

WALTER GEORGE JENKINS

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

Interviewed by

Charles Gordon Roland, M.D.

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Charles G. Roland, MD:

Mr. Jenkins, I wonder if we could begin by you telling me your full name, where you were born, and when you were born.

Walter Jenkins:

Well I was born in Souris, Manitoba.

CGR:

And your full name?

WJ:

Walter George.

CGR:

What were your parents' names?

WJ:

My mother's name was Pearl and my father's name was Nathaniel.

CGR:

And her maiden name? Do you remember?

WJ:

Her name was Wark.

CGR:

And were you raised in Souris? Did you spend your early years there?

WJ:

Yes, until I was 14 years old, then I moved to Winnipeg with my parents.

CGR:

What was our birthdate?

WJ:

January 14th, 1921.

CGR:

So what were you doing when war broke out in '39?

WJ:

I was going to school, going to high school.

CGR:

And when did you join up?

WJ:

I guess it'd be about November '40.

CGR:

Did you go straight into the Winnipeg Grenadiers?

WJ:

No, I was never in the Grenadiers?

CGR:

Oh, you weren't in the Grenadiers?

WJ;

No. I was a Royal Canadian Corps Signals, same as Ray. He was a signal corps man too. I dealt with the Brigade Headquarters. There was 98 of us, I think. That was Dr. Crawford and all the service corps, the dental corps and the whole works like that.

CGR:

I've got Grenadiers in my mind. I interviewed a lot of them in Winnipeg two weeks ago.

WJ:

Well nobody knows -- we always get categorized with the Rifles or the Grenadiers, you see. Nobody pays much attention to

Brigade Headquarters.

CGR:

Well tell me briefly then, what you did, what your war was like, your three week war, the fighting war. What did you do?

WJ:

Mainly running. Running in the dark, it seemed like to me, mostly. Even this friend of mine, Ted Kurluk and I (he just lives up here on Cecil). He was another telephone lineman. Him and I one night, we laid some telephone lines through the Japanese lines, in the dark.

CGR:

Really.

WJ:

Of course we didn't know that until after -- the guys got captured that we put the telephone lines to -- they said, "Hey, you guys come through the Jap lines." It was just a crazy story, you know, something that only happens in a war. Real mad. Like, we could hear Japanese machine-guns going but we -- the only time I'd ever heard a machine-gun going was, you know, in the movies with Humphrey Bogart or somebody like that, you see. I heard these Japanese machine-guns, they pop very slowly, you know -- pump, pump, pump -- compared to a Vickers which is very fast. I heard these but I was more interested in getting this telephone line in and seeing that my friend got down to the hospital because he had malaria. He was laying in the ditch there. Crazy things like that, you know, but when you think back on it now after 40 years, you know, you wonder. But I got knocked down about three times with shells, you know. Then when the doctor

says, "Anything wrong with you?" You just have to say "no." I haven't got any marks, you know. But I woke up in the middle of the night and I thought I had malaria but it was just from being knocked down three times, you know.

CGR:

Just the concussion?

WJ:

Yes. And I got a wall blown away from me, you know, it was about 6 feet away. Of course, being young, I thought -- you know my teeth were chattering -- and I thought I had malaria. It wasn't till months or years after I thought, "Well, hell, that must have been what was wrong with me," because I sure as hell didn't have malaria. It doesn't go away in the morning, you know.

CGR:

No, not very likely.

WJ:

That's mainly what we did. We were stringing telephone lines all over the place, and you never knew where you were. It was mostly at night.

CGR:

But you basically stationed at Brigade Headquarters?

WJ:

No. They sent us -- we were actually attached to the British forces, you know, we went out with the British guys because we didn't know where we were going. We had no idea.

CGR:

That's right. You only had two or three weeks to get acclimated.

WJ:

Yes, only two or three weeks and, you know, we're just getting ready to -- they were putting in all the underground cables and stuff just like they were in Victoria. When I left Victoria they were running all this up to the pillboxes and stuff like that. They hadn't got it all finished yet.

CGR:

Where were you when the war ended?

WJ:

When the battle ended?

CGR:

Christmas Day, 1941.

WJ;

The battle of Hong Kong? Well I went right completely around the island and came back to where it started, in Victoria barracks, and I started another turn-around. I got backed up all the time. That's where we were when they said to surrender. You know, they said the Japanese are running out of ammunition and they're dropping dynamite and stuff like this. And about half an hour later they said, "That's it. We're packing it in." What the hell does that mean?

CGR:

Then where were you -- where did you go first as a prisoner?

WJ:

Lets see. I stayed right in the barracks there for a couple of nights or three nights, and then we went over to Sham Shui Po

and then we went through, you now, back to Hong Kong island.

CGR:

Back to North Point?

WJ:

Yes. Start a whole routine, moving around, you know. It was pretty miserable there in the wintertime. It's semi-tropical in Hong Kong but it gets pretty miserable in the wintertime. Some of the guys had it pretty tough. They didn't have their all their equipment with them. I was lucky. I had a lot of equipment with me. Like I say, I'd gone right back to the barracks that I started in. Picked up all my gear when the battle ended. Lot of those guys were just in their coveralls.

CGR:

Just tell me a bit about what life was like in the early days in the camps, when you were still reasonably healthy.

WJ:

You could see yourself gradually going down. Like, I weighed 215 lb. when I left Vancouver and I was an athlete. You know I played with the Winnipeg Blue Bombers when I was a kid. I played two games with them, and then I came out here and my brother introduced me to an English rugger and I was on the B.C. championship team -- English rugger. We went over to Vancouver and played them. Vancouver, at the university there.

CGR:

This was in '40 before you went over to....?

