

## **The Men of the Line: Stories of the Thai- Burma Railway Survivors**

Pattie Wright  
Melbourne University  
Publishing, \$45

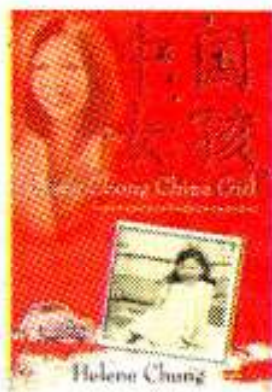


**STATISTICS ALONE TELL** you enough. Something like 30% of Japan's prisoners-of-war died, compared with about 3% of British Commonwealth, French and US troops under the

Germans (Russian POWs were treated worse — more than half died). For Australians, the Thai-Burma railway was possibly the unluckiest place to be. The sheer brutality and indifference of the Japanese guards is documented time and time again in this collection of the memoirs from those who made it back. The Japanese engineers, most agree, were the worst. The diseases — cholera, dysentery, malaria and others — the beatings (one man beaten for biting his lip, a habit he broke), the miserable rations and the 16-hour days took care of most. It's the tale of two brothers from Moonee Ponds (one made it, one didn't) that epitomises the journey from ordinary suburban life to the horror of the "Line". Marvel, too, at Tom Uren, who emerged hating not Japanese but "fascism and militarism".

## **Ching Chong China Girl**

Helene Chung  
ABC Books, \$32.95



**WE KNOW THE FACE OF** former ABC Beijing correspondent Helene Chung. Here is the story of how this Australian-born Chinese Catholic school girl became, in many ways, emblematic of the changing nature

of Australia. She may have been teased at school in Tasmania (like her mother) with the old "Ching Chong" rhyme and she had to put up with small-minded prejudice about her divorced parents (and her mother who was not only an artist's model but lived "in sin") but the spirit, energy and clear-sighted intelligence that eventually took her to journalism — via the theatre — and on to such iconic programs as *This Day Tonight*, then to become the ABC's correspondent in Beijing, shine through in this engaging memoir. Its tone is conversational, often wry and humorous but the passages dealing with the deaths of her husband and sister are told in simple prose that accentuates the loss. Like so many memoirs, it's a portrait of the subject's journey through life, the bright and the bleak, and the times themselves.