

Death Railway



The Naked Island

By Russell Braddon (1952)

This book is one of the best I have read on the subject of the fighting in Malaya, the Fall of Singapore and on the author's period on the Thai-Burma Railway.

The discussion of his fighting in Bakri to Parit Sulong is an absolute page turner; particularly when he describes his mates and what they are doing, the enemy and their tactics including Snipers, to the action of his mate who uses a Boyes anti-Tank Rifle to displace enemy tanks bound for their position.

He even describes his first act of killing a Japanese soldier, including his immediate thoughts which are incredible reading – I have never read a similar account on the

killing of an enemy in Malaya. Here's an excerpt:

"So in desperation, I moved alone to the tree in front of me and, as the Jap ran crouching towards it, stepped out from behind it and presented him with a firmly held rifle and bayonet. Upon this he promptly impaled himself. At the moment of impact, as I tucked my right elbow securely against my hip and moved my left foot slightly forward, I found myself thinking, "Just like a stop-volley at tennis" and spent the next hour musing, rather confusedly, over the unpleasantness of a situation which compelled one to apply the principles of a clean sport to the altogether dirty business of killing." (Braddon 1952: 85).

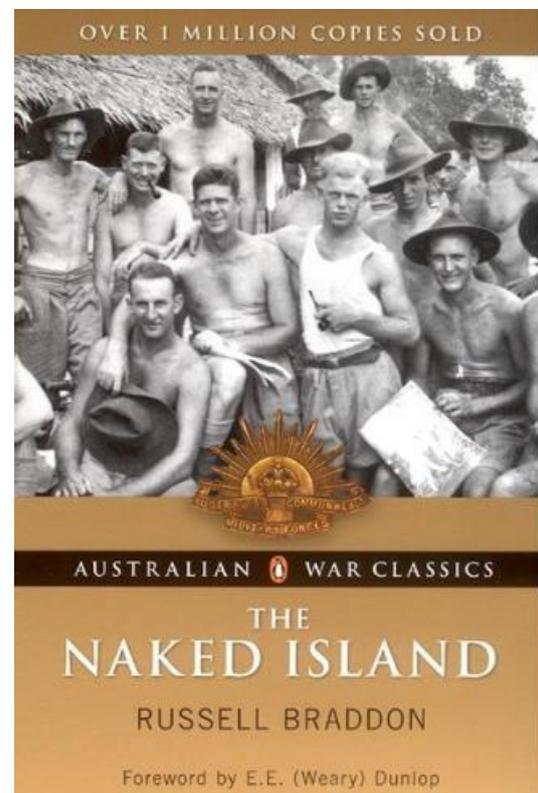
I understand he liked in the post war days to watch tennis in Wimbledon and was a good player of high standard himself.

His time 'on the run' is also fascinating reading told by a great story-teller. His style reminds me of the movie great Steven Spielberg who gives you early tips in movies by showing some piece of evidence or object that later has some sort of significance through the plot. Braddon's writing is very similar as he introduces tidbits of information and then brings them back quite often with humour to tidy up, hook and conclude his narration.

From near death on the railway to repetitious bouts of Malaria and the constant threat of overwork and starvation – Braddon saw it all and writes it all in this book including the many instances of bashings by the guards.

He even volunteers as an Orderly in the Kanchanaburi Hospital as he himself convalesces from his Malarial bed:

"I learnt to undress the dead, tidy up their belongings, straighten their legs, fold

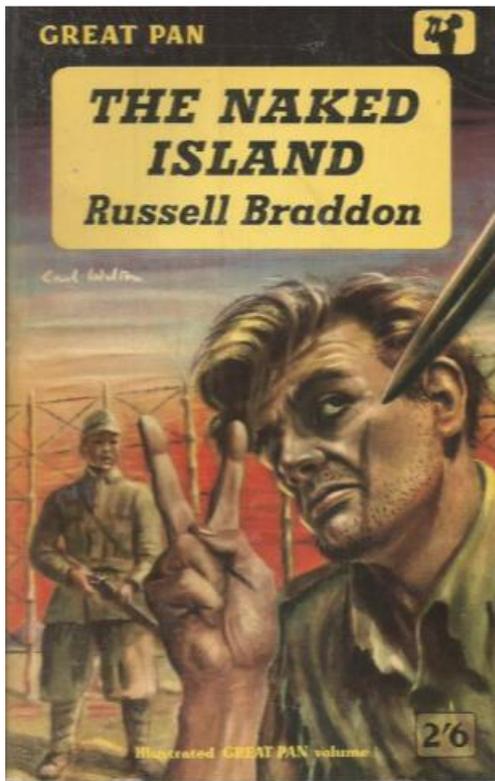


Death Railway



their hands across their chests, close their eyes. If the lids were reluctant to shut, a little cold water on a piece of cloth, and, after a few seconds, the eyes were closed and peaceful.” (Braddon, 1952: 234).

This is a must read book on the Fall of Singapore – action in Malaya combined with the Death Railway – I think it is a masterpiece and equal to any I have read on the subject –



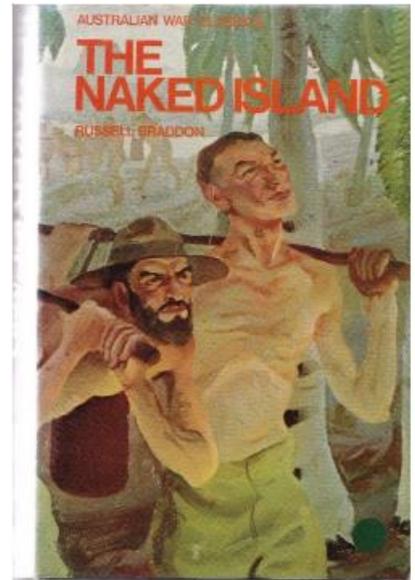
I really enjoyed Braddon’s humour, brilliant descriptive and observational writing style of what he saw – as mentioned a page turner that gives the reader a chance (with imagination) to stand next to the digger as he walks through Pudu Prison, into Changi, on the march up with H Force to Malay Hamlet and other places on the railway down to Singapore.

Thanks Mr Braddon for your writing and your service – what a book.

Russell Braddon: 1921-1995.

More on Russell Braddon:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituaries-russell-braddon-1613338.html>



Bibliography

Braddon, Russell (1952) *The Naked Island* – Pan