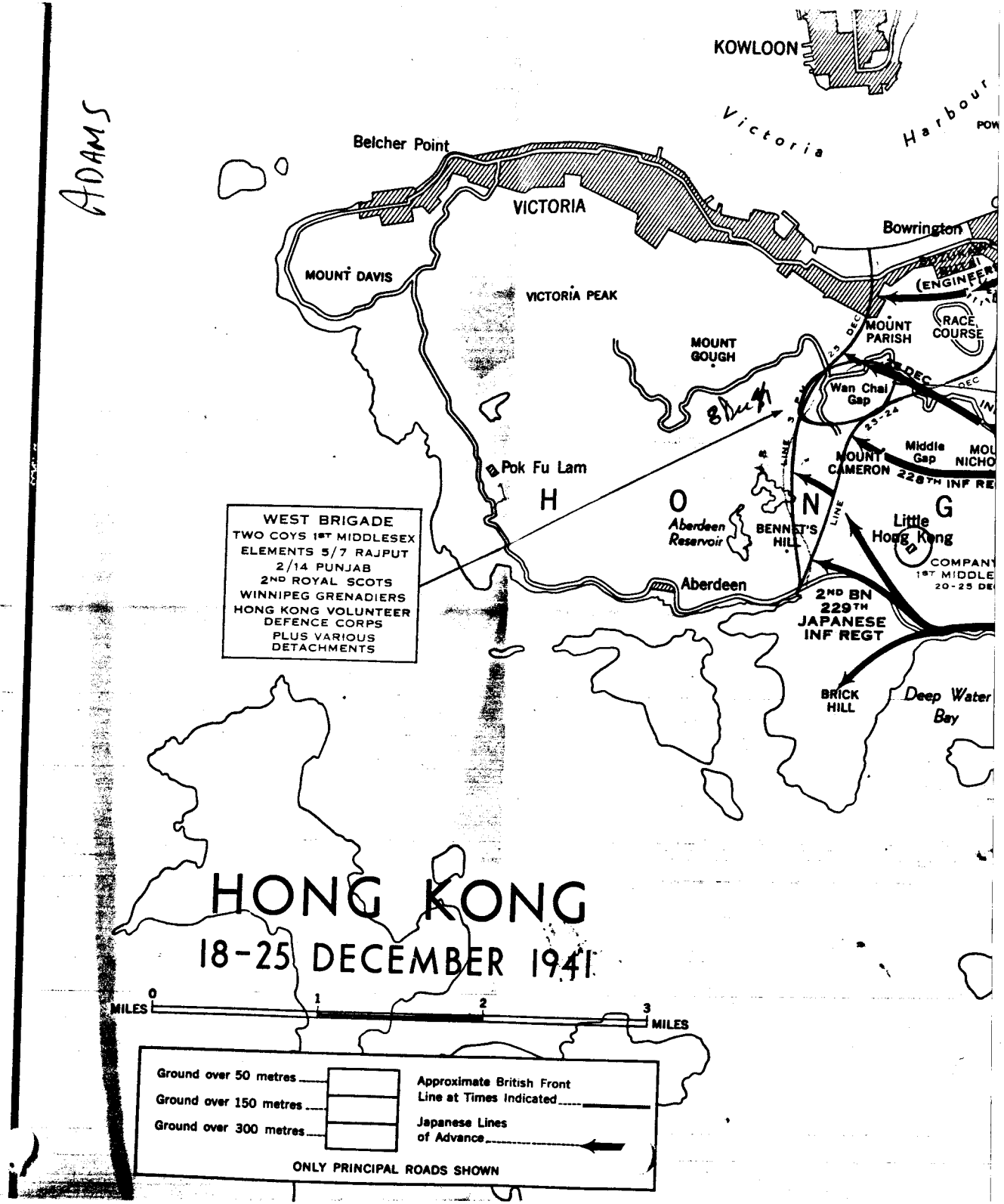
ADAMS
KOWLOON
Victoria Harbour
Belcher Point
VICTORIA
MOUNT DAVIS
VICTORIA PEAK
MOUNT GOUGH
Bowrington
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MOUNT PARISH
RACE COURSE
Wan Chai Gap
Middle Gap
MOUNT CAMERON
228TH INF RE
Pok Fu Lam
H O N G
Aberdeen Reservoir
BENNET'S HILL
Little Hong Kong
COMPANY
1ST MIDDLE
20-25 DE
Aberdeen
2ND BN 229TH JAPANESE INF REGT
BRICK HILL
Deep Water Bay
WEST BRIGADE
TWO COYS 1ST MIDDLESEX
ELEMENTS 5/7 RAJPUT
2/14 PUNJAB
2ND ROYAL SCOTS
WINNIPEG GRENADIERS
HONG KONG VOLUNTEER DEFENCE CORPS
PLUS VARIOUS DETACHMENTS
HONG KONG
18-25 DECEMBER 1941
0 1 2 3 MILES
Ground over 50 metres
Ground over 150 metres
Ground over 300 metres
Approximate British Front Line at Times Indicated
Japanese Lines of Advance
ONLY PRINCIPAL ROADS SHOWN

