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

Interviewed by

Charles Gordon Roland, M.D.

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Hannah Chair for the History of Medicine

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Charles G. Roland, MD:

Mr. Boyd, I wonder if you would tell me your full name, and your birthplace and birthdate?

Robert Boyd:

My full name is Robert Boyd. I was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, on the 4th of January, 1908. My mother brought me to this country when I was 18 months old. My father joined us one year later.

I received my early education in Winnipeg. I should say I started my schooling in Winnipeg and shortly after the outbreak of the first war, my mother went back to Belfast because my grandfather wanted to see his Canadian grandchildren (I had a brother and two sisters born in the meantime) and he wanted to see them. He was getting rather old. We went back and when our 6 months was up and when my mother was making arrangements to come back to Canada, she was told she would have to wait until the war was over because of the submarine threat. My Dad, of course, was over in the services, in the Canadian army. So we stayed over there and we didn't get back to Winnipeg until 1920. So I had a vacation for about 6 months.

When my mother found out that she couldn't get back -- we had been living with various aunts and uncles because my mother comes from a very large family -- so when my mother found out that we couldn't get back for an indefinite period, she rented a home of her own and shipped me off to school. So I received three years of my schooling in Belfast. Then we arrived back in Canada, in Winnipeg, in 1920, and my father had found a house for

us that was in West Kildona. I went to Governor Semple School; we moved into Winnipeg and I went to Ralph Brown School, which was my favorite school. And from there I went to Lord Selkirk -- I graduated from Lord Selkirk. I did one year at University of Manitoba and then I left and went into the business world.

I worked for a short time with the Ashdown Hardware people, where I received my early training as an accountant. Then I left there and went to the Canadian Pacific [Railway]. I stayed with the Canadian Pacific until the first of September, 1939, when I asked for leave of absence for the duration of the war, which I received. I was already in the militia prior to the war, of course, and I returned to work on the first of October, 1946. And I stayed with the Canadian Pacific until 1963, when I decided I was going to give myself a birthday present, when I was 55, and I retired at the age of 55 from the Canadian Pacific. Since then my wife and I did quite a lot of traveling in various parts of the world. My wife died three years ago. And my doctors figured that I couldn't very well look after myself -- I tried it on my own, two or three times at various places, and I finally ended up in here [Deer Lodge Center, formerly Deer Lodge Hospital for veterans] as a permanent resident.

I might go back and say that I had decided to join the militia in 1933. I could see the war clouds gathering in Europe and I figured, well, I for one was going to be prepared. So I originally enlisted with the 10th Machine Gun Battalion here in Winnipeg, and in 1936 the Winnipeg Grenadiers took over -- we were amalgamated with the Winnipeg Grenadiers, and the Grenadiers

were made Machine Gun Battalion for our brigade. And after taking a royal school and a B-wing with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, on the first of September when our commanding officer notified us that we were mobilized for active service (I had the rank of sergeant), I enlisted on the first of September as a private and I was promoted back to my rank on the 2nd of September!

C.G.R.:

A nice short career as a private.

R.B.:

Yes.

C.G.R.:

Just before we get away, can I ask you what were your parents' names?

R.B.:

My father's name was David. My mother's maiden name was Georgina Skelton.

C.G.R.:

Very good. And your father did what?

R.B.:

My father arrived in Winnipeg -- he told me this story about arriving in Winnipeg and getting off the train in the CPR station in Winnipeg at 10 o'clock in the morning -- it was one day in March, 1910, I believe it was -- and he was working for the Canadian Pacific Railway at 2 o'clock that afternoon, and he stayed with them until he retired at 65. He ended up as foreman of the St. Boniface operation.

C.G.R.:

Oh yes. That's a responsible job.

R.B.:

Well, it was a rather responsible job. But my father didn't want me to work for the Canadian Pacific. I wanted to when I decided to go to work, and he said one's enough, he didn't go for that. So anyway, as I say, I got a job with Ashdown Hardware. Then when I went after a job at the CPR, my dad knew nothing about it. I went to work one morning, I said good-bye to my mother and I went to work but instead of going to Ashdown's I went to the CPR and when I came home and at the supper table that evening and we're talking about how the day was, I said, well I told them I had a new job and the said, "Where are you?" And I said, "I'm with the CPR." My dad near had a fit.

C.G.R.:

Were you married before the war?

R.B.:

No. We were going to get married in June of 1940, but when war came along I talked my fiancee into calling it off until it was all over. So I got home on the 25th of October, 1945 and we were married on the first of December. As soon as I got back home we got married.

C.G.R.:

I assume you went off to the Caribbean with the Grenadiers?

R.B.:

Yes, I served in Jamaica with the Grenadiers, yes.

C.G.R.:

I don't want to get into that too much, because we can't

spend enormous amounts of time, but one question that's come up that I'd like to ask you about. One of the other people I've interviewed mentioned that someone in camp, I think at Sham Shui Po, he thought was on dope, and he thought he'd started this in Jamaica. Was this a problem? Were people getting involved with dope in the Caribbean, that you can recall?

R.B.:

No way, no way! I mean, I was in a position because, shortly after we were mobilized for active service, I was doing recruiting sergeant [work] at our headquarters at 194 Main Street and a runner came down and told me the regimental sergeant-major wanted to see me. And when I went back to our quarters at Minto Armory he told me that the adjutant wanted to see me and when I saw the adjutant he told me I was being transferred from B Company to Battalion Headquarters, because they wanted me as an orderly room sergeant. After kicking up much of a fuss and seeing the commanding officer and so on, they convinced me I was more use to the battalion as an orderly room sergeant and the commanding officer got me a promotion to staff sergeant. So I was a staff sergeant from, oh, early in 1939, and I was a staff sergeant when we went to Jamaica and I was in constant touch with the activities of the battalion, and I knew everything that was going on. And I knew all the boys, I mean I knew all the boys, all the officers, all the NCO's, all the men pretty well by name, by sight, and while some of the boys got themselves into trouble, most of the problem the boys were getting into was drinking too much rum. But I have never in my experience ever heard of anybody being on dope in Jamaica. No way! That's the first time

I've ever heard that story.

C.G.R.:

Well good. As soon as I heard it, I thought I knew the person to ask because I knew you would know. And as I say, this person wasn't accusing anybody, he didn't give me a name, he just said he thought maybe this was the case. So I thought I would ask you.

R.B.:

I could understand some of them maybe getting into it in the short time we were in Hong Kong, although I don't know to my knowledge that anyone did. But while we were in Jamaica, I know of no one.

C.G.R.:

And if this person was on dope, maybe it did happen in Hong Kong.

R.B.:

It could have happened, but it could possibly have happened in Jamaica too. But as I say, I can't see how stuff like that was available in Jamaica.

C.G.R.:

Okay good. Well let's leap over to Hong Kong and maybe you'd tell me first, how did you find Hong Kong? What was your reaction to it? I realize you only had three weeks between arriving and the war starting.

R.B.:

Well, we didn't get much of a chance. I mean, when we arrived, naturally of course, the whole battalion, the whole

brigade, the whole C Force was naturally confined to barracks for three days while we went through sort of orientation -- lectures and so on.

Then when they lifted, the boys went downtown and raised a little hell, as is normal, and then the war began for the regiment and we didn't get much of a chance to really get to know the place that well. I mean, we all had our own various ways -- some of the boys liked to go down and spend their time in these places where you could get girls and liquor and so on, but some of the boys preferred to go to some of the fancier places where you could get a good meal. Some of them preferred to go to the dance halls. There was various -- I mean, every man to his own liking. The same as while you are are in civilian life. You know what I mean. As I say, it was pretty hard to get to know in that such a short time before we were dragged over to the island to take up our defensive positions. So it was rather hard.

But my first impressions of the place was that is was rather dreary, dismal place. Although I was downtown a couple of evenings and the night life didn't seem to be too bad. But as I say, my first impressions on our way up from the boat, from the ship to Sham Shui Po barracks, it looked to me like a rather dirty dismal place. But that's only first impression of course, because the streets were very, very narrow and dirty and so on. But, as I say, we never really got a chance to get out and explore the place like we did when we were in Jamaica for instance; we had lots of time -- well, we didn't have <u>lots</u> of time but we had sufficient time when we were off duty to get around to do a little visiting here and there. We didn't have

that opportunity in Hong Kong to really get out and see the surrounding districts.

C.G.R.:

Not in three weeks.

R.B.:

We were pretty well confined to the city of Kowloon until we got over to the island and then we were confined pretty well to the city of Victoria, and not very much of the city of Victoria because we spent most of our time in our defensive positions.

C.G.R.:

You were on the headquarters staff:

R.B.:

Yes. I was with battalion headquarters.

C.G.R.:

Battalion headquarters. And throughout the fighting, that's where you were?

R.B.:

Yes. The brigade headquarters where Brigadier Lawson was killed was Wong Nei Chong Gap, and the Grenadiers' headquarters, battalion headquarters was at Wan Chai Gap, which is some distance inland from there. We tried to keep our operations going from that point. It was rather hard because the way the things worked out, everybody got scattered and it turned out to be guerrilla warfare and there was no organization. There was no such thing as fighting in a battalion formation or a brigade formation. There wasn't even much fighting in a company formation. It was all done in platoons and sections, and it was

very hard to keep in touch with one another. We were scattered all over the island. And the unfortunate part about it too, which has always been a sore point with the Canadians, is that they broke us up. Brigadier Lawson became the brigadier of what they called the West Brigade which included the Grenadiers and I believe it was the Royal Scots (or the Middlesex, I'm not sure which one of the British battalions it was), and the Middlesex were under the command of the Eastern Brigade commander, you see. And we've always felt that the Canadians should have been kept together in the one brigade. It's been a sore point with most of us ever since. They broke the Canadians up -- one battalion in one brigade, and over again.

And even at that it wouldn't have made a difference because, as I say, our A Company, for instance, didn't know where B Company was; B Company didn't know where C Company; D Company didn't know where -- you know, this is the way it was. And we at battalion headquarters, we had one hell of a time trying to figure out where anybody was, and we were doing the best we could to keep in touch with everybody, you see.

And of course I was getting, the casualties were drifting, in to me because our doctor and medical staff were also there, and then I was forever getting orders to send men out to reinforce -- somebody would need half a dozen men and I had to pick out some of the fellows even though they were wounded, they were able to walk and I'd say, "Any you fellows want to go with so-and-so?" And these fellows would say, "Sure Staff, I'll go, what the hell," you know what I mean, that sort of stuff, you see. Quite often I took some of the boys out myself for a

reconnaissance party when we had no other NCOs, when we had jobs to do and there was nobody else available. And I used to have quite some argument with my colonel, Colonel Sutcliffe, about let me go, because he kept telling me I was [not] expendable -- "No, we can't afford to lose you," you see. And we got to the stage, for a matter of fact, toward the last week there I was actually acting adjutant. They were forever taking my adjutant away from me because he had to replace another officer who had been killed in action, and they were short of officers so they changed him to adjutant, so I never knew who my adjutant was. And most of the time I was acting strictly on my own without an officer at all. And it was one of those mixed up affairs that nobody seemed to know what the hell was going on. Everything was being played by ear.

Then, of course, our communications were knocked out. We had our own communications, of course, our own signal staff -- Ed Normal -- and they were blown out so it was on the blink, and then the local telephone people, we lost that. I had one telephone in the battle box where I was situated all by myself. I had one boy from the Middlesex regiment and he had his right arm bandaged up. I had another boy from the Royal Scots with his left arm bandaged up, it would take the two of them together to operate a hand grenade. And this is what I was left with for a long, long time, and then they finally took my phone away because they needed it some place else. I asked my acting adjutant at the time what I was going to do and he said, "You can set your -- and cut out paper dolls."

Now is the sort of stuff -- I mean, there was a lot of humor, which I guess was the only thing that kept a lot of us going was the humorous part of it, although there was some very, very sad situations because we'd begin to realize towards the end that we were fighting a losing cause. We realized it because there were no reinforcements. We ran out of ammunition, we ran out of water. I remember one time they brought up a tank, one of these old oil tanks and they had some water in it and we each got a little cup of water and you could taste the gasoline out of it, but it tasted like nectar to us. But this is the situation, you see, and we were just so badly disorganized because there were so many different jobs that had to be done in different places, because the Japanese had infiltrated in so many different places that we'd get the news about landing some place, we'd have to send somebody there -- anybody that was the closest at hand -- and as a result we were split up so badly that nobody knew where anybody was half the time.

