

LIONEL CURTIS SPELLER  
Experiences as a POW in Hong Kong and Japan,  
1941-1945

Interviewed by  
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Lionel Curtis Speller, Victoria, B.C., 27 May 1990

Charles G. Roland, M.D.:

I'll say good morning. It's nice to have you here and I appreciate it very much. Perhaps you would begin by telling me your full name, your birth place and birth date.

Lionel Curtis Speller:

Lionel Curtis Speller. I was born in Victoria on 10 September 1919. Both my parents came from London, England. My father was from Croydon, and mother was from Shepherd's Bush. Father came to Canada in 1905 and mother came in 1910. They lived in Toronto for a year and then the doctors there said the climate wasn't suitable, and my father moved to Victoria and they were there until their demise.

CGR:

So you're a long-time Victorian.

LCS:

Oh yes, native son, yes. I did go to Frisco for, well, almost six months to learn orthopedic shoe making because that was my trade. I left high school to learn shoe-making and shoe repairing. And that was my trade right up until the time I joined up. But I had worked at lots of other jobs in between -- truck driving and delivering groceries. And finally I got to be manager, just before the war, of the shoe clinic at the Hudson Bay [Company store].

CGR:

Let me just go back before we forget this. What did your father do for a living?

LCS:

Well, my father was a jack-of-all-trades really, but he was a locksmith by trade, machinist and locksmith by trade. There wasn't a vault that he couldn't open. He was trained at Hobson-Hart in London. Anybody that knows London would have known of Hobson-Hart. And mother was a cashier for her father's green-grocery at Shepherd's Bush before she came to Canada. Then of course she became a mother, and there was eight in our family, seven boys and one girl. Five of us served in the second war, and five of us got home safely.

CGR:

Isn't that dandy.

LCS:

Yes. My youngest brother was, he was wounded the worst. But, as I say, we all got home safely. My brother younger than me, he joined up first. Well, he was in the reserve army so he was called up in '39. The three youngest were in the army and then the brother next older than me was in the navy, and my older brother Earl was in the air force, in the marine section.

CGR:

And where did you fit in the family? In what order? Were you third or fourth?

LCS:

Third from the bottom. The biggest lapse -- after myself came my sister -- and that's the biggest lapse in the ages. There's three years, a month, a week, and a day between myself and my sister. The four older brothers and then my sister and

the three younger that I am.

CGR:

Now how far did you go in school?

LCS:

I went to grade ten.

CGR:

Grade ten. And when did you finish grade ten, approximately?

LCS:

I was fifteen.

CGR:

So that would be twenty.....

LCS:

1933, yes.

CGR:

Not a good time to be looking for work and so on.

LCS:

Oh no, no. Oh, times were tough then. I left high school, I had to go back and complete Grade ten at night school, but I completed Grade ten, and then I went to serve my apprenticeship in shoe repairing and shoe-making.

CGR:

So then you were several years doing that, were you?

LCS:

Oh yes, till 1941. You see, when I joined up that was the reason I joined, they were calling for men to serve at their trade. Because I'll be quite frank, I had no military training, and I didn't want to kill anybody. But I thought, they're going

to get us anyway, so if I could serve with my trade, I would. So I joined as a shoemaker. And went into the Ordnance Corps, and I was promised two hooks [Corporal] and trades' pay, and after six months I had gotten neither, so I said well it's time to move on. I didn't fit in with what was going on in the Ordnance Corps.

So Colonel St. Louis, who was head of the Pacific Coast Signals he was well acquainted with my father because of their Masonic connections, but he had some boys and a girl too, but anyway he knew that I was expert on the motorcycle so he said, "Well if you want to come over to Signals I'll get you in. And if you prove your work then I'll see that you get your...." So that's what I did, I transferred to the Signal Corps, and went right ahead, and enjoyed it. I was only there about three or four months when the call-up went to go to Hong Kong. And, of course, I signed up as a volunteer, so you had no, lots of the boys that were in before me wanted to take my place but he wouldn't have any part of it. I was to go on this Hong Kong (we didn't know it at the time)....

CGR.:

No, no, you don't know where you're going.

OK. Well tell me a bit then about the trip across. Did you go on the Awatea?

LCS:

Yes. And, oh well, you've heard this story: we were jammed in like sardines. And the first time I'd seen a grenade, well, experience with grenade training was on board this ship. I'd had mainly revolver training as Motor VRs do. But I've been on the

parade and had rifle drill and one thing or another, but not to the extent of fighting a man. But I had the Signal Corps course in revolver, and motorcycle, and map-reading and all those kinds of things -- I passed that. And, yes, we boarded the Awatea in Vancouver, as you know. We went from there to Hawaii, and from Hawaii to Manila, and Manila to Hong Kong.

CGR:

Can I just interrupt to ask, "What is a Motor DR?" What does DR stand for?

LCS:

Oh, dispatch rider.

CGR:

Dispatch rider.

LCS:

Yes, pardon me.

CGR:

Any abbreviations I like to put down just to keep the.....

LCS:

In the Signal Corps a DR is a dispatch rider.

CGR:

Right, yes.

OK, now as I understand it you didn't get off at Hawaii or at Manila.

LCS:

No, no, we weren't allowed off.

CGR:

You stayed on the ship.

LCS:

Right.

CGR:

So Hong Kong was your first land-fall.

LCS:

Right. We arrived there on Sunday, November the 16th.

CGR:

Tell me some of your first impressions of Hong Kong.

LCS:

Oh, to me it was kind of shocking, because it just looked like sand hills. And of course, coming from BC, with the vegetation we have, it was just stunted growth. No, it was very depressing, especially marching from the ship up to our barracks because here was Nathan Road, and all the Chinese with their.... It didn't impress me at all. And then, of course too, flies and mosquitoes and all those things were really prevalent. And our barracks was very disappointing. Even our wood shacks that we left in Victoria were I think as good or better, because these barracks where they put us were just loaded with bed-bugs and lice and stuff.

CGR:

Now is this Sham Shui Po?

LCS:

Yes. And of course, I guess as Walter [Jenkins] told you, we had to set to and de-lice the place and we had a real job for just the first week getting settled in and one thing or another.

CGR:

Now, this is a regular British barracks, why was it in this

shape, do you know? Why was it in this condition?

LCS:

Well, it had been the married quarters of the British Army, sections of the British Army. I don't know which one but they had moved them out, you see, to make room for us. And only the Signal Corps and the Brigade Headquarters went in there. The two regiments went in the regular British huts that were similar to ours. But we were put in the married quarters which was just like a big apartment block. And the British had those iron beds, the wrought-iron beds with the "biscuits," [hard cushions] as they called them. And lice and cockroaches and mosquitoes and you name it. So that was the big project. And when we first got there it didn't impress us at all.

CGR:

No. Now, was this the Jubilee Building?

LCS:

Yes, right, that was it. And then after the first week, when we got settled in, of course we were out every day, for roll call and one thing or another, but after the first week then we started in our training and maneuvers -- learning where everything was.

CGR:

Did you have your motorcycles?

LCS:

No.

CGR:

No. Because I know most of the transport didn't get there.

LCS:



No, we didn't get our motorcycles until the day they declared war.

CGR:

Oh, but you did actually get motorcycles.

LCS:

Oh yes, oh yes, I had a BSA, BSA500. Yes, I had three different motorcycles. Loaned off one, so I had to get another one. I had a BSA and I had a Norton and I had a Aerial Square 4. Beautiful machine. I just had that for a day. Yes I was the only DR to ride from the first day to the last.

CGR:

Is that right? Well tell me a bit about the fighting war, short as it was, and what your experiences were.

LCS:

Well, I worked out of what was known as Brigade Headquarters. Of course, we got our orders from China Command. I don't know whether you'd call it devastating, it was -- every trip you took, your life was threatened. It didn't matter if it was 24 hours a day. And of course we were on duty 24 hours a day. There wasn't, you just grabbed a sleep if you could, if you could make arrangements for somebody else to get two or four hours in, and then of course we had to do duty at our headquarters up on Waterloo Road. We were on the Kowloon side, first, hoping to hold them back. But, oh, every time when I went up with a message it was, retreat, retreat, withdraw, withdraw. And it was very discouraging and besides taking your life in your hands. I suppose you've heard the story about the one trip they

sent me on where I, it was so urgent this parcel, and when I got up to the Colonel White's headquarters, the Royal Scots here, it was God damn dog food for his Scottie dogs!

CGR:

Oh really.

LCS:

I let him have it. I told him, when I got there, all these British officers, they had their Chinese coolies with them and one thing and another. And I wouldn't...a message or parcel it was so important that I had to see him. And when I handed him the parcel, he said, "Oh my God, thank you Canuck," he said, "At least my dogs have...." And I looked at him and said, "Don't tell me dog food." "Oh yes," he said, "dog haven't have anything." I said, "Well God damn it if I'd known that you'd have never got it." I said, "Risking my life to come up here!" Boy I let him have it. And we was going to have me up and ordered, and he was going to....And I said, "You wait until I get back to headquarters." And of course our officer, Captain Billings, he wouldn't have sent me had he known. But here was this parcel and it was urgent, and here's me risking my life through gun fire areas and dark to deliver the God damn dog food. Oh yes, what's his name, Major Lindsay wrote it up in his book. I told him I didn't care who knew it. That he was going to have me court-martialed and all of the rest of it, and I was insulting. And I said, "It would be the last God damn time that you see me. I tell you the next trip for Colonel White is going to be questioned, I'm going to open it before I leave." When I got back, and I told Captain Billings about it, of course he

apologized and he said he never would have sent me had he known. It had happened, but this was is the way they were. Oh yes, in a lot of places.

