

EXTRACT

WEARY' - THE WAR DIARIES OF SIR EDWARD DUNLOP

Alan Hopgood

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“WEARY”

A drama to honour a great Australian

by

ALAN HOPGOOD

(extracted from the War Diaries of Sir Edward Dunlop)

Of all the great lifetime achievements of Sir Edward “Weary” Dunlop, none can really compare with his heroism on the Burma -Thailand railway, when he not only led his men through those years of intense privation in the face of Japanese cruelty, but performed ‘miracles’ of surgery with makeshift equipment.

January 2005

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Melbourne

Alan Hopgood and McPherson Touring

“WEARY”

ACT ONE

(A soundscape provides an overture. Japanese music segues into the sounds of the jungle and distant whistling of “Colonel Bogey”).

This soundscape gives way to the sounds of busy Parliament Square (Melbourne), tram bells, traffic and horns, scenes of which now are projected on the back wall.

The set consists of three slatted walls, with three walkways, framing a lower space, in the centre of which and downstage is an office desk, lamp and chair. It suggests a doctor’s surgery although the desk and chair are the only items of furniture. Two sets of steps lead down from the walkways to the main floor. At several points, positioned near the walkways are document boxes.

Towards the back, near one set of steps, sits a shadowy figure, Mick.

Sir Edward ‘Weary’ Dunlop, aged 80 enters, dressed in his familiar suit with red button hole and walks down to his desk, calling off-stage as if to his receptionist.)

SIR EDWARD: Thanks, Valda. See you on Monday.

(He picks up a document box and places it on the desk)

Yes....

(now satisfied he has shut the world out)

Now I've finally given up surgery – some would say not a moment too soon – I'll have more time to give to This.

(As he opens the box, Mick, in the background stirs. Mick is dressed in Army uniform. During the following Sir Edward fingers through the contents, taking out loose sheets and sometimes scraps of paper)

SIR EDWARD: (cont)

Now that Helen has finally gone..... and my depression has lifted, I am ready to face...the diary.

(he continues to rummage through it as if selecting the winning raffle ticket)

Four years of my life in these boxes. 1942-1945. Four years in the hands of the Japanese.

(holds up a scrap of paper)

Four years captured on scraps of paper - anything I could lay my hands on - notebooks – Japanese exercise books – in Bandoeng, we actually ran a parliament and kept a Hansard - on toilet paper. These are the diaries of a working doctor, written up each day as a record, which, as Commanding Officer, I was bound to keep. But it also became vital for me to find the time each day - so the world outside should know

SIR EDWARD:

(cont)

what happened. Or if not - the writing of them would keep me sane a little longer.

(reads from the paper)

27 May 1942

“Nips in bad mood today. Twenty nine of our officers on the way to the dentist talked and smoked, so were hit on the head with sticks.”

(another piece)

10 July 1943

“Many men are lying in split bamboo right on the ground; there is much trouble with fouling of blankets. Also trouble in obtaining sufficient men fit for grave digging. They have given up cremating cholera cases.”

(another piece)

Hintok mountain

“Footware is also a matter for a fight; it is murderous working on rocks as hot as hell and covered with knife-like edges with no boots to protect the feet....224 men have no boots.”

(another piece)

“One disconcerting aspect of the patient is cholera sleep – the habit of sleeping or lying with the eyelids open and the eyes turned up so that the pearly whites stare from between the lids.....Four men died during the night and another one slipped into raving, confusional insanity.”

(another piece)

1 November 1942

“Several men have failing vision; I have seen 4 today”

This is all over the place. How will I ever....?

SIR EDWARD: (cont)
“The third death in a few days: 1017040 Gunner Abraham...”
(but suddenly he slumps)
No, sorry. I don't know that I can face it.

(the shadowy figure of
Mick stands)

MICK: You have to.

SIR EDWARD: (turns, surprised)
I...what?

(Mick comes down to
desk level though still at a
remove)

MICK: You have to face it. You've waited all these years. You've
finally got the courage to open that box . Now, you have to go
on with it.

SIR EDWARD: And who the hell are you?

