JOHN RAYMOND STROUD

Experiences as a Prisoner-of-War, 1941-1945

Interviewed by

Charles G. Roland, MD

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Oral History Archives

Hannah Chair for the History of Medicine

McMaster University

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Charles Gordon Roland, MD:

Mr. Stroud would you begin by just telling me a bit about who your parents were, where you were raised, just a little bit about your background?

John Raymond Stroud:

Well, I was one of six boys born in Clarkson, Ontario, November the 23rd, 1920. I'm the second youngest of six boys. I was educated in public school in Clarkson, moved to Toronto in 1932. My father passed away in Clarkson and we sold our home and moved to Toronto in 1932. I had continued my public school and high school in Toronto until I went to work with a custom broker -- Robinson, Heath. From Robinson, Heath I worked for Border Brokers. I was in charge of all Customs clearances for Border Brokers.

CGR:

Is that what you were doing at the time you enlisted?

JRS:

At the time I was working for Border Brokers and I took the noon hour, went up to the University Armories and joined the Toronto Scottish.

CGR:

Oh yes.

JRS:

I left work at noon and ended up that night that I was in the army. I had to resign my position.

CGR:

OK. Tell me -- again, just briefly please -- how you got from your enlistment in the Toronto Scottish to being in the

Royal Rifles and ready to head off to Asia.

JRS:

In July of 1940 we were shipped down to Valcartier camp machine-gun training center, which consisted of the Toronto Scottish, the Ottawa Camerons, the Royal Montreal Regiment, and another machine-gun regiment from the west. August of 1940 we were then moved to Three Rivers, Quebec, where we received our basic training. I received all my basic training. I was on three overseas calls which were called off at the last minute. From there they asked for 250 volunteers to go to Newfoundland, in 1941, to support their artillery. They were afraid of an invasion of Newfoundland because of the large German pocket battleships off there, and a number of ships were sunk. We were stationed at St. John's, Newfoundland, and Cape Spear (S-p-e-a-r), which is 21 miles outside of St. John's, Newfoundland, right on the coast, the Atlantic coast.

However, after a month there in the fog -- and we lost five people, walked right off, coming off leave in the fog and fell in the ocean. There was no one, nothing, just fog and you couldn't even see in front of you.

I said, "I didn't join this service to end up going over a cliff into the ocean." So I heard that the Royal Rifles were recruiting and they were going overseas so a fellow named Ken Dawe, D-a-w-e, and I went to visit the OC in St. John's, Newfoundland. They said they would take us, because there was two drivers wished to remain in Newfoundland, who were driving the supplies out to the artillery base. Then we were transferred, in August of 1941, into the Royal Rifles of Canada.

We came back to Valcartier. From Valcartier we were shipped down to St. John, New Brunswick, for a short stay, and then back to Valcartier. We were given our last leave and we were shipped out in October of 1941, "destination unknown," for BC, where we boarded the Awatea.

CGR:

Can you remember, in your preparation for going overseas, what kind of medical preparations were made. For example, did you have inoculations and did you have any idea what for?

JRS:

Yes, we were given inoculations. I remember that very well. We got it for diphtheria, typhoid. That was the two I remember. There was another one, but I think they were the main ones, for typhoid and diphtheria -- we were given inoculations by the doctors in Valcartier prior to being shipped out to Vancouver.

CGR:

But you specifically remember that diphtheria was one of them.

JRS:

Diphtheria and typhoid.

CGR:

Obviously I have an ulterior purpose in asking.

JRS:

I know, I often think of it.

CGR:

Right.

JRS:

Because I got diphtheria.

CGR:

OK, please go ahead.

JRS:

OK. On October 28 we left the harbor in Vancouver, BC, still "destination unknown," and it wasn't until we arrived in Hawaii for water and supplies that we were told what our destination was; we all figured we were going to Africa, around the Horn. We were going to end up reinforcing the regiments that were already stationed in Africa. Because we were given summer drill, you see. And this is what made us suspect we were going to a hot climate.

C.G.R.,:

What ship were you on?

JRS:

The Awatea.

CGR:

Tell me a bit about the voyage itself.

JRS:

Well, actually, I was very fortunate on the voyage. We got on board ship. I was "B" Company when I boarded ship. They asked for volunteers on board ship to serve the sergeants and the sergeant-majors and so forth, for their breakfast, lunch and dinner. But what I had found out was that while we were serving the sergeants, we were eating officers' meals across the Pacific, which I thought was good, and we had a lot of leisure time. Furthermore, we spotted an empty cabin and we took it over -- the fellows that were serving in the kitchen and the mess hall -- and

as a result we had pretty good accommodations going across. We weren't down in them bloody hammocks where all the others were. A lot of them were seasick. Actually, I'd spotted it and I got all my chums and we took it over. We were only challenged once by a Sergeant-major. "What are you doing here?" We said, "We were ordered in here because we're serving the sergeants and sergeant-major. "Oh," he said, "oh, carry on." Never bothered us the whole trip. We had a damn luxury accommodation, really. That's how it happened.

So on the ship I was talking to Sergeant [[Harold B.] Shepherd and he was saying, "did you drive." I said, "Yeah, I got a driver's license." "How would you", he says, "you're the 50-caliber man", he says, "we looked at your records". I guess before he spoke to me that I was a fully trained machine-gunner, and had all the qualifications. He said, "How would you like to come into Headquarters when we get to Hong Kong? We're getting Bren carriers and motorcycles." And he said, "How about you?" he says, "I'd get you to be a machine-gunner for Major [Malcolm T.G.] MacAulay." I says, "Fine." He says, "You wouldn't be in all those route marches." Well, it sounded great to me. Being young and adventurous and everything, I'd get a big picture of us going over the hills in Hong Kong and up in the New Territories. And MacAulay and me in the side car and him driving sometimes and me driving the motorbike, I thought we could. So I was actually transferred. I was up for a promotion to Corporal on board ship by, he was a captain at the time, Captain [Everette E.] Dennison. So I got on the boat "B" Company and got off Headquarters Company.

CGR:

But not a corporal.

JRS:

Not corporal, because I wanted to get transferred, I didn't want the corporal stripes, I wanted the excitement. I think, well, maybe, because a lot of people in that section of "B" company were killed in action, I probably would have been one of them for all I know.

CGR:

Yes. Please tell me a bit about your first impressions of Hong Kong.