Of course the British don't tell you about this, but there was a lot of these headquarters and I was there when, you know, four o'clock, half past, they had to stop and have their tiffin, it didn't matter. Which to me was....I didn't appreciate it.

Then another thing was too, that oftentimes, of course, we were going to our boys that were scattered in the various areas, you know, important areas where there are telephones and radios that set up. Within half an hour after they'd set them up, the Japs had us, they were shelling the place. And this became because how were they detecting it, but the Japs knew more about the Island than we did. Some of the ones we captured had maps pasted on them of every pill box; they knew more about the island, as I say, than we did. And it was a hopeless cause. And so what do you do when your sent out on these messages.

I remember one time at China Command Headquarters they had an urgent message for this Sir Cecil's Ride. I'm trying to think of the mountain, it was up at the end of it. In peacetime it was like a hiking trail for these, up the Wong Nei Chong Gap.

CGR:

Would it help to look at that map to see....

LCS:

None of the British volunteered or anything. They were sitting there and so I said, "Well, give it to me, I'll go." I don't know whether it's on here or not. There it was, to me it

was just like going, well almost like going up a hill climb.

CGR:

Well it doesn't matter.

LCS:

But I went up there and got fired at, but fortunately I got back. It's not marked on here, but Wan Chai Gap is here, and Wong Nei Chong here; they had almost had cut the island in half. And we left there and went over to, I think it was close to Tai Tam [Tuk] Reservoir. And Aberdeen I see it here, and I went up to Stanley, but I was to Tai Tam Tuk, the reservoir, Violet Hill.

CGR:

Perhaps you'd tell me how it came about that you were awarded the Military Medal. What was that for?

LCS:

Oh, December the 19th, when they landed, and in Wan Chai Gap and Wong Nei Chong where everything was hot and the armored cars had gone up there and been shot out, and oh there was a distance there of over a mile where you were wide open to shots. And don't ask me, but they told me when I left that I would be lucky if I got back. But anyway, by the grace of God or whatever, this distance of over a mile where I'd been shot at by both sides. And this was one of the important ones. But I don't know, as I understand it, and what I've found out, it was Colonel Levitt, of China Command, the British, that recommended me and two of or Canadian Officers had to sign it. When I got back he was, they were surprised, and I said, "How What the hell are you surprised at?" And they said, "Well, we didn't think you'd make it back. This dispatch rider was killed there just about an hour ago."

And I said, "Oh thanks for telling me, now that it's all over."

But anyway, I think that was probably one of the main, [the message] was, again, for the troops at Wong Nei Chong and Wan Chai Gap to withdraw. The fact that I, well I went on it several times after that. And they did, I said, "Well, if it's my turn, I'm going to get it, I'll get it." So I just volunteered and I went. As I say Colonel Levitt was just so proud of the fact: "Hell, I can't even get my own men to do it." And I said, "What the hell, if your number's on it, you're going to get it." So I said, "So far." And this is the way I carried on. You either live in fear or, I don't know, I took the attitude, as I say, this is what a lot of us boys had come to, that if you're number was on there you're going to get it -- if not, well, you'll live to fight another day and you just kept going.

CGR:

Well very good. Tell me about the surrender. Where were you? And when you got the news, and...?

LCS:

At that particular time we, at least where we were, we were in signal barracks right in Hong Kong at that particular time. I think Jenkins was there too, but anyway I think they called it Willingdon Barracks, their Civil Corps barracks. We were waiting because we knew things were tense, we'd seen the Japanese boat come over with the white flag; and of course Signals, being in the Signals we got the information before the rest of the boys did. We were told to sit tight, be on the guard but sit tight and wait to see what happens. Well, Billings, our signal

officer, Captain Billings, he'd been called into China Command Headquarters. He was shell-shocked at that time, grabbed a big white sheet, "Come on Speller you're going with me." I said, "What the hell do you need me for?"

Anyway, he dragged me over to China Command and I can remember the Japs there, with Tokunaga coming in with his sword, and saying to the Governor and General Maltby, "Remember me, Maltby." That Japanese grin on their face. And they were there to capitulate -- unconditional surrender. That's what it was. And of course I had to get out of that room because all the big red-banders were there. But I saw Colonel Tokunaga walk in with his sword, and he said, "Remember me." And he had other Jap officials with him. What happened after that I don't know. I left and went back to the barracks and waited. Then we were told -- oh, I don't know, it was about 5 o'clock in the afternoon -- that it was all over. And we were sent to different places.

Jenkins and I and I forget who was with us, we were sent into the China Lek Bar Warehouse. We spent the night there sleeping in the big coils of wire and cables and stuff. Somebody, I don't know whether it was Walter or not, one of them had picked up a cigar and we were -- I didn't smoke them, but we were taking puffs of this because we didn't know what the hell, I mean here it was Christmas Eve -- what do you do? And we talked and chattered until we got too tired, and we slept there all night. And then of course the next morning we all lined up out in the street for the search. And this was it, our walking day.

CGR:

Was there any bad treatment at that time? Were the Japanese

beating people up or...?

LCS:

Oh they were out in the streets and that but....

CGR:

No, I mean you the soldiers.

LCS:

No, it wasn't until the next morning when they started lining us up that we, when we all got lined up and they just went up and down slapping, some of them kicking, and some of them ripping off their glasses and tramping on them on the ground. A lot of them were stealing the watches and rings off the guys, and wallets. Oh yes, a lot of them were; there was no senior NCO or officers around -- this is what they were doing. And there was nothing you could do to stop them. If you tried stopping them you just got it worst. But those first troops, they just stole watches and rings and wallets like it was....anything, cameras anything of value.

CGR:

And then what happened?

LCS:

Then we were taken over to Sham Shui Po first. We weren't over there very long. Things were very unsettled. I think it was about a month or six weeks. And then we had to go over to North Point, we were brought back to North Point.

CGR:

Yes. My recollection is it was late January when the group from Sham Shui Po came back to North Point.

LCS:

North Point, yes. Oh yes, in January or February. It was cold as hell. As you know, North Point Camp was a refugee camp and the windows had been all knocked out, the Japanese had put their mule teams in there and their horses. And we had one hell of a job cleaning that out. These were wooden huts with cement floors, and water pipes were broken. No, it was a, it was a terrible mess -- big clean up. It was a long time before we got rid of the lice and the bed bugs at North Point.

Yes, and then the rains came, the monsoons, which didn't help matters either. So then we were plugging up holes in the roof and trying to find anything to block up the windows. We couldn't block them up entirely because we had to have sunlight and fresh air.

We were in North Point for, oh, the longest while. And then they started work parties. As you know, we were taken over every day on a barge to work at enlarging the Kai Tak Airport. They pretty well forced you over there whether you were sick or not. You had to be actually dead on your feet before you could get out of the work parties.

Then, I don't know the, exactly the Japanese psychology, but anyway they were to close North Point, it wasn't successful. This was after the three guys had escaped, a little after that, when they decided to move us back over to Sham Shui Po. And then bigger work parties, they'd get more out. But even then they had to walk or march over there. Some of them that couldn't, were taken over in trucks, but it was a regular work party to the Kai Tak Airport. And I was up on that up until the time we were



shipped off to Japan.

CGR:

Now how was your health all this time, your own health?

LCS:

Oh, it wasn't too bad the first six months; we were all losing weight. At that particular time it was my eyesight that was going. Oh, there was three weeks there where all I could tell was the difference between daylight and darkness.

CGR:

Really.

LCS:

But there was a doctor there they called Major Ashton-Rose. He was with the Indian Medical Service. A lot of the boys ridiculed him and everything else.

I was diagnosed as a dip-carrier [diphtheria]. And two or three times they had thought I had diphtheria but, as it turned out, I was a carrier. And so you were isolated, put in this compound. Dr. Ashton-Rose was in charge of that. And then I was having trouble with my eyesight, and he said, "Well, I'm going to see what I can do for you, young fellow." And he got carrot tops.

CGR:

Oh yes.

LCS:

And he said, "You might not like this, but you're going to have to chew this and chew this because right now this is all I can get." I said, "Carrot tops," I said, "Where is the bottom?"

And he said, "Did you ever have rabbits?" I said, "Sure I had lots of them." He said, "Did you feed them carrots?" I said, "Yes." "Well, what did they eat first?" And I said, "Well, they used to, they'd start on the tops as I remember, eat the greens." And he said, "That's right. You never saw a blind rabbit did you?" And I said, "No." And he said, "Well, you're going to eat those greens if you want to..." So I did. Oh this, it was so strong! Any way I stayed with it. He was determined, he got these carrot tops and chewed on them till, oh....

Anyway, he had a racket going with a couple of Japs, because the interpreter there -- I don't know whether you'd heard about it -- he had got VD. Ashton Rose made a deal with him that if he wanted to help him cure his VD he'd have to bring in some medicine. So he got some cod-liver oil, some kind. Between the cod-liver oil and the carrot tops and I don't know, my eyesight got better, anyway. So that when it come time to going to Japan they said I was fit. I went to Japan and....

CGR:

How long did this take about? How long was your vision bad?

