

51 · Sangshak and Kohima

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31 Division

Thai border, Irrawaddy River

Almost all of my comrades in the unit I belonged to, 58 Infantry Regiment, died in those battles. What I, one of the few survivors, can and should do is not to forget those dead comrades. My sincere wish is that 'how the dead comrades lived through the war and how they died' should be remembered not only by myself but by as many people as possible.

My unit came from Niigata prefecture, where Buddhism is widely believed in and almost every house has a small but fine family Buddhist shrine to worship their ancestors. However, those drafted into the regiment were young and unmarried, and could not be ancestors. Their parents had died and in their family there are only the uncles whom the younger generation has not met and who are going to be completely forgotten.

Most of those who died in the war were twenty to twenty-two years old. They fought for their country, to save their country in the national emergency. They believed that the country was in a serious situation, on the brink of survival in the face of the foreign invasion. It was natural at that time that the younger generation should go out and fight in such a national emergency. Moreover, when they left their home town, many schoolchildren and local people cheered their departure, singing songs and waving flags. This had greatly impressed the soldiers, who had a strong obligation to families and local folk.

Nobody wants to die, but soldiers dare to fight bravely to pursue their duties and to fulfil the wishes of the people at home. It is not easy to suppress the wish to live, and they charged at the enemy line in trepidation. Nobody dies smiling. Such brave

comrades are now almost forgotten. I wish more people know how they lived, how they fought and how they died.

I was an officer in the first reserve. At that time, late 1930s, those graduated from middle schools (at age seventeen or eighteen) were eligible to apply to become army reserve officers. As graduates of the formal Military Academy were too few as the war in China extended, the middle-school graduates were in fact forced to apply to be reserve officers. I was drafted in December 1938, and after twenty months' training was commissioned as an infantry officer, starting from the rank of Apprentice Officer. My first assignment was as an infantry platoon leader in 58 Regiment which had four sections of thirteen men each. In the Japanese army three platoons made up a rifle company, three to five companies formed a battalion, and three battalions with supporting units made up an infantry regiment. In these organisations, I was successively a platoon leader, commander of a transport unit, adjutant to the battalion commander and a company commander.

I took part in 'Operation Imphal' as we called it: the Japanese official name was 'Operation U-Go', which we were told a necessity was for the defence of Burma. However, we thought that it would not be easy to win, as we had to cross the rugged Arakan mountain range for about 200 kilometres from east to west. As the supply of food, ammunitions and many others was crucial, we had to carry by ourselves two weeks' rations, ammunition, shovels and clothes; a total weight of 40 to 50 kilograms. This was so heavy that once we sat down to rest we could not stand up by ourselves; we had to be pulled up by someone. The top brass came up with the idea of using oxen for carrying supplies, but Burmese oxen were used to pull carts, not to carry heavy loads on their back. About 700 oxen were allocated to our 2nd Battalion, and one of the four rifle companies was transformed into a transportation unit using oxen. Soldiers of the company had a hard time training oxen for carrying loads on their backs, for oxen did not budge when they were tired. These ideas of our top brass proved to be wishful thinking which disregarded the harsh reality.

Sangshak: on 15 March 1944 our 2nd Battalion crossed the River Chindwin and started to advance westward at the same time as other units of 31 Division and 15 Division. We climbed up and then went down the steep mountains, undisturbed by British troops or planes. After six days' hard march we poured into Ukhrul, a small village on the road from Kohima to Sangshak. British troops seemed to have evacuated it only a few hours before and the village was burning. We then realised that the enemy had destroyed all their food and supplies, to our great disappointment, but a sergeant brought a bottle of whisky he found and wanted me to give it to Major General Miyazaki, commander of the Infantry Group accompanying us. He seemed pleased to receive the bottle. We were very tired because of the long march and also as we had to run uphill to reach Ukhrul, so we were very eager to get a good rest. But to my disappointment when I went to General Miyazaki, he ordered our battalion to pursue the retreating British and to occupy Sangshak. At that time I did not know that Sangshak was in the operational area of 15 Division where we, in 31 Division, were not supposed to attack. This caused a problem later, as in such a big operation the area in which a division ought to deploy had been defined on maps and any departure from it should be approved by the Army Headquarters. As adjutant I was told that our target was Kohima but did not know the scope of the operation.

In the evening of 21 March, we occupied the village of Sangshak and found that it was not the main position of the enemy, so we then attacked a hill north-west of the village and occupied the enemy's south front position. The enemy mounted a heavy counterattack on us after sunrise. This was the first time we had fought with the British-Indian forces, which was very different from our experience of fighting the Chinese army which had inferior weapons to ours. Our battalion commander observed the enemy positions and ordered an attack during the coming night: 8th Company to lead the attack, followed by 5th and 6th Companies. From our experience in China we were confident of the success of

the night attack, but we had to expect that a mass of bullets from the overwhelming enemy automatic weapons would result in much greater casualties. When 8th Company broke through the enemy front line, 5th and 6th tried to advance, but very fierce enemy firing made their progress impossible. Under a strong counter-attack the commander and most soldiers of 8th Company were killed or wounded. Though we wanted to advance we could not even lift our heads because of the heavy fire which we had never before experienced.

Major Nagata, the battalion commander, insisted: 'The bones of 8th Company men should be recovered by all means and all the battalion should advance.' He was then shot through his neck and was bleeding, so I took out a bandage cloth, but he cried, 'Don't mind me. It's a trifling cut. Adjutant, organise the attack!' So I asked a soldier to bandage him and crawled to the commanders of 5th and 6th Companies and asked their opinion. Both said regretfully, 'We should retreat and try again. If we continue, we shall all be annihilated.' I agreed with them and went back to the battalion commander. Hearing my report, the commander finally realised that the attack could not be carried out and he broke down in tears, a man weeping in front of his subordinates, saying, 'Too shameful not to recover the bones of Lieutenant Ban and soldiers of 8th Company.' I tried to calm him down, 'Please be patient, we are not running away.' So we retreated back to a slope facing the enemy hill, under cover of the morning mist. It was the morning of 23 March.

