

John Charles Ford
Experiences as a Prisoner-of-War, 1942-1945

Interviewed by
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John C. Ford, St. John's, Newfoundland, 11 February 1985, HCM 9-85

Charles Gordon Roland, M.D.

Well Mr. Ford, I wonder if you would just tell me in a few words, something about your early life, who your parents were, where you lived and went to school, and what you were doing up till the time of the beginning of the war?

John Charles Ford:

Well, after I finished high school, I went to work in a business in Lewisporte for a year. And in 1936, November, I went to work with the Newfoundland Railway as an apprentice machinist. C.G.R.:

This is November of what year?

J.C.F:

This is 1936.

And after working there for about 3 1/2 years, as an apprentice machinist, working around steam locomotives, etc., (the war broke out as you know in '39) and in May the 1940 I enlisted in the Royal Air Force. And from May the 1940 we went overseas the later part of July. But in order to get to England at that time we had to enlist in the Royal Artillery, because the RAF draft at that stage of the game was only about 7 personnel. And we left St. John's the 1st of August 1940 on the R.M.S. Nova Scotia. And we sailed for Halifax to pick up part of our convoy. From Halifax to Bermuda to increase the force of our convoy, of course, and from there the North Atlantic to Liverpool.

We arrived in Liverpool on the 3rd day of September, 1940. From Liverpool we went to Sussex, Haywards Heath, actually, and after being there for, perhaps, a week, we were taken to Uxbridge by the RAF personnel. At Uxbridge we were given medical examinations and kitted out with RAF clothing. Did a certain amount of training, square-bashing. After a little while at Uxbridge we were sent to a place called Bridgnorth in Shropshire. At Bridgenorth we did our square-bashing (I use the word square-bashing, I guess it's familiar with most of you people).

C.G.R.:

Oh yes.

J.C.F.:

Yeh, just the army word for marching about. After some time there, perhaps about 2 months, we were sent to a training camp where they did technical work such as electrical, mechanics, bomb-armourers, and that was a place called Kirkham, in Lancashire. We did about 6 to 8 months at Kirkham. And after Kirkham we...after the trade school was finished we had passed out as flight mechanics -- you'd get a 1, 2, or 3, whatever the case might be. And from there on we were drafted overseas.

We went to a place called West Kirby, Hillbury Island, which is quite near Liverpool. That was a dispersal depot, and from that area we made up various drafts, for, perhaps, various parts of the world. After being there for about 3 weeks to a month, and not getting on a draft, I felt that time was going and I was wasting money and I felt I had to get on a draft. So I volunteered for a draft, which eventually ended me up in

Singapore.

Actually, I was not supposed to go to Singapore, I was supposed to have gone to Salisbury in Southern Rhodesia. Because of my impatience, I ended up on a draft and we went from Liverpool on the Duchess of York, after dropping in at our first port of call, which actually was Freetown. From Freetown to Capetown, Capetown to Bombay, Bombay to Ceylon, and after about 6 weeks, 6 to 7 weeks, perhaps, on the Pacific and Indian Oceans, we finally arrived in Singapore. We had no idea, of course, where we were going when we left England. There were various rumours, of course, but on a troopship they don't tell you where you are going until you're nearly there. So sometime in April, we arrived in Singapore and I was immediately posted to 36 Torpedo Bomber Squadron.

C.G.R.:

This was April of '41.

J.C.F.:

That's about April '41, that's right.

And I stayed with the Torpedo Bomber Squadron until, well, all the time I was there actually. In the period that I was there I was called in one day, and I was told that I was going to be posted to Burma. And I said to the adjutant, I said, "What's the reason for this?" "Well" he said, "according to your records," he said, "you're supposed to be an expert on Buffalo Brewster aircraft." "Oh" I said, "I didn't realize that." "Oh yes", he said. "Well" I said, "I'm afraid you've got the records mixed up because I've only seen and worked on Buffalo Brewsters very short periods." "Well", he said, "they've certainly got you

down here as an expert." "Well", I said, "I'm afraid I'm not an expert on anything, particularly Buffalo Brewster aircraft," (which are American aircraft, of course). And he said, "Well in that case," he said, "if you want to stay here in Singapore in 36 Torpedo Squadron, you may do so." "But", I said, "there's one thing I would like."

If you recall, I was posted to Salisbury in Southern Rhodesia, and after arriving in Singapore, all my mail came from Salisbury (as a matter of fact, there was one day in October, I got 32 letters, I think, they were all from Salisbury, in Southern Rhodesia). So I said, the records, obviously, were, you know, a little upset.

But basically, at Singapore we did reconnaissance work, we did met [meteorological] trips; I had flown many times in the rear cockpit with a Lewis gun. Not actually in action. But on operational and navigational trips. And we had made several trips up the Malayan peninsula, to a place called Kuantan. We'd ferry torpedoes up there. And we'd ferry some 250 lb. bombs.

Now the aircraft that we were using at that time was a Vickers Vildebeest. It may not be familiar to many people, perhaps, because it was a very old type of aircraft, which carried one 2000-lb. torpedo underneath the belly, and four 250-lb. bombs on the wings. So we had done some operational work to Kuantan. Perhaps we had thought the Japanese were going to invade Malaya, sooner or later. I think it was obvious to us that they were going to do so. Of course, we had no idea what time they were going to do it. But after operating at Kwantan,

back and forth to Singapore. (We were at Seletar, by the way. Seletar is the main airbase in Singapore. And there were 36 Torpedo Bomber Squadron and one other Torpedo Bomber Squadron -- two squadrons on the one airdrome. We had no fighter aircraft whatsoever.)

So after getting back and forth to Kuantan, finally, we happen to be at Kuantan when the Japanese attacked it, or at least their convoy was spotted -- 27 ships, I believe in the convoy -- they were spotted coming down the coast of Malaya. And, of course, we were all rushed up to Kota Bahru, which we had figured and our authorities figured, that they would make a landing there. And, obviously, they did make a landing there, and we happened to be caught there at that time. Realizing the tremendous force and the numbers of Japanese, we were at Khota Buru, with rifles advanced this time, now. And the Indian regiments were there, the Punjabs and the Ghurkas, and a few British. And, of course, by daylight we had fallen back. And from then on it was a continual fall, really, until we got back to Kuala Lumpur, and then back to Singapore.

But, basically, the force that they landed with was about 10 times the force that we had to meet them. We had not trenches there, we had no, nothing, no defences whatsoever, no barbed wire, no barricade, it was absolutely nothing, because we were not expecting them to land at Khota Buru or anywhere in Malaya.

If you recall, Singapore was a garrison, or a port that was supposed to be fortified toward the sea only. And we had a few 15 inch guns pointing out to sea, but they could not turn and swivel up country. I say up country, I'm talking about across

the causeway, Johore Bharu, and Malaya. And consequently, we were very much taken by surprise and so were all our forces. But, I recall, when we were at Singapore, we perhaps knew that things were going to turn out much like they did, because we knew that with the aircraft that we were flying, top speed of 110 miles an hour, we couldn't do much against the Japanese with the Navy Zero's which they had, apparently, a few of at that time.

It's interesting to note, perhaps, too, that Singapore was attacked before Pearl Harbor. And I don't know if you're aware of that, but we were, about an hour before, actually. According to Churchill's statement. But basically we were asked to hold on and delay the Japanese advances as long as we could, because they felt that reinforcements were perhaps on their way, but we knew, of course, reinforcements were limited due to the war in Europe, and it's perhaps...it hadn't turned, perhaps, by that time. Because this was in early '42 or the latter part of '41. And we knew that the war in Europe, or at least we thought the war in Europe had not progressed enough that they could spare any equipment to come to the Far East.

C.G.R.:

No. In fact, it was still going pretty badly.

J.C.F.:

Well that is true. Percival was there -- General Percival at that time, and General Wavell, of course, he came in there too. And our Air Commodore was Brooke Popham. And between the situation there with the forces they realized that we need far more aircraft than we needed in Singapore. I think, perhaps, our

complete force on the island, and perhaps in Malaya too, was about 200 aircraft. And previous to that, General Purcival had told the air ministry, or Churchill's office, that we needed at least 500 to 600 aircraft. And, of course, that was out of the question. They just couldn't spare them from the European theater to give it to us out there.

But we were asked to try to delay them as much as we could, even up to 6 months. And by that time they felt that it might be possible to get some equipment from the middle east, perhaps, down to Singapore, Malaya, to help to stem the tide of the Japanese onslaught. But, basically, it didn't happen that way, because before we had received any equipment, Singapore and Malaya had fallen. The nearest we got to receiving equipment was the Empress of Asia. She was sunk coming down through the Malacca Strait with a lot of very important equipment.

Now, I might add too, that we didn't have a tank of any description in Malaya. No armoured equipment whatsoever. It was all foot work. And if you can visualize what it's like going through the jungle, particularly during the monsoons, which it was at that time. And the Japanese had just, well, the majority of them had just come from China, and they'd been fighting there for 5 or 6 years and they were very experienced in jungle warfare, which we weren't at all. And in addition to that, they were there in numbers, they were mixed up like the native population, and in many instances they behaved like the native population, and they, in a lot of cases, they got behind our lines and they did things that...it happens in war, but this is the way they had to move, they got between your lines, and behind

them, they did everything because of the color and their size and their stature. And it was very different for us to move even backwards, because wherever we moved they had you blocked off. And the Malayan jungle is not the best, in the best of times, with the monsoons and the wild life that you have there and the mangroves and things of that nature, it was a difficult situation.

But, however, we did finally get back to Singapore, perhaps, after a week or two, in a very poor state. I say poor state because you know what the jungle is like, you're wet and you're damp and you're -- mosquitoes, there's everything in the world there. But we finally got back to Singapore and sort of regrouped as a squadron again. What was left of our squadron. I might add, too, that we lost 13 aircraft one afternoon over Kuantan. This was the time of the Prince of Wales and Repulse, we lost 13 of our aircraft that one afternoon. And I felt that that afternoon, I was at Singapore, and I called the crews and bid them farewell -- we knew at that time, and all our crews knew, that we were going on a suicide mission. There's no question about it at all.