ROBERT DEWAR ADAMS

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 8-83

Charles G. Roland, MD:

Well Mr. Adams, I appreciate your being here. Can you tell me your full name, your birth place, and birth date please, to start with?

Robert Adams:

My full name is Robert Dewar Adams. I was born in, close to Culross, Manitoba, January 23, 1913.

CGR:

1913. Okay. And your parents' names?

RA:

James Adams and Catherine Adams.

CGR:

What did your father do?

RA:

Worked for the railroad, the CPR -- Canadian Pacific Railroad.

CGR:

Yes. And where were you raised?

RA:

Treherne, Manitoba.

CGR:

Treherne. 1913 -- so when the war began you were 26.

RA:

Pardon?

CGR:

You were 26 when the war began. What had you been doing the last year or two before the war?

RA:

I was working for the railroad also. I started with the railroad in 1933.

CGR:

And when did you join the army?

RA:

The 26th of September, 1939.

CGR:

Into the [Winnipeg] Grenadiers?

RA:

With the Grenadiers, yes.

CGR:

The Grenadiers, okay. Can you tell me just in a few words what you did in the army between September 1939 and October 1941?

RA:

What I did in the army? Well, I went down to Jamaica, Bermuda. I spent three months in Bermuda doing guard duties and police work and then we went on down to Jamaica. I spent time with the guards, the internment camp guards, ships guards and then I was transferred into Headquarters Company -- from A Company into Headquarters Company -- and worked in Jamaica Command, in the postal department in Jamaica Command, for the last six months we were down there.

CGR:

Am I right it was in October that you were brought back, or September perhaps, from the Caribbean?

RA:

I believe it was the first part of October if I remember

right, yes.

CGR:

Okay. Tell me what happened then. Were you sent on leave?

RA:

Yes, I came back on the last draft from Jamaica, and when we got home here we were given two weeks leave of absence. I went out on two weeks leave, but I went out to Treherne, Manitoba -- my wife, my child and -- and I was there just one week when I got a call to come back. I reported into barracks and that was it. We were in and we just had one week to get ready before they moved us out to go to China.

CGR:

Right. When were you married?

RA:

1939.

CGR:

1939. And your wife's name?

CGR:

Hazel.

CGR:

Maiden name?

RA:

Hazel Wilks.

CGR:

Okay. Well tell me then, if you would, just in your own words, about getting to Vancouver and the trip, and get yourself to Hong Kong, if you would.

RA:

Well, we left the Robinson building and went down to the CPR yards; the train was waiting for us. We got on the train, we moved out to Vancouver, I think it was about a two-day trip going out. We got on the boat and they took us right off the train, right onto the boat, and we sat on the dock for a while and during the night they moved us out into the channel.

The next day we took off and we sailed to the Hawaiian Islands; we pulled in at Hawaii. We were there for about seven hours, I think it was, but we were not allowed off the boat. We had to stay on the boat and were not supposed to tell anybody where we were from or where we were going. In fact we didn't know -- at least, probably some of the people did know where we were going, but myself, I didn't know where we were going. It was -- the boat was real crowded -- it was hot, a lot of the boys slept on deck and they had entertainment for us on the dock while we were stationed in there, while we were refueling, I guess that's what they were doing, and taking on water and everything else. That night we sailed out of there. We went from there to Manila.

CGR:

What ship were you on?

RA:

The Awatea, that was an Australian boat they seemingly had brought over to Canada, air force or something, and they cut them from there and then that boat was for us to go back. The meals wasn't so good because we weren't used to eating mutton all the time and that's about all they had it packed with, mutton.

CGR:

Yes, the Australians seem to like mutton.

RA:

The Australians do, yes. We went on then to Manila. I am not too sure just how long it took us, how many days it was, but it was a few days. We were in Manila for five hours. Yes, I think it was seven hours in Honolulu and five hours in Manila. That night we pulled out and the commanding officer, Lawson, gave the orders that we would be sleeping with our equipment on and everything else, keep our guns at the ready, where we were going we may have to fight our way off the boat. That's the words that we got.