During the day of 23 March, the enemy attempted to capture our position and fighting continued. We had then five medium machine guns, but our guns with air-bursting shells had not yet arrived due to the bad road, so we could do nothing against the enemy mortars which threatened us. The mortar shells came down from above, so we could not shelter behind obstacles, as against bullets which fly low. The battalion commander and I were in a trench dug by the enemy. In the late afternoon, I had to visit company commanders to convey orders for the coming night

attack. I went by way of a communication trench and saw five soldiers crouching in it. On the battlefield soldiers feel forlorn and tend to stick together. Just as I told them to disperse, a shell exploded between me and them and all five were killed. I was facing the enemy so my face was injured. I could not see, I could not open my mouth and because of the wound I could not apply styp-tic treatment. If I tried to press my blood vessel closer to the heart I would be choked. So I put my towel on the wound and held it there. A machine gunner saw me and ran up and wrapped his towel around my face, which slowed my bleeding. As the enemy was near at hand I sent him back to his gun, which fought well and halted the enemy advance.

Next night, 24 March, firstly we charged into the enemy flank-defence position which had been hindering our advance. The battalion commander, commander of 5th Company and I were together. As adjutant, I had to be with the commander. Two grenades came tumbling down the slope towards us. As the distance between us and the enemy was so close, there were still some seconds before they exploded. The battalion commander picked up one grenade quickly and threw it back at the enemy. I kicked the other grenade at the enemy as I had my sword in my right hand and had no time to pick it up and throw it; otherwise it would have exploded in my face. The one I kicked back must have killed an enemy soldier. The rule of the battlefield is 'If you do not kill the enemy you will be killed.' This is why war is a vice. It is war that forces us to do the killing. In the war my comrades were killed in rapid succession and I may happen to be killed next. Despite that we had to advance towards the enemy. If we didn't, we would never win a war. If we advance we have to face determined men. It is the war which forces human beings into such a dreadful environment. In the human mind, there exists Buddha as well as demons, and natures vary. But the environment of the war turns human beings evil. As I said, I kicked the grenade at the enemy, but it had been set to explode within seven seconds and he had no time to kick it aside.

As the grenades we threw into the enemy position exploded

continuously with much noise, some of the enemy seemed to be getting rattled. Taking this opportunity, the battalion commander stood up crying excitedly, 'Charge! Charge!' and took the lead in dashing at the enemy position. We secured the position and 6th Company took up formation to prepare for the counter-attack. After a while, when the situation seemed settled, I ventured an opinion to the commander. 'On the next charge, please follow the company commander and platoon leader. Your presence is the basis for morale of all soldiers of the battalion.' He thought for a while and then looked up at me gently: 'I understand your opinion. I do hate the need to urge soldiers to fight more vigorously. But I must respect the pride of my commanders.'

On 25 March, 5th Company charged the enemy from the position we had captured the previous night, but failed and suffered big damage before reaching the enemy line, due to the fierce fire from automatic rifles.

At 4 a.m. on 26 March, the remnant of 6th Company, about 50 men, together with 100 men of 11th Company, attacked the enemy position around the church, led by Lieutenant Osamu Nishida, commander of 11th Company, and secured a part of it. Due to the heavy counter-attack Lt Nishida was badly wounded and many men were killed one by one, leaving only twenty fit men by evening. So we were pathetically preparing for the final night assault with all the remaining men of the regiment.

We attacked every night from the 22nd to 25th and every night many soldiers were killed. Despite that, we went forward. In war it is hard to comprehend the real situation. We felt that we were badly off as we knew our situation well, while we did not know the state of the enemy. But it happened that the enemy at Sangshak escaped. As we attacked on five consecutive nights, the enemy could not sleep and their nerve must have broken down. That's why they retreated. They left many things for us; shells, big horses and also wounded Indian soldiers. A few men were left behind having been sound asleep, sedated, and when they woke up they were in Japanese hands.

I was very much impressed to see that the corpse and sword of Lt Ban had been buried neatly packed in a blanket. Our men were all moved by this. As the enemy treated our company commander respectfully, our regimental commander ordered that enemy wounded should be treated and prisoners of war (those captured) should not be killed. After fierce battles when many comrades were killed, men were excited and felt strong hatred against the enemy soldiers and were provoked to kill even helpless prisoners. At that time our commanders had a conscience and controlled our men. The badly wounded enemy soldiers were sent to a Japanese field hospital.

Eight hundred and fifty men of our battalion crossed the River Chindwin, but now after twelve days, active men were reduced to half, 425 men. It was very heavy damage and in a normal situation the fighting power of the battalion would be regarded as almost lost, so we ordered the Oxen Company to leave the animals and join the main unit. They were far behind as oxen carrying supplies cannot negotiate steep mountains. We were reorganised and supplemented with captured weapons and headed for our target, Kohima.

Although my commander was shot through his neck he did not agree to be hospitalised. I wished to treat my own wound as I could hardly open my mouth and eyes. But as the wounded commander said he would proceed to the next battlefield and asked me, 'How about you?' I had to say, 'I will accompany you', against my personal inclination. So both the commander and I were bandaged like monsters and went to Kohima. Because of my wound I could not chew, so my only food was milk poured into my mouth as I looked upward. Fortunately, we captured canned milk from the enemy.

Kohima was a big village of about 4,000 people and was located 140 kilometres by road east of Dimapur, which was linked by railway to Chittagong. There was a good paved road from Dimapur to Kohima and then south to Imphal. Also a road ran from Kohima to the east, so it was located on a three-way

crossing. There were British Army warehouses in Kohima. The village of Kohima lay to the east of the road and British defence positions were on a range of hills west of the road. We advanced along the road and occupied enemy barracks (at GPT Ridge) on 5 April, as the enemy retreated to positions north-west of the barracks (Pimple), which we also occupied that day, but this time we suffered a high casualty rate of 110 men. One hundred and ten men killed just to break through a position! I named the hills of Kohima from the south, as Goat (Jail Hill), Horse (Detail Issue Store), Ox (Field Supply Depot), Monkey (Kuki Piquet) and Dog (Garrison Hill). We attacked the hills one by one. The village of Kohima was occupied by our 3rd Battalion on 6 April.

On the evening of 6 April Captain Nagaya, battalion commander, went ahead to scout the enemy positions of DIS and happened to come out in front of one. Being in imminent danger, the commander and his men rushed the position and captured it, but a grenade struck his head and he was killed. At that time I remained in the rear to organise arriving units for the attack. When I ran to him, he was dead, lying on a makeshift stretcher, a tent sheet tied between two poles. A small bundle of white wild chamomile was laid near his nose, which was the only offering to him. As we were to charge the enemy that evening, I could do nothing for him as my duty came first. I asked someone to take care of the corpse; to bury him in earth and cut off his finger and cremate it. The finger bone would be sent to his home.

