WILLIAM JOSEPH YEARDYE

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Interviewed by

Charles G. Roland, M.D.

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Charles G. Roland, MD:

Mr. Yeardye would you begin by just telling me a bit about your background? Where you were born, who your parents were, how you came to Canada, some of that information.

William Joseph Yeardye:

I was born in London, England, and I came out here just after I was nine years old. My aunt and uncle brought me, and I was raised in Hamilton. I went to Hamilton Tech, and I ran away from home, if you want to know. I went out west, and from there on I worked in the mines and on farms all through the depression. I've seen good times and I've seen bad times in this country. I'm very proud of this country to be quite honest with you.

Then I went to England in '38 (the war started in '39). I went in '38 and while over there [Prime Minister Neville] Chamberlain came back waving a piece of paper saying "Peace In our time," and right away they started to sandbag all the stores and buildings. I thought, well, it was no good to go back to Canada and then join up there, so I decided to join the RAF, hoping I would get a pilot's job -- which I didn't because I didn't have the education for it.

I joined the RAF and did my basic training, then took my armorer's course at Mamby, Lincolnshire. It was very close to the town called Louth. That's where I met my wife, and a few months afterwards we got married and I think I was one of the first Canadians married in England. This I am not quite sure of, but if I wasn't, I was one of them.

C.G.R:

You certainly started a flood!

W.J.Y:

Right! [laughter] Then I was posted to a bomber squadron, because I had training on synchronized turrets and that was a new thing that came out just after the war started, the turrets were the type that could swivel -- so I was sent down there to the Blenheim squadron [in Essex]. Then from there I got posted to Hemswell on Hampden bombers, and from there I was sent to a fighter squadron, because I had experience in bomb-carriers, turrets, all types of machine guns and cameras that took pictures from the air. Then, a little while afterwards, when the war really broke out, they began to make just "armorer-guns" or "armorer-bombs," whereas I was known as an armorer-general.

Then they formed 242 Squadron, which was made up of Canadians already in England and had joined the RAF, and we fought through the Battle of Britain. I was sent over to France to -- there was 29 of us sent over -- and we were attached to a squadron. We were supposed to go up to Dunkirk, and all we did was get as far as Lille, in Belgium, which was right on the border of Belgium and France.

Dunkirk fell, so we came back to Boulogne and we had to fix bayonets because the French got hostile with us, and we were put into a camp. That night, Germany bombed Boulogne for the first time. We had orders that any man who left the camp would be shot, because there was nowhere to go anyway, and that was the order, so we just had to stay there and that raid lasted all night long. It smashed all the boats, trucks which were on the docks; in fact, the next morning we went down to the docks and

there was all kinds of small boats coming across the channel and I got into a little, well it wasn't much bigger than a rowboat, and it came from Dover, this fisherman had brought it up from Dover and my buddy and I and two other fellows, that's all it would hold, took us back across the channel. The last thing I saw in Boulogne was the Salvation Army -- their van serving hot tea and buns to the soldiers that were left.

So we arrived in Dover and the Channel was just as calm, as calm could be. I don't think we would have made it if it had been rough, to be honest with you. We were taken into London and we stayed at the Union Jack Club on Waterloo Road until they knew what they could do with us. We were under orders not to speak to anybody about what had happened.

I eventually got posted back to where 242 was, up in Yorkshire, and I was there for about three weeks when England tried to form a line south of Paris and I was sent back again to France, to a place called Chateaudun. From Chateaudun we were on the run for, I think, about seven days until we got to St. Nazaire on the west coast of France. There was a big convoy there. The Lancastria was one of the boats.

We got on a small fishing boat. The reason we got on the fishing boat was that the Lancastria was supposed to take all air force personnel, but when we got to the gangplank of the Lancastria there was an air force officer and an English army officer arguing about whether the air force or -- one of them was saying the army should go on it, and the other said no, it should be the air force. So the officer that was with us took us to a Polish boat and we got into a Polish fishing boat. It took us out to

the convoy. Then we had to wait for the Lancastria.

Now, I'm not going to swear this is true, but anyway, while we were waiting in the convoy a Dornier came over and flew over the convoy. We understood that the Lancastria couldn't get out because the tide was down. Now whether this was because this argument had delayed things, I'm not going to say. So eventually the Lancastria got into position in the convoy, and two Dorniers came out of the sky and they bombed the whole convoy. Of course, everybody knows the Lancastria was blown up. The captain had orders to make for England and the convoy just split up. I don't think we had a bomb any closer than a quarter of a mile away from the boat I was on, but the Lancastria got one right down the funnel, and she blew up there. They didn't pick up any survivors. The orders were to make for England -- whether they were afraid that a bunch of Dorniers would come back and bomb the whole convoy...?

We landed in Falmouth three days afterwards.

CGR:

Three days?

WJY:

Three days afterwards. We sat on the streets and people came out with tea and sandwiches for us, because they didn't have much (they were on rations), until the air force wondered what they should do with us. Then they sorted us out from different squadrons -- because we were only part of a squadron. We were just sent there to strengthen the ground crew personnel [in France]. So we were sent back to Coltershall, then. The squadron had moved to Coltershall. And then we fought the Battle of

Britain.