C.G.R.:

Did this confusion get any better after the surrender? You still had a lot of responsibilities.

R.B.:

Oh yes.

C.G.R.:

Tell me about that, especially as it relates to the medical things because, of course, that's what I'm really interested in.

R.B.:

Yes. After the surrender, I know the group that I was with, I ended up with quite a lot of us and they put us in a big large

room. I believe it was a dormitory of some college or university there, and the marched us down to North Point Camp the following morning. They left up pretty well along, they just drove in a couple of trucks and threw three or four bags of rice on the ground and left. And our fellows hadn't the foggiest idea how to cook rice, they just threw it in a big pot and cooked it up, you see, and it came out like paste. Everybody was constipated for weeks on end. And the medical supplies were absolutely nil at that time.

It got a little better afterwards when the Japanese started to sort us out. They left us pretty well alone but our own officers more or less -- we kind of got organized. We organized our own outfit along the same lines as though we were still in Fort Osborne Barracks.

I went to work and made up -- went around to all the camps and made up a roster of all the boys that were in there, got their names and then I started asking questions about who had seen so-and-so, you see. On the way down from the hills, one of the fellows (I wish I could remember that boy's name), he saw this parcel or something lying in the middle of the road, so he picked it up, and it was a portable typewriter and he brought it and gave it to me. He said, "Staff, maybe you can use this." I said, "By God, I could use it if I had some paper." So I went to the colonel and I said, "You know, sir," I told him about this. I said, "You know, if I had some paper that I could use," I said, "I'd like to go around and make up a list of all the boys that we got in camp and try to find out what happened to the

others." [Copies of these lists are included in a folder on Hong Kong.] He said, "That's a splendid idea, Staff." So somehow he managed to scrounge up a lot of paper and some carbon paper and I went to work and I got around to all the boys, and made a list of all the boys we had, and I started asking them questions about those that were missing, you know. And I wouldn't take anybody's word for it. I had to have three fellows that would actually swear that they saw a fellow being killed in action before I'd report him killed in action. So I went to work and I made up battalion orders, you see, showing the....

C.G.R.:

I think I've got copies of some of them right here, that Harry [Atkinson] gave me.

R.B.:

Well, I made those things up and Colonel Sutcliffe said to me one day, he said, you know, some of the boys started getting into trouble, so, as I say, we started to run the place much the same as when we were still in barracks, you see -- try to keep some organization going and so on. Some of the boys got themselves into trouble somehow or other, and their sections or whoever's in charge of their hut ran them in front of the officer and they took them in front to the colonel and he, in a very stern face, gave them 10 days forfeiture of pay or something. He said, "Do you think we should do these part 2 orders?" And I said, "Yes sir." So he says, "Now look," he says, "we know damn well that these things won't stand up if we ever get back to Canada." He says, "and we don't intend it to. The idea is the purpose of morale and discipline. If we can maintain discipline

and keep the morale up, that's the idea. Let the boys feel that they're still in the army, they still have to obey their officers and NCOs." And he also said, "I'm going to have a talk with somebody later because one of these days the Japs are going to move all the officers out of the camp," and he says, "we want you fellows to make sure you look after the boys. That's our main concern -- look after the men."

So anyway, we started making out these part 2 orders, and I had made up a list of all the fellows in camp and I went around to them all and I started asking questions about the boys that were missing. I finally got enough information -- I mean, this was a long job, but actually it was a godsend because it gave me something to do. Because you know it could be very, very boring, as you can imagine, and I was kept busy doing that.

So anyway, the commanding officer decided -- at the end of each hut there was a little room with a kind of a little partition, not all the way up the ceiling but a sort of a partition. I don't know what the original idea of that was because that camp was originally used for Chinese refugees. But anyway, he gave me, in the Number One Hut, he said, "We're going to give this, put you in this room and we're going to consider this the orderly room, eh." And he said, "It's going to be your office as well as your living quarters." So I had all my stuff in there and I was kept pretty busy. As I say, I went around to all the fellows and I said, "You were with so-and-so," because I knew who knew who, like, because I knew the boys pretty well, especially the ones that were in Jamaica with me. And if I could

get three men that would say "yes" they definitely saw so-and-so go missing or get killed, then I'd report them. So I made up a list of those that were killed in action.

In the meantime, Ken Porter, who used to work with me in the orderly room in Jamaica before he got out, a very good friend of mine, he was in Bowen Road. And two or three of the boys from Bowen Road were being discharged and brought back to North Point, so Ken slipped one of these boys a note and a couple of packs of cigarettes and when this fellow came into the camp he said, "Staff, Sergeant Porter gave me this to give to you." And in this letter Ken had asked me to give these cigarettes to some pal of his in the camp (I can't remember who it was now), and then he enclosed a list of all the boys that were in Bowen Road Hospital. [Also on file.] Well that was great, because I was able then to go to work and make up another list and I put a little star opposite the names of those that were in Bowen Road Hospital. So then, with the fellows that were going from North Point Camp to Bowen Road, and from those that were going from Bowen Road back to North Point, Ken and I got sort of a little communication line going, you see. And we kept in touch with one another that way, keeping each other advised about who was where and what, you see. then he would give me a list of anybody that was admitted, that they had lost. In the meantime, I'd get a note saying that so-and-so who had been probably confined in some other part of the island had been admitted to Bowen Road Hospital, and so that was another name that was on my Missing list. And then every once in a while, unfortunately, there'd be a name of two or three of the boys who died in the hospital, so of course, right off the bat,

I'd put them on in my next set of orders showing them as died in Bowen Road Hospital on such-and-such a date for purposes of record.

If I remember correctly, I think I made four copies of those orders. I kept one, I gave one to Colonel Sutcliffe, one to Major Bailey, and I think Captain Golden had the fourth copy. The idea was that we were going to try and, if any of us did get repatriated or managed to escape or something, we'd get back to Ottawa this information. But I managed to get one of these oil-skinned little bags, eh, and I wrapped all that stuff up in that and by golly, I kept that stuff all the way through. I had an awful time, you know, because every once in a while you never knew -- especially when we got to Japan -- when the Japs were going to hold a surprise search on us.

I remember one time in particular when we were in Tokyo, in Camp 3-D, when they came in and I grabbed these things behind my back and I was standing with it behind my back, and when they came to me I slipped it to the fellow next to me and they passed this thing all the way down the line that way, and the Japs never caught on. But I managed to hang onto those and bring them back with me, and I kept them all down through the years.

Two or three times I thought about turning them over to the [Hong Kong POW] Association and then finally not too long ago I mentioned to Harry and I said, "Harry, I'd like the Association to have these just in the event that we might..." because the army and navy where we were holding our meetings promised us a little room of our own where we might have like a little museum

where we might have some mementos there, I though we might be able to keep something like that in there. And Harry said, "I'm going to make copies of those and send them down because I think those should be in the War Museum in Ottawa." He said, "I think Colonel Stacey would like to have them." So I said, "Okay." So anyway, he went to work and got a bunch of copies made.

So anyway, that's the story behind all that. I mean, it was just the fact one of these boys happened to find a typewriter and give it to me, and we were lucky enough to be able to get stationery and carbon paper, that I was able to do this thing, you see.

C.G.R.:

Did any of the other copies survive, do you know?

R.B.:

I don't know. I couldn't tell you to this day just whatever happened to those copies. As a matter of fact, it never entered my mind -- Colonel Sutcliffe died, you see, so I don't know what happened to his, whether he gave them to Major Trist not or Colonel Trist who became our commanding officer. And I never thought of asking Major Bailey -- of course he's dead now too -- and Captain Golden, he's down in Ottawa. And I never thought of ever asking any of them whatever happened to their copy. It never dawned on me, you know. But I know I managed to hang onto mine and got them back home with me.

C.G.R.:

Good for you. What about the medical officers?

R.B.:

Well we were fortunate, at least in the camp I was in, maybe

I'm getting a little ahead of my story. But when we were shipped over to Japan, we were lucky enough to have our own (Captain Reid) our own medical officer with us. Now he was the only officer that left Hong Kong, you see, because they kept them all there. They had built a special camp just in the outskirts of Tokyo for us. We were to work in the shipyards there, you see, and Captain Reid accompanied us. Well we were very fortunate in AT-D in having our own medical officer.

Unfortunately he had nothing to work with. Now I remember I had pleurisy twice and John decided -- well there were different things wrong with me along with the rest of the boys -- but I remember at one time when we had jaundice, he prevailed upon the commandant to let us have some sugar and they gave us a little, one of those little bowls that the Japanese used for their tea, a bowl of sugar, you see. Well, of course, what they did, they raided our Red Cross stuff, you see, because our Red Cross stuff was all packed up and they never give them to us, and this was probably bulk stuff, you see, which we never saw. The first Red Cross parcel we eve got we had to split one between three men. He [Reid] did the very best he could with what he had, you know, but that was better than nothing.

When we were in Sham Shui Po, we didn't do too badly because we still had Major [John] Crawford with us, you see, we still had Major Crawford, we had Captain Reid and the MO.....

C.G.R.:

Was there a Captain [Gordon] Gray?

R.B.:

I think it was a Captain Gray with the Rifles.

C.G.R.:

And then there's someone by the name of [Dr. Martin] Banfill.

R.B.:

Banfill's the one, yes. Major Crawford was a brigade MO.; Captain Reid was the Grenadiers' MO.; and Captain Banfill was the Rifles' MO., you see. And between the three of them, they managed to wheedle some, a certain amount of supplies, from the Japanese, so we didn't do too badly in that respect. But a lot of the supplies that the Japanese did supply them while we were in Sham Shui Po were substandard. I mean, they weren't, you know, some of their own stuff which at that time was not so good. But everything, of course, was in short supply.

The medical staff they worked their heads off, they worked day and night. But they were working against overwhelming odds. And, as I say, we were very fortunate, when the gang I was with went to Tokyo, we had Captain Reid with us, you see. Well, Captain Reid, he was a marvelous person. He worked his head off and he fought for us so badly, you know. There was lots of times when the Japanese would want a man to go to work when he was not fit and Captain Reid would fight, and fight, and fight, you see, and through his efforts a man was excused to work. So I mean to say, if it wasn't for that we'd have been much worse off. We were very fortunate, the camp I was in, AT-D in Tokyo.

I've talked to a lot of the boys that were in different camps to find out what their experiences were, you know. And I've talked to quite a few of them who had been in various camps,

and I've come to the conclusion that I was one of the lucky ones. We were in a very good camp, we had a very good [Japanese] adjutant. He could speak English. He was a rugger player and he had toured Canada with a rugger team. He had played against the New Zealand All Blacks he told us, but he was a peculiar sort of person. Every once in a while he'd have, they would call a meeting of a section leaders, of which I was one, and he'd sort of let his hair down and he would talk, and other times he would pretend he couldn't speak English. And he'd just sit there with a passive face behind his desk while we were being questioned by the interpreter and let on he didn't speak English. But he was very good in comparison to some.

It was so much different when we were moved up sent up north, different type of camp altogether. But we were very, very lucky in AT-D in that respect. Working conditions weren't too bad -- I was fortunate there too because I was only working with three other fellows, all young fellows from the Royal Rifles, and we got chosen to work in the carpenter shop. Our job mostly was going around cleaning off the benches and helping the younger (there was two of them) and there was one young fellow, we used to go around and when they were finished with their shift, they'd take these big planks that they had, you know, and throw them by the side and we would go around with a little two-wheel cart and pile them up and take them and pile them on the one spot, and take another bunch over to another place where they were going to start a new shift.

This little fellow was very, very good to us. He was a bit

of a rebel and I think he was kind of anti-Japanese, you know, sort of a rebel. And he used to take us to a place along the sea wall, a big concrete wall, you know, and they had sort of an opening inside. He had nailed some boards, 2X4's at each end and got these big long planks and put them down to make like bunks. He's take us in there and tell us to go and lie down. And every once in a while he'd give us a cigarette, you know, to smoke between us. Then he used to tell us that he was making a brazier or something. What do you call those things, those little stoves that you use in the house? He was making one of those at home, you know. He showed us a picture of his wife and his children -- they're great for that sort of stuff. And he was telling us about making this brazier at home and I asked him (we kind of conversed in half English, half Japanese, you know) how he did it and he was explaining to me how he used to take these parts -- because they were searched every night when they left -- all the workers were searched when they left the shipyard. He'd tell me how he used to put the stuff in here and wrap it around with this belly-band, and then he'd laugh and laugh and laugh. He thought that was the funniest thing, that he was fooling the bosses, you know. And he was so good to us, you know. So, as I say, in so many ways I was so very, very fortunate when I hear the stories at what some of the other boys had to put up with, you know.

