

Contributed by WX16572 Neil O. MacPherson 2/2nd Pioneer Battalion

15th December 1944, saw 545 Australian prisoners from River Valley Road camp, under the leadership of Flt Lt Sutherland, board the **Awa Maru** in Singapore. All are survivors of A Force on the Death railway. After 11 days battened down under scorching decks we sailed for Japan on Boxing Day. On 15th January 1945 the prisoners staggered ashore at Moji, Kyushu - dirty, bedraggled & starved, but unbowed, it was mid winter, snow on the ground.

150 of the group travelled to Senryu Emukae, after several days of training by Jap miners we were classified fit to work in a **Sumitomo** owned coalmine.

Compared to the horrors, death, disease, squalid conditions and brutal treatment on the Burma railway, conditions at camp 24 were 5 star. Comfortable warm huts, 12 men to an airy room. Apart from petty harassment by the guards, insufficient food to sustain the long shift in cramped and hazardous conditions underground, the morale was excellent. The Jap miners were helpful in teaching us how to survive in this dangerous environment, and unlike other work areas, no punishments were handed out.

On the 16th August 1945 we were told "the war is over". We took over the camp. Supplies dropped by US bombers helped make the next 5 weeks a pleasant memory. Hikes into the countryside, invitations from farmers, sharing their scarce food, prisoners in return sharing the bounties from the US planes.