

Transcription

Tape 01

01:00:36:00

All right Frank if we could start with an overview of your life story from go to whoa.

Where do you want to start from?

I would like to start from where you were born and growing up.

Well, born in Paddington Sydney 1st October 1919. Don't remember much about that.

How about growing up?

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Growing up in Paddington or 'Paddo' as we called it. And playing cricket in the back lane, hockey and all those sorts of things as we did then - made our fun really. Went to school at Christian Brothers Edgecliffe up till about 6th class I think. And then I don't what it is now or equivalent and then secondary school at the Marist

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Brothers at the High School at Darlinghurst. I went to the intermediate standard and then looked around for a job which were very hard to get. Just after the Great Depression time those years. Finally got a job at Wynn's Retailers Store in Oxford Street for a little while during the busy period over Christmas and from there

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got a cleaning job at, where was that, at Market Street, Westinghouse Sales and Rosebery I think it was called and from there started in the Water Board. So I started there in 1936 on the clerical side and was with the Water Board until I was called up, just prior to the war breaking out in 1939.

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When the navy was mobilized prior to the war in August '39 I was in the Reserve force, Naval Reservist and we were mobilized at the same time. I remember being down at the Naval Depot at Rushcutters Bay one drill night, quite a few of us down there to get our pay, it was pay night, and we got 30 shillings or 30 bob for a month's

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course down there doing a bit of seamanship and training. So they said well you've been mobilized and they said set number, they didn't mess around. This batch here naming them off HMAS Australia tomorrow morning 0730, this batch [HMAS] Darwin tomorrow morning at the same time so they went through the whole squad. And we were

assigned to guard duty up on the Newington Naval Magazine on the Parramatta River.

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It was a pretty big munition dump there, they had torpedo warheads, 6?, 8? ammunition, if that had of gone up half Sydney would have gone up ? it was a huge place. So we were there for about 6 weeks I think ? 6 or 7 weeks ? and then they took us to Garden Island and we were assigned as the pre-commissioning crew of the [HMAS] Westralia

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which was a ? to be a - converted merchant cruiser. Used to be on the interstate run. That was in Cockatoo Dock that they were doing the conversion so were on that in amongst the workmen there with oxy acetylene ? it was in a mess. But finally they put 6? guns on it and a couple of anti-aircraft guns and I think that was commissioned round about

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January, February 1940 and we did a shake down cruise to Melbourne. I know some of the - a couple of the dockyard fellas were still on board ? they must have been having a little bit of a sleep and they were in this after steering position on the stern. And just under on the top of that there was a 6? gun.

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So when we had a shake down cruise and had a bit of firing practice these fellas come streaming out ? they'd busted their eardrums ? there was blood running down their ears. They were directly under the 6? gun. So they woke up to loud bangs and concussion so I think they ended up with concussion. But from that shake down cruise a few of the blokes were seasick their first trip out to sea. I was fortunate enough not to be seasick

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And going around Gabo [Island] or Wilson's Promontory ? pretty rough going around there ? they were 30 foot waves breaking over the bridge ? so it was a really good shake down cruise for us. From there were dispatched up to Darwin and that was our port of call for about 2 months I think and we had to then

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before the Dutch came into the war it was, early '40, there were some German ships in the ports there the Makassar [Strait] and the Celebes so we did a round trip of Borneo and the Celebes for 6 weeks we were out to sea just doing the trip around outside the 3 mile limit. So they had bottled these German ships up and after 6 weeks at sea everyone was a bit snarly at one another

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6 weeks at sea and we came out of Darwin I think it was on a Sunday ? pretty hot and there was no cold beer on so we were drinking warm beer, so of course that combined with a few other things the Darwin mobile patrol was up there at the time, they'd been stationed there for a few months, and of course getting into the pub and out again

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things were a little bit dicey for a while so there were more blues [fights] than enough, fellas were coming back with broken arms, being carried on board on stretchers, so it was really a look see at what was happening. From there were were tran? - where did we go from there ? over to Colombo that's right. We were on the station in Colombo for the rest of that year.

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Colombo, Bombay, down to Mauritius doing patrol work and convoy work, boarded a couple of ships that they put a boarding party on and took them to Singapore and a couple of other convoys ? we went as far as Aden I think it was and then the British destroyers took over from there. We were coming back at the end of 1940, December ?40

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we were in Colombo Harbour when [HMAS] Perth came through from Australia on its way over to the Middle East. So the brother was on there at the time, he'd been on there since 1939 so I had a chance to go over and have a yarn with him as we were going back home and they were going over to the Med [Mediterranean] so we came back to Australia about January, end of January I think it was, '41 and we were on

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draft then to N Class destroyers as they called them. We were lined up to go to Portsmouth over in England and be the crew on some of these N Class destroyers so we got pre-embarkation leave and the uncle who'd come from over in England he gave me a few addresses to go see some of his relatives and armed with that I thought right we're on our way over to Portsmouth so we got back on board, I think [HMAS] Kuttabul

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at the time the one that was sunk by the Jap midget subs later on and anyway we were there for about 2 weeks and nothing happened. We were to go on an old 4 bastard Ceramic I think it was called, the name of the ship. So they sent us ashore again so we got another week's leave, we're going well, we thought this is good. So then it came about after another couple of weeks the Ceramic had been torpedoed off

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South Africa so that scrubbed the draft to N Class destroyers. So they put another batch in from Flinders Naval Depot so then we were transferred from there to, 6 of us I think, to the diving party, looking after the divers going down on the ships that had been degauss the degaussing gear as they called it. An anti magnetic mine ? it was a strip

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that they put around the outline of the ship, on the surface of the ship. We did that at Chowder Bay. From there I was quartermaster on the ASDIC [Anti-Submarine Detection Investigation Committee - Sonar] school, anti-submarine school at Rushcutters Bay. And then I think that was in August '41 and I'd just come off watch one morning, pretty cold morning in August, and living at Paddington it wasn't far from Rushcutters Bay and used to walk home

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and as I was going out the gate at the depot I saw this ship coming up the harbour and I had another look at it I thought I recognize that, it was the Perth on its return from the Mediterranean. My brother was still on it and I thought, ?He'd get out in the stream.? and I thought I'll go home and tell the parents you know and we'll have joyous reunion today with the brother coming home. Little did we know that 6 months later it was going to be a

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not a joyous one it was going to be a sad one. But anyway at that time it was a joyous reunion and we got together and had a good time and Perth went in for a much needed refit and then we were, and after that we were sent on convoy duties in the Pacific, patrol duties, escorted the USS Pensacola I think it was from Auckland to Moreton Bay

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we brought that in, and we took the first batch of diggers up to Port Moresby. Included in that lot were CMF [Citizens Military Force] fellas, militias, militia blokes, and they were the ones who stopped the Nips or the Japs until

reinforcements arrived. They were poorly equipped, and they didn't have that much training either but they stopped them. They cracked Japanese troops

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until the 7th Divvy [7th Division, AIF] reinforced them later on in 1941. But from there we were then dispatched to Perth was dispatched to Melbourne, [HMAS] Sydney had been sunk in the Indian Ocean in the November and we were sent around to Fremantle and I think we took the place of the [HMAS] Canberra, the 8? cruiser

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as to go up to Java, which we thought at the time was a 8? cruiser going up there fair enough, we were 6? Perth, but they had turbo trouble so I think we were the ones that took their place and we left Fremantle with a convoy of Dutch ships to go up Surabaya or Batavia so we up to near Broome when we were ordered back to

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Fremantle, got back to Fremantle a couple of days we took the same convoy got as far as Port Hedland I think it was and they said back to Fremantle again. By this Singapore had just about fallen. When we departed the next time I think it was on the 13th of Feb, no it wasn't, it was a minute after midnight ? sailor's superstition ? we didn't sail on the 13th we sailed on the 14th. Didn't do us much good

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and we went on up to Java by ourselves this time, no convoy. We thought this doesn't sound too good. So we went through the Sunda Strait and went to Tanjung Priok, the port of Batavia or Jakarta as it is now called. We were stationed there and joined the ABDA force American, British, Dutch and Australian

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hastily formed fleet really, it was pretty on paper, it sounded pretty good, 5 cruisers and 9 destroyers there was Exeter 8? cruiser, HMS Exeter of the Graf Spee fame, USS Houston, American 8? cruiser heavy cruiser with the after charge out of action due to a previous air-raid which killed a few of their

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crew there ? about 30 I think - and the 2 6? Dutch cruisers the De Ruyter and Java. The De Ruyter was the flagship of Admiral Doorman and Perth 6? and the 3 RN [Royal Navy] destroyers, 2 Dutch destroyers that's right, yes, and 4 vintage class 4-stack 1917-18 vintage I think they were, US

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destroyers and we went out to meet the Japanese invasion fleet but we didn't have any air cover which was vital out there, no air cover. This was why the [HMS] Prince of Wales and Repulse was sunk off Singapore, no air cover. The Japs just moved in with their dive-bombers and torpedo bombers and tipped the two battleships over ? terrible loss that lot. You know, of course that was the King

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George V as a modern battleship [probably means Prince of Wales as King George V was not present and never sunk] ? that was a heavy loss so without air cover the communication between our ships left a lot to be desired because of Dutch command and American and British and Australian. So we were at a disadvantage there and we finally met up with the Japs, which was an equal force of Jap ships off Bawean Island just north

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of Surabaya and that was on the 27th February '42 and it was about mid afternoon 4 o'clock in the afternoon when we commenced firing, we didn't because 6? was out of range of the 8? heavy cruisers, we were sitting ducks for a while there were straddled as they called it up from the 8? heavy Jap cruisers

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they were pretty close, say 100 yards short or more of the salvo and they would correct that and due to the skill of our skipper Hec [Hector] Waller, Captain Waller, he headed into the fall of shot each time, they corrected and went over, you could hear the whining the shells going through the rigging almost, and that happened about 6 times. But we got out of that without being hit. The Exeter was hit in the boiler room in forward

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boiler room and had to retire from the scene of battle because her speed was reduced to about half say about 15 knots or even less. So we lost an 8? cruiser early in the battle, the Kortenaer - Dutch destroyer that was hit with a torpedo at midships. I was on the 4? gun deck at the time on the Perth and it was just astern of us as we swung around as it was coming astern of us and it just jack-knifed

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and went down in about 2 minutes, and took most of the crew with her and our destroyers moved in to counter a torpedo attack by the Jap destroyers and I think the Electra was hit or one of the British destroyers and the battle continued on and off until dusk when visibility was pretty low at the time with the gun fire and the smoke

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and dusk coming on. It broke off for about half an hour or an hour and resumed in the night time and lasted til about midnight ? so about an 8 hour battle. For a naval ship it was a pretty long battle. Somebody said that one of the historians said that it was one of the biggest naval between surface ships since the Battle of Jutland in the First World War. Well, our ammunition was pretty low at the time

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after 8 hours firing and also the Houston. So the Japs then used, from their cruisers, the long range torpedoes, they were called the lance I think, the lance torpedoes and they were driven by oxygen, you couldn't see much of the white of the bubbles like our torpedoes ? they were superior to ours at the time and they were bigger, they were huge. So they used these to great effect from

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a distance, maybe 6 miles or 7 miles they let ?em go and the De Ruyter the flagship 6? Dutch cruiser was in the lead, that got hit with a torpedo and exploded in a sheet of flame, we were following the Java I think at the time, the Java was hit some little time later by a torpedo. We were coming up fast astern and we had to take

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swift action to avoid colliding with it and also the Houston astern of us was coming up quickly too and so we had to take evasive action to miss it and the two cruisers and the Java. So we got out of it without being hit and then Captain Waller who was senior to [the captain of] Houston under his command and he had the then 6?

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Perth undamaged and the damaged Houston and we made a feint as though going toward Surabaya to throw the Japs off then headed back at full speed to Batavia, that's right, to Tanjong Priok. We got there the following afternoon at about 2 o'clock I think to refuel which was interrupted by an air-raid and the natives just went through

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and I don't blame them and we continued refuelling after the raid was finished. We couldn't get any 6? ammo and the Houston was in the same plight, no 8? ammo, so we were pretty light on ammunition when we sailed that evening at about 7 o'clock to get through the straits, Sunda Strait, but we had reconnaissance reports that the Sunda Strait was clear of enemy shipping.

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It wasn't a very good report because we arrived at the entrance to the strait about 11 o'clock and we sighted a ship frying on the starboard bow and we signalled and we thought it was one of our corvettes. The skipper, just after we left Tanjong Priok going before my story, spoke to the crew over the loud speaker said

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that we are heading toward the strait and we don't expect to meet any enemy force there is a report that the Japanese convoy is heading in the opposite direction to what we're taking. I thought, oh you beaut, we're right. They were heading in the opposite direction, they were coming down the Strait as we were going into it and this ship that we signalled, the Challis turned out to be a Jap destroyer. So the battle of Sunda

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Strait opened up at about 11 o'clock and only lasted about an hour to an hour and a half we were engaging what turned out to be the Japanese western invasion fleet of Java. At least 4 cruisers, 9 or 10 destroyers in this other torpedo batch whatever, so there were the 2 of us low on ammunition and ringed by these destroyers.

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At one stage they came, we could see the Jap gunners from about 3000 yards away. They opened up with their search lights on us and we put those out with our short range weapons but then according to Jap sources they let go or fired 87 torpedoes at the 2 ships Houston and Perth, so they had to hit a few of them which they did. But didn't get a hit until

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after the battle started. We were out of ammunition at that time, this was signalled to the skipper was informed and then we decided or he decided to head the ship through the strait. We had just picked up speed of about 30 knots, almost full speed, when the first torpedo hit the starboard boiler room, the forward boiler room and wiped

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out all the crew there. And it almost lifted the ship out of the water, we're doing 30 knots, 7,000 ton ship and the force of that torpedo. I was on the upper deck and I was thrown off my feet and a few of the others were too. It lifted the ship up momentarily and as it settled back again and the heat from the torpedo blast was like opening a furnace door as it swept down the upper deck. Well that reduced speed to about 10

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knots and after that it was just a matter of time. The second torpedo hit up forward, we got numerous hits from the shellfire, I think the forward stack was knocked out and from the shrapnel there a lot of the fellas on the signal deck were killed or wounded. The starboard pom-pom had received a direct hit and also A turret

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and then after the second torpedo hit the order came through to abandon ship. It was useless then and then another torpedo hit on the port side. I went down to the quarterdeck to go over. I had a pair of sandals on it was just instinctive I just kicked them off you know take your boots or shoes off when you go into the water and as I was doing the fella next to me said, "Aren't you going over?" There were still shells

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coming over and explosions in the water and I said, "Yeah, as soon as I kick these off?". I had my Mae West slightly, the Mae West was the, you might of heard of it, the Mae West, it was a life jacket that you partially blew up, fitted across your chest, and named after that buxom actress Mae West. As I went over the side I thought, "I'm clear of everything,

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clear of the fellas in the water." and the next minute I was sucked under the ship because one of the screws was still slowly turning and as I came down under the stern of the ship I could see these huge blades coming down lit up by the phosphorous in the water and I said my last prayer there I think, and then the next one up, heard the swish as it went down, then I was dragged in and tumbled around like in a giant washing machine and then shot

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aft, terrific speed from that slowly turning propeller, and I ended up surfacing about 200 yards from the ship almost out of the water so I looked back and saw the ship just drifting away and a few other blokes in the water and I called out, so we got on to a Carley float from our ship, the Carley float was damaged by shell fire in one corner but it was still OK, still floatable,

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there might have been about a dozen of us on that. From there we floated around for a while trying dodge the Jap destroyers that we heard chugging up and down the Strait and then from there we got on to a lifeboat which was almost under water, it was off one the Jap transports and we baled

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that out and got into that. But Perth by that time was lit by the searchlights from the Jap destroyers and was just slowly sinking by the bow, as she went down gathered speed and just went beneath the water, you know you looked at it and that was your home for so long, and thought, Jeez, it was like what you might call a sinking feeling as you saw it go down. Anyway the water wasn't cold; it was warm in the water. We got into this lifeboat and

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covered in oil fuel. We headed towards what we thought was the coastline was still just early morning, pre-dawn, and still with the current so strong we weren't making much headway. There was a tattered sail in the boat that we saw and we thought that might be handy, we had great thoughts about we sail this and make our way to Australia but

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this didn't happen. About mid morning, it was coming up pretty hot by that time, the shoreline was still quite a distance away and we were rowing a bit and we were pretty tired by this time and exhausted after 2 or 3 days closed up at action stations so we were still making progress a little bit, a little bit at a time and there was a Jap destroyer on the

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other side of the Strait which was just patrolling up and down and we saw it peel off and head towards us and I thought, 'Oh yes, we'll keep rowing anyway.' As it moved nearer to us a few hundred yards away, the skipper came down on the fo'c'sle through a loud hailer and yelled out to stop in English. I thought, 'Oh bugger you, you

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know, we'll keep going.' so we kept rowing. With the shoreline a few hundred yards away a Jap destroyer a few hundred yards that way so we kept rowing. Then they trained a forward gun on us, it was a 5.9 you know. So looking down the barrel from about 500 yards away or less, at that 5.9 gun there wasn't much future in that so the order came through to stop so we were cowards, we stopped.

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And then they said again, follow us out, which we did, they took us on board, had to discard all our clothing, it was covered in oil fuel, but they were alright on the destroyer, they gave us kerosene, cotton waste to clear our eyes out of the oil fuel and ears, some of the fellows blinded by it, the hair was matted we were just like painted you know, we were black. And then they picked up a few more of the fellows

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floating around on bits of planks or whatever, they were exhausted too, so we dragged them on board and the destroyer then gave us water and explained the situation with regard to their rationing of water. These fellows were British trained originally, the navy, the Jap Navy, whereas the army I think was German trained.

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Anyway they were quite OK on the destroyer. Then from there they took us to a transport, Japanese transport, Somdong Maru and there were a few Yanks there off the Houston and 30 or 40 of us I think off the Perth and we were on there for about a week. We were not treated too badly there and then we were

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taken ashore. I think the Jap, going before my story, the Jap destroyer captain spoke fairly good English and said that you would now be handed over as prisoners of war I would say to the Japanese Imperial Army, more or less apologizing that we were going to be handed over to the Jap Army as prisoners of war. So as it was we were taken ashore

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at a place called Merak in Western Java and it was an embarkation point for the ferry service over to Sumatra. So we just had Jap g-strings on, underpants at that time, a bit of string and a piece of cloth about that long and about that wide which you put underneath and lapped it over, like a lap-lap, so that's all we had for the next 6 weeks. Anyway we were brought

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ashore, lined up in front of this waiting shed, made to squat down, and as we looked up there was a Jap army officer with two machine guns in the enfilade position on either side just pointing at us and he explained to us that we were POWs [prisoners of war] in broken English and, 'If you try to escape you will be shot.' Oh yeah, what chance have we got of escaping you know. So we were there for about an hour or so squatting in the sun

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while they made up their minds what to do with us and I just glanced around, the waiting shed was just like a normal waiting shed here, I looked around and looked back again, I thought what did I see, so I looked again. So there was a poster stuck to the wall of the waiting shed, pretty big poster, and had a painting or a photo of the Three Sisters in the Blue Mountains so I said

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jeez, and in a caption in Dutch and also in Indonesian and English it said, 'Come to sunny New South Wales'. I thought, 'Oh jeez, wouldn't I like to be there now!?' so we weren't allowed to speak to one another so I just nudged the bloke next to me. I just indicated, 'Have a look at this.' When he looked at it he couldn't believe his eyes 'Come to sunny New South Wales' oh it can't be true. So from there we were just loaded into trucks and

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taken off to this place, Serang I think the natives called it, a native village. That was a dreadful place, we were stuck in the local cinema that they used just to house the prisoners and there were hundreds in there already taken prisoner when we got there. It was

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like a tile floor, no seats, and you just had to squat one behind the other down the main aisle leading down on either side, we were in rows with Jap machine guns on either side of the projection room, and the guards on either door and at the entrance and we soon learnt there that we had to salute the Japanese from the officer right down to the lowest private

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and very forcibly we were told we had to salute and if we didn't we just got a bashing, be it with a rifle butt or with the fist, so we were there for about 6 weeks and our meal in the morning, we thought these Japs only have 2 meals a day so you know, we had a tenko in the morning, a tenko is the muster

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and they're hopeless at counting, they were just hopeless, they would come down and this row they'd number, 'Ichi ni san chi.' then the next row, the next row, right down to the stage and then they'd do it for the other side. That might go on for an hour or an hour and a half. There we are crossed legged just sitting there. After about a week of this

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everybody, oh yes a bowl of rice cooked by the natives was left outside in the hot sun in these little tin plates while this tenko went on, and then when it was brought it with this pinch of salt on the top and probably myriads of flies had been descended on them. So after about a week of eating this stuff, caked hard on top so you could just eat it with your fingers, dirty, filthy and most of the blokes had dysentery after about a week

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or two. So the latrine outside was just a pit dug probably about 8 foot x 6 foot, will I tell this? 8 by about 6 with a few branches across to squat on and this fellow every afternoon you'd

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get a heavy downpour of rain mid afternoon, consequently there were hundreds of blokes with dysentery and the rainwater filling this latrine up it was getting pretty full and when we stood up we'd have a blackout because we were

weak. Again, going before my story, we'd have that rice in the morning and then anything from say 8 o'clock to 10 o'clock at night we'd get a small

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bun be about that big. If you chewed your food 32 times as you are supposed to chew each mouthful. I used to chew that 64 times till there was nothing left in your mouth you know, it would just melt. So we were pretty weak after a few weeks of this treatment and dysentery. So this afternoon just after a heavy downpour of rain, this fellow stood up and he swayed a bit and had a bit of a blackout and wanted to go to the toilet, so

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out past the guard, gave him a bow, went to the latrine, had a bit of a giddy turn while he was there, put his hand ? there was a tree there ? near the end of the latrine, he put his hand against it, the tree trunk was all wet from the shower of rain and his hand slipped off and he took a header into this mess and all you could see were his feet and his ankles,

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so the blokes that were there dragged him out and everything went crazy. So the Jap he sort of, what was going on, took him into the street and threw him into the river, the muddy river and cleaned him up. That poor bugger, he went a bit bonkers for a couple of days I think, but things like that you know, and the only way we could have a scrub was outside

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after a heavy downpour of rain with the broken guttering, we'd get under it to try to get this oil fuel off ? but it was impossible it was still ground into us the oil fuel. After 3 or 4 weeks there we'd have ? oh that's right ? I'm just recalling this as I go along ? a Jap officer used come in every day or every second day and he would be all dressed up, they were all

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smartly dressed, he'd come in, and you'd know when he was coming and the Jap guards would ?Squatski!? they'd yell out which was ?attention? and he'd just stand there and look down at us filthy, dirty, mass of humanity, you know he'd just look at us as if we were not worth looking at see, and he'd pull his Luger out of his holster and there was deathly silence

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in the theatre. Hundreds of us there, not a word.