I really felt that the commander was a respectable person. There would be few such as he, a battalion commander who could weep in front of his subordinates crying, 'I should go to pick up the bones of my men. Forgive me for not going to pick up your bones.' Such a genuine man! I had felt that I could go with this man without hesitation. Many of those who talk about the crime of war may have a feeling that the military is somehow inhuman, insidious and cunning. But that is not true. If it were so, we could not charge at the enemy. We went together, trembling, in a scrum-like formation! This could be done only when

an excellent human relationship was established among us.

As I have said, war is like a vice, but armies differ. I belonged to the army whose men performed their duty saying, 'We do not mind the danger, after all, if we have to do it,' and risked their lives for the mission. We captured Barrack Hill on 6 April, where our commander was killed, and another unit took Goat Hill on the same day. Then, on 7 April, our battalion attacked DIS. We left our knapsacks on Jail Hill, went down the valley and moved secretly to the west slope of DIS. On the slope there were supply warehouses, ammunition stores and an automobile parking area. We went undetected by the enemy, surprised them, broke through the position, and captured the warehouses. We were very delighted. Such good news also pleases our superiors, so this was relayed to the regimental commander, who was happy and impatient to see the result and to report to his superiors. He went to the battalion headquarters. This caused a problem later. So far the situation looked OK, but there were several defence lines still before we could get to the top of the hill. Though we advanced steadily, destroying positions one by one, there were still more to go. If the sun rose before we took the top, our position would be exposed and we would be shot in the back from FDS; a real danger. We heard the noise of grenades near the top, which meant that not all positions were secured. I was worried about it, as were the battalion commander and regimental commander. I expressed my opinion to them that, though we hoped to take all positions by the sunrise, in case we could not, we should dig fox-holes and prepare to fight in daytime. If one is involved in fighting eagerly, 'Secure quickly, advance quickly', one tends to forget the alternative preparations. I set out by myself to tell this to our commanders.

The enemy on the hilltop, cornered like stags at bay, kept up their heavy gunfire. We were unable to find even a gap to advance by crawling, and it seemed we had reached deadlock. I made use of all available shelter and ran into the position of Hashiguchi Machine Gun Platoon at the ration warehouse, which faced the

enemy at FSD. There I saw about ten Indian soldiers sitting down in a dazed condition. I ordered Warrant Officer Hashiguchi not to kill these POWs and not to let them run away.

As dawn came, shelling from FSD became more and more intense and under its cover enemy soldiers came crawling up from the valley and threw grenades at us; a strong counter-attack. If they took this position and climbed up the hill, our men on the hill as well as the regimental commander and the battalion commander would be wiped out. So we had to prevent them getting up the hill at any cost.

I ordered the Machine Gun Platoon, 'Defend this position to the death.' So I had to say, 'I will do the job with you. Fight with me to the death.' My mission was to tell the men in the front line to dig holes if we did not capture the hilltop. But the situation I saw there was so critical that I was obliged to stay there. I fought on, sometimes throwing grenades.

The Machine Gun Company, with two guns, fought very well in a calm state of mind. They waited until the enemy soldiers came very close and fired accurately at them, followed by grenades, and several attacks were repulsed while enemy corpses were heaped up in front of us. Section Leader Kawase was shot through his head and another section leader fell down as his right thigh was cut through by a shell fragment. But all men remained bravely in position. Our men near the hilltop were fighting with grenades, but were also shot from behind and the sides from FSD and were in a critical battle. By 9 a.m. on 7 April, 6th Company was decimated after its desperate 'Banzai' charge.

From 10 a.m. the shelling became more severe, especially on the clothing warehouse and ration warehouses. As a result more than ten POWs and our guard were killed instantly. POWs were killed by their friendly fire. This is war! The shelling mixed with incendiary shells burnt the clothing warehouse where the regimental and battalion headquarters were located. Then the west ration warehouse, where the Machine Gun Platoon was, started burning and flames licked the roof, setting the whole warehouse ablaze.

I decided to move our position to the east ration warehouse, which I thought would not be shelled and burnt, being so close to the enemy. If we did not move we should be incinerated. But the enemy on the hill was waiting to snipe as we jumped out and crossed the parking space. Our soldiers were well experienced on the battlefield; removal of wounded and guns was done promptly and neatly. Although it was very dangerous to carry wounded men on their shoulders and to cross the open space, they did it in an orderly manner.

The fire moved to the ammunition storage and shells in it started to explode. Platoon Leader Hashiguchi was shot through his head at about noon. Men were moving around here and there trying to find a better place. It was clear that anyone who left his position would be sniped at from both DIS and FSD. In a critical situation everybody tends to think that his position is the worst. This mentality on the battlefield drives men to panic, disregarding the actual situation. At this stage the only method to defend this place was to stand united. And what we needed was a dependable commander. As I was the only officer there, I pulled out my sword and cried, 'Battalion Adjutant Lt Kameyama will command you, men here!' 'Survivors of every unit! Come here with your wounded men.' So about thirty fit men and about thirty wounded men gathered around me.

I ordered them to build a circular position under the eaves of the warehouse, and two medium machine guns were set upon each, facing the tops of FSD and DIS. Wounded men were placed in the centre of the circle. Bags of sugar and soybeans carried out from the warehouse were piled up around the circle and covered by soil dug by bayonets. This was not easy work as the soil was very hard and digging had to be done lying down; anyone who stood up was sniped at immediately. I told all the men: 'If you move out of here, you will be killed by the enemy waiting for you. We must hold this position to the last man, in order to protect our wounded and also the headquarters.' Trucks parked close to our position caught fire and flames set alight bags of sugar and beans

which we were using instead of sandbags: we put them out with milk from cans. It was unbearably hot; my face had a tingling pain and I almost fainted. I ordered every soldier to quench fire-flakes falling on the back of the man next to him while lying down.

The enemy came attacking from the hill to the east side of the warehouse and started to throw grenades over the roof, but because of the distance they bounced on the roof and fell on top of us. We spread a tent-sheet over our bodies and the grenades falling on it bounced away before they exploded. I told men that 'attack is the best defence', and when we heard enemy footsteps, or their voices, 'Hurry up, hurry up!' I let a selected soldier throw grenades, or ordered the grenade launcher to fire. As we were lying down it was not easy to throw grenades such a distance; the grenade could be lobbed back at us if it did not travel far enough. Actually I was wounded by a grenade thrown by one of us. So I designated Lance Corporal Tanaka to throw grenades. He gripped a grenade pressed against his forehead and prayed, 'May the shrine of my village help me', and threw it over the roof. Everybody asks God's help in case of emergency, and he threw the grenade uttering a prayer because of his sense of responsibility. All our eyes followed the flight of the grenade. In this way we could hold out until the evening, but the number of fit men was reduced to eighteen. I wrote a report of the day's fight and had a messenger deliver it to the battalion commander. It was very fortunate that the enemy did not come charging at our position. If they had, as we Japanese would have done, we might have been decimated as we were far fewer in numbers. I told the men, 'Our commander will come to help us. Hold out! Show your nerve!'

