ROY ROBINSON

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

Interviewed by

Charles G. Roland, MD

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Oral History Archives

Hannah Chair for the History of Medicine

McMaster University

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Charles G. Roland, MD:

Thank you for being here Mr. Robinson. Would you tell me your full name, where you were born, when you were born? A bit of these biographical details.

Roy Robinson:

Roy Robinson is my full name. I was born on October 22nd, 1920, in Winnipeg -- St. Vital. That's where I was brought up, and I went to school in St. Vital, a suburb of Winnipeg, Grade 12. Started to work for the T. Eaton Company, and joined the army in '39, at the outbreak of war.

CGR:

In September?

RR:

Yes, in September.

CGR:

What were your parents' names?

RR:

Well obviously, Arthur Robinson was my dad. He died -- I don't remember him. He was a veteran of the first World War and he came over from England and he died shortly after I was born. I don't remember my father. My mother was English too, and she came over to Canada. She traveled a couple of times during the war. I remember her telling me about coming over, she came over on one of the American boats, I think it was all lit up at the time. In any event, my Dad settled in St. Vital. My mother brought me up after he died. We had our difficulties in those days, but we managed.

CGR:

What was her name?

RR:

Eleanor Robinson.

CGR:

And her maiden name?

RR:

Orchard. I'm not a great family historian and I'm not great on relatives. You won't get too much out of me.

CGR:

Well, I've got everything I need. That's all.

So, in September of '39 you joined the Grenadiers? Tell me then, briefly, what happened between then and, say, about October of '41. Did you go off to Jamaica with the regiment?

RR:

Yes. Did the normal things, you know. We went to our basic training and, yes, I went to Jamaica with the regiment. I did the normal duties that we performed in Jamaica -- guard duty. I worked for awhile in the internment camp for a few months on the staff there. There was an internment camp. (You probably know of that.) I worked there. Mostly just basic soldiers' duty. I think I did have dingy [dengue] in Jamaica. I can remember having that. Outside of that, I don't think there was any other serious ailment that I had. I was relatively healthy and sports-minded -- played baseball, volleyball, swam -- those kinds of things.

CGR:

Okay. Then you came back in what, September was it, of '41,

the regiment came back?

RR:

Yes. We came back and spent a few weeks here, and then shipped off to Hong Kong. We landed there. I really don't think, you know, we were quite as aware of the tenseness or the vulnerability of the situation as the people there were themselves, or the British soldiers that were stationed there. They kind of brought us up to date very quickly. I think their favorite expression was, "they're waiting for the balloon to burst." In any event, we were just in Hong Kong a short while. When war broke out we were up in the mountains. We had gone up to our position. They had a number of defensive positions on the island and the companies of the regiment were assigned to certain areas.

CGR:

Which company were you in?

RR:

I was in C Company.

CGR:

The same as...?

RR:

Same as Jack Hardy. And he, as a matter of fact, he was down near the village of Aberdeen and I was up near the reservoirs, but we were in the same general area. That's where I was when war broke out and that's where I guess, basically I was most of the war. I was stationed quite a bit away from the reservoir, sort of back up in the hills, as it were. And the section that I was with, we...

CGR:

That's the Aberdeen Reservoir?

RR:

Yes.

CGR:

Well, maybe you'd tell me then a bit about how the ended and how you became a prisoner and what that was like. You hadn't been wounded during the fighting?

RR:

No. Well, there was quite a group of us and we were along a roadway. It was paved off a hill type of roadway with a ridge to one side. The Japanese were shelling, the shells were coming over this ridge and bursting in the valley or the other side and we were on the sheltered side, when the word came down that we had surrendered, that we had capitulated. There were some officers and senior NCOs in the area, so we gathered men together, and we -- I wasn't part of the communication, but eventually we, I think we spent the first night in the university. But one of the first things we did was dismantle our guns or rifles and throw the bolts in one area and chuck the rifles somewhere else, and throw the ammunition over a hill, or something of that nature. We spent the next -- my memory's a little vague whether we spent -- it seems to me that we spent a day somewhere around the Royal Scots' barracks, or something like that, before we moved on, because I can remember going with the fellows scrounging around the lockers, you know. I remember I found (you've seen these rugger shirts that are all, they're now getting rugger pants and rugger shirts with various stripes and multi-colors), well I

remember I found one in there. One of these things with this English squares on them, you know, a red square, and a white square, and a green square and I found one amongst the rubble and that was -- because I had nothing. I had literally nothing, just the clothes that I was in.