CGR:

How did you feel about that? I mean Bermuda obviously was not a combat zone and now you were obviously going into where there might be combat. How did you feel, and how did the men feel? Were they raring to go? Nervous?

RA:

Well no, I don't think they were -- some of them might have been nervous. I don't know. They knew what they had signed up for, they knew what they were going into, but there was still talk that they didn't thin that Japan would ever attack America or Britain. We had no trouble from Manila to Hong Kong. It's a 36-hour run, we made it in about 30 hours I think. At that time they told us, at least I was led to believe that the Awatea was the fastest boat on the Pacific at that time. They took us into Hong Kong. We got off the boat, we went to Sham Shui Po barracks....

CGR:

This was what, the middle of November, do you remember the date?

RA:

Yes, that was...I think it would be about the middle of November when we got in there. I am not just too sure of the date. I think we left here on the 26th of October, so it would be about the middle of November by the time we got in there. We were there three weeks, anyway, before war broke out.

CGR:

Not very long to get settled, organized.

RA:

Not very long to get settled, not very long to get used to the country, and it's all very hilly, pretty hard to carry equipment all over and we didn't have the trucks, vehicles that we needed. To transport the equipment they confiscated a lot of civilian trucks, cars and things like that for their own use.

CGR:

Now what were you doing, exactly, at the time? Were you still in Headquarters Company? What were your daily responsibilities?

RA;

Well nothing. We were just training, that's all. We were still trying to get the training in. You see we never had any, what you call real, right-down-to-basic training. When we left Jamaica, I was led to believe, I don't know, but I was led to believe that what we were doing, we were coming back and we were

going to be stationed on the west coast for extensive training. That was what I understood in Jamaica before we left to come home; but when we got back in here, got home here, I took a two-week leave but I was called back within one week. When we got in, I walked into barracks and I talked to the Sergeant Major and I said, "Well, I'm still on leave." He said, "You were on leave, you are confined to barracks now."

Then they started issuing tropical clothes again, all tropical clothes so we knew that...it was coming on winter time and they're issuing tropical clothes instead of winter clothes. So we knew that we weren't staying in Canada. We were heading for some place. A lot of people thought that probably it was Singapore or India we were going to, never figured once that it was going to be Hong Kong until we were told on the boat that that's where we were going.

CGR:

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

RA:

It was a Sunday. Well the war over there for us started on the Monday, actually, when they hit. Sunday we had just come back off church parade and I happened to be in charge of the small party of men that came from the church parade. My sergeant told me just to keep the men on parade for a few minutes, he wanted to talk to them. We were told then to pack everything, pack all our kit and get ready to move out. We moved out and went over on to Hong Kong island that afternoon and that night we set up tents and everything. I was at Wan Chai Gap.

The next morning war broke out and that's where I was when war broke out, Wan Chai Gap.

CGR:

Well, tell me briefly how your war went, your short war. What did you yourself do?

RA:

Well we were fighting around Wan Chai Gap. We moved over onto Mount Butler, and Mount Cameron, and it was on Mount Butler where I was wounded. I got hit with shrapnel.

CGR:

When was it that you were wounded?

RA:

That would be about the 19th of December.

CGR:

What kind of wound? Where were you hit?

RA:

I was hit in the calf of the leg. I just took a field dressing out, wrapped it and put a field dressing on it, and went on, continued on. It wasn't a real deep cut. It didn't get the bone or anything like that, it just got the leg. I continued on with that until we were captured on Christmas day, and they moved us into Hong Kong university where we stayed over night. Then they moved us down to North Point camp. I went to see the doctor then, and I took off the field dressing and he sent me to Bowen Road Hospital. They had to cut all the proud flesh and everything out; these maggots and everything was into it. They said the only thing that kept it from probably gangrene setting in, was the maggots.

CGR:

Yes, they look bad but they are good things in that kind of a wound aren't they? What do they feel like, do maggots feel like anything? Do you know they're there without seeing them?

RA:

I can't just remember. I know that the field dressing, I put it on and I never took it off. I just left it right there. They cleaned it all out and sewed it up. I was at Bowen Road Hospital for maybe a week and then I was sent back to the camp. But I've never had trouble with the leg. Then during the war I was hit again. We were in Sham Shui Po -- this was on towards the latter part of the war -- and the Japanese had an artillery piece not far from our camp hit amongst a bunch of buildings. The Americans came over looking for it. They finally found it and they came in one day and they strafed it. They flew very low over our camp. Some of their shells lit in our camp and I guess it was a ricochet off the wall that got me then, wounded me in the heel. But again, it was just a flesh wound.

