CLIFFORD LLEWELYN MATTHEWS

Experiences as a Prisoner-of-War, World War 2

Interviewed by
Charles G. Roland, MD
27 May 1983

Oral History Archives

Hannah Chair for the History of Medicine

McMaster University

L8N 3Z5

Interview No. HCM 11-83

Charles G. Roland, MD:

First, if you'd tell me your full name, where you were born and when you were born.

Clifford Llewelyn Matthews:

Full names: Clifford Llewelyn Matthews, with three L's in it, and I was born in 56 Ellesmuir Avenue in St. Vital in 1919.

What else?

CGR:

What day, what birth date?

CLM:

October 23, 1919.

CGR:

Your parents' names were what?

CLM:

Charles Edward Matthews was my father and my mother was May Elizabeth Matthews.

CGR:

And what was her maiden name?

CLM:

Her name was Mitchell, her maiden name.

CGR:

Were you raised in Winnipeg, up until the war?

CLM:

Yes, I was raised basically all the time in St. Vital except for a short period we lived in Emerson, Manitoba.

CGR:

Okay, and what were you doing in the summer of 1939?

I had been out threshing, riding the rods and threshing. We made a few dollars. Not too much but a lot more than we had without it.

CGR:

Yes. What did your father do?

CLM:

My father was a plumber, actually he had been the first plumber in St. Vital, but he had worked for Ashdown's at one time or another, many years ago, as a salesman. Apparently he was quite a self-educated person and my nephew still has his International Correspondence School books, and they are sheepskin bound. They are worth a whole lot of money I imagine. Anyway, he taught himself about mathematics and everything and he ended up to be fairly well versed in a lot of things. Actually better than I am; he had to teach himself.

CGR:

When did you join the army?

CLM:

I joined on September 12, 1939.

CGR;

And you went straight into the [Winnipeg] Grenadiers?

Yes. I just looked in the door and before I knew it, I was in the army!

CGR:

Then did you go off to Jamaica?

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CGR:

Then did you go off to Jamaica?

Yes, I was down in Jamaica for about a year and a half and, just generally speaking, I was with everybody else; then we were off to Hong Kong.

CGR:

Yes, tell me about Hong Kong. What was your impression of Hong Kong when you got there in the middle of November?

Oh, we didn't have too much time to see the town. It was kind of a crowded place, similar to Jamaica only perhaps several times more crowded, more poverty there. It was bad enough in Jamaica but it was much worse in Hong Kong.

CGR:

What company were you in?

CLM:

I as in A Company when I went to Hong Kong. I was with Sgt. Major Osburn.

CGR:

Where were you when the war began, where on Hong Kong?

We were in a pill box with several people, but I can't remember the name of the hill, you know, it was...
CGR:

Could you show me more or less where it might have been, on the map?

CLM:

Not really because I didn't really know too much about...(I should have brought my proper glasses.) But it was overlooking this here Deep Water Bay. Possibly, I think, it was just about

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Birthplace & date: (MARCH 1921 St. THOMAS'S HOSP., Con
Present address: Street 89 DOMONIC DRIVE Apt. City New ECHAM Prov. LOWDON
Boots Con 260 Prov. LONDON
Postal code (Zip) SEG 36Q Country SQU6CAM) Telephone (home) O1-857-3905 (work) Area code
Service number: 14/8616
Date of enlistment:
Name of Regiment or Unit, Company, etc.: RAF
Date & place captured: Q MANCH 1942 GIRDET, JAVA
Rank at time of capture: A/C
Wounded at time of capture: Yes No
Date & place released: August, 1945, BANDOKNE, JAVA
Would you give me permission to examine your service record (in
government files) in order to obtain additional information
(having to do with exact dates, etc.), for my research?
Yes No
signed:
Please return to:
C. G. Roland, M.D. 3N10-HSC, McMaster University Hamilton, Ontario L8N 3Z5

Canada (416) 525-9140 ext. 2751

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R.B.M.:

Mrs. Taylor was a very patient lady.

C.G.R.:

Was she English?

R.B.M.:

English, English.

