

Death Railway

T O U R S

Lieutenant Colonel (LTCOL) Charles Anderson VC

Charles Anderson's foray into military history began on the morning of 19 January 1941, when the HQ of the Indian 45th Brigade in the Muar region of Malaya was hit in an air raid. The Brigade's commander was injured so LTCOL Anderson was subsequently put in charge.

The South African born Anderson had fought in WW1 and was awarded a Military Cross; he was also a former big game hunter and new jungle warfare well. Between the wars he married an Australian girl and got stuck into farming at Crowther in NSW.

On 20 January 1942; Anderson's 2/19th and 2/29th, combined with the remainder of the Indian 45th and were involved in very heavy fighting, struggling to break through an enemy cordon. LTCOL Anderson led the successful attack to extricate the embattled Aussies; eventually they fought their way down to Parit Sulong where the bridge over the river was in enemy hands. Many attempts were made to take the bridge but the barricades and enemy numbers were too strong.



Studio portraits. (AWM 045111 & 100636)

When his men were pinned down on a ridge; he urged them to charge the Japanese line singing Waltzing Matilda. Anderson took the lead at the charge.

"A Corporal pointed out the whereabouts of two machineguns that were holding them up," details Colin Smith in 'Singapore Burning'.

"Anderson, accompanied by a Private Donnelly...announced he would try and deal with them, after which everybody must get up and charge. Once he was close

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enough to be reasonably sure his grenades would be on target, he let fly. His men caught up with him and the position was taken. The exploits of the big game hunter who was leading them reverberated down the column, a comic book hero came to life.”

By nightfall the next day ammo was low and many men were wounded; surrounded on all fronts by the Japanese. LTCOL Anderson ordered the men to disperse in small groups to the British lines, to fight again another day. He also had to make the fateful and difficult decision: leave 110 wounded Australians and 40 Indians behind in the hope the Japanese would take care of them and give them basic care. Anderson tried desperately to get ambulances/Red Cross marked trucks through enemy lines; however they came under intense fire and had to retreat.

The 110 Aussies were bayoneted, machine gunned and incinerated alive by the Japanese behind a small building near the Bridge of Parit Sulong. LT Ben Hackney was one of the only survivors – having endured 11 bayonet wounds; his story of survival is absolutely remarkable where he wrote his own account of that terrible day in ‘Dark Evening’ a dossier on those times at Parit Sulong.

A compatriot of Hackney’s wrote the book, ‘The Massacre at Parit Sulong’ (by Gilbert Mant). How tough was Hackney though – he survived the 11 bayonet wounds; the massacre (by playing dead) and later hiding under the house. He was captured some months later after dodging the Japanese in the jungle; he was interred at Changi Prison and worked on the Death Railway.

Only 400 of the 2/19th and 2/29th (less than a quarter of the number of Aussies at the start of the battle) made it back to safety and the British lines.

Two days before the surrender (13 Feb 1942); LTCOL Charles Anderson was awarded the Victoria Cross.

Source: The Australian & AWM