JRS:

Oh, my first impressions of Hong Kong were great. Our money went a long way over there. Drinks were cheap. Our basic training -- I had it all, so I was excused at noon hour every day, and I had from noon till midnight out on the town. Until the war started we were out every day from noon hour till midnight.

CGR:

What did you do? What did "out on the town" mean?

JRS:

Well, I was playing a lot of baseball. We were playing against the Portuguese ball team, both the men and women's, and other ball teams. We were invited to private clubs to put on an exhibition ball game. This was great. Of course, after the ball game we'd go into the club house -- free drinks because they'd sign the chits. Oh, I thought this was great! I was quite happy with this arrangement. As I say, the drinks were cheap, the

rikshas -- you could go for about a mile for about two cents. Of course, the British were mad at us because we were tipping the ricksha boys and, as a result, when we come out of a place, a bar, whether it was a bar or the club, they'd rush to the Canadians and ignore the British because we were good tippers, you know.

CGR:

Ah yes. Tell me how the war started for you.

JRS:

The war started -- it was a Sunday, we were downtown, we were ordered back to the barracks. No, I'm sorry, Saturday we were ordered back to the barracks. The MPs were ordering us back and on Sunday we were to get our kit together and we were marched out on the Sunday and we went by ferry over to Hong Kong. We marched about 5 to 10 miles to our positions, which was already allocated for various companies in there. We were stationed at PB 2, which was in Tai Tam Gap, and that was where we were stationed.

CGR:

OK, go ahead and just tell me a bit about your personal war.

JRS:

Well, my personal war: we were stationed there that Sunday night and on Monday we saw the bombers coming over. Of course, we couldn't believe it. We saw these planes coming. We thought, oh gee, we're getting reinforcements -- the British are sending in some of their up to date [planes]. Then we noticed, or we could see the Japanese "raw egg" on the wings and we realized it was them. They bombed us about the same time they hit Pearl

Harbor. But they were hitting the - they hit the barracks, which everybody had pretty well cleared except those who were in detention, and they hit the Kai Tak Airport. Then they zeroed over the island and we were using our Bren guns on them but I don't think we made a hit. Oh, there was a hit made but it wasn't from our group, I know. We were advised that Japan had just pulled a sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, and that we were at war with Japan. Of course, we were just all geared up for action because we had a few good weeks of the easy life. Even though it was easy, we were getting a little bored -- we were over there for action and we thought this was great, you know.

From there on we were in a pillbox, and the sergeant in charge was [Emile] Bernard. There was George Horswell in there.

CGR:

Horswell?

JRS:

Horswell. He died, though, here up in Sunnybrook, about two years ago. Sergeant Bernard survived the war but he was in a hunting accident and he drowned. Really, we were in that pill box for approximately 4 or 5 days, and our headquarters just down the hill from us, where we congregated for our meals and which they had dug into the cliff overlooking Lye Mun.

From there we were ordered out of our positions and I think the next thing I know of, Captain [William F.] Clarke was in charge of our group and we were ordered up on Mt. Parker. I always remember that because it poured rain and I had to put spikes in the side of the hill to provide me from sliding down the bloody hill! Now at that time I had the only Bren gun in

our group, and I would carry that heavy gun plus my pack and plus additional cartridges, and I carried that bloody gun until we were in action with the Japanese, and we ran out of bullets. Then I destroyed the gun. Actually, I ended up with a Tommy gun and then I also had a .38 revolver. Lots of grenades though.

CGR:

Please go ahead and just follow the train of events until Christmas day.

JRS:

We encountered the Japanese, both on Mt. Parker and on the outskirts of Palm Villa, because we were stationed around Palm Villa. When we got into Palm Villa there was quite a bit of supplies there and we helped ourselves to binoculars and further ammunition.

The Japanese came down over the hill of Mt. Parker, and we were at close combat with them there. From there we retired towards Stanley Village but then we were sent towards Repulse Bay to reinforce the garrison. We had one Bren Carrier, incidentally, then, a guy named [Carlyle F.] Savage was the driver of it. (I think he just died recently too. So I hear.) We were in combat with the Jap because they were coming at us from both sides then. They were coming from Repulse, they were coming at us from the hills of Mt. Parker and the other hills there. We were sort of being pushed right into a pocket. This is the Japanese strategy.

Mind you they had snipers already. I had two people killed on that...right near the reservoir. We went out on a patrol and I can remember Captain Clarke, Sergeant Shepherd, and "Yank"

[John F.] Burns, Savage. (See, I wasn't familiar with too many then, but I got to know them after I was a prisoner-of-war.) We were caught on the water catch by the Japanese, and also on the road leading up to the water catchment. That's where I, this Captain -- oh, and [not] Captain Clarke -- I meant to say [Lieut. Peter L.] MacDougall. He was in charge of us then and he always tells his wife I saved his life, because the Japs rushed us from the road and I lobbed three or four grenades over on them and got them smack. Because I was trained for this. I timed them bloody things right down....just almost left my hand and they went. But these fellows had them timed there to as much as 10 seconds, where I put my down to 4 seconds. Pull the pin and [throw] quick, because you only had a quick chance and they were on you. As a result we killed quite a few Japs, between machine-gunning them and the grenades. But we did lose. Two men were killed outright -- one was wounded mortally, and he was taken back to Stanley hospital.

From there, then we went on to reinforce the garrison at Repulse Bay. We were supposed to go right to Repulse Bay but the Japanese had already occupied it and then they turned and they were shelling [us all] to hell.

From there we ended up in Stanley Village. Now I remember the College there, and I remember the wounded in the one College, where a lot of them were murdered. One thing that does stand out was that we hadn't had any water for three days, we hadn't eaten for three days. Just what we could scrounge. But I went into the College and there was Chinese students there, and they had water saved up and they gave me my first drink of water in three

days. I always wonder what happened to them. They were educated Chinese from rich families in China. I never found out to this day what happened to them after, you know. I guess the Japanese killed them all off.

But from there...oh yeah, we shared a can of wieners on Christmas night -- no, Christmas Eve, the 24th. Then we were told we were going into the Fortress, Stanley Fortress. We were in the Stanley Fortress, we got a wash and we got plenty to eat in there.