C.G.R.:

Not from Newfoundland.

R.B.M.:

No. Not Canadian, not Newfoundland. Both Mrs. Taylor and Miss Senior -- Miss Senior was a favorite of his. Miss Senior, now she was, I guess, senior nurse, probably. She was also, I think too, senior to Greta Gauld. Miss Senior came over -- I'm not sure but what she was originally a Barnardo Girl because he'd worked at Barnardo's. And I think Mrs. Taylor, he met Mrs Taylor when he was working at Barnardo's. Now, whether she was a Barnardo girl, originally, I don't know, who'd come in -- she certainly was a very well qualified nurse, qualified in midwifery and, like him, very conservative; quite sociable; very, very, English compared to the Canadian thing, very rigid in their habits, you know. Nurses would do this, nurse wouldn't smile on duty -- you went around rather sour-puss most of the time and showed our dignity, and that sort of thing. Any hilarity was quite undignified.

I remember when Dr. Taylor was leaving on furlough and he'd handed things over, I guess it was the last day or two, and he was in getting some papers or something out of the drawer of his

Ex-Prisoner-of-War Questionnaire \mathcal{H}

Full name: EDWAND Mc DANIEL
Birthplace & date: & MARCH 1921 St. THOMAS'S HOSP., Con
Present address: Street 89 DOMONIC DRIVE Apt.
City New ECHAM Prov. LOWDON
Fostal code (Zip) SEG 36Q Country SQ16CAND
Telephone (home) 1-457-3905 (work) Area code
Service number: 14/86/6
Date of enlistment:
Name of Regiment or Unit, Company, etc.: LAF
Date & place captured: Q MANCH 1942 GIROCT, JAVA
Rank at time of capture: R
Wounded at time of capture: Yes No
Date & place released: August, 1945, BANDOKNG, JANA
Would you give me permission to examine your service record (in
government files) in order to obtain additional information
(having to do with exact dates, etc.), for my research?
Yes No
signed:
Please return to:
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the bottom of the arrow there and there was some lot of mountains there. We walked, I know that we walked -- this probably is Wong Nei Chong Gap over here someplace, is it? (I'm sorry, gee I wish I had brought my other glasses.)

Yes, then we tramped to Butler Hill one time early in the morning, after the Japs had landed, and that's where it started and where it ended.

CGR:

Yes, that's Mount Butler there. So you were round about here when the war started. And you went through the Gap?

Yes. We didn't really know where we were going, it was in the middle of the night.

CGR:

This is to give me a rough idea, that you were up in the Mount Butler area.

CLM:

Yes, we were right on there overlooking some sort of -- is there a reservoir or something?

CGR:

Tai Tam Reservoir, right there.

CLM:

Well, we were sort of overlooking that to a certain extent.
CGR:

And how long were you there? You were driven back from there eventually I guess.

CLM:

We were there maybe an hour or so, but I mean after the Japs

HCM 11-83 Clifford L. Matthews, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 27 May 1983 actually started shooting back at us we weren't there very long. I got wounded and my brother got wounded and a lot of people got killed.

CGR:

Where were you when the war ended, on the 25th? Were you in hospital?

CLM:

Yes, I was in hospital. I had a bum hand, but I managed to bring it along pretty well. I had a chance to stay with the badly wounded guys, the amputees and so on, so I thought well, what the hell, I might as well stay with them.

Were you at Bowen Road?

CLM:

CGR:

Yes, at one time I was at Bowen Road, but at that time it was because I was just about on my last legs with dysentery.

CGR:

OK, tell me about how you got wounded. When was that, do you remember?