WJ:

Yes. And its funny, I was talking to this Japanese guy,

Inouye, as they called him, and I'd heard that he'd gone to the University of British Columbia. I was talking to him one day, about that I'd just gone over and, you know -- It was only about three months before that -- and beat the hell out of the University of British Columbia in English rigger. But he wasn't too interested in talking about that. I realized after that the orientals in those days weren't allowed to become doctors or lawyers or they couldn't even go in the swimming pool. They weren't allowed to vote or anything, so you could understand this man's way of thinking. He got hanged after the war, that man. He was a British subject when they tried him. He said, "You can't do this to me." He got 15 years in jail, or something like that and then he said, "You can't do this to me. I am a British subject." Oh. A British subject eh." And they tried him, "Hey treason," and they hung the poor guy. If he had kept his mouth shut he would....but you could see this guy's way of thinking. Now you can, but I guess at the time we couldn't.

CGR:

It's hard to be sympathetic when you're in the middle of a war. He had a nickname, didn't he, or something?

WJ:

Oh, I forget. All the Japanese guys had names, you know, like "Slaphappy," or some name like that. They all had -- or "Bug Eyes" or something. For all the different guys, every different place, they had different names. But that's another thing that people will forget that the discipline in the Japanese army is just as severe as what they [the Japanese] gave us, you know. It's like the discipline was in the army when my

grandfather was in the army, one guy would slap the hell out of the other Japanese, you know. In fact, the prisoners from the penitentiary used to come and work in Japan down where we were. We used to feel sorry for them [Harry] Atkinson from Winnipeg, you know....

CGR:

He's one of the ones I've interviewed.

WJ:

Well, I can remember him looking at this poor little skinny Japanese guy working on the docks with us and the guy made motions like, you got anything to smoke? Atkinson broke his tobacco in half. Now this is like, you've only got two packages of tobacco a month. I can remember old Atky breaking his tobacco in half and going over and giving this guy half his tobacco. Now that's a big thing. It doesn't sound like much now but it's like giving some guy half your pay cheque, you felt so sorry for him. I always remember that about him. And they were poor skinny little guys and their discipline was, like I say, was very severe. If they got caught stealing they'd beat the hell out of them and throw them in -- I remember one guy they beat the hell out of him, threw him in the canal, pulled him out, threw him back in the canal again. That was their way of life.

CGR:

Well you started to tell me about losing weight and so on.

WJ:

Yes, I was surprised. Like the first 40 lb. I lost, I was still fairly strong. You know, my muscles weren't deteriorating.

You lose the fat first, of course, and then you start losing the proteins, start losing the muscles. And I was in a warehouse at one time and I remember being able to climb a rope better than I ever could when I weighed 200 lb. because I only weighed 170 and I still had lots of strength and I said, "Hey, now I know these guys could do it." You know, just a funny thing comes back to you now.

CGR:

You had 30, 40 lb. less to lift.

What was the diet like? What would be sort of a typical day?

WJ:

Well, it's like everything, it depends on the area you were in. In Hong Kong it was a lot of rice and boiled vegetables. Well, rats will die on that, you know. In fact, I read a book when I was in prison camp, Dr. McKerrason's book; this guy had been a major in the British army and he did some experiments on 5,000 rats. He wanted to find out why the people in India, you know, some guys were big and tall and some guys were short, and he wanted to know why some people had goiter. So he did an experiment on -- the diet that we were on at this time was just boiled rice and boiled vegetables -- and on that diet he said with boiled rice and boiled vegetables and some condiments and some milk, you'll get everything wrong. Like, your weakest point may be your eyes, or, you know, get a twisted spine (or these rats would) -- and so this is what I was watching my own fellow man doing there was deteriorating like this, you see. And I could see what was going to happen.

In fact, I read another book, I read two books. One was (I don't know where the hell that one came from, the one in Japan) and this guy did experiments on mostly what guys were thinking when they were prisoners-of-war. One of the things is that you can't make up your mind, you see. This is almost impossible, actually, when you get down, say, I got down to 125, 130 lb, round in there. And I could see this coming. You know, I'd come back into the barracks and I'd go to hang up my hat and if there was two places to put my hat I didn't know where to put it, you know. I didn't know whether to put it on the shelf or -- and then they gave me two pairs of shoes, and I'd have to sit there in the morning looking at my shoes for maybe 10 minutes before I knew which pair to put on. When I got out of the prison camp this didn't change that quick. I still had a hell of a time making up my mind about things, you know. But this is something that comes back to me now just talking about it.

CGR:

Was this in Japan, you think, that you started to notice this?

WJ:

Yes.

CGR:

So it was later on.

WJ:

When you get right down to the bottom; like we would have died, we all would have died in Hong Kong, you know, if it hadn't been for the Red Cross. You know, we used to make poems and

funny things about three men on a tin there, eating bully beef. But we got a little dried food and things like this, but if it hadn't been for that, eating rice and green horrors (we used to call it), we would have died I'm pretty sure. And that's in fact, why the big escape was planned, you see. It's good to see Lindsay's book [Oliver Lindsay, The Lasting Honour: The Fall of Hong Kong, 1941 (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1978)] come out now because my sergeant was the one that was in on this big escape, and I would tell people this and I think 99 percent of the people didn't know anything about it. And I'd start talking about this, and Lionel didn't know, and I'd mention to my friend down here. One guy that didn't think I was mad was Rob Manchester, who lives over here, and he was in the same room as Routledge and so he knew all about this escape, you see. And of course if Routledge had had a big mouth when they took him, I would have got shot too. I could have got shot if he would have said, "Well, he's in on this escape." But he was out for two years. They executed 32 people, which most people didn't know. They figure they just executed these two British officers, but they executed 32 -- they shot some and they cut the heads of the others. I just found this out from Routledge. I see Ron about once a year and something always comes out. It's a little more got out, you know. He's quite a fantastic guy. He was my sergeant. He was a signal corps sergeant. He was really a fantastic guy.

