

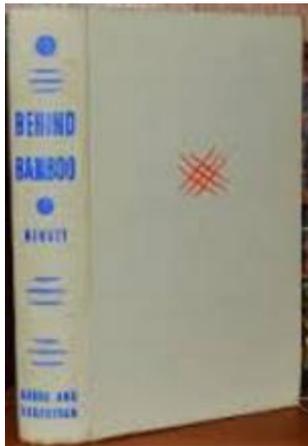
# Death Railway

## T O U R S

### **Behind Bamboo**

**By Rohan Rivett (1946)**

This was the first of the POW books published and penned only months after WW2 had concluded. With fresh memories Rivett put pen to paper and created a well written document of his time as a Guest of the Emperor.



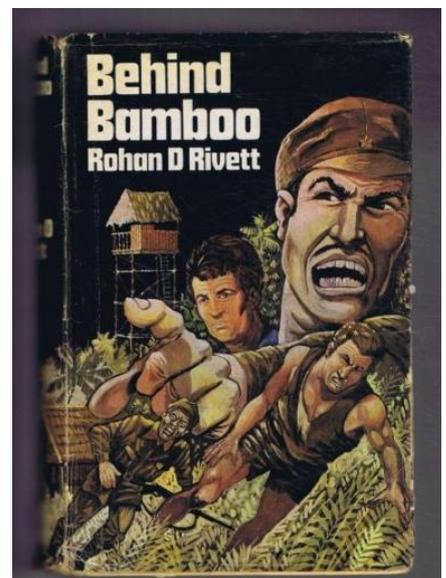
His writing style is of course super-polished as he was a Cadet Writer before the Fall of the Singapore, later becoming a War Correspondent. He has an articulated writing style with beautifully arranged words and descriptions depicting the current situation and crisis.

“Friday, 13 February 1942, dawned blue and cloudless, the morning sun making the sea a dazzling blend of sapphire and ultra-marine....Planes droned to and fro overhead for five minutes and then two came down in an unmistakable dive. The four-inch having fired once when the planes were well down on the horizon, which no other effect than the shattering of glass in the Wardroom and the scaring of most people out of their senses, our ack-ack barrage now consisted of sporadic rifle fire from a dozen .303 on deck and the brave chatter of the Lewis at the stern.” (Rivett, 1946: 19)

His escape with colleagues from the beleaguered Singapore Harbour down the coast is captivating writing – it feels like you are sitting next to him in his dingy as they head south dodging the Japanese Fleet and untrusting natives.

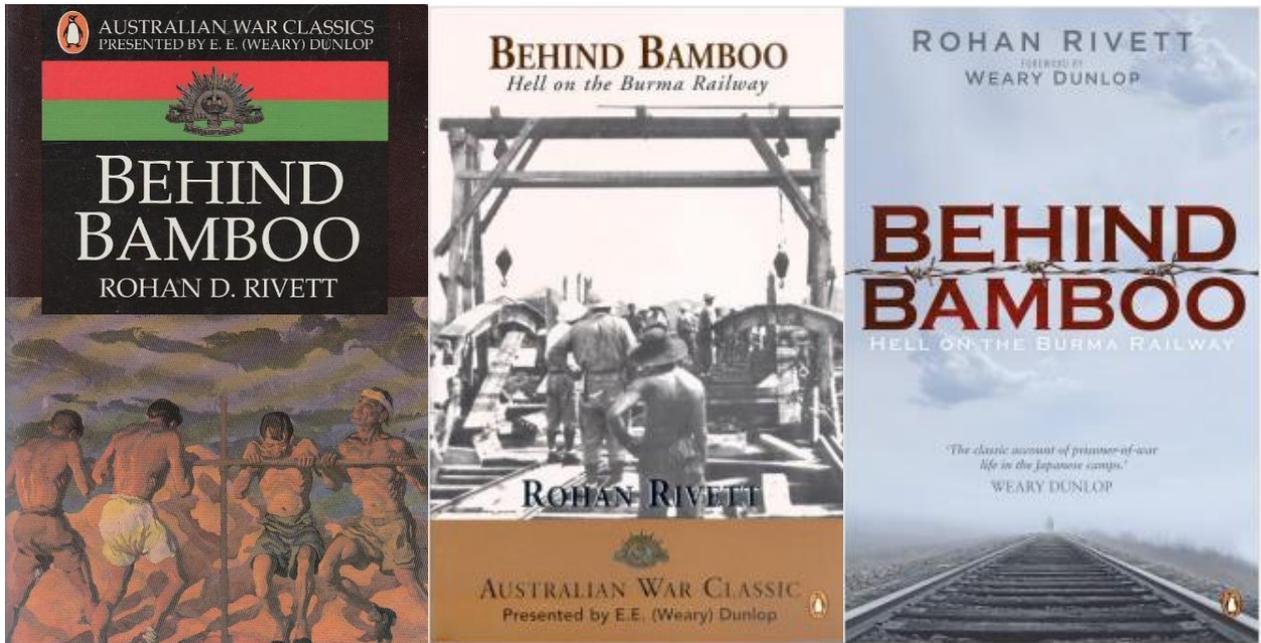
His description of the Perth and Houston action in the Sunda Strait also an honourable mention in his description of the action.

However his detail in the story of how he and the men travel in the bowels of the two transports: Mayebassi and King Kong Maru is fantastic writing with anecdotes and descriptions that paint the picture & experience in words.



“We had thought the King Kong Maru an inferno. We realized now that it had been only one of the outer compartments of the Jap POW hell. Now we were in the central torture chamber – the grill *de luxe*.” (Rivett, 1946: 161)

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Some different covers of the book over the years.

Discussion on the later part of the war as a POW was well documented by Rivett; his description of the Allied Bombings in the camps was the best on that topic I have ever read. Describing not only the deaths and effects of the bombing in the camps but the psychological trauma the bombing & strafing caused on a daily basis.

Rivett wrote 'Behind Bamboo' in Oct-Nov 1945; publishing in 1946; it was reprinted eight times and published more than 100,000 times. He wrote the book whilst recovering from the privations of the Burma-Siam Railway.

Rivett was a Wesley College Boy (Victoria) and later a student at Melbourne University (with Manning Clark) and later in 1938 a student at Oxford University – abandoning his studies at the outbreak of WW2 – with heightened interest in joining the AIF.

He worked for the Argus as a cadet writer before the war and then for the Malaya Broadcasting Authority in Singapore – the latter he wanted to keep quiet at all costs whilst a POW – for fear of being tortured for his efforts in reporting the war. He also probably wanted to keep quiet he was the Grandson of Alfred Deakin – Australia's second Prime Minister.

He married prior to the war however was soon divorced shortly after the conflict; to re-marry and work for the Herald – personally recruited by Keith Murdoch. With stints of writing in China (covering the Civil War) and later England, he returned to Australia to work in South Australia as Editor-In-Chief of the Adelaide daily: 'News'.

Sacked by Murdoch for being 'headstrong' he followed with writing stints in Switzerland and as a Freelance Journalist, Broadcaster, Public Speaker and Author – all the while promulgating Australians to be aware of their Asiatic neighbours.

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He died in 1977 of a coronary occlusion.<sup>1</sup>

## Bibliography

Rivett, Rohan (1946) *Behind Bamboo* – Angus & Robertson LTD

<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/rivett-rohan-deakin-11533>

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