CGR:

No kit at all?

RR:

No, no kit at all. So I did find this shirt and that was sort of my first accumulation of clothing. From there we went to the university. I think we spent one night in a big apartment that they had taken over. I was meeting more and more fellows from my company, and we had this one apartment, slept all over the floor, as it were. Then we wound up in North Point, was where I spent my first while as a prisoner.

CGR:

How long were you there, about?

RR:

Quite a while. I'm sorry, I just don't know. But it was -- if you've got dates from someone else, it was a general exodus of the camp. I moved with the group.

CGR:

When everybody moved.

RR:

Yes.

CGR;

Well, I can pin those dates down.

RR:

Nothing spectacular about me. I just moved with the group from there over to Sham Shui Po, I guess. Spent some time there and went on the work parties to Kai Tak and worked on the airport. Business associates, people that I know have been over to the Orient, to Hong Kong on buying trips, and I always tell them they're landing on my airport. Thank you very much. One fellow still does. He always phones me up and says, "I was on your airport."

Anyway, from there we went to Japan. The usual medical, at least the one I participated in to go to Japan, was you stood on one side of the roadway and you walked across a road. That was it -- if you made it across the road, that was your medical.

CGR:

You were healthy enough...

RR:

Well, yes. I wasn't really that, everyone was getting run down, I guess. I had a couple of run-ins with -- your bowels are always loose, just terrible, but that was sort of a common thing. It didn't really concern you too much. But I had a period when I couldn't eat. They gave me some medicine or some kind of a tasting liquid of some sort. I don't know what. And then, you know, a little bit and you drank it or something and it didn't seem to do any good. I don't know how long, but I know it was quite a while, I just clearly couldn't eat anything.

CGR:

Days? Weeks?

RR:

Yes, I would say for a couple of weeks that I just couldn't eat anything, just nauseated or whatever it was.

Anyway, I went to Japan. We had a whole series of needles. God! Just -- I'm sure we got needles for diseases that hadn't yet been discovered.

CGR:

Was this before you left?

RR:

Yes.

CGR:

This is preparation for going?

RR:

Yes, for going.

CGR:

Who gave you these?

RR:

The Japanese. They brought in a team of medical people -- nurses as well as orderlies or doctors, or whatever. I went to Japan.

CGR:

Excuse me. Before we get you to Japan, let me ask a few questions about life at Sham Shui Po. Can you tell me what a typical day would have been? What time did you get up? What did you have to eat? Where did you go? Exactly what kind of work were you doing and how did you get treated? Can you make up a typical day for me?

RR:

Well, the first step -- I guess I was at Sham Shui Po and

got sent back to North Point, where we were. But, like, in North Point (this is before I went to Sham Shui Po with the group in North Point) we played a bit of sports, those that felt like it and I was a young fellow and a fairly avid sports type, and we played a bit of baseball. I like to think that I played pretty good. So I did that. You know, the day was rather boring. You woke up relatively early (and, I'm sorry, I'm no good on times).

Of course the big event was your meals. And you took a great deal of care to make that last as long as possible. At North Point we used to get, our lunch was a bun, like a dinner roll type of thing. Well, we were there for a while, we did have some of those supplies, because that was our lunch, strictly a bun. Then at supper you had maybe a bowl of rice. I remember when Manila, when the Philippines fell, they brought some meat into the camp after that, and we figured that's where they got it from. You know, a side of beef or something like that -- stewed it up and we had soup with meat in it.

I read a lot, personally. They had a bit of a library in camp. Somebody had scrounged some books and I read every book in the library. I took a bit of pride in it. I had a little note-book and a stub of a pencil, I guess, and I wrote down all the books I had read. They had a complete library of Somerset Maugham and I read all his books, from front to finish. So I did that.

CGR:

This is all at North Point?