CGR:

Now, was Bader the.....?

WJY:

Bader was the CO [the second time we went to France].

CGR:

The CO all this time?

WJY:

Bader was the CO the first time we went into -- well, no, the first time we went into France we had -- Gobels [?] was our squadron leader.

CGR:

Gobels?

WJY:

Group captain. His father was Postmaster-General of Canada at that time.

CGR:

I see. I thought you meant the German Goebbels [laughter].

WJY:

No, no. There was -- I don't know if I should say these things; I don't think I'd better -- but there was a lot of stories about him. We actually got deserted in France. He was sent back to Canada, and I think he became Group Captain of a training center. I will say he wasn't very popular.

Bader came and took over from the squadron, as Squadron Leader.

CGR:

What was he like? I've heard different stories.

WJY:

He was a prince, he was a prince. If we ever got attached to a station, the first thing Bader would do was go down and see if the crews were satisfied. "I don't have to worry about the officers," he said, "I know they're all looked after," he said, "but my boys have got to be looked after too." So that was the type of man he was. I think anybody would have laid down their life for him. He was that type of person.

Of course, I was very close to him, being his armorer, and when he came down he used to say, "I've got another one Bill, thanks to you." This is what he would always say to me.

One day we were in the dispersal hut, and we were playing poker when he walked in. Of course, gambling was against the law in the air force. So he said, "Don't stop, don't stop." He got behind me and he said, "Gee, you've got a pretty good hand there Bill," he said, "bump it." I only had a pair of deuces in my hand. So I bumped it and everybody folded and I took the pot [laughter]. That was the kind of guy he was.

He thought of his crew an awful lot. I have cards from him, Christmas cards I used to get. When he died I sent a condolence card, and I got a reply back from his second wife. His first wife -- she died of cancer.

Another incident I can tell you. There was an Englishman that had come out to Canada as a farmer, and he'd made a lot of money and he retired as a gentleman farmer. So he gave a hundred pounds to the Squadron to have a dance and a good time. I don't know where the food came from, but there was all kinds of it.

Bader organized the whole thing. When we were going home -- of course everybody was feeling pretty good -- there was a fellow from Toronto named Fisher. We were walking down the steps and his wife Thelma -- he introduced us all to her as Thelma.

CGR:

This is Bader's wife?

WJY:

This is Bader's first wife. Fisher, he didn't recognize her, and he taps her on the shoulder and he said, "Who's taking you home tonight, Babe?" So Bader said, as she turned around, he looks up at Fisher and he said, "I think I will," he said, "she's my wife." [laughter] That was all that was said because he had his legs, he had two legs amputated. He couldn't drink too much because he'd lose his balance. But he'd have one or two with the boys and that would be it.

Another time I can remember, we were at Coltershall when a panic came on, and everybody -- the pilots -- took off. There was an alert for a German raider. We had a pilot named Christie; now Bader always used to lay in bed and his leg would be by the side of it. This day, this morning, it was early morning, Christie grabbed one of the legs and took it out of the dispersal hut and got into his aircraft and away he went. Of course, with the noise of the engines starting up nobody heard Bader yelling. So when everybody had taken off, one of the flight sergeants heard Bader yelling his head off. He went in and, "Where's my God damn leg," he was saying. So the supply sergeant said, "I don't know." He said, "Christie took it." [He left it outside the hut.] He got his leg back and strapped it on and when Christie

came back he said to Christie, he said (and he was out there and he was mad, real mad), he said, "What the hell did you do that for?" Christie just looked out of the cockpit, and he turned around and he said, "Well sir," he said "I thought you looked a little tired so I thought you needed the rest." [laughter] Bader jumped about that high, but he never brought any charge against him, he seen the joke later on. That was the type of guy Bader was.

CGR:

Well, tell me just a little bit about the Battle of Britain as you saw it, just before we get on to Java and so on.

WJY:

We were pretty busy and we lost a few pilots. One of the pilots we lost was McKnight, who came from Calgary. He had quite a few aircraft knocked down before they got him.

But we got moved around, and they'd take maybe 30 or 40 of the squadron, the ground crew, and put them down wherever the squadron was operating from, because Hurricanes couldn't fly from the north of England over the North Sea and engage in combat and then get back to their base, so they'd move their aircraft down -- to Duxford, was one place, just outside of Cambridge. North Weald was another place that they moved them to. We would go, part of the [technicians of the] squadron would go, and the main part of the ground crew would be up at Coltershall or whatever our main station was. Well, it was 24 hours go, go, go. Sometimes you got a break and then another time you didn't because different wings took off.

Eventually they broke the squadron up, and they made Bader

Wing Commander over the whole operation over the English Channel. He used to fly above and direct the flights. Once we lost Bader [he was taken prisoner], then they made up a squadron, they just shipped Canadians all over the place. But I stayed, I didn't get posted. They made the squadron up with English fellows, but it was still 242, and eventually we got notice that we were going to go overseas.

CGR:

Excuse me, one question before you get on to that. Did 242 fly Hurricanes all the time?

