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Experiences as a Prisoner-of-War in the Far East

Interviewed by

Charles G. Roland, MD

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Hannah Chair for the History of Medicine

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Charles G. Roland, MD:

Perhaps you would begin. This is now on. Would you just tell me where and when you were born, and a bit about your early life -- where you were educated, how much education you had, how you came to go into the service.

Joseph John Duguay:

Well, I was born in Shippegan [New Brunswick] in 1922, the 10th of July. I was raised on the farm. My schooling was quite brief because it just happened that my school days began during the depression days. Finally, we had to leave the farm and move away from there because our products couldn't be sold any more. Couldn't sell it.

So we moved to the city. And there we had a pretty hard time during the depression days. I continued my schooling in Atholville, New Brunswick. There I was educated by the nuns. All I had the chance to do was grade 8.

Then, when the war began, there wasn't much else to do but to join the army because there was no work. We had a hard time to make ends meet. Finally I decided to join the army even if my parents weren't pleased, I joined it anyway. After awhile we started to move around.

C.G.R.:

Now, did you go straight into the Royal Rifles?

J.J.D.:

First of all I was in the North Shore Regiment. This was only temporarily. After that, when I found out I would never be sent overseas to the front, I changed my mind and during noon

lunch I left and went to Matapedia and joined the Royal Rifles. Then we slept in Matapedia and we were trained to Valcartier camp in Quebec.

After awhile we were a traveling regiment, we used to think we were a traveling regiment. We went all over the place, to Sussex, New Brunswick, and we were a little while in St. John, New Brunswick, and Valcartier and all them. And finally we were told, well, we would be going to Newfoundland.

Then in the fall, I can't remember the date exactly, but I do know it was in the fall, we left for Newfoundland. And there on the Caribou we had the first big experience of war in our lives, because we had a heck of a storm and we had to turn back instead of going to Port aux Basques, we managed (how do they call that place again? I can't remember the place exactly but I might think of it later).

There I was in D Company. And Captain Price, my captain, found out, because my father had worked for them in the early days, the early years, he was a ledgerman and used to work for the Price Brothers, and he found out that I was a musician. So they took me out of D Company and they shipped me to Gander Airport. There I was transferred, and that happened to be headquarters, they used to call it the Intelligence at that time. And then I joined the band, the regimental band.

C.G.R.:

What did you play?

J.J.D.:

Well, I started off with a baritone that I used to play with

the Boy Scouts when I first started. Then afterwards I turned to the trumpets.

We had kind of a rough time over there. There was no place to go. There was only twelve houses and it was out of bounds for us -- it was only for the officers. But every two weeks we had a little sojourn in Grand Falls, one of the big cities in Newfoundland. It had a pulp mill there and we used to have a lot of fun every two weeks, when we'd go -- and to Bishop Falls.

I played hockey for the army, for the Royal Rifles. And it gave me a chance to visit Newfoundland a bit more. Corner Brook and places like that.

Finally we were sent to St. John's, Newfoundland. There, well it was a bigger city, quite cold. We could hardly get in the water even in July because it was freezing cold there all the time. I met a girl there and we passed a bit of time together while I was there.

But finally I was sent back to Canada on the Canadiana. We had a heck of a good trip there again because we got nice waters. And we arrived in Quebec City just at the beginning of night, and it was really a sight to see. The Chateau Frontenac all lighted up and it was really beautiful.

Then we went back to Valcartier again; from then on, we started to think about going overseas. Not us, but actually the government was planning that to send us overseas. And first of all we had a call that we had to pack up and be ready on a Sunday morning to leave for overseas. We didn't know where but finally we took the train on a Sunday afternoon in Valcartier. We started to move and all of a sudden we were in Vancouver.

From there we boarded the S Awatea. We took off and stopped in the Hawaiian Islands at Honolulu. And from there on we went to the Philippine Islands, to Manila, and then finally to Hong Kong. And that's where the fun begins.

From then on we were in Kowloon Barracks. It was a beautiful city.

C.G.R.:

Was that Sham Shui Po?

J.J.D.:

Sham Shui Po camp in Kowloon, they called it Sham Shui Po. Life was pretty nice and easy there -- weather was terrific. Sometimes too hot for our type of weather. And routine all the time, until finally we were told on a Sunday afternoon that we were at war, that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. If I remember it correctly, it was the 7th or something like that, December 7th.

C.G.R.:

Yes, right.

J.J.D.:

December 7th. It was in 1941. We took off and I was stationed in Stoney Gap. My job as an orderly started there. My experience as an orderly, we hadn't had much training with the regiment but I had a bit of training with the Boy Scouts, when I was in the Boy Scouts, and that helped an awful lot.

C.G.R.:

In first-aid?

J.J.D.:

In first-aid, yes. I had the St. John's Ambulance. In the

Boy Scouts we had to learn that. After awhile we worked more and then hell started and we didn't have too much food to eat. When we could get some we were very happy.