LCS:

Oh, it was all of three or four months. Yes, terrible, yes. Oh yes, [Ray] Squires fed me. Squires had to because I couldn't see. There was rice bowls and then they took our knives and forks away. If you had a spoon you were lucky but if you didn't have that you had to use chopsticks. And oh no, Squires fed me for a time there -- a couple of weeks because I couldn't see to eat. Oh, he was very good. There was him and a Limey called "Taffy" Jones. And they looked after me. And then gradually I

improved. As a matter of fact, of the Canadians, I was the longest one in the dip ward. I don't know what it was that just every swab and....

CGR:

This is the carrier ward.

LCS:

Yes.

CGR:

Where was that?

LCS:

That was in Sham Shui Po, but at the far end.

CGR:

On the sea side.

LCS:

Yes.

CGR:

Near Jubilee.

LCS:

At the far end of the Jubilee Building. And they were just one-story huts.

CGR:

But this wasn't in the Jubilee Building?

LCS:

No, no, it was a compound.

CGR:

It was a compound beyond.

LCS:

If I can remember right, I think it was, some of it was officers' quarters, because they were just one-story huts. And they were done up better inside and everything. I think they were officers' quarters. But anyway, the Japs had put up barbed wire and it was the carrier's compound. Of all the Canadians they tell me I was in there the longest.

CGR:

I'm just trying to get this fixed in my mind. If you're standing in the camp, looking at the Jubilee Building with the sea behind, which side of the Jubilee would they have been on -- right or left?

LCS:

It would have been the right side. When you say you're looking at the sea, you're looking towards Stone Cutters Island.

CGR:

Right.

LCS:

Yes. Well it was at the far end, and there was a little bay come up in there, sort of a little bay come up in there because had we could have, we could have escaped over, we could have got a boat to come up there close enough. You could have jumped over the wall. Well, just like in front of the Jubilee Building where the water come right up to the cement walls there.

CGR:

OK. Well that's good, I just wanted to get fixed where this was. So how many would have been in there in the dip-ward, the carriers ward?

LCS:

Oh, God, there were around 50-60 of us.

CGR:

Is that right?

LCS:

Yes. All mixed up -- British, Chinese, Portuguese, Canadians. Well it was the isolation compound for the diphtheria carriers.

CGR:

Now where were we when our coffee and tea arrived? We were talking about the location of the diphtheria carriers building at Sham Shui Po. So for a period of months then you were almost blind.

LCS:

Yes.

CGR:

I assume you didn't have to go to work.

LCS:

No, no, no. We had to do chores in there, exercise, but I couldn't go to work. I was only out of there about two weeks when this shipment to Japan went.

CGR:

Now were you on the first draft to Japan?

LCS:

Yes.

CGR:

January '43.

LCS:

About 700 of us, 750. Some got off at Nagasaki, but I went with the 500 with Dr. Reid that landed at Kawasaki and worked in the Nippon Kokan Shipyard. That was quite hard on the boys too. And then, oh I don't know how long I was there, but I got into trouble and then when they found out I was a shoemaker then they took me out of the shipyards and set up a little shoemaker's shop in the camp. That's where I was up until the last six months, when they disbanded and some went to Sendai, some went to Niigata, and I was shipped off.

Suwa, we were supposed to be -- at Suwa was a mixture of everything and we were supposed to be the bad guys. Like when I say, we'd either been caught at something or you'd struck the Japanese back or something. I don't know, I was like most of them, I took a chance and struck back once, but it wasn't worth it. You were black and blue for months afterwards if you ever.

CGR:

Well tell me about that experience. Where were you and what happened when you struck back?

LCS:

Oh this was at the shipyards.

CGR:

Yes.

LCS:

No, this young Jap kid, he was in our gang, but he kept giving me a bad time. And to this day I still think he was deliberately hiding some of my tools, because I was in the ship's plating crew. And the steel punch isn't very big, and the keys for tightening your drill, they weren't very big, but every time

it seemed, when I was busy I'd turn my back -- I was working the best I could -- it would be missing. And this one young Jap with, well I call him a Jap, he could have been a Korean, but he was one of the guards, and had these wooden poles, and it seemed every time I'd be...and then the boss would come along and I'd get hell and being accused of losing my tools. And I pointed at him. He raised hell and shook his fist at me, so that's all he had to do; I didn't shake mine, I just let him have it. And I paid for it. So, like all the rest of them, you struck back once but the punishment you received wasn't worth it. But they removed him from our gang and from then on I had no...

CGR:

But what did happen to you? What was the punishment?

LCS:

Oh, they just beat the living daylights out of you. The trouble was, we were so weak that the blow or slap would knock you over. So the minute you were on the ground then they'd put the boots to you. And if your teeth was in the way, well you got kicked in the teeth. People wouldn't believe it. That's why a lot of the boys come home with missing front teeth, and cut. Oh, as I say, if they knocked you down, 99 time out of 100 you got the boots as well, in the back, wherever it was closest, head or whatever. So you thought twice about doing it again. Some of them did, but I didn't.

And then a little while after that I was, if you know the shipyard work, if you worked on the plating, well then you're expected to put the plates, forming the frame of the ship, the

hull, and then of course you'd be on the riveting gang -- reaming and riveting, they weren't doing welding like they are now. And every opportunity we got, because all their drills and their riveting machines most of them, I shouldn't say all of them, but the majority of them were American-made, you see, so that if you could knock them over and they dropped down through the bottom of the weighs, they were broken, and they didn't have the parts to have fixed them. So it held up production. And, of course, you could get away for it so long, and then boom they'd accuse you, let you no doubt about it.

But what really brought it to a head was, we never knew it for the longest while, but the little Jap, our boss, was a Communist. And the boys, we found out, some of them, that if any one of them took to one side and did the hammer and sickle, you knew you had a friend. Of course, he showed us how to put these -- everything was bamboo over there, you know, and we got the knots out of the bamboo -- and put them in in place of the rivets, you see. Of course when it comes to launching them, because we were turning out an iron freighter there, one every three months. There was 16,000 employees there so that will give you an idea. It was a real assembly-line production. Anyway, they would get these bamboo shoots, and run the riveting guns over them and the bucker-uppers, and they never knew the difference until they launched the ship. And then of course the pressure of the water would...this worked fine for two of them but the third one they put strainers on the water pumps, and they pumped them out. This is where they found these....So being in that gang we were all lined up. Oh, we could have been shot, it



was definite sabotage.

It wasn't long after that we had the gun, because I was doing the bucking-up, I was small and could get up into the bow you see. I'd do the bucking-up and flatten the rivet once the rivetter drove it through. Anyway I got taken off that.

We had had to sign these papers of what our trade was. So when I put down shoemaker they took me out of the shipyards and set up this little shop in camp. We were so busy in there. And then they brought in the sewing machines. So we got one of the boys, an Icelandic boy that could do tailoring -- Kenny Agerbak it was from, I think they were from Pilot Mound, somewhere down in Manitoba.

Anyway, we had quite a little shop. Sometimes there would be as many as four or five of us. Because all they were doing was providing canvas shoes with a [split toe]. And of course it all had to be sewn by hand. And here I was, showing our boys how to, and sometimes we were up till midnight, because they were determined to get them to go to work, you see. Captain Reid wouldn't let them go to work unless they had shoes on. Whether they were wooden or whatever. This is why we had to work sometimes till midnight to keep their footwear. And I was there until the camp broke up.

CGR:'

How many would be working in there with you?

LCS:

Oh gosh, at one time there was Buster and Kenny, and the Copps boy, which was a good friend of Reggie Kerr's, and Ken

Gaudin was my helper with the shoes. Oh, there would be four or five of us at the busy time.

CGR:

And this is all a shop that the Japanese set up.

LCS:

Yes, yes. And of course I had to repair their boots as well, their army boots. And the Camp Commandant had high boots, and he couldn't get Japanese to fix them because they didn't know how to sew on a welt, but anyway I fixed it for him and then I was set with the Camp Commandant. But it was the little guy that was in charge that was the dirty little rat -- Shibota his name was. He was the storekeeper. Oh, he was a, always coming in and ranting and roaring: you've got to work harder, and all this. And of course as soon as he turned his back we didn't push it. We used to tell him, it was all by hand and we didn't have the proper, as a matter of fact, we made up a lot of tools to go along with this. I tried to get pincers, I tried to get the proper hammer, and he made me wait ages for it. But I was there right up until the time, I'd say the last six months when the bombing started.

Then they split that big camp up and sent us here and there. So many to Sendai, so many to Niigata, and I went with this crew to Suwa. And we didn't know this about being the bad guys until the Yankees came up to get us. It was funny, we were there on our own for, oh, almost a week, I guess.

Anyway, up comes these big black fellows from Tennessee and Arkansas, the biggest colored boys you ever saw. They were all six foot, great big tough soldiers. I said, "What the hell are

you sending up a gang up like that?" And they told us, "Oh you were the criminals." This is how we found out why we were up at Suwa, because we were supposed to be the bad guys. This is what they had told their officer. And these big men -- because we were dangerous. Hell, another three months or two, and we'd all been dead, the way it was going. We were just skeletons up there, you see, because the camp was there and it was another mile and a half, two miles, we had to march up this hill-side, dirt and mud. We took one step forward and two backwards when it rained.

CGR:

What were you doing there? What kind of work?

LCS:

A pick and shovel. It was surface.

CGR:

Surface mining?

LCS:

They were starting to cut in to the hole.

CGR:

What, coal or....?