WJY:

Hurricanes, yes. We went to a place called Bangor in Wales. We didn't know where we were going to go until a few days before they sent us up to Scotland; then we heard we were going to the Middle East. Well, the pilots all went off ahead of us, and we had big crates of mittens and balaclava helmets for the desert, because apparently it gets quite cold in the desert at night. Well, we figured we'd be somewhere in the Middle East.

After we set sail from Scotland the Japanese hit Pearl Harbor. We started to circle around in the North Atlantic for three days before they knew where we were going to go. Then they decided to go to the Far East to strengthen our squadrons there. Now here we were, a complete squadron of ground crew and no aircraft, no pilots -- just one of the boobs of the war. We stopped at Dakar, no, no, not Dakar -- that was a German base. We stopped -- Sierra Leone, is it, where they called it the "White man's grave"? Freetown, that's the name of the city.

CGR:

Freetown.

WJY:

We stopped there. We weren't allowed on land because of the high [risk of] malaria and spinal meningitis, and we just harbored there to refuel. Then we set out and we landed in South Africa, in Capetown. We refueled in Capetown again. We were escorted by the Royal Sovereign, a battle cruiser. We were attacked by subs from Freetown to Capetown, but no damage was done, apparently, that I know of. I don't know, I'm not sure of the records but they said that they had got one sub, because they were operating out of Dakar.

Then from Capetown we went up into the Maldive Islands to refuel again and then from the Maldive Islands we went (Singapore had fallen) to Java. In Java, a few of us got posted up into Sumatra, to Palembang, and we were expecting fighter aircraft from Malaya; we were going to relieve a squadron that was leaving for India. (I forget the name and number of the squadron.)

While we were there, we were waiting for these fighter aircraft to come in, and Hudsons came in with our markings. The doors opened and about a hundred paratroopers jumped out. The Hudsons had been captured in Malaya, and they were Japanese. So I opened the armory (well, I had orders to issue all guns from the armory and ammunition) and they surrounded the 'drome and they got up -- they were dressed in green -- they got up into the coconut trees. My flight sergeant was next to me and he got it right through the neck. I think they lost about 40 or 50 of the squadron. Well, the Dutch had native troops called the Ambonese

(they came from the island of Amboina, just off Java, and they were their native troops); well, a bunch of them managed to break through, and that evening more Hudsons came over and about 400 paratroopers dropped out. So the Ambonese took us 18 miles through the jungle to Palembang.

We were about 18 miles from Palembang, and there an Indian navy boat had been sunk; the engineer off of the boat commandeered a train and he took it right to the southern tip of Sumatra, which is on the Sunda Straits. Then we went across on a Dutch boat to Java, and we were no sooner in Java when the Dutch capitulated.

I'd been in France through all this, and yet a lot of these English fellows didn't know what it was all about as far as actual warfare was concerned, because they were all green. They'd never been through France or anything like that. Now I had no flight sergeant; I didn't have a sergeant. The Dutch capitulated, so I said to these fellows (now, we were ordered to go into a school), "I'm going to load up the armory truck with guns and ammunition" and I said, "Anybody wants to come with me. I'm going to make a break for the south of the island". They wouldn't come. They were scared. Well, I destroyed three aircraft on the ground at Batavia aerodrome. I put a torch to them. I took water tanks and maps and I loaded up from the NAAFI with lime juice cordial and chocolate bars and stew, and I headed for the south of the island.

I got stopped half way down, at a place called Tasikmalaya. This group captain came out. His name was Group Captain Walsh and he said, "Where do you think you're going?" I said "I'm

making a break for it". He said, "you can't get off the island". Well, I said, "Everybody is supposed to make a break for it". So, he said, "you're not going any further, and he commandeered, my truck; he said, "You're not going." So I started to argue. He said, "I'm giving the orders, Corporal", so I said, "If I ever get out of this alive" I said, "I'm going to report you" I said "every man's supposed to make a break." He said, "I've heard enough of that now." He called two SPs over and they took the truck and all the stuff that was in it and I had to stay in that camp.

Well then, about four days later the Japanese came and this Wing Commander walked out to greet them in the British style, and the first thing they did was slap him around.

So anyway, from there we were sent to Surabaya. Then, after a few weeks there, really, the Japanese didn't know what to do with us. They sent us up to Bandoeng, and worked on a aerodrome there. Then we went back to Surabaya again, and in that camp there was all the Dutch that had run the country, all the administration. They'd run the rubber plantations and the oil and any big businesses, and the doctors and lawyers. So then we were shipped to -- we were 18 months in Java -- then a month on Singapore. When they shipped us to Singapore and we started to work on a 'drome there. We were stationed right outside Changi Gaol.

One time we were marched through the streets of Singapore and in all the houses they had soldiers standing with automatic rifles. They didn't have any automatic rifles of their own, it was what they'd captured in Malaya and Singapore. They had a rifle that looked something like a .22, and it was very accurate.

Every street that they took us down, they split the parties so that one party went one way and we went another way, and the officer said, "Whatever you do, whatever you see, don't make a move -- don't make a move, because," he said, "otherwise you'll be shot." I found out later that it was a retaliation for a bunch of prisoners that were in Australia. They'd caught some prisoners. They tried to go across the Timor Sea, to invade Australia, and they caught some prisoners.

CGR:

Some Japanese?