Interviewee: Frank McGovern Archive ID 0019 Tape 02

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You've got an incredible memory

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Well you know it's imprinted on your mind, just hard to, well it was just there and you relive it. Sometimes it happens during the day that something might be said

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or? OK Where was I, in Serang. Purgatory. Serang. Oh yes this Nip officer and he'd pull the Luger out of his holster and the silence of the theatre ? dead silence ? he'd load it click, click and put his hand on his hip. Very

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arrogant type and he'd strut down the middle aisle so you had fellas there with shrap [shrapnel] wounds in their legs you know, bits of shrapnel. I remember one bloke had a couple of pieces in his leg, couldn't bend it too well, so his leg was sticking out a bit and this officer with his jackboots and leggings he just looked at it and he went whack and kicked him in the, right through there, well

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he passed out I think and then another fellow standing up, don't know why he was standing up at the time. I thought oh gee, so he said something in Japanese to him obviously so he just crunched him right across the face with the Luger, I think he went down in a heap too. Things like that you soon learnt that you had to salute, bow. If you didn't have a hat on, you bowed, if you had a hat on, you saluted

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so that was it. But we were told then that we could cook our own rice. We had one fellow there who was a cook on board, and he instead the natives cooking the rice he was given permission to pull the bags of rice in and he'd cook the rice for us which was a bit more palatable than being left out in the sun getting dried right out, with all the flies all over it.

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Then we, from there, I think we were there for 6 weeks, we were issued with Dutch/Indonesian green uniforms and they didn't fit us, save shorts and things like that and these type of boots, if they fitted you they were good if not it didn't matter you didn't use them. Anyway from there we were transported up to by truck

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to the Bicycle Camp that was in Batavia. Now the Bicycle Camp was termed Bicycle Camp because it was a Dutch/Indonesian Army unit that used to use pushbikes ? that was their like a mobile bike brigade, so that's the Bicycle Camp. And that was good compared to what we were in Serang. They had these proper constructed huts,

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with a main road going in between the two, Jap guard at the entrance and there we met up with the 2/2nd Pioneers, a Victorian outfit ? they'd been over in the Middle East in Syria and all those places, fought the French Foreign Legion because the Vichy French and the Free French at that time and they were landed in Java on the Orcades,

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I think took them to Java I think it was, before Singapore fell and all their arms, ammunition, it was a crazy set-up, all their arms and munition was on another ship which went to Sumatra. They eventually sorted it all out but it was just a shemozzle [mess] at that time, it was unbelievable, here they were, you know trained blokes, been over in the Middle East for about 12 months come back here to

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try to stem the Japanese advance but the Dutch didn't, they wanted to be declared an open city ? Batavia from what I can understand and something like the occupation by the Japs of French Indo-China anyway something along those lines. Anyway after a couple of weeks there they capitulated and these 2/2nd Pioneers were taken

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prisoner too so they were in the camp when we got there and when they saw us, they thought, 'God, who are these blokes?? you know thin, emaciated, dirty, just a pair of this green trousers on or a pair underpants that the Japs wore. They found out we were Perth survivors. Well, they couldn't do enough for us. They had a few pieces of rations, hard

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rations and that, shared their dixie [food tins] with us and gave us a few bits of chocolate and something like that. We were with them right through from Java to Burma, the Burma line, to the Rokyū Maru that was sunk and right through they sort of kept us all together. We were termed the No 3 Japanese prisoner of war camp I think it was called.

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Anyway back to Java. So were there for about 6 months I think in Java, working parties each day, organized down to the wharves loading ships into the oil wells, barrels of oil, pushing them along, stacking them up and all these kerosene tins, I can remember all these kerosene tins coming off the assembly line, all nice, brand new, shiny, neat, we had to stack them all up,

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the Nips were taking them somewhere. So we got a piece of, one of the fellows got a piece of iron, sharpened piece of iron metal, bit of metal so he said, 'See what we can do with some of these tins see.' so as we said right, so as we passed them along the line this sharp piece into the bottom of each tin as it went up into to be stacked up so that was our bit of sabotage for the tins. Anything we could do,

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we did. Now there were big crates of machinery, huge crates of machinery and in the top of them, we prised the lid off when the Jap guards weren't looking and we saw all the instructions written out there and you know what to do, so we just got those and just ripped them up and put the lid back on. Whether it did any damage, any good or not. But we tried everything, we did all that. But I've gone before

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my story again. Can we go back?

Yes we can go back a little bit. Remember that we will be going back a lot more times in the next few days as well.

Oh I see. This is back into the theatre. About the latrine and that you know. And there of a night time you know we would just collapse of a night time after the tenkos we had during the day, across one another, legs on top of one another, stinking hot, dirty, filthy, and

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the latrine had filled right up by this time. One night I just woke up and thought what's this, you know, half stupid, you know, the maggots had been crawling from across the veranda underneath the door and they were in amongst us. So I nudged the bloke next me and said look at this so kicked off and with our hands pushed them under

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the door pushed something against the door. Things like that you know. But it was a pretty horrible place Serang, a dreadful place so back to the Bicycle Camp and the working parties there so come the edict one day that we had to number in Japanese, before that we were numbering in English when we had the working party. We said, 'We're not going to do it.' ? a few of us.

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He said, 'Oh.' The officer said, 'Well it's the order from the Japanese command.' we've got to do it. We said, 'Well bugger them we're not going to do it.' So all right. So those who were not going to number in Japanese the order came through that there will be no food, that we will get no food unless you number in Japanese. So they chopped out the rice rations for 24 hours

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so we numbered in Japanese after that. Persuasion. Also we at one stage of the game the working party had gone out that morning, the edict came through from the Japanese commandant that we were to swear allegiance to the Japanese Imperial Army 'well we're not going to do this, not to escape. So finally and the Yanks said no they

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can't do that to us we're Americans. Well they did it all right, they closed the galley, there was no food in there in their portion of the camp, and no food for us and 'you will have no food until you do it.' So then the order came through from our blokes it was under duress and it doesn't mean a thing you're not doing it under your own free will. So we said OK we'll sign it so we all signed allegiance to the Japanese Army, under duress.

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When the work party came in that afternoon we were still signing, some of us were still signing they said what's going on 'they all wanted to get into the tongs and have a shower, wash down and we said just form in behind us and sign this. What is it? Just sign something. So they signed it as they came through. Hard to ask they signed it too. They didn't know what they were signing. That went off all right, we got our food back, our rice so came

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I think about October that year word came through that we were to be transported to a very good camp, where there would be plenty of food. I said oh yes, we'll go along with it and we were all lined up and this Jap came along, an interpreter, Japanese, he read the names out in English, all our names out in

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English, he wasn't bad you know. He stumbled over a few like McGovern or something like that, he knew what it was. Lined us all up. Tomorrow, 'astar, astar,' tomorrow all men, so he lined up all men down to the railway station in trucks in 50's Kumea 50 and loaded us on the train, down to the jetty

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Tanjong Priok, put us on board the King Kong Maru, King Kong Maru, remind you of King Kong that was our transport up to Singapore, we were in Changi for 2 days or the Selarang Barracks, it was the Changi area it was really the Changi jail that was for a few recalcitrant prisoners the rest was in the barracks, in the Selarang Barracks,

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they were quite good, the British had them, they were good barracks and we were there for 2 days and while we were there a Swedish Red Cross ship came into the harbour with bulk Red Cross supplies and we were at that time that was run like an army camp more or less by our own blokes as different from Java when we under direct control of the Japanese army although the Japanese army

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were around the perimeter all this discipline and all that was left to their own crowd. We were referred to as the Java rabble by our blokes up there in Changi, the Java rabble because I think some of the fellas that were in the 8th Divvy had managed to escape

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from Singapore after it fell down to various parts down to Java but they were interned there so I think when they caught on that these were young deserters or most of them were just the rabble from Java ? so it didn't go over too well with us so a team of 4, 3 or 4 officers, army officers, our blokes

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were coming down the road one day, there were in our string 4 of us or 5 of us, walking up the road, we just walked past them, and we heard, ?Hey!?! you know, so we turned around, ?Where are you from, you fellas from?? So they berated us for not saluting. We just turned around and kept going so we were termed the Java rabble.

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We didn't take too kindly to it. We were issued with a bulk supply of Red Cross parcel that came in that day. Were given by our own crowd a teaspoon full of sugar and a teaspoon full of coffee the two days we were there. So there was a bit of a feeling there about it all. From there we were then transported

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to the, we were taken down and put on board ship and transported up to Moulmein in the middle of the night, we went up on the Salween River, we were down in the holds of the ship, they were pretty terrible things you know, crowded ships, you only had that much space for each bloke on the ship in the hold and then they dragged us out and put us on a barge and there was a cold wind coming down the Salween River

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and because it was pretty fetid down below in the hold. So they took us ashore at Moulmein, bright moonlight night, marched us through the streets of Moulmein and to the local jail and we were placed in the local jail and they had Indian warders there, and as he was leading us

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away down to this other compound a few of us he looked around in and there were no Jap guards and in his thin English he said, ?I am very sorry.? just like that and we said, ?Yes, so are we.? He said, ?We do not like the Japanese.? they'd been in occupation for about 6-8 months in Burma round Moulmein and Rangoon but they weren't too happy with their kapos spiritus

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kapos spiritus fears the Japs called it they weren't very happy with it so anyhow we were in this compound and we all raced to various space to sleep that night and it was a barrack type of thing there and some of us got into that and a rotunda near the wall a few blokes got into that and another fellow went into a small hut, he got in there. So the next morning we wake up

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and tenko's on, normal tenko, and after that we had our feed of rice and melon water, pretty horrible stuff and we compared notes as to how we'd slept so we said, ?Oh, we slept on the verandah, on the barracks there that was all right.? and these other blokes that were in the rotunda were talking to the Indian warder after and he said, ?You slept there?? And they said, ?Yeah, good.? And he said, ?That is the leprosarium in

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there, that is where all the lepers are.? they said, ?Oh yeah.? Anyway it didn't mean much to us. And then this other fellow there who said, ?I had a good sleep, there was tabletop, head rest, the whole works.? he said, ?I had a good sleep there.? - that was the morgue, he'd slept on the slab where they put the dead 'uns. He said, ?I had a good sleep in there.? So things like that but anyway we were there about a week I suppose then we were marched

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from Moulmein to a place called Thanbyuzayat, it was the railhead and outside the wall of the jail there was this golden pagoda and I thought of Rudyard Kipling's poem: ?By the old Moulmein pagoda, looking eastward to the sea. That was it the old gold leaf down there, the Nips took all the gold leaf off later on I believe confiscated it,

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but that was ?the old Moulmein pagoda looking eastward to the sea,' well I think that's poetic licence because the Gulf of Martaban was on the westside and we didn't worry too much about that you know, that was it. So as we marched through the streets a pretty bedraggled looking lot, the local population, Burmese, Indians saw us

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and women and kids went back and came up with food for us in their hands, the local population ignoring the Jap guards with their rifle butts and giving us food and the kiddies too giving us food, we said this is terrific you know. Some of the fellows broke rank which was very stupid, which they did there was like a fruit stall on the corner,

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and the stall bloke was handing out the fruit to us, the Jap guards couldn't do anything there were about half a dozen of them, they just came up and as the word got around there were heaps of women and kids coming up with more food, giving us food. Never forgotten that, the local Burmese in Moulmein. Anyway we eventually reached the railhead, put in trucks, and taken out through the jungle

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to the 25 kilo [kilometre] camp where we commenced work on the Burma railway. On our side the Burma side, in comparison to the Thai side, although we had a names for each camp, I think the 25 kilo was 10 yin or some name like that, Yanki Yan I've got it inside anyway, 25, 30, 35

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kilo right up to the border the Burmese border with Thailand. On the Thai side they called them by name, there was Tarsau, Namtok things like that, instead of kilos, they named them. We commenced digging 1.6 cubic metres of earth a day for each bloke, 1.6 doesn't sound much, 1.6? You could do that pretty well, but on a rice diet you know

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after about 12 months on a rice diet, we weren't too strong and we just had shovels and axes or chuckles as we called it. Say the 3 or us went out, we worked in threes, one bloke would dig the soil he might strike the roots, he would have to clear the jungle out of boulders or rocks and the Jap engineer would measure it out, 1.6, 1.6, 1.6, and peg it out, and this is what we had to dig.

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And we had wicker baskets that round and about that deep so the fellow shovelling would fill these baskets up and the other 2 would carry these baskets, like coolie labour, over to the embankment empty it out, come back, fill it up, empty it out, that all day stinking hot, 40 degree heat you know, have a break at lunch time, you'd have a bowl of rice and

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there would be thousands of cicadas - wah, wah, wah, elephants working in the jungle with some of the blokes, digging out bamboo, huge clumps of bamboo, they even starved the elephants in the finish, they weren't too clever either. But it was pretty hard yakka [work] and we improvised after a while and instead of the baskets carrying them what we called a tunga, two bits of bamboo

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with a rice bag strung between it like a bedding, just like that, and one fellow who'd been shovelling would put the earth into that between one or two of the shafts and carried it over which speeded things up but it was a bit silly because Nips saw us going OK at 1.6 so they increased it to 1.8 or 1.10 so the we thought right, where they measured

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out in the early morning in the heavy dew and that, say we dug that lot out today and tomorrow, he'd put the pegs in and measure off 1.6 each and when he went down the line measuring, measuring for other squads we'd shift the pegs, we'd shovel down into the good earth and got the dry earth away and got the moist earth and shift the pegs back, so instead of 1.6 or 1.8

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it was probably nearer 1, so we did it that way. Bridge building was another thing. It had in the dry season, the rivers dried up, you know small streams, I think there were about 400 bridges altogether along the line right through 400 kilo length of line and they'd have a bamboo platform on this bank

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of the river bed and a bamboo plank on that side built up and in the river bed itself, was scaffolding and across the top was this gantry and this huge weight probably about that big and that round, with an eyelet at the top and the rope coming through on either side over two pulleys and that strand would go down thick rope and be divided by a dozen more

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lengths of rope so we'd have to man each length of rope, a POW on either side. A Jap engineer would get up the top and start sing songing: 'one two three itchy nee nisanyia, itch nee nisanyia.' You'd pull the weight up and drop it down on to these logs pile driving, manual pile driving, that's what it was. All day, 'itchy nee nisanyia,' bonk!

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Driving it in slowly, slowly, these were the supports for the bridge. So this went on day after day, there was always an extra one towards sunset. One more, one more. So bugger you, one more. So all right, one more. So this day we'd just about finished the bridge this particular type of bridge and this grinning ape's up the top, Sato I think his name was, Sato yes,

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and he'd say, 'One more, one more!' so we'd say, 'OK we'll get in one more.' wised up the blokes on the other side and on this side instead of saying 'itchy nee nisanyia' we just said One, Two and he, 'Oi Oi stop, stop!' 'THREE!' so the big weight hit the top of gantry where he was, where he was straddling, shot him up in the air, tumbled him down in between all the logs right down to the river bed

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about 20 to 30 ft. So we said, 'Goodbye Sato, he's gone.' bugger me they took him back to camp on a stretcher, three days later he was back on the job with a sprained ankle that's all he got out of it, a sprained ankle, we thought he was gone you know. We said goodbye Sato. He was back again. So the bridge building went on and then during the dry season increased labour then the

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wet season started and we thought they won't work us during the wet season, oh boy, it went from dusk, dawn to sunset, 12 hours a day 14 hours a day, pouring rain, absolutely pouring rain just absolutely pelting down, day after day you know. They gave us boots to wear, just the g-string

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and boots and I had a tattered old hat, I don't know where I got it from and that was it. Just a tattered old hat, g-string and boots. The mud was that deep it went up to the calves of your legs and one particular day there we were carting this bag of rice on a tunga, a stretcher, makeshift stretcher and we came up from the river itself, it was a raging torrent and the rice had been

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landed in barges and then from there put on this tunga and we had to take it up the bank to the cookhouse. Well your feet are going into mud up to here and you're trying to squelch it out and you know it was like glue so ... all of a sudden the foot came but the sole of the boot stayed in the mud and I only had the uppers, that's all that was left of my boot. They were useless things, they were pretty weak.

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So things like that, and the mud and the incessant rain was unbelievable. But they worked through it. We were called the mobile force at that time after the embankments and the bridges were built we laying the plates, the rails, they were dug with a manual auger at one stage, to put the spikes in, just to start a hole in the teak sleepers, you'd

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have a spiking hammer, one on that side of the rail and one on this side and two spikes in to hold the rail in and you'd go in unison, one, two, plug, like driving tent pegs until we thought this is hard yakka so we got the bloke on the auger to go a bit deeper, instead of that much, in that much, so the spike was holding the rail by about that much, so then the Japs

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bought in a machine, it ran along the rail, a machine auger, and we did the same with that, we told the bloke to bore it a bit deeper, bore it a bit deeper, which he did, so away we went spiking the rails until we got to the 105 kilo. But during the wet season, blokes were dying like flies, with dysentery,

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malaria, beri beri, with the beri beri, your feet, ankles and face would swell up, it would be like puffy like a mound of dough, and your hands would be puffed up, and you would put your finger in and push the flesh in like that and the hole would stay there like that for a couple of minutes until it gradually moved out. You know some blokes died through drowning in their own water you know, into their lungs and that,

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they'd fill them up with water, you know they could hardly see out of their eyes sometimes, they were just slits and puffed up. But with a combination of beri beri and malaria more or less that was it. And then the ulcers, they were shockers. You would only have to have a scratch. If you were ballasting and one of the stones hit your leg and you just cut it or scratched it, after a few days that would fester

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and it would grow bigger and you could see it growing bigger day by day and then it would be an ugly, horrible sore and it would go in deep, and fellas used to with the doctors used to try to gouge it out with a spoon because they had nothing to do. Sulphanilamide would have cleared it up I believe, but they didn't even get basic medicine. They cleared it out like that. They called one of the camps there, the hut, the Ulcer Ward. Well you'd go in

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there and the stench - rotten flesh and that. With some fellas maybe it would start at the ankle and it would go right up to the knee and the whole sinew would be exposed and the bone it would be that deep, this rotten flesh. Poor fellows had legs amputated with primitive equipment, but they did the job and they came through all right. They'd beg some of the doctors to take their leg off, the pain was absolutely

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shocking. But quite a few died from the ulcers and subsequent disease, malnutrition, malaria, dysentery well you've heard all that anyway. When we'd come in as a mobile force behind the natives, they had no hygiene whatsoever, the hygiene we had was good, these 2/2nd Pioneer fellas, they were terrific, they built latrines,

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urinals, and that you know they were very good, but the natives had nothing like that and when cholera hit whole camps, the Japs used to burn the whole camp, some of the natives were still alive in there I think, although with cholera. Some of our fellas did get cholera but died through it. But not too many, we were given injections by the Nips, I think I've still got

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the mark on my arm where the blunt needle went in after about a thousand blokes had been given this needle, you know. Got a bit blunt. Anyway we escaped the cholera to a big extent through the hygiene. When we get to the 55-kilo camp, that was a hospital camp. Now you've heard of Weary Dunlop, our own medicos

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were pretty good too, right through the line, but this fellow Coates, I think he was a Major Coates, came from Victoria, what was his name, he got a knighthood out of it, Sir, oh jeez, I'll think of it later, Coates, anyhow his name was, well he did a terrific job there, equally as good as Weary, although Weary Dunlop was a good administrator I

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believe, Reg Coates, oh some name like that, anyway it doesn't matter, no it wasn't it was Sir Albert Coates, that's who it was, yeah Albert Coates. He did a fantastic job and one day he got pretty sick with scrub typhus, even the Nips were worried, because if he died, they had nobody to look after the sick blokes, consequently the more blokes