We lost everything we had at our barracks because we never had a chance to come back. All our personal belongings and things -- we lost everything there. After that, well we fought on, and I got the job of being the night observer. Every now and then I had to start the generator and start a big spotlight on shore to see if the Japanese was not landing. A funny job for an orderly or a stretcher-bearer, which I was. I was doing the job, anyway, and I was with a fellow named Norman Cormier [E30346, RRC, Rfn.]. We used to work together at night and we used to start with the generator and and spot the shore to see if there was no landing.

We had a big 12-inch cannon just on top of our heads, and when that thing went off, boy! everything broke, even the glass on my watch broke. With Japanese ships around and they were trying to get closer to fire at us, and then finally they opened up the big 12-inch gun and they pushed them away.

Finally, from then on we went into hell -- not enough men trained, the people walking along with grenades by the rings, and couldn't fire a rifle, especially the Hong Kong Volunteers [Hong Kong Volunteer Defense Corps]. They were not trained at all. They were government secretaries, or they had big jobs like manager of this and manager of that, and didn't know too much about how to fire arms or bayonet, the couldn't even put it on.

So actually the war was like that for us. It was something that had not been planned properly. Secondly, we had not the

training for it. Thirdly, we should never have been sent there at all. But we were there so we had to do the best of it. All we had in mind was to get our big Xmas dinner that they had promised us. And the boat was sank between Honolulu and the Philippines -- we never saw any big turkey they had promised us for Christmas.

Anyway, things went on from bad to worse. We knew we were losing ground and we didn't have one plane to help us. We didn't have any ammunition, we had nothing to defend ourselves with except the rifle and the bayonet and 50 rounds of ammunition. They kept all the ammunition for the machine guns. You got 50 rounds and that was about the end of it.

So finally, on Christmas day, we surrendered to the Japanese. I was with a group, there were five of us. The only names that I can remember is there was a fellow named Cronin [John J. Cronin, E30104, RRC, Sgt.], a fellow named Cole [Lewis A. Cole, E30557, RRC, or Lloyd Kerr Cole, E30529, RRC, Rfn.], I think it was Dick Cole, and Ken Barnes [Kenneth R. Barnes, E30117, RRC, Rfn., died 4 February 1944]. There was another man with us and I don't remember his name. And two of them was wounded. I used to look after them; being a stretcher-bearer I still had my pouch.

So we hid in the bush and finally we were the last persons to be taken prisoner. We were taken on New Year's Day.

C.G.R.:

Oh really.

J.J.D.:

Yes. There was five of us and we were the last to be taken prisoner.

C.G.R.:

And where were you at this time?

J.J.D.:

I don't even know. We were in the hills somewhere on the island of Hong Kong, but not exactly, because we traveled only at night then, and there was only five of us, we didn't have a chance to attack anybody. We kept out of sight as much as possible. Food was hard to get -- they used to watch the Chinese and they used to go and raid our pillboxes -- there was food there. And I don't think they asked. But we grabbed them and we took the food from them, and that's what kept us alive. But we were five days, six days without drinking.

Then during the night, early in the morning, we got to a reservoir and we were so thirsty. There was bodies floating all over the place. We just pushed them aside and just dug our face in the water and drank there until we couldn't fill ourselves anymore, we were so full. Then we started to walk.

Then I decided that we will not roam at night anymore, because those two fellows wounded was getting infections. Then we started to walk, we threw our rifles away and we started to walk during the day and we kept on walking. And finally we got to another small reservoir. There was a lot of Japanese there and they were swimming in the reservoir. So actually we were taken prisoners that day and we found out it was the first of January, it was New Year's Day. Then we were put on a truck and taken to the North Point Camp.

Then it all started there. I became an orderly, regularly in a kind of a hospital, if you can call it a hospital. The patients were sleeping with cotton blankets on concrete floors. No sanitation, nothing, no medicine, no nothing. They started to get diarrhea, we had a heck of a job with diarrhea for awhile.

Then we escaped, probably, death, Manny Hickey and I [Joseph S. Hickey, E30516, RRC, Rfn.; or Paul J. H. Hickey, E30514, RRC, Rfn.; or William J. Hickie, E30331, RRC, Rfn.]. There was five men that had planned to escape. So that if we stay here and they escape we will be shot because we're in charge of a hospital. So we managed to go and get some hot water from the kitchen to make ourselves an alibi and when we came back the guys were gone.

C.G.R.:

They were escaping from the hospital.

J.J.D.:

From the hospital, they made a hole in the back of the hospital and they escaped from the hospital. Well, we never heard from them afterwards, and we never saw them again. So there was a big question if they are alive actually. There was not much chance of them hiding on an island or on the Chinese coast, the Japanese were occupying the place and it was almost suicide to do that. Anybody wants to try it, and they did. Then the Japanese, we had a run-in with them, and we told them we were in the kitchen at the time. Wilfy and I, we had our alibi certified and we managed to get out of it -- probably it would be a beating, and probably shot. It was more or less aiding, helping somebody to get away.

Some folks have been for a long time trying to forget too.