CGR:

Lindsay's book is pretty good, in your opinion?

WJ:

Yes, very good.

CGR:

Everybody I've talked to seems to have the same feeling. It's the best of the books.

WJ:

It's well written. He did a lot of research on it.

CGR:

Well, tell me more about how you coped and how your health was affected as time went along.

WJ:

Well, I went along almost a year and I was pretty well, then I got what they called cardiac beriberi. Like most people, you think your heart's over here, you know. And I went to the doctor and I said, "There's something wrong with my stomach." So he said, "There's nothing wrong with your stomach," he says, "you've got cardiac beriberi," and this is where the Red Cross came in. You see, I was walking bent over and it's an awful feeling, you know, to have your heart being pushed by this liquid. So it just happened that the Red Cross had come in then and I got about half a dozen vitamin B shots and it was only a couple of days and I could walk without that terrible feeling pain, you know. So I got a half a dozen shots of that.

Then I got some pellagra, too, on the front here [front of ankles] around the same time. I was out working on the airport and I thought it was sunburn and they said, "Don't be so damn silly." So I went and seen the doctor about this and he said, "Oh yes." And they gave me, oh, half a dozen shots of (they call

it niacinamide now) nicotinic acid. And I went to see this friend of mine and he was giving the shots and he says, "Do you want to lay down?" And I said, "hell no. That won't bother me." After I got the shot I said, "I think I will lay down, too," because it's just like somebody hit you in the belly there, not very long but you can feel the, you know.

But I was lucky in that respect at that time. I was able to pass the medical to go to Japan. The medical was -- they lined us up on one side of the curb (this road came right through the camp), and they lined us up on the curb, I don't know, maybe 600 guys, and then they had Japanese guys stationed in the middle of the road about every 10 or 15 feet. And as you walked from one curb to another the Jap would pick you out and say, "You can't go, you can't go." Because what happens, when you get on this diet the first thing that goes, generally, is the muscle on the front [of the leg] here, I guess, and your toe drops down. And then the only way you can walk is to lift your knees high, so you get that -- you know, like, alcoholics get this. So they could pick these guys out and they didn't want them to go to Japan. The guys that were like that were pretty lucky, because a lot of guys walked pretty good and when they got to Japan where I was, I think 85 died out of 300 guys the first three months we were there. It was up in the north, you see, and it was a very cold climate up there. Of course they thought, well, it was like everything -- they thought that things are so bad they can't get any worse. Going to Japan -- the Japanese guys they thought that Tokyo was the capital of the world, you see, and we listened to them talk about this so we thought, you know, Japan must be

great. And, of course, everybody thinks Japan is orange blossoms or cherry blossoms and everything. When you get away from that southern region, it only takes about 150 miles from there and you get real cold weather. In fact, I remember looking at the Expo on television and I said to my wife, "These guys have got rocks in their heads to open this up in April. It will be snowing." turn on the television and sure enough it was snowing. But most people can't relate this to Japan, especially on that northern island, what they call it, Hokkaido, that's really cold up there. That's like we got talking about diet, their diet up there is different. It's like Northern China's different diet. Wherever we were, we went into different diets. It depends on what was in the district.

CGR:

What was the trip up to Japan like?

WJ:

Oh, it was a good trip.

CGR:

Excuse me. Were you in the first draft that went?

WJ;

I think we were the second.

CGR:

Second. So that was spring of '43, was it?

WJ:

Around there, because I was two years in Japan. But that trip, actually the ride on the ship wasn't that bad either, you know. We relate back to it because we didn't lose anybody. We

had two meals a day and we had water to drink. And we spent a week in the harbor in Formosa. The guys in the stern they were in on coal, they put coal in with them but up where we were, it wasn't nice, but they had it so that we could go up and take a shower, turn on the salt water, you know. And finally guys were down there playing cards and they didn't want to go up. We went up in groups like. So I think we spent half the day up there just talking on the deck. It sounds incredible now when you hear all these terrible stories about these ships going. I was lucky I guess, you know.

CGR:

A lot of the Americans, a lot of ships sunk by their own submarines.

WJ:

Oh yes. The first one that left Hong Kong was sunk.

CGR:

Was it?

WJ:

All the English guys on it. I was talking to one of those guys a couple of years ago.

But the train trip wasn't bad either. It was a passenger train. It wasn't boxcars or anything like you see prisoners in. You know, we sat in these little seats and it took us a day and a half, or something, to get up there. We thought, "Boy, this is the place. They were right." We got good meals on the train.

CGR:

How did the civilians react to you?

WJ:

They were typical Japanese. They did as they were told. I never had anybody throwing rocks at me or anything like that. I remember one time this Japanese guy saying to me, "Go down and get this small cart," you know, a hand cart, like. They used to use them for moving stuff around. And I went through this warehouse and it was full of Japanese people sitting there, like a huge station. They were waiting to get on this freighter going to Korea. I guess it was. They just looked at me. They didn't pay any attention to me. I was amazed, after I thought about it, but nobody said anything to me. But they were people that did as they were told. Like the old Kempei Tai thing equivalent to the German Gestapo. They were around the docks there and everything and they put the fear of the Lord into those guys, I'll tell you. They seen a Japanese guy coming down the dock and he had a parcel, and he'd say, "What's in the parcel?" And this guy would have a guy behind him, like a rifle or bayonet, and boy these people would get right down on their hands and knees, open the parcel and put their head right on the ground and show them there was nothing, they weren't stealing or anything like that. They were really afraid of those people.