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that got sick they had nobody to work on the line, that's all they were worried about. He was that crook that his orderlies made a tunga, a stretcher for him, and with his bare necessities, his stethoscope, or whatever he had, not much, sat him on that and carried him around on that tunga to look after the sick blokes, that's what he did. So I believe there is a memorial being built to him

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down in Ballarat or Bendigo, Ballarat I think it is. Sir Albert Coates did a fantastic job. So it went on during the wet season to 105 kilo, that was a shocking camp the 105 kilo. We were burying 2 or 3 blokes a day in the finish during the wet season. A mate would go out, or a mate had been sick during the day, you'd leave him there and go out

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on the line and 14 hours later, he'd come back and he'd be buried. They'd go, all of a sudden they'd go, through malnutrition, berri beri, dysentery, the whole works. About 3 or 4 a day sometimes. We got to the 105, that was at the height of the wet season I think, and this camp was built in a bit of a hollow and there was a rocky strewn

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entrance coming down, and the water would gush down there like a waterfall, it went right through the hut and the bamboo slats on either side where we slept had risen up about that high but the muddy water was going almost as high as it, that was through the middle of the camp, where we slept so when you got up you'd be in 2 feet of mud and water as you got up off the bunk

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off the slats. She was a shocker. The rain was almost like needles hitting you, it was so heavy pelting down but that was 105. When the wet season finished gradually the sun came out everything dried, but everything rotted in the wet season and we gradually got a bit better with the 'speedo speedo' as they called it, the Nips,

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you just worked, worked, worked, that all it was and as I say it went 14 hours a day and they'd use carbide lamps during the night to do the bridge building or laying the plates or rails, with carbide lamps or torches made out of bamboo and pitch in them, that's how they used to be like. Like Dante's Inferno, looking at all the shadows, Jap guards yelling out, 'Kurra Kurra,'

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or, 'hurry hurry' or what was it? 'Haiku Haiku!' hurry up, and that's how it was right until we got to the border, Three Pagoda Pass at the border, and that was the ancient pass where the invading armies of the Burmese or Thais used to come through, so we linked up there at a place called

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Nieke, I think that was the name of the village and the rail lines met there, were just after Nieke where they met up with the Thai side. Then they took us through on these flat-tops as we called it to the Thai side, on these flat-tops after we completed the Burma side, the flat tops are two sets of bogeys [wheels],

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with rail stretched in between them and with timber on top of that. We sat on those with whatever gear we had to take us through to, to the River Kwai, Tamerkan is the name of the camp a big camp there. So we're on these flat tops and we're going along the rails and we're looking down through the timber we thought to ourselves, hope they did a better job on the Burma

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side with these spikes in the rails, because we came around the curves the rails would be moving see, so then we got to this bridge, 3-tier bridge built on the Thai side. I think that it was called Lampo Viaduct or it might have been the one they referred to as the Pack of Cards Bridge. It collapsed three times killing a few of blokes, and they built it up again, 3-tier, on the

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side of a cliff and a river down below, and we're on these flat tops and we thought oh yes, and it's going around the curves and the rails are moving a little and thought, 'Stone the crows let's get round this curve quickly!?' so we got on to the straight part everything was right but they did a little bit of a better job than we did on the Burma side I think. So we ended up by going over the Kwai River to the Tamerkan, huge camp where all

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fellas from the Thai side and Burma side were gathered, and there was a big celebration there by the Nips about the completion of the line and the bridge, there were two bridges over the Kwai, timber bridge and a steel bridge. Somebody's told you this before probably?

Nobody has told us your story.

Oh right. So there was a timber bridge a few yards down from

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the steel bridge. So we were housed in this big camp at Tamerkan, things improved there because the Thai side there was better food than Burma, and they were able to transport greens, vegetables and rice up the river in barges, offload them there and bring them up to the camp,

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so we did a bit better there and recovered a bit but we were still pretty bare. And there they formed the Japan party, that's where the Japs formed the Japan party there at this big camp at Tamerkan that was the next episode on our way to way to Japan

Interviewee: Frank McGovern Archive ID 0019 Tape 03

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Haven't mentioned some of the Jap guards or Korean guards along the line, we called them by names, the ones didn't like, there was one bloke called Holy Joe who used to come along to our church services, he was a Christian, he'd be at the back he wouldn't join in, he

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wasn't a bad Nip, but there was another fellow, what was his name, George, we called him George. He was trying to learn English he came to me one day and said pointing the sky, 'sly'? Couldn't say k, 'sly?' 'No George, sky.?' 'Oh.?'

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you could imagine him behind a plough you know, a peasant, 'sly,' I said, 'All right George. Berry difficult.' I said it was, 'Berry difficult George, almost bloody impossible, you know, buddy.' But some of the fellows taught them to swear, it was the worse thing they could do because if we or one of our blokes had got into a bit of trouble and swore at a Nip, this Nip got on to it

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and one bloke had a terrific bashing one day for swearing at the Nip. This Nip engineer and he was led out. We were all made to sit down, we were all out on the line, sit down, the Jap engineer called the guard, this fellow was led out into the jungle

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with the Jap guard after he'd been bashed, and he told us afterwards what happened. The Jap guard loaded his rifle and made the fellow walk 10 paces and the engineer made him turn with his back to the rifle and he thought this is it, anyhow they fired a shot but it was flying over his

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head just to intimidate him. Anyhow they broke his jaw and he had to get a couple of teeth out and his jaw had to be wired. See the swearing, they had got on to it. It was pretty silly - things like that. One Korean guard, the Korean guards were as bad as the Nips, because they were treated by the Japs as second class citizens, Japan had occupied Korea for umpteen years and they were

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looked upon as second class citizens and consequently they used to take it on us ? they were bigger than the Japs, bigger blokes, and they packed a lot. We had one fellow called The Stormtrooper, he would have been about six feet and he was like a boofhead bloke and he'd wear these jackboots and plod through the camp and he'd have a length of bamboo be about that thick

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and he'd belt hell out of you with this length of bamboo, if you were doing something that he thought was wrong he'd just give you a whack with this. Crikey, he'd belt hell out of you. One night we were having a bit of a sing song and we were singing, what was it, Road to Gundagai, or something like that or Irish Eyes Are Smiling, You could hear the angels sing ... So Boofhead, as we called him, this Stormtrooper,

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called the camp interpreter who was Captain Drouer, who came through from Hong Kong, and he used to be in intelligence before the war, Englishman ? a real good bloke ? he survived the war, I saw him a couple of years back. Captain Drouer, he spoke fluent Japanese so he was called out by Boofhead this time who wanted to know what we were singing, so we were all lined up like

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the 6 of us, so the interpreter had to tell him what we were singing. And just prior to that the first air raids were happening on Bangkok , passing over the camp, the planes, and bombing Bangkok. So when we came to the words, 'you can hear the angels sing,' Boofhead said we are signalling to, you wouldn't

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believe this, we are signalling to the bombers. He said, 'You are not to sing anymore, no more singing.!' With that he bashed the 6 of us and that was it, no more singing. But how puerile, we were signalling, but how stupid, but the paper that I've got was written up by, see that photo up there Chris [interviewer], that

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photo there and the paper is the Greater East Asia or Greater Asia which the Japs used to issue to us and the local population, printed in English as propaganda and I brought that one back through a couple of searches, issued in Burma got it through the sinking of the Rokyu Maru, got it through a couple of searches in Japan and brought it back, anyway that's another story, and Boofhead

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yeah, so he laid in to us and said there was to be no more singing. Captain Drouer, by the way, later on along the line, must have upset the camp commandant because they made him dig a foxhole and they filled it with water after they had bashed him and they made him stand outside the guardhouse for 24 hours , and he had to stand in that water filled hole

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for 2 days ? they kept filling it up with water and they made a mess of him, he can't use his right hand too well, so he shakes hands with his left, so he survived and he got back, but things like that, they were bad wretches some of them. So Tamerkan yes, we were at Tamerkan Japan party. So we were all issued with new shorts,

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striped, coloured shorts, I think the girls from the houses of ill fame made them for us, I'm not too sure, in Thailand. We were issued with these shorts and we were all kitted out with them you know, all going to Japan, the land of the cherry blossom and all this hoo-hah so all that. So we had heard by this time that a lot of ships had been sunk, and even the Nips told us

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that we'd be shark bait, indicated. So from Tamerkan we were taken by cattle truck in these steel trucks, about 40 to a truck, stinking hot, oh dreadful, to the rail head Bampong which was the rail junction from the Thai side and going on into Burma and from there

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I think we had to, we were loaded on to another train which took us through to Bangkok then from Bangkok, we did a tour of South East Asia Japanese style. From Bangkok, this is where I'm getting a bit hazy. We were taken through Cambodia, that's right to Phnom Penh,

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this had been in the news a lot with Pol Pot, Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, and it was a nice city you know, we'd been in the jungle for bloody nearly two years and to see this place, French colonial style, boulevards you know, with boulevard trees down the side and I said, ?This is nice, let's stop here.? but we didn't, so they loaded us on to this river craft, it was like an old paddle steamer,

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on the Mekong River and it's a huge river the Mekong River, a mile wide in parts, it was huge, cultivation on either side, it was tremendous and then we went down the river for a couple of days then they landed us I don't know whether it was Phnom Penh or ? or somewhere else there, anyway they marched us through the jungle there so we marched through the jungle for a day or two and then we came across some of these

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temples that had been there for hundreds of years covered with vines and monkeys clambering all over them and we went through there and we slept that night at a rail station I think it was, slept there for the night and then the following day took us through to Saigon. Now Saigon, or Indo China was

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occupied by the Japs, I don't think the French fought them, I'm not too sure, but I think it was just occupied so it wasn't like Malaysia or Java, it was a different set up. We could sense it and we were a bedraggled looking lot of blokes you know that had been through the jungle, marching through the jungle and on trains, in cattle trucks, so we're a pretty

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dirty dishevelled looking lot and we're marching through the streets of Saigon with Jap guards on either side, so we see these French people and a couple of the French girls riding pushbikes. We hadn't seen a white woman for two years so our eyes were sticking out a bit so, look at these, it was beaut, they were good sorts you know. Anybody would have been a good sort by then

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you know. As we came through the town we smartened our step up instead of dragging ourselves along and the French people came out of their houses, some of the Frenchmen and they were giving us the V for victory sign and putting the hands up when the Jap guards weren't looking. So we started to pick our feet up and march a bit better and some the blokes who had good voices started to sing songs you know. So one of the blokes knew a bit of the

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French Marsellaise and so he started singing this, so we know a bit of the tune or the tune itself, so they tra la tra la tra , so we picked our step up and the Nips guards saying shut up, you know telling us to keep quiet. Didn't mean a thing, we kept going you see. So more French people came out, more see, probably the Japs knew the French Marsellaise, the

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national song. So we kept singing and then said ,?OK they don't know who we are, what about Waltzing Matilda?? So we started to sing Waltzing Matilda. And that went pretty well. I thought the Nips might have known Waltzing Matilda from the First World War. So we were still singing this as we marched into the camp. Now in the camp there were some Poms, British, that had been captured in Hong Kong or

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wherever and were put in there and this camp by the way was pretty good, the best camp that we'd been in, as it turned out later, so as we marched through the gates these Poms were looking at us, ?Who the bloody hell are these blokes?? you know, ?Strike me, this bedraggled looking lot, singing their heads off as they're marching through?? And they just gave up. So then they found out later on that we were Aussies, and

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that camp was really good. One day, when we got to know them, the cookhouse and that, they said, ?We'll have to fatten you blokes up.? you see, so we said, ?What are you going to do?? they had piles of bags of rice in the storehouse up to that ceiling and greens and eggs. We hadn't seen an egg for 12 months and we thought, ?What's going on, what is this place??

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So they said, ?This is all right, this is all right.? So, ?Who is this all for, are you cooking for the Japs,?? they said no. We thought this can't be right so one day I was talking to a mate of mine and in comes a little horse and cart, a pony the size of a cart and the cart the size of a pony with these Annamites [like a goat], they were small people, Annamites,

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and on there were these crates, bamboo crates, with vegetables, about that deep, with eggs and that, so I ran along side the cart and I said to Ritchie this mate of mine, 'We're going to knock a few of these eggs off.' which we did. And the Poms got on to us and said, 'What are you doing Aussie?' We said, 'We're knocking off a few eggs, we going to cook 'em up.' They said, 'They're for the cookhouse, for the POWs!' Gee

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we ate like lords for the next couple of months, we thought this is unbelievable. So there was a difference between the Jap guards there and our own crew of Jap guards and Koreans, bad swines. I was having a scrub there one day after the working party in the tongs and I thought I'd take a short cut. There was a tennis court there and a house up further where the Jap commandant

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lived so I thought I would cut across the tennis court save going round and round and just as I was half way across the tennis court, the Jap commandant comes down fully booted and spurred and I thought, 'Oh strike me, I'm gone.' So I just had a bit of towelling around, clogs on and Jap underpants on, so I just looked at him, stand to attention

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gave him a decent salute, bowed, so he said in English, he returned the salute, 'Where are you from?' 'Where am I from?' I thought, so I said, 'Burma.' just like that. 'No no, where are you from?' 'Oh, Australia, Australia.' 'Oh.' he said, he was smoking a cigarette, 'Australia, oh, hmm, you

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are going to Japan?' I said, 'Japan party, yes Sir.' He said, 'You take care.' So that was the end of the conversation, so I bowed again and went back to the camp. So I told my mate Jerry Parkes, there, 'I just met the Jap Commandant and had a yarn with him.' he said, 'What!'

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I said I had just met the Jap Commandant and he spoke to me in English, so he said, 'Oh yeah what did he say?' 'He wanted to know where I was from and told me to take care.' He said, 'Told you to take care?' I said, 'Yeah, that's what he said.' He said, 'Strike me I'll be buggered!' he said, 'I don't believe it!' I said, 'That's what he said, to take care.' He said, 'Japan party, take care.' 'Yeah I suppose we'd better take care or we'll be

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bloody shark bait when we go.' So that camp was good but it didn't last. They took us down river to put us on board this transport and each of us had to take on a ? I think it was there, no it was Singapore going before of my story. Put us on board and we were there a day ready to sail and next day off again, disembark, everybody off.

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The blockade of Saigon was on by the US subs [submarines], couldn't get us out, so back to the camp, so only there a day at the camp then load us on to trucks, cattle trucks, took us through to Mampong, Mampong down through Malaysia through to Singapore at River Valley Camp we were at. A dilapidated looking place, a few

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Poms were there and back to tors it was really, back to the old style. And in there were a team of Ghurkhas, you know,

a separate camp, and we managed through, a couple of us to the Ghurkhas you know, they were good blokes. They were camped there under strict surveillance away from the rest of us. They showed us how to plant food tapioca and stuff like that. A good team of blokes

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they were. So we were there for about a month and Japan party as separate from the English, the Poms, working party, very little to eat, back to the old rice diet and whatever and away from Saigon and then we were to be loaded on to these ships that were in the harbour,

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that's right the Rokyu Maru was where we had to be transported on the Rokyu Maru and when we had to, each POW had to take on a slab of rubber, it was like a square of rubber, solid rubber about that big square, and a handle on it, fashioned into it. It was about 1300

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POWs loading this on board, rubber, just rubber, taking it up to Japan, which they thought not as lifesavers, just to transport to Japan. So we were shoved down into the hold of this bloody transport, standing room only in the hold, it was a narrow gangway stairway coming down into the hold

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and only one could fit down at a time and we were standing there all that day, no air, it was fetid and blokes with dysentery too and the perspiration was just running off you and forming a puddle down the bottom of your feet and blokes were just keeling over left, right and centre and the Jap guard up top was using his rifle butt, nobody up, until we're carting

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blokes up that had flaked out, that had fainted and finally the Jap, the lieutenant, he could see what was going on and allowed a few up on the deck. We put the salt water hose on them you know, to bring them to. After that a few were let up on deck providing we behaved ourselves, this was the proviso. And it was relaxed after that but the stinking,

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dirty hold that we were in you know, with just a small handful of rice and warm water, sort of scented water we had and the latrines were over the side of the ship where there were just a few planks under, looked like a little dunny [toilet] there on the side of the ship, so that's how it was

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for the next 5 days. We headed out from Singapore with a few other ships and a few more ships from the Philippines joined us and it was a pretty big convoy, about a dozen more ships, escort on either side and up the forward part and just before dawn on the 5th day out,

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yes on the 12th September I think it was when the, as it was the destroyer on the starboard side was hit with a torpedo and it was the Shikinami we learnt later, the Shikinami that was in the Battle of the Sunda Strait with us, the Shikinami, so it got its desserts and 2 tankers were

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hit, they just burst into flames ahead of us. I was on the upper deck at the time near the forward of the bridge, blokes were sleeping all over the hatch covers and that and then we thought, 'It's on!' and then we heard the Nips clattering across the upper deck in the clogs and I thought, 'Yeah this is it.' and the torpedo hit us midships. And the Nips in their panic, lowered some of

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the lifeboats straight away, and a few minutes after another torpedo hit right up in the forward, right up in the bows and the geyser of water from that was like a waterfall. Tons of water went up into the air and came down on to us and flattened us through the deck, it was that heavy, and a tidal wave of water swept down over the fo'c'sle and fellas were being swept off their feet

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you know, they'd come to their feet and swept off their feet over the hatch covers, a tremendous amount of water. So the Nip gunners, one of them was draped over the guard rail, he'd been killed with the explosion, there was a gun up forward and some of our fellas were down in the hold still, so fellas started to panic a bit, the bloke next to me said he was hit, so I told the officer lieutenant, I forget what his name was, I said, 'This fellow

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has been hit I think.' so he yelled out anyway I told him. Quite a bit of debris coming over from the bridge, so I thought about my mate down in the hold. So we went over there and the hatch covers have a beam across to hold the hatch covers, to hold the beam, so I straddled that and I said, 'How are you going down there Jerry?' and he said, 'Get off that bloody girder, it's likely to come down!' and I said, 'Well, you're underneath mate!' just like that so

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I soon got off it. I said, 'We'll put the hatch covers down so that you could clamber up.' so it was only this narrow gangway and one at a time coming up, there were a few hundred down there so all of them got off, the Nips in the meantime had shoved off, left us, so my mate Jerry Parkes said, 'What do you reckon we do?' I said, 'We'll settle them down on an even keel.' even though they had 2 torpedoes in them and it was settling down

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on an even keel, whether the rubber had something to do with it you know, all the rubber we took, settling down. So a lot of the blokes went overboard straight away and some of the 2/2nd Pioneer blokes, the army blokes, they got stuck into the Nips and as they came up from below, they were hitting them with these bits of timber, giving it to them and even the warder, one of the fellows, he was a big bloke, he did a bit of boxing,

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Frank McGrath, a big tough rooster, he pushed a couple of the Nips under the water and stood on them and kept them under there, drowned them. He did two over and then a Nip officer, one of the fellas was telling me after, one of our blokes, he said he grabbed the Nip officer to take him too, but the Nip officer was pretty strong and he'd already done two over this fellow, they both went down, and

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that's what happened to them. I didn't sight them after. Anyway my mate and I said, 'We'll have a look around the ship.' so we went up on to the bridge and the charts were there, so I said, 'We'll grab a couple of charts Jerry.' so I said, 'We'll know where we are.' so he said, 'Well righto.' so I decided to

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relieve myself in the corner of the bridge so he said, "Away you go, use one of the charts as toilet paper." see, so that gave me a great deal of satisfaction to do that on the ship so then we went down to try to get down to the galley, but that was under water, we were looking for food, so I went down aft where the Nips used to have some of the comfort women there, they carried their own women with them,

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and they'd taken them all off except one who was sitting there on this gangway leading up to the deck crying her eyes out, seeing us all dishevelled looking POWs, what was going to happen to her, so we weren't interested in her very much so I went down into the hold where the Nip quarters were, got hold of a, they are the greatest scroungers of all times, anything that was useful, so there was a fountain pen there so I grabbed that, put it in my kit, a tin of condensed milk, I saw that

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and grabbed that, and cigarettes, got that and put that in my kit, anything at all and then the ship started to creak, started to move a little bit, creaking and groaning. I thought, "I had better get up out of this." so I clambered up on the inside of the ladder because the ship was going over like that so instead of on the outside, I was on the inside and went up to the upper deck. Saw my mate Jerry. By this time a few of our fellows

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were trying to offload, or trying to lower a boat down which the Japs, in their panic, had jammed in the davits. We eventually got it free and I think it was that lifeboat that we lowered down, one I know hit the water too hard and it sunk, anyway I think this was the one, anyway

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we'll say it was. We said to the Nip lass, "Do you want to get into the boat?" indicating the boat, so we tied a rope around her middle and lowered her into the boat and as we lowered her down on to the water, a lot of the blokes were in the water, piled into the boat and I'm on the upper deck with my mate and we don't even have to get our feet watered, we slid down the rope but you couldn't get into the boat

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because it was packed, there must have been about 100 on there. Two inches of freeboard, so we hung on to the side of the boat, and the lanyards were hanging beside the boat, dragged away from it, the ship was still afloat, and our blokes were in the water everywhere and the Nips had pulled off about a quarter of a mile in their lifeboats and that ship floated all that day until about dusk. My mate Jerry Parkes who was with

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me, he said a couple of blokes swam back to the ship to look for food or whatever, so he said, "I'm going back to see." So I said, "I think I'll stay here Jerry, I'll hang on here." so he swum back to the ship and that was the last I saw of him. That afternoon two destroyers came up, Jap destroyers, and the sea was getting a bit choppy by this time, picked up all their own crowd.