C.G.R.:

How about your own health? Tell me about some of the health problems you had.

R.B.:

Well, while I was there, of course, I developed what they

called the "happy feet", you know, this hot-foot business. I guess it was all caused by this avitaminosis nonsense. Everybody had that. I had pleurisy, twice, when I was in AT-D; I had...

C.G.R.:

How did they treat that? What did they do about it? Did they have anything to do?

R.B.:

No. Where Captain Reid was, they had sort of a little cubicle built for Captain Reid for his office and outside there they had two or three, you know, with little strips of wood in between to separate the beds. They had a couple of rows of those set aside for the "hospital" and they put us in there. We'd just lie there, and in addition to the blanket we had we used to use our greatcoat as an extra covering. And all we got would be maybe a cup of hot water. And you know Captain Reid had to sign a chit to get hot water from the kitchen! And the cooks were told (we had our own boys working in the kitchen, of course) and he had to sign chits to get hot water, and then they would give us a cup of this hot water about every hour. We had our own medical sergeant and medical corporal with us too, you see -- Sergeant Mawson and Corporal Morgan of the Grenadiers, they were our medical people and they came with us.

C.G.R.:

What was the sergeant's name?

R.B.:

Earl Mawson, he died out in Vancouver a number of years ago -- and Corporal Red Morgan. I remember getting about half a cup

of sugar the time I had the jaundice. I had pleurisy twice. Of course I had dysentery, pellagra, beriberi.

C.G.R.:

All of the things that went with the....

R.B.:

Yes, with the territory.

C.G.R.:

You didn't get diphtheria?

R.B.:

No, I didn't. I was fortunate that way. We had no diphtheria in Japan, all our diphtheria was in Sham Shui Po camp. We had a very, very bad seizure of diphtheria in Sham Shui Po. I never could understand that, but this is what happened.

I had a terrible toothache when we were in [camp] 3D and I went to Captain Reid and I said, "Captain, is there anything you can do with that, it's driving me crazy." And he said, "What are you doing, Bob?" We had our water tap outside and the water was very, very cold because their weather is much similar to ours, a little milder of course, but in the winter time the weather is quite cool. I used to try and hold this cold water in my mouth. Anyway he told the camp commandant. So one day they came along with a guard and they took me down -- see this company that owned the shipyard, we were on hire to them, they had to feed us, all our food was supplied by them and all our goodies -- once in a while we got a little bit of something. See, the army hired us out to them. So they took me down to the company's hospital and this little character takes me downtown; we walked for miles down through the heart of Tokyo, I thought we were never going to get

there -- and the tramp, tramp, tramp -- and we got into this place. Oh, it was such a nice clean-looking place and all the nice dentist chairs and all the stuff, and I kept looking around -- everything was American, all American equipment. And the young dentist he starts drilling on me and I can't tell him to "pull it out, pull it out" and he kept drilling and drilling and then they got finished. He said something to the guard and away we went.

I had to go back -- I went back to him I don't know how many times, and every time I went back he would drill. Well I thought this son-of-a-gun is using me as a bloody guinea pig, you now. I wanted the darn thing extracted. I kept telling them to pull the damn thing out, you see, but he kept drilling. Then finally one day he starts sticking something in and he starts filling it with something, you see, and he put a cap on it and that was it. But you know there was one time I was in there and one of their workman was in there and he was in the next chair to me. And I don't know what they were doing, but one of the dentists (I suppose they're dentists), but anyway one of these fellows was holding a kind of little chisel thing on this fellow's mouth, you see, and the other one had (honest to God, Doctor), this was a real wooden mallet. It wasn't one of those little small things and they were bang, bang, bang. And I thought, "My God! That's the way they treat their own people!"

Well, you know, when we got to Guam, there was one evening we were sitting out in the outdoor theatre, the USO they were coming through to entertain us -- this was on our way home -- and

they had given us some peanut brittle. I'm sitting there chewing on this peanut brittle and this darn crack, this tooth had cracked and I said, "Oh boy!" I went back to the hut and went to the nurse and I told her what happened, so she said, "I'll tell you where the dentist lives, his office will be closed," so she gave me directions to get to his quarters.

Well, I went down there and I explained to him and he said, "Okay son," and we went back to his office. And he broke this tooth away and he started pulling out this floss stuff, and he says, "My God! Who did this." He kept pulling and pulling and pulling and pulling. There was yards of this stuff in there, and he said, "How...." So I told him what had happened. He said, "How the hell did he get all that stuff in there?" He says, "My God! It's impossible to get all this floss in one little hole," But that little bugger did it though! It was the funniest thing. Oh I had all kinds of humorous things happen to me, and those are the things I like to remember, you know. I try to put out of my mind the other part. I like to remember the humorous parts.

I remember one time, the day we were leaving Tokyo to go to Sendai. They marched us down to the railway station and they got us off the train, and then we had to wait for the other train to take us to Sendai. We're all sitting in this big waiting room, and I forget exactly what happened, but anyway, this Japanese officer who was in charge he jumped on me because apparently I was supposed to be in charge of this. I mean I was the senior, or at least I was the honcho because I was one of the section leaders. (See, what they did when we got there -- there was 500 of us -- they broke us up in sections of 50 and they asked

Captain Reid, they wanted 10 honchos so Captain Reid picked out the 10 senior NCOs, so I was honcho No. 9. So this little character he picked on me for something that somebody else had done, anyway. He kept ranting, you see, and I didn't know what the hell he was talking about. He came up to about here on me, you know [pointing to his mid-chest]. Then finally he looked like this "wait a minute", he walked over to the corner, he gets a box, brings over the box, he puts the box in front of me and then he stands on the box and he gets up in front of me so he would be taller than me, and then he starts in again. You know, the Japanese are funny. They have to work themselves up. They're not like us, they don't blow their cork instantaneously. They have to work themselves into it. But this little son-of-a-gun goes and gets this box so that he could stand on it so that he could look down on me, you know. They're funny.

C.G.R.:

There are several other questions. One of the things I wanted to ask about was sex. You had a lot of young men, reasonably healthy, at least for awhile; was there a lot of talk about sex? Did people think about sex? Did <u>you</u> think about sex?

R.B.:

Doctor, when we were -- I remember we would sit around AT-C, you know, at night and if somebody had a cigarette we'd pass one cigarette around maybe 5 or 6 or 7 of us, you know. One night, there was the same little crowd of us sat around, 6 or 7 of the boys in my own section, and we started off at the corner of Portage and Main and we started off with Charles' Restaurant and

we visited every restaurant and cafe from Portage and Main to Sherbrooke and Portage, crossed the street and came back again. And that's all we ever talked about was food. I don't remember ever hearing women ever being mentioned. All we ever talked about was food.

C.G.R.:

It's not surprising under the circumstances.

R.B.:

Yes, well, I mean to say everybody was hungry, but that's what we used to do, we'd just talk and some of the fellows used to get angry and say "Ah shut-up!" because some of the guys who had a little more will power than the others would tease the other fellows and say, "How would you like a nice great, big, juicy beef steak with onion," and stuff like that you see, and some of the other boys would, you know, get a little peeved.

You know another thing too I noticed, some of the fellows, I used to watch them -- I used to watch them -- I used to watch my boys and the fellows in my section very carefully because I felt I was responsible for them. And some of them would sit there and there was a few of them always wanted to be the last to be finished [eating]. They always wanted everybody else to finish before them, and I think the idea was that if they finished and if there was somebody else eating, they felt that they weren't getting their fair share, you know. But I remember this one night in particular, we sat around there and we visited every restaurant, cafe, eating-house all the way down Portage Avenue and all the way back again. And as I say, I can't recall ever, all the time I was in there, anyone ever talking about sex or

women, all they ever talked about was food.

C.G.R.:

What about homosexuality, before the war or during?

R.B.:

I never had any experience of it, I've never heard of any of it. I'd imagine if there had been any at all, it would have been in Jamaica probably. It could have happened perhaps in Fort Osborne Barracks, but to my knowledge I never heard anything. When we were in Jamaica, everybody pretty well had their own ways, and some of the boys had their own girlfriends, some of them went down to the red light district, you know, and so on. But I never heard at any time of any boys being that way, and I never heard of anybody being a "homo."

C.G.R.:

Interesting isn't it when there's so much talk about it now.

R.B.:

You know, it is a funny thing. I mean, apparently, I mean, I've come to the conclusion recently that it's more prevalent than we ever thought, but as so many coming out in the open now, you see, it's what they say it's "coming out of the closet." And apparently it means this thing has been sort of -- even the homos themselves didn't want to talk about it, but now they're not reticent at all, as a matter of fact, they seem to be rather proud of it, eh.

C.G.R.:

It's changed a lot.

R.B.:

That's right, it has changed a lot, and it seems to me that there is a lot more of it then we ever imagined, you know. But I've never heard of any in my experience in the army.

C.G.R.:

As you look back on this time, what do you think was the worst part of it for you? If you had to name one thing, what was the worst thing of the whole experience?

R.B.:

I think probably the worst, not exactly an experience per se, it was just the feeling that we weren't in touch with the people back home. I think what worried me probably more than anything else right from the start until I was able to send a wire home, was the fact that my people didn't know what happened to me, because they didn't know whether we were alive or not, and how we were getting along. I made a couple of broadcasts while I was in Japan. One of them got through as a matter of fact, and my mother and dad told me after I got back home. There was a chap somewhere in California who used to pick up a lot of these things on his short-wave and he picked up a broadcast of some of ours, including mine and he sent it to the City of Winnipeg Police Department. My mother and dad were sitting out on their veranda one evening and a cruiser car pulled up and this constable came out and said, "You're Mr. and Mrs. David Boyd?" And my dad says, "We are." "Do you have a son overseas in Hong Kong." "Yes." "There's a record. He made it."

C.G.R.:

How did that happen? How did you get to make a broadcast?

R.B.:

Well, the Japanese chose some of us to make this broadcast, see. And they told us that we were going to broadcast, we were going to do a broadcast. So (I forget how we were chosen), but there was about six of us, so I called them altogether and I said, "Look, we know what the idea is." I said, "For Heaven's sake, say you're being well treated or you'll never get through." This is the idea, it's propaganda, eh. We know damn well it's propaganda, so I says, "Now, you can say it in such a way that, you know, our folks back home will get the idea," you see. And I said, "Try and mention as many of the boys as possible." So what we did, we made up a list so that we wouldn't duplicate, you see. So I made up a list of boys because we knew our time would be limited, so I made up a list and I made sure that the other boys, that none of us had duplicates, and we would try to cover as many names as possible.

So they brought us into this place and I just said, "This is Staff Sergeant Bob Boyd of the Winnipeg Grenadiers speaking from a prisoner-of-war camp in Tokyo..." Like they kind of told you had a time just to be careful what we said. I said, "Speaking from POW in Tokyo, Japan. I am well, we are being well looked after. I said I'd like to say hello to my sister, she's a bright one.) I want to say hello to my sister Margaret. Tell mom and dad, and tell my brothers and sisters that the Japs are very good to us and we're being treated well. Be sure to tell Uncle Joe." Well my kid sister caught on (she told me after I got home), she caught on right away. (No, I said "Cousin Joe," I beg your pardon, cousin Joe, my cousin Joe Riverie in the marines.) There

used to be an old saying, you know, years ago when we were young -- "Tell it to the marines." And Margaret caught on right away, you see. So anyway, I went on and I said, "I was fortunate that I've got so-and-so with me," and I mentioned a bunch of names, and this is how the thing got through. because all the boys did the same thing, they all said that they were being treated well. You see, this is what the Japs wanted, they wanted propaganda. If we had said anything else, that thing would never have gone through, you see, and we realized this, so I told these fellows, I said, "This is strictly propaganda, so be damn careful what you say." So this is how it happened.

Now I can't recall just exactly when my mom and dad got that record, but it was quite late. But anyway, that would be their first inclination that I was still alive, you see.