MICK: Who the hell am I? No-one in particular. Everyone in general.
I am the unknown soldier.
I am the future. I am the genie of the box.

SIR EDWARD: (aside)
What did I have for lunch?
(to Mick)
How did you get in here?

- MICK: I've always been here. But now, you've released me.
And I am here to give the other side of the story.
- SIR EDWARD: What other side of what story?
- MICK: What you won't say about yourself? How highly you were
thought of. The miracles you performed. What made you the
great Australian hero. Now, did you write about that?
- SIR EDWARD: Probably not.
- MICK: How your great physical strength, your sporting prowess.....
- SIR EDWARD: My what?
- MICK: You were heavyweight champion of the University
- SIR EDWARD: Well, nobody could knock me out... because of my long reach.
- MICK: You were a rugby International with the Wallabies.
- SIR EDWARD: Again, nobody could stop me. I'd charge for the line, arms and
legs going.
What's all that got to do with it?
- MICK: Your training as a surgeon, your knowledge of men – all made
you the perfect leader to face that crisis.
- SIR EDWARD: (indicates the box)
How do you know it's not all in there?
- MICK: I know what's in your diaries.

SIR EDWARD: Good God, man, I don't even know myself till I read them again.

MICK: Then you'd better get on with it. I'll just be here. To remind you – of friends – and enemies....Weary.

SIR EDWARD: Sir Edward to you.

MICK: Weary – stuck with you all your life. Bit obscure.
“Dunlop? Dunlop Tyres. Tires? Tired. Weary.”

SIR EDWARD: (uneasy with Mick)
This is not going to be any easier with you there.

MICK: Just forget about me.

(Mick goes back to his position)

SIR EDWARD: That's easier said than done.

MICK: Please. Proceed.

SIR EDWARD; (takes out a scrap of paper and reads)
Ah, yes – rations.....rations....my God, what we were forced to eat. Even today, all these years on, every time I sink my teeth into a steak, I think.....
The average daily calorific intake per man was approximately 1600. A man doing no work requires 2040; moderate muscular work requires 2900. So, theoretically we were just about alive. And that was in '42. Things got a lot worse later.
18 July 1942
“Slapping is in vogue again.”
Excuse me.

SIR EDWARD: (cont)
(turns to Mick)
This what you wanted?

MICK: (calls)
You're doing fine.

SIR EDWARD: "About eight Australians were slapped down for bringing in contraband cigarettes...The Nipponese who slapped them were very short and had to swing wildly, uphill. The results were rather devastating actually – a ruptured eardrum, a broken tooth plate and a tooth knocked out.
Being rather tall myself I am often required to bend over so they can reach me."
(another piece)
I told you...
(looks for Mick)
Where's he gone?

MICK: (calls)
Still here.

SIR EDWARD:it's all over the place.
This is from Lord Moran. I was in London when the war broke out. St Mary's Hospital. When I decided to serve with the AIF, Lord Moran wouldn't accept my resignation, because it was more important I should play rugby for St Mary's.
That's when Helen and I got engaged but the war intervened before she could join me. She said she'd wait for me. Well, wait she did, bless her. For eight long years. Eight precious years.
I was serving in Greece and the Middle East, when Japan came into the war and John Curtin recalled us to Sumatra and

SIR EDWARD: (cont)
Java to hold the Japanese at bay. And that's when it all went hideously wrong.
So wrong....
January 1942.....
(slumps)
No, I can't face this.

(the back projection changes and with a surge of jungle sounds, the young Weary now appears, dressed in neat Army shirt and shorts, with the epaulettes of a Colonel. His appearance is another shock for Sir Edward)

WEARY: We are sailing for Java on the Orcades. We are poorly equipped. Most of the men are still in winter uniform. The machine gunners are on one ship and their machine guns on another, so they are to be given old rifles, some from World War 1, bayonets without scabbards, even big sticks - supposedly to halt the Japanese invasion.

SIR EDWARD: Who the hell is that?

MICK: Don't you recognise yourself?

SIR EDWARD: Oh, my God.

(as if in a trance, Sir Edward walks a small distance from the desk to confront 'himself')

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