RR:

This is North Point. We had some concerts in North Point, and I like to write. One of my limited abilities is that I can write and I wrote "The Rice-O" program, which was based on the Jello program, Jack Benny, and it was strictly a take-off on that. The incentive, if you like, behind that was the fact that for performing at the concerts, maybe there would be a pack of cigarettes for the participants. I mean, 10 guys would get one pack of cigarettes and everybody would get a cigarette or maybe you'd get two cigarettes. Well I started off on the company concert and wrote the first Rice-O program and it went over well and they wanted me then to write one for the camp concert, which we had maybe every two weeks or however. And I did that. For that, again, you'd get a couple of cigarettes. And cigarettes were hard currency. You've already come across that. So if ever you run into that situation again, for Pete's sake, just get our hands on all the cigarettes you can and you'll live royally. But anyway, that was one of my high points. After we went to Sham Shui Po, back there again, again I wrote another Rice-O program for the camp. This was when they were all, they had bigger concerts there, but again I wrote the program.

CGR:

Were you working at North Point? You didn't have to go out and work?

RR:

No, we didn't work at North Point.

CGR:

Sorry, you were going to ask me something.

RR:

I was going to say, do you remember the Jack Benny Jello Program?

CGR:

Very much. Absolutely.

RR:

Well, okay. That's what it was. You know, "Rice-O, the Rice-O program starring...," and then it went on. We had all the characters built. Anyway, I enjoyed that.

At Sham Shui Po, it was a little different of course. It was bigger and you just wandered around. I was on the work party, I went to Kai Tak, but you didn't do a heck of a lot in the day. In the beginning, we walked around the perimeter of the camp, all the way around. And we did that. Later on, I guess you did less, but there was really no sports at Sham Shui Po, come to think of it. I really can't tell you what the heck we did, which is kind of interesting. If you were on a work party, that kept you going all day. I guess if you weren't, you were resting up for the next day when you were. I was usually the, not the orderly sergeant, but I guess the orderly corporal and I used to keep the company roster. And because there was no lights, I developed a knack to be able to write in the dark, you know, rather large. I'm not a good writer but I knew the company roster by heart and then could write names down of the work party that we were sending out, or that weren't going out, and I'd delete them, and I'd do that in the dark, because the sheets are that rough newspaper-type pads, you know. That was rough and I used that. So I did that. And then as I say I went to Japan.

CGR:

What was the trip like?

RR:

Interesting. I guess we did not too bad. We went on the Tituna Maru, which was actually, you'd probably call it a Love-Boat type of a ship that the Japanese had on. We were put down in a sort of a hold or hallway down in the bottom of the boat -- no rooms or anything. You just kind of filled a square hallway, and there was enough room for everybody to lie down. That was it. You really couldn't walk anywhere because if you did you stepped on the guy next to you, type of thing. But we went over I guess relatively quickly. I did all right at sea. The ocean voyage didn't bother me the first time, the second time, or whatever, so I had no particular sickness or anything.

We landed at Yokohama and from there we went by train up to -- well I was in 3-D, you know, Kawasaki, between Tokyo and Yokohama. We went up there. I remember on that train they sat us down, we didn't move. You weren't allowed to move. And that took a part of a day and a night and then the next day, but you never went to the bathroom or you never, you know, you sat in that seat and that was it. The first few hours are the worst and after that it really didn't seem to bother you, but we never moved.

Then we went by, from there we went to 3-D, and I didn't work there for a long time.

CGR:

When did you go to Japan? Was it '43?

RR:

I went in one of the earlier drafts. I guess it would be '43; 3-D is with the big camp, the Rifles and the Canadians.

CGR:

Well, Jack went in the summer of '43. Did you go before him?

RR:

No, I think he went after. I went before that.

CGR:

You went before him. So it would have been early '43.

RR:

It was early in the year, it was the early part of the year. When we went there we knew we were going to work, and we worked in the shipyards. But when I got there, I had a pair of army boots that I had had on when I was captured and I had retained them all the time. I had these army boots on and we were in camp and they had given us socks, a pair of these white tubular things, and I can remember I had them on and when I took off my boots they caught for some reason. When I put my hand inside my boots, I had nails, big nails, sticking up inside my boot, which I didn't know until I put my hand in. I didn't realize that my feet were numb all the time until I put my hand in my boot and found these nails that I didn't realize were there. So I guess being dumb and optimistic and, I don't know what else you might describe it, but I didn't realize that I was quite as sick as I was. So before we went on work party, we had a medical, Japanese and our doctors, and I got turned down. They wouldn't send me out on the medical, and I was probably, I was the last one in the

camp to go out [and work]. I was in camp, oh, for a year before they let me out. Well, despite the fact that I couldn't feel the nail in my boots, my feet developed into terribly sensitive. I could not stand any -- if I'm sitting here and you walked behind your desk I would break out in a cold sweat. Despite the fact the desk was between us and you were aware of me and you were going to miss me, I would break out in a cold sweat. I couldn't stand anybody to move.