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Oh during the day, that's right, going before my story again, we told the Japs in the boats that there was a Nip woman on board and one of them yelled out, we indicated a woman in Japanese, he said, "Mati presento presento." "You can have her, we don't want her, she's taking up room in the boat." I'm hanging on the side in the water you know. They came over eventually took her, they had side

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bayonets, took her and also a keg of water that we had managed to put on board and there was another keg of water, so I said to the blokes to cover it up with your feet and with your legs, which they did. Anyhow they took the keg of water and took the girl so I managed to get into the stern sheets at that time on the boat and floated around all that day. Two Nip destroyers came up that afternoon, picked up all their crowd, left the life pads,

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vacated them and the other destroyer was circling around and we thought, 'Oh yeah, what are they going to do?' because it was pretty choppy water by this time and the skies were lowering and coming up like a storm, and finally they turned, slowly turned, and started to head away and we thought, that's good and a Nip officer came down on to the quarterdeck and through a loud hailer, waved

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to us and said, 'Goodbye, goodbye.' so we gave him a sailor's farewell and let him have it and said we said, 'Hope the bloody Yankee subs send a torpedo to you and sends you to the bottom!' you know. Anyway they just shoved off and left us. So all the lifeboats that were around, our blokes got into them. There was Brigadier Varley, a VC [Victoria Cross]

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winner from the First World War [Brigadier A.L. Varley ? awarded the Military Cross and Bar during WWI, not the Victoria Cross] and a team of other blokes in these 6 boats. We were in this boat and 3 other or 4 other boats and during the day that afternoon, it was a little bit later on, it must have been, or was it the following day, no it must have been that afternoon,

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I'm just messed up with the days, this lifeboat came along side, nosed into me and a few of the Perth survivors were on there, I'm in the stern sheets this time, not knowing anybody and Frank Ritchie, one of the Perth survivors was standing up steering this other boat, and he saw me and said, 'Oh Mac, we can take two more.' see so I said, 'Righto Ritch.' and I stood up to step into the boat and two squaddies, soldier diggers

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stepped into it from the middle of our boat at midships and he said, 'I got the two now Mac.' so I said 'OK Ritch, see you later.' That lifeboat headed towards the Philippines and was never sighted again. Somebody's looking after you, you know, up top. We offloaded some of our crew into the other three boatloads,

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there must have been about 30 odd to a boatload so we had bit of a council and what are we going to, where are we heading, and we said, we'll head towards China we must be up there near China somewhere. So being 5 days out from Singapore heading up to Japan so we decided to head west, nor west to China. And the one that went to the Philippines was never sighted again and the other six boatloads, six of them, with Brigadier Varley

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and all that crowd headed in a more northerly direction I think and we did hear, and never sighted them again that day, until the following day we heard machine gun fire, it was heavier than machine gun, naval pom pom gun, heard naval 2? shells, pom poms going off, we didn't sight anything, we just heard it, because sound travels over the water as you know, and we never sighted those six

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boatloads either from that day. We four boatloads headed towards China as we thought, what was that song 'Slow Boat to China?', which it was. So we did that the following day and we had one keg of water and in the bottom of the boat we found a cigarette tin and it had about 50 cigarettes in it, the old tins of cigarettes

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and no lid on it, no cigarettes, we just emptied it and found it lying on the bottom of the boat so we used to eke out a couple of mouthfuls of water from that every afternoon at dusk, and drink that, each one of us. If there was a squall of water, we'd suck the water off our arms and dunk ourselves over the side during the middle of the day, keep a watch out for

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sharks, while we still had the strength to cool ourselves off and get back into the boat, but we thought, how long does it take us to get to China, maybe we had enough water to last maybe to last 8 or 9 days, so on the morning of the third day we're doing the drill, the same drill again, that night there was the tail end of a typhoon I believe and pretty heavy

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following sea and we thought we made good pace that night with the following sea, good way, but whether we did or not I don't know. But on the morning of the third day a recce [reconnaissance] plane came over, it would have been a Jap and later on that morning we saw smoke on the horizon astern of us and two Jap frigates, they were in sight, about midday I think it would have been

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and we thought, 'Oh yeah, see what's going to happen to us.' We could see the Jap gunners manning the guns as they came close in and there was a more humane skipper on this one. One boat astern of us with Rowley Richards, Doc Richards on it, they took them on board and came in and nosed in along side us and bumped us as they nosed in, and we swung along side and they had a scrambling

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net down, a scrambling net, which Big Doug and I hung on to, all the crew got up and then we got on board and then they picked the other boatloads up and we explained to them about the other boats, the captain more or less explained that the other boats would pick them up. They were never picked up. We learnt later, apparently,

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the Japanese High Command had been instructed to pick up Australians, not to pick up British or Americans, I don't know. Far as Australians go, we don't know. But I understand there was somebody that told me that afterwards. But they didn't know who we were; well they probably knew we were Australians because most of us were Australians in the Japan party on this one, there were a few English

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and then contradicting that, the Kachidoki Maru was also in the convoy and that had a lot of English POWs on it. That was sunk too. But that went down within a few minutes and most of them went although when we got into Hainan Island on the tanker, which will come later, we found out that there were survivors from the Kachidoki Maru. They were in a mess; they were on the tanker too.

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So we were on this frigate that night which picked us up before ? nosing around, and there was wreckage everywhere you know, from the convoy where we had been torpedoed and ships had been sunk and there was still oil still alight, burning

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on the surface of the sea, and we were on this frigate, on the fo'c'sle on the deck, just under the fo'c'sle gun and they're nosing into this, and I thought, ?Oh gee, we were silhouetted against the flame.? an easy target for a sub. Anyway we didn't get hit, so it was bit of a nerve wracking experience heading into this fire. I thought, ?Oh jeez don't do this!?

Anyway

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a couple of days later we headed into Hainan and they offloaded us onto a fully loaded oil tanker. We were in the forward well deck for that and we thought, ?Gee this doesn't look too good, they're not going to transport us to Japan on this surely?? While were there during the day, an air raid commenced and we thought, ?Oh no it can't be!?

and they were bombing

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the shore installations, so one of our fellow said, ?Well I'm not stopping on here, I'm going to swim ashore, go over and swim ashore.? The Nips probably read our thoughts because they could see the agitation going on down below, they put machine guns on either side of the bridge, anybody who tried to swim ashore would be machine gunned. Fortunately the air raid stayed away from the ships and just on the installations

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on the shore. The following morning, the lieutenant commander who was in charge of us he said, he refused to go with us on the tanker, refused to go to Japan, from what I learnt, somebody understood what was going on, or the captain refused or something happened or one of them refused, there was squabble going on between the Nips

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and we were offloaded on to another ship, a big ship, a whaling ship and from there we were to be transported to Japan.

Interviewee: Frank McGovern Archive ID 0019 Tape 04

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Frank, on the last tape we were just getting to you arriving in Japan

Yes, that's right, on the whaler. The whaling ship that we transferred to from the tanker was a huge cavernous ship, we were down about a, from the upper deck, there was a ladder going down about 20ft, this huge cavernous area where

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they used to drag the whales up from the stern, cut them up there, and they had tanks underneath for the oil, so it was really a bomb too you see, full of oil, if we had of got hit. One of the escort vessels was torpedoed when we were only about a day out from Japan and the windows in the bridge were shattered on our ship, but one of the Jap engineers came from

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down in the engine room, after the escort vessel got hit and in English, he'd probably been a merchant seaman told us

he said, 'It's all right we are not hit.' just like that. But we had another mate of mine, Dick Duncan, who died a few years back, found out that there was another way of getting up the ladder, another way of getting out of the hatch, there was a small cleated door, and he told me about it,

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you could open it and go through a passage way and get up. We kept that under wraps but it was there in case we did get hit. So we ended up getting to this place, Moji in Western Japan, it was, I think it was on Kyushu Island across the [indecipherable ? either Korean or Tsushima] Straits anyway and we got there at night time, and from there were offloaded on to a

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wait a minute, I'm going before my story, Moji, a pretty dreadful place, we got there that night I think. The following day anyway, we're on the jetty or the landing place and there's office buildings all around the place, it was a drab looking place, a lot of timber places,

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and where we were, we had to sit in rows, didn't have any clothes on, just pair of shorts or something wrapped around us, had to squat there with the guards around us in full view of the local population. I think they did it on purpose to degrade the white man you see, utter degradation it was, we were there dishevelled, dirty, fellows with dysentery

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fouling themselves, full view of everyone, just like being down at Circular Quay, stuck down there, everybody looking at you, all looking out the windows at these dirty looking bits of humanity. From there we were led away and put through a delousing place, it was big tanks of water or disinfectant,

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huge tanks, like a wading pool and we were pushed in there and shoved under with long bamboo poles, like a sheep dip or a cattle dip, going through a race, pushing us down, so they pushed us down into this disinfectant and from there they put us into another tank, full of water to get the stuff off us, so from there we were then herded along to these horse stalls which

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had just been vacated by the ponies or the horses, so they were pretty filthy too, so we were kept there all that day. I think it was the following morning or that afternoon we were taken to a hall and split up, one lot going to a place called Sakata, that was Rowley Richards, the doctor, and the rest of us were

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transported by train, I think it was a 36 hour journey by train to Yokohama where we landed at the station there. From there we were taken by trucks to this POW camp which was in effect a real POW camp as you see depicted in pictures. Timber huts, small compound

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and high stockade walls about 20 foot high, very confined, to what we were used to in Burma ,after being in Burma, the jungle, all of that, Thailand. This was confined; this is what we found so different from being in the jungle even though we were POWs so we were then put into work parties after a day, issued with thin, bark

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like, made out of bark I think they were, from Taiwan, hessian bags in a dark colour, tunic, trousers and a canvas like pair of shoes and a cap. We had our number there, mine was 158, 'hago ogi wodgi' and a big white piece with the number on the back,

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around that big, a tunic and then one on the cap, so they saw you coming and going looking down at you. This is how it was and day to day we were marched through the streets to the factory, Shabor Engineering Works, we worked there all day. Our job was arc welding. I don't think it left the yard, it was just put outside, it might have been for the war effort

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but it all got bombed to pieces in the finish. It was pretty dreadful up there you know, drab, horrible, and as the winter came on, strike me, it was that cold, it was a shocker. The thin pieces of cloth we had on us, we used to wear everything to bed, the clothes you wore to work you just stayed in them, even the cap, you put that on of a night time just to get warm and we used to sleep together, there would be two or three sleeping.

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They had blankets but they were heavy that's all, but there was not warmth in them and the work in the factory wasn't arduous just drab, drab existence, on a rice diet or a rice and millet diet and we worked probably an 8 or 9 hour day and

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the tenkos, the mustering, morning and night, lights out, and you had to keep watch of a night time so many firewatchers they called it, scared of fire, timber homes and used to have to report as the sentry as they came in how many men here, how many men sick and all of this business. And the blankets that you had or any clothes that they issued to you

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were stacked at the head of where you slept. Say you had three blankets, useless, but if they were out, if there was one there, one there and if that edge was out half an inch you'd get bashed. It had to be square, had to be in line, dead line, and it had to be kept neat and tidy. And all the signs around the place,

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'work cheerfully,' oh you know? So the fumen [possibly a shortening or alternative expression of Foo she bun ? Japanese for guard or sentry] who were in charge of us they were like a quasi-military lot in a non-descript uniform with badges, they went for badges a lot and we called them fumen and they were a bad lot of wretches. Watanabi was one bloke, he was the first lieutenant, horrible looking wretch, and a horrible

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so and so besides, sadistic, the head fumen, he was a sadistic brute, he was just, if he was bashing anybody, his face would drain of colour, just get embroiled into it, and they used to have those long pogo sticks, as long as a billiard cue, and they'd have sharp edges on them like a hexagonal and they would use those to

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give you a bash on either sensitive parts or on your elbows where they'd hit most, or on your head. There was one Dutch Javanese fellow there, older fellow than most of us, and he got into trouble there one day and this 'ornadella san'

the head fumen, we called him Rubberneck because he had a habit of walking around the factory and he'd be swivelling his head around side to side looking, Rubber neck.

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He got this bloke one day and he'd question you for a while say something to you in japanunda as if to say, 'Why were you doing it nunda??' and then he'd start hitting with this pogo stick, and each time he spoke he hit it harder, bang until the blood started to trickle down you know and then he really got into it. And then as the bloke collapsed in a heap on

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the floor, concrete floor, he would get one of his underlings to get a fire bucket full of ice water during the winter, with a film of ice on it, throw it over the bloke so that it would bring him to and then of course the 2 to 3 kilometre march back to the camp in the cold, miserable, biting wind, and you could be sure of getting pneumonia or something worse. So that went on day after day. Some small misdemeanour

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they'd get you for. What an army, horrible mud, yeah. You're coming back to do details because I've probably missed a few things, it's OK. It was getting that cold that we used to sleep in all our gear to try to get warm and sometimes the guards

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they'd be out with a brazier in front of them at night in the guardhouse, outside in the compound. Some of the blokes who had committed a misdemeanour, some slight thing, they'd be standing outside to attention for up to 6 hours at a time, outside the guardhouse just away from the braziers so they that wouldn't get any warmth, kept on the side and if they moved a bit, the change of guard would give them a bit of a bash as they went through.

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They'd be like blocks of ice when they'd come in. It went on all the time and as the air raids started, it got worse, you know, they took it out on us. My mate Keithy Mills, yeah,

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would get in after walking through the snow and all that, just in the water troughs, wash our feet hands and face, we almost stopped doing that. We'd go into this platformed area and we'd have

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a piece of soap which was about an inch or so long and the towel would be a piece of cotton cloth about so big, you'd have to wring it out every time you tried to dry yourself. So it was that cold this day, I said to Keith, 'Wait till I soap up mate.' which I did and I got a bit of soap, was shivering like blazes and I said, 'Righto throw the bucket of water over.' which he did and this day it had a thin sheeting of ice on it and he threw it over me and I nearly froze to death. So I said to Keith, 'No more, no more,

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finish!?' So we had no baths after that for about 3 weeks. So we must have been about that high that even the Japs probably thought they'd do something about this so they piped some hot water though into this big tank and we soaped ourselves in that, which was good. But we were a pretty filthy looking lot you know, scabby sores on us and that, horrible,

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I won't go into that and one day Pat Major was working on the guillotine, it was a pretty big guillotine about 8 or 9 feet long, cutting up huge pieces of steel and on there one day he saw 4 fingers which had been lopped off by

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one of the Jap workmen and he got a piece of cloth and put the fingers on it and took it over to the foreman, the Jap foreman. He just looked at it, he couldn't bear to look at them, he was nearly physically sick you know. So one of our fellows walking past said, "What have you got there Pat, don't throw them away, don't waste them, bring them back to the camp and put them into the soup in the camp?" He said, "Righto."

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But anyway, where did we get to, different things like that. This Jap foreman in charge of our section, the arc welding, he wasn't a bad Nip. Even the coldest weather, he was a fairly old bloke, a couple of teeth missing and gold teeth and that, in the coldest weather he'd be going around in clogs, biting cold winds

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you know, how does he do it? Anyway, he wasn't a bad Nip. One day he got issued with some mandarins, about half a dozen mandarins so with the goings one you would have thought he'd won lotto or the lottery, because they were rationed too. So this fellow, supervisor, with his armband on and his cap and all that, come around with these in a basket, looked around, gave it to the

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boss, six mandarins, "Oh arigato gozaimasu." and big bows, and all this business, we were looking at the mandarins and my mate and I thought gee we'd like to get one of these, so slowly the bloke moved off, the supervisor, so the foreman went over very slowly, just moved away very slowly over to the iron desk, opened the drawers and put them and closed the drawers, folded his

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arms and just walked around, and after a little while went over, all in slow motion, went over to one of his best workmen I suppose, with a mandarin, "Oh, arigato gozaimasu." so he did this a few times and there was one mandarin left and our mouths watering, so said to Max, "Strike me I'd like to get over to that steel desk." he said that there was no chance, so anyway

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the foreman goes over again, slow motion, gets the mandarin out and breaks it up into quarters, has a look around the factory to see if any guards are looking, came over to me and gave me a quarter of a mandarin, a quarter of a mandarin! So I said to myself, "You can't knock that. That's the good part of it." So a couple of times like that

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he did good things like that and the ordinary Jap that you worked with, they were OK, they were under the thumb of the military. Give you an instance. We were marching 2-3 kilometres to the factory during the peak hour, we'd come to an intersection, hundreds of Nips going to work too, a lot of them riding bikes, pushbikes, so we we're going across this intersection,

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come to a halt, so probably this fellow on his pushbike was getting a bit anxious to get to work, rode through our ranks, so they chased him, the guards, full view of us and the population, used these pogo sticks, knocked him off his bike and kicked hell out of him, just left him lying in the gutter. I said to my mate, "What chance have we got if they do that to their own?"

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So that's how it was. So that's the other side of it. Fellows who didn't go to Japan didn't see that, the fellows that were kept on in Burma and Thailand anyway that's that other side of the story. But come the time when the warmer weather was coming, winter was getting over, I think it was February, March, when the air raids started. Because our fellows were getting closer to the main islands

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and these were the B-29 Fortresses coming over, huge planes at that time, 4-engine job and the Nips used to call them Bnee B-29. And they were scared of them too. The air raids started a couple of nights and as they commenced getting more and more frequent the Nips used to take it out on us too, the guards,

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till one night, or one afternoon, the air raid sirens went, I think March, April, and it had been a very windy day and these planes came over and dropped incendiary bombs, only a few of them, but apparently it was to mark a perimeter where the planes that night were to come over and firebomb the place,

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this was the firebombing of Tokyo. I've got a photo in there of it. I'll show you. That night those flyers were still going, and hundreds of these B-29s came over and after they had been going for about an hour, we were preparing to evacuate the camp because it was getting closer and closer and as we

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came out of the stockade gates to this narrow street, you looked down to the end of the street and fire towers everywhere and all you could see from one side of the street to the other was this mass of flames, like it was rolling, an army of fire just rolling up the street, you could hardly breathe, it was taking all the air away and you were finding it hard to breathe and it was a residential area

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where we were and it was just exploding as the fire came up, so we doubled away with the guards and away from, as far as we could and we were going along this narrow street and women and kids, women with babies strapped to their backs, kiddies running alongside them trying to escape the flames, pretty impossible and they were all heading down towards the Sereda River, trying to get down there.

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This plane was coming over, we know we won't survive this one, this won't be far away, and dropped this load of incendiaries, it was like a firework exploding a few hundred feet up. We crouched down beside one of the low brick walls and this street going away from us is jam packed with women, kids, civilians as this lot came down. We were, as we crouched

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down, we just looked and the whole street, the whole lot just erupted in flames, the whole bloody lot. "Gee?" we said, "Let's get going before the next lot comes over!" So we ran and caught up with the main bunch, and came to an

intersection, like a Y intersection in the road and there were a lot of Nip civilians there and in the glare of the fire, you could see their faces, they were contorted in

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hatred, they wanted to get at us, well we were burning their place down, killing them, so the Nip sergeant, Sergeant Hino, out comes the sword, holds it aloft, and you could see it burnished against the flame, and he speaks to them for about 5 minutes and goes on in Jap at them, shows you how powerful the military was, we're standing there ? what's going on ? they're wanting to

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get at us and the guards had their fixed bayonets, after he had finished speaking, they fell back on either side. Through we went except one bloke at the back, he dropped off a little bit, I don't know whether he had a crook foot or not and they fell on him and gave him the works, they gave it to him. So we thought at the time, we're going across this vacant allotment

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away from the flames and silhouetted against the people in front of us the fellows are bending down and getting up and we thought, ?What's going on here?? and then we could smell onions, and we thought, ?Onions!?! and we were going across a field of onions, a patch of onions. Here we are grabbing these onions and devouring them as we went over this paddock of onions.

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It looked as though a team of locusts had gone over that the following day. It was denuded. And that raid went on for possibly 4 hours. We were led back the following day through it all. As far as we could see it was just burnt, 16 square miles, can you imagine 16 square miles? Say from here to Coogee to Maroubra.

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Nothing except, have you seen photos of the atomic bomb on Nagasaki? Like that. A few concrete buildings that's all, the rest burnt. A few dark drunken scarred telegraph posts to show where the roads were, you couldn't tell where the roads were, deep in ashes and we had to walk through this. And we were talking to a wing commander after the war and he was talking about the fire bombing of Tokyo where we

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were and we said, ?Yes were in that.? and he just looked at us as if to say, ?Oh yeah.? So we said, ?We were in the Kawasaki area.? he said, ?Yeah that was where the air raid was, in the suburbs of Tokyo.? and we said, ?Yeah, that's right, our camp was burnt out.? He said, ?Do you know how many bombs were dropped that night?? and I said, ?There were a bloody lot, we know that much!?! he said, ?30,000 incendiaries were dropped that night.?