We were called out the next day, which was Christmas day, we were given a shovel. We loaded as much ammunition as we could and we were heading for the gate of Stanley Fortress, and that was where we were going to make our last stand. While we were doing this the Japanese were mortaring us and two fellows about here to that den door [30 ft.] were killed right in front of me, because we were in twos going forward, we didn't stay in a group. They were just blasted right away. They were killed instantly by mortar. The Japanese were mortaring us. There was still fighting going on right till Christmas night, even though I understand that in the afternoon they surrendered. And the Japanese were still blasting and that was at night; there was a lull came after dark, and that's the first indication that the war was over -- that we had capitulated and they [the Japanese] were told. Then they went around the line telling us.

If they hadn't of [surrendered] they would have wiped us out the next day. Because the Japs had us surrounded and they had the guns set up, the mortars set up, and they had a hell of a lot of good troops ready to storm us. We were told to lay down our

arms and wait for further instructions. We were there, and we did eat pretty good when we got back in the Fortress. As a matter of fact I got constipated. Christ, I hadn't eaten for days and I just gorged myself instead of being.....I ate excessively. It was canned stuff that the British had stored in the Fortress.

Then we were moved out, and I can't give the exact date, it was only about a week later that we went to North Point [camp] -- marched out to North Point under Japanese guards. They had machine guns mounted on tanks. They had armored cars and, of course, they had the Chinese, along the routes, spitting and throwing stones at us, you know. How quickly they turned against us, you know. The friendly Chinese. That's when we were marched to North Point.

It was a dirty filthy place when we got to North Point. The windows were out. Some buildings were destroyed or half destroyed. The roofs were off some. But the smell of the horses that had been stored there, or donkeys, I guess they were! Because the Japanese were great on donkeys for carrying their ammunition and their guns up those steep hills. But they had housed them in this blood place. They figured it was good enough for them it's good enough for the prisoners. And that's where they shoved them.

Now, after I was a prisoner a short time I got -- malaria was the first thing I got. I got no medication whatsoever, and I know I was in a coma for about two days, because I don't remember. The first thing I remember, everything tasted like rubber. The rice, and whatever they fed us. I don't remember much about

it. Then I got dysentery in January, and I was put in the dysentery ward, which was just on the outskirts of the camp, way at the far end of the thing and laying on the floor, no medication whatsoever.

CGR:

Excuse me, let's go back to the malaria just for a moment. No quinine?

JRS:

No quinine.

CGR:

Nothing at all.

JRS:

Nothing at all. No. They had no quinine. So they claim.

CGR:

Now at this time, was there a hospital?

JRS:

No. That was the first thing I remember was they said I was out for about two days. I probably wasn't out I was just sick, because they said you were sweating a lot, they put a lot of blankets over me.

CGR:

Do you remember who was looking after you? Was it a medical officer?

JRS:

I don't remember him, although the medical officer did come to see me. I couldn't go to see him because I was delirious. But I understand Dr. [John N.B.] Crawford looked after me. I don't remember [Capt. Stanley Martin] Banfill at the time.

CGR:

OK, well then go ahead. You were starting to say about the dysentery.

JRS:

Then I had dysentery and then I was put in the dysentery ward. Again the only people I can remember -- I don't remember a doctor attending me -- was the orderlies there. I don't know, I was pretty damn sick when I got dysentery. I was really....I figured this was it. After I had malaria and then dysentery.

CGR:

These were pretty close together?

JRS:

Oh, we were laying on floor - damp, and a little sort of a stretcher and that was.....and we were just one after another in there with dysentery. It was damp, I can remember, and smelly as hell. It was an old warehouse. It wasn't the wooden huts that we had in North Point. It was a sort of a warehouse that was set up in the corner of the camp. That was it, yes.

CGR:

Was there running water in the camp, do you remember?

JRS:

Well, we got water. Yes. But not drinkable, everything had to be boiled, they warned us. But if you wanted to wash yourself, I know we did, because I remember doing that after I got out of the dysentery [ward]. I don't know how the hell I survived that, but....I did reasonably well after the dysentery. I was back in my hut again, which was right by the road and right

across from the Jap guardhouse.

CGR:

How long did the dysentery last, do you remember?

JRS:

I think about 10 days.

CGR:

About 10 days.

JRS:

Ten days I was there, yes. Of course they got the records on that, I think. But I was so bloody sick, I didn't care if I lived or died then when I had malaria and then bang with the dysentery, and that was it.

Then later on I got my strength back, and then we were taken out to Kai Tak Airport. We were taken over by barge to the mainland, and we were working, and then my eyes started bothering me from the sun. I'd be out there and I ended up I couldn't see, even though I had dark glasses I'd scrounged. Eventually they terminated Kai Tak Airport. We were too slow and we were too bloody weak and too sick because we weren't being fed.

Our food consisted of a small mixture of barley and rice. I remember we got eggs that had been buried for a long time and made them into scrambled eggs. We got seaweed, we got some shark meat. What else did we get that was there? We got a few vegetables besides seaweed, but that was about it. But the rations kept going down, and we were getting weaker and weaker. For the first few days we got enough food. We were eating good because we had a lot of camp food, but the Japanese came in with lorries and took every bloody thing out of the camp. They took every-

thing. We had jam, cookies, and everything else. They took everything out of the camp and that's when we started feeling it.

CGR:

Do you remember roughly, when you started going over to the airport to work?

JRS:

I'd say about February.

CGR:

So just a couple of months after the surrender. Roughly how long did you continue to work there?

JRS:

Well, I'd say about three months.

CGR:

About three months.

J.R.S.

About three months, because my eyes hurt. It was the sun, and the starvation rations. The only thing we did get at the airport a few times, was peas with sweet sugar in it. They'd give us this at noon over there. God! it was gorgeous. It was the first sweet stuff we got. They were green peas, you could drink it and then eat the peas. I remember that very well. God! that helped. But that disappeared after a few days because everything was rushing to get on the work detail. To get out there to get the green peas in the sugar.

CGR:

How were your eyes bothering you?

JRS:

They were watering a lot, and I couldn't stand the rays of

the sun. Not only myself but a lot of my friends were the same bloody way. Between the starvation (and they said that malnutrition was starting to set in) and the hot rays of the sun. And quite frankly, I'd go look and all I could see was just stars in front of me and I couldn't see 10 feet in front of me at the end. I'd come back, and I couldn't even see my way in. This was not only myself but a lot of my friends were the same.

CGR:

How long did that go on?

JRS:

That went on until the work discontinued. Then we were eventually moved to Sham Shui Po; I think that was September of '42.