In 3-D we lived in, it's a main aisle and off the main aisle were sections into which maybe 16 or 18 people slept, and down the center was a table, a wooden trestle-type table. And if you sat on the edge of the bench, where the regular straw mat, wood with the straw mat over it, if you sat on the edge -- I wouldn't sit on the edge and have someone walk between me and that table. If I saw them coming I just had to get up and almost hide, you now, get away up at the head of my bed and sit there holding my feet. It was just, you know...

CGR:

Because they were so sensitive?

RR:

Yes. But sensitive because you were moving. And of course they were hot and cold and ached and what not, but what got me was I couldn't stand anybody walking near me. I also had difficulty walking unless I could see. I had to see where I [was putting my feet] and I still walk with my head down. I suppose that's oh, I guess I'm never going to get over that. Whether that's anything to do with it or whether it's just my imperfect posture, period, I don't know. But I like to see where I'm

walking. But in those days I had to. And it would take me, oh, 20 minutes to walk 100 yards. I just couldn't go any faster. But outside of that -- I couldn't move. The rest of me seemed pretty good.

CGR:

What did they say was wrong?

RR:

Well, I say it was dry beriberi. In camp they did, eventually they did bring in some injections. I used to get a shot. But I remember once we had an examination by the doctor who came in, Dr. Sunshine we called him because he insisted that everybody that was in sick get outside and sit in the sunshine, whether there was sunshine or not. So we called him Dr. Sunshine.

CGR:

This is a Japanese doctor?

RR:

Japanese doctor, right. He was examining us, the people that, no-work men. By then my army boots had long gone. They had to go to someone who was on the work party and I had a pair of these wooden shoes with the canvas strap across the toe.

CGR:

Sort of a clog.

RR:

Yes, that's right. A clog you got with the canvas strap across the toe, and that's what I wore. I went in to see him and he did a number of things. I forget what. But one of the things he did was test my reflexes. He sat in front of me, a couple of feet away on a chair, and I sat facing him, crossed my knees. He

tapped my leg. My leg flew out like a spring-release catch and the shoe flew up in the air to the ceiling, and as it fell down he leaned over to one side and the shoe fell beside him. I crossed my legs over and he tapped my other leg, and it flew up and he leaned the other way as the shoe fell down beside him. And all he said was nanda, whatever that was. But I guess my reflexes were so loose. It was just a tremendous reflex action.

Then I had this moxibustion, interesting. You've heard of it? Counter-irritant thing. I had that.

CGR:

Tell me about that.

RR:

Oh, that was -- I guess in some parts of Japan it's a great...and I suppose the theory is not bad. If you've got a sore toe, bang your head and you forget about your toe. I guess there's something to it. But I had it and, oh, I've still got little scars down my stomach. I had three down my stomach, and on my upper thigh, and my lower leg, and some here. You can still see scars if you look at it. Little pieces of punk and you just place them on your skin and you lit them with the taper that you use for firecrackers. They burned down, and then you had to put another one on. And you went back the next day and repeated that process. If you were very careful -- very, very careful -- and you could put the punk on exactly the same spot as you had it yesterday, you maybe had a little bit of a scar there and it maybe didn't hurt too much. But if you rubbed it off, or if it burnt down too low! I sure as heck didn't like it. But it was something that you did. I obviously couldn't work because I

couldn't walk with the work party and you had to go through these things. See, if you didn't work they cut your rations. And so, you were careful. Well, I suppose part of doing these moxibustions, this counter-irritant was, as long as you're doing their bit, then maybe they will not cut you or the camp off completely.

CGR:

Now the idea was -- I understand the principle. You light this punk and it burns down -- when do you know to stop? I mean, it's just, when it's painful enough you stop?

RR:

You don't stop. You see, the punk is very light, coarse, burnable material -- smolders, you see. And it doesn't stop. It stops when it hits your skin, like when the punk is gone, it burns out against your skin, and eventually you would build up and it...

CGR:

And it hurts presumably.

RR:

Certainly. The next day, or the next three or four days, or how long you were on it (we were on it for more than one occasion and for quite awhile), you would develop a scar and maybe the scar would be as big as your thumbnail. So that the pieces of punk would get bigger too.