C.G.R.:

Of course. Please go ahead; you were talking about being at North Point.

J.J.D.:

OK. Then it's no use to go into all the detail. After awhile, finally they decided to send us back to Sham Shui Po.

C.G.R.:

Now, excuse me, before we go to Sham Shui Po, I know we don't have time for all the details but I would be grateful for anything you can tell me about the hospital. You've mentioned a bit about how crude it was, but anything else that comes to mind -- who are the doctors, was it Dr. Banfill [Capt. S. Martin Banfill, RCAMC, RRC], was he there?

J.J.D.:

No, Dr. Banfill was in the MI room [Medical Inspection Room], and apparently he used to come and make his rounds in the hospital but he was not in the hospital all the time. We were in the hospital all the time, but he must have come mostly at nights, because lots of the men the doc wanted to work nights they were kind of scared -- there was rats all over the place. We were right on the waterfront and I worked an awful lot of nights, long long hours, 10, 18, sometimes 20 hours a day.

Actually, the hospital conditions was something out of humanity. Impossible to help people or treat them, they were so sick they couldn't even get up. But we didn't have anything else to do, we didn't have any beds, we didn't have any blankets, just a tiny little gray cotton blanket that we used to put on the

ground. We had no pillows, nothing like that. They used to take their pants and put it underneath their heads for a pillow. Well, actually, ourselves, we did the best we could. We worked long hours and tried to do the best we could to help them. But like I said awhile ago, we were not trained, we were not doctors, we were just fellows that had been put there because we were bandsmen.

We went through that, like I said, in conditions that were not normal for any civilization even if it's the worst on earth today, there still is a lot of people having a hard time. But actually at least they have the medicine, and they have aid from other countries, they can get through with them, they know they are not prisoners, that's one thing. And when you don't know what's going to happen tomorrow, and you don't know if you're going to be shot, you don't know if you are going to live one month, two months, or maybe longer than that....

Well, for my part, I don't know why, I never thought about it. Well I thought....[pause]

C.G.R.:

Do you want to stop for a minute?

J.J.D.:

Well, I never thought about my own health. All I thought about was the others. Went through it, and then we had too much to....

C.G.R.:

When you went to Sham Shui Po, you carried right on with the orderly work, did you?

J.J.D.:

Well, that's where the big thing began. They put us on a scow at about 2 o'clock in the morning, because they could not take us out during the day on the Star Ferries, those big things that they had there, flat boats to transfer the people working in Hong Kong or Kowloon. So at 3 o'clock or 2 o'clock in the morning we were taken out of bed, if you want to call it a bed, and then they put us on that flat boat and we went across to Sham Shui Po.

When we got there, Dr. Banfill called me and said, "I want you to prepare an isolation camp because we have a real bad case of diphtheria on our hands." Holy gosh, diphtheria, well I knew that it was really a bad disease, dangerous and contagious. So he said, "Pick somebody to go with you and open up a camp." So I picked up a fellow named Pat Poirier [Joseph P. Poirier, E30271, RRC, Rfn.]. He was an orderly too, he was a drummer. We went in those barracks, and barricaded it, and made a sign for "Out of Bounds," and we started to prepare beds. When we got over there, well, we had the army beds and we managed to get all the sick people on those beds.

C.G.R.:

Now excuse me, was this in the Jubilee Building?

J.J.D.:

No, no.

C.G.R.:

That was later.

J.J.D.:

That was later. The Jubilee Building came after that.

C.G.R.:

OK. Fine.

J.J.D.:

Then they were coming, Captain Banfill, Dr. Banfill used to check the men one by one as they went through and then, whoever had it [diphtheria], he'll send them to our camp. Then we put them down there. So actually we're not prepared for that too much. We had nothing -- no antitoxin, nothing to help them in any way. So Dr. Banfill told us, he said, "Just take potassium permanganate, with a gauze, and just put that over your mouth." A heck of a protection for diphtheria, but anyway....Then I remember when I went to school, I was inoculated for diphtheria, and probably that's what helped me go through it, and Pat had been inoculated too, and everyone I put on the staff to work for the fellows with diphtheria, I made sure that they had been inoculated before, because it was just like putting fat in a fire. And we had quite a job! We used to lose from eight to ten men every day, every day, every day.

Then the Japanese called us out, I remember it was Major Crawford [Major John N.B. Crawford, RCAMC, senior Canadian medical officer at Hong Kong] then, and we were called on parade and the Japanese, I remember it was Dr. Saito [Capt. SAITO Shunkichi, IJA medical corps], with the interpreter.

The interpreter was, I can say, a very good friend of mine because we used to talk together. Every day he used to come and see me because he came from New York, he had a son playing baseball for the New York Yankees at the time. We used to talk a

lot about sports.

They called us on parade and Saito had a piece of water hose about that long [ca 18 inches] in his hand, and he told the interpreter to tell us that we were killing our own men. So, after he had said that, he told the interpreter again, he said, "If you think if you're doing your job, take one step forward and we'll kill you." So Major Crawford shouted, "I don't want one man to move." He said, "That's an order." So we didn't move, but a fellow named Varley [John L. Varley, B24237, RRC, Rfn.] he stepped up.