CGR:

Well, where did you go in Japan? Where did they take you?

WJ:

I was up in the north, called Niigata. There was 125 guys died in Japan, I think, altogether; there was over 100 that died in our camp. That was really a bad camp and I think maybe it was from being so far north. It was cold and of course you always

think you're at the bottom of the heap, but I was lucky I was out on the long-shoring and we could steal stuff. You know, we'd steal beans and things like this. The guys that worked in the coal yard I used to feel they were really on the bottom. That was hell, that was, working out in the cold in their bare feet in this coal yards, you know. They brought in the coal I guess from Korea or China, wherever it was coming from.

CGR:

In your camp, was there a doctor? A Canadian doctor?

WJ:

We had (what the hell was this guy's name?). I think Stewart was his name, an Irishman, no British-Irish. He was over to visit Kenny Cambon. Kenny Cambon is a doctor over in Vancouver now. He was an orderly in the prison camp where I was. And he said when he was a kid there (he learned to speak Japanese, he was a very intelligent kid, learned to speak Japanese very well), and he became an orderly (nobody wanted that type of job), but he became an orderly and he was going to be an engineer, an electrical engineer or an aeronautical engineer or something like that when he got out. It sounded fantastic in those days, but Manchester had a job down here with the government and he seen this file going by, Cambon, "There's an unusual name. This guy's been in..."

CGR:

How do you spell his name?

WJ:

Cambon. I don't know how to spell it. But he lives in Vancouver. He's married to a doctor and their both eye, ear,

nose and throat people. He was quite a kid, that Kenny Cambon.

CGR:

Anyway, you had this Dr. Stewart there.

WJ:

Yes, he was our doctor. I don't know what kind of a doctor he was, but he was like all the doctors. It's like telling me to be the doctor. I could have been the doctor because all I could do was say, "Go and put some hot water on it. Or put some cold water on it. Or have an aspirin." You know, take a powder, or something like that, you see.

CGR:

I want you to tell me something about Dr. Banfill, whom you mentioned. Was he the one that looked after you had the cardiac beriberi?

WJ:

No, no. I can't remember. It could have been, I don't remember. It could have been him. We had three or four of our own doctors there, you see. But he was quite a guy to talk to. He was telling me that -- the Canadians weren't, you know, they were like boy scouts, they were sent into a war and they didn't know anything about it. The British officers would say, "Listen to these guys." And then we'd say, "Hey Charlie, what's going on up there," and they'd say, "They're not addressing us as Major," or whatever. So one time and the battle was on they said, "Why in hell don't you Canadians do what you're told?", said this to Banfill. So somebody came in and said to him, "Well you'd better take off, the Japs are coming." So he thought, "Well, I'd better

do as I was told. I was told to stay here." So he stayed in this tent and he had his orderlies and his wounded guys and they came in, the Japanese, killed all the patients and killed his orderlies, all but one. He got cut across the back with a sword, I think, and he lived. But I think they killed all of them except him and they kept him for about three or four days in suspense and they would say, "Well, we're going to kill you tomorrow." And then they'd talk to him and talk to him, and then at the end of about four days the Japs says to him, "Oh no, we're not going to shoot you. I just wanted to see what your reaction would be when I told you I was going to shoot you."

CGR:

Were there any of the doctors that you did have anything much to do with...?

WJ:

I didn't. I didn't have an awful lot to do with them. Well if you had malaria, like, I'd go and see -- maybe Dr. Crawford would be there. He was very sympathetic and he'd listen to them. That's about all he could do. I had malaria one time and, you know, I went and he said, "Well, the only thing I can tell you is go and lay down. That's about all there is." Of course, if somebody had something, I think there was two or three times they took guys' appendixes out, or something like that. The British officer, I think his name was Ashton-Rose, he did that to two different fellows and this one friend of mine, I was in the dysentery ward with him, and he only had a little scar about that big [one inch] for his appendix and he said the reason he had that (and it was in a different spot for some reason), but they

had taken out a guy a week before and they operated on him and they had to cut a big long cut in him because this guy's appendix was hooked around his something, eh. I don't know what this, around his liver, what ever. I can't remember the story details. But anyway, when Smith-Dutton went in there they said, "Hey, by the feel of it, maybe this guy's got the same thing." But instead of having the big cut like the other guy he got one about this long. It was just a fantastic thing what happened to him.

CGR:

How did they treat you for dysentery?

WJ:

Well, one time when I had dysentery they gave me Epsom salts and I was put in isolation. But when I got to Japan I constantly had diarrhea, and one time they took a stool test and it was just mucus that comes out. They put me into isolation and the treatment for that was two pints of potato starch a day. I went in on my birthday, that was it, in January, and I got out of that place in April. And I missed all the hard work in the snow. I think maybe it saved my life too. I had a lot of diarrhea when I was there and I think, it wasn't like regular diarrhea like from a germ, I think I had what they called amebic dysentery too, that's why they put me in there, because I was a carrier.

But I think a lot of it was from the water. This friend of mine, Lance, he lived in Japan and he says, "I think maybe there's lot of volcanic ash something, you know, could be arsenic or something in this water." He said, it just affects you that way." Now I don't know how true that is, but it could be because

the water was beautiful water for drinking. It had a good well and everything. It was really nice water. It was sandy soil, but as soon as I got away from there, diarrhea...you know.

CGR:

It must have been something like that.

WJ:

I figured maybe that was it, but like I say, I was a carrier and that's why I was in that place for three or four months, or whatever it was.

CGR:

And for all those months, basically, all they did was give you potato starch?