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by these hundreds of B-29s. And he said, ?Do you know how many civilians died?? we said no, ?There must have been thousands.? he said, ?Well over a hundred thousand.? They don't know the exact figure because of identification. The bodies, as they were coming out of some of the buildings, collapsed and they were piled on top of one another and through the heat, the intense heat they were welded together, the bodies were just

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melted together. They wouldn't know how many were killed. It was man's inhumanity to man ? it was a shocker. Anyway that was in March, April and we were moved out of that camp, actually it was burnt, to the factory area. Put in

a disused building, one storey building near the factories, there were factories all around us, and the raids were then changed

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from incendiaries to the heavy stuff, thousand pounders, so we thought strike me, it won't be long now, because they were doing pattern bombing coming over in hundreds the B-29s ? they'd do that area over one night and that area over, saturation bombing, they were getting closer to where we were and we thought gee. This night the air raid had been going for about an hour and I thought,

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I was talking to Keithy Mills, me mate, he was standing next to me and I was sitting on the shelving where we slept, timber shelving, and he said to me, ?Mac, what do you reckon we go up to the air raid shelter?? well the air raid shelters were only a few sand bags piled together and if you dug down any further than a foot or two it was water,

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saturated ground, you'd strike water and the camp or the hut, the building was built over a reservoir of water. So as he stood there and was speaking to me about going up to the air raid shelter, I said, ?Oh no what would be the use of going up there?? and this bomber came over and there was this roaring, crashing sound like an express train and a sticker bomb went right through the place and blew it apart. I rolled over on to my stomach and the next minute

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I'm up in the air going over and over, somersaulting, a queer feeling like being in slow motion, up and over, up and over, and then falling, fortunately feet first. When I landed I was in water up to my chin. I thought, ?Where the hell am I?? Didn't know where I was, thought I had been blown out into the bay because we were only a hundred yards from the bay.

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When my head came up I hit something and I could see flames, fire and shadowy figures and I thought, ?Bloody hell, what's going on here?? so I put my hands up and held on to something and it was the timber roofing, the place had been blown apart, and all the timber had come down across the crater where I was. I held up with my hands, I could breathe because the water was up to there, I saw the shadowy figures silhouetted against the flames and

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it looked like Dante's Inferno I should imagine, a scene from that and then I felt nothing from there down. And then I thought, ?Oh God.? you know, so I held on with one arm you know, so I felt down and that leg was there and I did with the other arm and felt that leg there see. Then I felt this terrific pain in my back and I thought, ?My spine's gone.? as it turned out it was a

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compression fracture of the vertebrae in the lumbar. I learnt later. I was paralysed from there down. So I just hung on and then I saw a bloke coming across and it turned out to be Mike Palmer, he lived in the US, he was a US Navy man who'd been taken prisoner in the Aleutians and brought down to Tokyo. I formed a good friendship with him over the years and

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he said, he sort of looked down, I could see him looking down and sort of heard my voice, because I yelled out and he said, ?Is that you Mac?? I said, ?Yes, is that you Mike?? and he said yes. I said, ?Will you help me out?? he said, ?I

can't get you out of there. There's a hole further down and you'll have to go under.? so I said righto, down under the water line, hang on and finally I got to the surface and he dragged me out.

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Only the rubble of the building, that's all that was left, only two ends standing. Took me out of the compound and laid me alongside a lot of other blokes lying there. There were yells and screams and fire so he said, ?I'll have to leave you here Mac I'm going back in to help some of the others.? so I said, ?OK Mike.? So he laid me down, and I was like being in a straight jacket, all the mud and that had come up under my jacket and it was in my ears and my face was

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cut and I was out like this and I couldn't move, and then they put another bloke along side me and then another bloke and then they evacuated the camp, they moved away to a bombed out area because the Nips had figured it out that they wouldn't bomb that again. So they stayed there all night and I'm lying there and the fires going around me, yells and screams had died down and the drone of the planes had faded into the distance

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and I turned my head to this bloke and spoke to him and he didn't answer ? he was dead. So I spoke to the bloke next to me on the other side, no answer, so I'm just lying there in amongst all these dead ones, so I thought, ?Oh well, you know.? I think I said a few prayers. Then it started to rain, gentle rain and it helped put the fires out and I thought

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to myself, ?What's going on?? ? that was the loneliest night I had ever spent I think. Anyway the fires subsided, the rain stopped and the sky was beginning to lighten, dawn was breaking and then I heard voices in the distance, they were coming back to the camp.

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Then they started to sort everything out ,the dead uns, the injured blokes and they washed me down and scrubbed all the dirt and rubbish off me and loaded me on the back of a truck with some other blokes they were in a pretty bad way some of them with shrap wounds, there were a couple of Dutch fellows with huge chunks out of their legs which necessitated amputation later. Anyway we're on the back of this truck about 12 of us and they set off,

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it must have taken an hour or half the night, I don't know how long, I think I had passed out with the pain till we got to the Shebora hospital because they were going over rubble strewn roads and into craters and beauty, and my back was aching like blazes. So they had a SBA in charge of us in the hospital, a Yankee SBA [sick bay attendant], Buck Barlow, I remember his name now and they put

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the fellows with the bad wounds in bed and put me on a stretcher, I was just lying on a stretcher. A couple of Nip doctors came over and a nurse and looked down on me and said something to one another, and I just lay there, the nurse took my footwear off and I said, ?Arigato.? thank you, and they operated on the two fellows who had these bad shrap wounds I think

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and they were coming good, they did a good job on them. I'm lying there, it must be 2 or 3 days, I can't move, I've had it, and the pain, and that night I said to the sick bay bloke I said, ?Buck, can you give me something, can you give me a shot?? He said, ?No Mac.? he said, ?I haven't got anything to give you. We're in hospital and they haven't got anything

to give you, not even an aspirin.? So I said, ?OK

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mate.? you know. He said, ?There's other blokes pretty crook [ill] too.? so I said, ?Yeah all right.? so I got the message. So we sweated that out and about 3 days later one of the fellows that had his leg amputated, took him into the operating theatre and about an hour or so later they wheeled him out and Buck came over to me, the SBA fellow, and said, so

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and so's dead. I'm looking up on my back, so I said, ?Dead!? I said, ?He was coming good.? ?Yeah.? he said, ?The so and so's had cut an artery in the groin and had drained all the blood out of him, they wanted the blood, see they murdered him.? I said, ?Strike me this doesn't sound too good.? and I'm lying down there and I thought jeez. So next day they started to wheel the

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other bloke in, that had had his leg amputated and the SBA fellow said to me, ?I'm going in this time.? just like that. When he got to the operating theatre door, there were two guards there, sentries, and shoved him off back to the ward. They wheeled the other fellow out and he was dead too. Cut the artery in the groin. So I said, ?Buck, help me up.? it was great incentive to get up

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so with his help he got me up and I could just shuffle my feet a bit and the next day I did the same. I said, ?Leave me mate, I think I can do it.? just a few yards and back. So I was on my feet but I think we were there about 10 days and the Nip officer came in one day all spruced

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up and spic and span as they usually do and he said, in English, very briskly, ?All walking wounded outside!? I looked at Buck and said, ?That's me, outside, I want to get out.? So I hobbled out along with about 6 others. So the officer said this way, so I'm on the veranda and went to this courtyard

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where there were some Nip soldiers with their rifles standing in a group. It was an enclosed area with a brick building around. So with his sword scabbard he drew a line in the dirt and we had to toe that line and he paced off to where the Nip soldiers were about 10 to 15 paces, they'd all come to attention. I looked at the bloke near me and said, ?This doesn't look too good mate.?

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So he drew another line and he said, pointing with his sword scabbard at the end of the line, ?You walk.? So we thought, oh we've just got to do a sort of a trial run for him, and then next bloke, next bloke, next bloke and then he came to me and I said oh gee, and then I walked 15 paces, I'm going to do it, so real parade ground style, stiff,

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I got up and got to it and then I couldn't do an about turn because I think I would have fallen over so I did a quarter turn, quarter turn, and got back to the other lines, I'd made it. The sweat was pouring off me by this time. We were all loaded on to a transport truck and taken back to camp where the fellows were building a new camp away from the factory area

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so I got out of that place, that charnel house. The doctor ? they wanted me to go back after the war to Singapore and give evidence, I said, ?No I'm not going back, I don't want to go back.? I said, ?You've got enough evidence without me.? Anyway he was hanged as a war criminal, the doctor, Dr Death they called him. He experimented on the POWs. So

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I continued working, that was pretty painful, I couldn't bend down with my back, I just had a knees full bend each time, that's how I managed to do it and we all built a camp, they thought I wasn't working too well, the Nips, so they bashed me up, they thought I was malingering, but I couldn't bend down. Come the day when August 15,

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1945, August 15, about midday, we were all herded into the air raid shelters and we learned later that Emperor Hirohito was to speak to the people but we as horihos, despised prisoners, we were not allowed to listen to the divine emperor, so we were put in the air raid shelter and we thought there must be an invasion on or something you know, you could tell by the body language

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and by the way they were going on the Nips, anyway an hour later we get out of the air raid shelters, they've doubled the guards and instead of the fumen they've got regular army blokes too, they've doubled them all. So away we marched out of the factory back to the camp but we go back by a different route and as we came over one of the last bridges remaining there, this old crone

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she was just standing there, woman with her thin bony hands and her face, and tears streaming down her face and she was screaming and she was wanting to get us to tear us to bits. The Jap guards just pushed her aside you know. Came back to the camp, locked the gates on us and afterwards the camp commandant came out and through the interpreter said peace negotiations were going on between allies and

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Nippon. But Nippon is still strong. We thought, ?Oh yeah, Nippon is still strong.? We thought, ?Yeah not very strong I don't think.? Vic Duncan, a mate of mine, he died a few years back, said, ?Mac I think it's over.? I said, ?I don't believe it's over until those air raids stop and the sirens stop.? So that night the sirens started, so I said, ?There you go

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mate, there go the bloody sirens again.?

Interviewee: Frank McGovern Archive ID 0019 Tape 05

When we left of yesterday you were telling us about?

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The Shebora Hospital wasn't it, that's right. Well I think I was about 10 days in the hospital and then they said all the walking wounded back to camp, which I managed to be a walking wounded which got out of that, When I got back to camp I

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didn't know that any of the fellows were killed, I had had no idea, I knew there some damage done and that but my mate that was standing next to me talking to mes Keith Mills, came from Maroubra by the ways he was standing up and I was sitting down on the timber shelving where we slept and I think I said I rolled over when the sticker bombs went through the camp. Apparently he got the full force of it along with

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I think about 30 altogether were killed and a lot more wounded, but the crater that was made by the bombs filled with water, and when they drained that out they found a few bodies in there and there were 3 survivors, Perth survivors who were killed in amongst those 30 and Vic Duncan,

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who died a few years backs a mate of mine he got out of it all right, had to identify some of the bodies and he could only tell his mate Tommy Johnson by the tattoo on his arm, you know he saw the tattoo and that's how he identified Tommy and another chap from Melbourne, Pat Major, he was killed also.

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But the chappie who was talking to me, Keith Mills, they found his body without a mark on it in the crater in the water, he'd probably got knocked out and drowned in the water. He was knocked unconscious and that was it. But it took me a while to get over that you know, it was a low point in three and a half years that I was POW

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and I was talking to one of the Yanks there one day, that I got friendly with, he was the fellow that pulled me out of the crater as a matter of fact, and he said yeah I lost so and so too, his mate, he was killed, he'd been with him three and a half years, four years, his mate, that's how it was. That was only 4 weeks before it was all over. July 13th. Then of course after that we were sent back to work,

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and I wasn't going too well with the pain in my back and I couldn't bend down very well. I think I did tell you yesterday about the when we were herded into the air raid shelters one day, August 15, didn't I? August the 15th the day the Emperor spoke to the people?

They didn't want you to hear it?

Yeah, the divine emperor and the lowly POWs you know, rabble, we weren't allowed to listen

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to him. When we got out of the air raid shelter about an hour later they doubled the guards and took us back through a different route put us into the prison camp, the new one doubled the guards around the perimeter and the camp commandant spoke to us that afternoon that peace negotiations were going on and that night my mate Mick said to me, 'Well I think it's over Mac.' and I said, 'We'll see if there are any more air raids.'

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Anyhow they sounded that night, the sirens but there was no air raid so that was a good sign. So the following day about midday sirens went again but it was only a recce plane going over and the next day word came through that we had to paint on the roof of the hut PW in white, in 30 ft letters, so we then knew that this was it. There was no

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rejoicing or jumping in the air like that, we just accepted because we thought of the blokes that had just been killed and we thought how close it was until they changed the guards, took out all the fumen and put English speaking guards only

with side arms, no rifles. They tried fraternizing with us, sat down on the bench with us, say

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?Have a cigarette.? you know, ?Where are you from? Australia, oh yeah.? So one bloke squatted one day next to me one of the Nips and he said smoking a cigarette, he looked at me and said, ?You very hoppy.? very happy, couldn't say it, very hoppy, ?Yeah.? I said, ?I'm very hoppy.? very happy and he said, ?Nippon

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very sad.? I said, ?Oh well, time marches on like you know and it's your turn now.? So I think that Mick and I the following day, no the planes came over, the B-29s, came over the following day, the bombers that did all the damage, they were huge planes, 4 engine jobs and coming over the camp dropping food parcels.

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The first one that came over was a fighter plane off one of the carriers I think, he zoomed over the camp pretty low altitude and did a victory roll, circled round and he was about a couple of hundred feet up and dropped a food parcel out, just dropped it into the compound and it had a note on it, ?Chin up, beer and steaks for everyone in a few days.? Pilot officer, forget his name, but he was from Milwaukee, I

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remember this quite well, so he did another victory roll and away he went. Anyway the next day another plane came over and opened these bomb bays and dropped these huge parcels, they must have been about 12 foot long and a couple of feet square, yeah about 12 foot, in different coloured parachutes, hundred of them coming down, they were at pretty low altitude and some of the parachutes didn't open so they went through the roof of the hut,

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one bloke ended up with a broken arm and I said, ?I'm not going to wait to be killed by a food parcel I'm going up the air raid shelter.? which I did, then they dropped hundred of these things, one outside the camp went through the roof of a house and it killed this Jap who was lying down I think at the time. Just went straight through and flattened him and you know the families were there, the wife and that, crying.

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We got a medico to go out there and see if he could help them but it was too late, he was squashed, he was dead. Anyway we had enough chewing gum, cigarettes and KD rations [emergency rations packs], as they called them, for a thousand blokes, there were only 300 hundred in the camp. Boots, they were piled high in one of the rooms as high as you could jump over you know,

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a thousand boots, I think the Nips got all of these later when we evacuated you know. They didn't do this by halves the Yanks, they just flattened the place with all these food parcels. So Mick and I, we were told we had to stay in camp, we said, ?Oh no, we'll be right.? and went out, took some food in a food parcel, went out, because we knew the Japs, and civilians,

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were pretty well starving too, they were rationed pretty solid, they didn't have much food, so we went out and went into a couple of the places, we could see the situation there, a wife and a bloke there and a photo of one of their sons with black around it, explained killed in the war and all this, the same thing so we left a couple of tins there for them

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and went somewhere else and fed up a few more. One little kid was running around and I gave him some chewing gum, his eyes wide open, 'Chew it see, don't swallow it, spit it out.' Anyhow he ran home, told his mother, anyway she came running out and we gave her some food parcels too. So it was about a week or so after that we were told to

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get ready and we would be taken by trucks down to Tokyo Bay. So, by this time after a couple of weeks of good food we were feeling all right and we said, 'No, we don't want trucks, we want to go down in buses.' so we got a little bit uppity about it, we wanted to do it in style. So they said OK and put the buses on. For miles we went down through this devastated area,

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factories just obliterated, the whole area was just flattened, miles upon miles where factories were, the industrial area, all wrecked until we eventually got down to Tokyo Bay and all the Yanks were there and the sergeant who was in charge of our camp, Sergeant Hino, he came down

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too, you can't understand the Jap way of thinking, we'd been with them for three and a half years. He just stood there on the parapet, and as we got into the landing barge to take us out to the hospital ship, the Yanks were taking us out there, he was standing there with a handkerchief, he took a handkerchief out and waving us goodbye you know. I said to Big Duncan, 'Can you work them out?'

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he said, 'No, I think he's really emotional about it you know.' There he was waving this handkerchief goodbye, we said, 'Hooroo, we're glad to see the last of you.' Anyhow they took us on board the Benevolence the USS Benevolence, the hospital ship and we dirty, scabby looking lot, all the nurses were there you know,

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and they said, 'Right, strip off and into the hot showers.' and we thought, 'Yeah you're got to be joking.' We got into the shower ? 'Throw all your clothes out here, we're coming to get rid of all those filthy clothes.' We had a decent scrub up, hot shower and we got out of each cubicle, there must have been half a dozen cubicles there, was this underwear - underpants, singlet,

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gob's [soldier's] outfit, shoes, we had to work the size out, and a gob's cap so we had to dress up as US soldiers, it was terrific. That night they bedded us down on the Benevolence in stretchers and blankets and the whole works. And half way through the night I woke up there was a fellow coming around with a blanket, putting another blanket on us, tucked us in and all that,

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couldn't do enough for us. It was unbelievable. So we were all there for about a week I think, and word comes in that we were to be taken to Manila in the Philippines on board the HMS Beaker[?], which was a utility or tender aircraft carrier, small aircraft carrier. There must have been about 2 dozen of us

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on there we were classed as fit, some of the others were still in the hospital. So we lined up there and went on board the Beaker and took us down into the hangar, gave us food and the RN, the Royal Navy had a rum issue, so they came around with a toddy of rum and we said, "At this stage we won't be able to have any rum." so we gave it to one of the Pom sailors

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so they said, "You beaut!" They got a couple of more tots of rum than their usual ration. But that evening after the [UNCLEAR] came round and after we had got our tucker, they said, "Lights out but we're still having a bit of a brown out because there might be rogue Jap subs around." and I said to one of the fellows, "What do you reckon about sleeping down here in the hangar?" he said, "I don't know, there's still a bit of a brown-out

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on." so I said, "I'm going up on the flight deck." so we got all our gear and went up on to the flight deck, we slept up there, we wouldn't go down below, we'd had too much of it and we'd got out of it and we're not going to get torpedoed by some rogue Jap sub, so we slept up on the flight deck and the following day, as we went down, steamed up to get out

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of Tokyo Bay, it was full of warships, there were battle ships there, the [USS] Missouri where they signed the surrender, other battleships, heavy cruisers, light cruisers, destroyers, line upon line of ship and each ship dressed, they knew we were POWs and we were the first batch of POWs out and one of the chaps who had been on the Perth sent a signal to the [HMAS] Hobart, our ship that was in there,

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the Hobart was in there at the time that there were four Perth survivors, so they had to signal across to the Hobart. The Hobart wanted to take us back, take us on board, but I said, "No, we had to be debriefed and go through all the rigmarole in the Philippines." so we went down this line of ships, we were all lined up on the flight deck, they cheered us as we went down, I thought, this is good, up the other line of ships and down they took us an hour to get out of Tokyo Bay. It was a fantastic sight

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and then we headed off towards Manila and when we got there, they debriefed us and I remember one Yank, he said, "What outfit are you in?" and I said, "RAN." RIN he wrote down, I said, "No RAN." "Yeah." he said, "RIN." the accent I suppose, "No." I said, "RAN, Royal Australian Navy." "Oh." he said, "Royal Australian Navy,

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RAN." he got it right that time. Then he said, "You know I've met a few of you guys, you guys stink." I said, "Yeah, well you'd stink too if you hadn't had a decent scrub for the last six months!" like that, so he settled down after that I think and we went on with the debriefing. From there I met up with a chap who I used to work on the Water Board with

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and he came into the tent one night, we'd been there two days and he saw my name of the list of survivors, of POWs, and he said, "Frank McGovern?" I said, "Yes, yeah, oh Phil, Phil Phillips." worked on the Water Board with him. He was in charge getting the fellows from Manila on to a plane back to Australia. He said, "There's a plane going out in a little while,

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would you like to be on it?" I was in my underwear at the time and I said, "Yeah Phil." He said, "I've never seen a

bloke get dressed so quickly. I was staring at you one minute in your underwear and next minute you're dressed ready to go.? With that, we were lined and ready to go to the airport and the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] crew and a Liberator, a four engine Liberator, stripped of all the seats, just a few mattresses thrown in, I think there were a

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dozen of us on that and they were a good crew, they were terrific. Anyway we developed engine trouble on the way from Manila to Darwin and we had heard previously, that previous a plane had ditched got wiped out, went into the sea, anyway they said, ?We'll be right fellow, no worries, we've got three other engines, so we'll be right.? so we said, ?OK, we'll take your word for it.?

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We got to Darwin all right but we were grounded for 24 hours while they fixed the engine up. Took eleven hours from Manila to Darwin and when got to Darwin I kissed the tarmac and thought, ?You beaut Aussie, we're here!?' and the following day after they had fixed the engine up, put us on board and came in over Sydney Harbour, a beautiful spring morning it was,

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September 17th, it took 11 hours direct flight to get from Darwin to Sydney. So the captain of the crew said, ?Fellows I've got permission to circle the Harbour.? so he said, ?Just keep to one side of the plane, don't all race to one side, we'll have to keep it on an even trip.? so we said all right, so he said, ?I'll go back the other way too.? so we circled the Harbour,

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over the northern beaches, Manly, all that area over the Harbour Bridge, straight over the city, Watson's Bay, back through the Heads, and then did it the other way. It was terrific. So we lashed them [gave them] with whatever gear we had, we had plenty of cigarettes, US cigarettes, they hadn't seen them, pretty scarce, so we gave them a carton of cigarettes and they said, ?We don't want these, take em.? ?What about your mate over there, the co-pilot?? so we give him a carton, handed them all out.