CGR:

Was Sham Shui Po better or worse?

JRS:

I would say much better. The toilet facilities, we had running water. We were reasonably grouped in each hut. The only thing again -- of course I should have mentioned it before -- we got the same thing again, the bed bugs. The bloody bed bugs used to just love my blood and every night I was eaten alive with them. Even at North Point we used take these bloody wooden slats -- they were two-deckers -- out and bang them and the bed bugs would come streaming out and we'd just try and kill as many as we could, you know, and then put them back in again. But the same thing in North Point. Now, I was fortunate enough later on, I just wouldn't sleep on the bloody thing. What I did -- we got a little ration of sugar -- what I did, I laid on the floor with my

blanket and I put holes in several places around my blanket and put sugar and raised ants, and they were like a sentry, you know, they went for those bloody bed bugs.

CGR:

Is that right?

JRS:

They did, yes.

CGR:

So you had ants eating your bed bugs.

JRS:

And protecting me. They used to patrol, and I used to watch them! They'd grab them, then pull them down the hole. I raised quite a....and some of the other boys were starting, too. At least I could get a decent sleep. But then I hit the tingling feet. That was when ....I had seen friends of mine (some are still alive here in Toronto, today) in the, what they called the torture ward, their feet in these...just hours after hours squeezing their feet. I used to go over and see this Wally [Walter] Gray, he's still alive here today, to help him, before I got it myself. He used to squeeze, you know, rub his feet and make them feel better. But he had that. I couldn't believe what they were going through until I got it myself. I got the bloody thing. It was hot feet, but we used to call them the tingling. Thousands of...just seems as if somebody put me in a vice, tightening it and then letting up. There was a lot of heat come off them. That was that tingling feet.

Then we had tests for....

CGR:

Excuse me, before we get by that, do you remember about when that started for you, the tingling feet?

JRS:

It would be early in the spring of '43. Because it was before we were taking tests and I was a carrier in Dip and I was taken out of the old barracks and put in screened, in a special compound for a carrier of diphtheria.

CGR:

OK. Well, why don't you go on with that story now, since you started on diphtheria, and tell me about that.

JRS:

All right. I was in the diphtheria [compound] -- as a carrier, now, I didn't have it. Then I had beriberi. Now, there's various beriberis and you probably know more about it. You have the wet beriberi and the dry. I had the dry beriberi. But I also had -- it was in my chest and I had a hard time breathing, like somebody was sitting on my chest all the time, and then they'd get up and you could breath and then they'd sit back down, and apparently this pellagra had gone up in my chest. That's all. So I got another bout of dysentery while I was in the compound.

Oh, while I was in the....as a carrier, I became an orderly. I volunteered as an orderly, for something to do. I was looking after those that were sick in the ward; and we had many die. Get up in the morning and you'd look and check your patients and the guy would be dead there and we'd have to stuff him full of cotton batten and everything, and prepare him for burial. We did

that.

CGR:

What, the mouth, the rectum, and the nose?

JRS:

Rectum, yes, nose.

We had one guy, we were getting him ready, but he was a Jehovah's Witness, and we found the pills that were stuffed under his pillow.

CGR:

He didn't take them.

JRS:

He was a Jehovah's Witness. I remember him very well, because we got up and here we were figuring we were helping him, and here is the stuff was under his pillow. He never did take the little medication we got.

The doctor who was in charge of us there was Dr. Ashton Rose. A fabulous person.

CGR:

I've heard that name often, yes.

JRS:

Oh, he was, if it wasn't on tape I'd....to myself he was much superior to our own doctors.

CGR:

In what way?

JRS:

Well, he got extra food for the men in there sick. I know he got hot chocolate for them. We served hot chocolate there, and this did help the patients; we found a big difference when we

were giving them hot chocolate. We were giving them some medicines which Dr. Ashton Rose gave us and prescribed, and we were giving these to them, except this guy who was a Jehovah's Witness. As a result the men's health picked up.

Then I got dysentery myself. I became a patient and the orderlies that I was working with were....and they said we can remember you well, John, you just threw up one night all over everybody. I had it. Then I became a diphtheria patient and they whipped me out of there. I did get the medication, I was put in the Jubilee building, and I can remember going in there and this chap (and I think you went to see him), in B.C. he was in charge of the Dip ward.

CGR:

Squires, Ray Squires?

JRS:

Squires. Did you see Ray? To me that man should have had a medal for what he did for the dip. He was fantastic, Ray Squires. He was in charge of the Dip Ward. I remember getting the inoculation. However, it had to be in, I think, around June of 1943, because there was a draft. I don't remember, the fellows said we went to see you, and they figured tomorrow you'd be gone. I was delirious and I remember people talking to me but they thought I was unconscious -- I wasn't unconscious. I could hear them but I couldn't speak, and I was laid on a stretcher on the Dip Ward, and I was pretty well gone. I remember Dr. Banfill coming in to see us. That's when I remembered. And he said, "Not much more we can do for him." I felt like ...."Hell, I'm going to get out of this place." While I was a patient there we

were moved out of the Jubilee building. We were moved back to an area in the sick bay in the regular barracks, again. Then apparently, and I don't remember, I had...the pellagra broke in my throat, or in my chest, and they said that the orderly was shoveling green stuff out of me.

CGR:

Out of your mouth, you mean?

JRS:

Out of my mouth. Then I had a seizure, an epileptic seizure from the pellagra. He said, "There was two ways -- it either went to your brain or it come out in you mouth." And Les Varley, he's dead now, but he said, "We did this with a spoon, just dug out green phlegm out of your mouth." Do you know, after that, that heavy feeling on my chest left.

CGR:

Is that right?

JRS:

Dr. Banfill prescribed: I got a little milk, I got an egg, and some medication -- thiamine, thiamine shots. I got thiamine shots, I remember that it made you hungry as hell. I got a little milk and I got an egg. It was amazing how quickly I recovered. They couldn't get over it. I had to learn to walk all over again. I remember just getting up on two feet and falling down. But get every little....and next in a walker with two sticks to the next bed. This was a great accomplishment for me. Gradually I got my strength back. Even Dr. Banfill and me were talking [long after], "I don't know if you remember me, although you remember me coming home on the train after we come

back from Japan." He said, "I never thought I'd see you again." He couldn't get over me being on that draft in August of 1943 to Japan. That was it as far as Hong Kong. I just gradually got my strength back.

