

# BRIDGE HOUSE SURVIVOR

Experiences of a civilian prisoner-of-war  
in Shanghai & Beijing 1942-1945

by  
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With an Introduction and Afterword

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## CHAPTER I

# SHANGHAI, 1942

**T**HE Pacific war had been going on for ten months and we, in Shanghai, had not felt the horrors to the extent that the peoples of other lands and cities had felt them. It is true that we were all living under the shadow of the Rising Sun and all that it meant, but we still did not realize what war really meant. On the advice of our representative Consular bodies, we had continued our work as usual in the various utility companies under Japanese domination. We had been assured by our conquerors that provided we did not indulge in any subversive activity that we had nothing to fear but knowing the Japanese as I did, I did not put much faith in their assurances.

Personally, I had predicted that as soon as our usefulness to them had come to an end they would get tough with us. Many of my friends pooh-poohed this idea, saying that the Japanese needed us and that as Shanghai itself was a vast concentration camp, we did not have much to fear. These optimists pointed to those who had already been thrown out of employment, saying that they had not been interned and therefore what had we to fear? My reply to this was that had they commenced to intern those who were not employed, this would have brought about a lowering of the standard of work the Japanese were getting out of us who were employed, and would also encourage wholesale attempts at escaping from the Shanghai area. This would, of course, have necessitated the deviation of thousands of men from the active fronts for the purpose of guarding the

boundaries of Shanghai to prevent such escapes. My predictions were only too true.

Immediately after Pearl Harbour, a few leading British and American business men and journalists, amongst whom was the late journalist and China hand J. B. Powell, were immediately arrested and taken to the infamous Gendarmerie Headquarters known as "Bridge House." We heard rumours that they had been badly tortured and were being detained under the most unspeakable conditions of filth and misery, but as nobody could see them, this could not be verified. Those who were fortunate to eventually be released were too frightened to talk, but from one of these I had obtained certain information which bore out the truth of what we had heard was going on in Bridge House. His story filled me with horror, and whilst I was not doing anything which might have been termed subversive, I realized that any of us might fall under suspicion. During the summer of 1942, I had been more or less actively engaged in assisting the local Soviet Community in raising funds for their Red Cross, my argument being that this could not be considered as subversive and as I could not in any way serve my own country, that the least I could do was something for the wounded of our Ally. As the months wore on, I thought that I was getting away with this and then came that day which will forever live in my memory as the blackest day of my life—October 6th, 1942.

## CHAPTER II

# BRIDGE HOUSE PRISON

**O**CTOBER 6th 1942 was one of those beautiful Shanghai autumn days, still quite warm with the sun shining brightly and making one feel good to be alive. The morning at the Office was humdrum and monotonous as it had been from the start of the war. I went home to tiffin at noon and had one of my favourite feeds, namely, mince beef, rice and vegetables. It is funny how one remembers little things like that. I had arranged with a very dear friend that I would meet her at one of the local clubs at half past seven that evening, and after having made this arrangement and looking forward to the evening, I returned to the Office.

At about twenty minutes past two, my telephone bell rang and the following conversation took place, "Hello, this is Koshino."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Koshino. What can I do for you?"

"Are you in your Office?" he asked.

"Of course, I am. What do you want?" I replied.

"Oh, nothing. I just wanted to see. Thank you."

I put down the receiver mildly wondering what it was all about. I did not have to wait long, as a few minutes afterwards the door opened and in walked Shinohara, the Japanese General Manager of the Company, followed by eight of the toughest Japs I have seen.

I rose to my feet as my first thought was that this was one of the usual parties of Japs being shown around the building,

which at that time the Japanese were doing a lot of. They were quite proud of their acquisition. However, Shinohara walked up to me and said, "Are you Tim?"

"Yes, I am." I replied.

Then he introduced his party, "These gentlemen are from the Japanese Gendarmerie and they want you to go with them to their Headquarters, as they have a few questions to ask you."