WJY:

That the Australians caught. They executed them, and this was a retaliation. This is what I was told afterwards. Now I don't know that this is all authentic, but when we were marched through the streets of Singapore, we compared notes afterwards with some of the guys. Now some of them said that they'd seen five British nurses in a store window, stripped, but I didn't see that. Where we went, they had Chinese women tied to lampposts and a bamboo shoved up between their legs, and bleeding to death. On all of the lamp posts was Chinese heads of the men that they'd executed. I saw that personally. I also saw two babies thrown up into the air and caught on bayonets. Four or five of the Japanese just caught them on a bayonet. I saw that personally. But I didn't see the nurses in the window.

CGR:

No.

WJY:

We compared notes when we got back to camp. We were there a

month, in Singapore, then we were put on a boat for Japan. In the hold, they carried bauxite, you know, that sulfur aluminum. We were sent down into the holds -- this was a mixture of Dutch, English, Australian, American -- and we were put into these holds, and we were chest to back.

CGR:

Crammed in.

WJY:

When they couldn't get anybody else in, they shut the holds down. One or two could sit down; the rest would have to stand up. In Singapore the humidity is about 90%. It's right on the equator, so you can understand the heat. We were like that for three days, and all they would do was lower food down in a pail. That boat was called the Mati Maru, and I understand the captain was executed at the war criminal trials. After we set sail....

CGR:

Now this would have been what, late '43? Early '44? Approximately.

WJY:

Well, I was 18 months in Japan. No, I was 22 months in Japan.

CGR:

Well, it would be late '43 then.

WJY:

Yes.

CGR:

Yes. Fall of '43.

WJY:

Yes. On that whole trip, some of the guys went mad with thirst and they were biting their arms and sucking the blood from them, and they were dying off like flies. I understand there was over 2,000 on that boat, and there was just 800 of us staggered off at Kobe.

Personally, my mouth was all sores. My tongue was sores. What they used to do on the trip was lower the pail with rice and the strongest got the most. That's how you survived. It was a matter of survival of the fittest. Then, every two days, they'd lower a rope down and you'd tie the dead onto it; they would haul them up and throw them over the side. Several fellows went mad. [After a while there was room to lie down.]

CGR:

What happened to them?

WJY:

They eventually died. They'd go into delirium and they'd die. When we landed at Kobe, they took us to a big hall and we could hardly stagger off the boat. They fed us a curried soup, and then they took pictures for the Red Cross. This is what I understand it was for -- the Red Cross. If you didn't eat -- you can imagine eating curry with your mouth all sores --if you didn't eat it then they just smashed you across the head with their hands. Slapped you across the ears.

So then from Kobe I was sent up to Wakayama; that is a little way past Osaka. I worked in a pipe factory there. This was pipes -- steam pipes for boats, and our job was to inspect -- we had a drawknife, and their method of making pipes was from the

first war, because we saw machinery from England that had 1918 on it.

CGR:

Ah yes.

WJY:

And 1912. They had this pipe after it had been formed. I don't know where they formed them, but to get a proper gauge, they had a die go inside and a die on the outside and it was pulled through this machine, and then it had little flaws in it and we had to take this drawknife and take these flaws out. And file it smooth. This was the work we did. When a camp got below 400 in strength they used to replenish the people that died, because a lot of people died.

CGR:

I'll just stop you there and turn the tape over.

[End of side 1.]

WJY:

Then when we got to Ikuno (I was sent to Ikuno, to make up the strength of 400) -- oh, I might add when I was in Bandoeng, we decided to make breaks for it -- I mean for the coast. Four fellows went over the first night, and they were going to make for the coast and then every three nights another four would go over. Well, two days after they [the first four] went over the fence, they brought them back and everybody had to assemble and they had these four guys and they beat them up. So the orders were, if any other man tried to escape, they would pick ten at random and shoot them. This is what they would do. So that put an end to trying to escape. Mind you, we were up against it

because our eyes weren't the right shape to start with.

CGR:

Right.

WJY:

In fact, they used to call us "Big Noses" with "Big Eyes". This is the signs that the Japanese troops used to make to us. So they took them out onto the drome and everybody was assembled and they shot them. They shot them in front of us. So that ended that escape business.

Now, getting back to Japan, I was sent back to Ikuno, and that was right in the interior, in the mines, and I worked in a copper mine, because I'd worked in gold mines up in the north, and I knew what it was all about.

CGR:

What gold mines did you work in in the [Canadian] north? Whereabouts?

WJY:

I worked in the Central Patricia, up north of Sioux Lookout. I worked in the St. Anthony Mines, north of Thunder Bay. I worked in the Hollinger. I worked in the Frood.

CGR:

I was raised at God's Lake [Manitoba]. That's why I asked.

WJY:

God's Lake.

CGR:

Yes. In northern Manitoba.

WJY:

Is that right? I had a homestead in northern Saskatchewan

when I was eighteen.

CGR:

Really?

WJY:

Yes.

CGR:

Go ahead, then. You were saying you were in the copper mine at Ikuno.

WJY:

Yes, and we had to work underground. While we were there, dysentery broke out in the camp and they wanted volunteers to look after the fellows in the camp, so I volunteered because I'd never had malaria or anything like that. A lot of the fellows did get malaria from the tropics. So I looked after the fellows with dysentery, which was quite contagious, but I never got it.