CGR:

Well, as I say, I know what it is but I've never talked to anybody who actually had it done to them.

RR:

Next time you have a headache, try it as a remedy. I assure

you you won't think much of your headache.

I had pellagra pretty bad in North Point. I didn't tell you about that, but I thought I'd throw that in. You know, the open sores where your skin looks just like jelly, tapioca (I guess) is a better word. It's all little bubbles, eaten in. I had that quite bad on my legs.

CGR:

Did they have supplies of vitamins there to get rid of that, or did it just go away?

RR:

We did have a little bit of that purple stuff.

CGR:

Oh, potassium permanganate?

RR:

Yes. Occasionally you got a little bit and you just dabbed it on. Outside of that...that's going back to North Point.

But anyway, in Japan, eventually I got so I could walk and eventually I went out with the work party, but I didn't go <u>with</u> the work party, I went behind it. There was maybe a dozen of us or so that were like me, could not walk very fast. So we brought up the rear as it were. I had a great job. I used to sweep out one of the machine shops, was my job. You know, broom like a witch had, long sticks. If I had been Brunhilda I could have ridden it home.

Then from there I went up to Komichi, up to the iron mines. I went up there, and that was after several bombing raids in the Tokyo area. It was interesting. We went up there and I remember

we got up there and they landed us up in a parade square, and it was an already established camp. There was some, I forget how many, there was a number. Not everybody in camp, there was only a small portion. They lined us up before we went in and they said, we weren't to tell anybody a thing about the bombing raids, about the B-29s coming over, about the off-shore raids. We weren't to tell anybody a thing because the people up there didn't know anything about it. Of course you might as well have talked to the wind because, obviously, we told people. And they didn't believe us. They had never seen it.

CGR:

They presumably still thought the war was going well. The Japanese were winning.

RR:

Absolutely, absolutely.

CGR:

Presumably you had British or Canadian medical officers at these camps also, did you, in addition to the Japanese? You mentioned Dr. Sunshine and so on.

RR:

Yes, we had a doctor, in Kawasaki we had Dr. (now isn't that interesting). Dr. Reid was with us. Where did he wind up? We had an American. Gee that's terrible. I have to talk to somebody to refresh my memory. Oh yes, we had a regular Canadian doctor. We had a couple of our medical people were there and we had a bit of a sick-bay. If a person was real sick they would go in there. And I assume they had some medicines because, as I say, we did get injections for beriberi.

CGR:

In your behind?

RR:

Yes.

CGR:

But presumably not much in the way of medical supplies.

RR:

No. Up in Komichi, when we went to the iron mine -- I got put into the gang that went into the iron mine, pretty low menial type of work. You walked to the iron mine. It was interesting. It was a mountain, and the 550-foot -- we worked the 440-level and that wasn't below the ground. That was 550 meters above the ground. You went up a winding road till you got to the mine pit and then you went up. Apparently this mountain was real pure iron concentrate.

CGR:

Iron ore.

RR:

We worked in there and you went a long way in, just literally right into the mountain, and followed it along. It was damn cold in there. I worked there for awhile, when we got there, loading cars, shoveling and loading the iron ore. One day we had a hot bath in camp. The camp had a proper boiler and a big vat where you could get maybe 20 or 30 people in it at a time, and maybe every second month they'd give you a bath. We'd gone as long as three or four months without a hot bath. In any event, they had this hot bath this day, and I think

it was the first one they had since I got there. I was standing there -- it's a cement pit and you wash yourself down, before you get in. You don't go in the water and bathe. You bathe before you get in and you soak in these things and come out and wash yourself some more. I remember I was doing that and one of the Japanese guards were there and he pointed to my groin and he said something and I looked down and I had a hernia. I didn't know I had a hernia. But there was the distinct bubble in my groin. He pointed it out and he must have said something to somebody. In any event they took me off the mine detail because of that.

I went to work on the yama, on the mountain. Stayed in camp for a while and they don't like you doing nothing, so I went out with the wood-cutting detail up the mountain. It was kind of a break because the mine was cold and dank and wet. Certainly not a very cheerful place to work. Then I went up to Yama and the Yama was like working at the hills, walk through the fields and along the path and by a little stream. And then you went up the mountainside and cut down these trees and trimmed them off and shot them down the natural shoot in the side of the mountain and they used these in the cook-house. So I got kind of a break. That was a lucky break, the hernia. It didn't really bother me. I had it fixed when I got back to Deer Lodge -- or Fort Osborne Barracks, in the old hospital, and I got it fixed there.