LCS:

Iron ore. And the lowest grade you could possibly work; for every hundred tons that we picked-and-shoveled out of there, they got one ton of ore. So you can tell what it was like. And it was these overhead rail cars. We would load them up, and you could see them going down. They switched you around; sometimes you were on a pick and shovel, sometimes you were doing the coke

burning, preparation for it and everything like that. But it was God damn hard work. And it was just as hard getting up there in the morning; then, coming back at night, of course, it was all downhill.

CGR:

There were just Canadians there?

LCS:

No, no, no, there was everything at Suwa -- British, Canadians, Americans, and Portuguese, and Javanese. Oh yes, there was everything. As I say, we were supposed to be the bad guys.

CGR:

And were some of the group bad guys?

LCS:

Oh yes, oh yes.

CGR:

They really were.

LCS:

Oh yes, because I always remember we never knew it, but we had some big pilots, B-29 pilots, there, American boys, we had two or three of them from New York. And their background doesn't matter. But going up to the mine there were several Japanese farmers; this one guy had a goat and we heard these big Yankees say, "We're going to have that so-and-so goat." And we never knew anything about it. But anyway, unknown to us until we knew that it had happened, they had dug a tunnel under their beds out to the outside of the fence, all during the night. God knows when. But we came home this night and the old [Allied POW] camp

commandant saying: "If there is anything unusual in your soup, keep you God damn mouth shut." Birchall had warned us, you see. Unknown to us, during the night these guys had gone out through their tunnel, got this goat. killed it, and skinned it, and brought it back into camp. And here we were to have it in our soup. And if you don't think that was the slickest operation! We wouldn't have known a thing about it but the Jap farmer had traced the blood. And here you see this hole. The guards went by the hut but they had covered it with bows and leaves and stuff, and had they ever stepped on it they'd have gone through it for sure. But this shows you how often they patrolled because they missed it. But, oh no, these American B-29 pilots, they were smooth! And I'm telling you that goats meat tasted damn good too. We all had three or four little pieces in our soup.

CGR:

And did the Japanese find out?

LCS:

No they didn't find out until this farmer traced the blood, you see. They never thought about this and right up to the fence. He was complaining that that was hair from the goat and, blood. And this farmer claims, so of course naturally we were wrong on the spot. Nobody would own up to it. So until we did we were going to be kept standing there forever. Until finally they concluded, "Well somebody in the camp has done it." And this old farmer, was oh....It was quite a scene, I'll tell you. Anyway these two big boys they owned up to it and they got beaten up and taken away. We don't know, we never did hear what

happened to them.

CGR:

I think you said something about Birchall warned us. Is this Leonard Birchall?

LCS:

Yes, oh yes.

CGR:

Oh, I've interviewed him also.

LCS:

Well didn't he tell you about the goat?

CGR:

Not this particular story, I don't think, no.

LCS:

Did he ever tell me about the horse?

CGR:

Well tell me.

LCS:

Well, they were crying for meat, and somewhere in the area this Jap farmer had an old horse. Oh you never saw anything like it, his bones sticking out. And of course there was a couple of French Canadians there. They knew how to slaughter a horse and all the rest of it. So this big tri-pod was built in the camp. The Japs agreed to bring this old horse in if we'd cook it up. And these two French Canadians, and oh God, whoever taught them how to kill a horse, I'll never know, but they set up this big tripod. And one took a swing, and missed. And that poor horse went through hell until they finally did kill it. And then of course it was hanging it up and cutting it up. And oh, tough,

Christ! Len never told you about that, hey? Maybe he'd forgotten.

CGR:

Well, he had a lot of stories to tell and maybe just didn't get to those. He had a pretty interesting war. Tell me a bit about him.

LCS:

There was a real man. Birchall took nothing from none of them. We'd heard about him, these rumors. And of course we thought it was funny that a Wing Commander from the Royal Canadian Air Force would be in Singapore. But anyway, this last six months eventually we wound up, he was our camp commandant. Who ever told you about Birchall with guts.

[End of side 1.]

Yes, he was a medical corporal, and of course....

CGR:

Do you know his name? Do you remember his name?

LCS:

I can't off hand. I think it was Saito. Anyway he had lived in California, so he spoke good English. But he was the meanest little bastard that you ever laid eyes on. Quite stocky and very neat and tidy. Of course, he having lived in California, he would quite often -- he was slapping around and everything. But every one he did, Birchall went over to him and he just stood up to him, and he "Next time, you slap me, you try it." And of course not even the Camp Commandant -- because they knew Birchall could....And if it hadn't have been for him this

Corporal would have got away with murder. He used to make his rounds with the sick, Birchall was right behind him. Once Birchall got to know what was going on, he didn't do any more slapping because he knew if he slapped a guy Birchall slapped him so hard. Even though the small rations that we were on, he was still the wiry tough guy. As far as I'm concerned, Birchall was the best officer ever seen for standing up. Now, in other places he might not have done the men any good, but the Japs sure respected him. It was surprising.

The Camp Commandant there would, as mean as he was -- "little Fat Pig," we called him -- he respected Birchall. "Birchall comma here." And Birchall would say, "What the hell do you want now? Is it important? You come here." Just that way. Oh no, he was a fine man, old Len Birchall. [laughter] I get a kick out of him.

I was most surprised, and I shouldn't say this on the record, but I saw him get tight at one of our reunions down in Toronto. And oh boy, he's still a wild Irishman. But anyway it would sure have been a hell of a lot worse if he hadn't been at Suwa, I can tell you that. And he and the Americans got along great, because if a guy was in trouble, boy he was right there. And he stood between the Jap and you. There was none of this standing to one side or anything. Birchall said, "You hit me first, you try it." Oh yes, it's amazing. And he got away with it.

As I say, we had heard all about him when we were down at 3-D. Various rumors would come in when they brought in supplies or something. Maybe the guys would come from the other camp or



somewhere. All about this tough Canadian officer. I had him for the last five months and I know he was just every bit as they said he was.

CGR:

You'll vouch for him.

LCS:

Great respect for Birchall.

CGR:

Was there a medical officer at Suwa, a POW medical officer?

LCS:

No, no. Just the medical corporal.

CGR:

Just the Japanese medical.

LCS:

Yes, this little corporal. And as I say, where he got his experience from, or training or whatever, I don't know, but what little bit of medical supplies or bandages we had, he was in charge. He thought he was a doctor. He'd lived, as I say, he'd lived in California. I believe his name is in my diary somewhere. But he was a mean little, mean little bastard. But, as I say, Birchall, he put up with it for so long and then he took over. And he didn't get away with his slapping any more. Because if a guy was sick, and got this slapping, it could, something like that was enough to kill him, because of the mental, the psychological effects. "I can't win, I'm being beaten." Some of the French Canadian boys were like that, they gave up easy. So Birchall was a real inspiration to some of

these guys.

They began to figure well maybe, being a little chicken or something -- you've got to stand up to them. But there was ways of doing it, because the Japanese were so unpredictable -- right from the start. They could be smiling at you and another minute later, just beating the living daylight out of you. And you could never figure them out. There was only one that ever was, was the interpreter we had that was so God damn, it's....Well he's passed on now.

CGR:

Was this at Hong Kong?

LCS:

No, in Japan. I don't think it's good to name, but he was one in a million.

CGR:

Please do name him. I mean, since he passed on you can't do him any harm.

LCS:

I know, but his son is still alive and he was a suspect. One in million and a real friend. He saved my live twice -- smuggling in medicine for Dr. Reid for me when I had pleurisy. But of course he had lived in Canada for eleven years. He came to Canada and worked in the Ford motor plant at Windsor, worked his way up, and then he got promoted to Detroit. Well then he'd been in Canada about seventeen years, Canada and the States, eleven years in Canada and the rest [in the US]. And back in 38 because his father died. And then when it coming back they wouldn't let him out.

CGR:

Yes, I think that happened to a lot of people.

LCS:

Yes. So that they were prepared. And they still are preparing for the next one. I don't care what anyone says I could go on about that too.

CGR:

Well tell me a little more about him. He was an interpreter at Kawasaki.

LCS:

Yes, yes, and then he was sent to Suwa.

CGR:

Oh, so he went along....

LCS:

Oh yes. So even at Suwa I had a good friend. It was a much smaller camp, of course, at Suwa, so you didn't get the opportunity to get together as often. But little things like, he was a civilian worker, and they had nothing, and I was able to fix his shoes on the sly --and little things like that. And of course, he brought me cigarettes which I used for trading, because I wasn't smoking. And things like pepper and mustard and horseradish, anything to put on the rice. Oh no, at 3-D he smuggled in a lot of black market medicine for Dr. Reid. We would have been in the soup if it hadn't been for this little guy. And of course, well there was two of them there that was....There was the old fellow, Kokayama, he was good too. But he was just with Dr. Reid, nobody else.

Kokayama was a fine old guy. And he had been to the States too. I can't remember whether he worked or lived there, but he had been there. A lot of them that, these Japanese had said they spoke English was just....The guy we had in Hong Kong, I don't know whether they've told you about Kondo. He was just a bloody joke as far as speaking English.

CGR:

I'm curious to know, why do you feel you shouldn't mention this man's name? I mean, he was a good guy.