So I started an argument with the interpreter and Dr. Saito came to me and he hit me across the face here with his water hose. I didn't go down, I stayed up. I got a headache for awhile. And finally they took Varley away. We said, well, maybe we may have seen the last of him. Although he was not a bandsman he came to give us a hand just the same. We used to appreciate it a lot. And finally, two or three days later, Varley arrived with a big smile and he said, so we all rushed him and ask him what happened. Oh he said, "They told me I was a very brave man and they gave me an awful lot of cigarettes." So he got a medal for that, distinguished order or distinguished service medal, something like that.

C.G.R.:

Do you think he really was brave? Somebody has suggested that he perhaps just didn't hear the order and he stepped out just by mistake. Do you have any....?

J.J.D.:

Well, Varley was a funny man. He, like you said, he never

thought what would happen, he would do things just on the impulse. And when Dr. Crawford said, "Do not move," he stepped out. Probably he never heard him, but I never could get it out of him that he had not heard him. But I knew that Varley was like that, he'd go an awful lot on impulses. Probably it just happened automatically. We didn't want to move. And the reason for that, we said by gosh if we move here and we are beaten or something like that, whose going to look after the sick people? So actually it was probably a good move when everybody stood quiet.

After awhile, well, they didn't give us much more, we didn't get more medicine, we didn't get better treatment, people kept dying just the same. So at the end of all that, I do not remember for sure if they got antitoxin for the sick, but finally it stopped altogether. So I do not remember.

I never gave an inoculation myself for diphtheria, I gave an awful lot to patients therefore when we had, we used to call it vitamin B2 thiamine, and most of the time they used to come, at that time I was in charge of the MI room. Every day, well, I used to have an awful lot of people coming through for inoculations or taking vitamins by mouth. Some of them was so thin you couldn't find enough flesh on them to stick a needle in, so we used to give it to them by mouth, you see, with just an eye-dropper.

Then finally they took that camp, after the diphtheria crisis, they opened the administration building. It was a big building that used to be for officers and you called it awhile

ago...?

C.G.R.:

Jubilee.

J.J.D.:

Jubilee Building. Then the hospital was put in there, and there was four or five floors in there. Dr. Banfill, I used to see almost every day. And we had categories, we had the floors separated, and I was on number 2 floor, something like that, I think I was on number 2 floor. And that fellow Drover [Archibald F. Drover, E30730, RRC, Rfn.] was on another floor, and another chap, I don't remember the name but....

C.G.R.:

Squires, do you remember Squires? [Arthur R. Squires, K80593, HQ, "C" Force, Sigmn.]

J.J.D.:

Well, Squires was at the end. Oh yes, that was just before I left for Japan. When we went to the Jubilee building, then after that they organized a group. There was Squires, and there was an English fellow, oh my gosh what is his name now, and [Fred] Drover and all them, they were not with the first bunch of orderlies, they just came after. Claricoates [Ronald Claricoates, E30161, RRC, Rfn.].

C.G.R.:

Oh, I've interviewed him.

J.J.D.:

Yes, Claricoates.

C.G.R.:

Ron Claricoates.

J.J.D.:

Yes, Claricoates, and [Fred] Drover, that was orderlies that came after, at the Jubilee building, and they were put in charge of floors.

There we had, it was a bit better. Fellows just organized themselves with cans and made themselves little heaters, and they could heat water. They used to make little heaters. Sometimes they would take bread and let it dry and make a little charcoal of fire when we could get a charcoal of fire and kind of burn that bread and used to make ourselves some kind of a brew just like coffee, you know. I remember when I was young they used to burn bread and make coffee with that. We used to call it coffee but actually it was burnt bread. And it gave us something to drink because food was scarce.

But in the Sham Shui Po Camp, we had better treatment there. First of all, we had beds, and we didn't have more food but actually we had it regularly because it was well organized, well organized under the circumstances. And I organized a softball team.

C.G.R.:

Were you in charge of the orderlies there?

J.J.D.:

Well, I was in charge of <u>my</u> shift.

C.G.R.:

Of your shift.

J.J.D.:

But nobody was in charge of the orderlies. We were just

working there but when it was my shift I was in charge.

C.G.R.:

I see. And in the Jubilee building, now you said you think you were on the second floor.

J.J.D.:

I think I was on the second floor, then I was in charge of that floor.

C.G.R.:

And what kinds of diseases were you looking at? Were they divided by diseases?

J.J.D.:

They were divided by, like the first stages would be on one floor, then after they would get better and they would put them on the second floor to make room for others, it was just like convalescence.

C.G.R.:

Convalescence, oh yes, I see.