CGR:

How long were you sick with the diphtheria? Do you remember, about? Hospitalized.

JRS:

Oh, I'd say about a month.

CGR:

About a month.

JRS:

About a month, yes. I had a critical period of two weeks, and then I got over the crisis. Then there was convalescing, when they brought me out of Jubilee. I remember who was on the stretcher -- Padre [Uriah] Laite was one of them -- and they were carrying my stretcher, taking me in a stretcher. I forget who [else], but I do remember Padre Laite was on one end of the stretcher and they were carrying us out of the Jubilee over to the regular ward that they had set up.

That was when I suddenly got the bloody seizure with the pellagra coming out of my chest. They said if it had gone to the brain, you would have had it. That was the last thing I remember there.

CGR:

How long were you an orderly?

JRS:

I was an orderly, oh, a good six weeks before I got dysen-

tery and then the diphtheria.

CGR:

Were you on a particular ward, when you were being an orderly?

JRS:

Yes, yes, we were.

CGR:

Which one, do you remember?

JRS:

Oh, I don't really remember because there was...we had a little room at the back, at the end, and I remember one day the cooks were throwing -- I always remember this because the cooks were throwing out the fish heads and we got them and in a tin we boiled them and made soup for some of our patients there. We got a little rice and put that in, boy did that ever help them! And I thought, "What in the hell are they throwing fish heads out for?" They figured they are no good but we boiled them up and put a little rice in them, served them, and they loved it.

[Phone rings]

CGR:

Oh, yes, you were saying, as an orderly you were in a little room at the back and you were talking about cooking the fish heads.

JRS:

Fish heads, and boiling them up, making soup out of them, and the kitchen was just over from our little room and they were throwing these things out. We just pick them up.

CGR:

This was POW cooks, not Japanese cooks.

JRS:

These were POW cooks. Oh, no. These were POW cooks throwing out fish heads. We used them. I remember thinking, why the hell would they be throwing out fish heads. We did, we boiled them up and made soup and put a little rice in it and it was fine.

CGR:

What kind of patients were there on the wards that you were looking after?

JRS:

See, they were Dip carriers. We were in with the Dip carriers. But they were also suffering from malaria and dysentery.

CGR:

Perhaps you'd tell me then, a bit about your trip to Japan.

JRS:

Yes. If I remember it was August 15, 1943. We had what's that called, a courtesy examination by the doctor, whether you were fit to go to Japan. I wanted to get the hell out of Hong Kong after all the disease. I figured, first of all, they must be more civilized in Japan, you know. That the food must be better, we'd get decent clothing, and decent food and medication, which we certainly weren't getting in Hong Kong. So I volunteered, sort of. The doctor didn't want me to go, Banfill, because it was only a short time I'd got over the diphtheria and dysentery and all that. Oh, I should have mentioned too, that

tingling feet I had -- I'm sitting on my bunk one day and it disappeared! I used to pray like the devil -- get rid of all of it, oh, please. I couldn't believe it. It disappeared.

CGR:

Just went away.

JRS:

Went away just like that.

CGR:

For no particular reason that you could....

JRS:

Well it may have been the thiamine shot and the egg and the little milk that helped. But it went away.

CGR:

Never came back?

JRS:

Yes, it came back in Japan, later on. But it did disappear for quite awhile, until I got to Japan where it bloody well started again! But it was August the 15th, I remember being loaded on the bloody -- we heard that they were sending a luxury liner to take us to Japan. Well, when we got there there was an old bloody scow, and we were put down in the hold of the bloody scow, and it was carrying coal before they threw us down there. We were thrown down in the ship, right down, and the hold was boarded up and the tarp put on. From there we were shipped to Japan. Now, we were a little scared because we had already heard about the British being shipped and they were torpedoed by the American submarines. It was strictly all British draft that went out in January. And they were torpedoed.

But anyway, we did get out of the hold by night. So many at a time to go to the latrine, although we had buckets. We did get some air, and we also, I remember just strictly getting up on the deck for a short period when we were in Taiwan. They stopped there, and the Japanese bombers flying over, that was our protection from the submarines.

CGR:

How many would have been on the ship, roughly?

JRS:

Close to 300 in the little scow, you know, I don't think it was any bigger than that bloody ferry going across to the [Toronto] Island. We were amazed at the smallness of the thing, and we had all of us going in there and we were just [packed] like this, in the bloody ship, you know. We lost a few on the boat going up. They fed us once a day, very little water, and this weakened our condition and we were in bad shape as it was, but going down in that bloody hold, it was hot as hell down there. Stunk to high heaven because guys were urinating, and throwing up, and dysentery and the little "honey buckets" that we had down there weren't sufficient. Everything was lowered down to us.

CGR:

So how long did it take you to get to Japan?

JRS:

I think it was, as I recall, about two weeks. Because it was about September when we arrived. We arrived in a place called Kobe. We were taken out and we were pretty God damn weak and the Japanese were on horses, Japanese soldiers, and beating

us along the street, and Japanese were all pointing their fingers at us, you know, spitting at us. We were congregated in the station in Kobe.

There was our first treat. We were given a little wooden box with rice and fish in it, and chopsticks even. A little square box and God! that was nice.

We were loaded on, which was not a bad train, but all the blinds were pulled. The next thing I know we landed in Niigata. We didn't know where the hell we were going. They didn't tell us. And we were split up, too. Because some of the boys that were on that ship went to another prisoner-of-war camp -- we never did see them. I never saw them until after the war.

We arrived in Niigata in September and I remember this, they did give us a hell of a big meal. It was red rice -- I don't know what the hell they called it. We said, "red rice." But it was filling, we just gorged ourselves. "Oh", we said, "You see, the good life in Japan." That was the last time we ever got our bellies filled, was that night! They give us a big feed and then we were given the next day off. We were issued with bloody, as I recall, like a Japanese shoe, only it was only the toe, rubber. All the Canadian uniforms were confiscated and we were given Japanese uniforms. Baggy pants, which never fitted anybody. Mine was, Christ, I had long arms, so it was up darn near about there, and one blanket. One blanket.

CGR:

Was Niigata a large camp?

JRS:

It was at the beginning, and then we were split up. We were

all together, and then our group, who did the coalyards and unloaded ships, were taken away from the foundries. The foundry group stayed in the original camp and we were moved to another camp about 5 miles away, marched off. When we got to the new camp, it wasn't even completed. It was still in the rough stages, but they threw us in there. That was '43.