LCS:

Oh I know, but if it's ever going to be published, because you have to be so careful with the Japs. Oh yes, for years after....I'll just give you an instance now if you haven't heard about it. I was telling you about the bamboo rivets. And our boss was the finest little guy; he drew that hammer and sickle, and we knew we had a friend, you see. He was the one that put us up to it. But about fifteen, twenty years after the war, do you know that the Japanese government had traced that man's history! Because I got to know it through this friend I'm telling you about. They traced and here it had turned out that as a boy he had gone to school and learned to read and write English. So that all the time we were working with him he knew what we were talking about. Because when we were up on the trial, when we were lined up we could have been shot. You know, "Who did this?" and all the rest of it. Do you know that he told the same story as we did. That's how we got away with it, you see. But even after the war the Japs were still, the military were still concerned about this item because, as I say, don't forget here

they are building freighters, they were nine, ten, eleven thousand ton, twelve thousand ton, they weren't big but they were, it was the Japanese war effort, and here they launch them one day and they come to work and they're at the bottom of the bay, when they got up next morning! This was lost! And as I say it was fifteen, twenty years after, they had followed this guy and it turned out that he had learned English, so that they knew they had goofed. They didn't find it out until after he had died, you see. And I guess they went over his records. But fine little guy he was.

CGR:

What was his name? Do you remember?

LCS:

It's hard to pronounce. Ichikuro. They got this "-san" after it, which means Mister. But as I say I found out from my friend that that's how they, and this is why he was worried. Now, in addition he had a nominal roll, this friend of mine, of all the Canadians that had come to Japan, of all the ones that were at Kawasaki, in 3-D in the shipyards, their name and their address and their religion, and their parents and everything. He had a nominal roll.

Well, about oh, I guess it would be 1954, '56 I had a friend, a business man here that ran the alarm guard service, and he was going into Japan to see the electrical manufacturers, because for his electric eye that he had invented for burglar alarm -- they had them made in Canada and the United States, and it was going to cost him three times what -- so being friends, he

wanted to know if I knew a Jap over there that could speak English well enough to help him go as an interpreter, you see, rather than pay. So I gave him this name. He contacted him, and oh he saved him thousands of dollars. And he paid him for his services.

But on this man's visit, this man that ran the alarm and dog patrol, when he come back he brought me back this parcel. He opened it up and here it is, his records of the all the Canadians that were in Japan, you see. I said, "What the hell is he sending it back to me for?" He said he's afraid of being caught with it. And this was well into the '50s. So, you see, he was still afraid. And it was the same time, how I found out about this other guy, this old guy in the shipyards that had died. And they had found out that he had spoke perfect English. Because the Japs, this tribunal, military tribunal, when we were all lined up over this, putting these bamboo rivets, the old boy had told the same story as we did, you see. Our excuse was that we didn't know anything about it. We blamed -- said it must have been the Jap riveters, and I knew it from having been in the shipyards for a short while, that they are supposed to go around and test every rivet. So it must have been their tester that goofed, you see. This was our story. This was the old boy's story too. He told it. I'm repeating myself but, as I say, this friend of mine brought back everything that he had regarding the Canadians. The nominal roll, and the recommendation that he had written for Dr. Reid, or Dr. Reid's recommendation, he got rid of everything by sending it back with Mr. Maynard, this friend of mine. And I said, "What the hell did he send me that back for?"

He said, he's afraid to keep it in case he gets caught.

CGR:

Well, I wish you'd give me this name, because I like to get the name of a good person; we have so many bad ones but that's up to you. It's hard for me to believe that 50 years later it would really matter.

LCS:

Oh it does. The Japanese, if it wasn't going to be published I'd gladly give it to you because one of his sons still writes to me.

CGR:

I can gladly guarantee it won't be published. I mean I'll turn this off. I'm just curious, you know.

LCS:

Well, turn it off then. [turned tape off]

The boys all knew him as "mush mouth" because at birth he'd had a hare-lip. Oh yes, his widow is still alive, and the son writes her best wishes to me and all this Christmas cards and pictures we exchanged.

CGR:

Well let me ask you about somebody else. Tell me about Captain Reid.

LCS:

Dr. Reid, yes.

CGR:

He died many years ago, so I've not been able to interview him. I've interviewed most of the other medical people.

LCS:

Well, he wouldn't have, I don't think he would have. When Dr. Reid came home, I don't know, there was something went screwy down in Ottawa with the medical bunch that went over with us because, I'll tell you, you would be better, Dr. Banfill would be better to tell you.

CGR:

I've interviewed him and in fact I'm going to be seeing him, I'm interviewing again on the 8th of June.

LCS:

Well, you ask Dr. Banfill what happened to Reid because I know you've got the machine on but I figure Dr. Reid was shit on. First, he was the only Canadian officer that was sent to Japan. And if you can imagine with nothing to work with, and I mean nothing, and to look after 500 men and be the Camp Commandant, the liaison between the Japs and us, nobody, but nobody, could have done better. Dr. Reid was another Birchall as far as I'm concerned. Although he wasn't the man that would stick up his fists and fight, he wasn't that type. He tried to do it with diplomacy and words.

But if there was ever a man that should have got their DSO or their DCM it was Dr. Reid because, I don't care, you'd have to be something out of this world to do the job he did after we went to Japan. Because it wasn't easy. The hierarchy in the Nippon Kokan shipyards would want to get as many men out to work, and everything else. Well, Reid knew the boys that were sick and everything. And as much as he pleaded with them, the sergeants or guards would come, "No." Now I forget the word for work



[shigoto], but you've got to go. And Reid would stand there, "No, no, no. He's sick." And all this. Then of course they'd get to work and some of them wouldn't make it. Then if they'd fall by the wayside it meant that one of the guards had to bring him back to camp or something, and then the poor guy would probably get beaten as well as being too sick.

But, no, for a man to do the things he did, I don't know whether you'd call the word innovative, but even as a medical man, his own initiative, things he tried. Even with myself, Reid would stay up around the clock, to make sure he made it through the next day. A wonderful man, Dr. Reid, I'm telling you.

But of course, there again, Dr. Banfill will tell you, when they came back to Ottawa and they stayed in [the RCAMC]; of course Crawford was the "big cheese" and had the political pull, and something went wrong along the lines because Reid left there and came out to Vancouver. And he was, for awhile he was quite a dejected man. Dr. Reid he got into a clinic over there and was busy as hell, but he absolutely refused to talk about Hong Kong or anything to do with it. I was welcomed to visit him in his office or in his home, but nothing about the war. It wasn't till after he had his severe stroke, and he came over to visit us, and as a matter of fact he was in one of these rooms, him and his third wife, I think she was, Kathy. And he was so good to me. My wife thought he was just so wonderful. I told her, I said, "Well, that's the way he was to me in the prison camp."

No, I'm surprised, there was quite a few of us that signed a document, we were hoping that Reid would have been recognized.

But I don't know, I'm told that in order for him to have received some high honor that Crawford would have had to sign it being the Senior Medical Officer and he wouldn't. Because I think somebody thought that Crawford, somebody was going to write him up. But they always blew up Crawford, or he blew himself up, to be the big hero of Hong Kong. Well, Crawford did a good job but he didn't do anywhere near the job that, or wasn't under the circumstances, that Reid did after we went to Japan. Because, as I say, there was 500 of us there at Nippon Kokan, and how Reid survived through it it's, did a wonderful job medically, militarily, and subjectively, psychology, whatever.

CGR:

Psychologically.

LCS:

Yes, psychologically Reid was just tops, yes.

CGR:

Tell me something about your own health in 3-D, specifically. You mentioned you had bad pleurisy.

LCS:

Yes. A couple of occasions. Well, the first time, and I learned my lesson. You see, the Japs, we had a, you've heard of these cement bath tubs they had, and of course the Japs had to bath first, and then we bathed after them, which didn't appeal because a hell of them had VD or TB. And how were you to know. So, this didn't appeal to me even the first time. It was hot water and all the rest of it.

So anyway I went and got a bucket and I had a cold water bath. And that was the first time how I got it [pleurisy]. And

then the second time, of course, I got it at the shipyards, at work through the storm that set up this day and really set the chills through me. You're working out there and if you know what the dockyards are like, dry docks, it's all cement, cold as hell, and the wind blowing in there. Oh, and we had nothing inside us to keep us warm. I didn't do too bad.

After I set up the shops, I used to get a few little extras from the Japs, like an orange or something, or some of their dates or something. The odd time the Camp Commandant, if he thought we were behaving ourselves, or doing good work, or had fixed his shoes, he would bring me a little extra. It all helped but it really wasn't that much. But no, I managed to come through 3-D pretty good.

And I know I was in good physical condition before I was taken prisoner, but it was the last five months at Suwa that was bad, and that was because of the strenuous work. It was worse than the shipyards because for every three men there was a guard over you. You just didn't get a chance to have a little rest when you wanted. It was real slave labor up at that mine. And it was with, I think with most of them in mines. Some of them had it worse, because ours was open pit. But where these boys had to go underground, I don't know how they survived. Ours was bad enough. And then we were subjected to the weather too. The only protection you had was if you were doing the coking. If you were on that then you switched around.

CGR:

One of the things I wanted to ask about: Nakamura, the

Commandant at 3-D, he's the one -- you testified to business about the Red Cross shoes. Do you remember that?

LCS:

No, no. Nakamura wasn't at 3-D. Was it Nakamura? Now you've got me.

CGR:

Again I'll just put this off.

LCS:

Some of these [Red Cross] stores were cooked up and into pies, cakes and other edibles for the use of Nakamura and his staff.

