. Don's commute was an easy one: a mere 50 feet from home to office – in stark contrast to the mileage he accumulated in employment with the RAF.

A soft-spoken and modest man, Don downplays his experiences in serving his country, which he calls "not very spectacular compared to some." He considers himself exceedingly fortunate in life, and this includes all of his wartime experiences. He is an inspiration for having pressed forward with his post-war life rather than succumbing to the anguish, cruelty, and heartbreak of his Rangoon ordeal.



Don with his wife Joan, son Craig and daughters Mandy (left) and Anita (right) in a family portrait taken on 1 July 1998. Mandy lives close to her parents' Mytholmroyd, West Yorkshire home. Anita lives in Australia, while Craig indulges in his passion for world travel and is often away from the UK for months at a time. Full family gatherings, such as this one in 1998, have always been rare, but special, occasions for the Lomases. (*Don Lomas*)

POSTSCRIPT

On 15 October 2008 and well into his 92nd year, Don passed away peacefully after a brief stay in a care facility near the village of Mytholmroyd, West Yorkshire – his lifelong home, with the exception of his wartime RAF service years.