

Ray Parkin Papers

Australian Manuscripts Collection MS 13601

Acquired 2007-08

Ray Parkin (1910–2005) was a sailor, writer, artist and prisoner of war (POW). He joined the Royal Australian Navy in 1928, and when he became a POW of the Japanese in World War II, he was one of Edward ‘Weary’ Dunlop’s Thousand working on the Thai–Burma Railway.¹

While in captivity, Parkin secretly kept a series of diaries detailing his wartime experiences. Whenever materials were available, he sketched and painted local flora and fauna and collected stories of and about his fellow POWs. These works are inspiring both for their sensitive depiction of the daily survival of POWs and for the fact that they were created in such dire circumstances. For Parkin, painting and drawing became a way to temporarily escape the deprivations of ‘being on the line’ and to ameliorate the miserable and cruel monotony of captivity.²

The diaries were smuggled out of the camp by ‘Weary’ Dunlop and returned to Parkin at the end of the war.³ Abridged versions were published by Hogarth Press as *Out of the Smoke* (1960), *Into the Smother* (1963) and *The Sword and the Blossom* (1968), and later reissued as *The Wartime Trilogy* (2003) by Melbourne University Press. In his papers, Parkin recounts that when writing *Into the Smother* he ‘omitted some things that, while true, would have left an overwhelming impression on the reader and made for difficult reading’.⁴

The papers in this collection, acquired with the assistance of the State Library Foundation, cover the period 1941–2005. The archive’s organisation reflects Parkin’s commitment to meticulously recording his personal observations of life. The collection includes first drafts of novels, original diaries and galley proofs, as well as professional correspondence conducted with Hogarth Press editors. Also in the collection are letters spanning a period of more than 40 years, revealing a longstanding friendship with writer and philosopher Laurens van der Post, who Parkin first met during their time as POWs.⁵

After leaving the navy, Parkin worked at Melbourne Ports as a shipping clerk. He continued to paint and draw ‘his ships’, as well as subject matter from his long wartime memories (often in biro on the back of lined ledger pages).

Parkin’s passion for ships is evident in the material in the collection relating to the 1997 publication of *HM Bark Endeavour*, an elaborate illustrated non-fiction work about life on board Captain Cook’s *Endeavour*.



Top: Ray Parkin, *My Hat!*, watercolour, April 1944. Ray Parkin Papers, Australian Manuscripts Collection, MS 13601/21/18

Above: Ray Parkin, *Butterflies-Siam*, watercolour, February 1942. Ray Parkin Papers, Australian Manuscripts Collection, MS13601/21/18



Ray Parkin, *My Temporary Camp Alone, Hintok-Konyu Road*, watercolour, August 1943.
Ray Parkin Papers, Australian Manuscripts Collection, MS 13601/20/29



Ray Parkin, *Cold Tea & Patience, POW Camp Bandong Java*, watercolour, July 1942.
Ray Parkin Papers, Australian Manuscripts Collection, MS 13601/20/17