But, what do you do? You've got to do as you're told in war, and we did our best; our best was not nearly good enough, obviously, and neither were the aircraft good enough. So, I don't think for one moment that you can hold anything against the personnel for what they tried to do and what they were doing. It was a situation which nobody relished, rather unfortunate, it was a fact and you must face up to it. That's all we could do about it.

We did our best. It was a terrible smack in the face for the British to have to capitulate. And General Percival capitulated at the Ford motor works on Orchard Road. It was a terrible blow to our morale as British people who had to say, "Look we must accept defeat."

At that time, of course, the Japanese were well on the go, they were sweeping everywhere, they had probably attacked the Philipines, they had come down through Malaya, they had tried to destroy the American fleet at Pearl Harbor, they had sunk all our fleet. I say "our fleet", because that's basically all we had, the Prince of Wales and Repulse with the few destroyers. We didn't have an aircraft carrier out there. The Indomitable was supposed to go there but she'd ran aground just before she was due to come out and sure, she was on dry dock, you see.

The thing might have been different, we may have never lost them if things had turned out as was planned. But unfortunately, things don't always turn out that way, and it was inevitable, actually. And we as individuals, we felt that we are British, we will do our best and if the worst comes to worst, we'll have to take it, and we did take it. It was a very unfortunate circumstances and to this day it makes one wonder why Malaya and Singapore had to fall. Realizing, of course, there were a lot of Australian troops, there, but again, a lot of the Australian troops only arrived there a week or two before the Japanese invasion. And they were not trained, very much undertrained, actually. New personnel. And the same thing applied to some of the fellows that arrived from England.

They were new personnel and they were not trained, and it's

bad enough going from our type of climate, in Europe, to the climate in Malaya and Singapore. That alone is a battle, because of the temperatures. You know, you've got temperatures up in 90, 110, 120 degrees. And that alone was enough to discourage people. And it does take awhile to get acclimatized, you know. And these fellows were at a very, very, much disadvantage.

Now, we went out there, we were probably the first, the first regular people, or the first wartime people that arrived in Singapore. The people at Singapore had been there for a number of years and they belonged to the auxiliary, and some of them, I'd say 90% of them had never seen a bomb drop and never heard a bomb. And for that reason, they were, you know, it was something entirely new to them. And even the ack-ack guns, the Indians had never fired a Bofors gun before. And they had no idea in the world how to cope with that sort of thing. And for that reason we were right under the gun because we were....let's say we were green. At least the majority of them out there were green.

And, I can say too, perhaps, that our commanders, I'd hate to say it, but, they weren't all that they should have been, perhaps. There was quite a bit of bickering between the army, navy and air force. And when I realized that the naval base at Singapore was evacuated by the navy and not a thing destroyed or damaged! Makes one wonder, really. But, if you can visualize the white man fighting against the Japanese in Malaya where there are so many...well, there were a lot of Japanese, there were a lot of Chinese, there were a lot of Malays, and a lot of Indians.

And if you can visualize our people, I say our white people, trying to do anything against this type of people, because you didn't know who was your friend, who was your foe, and this was a very, very difficult situation, very, very difficult.

C.G.R.:

I can understand that.

J.C.F.:

And the people themselves, there, the natives -- I say the natives with all due respect to them -- if you had a dollar to offer them, whether it be Japanese dollar, or British dollar, they took that dollar and gave them all the information they wanted. So I'm saying, the Japanese didn't have to buy the information, because, in my opinion, Singapore was...a lot of Japanese lived in Singapore prior to the war, and they had got a lot of materials out of Singapore, as you fully realize. And got the rubber and the tin and everything else that they wanted. Because they had all their people, they ran most of the...well, not most of the hotels, but quite a few of the hotels there. And for that reason they were well in with the troops. You know, we had the New World there, and the Aki World, and the Great World, which was entertainment centers for the troops. You went there and they had taxi dancing. And you danced with the girls, and the same girl you were dancing with could have been Japanese or she could have had a Japanese boyfriend. And all the information they needed, or at least they knew a lot more, perhaps, about Malaya and Singapore, than we actually knew. And this is why the Japanese perhaps, made such a rapid movement down through Malaya. And there was no way of stopping them.

But, I would say, perhaps, this too -- we stopped the Japanese advances to some extent. It makes me think sometimes how they swept us off our feet, and I don't think it should have been. Unfortunately, it did happen. Perhaps, too, we stopped our advance to the extent that we perhaps stopped them from invading Australia. I'm not too sure, but, when you realize that there were about 165,000 prisoners, including British, and not many Americans, actually, in Malaya. There aren't any, actually, or there weren't any. But, Indians, Chinese, and Malays, that was a lot of people to look after. But by the same token, they released most of the Asiatics after they were taken prisoners. They weren't kept in camps, only the odd one like we were. They were released to go back and do the work that they Japanese wanted them to do because they were right under their finger, you see. But, when you realize 160,000 people, that meant a lot of guards, a lot of food, a lot of everything, so this interrupted the Japanese flow down through the Pacific.

Now, after the Japanese were on the island of Singapore, at that time they had cut off our water supply, the reservoirs were broken, they had bombed us quite severely. We were at a place called Payaleba -- Payaleba Village, actually. As a matter of fact, the International airport was built at Payaleba some years after.

C.G.R.:

Can you spell Payaleba?

J.C.F.:

Yeah. P-a-y-a-l-e-b-a, Payaleba. And that was on the way

between Seletar and Singapore, actually. But the International airport was there. And we were at Payaleba and we were told, (there is a part here this little book I've got here where) we were ordered out of Singapore, get out the best way we could. Yeah, yeah. We were ordered to the Dutch East Indies, the RAF personnel, to the Dutch East Indies. When last heard from the landing field was so pitted with bomb craters that it was no longer useable. So we were ordered by Brooke Popham.

C.G.R.:

Right. And how did you get out?

J.C.F.:

Well now that's a story that is quite interesting, actually. While we were at Payaleba, we were there living on bully beef, and whatever rations we could scrounge. We certainly were far from organized. We had just left beautiful quarters at Seletar. And we left it to the Japanese. They took us out of our quarters and we defended the airport with rifle and bayonet. And when the Japanese stepped into Seletar we were overpowered and we got back from Seletar back to Payaleba. Payaleba is on the way to Singapore town, actually. Perhaps 5 or 6 miles from Seletar airbase. And we were in a schoolhouse, an old building there. And after being there, perhaps, a week, the order came through for us to try to get away as best we could.

I called at the...about 3 o'clock in the morning, we had a school bus (one of the yellow school buses, quite familiar to us here.) and one of the officers said to me, "Now let's get out the best way we can." So we'll get the school bus, get your duds together and put it in the bus and we'll, we'll go Keppel

Harbour. That was the shipping port for Singapore, you see.

We went down and there was a tug by the side of the wharf. Now, I think, perhaps, it was probably planned too. But there was a tug by the wharf. I say a tub, probably, 5,6,7, other tugs. And we had to fuel it. It burned bunker, bunker coal, that is. Not bunker oil, it was a coal burner, We got our coal supplies aboard and we raided the warehouses on the dock side. We provisioned the ship and all the people that were near the area -- we got particularly the RAF and there were some army too -- got aboard this little vessel and we sailed for about 3 o'clock in the morning for Sumatra. And for the life of me I don't know yet how we ever arrived in Sumatra. We went to Palembang, I don't know how we got there -- I don't know.

But that was about 4 o'clock in the morning. When I went on the dockside, that was on this bus, there were only about 4 of us on the bus, actually, on that particular bus, because we had all the baggage. And the officer said to me, "You better take a Lewis gun now and get on the back of the bus." At that time, of course, they had a curfew in Singapore. No one was allowed out, only the Japanese and they were all over the place. But fortunately we didn't see any that morning coming down to Singapore. So we got to dockside. I remember the HMS Trusty, a submarine, was there. She was by the dockside. And I've often wondered if they ever got away. But one of the matelots was on guard there, he was a Scotch chap, and when we arrived on the dock he was in no condition, actually, to do what he was trying to do. I shouldn't say that but he wasn't.

But the Trusty was still there and they were doing guard duty on the dock. And this matelot said, "Do you want some liquor?" He said, "The warehouse is here. The warehouse is open. Get all the liquor and cigarettes you like," he says, "You can help yourself to everything. And, of course, this is exactly what we did. We took an ample supply of the food, cigarettes, and liquor. Carried it aboard the tug, and as I say, we sailed about 3 o'clock in the morning for....we didn't know where we were going. We thought we might be going Sumatra or Java. But we arrived at Palembang.

Now, I don't know if you are familiar with Palembang, but Palembang is about 60 miles from the sea. It's an oil refinery port. And before we got to Palembang, I think the Japanese had flown over us. Or, at least, I think they'd spotted us, because for some unknown reason we were not stopped by any ships of any kind. And before we got up to Palembang proper, there were numerous ships sunk in the mouth of the entrance to Palembang. Their masts just above water with the flags flying. So apparently the Japanese had been very active around these waters either by torpedoes or aircraft bombs, I don't know.

But basically, we got to Palembang. We stayed on the little tug we were on for, perhaps, a week or two. And by this time, of course, we were getting fidgety again because the quarters were cramped, the ablutions or the toilet facilities were terrible, short of water, and we finally got after the Dutch to say, "Well, what are you going to do with us?"

Once we arrived in Palembang, in the Netherlands East Indies, we were under Dutch control, although General Wavell was

in Java. But we became under Dutch authority then, you see. And they took us from Palembang about, oh, early -- late in the night, I guess, or early in the morning -- about 1 or 2 o'clock. They put us on a train, after being there a week, and took us to a place down the southern part of Sumatra and then from there across the Sunda Strait to a northern part of Java.

We arrived in Java, perhaps, oh, I'd say it was a day's trip, about 8-9 hours. When we arrived in Java they had a train lined up there for us. I'd say a cattle train -- all wooden seats -- typical of what they used it for, you know, the type of people that were using it. They certainly weren't like, like we were used to over in this part of the world. And we arrived in Batavia (I think they call it Jakarta, now), we arrived in Batavia about 9 o'clock at night, and we were met there by the Dutch. And we were bused, or trucked, I should say, to King William III School, and Mr. Cornelius (this is a school house by that name).