The battalion commander called my name and came crawling to our position, while we threw grenades at the enemy to cover his move. He asked me, 'How's the situation?' I answered, 'As you see now. We have not the power to charge the enemy.' So the commander gave up and allowed us to retreat.

I still told the men that we would keep fighting, but in order to lessen our load we should first send back the wounded and then

the bodies of the dead soldiers for their bones to be sent home. On the battlefield if a man feels 'I should do this' or 'I should defend here', he thinks of nothing other than his mission. If he is told to retreat, he feels that he is saved and wants to stay alive and loses his courage. When about half of the dead were carried down, I told the men regretfully that we should not try again as we would not win even if we charged the enemy. So we went down with machine guns and the remaining corpses. I carried on my back a dead soldier. A dead man is heavy, in the same way as a sleeping baby is heavier. When I carried him on the back, his head bumped against my neck. When I changed his position, his cold head stuck to the other side of my neck. Painful feeling of sorrow!

When I came back to headquarters the commander, with only a messenger, was waiting for me. It was almost the dawn of 8 April. The soldiers were allowed to sleep until the evening, but the officers had to prepare plans for the next attack. It is true in war that when we are suffering, the enemy is also suffering; and as the defender should be suffering mentally more than us, our commander decided to attack the hill that evening. But our battalion had lost most of the men and had not enough soldiers to charge the enemy. So the regimental commander ordered his Signal Company to attack the hill with us. It was a critical decision; if the soldiers of Signal Company died, the regiment, without communication, would not be able to continue fighting as a systematic unit, which was like burning our own boats.

From the bitter experience of the last attack, we realised that we could not win against the strong enemy, who had many automatic weapons, by surprise night attack as we had done successfully in China. So we laid out all available anti-tank guns, medium machine guns, light machine guns and grenade launchers (2-inch mortars), and assigned each gun a specified target. I commanded these support weapons on Jail Hill, while the battalion commander went to attack DID with the Signal Company and the remnant of our battalion (mostly 5th Company). After breaking through several defence lines we finally captured the hilltop

by noon of 9 April. But our strength had been exhausted.

On 15 April our 7th Company, who had been despatched to attack a retreating route of enemy, returned. In the night of 16 April we shelled all the enemy's firing points with all of our guns and additional mountain guns, and 7th Company with a platoon from regimental headquarters charged towards the top of FSD shouting 'Wasshoi! Wasshoi!' (Rush forward). The enemy was startled by this dashing cry and fled towards Kuki Piquet along the ridge. We chased them and captured FSD as well as Kuki Piquet. After sunrise persistent shelling from Jotsoma fell on the captured hills. Enemy incendiary shells covered all our positions in flame, and even the roofs of positions started burning and many of our men were lost quenching the fire. British planes bombed us repeatedly and the enemy counter-attacked us fiercely several times. From these we suffered greater damage after the occupation of hills than during the attack.

On 19 April enemy tanks came attacking us for the first time. Our anti-tank gun shells hit the leading tank but without any damage. Our close-attack teams threw fire bombs (glass bottles filled with petroleum) onto the tank from the top ridge of the cliff, and as the tank faltered a soldier dashed up with an explosive and cut the caterpillar tread, but he did not come back. All the tank crew, who bailed out or remained to fire the machine gun, were killed by sniping, and two tanks which followed turned back.

On the night of 23 April the remnant, thirty men of 7th Company, attacked Garrison Hill supported by machine guns and only a few shells of the mountain gun, and captured the front line position. But when a company of 138 Regiment went ahead to the hilltop, petrol drums stored by the enemy caught fire and all advance routes were blocked by the spreading flames, lighting up the battlefield like daytime. As the attackers were shot at from the hilltop, the commander had to give up the attack.

After the attack our rifle companies which originally had 180 men each were reduced to four in the 5th, four in the 6th, sixteen in the 7th and none in the 8th. Machine Gun Company had

thirty-five and Battalion Gun Platoon fifteen. With such small numbers of men we were not able to attack any more. As our mission was to prevent the enemy reaching Imphal as long as we could, we went on the defence.

It was fortunate for us that the enemy respected human life. They came attacking our position, but when we sniped at them they retreated. And next morning they bombed us from planes and shelled us or surrounded us, and after most of our position was destroyed the enemy infantry came climbing up the slope. But when we shot them 'bang, bang', they went back. If they came close we were sure to be killed. But as they did not charge like Japanese, we had little fear of being killed; as long as we were in the foxholes we would survive unless we got a direct hit. However, if we had been on the plain, none of us would have been alive under attack from tanks. In such circumstances we continued fighting in foxholes until 31 Division ordered us to retreat, from the Kohima hills on 13 May, and from the Aradura hills on 3 June.

Although we kept fighting it was very lonely and miserable to stay isolated in a foxhole on the mountain in the situation when a chance of winning seemed too remote. We ran out of ammunition and food, so sometimes we went out to attack an enemy position at night, and when the enemy ran away after firing several rounds, we collected rations, bullets and grenades, and used them the next day. In this way we held out stoutly day by day, but inevitably someone got hurt or killed, so only a few, maximum seven to eight, men defended a position. It was heartbreaking that even if one did his best, nothing could help. And it was even more heartbreaking that one's comrade had to do more work if one became unable to move. If he were heavily injured he would regret overtaxing his mates. Those men passed away saying, 'Excuse me. I regret dying.' They died apologising and weeping. The battlefield takes the life of such brave men, and there is no way of helping them.

We were short of food, but most distressing was that we did not have bullets. Still we did not give up and never thought of

running away. In fact, our unit was not beaten off in the fighting, but by the bold strategic decision of Lt General Kotoku Sato, Commander 31 Division, we turned back towards Burma. We walked over the muddy mountains, drenched in rain, exhausted and hungry, and got back to our base on the River Chindwin in the latter part of July 1944.

52 · Feeding a Battalion

Probational Account Officer Masao Hirakubo, 3rd Battalion,
58 Infantry Regiment, 31 Division

Kohima, Myohta, Mawchi, Bilin, Thaton

The 3rd Battalion of 58 Infantry Regiment fought at Point 7378 and at Shangshak, and then worked around to Kohima from Mao, while our 2nd Battalion went on the Kohima–Imphal road. I was the accountant officer of the battalion who was responsible for 1,000 officers and other ranks, when any supply from behind seemed impossible.