CGR:

Not a major thing.

RA:

It wasn't anything serious, no.

CGR:

That's good. Well, tell me about life in the camp.

RA:

Life was what you made it in the camp. You could make it real miserable for yourself; you knew you were there and make the

best of it, and that's what everybody did. I know it was real rough at times, the working, and the food, the work we had to do and everything else.

CGR:

What kind of work did they -- you were forced to work, you didn't have any choice?

RA:

Yes, that's true. They had so much work that they had to get done, and they built the airport, re-extended the airport. I worked on that for quite some time, pushing little rail cars with dirt and digging this bit, well it was a bit of a hill there. We extended the airport. Then I worked on digging tunnels, digging tunnels in the side of the mountains, side of the hills. When they made the roads up around the hills they just, the dirt was shoved over the edge. They didn't have the machines, it was all manual labor and everything. But that was all done by Chinese. That was before we got there. We were working then digging these tunnels -- you dug (I think it was) about four feet wide, six feet high and you dug in ten feet, and then you went ten feet this way. It was like a zig-zag tunnel. They said that they were going to store supplies in there and, in case of bombing or something like that, that the blast wouldn't...if a bomb lit close the blast wouldn't....

CGR:

Because of the zag, yes, I understand.

RA:

Then, it was in there where I got my back hurt.

There was three men to a tunnel. One man was doing the picking,

one man doing the shoveling, one man doing the wheeling with the wheelbarrow. You took turns. One guy would pick for a while and another guy shovel and you just took turns. We were working in there one day, and there was three of us, a fellow by the name of Des Morrow, and Winston Fox, and myself, and I was on the picking at that time. They had just went out with a wheelbarrow full of dirt when a big hunk of the roof collapsed, came in. I was bent over picking at the bottom and it got me right in the small of the back and just drove me right down. They helped me, they got me out of it, got me outside, got me sitting down, laying down and that. But there was no way of getting back to camp. There was no medical staff there for it. I just had to wait until we went in. When I went in, I went...the doctor seen me, Dr. John Crawford, and I was put in the hospital right away, but there was nothing they could do for it. They didn't have nothing to help me.

CGR:

When did this happen?

RA:

Well into the fall of 1944. I have had a bad back ever since that. In fact when I came home, not long after I was home, I was in hospital in Deer Lodge here. They gave me belts to wear, which I, I get two belts. About every six months they told me to order a new belt. I have to wear these belts and I asked then how long I would wear them. The doctor at that time, I just forget what his name was, but he told me, he said...in fact I came in and he looked at the belt and he said, "How long have you been wearing this?" After he examined me and everything and I

told him how long I had been wearing it, and I said, they told me to wear it when I needed to wear it, not to let my back get too used to it. You'll get your back used to it and then you won't...and I said I tried that but it's pretty tough to go without it, and he told me right then, he said, "well those days are gone forever, you'll wear that belt at all times." So very seldom am I without the belt on.

CGR:

With the belt on you are reasonably comfortable, are you?

RA:

Reasonably comfortable.

CGR:

Go about your daily work and daily activities?

RA:

Yes.

CGR:

Tell me more about the work. What sort of hours did you work? When did they get you out and...?

RA:

Well, when we were working on the airport we used to get up oh, round about 6 o'clock, before 6 o'clock, had our rice, tea; we were on the parade square shortly after 7 o'clock and then the boat came, some barge came to take us around to the airport. Sometimes we would leave 8 o'clock, sometimes it would be a little later, sometimes a little earlier. You never got back before dark at night.

CGR:

What camp were you in?

RA:

Sham Shui Po.

CGR:

Were you there the whole time?

RA:

I was there the whole time, yes.

CGR:

Tell me about the food. What was the food like? What was an average day's ration?

RA:

Well, it was just a little bowl of rice, sometimes a little bit of greens, vegetable (very seldom) and tea. The cooks did grind up rice, I don't know how they got started on...but they'd make rice bread and you'd get a slice of rice bread. Well you ate it right away, if you didn't eat it, if you left it to the next morning you wouldn't get your teeth into it because it was made from rice flour and it was just as solid as anything. But the rice was always sloppy. The food wasn't real good.

CGR:

And not enough of it.

RA:

Not enough of it, that's true.