"Is there anything wrong, Mr. Shinohara?"

"I don't know" he replied.

In the meantime, the "gentlemen" had gathered around my desk in a semi-circle with their hands in their jacket pockets. It was quite apparent that they had guns.

I picked up my jacket and three of them escorted me out of the building and politely asked me to please step in their car. Needless to say, I was horribly frightened but wishing to test out just how serious the matter was, I asked if I might smoke. My escort very politely gave me permission to do so, even offering me a light. This made me feel better and so we proceeded to Bridge House, but at the entrance to the Office, their demeanour changed as one of them barked, "Put out cigarette! Go inside!"

I went in and leant against one of the chairs with my hand in my pocket and waited. Suddenly, a voice barked across the Office, "Take your hand out of your pocket or else I shall slap your face, you English bastard."

Needless to say, I had never pulled my hand out of my pocket so quickly in my life before. Then one of them came up to me and ordered me to sit down and proceeded to question me as to my name, age, nationality and so forth, entering all these details on a form, after which he ordered me to empty my pockets and remove my necktie and belt. All articles so removed were duly entered on the form and I was asked to remember "all things."

The "gentleman" who had barked at me, came over and putting his hands on his hips said, "This is Bridge House and you are going inside and if you speak inside I will cut your damn head off. You understand?"

I replied that I did. I was then taken out through the back door and then into another back door. My escort tightly clutching my arm, knocked on a door. I heard bolts being shot back and the door was opened by a Gendarme in uniform. I was roughly pushed in and got my first sight of the cages. The stench that struck my nostrils was terrible, and the sight that met my horrified eyes was something that I shall never forget. I saw three bearded miserable faces peering at me through the bars of the cage. One of them was that of a friend, but I did not recognize him. I did not have much time to see more because I was roughly pulled around and the guard on duty began to take down details of my name, etc. He barked out "Sango" which meant third cell. I was then hustled along the passage and was halted before a wooden barred door, where I was ordered to take my shoes off, which were placed in a sort of cupboard where there were many other pairs of shoes. The doors of the cell were opened and I was pushed in.

This cell was in reality a cage with solid wooden walls on two sides and bars also of wood on the other two sides. It measured 19' x 11' and into this space were crammed twenty human beings, men and women. When I arrived, there were three other white people, two men and one woman and sixteen Chinese, all men. They were sitting in rows on the floor which consisted of a sort of platform raised about 2' above the concrete floor. In one corner, in a sort of alcove, was the lavatory bucket whence came the terrible stench. I eventually discovered that there were ten such cages in this section of the gaol with similar conditions existing in all of them. The cages were situated in what had been garages, which were part of the Bridge House apartments.

A space on the edge of the platform was pointed out to me by one of my fellow prisoners and I sat down. I was too terror stricken to even think and could only sit there staring in front of me. Eventually my nerves calmed down a bit and I looked around. Three of my fellow prisoners were smothered in a loathsome skin disease. All were in varying stages of emaciation. One

of the other foreigners came near me and asked me in a whisper who I was and what my case was. I told him my name but told him also, that why I had been brought here I did not know. We entered into a whispered conversation and he informed me that he had been there since 6th August and that as far as he could make out, they had not nearly finished with his case. The story that he told of his sufferings was horrible in the extreme.

Ali (for that was his name) told me that his fiancee had been arrested the day before he had. His own arrest had been almost accidental as he had telephoned to her and an obviously Japanese voice had answered his call. Being exceedingly worried, he had walked around to his fiancee's house and was about to turn in at the apartment house entrance, when a party of Japanese plain clothes men were just on the point of leaving. He turned away, but was called back by one of the Japs who asked him who he was. He told them, giving them his name. They asked him what his nationality was and he said he was an Iranian. They told him he could go and he had only taken about a dozen paces when he heard one of them say, "Oh Iranian. Enemy subject. Hey! Come back." He went back to them and was told that he was under arrest. He was removed to Bridge House and was immediately questioned. His questioning occupying something like twelve hours without a stop. He denied knowing anybody living in that particular apartment and when they accused him of being a member of a big Russian spy ring, he had laughed at them and denied it.