But this is the thing that used to bother me more than anything else, was worrying, I was worrying about the folks back home because I knew that they were worrying about me. Other than that though, I can't recall any one particular instance that was any worse than the other. I've had my humorous moments there, I've had my bummers.

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I mean, the Japanese had a peculiar system of discipline and punishment. I was section leader of No. 9. Now even though I was in camp, I was unfit for work, I couldn't go to work even though I was in camp. If one of my boys at work did something wrong, the Japanese would call me up to the office and sometimes they'd slap me around for it. Lot of times it was really not bad, not vicious, grabbed me and slap me around a few times, but mostly -- the odd times, it all depends on who it was. Some of

them were really vicious, but mostly it was more or less a little token, eh. But the idea behind it was that I was supposed to go back and take it out -- you see, this is how they do it. And they could never understand why we didn't do that. And we couldn't convince them that we didn't do that way in the Canadian army, you see. But that was the idea.

I remember one time I really did get knocked flat on my ass. One of my boys -- Johnny Campbell, he was over in the hospital part and his greatcoat -- it wasn't his own greatcoat but it was a greatcoat because, I think, it was when we were in North Point they through in a whole bunch of clothing and dumped them in a heap and we just went over and helped ourselves, you see. And anyway, he got this greatcoat and the Japanese, whoever it was, the orderly sergeant took a look around and he saw this greatcoat with some holes in it, you see. So right off the bat they called me in to the commandant's office, you see. So I went over there, so this darn sergeant Shabata (I think it was Shabata, I'm pretty sure it was Shabata because he was the dirty one), he started yakking away. So then the camp commandant's behind the desk was passive, just like Buddha and the interpreter starts telling about Campbell's greatcoat having holes in it, you see, and should be fixed and all that sort of stuff. So I said, "That's made by shrapnel. Sgt. Shabata wouldn't know anything about shrapnel." Well the little son-of-a-gun couldn't speak much English, but apparently he could understand because he lifted one right from the floor and he got me fresh on the jawbone and I went "slam" right on my backside. Gee I got up, Oh, I don't know

how I ever held back [from hitting him].

But generally, I didn't get into that much trouble; as I say, most of the time it was just a little token. It was just nothing. The odd time there was one or two that were kind of vicious, but I mean most of them would just sort of, more or less of a token thing. But I mean, I've spoken to a lot of our fellows and they had a rough time, but for myself, I've always figured that I've been very, very fortunate. Fortunate in the camp I was in, fortunate in the type of work I had to do, and fortunate that we had our medical officer with us, particularly, I mean even though he didn't have very much to work with, we had more confidence in him even though he'd give us a cup of hot water and give us a pat on the back and say, "Okay boy" -- you know, we felt better for that then we would -- I mean, these damn Japs poke around at us, you know, poking you here and poking you there, just experimenting on us, you know. So that was all a big help to us.

C.G.R.:

Did you have any problem at all with what you might call "bad apples," in the camps? Our people, who were real troublemakers? Collaborating?

R.B.:

Not in my camp, no. I know we had one in particular -- I guess you'll hear about that from someone later on, fellow who got court-martialed. He was a great friend of mine before the war, but I never saw him from the time...the last time I saw him was at sometime when the war was still going on. He was a sergeant-major of a new company that started up. E Company, and

he brought in a Chinese 5th columnist that they caught signaling across the channel to the Japs on the mainland. Mark caught this fellow, so he brought him down to me and I said, "What the hell am I going to do with him?" he said, "Well, I don't know. I don't want him." So I said, "Okay." So I took him down to our base and his hands were tied of course, and so I got in touch with command headquarters downtown. So the next morning they sent a couple of MPs up and they took him away. So I asked the next morning, what happened to him. They said, "Ah, we took him out and shot the bugger." But that's the last time I saw Mark; I never saw him after that. He wasn't in the same camp as me, even in Hong Kong. And when we came back and I heard these stories about what had happened to him, I was quite surprised.

But we had no experience like that in my camp. We didn't have anybody at all that we would consider, no way at all would ever [collaborate].

C.G.R.:

How about your officers? Did you have good officers?

R.B.:

I thought we had very good officers. I mean, some of the boys said, well, he didn't like so-and-so. Well, you're going to get that no matter where you go.

C.G.R.:

There's bitching everywhere.

R.B.:

You know, and all kinds of voices -- didn't like some of their NCOs either, but that's only natural too. I mean I know

there's two or three of the guys that were NCOs that I didn't particularly care for. I didn't think they were doing their job properly, but that's -- everybody has a different way. I found our officers, by and large, to be a pretty damn good outfit. They were very, very good, they did the best they could under the circumstances. I though we had a bunch of damn good NCOs. We had a lot of NCOs that were well trained. A lot of them were ex-British officer personnel who had come out to this country, who had served in the British army in between wars and had come out to this country and then joined up in the militia, and they were very, very good. I though our officers -- I don't see how you could have found any better, they were a fine bunch of men, I thought. I could see nothing wrong with them, and I was in a position to know.

See, all of our fellows, of course, you talk to most of our fellows and they only came in contact with their own NCO and own officer, their own platoon sergeant, or their own company officers, their own company commander, and so on. Where I was in a position where I knew them all, I knew everybody. In the whole battalion I knew all the company commanders. As a matter of fact, I knew a great deal of our officers, we were on a first name basis when we were off parade -- on parade it was strictly 'Sir' and 'Staff', but off parade it was 'Bob' and 'Bill' because I had known a lot of these fellows in civilian life, eh. And I found them to be very, very good. Then, of course, you see, I had served in the militia and I had some damn good training in the militia and a lot of our officers that we had were in the militia too. We knew each other and we knew how to work together, which

is a big thing. I mean co-operation is a great thing and if you can't co-operate half the battle is lost, you see.

If you take a look at our record, you'll find that on a percentage basis, we lost more officers, our casualties were highest amongst officers, and secondly in NCOs. And if you went on a percentage basis, we lost a larger percent of officers than any other rank and our next ranks was NCOs, which goes to show you that our fellows were doing their job. I mean, they were in there first, they weren't standing behind and letting somebody else do the job. They were doing their job properly. That's the way I've always looked at it.

C.G.R.:

What do you think is the best book that's been written about it?

R.B.:

The what?

C.G.R.:

The best book.

R.B.:

Well, the best book I've read so far is this No Reason Why. I thought that was a rather good book. I've read others and I thought, well, it doesn't tell the whole story, too much -- I don't know. Some of the stories I've read (I haven't read that many), but the few that I have read, they don't sort of cover the whole story. Some of them dwell too much on what they've been told by one individual. Now I've been asked (I don't know how many times), I've been asked something like this thing here, to

give my impressions about so-and-so, and what do I think and all that. I was interviewed by another study some years ago for the Manitoba Museum on Man and Nature. It was on CBC radio and TV, and I tell everybody I speak to, "Look it. You could talk to a 100 men, you'll get a 100 different stories." I think I'm probably in a better position to talk about the entire picture, overall, then anybody because I could see from a long-range point of view, as well as close up to my own personal stuff. Well I said, "Look it, you talk to a 100 men, you're going to get a 100 different stories, because everybody could only think, can only tell you about what happened to him personally."

And so many things happened to so many different people, because we never fought as a complete unit, not as a complete battalion, not even as a complete company. Even our companies were split up into platoons and sections, and we had cases where we had men holding a position or trying to take a position with a bloody lance-corporal in charge. I know of two instances where a section had been cut down where there was only about a few men left and a private took over -- lost their officer, lost their NCO, out of touch with everything. Well, who's going to tell that story, except the people that were there. You don't know these things, you see.

C.G.R.:

This is exactly why I'm trying to talk to as many people as I can.

R.B.:

Well certainly, that's a marvelous idea, it's a marvelous idea because, as I said before, you can talk to a hundred

different people, and you're going to get a hundred different stories because everybody's got his own idea. It's only human nature that you are going to talk about the things that affect you, the things that you saw, the things that you went through. What happened to the other fellow you're not interested in, or you don't know about.

Now I've made it my business, for a number of years, especially after we first came home, to try and talk to as many of our boys as possible who were in different camps to find out and try to get a picture from them, you know, of what the conditions were in their particular camp. And that's why I've come to the conclusion that I consider myself very fortunate that the camp that I was in, we were pretty fortunate in comparison to some, you know. But as I say, I keep repeating this, talk to a hundred men, you're going to get a hundred different stories.

And I mean, it takes someone like yourself to get these stories and try to correlate them, kind of put them altogether and get one picture, you see. I've read a story (I forget who wrote the book), but anyway, half the story was on information that was given by one man. Well, one man couldn't start to tell the story of what happened to a battalion, of what happened to a platoon, let alone the whole issue, eh. And then, of course, as you now as well as I do, some people have a tendency to elaborate. I mean especially as the years -- you've heard the old saying "old soldier," and as the years go on our memories dim and to make up for our loss of memory, we manufacture things.

C.G.R.:

You don't have to be a soldier to do that.

R.B.:

Well, that's quite true too. We all do to a certain extent. I suppose that's right too, we all do that to a certain extent. It's too bad that we didn't have someone like yourself that could have done this 35, 40 years ago, because while these things were still fresh in our minds, that was the time to do it. I think if this had been done away back then, our people our veterans and our Association, wouldn't have had the hassle they've had over the years in getting what we figure was due us.

C.G.R.:

It would have made a difference.

R.B.:

It would have made a big difference. And right now it just seems to me that we're only beginning to get the recognition now that we should of had years ago. It's far, far too late, because the present generation right now, if you start talking about the war, they don't know whether you're talking about 1939 or the Boer War. Now what war were you in? Were you in the South African war or the first war? You know what I mean? The young people today, they have no idea and you can't blame them and I hope to hell they never have to learn first hand.

C.G.R.:

Well I've run out of questions. Is there anything else you can think of that we ought to talk about?

R.B.:

Well, not that I know of. I've enjoyed this very much, although it seems to me I've done a lot of talking and said

nothing.

C.G.R.:

No, you've done a lot of talking, but that's what I wanted, and you've said a lot. I appreciate it.

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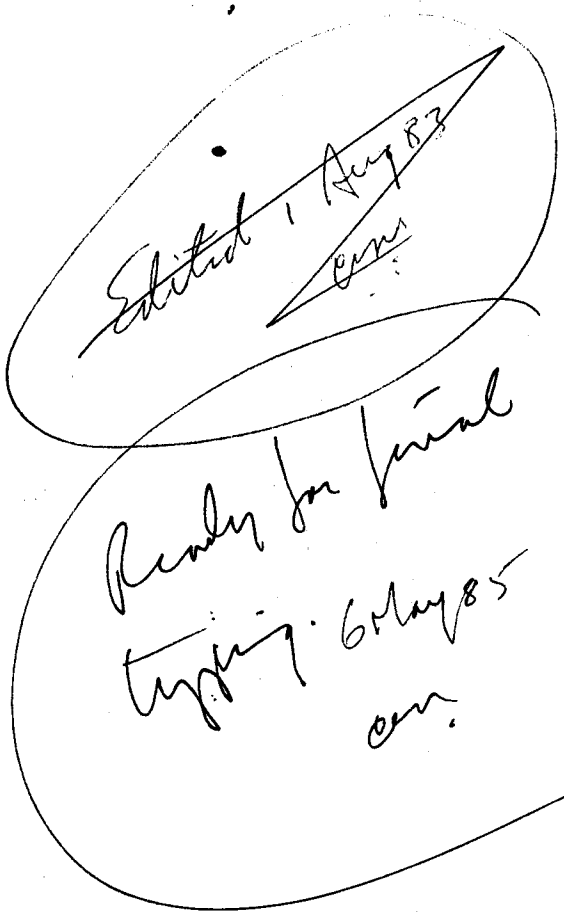

Mr. Robert Boyd

May 28, 1983

Deer Lodge Centre
Room 415
2109 Portage AVe.
Winnipeg, Manitoba

HCM 13-83

Charles G. Roland, M.D.:

Mr. Boyd, I wonder if you would tell me your full name, and your birthplace and birthdate?