CLM:

Well, we were all congregated, possibly not quite at the top of Butler Hill, and our Major, Gresham, said -- or someone came down with word that the Japs were moving up the side of the hill and that we were to go and drive them back. Well, some of the boys, I think it was Bill Bell, he got to the top of the hill and he saw a little action there no doubt, and he was a pretty husky guy. I'm sure he accounted for himself quite well. But anyway, apparently there were too many of them; we were coming up the

hill and I was perhaps yelling to a friend of mine, "Watch out for those hand grenades, they're falling all around you," and one fell right between his legs. I told him to jump and he jumped, but the thing didn't go off anyway. We could see these Japs up at the top of the hill and I seen one crawling along and I shot him; I heard quite a commotion and I said, "Look at that so and so, I sure nailed him didn't I." Well that was about my last words before somebody opened up on me. In fact, I think I was firing another shell because I was left-handed at that time, and I was shooting up like this -- and the bullet came and hit me here and came out under my arm.

CGR:

The left shoulder?

CLM:

Yes. Well of course it just went dead. I didn't know what the hell was the matter with it then, but just in that same burst of machine gun fire, I saw Gordon Land. He was nailed right through the forehead. And I saw George Law, I heard him. They said he was killed, because I could hear him screaming, I couldn't really see him but I knew about where he was. They said that Captain Birket had been killed up there, and I guess there was perhaps more, but that's what I remember, at least. And I remember Major Gresham. Well, I was half way up the hill and I had got wounded, and I was going down the hill and Major Gresham of course was trying to keep his boys together. I had to convince him that I was actually wounded and I couldn't hold a rifle anyway so I might as well get the hell out of there. Anyway, he bought that. But he was right there, I must say. I mean maybe

they call him an old granny but he was there when he needed to be
-- and he was killed there too, as a matter of fact. Just a
short time later. I think some people have cast a few shadows on
him as being a bit of an old woman, but as far as I was concerned
he was there and done his job as he was supposed to.
CGR:

Well, what happened to you next, then?

I went down to the bottom of the hill and here there was a couple of guys -- Ed Currie, Chuck Bradshaw -- they had a machine gun set up, a Vickers gun, which was too big to take up the hill. Anyway they were stuck there, and things were getting very bad, and they said, "Well, you guys make it across this little opening here and see if you can get back roughly towards Wong Nei Chong Gap," or back to where we came from. So they stayed and covered us while we made it over there.

There was two or three wounded guys, my brother was wounded, I was wounded. We eventually made it over a little further away from the Japs than what we were, and we were on our way back to Wong Nei Chong, or someplace where we had some friends, and then we got sort of cut off; apparently the Japs were all around us and we didn't know it. I remember Ed Currie laying on the side of the hill, and I don't know if it was our own people or the Japs that were shooting at us, but the bullets was just going like this...he was holding his hand up, he didn't really realize how dangerous that was at the time.

What day was this, do you remember?

CGR:

CLM:

That was on the 19th of December, early in the morning, when the Japs landed. Well what happened later, there was a bit of one thing I sort of regret, you know, was that I told this Gordon Land that I had seen his brother killed. You can't really say it wasn't the right thing to do, but you said it anyway and that was all there was to that. Well anyway, just before we were captured there was Sam Stodgell laying beside a -- we were a bit demoralized at this time, a lot of us, but there was Sam Stodgell laying behind a Vickers gun and this Jap officer came over the hill with his sword out, motioning for us to lay down our arms and he just pulled the trigger and that guy he just flew like a bag of gar-Then Gordon Land says, "I guess these guys don't take any prisoners anyway." He had a hand grenade in his hand and he threw it at the Japs too. We didn't have any ammunition either at that time. You know, nothing as far as the automatic weapons This one guy had the Bren gun and that was it. Anyway, they started laying down a barrage and our sergeant major [John Osborn] was with us and I guess he fell on top of a hand grenade or something. [Sgt. Maj. John Osborn was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross for this action.] He was very close to me because I seen this thing coming, it looked like a damn football to me, but anyway that was about when we surrendered, when we were taken prisoner there.

CGR:

Was this all on the 19th?

Yes. Probably all within an hour or so; you lose track of time.

CGR:

And did you get medical treatment then?