CGR:

Didn't you?

WJY:

No.

CGR:

You're very fortunate.

WJY:

Yes, I know. The medical officer that we had with us, he had no medication for them. He said, the only thing you could do was maybe grind up charcoal and put it in the rice, so this is what I used to do. A lot of them died. A big percentage of them died of dysentery, and the Japanese were dead scared of dysentery. One camp I was in, it was at Wakayama -- when the first

dysentery started, they inoculated us with something, but they used the needle for not just one for each needle. [It used to do about 20 men.] By the time it got to me I thought it was a spike being driven into my arm. They just put it into some alcohol, and, "Next, next."

CGR:

Who was the medical officer at Ikuno?

WJY:

I forget his name. I couldn't tell you. We were mixed with Americans, English, New Zealand, Australians, some of the Ambonese troops were there. Then we knew it was getting near the end, because an American commander -- we used to have little meetings at night, and he said, "Whatever paper you can get hold of, while you're at the mines," he said, "bring it to me." He got in real friendly with the interpreter and he said to the interpreter, "I think Japanese is a wonderful language." He said "I'd like to really learn it." So the interpreter said, well, he could help him. so he got a book, like a dictionary with English words and the symbols of the Japanese behind it. He thanked him, and he was telling us this, and how he studied it, and what a wonderful language it was, and it was all a bunch of bull, of course. Any pieces of paper we got, we used to smuggle in, because we worked with civilians, Koreans, that had been taken prisoner.

CGR:

Forced labor?

WJY:

Forced labor. They lived in hostels and they were bosses

over us. They used to give us a pretty rough time.

We got little bits of news about how the Americans were bombing the boats in Manila harbor, and then retaking the Philippines. Just little items. Then one day somebody got a piece of paper and it said, "A message from the Emperor." He said that Japanese civilians should be more alert to help their soldiers to stop these bombing raids and to tell the Japanese soldiers when the aircraft were coming. This is what that piece of paper said. So anyway, a few days later we heard about the atom bomb. Somebody had got a piece of the paper and it had the atom bomb in it. Then we knew it was coming near the end, because the Japanese started to get really kind to us, and do us great favors.

I went to work one day and I was bending down picking up a drill -- steel drill -- and this Korean hit me across the back with one. He said I wasn't working fast enough. I didn't figure I was going to make the next winter anyway, so I just straightened up and I grabbed him by the shoulder, and I pushed him right up against the rock face; two or three Japs pulled me off of him and they sent me back to the camp, and the interpreter says to me, "You were very foolish," he said "to do that." But they sent me back to the camp and I was lying on the bed when the rest of the boys came, and they thought I'd be in their little jail, being beat up. They never even put a hand on me.

So it was about two days after that, the bombers came over -- the American B29 -- and they dropped pamphlets and it said, "We will be dropping food to you, in a couple of days," to be on the lookout". Well, once they dropped that, all the Japanese left the camp. They all left. So we kind of ran the camp. We

didn't have any food, because there was only 400 grams of rice a day and it had been cut down to 200, because somebody had stolen a Red Cross parcel. They caught him and they gave him a real going over, I'm telling you. Then they cut us down to 200 grams of rice a day. We would be so happy about what we were going to eat and that.

So anyway, these B49s come over, and they opened the doors and you've never seen a sight like it. They dropped 45-gallon gasoline drums on different colored parachutes -- orange and white and red. Something that would show up. They couldn't drop them into the camp because we were in a valley, and it was hills on either side, so they dropped them on the side of the hills, and they pushed out clothing, and it was the funniest thing. Some of the bales broke before they landed and you'd see shirts coming down with the air in the sleeves, and pants. It was really something to see. Boots -- boots! I've never seen so many pairs of boots raining down out of the heavens in all my life.

So we went out of the camp and we managed to get these barrels with the food and we'd unload them and pack 'em on our back and we'd get it back into the camp. Everybody was talking about the big feed they were going to have. I opened up a tin of bully beef, and I don't think I ate a piece any bigger than that lens in my glasses, and I couldn't eat any more. I was full.

CGR:

Right.

WJY:

I was full up. Everybody was the same. I guess the stomach

had shrunk. And I had beriberi. That was the worst thing I got. You'd think I still have it, but it's arthritis.

CGR:

Did you have wet beriberi?

WJY:

Pardon me?

CGR:

The wet beriberi, with the swollen ankles?

WJY:

Oh, I was swollen up all over. You'd push your finger in and it stayed in the flesh and made a hole. Yes, I had that for quite a while.

So we got released, eventually the American troops came in and released us. They took us back on the train, and we went past Nagasaki, and when we stopped there, they took us out to show what the bomb had done, and they called it the city of shadows. Where a person had fallen on the cement, the cement was still white, but all around it was brown, dark. Where a lamppost had stood, you'd see a white shadow across the sidewalk. But damage, as far as I could see, it didn't look any worse than Osaka, and they had just had incendiaries because the houses were just paper things, and a bunch of incendiaries burnt them down just as quick as what the damage in the Osaka was. In Nagasaki.