WJ:

Yes. Well, potato starch and soup, you know, fish soup and some greens, some things like this, you know.

CGR:

But no medication? They had no medications or...?

WJ:

They used to give you (if you went to see the doctor) they'd give you a little envelope with this medicine in it. Now I never did find out what it was but it was the most bitter tasting stuff I ever tasted in my whole life. And I don't know what it was. It didn't seem to do much good, anyway, but I couldn't tell you what it was. It didn't seem to do much good, anyway, but I couldn't tell you what it was. I never did hear anybody ever say what it was. And every once in a while they'd give you some

aspirin. The Japs would bring in some aspirin. I remember the guys using that to put in there to make -- take flour and put aspirin in it and that's make the flour rise a bit, you know.

CGR:

It was good for something.

Were you ever treated by a Japanese doctor?

WJ:

Never. One guy came in to check me one time when I was in the hospital, but he never -- I don't know whether he was a bona fide doctor or not, or whether he was just curious. He said he was but he stuck his hand in one side in there and I thought it was going to come through. I guess he was feeling my liver. But he stuck it in about this far [several inches] it seemed like.

But I was never -- Manchester lives over the next street. He went down to Tokyo and had piles operated on, and of course that was a terrible operation. They weren't very good doctors, you know, not that I heard of them being any damn good, anyway. Might be now but in those days they weren't. You know, I never heard anybody saying that they were cracker-jack doctors.

CGR:

How about dental work? Did you have any dental work done?

WJ:

Yes. We had -- in North Point there's a little dentist we had. He was from Souris, Manitoba. Of course it was the same thing there. You see, they could fill your teeth but they didn't have the right things. I got a couple of teeth filled there, and I think it was an American dentist in the last camp I was in in

Niigata and I think he was in the Navy -- he filled a couple of teeth for me. I think they used to pull a lot of teeth too.

CGR:

Yes. Was there a dentist [Winston] Cunningham? Does that name ring a bell?

WJ:

Yes, Cunningham. He was from my home town.

CGR:

That's the one, is it?

WJ:

Yes.

CGR:

Oh, I'm going to see him. I'm interviewing him in about two weeks.

WJ:

Well tell him you were talking to me.

CGR:

Oh for sure.

WJ:

That guy, beyond a doubt, was one of the best hockey players I ever saw in my whole life, bar none. If he hadn't been a dentist -- like nowadays they say, "Christ, don't be a dentist be a hockey player." But he was my idea of a hockey player. He wasn't trying to kill somebody. You know, nowadays. He was a stick-handler, you know, they didn't even have all the pads on them. They didn't have shoulder pads and all that crap, you know, banging each other up against the boards. But he was a

beautiful hockey player, he was fantastic. I think one of the best I've ever seen, even watching these guys on TV. He was excellent.

CGR:

Yes, the game's changed a lot. I used to play goal, of course, in the days when nobody wore masks. You never thought about wearing a mask.

WJ:

And they didn't have the slap-shot either.

CGR:

No. Just as well.

Did you stay in the camp in Niigata till the end of the war?

WJ:

Yes, I was there two years, two or three. You know, up and down the road there was a couple of places. The building fell on us New Year's Eve up there, '43, '44.

CGR:

Yes, I heard about that.

WJ:

It killed a bunch of guys. Killed half a dozen. I can't tell you that but it's hard to visualize. I'll show you this picture. Now if you look, you came in the front door of the hut, there's what you would see.

CGR:

Maybe you'd tell me something about this business about the alcohol and so on? I've heard it from somebody else but...

WJ:

Well, this alcohol was in drums and this friend of mine, he

said he'd tried some of it and he said, "Boy, don't drink that." He says, 'I had a sip of that yesterday and it made me sick.' And they were loading it into boxcars. Of course I didn't take any. I was a tea-totaller when I joined the army. So I could get into trouble with the Japanese by just being there. I was the cartoon character of a European, you know, tall and hooked nose and blue-eyed, you know, so they just belt me once in a while just to keep their hands in. So I figured I'd better not take any of that. I'll get into enough trouble without that, so that saved my life actually. Actually, I got some of the alcohol for a good friend of mine. And I killed him. I sure felt bad about that. That's life I guess.

CGR:

You certainly had no way of knowing.

WJ:

There's a peculiar story about that. This Bobbie McLeod, when I got home my parents moved and they moved to an apartment block, and this woman, Mrs. Webster (she'd married again), she said, she met my mother and she said, "Bobbie's dead." My mother says, "You get a letter from the war office." "No," she said, "I was talking to him." She was a spiritualist, you know. So my mother said, "Oh." She said, "I was talking to him and he's fine." So when I got home she's telling me about this and she said, "When did he die?" And I told her and it was that day.

CGR:

Oh really.

WJ:

It was that day. So I went to a party after and she was there, this little Mrs. Webster, she's a Scottish lady. "Well, Bobbie's here tonight," so I didn't like to say, "Well, I don't believe that." Strange, eh. An interesting story.

CGR:

Mysterious things go on.

WJ:

That was really weird.

CGR:

One of the things that I always ask about is, what about sex? Was sex something you thought about?

WJ:

Never. I just thought about food.

CGR:

That's what everybody seems to say.

WJ:

If you get so far down on the thing, it's like -- I was talking to Jan Solecki, he's a professor of Slavic languages, UBC, he was in there. We were talking about prisoners-of-war, and the guys in Europe had it better than us. And he said, "I wonder," he said, "their food might have been better and they might have been in more of a quandary mentally than we were, because you went to sleep at night and you hear somebody talking about food and you get up in the morning and somebody is talking food. And these guys maybe had enough food and they thought about other things." So he said, "It might have been more of a mental turmoil that what we were in." I never thought of that way, you know.