The next thing, we were out to work; two days later the guys were collapsing, even on their way to work, but then when we got there we found out the work we were doing was loading ships coming in with coal, going up and down all day with 75 pounds in each basket. We were just collapsing -- what the hell I was weak, and my arms and legs weren't used to it, neither were my chums. The Japanese beating you up like you were bloody bees, up and down all day long, unloading into boxcars. Not a boxcar, you know the open coal car. Filling them up. I remember the guy that was in charge of the camp, we called him "Bluebeard." He could speak some English, and he was the owner of that coalyard.

CGR:

Well, what happened?

JRS:

Well, as I say, we were beaten up, and gradually we got stronger and we were given a little better rice and some seaweed -- that was our lunch. Most of the guys don't....as soon as they got there they ate it, they were so....they had little to eat for breakfast. So they went all day without eating, and this is what we did. Now, I did that for about a year. I got a promotion. I don't say a promotion.

I don't know, have you spoken to Bob Manchester yet? You

should talk to Bob. Bob was my honcho. He was in charge, the senior NCO in charge. In the latter part of '44 we were switched to the docks, unloading food ships from Korea. That's when we started stealing right and left. Anything from tangerines, powdered milk, butter, fish. If you got caught you got beat up, and I got caught a couple times and I got an awful beating up. But that's when, quite frankly, that's when my health picked up. We were stealing as much as we unloaded. Because the American prisoners of war who had joined us from the Philippines, they got that job as soon as they came to Japan and they taught us how to go about stealing from the Japs when you were unloading the food supplies. And this helped a lot.

Now what we were doing, too, we were smuggling stuff into the camp for the sick. The crazy Japs, we got used to them. One of the Americans taught me -- I got an Australian hat -- I used to wear this bloody Australian hat and I'd put the stuff on my head, and they'd search everywhere but the hat. All down here, make you pull your breeches down and everything. I would balance this God damn stuff on my head and take it into camp, because some of my buddies were in that sick ward and I was feeding them. I would smuggle in beans, and I'd smuggle in tangerines, sweet potatoes, and I even took in a can of powdered milk.

[End of side 1]

CGR:

How did you steal from the Japanese? How does one steal from the Japanese?

JRS:

OK, you go to the godown, where they unloaded the stuff on a crane, down. These were big grass bags, sort of speaking, and you'd put one on your shoulder, and then you'd fall behind. You've got your hook, and you have one hook holding it and the other hook you'd whip one out of his bag and the guy behind would steal one out of yours just enough to open it.

Now, I remember this one day the Japanese noticed a crate of canned milk opened, and they followed everybody to the benjo and anybody that their stools were white, they got beat up. Of course they showed white, because we were eating that stuff as fast as we could get in our mouths. You could only eat so much powdered milk, you know. But we made sure everybody got one when we discarded those cans but they found the bloody case that had been opened, somebody had stolen everything, and they were smart enough to check the benjo. Run in the benjo when you went.

Also same as apples. I ate 56 apples one day, without chewing them because you couldn't start chewing. They were only small. Put in your mouth and gulp! That night I came into camp, I couldn't even eat the small ration they gave me in camp I was so full.

CGR:

So your health was improving at this stage, then. Did you have any serious illnesses from then on?

JRS:

I had dysentery there and I they found I was a carrier of dysentery. They took us off the work project for a while. And they segregated us. Then they found there was too many -- quite

frankly some of the fellows that were in there didn't have [dysentery] -- but we were switching stools to those guys that didn't, to get off the winter work projects. Then they found there was too many off sick and they kicked us all back out to work again.

I should have mentioned that back in Hong Kong I was blind for 21 days; after I had the pellagra and this green stuff I went totally blind. I couldn't see the doctor, I could hear him and see a shadow, and gradually my eyesight came back after about three weeks. I was totally blind, couldn't see a thing.

CGR:

That must have been scary.

JRS:

It was scary. But don't forget we already had a lot go blind in Hong Kong in the prisoner of war camp. They never got their sight back and they are in the CNIB today. Gomaine [?], Johnny [John W.] Chatwell, Alf [David A.] Jamieson, for a few of them. I forgot to mention it because I often thought of it, because I go to an eye specialist once a year and I said, "You know, it's a miracle because I was totally blind." Gradually it came back. But I think the milk, the thiamine shot, and the egg I got helped everything. I always thank Dr. Banfill for that, because Dr. Banfill was looking after me then.

CGR:

Where did the eggs come from? How did they get eggs?

JRS:

The officers were getting paid, I think it was $60 a month. They pooled it and some of that money did go for the sick, and

they bought eggs outside from the civilians when they were permitted. At high prices. But this is it, because I often wondered where did the milk [come from] -- it was pure from the bottle -- and it was an egg and I remember getting the thiamine shots. But the second shot made you -- but it was doing me a lot of good too -- but it made you hungry as the devil. That's one thing I'll remember about that.

CGR:

Was there any interest in sex while you were in the camp?

JRS:

None whatsoever. Not a thing. When I tell people I slept with my buddy, they thought we were a bunch of homosexuals. I said, "we only got one blanket and the winter's were so severe you slept with all your clothes on, you shared your blanket and his blanket to keep the body heat."

And you shared the lice, because I never had bed bugs in our camp in Japan but we sure as hell had the lice, and they used to get under your arms and we used to sit up there at night cracking them. One guy was actually eaten alive with bloody lice, you know. His skin was just covered in welts from the lice. But they gave you a day off for delousing and bath, once a month. But then when you went in for the bath they kicked you out in the cold weather and you put your clothes back on after they were deloused, and they were damp. Some of the fellows took pneumonia.

CGR:

Excuse me, what did you say his skin was covered with?

JRS:

Just welts where the lice had eaten all over him. All down his body.

CGR:

Did you lose a lot of weight?

JRS:

Yeah. Do you want to see a picture of me while I was a prisoner up there?

CGR:

Very much. So you were down to 90 pounds. And your normal weight would have been...?

JRS:

About 160.

CGR:

About 160, yes. And you were number 103.

JRS:

Hyako-son, yes.

CGR:

Hyako-son?.

JRS:

Hyako-son. Incidentally, that was in the war museum. I just got them back, they had them on display in Ottawa. Do you want to borrow them?