So anyway they took us to a little seaport and we left from there for the Philippines. While we were in the Philippines -- oh, by the way, I might add, when I tried to escape in Java, in the meantime, making my way down the island, my name wasn't on the list. I was missing. They got word back to Canada and to

England that I was missing, presumed dead, and it was quite a few years before -- quite a few months [18 months] -- before they found out I was alive.

CGR:

It'd be a bad time for your wife.

WJY:

Pardon?

CGR:

A bad time for your wife.

WJY:

Oh yes. When we got to the Philippines, they had the camp just outside of Manila divided -- they were really organized -- it was divided into one place for Australians, one place for New Zealanders, one place for English troops, one place for Canadian troops, one place for air force, and one place for Americans -- and they really treated us good. We used to get free issues of beer. That was another thing that we were warned about. Taking any liquor. Because of the fear of blindness. In fact, I know two fellow that lost their eyesight. They got into some Japanese hooch. They lost their eyesight, eventually, because I met them in England when I was discharged.

The Americans used to issue us a bottle of beer, a packet of cigarettes, and two cigars a day. And beautiful food. Oh, they did, but you couldn't eat very much. We were there in Manila and they had the history of everybody there. One fellow I was really friendly with, a guy named Stewart, he was saying they'd call your name and they'd tell you what had happened to your parents or anything like that. I was told my aunt had died. I didn't

know. She died in '41. I didn't know anything about that. They gave me that information. How they got it I don't know. This Stewart, he came out after being interviewed and he was crying and I said, "What's the matter, Jim?" He said, "I've just had the news my father, my mother, and two sisters have all been killed. They lived in Liverpool, and they'd been bombed." They had that information and they gave it right off to him. So I said, "what are you going to do?" He said, "I think I'll stay in the service." Outside of losing my aunt, everything else was okay. My wife hadn't remarried or anything.

So then we went across the Pacific on the aircraft carrier Implacable. That was a British aircraft carrier. They converted it into a prisoner-of-war ship; most of the prisoners-of-war went through the States, so they said that Canada wanted some. So we were the first prisoners to land in Vancouver, and, of course, people were taking everybody off of the boats and into their homes, and really giving them a good time. I didn't go, because I wanted to get back to Hamilton.

It was just unfortunate that I took the northern route. The train they put me on was the northern route that went through to Montreal, instead of coming down through Toronto. We were going to a place called Debert in Nova Scotia. Guys were being pulled off the train every stop. People would pull 'em off and take them into their homes. So, I thought, well, I won't do that, because I want to get home and see my folks. I went to Debert and when I got up there, guys were saying, "Gee, your name was being broadcast over the station at Toronto. People wanted to see you." 'Cause I have cousins in Toronto, and cousins here.

So I went up. There was an Irish guard who was head of the camp there, and I went up to get a pass, a railroad pass, to come back to Hamilton. He said to me, "You can't have it." I said, "Why not?" He said, "You're going to England to be discharged." I said, "I've been away from home seven and a half years. I'm going back to Hamilton." I said, "I've rode the freights in this country," I said, "many a time, and I know the freight. I'll just jump the freight and go home." He said "I'm giving you the orders." I said "you don't need to bother." I said "I'm no longer in the service. As far as I'm concerned, I'm no longer in your service or anybody else's. I'm a free man. I've gone through enough." So he got mad and he sent me out.

I didn't have a pass, so I went to the padre and I explained to him. I said, "I've lost my aunt. I was told that in the Philippines. Why am I being deprived of being sent back?" I said "if they don't," I said "I'm going off. I'll catch that first freight west." I said "I know the way." So he said, "Don't you do anything rash until I come back and talk to you." So he was gone about half an hour; he came back and he said, "You go to the orderly room and," he said, "you've got your ticket back to Hamilton. You'll be notified in Hamilton when you're to sail." So I came back here and I seen the doctor and some of my cousins, 'cause my wife was in England. She wasn't over here. So anyway I got a letter after about three weeks saying I was to sail on the Queen Mary from New York City and to report to Fort Hamilton, which was just outside of New York.

So when I got this letter, I said to the doctor, I said,

"You know, Uncle John," I said, "I think I'll go to New York about four days early. I may never have a chance to see it again and I'd like to see it now." So I left Hamilton, and I went down to New York, reported at Fort Hamilton, and the guy in charge he said "you're four days early." Well I said, "I thought I could get a pass for the day and go out and come back at night, report back at camp at night." Well, he said, "We've got a lot of stragglers coming through," because they'd been doing the same in the States as they did here, taking them off and put them in their homes. Once they reported back to Fort Hamilton, they kept them in there. So he said "I've got something better for you than that." So he gave me the address of the English-Speaking Union, and I went down there and I seen the lady, and she already knew I was coming, because I think he'd phoned her. So she said, "Oh, we've got a hotel picked out for you. You're our guest, and you'll have the keys of the city while you're here. Everything," she said, "is free, except you cannot go and drink." I wasn't interested because any place I ever went, I seen the place, because I could always go to a pub afterwards, but I wanted to see the historic places, same as I did in Capetown. I was there for four days, and I'm more interested in what they have to show.