The pupils, obviously, weren't there at 9 o'clock in the night and they had put us there and we slept on the floor, on the hard floors. There were no beds, or no anything there. And they said, "Now, we're going to give you a good meal, now." Because we hadn't had any good substantial meal, perhaps, for -- well no cooked meal, perhaps, for 2 or 3 weeks, any more than bully beef and a few bananas. And we arrived at Mr....well, some went to Mr. Cornelius and some went to King William III school. And they came out about 10 o'clock at night and they had bully beef and a banana, I think, was our lunch. This is what they called a good

lunch!

So the following morning, of course, we were trying to get regrouped now. At that time we'd had, perhaps, an advance to us arriving in Sumatra. We had 1 or 2 of our aircraft, had got away from Singapore and it arrived at Sumatra. And they'd flown from Sumatra into Kalajeti. Now Kalajeti is in Java. So I remember this day quite clearly.

They had the City of Manchester there and they were unloading some trucks down at the dockside. And the NCO in charge came to me and says, "We've got a work party going on down the dock. Would you want to volunteer to go out?" I said, "Sure, I'll go on it." We went down and started unloading - we worked all night, actually, unloading the City of Manchester, taking out trucks, there were no armoured vehicles, all trucks actually. And one of the crew of the City of Manchester, he said to me, "You know," he said, "if I were you I wouldn't stay here." He said, "We're going to Australia. Now if you want to," he said, "you should come with us." I said, "No I'm staying with my unit."

And we finished the City of Manchester about 7 o'clock in the morning. We worked all night on it, actually. Then we went back to our King William III school. And during the day some of our blokes, they did get away on the City of Manchester, to Australia. But being the type of individual that I was, I said, "No. I'm staying with the unit, regardless."

We went back and then, the following day, we went to Kalajeti airdrome, we were....I don't know why we went there, actually. We had a few aircraft left. Maybe 2, or 3 at the

most, 3 at the most. And we were supposed to do reconnaissance and try to stop the Japanese, and perhaps, damage the airport so they wouldn't be able to land on it. But we operated the aircraft for two weeks. But nothing to operate with, really. If you know what I mean, the equipment we had was practically nothing. And I don't think we had any bombs at that time, either. If there were they were very limited.

So after 2 or 3 weeks there, finally, the Japanese...they did land in Sumatra. As a matter of fact, they were dropping parachutes before we even left there. They finally came into Java and made a landing there and we had moved north to Butanzork. And I remember at Kalajeti, the officer saying to me -- and I remember his name now. He detailed a chap by the name of Corporal Heslop, Ford, and French. There were 3 of us. He left us a 1500-weight Bedford truck. And he said, "Look, you are to destroy these aircraft."

At that time they were boarding the old Boston aircraft. I don't know if you are familiar with the Boston? They boarded the crowd -- that's the remainder of our squadron that was left -- they boarded a Boston aircraft and went to Bandung. And they left us a 1500-weight Bedford, and they said, "Now we're going to...we'll meet you at Butanzork." And after we destroyed the aircraft, I remember, you know, I remember the aircraft. I believe it was K4173. It was the aircraft that we destroyed on that airdrome before we left that morning. And when we were....after we destroyed the aircraft with incendiary bullets, the four 250-pound bombs were laying under the wings on the

ground. They weren't mounted on the wings because the aircraft was unserviceable. They had the prop taken off, you see. And we were told to destroy it. Well, we destroyed it with incendiary bullets.

As we were leaving one side of the drome, the Japs were coming in the other. They chased us off the drome. So we struck the main road, and of course, we struck the main road and there were people, literally thousands of people. We were going one way and they were coming the other way. We could never figure why. However, we did get to Butanzork late that night and again, we regrouped there with....Well, there weren't many there, perhaps no more than 25 or 30, and we were told where to go, but we had a road map. We got to Butanzork, but all the evacuees and the refugees, they were all coming with all their wares, with packages on their back, and the roads were littered with people.

When we arrived in Butanzork, again, we bedded down for the night, and then next morning we had our own lorries then, we had our 1500-weight Bedford -- we didn't part with that -- and we moved south again. We moved back to Batavia, and from Batavia we went into Bandung, and from Bandung we sort of regrouped again, but it wasn't much of a group actually, because we were so disbanded....There was nobody in charge, really. So we went to Bandung, and we still had our few 1500-weight Bedfords; we went to a service station, we went to the hotels, and everything we did we charged to the RAF. Now, at that time Java was in a peak disorder, as was Sumatra.

And we went to Gharute, we were going on the beaches of Gharute to meet the invading Japanese forces. And while we were

there the Dutch capitulated. And they...we didn't want to give in, we had a few rifles and bayonets and a few bren guns. And they said, "If you don't capitulate we'll turn the Dutch army on you." And our officer said, "Well, we don't have much choice."

But, however, we thought, perhaps, that there was some hope that we may get to the seashore and perhaps see a ship of some description. We may get away on it. But, I think, since then how foolish it was to think there would be a ship within these waters! The Japanese had everything cleared for, perhaps 100, perhaps 1000 miles. And there was nothing in the waters.

However, we were taken then at Gharute and the Japanese moved in and they said, "Now, were going to leave here for a little while. And the proper thing for you to do, perhaps, is go to the mountains and we'll keep an eye on you, and grow a few vegetables, and so on and so forth." But unfortunately that was short lived. We were only there, perhaps, a week, and the Japanese got organized enough that they came in and took us back to Batavia.

I'll tell you, it was a terrible sight, really. To think that we as Britisher's would be under these little -- you know -- I could use the word for them, but I'd probably better not. But, however, we did get back to Batavia and they put us in a cattle pound. We slept on cobblestones. At that stage of the game they asked us if we'd be kind enough to write a letter to our next of kin. Which we knew would never be posted. We did write letters, for their benefit, actually. Because we knew they had no way of getting mail out and didn't intend to send them out.

After a little while, maybe a week or two at Gharute -- now, I must say, we lived very well there because the natives...we had a few Dutch guilders left, and the natives were all very willing to do a little bit of black market work with us like sugar, bananas. And they'd pass us peanuts. They'd pass it under the fence to us when the guards weren't looking.

But they didn't leave us there too long. They took us back to Kalajeti again. And the reason they took us back Kalajeti because they had known that we had destroyed the airdrome before we left. And they took us back there. Then they said, "Well, all right, we're going to put you fellows to work now repairing your damage." It was exactly what they did. We built a small track similar to the....well, the same thing, I would think, as the cars they use in coal mines. You'd load up these cars with....they had a bull dozer there and they pushed the earth up in mounds and we shoveled the earth into these carts and pushed them, one behind the other, perhaps for 1000 yards. And then we dumped. What we were doing was enlarging the airdrome. We worked at Kalajeti, well, perhaps, a couple months, 3 or 4 months doing that. And that was very, very hard work. Ninety degrees, 100 degrees. And the only thing they gave us to eat, of course, was a little bit of rice at that time.

They did give us, or at least they did try to keep us supplied with hot water, for drinking purposes. While we worked on the airport during the day they (we drank out of bamboos of course) they had a big 45 gallon drum. And they had a big fire underneath it. And every man went to the drum and dipped out his drink of hot water. Now, we were told hot water is good for you

when you are sweating. Perhaps it was, I really don't know. But, anyhow, it kept us from drying up, dehydrating. And the weather was very, very warm. And after we'd repaired the airdrome - I say repaired, we did, we extended the airdrome and the native people put down new sods, and in a very short time the airport was operational. And I know at that particular airport the Japanese had flown one or two of our Long-nose Blenheims, which they had taken from the Royal Air Force. Probably it was discarded or unserviceable. They made it fit and were flying it.

But at Kalajeti then, we stayed for a very short while and they took us back to Batavia, and we just waited our time at Batavia until they got a ship to take us back to Singapore, to Changi. They took us down to the dockside in Batavia (I'm using the word Batavia because it was Batavia at that time, it's Jakarta now). And they put us on a ship called the Singapore Maru, an old tramp. I say a tramp. And there they took us back to Changi and we arrived at Keppel Harbor. I'd say there were probably 150 to 200 at this time.

We landed at Keppel Harbor in Singapore and whatever goods we had with us, such as our kit bag, we had a few kit bags with us, you know. Each individual has his own shirts, and underwear, and towels, and things like that. Because this is the early stages of the war, of course.

And they said, "Well, you're going to march now Changi." From Keppel Harbor to Changi. Well, in my opinion would be about 8-10 miles. In the blistering heat of the day. And a lot of us at that time were getting down for footwear. Footwear was bad.

The majority of us, of a matter of fact, were in our bare feet at that time. Because they had not given us one earthly thing. That was from the 2nd of March until, I would say, September, latter part of September. And we started to march to Singapore, from the dock at Keppel Harbor. And we were strewn all over the place. And the Japanese guards were there with rifles and bayonet. And as we went along the way, every now and then, every 3 or 400 yards they'd have a Chinaman's heads stuck up on a post to show you what, you know, what's likely to happen if you didn't behave. And they'd do that, every now and then, you'd see a head stuck up on a post somewhere on a fence.

So they said, "All right, we're going to march." Because the Japanese, they're very rough in their way, too, you know. And every second word was gurrah!, gurrah! I don't know if you know what that means or not, but it's hurry up and get on with it, and this sort of thing. But, as you dropped out of the ranks going back, the people that dropped out, we never saw them anymore. If you dropped out and fell by the side of the road, you stayed there. But darkness caught up with us unfortunately, or fortunately, and they sent out trucks to pick us up. And you can imagine the turmoil, now. It's just that dark at night, trying to rush the people in these trucks to get them back to Changi.

With blistered feet and sick as dogs, nothing to eat, we finally arrived in Changi about 10 o'clock at night. And of course, we were put in the notorious Changi Jail. And after some time there -- they had us out every day, mind you -- a little working, we were cutting rubber trees. I say cutting rubber

trees, I don't know if you had any experience trying to cut a rubber tree with the ordinary swinging ax? The bloody thing used to bounce off a dozen times, you know. And they'd be over and watching you cut these trees and getting a great kick out of it. But, they're full of latex, as you know.

After being there a little while, we cleared a bit of land, and we were supposed to grow sweet potatoes, primarily for the Japanese, obviously, because we knew we weren't going to be around that long. But we were there, let me see, oh, we were there, perhaps, till the last of November, probably the first week in December.