J.J.D.:

Yes, just like convalescence. On my floor, well, I had the bad cases, I stayed in diphtheria all the time until it cleared completely, which I kept going over there. And there was something that just doesn't figure. I met a few of the Hong Kong boys and they told me about a fellow name of Clapperton [Albert Clapperton, E30266, RRC, Rfn., died 5 November 1942 of faucial diphtheria], that he had died in the Jubilee building and I'm positive he didn't die in the Jubilee building because, my goodness, I used to work on this shift when Albert Clapperton was in there. But I was working days, I was working days at that

time. One night, a fellow here from the Winnipeg Grenadiers, he put a set of stethoscopes around his neck and he went to the guy and -- Clapperton was a very big man -- and put on those stethoscopes and he checked him and he said, "I don't think he'll pass the night." He was not a doctor or anything, he just acted like one. Next morning Clapperton was dead.

C.G.R.:

That's strange, isn't it?

J.J.D.:

Yes. I would have stopped him if I had known. And he should have been stopped, the guys were in bad shape then, you must never do a thing like that. So actually we, I can't remember his name; he won't help, he never was an orderly again.

Actually, the fellows that really did a big job there in my time there that I can remember, was like Pat Poirier, Manny Hickey, those are the three of us like, that I remember that had really worked a lot for the sick. And then afterwards it was just, well, if the fellow couldn't stand it anymore they put enough blood in, but we kept going all the time, we never stopped. Actually, like I said, in diphtheria, well Pat Poirier and I were the two, we were the most vulnerable for the disease because we were with them all the time, all the time too, all the diphtheria what we have there.

C.G.R.:

At this time, when you were looking after the diphtheria patients, can you describe for me an ordinary day? I mean, what kinds of things would you have been doing? How did you look

after the diphtheria patients? What problems were you looking after?

J.J.D.:

Well it wasn't much that we could do, but we used to make them gargle as often as possible, and kept a gauze over their mouth so they wouldn't cough on somebody else.

C.G.R.:

Like a mask.

J.J.D.:

Yes, like a mask but it was just a little gauze, you know, two little things around the ears. Well, you've seen the doctors operating like that, you should know that, because you're a doctor. And we tried to encourage them as much as possible, although sometimes it was very pitiful because they'd grab your arm and say, OK. if you ever get out of here would you tell my mother this? or will you tell my wife this? or my family this? and all that. It was, you know, you had to have darn good character to accept the role, because it was hard on you too. You had to keep that in mind, we were working under really bad conditions, and still had to support all that.

A lot of them had to quit because they couldn't take it. Well, actually, probably nerves or different things. Probably some people softer than others. It was hard work, it was hard work under the circumstances. Of course, during the prisoner of war days my best sojourn was in Sham Shui Po camp. Outside of that, well then, after that we were kept with a bag of cement on our shoulder, they made us run around like a track, and the ones most fit, we were shipped to Japan, working in mines and working

in different manufactures and different places.

C.G.R.:

Where did you go in Japan?

J.J.D.:

Well, my first camp was in Arimasu, that was close to Osaka. We used to take the electric train in the morning and leave and work in the big manufacturers in Osaka. There I worked as a blacksmith, they used to call it, with a big sledge hammer, hitting with a seven, eight, pound sledge hammer, and then having a twelve to fourteen pound snubber, where they used to model what we were doing. We were doing locomotives for mines.

From Arimasu, then we were put up on a train, they blindfolded us, and we drove all night and the next day we were in Toyama. So we started to work in a place there in Toyama, at the same job. Always in manufacturing. I never worked in mines, always in manufacturing. Again, at this time I had a better job. It was on boilers for locomotives, but on boilers I didn't have to use a sledge hammer any more, only once in a while. I was a reamer, I was called. You know boilers for the tubes, and I was the man reaming the tubes, and then I learned how to make the reamers and became pretty good at it too.

There, life wasn't too bad as long as you kept your place, and you had to work as much as you could. You didn't want to do too much, but if you didn't make enough, well, then you would be beaten up, so actually we did the best we could, as fast as we could, but not too fast, for we didn't want to fill up the production, we wanted to keep it as low as possible. We didn't

have too much chances when you have a gang of Japanese around you and they would keep on pushing you all the time; you just had to move even if it's not fast, you still have to move just the same.

C.G.R.:

Were the Japanese women working there as well as men?

J.J.D.:

Not too many at my place. There was women all around the place but always outside the wire. They used to be the horses. Those women used to carry bricks on a cart which was balanced, and they had ropes in front and they used to pass it across like that. They were the ones putting all those bricks to the manufacturer.

Then there was another group, they were in the ashes because the Japanese, they pick up every little bit of scrap that they can get. So even after it had gone through the manufacturing they would clean up all the ashes and every little bit of metal that they could find they would pick it up again. Those were the women, after they finished working at four o'clock in the afternoon, they'd go and get the tub of water and put it there and just strip right off and wash themselves right in the middle of the working. There was no secrecy over there, people walked from the street bare naked almost.

C.G.R.:

That raises another question, since we got into that, and that's the whole question of sex. Were there feelings of sexuality?