I went to Jack Dempsey's for a steak, and I said to the girl, "I have this card, they gave me a card." So she took it and she came back and she said, "You order anything you want." She said, "it's okay." The only trouble I had was with a taxi driver. I went all through Harlem, I went to Coney Island, I went into Radio City, and I went to Grants tomb. I seen the Central Library; I seen Central Park. You name it, I seen it.

This taxi driver. I took a taxi (I forget where I was going to) and when I got out, he told me the fare, so I gave him this card, he said, "Oh -- wait a minute, Mac." He said "wait a minute. I've been stung before." He said "this is my cab. I own this cab, and I can't afford to run you all over the place." I said "I'm not giving you a line, go to a telephone booth and call." "Yeah, and," he said, "while I call you take off, eh?" I said, "No, I'll come with you." So anyway he took the card and he phoned this number on the card, and he said afterwards (he looked so foolish) "I'm sorry, Mac" he said, "but I can't afford to lose a fare." He said "I'm really sorry." I said, "forget it." I said, "I wasn't putting you on, anyway."

So I had four days of traveling New York free. It would cost me plenty now if I went.

CGR:

Yes indeed.

WJY:

Then I sailed on the Queen Mary to England for my discharge. It was ironical. They wouldn't discharge me here. They sent me to England to get discharged, and then they sent me all the way back.

CGR:

Sound like the service, doesn't it?

WJY:

So that is the whole story in a nutshell.

CGR:

Well, very good. Perhaps I could just go back and ask a few questions about some of the things you've been telling me. This

business when you were a medical orderly, a volunteer. How long did that last? How long were you looking after those people?

WJY:

Oh, about six weeks.

CGR:

About six weeks.

WJY:

See, the reason I did it -- it got me out of going underground. It was pretty rough, because I weighed 138 pounds when I came out, and when I joined up I was 178 pounds. So I was pretty weak. I suffered when I came back. I had boils, and I was quite nervous too for some time. In fact, I couldn't get up on a stepladder. I was too scared. Gradually it wore off. And of course I had beriberi. I still had beriberi when I got back. I guess it took quite a while to go away. Outside of the ulcers -- I had ulcers of the stomach that developed [and psoriasis].

CGR:

When was that? Soon after the war? Or during the war?

WJY:

No, no, it was after, a few months afterwards. One of the doctors told me at the Veterans' [Hospital] that it was due to your stomach going without food for so long, and then having food that wasn't good for your stomach. I wanted everything that I'd missed like pie and things like that.

CGR:

Right.

WJY:

So I guess it was a natural reaction that I developed ul-

cers. But they seem to have cleared up quite well. Then three years ago, arthritis started. I had this hip replaced, a year ago last April. I think I've got to have the other one done too. [It was psoriatic arthritis according to Dr. Bianca, at Chedoke Hospital; the doctor said to was the result of being a POW, although I worked 30 years as a maintenance man with no sign of arthritis.]

CGR:

Was there a lot of brutality? You mentioned the Korean hitting you in the back and so on.

WJY:

There was a lot of that. See that scar down my nose? You see that scar there [right forearm]? When I worked at Wakayama, I was in charge of the party, and when I came back that night, the Japanese reported me and said that my gang wasn't working hard enough, so they stood me outside with a stone over my head holding it up, and I'd been down in that place working for about eight hours as it was, and every time I lowered the stone, a Jap would come up and beat me up. Then eventually, well I lost consciousness, whether he hit me hard enough I don't know; I lost consciousness, and the officer in charge of us in the camp, he was witness to all this and he went to the interpreter and apparently, when he got the interpreter, this Jap had stuck the tip of his bayonet into my arm to see if I was pretending. Then he stopped him and they took me back to the hut. Bandaged my arm and took me back to the hut.

The split on the nose, I was in Java at the time, and I was rolling a cigarette. We used to scrape the bark off of the trees

and roll it in paper and smoke it. It was after lights was out and I was smoking away, and a Jap seen the red glow and he came in and he laid into me with feet, boots, and what-have-you, and he just slapped me and blacked my eye. Then when we went out on the work party that next morning my face was all puffed up and my nose was split and that side was cut, a Jap started to laugh about it, and this Jap come up and he was laughing and pointing and he hit me in the other eye, and the guys were singing -- "Two lovely black eyes. Two lovely black eyes." You had to take it that way. You had to try and make a joke or something, else you'd have gone nuts. Definitely would have been.

Brutality was bad. A lot of fellows I've seen beaten and unconscious, tied to palm trees, and then big ants going up and down. They'd take a bite out of you. It was real torture. Another favorite thing they used to like to do was stand you outside with your hand tied behind your back and put a tin pail over your head. So that the heat -- the sun -- beat down on the pail, and this kind of thing. Every time you seen a Japanese soldier, you used to have to say kari, which meant bow, and you had to yell out kari and then bow. If you didn't, you got the tar beaten out of you. That was the kind of things that went on.

Mind you, they did it in their own services. They had no red tape about putting you into the brig or anything like that. I saw a guard, a commander of the camp, Japanese commander of the camp, come up and cuss the guard out, kari, right away, you know. He didn't do it fast enough for him, so he just went down the line. That day there was five guards and he called them all up, lined them up, and he came right from the ground, bump, bump,

bump. They'd stand up to attention again: bump, bump, bump all the way down. He just beat them up. That was the end of it.