I might say, too, that the Singapore Maru left Singapore for Japan in October '42, as we arrived in September. She was torpedoed with all the prisoners on her. So we were fortunate to have got off her in Singapore. They lined us up after being there some time. We were actually a nuisance to them. Because they had to feed us and they had to guard us and they had to have medical examinations (which they didn't have, of course, at that time). They didn't care about it either. But what they did after there sometime, we were working, sweating, some people had started to lose weight, obviously, because of the temperature and the way we were working. Because we weren't used to working that way in the tropics, you know. The British only worked --well, we used to go to work 8 o'clock in the morning, 12 o'clock noon we were finished. And then at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, you started your sports. But you only worked half a day there because of the intense heat, of course. But after being there

for sometime, they finally decided well, now we're going to send some people up to the railroad. Now, we had not heard about the Thai railroad at that time. Have you read the book Bridge on the River Kwai?

C.G.R.:

Oh yes.

J.C.F.:

Oh well, you know what I'm talking about.

C.G.R.:

Yes, I'd interviewed a couple of men who worked there, too.

J.C.F.:

Oh, is that so? Oh, oh, I see, that's interesting.

Yeah, well, I was at Singapore, you see, and they lined us up on the tarmac. I say the tarmac - on the parade ground. Changi was a very big place. It held, perhaps, 60 or 70,000 British troops at one stage of the game. And, finally around the first week in December, they got us all lined up, and the Japanese started numbering off. I remember these things. Well, I know the Japanese counting very well, you know, ichi, ni, san etc.

My buddy was a chap from Plymouth, in England. He was standing next to me. When they came to us they just dropped right inbetween the two of us. They said, "You go that way. And you go that way." Just separate. My friend, who was next to me, he was bound for Japan too. They never arrived. The ship was torpedoed and with all hands -- they were all lost.

Fortunately, we went this way, we went on a Japanese liner. The liner was built in Belgium, actually, in Belfast. We went on

this liner, and on that ship there were 3 or 4 decks. There were some Australians on one deck and we were on the next deck up from them. And we weren't allowed to take cover. We were barred on deck, not allowed below.

We left Singapore, I would say, perhaps, the first week in December. I know we arrived in Nagasaki. They would not let us take shelter of any description, the washrooms were rigged out over the water. And they gave us 2 meals a day, rice in the morning and rice in the afternoon. And the wind was bitter cold, going through the China Sea. But first of all we went to Taiwan. We took on water in Taiwan and fuel. To my knowledge, we didn't land any prisoners there. From Taiwan, we went direct to Nagasaki. And that was the coldest time, I think, I've ever been in my life. We were barred on deck, we weren't allowed inside, no way. It was a large ship and they had lots of accommodations for us, but I think they were frightened that we were going to spread the lice and bugs and everything else we probably had at that time. So we finally arrived in....

C.G.R.:

So it wasn't that the rest of the ship was fully occupied so you had to be on deck.

J.C.F.:

I'm not too sure, I think there was lots of space inside but the Japanese were keeping that for their own use, they didn't want us to get inside. The Australians, by the same token, were on the next deck and they were barred on deck as well. Now we were on deck and we suffered untold agonies, cold Siberian winds

right across the China Sea. And the water was rough. But the fortunate thing that we didn't have an attack by a submarine or we didn't have an escort. We went completely, entirely on our own.

We arrived in Nagasaki on December the 17th, about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, December 17th, 1942. And when we arrived there they brought out a tug boat and they had a landing barge and they put us on the landing barge and then on a tug boat, and then they took us to a little island right in the mouth of the harbor. And from there we paraded, perhaps, a mile, a mile and a half to a camp. And when we arrived in the camp, there were many prisoners there when we arrived. They were from the HMS Exeter. You remember the Exeter was sunk in the Java Sea. The crew of the Exeter, and the Encounter, and the Pope. Now, the Pope I understand was American. The Encounter and the Exeter were

[End of side 1.]

So when we arrived at Nagasaki, we were encountered with the crew of the Exeter and the Encounter, and the Pope. And they said then, "You can prepare for 3 or 4 years." And I said, "You're crazy, man. We'll never last 3 or 4 years." And unfortunately we stayed there for 2 years and 9 months before the war came to an end.

Now, while we were at Nagasaki, of course, we worked at the dockyard. We were ship-building. At one stage of the game we had 1,200 prisoners there. But every now and then, perhaps, every 3 or 4 months they'd bring in 2 or 300 prisoners. But they were careful not to mix them up with the people that were already

there. They had new blocks in which they put them by themselves. The only reason I can think, perhaps, is they may have something to tell us that we didn't know. Not that we knew anything, because we were in a complete blackout, we knew nothing about what was going on in the outside world. No news, no radios, we didn't have anything.

So anyhow, we were broken up into various groups and went to work at the dockyard every day. We'd get one day's rest in about 10 days. And we were divided into groups at the dockyard. I worked in number 7 group, which the Japanese called nunabang. I don't know why nunabang, but that's perhaps number 7 for Japanese. But I don't think it was really. But I operated the guillotine at the dock yard, cutting metal plates. And in that group there were 7 of us. Mighty cold job, I must say. Exposed to the elements and the weather and everything else that went with it. Plus, lack of food, no eating, nothing at all. And we worked at the dockyard, then for the...until such time as they dropped the bomb.

But the life in the camp at Nagasaki is nearly undescrivable, actually, because there were 40 men in a room about 24 feet long and about 18 feet wide -- 40 of us! At least we started off with 40, but by the time we finished there was only about 17 or 18 of us there. The rest of them had just passed on. Now, one of the things, perhaps, that hit people more than anything, was the fact that we had come from a climate in Singapore -- 100 degrees -- we went into snow flurries on December the 17th, with our shorts on! And a majority of the

people, obviously, came down with flu, pneumonia, and pleurisy.

The first 2 months we were at Nagasaki, we buried 60 people. Every day you came home there were 1 or 2 people laying out in the corridor. And there was no treatment for them, there was absolutely nothing. The Japanese had thought, perhaps, that the creosote pills were a cure-all. I seem to recall that the...one of the things we were very short of was M & B tablets. Is there such a thing as M & B, M & B?

C.G.R.:

Well, I've heard of it, yeah.

J.C.F.:

Well, this is the thing, they used to say, "If we only had M & B tablets". Now, I don't know what they were talking about, actually. Something to do with sulphur, I think, perhaps, eh.

C.G.R.:

Could be.

J.C.F.:

I don't really know.

C.G.R.:

I thought they had...those weren't the things that had brewer's yeast in them, were they?

J.C.F.:

I really don't know.

C.G.R.:

Yeah, I'm not sure. But, I've heard that expression before. [Actually, M. & B. stood for May & Baker, a British pharmaceutical company that manufactured an early form of sulfa drugs.]

J.C.F.:

Yeah, yeah. Well, this is the thing that they said, "If you only had M & B tablets, you know, we'd be able to conquer this sort of thing." But basically, talking about camp life, now, and I think camp life is very important, if you want me to continue.

C.G.R.:

Yes, oh yes, that's exactly what I want to hear about.

J.C.F.:

Yes. Well, the camp life, you see, was rather, rather terrible. Now, we'd get up in the morning. Reveille was 6 o'clock, and the first thing you did....I might say, too, there was no heat in the room whatsoever, you know, absolutely nothing to keep you warm. Contrary to what people say, Japan is mighty cold in the wintertime. January and February, you can have cold weather. It's moderate, perhaps, the rest of the year, but these 2 months were terrible. No heat in the room, we'd get up in the morning, Japanese would have roll call at 6 o'clock.

We had a Dutch...we were interned with Dutch as well, you see. They had a bugler there who blew reveille or whatever you call it, reveille, all right, and we were all out of bed. The Japanese came around to the rooms, making sure that everybody was out of bed. The first thing you did in the morning was rub your body down with a brush, very rough brush, and the idea of that was to get your blood in circulation. And a guard went from room to room and if he caught one person in that particular room not using that brush -- the brush was something like a scouring pad

with two strings on the end of it and you sawed it back and forth on your back -- and if he caught one person not using that the whole room suffered. Their philosophy is entirely different from ours because they believed that if one man in that room did something wrong, then all 30 or 40 men were responsible for it and they suffered too. So actually, what they were doing is making us to look after the rest of the room, if you follow what I mean.

Now, after rubbing down for about 10 or 15 minutes, your body would become red, of course, what was left of our bodies after a certain period. Then the next thing, you had a period of delousing. And we had plenty of body lice. Plenty of bed bugs; fleas were numerous. After you'd done this, they'd have roll call -- tenko. And then you lined up one behind the other and the Japanese officer would come around with a guard, obviously, and he did one room at a time. And he...they gave us one week, actually, to learn the Japanese language to be able that roll call. And he'd start with number 1, which was ichi, ni, san, and so on, right around the room. Very often they couldn't count, they were very poor counters, I might add. At least I thought them very, very, very terrible. They couldn't depend, they couldn't trust themselves, and they couldn't depend on their count. They would have to do it 3 or 4 times.

After that was finished, he'd move on to the other room; you weren't allowed to interfere with their roll call at all. You weren't allow to move to the room until the bugle had sounded, which meant all clear. When the all clear sounded you were permitted to proceed to the galley and pick up two boxes of rice.

I might say that we had an orderly system for that. We took turns on rotation basis -- two fellows did the orderly every week. We would go and get the 2 boxes of rice, bring it in the room, and the two boxes of rice consisted of our breakfast and our lunch.

C.G.R.:

How large would the boxes have been, about?

J.C.F.:

The boxes would be about 2 feet long, by about a foot wide, about 8 inches deep. And they wouldn't always be full of rice, half-full with wet, sloppy rice. No salt, just boiled rice. Then the rice was dished out. Each man would have his plate on the table. And the man who was responsible for allocating or dishing out the rice put two little portions on each plate. One portion was for your breakfast, the other portion was for your 12 o'clock lunch. After this was done, the boxes had to be washed up before we were allowed to go to work. But the boxes were just placed inside the door until you'd ate your breakfast. Many people ate their breakfast and their lunch together, because there was only enough in the two boxes for one meal, for that number of men. But some people put a small portion in a little tin can. I should have brought the cans down to you, I've got the can now. Have you ever seen one?