Robert Boyd:

My full name is Robert Boyd. I was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland on the 4th of January, 1908. My mother brought me to this country when I was 18 months old. My father joined us one year later. I received my early education in Winnipeg. I should say I started my schooling in Winnipeg and shortly after the outbreak of the first war, my mother went back to Belfast because my grandfather wanted to see his Canadian grandchildren (I had a brother and two sisters born in the meantime) and he wanted to see them. He was getting rather old. We went back and when our 6 months was up and when my mother was making arrangements to come back to Canada, she was told she would have to wait until the war was over because of the submarine threat. My Dad, of course, was over in the services in the Canadian army. So we stayed over there and we didn't get back to Winnipeg until 1920. So I had a vacation for about 6 months. When my mother found out that she couldn't get back -- we had been living with various aunts and uncles because my mother comes from a very large family -- so when my mother found out that we couldn't get back for an indefinite period, she rented a home of her own and shipped me off to school. So I received three years of my schooling in Belfast. Then we arrived back in Canada, in Winnipeg, in 1920, and my father had found a house for us that was in West Kildonan. I went to Governor Semple School; We moved into Winnipeg and I went to Ralph Brown School, which was my favorite school. And from there I went to Lord Selkirk. I graduated from Lord Selkirk. I did one year of University of Manitoba and then I left and went into the business world. I worked for a short time with the Ashdown Hardware people, where I received my early training as an accountant. And then I left there and

R.B. cont'd:

went to the Canadian Pacific [Railway]. I stayed with the Canadian Pacific until the first of September, 1939 when I asked for leave of absence for the duration of the war, which I received. I was already in the militia prior to the war, of course, and I returned to work on the first of October, 1946. And I stayed with the Canadian Pacific until 1963, when I decided I was going to give myself a birthday present, when I was 55, and I retired at the age of 55 from the Canadian Pacific. Since then my wife and I did quite a lot of travelling in various parts of the world, ~~and~~ my wife died three years ago. And my doctors figured that I couldn't very well look after myself -- I tried it on my own, two or three times at various places, and I finally ended up in here as a permanent resident.

I might go back and say that I had decided to join the militia in 1933. I could see the war clouds gathering in Europe and I figured, well, I for one was going to be prepared, so I originally enlisted with the 10th Machine Gun Battalion here in Winnipeg, And in 1936 the Winnipeg Grenadiers took over -- we were amalgamated with the Winnipeg Grenadiers, and the Grenadiers were made Machine Gun Battalion for our brigade. And after taking a royal school and a B wing with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, on the first of September when our commanding officer notified us that we were mobilized for active service (I had the rank of sergeant), I enlisted on the first of September as a private and I was promoted back to my rank on the 2nd of September!

C.G.R.:

A nice short career as a private.

R.B.:

Yes.

C.G.R.:

Just before we get away, can I just ask you what were your parents' names?

R.B.:

My father's name was David. My mother's maiden name was Georgina Skeleton. (Skelton ?)

C.G.R.:

Very good. And your father did what?

R.B.:

My father arrived in Winnipeg -- he told me this story about arriving in Winnipeg and getting off the train in the CPR station in Winnipeg at 10 o'clock in the morning ~~and~~ it was one day in March, 1910, I believe it was and he was working the Canadian Pacific Railway at 2 o'clock that afternoon, and he stayed with them until he retired at 65. He ended up as foreman of the St. Boniface operation.

C.G.R.:

Oh yes. That's a responsible job.

R.B.:

Well, it was a rather responsible job. But my father didn't want me to work for the Canadian Pacific. I wanted to when I decided to go to work, and he said one's enough, he didn't go for that. So anyway, as I say, I got a job with Ashdown Hardware. ~~And~~ then when I went after a job at the CPR, my Dad knew nothing about it. I went to work one morning, I said good-bye to my mother and I went to work but instead of going to Ashdown's I went to the CPR and when I came home and at the supper table that evening and we're talking about how the day was, I said, well I told them I had a new job and they said, "Where are you?" And I said, "I'm with the CPR." My Dad near had a fit.

C.G.R.:

Were you married before the war?

R.B.:

No. We were going to get married in June of 1940, but when war came along I talked my fiancée into calling it off until it was all over. So I got

R.B. cont'd:

home on the 25th of October, 1945 and we were married on the first of December. As soon as I got back home we ~~were~~ got married.

C.G.R.:

Well, I assume you went off to the Caribbean with the Grenadiers?

R.B.:

Yes, I served in Jamaica with the Grenadiers, yes.

C.G.R.:

I don't want to get into that too much, because we can't spend enormous amounts of time, but one question that's come up that I'd like to ask you about. One of the other people I've interviewed mentioned that someone in camp, I think at Sham Shui Po, he thought was on dope, and he thought he'd started this in Jamaica. Was this a problem? Were people getting involved with dope in the Caribbean that you can recall?

R.B.:

No way, no way. I mean, I was in a position because shortly after we were mobilized for active service, I was doing recruiting [work] sergeant at our headquarters at 194 Main Street and a runner came down and told me the regimental sergeant-major wanted to see me. And when I went back to our quarters at Minto armoury he told me that the adjutant wanted to see me and when I saw the adjutant he told me I was being transferred from B Company to battalion headquarters, because they wanted me as an orderly room sergeant. After kicking up much of a fuss and seeing the commanding officer and so on, they convinced me I was of more use to the battalion as an orderly room sergeant on aceount of my back ground ~~problem~~ in civilian life. So I was stuck as orderly room sergeant and the commanding officer got me a promotion to staff sergeant. So I was a staff sergeant from, oh, early in 1939, and I was a staff sergeant when we went to Jamaica and I was in constant touch with the activities of the battalion, and I knew everything that

R.B. cont'd:

was going on. And I knew all the boys, I mean I knew all the boys, all the officers, all the NCO's, all the men pretty well by name, by sight, and while some of the boys got themselves into trouble, most of the problem the boys were getting into was drinking too much rum. But I have never in my experience ever heard of anybody being on dope in Jamaica. No way! That's the first time I've ever heard that story.

C.G.R.:

Well good. As soon as I heard it, I thought I knew the person to ask because I knew you would know. And as I say, this person wasn't accusing anybody, he didn't give me a name, he just said ~~see~~ he thought maybe this was the case. So I thought I would ask you.

R.B.:

I could understand some of them maybe getting into it in the short time we were in Hong Kong, although I don't know to my knowledge that anyone did. But while we were in Jamaica, I know of no one.

C.G.R.:

And if this person was on dope, maybe it did happen in Hong Kong.

R.B.:

It could have happened, but it could possibly have happened in Jamaica too. But as I say, I can't see how stuff like that was available in Jamaica.

C.G.R.:

Okay good. Well let's leap over to Hong Kong and maybe you'd tell me first ~~about of how~~ how did you find Hong Kong? What was your reaction to it? I realise you only had three weeks between arriving and the war starting.

R.B.:

Well, we didn't get much of a chance. I mean, when we arrived, naturally of course, the whole battalion ~~of course was~~, the whole brigade, the whole C Force ~~seaport~~

R.B. cont'd:

was naturally confined to barracks for three days while we went through sort of orientation -- lectures and so on. And then when they lifted the C.B. the boys went downtown and raised a little hell, as is normal, and then the war began for the regiment and we didn't get much of a chance to really get to know the place that well. I mean, we all had our own various ways -- some of the boys liked to go down and spend their time in these places where you could get girls and liquor and so on, but some of the boys preferred to go to some of the fancier places where you could get a good meal. Some of them preferred to go to to the dance halls. There was various -- I mean, every man to his own liking. The same as while you are in civilian life. You know what I mean. As I say, it was pretty hard to get to know in that such a short time before we were dragged over to the island to take up our defensive positions. So it was rather hard, but my first impressions of the place was that is was rather dreary, dismal place. Although I was downtown a couple of evenings and the night life didn't seem to be too bad. But as I say, my first impressions on our way up from the boat, from the ship to Sham Shui Po barracks, it looked to me like a rather dirty dismal place. But that's only first impression of course, because the streets were very, very narrow and dirty and so on. But, as I say, we never really got a chance to get out and explore the place like we did when we were in Jamaica for instance; We had lots of time -- well, we didn't have lots of time but we had sufficient time when we were off duty to get around a do a little visiting here and there, which we didn't have that opportunity in Hong Kong to really get out and see the surrounding districts.

C.G.R.:

Not in three weeks.

R.B.:

We were pretty well confined to the city of KOWLOON until we got over to the island and then we were confined pretty well to the city of Victoria, and

R.B. cont'd:

not very much of the city of Victoria because we spent most of our time in our defensive positions.

C.G.R.:

You were on the headquarters staff?

R.B.:

Yes. I was with battalion headquarters.

C.G.R.:

Battalion headquarters. And ~~were you~~ throughout the fighting, that's where you were?

R.B.:

Yes. The brigade headquarters where Brigadier Lawson was killed was Wong Nei Shong Gap, and the Grenadiers' headquarters, battalion headquarters was at Wan Chai Gap, which is some distance inland from there. We tried to keep our operations going from that point. It was rather hard because the way the things worked out, everybody got scattered and it turned out to be guerrilla warfare and there was no organization. There was no such thing as fighting in a battalion formation or a brigade formation. There wasn't even much fighting in a company formation. It was all done in platoons and sections, and it was very hard to keep in touch with one another. We were scattered all over the island. And the unfortunate part about it too, which has always been a sore point with the Canadians, is that they broke us up. Brigadier Lawson became the brigadier of what they called the West Brigade which included the Grenadiers and I believe it was the Royal Scots or the Middlesex, I'm not sure which one of the British battalions it was, and the Middlesex were under ~~was to~~ the command of the Eastern Brigade commander, you see. And we've always felt that the Canadians should have been kept together in the one brigade. It's been a sore point with most of us ever since. They broke the Canadians up -- one battalion in one brigade, and over again. And even at ~~Naming it~~ that wouldn't have made a difference because, as I say,

R.B. cont'd:

our A Company, for instance, didn't know where B Company was; B Company didn't know where C Company; D Company didn't know where -- you know, this is the way it was. And we at battalion headquarters, we had one hell of a time trying to figure out where anybody was, and we were doing the best we could to keep in touch with everybody, you see. And of course I was getting, the casualties were drifting into me because our doctor and medical staff were also there, and then I was forever getting orders to send men out to reinforce -- somebody would need half a dozen men and I had to pick out some of the fellows even though they were wounded, they were able to walk and I'd say, "Any you fellows want to go with so-and-so?" And these fellows would say, "Sure Staff, w[illegible] I'll go, what the hell," you know what I mean, that sort of stuff, you see. ~~And~~ quite often I took some of the boys out myself for a reconnaissance party when we had no other NCO's, when we had jobs to do and there was nobody else available. And I used to have quite some argument with my colonel, Colonel Sutcliffe, about let me go, because he kept telling me I was [not] expendable -- "No, ~~you~~ we can't afford to lose you," you see. And we got to the stage ~~right~~ for a matter of fact, toward the last week there I was actually acting adjutant. They ~~preferred to~~ were forever taking my adjutant away from me because he had to replace another officer who had been killed in action, and they were short of officers so they changed him to adjutant, so I never knew who my adjutant was. And most of the time I was acting strictly on my own without an officer at all. And it was one of those mixed up affairs that nobody seemed to know what the hell was going on. Everything was being played by ear.

Then, of course, our communications were knocked out. We had our own communcations, of course, our own signal staff -- Ed Norman -- and they were blown out so it was on the blink, and then the local telephone people, we lost that. I had one telephone in the battle box where I was situated all by myself. I had one boy from the Middlesex regiment and he had his right arm bandaged up.

R.B. cont'd:

I had another boy from the Royal Scots with his left arm bandaged up, it would take the two of them together to operate a hand grenade. And this is what I was left with for a long, long time, and then they finally took my phone away because they needed it some place else. I asked my acting adjutant at the time what I was going to do and he said, "You can set your [illegible] and cut out paper dolls." Now is the sort of stuff -- I mean, there was a lot of humour, which I guess was the only thing that kept a lot of us going was the humorous part of it, although there was some very, very sad situations because we'd begin to realise towards the end that we were fighting a losing cause. We realised it because there were no reinforcements. We ran out of ammunition, we ran out of water. I remember one time they brought up a tank, one of these old oil tanks and they had some water in it and we each got a little cup of water and you could taste the gasoline out of it, but it tasted like nectar to us. But this is the situation, you see, and we were just so badly disorganized because there were so many different jobs that had to be done in different places, because the Japanese had infiltrated in so many different places that we'd get the news about landing some place, we'd have to send somebody there, anybody that was the closest at hand, and as a result we were split up so badly that nobody knew where anybody was half the time.