We went into Naga Village north-east of Kohima Ridge (which the Japanese called Kohima Village) in the early morning of 5 April 1944 with complete silence, the enemy being surprised. To my great delight there were twenty warehouses in which a lot of rice and salt were piled up.

I thought it essential to secure the food and asked the battalion commander to lend some men to carry out rice from the warehouses during the night. The adjutant bluntly refused, as all the soldiers were fast asleep after the hard march in the mountains and the work could be done on the next day. So I argued and fought hard with him and the commander finally supplied me with 50 soldiers. I took command of the men and carried as much rice and salt as possible to a valley. Next morning many British planes bombed the warehouses and everything remaining was

turned into ashes. I regretted not to have carried out more.

While the battalion was attacking Kohima Ridge from the fork road, my unit with fifteen men cooked rice and boiled water for drinking all night after sunset. We put two big rice balls in a mess kit and water in a canteen per person, and carried them to the front line. They ate them, breaking them into small pieces.

My problem was that there was nothing to eat with the rice balls. We purchased pigs from a village about 20 miles away and collected edible wild grasses from the field which were boiled with salt and put in the mess kits. Sometimes I went to the divisional depot and got a tiny but satisfactory allocation of rice, thanks to my securing the warehouses.

When we were to retreat on 1 June, we had still some rice left which we divided among all the men in the battalion.

53 · Drifting Down the Wild Chindwin

Senior Private Manabu Wada, Transport Section, 3rd Battalion,
138 Infantry Regiment, 31 Division

Kohima

In July 1942 I was to enlist in the 138 Infantry Regiment. Against my wishes my father accompanied me to Nara, where I had spent my childhood. We stayed for the night at the home of a friend of mine, the Yamadaya Inn, close to the Sarusawa Pond.

The next morning father and I set off for the regiment's depot at Takahata. At the gate I handed to my father my possessions wrapped in a *furoshiki* – a cloth used for wrapping clothes. Three days later my unit marched to Nara railway station on the first stage of our long journey to the central China front. I had been ordered to tell my parents of our departure date and obediently sent them a postcard. Near the station I saw my stepmother and stepsisters, but I could only glance at them due to the crowd of people.

The train took us to Kure, in the Prefecture of Hiroshima, where we embarked on a troop transport. The crossing to China was very rough, the ship pitching and rolling and tossing so that many of us were seasick and longed to be on dry land again. We steamed up the wide Yangtse River to Daitso, a dirty, run-down port where we disembarked. In the gathering twilight we could see gun flashes on the mountainside across the river, and knew we had arrived at the frontier with China.

For the next three months we underwent an intensive training course in the area around Daitso. In January 1943 we set out in a troop transport, taking on supplies and water at Keelung, in Taiwan, en route to an unknown destination. We spent many hours guessing where the ship would end up. If we carried on southwards we should arrive at Java in Indonesia, we agreed – but if we turned to the west it must be Singapore, for the Burma front. The ship turned westwards and towards the end of February we were disembarked at Singapore before travelling to Kelang in Selangor State. We fought once against the Communists' Anti-Japanese Corps, and then the regiment moved towards Burma.

One day in May 1943 while we were advancing on Burma we heard rhythmic shouting in Japanese by British prisoners: 'One! Two! Three!' and then we met a working party carrying rails and sleepers and wearing only loincloths in the burning heat. All of them were wet with perspiration. A British soldier came up to me and said, 'Japanese master, please give me a cigarette.' He was a very tall man, perhaps about 1.8 metres tall. Owing to the hard daily work he was skinny but well shaped. He had brown hair and I thought that he was 22 or 23 years old. These men were working to build a bridge on the Burma side. A similar wooden bridge was to become famous as the film *The Bridge on the River Kwai*.

I gave him a few cigarettes from my chest pocket, and we each lit one and smoked together. He smoked with great enjoyment and blew out great puffs of smoke. Although we could not understand

one another clearly we managed a dialogue with gestures. After a little while he threw out his chest and said, 'Japanese Army will be defeated. The British Army will finally win without fail.'

I was displeased at his words because he was actually smoking my cigarettes and I questioned him closely. 'Japan will win definitely,' I said heatedly. For a short while he kept silent then said, 'The Japanese Army can never defeat the British Army if the Japanese continue to construct railway by human power like this. The British Army would not use human power in this difficult construction work, but with mechanisation.'

I could agree with this opinion although I had no feelings about the way the work was done as a Japanese operation. We continued the conversation and at last parted with a handshake and a smile, telling each other to be careful about health, and to be tenacious although there was no telling when the war would be ended. All this took place in about twenty minutes. (But later, I remembered his words when the Japanese Army was smashed to pieces in the Imphal Operation.)

Because he spoke with such confidence of the virtues of his mother country I bore him respect and at the same time I had an affection for him. As the Japanese proverb says, 'Yesterday's enemy is tomorrow's friend.'

I SHALL NEVER forget the date of 15 March 1944. This was the dry season, and the great Chindwin River was now so shallow that we were able to walk across it at Tamante on our first steps towards the Imphal Operation. The regiment was to spearhead 31 Division's rapid advance to attack the British and Indian forces beyond the Arakan Mountains and capture Kohima in India's Manipur State.

We began the operation with twenty days' rations and a herd of cattle, and marched towards the border with India. It was absurd that we should have been ordered to go into battle hampered by cattle, but no more food reached us from the rear as the days went by and we struggled up the Arakan Mountains. At that

time we thought only of victory, never of defeat, and soon the path was opened as we brushed aside enemy resistance.

Conditions were hard, well-nigh impossible. At 3,000 metres the mountains were shrouded in freezing cloud, and the rocks and trees were covered in moss and lichen. Matches struck at this altitude went out immediately, so we could not light cooking fires or boil water. Our cattle and horses fell down the mountainside, taking our provisions with them; the slopes were so steep we couldn't go down to retrieve anything. The bodies of enemy soldiers lay along the track, corpses blown up with gas gangrene as they decomposed, but at last we reached the summit and could see, to the west beyond the boundless sea of clouds, Tibet and the Himalayas.

We complained bitterly to one another of the incompetence of our generals who had sent us into the mountains without any proper climbing equipment or clothing, and hampered by large herds of cattle which could not climb the steep, rocky paths which even we soldiers found hard enough. To make matters worse, medical orderlies had to do their best to walk alongside the sick and wounded, slipping, sliding, falling, time and time again.