CGR:

And you say that didn't happen, or just that you didn't say that it happened. Because it's in there. If I can just look at these other pages. There was a very particular....

LCS:

Oh Jesus isn't this funny. Of course this is 45 years ago. His name wasn't Nakamura.

CGR:

Now here you say at the bottom....

LCS:

Lieutenant Wamori, Wamori was our Camp Commandant at 3-D, it wasn't Nakamura -- Wamori, Lieutenant Wamori, it wasn't Nakamura. I'm going to read this through because I have my doubts about some of those. As I say, Doctor, I was never interviewed at Vancouver. I'm God damn sure I wasn't. Some of these officers interviewed me right over there, in there because....Let me see now. No it wasn't Nakamura -- Wamori was our Camp Commandant at

3D. I'm going to check into this. This amazes me.

CGR:

But this business of Red Cross booths. That doesn't mean anything to you?

LCS:

I never gave, or saw Wamori take, a pair of Red Cross boots.

CGR:

Because it says, "I personally was compelled to give these boots to Nakamura."

LCS:

I never had any boots to give.

CGR:

OK, well I just thought because you were involved with the shoe business that this fitted.

LCS:

No, this beats me.

CGR:

Now, as far as the camp is concerned, my recollection is that there were two commandants there, and Nakamura was the second of them. But I've just got to find the appropriate place in the evidence here.

LCS:

No, I saw Wamori take Red Cross parcels but sure as hell his name wasn't Nakamura.

CGR:

And Nakamura certainly was a professor at Nippon University.

LCS:

Nakamura could have been but he wasn't in our camp. Wamori was our....That name, it just came to me.

CGR:

One of the other things I wanted to ask about was that there was mention in this same war crimes trial material that I have here, that I just copied in Washington, material about the building of an oven in the camp. Do you remember anything about the building of a big oven?

LCS:

At 3-D, at 3-D?

CGR:

Well I thought it was 3-D but the trouble is this man was at several camps and it's hard to separate out this from different camps. But that obviously doesn't ring a bell to you.

LCS:

No, no, no we built a clay oven, or say the cookhouse had built a clay oven at Suwa. But the equipment at 3-D was already there.

CGR:

Did Suwa have a number as well as being called Suwa?

LCS:

No. All we knew it was as Suwa. You see, most of them had a number. There was Headquarters, Omori, and to my knowledge it never had a number. I was there for three weeks. Shinagawa, the hospital, to my knowledge didn't have a number. And Suwa, I never heard of it having a number. Because this is what a lot of them say to me, "You were at Suwa. I never heard of it. You must be crazier than all the rest of us. Where the hell was

that?" And it's so funny, or not so funny, but one of these big B-29 pilots that impressed me, and we got along well, was a boy named Roy Gentry. When we broke up camp we took down names and addresses on pieces of paper, and I had kept this. This was such a big fellow, handsome and good natured, and I got to know him at Suwa. Anyway, before we it left got taken down because most of them, at that time, if they'd lived in Washington State, you see, because I said, "Well I live in Victoria, and go to Port Angeles," some of them were from Port Bremerton, all over, and I thought well it might be a chance of seeing them.

This Roy Gentry, I forget his address, but anyway, all during the years corresponding with the various guys in California and Texas, and Florida and all over, I could never find anybody that knew this Roy Gentry until here in February of this year, and I got the American Prisoners of War magazine, and here I saw where this Roy Gentry had been made a Commander of one of their chapters in Florida. So I wrote to him. It might seem unusual but I said, "I remember this Roy Gentry so well and we got along." Sure enough, here it is, I get an answer back and he photocopies a bunch of us cut up the parachute that dropped our Red Cross parcels after the war. And he took all his on this piece of parachute that he cut out, and here was my name "Lionel Speller," or Lee they nicknamed me, "Canadian Signal Corps, Victoria, B.C." He had photographed it. So he said, "Isn't it funny." And then several other names on there that, I should have brought them down to show to you. But here's 45 years gone, well, yes it's 45 years gone by, and here he is in Florida and

now he's become a Commander at one of the Chapters down there and said he was leaving in a few days to go for a holiday somewhere but he'd write more to me when he come back. He sent me the photocopy of these names that were on his piece of the parachute. Now mine, I gave mine to my brother that's a pilot. But I wrote mine down on paper. But the pieces of parachute, because my brother wanted to have it. Whether he's still got it or not. But Roy had saved his. What were we getting at?

CGR:

Well, I've sort of got confused myself because we got into this business about Nakamura and I think we've decided just to sort of leave that because that's kind of confusing.

LCS:

Oh yes I'm going to check that.

CGR:

What I'm going to do, is when I'm finished here, I'll give you this whole package, but we'll talk about that after were done. But I'll give you this whole package then.

Something else I wanted to ask you, but to go back to Hong Kong then, was to tell me a bit about Major Ashton Rose. I find him a very intriguing sort of a character. You've indicated some people thought well of him, some didn't, and so on. Tell me more about him.

LCS:

I know, I know. A lot of them said that he was a phony, he wasn't a Major, he wasn't this. I can only tell you that, as a medical man, Ashton Rose looked after me super. I can only speak well of him. Whether he was only a Lieutenant or what he was,



that part of it I could care less. As a medical doctor, to me, he knew what he what he was talking about, to me he did everything to restore my eyesight, and did that. I can't remember a day went by "Well young feller how are you today?" I can only speak too well of Ashton Rose. I've heard all kinds of stories about him after. But for me he was a gentlemen and he was a good doctor, and he certainly looked after me, so I can only speak as I find. And like you say, doctor, I've heard all these stories about Major Ashton Rose, he was phony and all this. Some of the East Indian boys in the regiments, they spoke well of him, because he was their doctor -- Indian Medical Service.

CGR:

I know. I've tried to trace him down, and nothing. I can't find anything out about him.

LCS:

Is that right?

CGR:

Post war, I mean post war. No, he just seems to have vanished.

LCS:

He went back to England, as I understand it. I'll try and find out for you.

CGR:

If you ever find anything I'd be very very grateful.

LCS:

Yes, he went back to England as I understand it. Now, whether he was discharged or not, I don't know. But a lot of

them said he wasn't a Major, and he wasn't a doctor, and all the rest of it. Well, he wouldn't have been there, he wouldn't have been there.

CGR:

Right. What did he look like? Do you remember? Can you describe his appearance at all? Was he tall, short, fat, skinny?

LCS:

No, about own height, a fine-looking man, fine-looking man. And very neat and clean at all times. He always short sleeve shirts, British Officer shirt. And he had his majors' pips up, and surely there was ranks over him -- British and Canadian that could have forced him to take them down if he didn't have that rank. No, he was always neat and clean and very active and I believe, I believe he had some East Indian blood in him, because he was very dark.

CGR:

That's my understanding.

LCS:

He was very dark, and he always had a neat mustache. But, as I say, from my experience with him in the diphtheria, a gentlemen, an officer, and I couldn't speak too highly of him, regardless of what they say now. And I know lots of other boys too, because I've run some of them -- "Ah Ashton Rose, that all bull shit." Well, I take it for what it's worth, and I know what he did for me.

CGR:

Right. Well that's what I'm interested in -- your personal observations.

LCS:

In his British officer's shorts you now, and the stockings with the tabs, always properly dressed, neatly dressed. He just...oh, hygiene, he was just, you didn't go into him dirty or anything, he'd tell you, "Go and wash. That's why you got skin...." You had to be, oh, he was immaculately clean. How he did we'll never know. But of course he had a batman too. This Welshman "Taffy" Jones, we called him, was his batman and Dr. Ashton Rose was always immaculate and so fussy about cleanliness when he was dealing with you.

CGR:

How about Jones, is he still around?

LCS:

"Taffy" Jones?

CGR:

Yes.

LCS:

No, he's gone.

CGR:

He's dead.

LCS:

Yes, yes.

CGR:

I was thinking if I could get him he could tell me.

LCS:

Oh yes, oh could he ever. And he was such a character.

CGR:

This is really detective work, you know. I'm just trying to....

LCS:

Oh, if you could have interviewed him, he was a bugger, that Taffy. He was the type, "You can't get a lady, get a nice fat boy." Oh yes, you had to watch Taffy.

CGR:

Well that leads me to a subject I want to talk about, which is the whole subject of sex, and sexuality in the camps.

LCS:

Oh, it happened, it happened. There was no doubt about it.

CGR:

Homosexuality, you mean, it happened?

LCS:

Oh yes, there was, there was buggery going on, oh yes. It was mainly with the British, and the Navy boys were the worst. Apparently this was -- well, I shouldn't say it's unusual but it's not uncommon, but oh no, me I was completely innocent of that stuff and stayed away from it. I wasn't attracted. We had, you probably heard of Sunny Castro, we had guys that dressed up as women and stuff and these things went on in camp. But I'll tell you, those were some of the first to die. Whether it was this what they call AIDS now or not, I don't know, but spinal problems would set in, and deterioration, and a lot of guys don't know it either too. But you know doctor, in Jamaica, a lot of the grenadiers had VD.

CGR:

Yes, I've heard that.

LCS:

Yes. Well after we were taken prisoners, you can ask Dr. Crawford, all those boys that had been in Jamaica and had VD were the first to die.

CGR:

Is that right?