C.G.R.:

Was did this confusion get any better after the surrender? You still had a lot of responsibilities.

R.B.:

Oh yes.

C.G.R.:

Tell me about that, especially as it relates to the medical things because, of course, that's what I'm really interested in.

R.B.:

Yes. After the surrender, I know the group that I was with, I ended up with quite a lot of us and they put us in a big large room. I believe it was a dormitory of some college or university there, and they marched us down to North Point Camp the following morning. ~~And~~ they left up pretty well along, they just drove in a couple of trucks and threw three or four bags of rice on the ground and left. And our fellows hadn't the foggiest idea how to cook rice, they just threw it in a big pot and cooked it up, you see, and it came out like paste ~~and~~ everybody was constipated for weeks on end. And the medical supplies were absolutely nill at that time. It got a little better afterwards when the Japanese started to sort us out. They left us pretty well alone but our own officers more or less -- we kind of got organized. We organized our own outfit along the same lines as thought we were still in Fort Osborne Barracks. I went to work and made up -- went around to all the camps and made up a roster of all the boys that were in there, got their names and then I started asking questions about who had seen so-and-so, you see. On the way down from the hills, one of our fellows (I wish I could remember that boy's name), he saw this parcel or something lying in the middle of the road, so he picked it up, he carried it down to the camp with him and when he got there he opened it up, and it was a portable typewriter and he brought it and gave it to me. He said, "Staff, maybe you can use this." I said, "By God, I could use it if I had some paper." So I went to the colonel and I said, "You know, sir," I told him about this. I said, "You know, if I had some paper that I could use," I said, "I'd like to go around and make up a list of all the boys that we got in camp and try to find out what happened to the others."* He said, "That's a splendid idea, Staff." So somehow he managed to scrounge up a lot of paper and some carbon paper and I went to work and I got around to all the boys, and made a list of all the boys we had, and I started asking them questions about those that were missing, you know. And I wouldn't take anybody's

* Copies of these lists are included in folder on Hong Kong.

R.B. cont'd:

word for it. I had to have three fellows that would actually swear that they saw a fellow being killed in action before I'd report him killed in action. So I went to work and I made up battalion orders, you see, showing the....

C.G.R.:

I think I've got copies of some of them right here that Harry [Atkinson] gave me.

R.B.:

Well I made those things up and Colonel Sutcliffe said to me one day, he said, you know, some of the boys started getting into trouble, so, as I say, we started to run the place much the same as when we were still in barracks, you see -- try to keep some organization going and so on. Some of the boys got themselves into trouble somehow or other, and their ~~sex? and~~ sections or whoever's in charge of their hut ran them in front of the officer and they took them in front to the colonel and he, in a very stern face, gave them 10 days forfeiture of pay or something. He said, "Do you think we should do these part 2 part to order?" And I said, "Yes sir." ~~and~~ so he says, "Now look," he says, "we know damn well that these things won't stand up if we ever get back to Canada." He says, "And we don't intend it to. The idea is the purpose of morale and discipline. If we can maintain discipline and keep the morale up, that's the idea. Let the boys feel that they're still in the army, they still have to obey their officers and NCO's." And he also said, "I'm going to have a talk with somebody later because one of these days the Japs are going to move all the officers out of the camp," and he says, "we want you fellows to make sure you look after the boys. That's our main concern -- look after the men."

So anyway, we started making out these ~~part to~~ Part 2 orders, and I had made up a list of all the fellows in camp and I went around to them all and I started asking questions about the boys that were missing. ~~And~~ I finally got enough information -- I mean, this was a long job, but actually it was a godsend

(What are Part 2 Orders?)

R.B. cont'd:

because it gave me something to do. Because you know it could be very, very boring as you can imagine, and I was kept busy doing that. So anyway, the commanding officer decided -- at the end of each hut there was a little room with a kind of a little partition, not all the way up the ceiling but a sort of a partition. And I don't know what the original idea of that was because that camp was originally used for Chinese refugees. But anyway, he gave me, in the number one hut, he said, "We're going to give this, put you in this room and we're going to consider this the orderly room, eh." And he said, " It's going to be your office as well as your living quarters." So I had all my stuff in there and I was kept pretty busy. As I say, I went around to all the fellows and I said, "You were with so-and-so," because I knew who knew who, like, because I knew the boys pretty well, especially the ones that were in Jamaica with me. And if I could get three men that would say "yes" they definitely saw so-and-so go missing or get killed then I'd report them so I made up a list of those that were killed in action.

In the meantime, Ken Porter who used to work with me in the orderly room in Jamaica before he got out, a very good friend of mine, he was in Bowen Road. And two or three of the boys from Bowen Road were being discharged and brought back to North Point, so Ken slipped one of these boys a note and a couple of packs of cigarettes and when this fellow came into the camp he said, "Staff, Sergeant Porter gave me this to give to you." And in this letter Ken had asked me to give these cigarettes to some pal of his in the camp (I can't remember who it was now), and then he enclosed a list of all the boys that were in Bowen Road Hospital.* Well that was great, because I was able then to go to work and make up another list and I put a little star opposite the names of those that were in Bowen Road Hospital. So then with the fellows that were going from North Point Camp to Bowen Road and from those that were going from Bowen

*Also on file.

R.B. cont'd:

Road back to North Point, Ken and I got sort of a little communication line going, you see. And we kept in touch with one another that way, keeping each other advised about who was where and what, you see. ~~And~~ then he would give me a list of anybody that was admitted, that they had lost in the meantime, I'd get a note saying that so-and-so who had been probably confined in some other part of the island had been admitted to Bowen Road Hospital, and so that was another name that was on my missing list. And then every once in a while, unfortunately, there'd be a name of two or three of the boys who died in the hospital, so of course, right off the bat, I'd put them on in my next set of orders showing them as died in Bowen Road Hospital on such-and-such a date for purposes of record. ~~And~~ if I remember correctly, I think I made four copies of those orders. I kept one, I gave one to Colonel Sutcliffe, one to Major Bailey, and I think Captain Golden had the fourth copy. The idea was that we were going to try and if any of us did get repatriated or managed to escape or something, we'd get back to Ottawa this information. But I managed to get one of these oil-skinned little bags, eh, and I wrapped all that stuff up in that and by golly, I kept that stuff all the way through. I had an awful time, you know, because every once in a while you never knew, especially when we got to Japan, when the Japs were going to hold a surprise search on us, ~~you know~~.

I remember one time in particular when we were in Tokyo ~~at~~ in Camp III-D, when they came in and I grabbed these things behind ~~onto~~ my back and I was standing with it behind my back, and when they came to me I slipped it to the fellow next to me and they passed this thing all the way down the line that way, and the Japs never caught on. But I managed to hang onto those and bring them back with me, and I kept them all down through the years. ~~And~~ two or three times I thought about turning them over to the [Hong Kong POW] Association and then finally not too long ago I mentioned to Harry and I said, "Harry, I like the Association to have

R.B. cont'd:

these just in the event that we might..." because the army and navy where we were holding our meetings promised us a little room of our own where we might have like a little museum where we might have some mementoes there, I thought we might be able to keep something like that in there. And Harry said, "I'm going to make copies of those and send them down because I think those should be the War Museum in Ottawa." He said, "And I think Colonel Stacey would like to have them." So I said, "Okay." So anyway, he went to work and got a bunch of copies made.

So anyway, that's the story behind all that. I mean, it was just the fact that one of these boys happened to find a typewriter and give it to me, and we were lucky enough to be able to get stationery and carbon paper that I was able to do this thing, you see.

C.G.R.:

Did any of the other copies survive, do you know?

R.B.:

I don't know. I couldn't tell you to this day just whatever happened to those copies. As a matter of fact, it never entered my mind -- [redacted] Colonel Sutcliffe died, you see, so I don't know what happened to his whether he gave them to Major Krist not or Colonel Krist who became our commanding officer. And I never thought of asking Major Bailey of course he's dead now too and Captain Golden, he's down in Ottawa. And I never thought of ever asking any of them whatever happened to their copy. It never dawned on me, you know. But I know I managed to hang onto mine and got them back home with me.

C.G.R.:

Good for you.

What about the medical officers?

R.B.:

Well we were fortunate, at least in the camp I was in, maybe I'm getting a little ahead of my story. But when we were shipped over to Japan, we were lucky enough to have our own (Captain Reid) our own medical officer with us. Now he was the only officer that left Hong Kong, you see, because they kept them all there. But there was about 500 Canadians, I think, on that first draft that went over there. They had built a special camp in just the outskirts of Tokyo for us and we were to work in the shipyards there, you see, and Captain Reid accompanied us. Well we were very fortunate in III-D in having our own medical officer, unfortunately he had nothing to work with. Now I remember I had pleurisy twice and John decided -- well there were different things wrong with me along with the rest of the boys -- but I remember at one time when we had jaundice, he prevailed upoin the commandant to let us have some sugar and they gave us a little, one of those little bowls that the Japanese used for their tea, a bowl of sugar, you see. Well of course what they did, they raided our Red Cross stuff, you see, because our Red Cross stuff was all packed up and they never give them to us, and this was probably bulk stuff, you see, which we never saw. The first Red Cross parcel we ever got we had to split one between three men. He [Reid] did the very best he could with what he had, you know, but that was better than nothing.

When we were in Sham Shui Po, we didn't do too badly because we still had Major Crawford [John] with us, you see, we still had Major Crawford, we had Captain Reid and the M.O....

C.G.R.:

Was there a Captain [Gordon] Gray?

R.B.:

I think it was Captain Gray with the Rifles.

C.G.R.:

And then there's someone by the name of [Dr. Martin] Banfill.

R.B.:

Banfill's the one, yes. Major Crawford was a brigade M.O.; Captain Reid was the Grenadiers' M.O.; and Captain Banfill was the Rifles' M.O., you see. And between the three of them, they managed to weedle some, a certain amount of supplies from the Japanese, so we didn't do too badly in that respect. But a lot of the supplies that the Japanese did supply them while we were in Sham Shui Po were substandard. I mean, they weren't, you know, some of their own stuff which at that time was not so good. But everything, of course, was in short supply, ~~and of course~~ the medical staff they worked their heads off, they worked day and night. But they were working against overwhelming odds. And, as I say, we were very fortunate, when the gang I was with ~~when we~~ went to Tokyo, we had Captain Reid with us, you see. Well Captain Reid, he was a marvelous person. He worked his head off and he fought for us so badly, you know. There was lots of times when the Japanese would want a man to go to work when he was not fit and Captain Reid would fight, and fight, and fight, you see, and through his efforts a man was excused to work. So I mean to say, if it wasn't for that we'd have been much worse off. We were very fortunate, the camp I was in, ~~in~~ III A-D ~~and~~ in Tokyo. I've talked to a lot of the boys since I've been back home, and I like to talk to some of the boys that were in different camps to find out what their experiences were, you know. And I've talked to quite a few of them who had been in various camps, and I've come to the conclusion that I was one of the lucky ones. We were in a very good camp, we had a very good [Japanese] adjutant. He could speak perfect English. He was a rugger player and he had toured Canada with a rugger team. He had played against the New Zealand All Blacks he told us, but he was a peculiar sort of person. Every once in a while he'd have, they would call a meeting of a section leaders, of which I was one, and he'd sort of let his hair down and he would talk, and other times he would pretend he couldn't speak English. And

R.B. cont'd:

he'd just sit there with a passive face behind his desk while we were being questioned by the interpreter and let on he didn't speak English. But he was very good in comparison to some. It was so much different when we were moved up sent up north, different type of camp altogether. But we were very, very lucky ~~in that~~ in A-III-D in that respect. Working conditions weren't too bad -- I was fortunate there too because I was only working with three other fellows, all ~~the~~ young fellows from the Royal Rifles, and we got chosen to work in the carpenter shop. ~~And~~ our job mostly was going around cleaning off the benches and helping the younger (there was two of them) and there was one young fellow, we used to go around and when they were finished with their shift, they'd take these big planks that they had, you know, and throw them by the side and we would go around with a little two-wheel cart and pile them up and take them and pile them on the one spot, and take another bunch over to another place where they were going to start a new shift. ~~And~~ this little fellow was very, very good to us. He was a bit of a rebel and I think he was kind of anti-Japanese, you know, sort of a rebel. And he used to take us a place along the sea wall, a big concrete wall, you know, and they had sort of like an opening inside ~~and~~ he had nailed some boards, 2x4's at each end and got these big long planks and put them down to make like bunks, he'd take us in there and tell us to go and lie down. And every once in a while he'd give us a cigarette, you know, to smoke between us. ~~And~~ then he used to tell us that he was making a brazier or something. What do you call those things, those little stoves that you use in the house? He was making one of those at home, you know. He showed us a picture of his wife and his children ~~and~~ they're great for that sort of stuff. And he was telling us about making this brazier at home and I asked him (we kind of conversed in half English, half Japanese, you know) how he did it and he was explaining to me how he used to take these parts -- because they were searched

R.B. cont'd:

every night when they left -- all the workers were searched when they left the shipyard. He'd tell me how he used to put the stuff in here and wrap it around with this belly-band, and then he'd laugh and laugh and laugh and he thought that was the funniest thing, that he was fooling the bosses, you know. And he was so good to us, you know. So, as I say, in so many ways I was so very, very fortunate when I hear the stories at what some of the other boys had to put up with, you know.