CGR:

Was your health reasonably good from then on? You got through till the end of the war without any other major...?

RR:

Yes, I guess so. I'm not a complainer. I lived with a lot

of things that maybe I should be complaining about but I won't do that. I think I had the optimism of youth, I guess, and perhaps the blindness of the dumb. But I don't think that's entirely bad when you're in a situation like that.

CGR:

I agree. But still, if there's anything you'd like to "complain" about this is the time because I'm interested in knowing exactly what happened to you and I don't look upon it as complaining. I'm eager to know sort of what kinds of experiences you had.

RR:

You'll never get an education like that. I think that part has done me good, doctor. I've seen men turned into boys overnight and boys turned into men. You know, the big, strong leaders, Christ, they're snivel-and-scroungers. Just what they wouldn't do for anything; just terrible, I think. And then on the other hand, there's the young one or the little kid or the one that's not so strong or doesn't excel at sports, or had no particular respect -- you know, not the real macho type -- turned out to be just a real strong character. I've seen it. It's a tremendous education. I learned a lot and I think that's done me a lot of good throughout, after I got back. It makes you a hard character. You don't find as much compassion as you should, I'm sure, in the general Hong Kong vet. It isn't there. It doesn't mean to say that we don't understand as we don't feel, but it's just a little different.

CGR:

But you don't want to do it again.

RR:

Oh hell no. I wouldn't do it again. No. That's what we were saying -- like, as you know, we get a fair break in pension because of the time we spent in prison camp, and it's much appreciated right now. But I'd never go and earn that kind of money in those kinds of circumstances again. It certainly wouldn't be worth it.

CGR:

One of the things I like to ask about has to do with sex. Was sex something you thought about? Were you too hungry to think about it?

RR:

Sex was not the least bit in our -- we had a rule. You know, if I was not working, I was in camp, okay, and we had a rule. The boys would gather and there would be 15 or 20 guys in for various reasons and you would sort of gather in the afternoon and sit around and talk about every which thing, and one rule and that was that you couldn't talk about food, okay, until 10 minutes before it was time to eat, because otherwise that's all you talked about and it got to be an obsession. But sex never came up, never came up. Not me and not in our conversations or whatever. There might be the odd bit about, you know, thinking about some of the girls that you knew, or something like that, but in the memory, fondness type of thing. Certainly not -- no, it just wasn't there.

CGR:

You ever have any awareness at all of homosexuality?

RR:

No. And yet that's odd. I thought of that myself, because it's become more and more, it's a common topic.

CGR:

That's why I asked the question. It seems...

RR:

You bunked together. When I was in 3-D, well it didn't happen in North Point and not in Sham Shui Po, but there it was pretty hot. But when you got to 3-D, to Kawasaki, near Tokyo, and when we went up north to the mine, it got cold, and you bunked together. Each man had three or four blankets and there were several ingenious methods of making a bed so that you couldn't kick it out, double folded over and then what not. And two fellows bunked together. I mean it was everybody, just about. There was the odd fellow that was just maybe a little too dirty so that no one would have anything to do with him. But 90 percent of the people at least bunked together. And then no. Whether I was naive or what, I don't know, but I can honestly say that I, really -- so it wasn't there.

CGR:

This is what I hear routinely and I've asked many, many people the same question. And certainly it's something that seems so much in the news these days.

RR:

Yes, that's right. You know, we must not have been reading the right newspapers in those days, I guess. Certainly the opportunity was there.

CGR:

But no interest.

RR:

No, none at all.

CGR:

Were there any bad apples in the group?

RR:

Oh sure.

CGR:

What kinds of things? I don't care about names or anything. But what sorts of things went on?

RR:

I like to leave the bad apples to myself, if you don't mind. Different people have different views, I guess. But some of the things that I've seen people do to themselves, or do to others, or the way they act. I just leave it alone. I'm usually quite opinionated and there's been two or three things happen about our regiment, people, and fortunately I've been smart enough to keep my mouth shut. And I intend to.