C.G.R.:

No.

J.C.F.:

Oh, goodness, gracious, if I'd known that, I'd have brought

down the can. I've still got my can. But, anyway, we'd eat our breakfast right there with chopsticks. We had no knives, forks, spoons, any utensils of any description. Only a plate and chopsticks. So we ate the breakfast portion. And if you felt you had enough for breakfast, what was left you put in for lunch. Still cold, mind you, it was never warm.

After breakfast your boxes had to be washed up and then you could have 10 minutes smoke period. Smoke period consisted....or at least our rations were 3 cigarettes per man per day, providing you could get them. And you were allowed a few minutes to smoke, and the type of ashtray we used was sawed-off bamboo. The guard would come around and he'd light the cigarette in the first room and you'd transfer the light from one room to the other. And shortly after that the bugle would sound again to fall in on the parade ground. They gave you a very, very short time to do this. Many people didn't smoke because you didn't have time to smoke. And I might say that the 3 cigarettes a day that we were permitted, we bought them ourselves. We were getting 10 cents a day. Instead of taking the actual cash, the money was put in a pool. And the man in charge of the room -- we had one man in charge of each room, you see -- he'd pool the money and pay the Japanese for the cigarettes.

We also had a little black market going with an interpreter. He had served some time in the American navy in the First World War and he was our interpreter and we had a little bit of black market going with him.

C.G.R.:

This was a Japanese?

J.C.F.:

He was Japanese.

C.G.R.:

Right.

J.C.F.:

But he was limited too, because, there weren't much to buy in Nagasaki. And occasionally he would smuggle in, if I might say, aspirin tablets. No bandages, because they were at a premium. But the odd thing he would smuggle in. And, of course, we had to have a little bit of money in the kitty to pay him. This was all black market, mind you, and he stuck his neck out pretty far, I might add. But, fortunately, he spoke good English and he knew our situation and sympathized with us more than anything. But, however, other things that we...anything that we wanted and if there was any money in the kitty, for the benefit of anybody in that room, was all allocated and, let's say, it was handled by one man. It had to be because you couldn't have everybody interfering. And it was done to the benefit of all concerned.

Now, after the breakfast, we washed up our utensils, and then we fell in on the parade ground. We were right on the edge of the water, as a matter of fact. I might add too, I've got a drawing of the camp, which I made in Japan. I've got that too -- the complete camp. Oh yeah, I've got a lot of things, actually, that I've preserved and looked after. I should have brought down that to you, really. I'd liked you to have seen that.

But we'd fall in on the ground and then the Japanese army

would come and they'd roll call us again. And then they'd march us off to the dockyard. They'd probably do it 3 or 4 times before they'd get the correct numbers. They'd march us down to the dockyard and then they'd hand us over to the navy. The navy would count us. Now, they could not agree -- the navy could never agree with the army. So they had to go over it 2 or 3 times. Then they'd hand us over to the dockyard. And they'd have to count you. And if ever you saw a schmozzle, we had one. Standing out in the cold, perhaps, as much as a half an hour.

And the other things, too, that we were not permitted to do, we were not permitted to talk in the ranks if there's Japanese near you, we were not permitted to whistle under any conditions, because they felt that when you were whistling you were happy. And no way did they want you to be happy because they knew that you might have known something they didn't know. No way did they want you to be happy. And they would not let us whistle or talk. If you passed the guardhouse going into dock, and you were caught talking, you were just grabbed by the shoulder and hauled out -- you and your buddy. And you turned up at the dockyard much later, black and blue. They used a baseball bat, they used pick-axe handles, they used bamboos, used face-slapping, they used nose twitching. Have you had that experience -- anybody telling you that one before?

C.G.R.:

Not nose twitching.

J.C.F.:

Oh no? Twist your nose. Stand at attention and have it done 10 or 15 times. Oh, very annoying. Can you imagine how

annoying that could be? Oh yeah, that was quite common with them. And they used various tortures, of course, but not so much tortures at the dockyards as were at the camp, really.

Now, once we got down to the dockyard we automatically went to our various groups. As I said I was in group 7. And we displayed a number. (I still got my number too -- 2207 is my POW number.) We displayed a number on our left breast. The idea of that number was to indicate to any Japanese in that dockyard that I was supposed to be in a certain location in that dockyard. Now, if I was caught anywhere else, I had no right there. And they let me know it in no uncertain terms, by beatings and bashings and everything else.

The only reason we had to go anywhere else, actually, was to go to the benjo, which is the toilets. Which we went quite frequently because everybody had dysentery. It wasn't a matter of having it day and night, but you practically had it all the time. And the Japanese, in many cases, would accompany you to the latrines and stand outside the door, and it was a complete rush all the time you were there. But while you were there you got the opportunity to snatch a cigarette if you had a butt left. You didn't have any left, I can assure you, but we used to do that. And the Japanese would smell the smoke and, of course, they'd go right mad. And everybody there would take a beating. But these are the things that you do, realizing that the consequence could be very rough on you. But you had to do it when you had to do it, you know.

But, then again, you'd get back to your place of work and

you'd start all over again. And lunch time was 12 o'clock -- they gave you 20 minutes for lunch. You weren't allowed to warm your food. The only heat we had on the dock were these little open fire braziers, we called them. Charcoal burners, see. The Japanese could warm their food on that but the POWs weren't allowed to do that. Most of us kept it in our seat pocket because that was the warmest part, it was heat from your body, whatever -- not much but enough to keep it -- not ice cold anyway. And then you'd have your lunch, and they gave you 5 minutes smoking.

And then the chap in charge of the guillotine that I was on, he was the ancho -- he'd have you back to work again, because he was watched too, by the various army guards. They were patrolling the dockyard. And you'd go back at your work again and then 5 o'clock in the afternoon, then, work would commence and you'd form around the parade ground again. And they'd go the same routine again, counting everybody and made sure they had everybody -- the numbers that they delivered in the morning.

Now, there were many times that they didn't have the same number, because if everybody fell sick during the day, obviously, they wouldn't be there, they'd be up in the sick bay or back at the dockyard. It was very hard, sometimes, for the Japanese to understand that. But, however, when we got back to the dockyard, or back to our camp, the first thing we'd do is try to wash yourself. This was a chore because we had no soap, the whole 3 years, or 2 years and 9 months I was there, I never had a bit of soap. They had a little piece of galvanized pipe there with 1/8th holes drilled in it. They turned on the water for 20

minutes, with a little drip of water, ice cold, and you'd just swill your face over in your hands and then you'd get out and get back to your room as quick as you could to make room for someone else because the space was limited.

Once you got back in your room then, of course, you'd pick up your rice box again. This time you'd only pick up one. Two in the morning, one in the afternoon. And the same routine -- the plates were put on the table. And we had one fellow in particular, a fellow came from Lancaster in England, Freddie Gardiner -- I remember his name quite clearly -- Freddie used to be the man that would divide the rice out, nearly to the grain. And you don't realize how important it was to have that done near to the grain of rice, because there were people there who would quibble over one grain if they thought the other guy had more than them. So for that reason it was always share and share alike, whatever you had. There was no such thing as "you have more than me" or anything like that, because you couldn't afford that. Because our very existence was based around the foods, of course, they were getting at that time.

After that was over you had wash up your boxes again. And from that until, let's say, from 7 o'clock til 9 o'clock, you were permitted to smoke. Now, they had lights, they had electric lights in the camp. But, as I say, no heat whatsoever. There were long tables right up to the center. You slept all together in this room. And ate in the same room. There were 20 men -- or 10 men on the bottom, 10 men on top, and 20 on the other side. We had double deckers. And we just had the hard matting,

Japanese matting. And that was all we had to sleep on. Now, anybody who had blankets when we went there, which we obviously did, they took our blankets away from us and said, "They weren't sanitary." And they gave us Japanese ones and you could shoot birds through them. They were made of fibre, I think, or coconut fibre or some darn thing, or grass weed. But they weren't any good. So, obviously, we slept with everything we had on. All the clothes that we ever had. You had to keep it on that night. And you got as near as you could together, to keep the body heat from the individual people. We had no pillows -- whatever little bit of junk you had, you'd pile up and roll up anything you had and sleep on that. Even your mess can or whatever you had you'd sleep on.

And, as I say, during the night, once the lights went off, the cockroaches or the bed-bugs would start going. And if the lights came on suddenly for some unknown reason you'd see them then. They went all over the place. And we slept in that and you'd get up the next morning you'd have blotches all over you. And, of course, as I mentioned, the first thing you'd do was the debugging process. And it was very necessary, because -- I could feel some of body lice now -- and they were little white fellows, you know, and could they ever bite. Oh! But then we....after this was done then they'd give you a couple hour's smoking and then they'd have roll call. And then the next thing, of course, was lights out.

And the Japanese would come around, perhaps, every hour to see if the lights be out now and see that nobody is smoking. And your ashtrays had to be washed and put on the outside table so

they could see them. Ashtrays were not allowed in your room, only in smoking periods. And that was part of the inspection, the ashtrays. So they were very, very strict, very, very strict with us.

And then we'd turn in then for the night -- I say turn in -- we'd cuddle up together and huddle the best we could. And, of course, we were confronted with lots of rats going around overhead in the beams and all this sort of stuff. But fortunately they never bothered us, to my knowledge. But they were there. We'd see them. And hear them too, oh, they kicked up an awful fuss. Seams were wide open -- stringers, you see. But they never, ever bothered us to any extent. Now, the other thing, of course, during the night, being on a rice diet, you'd have to go to the latrines perhaps two or three times a night -- you only had water anyway. Now, I might say too, that we had lots of water to drink during meal periods. It was Chinese -- I say Chinese tea -- green leaves thrown in a bucket of hot water. Barely, colored, no taste whatsoever. So we drank quite a lot of that. We had to because we acquired a taste for it. We couldn't drink it now, we couldn't drink it before. So when that's over -- and going to the latrines at night, again I would say, there would be guard in the passage-way.