Not a hell of a lot. I had to walk with my hand up over my head like this. If I had taken my hands down they might have shot me. I had to hold it up, and I wasn't really threatening anybody very much the way I was, they could see that. Anyway we stayed in a -- they put us all in a garage maybe, oh, about three times the size of this place. It was just behind their front line. Then I think our own people sent over a couple of mortars and they scored one direct hit. I mean there was our guys I was talking to a second before that -- they were just dead you know. They said it was a mortar that hit us; well, there was a big hole in the roof anyway. I managed to weather that and eventually we got all tied together and taken down to a place called North Point Camp.

CGR:

Did the Japanese ill-treat you at all? Were they beating you up or any of the things you read about?

CLM:

Oh, the odd rifle butt if you lagged behind or anything like that. In fact one guy, they cut him out of the lineup and shot him. I didn't see them but I understand that he was shot or bayoneted or something like that, but he went hysterical and he seemed to much of a threat to them the way he was. I guess they just shot him.

Well they didn't treat us good, that's for sure, but I didn't really find myself in the forefront of anything. It's better to play things a little low-key at a time like that because you're in no position to make a speech.

CGR:

Well, then what happened? When did you get some treatment?

Oh, we went to North Point and then we were sent to this place called Argyle Camp, where there was a bunch of Indian prisoners, Rajputs, I'm not sure what they were, but anyway a doctor seen me there. He just looked at it and put a band aid on it. It was a pretty neat little hole. That was about all there was to it. My arm was sort of buggered up for using it for a couple of months and then I started exercising it, trying to get it up a bit, and I finally done that. Then it got so that I could hook a pail of water or something in my hand, and with a little perseverance I think it must have helped it some. It has reached a stage now where it doesn't really bother me that much. play the piano or anything. I am still left-handed. hammer with this hand. Well, we were not getting much to eat at that time, so you weren't really worried about your arm, you were more worried about your stomach. And we had dysentery. CGR:

Did you stay in this area until the war ended?

We stayed in the Argyle Camp for a while and then we went back to North Point. I think that's the way it happened. I am a

little foggy in my memory at times. I didn't really keep track of the dates or anything very much; and then we went back to North Point and we had a fairly hard time for, oh, maybe four or five months. From there they moved us all over to the big... CGR:

Sham Shui Po?

CLM:

Sham Shui Po, yes, they moved us all over there, all together, after -- I'm not sure but it was maybe less than a year, anyway, that we all ended up in Sham Shui Po.

CGR:

When you say you had a rough time at North Point, what do you mean?

CLM:

Well, we didn't have anything to eat. Our ration, twice a day, was a little cup made out of a Carnation milk can, one of these smallest ones. It was rolled over and there was a piece of wire put through for a handle, and that was our ration for half a day. We got that twice a day. It really wasn't a hell of a lot and we were getting thinner and thinner.

CGR:

Yes. Those are what, four or six ounces, six at the most, maybe four.

CLM:

Geez, I don't know. I think they might even be three or something like that but it was a fair amount of water. It's just the smallest can you could buy. Something like a bachelor would buy to have in his fridge. We went for a long time on just the

rice alone and then we got potato tops and stuff like that. Very thin, but it was green water anyway, with the odd potato floating around in it, and that was, well it was the hardest on us I guess, because we weren't really used to those kind of rations. At least I managed to get through it, but I was getting down to maybe 85 or 90 pounds. My brother, who is generally somewhat bigger than me, maybe should weigh 20 pounds more than me, he was down to 90 pounds and he was just like a walking skeleton.

What was your normal weight at that time, about?

Really, it wasn't all that great because I am not a really fat person. I think when I joined the army I was 128 pounds, but I was in very good condition. But to lose 30 pounds off 128 is getting down a little low. But I'm sure -- I know that later on I was down to 80 pounds.

CGR:

Were you in the hospital in Sham Shui Po?

Yes, if you could call it a hospital. I mean it was just a shack with a bit of a roof on it and not too much for windows, you know, just what was left of the results of the war. And there were some old army biscuits and old army beds around and stuff like that. I was in the hospital for a while, after I went to Sham Shui Po, and then just about the time I was on my last legs I got sent to Bowen Road Hospital and then I came back from there...

CGR:

What was wrong with you then?

CLM:

Well actually it was just diarrhea.

