

## Private H.B. (Harry) Castilla; 2/4 Machine Gun Battalion: POW Thailand

By Robert Atkins, Mundaring Western Australia; January 2023



Henry Bussell de Castilla, known as Harry Castilla, was born on 25 October 1908 to Henry Couper de Castilla and Violet May Bussell, in Perth Western Australia. Prior to World War II he was a driller, Bogger and Miner in the Goldfields of Western Australia.

Harry Castilla enlisted at Kalgoorlie on 17 December 1940 then at the Recruit Reception Depot, Claremont, Western Australia on 15 January 1941. He undertook his initial training at Northam Camp and was assigned to the 2/4 Machine Gun Battalion, 'C' Company, 12 Platoon in June 1941, where his cousin Ian David 'Pop' Heppingstone was a 'Rangetaker'. The cousins embarked for Singapore on 30 December 1941. The 2/4 MG Batt., disembarked Singapore on 24 January 1942. His army dossier next records him as a Prisoner of War at Changi under the authority of the Japanese on 15 February 1942<sup>1</sup>.

Harry De Castilla was assigned by the Japanese to 'A' Force Burma, Green Force No. 3 Battalion to work on the Burma end of the Siam-Burma Railway. Harry was moved south into Thailand when the railway was completed in December 1943 spending nearly three months ill at Khonkan Hospital Camp before being moved to the Tamarkan camp. Then he was moved to the Kachu Mountain Camp joining his cousin Ian 'Pop' Heppingstone<sup>2</sup>. This summary is taken from the 2/4 Machine Gun Battalion web site.<sup>3</sup>

Pte. H.B. de Castilla was recovered to Singapore from the Japanese POW camp in Thailand on 20 August 1945. He was flown to Brisbane on 30 September, then to Sydney by train on 1 October. He travelled from Sydney to Fremantle via the HMT *Otranto* disembarking on 11 October 1945. Harry spent most of the next six months in hospital, discharged on 17 April 1946. He was discharged from the army on 30 April 1946.<sup>4</sup> Harry married Mavis Love Skipsey in 1952 and they lived in Swanbourne until her death in 1971 and his death in 1973. Harry worked as a clerk after the war.



*Harry de Castilla and Mavis Skipsey on their wedding day, 1952.*

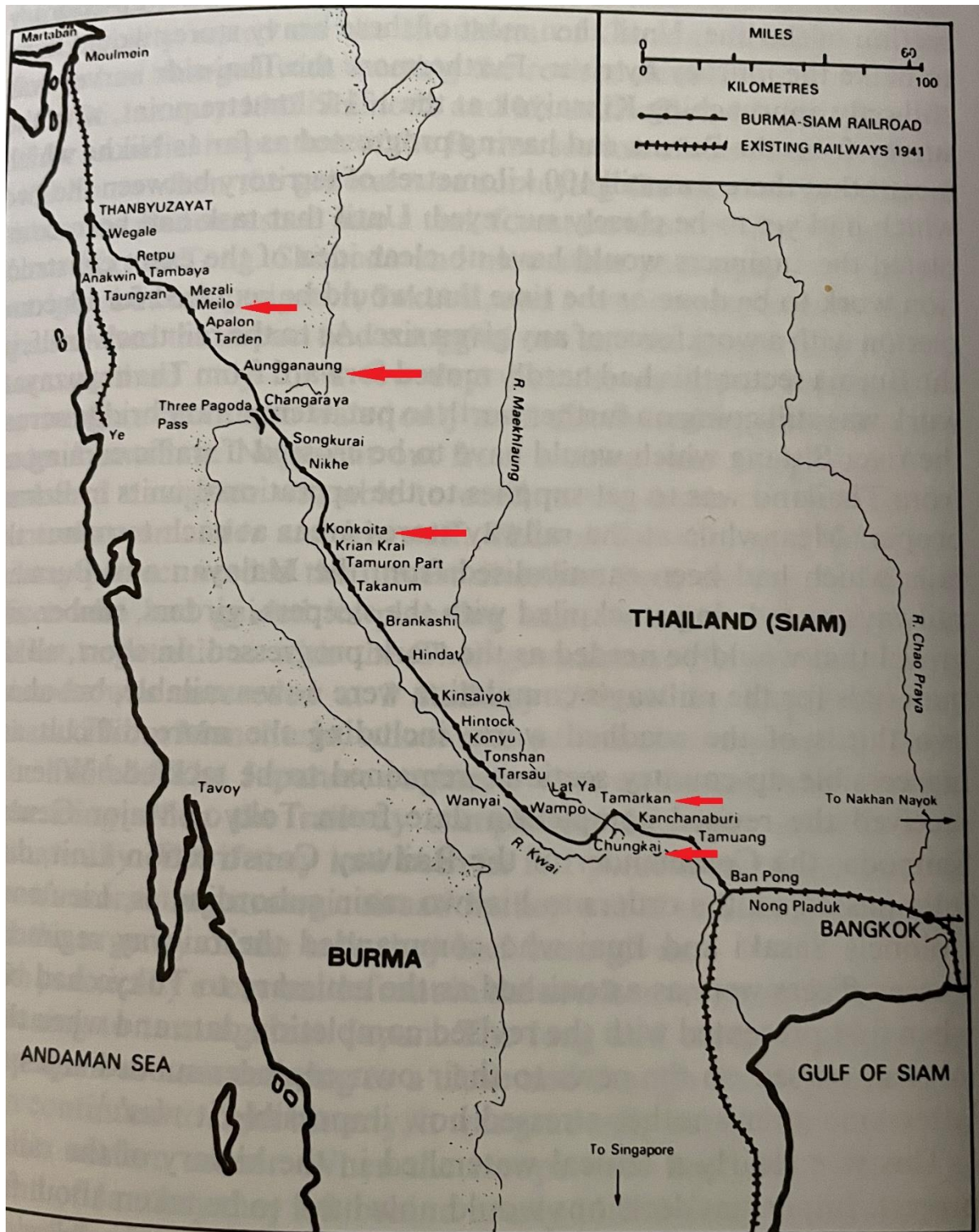
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<sup>1</sup> National Archives of Australia, digital World War II personal dossier records

<sup>2</sup> Heppingstone had been assigned to 'D' Force Thailand, S Battalion by the Japanese

<sup>3</sup> 2/4 Machine Gun Battalion: <https://2nd4thmgb.com.au>

<sup>4</sup> National Archives of Australia, digital World War II personal dossier records



Some of the camps H.B. De Castilla was located

Source: River Kwai Railway, Clifford Kinvig, 1992

#### 4. The Burma-Siam Railroad

<sup>5</sup> Kinvig, Clifford (1992) *River Kwai Railway, The story of the Burma-Siam Railroad*, Biddles Ltd, Guildford, Surrey, UK