J.J.D.:

Well actually, the way we were, myself I was 102 pounds and

we were a camp of 6000 people and the heaviest man was 120 pounds, and that guy used to weigh 240 during normal days. We didn't think too much about sexuality there. First of all, OK, it could have happened probably between homosexuals and things like that, but there was no women to tempt us, anyway. For my part I don't remember having suffered too much from that. But I'm talking for myself, not in general.

C.G.R.:

I understand. And seeing these naked women now and again that didn't....?

J.J.D.:

I used to look, but I mean they didn't affect us in any way. Not with the little bit of food we used to eat during the day and hardly, well actually, there must be an awful lot of vitamins in rice because it kept us alive for four years. Of course we didn't have Uncle Ben's rice there, we had the coarse rice, and it was a good thing it was coarse rice, otherwise none of us would be alive today. We'd all be dead.

It must have taken an awful lot of constitution to get through a thing like that. I would think, under normal conditions, maybe we wouldn't have survived. We worked hard, and the only way that we said that we can get out of work is to tough it, and one day it will have to stop. And when it does I will be free again. So actually probably it is the morale that kept us like that more than anything else. But we were motivated anyway.

I never thought of dying, or I never thought of sickness, and I never thought of anything, and my gosh I used to go and

almost drag myself to the hospital and every ten minutes I had to rush because I had dysentery. I was lucky. I never got that yellow fever. A lot of my friends had it. I remember especially a guy, his name was Smith, all of a sudden I find him walking along and sweating so much. I take his temperature, and it was 106. Then I took him in, just borrowed blankets from everybody and roll him in blankets and let him sweat it out. And I think Smith still has the yellow fever, it still comes back to him, he never got rid of it. I haven't seen Jack Smith [perhaps John H. Smith, E30121, RRC, Rfn.] for so long, so I don't know if it still comes back. I remember a fellow named Thompson [seven Thompsons and two Thomsons in "C" Force] that used to get the yellow fever, and holy mackerel, that guy would sweat. You couldn't keep blankets around him.

C.G.R.:

Were you married when you went overseas?

J.J.D.:

No. I was too young.

C.G.R.:

You mentioned this girl in Newfoundland, I thought maybe that was your wife or....

J.J.D.,:

No, no, no, no.

C.G.R.:

Did you do any orderly work in Japan, medical orderly work?

J.J.D.:

No.

C.G.R.:

Were you at Toyama when the war ended?

J.J.D.:

I was in Toyama when the war ended, yes. In Toyama we had, while we were Japan, a couple of Red Cross parcels. And we were really happy to receive that, and we will always be grateful to the Red Cross for that because, after so many years, we could taste something that we were used to, like that meat, and even if I don't eat sweets at all, a darn good spoonful of jam was really good, strawberry jam, or a little chunk of chocolate, and things like that. It was really something to us. Well of course, the cigarettes, there was not much in there. Most of the fellows used to smoke and not a lot of them used to trade their cigarettes for food because there was people in there that couldn't get away from the cigarettes. They would sell their food for cigarettes.

C.G.R.:

I've heard of that, yes. It's amazing isn't it?

J.J.D.:

Yes. And then well, you know, among a gang you will always find somebody who was just a tradesman, and the Japanese are awful people for gold. So they used to trade their rings, their watches and things, for cigarettes. Well actually, the cigarettes in Japan, sell almost for nothing, and they used to give so many packages of cigarettes for a ring. So that guy here he was the friendly with the Japanese, so all the fellows who had a ring, or whatever it was in gold, they used to bring it to him. So that guy lived well over there because he was getting an awful

lot of cigarettes from the Japanese for gold. He would give so much to the fellow that had the ring and he would keep the rest. So he didn't run out of food too much. Of course, it was a very good thing for him that he had the idea of doing it and he got the connections, good enough for him. I have nothing against him. I didn't smoke too much.

Once in awhile I used to smoke a cigarette when we got a Christmas parcel. We had no cigarettes, and the fellows used to follow the officers, and the officers were getting paid, and they used to buy cigarettes. They could buy cigarettes, they could buy eggs and things from the Japanese, but in Sham Shui Po, I'm talking about. Not in Toyama. Toyama we had no officers there, just one doctor....

[End of Side 1]

And they would follow the officers and as soon as they threw a butt away, they they would dive at it and try to pick it up, and the lucky fellow was very very happy, big smile on his face. And they used to take, if you want to call it toilet paper, it was a dark brown paper that we used to get from them when we went to the bathroom, to the toilet, and they used that paper to roll their cigarettes in, and put little bits of tobacco, and then they rolled it up, and smoked paper, more or less, than anything else. It was just a little bit of tobacco in that.

We started to work, like I'm talking about Sham Shui Po again, we started to work in Sham Shui Po building an airport, an airport.

C.G.R.:

Oh, Kai Tak?

J.J.D.:

Yes. That again, there, was a big ordeal because everything was done by hand. We had to shovel all the more or less the land that was on top of it, because the airport there before was just a ground thing. So we had to lift them all up with two bamboos and a rice bag, just dump the earth or the dirt in there, and we used to carry it away.