CGR:

Was there any sign of homosexuality that you saw?

WJ:

Not that I, I never...I heard this story, mind you, and there was two guys in one bunk and this officer said I'm going to report you guys to the Japanese. So he went and reported it to the Japanese and the guy told him the story and he said, "Yes." You know, "What's your problem?" sort of. He just accepted it. There were people like that. "What the hell are you telling me for?" I don't know how true that is but I heard that story. That was at the beginning.

CGR:

Was there anything you thought about all the time except food?

WJ:

Not that I can think of. That was mainly it. You always wondered, how the hell you were ever going to get out of there. Well if the atomic bomb hadn't been dropped, we wouldn't have got out. As you know, the orders were down for, I think it was September 6th, for everybody to be killed. Now the Japanese were putting, you know, say, putting barrels of oil on the beaches and everything like that. I saw this guy from Africa, Van Der Post, he was taken prisoner but he was only a prisoner-of-war for about a year, I think. And he was talking about where he was, that this guy decided he was going to kill them all anyway, even though the war was over. They sent an emissary down there from Tokyo and the guy said, "You'll do as the Emperor says." So they

came to Van Der Post and they said, "The war is over. Have a drink with us." and of course if they would have asked anybody but a guy like Van Der Post, they would have put a few obscenities in there. And he said, "Beautiful." He said, "No thank you very much." He talked very British being from South Africa, and of course that's the best way, that's the way a Japanese puts another one down, overly polite; if you're overly polite to a guy that's really insulting him. You could really insult them. I don't know there's many people who knew that, but van der post, he did. He was on there talking on Channel 9 one time. I watched him for about an hour. He was talking about the war.

So you couldn't see what was going to happen, how you could get out.

CGR:

Did you ever think that you probably wouldn't get out? Do you remember?

WJ:

Well I think if you really -- there was always that in the back of your mind that you would get out, somehow. It's like when you joined the army you think, all them other dumb guys are going to get killed, I'm not. You know. If you didn't, you could just lay down and die.

Like when I weighed 127 lb. Dr. Stewart he said to me, "You'd better stay in." If I hadn't stayed in then I would have died. I'd seen enough guys dying, like, I knew that was it, I knew how I was going to die. Because I got my dinner at noon (that's a bowl of rice) and didn't have enough time to eat it.

Like I was eating in slow motion. I couldn't eat fast. (I used to just gobble things down.) And I put it in my haversack and when I went back to barracks that night, I was running and my feet were just -- I thought, "Boy, this is it!" because I had seen enough guys that couldn't eat. And I thought, "How the hell can you not eat?" But I went and seen this doctor and pulled up my shirt and I said, "I'm sick." And he said, "You sure as hell are. You'd better take a couple of days off." That was when the building fell down about the next day or so, and there was just enough to, you know. If I had gone another few days I would have died, go in my sleep or something.

CGR;

Is there anything else you can think of that would be of medical interest that affected you personally? Friends that had particular things wrong with them that you saw?

WJ:

Well I guess you've heard all about the electric feet and the strawberry balls, all these things. I couldn't think of any worse torture to put on anybody than to have that electric feet, you know. Like I say, I can tell you about it but the only way you come close to it is if you had your ears frozen or something when you were a kid and they start to thaw out. That's very similar to it. But it's day and night.

CGR:

It goes on and on, yes.

WJ:

It did drive a lot of guys mad. Some guys died from it.

They soaked their feet too long. You know, you'd try anything. Put them all in one ward, the agony ward. That's when I said to Routledge when we were going to have this big escape, I said, "What about all these guys in the agony ward?" He said, "Look, we're going to die here anyway." He says, "It's either a matter of getting out of this damn place and running and getting shot or lay here and die." That's about what it was at that time, and then the Red Cross came in.

CGR:

Were you in the agony ward?

WJ:

No, I never got that sick. I got electric feet, of course. Everybody had that, but I didn't get it bad. You know, I wasn't as bad as some of the guys were.

CGR:

And then as you said the Red Cross came in and things got a little better. Did you get Red Cross food parcels?

WJ:

Oh, we got about two or three, I think, overall. But the bulk Red Cross is what saved us in Hong Kong. I don't think we would have survived without that. In fact, my brother asked them, when he was in Geneva, and they said, "We can check anybody we felt in the last 50 years." So he said, "How about my brother." They brought out two folders.

CGR:

Really.

WJ:

Yes. He's with the International Red Cross. He's in

Pakistan right now. But he said it was amazing that they could check that out in that short of time.

CGR:

How about brutality? Were you personally beaten up?

WJ:

Oh, I used to get beat up. Like I say, the Japanese would do this to their own people. They killed poor old (oh hell, I can't think of his name), he's from Keewatin -- Mortimer. They killed poor old Mortimer. They chained him out in the snow. They killed the American guy that was with him, they killed him. They knocked his brains out. But Mortimer they kept him out there till his feet froze and his hands froze and the doctor cut his fingers off with the scissors, you know. And they would stink like hell. He was in a little hospital where I was. He was the toughest son-of-a-bitch that ever lived, I think, and died. He was a tough bugger. He never -- right to the very end -- he didn't moan or anything. He just said, "Them dirty bastards." That's got to be the toughest guy that ever lived. He was something else.

CGR:

Is this Japan or...?

WJ:

That was in Japan.

CGR:

How long did they leave him out?

WJ:

Oh God, I don't know. You know, I have such a terrible

memory that when they had him chained out, him and this other guy, when I came in from work I looked the other way because I knew if I looked at him, well I'd see that son-of-a-gun for the rest of my life. And I get shoved in the hospital and I was right with him. I was with him when he died.