LCS:

Yes. They were the first to die. Everything affected them worse and especially with the dysentery, and the loss of blood. But Dr. Crawford will tell you. I know a lot of them say, "Where do you get your information from, Speller?" Well, over the years I've made it my business, like you, to find these things out. Another thing that I, my own personal, what I call my own research where I've been told I was crazy and didn't know what the hell I was talking about, and I learned this from "Paddy" Keenan. You've heard of him as the RSM for the Grenadiers. That during checking over with the guys and those that got married after and their children, and the physical defects, "Paddy" Keenan was like me, he didn't find one of them that you couldn't detect something that was as the result of the father's prisoner of war experience.

CGR:

Really.

LCS:

Yes. Now, you take my son, because when I came home I know I was bothered terribly with my nerves. My son now is 35, he'll be 36 next month, six foot, and a nice big Skookum boy, has a bad

habit, or not a bad habit, it's natural, but he'll be sitting talking to me, he's conductor on the railroad, does a good job, and they've recommended him for the engineering school, which he's leaving in September, but I'll be sitting there talking to him, and he sits like this. Now, this is the way I used to be for four or five years, but in both legs. My son now has got it, and my wife is [inaudible]. But this is just one sample, that my son will sit there like that and for no reason at all, he's in perfect health, but that leg is just going like that. You tell him to "Stop, Ross!" He'll stop and then sitting he'll start again. Now where did he get it from?

My daughter, hers is a little different. But my wife noticed when she gets excited and laughing is this, oh hesitant and everything. "Just like you when I first met you. You used to do the same thing, only you forgot." But anyway, as I say, "Paddy" Keenan and I, we've, on occasion, we have made this remark about, "You can tell the children of a Hong Kong veteran." Every one of them. But of course you go to the medical people, and they say, "That's silly." But it's there, Doc. I can show you any number of kids that I know, of parents [where the man was a POW at Hong Kong] here, where there is one little item in that respect to health that is showing on the children.

CGR:

Well, that's interesting.

I just wanted to say, you mentioned Sunny Castro, I was in Hong Kong in '87 and he died about six months before. And I was hoping to interview him. Everybody remembers Sunny Castro. And I was eager to interview him.

LCS:

He was a devil. But if you'd ever saw him -- and how the hell he ever, where he got the stuff from -- but when he dressed up like Carmen Miranda, or anything else, oh brother! But, no, Sunny was -- I stayed away. I say any of my performances, anyway, I could do was either with a skipping rope or something to do with athletics. But, not that stuff, no. I didn't go for that stuff.

CGR:

The other question I wanted to ask, having to do with sexuality, is, was there any ordinary sexuality, any heterosexuality? Did any of the POWs have contact with women, or the Japanese women?

LCS:

If they did it's news to me.

CGR:

It seems unlikely but I thought I'd ask.

LCS:

Yes. After the war when they got out, some of them they couldn't wait. You see this is what turned Dr. Crawford off. I don't know whether he ever told you, but in Hong Kong, you see, Crawford stayed in Hong Kong with the boys, and they were all taken out on the parade ground and warned: you know, "OK. you're free, you can go and travel the streets and stuff. But if you get VD don't come crying on my shoulder." Well, this happened, right after, and again, here Crawford got them all out and told them, "Well, I warned you, and some of you, you've gone out and

drank and got VD; when you get home don't come crying on my shoulder." Well that was not way to treat guys after being locked up because as officers they could have gone to some private club and done the same thing, only protected. But I know I heard this from guys and they felt bad about it. But he, "When you get back to Canada don't come crying on my shoulder." Then there was the other, I don't know whether you ever heard, have you ever heard of this Dr. Hoffer?

CGR:

Hoffer?

LCS:

Yes. Abraham Hoffer.

CGR:

I don't think so, no.

LCS:

Oh. Well he was, he was professor of medicine down at the University of Saskatchewan.

CGR:

Oh, oh, yes. I thought you meant in the camps.

LCS:

No, no, after.

CGR:

Yes, yes. The multi-vitamin, the massive vitamin man.

LCS:

Yes, well....He's good, I don't care what they say.

CGR:

No criticism at all.

LCS:



I can tell you, because I worked for DVA, Veterans Hospital. I can tell you that when it comes to schizophrenia, and if a patient wants to do what Dr. Hoffer does, he can cure schizophrenia. He's done and I can show you. I admire him. But anyway, he offered the Canadian government to take the boys, but he wanted to put them all in a camp for at least one year. Treat them his method to bring them back to normal.

From my information I heard, no way; Dr. Crawford, he was with them, he knew all about it and all the rest of it. Well, I forget, I was being treated by doctors here when I, I've got nothing against them, they looked after me, but for 12 or 15 years my rear end was like a punch board from getting vitamin B shots, and a crib board and what have you, and everything, until finally I thought, this is crazy the way I'm going because I was playing soccer. Anyway, an old chap from Saskatchewan came out, Alton Johnson, and he said, "Lionel, you should use your money and go down and see this Dr. Hoffer, and get on a proper routine." Well I didn't. I said, "Alton, you may be what he's done because for your age, your years, you look like a million dollars." And he said, "Lionel I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for Hoffer." He said, "I was so crippled up with arthritis." And I don't know, did you ever hear of George Porteous, the YMCA man.

CGR:

Oh yes, yes.

LCS:

Porteous was the same way, you wouldn't believe me. And he

said, "Look at us now. We both went under Dr. Hoffer's vitamin therapy. Look at us." So anyway, I took a few and my wife was listening and it's like niacin. Everybody laughs, you don't need it. Vitamin C, you don't need it. Well I take it. Believe it or not, doctor, as bad as I was, I played soccer right up until I was 48 years of age. Mind you, as I say, I looked after myself, and I wasn't a habitual drinker and smoker. Being in sports most of my life -- soccer, and bicycle racing, and boxing, and wrestling, and what have you, and I wanted to keep fit. I always felt that I never overdid it, but I wanted to be a participant -- I didn't want to be a fan.

Anyway, the things that Alfie Johnson and Ray Squires had got from Hoffer -- "Try it Len, it isn't going to hurt you." And it sure as hell hasn't. I know when I got my cataracts and I had to have implants and -- "Oh, what about all your vitamins?" And I said, "Well, things like eyesight or hearing, you can't repair that once that damage is done." I said, "You can maybe prevent it from getting worse but don't blame the two vitamins I take on to my cataracts for God's sake. My brother's ten years younger than I am and he's got cataract and he wasn't in the prison camp. So how do you account for that." I said, "Don't be so...."

But those are the kinds of things that people throw at you. And I know my sister, "Oh, you eat the proper food. You don't need that. That's all vitamins, that's all." That's fine but as you get older you require these because you are a medical man and I know doctors that take them. I know one doctor in this town that takes over his vitamin C 1600 a day, and he says he should take more, but he said, "I don't get time and I like to take them

with my meals." That same doctor takes niacin the same as I do, a 1000 cc a day. I know lots of these guys. Anyway, what were we on?

CGR:

Well maybe we should get back to the camps, because we're kind of drifting away. We've been talking about sexuality and then you were talking about the venereal disease, which got us to Crawford.

LCS:

There was another thing that I should tell you too Doctor that....Oh I did, about the boys in Jamaica, the ones that had VD. They were the first ones to die. Yes, all of them. The records that he had were the ones that....And of course a lot of them that were heavy rum drinkers too. He detected them just like he did the smokers.

CGR:

Yes, you mentioned that.

In the shipyard were there Japanese women working there as well as men?

LCS:

Oh yes, yes. Not close by, though. No, the women had other jobs not close by. But we passed them to and from work, things like that. But you dare not look at them or even smile. You'd get your head knocked off. Oh God yes....

[End of side 2]

CGR:

[LCS asked to describe the camp at 3-D.]

LCS:

It was quite level land around there and in an industrial part of Japan.

CGR:

It's really sort of a suburb of Tokyo isn't it?

LCS:

Right. Oh yes, yes. Actually, although the area was Kawasaki, we were in what they called a prefecture, and it was Tsurumi, the shipyard. It was actually in Tsurumi, which they called prefectures or I don't know, local area.

CGR:

T-s-u-r-u-m-i.

LCS:

I've forgotten how you spell it.

CGR:

Well, there it is right at the top there.

LCS:

Yes, yes. Tsurumi.

CGR:

OK, there were about 500 in the camp, did you say? About 500 Canadians.

LCS:

Five hundred Canadians, there was, when we first arrived there, yes.

CGR:

Were there any other POWs there?

LCS:

No. A couple of times we had the crews from Javanese, from

the Dutch East Indies, would come in there. But we didn't mix so they didn't stay too long. And then we'd get the odd, maybe 3 or 4 American B-29 pilots, and they sent them over there, but they didn't stay long either. A few days, maybe a week or -- this happened. And then, of course, also at 3-D, I don't know whether you ever heard, we had an American Commander come in there named Dockweiler.

CGR:

Dockweiler.

LCS:

Dockweiler. Yes, he was from the States. And of course this didn't please us very well because he was a Commander you see and so he was senior to Dr. Reid. And being all Canadians we didn't appreciate taking orders from a Yankee. But he was a doctor too, he was a surgeon, and he was a good man. After the war was over he proved to be very helpful. But we didn't care too much for him in camp.

CGR:

Why was that?