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They were a terrific crew, so landed at Mascot, interviewed by the Press and the navy wanted Perth survivors and the army blokes wanted their crowd, so there was a bit of chaos sorting everything out. They gave us a cup of tea and a biscuit or something and then we were in the navy truck that took us to Balmoral Naval Depot

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and then we met up with Mum and Dad and it was terrific you know. Saw one of the fellows I knew, he was doing some job there, I recognized him from the early part of the war when we first paraded together. So I had a yarn with him ordered a limousine and took us home, it was a terrific home coming, fantastic,

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flags waving everywhere, placards and all this business so? We were still in the navy and we had to stay in until we were debriefed and I went up for a medical. I went before a team of surgeons, there must have been about 6 of them, all with their pens and papers, interviewing me, ?What diseases did you have?? ?Oh malaria, beri beri, dysentery...?

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named them all and they said, ?Oh yes. Tropical ulcers.? they said, ?We believe you had a bad spine.? I said, ?Oh yes.? I believe from what they said after they X-rayed it. They said, ?We've X-rayed it too, we've got the X-ray results here.

A compression fracture of the lumbar vertebrae with a chip off the adjoining rib.?

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I said, ?I don't know where the chip is, that's still floating around.? So they said, ?What treatment did you have after it happened?? I said, ?I was put into hospital, but I didn't have any treatment, I was put on a stretcher, laid on a stretcher for about 5 or 6 days but I didn't have any treatment.? They looked at one another and they looked at me and I said, ?I can substantiate what happened.?

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and they said, ?It's all right.? they said, ?We believe you, we believe you, we were just wondering, we couldn't get your back any straighter if we put you in plaster for 6 months.? So I said, ?It just happened, just lying on a stretcher.? They said, ?It's unbelievable really, that this had happened.? I said, ?I was paralysed from the waist down for that length of time.? I said

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?Yes.? they said, ?What about bowel movements?? and I said, ?No bowel movements for about 6 days.? and then they understood, and they said that if I had had a bowel movement it would have been curtains for you. So I said, it happened, so I was all right. So I said OK and I got a medical discharge from the navy I think that was in March

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maybe in 1946 and after another month went back to where I got the old job back at the Water Board. It took a while to settle in though. I don't think I mentioned about the brother, I'm going back now to when we were sunk. He was an engine room artificer I think I did tell you, and his action station was down in the after control, after steering I should say, the after steering

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and that section of the ship down aft. When the order to abandon ship came through and they went over to the port side and that was on the starboard side of the ship, it was just after midnight, you couldn't see much and the last torpedo had hit on that side or somewhere in that vicinity and there was still fellows going over and there was a lot of shell fire and coming out, there were a lot of explosions in the water and I think that is where a lot of them were killed. I think I did tell you,

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that's when we got on to a Carley float, on a lifeboat and finally got ashore. Anyhow we got back home, met everybody, met up with Merle eventually and quite a few others, so that was it, settled back into civvy [civilian] life. It took a while though. Very difficult. I said to one of the fellows they should have locked us up for six months after we got back. People

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were not supposed to talk to us about the war. They thought we were all a bit stupid, I think we were, but stir happy. I remember one night going out on a tram to Bondi, to meet Merle one night and still in uniform and we were in the, it was a dreadnought type of tram, open at the back, you know that type of tram and there was only another bloke sitting in the corner

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and I was sitting here, in uniform, and as we came around from Queen Street into Edgecliffe Road one of the fuses blew out and it just went bang! I ended up under the seat that seat opposite, straight under and I was in uniform and

God I was feeling stupid and the bloke sitting down there, digger who'd been to war,

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just looked at me and said, 'Son, it's going to take you a while to get used to it.' I just shook my head and said, 'Yeah.' Things like that, you're stir bomb happy, you might read about it but it really happened. We were in a pub there one day, a few of us, and one of the fellows who had been with us, a POW, we were talking to two other blokes that hadn't

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been POW and this fellow came around and saw us over there and yelled out 'Squatski!' which means attention in Jap. The two of us, I dropped my glass, I had half a glass of beer, I just dropped it and came to attention. Immediately I knew so I stopped, so the other bloke did the same, that was a couple of months after we got out. It was imbued into us,

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it was there. We gave him a right shellacking [teasing], it was all right afterwards. These other two blokes just looked at us and said, 'What's going on, these blokes are stupid??' which we were I think. Things like that, people couldn't understand. Very, very hard to get it through to them and we would maybe go along and talk to some of the fellows who had been in the army or navy but weren't POWs, we'd have a drink with them,

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we might be there for a while, and we'd be having a conversation and they'd be talking about things that we didn't know anything about. It seemed as though for those three and half years the world had just passed us by you know. We then went and saw our own mates who had been POWs, that's what we did, we were on common ground when we talked to one another but it took a long time, a hell of a while. They did give us an update on things

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down in the navy a bit, we went to Melbourne about a month after we came back they gave us an update on things that had happened which helped us a bit but it didn't get to the nitty gritty of things. This fellow Vic Duncan, he came back with us, he was with his wife Betty in the bus one day and it was a crowded

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bus, up to a point, all the people up the front end, very few at the back end, standing room only so he said, 'Move down the centre please.' nobody moved, so he said it again, 'Move down the centre.' so he just pushed, pushed them all down. Poor Betty, she thought she was done for, she got off

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at the next stop. Things, we were just out of kilter with things, we just couldn't settle down, we didn't know, we were just away with the fairies at times. But I think that was about it, but as I say it took a while to get back into things. Times I thought about giving my job away for what it's worth and the fellows said, 'No, no stay with it for a while.'

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which I did. So gradually sorted it all out and got back into the scheme of things. But it's still there, even now. But that's about it. I don't think there is anything else to say.

Can I ask a few questions then if I can? On the coming home bit, did the army or the navy or the air force offer any

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kind of support to people who had been POWs in terms of I guess now they offer counselling for things ?

No, no I don't think that was around at that time, counselling. That just didn't happen. Oh no, or what do they call this other stuff, post traumatic, they didn't have that until a few years ago ? Post Traumatic Stress [Disorder].

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I don't think they knew anything about that. So it was. I don't think I can, about anything else, maybe later on, but I can't think of anything at the moment. Unless you ask a few questions I might go back and it might just jog the memory.

That's OK, I will. Just on your homecoming, I've heard or read other POW accounts that say, I guess now

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that I'm coming home, they weren't really expecting much because they were worried because people would think that they didn't have a real war.

Well yeah, in a sense yeah. Well that's true. We were on board the... I don't know whether it was the Beaker or on board one of the other ships and one of the fellows said, oh yes it was, and we were saying, ?Gee what are they doing all this for with all the line of ships?? ?Oh.? he said, ?You blokes are heroes!?' and we said, ?Heroes? What for, you know what for??

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we said, ?We finished our war three and a half years ago except fighting the Japs.? and then he said, ?You did your share.? just like that, that's three and a half years in captivity, we said, ?Oh yeah.? and that was that, you just accepted things. And I don't know, people didn't talk about it much and I used to wonder at times, and I believe

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they were told not to talk too much about it with us, they might just go off the deep end or something like that. I don't know, I don't think we would have, we might of. Some blokes couldn't cope with it. See I wasn't married at the time, some blokes came back to broken homes, the wives had gone off with

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somebody else, a Yank or somebody, because of course they didn't know what had happened to them, three and a half years, so they thought, ?posted as missing presumed killed,' so there it was and a couple of blokes committed suicide, they couldn't cope, one bloke put his head in a gas oven, another bloke threw himself under a train, things like that you know, none of our fellows,

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they were army blokes that I didn't know but I heard about it. Come to think of it there was one of our fellows I think, I don't know who they were, no names no pack drill. But most of us settled down to civvy life. Pretty tough but we did it. But as far as any counselling, except for that spat down that the

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navy gave us, that was about it. Nothing else. I did go and see Keith Mills's parents, the fellow that was killed, my mate and broke it to them as

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much as I could and they gave me a photo of him. Still got it. He didn't live far away, he lived at Maroubra, so I think that's it.

Did they appreciate you coming

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to talk to them?

Oh yes, yes they really, really appreciated it you know. But the people back home they, my mother and the father, they got a double whammy really because they didn't know what had happened to us except through the Red Cross, they used get messages through, I've still got one of the cards I sent at home, and

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I got two letters in the three and a half years. What was it I was going to say, when we were, I think they got word through 6 months after we were sunk on the Perth that we were POWs and then the 4 chaps that were rescued by the subs,

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the US subs that had sunk the Rokyū Maru they didn't know that there were other survivors and we didn't know that they had been rescued until after the war so when they got back here, they thought the best thing they could do was go and see our parents. So it was a double whammy. So

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postie is gone again, a second time but it must have been pretty tough on them, tough on us, but it must have been bloody awful on them. To be told again, with the war 12 months to go and told their son's gone again, sunk on the Rokyū Maru, no other survivors. Out of the 1300 POWs on the Rokyū Maru

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about less than 300 survived. A lot of mates perished in the sea, drowned, lack of food, lack of water, just drowned, some of them machine gunned by the Nips. Yeah so things like that, pretty tough for the people back home I think, very tough on them.

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They had to sweat it out, a long period three and a half years.

Did they have an understanding of what you POWs had been through?

No, not until the list of us that came back and told them about the conditions and even then had it suppressed

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because of the fact there were still fellows in the prison camps for the next 12 months and it might have been taken out on them. Well as it was, with the firebombing of the cities, Tokyo in particular, and the other cities, and then the heavy stuff coming over killing so many Japs. It wasn't until the atomic bombs

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went off on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, we didn't know about it, we were in Tokyo and it was only then that the Nips really came to the understanding that they couldn't win the war. When the Emperor spoke to the people on the 15th August, at midday, we thought there was an invasion on the mainland island

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of Japan but if there had of been, no POW would have survived. The order came that afternoon at 6 o'clock that night that it was up to the individual camp commandant how it was to be done, that we were all to be executed, machine gunning,

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by gas, or whatever means that was suitable to their particular area. The air raid [shelter] that we dug was in the side of a hill for us and it was only a small opening and we could have easily been entombed in that. Other places dug ditches that they surmised

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were for mass graves and that. But only for the firebombing, killing so many and the atomic bombs that brought the war to an end, fortunately. You hear people going on about the atomic bombs. One fellow said to me one day, I think he belonged to, he was some religious group anyway, one Sunday morning, me being a tyke [Catholic], I'd been to mass anyway,

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and come home and I was sitting out on the veranda reading the paper when he started talking, I said "Oh yeah, yeah, yeah." "Believe in this, believe in that?" "Yeah, yeah?". He said, "I'm interested in reactions to death and destruction." so we got around to the war and he said, "The atomic bombs in particular, what a horrendous thing that was." So I said, "Oh yes it was."

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and he kept on going about it and he said, "I got a paper here for anybody who is opposed to the nuclear weapons and all that to sign." so I said, "You can stick that back in your pocket!" Oh, oh, you know. I said, "I was in Japan when the two atomic bombs were dropped." silence,

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and he just looked at me, and then he said, "You were in Japan?" I said, "Yes, I was a prisoner of war in Japan at the time the atomic bombs were dropped." I said. "Only for those atomic bombs I would not be here today talking to you." So I said, "Although it killed thousands." I said that if there had been an invasion of Japan it would have been millions

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killed, I believe so too. I believe the invasion forces that the Yanks had to go into Japan was incredible. 50 or 60 aircraft carriers in two groups, half a million men to land on Kyushu and they expected over a million casualties if they had invaded Japan. So I said

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to this bloke, that was it, the atomic monster.

Interviewee: Frank McGovern Archive ID 0019 Tape 06

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I'd like to go back to the beginning now Frank, now what did you know about the navy before you joined?

Well as a kid I remember our father taking us down to the, my brother Vince and I, down to Rose Bay and those places, and saw the ships in the harbour the old tin Guyra, I think it was a 4 masted ship, things like that, you know, down to see them going through the hoops,

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or the [UNCLEAR] that's where they used to put the delinquents they used to put them on the [UNCLEAR] they'd have too a few months training on there, they reckoned they came out better blokes, whether they did or not, pretty rough I believe and a lot of the fellows joined the militia to get an extra few bob in their pockets at that time and a mate of mine said, 'I'm going to Rushcutters Bay.'

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one night so that's why I went down to the navy. So that was about it, nothing much else, we didn't go as cadets, just as reservists. So that's as much as I knew about the navy.

Did you know much about World War I?

Only through the history books, but mainly, but this is again. We learnt more about British history than Australian history, you know Henry VIII and the

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Battle of Hastings and the Norman Invasion, Agincourt and all that, we read a little about Gallipoli but nothing about the Western Front and things like that, just wasn't in our history books, British history. I think it's changed now a bit. But that was in secondary school too. Nothing much about Aussie history, Captain Cook, [Captain] Phillip

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and all that. As far as the First World War, nothing much that I can remember. I think it's a shame really because the nationalistic spirit wasn't there about then, it was more or less Mother England, that's what I think it was, mainly that, look to Mother England, you know. Well we've got look to ourselves now and sort our own selves out,

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that's what I think about it. But as far as the navy, that's all I knew about the navy just by going down and looking at the ships in the harbour, seeing them from the school where we were in Edgecliffe. The old Albatross I think it was a seaplane tender at that time, the Albatross.

Was Vince in the navy before you?

Yes

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he joined the permanent navy. Vince did his earlier time as fitter and turner completed his indenture there and joined the permanent navy with his qualifications as a fitter and turner, as an engine room artificer I think it was fourth class that he joined as just before the war. So then he

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was sent to join the Perth, he went through to Halifax up there in Canada and from there joined Perth just prior to the war and ended up over in New York for a while at the New York State Fair and there was a bit of mutiny on board there because of dress regulations, well written up in American papers, 'Aussies go on mutiny'

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or something like this you know and then they went to Jamaica in the West Indies and that's where war broke out they were there at that time. So he was in from the word go. I was too, but as a reservist.

Were you ever expecting to actually see action when you joined the navy?

Yes, see the navy was

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not only the defence of Australia but when we signed up as a reservist you could be sent anywhere in the world, no like say the army which was, they volunteered and went overseas, but with the navy you joined up and that was it and you could be sent anywhere, so it was more or less expected of you, yes. But the ship we were on, the Westralia, a merchant cruiser didn't get into the Mediterranean at that time in 1940, we were more

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or less on convoy duty as far as Aden all around the Indian Ocean looking for raiders, German raiders, things like that, flat out we could do about 20 knots we had seven 6? guns on there World War I vintage, not very good. Had we got a hit it would have just blown the ship up. We weren't armed like

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a cruiser or a destroyer or anything like that. So they kept their distance more or less. But a fighting ship like the cruiser Perth, Sydney, Hobart, Canberra, Aussie you were into it.

What was the difference on board between a converted merchant ship and a ?

No difference really it was

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run along the naval ship lines, gunnery part of the ship like fo'c'sle full top, main top, quarterdeck, part of the ship, man the guns, lookout, engine room facilities they did everything that was on a normal warship. It just didn't have the striking power of the cruiser or a destroyer for that matter.

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What was your role when you were on the Perth?

On the guns, gunnery able seaman and guns. They had 4? guns, and they had a 4? gun deck, twin mountings, semi automatic, they were pretty good and they were like a big .303 bullet, shell would stand about that high, with the casing, brass casing,

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and the bullet went in about that much, shove them in twin guns, press the trigger and away they'd go. They'd shoot them out pretty smartly too and when you stand at the back of them the shell casing would fly out, it'd fly out to about that wall, as the gun recoiled, fill them up again, remount and reload it, they were a pretty good gun, about 2, 4, 6, 8 of

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those, eight 4? and eight 6? and numerous short range weapons point 5s, nullamore[?] point 5s pom poms, twin Lewis we had about 6 of those, for anti aircraft defence. Sometimes we would open up with a 6? against the, we did that in Tanjong Priok against the Jap Nip bombers that were coming over,

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a formation of 9 were coming over while we were tied up alongside and I was on the point 5's down aft and as they were coming over, in a direct line, they dropped their bombs tried the foward, 8 tonner I think it was 6? HE, high explosive, knocked the first one out, wobbled and went off and that spoilt

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the whole aim of their bombs, they hit one of the tankers in the harbour, it was a near miss for us but it sent them off

track. It blew the doors off the go downs, the blast from the 6? was tremendous, knocked it straight out on the wharves, everyone ducking for cover made us run, they were running everywhere too, I don't blame them. But the 6? had a pretty good punch,

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6? not as good as the 8?, the 8? had a bigger range than the 6?.

What would you do on the ship when I guess you weren't in battle, what would you do?

Oh there would be cleaning, scraping parts of the ship mainly on duty most of the time,

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would be on lookout 4 hours on, 4 hours off. You'd be scrubbing the decks or holding starlock was on the old type ships or you'd be chipping and scraping, overcoming the rust problems a lot of things like that. If you were a torpedoman, you'd look after the electrical stuff, it would be just like an electrician's job coming around checking the wiring

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and all those things. So there was a lot to do manning the sea boats or [UNCLEAR] for the captain or the officers going ashore but it was 24 on, 24 off and in that 24 hours on you were 4 hours on, 4 hours off . So it was pretty steady stuff.

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Was discipline tough on the ship?

Pardon

Was the discipline ?

Discipline, oh yes. There was pretty strict discipline. You had to have everything spic and span down to the mess deck, slinging your hammock, tie it up properly, stowing away and all that stuff, going ashore having the proper rig-out on, you'd be lined up,

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get dressed up and they'd have a look, say yeah and have you hanging on right, have the bow knot over there and have bow knot over the left ear. We used to have it over the Jack Me Hardy types over the left eye. I see it's pretty regular now they've got it back over the left ear when you see some of them. We used to tie the bow; I was pretty good at tying the bows, used to charge threepence to tie the bow see,

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OK McGovern tie the bow, so OK I'd tie the bow, just have it nice and neat, trim the edges on it, and we used to tie it just at the end of the name so the ship's name had to be there and the bow at the end of it would be over your eye you see, instead of over the left ear, if you put it over the left ear the name of the ship would be around here. So that's how we overcame that regulation. I had my sleeves rolled up one day, just the cuffs, it

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was a pretty hot day, CPO [Chief Petty Officer], ?Roll your sleeves down!? you didn't mess around, you rolled them down or otherwise you'd be up before the bloke getting punishment, stoppage of leave or something like that. Carting up projies [projectiles] around the deck, 112 lb 6? projies trying to take it around the decks on the double. I think

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it's changed a bit now. I don't think they have those 6? projies any more I don't think, they've just got missiles. Discipline was pretty strict particularly with Hec Waller, Captain Hec Waller, mainly with the officers, he really made

them toe the line and as one of the subbies commented on it, he said, 'He's giving us a rough

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trot Hec.? not so much as the lower deck fellows, it was us, not so much the officers, we're copping it. But he was pretty straight and firm, he was good. Of course the discipline in peacetime would be a lot stricter than during the war time, you could relax a little bit in the war time as far as the rigs concerned.

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But you had to be back on board at a certain time and that was it, and if you weren't, the master at arms would be mustered on the quarterdeck when you came on board and you had police cards, like an ID card, so if you didn't get your cards, you would go into the police officer the master at arms office and then you would be called up before the bloke.

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'Where were you this morning at 0730 hours, you didn't collect your card.' 'No chief.' 'Don't call me chief, call me master at arms!' that's what you had to call him, master at arms. Then you'd get punishment from that, what they'd call adrift, maybe a couple of days stoppage of leave on your home port particularly.

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So that's how it worked out. Drunk and adrift, was worse still. Some of the officers of the watch would be OK; some of them would be stricter than others. Couple of the blokes, worse for wear, came back on deck on board one day, staggered up the gangway, saluted the quarterdeck, almost fell over,

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looked at the officer of the watch, not you again calling him by name, you so and so's, yes sir, put your cap on straight and get down below and stay there. Just dismissed him. Another bloke might say, you're in trouble, up before the captain drunk and adrift. But a lot of things like that they got away with.

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On our way up to Suva before we went up north we were doing a convoy on a run, we went out to meet the Pensacola I think off Auckland, the USS Pensacola, it's similar to the Houston the US cruiser, and we escorted the Pensacola into Moreton Bay and this was in January '41, 42, and then we

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were on our way up to Suva and on our way up there, it was a pretty quick run up, and some our fellows through the gun lobby were on the fo'c'sle mess deck down below 6? gun lobby, just underneath the forward 6? guns which used to come right down to the ammunition loft right down below there, so these fellows this night they were a pretty rough crew they were some of them, got

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through into the lobby went through the passageway into the ward room got into the ward room down aft, the ward room liquor store and knocked off a crate of spirits, I think there was gin, whisky, a crate of it. Pulled it back through to the fo'c'sle mess deck and they were getting stuck into this stuff, well we said to one another look at these blokes, they were rotten.