CGR:

If I could, yes. I was going to ask.

JRS:

Make sure I get them back because it's the only one I got.

CGR:

Oh, absolutely.

JRS:

I've got them identified in here. Sid Street - oh, I put my name on there so I'd get them back.

CGR:

You mentioned that you were beaten up a few times. Tell me, what kind of beating up is this.

JRS:

Well, there was two kinds. You see the guards took us to work, and then we were turned to the foremen. Now, these foremen were Japanese, either Japanese soldiers, navy, or air force, who had been wounded and brought back to Japan wounded, and they were put in charge of the prisoners of war. They had a hate on for prisoners of war because they figured we were the enemy and they were wounded because of us, you see. And they were in charge of us when we got out there. It was because you weren't going fast enough. Because you got this everyday where, "Speedo, speedo!" and as much as you explained to them that, as we say in Japanese "messi [???]", "little to eat, hard to work," "messi topson [??]", we work harder. They say, "Oh, messi topson all the time". Like it was, hell, we were starving all the time until we got onto the unloading of food ships, I'll tell you. I bloody well made up for it. But this was theirs. And they'd beaten the hell out of them. As a result some of my good friends were actually beaten to death on the job, Torontonians. Because we went by name like, Street Stroud, Snedden the Steel. As a matter of fact I got [a list of] all the deaths, here, of our camp. I think I sent Kenny Cambon a copy of the people that died in our

camp, and what they died of. We had some that were executed. Well, not executed, you probably heard of whatever....

CGR:

Tell me about Christmas. Was Christmas something that got celebrated in anyway at all?

JRS:

Well, the first Christmas we had, of course, was 1943. I know we didn't work on Christmas. I'm not sure the dates of the parcels. We were pretty....that winter killed the hell out of a lot of us, you know, the hard work, little clothing, cold all the time. But I do remember New Year's Eve, because the hut next to us collapsed and this guy Jack Burton can fill you in on that, because he was in the hut when one of the guys was on top of him and got a part of the scaffolding right into him. Jack was right underneath it. I think we lost about 18 prisoners on that crunch. Because the heavy snow, we had a big snowstorm in Niigata, Japan, and as a result the building collapsed. We were right in the next building.

CGR:

Yes, I think Walter Jenkins was in the building that collapsed.

JRS:

Well, Jenkins was and so was this Jack Burton. This Jack Burton that is on that list there.

But we did get two Red Cross parcels in Japan but they were pilfered when we got them. We divided one amongst four people, I remember.

Another incident: I came in off work one night and the

Japanese called me over by the tap there and he was cursing the American soap, and the silly ass was trying to wash clothes with a bar of Kraft cheese that he had stolen out of a Red Cross parcel, you know. Well, I'll tell you, I quickly got him some soap and swapped him for the American....I said, "this is Canadian soap here, I'll take the American soap." I had smuggled in some soap in the camp. As a result I washed that God damn cheese off and it was cooked up and put in the rice, I'll tell you.

But the silly buggers, they were...and another instance I'll always remember too, the Japanese were stealing the chocolate out of the Red Cross parcels, and they were cooking it up and putting chocolate sauce on their rice. We got a couple of dysentery stools and mixed it in with their chocolate sauce, and they all got dysentery and they never touched a chocolate again! They believed they just caught the dysentery from them, but we had put live stools in that God damn chocolate. Imagine them, they were enjoying their chocolate with the live dysentery stools. If we'd ever been found, we would have been beheaded.

CGR:

Yes, I'm sure.

JRS:

But, no, I can't say that there was anything special about Christmasses. There is one thing, though, and I'm trying to get this from Ted Barlow, there was a Japanese commandant in the camp for a short period, and rations went up and [John L.] Varley tells me that he used to come around looking in the window and see oh, we were enjoying more rice, you know, more food, and we were smiling again, and he was happy. But Varley tells me that

he used three month's rations in about two weeks, and gave it out to the prisoners and he was relieved and taken away.

Varley tells me he was there, he got all the God darn supplies out of the locked storage area, and started feeding the prisoners, and he was relieved within three months. That was one time, in the whole time, and the only time in Japan that they fed us good in camp. He was relieved, and he was so happy that we were happy.

Because the first bastard that we got in the camp commandant, he told us that we were nothing but [scum] -- that we owed our lives to the Emperor, and that some of us may be permitted to go home when Japan won the war. That bastard they got after because he was a sadistic bastard and he beat a lot of prisoners up -- the sick ones too. Not only the ones that were working but the sick ones too. As a matter of fact when he was talking to us somebody twitched, and he ran down there and beat the hell right out of him while we were standing there. This is the speech we were getting just after we arrived in Niigata, Japan.

CGR:

Were there any bad apples in the camp?

JRS:

You mean our own men?

CGR:

Yes. I'm not particularly asking you to name anybody, but were there?

JRS:

No, not really, not really. Some people had allegations about the orderlies, but myself, I found that when I did go for

treatment they were good. Because my knee caps were bothering me, and I'd come in off work, I wasn't looking to be excused from work because your rations were cut down when you didn't work, the sick. But they heated bricks up and put them on my knee. I used to get this treatment when I came off work and right in the knee caps, like arthritis. I know they give them...I found them very good. Although I didn't go in there too often. The only time I had anything to do with the sick bay was when we were tested for dysentery and we were isolated and then we were put back. But on the whole, no, I'd say no. Canadians and Americans got along very good together, very good together.

CGR:

Yes, we're not terribly different.

JRS:

We didn't get along with the British in Hong Kong, I'll tell you. We were fighting like hell. No wonder the Japs moved them off by themselves. But on the whole, no, I'd say not, I found no bad apples. We argued at times. We were all hungry. Tempers would flare at times then it would work, but on the whole, I'd say no. Of course, I was an easy-going guy. I never had any trouble. I think on the whole we got along damn good together, considering we were all in the same boat, starving, and doing without.

CGR:

How did people seem to cope with this experience? Were there people who had difficulty coping?

JRS:

Yes. I think that people that had difficulty coping were

those that were married and had families. They were worrying how their wives were making out and this. I was single and a young, fiery guy then, didn't care a shit about tomorrow. It was today that mattered, I never worried about tomorrow. But those that were married and still had pictures of their loved ones, they're the ones that found it a little difficult. They were a little older and had families. These were the ones that I found much so, because I used to try and cheer them up. I'd say, "Well, look it, regardless of how the news sounds we're going to....there is no bloody way Japan's going to win this war. Just survive today and you'll be out tomorrow."