They asked us whether we wanted to go to the guardhouse or do you want to get beat up. Well, we'd say, "Be my guest. Give me a couple of belts." They'd give you -- there little guys, and they give you a couple of shots -- maybe a bang in the fact and you'd get a black eye or something out of it, and that would be the end of it because that was their type of discipline. You know, I got two black eyes once; I forget what the hell it was for. I think I didn't get out on parade quick enough and a guy belted me and I hit my other side of the head on the wall and I had two black eyes. But they would ask you, you see, and if you went through all the discipline routine, you see, if you went through that well then you might get beat up and you'd lose your meals too.

It's like this friend of mine, I use him for the difference between education, stupidity, and ignorance. He had very little education. He was ignorant like a lot of us on a lot of things. He went to school for a total of Grade 7. But this Jap was talking to him and this guy's -- Mulvaney is his name, part Indian and part Irish. And I told a story about him for many years and I finally found out what had happened. It's a bad, long, involved story.

Anyway, this Jap is looking for him. He said, "Hey, you look different to the rest of these guys." Mulvaney says, "Yes,

I'm part Japanese you know." He said, "My mother was Japanese." And the guy said, "Can you speak any Japanese?" He said, "Hell, no. My old man was a rotten Irishman." He said, "He wouldn't let me learn on word." He conned that guy right there and the guy gave him a package of cigarettes and he was supposed, he'd been stealing down at work, and he was supposed to go to the guardhouse. He went to the guardhouse and the guy says, "Gee, if I send you back to work maybe the Kempei-Tai will get you and they'll beat the hell out of you and maybe kill you." He said, "I'll give you a week in the guardhouse." He got a week in the guardhouse and never had so much to eat since he'd been a prisoner-of-war. And the guy says, "Jesus christ, you guys are stupid." This guy spoke real good English, the camp commandant. He said, "You crazy guys." He said, "Do you mean to say that you've been getting the hell beaten out of ou down at work for two years and never complained about it?" You see, he wanted to go through the old routine. He said that we should have been complaining to him and then he would see that were were disciplined. He kicked the eye out one guy. And he would have seen that we were disciplined properly, see.

But anyway, they come on an investigation after Mulvaney got into this, and it turned out that these guys had been stealing our rations and selling them for two years. I think some of them went to jail. I'm not sure now. I know they changed all the guards and some of them got sent to another part of the docks. It was quite an investigation, but all on account of Mulvaney.

CGR:

What happened when the war ended? How did the next couple of weeks go?

WJ:

Well, it gradually dawned on us, you know, there was a little lull there and the planes come over and nobody fired at them. And then they started dropping stuff to us. I got the first meal I had that was worth anything. I was up on the hill and we were picking up all this stuff, you see. They're dropping it with parachutes; I put all the broken cans into one big bucket and this officer said to me, "You take that down." I cut my thumb, you see. He says, "You'd better go down and have that thumb looked after." As soon as I got away from where he was, I just -- it was fruit cocktail. I ate about (it seemed like) a gallon of it. And I couldn't eat peaches or fruit cocktail for about two or three years after the war. It's like you don't get sick of something -- I never got sick of rice because I never got too much of it. But this brought on the dysentery again so I wound up back in the hospital. And they brought on the dysentery again so I wound up back in the hospital. And they came over and dropped another bunch of stuff and a barrel came right through the hospital roof and then set the place on fire. And the first meal I had in four years that was palatable, I couldn't eat.

And when I got down to -- I went by train....the governor of the state, some state, I forget, a huge man. He flew in and he came and talked to us. I didn't bother to go and see him, but he's the governor of one state now. And we went down by train to Tokyo and I was so bad while standing in the line -- we went through debugging. I was, you know, didn't like this too well

because I wasn't lousy. I used to get a good wash every day. I was one of the cleanest prisoners-of-war in the world, I guess. We had good facilities there at the end. The first year we were there we didn't. But I was in such bad shape that I remember this big marine come over to me and said, "Boy, you look in bad shape. You better go on the hospital ship." I said, "No, I'll be all right." "Okay," he says, "suit yourself."

I must have weighed about 140 lb. then. By the time I got to Victoria a month later -- left on the 6th of September -- by the time I go there I weighed just under 200 lb. Now I was talking to a guy on the train going out of Vancouver, we compared notes, my sister lives here, so I missed the draft out, and I talked "What camp were you in?" Well we were in the same camp. He was on the coal gang. There was only 100 of us there, 100 Canadian and about 200 Americans. At the end there were some guys getting in from Guam -- not Guam but Shanghai. This guy everybody says, "Hey, you guys look great." If they had flown us home they would have put us in the hospital for forever.

CGR:

How have you been since the war?

WJ:

I've been pretty good. My legs will swell up, you know, if it's a hot day. My nerves may not be what they should be. I looked after myself pretty good. I'm the North American champion hammer thrower.

CGR:

Really.

WJ:

For guys over 60. I broke the record for guys between 55 and 60 about three or four years ago. I beat it by two meters. If I had got to it the year before, I would have beaten them by about 6 meters. I just broke the Canadian record about two weeks ago in the 12-1b hammer for guys over 60. I keep myself in pretty good shape.

CGR:

You must. You look in good shape.

WJ:

I don't drink at all, I don't smoke. I used to drink like a beer, but it wasn't doing me too much good. It depends on the weather. Like I say, if I go to a track meet, like when I went to Ottawa last year when it was a nice day like this and it's just my kind of weather and I won the championship, North American. But the next day it was as hot as a firecracker and I get up and, oh, now you've been practicing with a shot put and I could throw the shot put around just under 12 meters. I threw it 10! I'd been practicing all summer. I won two events. I won the weight throw and the hammer throw.