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One bloke had an accordion and was dancing on a mess deck table, and another bloke doing the Highland Fling, well they were having a great old a time. We were away from the officers' quarters actually so we said, 'Strike me, we hope that someone doesn't come down because they're gone.' anyway the mess deck table collapsed with one of them. At the end of the table there was a locker with RN ers that was

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sauce, black sauce, Worcestershire sauce and red lead, tomato sauce, butter and all that stuff and all that came streaming out all mixed up together, all over the place and the blokes were slipping all over the deck. We said to one another, 'These blokes are mad you know, mad with the grog [alcohol].' so anyway, nobody got into trouble for that. They didn't even discover that this crate of liquor had been

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knocked off. They were mad, absolutely crazy. Got ashore in Suva. I was dutied that time and they'd had a rare old time on the kava I think, they got stuck into this liquor ashore, and they were coming back in a sea boat and we were anchored off in the stream and they are counting the,

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he wasn't very popular this officer, he was the first lieutenant at the time and he got taken off down in Melbourne on the way around but they were counting him out, calling him by name said a few obscenities with it so he's pacing up and down the quarter deck with a telescope under his arm. I'm on the point 5's up above that, and I could hear everything. I thought, 'There he is down there, they're going to cop everything when they come back on board.'

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anyway when they got near the ship, they quietened down not a word was said, up they came up on the quarter deck and nothing, nothing was said, we got out of it all down below and I said, 'They're gone.' but they got away with a few things. But this particular fellow was two and a half round, the first lieutenant, he was taken off in Melbourne and I don't know where he was going, Canberra I think and

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Martin came on board, William Martin, he was the son of David Martin, the Governor [Governor of New South Wales, 1989-90]. Sir David Martin, he was a real good bloke, David Martin anyway his father, I think David Martin was only about 8 years old at the time when we were sunk and his father didn't get out of it, I think he was seen

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the following day floating past down the stream in the Sunda Straits on a spar or something like that so he probably perished out in the Indian Ocean or somewhere like that. But we used to meet up with his son, David Martin, a really good bloke. He'd come along to our reunions and sit down and have a beer with us a good bloke, one hundred percent.

Was there ever a time when you got in trouble on the ship?

No, not on the Perth no,

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the time I was on there I didn't have any strife. On the Westralia I did. We were doing a survey down in the Maldives, the Maldives Islands; you know a big tourist place, a beautiful spot. We'd come down from Colombo to do a submarine survey on one of the atolls a beautiful spot, and when you'd come through

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the coral reefs, it would narrow in and you would anchor in the lagoon and I'm not too sure who was in charge of it, it

might have been part of India, I think it was at that time. Anyway we were currying favour with the local chieftain or whatever he was, and he was invited on board just to curry favour so that we could sort a submarine

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base. So I'm on duty on top of the gangway and this gang of bloody cut-throats were coming up, the sheik and his bodyguard and I looked at my mate on the other side of the gangway, and I just looked at him and said, 'Look at this lot.' They came up with hands on the daggers, about that long, one bloke

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had a scar right down here, another fellow had a patch over one eye, they looked like pirates and he had a hand on this side on the dagger, they were the bodyguard of this sheik. So he was invited down to the captain's cabin you know to have a yak [chat] with him. They didn't even take their hand off the dagger the whole time they were there. I thought I wouldn't like to meet up with these blokes. Anyway

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getting back to me getting into strife. We had the fire bloke on, pus-a-duc[?] as they call it, the seaplane and it was rigged up in such a way on this platform down below and a primitive business. The jib used to go out and the wire would go over through the top of the jib and anchor on top

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of the plane and this would be connected to a winch, yeah a winch, and then it would come up on to a big wheel with a huge flange on it and it had to be held at a right angle for it to run through smoothly. Anyway they are revving the plane up this day to go and have a look see and the pilot's in there, revving it up, roaring away you know and everybody looking at it they'd jimmied away

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this fellow was, what was his name, forget for the minute, two and a half ringer , Brooks, oh Lesley Rundle Brooks, standing on the gangway, I'm behind him and all of a sudden he says, 'Righto hoist away.' and the winch is churning over the wire begins to run,

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the plane's revving up, leading seaman, oh I forget his name, he's supposed to do the job so he says, 'Hang on to this Mac.' so I hung on to it, but it wasn't at the right angle. He went and did something else. And immediately the tension got on it, I could see the wire going over the edge, I yelled out, 'Hey!' everyone's looking down you know, and the plane's revving and the next minute, crunch,

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the plane went, it had been taken up about as high as this ceiling and it went straight down on to the platform. The under carriage was squashed and who got the blame, me. Up before the skipper, he said 'McGovern, I thought you were one of the bright boys on board.' and I said, 'Yes Sir.' He said, 'Now, this survey for a submarine base has been put in jeopardy, on account of a

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careless act.' and he read the riot act to me see. And I'm saying, I thought to myself, 'If I say anything I'll put the leading seaman in.' so I had to cop it sweet. So what was it, 7 days jagers as they called it, 7 days carrying 112 lb projies [projectiles, shells] around the upper deck. Each day I had to do this until on the third day the master at arms called me into his office

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and he said, 'Hey Mac come here, I think you got a raw deal up there.' I didn't say anything, I said, 'Oh yeah.' he said, 'I think you were shielding somebody.' and I was, I said. He said, 'Yeah, I thought so.' He said, 'Forget the rest of the punishment.' So I said thanks very much so the CPO who was in charge of the fo'c'sle which I was part of the ship,

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all that day I didn't show up to do the punishment so he said, 'Hey McGovern I want to see you, you're supposed to be doing another 4 days punishment.' I said, 'No chief, not me.' He said, 'What do you mean, not you? Go and get another one of those projies and away you go.' I said, 'No chief I don't have to do it.' he said, 'You've got to do it.' I said, 'No, go and see the master at arms, he let me off.' He didn't

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believe me so he went to see the master at arms and he said, 'Yeah, you're right.' So that was the only time I got into strife. A couple of time I just missed out though. I was up before the, who was it, now it was New Year's Day, and we were on our way back from overseas on the Westralia. The fellow who was officer of the watch had been on the Sydney in the Mediterranean and as it turned out he wasn't a bad bloke, saw a bit of action over there

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with the Bartolemeo Colleoni the Sydney had sunk. We're on the guns crew, 6' gun, fo'c'sle, mess deck and we're supposed to relieve and we're on the 8-12 watch, midnight, ten past twelve comes and no relief coming up so bit of a rebel. I'm going down to get these blokes it's ten past so and so 12 and

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the CPO, I didn't like him very much said, 'You're not going anywhere McGovern.' so five more minutes went by and I shot off down to get the blokes, gave them a shake and the next day, deserted the gun and you're up before the officer of the watch you see so, 'What have you got to say about it McGovern?' so I said, 'Sir, what

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happened, we'd done our watch and the guns crew was just down below and thought I would just duck down and come back again.' and he said, 'This is a serious offence you know, seeing that its New Year's Day.' he said, 'I'll let you off.' So I said, 'Thank you Sir.' gave a good salute, looked at the CPO and down below I went. Later on, on board the Westralia, I got drafted off when we came back

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and it had been simmering ever since we had been over there due to various things that had happened disciplinary wise by the first lieutenant he'd had come up through the ranks, he was a good seaman, but a stickler for discipline. We had no lockers on board the Westralia, we used to live out of our kit bag and it used to be a structure like that, that you'd shove your kit bag into and consequently in the

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tropics, everything would go mouldy, you'd get your Number Ones out and your shoes would be with green mould on them and you'd have to clean them up you know, your Number Ones, your uniform before you went ashore, so when we got into Bombay, most of us bought these suitcases, cheap they were, got on there so we put them on top of the locker, there was a little bit of a flange around, so we put them on there. So the order came through that all

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cases over a certain measurement had to be put down in the Number One Hold. We said oh gee, we explained it to them, Jimmy and I, that all our uniforms are going mouldy you know. It didn't matter, all suitcases under a certain measurement down below. A few of the blokes said no, we're not going to do it. So captain surrounds us one Saturday morning coming through the mess deck

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Brooks, he's there, Number One, and he sees all the cases there and so the order came through from the CPO [Chief Petty Officer] of the fo'c'sle mess deck, parade all the fellows from the fo'c'sle mess deck who have suitcases over a certain measurement. So they all got hit. They all they were all locked up in the gaols on board, in the cells, they got cells out of it. There were certain other things, so you hit one bloke,

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Keith Costa, remember Keith. We were hoisting the sea boat this day and everybody had to man the ropes to hoist the sea boat up, one two, one two, and then you'd go up there and then you'd come back again and join the line and wait until the sea boat was up, there were a few blokes in there to keep it going, to join up by the side of the ship. So this mate of mine, Keith Johnson, he only died last year, he was on the Perth

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with me and he was doing some job on board and a rubber cut or a wire had cut his hand there and he had it bandaged up, so he couldn't hold the rope properly to hoist the sea boat. So Brooksey's got his [tele] scope under his arm and he said, 'You're not trying there Costa.' so he hit him with the scope across the back. Well we got the sea boat up and we said, 'Gee, you copped one there mate.'

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and he said, 'I'm going to get at an apology from him, the first lieutenant.' and we said, 'Good luck to you mate.' So he saw the CPO [Chief Petty Officer], Buck Meelion[?] and he said he didn't do the right thing by him. He explained the situation to him and he said righto, we'll go and see him, front him. So he did, fronted him and got an apology from him. But things like that went on and on until we got drafted and I would have been

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in it too, there was a mutiny on there while it was in Sydney harbour. But we all went round; I was on [HMAS] Kuttabul at the time, the Kuttabul, the one that got torpedoed by the Japs. But hey there was a mutiny on board the Westralia so old Brooksey's in strife, so they put the ship down the harbour, anchored it off Watsons Bay and there was a court martial on board. It was badly run

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the mutiny and there were certain stories about it that I disbelieve. There is no use going into that anyway. The whole lot of the ringleaders got 6 months out at Long Bay [Gaol]. But they did it on their ear, 6 months at Long Bay or 3 months whatever it was. The warders heard about it out there and said you blokes are all right and gave them a bit of sweeping up or something like that. They got a

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stretch out at Long Bay over it. But Brooksey, I don't think his promotion was stopped after that, he became a commander or captain, I don't think he got further than a commander. So I missed that one, otherwise I think I would have been in it too.

What do sailors think of their captain generally, is there??

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Well talk about, we had two or three skippers on the Westralia, Rosenthal, with a name like that he was a Jew, a Jew in the navy, and I don't think he got any further than captain and he was quite OK, he was all right. Although he did hand out the punishment to me in regards to that.

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He was transferred for the, or drafted to first class destroyers, and he did a good job there on first class destroyers. We were going to, some of us early in the story, I told you. He was OK, but Hec Waller had all the crew, without exception, stand by him, he was a really good skipper. Knew what he was doing and he was Number One.

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He'd hand out punishment too if he thought it was fair and that was it, no, he was good. It was a shame that he went down with the ship, he would have ended up as admiral for sure, no risk. He gave the order to abandon ship, after we were out of ammunition, he was on the bridge, calling to the officers up there who were

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moving off the bridge, he ordered them off the bridge, and the last bloke that was up there, I forget his name, I think it was Gayle, a lieutenant and he was getting a bit agitated and the skipper was still there with his arms over the bulkhead looking down at the turrets and he said, 'Go on, get off the bridge Gayle!' which he had to do, that was the last I saw of him. There was another salvo shell come over

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hit one of the turrets there and probably got killed then. But as far as going down with the ship he probably wouldn't have stayed on board just to go down with it. He was probably wounded or killed as he saw everybody off the ship and the same with Rooks the captain, commander of the Houston, he was hit with a piece of shrapnel, fatally, just as the ship was going down and both skippers

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went down with their ship. Captain Rooks was given the Congressional Medal of Honor and his whole crew a citation, presidential citation. Hec Waller was given the DSM [Distinguished Service Medal], he had a DSO [Distinguished Service Order] and Bar with his Mediterranean service and that's all he got out of it. So we tried to get

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posthumous, well I don't think you ever get a VC [Victoria Cross] in the navy, that's for sure. It just wouldn't happen I don't think.

Why's that?

Well I think it's got certain implications, if you got a VC in the navy everyone, wherever you went, you would have to salute, you'd have to be saluting every time. I think that this would be it. See you're on board ship, confined space, and if any of the

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crew got a VC, well that would be it, he wouldn't be on board any longer, they'd give him a job ashore. So I think that's the reason for it I think. This fellow Sheehan that strapped himself to the gun, I think he was on the Maitland [actually HMAS Armidale], and they were sunk south of Java and all his mates and a mate of mine was on there, I grew up with, I mean the Japs machine

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gunned them in the water. He brought one plane down but went down with the ship. And they named one of these new class submarines after him, the Sheehan. They've got the Waller, the Collins, they call it the Collins Star Sub, the Dechaineux and the Sheehan yes. [Referring to Able Seaman Teddy Sheehan]

06:38:30:00

How did you get on to the Perth?

Pardon

How were you put on to the Perth?

Oh you get drafted on to different ships, different times. I was the quartermaster on the ASDIC [anti submarine detection committee ? sonar] school at Rushcutters Bay, the anti submarine school when the Perth came back from the Med and I told you there were 6 of us from the anti submarine school, they wanted

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a draft on board Perth, a few from Flinders Naval Depot, they were more experienced hands at that time, some had been drafted off Perth and we had just got the draft on there. But I believe there were 3 sets of brothers on the Perth, the McGoverns, Delbridges and Ryans

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and each one of those didn't survive the action, one from each and I believe that word went through the navy after that they wouldn't have members of the same family on board of the same ship which turned out to be pretty good because I think it shouldn't happen on board in case something happens. Look at that one, the US ship the Kelly had five on the

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one ship and five went. Crazy. [referring to the five Sullivan brothers who perished on the USS Juneau, sunk 13 Nov. 1942]. So that was how we came on board there, just a draft, just got caught up in a draft as they say.

Were you happy about that?

Oh I didn't mind it, the Perth was the one. Wherever you went, that was it. Fate came into it. Some of the fellows that I knew were drafted on to the Sydney

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off the Westralia, and they had no survivors on the Sydney which gets me, there's always a survivor but not on the Sydney. They did find a skeleton I think on one of the Carleys which floated for some weeks in the Indian Ocean and I think they picked it up ashore at Christmas Island, it was a Carley float with

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a skeleton on it. They thought it was off the Sydney. But you think they would have found the Sydney, I think they should have with their equipment they've got now, surely they haven't even located it. But still they haven't done it yet. I don't know whether it's a cover up job, I think it might be.

Interviewee: Frank McGovern Archive ID 0019 Tape 07

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Yesterday Frank you were telling us some stories you talked about superstitions, and I heard that were there many superstitions being?

Oh yes. There was another one we had while we were in Tanjong Priok there was an air raid on and Hobart was in port at the time HMAS Hobart, the sister ship to Perth and during

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the air raid we had 2 padres on board and one was to go to Hobart, but during the air raid Hobart got under steam and pulled out of the harbour and the launch that was taking the padre over to the Hobart came back to the Perth, so having 2 padres on board definitely a no no, that was one big superstition.

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Also we had a cat on board called Red Lead, it was called Red Lead because it got into the paint one day and knocked over a tin of red lead so it got painted in red lead, but I think one of the chaps Bob Collins, one of the fellows picked up by the US sub, he was on the Rokyū Maru, he brought it on board one day

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I'm not too sure whether it was Sydney or Melbourne, anyway he had this kitten and he brought it on board and Reid, before he got drafted off in Melbourne, the two and a half ringer, the first lieutenant said get rid of that so and so cat, so they put into the paint locker so Bob Collins retrieved it this day

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and kept it while he was up on the bridge and he just put the cat down and it went over and rubbed up against Waller's leg and he looked down and said, 'Oh, a cat.' and he picked it up, stroked it and all that, so it stayed on board. But then while we were in Tanjong Priok, it wanted to go ashore,

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it wanted to go down the gangway and get off the ship and they brought it back again and it did that to us three times. That's another no no, having a cat on board things like that. Sailing after the minute after the 13th Feb, I think I told you about that didn't I? So it all added up. They called the padres the sin bosun on board, the sin bosuns, two padres no good and a cat on board, no good

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and sailing on the 13th, no good but it didn't make any difference. All those superstitions. Anyhow that's how you go. **When you were growing up, you were from a working class background weren't you? Do you reckon that that helped you out in the navy?**

Yes, definitely. At the end of the Depression too from the time we spent as POWs

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toughened us up. The Depression years here you know as a kid, we used to go up to the local green grocer and say, 'Have you got any specks mister, or broken biscuits mister, out of the tins??' Things like that. Things were pretty rough. Instead of a roast dinner you might have a piece of bread and dripping. Dripping you know, the fat

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especially down the bottom where you would pick up the gravy part of it, that was good . I think it did toughen us up for sure.

And the grocers and things that you hooked up with, did they help you out, did they give you bit and pieces along the way ?

What was that?

The local grocer up the road?

Oh yes when we were kids. Old Joe Marcello, he was the Itie [Italian] fellow there he was pretty good. He used to give us a ride on the back of his

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lorry at times when we were kids. 'Joe have you got any specks?' then he'd say, 'Get out of the shop, oh here you are.' and he hand you a speck, you know and you'd enjoy the speck, or the broken biscuits. You'd be flat out going to the pictures [movies] on a Saturday afternoon, six pence to go into the pictures and we did a bit of cheating there a couple of times my brother and I. When Mum would go up to the

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butcher shop to buy some meat occasionally, you'd get these coupons see, they're different coloured coupons, blue, pink, orange, so we had the bright idea of manufacturing some tickets to get into the pictures because they were similar in size and colour. So we'd go up with the different coloured ones, make

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the 6 on it and wait until the lights went down a bit, what colour are they today are they, blue, blue, so the lights would go down and you'd go in with a team of kids and anyway they got on to us. Yeah, butcher's coupons. So the lights stayed on bright, they didn't

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dim them until the picture started. They overcame that one but there were different things we got up to. You made your own fun too going around playing hockey or cricket in the back lane or down at the park.

Was it a pretty close family that you grew up with?

Yes pretty strict, the old man was pretty strict on us. He was tough.

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Because he came from a working background too and his parents came from Ireland and they had it pretty tough, and it was handed down the line I think. Yes he was pretty strict.

I'm pretty curious, I'm not sure if you mentioned it to Isobel [interviewer], but what made you choose the navy over the other forces?

Nothing really, maybe we got the idea when we were kids, we used to go down and see the ships in the

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harbour, that may have had something to do with it, but I don't know. Some blokes joined the army, the militia. This mate of mine said I think I might go down and become a reservist in the navy, so I said OK mate. It was Ray Sealy. Remember Ray Sealy. He lived down the road, so I said OK Ray so go down and join up. It was an extra few bob a week and we went to drill nights. Also there was the

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lure of what you probably might call it, of a trip on board a ship and you were in continuous training which was supposed to be, I think it was in the, I was lined up to go in the September or October of that year that the war broke out on the Hobart, up to Noumea, and I thought this is going to be a good experience. We went to Noumea all right but it was during the war on a different ship.

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Do you reckon that the training that they gave you prepared you for what for the tours and things that you got involved in?

What in the navy?

Yes, yes just generally.

Yes, discipline was pretty strict but I don't think it did us any harm the discipline. I think you've got to have discipline, you've got have a sense of responsibility. I guess this is what it was. I think maybe

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that this is lacking a bit now in the schools and in the home I think it might have something to do the social unrest we have, I don't know, I might be wrong. But it didn't do us any harm I don't think. I don't think any of us turned out no hoppers.

You've done very well. I would like to talk about mateship for a minute, particularly given

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your experiences on the Thai/Burma Railway just helping each other out, can you talk about how you got each other through, what you went through?

Yes. If you didn't have a mate you wouldn't get through, put it that way. You just to have somebody to lean on, somebody to help you along, otherwise it was pretty rough. You didn't have somebody, know you had your special mate and the all right mates,

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but you used to have a special mate, or a couple for that matter. It really did, they talk about the mateship being a bit hackneyed and all that but it's not. It is real, absolutely, it's absolute, it's there, if you didn't have it you'd find it tough going. No one's an island; you just had to have someone to talk

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to, give you a hand out mate, you know it was there all the time. I don't think anyone, Australians I'm talking about, I don't think anyone on the Burma Railway died by himself. They always had somebody there. All this if you had a work party and he left his mate there in the morning and he's dead when he came back that night, which happened, but

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no you always had mates. It was really a very big thing. I think more so than maybe other nationalities, Australians, certainly it happened with the Poms there after the sinking of the Kachidoki Maru and the Rokyū Maru, they didn't have that,

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some of them, not all of them just didn't have that outlook to keep going. When we were in the lifeboat on the slow boat to China, we had to take it turns to row, a couple of them, the Poms you know, they were going to give it away. So we said, 'If you don't bloody well row, you go overboard.' you know it was like that.

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It was pretty grim there. But you had to, but I think as you say Australians, their mateship is pretty good, I think it's still there too, look at Bali [the terrorist bombing in Bali].

Yes very true. And it seems to be a very unique thing with Australians.

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Yes I think so. It would be the same over probably over in Middle East in Iraq, it would be the same there. They got a good wrap up, the fellows there, our blokes. Timor, East Timor that's another one.

So you mentioned about nobody dying alone

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so if somebody was always with them how would that work in terms of the Japanese trying to force you keep going, keep working?

