ORIGINAL COMMUNICATIONS.

EDITORIAL FOREWORD.

WITH the exception of the introductory "The R.A.M.C. in Thailand," the following articles by Captain Markowitz and Major Hazelton were written whilst Prisoners of War in Japanese hands. Be it borne in mind that they were writing, and working, under what may euphemistically be described as adverse conditions without access to medical literature of any kind. No more need be said. The articles are published as written, with no editing, so that they may remain a permanent and vivid record of work done under such conditions. Further articles are under consideration and will be published either in the "Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps," or elsewhere, as soon as is practicable.

THE R.A.M.C. IN THAILAND P.O.W. CAMPS.

BY

Captain J. MARKOWITZ,
Royal Army Medical Corps,

Eheu fugaces, Postume, Postume,
labuntur anni, nec pietas moram
rugis et instanti senectae
aderet, indomitaque morti ...
HORACE.

This series of papers, written by lamplight in a jungle in Thailand, summarises certain experiences which we believe should be recorded as comprising one phase, possibly without precedent, in the activities of the R.A.M.C. This is not the place nor would it serve a useful purpose to relate how approximately 350 medical officers were captured with the defeated forces of Singapore and, instead of being released according to the Geneva Convention, were removed
and treated as ordinary captives. At first this caused resentment in our Corps but it was soon realised that our captivity was providential: great as has been the death rate from causes of one sort or another, every member of the Corps felt that these deaths would have been double or treble had we been separated from the troops.

These papers concern what happened to us that is worthy of note at Chungkai, Thailand. Doubtless others will have their experiences to relate. Chungkai was a jungle camp situated about 60 miles north-west of Bangkok on the Meklong-Quenol river. It was a camp for sick British and Dutch, and had a population of approximately 7,000. About 1,500 of the sick were entirely bed-ridden. The others, suffering from tropical ulcer, chronic malaria, etc., were able to walk and in part minister to themselves. The author arrived in May, 1943, functioning as surgical specialist and, later, as cholera officer.

He found the hospital denuded of medical and surgical supplies. Our pharmacist had a stock in trade which could be put in a doctor's handbag, excepting anti-malarial drugs which at the time were abundant. During our stay here it became essential to make certain improvisations. There was, for example, practically no morphia, practically no sulphonamide, and even sodium bicarbonate was lacking. Dressings were supplied every three weeks in quantities adequate for 50 sick. At first chloroform and ether were supplied meagrely; later the supply dwindled to a trickle that would suffice a reception station. Surgical supplies when we arrived were practically non-existent but we were able to scrape together a dozen Spencer Wells forceps and a few hypodermic needles of varying sizes. Even fuel was restricted and containers which could serve as sterilizers had to be scrounged. Such things as X-ray facilities, bacteriological aids, biochemical studies, the ordered panoply of an operating room, were not available. With our five senses and a minimum of supplies the R.A.M.C. at Chungkai and other places had to cope with epidemics of diphtheria, cholera and bacillary dysentery, and with the ever increasing and endemic presence of the avitaminoses, extensive tropical ulcers, amoebic dysentery, malaria in all its forms and such medical and surgical accidents as are not peculiar to the tropics, viz.:—appendicitis, intestinal obstruction, pneumonia, etc. At the time of writing these papers (November, 1943) there was an average of 10 deaths a day. The bulk of these were due to cerebral malaria, pellagra with beri-beri, tropical ulcer, debility and amoebic dysentery.

These observations were made in co-operation with Lieutenant-Colonel E. St. Clair Barrett, R.A.M.C., and Major A. L. Dunlop, R.A.M.C., who generously withdrew their names from the title page.

The author finds difficulty in expressing adequately his appreciation of the industry, resourcefulness and courage of the following:—Sgt. T. J. Steggall, S.S.V.F., Sgts. G. Backhurst and G. E. Holton, R.A.M.C., Ptes. G. W. Vaughan, R. J. Woolridge and W. Tolson, R.A.M.C. In the Odyssey one reads that Father Zeus takes away half of a man's virtues when he makes him a slave, and in looking around this prisoner-of-war camp one finds no difficulty in believing this statement. The author can only say that his associates must have been richly endowed.