You really don't understand, in my opinion, unless you're there. I can sit here all day and tell you things that happened but unless you're there you really don't get the full impact, and you think that I'm either bullshiting, or I'm just putting it on, or you are not getting the true intent of what I'm saying in there. You can't get it. So I just don't talk about it. I'm not a great war talker because I think that people have to be there to really understand it.

I've read two or three -- there's been several, I think,

something like it some of the things that have happened in Vietnam and some of the things that happened in Korea. Some of the court martials, some of the instances that the papers have got hold of and blown up or done what to. I don't see how you sitting back here can judge me sitting over there. You have to be there. If you're not there you're just not qualified. So, I'm sorry. Yes, I've seen it but that's me, mine.

CGR:

You tell me whatever you're willing to tell me. That's no problem. Not at all. You don't have to explain.

RR:

I'm not willing to, I don't want to talk about that.

CGR:

My own interest in bringing it up has nothing to do with muck-raking, except that some of these individuals I see as being, in some cases, psychological, psychiatric things -- and that's part of my medical interest and that's why I asked the question. Not because I wanted to hear about anybody's dirty laundry. Just because it's dirty laundry, you know, that's...

RR:

I'm sure it is, but nevertheless...

CGR:

No, no. That's fine. Anything else about your own medical history over there we haven't talked about? You mentioned the pellagra at North Point, your long problems with your feet and so on, your hernia.

RR:

I had a second hernia after I'd been back a while and I had

it fixed. At the pension advocate's suggestion I applied for pension consideration on the contention that my feet were not secure. I was turned down, and I was rather surprised because my feet aren't and they're not today. But again, Jack Hardy and I, the chap you [interviewed] previous, you know we were discussing that and once you have something for a while, you just adjust and that's normal.

I mind the story, well I always tell myself (I'm sure you've read the story and heard it in countless variations many times), and I read it in Reader's Digest, where the chap had the bell ringing in his ear and he had it, period, ever since he could remember. One day in the medical examination a conversation came up and he had this bell ringing in his ear. He was suprised to hear that everyone didn't have a bell ringing in his ear. The doctor said, "I can operate on that and repair that." And the fellow thought it was wonderful, so he had the operation. Two weeks later he asked for the operation to be reversed so that he could get the bell ringing in his ear because it was just driving him crazy. Well, that's what I'm saying. Some of the adjustments that I made, like suddenly if it was righted I'd probably would have trouble adjusting.

CGR:

Basically how has your life been since you got back? Have you been working full time?

RR:

Yes. I worked full time. I did fairly well. I wound up with a fairly responsible position with Eaton's.

CGR:

You stayed with Eaton's.

RR:

I stayed with Eaton's. I wound up in a fairly responsible middle-management position, an Activity Head, as they call it, with a number of other mangers underneath me, and there were other activities. I did quite well. Nothing too physical. I've always found that I don't have the physical stamina. Even socially. If I'm out socially, if we're at a dinner dance, or some kind of a social, and it gets late on in the evening and I get tired, I say to my wife, "I'm tired, I think we should go home," and I just pack it up and that's it. We've always done that.

I like to think that I look after myself. I have a regular little exercise routine that I go through every day. I do a lot of walking. I have a little theory. You know, I may be dumb. You just don't seem to have that energy reserved that is there, and I like to be busy. I'm not a sit-around type. I always usually find something to do. I like to be fairly active. It's my theory that when we were prisoners, all the time through Hong Kong and Japan, that our body used up all our reserves of muscles and sinews that we built up as youngsters in playing these games and running around and doing all that. Once we got back, of course, we never had the opportunity to build these deep reserves up again, so we're kind of running on the surface, as it were, all the time, which is why we tire and just haven't got it. That's always been my sort of a theory.

CGR:

Not a bad theory I would think. Has all of this -- these

four years -- been a bad experience for you now? You don't dream about it at night?

RR:

Only when I eat cheese.

CGR:

Only when you eat cheese!

RR:

I told that to the psychiatrist when I was talking to him and apparently there's some connection between cheese or milk products and dreaming. It's quite interesting. I've never heard of it before. I never eat cheese in the evening, because I always fight the war. I always go back, usually to the time we were up by the mountain pass and we had the attack at night and everybody disappeared, and I devised a way to get back down and out of there. It's usually what I do.

CGR:

But it's not the POW time, it's when you're fighting up in the hills? That's interesting.