Well you'd always have working parties and most of the time, even the blokes that were sick had to get out when the 'speedo' came on, but you would always manage to contrive to have someone looking after the sick bloke,

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but of course the engineers and that, the Jap engineers used to come through even though the doctors, they got bashed up too the doctors, they were saying he can't work, he can't work, he can't work and they said if you can stand up you can work. Blokes with malaria they were sent out on the line too. So the other two, or the three of us, say one bloke had malaria, the other two had to do his job too because he wasn't capable, shivering to death.

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Things like that. I think, I'm not sure whether it was Weary Dunlop or not, when the Nips were really put it on and one bloke, the engineers went through and said that he's ready to go out, I believe Weary picked this fellow up, he was just skin and bones, and took him over and said to the Nip engineer, this man too. Yeah, it knocked the Nip a bit I think this was

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quoted by somebody, I didn't see it but I believe it was quoted to give an idea of how they were. As Nagatomo, [Lt] Colonel Nagatomo, when he addressed us up there in Thanbyuzayat, in Burma, just before we went on to the Railway, I've got his speech somewhere, said that, 'Line would be built, we want your cooperation, and Nippon

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is looking to you to join the co-prosperity sphere.' and all this business, 'And it will be built, many men will die but it will be built.' Many men did die but it was built.

Do you think he knew what he was saying in terms just how many men were going to die? Do you think he was fully aware

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that men were going to be worked to death?

Oh yes. We just treated it as a joke in a sense. He's up on a table giving his spiel, and we're all standing around in the compound and, you remember the trams with the different destination signs on them? You'd have a

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red board for something like Bondi, or North Bondi, a green one and this particular one, that one fellow had remembered Dulwich Hill and it had two brown spots on it I think it was on it. Well Nagatomo after his big spiel went on for about half an hour about the cherry blossoms in Nippon and the pure water running down water falls and all this garbage, when he'd finished, 'And you must all work.' cheerfully he turned

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around and in the breeches, in his pair of breeches, he had these two patches, you know how you have a patch on your arm, leather patches, well he had two leather patches for when he went horse riding. Well he had two of these brown patches and one of our blokes yelled out, 'Dulwich Hill!?' Well Dulwich Hill was the sign for the tram. Well all of us burst out laughing well,

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and he turned around and gruff, gruff well, rattled his brain, and then the Nips, the soldiers, moved in, these soldiers with their rifle butts, we started to laugh and they thought we were laughing at him, which we were doing, but Dulwich Hill, it brought the house down. This is what we thought of his speech. But as it turned out, it was proved correct, over our dead bodies

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they built the line.

As you were telling that story humour comes to mind like as a way to help.

Oh yeah, no risk of that

Was that something you used yourself a lot?

I think you try to outdo the Nips all the time you try to outsmart them and we did it on quite a few occasions but

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in the end they were bad wretches some of them, some of them really got stuck into you, they really flattened you. The worse part I feel was not Burma was up in Japan that was the worst feature because of the weather, the weather got to us. The weather was getting to us in the winter months. It was getting to us, I think I might have told you, more than what the Japs

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could do to us, it was really getting us that winter. O brother. You'd have your canvas shoes on, that's all you had on, to traipse through the snow, and of course they'd be water logged and they'd be icy by the time you had finished 2 to 3 kilometres and you'd have your head pulled into your shoulders, the biting wind, and

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you'd be trudging along there and it reminded me when I read a book when I was a kid, not that it was like it, The Retreat of Napoleon's Grand Army from Moscow, like automatons, that's all we were we were going through, trudging through the snow, not saying, we couldn't talk to one another, grey days, grey skies and everybody had grey faces.

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You know you'd get back to your camp, we were down to monosyllables, there was no conversation, she was bad news, and then you'd just have your rice and then there'd be tenko and then you'd just hit the sack and get up the following day, tenko, and off to work again, you know off to the factory, frozen like blocks of ice and it was a bad time

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and we said to one another, ?Gee it's got to be over before next bloody winter because we won't last the distance.? things were bad. But we probably would have lasted again if it came but it didn't fortunately. It was over before the next winter. That was the worst part of it, that cold weather. I will tell you Isobel, it'll be

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all right, it is rather crude but?

You can be as crude as you like

The latrine trenches were made as a long trench and this particular day the blokes are squatting down one behind the other, so this fellow, this day he was a real character and

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the blokes in front of him and he's behind him and he said, 'Hey Jim.' 'Yeah, what?' he said. 'I can see it's turned out rice again.' It's turned out nice again, oh gee. Things like that that kept it moving, kept it going. Yeah, things turned out rice again, oh. And then another fellow,

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the road went through this particular camp up in Nieke and our huts were over that side and a few over this side and there was a Nip sentry on the road or path we used. So this particular morning this fellow came over and had a bit of an old shirt, this was all his was wearing around his waist tied here, and as he came

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to the Nip sentry so he had to bow to him, he had no hat on, so he gave a very good salute and as he went down the Nip came and returned the salute, he said, 'Good morning.' calling by this name so and so, we were standing there and we heard this we thought, 'Oh jeez, good morning.' you know

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and the Nip got up giving him a salute got up from his bed and walked on. And I thought to myself, 'Just as well he can't understand our slang words mate.' 'No.' he said, 'He's too dumb for that.' 'Just as well he didn't, you wouldn't be walking now.' and he gave him a decent screw and a decent serve too. There were funny things right through you know that happened.

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You thought you were doing that to the Japanese right to the end?

Yes. Except, it was a little bit different say in Japan, quite different, quite different up there along the line even, bad enough there. I reckon Japan was bad or worse.

Apart from that winter what made it really bad?

Oh they were bad wretches, the fumen they were really

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nasty so and so's. The guards along the line were bad enough. We had the BB, we called him the BB, the Boy Bastard and the BBC, the Boy Bastard's Cobber [friend]. That's how it was. The BB was a round faced young looking bloke but he was a nasty customer, so we called him the BB, Boy Bastard, and his mate the BBC was equally as nasty, the Boy Bastard's Cobber but that's how they got the names, we really

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let them have it.

And what would they do?

Oh they'd bash you for the slightest thing, they'd hit you with a rifle butt, pick handle or whatever they could lay their hands on. And wham it in. Up in Japan, the fumen they were really nasty customers, as I say, the head guy there, he was tried as a war criminal and strung up and killed a bloke one night

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and his offsider Watanami, real sadists they were. And we were in a confined space up there compared to the more open jungle, the camps were more spread out, the one up there in Japan, we were confined and it was so foreign to us coming from there to a small compound, just the one hut or small camp and you were with

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them all the time the Nips they were never out of your sight, whereas you could go into a corner of a hut up in Burma to get away from the so and so's not up there. And the weather too, the cold weather. But we got through it all right.

You did, you did. Was there any time throughout all of that where you were starting to feel it was getting a bit hopeless?

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No I don't think so. Hope was a big thing for us because we thought we'd never get beaten. That was our thought, we'd never get beaten, that was our thought. And hope, probably a bit of hate kept you going, we hated the swines, we probably thought that too but you can't, you can't keep hating forever, it would just rebound on yourself. But I

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think hope, and faith for me particularly, and some of the other blokes too. When you say it was hopeless, well there a particularly bad day during the winter months, I'd been caught up in the bashing business and I felt pretty lousy, couldn't see out of my eyes, all black and that, and it was snowing

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like a bad day at the office, and cold and miserable, hungry, dirty, filthy and you'd be getting back to the camp and you didn't feel like talking to anyone you know and it was getting to me, you know and I thought this grey day, grey skies, smog, and the sun had only come up a little while and gone down again, and this smoggy atmosphere

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and it was something just inside me, I don't know what it was, this particular day I just simply said, I was down you know, I thought, I just said, 'God. How long... how long.?' But

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it just lasted a few seconds, I just cried out, 'How long?' Had to keep going. Eventually things started to improve a bit you know, just days like that sort of got you but I remember another time, it was more or less when things got to you like that, some of the blokes could do it, I did it a couple of time,

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you were there physically, but you put your mind somewhere else, right back home, going to the football or the cricket and going dancing you know. I used to go dancing with Merle, this particular song one night, I might have told you, this particular day I had been

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down a bit and I was somewhere else, I was working away there feeling lousy and I heard this tune, I used to hum this tune to myself and it was pretty popular at the time and I was just sort of singing it to myself and say the words to myself, I remember it quite well, it went, 'Turn the hands of time for

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me, let me live my memories, and once more I long to be beneath the lights of home.' Just say those few words, sort of got you going again. But those days weren't that often, those particular days.

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When the weather improved, we improved with the weather and so we went on day to day with bashings, air raids and away we went until we got over it, and the war came to an end and that was it.

You've talked a little bit about faith, did you feel that in some way God was looking after you?

Yes.

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So many times I could have gone. On the Perth, underneath the Perth I had I was dragged into the props and I got out of that, on the Burma line when so many died up there, the sinking of the Rokyū Maru when it was going to go under that lifeboat with my mate, 2 other blokes went in, the air raid when

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my mate was standing next to me and he got it and I didn't. You know, percentages, pretty hard at times. I said, 'The good Lord is looking after me.' no risk, I firmly believed it.

Is that something you'd share with your mates throughout the time or was it much more personal?

No, it was there and thinking about it, getting home

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that was it. But that was a big thing, faith, I think a big thing.

Would you help yourself in that department through prayer and things like that?

Yeah, you would say to yourself, we used to go, as a tyke, a Catholic, when we were in Burma, there'd be a few of us

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and we would have a bit of a prayer session away from the other blokes and would say the rosary. We'd do that of a night, when we had the chance to do it. And I think it helped a lot, it helped a great deal. I'll say this as a Catholic, the 15th of August, in the Catholic Church,

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I don't know whether you know it or not, is the Feast of the Blessed Virgin, Feast of the Assumption and it was the 15th of August when the war finished. Now there we go, another thing, I'm firmly convinced about it, firmly convinced that prayer, I reckon had something to do with it. As they term it Our Lady Queen of Peace. I reckon

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now I go to the church, the Sacred Heart up at Randwick and on the 15th of August I get a bunch of flowers and put them on the altar with a little note and a priest got on to me one day and said, 'What's that

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you've got on there?? I said, 'Just a bunch of flowers and a little note.' 'Yeah.' he said, 'I saw that.' and he said, 'Oh.' and he said, 'Can I have a look at it??' and it said, 'Thanks for the intercession, ex-POW, Japan.' And he said, 'You were a POW in Japan??' and I said, 'Yes.' and he said, 'That's a nice thought.' and I said, 'It's just a thank you, that's all.'

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I do that each 15th August.

You put those flowers every year? I think that's beautiful. She might have heard you that one winter night.

I think so.

It might have been your fault the war ended.

Well I'll accept the blame. Yeah.

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I was just wondering you were just mentioning your grandsons, have you shared many of your history, your war stories with the kids, your grandkids?

No. They know but that's all. I might have but stop me if I have. But anyway.

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Yeah, in Japan, we had this had this go-kart, that we used to, in big containers, which we'd take back to camp and during the day we'd get scraps off the Jap table after they had finished eating and put into these containers, and then we'd take it in turns to drag it back with a little rope around your neck,

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pull it back to camp, haul it back to camp, put into the galley and they'd cook it up, boil it up supplementing your rice diet, a bowl of rice in the night time and we called it Hungarian Goulash. Well, 'Anybody hungry for any Hungarian goulash?' yeah, well we're all cold, hungry, in it would go a horrible looking bloody mess and

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there'd be bits of seaweed and apple core, orange peel, but it was boiled up so we'd eat it. So my mate Keith is sitting next to me this night, and I'm digging him with the chopsticks I dragged something came out a bit further, and I said, 'Hey Keith, look!' he said, out, 'Oh well strike me!' it was a bandage.

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No more Hungarian goulash for McGovern. I said, 'That's it, finish.' He said, 'Me either, no more Hungarian goulash.' It had been boiled up you know, that was enough, no more. Sorry Isobel.

She's heard worse.

Hungarian

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goulash.

You just reminded me of something, of a story you told us a little bit about yesterday and that was when you were in Japan in the camp there, you mentioned that a bloke had lost 4 fingers, can you just remind us of that story?

Well one of our fellows, Pat Majors, he was killed just before it was all over

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Pat, but he was working the guillotine this day and as he got there to put a sheet of, it was a pretty big guillotine, it would cut steel about that thick, he was getting ready to shove this piece of steel through and he looked down and there were 4 fingers there. Well this Nip, this Nip had miscued and had chopped the fingers off and he got a piece of cloth

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or whatever it was and put the 4 fingers on it and took it along to the Nip foreman and he nearly, he was physically sick you know. So one of our fellows was going past at the time and saw the 4 fingers and said, 'What have you got there Pat?' 'Oh.' he said, 'Have a look.' 'Don't waste them mate, take them back to camp and put 'em in the soup.' So whether he did or not, I don't think he did.

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That would have been a good day.

It was.

Interviewee: Frank McGovern Archive ID 0019 Tape 08

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I was wondering Frank if I could talk to you about the night after the bombing raid in Tokyo when you were lying there numb, and you were injured and the person next to you had died and the person on the other side of you had died. You said to us yesterday, that it was the loneliest time. What did you do to get through that?

Well,

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I guess it was the loneliest night, because they were both dead. There was a crowd a few there on this side and I just thought to myself, well as I have said the planes had gone and the camp had been evacuated and the rain had started which dowsed the fires

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and it was just gentle rain and I was just lying there, couldn't move, was paralysed and I thought to myself, 'How did I get into this position, to be here, to be lying here injured and can't move??' and it seemed to be a hopeless situation, nobody to talk to,

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pretty rough, nobody to say, 'How are you going fellow??' just nothing and it was just as I say the loneliest night ever, just to lie there because I don't know how many hours it was but when the air raid started, I'm not sure, it might have been midnight, it might have been after, but then it would have been by dawn, it probably would have been about 6 hours

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I was lying there, I might have just passed out for a little while with the pain, it was pretty excruciating. Although I was probably helped a bit with the mud, I was encased in mud; I was just like this in a straight jacket and that probably kept me still. I don't know what I was thinking of I just hoped that somebody would

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come along soon and do something. And when the dawn started to break and I heard voices coming back well I thought somebody's on their way now to sort things out which they did, helped out, yes. But it was a pretty long night and a lonely one too.

I think possibly,

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one of the loveliest images that you have spoken of over the time that we have talked when the Americans dropped all their food packages, you went out into the Japanese township and gave them out.

Oh right. My mate and I knew, Vic Duncan it was, knew that they had gone through pretty severe rationing. We had no hatred

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towards the women and the kids at all there, nothing at all there. It was only the fellows, well the guards, even when I thought about it the old gaffer, the foreman, giving us a piece of mandarin I thought, you know, you can't knock that the way they were situated. We had heaps of stuff there that would probably

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be pilfered or rot or do something, so we thought we'd go out and hand out a few of the things. I know a little kid came up to the fence one day, just before we went out and with his big eyes there he was just looking at me and I gave him a piece of chewing gum or something and he raced home, tore home to his mother and his mother is Haha is from Japanese

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so I said 'Asta' meaning tomorrow. 'Kusho koi asta' meaning come tomorrow. She came up with him and I went in and said 'muddi muddi' wait - so I went in and got a couple of more packets of some stuff and put it through the fence,

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'dozo, dozo,' - please take it, take it. 'Tuksan, Tuksan,' - we've got plenty 'Tuksan,' take it. So my mate and I went out and told him about it, so he said, 'We'll go out, bugger the instructions to stay in camp, we'll get out.' so we did and nothing untoward happened, and we just went out and handed out some of the stuff. A couple of these houses we went into, a temple, we went into

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one of the temples and wandered off down the road and we went into a camp, I think it was a Scotties or Scottish or English camp and I might have told you, a two deck loft like where they drag up equipment you know and this day we had a Jap guard with us

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to show us the way and this fellow came out and I don't know whether he was a Scotty or an Englishman, and he said, 'Where are you from?' and we said, 'Australians, we're from a camp up the road.' he said, 'Do you want me to look after this fellow?' and we said, 'No we want him to get back to camp, we don't know where to go.' so he said, 'Righto.' Apparently they hadn't changed the guards there

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and it was like a kangaroo court and they were bringing these blokes up, the guards, the unworthy guards up into the loft and then they said you did this and you did that and you bashed this fellow and bashed that fellow, made them understand what they were talking about and they were just there sitting on a chair, whoosh, straight out the loft on to the cobblestones

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below, 20 feet below they were doing that to a few of them, they looked after them they said. Of course they changed our guards and put in English speaking guards, but in this particular camp they hadn't changed the guards. So that's what they were doing there. So we didn't have any of that feeling because it was only towards the particular guards.

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As far as the Nip people were concerned, we worked with the fellows in the factories, we were their labourers, they were all right, they were OK. We had no ill feeling against them at all, just the guards. I know it was different for fellows who didn't go to Japan, or maybe they were in a different camp to what we were, they only had the

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engineers and the guards to worry about and they hated them really and so did we. It was really hatred against them but up there we found it a bit different except for the fellows in charge of us. But as far as the women and kids were concerned, they were under the thumb too, of the military, it was a military

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dictatorship, that's what it amounted to.

How do you let go of that hatred?

Well it took a long while, it took a long while. As a matter of fact when we went down there, when we went back I was with Vic Duncan at the time, Merle came up later, and we got into the train this day and there were some Nips there around about

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our age, they were sitting in the seat opposite and I looked at 'em and thought to myself, 'Wonder what they were doing during the war?' you know. And when we got off the train I was talking to Vic and I said, 'What did you think about those old Nips that were there?' 'Yeah.' he said, 'I was wondering what they were bloody well doing in the war, whether they were

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guards on some of our fellows or not.' I said, 'Yeah, I was thinking the same thing.' There was a feeling there. And one particular Nip there, we asked him one day, or Vic could speak a bit more he could speak Japanese fairly well, he had learnt it.

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And he asked this fellow something about accommodation and the Nip answered in such a manner that he had no accommodation for gaijins, foreigners, and Vic ignored him then and talked to the woman who was there and she was all right, and this fellow interrupted

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and you could sense it straight off, and Vic turned to him and said, 'I'm not talking to you, I'm talking to the woman.' see, it came up that feeling was there but it turned out to be all right. But see, 'I'm not talking to you, I'm talking to the lady.' See it surfaced at times but

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as I say you can't keep hating, it goes against yourself. But just a couple of things like that. But eventually I suppose it just dissipates. And of course the young Japanese people now they say they don't know much

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about the war, I think the bushido spirit or the samurai spirit, I don't think they have that any more, they are more westernised now than ever.

Did you ever understand the Japanese?

Very hard to understand them, to get into their mind, very difficult. That incident about Sergeant Hino, waving us goodbye

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with the handkerchief, I said strike me, I can't work it out see. He was given a prison sentence for withholding Red Cross parcels. We were given, shared one Red Cross parcel one Christmas up in Japan, the Christmas we were up there, a third of a parcel a man. And then we got another issue in the New Year I think. That was the only time

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we got any Red Cross parcels I think except for that episode in Changi when there was that Swedish Red Cross parcel, where we got dished out a spoonful of sugar or cocoa. We never received any other Red Cross parcel, even though they were in the camp, but we never got them. Because if we had, we probably would have eaten as well as the Japanese people towards the end of

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the war when things were rationed pretty badly for them. It was interesting sharing the Red Cross parcel between 3. A little tin of butter, measured right to the millimetre, and there was a small packet of currants, you know little packet of currants, you know how the kids get,

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so there were 25 in there, so 12 each, no 8 each, one over. So we said, 'One currant, what are we going to do??' so we drew lots for that currant to see who was the lucky one who got it, one currant. And then we put the currants, some of the currants

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in a little mug of water for the following morning on the rice, so they'd swell up and then we'd use them on the rice the following day. Things you did when you were right down to the nitty gritty. Amazing you know.

Did anything compare to that day when you touched down in Darwin?

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Oh that was terrific. You were just there, you were home you were in Australia, you were there. Oh such a relief. The relief was fantastic. And then the sight of Sydney Harbour, coming over on that clear spring day on the plane, you just looked down

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and oh gee, you'd just look at it, you just couldn't absorb it all, just looking at it, you were thinking, 'Oh jeez, no place like home.' it's well said that old song, 'no place like home.' Who wrote those few words? 'Be there a man never so dead, be there a man ever so dead,

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never said to himself this is my home, my native land.' It's quiet true, yeah it's quite true, home sweet home. So any more questions?

I'll just ask you a final couple.

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Looking back over your experience, what would you say to your grandson if he was thinking about heading off to war?

If he was going to war, difficult one. 'Look after yourself as well as you can and your mate. And don't get caught.' That's what Cath said to me the other day, Cath this is the girl, woman now, who used to go out with the brother, Vince, they were almost engaged I think

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so anyway, she told me and I never knew this, and she said to me, I sent her a plaque about my brother, they had a commemoration service, so I sent that to her, only recently and she said to me, "Oh it's good talking to you Frank." I hadn't talked to her for quite a while and I said I'd send this memo over to her and she never married, and

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she said, "Vince always said to me that he would prefer to die or be killed than be a POW, never ever wanted to be a POW." I never knew that and she told me the other day. So, he didn't become a POW.

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Yeah.

I guess everything that we've said, is there anything else that you would like to add?

No I think I have just about exhausted it all that I can remember. Maybe something else will come up later on and I'll think I should have said that. No, I think that's about it. Quite a deal wasn't it?

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It is, it was wonderful.

INTERVIEW ENDS