C.G.R.:

Now, you did that?

J.J.D.:

Yes, I did it much because I was considered as a fit man, so they took me off orderly work for awhile to go over there, because there was an awful lot of sick people that used to go over there. And at the same time that somebody was to get sick, well, they used to come and get me to help them.

C.G.R.:

You mean if they got sick at work?

J.J.D.:

Yes. But not sick at work, the Japanese used to, we were just allowed so many sick people in camp, so every day we had to carry people on stretchers to the airport and just put them all on stretchers and leave them there in the sun all day long, just because they would not allow more than so many people in camp. Actually, well, I was sent over there to work and at the same time take care of those fellows, because we didn't have any break there; like there was no unions over there, you didn't have an hour break or an hour and a half break for lunch. We didn't have

any lunch. Once in a while they would bring us a little bowl of sweet soup. I don't know what it was made of but it was sweet. That was very appreciated too, because anything that we could put our hands on to eat was really something. I've seen guys watching the Japanese having their lunch, and as soon as they threw half a potato peel or anything on the ground, the guys would dive there just like animals or vultures, and eat it without cleaning it or anything, just swallowed it like it a [inaudible]. I thought it was horrible. When people are in a stage like that to....There is something that I don't believe a human being can realize -- what it is to be under conditions that you would do anything to survive, anything at all to survive. They gave us food and things, and they would forbid us to eat the bones, so why if it was in what little soup they gave us, they didn't want us to eat the bones -- why, I don't know what type of animal was in there, but we were forbidden to eat the bones. So it was all strange actually. Those people, in those days, they were just like animals anyway.

We had a little dog that used to come and see us everyday, and one day the little dog didn't come. So we waited for awhile and waited for awhile, and finally we asked the Japanese what they had done with the dogs. He said, "Remember when we gave you a little bit of stew, of meat? That was the dog." They killed the dog to eat it.

After awhile we couldn't go back to Toyama again. There in Toyama we worked seven days a week just like any of the other places where we were. And the meals were just like we had before, we had a little bit of rice for breakfast, little bit of

rice at night, when we could light the fire because we had to bring dust, sawdust from the mill nearby where we worked to burn to cook the rice. When there was an earthquake or something like that, and we had money while we were over there, communications used to stop altogether and then we had to walk and carry the sawdust with us at the camp. But when we got there, well, everything had broken down because of the earthquake so we were a couple of days without eating until we could get everything ready again. That happened when we crossed from Hong Kong to, today they call it Formosa, today they call it....

C.G.R.:

Taiwan.

J.J.D.:

Taiwan, Taiwan. Well then we had a big storm and everything washed around the decks so we were a couple of days without eating. That happened when we were working in Osaka, we had a big, big earthquake there, a really big one. The earth was just, we couldn't stand up or anything, the chimney was going like that, and dust and things all over the place. Things like that happened often. They didn't give heck if we died or not, just as long as we worked in the shop, that's all they worried about.

C.G.R.:

What draft did you go on? Do you know which draft? I think there were three.

J.J.D.:

Yes, I was on the second draft.

C.G.R.:

And how did the war end in Toyama?

J.J.D.:

Well I'll tell you, I was coming to that. Finally one day, well it happened at night, if I can remember, we saw a terrific white cloud going up with all kind of colors, just like a rainbow with all kinds of things, and it went up for two days. And we stopped working altogether. Well we felt funny, but my goodness, we must have hit the fuel reserve or something like that. We never thought it would be an atomic bomb. We didn't know anything about that.

We used to steal newspapers from them, and we had a fellow named Freddy John. that guy was born of a Chinese woman and an English man, and he was born Chinese. The Chinese and the Japanese characters are very similar, but not exactly the same, they are similar. When we could steal a newspaper, then he would interpret for us, translate it. And in the camp, we stole a newspaper and the next day we noticed the Japanese were all leaning down in front of the radio (they didn't have any television then). So we said, my gosh the Emperor must be talking. (I cried a lot when he died too, you know!) So we knew by the tradition that when the Emperor was talking they had to kneel down, face down to the earth. You couldn't look up even, even at the radio. And when they finally woke up from that trance, they had an awful long face. So something happened.

Then, in the middle of the distraction, we managed to steal a newspaper from their camp, from their place. We gave it to Freddy John at night and it was around, everybody was on their tatamis, we used to call it tatamis what we stepped on, and he

gave us the news. And he told us what we had seen and we were still seeing was an atomic bomb. Of course we didn't know what an atomic bomb was. Well then he gave us all the details there and he said in real panic like now, and there was possibilities of [affecting us]. Well actually we were 75 miles from that bomb when it fell. We saw it all going up -- it was quite a size.

Then, all of a sudden, trucks started to come in with all kinds of blankets, we had all the blankets we wanted now. We all said, how come now they have blankets for us and they didn't have some while we needed them? Well, actually it was all things the Red Cross had sent them and they had kept them for themselves, and they were afraid now international laws and things would get in there and they were afraid when they started bringing those things in, but we didn't get food. They brought us fish.