They put him into the cell that night and the next day had resumed questioning him. Finding threats of violence of no avail, one of them asked him if he was thirsty. As the liquid ration was very low, consisting of only half a glass of tea per day and the weather being extremely hot, he naturally said, "Yes, very thirsty."

They all laughed uproariously at his reply and told him that they would give him a good drink. A kettle of water was brought into the room and he put his hand out for it, but they said, "No,

no, we will help you." They ordered him to lie on the floor and when he refused, he was promptly knocked down and tied to rings on the floor. A wet towel was slapped over his face and he got his drink! Kettle after kettle being poured into his nose and mouth. Finding this ineffectual, they had beaten him with dog whips. They found this of no use, so simply yelling with rage, they beat and kicked him around the room. He was then carried half conscious back to the cell and thrown into it.

They left him alone for a couple of days and then had taken him up again and suddenly opening the door, had thrust him into another room where he saw his fiancée seated in a chair, obviously terrified and in pain. She started to her feet and cried out his name. Of course, that gave the game away and finding it useless to deny his acquaintance with her any longer, he admitted that he knew her. They took him out and asked him if he had negotiated a draft for US\$ for her. Having done this, he admitted it, but said that beyond knowing her very well and having done this favour for her, he knew nothing else.

Then commenced a period of absolute horror for him. He told them repeatedly that no matter what they did, he would not admit to having done something which he had not done. They beat him, burnt him, strung him up by his thumbs, tied ropes to his ankles whilst he was in a sitting position and bent his knees in the wrong direction, they placed angle iron bars across his shin bones on which two men sat for half an hour till he was nearly insane with the pain, they tied him to the wall and turned a savage dog loose on him and finally took him down to the swimming bath and nearly drowned him. Ali was indeed a superman. He never gave way and never admitted anything. At a later date, I saw a Japanese guard stick a bayonet point into his knee, and he never uttered a sound beyond looking the Japanese in the eye and saying to him, "You dirty Japanese bastard." For once I saw a Japanese appear to be absolutely ashamed, of himself.

After hearing of these horrors, you can well imagine what my own feelings were. Ali said to me, "You do not have to worry too

much about that, as your case might mean nothing and you will soon be able to obtain your release. Just put on a bold front and you will be all right."

I asked him how long it would be before I would be taken up for questioning and he replied that it all depended on whether the Japs had anything definite on me and which, if they had, they would have me up right away or whether they had to do a lot of investigating before taking any action.

By this time, it was nearly five o'clock. Through the bars we saw another victim being brought along. He was thrown into our cell and turned out to be a sixty-two year old Englishman named Douglas Fleming. The Japanese pronounced his name "Fleshing." He had been brought in on a framed-up charge. They alleged that he knew something about two other Britons who had been arrested on the grounds of being in the pay of the British Government. Old Pop, as we called him, had strenuously denied this.

By that time, I had begun to settle down a little bit and looked around and tried to get acquainted with my fellow unfortunates. One of them was a dear old chap of sixty-three years of age, a Russian Jew named Podolsky. He had already been in twenty-five days and, for his age, was bearing up remarkably well. He had not, as yet, been questioned in any way. Another inmate was a respectable Russian woman whom I shall call Shura, aged forty-six. She had been in since September 8th and I have never seen anybody so utterly terror-stricken as she was. A Jap had only to look at her and she would commence to tremble like an aspen leaf. Incidentally, her place in the cell was right beside the lavatory bucket. I will never forget my embarrassment when nature made its demands and I had to use the bucket for the first time in front of her. I remember very timidly and embarrassedly asking her pardon. She looked at me with great surprise. However, one soon got over one's embarrassment in this respect. The remaining prisoners in the cell consisted of sixteen Chinese, all males.

At half past five, we received our dinner which consisted for