And no matter what hour of the night that you went to the latrines, you'd always meet a dozen or so fellows. Some had diarrhea, which the majority did, of course. And some were vomiting, but you always had to salute the guards. Realizing, of course, that the Japanese soldier was the lowest form. The

officer took it out on the NCO, and the NCO took it out on the private, and the private took it out on the POWs. And this was the very way they operated. But you had to salute them and bow to them at any hour of the night. Now, can you visualize going to the latrines 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning, half asleep, and see a guard sitting down and taking the trouble to bow and salute to him? Farthest from your mind. But I can assure you you did it or you didn't go back any more. You just, you know, they just bruised you and threw you in the room and that was it. This happened to many, many, hundreds of occasions.

Now, while we were in the camp we used to have sick parades. Every second or third morning they'd have a sick parade. And we had a Japanese MO there. And we also had a few of our own doctors. We had a few Dutch doctors, and we had....I remember one name in particular. Maybe you've not come across it. Captain Farley, an American dentist.

C.G.R.:

No.

J.C.F.:

Well, Captain Farley was with us. Yeah, he was a dentist in the American army. And we had another chap there too -- I forget his name but I remember Captain Farley quite well because I got to know him quite well. And he was one of the doctors, of course, but not a medical doctor -- he was a dentist. But he worked in conjunction with these people as near as he could realizing that the Japanese -- you'd go to see the Japanese doctor and sometimes you'd see your own doctor first. And in many instances the Japanese doctor would be with our doctor. If

the Japanese doctor could not see anything wrong with you, like any ulcer on your skin or any boils on you or anything like that -- of course boils wouldn't keep you in camp anyhow, everybody had boils, but that wouldn't keep you in camp. They just cut them open with a lancet and that was it, you know, with no anesthetic or no freezing or not, you just went to work with that. But the Japanese doctor, if he could not see anything, you know, like an ulcer on your leg for instance -- but stomach trouble, headache -- out to work!

And they worked on a quota system that so many men every day had to work out of that room. And the number of men that were sick in that room that day, interfered with our rations. They fully believed, when a man is sick he doesn't need to eat. So for that reason, if you had 5 men in your room that were sick, that means that our rations were cut by 5 people. Half rations when your sick. And their philosophy was that a sick man doesn't eat. Now, we rate the opposite. We say the sick man needed more food because he wouldn't be sick if he had enough food in the first place, in a lot of instances. But the Japanese would not, would not under any conditions, under any conditions believe our doctors. I might say too, we had a German doctor in there, Doctor Feiswich -- he was an S.O.B. He was an S.O.B if ever there was one.

C.G.R.:

In what way?

J.C.F.:

He was cruel. He was German. He was Dutch army. Feiswich

his name was -- I think he was court martialed after. But he was the devil. He was the kind of an individual that cooperated with the Japanese. When we came out to the camp, I came out 90 pounds, but he didn't come out no 90 pounds, I can tell you that one. He was in good, well, good shape when he went there, because what he was doing was the Japanese were feeding him. Because he was feeding them information and he was working with them to keep all the people he could at work in the dockyard. And he was a head doctor -- he was a surgeon.

Well, to give an example, if you wanted a toenail taken off, or a finger nail, or a tooth extracted, or any minor operation -- you know what he would do? He'd take you in -- we had a sick bay there, again a place as big as this, I suppose, with wooden benches -- he'd put you on that [bench] and he'd nail the first four or five people going by and he'd get you to hold down this individual while he took off a toenail without any freezing or any anesthetic whatsoever, or extract a tooth. And you could hear screams all over the place. But he was an S.O.B. As far as we were concerned, we always thought he was one.

We had, I might say, the Japanese had lots of medical supplies, stored away -- Red Cross -- but wouldn't give us a thing. They would not give us a thing until after the war was over. After the war was over this Dr. Feiswich claimed all the Red Cross stuff was there, and he was court martialed for it. I don't know what happened to him after. Of course, he'd be gone now because, man, he was perhaps, in his 50's at that time, you see, we were only young. But he was bad.

Now we had other Dutch doctors, they were good. But he was

one S.O.B., if ever there was one. He treated the prisoners very, very, cruel, he had no time for them at all. I've seen him slap prisoners across the face. If he had a patient and was trying to -- anything....I'll give you an example. I had a case here one time -- I don't know if you can see the mark there now -- there's a mark right there.

C.G.R.:

Oh yes. On your right wrist.

J.C.F.:

Yeah, I had a boil on the arm there and I went down to him and he looked at it and "Yes", he said, "I'll fix that." He squeezed it together like that. The knives that we had, the lancets that we used were all made on the dockyard. We made them down there. He just squeezed it together, drove a knife in it, he left a hole about an inch long. He took his tweezers drove down in it and twisted the tweezers around 4 or 5 times. With no anesthetic, no freezing, whatsoever. Can you imagine what effect that had on the tissues? Now, turned around 3 or 4 times and he put a draining in the back here. He put a draining in the back, so he drove the knife in there so it drained through the bottom. You know how they treated that? They put a cellophane, they packed it with cellophane off of cigarettes packages, Japanese cigarette packages, and he put condes [?] fluid over it.

C.G.R.:

What kind?

J.C.F.:

Condes fluid. Pot.[assium] permanganate.

C.G.R.:

Oh yes.

J.C.F.:

That's all we had, blue water. We used that for everything. And he filled it and doused it with blue water. Pot. permangum we used to call it, or condes fluid. These names may not be familiar to you because these are names we used there, you see. But this is what they used. And I went to work everyday with this arm up in a sling until that healed over. No such thing as staying home for a thing like that -- I went to work with one arm because by me going to work it meant that a ration wouldn't be cut in that room. And for that reason I would not ask to be kept in camp. But the mark is still there and it's bothered me occasionally, but not so serious, really. But, I'm saying this is the type of things they would do to you.

And if you had someone who was fighting, he'd just up and bang you across the face and knock you down just the same -- I'm talking now about the fellow who's taking out a.....for instance, that nail there I lost in Japan, that's my thumb nail -- I lost it in the guillotine. I went up to the Dutch sickbay and this skin here was pushed right down over the nail, you see, and the orderly just looked at it and he took a pair of tweezers and he drove it underneath it. And the doctor said, "What did you do." He said, "I took it off." He said, "You had no right to take it off." And I can assure you that that was pretty sore. Imagine! Sometimes they'd drive scissors in, split it in two -- half each way -- that's the way they did it. This is one of them right there. And they did this to numerous people.

And toenails were another thing. Imagine two people on each side of the man, holding him down, so he could take a toenail off. And ingrown toe nails were very common, you know. But these are the type of things they did. Now, in the sick bay too, if there are people sick on the bed -- I remember a friend of mine, Arthur Heatherall from Tottenham in London. Arthur was a big chap, he was a bus driver, prior to the war, and I used to go to visit him quite often. And the last one off he said to me, he said, "Oh," he said.....he was frothing, frothing from the mouth, just beads of froth coming out. And he was practically delirious. He said, "Oh, don't let me die. Don't let me die." All I could do was, "Arthur, you're all right, you'll be all right." The next morning he was dead. He couldn't be all right.

We had another young fellow there from British Columbia, the only Canadian who was with me, you see, I was with the English and the Americans and Dutch. I was the only Canadian, you see. Now, we had one fellow, "Candy" [Victor] Syrett from B.C., who died in the first few months we were there. Great big strapping man -- but he only lasted a couple of months. But, what, what happened to him -- I don't know. I think it was pneumonia. But, basically, our sick bays had absolutely nothing. And if you had to have an operation, they operated right there and then. Just took your appendix out and things of that nature.

C.G.R.:

And they did that right there.

J.C.F.:

Oh yeah, right there, oh yeah, oh yeah right there. No

anesthetic, no nothing at all, he just took you and....oh, yeah doctored you right while he had you. So there were many people died should never be dead. Because the Japanese would not supply any equipment. They had no medical supplies of any description. No bandages, no bandaids, nothing. And the bandages that we would use for ulcers -- are you familiar with leg ulcers, I suppose?

C.G.R.:

Oh yes.

J.C.F.:

You are. Well, you know what a leg ulcer's like. What we would do is take the bandage they put on (that they [the ulcers] would weep something terrible), you take the bandage and wash them out time and time and time again, with no soap. Just rinse them out in water and get the old...well, you'd try to get the blood off and the matter out of them, see, and use them over and over and over again, the same old bandages. So how could anything get well?

And there were many people to this day, I think, perhaps, who've got skin disease on account of it. I really don't know. I suppose. But the ulcers were terrible things. And any open wound, it took ages for the thing to heal up because there was nothing in this world to help it along. And our resistance was so low that it wasn't even funny. Now, I'll give you an example, perhaps. In the first year we were there -- I might add too, that when I went there I was about 170 pounds, from Singapore, and I hadn't lost any weight in Java because we were doing blackmarket trade, you see. But when I got to Japan the first

year or two we were in pretty good shape. But after the first year things started to get grim. Perhaps they got grim in the motherland of Japan, because their rations were cut too. At that stage of the game, after a year or two, the American submarines were very active in the Pacific and they found it very difficult in getting ships from Sumatra and Java and the Philippines back home to the motherland. And for that reason, they were short of supplies.

So the last year or last year and a half that we were there, we were down to practically death door. And our rations were cut. Every six months our rations would be cut shorter. And we knew why they were being cut. Because they just couldn't get it home. Now realizing, of course, that the majority of the Japanese forces, the army, were all in the outlying islands, at Singapore and Malaya, even as far as Burma, and in order to get the food back to the working population that were keeping and supplying the arms and equipment, they had to have food, they just couldn't get it. So the last stage of the war we were cut and for that reason, I say that reason, we had used up our body fats, we had no oils whatsoever. And when the war ended I was down to 90 pounds. Not only me, not only me, everybody in the camp.

And what I'm saying to you now, and I'll say it to anyone: had the war lasted another six months there would be a lot of us that would have never been here. We would never have been here because we just couldn't survive any longer. Imagine me coming at 90 pounds. And a lot of other people too. We were just the

frame, just walking bones. And in my opinion, and I'll say it, the Japanese couldn't care less. As a matter of fact, the more people that died, the better they liked it, the less trouble they had.

But, again, they cremated everybody, you know. And I went on many funeral parties in Nagasaki. And they would ask for volunteers. And I used to like the idea, getting to Nagasaki, actually clear of the dockyard. I used to volunteer for these parties. Not knowing, of course, when I was going to be next. At the stage of the game, I couldn't care less, to be honest with you. That's the very way we felt: his turn today, mine tomorrow.