C.G.R.:

How about your own health? Tell me about some of the health problems you had.

R.B.:

Well, while I was there, of ocourse, I developed what they called the happy feet, you know, this hot-foot business. I guess it was all caused by this avitaminosis nonsense. Everybody had that. I had pleurisy, twice, when I was in III-D; I had...

C.G.R.:

How did they treat that? What did they do about it? Did they have anything to do?

R.B.:

No. Where Captain Reid was, they had sort of a little cubical built for Captain Reid for his office and outside there they had two or three, you know, where we used to sleep, just big long sheets of this sort of matting, you know, with little strips of wood in between to separate the beds. They had a couple of rows of those set aside for the hospital and they put us in there and we just lie there, and in addition to the blanket we had we used to use our great coat as an extra covering. And all we got would be maybe a cup of hot water. And you know Captain Reid had to sign a chit to get hot water from the kitchen! And the cooks were told (we had our own boys working in the kitchen, of course) and

R.B. cont'd:

he had to sign chits to get hot water, and then they would give us a cup of this hot water about every hour. We had our own medical sergeant and medical corporal with us too, you see -- Sergeant Mawson and Corporal Morgan of the Grenadiers, they were our medical people and they came with us.

C.G.R.:

What was the sergeant's name?

R.B.:

Earl Mawson, he died ~~up~~ out in Vancouver a number of years ago -- and Corporal Red Morgan. I remember getting about half a cup of sugar the time I had the jaundice. I had pleurisy twice. Of course I had dysentery, pellagra, beriberi.

C.G.R.:

All of the things that went with the...

R.B.:

Yes, with the territory.

C.G.R.:

You didn't get diphtheria?

R.B.:

No, I didn't. I was fortunate that way. We had no diphtheria in Japan, all our diphtheria was in Sham Shui Po camp. We had ~~it~~ a very, very bad seizure of diphtheria in Sham Shui Po. I never could understand that, but this is what happened.

I had a terrible toothache when we were in [camp] 3D and I went to Captain Reid and I said, "Captain, is there anything you can do with that, it's driving me crazy." And he said, "What are you doing, Bob?" ~~I said, "I'm..."~~ we had our water tap outside and the water was very, very cold because their weather is much similar to ours, a little milder of course, but in the winter time the weather is quite cool, ~~and~~ I used to try and hold this cold water in my mouth.

R.B. cont'd:

anyway he told the camp commandant. So one day they came along with a guard and they took me down -- see this company that owned the shipyard we were on hire to them, they had to feed us, all our food was supplied by them and all our goodies -- once in a while we got a little bit of something see, the army hired us out to them. So they took me down to the company's hospital and this little character takes me downtown; we walked for miles down through the heart of Tokyo, I thought we were never going to get there -- and the tramp, tramp, tramp and we got into this place. Oh, it was such a nice clean-looking place and all the nice dentist chairs and all the stuff and I kept looking around -- everything was American, all American equipment. And the young dentist he starts drilling on me and I can't tell him to pull it out, pull it out and he kept drilling and drilling and then they got finished. He said something to the guard and away we went and I had to go back -- I went back to him I don't know how many times, and every time I went back he would drill. Well I thought this son-of-a-gun is using me as a bloody guinea pig, you know. I wanted the darn thing extracted. I kept telling them to pull the damn thing out, you see, but he kept drilling. Then finally one day he starts sticking something in and he starts filling it with something, you see, and he put a cap on it and that was it. But you know there was one time I was in there and one of their workman was in there and he was in the next chair to me. And I don't know what they were doing, but one of the dentists (I suppose they're dentists), but anyway one of these fellows was holding a kind of little chisel thing on this fellow's mouth, you see, and the other one had (honest to God, Doctor), this was a real wooden mallet. It wasn't wasn't one of those little small things and they were bang, bang, bang. And I thought, "My God! That's the way they treat their own people!"

Well you know, when we got to Guam, there was one evening we were sitting

R.B. cont'd:

out in the outdoor theatre, the USO they were coming through to entertain us this was on our way home and they had given us some peanut brittle and I'm sitting there chewing on this peanut brittle and this darn crack, this tooth had cracked and I said "Oh boy!" and I went back to the hut and went to the nurse and I told her what happened, so she said, "I'll tell you where the dentist lives, his office will be closed," so she gave me directions to get to his quarters. Well I went down there and I explained to him and he said, "Okay son," and we went back to his office. And he broke this tooth away and he started pulling out this floss stuff and he says, "My God! Who did this." He kept pulling and pulling and pulling and pulling. There was yards of this stuff in there, and he said, "How the..." so I told him what had happened. He said, "How the hell did he get all that stuff in there?" He says, "My God! It's impossible to get all this floss in one little hole" but that little bugger did it though! It was the funniest thing. Oh I had all kinds of humorous thing happen to me, and those are the things I like to remember, you know. I try to put out of my mind the other part. I like to remember the humorous parts.

I remember one time, the day we were leaving Tokyo to go to Sendai. They marched us down to the railway station and they got us off the train, and then we had to wait for the other train to take us to Sendai. We're all sitting in this big waiting room, and I forget exactly what happened, but anyway, this Japanese officer who was in charge he jumped on me because apparently I was supposed to be in charge of this. I mean I was the senior, or at least I was the honcho because I was one of the section leaders. (See what they did when we got there there was 500 of us. They broke us up in sections of 50 and they asked Captain Reid for the, or they wanted 10 honchos so Captain Reid picked out the 10 senior NCO's, so I was honcho No. 9. So this little

R.B. cont'd:

character he picked on me for something that somebody else had done, anyway and he kept ranting, you see, and I didn't know what the hell he was talking about. He came up to about here on me, you know. [pointing to his mid-chest] Then finally he looked like this "wait a minute", he walked over to the corner, he gets a box, brings over the box, he puts the box in front of me and then he stands on the box and he gets up in front of me so he would be taller than me, and then he starts in again. You know, the Japanese are funny. They have to work themselves up. They're not like us, they don't blow their cork instantaneously. They have to work themselves up to it, and this is how they do it. They start off, and they just work themselves into it. But this little son-of-a-gun goes and gets this box so that he could stand on it so that he could look down on me, you know. They're funny.

Well Doc, I'm sorry. I'm doing a lot of talking and not telling you anything.

C.G.R.:

Oh, you are.

There are several other questions. One of the things I wanted to ask about was sex. You had a lot of young men ~~[illegible]~~ reasonably healthy, at least for awhile; was there a lot of talk about sex? Did people think about sex? Did you think about sex?

R.B.:

Doctor, when we were -- I remember we would sit ~~were~~ around III A-D, you know, at night and if somebody had a cigarette we'd pass one cigarette around maybe 5 or 6 or 7 of us, you know. One night there was the same little crowd of us sat around, 6 or 7 of the boys in my own section, and we started off at the corner of ~~40?~~ Portage and Main and we started off with Charles' Restaurant and we visited every restaurant and cafe from ~~Porridge~~ Portage and Main to Sherbrooke and ~~Porridge~~ Portage, crossed the street and came back again. And that's all we ever talked about was food. I

R.B. cont'd:

don't remember ever hearing women ever being mentioned. All we ever talked about was food.

C.G.R.:

It's not surprising under the circumstances.

R.B.:

Yes, well, I mean to say everybody was hungry, but that's what we used to do, we'd just talk, and some of the fellows used to get angry and say "Ah shut-up!" because some of the guys who had a little more will power than the others would tease the other fellows and say, "How would you like a nice great, big, juicy beef steak with onion," and stuff like that you see, and some of the other boys would, you know, get a little peeved.

You know another thing too I noticed, some of the fellows, I used to watch them I used to watch my boys and the fellows in my section very carefully because I felt I was responsible for them. And some of them would sit there and there was a few of them always wanted to be the last to be finished [eating]. They always wanted everybody else to finish before them, and I think the idea was that if they finished and if there was somebody else eating, they felt that they weren't getting their fair share, you know. But I remember this one night in particular, we sat around there and we visited every restaurant, cafe, eating-house all the way down ~~Porridge~~ Portage Avenue and all the way back again. And as I say, I can't recall ever, ~~and~~ all the time I was in there, anyone ever talking about sex or women, all they ever talked about was food.

C.G.R.:

What about homosexuality, before the war or during?

R.B.:

I never had any experience of it, I've never heard of any of it. I'd imagine if there had been any at all, it would have been in Jamaica probably.

R.B. cont'd:

It could have happened perhaps in Fort Osborne Barracks, but to my knowledge I never heard of anything. When we were in Jamaica, everybody pretty well had their own ways, and some of the boys had their own girlfriends, some of them went down to the red light district, you know, and so on. But I never heard at any time of any boys being that way, and I never heard of anybody being a Homo.

C.G.R.:

Interesting isn't it when there's so much talk about it now.

R.B.:

You know, it is a funny thing. I mean, apparently, I mean I've come to the conclusion recently that it's more prevalent than we ever thought, but as so many coming out in the open now, you see, it's what they say it's coming out of the closet. And apparently it means this thing has been sort of -- even the Homos themselves didn't want to talk about it, but now they're not reticent at all, as a matter of fact, they seem to be rather proud of it, eh.

C.G.R.:

It's changed a lot.

R.B.:

That's right, it has changed a lot, and it seems to me that there is a lot more of it then we ever imagined, you know. But I've never heard of any in my experience in the army.

C.G.R.:

As you look back on this time, what do you think was the worst part of it for you? If you had to name one thing, what was the worst thing of the whole experience?

R.B.:

I think probably the worst, not exactly an experience per se, it was

R.B. cont'd:

just the feeling that we weren't in touch with the people back home. I think what worried me probably more than anything else right from the very start until I was able to send a wire home, was the fact that my people didn't know what happened to me, because they didn't know, our folks back home didn't know whether we were living or dead. They knew that Hong Kong had fallen, but they didn't know. I mean, they had no casualty list, they didn't know who was -- so they didn't know whether we were alive or not, and how we were getting along. I made a couple of broadcasts while I was in Japan. One of them got through as a matter of fact, And my mother and dad told me after I got back home there was a chap somewhere in California who used to pick up a lot of these things on his shortwave and he picked up a broadcast of some of ours, including mine and he sent it to the City of Winnipeg Police Department. My mother and dad were sitting out on their veranda one evening and a cruiser car pulled up and this constable come out and said, "You're Mr. and Mrs. David Boyd?" And my dad says, "We are." "Do you have a son overseas in Hong Kong." "Yes." "There's a record. He made it."

C.G.R.:

How did that happen? How did you get to make a broadcast?

R.B.:

Well, the Japanese chose some of us to make this broadcast, see. And they told us that we were going to broadcast, we were going to do a broadcast. So (I forget how we were chosen), but there was about six of us, so I called them altogether and I said, "Look, we know what the idea is." I said, "For Heaven's sake, say you're being well treated or you'll never get through." This is the idea, it's propaganda, eh. We know damn well it's propaganda, so I says, "Now, you can say it in such a way that, you know, our folks back home will get the idea," you see. And I said, "Try and mention as many of the boys as possible."

R.B. cont'd:

So what we did, we made up a list so that we wouldn't duplicate, you see. So I made up a list of boys because we knew our time would be limited, so I made up a list and I made sure that the other boys, that none of us had duplicates, and we would try to cover as many names as possible.