In mid-April, after many days of bitter fighting we captured ridges north of Kohima but 138 Regiment now had no rations left. The British had burned their food and supply depots so that not even a grain of rice or a round of ammunition was left for us. The best my comrades and I could do was to find three tins of corned beef in the enemy positions. How could we be expected to fight on in these circumstances? By April 5 our three weeks' rations were exhausted. As April entered its third week, we had to stave off the pangs of hunger by eating meagre supplies of biscuits and the corned beef.

The enemy's heavy and medium artillery opened up on us as a prelude to their infantry attacks. For our part, we were limited to reply with just a few shells each day, while the British shells rained down on us in hundreds and thousands in great barrages. In this storm of fire we had to run to seek shelter and could barely hold

Kohima. It is not possible to express our terror as shrapnel burst upon us with tremendous force so that officers and men were cut to pieces by jagged splinters that tore into the head, the abdomen, arms, legs. We watched as enemy reinforcements arrived by truck with more and more arms and ammunition to be thrown immediately against us. It was only at about three o'clock in the afternoon when they took a tea break, as we could see through our telescopes, that we had a respite from the shells, but we could not use our rifles on them because the range was too great.

Throughout our long siege of Kohima enemy fighter aircraft flew along the face of the valley in front of us and cargo planes dropped arms and water to their leading troops. Without meat, rice or rifle and machine-gun ammunition we could only watch. Occasionally our own fighters, marked with the Japanese Sun, flew in support of us against heavy anti-aircraft fire but quickly disappeared again beyond the Kohima Mountains.

It was during the battle that our Commanding Officer, Major Shibazaki, was killed by a hand grenade. That was on 18 April, a month after the commencement of the Imphal Operation. Sadly, we cut off his hands and cremated them so that his bones might one day be consecrated at the cemetery back home. One day when we were walking on a jungle road, leading men hit a piano wire between trees, causing the connected grenades to explode. Then we were fired on by machine guns and a number of our comrades were killed. I was not hit as I was in the rear.

It was not surprising that in the middle of May the British 2nd Division found it possible to recapture the hills of Kohima Ridge from us. Our losses had been dreadful. Our soldiers fought bravely, but they had no rations, no rifle or machine-gun ammunition, no artillery shells for the guns to fire. And, above all, they had no support from rear echelons. How could they have continued in such dreadful circumstances? The monsoon season had started and the Kohima region is notorious for having the heaviest rainfall in the world. In the unceasing rain there was no shelter. If one hid beneath a tree the enemy's shells would destroy not just that tree

but everything around it. There was only one consolation: the rains reduced the firing but it resumed as soon as the rain stopped.

It was impossible to cook rice in the rain. Sometimes we made a fire from undergrowth and boiled vegetable matter as the only means we had of staving off our terrible hunger. When the shelling began again we entered our 'octopus traps' – holes dug in the ground to a soldier's height – but the rain flooded in so that we were chest-high in water and had to climb out. We felt we had arrived at the very limit of our endurance.

At the beginning of the Imphal Operation the regiment was 3,800 strong. When our general gave the order to withdraw to the east we were reduced to just a few hundreds still alive. Without shelter from the rains, with boots that had rotted and had to be bound with grass, we began to trudge along the deep mud paths carrying our rifles without ammunition, leaning on sticks to support our weak bodies. Our medical corps men slipped and slid as they carried the sick and wounded on stretchers or supported the 'walking wounded'. Some of the orderlies were themselves so weak that they fell to the ground again and again until their physical and moral endurance was at an end, so that when a sick man cried out in pain they simply said, 'If you complain we'll just let you go, and throw you and the stretcher down the cliff side.'

Icy rain fell mercilessly on us and we lived day and night drenched to the skin and pierced with cold. I remember how we longed for a place, any place at all, where we could take shelter and rest. Once we found a tent in the jungle; inside it were the bodies of six nurses. We had never imagined there would be female victims, especially so far over the Arakan Mountains. Why, we asked one another, had the army not taken the nurses to a place of safety? In another tent we found the bodies of three soldiers who had killed themselves. How could one ever forget such terrible, distressing sights as the dead nurses, and the soldiers who had taken their own lives? All I could do was to swear to myself that, somehow, I would survive.

Our path to safety lay beyond these Arakan Mountains covered

in dense jungle. In the rain, with no place to sit, we took short spells of sleep standing on our feet. The bodies of our comrades who had struggled along the track before us lay all around, rain-sodden and giving off the stench of decomposition. The bones of some bodies were exposed. Even with the support of our sticks we fell amongst the corpses again and again as we stumbled on rocks and tree roots made bare by the rain and attempted one more step, then one more step in our exhaustion.

Thousands upon thousands of maggots crept out of the bodies lying in streams and were carried away by the fast-flowing waters. Many of the dead soldiers' bodies were no more than bleached bones. I cannot forget the sight of one corpse lying in a pool of knee-high water; all its flesh and blood had been dissolved by the maggots and the water so that now it was no more than a bleached uniform.

In my thirst I looked for clean water as I struggled to catch up with the division's remnants. Once I found what I thought to be a spring whose water rippled out of a fissure in the rock. Filling my cupped hands, I was about to drink when I saw maggots floating in them and in disgust I threw it down. It was then that I found it was a stream where ten or more soldiers had come for water and were now no more than bones. Upstream beyond the skeletons I at last found water that I could drink. It was where the water buffalo drank.

We walked and walked endlessly along a road littered with corpses. With almost nothing to eat and our feet aching and legs weary, we used sticks to support ourselves until at last, several days later, I don't know how many, we reached Tonhe. Although there were three or four houses there we found no villagers and assumed they must be hiding somewhere.

While Accountant Lieutenant Sasakai and his men would make their way by land, four of us, Sergeant Masuda, chief of the transport section, Fukushima, Kano and I decided to build a raft and float on it down the Chindwin to Thaugdut, where we hoped to obtain food. My companions were all older than me

by seven years or so and had more experience than I had.

It was already three o'clock in the afternoon and there was hardly time to make a raft and leave Tonhe before sunset. Hurriedly we went into the bamboo and cut about thirty lengths, each five to seven centimetres in diameter and five metres in length. By five o'clock the raft was ready for the water. It was already dark. This was the middle of the rainy season and the red-brown river was running fast and rough with white-capped waves in the shallow, turbulent rapids. We launched the raft and scrambled aboard. 'Let's go!'