Now the doctor, he was an English doctor.

C.G.R.:

Do you remember his name by any chance?

J.J.D.:

Riley.

C.G.R.:

Riley?

J.J.D.:

Yes. He said, "Fellows, I'm going to tell you something. We got fish." He said, "The cook asked me over," and he said, "those fish are not fit to eat, so if you don't want to eat it just say so and we'll not cook them." We were so hungry we said, "Cook it anyway." So they put it in a rice bag, they wouldn't

put the fish in the water, they just put the fish in the rice bag and they just dumped it in the water like that, so the juice would come out. Well now, that fish had so many worms in it and it was moving and that's why Dr. Riley didn't want us to eat it. Anyway, the guys ate it. And they got diarrhea. Oh my goodness. They couldn't make it to, you know, the latrines, we used to call them, and the toilets was pitiful, and it was on the same flood, and it was going down and the fellows was walking there, and they would just let go themselves. And when they would slide right to the latrines, head first, and sometimes feet first, and they'd get up and they were full of all kinds of shit, like you call it in good French or good English. It was an awful mess.

After that, one day we woke up and in front of the camp there was all the rifles, all stacked up like that, and there was two guards around. So the camp commandant walked in and I was lucky, I was the first one to meet him, so I let him have it just on the nose. Then when he walked up, he wouldn't come in the camp any more but before he left, he was bleeding, and said, "The reason why I came here was to tell you that we are going to leave a few, a few guards to protect you from the people," because Toyama had been bombed completely. Nothing left in Toyama. Everything had been bombed, there was nothing left. All you could see was the brick chimneys smoking a bit, and groups of people here and there. Toyama was completely destroyed, completely destroyed by 150 B29s, American B29s.

The next day they were coming back again. It was after the atomic bomb. The next day after the bomb had fallen American B29s arrived and they started to drop parachutes.

But before they did that, they sent a FU4 from the aircraft carrier and he dropped us newspapers and different things to let us know what was going on. And the poor fellow, he was a young fellow from the West coast, and he cracked up just outside of our camp. So we busted out of the camp, right out, and we managed to stop the motor, the plane had turned around and hit the stone building, and when we looked at the pilot he was dead. We could see his brains coming out of his helmet here. Then we heard a moan. There was another fellow, another flier at the back. And we got him out of there and Dr. Riley came over and looked after him. So that plane that just crashed against the building; couldn't do much so I took the salt, kind of the Japanese salt we had there, and they put both his legs here. And I buried them just outside our camp in Toyama. They must still be there. And the next day Captain Doolittle came over to pick up the body with the Jeep they had landed in Toyama Bay. And they came with a Jeep and picked up the rest of the body up and the other fellow was a kind of a staff officer with red stripes. And they took them back to Toyama. And that's all we heard of them after that.

Then a tragedy occurred. In that plane after we had bust out of the camp and got those guys over there, one fellow, Scotch, he found a bottle of alcohol that was used to de-ice the wings -- pure ethyl something, and he brought that in the camp and he drank a mouthful of it. And then he just dropped there and he turned blue. So we brought him in, we used to call it the hospital there, and Dr. Riley and I looked, took care of that man, so he took, we didn't have scalpels, we used to use razor

blades, and we opened him up. And all inside of his stomach was blue and just burned out just like..., he had drank pure alcohol, the strongest alcohol that you can imagine. Now, you imagine that man, four years in the prisoner-of-war camp and then killing himself with a thing like that.

C.G.R.:

Yes, just as the war ended.

J.J.D.:

Just as the war ended. After that, well, we were taken on a train with Japanese guards, because they were afraid we would be attacked by the people, they shipped us to Yokohama. We stopped at Tokyo when we went to see the geisha girls. And some of our guys, again after four years of hardship like they had, they knocked around with the Japanese girls over there and six or seven of them got gonorrhea.

So finally we, in Yokohama, we were put on a small, kind of a small ship and sent across to the hospital ship. And that's where we lost everything. All the souvenirs we had and everything that we had in our possession, the pictures, or souvenirs like swords and things like that, they took it all. Took everything off, we stripped and then they passed us through a disinfectant bath, with sprays all over, we had to shut our eyes. And then when we got a little further on they gave us a pair of shorts, a pair of sailor's white pants, and a little tee-shirt and a white sailor-boy hat, like the navy wears.

And then they shipped us to Guam. So in Guam we had a stage there. We had a good time in Guam. It was all American -- it was a real lively city there. It was a nice island, but they made it

a city. Gosh I was so surprised, I saw some Japanese prisoners of war. They worked right there, Japanese half prisoners, they killed themselves first. There was hundreds of them working for the Americans on Guam.

One thing, we were really well treated by the Americans. Holy gosh. I almost lost my ship. I was with a gang of them and we were having some American beer, and all of a sudden I heard on the loudspeaker the bus was waiting for us to take the ship to take us back to Hawaii. I'll never forget Hawaii and then back to San Francisco, when we had a lot of time there.

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