But we'd go to Nagasaki, we had to go about 15 or 20 minutes on the boat, from the little island we were on across to the docks at Nagasaki. Then we put the corpse on our back, we had a wooden box made for them, mind you, not a casket, only a wooden box -- rough lumber. We'd cart them on our back up the side of a hill to the crematorium. We got to the crematorium, we put them on a little trolley and we opened the furnace doors and just pushed him in.

And we'd wait, perhaps, I'd say an hour, maybe an hour and a half, and then the tray underneath would be pulled out and the bones would be left on it. And I remember a chap one day said to me, "Pick up the bones." At first I...foolish enough I caught a bone and it was mad hot. You know with just coming out of the fire, you know. I said, "You son of a.....", you know. "Who cut your hair last," so to speak. He got a great kick out of that. But normally what you do -- they have a pair of tongs and they

take the bones and they put them...and they grind the bone up, you see, and make the, and they make the remains, you see. But this happened quite often.

Now I'm too sure if they ever kept the remains of any particular individual and sent them back. I'm not too sure. Now, I'm told they used to have little lead caskets and the remains were taken and put in these lead caskets with numbers on it and so on. I'm not sure of that, I've no way of knowing. But I can tell you that even after the war I received -- I don't know how this happened, really -- but I received a letter from a woman in Australia asking me or telling me how kind I was to tend the funeral of her son at Nagasaki. And no question about it, I was at the funeral party of her son. But how she ever knew, I'll never know. But I was there.

C.G.R.:

It must have been some of his mates told her about you.

J.C.F.:

Well someone had to tell her, but I don't know how. But she did write me a letter and thank me for it. But I might say that the things were terrible in the camp, they were rough, the medical supplies were practically nil, we had no clothing, we had no food. I might state too, we had one leper in our camp, you know.

C.G.R.:

A leper?

J.C.F.:

Oh yeah. Yeah. We had a fellow with leprosy from

Indonesia. And what they did with him, they segregated him from us, they'd build a little 2 X 4, on the way out of the camp. And they kept him in that by himself all the time.

C.G.R.:

A little hut.

J.C.F.:

Yes. But he had a big fence around so he couldn't get out. And we'd pass that every day going and coming back to the camp. And the Japanese were scared of him, they were frightened to death. They'd go and pass his food in underneath the fence, you know, and get out quick. They were scared of him for some reason or other. But I'll never forget that fellow. He had a wonderful sense of humor. He used to have a tin whistle. And very often he'd play on this tin whistle, "There'll always be an England." And yet he was a Dutchman.

But we appreciated that because...here is a man there with leprosy. Right in this camp with us, who was not entitled to anything like we were. I say entitled, I'm talking about going back and forth. At least we got back and forth to the dockyard. Have you ever been barred up in a cage like an animal? And his sense of humour never changed. And I often thought about that, you know. The poor fellow. But basically, they got very little food, or he did.

C.G.R.:

Did he survive, do you know?

J.C.F.:

Yes he did survive, yes he did survive. Yes, he survived, he came out when we came. I say came, we came, he was alive

right to the last.

Now, we had no padres in Japan, you know. Not in our camp, never had a padre. Our church services were all, you know, in our washroom, perhaps once every month. The whole time we were there we didn't get any soap. And for this reason we could have the little places for the washroom -- it was a community bath, actually, and we would go there (certain rooms would have certain days) and the pool would be as large as this room. It had about 2 feet of water in it. Regardless of any skin diseases, and they were numerous, everybody got in that pool together with no soap. It was just a matter of relaxing in the warm water.

C.G.R.:

It was warm.

J.C.F.:

Yes. The Japanese had probably used it a thousand times themselves, the guards. And then they'd have, for instance, I was in room 3. They have room 1, 2, and 3 tonight. One room at a time. The next night they'd have 4, 5, and 6 -- same water. The water was never changed. How long the water lasted I'll never know. But water was there all the time. And if you can visualize getting in dirty water with every kind of body rash, every kind of ulcer, (if there is such a thing as every kind), but there were many kinds of body rashes, as you know. And everybody had....there was nobody exempt from anything in my opinion there. Some worse than others. But everybody had their share of something.

Malaria, of course, didn't affect us in Japan. Malaria was down in Malaya and at Thai railroad. They were confronted with malaria but we weren't in Japan, we...our problems differed. Perhaps the people who had not got to Japan might have been better off in some instances than we were, in this respect: they didn't need the clothing, first of all, to keep them warm. So they wouldn't need the fats. We in Japan needed the fats and needed the clothing. But the fellows down in the, let's say in Singapore, Malaya -- I'm not talking Thai railroad because that was something else -- I'm saying that fellows down there always had the opportunity or at least the advantage of having a warm day and the sun would do something for them.

In addition to that there is always the possibility of getting some contraband goods. And we got contraband whenever we could, we smuggled in all shapes and forms in our crutch, in our hats, everywhere you could think about, you know. And this is the game that you had to play under these circumstances. But I might say too, that we perhaps knew we were going to be taken prisoners of war, even before the Japanese came in. We were prompted about it -- what to do, what not to do, how to prepare ourselves for it. So it was obvious, the handwriting was on the wall long before it happened.

Even in the Hong Kong fellows, we could not hold Hong Kong with a few Canadian soldiers went over there Christmas 1941. It was worse than Deippe, really. But we had to do it because of what we were and who we were, and nothing more or less. And I think we put up a good show under the circumstances. I'm not happy with the situation, mind you, but realizing 3 years and 9

months in a prison camp is not very enticing. And someone said to me today, "Would you do it again?" "Not enough money in the world."

C.G.R.:

Let me ask you about one part of this because I understand from some notes that Dr. [David] Parsons prepared, that you were at Nagasaki when the "A" bomb was dropped.

J.C.F.:

That's right, that's right.

C.G.R.:

Tell me a bit about what that experience was like.

J.C.F.:

Yes. I can do that.

I was at Nagasaki from, as I said, December '42 until 13 of September '45. When they....that morning they dropped the bomb, I was working at the dock yard. It was my turn that morning to go for the bucket of Chinese water. Shortly after 11:00 -- it was a beautifully clear day, there wasn't a cloud in the sky, it was beautiful -- I just picked up a bucket to go up, with the permission of the Jap ancho, to get the bucket of hot water, and it was quite a walk to get it, it was perhaps 10-minutes walk in each direction, so by the time I got back it would be, you know, 20 minutes to 12:00, cause I was going to take my time anyway, (they knew that) [laughter], you had to sling as much as you could, but when I got back or just when I stepped up, why here, I saw this terrific....I saw the mushroom, you know, I watched it. I saw the mushroom and the blast. And, of course, it took me and

through me up against the guillotine. But I felt the intense heat before it struck me, before the blast struck me. And I looked up at the building where we were in the dockyard and there was people running and screeching, and over towards Nagasaki everything was in darkness. The mushroom had blacked out everything. And to me, it was like the sun had fallen out of the sky. And we had no indication or knowledge in this world what had happened. But there was enough heat from that blast that you just couldn't stand up against it. So I hit the ground -- well, I hit the ground because I was knocked out. A few minutes after I came back there was still intense heat and there was still a very, very heavy cloud, hazy, smog, there was everything.

So when I got up, I looked towards Nagasaki, of course, and she was a complete fogged-out black. But in the little pieces in between, you could see fires burning all over the place. So by this time, by this time the Japanese had tried to round us up. This was perhaps 20 minutes after. But the cloud is still all over there and the blast was terrific and also the intense heat. It was out of this world. There's nothing....well, I hope I never again will ever feel anything like it.

And we had no idea what it was. We said, "Well, it could be an ammunition dump. It could be a battleship in Nagasaki harbor." We had no idea in the world. Anyhow, the Japanese took us in their air raid shelter, they had many air raid shelters dug in the side of the cliffs, you know. And we were told on many occasions, These air raid shelters were made for us in case the Americans ever invaded Japan, all the prisoners would go in there and that's where they would stay. And we had them in our

own camp, we had them at the dockyard, we had them all over the place. And we knew that if anybody set a foot on Japan's soil we were in....put in the gas chamber and that was it. We knew that.

Now, they took us in the shelters and of course, being the nosy crowd that we were, we tried to peep out, you know. And, of course, the Japs, themselves were so alarmed, and so, well, let's say they didn't know what struck them. And they were so amazed, unexpected, there was no air raid siren that morning. Never an alert. Beautiful clear day. I watched the plane, I watched the plane fly over after he dropped the bomb. Just the same as I'm sitting here now. And I might say too, that I've been in touch with the man who dropped that bomb.

C.G.R.:

Is that right?

J.C.F.:

Yeah, he's living in Boston, right now. Major General Charles Sweeney. And we've been corresponding back and forth. His target wasn't Nagasaki, you know. His target was Kukura. But when he got over Kukura, Kukura is not far from Hiroshima, the sky was cloudy and he couldn't see anything, so his alternative was Nagasaki. And when he struck Nagasaki, beautiful clear day, he had to get clear of that bomb as quick as he could. Now, I might say, I've been corresponding with the Japanese quite recently, you know. The mayor of Nagasaki, and Professor Yamashata, well, I've got several letters from them. And they're telling us, or telling me actually, that I was about 3 miles from the center of the bomb. I say I was only a mile.

C.G.R.:

I was going to ask how close you were.

J.C.F.:

Well, it's difficult to pinpoint, but I say a mile, a mile and a half, perhaps. But when you can see the plane, and I said at that time, being in the air force, there are many arguments about that, you know, among personnel. Someone said, "How far. What's the height?" I said, "Oh, not far from 30,000." So, when I was talking to Major General Charles Sweeney, I said to him, I said, "What was your height that day." He said, "29,500 when I let go of the bomb." So, I was 500 feet out. So that was a good guess, you know, it was only a guess, obviously.

But, I'm saying now, you know, sometimes you can be near a thing like that. But they dropped the bomb, and after the bomb was dropped we still worked at the dockyard after that, I might say. We went back to the dockyard for 3 or 4 days after that. And the Japanese were very much engaged with making little caskets for their dead, of course. There was 60 to 70,000 killed at one shot, you see. That's their figure. Now, I've got a little diary, too, that I made right there in Nagasaki. Yes, that's the figures they gave us at that time. This is not something I've read since. And what they're saying or what they said to us, "You go back to your camp" after we worked 3 or 4 days, but we knew something had gone wrong. We knew that there was something. No way in the world of telling what it was.