I had one guy, Mel [Melbourne J.J.] Carter, and I'll always remember him, he's still alive here, coming in after working all day -- he'd given up, he had sores all over his hands, bandaged up and he wouldn't eat. We used to go, and I remember doing it myself, feeding him like a little baby with a spoon after coming in, after doing 14 hours work. He survived and he got home, you know. I always think of that guy; he had given up, actually. But I had just a little talk to him. And false rumors we gave him, you know, we heard the big sea battle and the Americans had knocked the shit out of the Japanese and the Japanese fled the scene and lost "X" aircraft carriers and so forth.

These shit-house rumors used to help these fellows. That was as good as food, you know, to them. The other time when the Japanese finally released the Red Cross parcels to us, you know. They did release mail while we were in Japan, although some of the stuff was missing.

CGR:

Was there any suicide that you were aware of?

JRS:

It wasn't suicide but some of them deliberately threw themselves off the ramps where the coal cars were going around. Or threw their hand in, and it just took their fingers right off. Some threw themselves over because they couldn't cope with the work and it was too heavy. You see, they had one-man and two-man cars. The two-man cars were really tough. And then Japanese put on and say, "Oh, they are only one man." The poor buggers that was pushing them. We knew the good easy cars to push up on them tracks, and the tough ones, and we'd run like hell to grab an easy car. But the poor bugger that was a little slow got the, what should have been a two-man, and he couldn't cope and they just threw themselves off or threw their hands in. And then, of course, there was....

CGR:

To deliberately injure themselves to get off work.

JRS:

Deliberately injure themselves, so they could get off work. They couldn't cope, and there is nothing wrong with it, but they had enough guts to stick their hand in there or throw themselves off. They didn't kill themselves but they were injured. But to throw their hands in that thing, Jesus Christ! that just took their fingers right off them. Then, of course, morale didn't help us when that guy Mortimer, he was accused of stealing a can of salmon, I believe it was. They found an empty underneath his boards of his bunk and they accused him, although it was still

debatable whether it was him. What they did was tie him to a stake out in front of our camp in the middle of winter and just with his, I think he had just the Japanese pants on, but they took his shirt and everything and he literally died of gangrene. When they brought him they used to bring him into the washroom. I remember seeing him there, his hands were all swelling up, his legs were all swollen, and he had gangrene. It was too late to do anything for him.

Then there was an American. He was the nicest guy, but he was a dingy. He really was. I got his name on that list. He literally walked out of camp one night. He didn't escape! He used to be at work singing away, you know. The Japanese used to go "Dingy." They knew he was. But he'd sing away, beat him up he'd sing. He walked out of the camp one night and they accused him of escaping and they put him in the jail downtown and according to the report I got there he was executed when the war was over. He got literally killed.

That happened to a camp up, I think it was fifty miles away, they had all the American air force guys that were shot down on bombing raids over Tokyo. We used to see them shooting. You see, we were up half the night when an air raid shelter, when the B-29 Bombers were going over. We used to see and the Japanese aircraft carriers couldn't miss because they kept the same formation and they were shooting down planes. But they kept the...when the war was over they took those fellows out and used them for bayonet practice -- murdered them, when the war was over.

But we never did get in contact with them because they were

50 miles from our camp, a special camp for American pilots.

CGR:

What in your opinion was the worst part of this whole experience?

JRS:

The worst thing was prolonged hunger, continual hunger. That was number one. That was...food was in our thoughts from shortly after being prisoner of war till we were released: food, number one. I'll tell you in my camp, most of our -- it wasn't women. It was just to feel strong and well again, you know; you were weak, anybody could blow on you and you'd fall down. I think this was a lot of it. My craving, when I got out, I loved a big quart of ice cream and also cheese. That was two things I wouldn't....Some said steak -- I was thinking of cheese, milk, and ice cream. When I got liberated I was in San Francisco, I bought about four packages of Kraft cheese and Christ! did I ever get bunged up. That was my craving. I had ice cream, all kinds of ice cream, on liberation. All the way from Yokohama, you know. But these were the cravings. Women were the last thing, I think, on everybody's mind. Food was number one, I'm sure everybody would say that. Some of them may have been craving to get back to their wives and kids, but Christ! food was on our minds. And a beer -- I used to say "Geez, wouldn't it be nice to go in that old hotel in Toronto and just have a cold one."

CGR:

Anything else you can think of? Particularly anything of a medical nature in a broad sense?

JRS:

Well, obviously we were lacking medicines, bandages. These coal sores were all bloody bandages, and they were boiling them and putting them back on patients there. It wasn't the orderlies' or the doctors' faults, they just didn't have the bloody medicines -- the Japs stole all our medicine away from them. I'm sure Kay Christie could verify that often at Bowen Road. The same was in the prisoner of war camp in North Point, and Sham Shui Po, and in Japan, we lacked medicine.

When we broke out, for instance, I had loose stools the whole time I was a prisoner of war. When I got beat up, I literally shit myself. The Japanese beat me up one day and I just shit myself, I had no control. You had no toilet paper and here you are with shitty pants, you had no change of clothing. You did the best you could to clean them out and go back to work. This was a filthy thing you had to live through the whole war. You stunk to high heaven, every prisoner did. Because we had no change of clean clothing.

CGR:

How have you been since the war?

JRS:

Well, I had a few setbacks when I came back. I put on weight, obviously, like everybody else. My feet were bothering me quite a bit. My legs, my muscles, I had muscle spasms and they just...from the hard work I suppose. I had a lot of diarrhea when I came home. Now, when we came to Bowen Road Hospital we had....I had tests all the way home but we had third tests and they found a number of worms in me, and I was on a three-day

medication. I think it was like Epsom salts they gave us. It would clear you, you didn't have any solid food for three days. We got all kinds of worms then. As you are aware, we found some, I remember said Strongyloidiasis. They had that test and there was over 100 had various kinds of worms in their systems. Still got them and they are now treated. Did you see the report on that?

CGR:

Yes, yes, I did.

JRS:

I've got it here because I was the go-between, between the department and the veterans organization. I got them all. There was a hundred -- what did they call it -- what the hell's the name now -- besides Strongyloidiasis, we had four cases.

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