LCS:

Well, it was his attitude. And of course he could never figure out why he was sent there and neither did we. He was Yankee navy, and why the hell they would send him there and then to put him over Dr. Reid just didn't appeal. I think he was a sincere man but he wasn't our type. We didn't appreciate him being there at all. But after the war he proved to be a big help. He was the one that informed us that they had a War Claims

Commission; Ottawa had denied it for the longest time, and here was Dockweiler and he gave us the address and the name. That's what opened the door for us to start appealing for War Claims. Oh yes. Ottawa denied it and they didn't notice that, as I say, Dr. Dockweiler was being up there in the military and an exPOW, and he gave good information after the war.

CGR:

Maybe you'd tell me something about your beriberi. You said that you had beriberi. Was this in Hong Kong or in Japan or both?

LCS:

Oh yes, I had the wet beriberi. Well, no it hit me more in Japan. Yes. I had the wet type. There was the wet and the dry.

CGR:

With all the swelling.

LCS:

The swelling, and the starch, you could write your name on your skin, it was so scaly. At night it was terrible when you laid down -- ache, ache. And the loss of feeling at your finger tips and your toes. Oh, some of the dry beriberi hit the boys so hard that they even, of course, soaking their feet in cold water was a big relief, but when they couldn't get, some of them were even soaking it in their own stool, and it was terrible. Then, of course, pellagra set in and some of them lost their toes, they just rotted off because....

CGR:

So called "happy feet" or "electric feet."

LCS:

Yes. It was a loss of strength and, with mine, my face swelled up. I should have brought you the pictures the Japs took it when I had it bad.

CGR:

Oh yes, I wish you had.

LCS:

Well, they took pictures of us, but at this particular time, this was in case you escaped, I was just full of this and my face was blown up and I looked like a slant-eyed myself. And then of course too, the pellagra was bad too, from the sores in the side of your mouth, and cracks in your hands. Oh, it was....

CGR:

Now, did you have that?

LCS:

Oh yes, yes. Well in our hands you wouldn't, maybe you wouldn't believe it, doctor, but the best cure for that was your urine.

CGR:

Is that right?

LCS:

Oh yes. We peed on our hands and then just let it go in. Whether it was the salt or whatever, I don't know, but it was the boys from Quebec that found this out. When it affected your hands. It was bad enough, you didn't want to put urine on your face, but it helped a great deal. It was the same way with the strawberry testicles. I mean, the only way to cure that was, some of them, the Japanese had a tooth powder they called

"Lyons," L-y-o-n-s. And it was this tooth powder. And if you could get some of that, it wasn't bad, but most of them we had to urinate on our hands, and then to just stop it from getting any worse. And it worked. Yes, it's amazing. You wonder but....No, that "strawberry balls" as they called it, was terribly painful. We didn't have the underwear, the proper underwear to hold our testicles, as you know, there was just those things. Then of course the perspiration didn't help things, and we weren't getting the baths like we should have done.

Oh yes, I don't know whether I ever told you, I should have mentioned this but -- I don't know whether any of the boys ever mentioned it -- but one of the things that put me off with the bathing, because as I said we had to bath after the Japs. Well, there was one night, and I forget what I had done, but I had to march. Here was these Japs in the tub, three or four of them bathing, and masturbating themselves.

CGR:

Really.

LCS:

Yes. Do you know what they did? You will never believe it. They would get a fly and they were exceptionally big over there. Pull the wings off, you see, and then put the fly at the end of their penis and this would help them to ejaculate or whatever, and this was all going on in the bath tub. I was afraid to say anything, especially to Dr. Reid, but after seeing that do you think I could go and bath in that water? No way.

CGR:

I don't blame you.



LCS:

I didn't say boo for the longest while after but this was one of their, oh yes, they thought that was a great deal. I remember this little Shibota one time, and I told him, I said, "The Japanese were dirty," the Japanese soldiers. And of course he was asking me "Why, kodo?" I was telling him, I'd see them in the bath, and oh, he beat the shit out of me after that, because he wondered how I saw it, you see. I wasn't supposed to be looking. "No, No, the Japanese don't do that." And if I was ever to repeat it again he was going to take me up to the Commandant. As it was he slapped me around plenty. but I saw it once and that was all I wanted to see. And this is what they were doing. I couldn't figure it out. And then too, I talked to the odd soldier, and they figured, well there was no women around so, "Oh good, good!" They thought it was just great. Of course they had a great habit too, "Oh Canada soldier, all we thought about was....," and they'd usually go like this [gesturing to indicate a large penis]. Oh, whenever we were bathing or anything, they were around just all nice, and making their remarks about the different guys and how they were built. Oh yes. Well, it was like I always said at the start, give them a rope and a tree and they're just like a bunch of monkeys, you know, the average Jap soldier. Real coolie type. The mentality was very low. And so were there morals, if you want.

CGR:

This is always a sort of a tricky subject, and I don't want to give the wrong impression, I'm interested in whether or not

there were any sort of bad apples in the group? I'm not interested in names or anything, but amongst the POWs, and what kinds of things were going on?

LCS:

Well, laundry, for instance, you had a chance to do your laundry once in, you could watch certain guys that if you had a better shirt than they did, or so, and they'd switch it. Oh yes, stealing went on. It wasn't towards the end, but there was the odd one. And, it wasn't against one another so much as they were stealing from the Japanese, some of them. I did it myself. You had to survive. I know if you could steal a bit of rice or a bit of black pepper or anything, or you saw it, or especially a Jap orange, because they tasted so sweet to us. Oh yes, you'd steal. But at the start it was, what happened between, in North Point and Sham Shui Po, but once you got to Japan you had to stick together. And of course you didn't have the same opportunities to steal from one another because of such close quarters. But, oh yes, steal from the Japanese, oh yes, definitely.

CGR:

It was fair game.

LCS:

Yes, oh yes, that happened.

CGR:

Were there any collaborators, do you think, that you're aware of?

LCS:

With the Japs?

CGR:

Yes.

LCS:

Oh yes. Creeps; common "suck-holers" was the word. There was the odd one. It didn't get too serious though, not at 3D. No, Captain Reid had some good lectures, and this is what they were pointed at, is sticking together, working together, defeat them at their game, and that was, you see they did their out most to get us down. And as Dr. Reid always said, "Our game is to get them down." This would have more effect. And it worked, it worked.

Oh yes, they used to, they couldn't figure us out. They tried everything to break our morale. This was part of their game. As Dr. Reid used to say, "The only way we can beat them is to prove to them, and we get them down, trying to get us down." This was his psychology. It worked. Oh yes, they were, oh, they'd be surprised what....

I'll give you instance, doctor, like out of work. The Japanese knew how hungry we were, the workmen. And so, if there was a gang at any time, and there was a lull, or stop, or something, and they had an orange, they would wait until they got a bunch of prisoners around. Because as soon as we saw them with an orange, they'd throw it on the ground to watch us fight over it. This was their type. And the same way with their -- they'd light up a cigarette if there was a bunch around and then throw the butt down to watch the boys dive and fight for it. This was their type of....I don't know, it was....But it happened.

CGR:

Was there any difficulty in any of the camps you were in -- I've heard there were people who were so addicted to cigarettes that they'd trade their food away.

LCS:

Oh, that's right, oh yes. This is what I was telling you earlier, that men died because trading off their rice, their rations for cigarettes when you see, of course, they just went down hill that much more. Because cigarettes didn't, I know myself I, there were times when if a guy had a cigarette and you were really down, a couple of puffs could really give you lift. I've seen as many as 13 take a couple of puffs off one cigarette. I've done it myself. Even though I wasn't a smoker, but it was something to it. It gave you a lift. But as far as men died, oh yes, we had lots of them. It was a shame. They died because they sold their rations for cigarettes.

CGR:

Was there any effort to stop this? Did Dr. Reid try?

LCS:

Oh yes, oh he tried -- pleaded with them, pleaded with them. Well, there was nothing more than you could do than take them to one side and talk to them. What else could he do? And of course he'd get them there, and they'd say, "Well, Dr. Reid if we, well then you give me a half a cigarette a day," or something. Dr. Reid didn't have them either. And, I know he would have liked to have smoked but he had to figure, well they're not available. So he didn't smoke. But, oh no, he pleaded with them, orderlies, different ones. Squires was the great man, great orderly but some of them were just addicted, and they had to have their

cigarette.

Yes, it was like some of those British boys with their buggery. And oh if they didn't, they were just mean. And I don't say it killed them in that respect, but their outlook and their attitude was real mean, that they weren't allowed to sleep just next to some guy. And the British navy boys were the worst. Oh yes, but this had gone on, so they tell us, for years in the British Navy.

CGR:

Did you lose a lot of weight?

LCS:

Yes, it was a lot to me. I was a featherweight, 126. That was just a month before we went to Japan. I was in the Canadian Amateur Championships at Vancouver. And that was my 126, I was a featherweight. At Suwa I had gone down to 92 pounds. It wasn't as bad as some of the bigger fellows.

CGR:

No.

LCS:

No. Fortunately being, and then I shrunk a half an inch. I was supposed to have been 5' 4 1/2" when I joined and I was only 5' 4" when I came home. And this was normal according to Dr. Crawford.

CGR:

Yes, I think that's right.

LCS:

When I had the pneumonia I had run down to about 65 pounds.

But I built up, taking care and watching myself and one thing and another, and getting a few extra rations here and there where ever you could beg borrow or steal.

CGR:

OK. I think I really am running out of questions.

LCS:

Well if there is anything else you can think of, doctor, I don't mind putting it in writing for you.

CGR:

Well thank you. I might very well want to follow up.

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