So one day we went back to the camp and someone says, "Boys we're going to have bully beef tonight." We all said, "bully beef! You must be kidding, you're gone cracked." Sure enough

they had Red Cross parcels there which they opened up. And they gave us a tin of bully beef for about five men. Well, we said, "This is it. There's something, there's something, there's something over, there's something on, you know. So, perhaps, the next day the Japanese said, "All men yasme." Now, yasme in Japanese is rest. Kioski is stand to attention, you see. "All men yasme." "Well", they said, "there's something wrong with this for us to be having a day off."

So, finally, back in the camp, we saw American aircraft come over. It was a B...wait now, wait now, wait now, Mitchell bomber, it was a Mitchell bomber. B - not 24. Anyway, it doesn't make any difference, it was a Mitchell bomber anyhow. It came over and "Boys", we said, "there's something here." No markers on that plane, I mean, there's no Japanese marking on her. So in the mean time, down comes a fellow from Japan, from Tokyo, and he was interested in getting POW written on the roof of our place. Our camps were never marked, you see. And he wanted to put POW on the roof. And we said, "What do you want this for?" "Oh, we had to paint the POW on the roof."

So the plane came over a few days after that, we got out blankets and we wrote out NEWS. And of course he dipped his wings, made a couple of rounds and I feel...I get emotional about that now, actually, because after being there that time, you know, it's a hell of thing, really. And he dropped his Red Cross parcel, emergency supplies, and he had a little note in it, saying that the Japanese had surrendered, unconditionally. From then on, we were set.

- acclimatization, 11, 25, 29-30
 aircraft, 7, 8, 9, 18-19, 58,
 Blenheims, 23; Bostons, 19;
 Buffalo Brewster, 4, 5; de-
 struction of, 9, 19; fight-
 ers, 6; K4173's, 19-20; Navy
 Zeros, 7; Vickers Vildebeest,
 5
 airfields: destruction of, 14,
 19; Kalajeti, 18-23; Paya-
 leba, 13-14; Seletar, 14
 Aki World, 12
 alcohol, 16
 ancho, 38, 55
 anesthetics, 44, 48
 appendix, 47
 armies: Australian, 10-11;
 British, 6, 1; 0, 15; Can-
 adian, 54; Dutch, 21; Jap-
 anese, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 14,
 15, 19, 20, 21, 35, 49
 ashtrays, 34, 40-41
 aspirins, 35
 Australia, 13, 18, 51

 bandages, 35, 48
 Bandung (Bandoeng), 19, 20
 Batavia (Djakarta), 17, 20, 21,
 23
 baths, 53
 beds, 17, 39-40
 bed-bugs, 32, 40
 black market, 22, 34-35, 48:
 see also "smuggling".
 blankets, 40
 boils, 43, 45
 bombs, 11, 19, 20: atomic, 29,
 55-57, 58
 bones, human, 51
 boxes, rice, 33, 39
 braziers, 38
 Bridgenorth, 3
Bridge on the River Kwai, 26
 brushes, body, 31-32
 brutality, 24, 36-37, 43-44,
 45, 46

 bugler, 31
 bullets, incendiary, 19-20
 Burma, 4
 buses, school, 14-15
 Butanzork, 19, 20

 camp, prison (Nagasaki), 29-
 50, 51-55
 camp, training, 2
 cans, 34
 capitulation, 9-10 21
 captivity, evaluation of, 21
 caskets, 50-51
 China, 8
 China Sea, 27, 28
 Chinese, 11, 13, 24
 Changi, 23, 26
 Changi Jail, 24
 chopsticks, 34
 cigarettes, 16, 34, 37
 circulation, 31
 civilians, Japanese, 12
 clothing, 3, 51, 54
 coal, 15
 cockroaches, 40
 cold, 27-28, 29, 31, 36, 40
 collaboration, 44
 commanders, 11
 contraband, 54
 cremations, 50
 curfews, 15

 decapitations, 24
 defeat, evaluation of, 9-13
 defences, 6
 dentist, 42
 depot, dispersal, 3
 diarrhea, 41
 diary, 58
 Dieppe, 54
 discipline, Japanese, 32, 36-
 37, 41-42
 dockyards, 28-29, 36, 37, 38,
 50, 55-56, 58

doctors, unidentified: British, 42; Dutch, 42, 44; Japanese, 42-43
 drafts, 2, 3
 Dutch, 16, 17, 21
 Dutch East Indies, 14, 16
 dysentery, 37

enemy, identification of, 11-12
 enlistment, 2
 examinations, medical, 3, 25, 43
 execution, threat of, 24
 exposure, 27-30

Farley, Capt. __, 42
 fats, body, 54
 Feiswich, Dr. __, 43-45
 flies, 32
 food, 14, 16, 17, 22, 27, 29, 39, 43, 49, 51: bananas, 17, 22; bully beef, 14, 17, 58-59; heating of, 38; peanuts, 22; sweet potatoes, 25; sugar, 22
 footwear, 23-24
 Ford, __, 19
 Ford Motor Works, 10
 French, __, 19
 friend, death of, 26
 funerals, 50, 51

Gardiner, F., 39
 gas-chambers, 57
 Gharute, 20-21
 guards, Japanese, 22, 24, 27, 38, 40, 53
 guillotine, metal, 29, 38, 46, 56

Haywards Heath, 3
 healing, 48
 heat, 22-23
 Heatherall, A., 47
 Heslop, Cpl. __, 19
 Hong Kong, 54

hospital: see "sick-bay".
 hotels, 12, 20
 hunger, 24
 illness, 24

Indians, East, 6, 11, 13
 influenza, 30
 inspections, 40
 Intelligence, 12
 interpreter (sympathizer), 3, 35
 island, 50

Johore Baharu, 7, 8
 jungles, 8, 9

Kalajeti, 18, 19, 21
 Keppel Harbour, 15
 Kirkham, 3
 knives, 45
 Kota Baharu, 6
 Kuala Lumpur, 6
 Kuantan, 5, 6
 Kukura, 57

leper, 51-53
 Lewisporte, 2
 lice, 27, 32, 40
 lights, electric, 39
 Liverpool, 2-3
 looting, 15, 16

machinists, 2
 malaria, 54
 maps, 20
 mail, 5, 21, 51
 Malaya, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 54
 Malays, 11, 12, 13
 marches, forced, 23, 28
 matelots, 15-16
 meteorology, 5
 missions, suicide, 9
 money, 22
 monsoons, 8, 9
 morale, 10
 mortality, 29, 30, 48, 49-50

mosquitoes, 9

Nagasaki, 27, 28, 50-51, 55-59

nails: thumb, 46; toe, 47

natives, 8, 22, 23

navy, Japanese, 36

Newfoundland Railway, 2

New World, 12

nose-twisting, 36

numbers, P.O.W., 37

Palembang, 15, 16

parachutes, 19

parades, sick, 42

parcels, Red Cross, 59

Payaleba, 13-14

Pearl Harbour, 7, 10

Percival, Gen. Arthur, 7, 8, 10

Philippines, 10

pleurisy, 30

pool, money, 34, 35

Popham, Air Comm. B., 7, 14

possessions, 23

potassium permanganate (Condes fluid), 45-46

pound, cattle, 21

pneumonia, 30, 47

prisoners, 13, 23, 25, 28-29:

- Australians, 27; British, 26; Dutch, 31, 51-53; isolation of, 28-29

operations, minor, 44

orderly, 46

"orderly," 33

railroads, 2, 26, 54

rations, sick man's, 43

rats, 41

reconnaissance, 5, 19

records, military, 5

Red Cross, 44

refugees, 20

reinforcements, 7-8

religion, 53

remains, human, 50-51

responsibility, collective, 32

veille, 31

roll-call, 32, 36, 38

Royal Air Force, 2, 14, 15, 20, 23

Royal Artillery, 2

rubber, 12, 24-25

schools: King William III, 17, 18; Mr. Cornelius, 17

scissors, 46

Seletar, 6, 14

shelters, air raid, 56-57

ship-building, 28

ships: City of Manchester, 18; Duchess of York, 4; Empress of Asia, 8; Encounter, 28; Exeter, 28; Indomitable, 10; Japanese, 6, 26-27; Nova Scotia, 2; Pope, 28; Prince of Wales, 9, 10; Repulse, 9, 10; Singapore Maru, 23, 25; sinkings of, 16, 25, 26; Trusty, 15-16

sick-bay, 38, 44, 46, 47

Singapore, 4, 11, 13, 14, 15, 23

skin-diseases, 48, 53

slings, 46

smoking, 34, 37, 39, 40

smuggling, 34-35, 54: see also "black market".

soap, 38, 48, 53

submarines, 15-16, 49

subterfuge, 8-9

Sumatra, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20

Sunda Strait, 17

supplies, medical, 44, 48, 51

surrender, Japanese, 59

Sweeney, Maj. Gen. C., 57, 58

Syrett, Victor ("Candy"), 47

tablets: aspirin, 35; creosote, 30; M&B, 30-31

Taiwan, 27

talking, 36
 tanks, 8, 18
 tea, Chinese, 41, 55
 tin, 12
 toenails, ingrown, 47
 toilets, 16, 27, 37, 41
 Torpedo Bomber Squadron, 4, 5,
 6, 9, 19
 training, military, 2: lack
 of, 10
 trains, 17
 treatment, medical, 30
 trucks, 17, 18, 19, 20, 24
 tweezers, 45, 46

 ulcers, 43, 48
 Uxbridge, 3

 vomiting, 41

 war, European, 7, 8
 warfare: experience in, 8, 11;
 jungle, 8
 washing, 38
 water, 13, 16, 22, 41
 Wavell, Gen. Archibald P., 7,
 17-18
 weight-loss, 25, 44, 48-49
 West Kirby, 3
 whistle, 52
 whistling, 36
 work, 13, 18, 22, 24-25, 26,
 28-29, 37-38, 46, 58:
 quotas, 43; technical, 3

 Yamashita, Prof. __, 57