CGR:

No court martial.

WJY:

No court martial or anything like that. They just got it right there, which saved a lot of paper work.

CGR:

Yes, I suppose.

You'd been married fairly soon before this. Was the absence of sex a problem? Was this something that bothered you, or bothered the others as far as you could tell?

WJY:

You never thought about sex. Sex left you, and the only thing you thought about was food. Like, we used to gather together and have chats in the evening, and somebody'd say, we're not going to mention food tonight. We'll talk about something else. Then somebody'd say, oh, do you remember the way my mom used to make them apple pies. Then that was it. Everybody talked about food. I used to have a dream of cream puffs floating by. I was trying to reach out for them. I couldn't just get them. I don't know why it was cream puffs, and I thought I was going out of my mind, and I never said anything to anybody. One day, we were sitting around in a little group and a guy says, "I keep seeing plates of Yorkshire pudding and beef." Then everybody started to talk and they'd all seen things. Some had seen pies flying by. And sex was -- you used to see the odd Japanese woman and you never even fizzed on it. Nobody'd say, "Well, I'd

like to take her out tonight." It never occurred to you. Never occurred to you.

CGR:

How about homosexuality? Any evidence of that that you're aware of?

WJY:

I'm not aware of any. I'm not aware of any. I wasn't approached in that way, at all, and I never approached anybody myself, so I don't know. I don't know if it happened or it didn't, but I doubt it very much, because everybody was too blinking weak.

CGR:

Tell me something, if you would, about coping. About how people coped with this. For example, you came home and an awful lot of people didn't. Why did <u>you</u> come home -- you personally -- do you think?

WJY:

Well, I've seen guys that were twice as big as me, great big sturdy fellows, and if they got a sickness, they just gave up. I didn't know how easy it was to will yourself to death. I've seen other fellows, little scrawny runts of guys, and they'd turn round and say, "There's no bloody Jap that's going to kill me. I'm coming out of this anyway." It was just a matter of what your frame of mind was. If you gave up, you were gone, and that was all I can say.

CGR:

And you didn't give up.

WJY:

No way. No way. I wouldn't give up. Too stupid I guess [laughter].

CGR:

Were there people that might be called "bad apples" in the camp, amongst the prisoners?

WJY:

Yes, yes. As I say, we'd got this guy that stole the Red Cross parcel. I only had three and a half parcels the whole time I was in there. The camps that we were on, there was a building stacked to the roof with them, but the Japanese used to eat them. They used to take the cigarettes out of them.

CGR:

Yes, I didn't understand that that guy was taken care of by the prisoners. I thought you meant the Japanese had taken care of him.

WJY:

Oh, no. The Japanese took care of him.

CGR:

Oh.

WJY:

They sent him to a jail, and when he came back (he was a fellow that was in the tank corps of the British army) he said that they used to blindfold him and then creep up to him when he couldn't hear them, and then they'd beat him, and he said this went on for days. He was away about I think nearly three weeks that I can remember. I mean, this stuff all happened 40 years ago and it's hard to remember little details. But what I've told

you is the actual truth of what I experienced, not made up or anything like that.

CGR:

Were you able to do anything to celebrate things like Christmas?

WJY:

Yes, they used to let us put on -- in one camp we were at, the guys put on a skit, but then they gave us a little extra rice that day, and that was it. That was the only holiday. Another thing that happened, fellows that were in hospital in Java told me that the Japs would come along with a whole bunch of fruit and cigarettes and stuff like that and take a picture of the patient in bed and then whip it all off and put it onto the next bed, and this was for -- I was told, I don't know -- was for the pictures to go to the Red Cross to see that we were being treated humane.

CGR:

What was the worst part of this whole experience for you? Can you single out one part of it, one thing?

WJY:

Well, the worst part was having my freedom taken away, I should say, and thinking of my wife and my folks. That was always on your mind, and the whole three and a half years was wicked I'd say.

CGR:

It was all bad.

WJY:

Yes, it was all bad. There was no good points. If we were

in Java and there was a Christian commander of the camp, so he got us to work and make big gardens and I remember like putting in tomatoes and sweet potatoes and daikon, and we thought we were going to live pretty good, and then just as they were getting ripe, he got posted to another camp and another guy come in and took the whole thing. They used to bring in about-- oh I'd say 40 or 50 pounds of meat -- I don't know, goat or whatever it was -- and the first thing was that the commandant would see it come in, he'd cut half of it. That was his. Then the soldiers, they had as much power as a general. They used to take their share of it. So eventually there was a piece of meat about that size [4 X 4 X 6 inches] for 400 people. So they just cut it up in little squares and boiled it.

[tape turned off]

CGR:

The Japanese were?

WJY:

Yes. Like, the pipe factory I worked through was run by the Mitsubishi. Everything in there belonged to the Emperor. The workers were all looked after, and they considered it a lifetime job, as far as I can remember and what I've read since. They'd get an issue of shoes -- not us, but they would. When the tangerines came in, they were given issues of tangerines. When the fish boats came in, they'd get big issues of fish, and they were looked after pretty good [compared to us].

[Bracketed additions made by Mr. Yeardye, November 1987. CGR]

INDEX