CGR:

You lost weight?

RA:

Oh yes, I went down to 112 pounds, but there was people went lower than that, as far as that goes. The food and the dysen-

tery, I think, I had dysentery quite a few times and that dragged me down pretty bad. I went over there weighing around about 190 lbs.

CGR:

A big loss.

RA:

I went down to 112, that was my lowest weight.

CGR:

How long would an attack of dysentery be with you?

RA:

Oh, I don't know, it varied I guess. Sometimes you would be in hospital maybe for a couple of weeks, sometimes longer, sometimes not that long. But they had nothing to give you. All they'd give you was just liquids.

CGR:

No medicines.

RA;

No, there wasn't that kind of medicine for it.

CGR:

Did you have any other sicknesses while you were in camp?

RA:

No, other than the dysentery, that was the biggest thing with me and then I was a dip carrier. I didn't have diphtheria but I was a dip carrier, yes. We were segregated off from the rest of them.

CGR:

Were there a lot of carriers? Were there many carriers?

RA:

Yes, there was quite a few, quite a few. There was a lot of the boys died from diphtheria, an awful lot of them. But they had nothing they could help them with anyways. They were just dying off.

CGR:

Did you get Red Cross parcels at all?

RA:

Yes. They sent in Red Cross parcels I think, if I remember right they brought in Red Cross and, I don't know how many truck-loads they brought in, and one day -- the next day -- they came and took them practically all out. When they'd give out the Red Cross parcels two men had to share a parcel. You didn't get one by yourself, you had to share it with somebody else. But the Japs was v was a Swiss, he was with the Red Cross, the International Red Cross. He was a representative in Hong Kong and yes, he came into camp but he had to let them know when he was coming into camp. He just couldn't come up there and come in at any time. When he did come in, there was always enough of them around him that they steered him where they wanted to go and they knew that he was coming in on such and such a day, so they'd get a certain part of the camp all fixed up, set up perfect for him. When he came in then he went [there]...he didn't get into the hospital where the real sick ones were, and things like that.

CGR:

Did you have Sunday off or did you work?

RA:

Sometimes you worked Sundays, yes, sometimes you worked

Sundays.

CGR:

What did you do when you had a day off? How did you occupy yourself?

RA:

Wash your clothes. Sit around. Rest. Sometimes the boys would go and watch some sports of some kind that they were doing. They did play a little bit of softball there and things, the officers and that. But most of the time you just sat around. That was the hardest part, because the more you sit around the more you're thinking of home, things like that.

CGR:

Yes, this must have been, in a way, a little tougher on you than on most of them. You were married, had a child. Most of them I assume were unmarried.

RA:

Well there was a lot of them that was unmarried. There were a lot of married ones there too, yes. It was tough when you were thinking and wondering what's happening back home, how things are going and things like that.

CGR:

Did you get any mail?

RA:

No. I got one letter -- I never got one from my wife -- I got one from my mother but it was all blacked out, just my name at the top and their name at the bottom. The rest was all blacked out.

CGR:

Every word?

RA:

It didn't tell you much except they were still alive on the day they wrote the letter I guess.

RA:

They were living anyway, they had wrote the letter. That was the only letter I got. They told us that we could send letters and we wrote letters but we don't know whether they got through or not, at that time. My wife got a letter from me, yes, but it was the same thing, it was all blacked out. In fact I think she still has the letter.

CGR:

Were you bothered by sex -- by the absence of sex? You had been married so that, you know, you were...Was this something that you thought about?

RA:

In a way, yes. You thought of it, things like that but...

CGR:

Not much you can do about it.

RA;

There was nothing you could do about it, that's true.

CGR:

Was there any homosexuality in the camp? Was this something you were ever aware of?

RA:

No, I was never aware of it.

They put on plays and different things like that. We had

people, I forget how many plays they put on there but they put on a few. They had 3 or 4 Portuguese boys, very fine fellows, and they fixed them up as girls. Everybody had a good time thinking, well, they sure look like girls, fixed up, and I know that everybody used to say that she wasn't for real but she was for real as far as we were concerned. That was one of the boys, Sonny Castro was his name. There was another one, oh -- names, I just can't place them.

CGR:

It's been a long time.