CGR:

Dysentery?

CLM:

Dysentery. Generally speaking it was just diarrhea, you know.

CGR:

Who were the medical officers at Sham Shui Po?

CLM:

Dr. [John] Crawford.

CGR:

Yes. Was he the only one?

CLM:

No, he had, let's see Dr. [John] Reid also. I believe it was Dr. Reid.

CGR:

Yes, I've heard that name.

CLM:

He was perhaps a younger person than Dr. Crawford. Not much but...

CGR:

So you went to Bowen Road, and what did they do to you there?

CLM:

Well, there we were able to get oh, perhaps a part of one of

these full of sour milk once a day. It was sort of, very roughly, like a hospital. You know, they gave us things perhaps a little better than what we would have got if we had been in Sham Shui Po camp. I guess it must have been enough because we came back from there. Not everybody came back, but I did.

CGR:

Were you there a long time?

CLM:

I think perhaps about three months.

CGR:

Do you recall dates? I don't mean exact dates, would this have been the end of '42, end of '43 or...?

CLM:

I believe it would be about...it was when we got our first Red Cross parcel. We each got a Red Cross parcel when we were in Bowen Road. It was around Christmas too. So that was more or less our Christmas present, you know.

CGR:

A pretty good one, I'll bet.

CLM:

Some guys ate the whole damn thing in one day, and made themselves sick. But at least they had their kicks anyway for one day.

CGR:

Had their celebration.

CLM:

Eventually I came back from Bowen Road and was, sort of because I chummed around with my best friend who had a leg off, I

was able to move in with the wounded guys and from there towards the end of the war, we were sent to a place called Central British School. The food wasn't any better, particularly, but there wasn't too much...no work to do. Well, that's where I ended up. CGR:

This was on the island?

CLM:

No. It was on the mainland, Kowloon. It was a place called the Central British School.

CGR:

Oh yes.

CLM:

I was perhaps in better shape than a lot of them, because I had two legs and two hands, and I got a job there grinding rice on a big stone grinder. It's a big hunk of granite or something, chiseled out, and then there is a big tray chiseled out of granite underneath it. Then there is a hole in it, a handle on top, and you used to get these soy beans and you'd grind it around and put a couple more soy beans in; anyway, it amounts to this thing grinding out flour in the tray on the edge of it continually, as long as you kept putting the stuff in there. Occasionally I'd eat the odd soy bean. It got so I was perhaps in a little better shape towards the end than some of the other guys.

CGR:

In this group at this British School, they were all, or mostly, people that had amputations and so on?

CLM:

Yes. There was a couple of blind fellows.

CGR:

The more severely injured.

CLM:

Major [Harry W.] Hook died there. He had some kidney problem, or water in his tissues problem, where they used to have a pail sitting beside him and used to drain water off him all day long, and eventually he died. Just before the war was over.

Then one night, the Japs weren't there any more. ventured out. We had a notion that something was in the wind because we used to get some sort of news relayed to us from some radio contact, and one of the senior guys or the biggest guy, the more reliable. He was quite a big, tough customer, Ganton, and he got the news from someplace. We didn't ask him where he got it from, but he called certain ones of us together and told us the news. There was a couple of fellows he didn't call together because they just couldn't keep a secret, they'd have to talk to somebody about it. And they didn't want the Japs to get news of this here source of information. Eventually they just took off one night and they weren't there in the morning. So we went down and browsed around and walked down to one of the civilian camps with our fandushi on. You know, this piece of cloth and the string around it. That's all we had on. We had worn them for so damn long we didn't realize it was anything out of the way. They'd probably run you in if they ever saw you down on Main Street with one of those on. But that's generally where it ended. We went to Manila and stayed in Manila for a couple of months or something like that, and came back to Canada, and

HCM 11-83 Clifford L. Matthews, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 27 May 1983 eventually got out of the army.

One of the questions I like to ask about is, what about sex? You were young and vigorous men mostly, although not very well fed. Was sex ever something you thought about?