Immediately, though, the raft sank beneath our weight until we were up to our waists in the water. Jumping onto the riverbank we cut another twenty bamboos which we lashed to the raft and at once set off again. Pushed along by the strong current, we manoeuvred to the middle of the rapids, our feet continually under water. None of us had a watch and we soon lost track of time in the darkness but it must have been about ten o'clock when rain began to fall. The clear sky and the stars disappeared and now the monsoon rains fell in torrents to drench us. With no shelter we had somehow to survive the bitter cold. Hours seemed to pass as the raft was carried along and we huddled together, soaked to the skin and shivering wildly. Suddenly I spotted a red light ahead of us on the right.

'That fire is the first sign that we are arriving at our goal,' said Masuda. 'We have arrived very quickly,' said Fukushima. 'It would take us a week by land!' At once we prepared to try to bring the raft to the riverbank, as close as possible to the fire. As we approached a number of soldiers ran towards the shore to help us land. 'Here you are!' they shouted, but the raft was pushed away from the shore by the strong current and carried back into the middle of the river. Still we floated on and on, hungry but with almost nothing but a few grains of rice to eat, our legs deep in the water. I told myself that walking was difficult enough, but much easier than sitting motionless on the raft, afraid to move an inch for fear of capsizing. I took some rice from my waterlogged bag

and began to gnaw it like a rat. It was soft and water-saturated, but it was food and we shared it.

'There is no way we can manoeuvre the raft to the shore in order to land,' said the chief. 'When we see land close enough, will you swim to the shore?' 'Kano and I cannot swim. I will tie a rope to you so that once you are on land you can pull the raft to the bank.' I lengthened the rope and tied one end around me. Soon we were about ten metres from the shore but we couldn't get it nearer and the rope was not long enough. 'I'll jump in here,' I shouted, 'but pull me in on the rope if I sink or I shall drown!.' Wearing only my loincloth I threw myself into the water, looking for the nearest place to land. With all my strength I tried to swim against the current but it was useless and soon I began to sink beneath the surface, swallowing quantities of water as I struggled to stay afloat before they pulled me back to the raft.

'Now it's my turn,' said Fukushima, and untying the rope I handed one end to him. Quickly he jumped into the river, going under at once before coming to the surface seven or eight metres ahead of us. I began to feel that he might be all right and shouted, 'Swim across the rapids towards the shore while we paddle hard behind you!' He found it very difficult to swim the last two or three metres but somehow managed it. We were now almost at the shore and Kano shouted to Fukushima, 'Bind the rope to a tree!' But as Fukushima scrambled onto the bank he stumbled and let go of the rope which he had not tied around him. Wearing only his loincloth, he could only watch as the raft went spinning out into the middle of the river once more. On it were his clothes.

'Wada,' he shouted, as he ran along the bank to keep pace with us, 'paddle the raft to the shore!' It was no good, and we watched as he turned away and disappeared into the jungle.

We all were sad that there was nothing we could do to help him and gazed at the surface of the water in sad thought. Then Kano broke our silence. 'He will have a hard time of it. All he has is a loincloth and he will need clothes in the cold night. Where will he find food?' he asked. 'Well,' he answered himself, 'somehow he

will muddle along.' The chief was silent for a while. Then he said, snapping out of it, 'He will put on the clothes of dead men.' I prayed to God that Fukushima would survive his ordeal and soon catch up with our division. (Much later I learned that he had died of sickness in the jungle near Sagaing on the Irrawaddy. It was a miracle that he had managed to travel as far as he did.)

The heavy rain continued and in the strong currents the raft's speed was ever-increasing so that we shot along as fast as an arrow, piercing the night. Wordlessly the three of us crouched together, arms folded against our curled-up bodies for a little protection against the cold. Kano told us that villagers had warned him not to float below Sittaung because there was a great swirling current the width of the river which would seize the raft and drag it to destruction and we would surely die. He went on, 'If we continue as we are we shall see a white pagoda at Yuwa, the junction of the Yu and the Chindwin, where the river becomes a maelstrom due to the monsoon rains, and the sound is so great that it is like that of the Niagara Falls in America. We must somehow land upstream of the junction.'

It was pitch dark. We had no idea of the time, nor even whether the sun had set, but the rain had stopped at last and a weird silence fell with only the sound of the water splashing against the raft. It could have been midday or midnight; all we could make out was a dark rain-filled cloud above the river. Then we heard a deep, rumbling noise, something like an earthquake shaking the earth or a mountain. Was there a waterfall ahead? We panicked at the thought, our stomachs tightening in terror. Was this to be our fate? Again the raft increased in speed as we approached the waterfall and the noise grew ever greater. Somehow we must stop the raft before it was too late. But how? Now we could make out the white pagoda over to our right. This was Sittaung and we were at the mercy of the current. Very soon we would be at the junction of the two rivers the villagers had warned about. Suddenly the raft was stationary! Kano threw a piece of wood into the water. It floated beside us, motionless!

Almost at once, though, we began to move again and I saw a big log nearby which I thought I might be able to tie our rope to as a drag-anchor. With the rope around me I jumped into the water and swam to the log which I then pulled to the raft and lashed to the side. In an instant we were careering through the wild white water, the bamboos creaking and groaning and the raft turning, turning, turning in the chaotic currents. We prayed that the raft would not break in pieces. Then we were too tired and fell asleep. When Kano woke me up we were through the terror, and all fell quiet as we looked at one another. We were tired to the point of exhaustion and once we had rejoiced at our deliverance we dozed off as the raft floated safely down river. We were safe.

I asked Kano whether we should untie the log which was slowing the raft down. It had done its job. 'Yes,' said Kano, 'we must arrive at our destination as soon as possible', and in a moment the log was released and floating away behind us. In the growing light of dawn the dark green of the jungle was changing to a lighter colour as it began to give way to the plains. No longer could we see the white pagoda which in the darkness had appeared like a great cliff beside the river. It was as though we were now awake following a nightmare.

Now, though, we felt a great uneasiness: could we get the raft to the shore without being attacked by enemy aircraft? We gnawed a little water-saturated rice. A knife and a stethoscope I had with me on the raft had been lost over the side; parts of the stethoscope were of ivory. Both had been given to me by Dr Kajitani and the loss upset me. The sun grew hotter and hotter as though we were in the South Seas, I thought. I took off my canvas shoes and as I did so the entire skin of the soles of my feet came off with them. Both the chief's and Kano's feet were all right but mine were very painful and for a while I put my feet in the sun to dry them after so long in the water.

A miracle happened! The raft was drifting to the shore, towards the grass on the right bank! Forgetting the pain in my feet I jumped over the side with the rope to tie one end to a tree only

10 metres away from us. At once I went beneath a mat of fallen leaves and withered trees lying on the surface which mistakenly I had thought was solid land. Fortunately the water was still and I struggled to the shore but I had not the strength to haul myself up the metre-high bank and Kano helped me back onto the raft.