RA:

Yes. When the Americans blew the big installation, big oil installation, not far from our camp, one afternoon they blew it and the Japs had been taking a lot of fuel out from that. And that burned there for a couple of days. After it was all cooled down and everything, we had to go over, and they filled barrels of gas, so we had to roll them down onto the docks and set them up and everything, and clean up. One Sunday, well we were there one Saturday working and sabotage came out. You'd see a barrel that's got a leak in it and you turned the leaky side down. We got away with it all day, but the next morning, Sunday morning, they called for a work party. When they called for a work party on a Sunday it was something special, so everybody liked to get out on that because that's usually going down into the heart of Hong Kong, or down into the heart of Kowloon, you're not staying out on the outskirts -- you see a little bit. I know I volunteered to go on it. They wanted volunteers and I volunteered to go along. That was the foolishest thing I think I've ever done.

I can always remember, they say in the army, never volunteer for anything, but I volunteered and they took us right back to the oil installation where we had worked on the Saturday and they made us take all those barrels out that was leaking. They didn't let you move very easily. You had to get them out of there the best way you could get them out. They were pretty mad about it.

CGR:

What about Japanese brutality? Did you have any personal experience? Were you beaten or...?

RA:

Myself, no. Well I was hit once and it buggered up my ear. I was hit with a rifle butt one day. For what reason I still don't know, yet; I guess he just wanted to take his frustration out on something and he started to yell at me and I didn't know what the heck he was talking about or anything else, and he just hauled off and hit me with the rifle butt across the side of the head and buggered up this ear. But I have seen some of them get beat around, yes.

CGR:

How about as the war ended [in 1941]? There were some really major atrocities. Were you aware of any of these? Any of your buddies involved? You know, they bayoneted prisoners and things like that.

RA:

No, you heard about it but that's all. We were working, as I was saying, on these tunnels, and after I went back to work I went back to the tunnels again. We always had one of our own boys that was, like, in charge of the work party. He had to

report to the Japs and that. Every night when we left he would ask them what was tomorrow and they would tell him what. This civilian Japanese, he could talk good English and he would tell him what he had to do the next day. I know when we were there that day, this particular day, well it was the last day we were out there; and the Indians, from India, they had taken them out of camp and made them do guard duty. This one Indian, he said something, "big troubles." There was a little fellow, they seemed very very nervous that day for some reason. More nervous than we had ever seen them. This little Willie, we called him Willie, he was a little Jap and he said "Selambang" was no good. They said "Selambang, Selambang" no good. So he couldn't speak English but he made the motions of an aeroplane and then he went like this and zoom, like bombs coming down and then he just went whoof, selambang, so it was not good, so we figured. The Indians said there was something, they didn't know what it was, but it was something real big and we had, when we left that night, before we left to go home to camp, this corporal he asked the Japs what about tomorrow? And he said, maybe no tomorrow. So we couldn't figure out what the heck. So they took us back to camp and they were very good to us going back that night, I remember. After we got in camp this George Lemay, a fellow by the name of George Lemay (a French-Canadian but he had been over, his father worked, I think he worked for the railroad, the CPR and he lived in Japan for years. I think he took his schooling in Japan and he could speak fluent Japanese) he was an interpreter, and they asked him about it. George said that he didn't know he couldn't get the full details of it but he said there is something big. He

said we don't know what it is. But he said, just be very quiet. It was during the night the Japs came in and told us that was it, the war was over.

CGR:

So the big bomb, that was the atom bomb at Hiroshima. I see.

RA:

The big bomb, that was the atomic bomb, yeah, that was it. That was the second one that they had dropped. I guess the first one and then they dropped the second one. But it was a good thing. I believe they done right. It saved a lot of lives. Well, sure it took a lot of lives as far as the Japanese was concerned but it saved a lot of lives for the Allies anyway.

CGR:

Yes, it must have been a tough decision.

RA:

It was a tough decision for anybody to...I know I wouldn't want to have to make that decision. But it ended the war.

CGR:

When you were in the camp was there much black market activity going on? Did you have opportunities for that?

RA:

Well you didn't have the money. You just traded and things like this you know. A lot of guys would trade their food. We got 10 yen a day for working; well, we used to call it the equivalent of 10 cents. Sometimes you could buy stuff through the fence. The Chinese would get up there and you could buy stuff through the fence and things like that.

CGR:

But you had to have something to buy it with.

RA:

Yes, you had to have something to buy it with. Inside the camp you traded different things. Sometimes if you didn't feel like eating all your rice you'd trade some of your rice off, things like that. That was going to get me home, and I was going to eat, you know. A person asked me one time if at any time it had ever occurred to me that I may not come back home. I said that was the farthest thing from my mind, not going home. I came over there and I wasn't going to lay on foreign soil if I could help it. I said I had a wife and a child at home and I was going home if I possibly could.