CLM:

Not too much, no. Oh you thought about it, I mean, but that was just about it. It wasn't too much of a driving force, although there was the odd -- I don't know whether homosexuals or what they were -- but there was the odd officer who perhaps had these Eurasian people, they seemed to be very feminine and they were fairly talented people, and they used to dress up. I don't know whether they liked it or not, but they used to dress up and make a negligee out of old cheesecloth or something like that, and they put on a few shows. I had the feeling they sort of enjoyed that sort of thing. You now, some of them. And the odd officer, well not the odd officer, but I know one, rather (he's dead now anyway). But he seemed to be terribly friendly with this here Eurasian man. They are very nice, soft-spoken people but the odd one is, seemed to me to be pretty feminine.

Very smooth skin, small.

CLM:

CGR:

Yes, they are nice to talk to, I mean good friends, but... CGR:

I was going to ask about homosexuality, too.

CLM:

Yes, well I never had any connection with it, although there

was one guy, an Australian, that sort of sounded to me like he was a bit of a weirdo. Or maybe not a weirdo, but he was just, perhaps, would tackle anything that came his way.

CGR:

But it certainly wasn't something that was common, you'd say?

CLM:

No. Just among my own friends and that, I can't say as there were any.

CGR;

That's the impression I seem to have from talking to people. CLM:

None of the Canadians you know, the run-of-the-mill privates like myself seemed anything inclined that way.

CGR:

How did you get along when you got back? Were you able to get back into life reasonably well?

CLM:

Well, I was a little bit doubtful about everything, you know. I didn't dare build a big house. My wife waited for me while I was over there.

CGR;

Oh, you had been married before.

CLM:

No, I wasn't married but my wife was true to me and she was there waiting when I got back. We got married eventually, just before I got out of the army. We've raised a couple of kids and everything has been almost as successful as it could be. We've

had our problems. I wouldn't like to mention on that, but my son was a Rhodes Scholar, but has had some setbacks. That sort of helped me to have maybe a little more drink that I should have had at times. I mean that was my excuse, at least, but there was no doubt about it, we had a hard time for five years. Spent a lot of money.

CGR:

Well that can happen, no question. It happens to lots of people.

CLM:

Yes. It's the smart ones that it happens to though.

CGR:

Sometimes, yes.

CLM:

It seems that way.

CGR:

How do you feel about this whole experience? Is this something that gives you trouble now? Do you ever wake up or get dreams about it?

CLM:

No, not really. I might have had a bad dream occasionally but I can have bad dreams about anything. I don't really dream very much. I am one of the fortunate ones. I was able to come out of it. I don't have to worry about money and, of course, I worked, as well; I have a pension from where I worked. Pension from the government. No money problems at all.

CGR:

It's nice to be able to say that.

CLM:

Yes. Oh, I don't have the grandest house in the world but if I wanted a new car, I could buy a new car. I think we've been treated pretty well myself. The odd guy went about it in the wrong way, perhaps, you get a little feedback from some of the doctors, because they could only take so much too.

CGR:

Yes. Is there anything else about your medical experiences during the war that we might talk about, anything you haven't touched on?

CLM:

No, not that I can think of. I used to work for the government and I used to drive. I had, not a high-paying job but I had a good job where I used to drive a government car and go around shopping for oddball things around the city. I found at one time that I was getting pretty up-tight, driving the car, and I did come, I came to see the psychiatrist here. In fact, one of the doctors suggested that I do go and I did have -- I was on Elavil for awhile, but I was sure that I really didn't need what he was giving me. I mean, one would do me for perhaps a week, and I didn't really need a whole course of medicine. I just needed a little bit of help over the rough spots. I still take the odd one maybe once or twice a month. That's 10 mg of Elavil. very relaxing but I mean, I wouldn't want to be taking 40 mg twice a day or anything like that, I'd be... CGR:

You can get too relaxed.

Yes, yes. So I have some left over, enough that I never need to come back here to get any. But there's times when I figured I need them.

CGR:

Well that's good. Is there anything else you can think of at all that you'd like to talk about?

CLM:

No. Nothing I can think of. I don't have any complaints.

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