CGR:

Very good. And what is the new record?

WJ:

The one I threw there last week was 40 meters, 52 centimeters and the Canadian record is 39 and 78. I was throwing the other night and I can beat the record pretty near every time. I feel pretty good about that.

CGR:

Yes, you should. That's great.

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BOB McKIBBON	3	30, 31, 32
ROY McLACHLAN	1	47
McLAREN	1	31
ALF McLAUGHLIN	2	33, 34
NORM McLEOD	2	31, 32
LOCKIE McNEILL	1	30
GORDON MCPHEE	1	42
JIM McPHERSON	1*	49
BOB McTAVISH	1	39
IAN McTAVISH	1	48
BILL McQUARRIE	1	48
FRANK McVEY	1	32
OLIE MIDGARTEN	1	37
LEW MILES	1	48
CAM MILLER	1*	49
TOMMY MILLER	4	30, 32, 33, 34
BOB MILLER	1	43
JACK MILLIDGE	2	30, 31
HAROLD MILLON	1	48
ED MILLS	4	31, 32, 33, 34
HERB MOBBERLEY	7	33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39
TOM MOBBERLEY	3	33, 34, 35

PLAYER	SEASON	YEARS
LOU MOGUL	11	32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42
BUD MOOREHOUSE	1	42
TED MORLEY	1	30
DAVE MORRIS	2	36, 37
FRANKIE MORRIS	2	30, 32
JOHNNY MOYSE	1	32
FRANK MULVEY	5	39, 40, 41, 45, 47
MUSICK	1	33
MYERS	1	30
<b>N</b>		
BILL NAIRN	6	34, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40
BERT NELSON	1	33
HAROLD NEUFELD	1	49
JEFF NICKLIN	7	34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40
AL NOBLE	1	37
ED NORVACK	3*	47, 48, 49
<b>O</b>		
ED OGALSKI	2	45, 46
STEVE OGRADNICK	2	41, 42
BERT OJA	3	35, 36, 37
STEVE OLANDER	5	33, 34, 35, 36, 37
ALBERT OLSON	2	43, 45
BILL ORDWAY	1	46
<b>P</b>		
NICK PAGONES	1	35
ALLAN PASSMAN	5*	45, 46, 47, 48, 49
JOHNNY PATRICK	2	34, 35
LYNN PATRICK	1	34
HARRY PEARLMUTTER	2	36, 37
NORM PENNY	2	30, 33
JOE PERPICH	2	35, 36
GORDON PERRY	3	47, 48, 49
HERB PESCHL	7	35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41
EDDIE PETERMAN	1	35
PETE PETROW	1*	49
ALF PIKE	1	43
MARTIN PLATZ	1	39
PAUL PLATZ	1	43
ED POLLOCK	1	45
POSTIE	1	31
KEN PRESTON	2	41, 42
CHARLIE PROUDFOOT	1	33
<b>R</b>		
ART RAVEN	1	34
JOHNNY REAGAN	1	47
RUSS REBHOLZ	6	33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38
DAN RENNIE	1	33
DON RICHARDSON	1	31
BOB ROGERS	1	31
BOB ROSE	2	33, 34
CLIFF ROSEBOROUGH	9	34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42
VIC ROSENBLAT	1	30
IAN ROSS	1	42
BARNEY ROURKE	1	42

PLAYER	SEASON	YEARS
PERCY RUBENSTEIN	1	43
HARVEY RUSSELL	4	32, 33, 34, 36
<b>S</b>		
BOB SANDBERG	3	47, 48, 49
ERIC SANDBERG	1	43
BOBBY SCHILLER	1	34
LEN SEREBRIM	1	42
JIM SHELDON	1	43
WAYNE SHELLEY	5	38, 39, 40, 41, 42
GEORGE SHIELDS	1	43
STEVE SHISKA	1	37
NATE SHORE	6	40, 41, 42, 43, 45, 46
MOE SIMOVICH	6	39, 40, 41, 42, 46, 49
SLIMON	1	30
BOB SMITH	1	47
DON SMITH	4	46, 47, 48, 49
GORDON SMITH	3	45, 46, 47
TED SMITH	1	31
OSSIE SNELL	2	39, 40
IAN SNIDER	2	30, 32
PETE SOMMERS	1	36
S. SPOONER	2	34, 36
SPRINGER	1	33
JACK STEPHENS	1	45
ART STEVENSON	5	37, 38, 39, 40, 41
STEWART	1	33
STRATTON	1	33
JOHNNY STROPPA	1*	49
GORDON STURTRIDGE	1	49
DANNY SUMMERS	1	45
SUTHERLAND	1	33
<b>T</b>		
BIFF TAYLOR	2	32, 36
JOE TESSLER	1	45
TINY THOMPSON	1	43
BERNIE THORNTON	1	41
TIPPEN	1	31
GEORGE TOMAN	3	45, 46, 48
WES TRACEY	4	30, 32, 33, 34
JOE TURNER	1	47
TY TYSON	3	30, 31, 32
<b>U</b>		
AL URNESS	1	33
<b>V</b>		
RON VAACHER	2*	48, 49
KAS VIDRUK	4*	42, 45, 46, 47
ART VOYER	1	31
<b>W</b>		
WARREN	1	34
JOHNNY WESTRUM	2	47, 48
BRIAN WIFLEY	1	46
TOOTS WIGGINS	1	32
NED WIGINTON	1	32
ERNIE WILLIAMS	5	42, 45, 46, 47, 48
KEN WILLIAMSON	1	33
MEL WILSON	9	37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 45, 46, 47