CGR:

In general, a pretty good bunch of guys through the prison camp, people worked together pretty well and so on?

RA:

Oh yes, yes. They were very, oh yes, the guys was all very good, that's right.

CGR:

No bad apples.

RA:

No. Well, there was, there were a few that were bad apples as far as that goes, but thank God there was no Canadians. Oh well, no use in mentioning names...

CGR:

No, I don't want to know names but if you can tell me a little bit about what kinds of things.

RA:

Well, a few collaborated with the Japanese, turned guys in and things like that. Guys got beat up for it and everything else.

CGR:

But you say none of those were Canadians that were doing this?

RA:

No, no.

CGR:

What happened to them? Did they get taken care of in some way?

RA:

They got taken care of after the war was over, I understand, yes. The only one that was a Canadian, but he was a Japanese Canadian, I don't know what his right name was but they called him "Slaphappy." His father was in the first World War, I understand, and he lived in Kamloops, BC, ran a store in Kamloops BC. In 1938 he, him and his uncle, went to Japan. Now why he went to Japan I don't know, but he went over to Japan and anyways, when he got over there he stayed over there and when war broke out, he went into the Japanese army. He didn't go in as a fighting man, he went in as an interpreter. He was a Canadian citizen. He was one of the meanest guys that ever was. He was worse than any of the Japs. He told us, told the Canadians what he had been used like when he was here in Canada and everything else, and he said we had had our turn, now it was his turn. But when the war finished he was picked up and he was tried for his war crimes and

they tried to get him off by saying he was, his lawyer tried to get him off by saying he was a Canadian citizen. They changed their thing then to what would be treason, and he was shot.

Now Major Boone that was the camp commandant, I don't know what happened to him but he collaborated with the Japs all the time. I know he was arrested by the British officers as soon as the war was finished and I think he was taken home to England and he had his trial in England. But what happened to him I don't know.

CGR:

Do you remember what regiment he was with?

RA:

No, I have no idea.

CGR:

How many men were there in the camp? How large a camp about?

RA:

Oh, I guess at one time there was -- well, you see, there were different little camps, but in our camp I would say there was 9,000 or 8,000 men. Now I'm only guessing at that, it was quite some time ago. Then you see they started shipping these drafts out to Japan, and it finally dwindled down and dwindled down. I was on two drafts to go to Japan but I never made it on account of dysentery. I took dysentery.

CGR:

You had your officers with you in camp, is that right?

RA:

Yes, not right in the camp. You see our camp was divided in

two. They had the officers camp and our camp and there was a walkway down between us. We could talk over to them and we could see them. There was the odd officer, junior officer, that was in our camp yes, but most of them was in the officers' compound.

CGR:

How about the medical officers?

RA:

Medical officers?

CGR:

Yes, were they in your camp?

RA:

Oh, they were in our camp, oh yes, they were in our camp. Major John Crawford was in our camp.

CGR:

Do you remember any of the other medical officers?

RA:

Major Ashton-Rose, he was the Indian, he was with the Indian regiments. He was a medical man, he was in our camp. Captain Gray was in our camp until he went to Japan. He was the only Canadian officer that was shipped to Japan and he went in charge of one of the drafts that went out there, as the medical officer. [Actually, the MO who went to Japan was Capt. John Reid.]

CGR:

I see. They did pretty well by you, as best as they could, the medical officers?

RA:

The medical officers done everything they could. With what they had to work with they done wonders. They were wonderful

men, yes, I will say that. I remember one night in camp when this little fella I knew, a little French fella, Earl Vermette was his name, and I don't know, we were sleeping on the floor. We had our stuff on the floor and we were sleeping on the floor, and he was sleeping right next to me. During the night he started to scream. He was having a dream, nightmare, and he started to scream. I jumped up to see what the heck was the matter and his mouth was wide open and he had screamed and his mouth had locked, the jaws locked back here. So we got him out, and the Jap sentry came running in to see what was going on. We showed him the guy and he motioned to take him. So I went with him and we went over and got Dr. Crawford out of bed. He took a look at him, and he took a towel and he wrapped it around his thumbs, and he put it in on his lower jaw, on the teeth, and with his hands underneath his jaw he gave it a quick snap, I guess. He finally got it, it snapped closed and he put his one hand underneath the jaw and the other hand on top of the head and held it like that. When Vermette went to speak he told him to shut up, he said, "I just got it closed, don't get it locked open again." No, Dr. Crawford was real good and so was the other ones. Major Ashton-Rose was doctor in with us when we were in as dip carriers. He was our doctor in our compound. This disinfectant pot permang, [potassium permangenate], I don't know whether you have heard of it or not. Probably you have. I remember on fellow that came up there, and every time you would get some rash or something would wrong either the fellow would say, "Oh, bathe it in pot permang." Old Ashton-Rose he says, "Well gall darn it, he says, pot permang for everything, he says, and probably if I got pregnant you'd say

pot permang for that too."