After about an hour's rest I crept across the floating, leafy mat and was able at last to tie the rope to a tree. Removing several of the bamboos from the raft I laid them to form a bridge which we could walk across to the bank. 'Out of the frying pan, into the fire!' We now found we were trying to walk through a thicket of cane – the cane which chairs are made of – with its sharp thorns. It was impenetrable.

'Wada,' said Kano, 'you wait here. The chief and I will go to see what we can find', and off they went with a 'ra', a sword that villagers use to cut vegetation. In an hour they were back, dripping with sweat.

'We searched for a path,' they told me, 'but there is nothing, only water, and we can't reach the other side without swimming across the stream.' They added, 'We shall carry you on our backs to the water and then you can swim across.' I thanked them for their hard work in trying to find a way through the jungle in such heat.

We rested a short while and then Kano carried me on his back along a path cut through the jungle. Forty minutes or so later we came to a large pond, or lake, which had trees growing in it; the rains had flooded the land here. The water was so clear that we could easily see the bottom. To get to the far side we would need a raft, or perhaps two – one for the chief and the other for Kano – which I could pull over once I had swum across.

As soon as the little rafts were built I swam across with the rope around my body and the other end already tied to one of the rafts. We put what few things we had on the raft which I then drew towards me and unloaded so that they could pull it back to them. Next, the chief came over on his raft, then it was Kano's turn. He tried to get onto the raft but because he was heavier than the chief

there was a danger the raft might capsize and he shouted, 'Don't move at all once you are on. If it leans over cling to it and we will keep pulling!' Slowly we dragged him over to join us but now I was exhausted, so tired that I could do nothing more that day.

As darkness fell we gathered leaves with which to make a bed and lay with legs and arms outstretched. In the daytime the jungle was chokingly hot but at night it grew cold and we longed for a fire to warm us. The chief took a cartridge from his bag, together with three matches and a piece of black paper one centimetre square – the paper on which matches are struck. Kano and I looked on in hope and wonder at a tiny bunch of dried leaves in the chief's hand as he struck a match and held the flame to them. They caught alight! Immediately we had a vigorous fire going which shone on our happy, cheerful faces.

'Is there any rice left, Wada?' asked the chief. 'I think I have a little,' I answered. 'Let's boil it into a thin gruel.' Soon it was ready, without any salt but juicy and hot so that its heat soaked into our stomachs. Thanks to the fire we slept soundly until the following morning. We walked through the jungle, eating tree buds as the only food we could find. Now we began to hold different opinions as to our future plans. Kano insisted on returning to the raft, but I preferred to stay in the jungle and look for a village and this was what we agreed.

Around about midday the three of us began to descend a valley stream of about two metres' width. We were so tired and weary that we had to hold on to one another as we staggered and slipped on the rocks; where the obstacles were too big we left the stream and walked in a roundabout route to rejoin it. On and on we pressed until the stream widened to ten metres or so with a sandy shore-line which made our walking much easier. Suddenly there came the sound of a dog barking. We listened intently and heard somebody cutting bamboo. Then we saw two villagers with a dog digging up bamboo shoots. At the same time they saw us and smiled, asking, 'What is the matter with you? We had not expected to see Japanese here.' The chief said, 'Is there a village

near here?’ to which they answered, ‘If you go on another four kilometres you will find a village but it has no villagers. They have all run into the jungle for fear of the aeroplanes.’

We explained that we had not eaten for many days and then they told us that we would find plenty of rice and sugar in the village, and they would show us the way. With that the two villagers began to walk very quickly, saying that soon the sun would set. Somehow Masuda and Kano managed to keep up with them but for me it was impossible.

‘Follow on as fast as you are able, Wada,’ said Kano. I replied that I would but I felt my feet were too heavy and painful to catch up with them. Soon, in the gathering gloom, I could only dimly make out their figures and almost lost sight of them. It must have been about eight o’clock when I found the village and called out, ‘Where is the chief? Where is Kano?’ To my relief they shouted, ‘Here we are!’ and I tried to stagger to the house with a roof where they and the two villagers were sheltering.

The house was built on stilts; the area underneath was for keeping pigs and cows. I picked up a ladder with notches cut in it for footholds, but each time I tried to climb it I fell down so that then my companions had to pull me up to join them. Almost the moment I was safe and lying on the floor of the house I lost consciousness through malaria, dysentery and malnutrition.

THAT EVENING Kano cooked the rice we had so much longed for. With raw sugar the taste was not good, but the rice was hot and that was important. All the same I could not eat any of it because of my malaria. By the following night I was semi-conscious with a high fever and hovered between life and death; my bowels were loose with dysentery, and I was weak through starvation. With no blanket to cover me and with nothing but the bare floor to lie on, I lay there shivering uncontrollably. ‘You must eat,’ said Kano, ‘without food you will die.’ And he put rice in my mouth but again I lapsed into unconsciousness. For several days – I don’t know how many – the chief and Kano fed me with

gruel but I couldn't swallow it. My eyes saw nothing, I could not hear, nor was I able to speak. Then a miracle! Suddenly my senses were restored! I stood up unsteadily. My malaria was gone. Dizzy, I looked around me and saw the hot sun shining on the fields and the trees. The next thing was to try to walk and I took a few steps supported by a stick. Maybe I walked thirty or so metres before I had to lie down on the grass near the house.

I had no idea how many hours I slept. When I woke I found beside me a portion of rice on a banana leaf lying close to my mouth. A villager or a priest might have put his ration actually to my mouth because I found a grain of rice stuck to my lip. As I slowly ate the rice I gave thanks to the Burmese for their kind deed.

A few days later Kano said to me, 'We can't stay here until you recover from sickness. We have to go. I will get you to a field hospital even if I have to drag you!' But it was no good; my health and strength did not return and I found it impossible to keep up with him and the chief. Now Kano took me by the scruff of my neck and forced me to walk. All I could think was, 'Leave me alone. I want to sleep in the jungle as long as I need.' But when I asked him to let me rest he said, 'How foolish you are! If I let go you will sleep immediately, and if you wake up you will find you are dead! You must keep walking.' And he continued to drag me along.

Once he picked up a piece of wood and hit me with it so that I should not fall asleep. I hated him then but at the same time I was thankful for what he was doing to save me. Ten days later we entered Kalewa where there was a field hospital. I was so grateful in my thanks to the chief and Kano for all that they had done for me.