So they brought us into this place and I just said, "This is Staff Sergeant Bob Boyd of the Winnipeg Grenadiers speaking from a prisoner-of-war camp in Tokyo..." Like they kind of told you had a time just to be careful what we said. I said, "Speaking from POW in Tokyo, Japan. I am well, we are being well looked after. I said I'd like to say hello to my sister Margaret, (Margaret's the smart one in the family, she's my youngest sister, she's a bright one.) I want to say hello to my sister Margaret. Tell mom and dad, and tell my brothers and sisters that the Japs are very good to us and we're being treated well. Be sure to tell Uncle Joe." Well my kid sister caught on (she told me after I got home), she caught on right away. (No, I said cousin Joe, I beg your pardon, cousin Joe, my cousin Joe Rivery [?] in the marines.) There used to be an old saying, you know, years ago when we were young -- "Tell it to the marines." And Margaret caught on right away, you see. So anyway, I went on and I said, "I was very fortunate that I've got so-and-so with me," and I mentioned a bunch of names, and this is how the thing got through. Because all the boys did the same thing, they all said that they were being treated well. You see, this is what the Japs wanted, they wanted propaganda. If we had said anything else, that thing would never have gone through, you see, and we realised this, so I told these fellows, I said, "This is strictly propaganda, so be damn careful what you say." So this is how it happened.

Name correct

Now I can't ~~just~~ recall just exactly when my mom and dad got that record, but it was quite late. But anyway, that would be their first inclination that I was still alive, you see.

But this is the thing that used to bother me more than anything else, was

R.B. cont'd:

worrying, I was worrying about the folks back home because I knew that they were worrying about me. Other than that though, ~~I mean,~~ I can't recall any one particular instance ~~where there~~ that was any worse than the other. I've had my humorous moments there, I've had my bummers. I mean, the Japanese had a peculiar system of discipline and punishment. Now I was section leader of No. 9. Now even though I was in camp, I was unfit for work, I couldn't go to work even though I was in camp. If one of my boys at work did something wrong, the Japanese would call me up to the office and sometimes they'd slap me around for it. Lot of times it was really not bad, not vicious, grabbed me and slap me around a few times, but mostly -- the odd times, it all depends on who it was. Some of them were really vicious, but mostly it was more or less a little token, eh. But the idea behind it was that I was supposed to go back and take it out -- you see, this is how they do it. And they could never understand why we didn't do that. And we couldn't convince them that we didn't do that way in the Canadian army, you see. But that was the idea.

I remember one time I really did get knocked flat on my ass. One of my boys -- Johnny Campbell, he was over in the hospital part and ~~the~~ his great coat -- it wasn't his own great coat but it was a great coat because, I think, it was when we were in North Point they brought in a whole bunch of clothing and dumped them in a heap and we just went over and helped ourselves, you see. And anyway, he got this great coat and the Japanese, whoever it was, the orderly sergeant took a look around and he saw this great coat with some holes in it, you see. So right off the bat they called me in to the commandant's office, you see. So I went over there, so this darn sergeant Shabata (I think it was Shabata, I'm pretty sure it was Shabata because he was the dirty one), he started yakking away, so then the camp commandant's behind his desk was passive, just like Buddha and the interpreter starts telling about Campbell's

R.B. cont'd:

great coat having holes in it, you see, and should be fixed and all that sort of stuff. So I said, "Mr. Yunganoki, those holes in Campbell's great coat are shrapnel." I said, "That's made by shrapnel. ~~S/A.~~ Sgt. Shabata wouldn't know anything about shrapnel." Well the little son-of-a=gun couldn't speak much English, but apparently he could understand because he lifted one right from the floor and he got me fresh on the jawbone and I went "slam" right on my backside. Gee I got up, Oh, I don't know how I ever ~~scuttled~~ held back [from hitting him].

But generally, I didn't get into that much trouble; ~~but~~ as I say, most of the time it was just a little token. It was just nothing. The odd time there was one or two that were kind of vicious, but I mean most of them would just sort of, more or less of a token thing. But I mean, I've spoken to a lot of our fellows and they had a rough time, but for myself, I've always figured that I've been very, very fortunate. Fortunate in the camp I was in, fortunate in the type of work I had to do, and fortunate that we had our own medical officer with us, particularly, I mean even though he didn't have very much to work with, we had more confidence in him even though he'd give us a cup of hot water and give us a pat on the back and say, "Okay boy," you know, we felt better for that then we would -- I mean, these damn Japs poke around at us, you know, poking you here and poking you there, just experimenting on us, you know. So that was all a big help to us.

C.G.R.:

Did you have any problem at all with what you might call "bad apples," in the camps? Our people who were real troublemakers? Collaborating?

R.B.:

Not in my camp, no. I know we had one in particular -- I guess you'll hear about that from some one later on fellow who ~~who probably~~ got courtmartialed. ~~But~~ he was a great friend of mine before the war, but I never saw him from the time...

R.B. cond'td:

the last time I saw him was at sometime when the war was still going on. He was a sergeant-major of a new company that started up, E Company, and he brought in a Chinese 5th colonist that they caught signalling across the channel to the Japs on the mainland. ~~They~~ Mark caught this fellow, so he brought him down to me and I said, "What the hell am I going to do with him?" He said, "Well, I don't know. I don't want him." So I said, "Okay." So I took him down to our base and his hands were tied of course, and so I got in touch with command headquarters downtown. So the next morning they sent a couple of M.P.'s up and they ~~said, "Well, where is he?"~~ took him away. So I asked the next morning, what happened to him. They said, "Ah, we took him out and shot the bugger." But that's the last time I saw Mark; I never saw him after that. He wasn't in the same camp as me, even in Hong Kong. And when we came back and I heard these stories about what had happened to him, I was quite surprised.

But we had no experience like that in my camp. We didn't have anybody at all that we would consider, no way at all would ever collaborate.

C.G.R.:

How about your officers? Did you have good officers?

R.B.:

I thought we had very good officers. I mean, some of the boys said, well, he didn't like so-and-so, well you're going to get that no matter where you go.

C.G.R.:

There's bitching everywhere.

R.B.:

You know, and ~~any~~ all kinds of voices -- didn't like some of ~~our~~ their NCO's either, but that's only natural too. I mean I know there's two or three of the guys that were NCO's that I didn't particularly care for. I didn't think they were doing their job properly, but that's everybody has a different way.

R.B. cont'd:

I found our officers, by and large, to be a pretty damn good outfit. They were very, very good, they did the best they could under the circumstances. I thought we had a bunch of damn good NCO's. We had a lot of NCO's that were well trained. A lot of them were ex-British officer personnel who had come out to this country, who had served in the British army in between wars and had come out to this country and then joined up in the militia, and they were very, very good. ~~And~~ I thought our officers -- I don't see how you could have found any better, they were a fine bunch of men, I thought. I could see nothing wrong with them, and I was in a position to know. See all of our fellows, of course, you talk to most of our fellows and they only came in contact with their own NCO and own officer, their own platoon sergeant, or their own company officers, their own company commander, and so on. Where I was in a position where I knew them all, I knew everybody. In the whole battalion I knew all the company commanders. As a matter of fact, I knew a great deal of our officers, we were on a first name basis when we were off parade -- on parade it was strictly 'sir' and 'staff', but off parade it was 'Bob,' and 'Jack,' and 'Bill,' because I had known a lot of these fellows in civilian life, eh. And I found them to be very, very good. Then of course, you see, I had served in the militia and I had some damn good training in the militia and a lot of our officers that we had were in the militia too. We knew each other and we knew how to work together, which is a big thing. I mean co-operation is a great thing and if you can't co-operate half the battle is lost, you see. ~~So I can't see --~~ if you take a look at our record, you'll find that on a percentage basis, we lost more officers, our casualties were highest amongst officers, and secondly in NCO's. And if you went on a percentage basis, we lost a larger percent of officers than any other rank and our next ranks was NCO's, which goes to show you that our fellows were doing their job. I mean, they were in ~~their~~ there first, they weren't standing behind and letting somebody else do the job. They were doing their job properly.

R.B. cont'd:

That's the way I've always looked at it.

C.G.R.:

What do you think is the best book that's been written about it?

R.B.:

The what?

C.G.R.:

The best book.

R.B.:

Well the best book I've read so far is this No Reason Why. I thought that was a rather good book. I've read others and I thought well it doesn't tell the whole story, too much -- I don't know. Some of the stories I've read (I haven't read that many), but the few that I have read, they don't sort of cover the whole story. Some of them dwell too much on what they've been told by one individual. Now I've been asked (I don't know how many times), I've been asked somthing like this thing here to give my impressions about so-and-so, and what do I think and all that. I was interviewed by another study some years ago for the Manitoba Museum on Man and Nature. It was on CBC radio and T.V., and I tell everybody I speak to, ~~them~~ "Look it. You could talk to a 100 men, you'll get a 100 different stories." ~~because~~ I think I'm probably in a better position to talk about the entire picture, overall, then anybody because I could see from a long-range point of view, as well as close up to my own personal stuff. Well I said, "Look it, you talk to a 100 men, you're going to get a 100 different stories, because everybody could only think, can only tell you about what happened to him personally." And so many things happened to so many different people, becasue we never fought as a complete unit, not as a complete battalion, not even as a complete company. Even our companies were split up into platoons and sections, and we had cases where we had men holding a position or trying to take a position with a ~~buddie~~ bloody lance-corporal in

R.B. cont'd:

charge. I know of two instances where ~~we had or~~ a section had been cut down where there was only about a few men left and a private took over -- lost their officer, lost their NCO, out of touch with everything. Well who's going to tell that story, except the people that were there. You don't know these things, you see.

C.G.R.:

Well this is exactly why I'm trying to talk to as many people as I can.

R.B.:

Well certainly, that's a marvelous idea, it's a marvelous idea because, as I said before, you can talk to a 100 different people, and you're going to get a 100 different stories because everybody's got ~~their~~ his own idea. It's only human nature that you are going to talk about the things that affect you, the things that you saw, the things that you went through. What happened to the other fellow you're not interested in, or you don't know about. Now I've made it my business, for a number of years, especially after we first came home, to try and talk to as many of our boys as possible who were in different camps to find out and try to get a picture from them, you know, of what the conditions were in their particular camp. And that's why I say I've come to the conclusion that I consider myself very fortunate that the camp that I was in, we were pretty fortunate in comparison to some, you know. But as I say, I keep repeating this, talk to a 100 men, you're going to get 100 different stories. And I mean it takes someone like yourself to get these stories and try to collate them, kind of put them altogether and get one picture, you see. I've read a story (I forget who wrote the book), but anyway, half the story was on information that was given by one man. Well one man couldn't start to tell the story of what happened to a battalion, of what happened to a platoon, let alone the whole issue, eh ~~because everybody --~~ and then, of course, as you know as well as I do, some people have a tendency to elaborate. I mean especially

R.B. cont'd:

as the years -- you've heard the old saying "old soldier," and as the years go on our memories dim and to make up for our loss of memory, we manufacture things.

C.G.R.:

You embroider things.

R.B.:

That's right, we do a little embroidery and elaborate on a lot of things, you know. I suppose that's human nature.

C.G.R.:

You don't have to be a soldier to do that.

R.B.:

Well, that's quite true too. We all do to a certain extent. I suppose that's right too, we all do that to a certain extend. It's too bad that we didn't have someone like yourself that could have done this 35, 40 years ago, because ~~when~~ while these things were still fresh in our minds, that was the time to do it. I think if this had been done away back then, our people our veterans and our Association, wouldn't ~~of~~ have had the hassle they've had over the years in getting what we figure was due us.

C.G.R.:

It would have made a difference.

R.B.:

It would have made a big difference. And right now it just seems to me that we're only beginning to get the recognition now that we should of had years ago ~~when~~ it's far, far too late, because the present generation right now, if you start talking about the war, they don't know whether you're talking about 1939 or the Boer War. Now what war were you in? Were you in the South African war or the first war? You know what I mean? The young people today, they have no idea and you can't blame them and I hope to hell they never have to learn first hand.

C.G.R.:

Well I've run out of questions. Is there anything else you can think of that we ought to talk about?

R.B.:

Well, not that I know of. I've enjoyed this very much, although it seems to me I've done a lot of talking and said nothing.

C.G.R.:

No, you've done a lot of talking, but that's what I wanted and you've said a lot. I appreciate it.