CGR:

Anything else you can think of to tell me about this experience in camp that you think might be of interest to me? Anything about any of your friends, illnesses they might have had or anything at all.

RA:

No, there's nothing like that.

CGR:

When did you home?

RA:

I got home in October I guess it was. We sailed out after the Australians came in. They come over and then we left. We went to Manila. We were in Manila I guess for over a week. We were getting medicals. We sailed from there to San Francisco, we come into San Francisco and they took us off the boat, fed us, and paid us some more money then they took across by small boat from San Francisco to Oakland. Then we got on the train there and rode up the west coast to Seattle and then they put us on a ferry and took us to Victoria. We were wanting to get home as quick as we could but they were giving us Canadian clothes and all medicals again and everything. Then they took us across, we went across, and I stayed in Vancouver for a couple of weeks. My wife and child was out there so I stayed there. Then I came on home to Treherne, Manitoba, for a week, then went back again and stayed the winter in Vancouver and was in hospital. I was in Shaughnessy Hospital. I got a letter from Ottawa to report in to Shaughnessy Hospital for a medical checkup and everything

CGR:

How have you been since then? I know about your back. Any other long-term medical problems?

RA:

No. Oh, I've had trouble with stomach trouble the last couple of years. I've had trouble with bowels but the doctor seems like he's getting them straightened out. The last while I have been waking up in the morning and feel very nauseated, very nauseated and tired. Really played out. In the last couple of weeks I have been getting a sore throat, all down through here.

CGR:

But that's fairly recent, you haven't had that since the war or anything?

RA:

No, but I don't think [I've had] much effects. My legs, yes, I have had trouble with my legs ever since I came back and they are just burning and aching from the knees down. They do it all the time, day and night, and lots of nights I can't sleep with covers on. I've got to kick the covers off, my feet are just burning. I have asked the doctors about it. I've been to orthopedic doctors and everything else and they say there is nothing they can do for it. I know when I first came home I talked about it to doctors and they said, "well, it took four years to make you that way, we haven't got anything that can change it just in a short time." Now they finally here, about two years ago, they told me that there was nothing they could do about it, you just have to live wit hit. So that's what I'm

doing.

CGR:

What kind of work have you been doing since the war?

RA:

Oh I went back to railroading. I retired in 1973, I retired early, I took my pension at 60 years of age. After that I came into Winnipeg here and I have done commissionaire work for a while. Then I went as a messenger for a brokerage company and then I quit that. Then I just took part-time at a brokerage company.

CGR:

How about your family? They were glad to have you back. You had more children, did you?

RA:

I had another boy after I came back, yes. I've got the two boys. They're all fine, doing good.

CGR:

How has this whole experience affected you? Has it had any permanent impact on your life? I mean, other than that you wear a belt and so on. Mentally, does it bother you?

RA:

No. It don't bother me.

CGR:

You don't wake up in the night screaming, or...

RA:

I don't talk about it that much because it's, I don't know. I figure that you talk to people and they weren't there, they don't realize what it actually was all about. So when you try to

explain to certain ones what it was like there, they just can't believe it.

CGR:

My experience is, most men seem to feel much the same way. Most people don't seem to talk about it a lot.

RA:

No. Well like one fella said to me, I remember his saying one time in camp, "When I get home and anybody asks me what it was like I'd just tell them that I could talk to you for hours and you wouldn't know what I was talking about," so he said, there was not use in talking about it. No, even my family, they never, they didn't push me to talk about it or anything like that. It was just something that I, it's an experience that, it was a good experience as far as that is concerned. Like I say, it's an experience that I'm glad I went through, because nobody could have told me what the human body could really take in that four years, and I'm glad I went through it to experience that myself, what the human body can really take. But it's an experience that I would never go through again.

CGR:

No. I understand that.

RA:

The one fella always said, "I should have done what they told me, always save that last bullet for yourself." It's the coward's way out. But it is an experience I wouldn't want to go through again, but I'm glad I went through it.

CGR:

Very good. Is there anything else that has come to mind

that you want to put in before I...

RA:

No, I think that's about all, I think.

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