RR:

It could be, you know, and I suppose it would take a psychologist and I'm certainly not. I don't talk about the war. I'm not one of those people who sits down and reminisces about the war. I'd rather talk about the latest sports scores or the stock market, or about the garden or whatever, current affairs. But I'm not a war fighter and I don't reminisce. Whether I'm avoiding it or not, you'd have to tell me. I don't know.

CGR:

I'm not a psychiatrist either but I'd say you're going on

with life. Today is what you're living.

RR:

I don't go back too often. It doesn't bother me. As I say, I like to look at it a positive way. I think I got a lot out of it, just a lot out of it. There's some attitudes and outlooks that maybe aren't all that good, but boy there's a lesson in human nature there. Just priceless as far as I'm concerned.

CGR:

Is there anything else you can think of that we haven't talked about? We've skipped over a lot of things.

RR:

Very interesting, you know, you talking about psychologists; some things always stand out in your mind. When we landed, when I was in Japan we met an intelligence officer. The first soldiers we saw, as a matter of fact, were a couple of intelligence men from Canada that had come up to our camp, and this other chap that I bunked with at the time, he and I cornered this guy and, gosh, we talked about everything. He knew who was in politics and who won the Stanley Cup. He certainly was an Intelligence Officer. I give him full credit. But anyway, when we got back, and we got back through Guam by boat and landed in San Francisco and then went by ferry up to Vancouver and then went over to Victoria, or went by ferry to Victoria, I guess, and we were there for a couple of days. When we got off the ferry, got on the bus to go to camp, they gave us a pamphlet. And it's always impressed me to this day, because that pamphlet told us what our feelings would be when we stepped on to Canadian soil and when we first drove through the city and saw the people. Who the hell

ever did that was -- it always impressed me because it's exactly what happened. I was really impressed with the Canadian Intelligence because it just described your feelings to a tee.

CGR:

They really knew.

RR:

Tears welled up in your eyes, you got a lump in your throat, and it was just there. But you can't think too much. I got along. I maintained that I've got a twisted foot and a leg out of the deal, and they tell me that I haven't, and, they're just crazy! I don't care. I get along with it. I'll show you my shoe. I wear it out on one side, how I walk. I never stand with my foot flat on the floor, I always bend my ankle. They tell me no, everything is normal. Well it isn't. Like hell. Again, that's it. I know it and I get along fine. It doesn't bother me. I go about my life.

CGR:

How do you feel about the Japanese?

RR:

Oh fine.

CGR:

No problems?

RR:

None at all. You know, seriously, Pearl Harbor. I think that was one of the greatest military coups of all time. That's the way to fight a war. Get in there and give the guy the dickens before he knows what's going on. I'm sorry. The Americans would hate me for that. But I just happen to think that's the

way to fight a war. I don't want to fight a war and I don't want anybody -- but, you know, none of these niceties before. No, I have no regrets. If my country was at war, I'd join the army because my country was at war and I'm sure the Japanese soldiers more or less did the same thing. Whether he was voluntary or forced, which ever the policy the country was he was for it and good for him. Why not? So I have no animosities towards them at all.

CGR:

Well, that's great.

RR:

At the camp the expectation was that we were going to have meat in our soup with the rice and of course that's tremendous, you barely think of that. Well, the officers had their own quarters, in a separate area away from the men, and of course it's only natural there's all kinds of rumors and jealousy and, you know, it was just ripe for those kinds of situations. And we had this soup and there were, I guess, little bits of meat and it was fairly thick, and it was quite good, but rumor got around that the officers had had steak. Which as far as I'm concerned is just ridiculous. But that's the kind of situation you're in. So on the Rice-O program, shortly after we'd had this meat episode, one of the portions of the program was a news broadcast and it was just done like a regular radio broadcast. It started out, you're at home in your favorite easy chair, sat back and lit up a cigarette and you turn the dial and you hear -- and then we'd come in, you know, RICE-O, the Rice-O program. And then the news broadcast, it said that the reports had been denied from the Hong

Kong camps that the officers were getting the best of everything. As a matter of fact, it's been reported that the officers get the meat but the men get all the gravy. It went over well. It was a big gag and I don't think anyone could have said that [to their faces] without some prejudice, but, on a console like that it went over well.

CGR:

Well that must have been about April or May of '42, I guess? It was April when Bataan surrendered and so on.

RR:

Yes.

CGR:

Well that's great. Thank you very much.

RR:

Thank you.

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