ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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START OF TAPE - SIDE A

> Identification: This is an interview with Doctor Edmond Sheedy in Adelaide on 21st January 1991. Dr Sheedy was an RAP Sergeant in the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion attached to H Force and only did his medical corps in the post-war period.

Well at your request I'm just going to give you a brief account of my very early childhood leading up to the time of enlisting. I was unfortunate enough to be born into rather impoverished circumstances and essentially without parental control so at the age of ten and a half I was happy to begin work on a farm and work in fact as a farm labourer for three and a half years and subsequently in horticultural vineyards and such work for a further two or three years. And at the time the war broke out I found myself as a youth porter in the South Australian Railways. Not liking any of the work I'd ever done and wondering what I could do, and at the age of eighteen I thought well what can I do and I thought of my early school career which was quite satisfactory. I'd topped all the grades except Grade 4 in which I was unhappy with the teacher.

> You left in the middle of Grade 6 pretty well the end of ...

... of my high scholastic career. So I thought I'd contact the international correspondence schools and this I did and started from scratch again with the idea of getting some formal education including shorthand and typing because I was at a loss to find what I was good at.

When the war broke out for a while I thought I'd stay behind and educate myself and get some of the good jobs which should be vacant if everybody else was overseas. But I decided that although I was a pacifist and a very ardent Methodist and I felt I couldn't possibly kill anyone but ... but as a pacifist I felt that I could still do a non-combatant job. There were lots of things to do besides shoot people and handle machine guns. So I approached the local enlisting officer and put my case to him and just said bluntly look I don't mind joining up but I want a non-combatant job. I certainly am not going to handle weapons. He said, 'Well Sheedy, you're just the boy we want, you know what you want and where you want to go. You join up and I'll guarantee that you get a non-combatant job'. So I did this and with characteristic perversity they drafted me into machine gun battalion. So I put the case very simply to the acting commanding officer and he said, 'Well I don't know what to do with you Sheedy. Get into the RAP and report to Doctor R.A.A. Plue'. So I did this and because I was in the job as a medical orderly I thought I'd better read something about it and from that time I became more interested in it. When we were taken prisoner of war subsequently we found our way to Bandung and there classes were set up of various sorts and various subjects - languages, English, History and what not. So I enlisted in these and started my formal education as it were.

Later on in Thailand on the railway and in camps like Tarsau, Nakum Patom, I came into contact with people who were very well

educated. Major Walker for example was at Nakum Patom was the Assistant Director of Education in Malaya. And not only was he very skilled in educational features but he was an excellent Latin speaker and he was principally responsible for most of my Latin tuition - and taking me to Leaving standard which I did on return - to the point where we could walk around the camp speaking Latin, myself rather haltingly and he very fluently. And similarly there were people like George Brooks and others who were well versed in French. But George Brooks I remember, because he spent a lot of time with me and we were close friends as much as teacher and pupil, and he was responsible chiefly for me being able to come back and sit for Leaving Honours French and do that. And similar with mathematics Bombardier Bomford was a Graduate of Oxford and an excellent Physics teacher. And he took me from virtually the simplest equation in Physics and Mathematics to the stage that I was doing calculus and what not, not very well but doing it in the sand most of the time because we were short of paper and what not. And so at the end of our internment in 1945 I came back and got straight into the University and asked for permission to sit for the Leaving. I was able to sit for Latin and French I think at the Leaving examinations but I couldn't sit the others until the next examination in January. But I was able to satisfied the examiners and I was able to start medicine. And so that was that. So that's a short story.

> Well it's a remarkable one because I see you graduated in 1951. You must have been in the earliest batch of ex-service graduates. Is that right? You went straight into University straight after the ...

Yes, there were many of us in that first year beginning in the 1946 and I think of the 105 or so, see, I don't think any of the ex-servicemen missed except perhaps one did. So we stayed at home and worked rather than go out and play.

> There's certainly no concessions for you in order to pass. Well Red, perhaps if we moved on to when you were heading for the Railway. Which force were you in by the way?

I thought it was H Force but I've actually forgotten. But we ... from the moment we were taken prisoner of war most were associated Weary Dunlop, Brigadier A.S. Blackburn, recently promoted to Brigadier was in charge of the machine gun battalion. But we were taken as you know in Java and then moved to Garut where as a medical orderly I simply functioned as the Sergeant in Charge and we had a little hospital with a few beds in it. Just a makeshift hospital in the school at Garut which provided me with a lot of paper incidentally so that I could pursue, very sparingly, saving paper as much as I could for language and what not.

> You stayed at, the posting was the RAP, the 2/3rd Machine Gun was it?

Yes, yes. I'd had no formal training as an orderly. All I'd had was what I learnt myself as a RAP Sergeant. There were never any organised classes or lectures on anything throughout the whole time. What I had to find out I had to find out the

hard way. Anyway we moved from Garut to Bandung where these educational classes were instituted. Incidentally when we left Garut we were told by the Nipponese with less than 24 hours that we were shifting and I had personal instructions not to take any medical gear whatsoever because there was plenty at Bandung. We didn't believe that and although it was very dangerous not to do what the Japanese told you, in the darkness of the night I organised a series of people to come in and take small quantities of medical supplies. It was impossible to keep a record of who were involved and what they took. It was dangerous enough to get the medical supplies out of that hospital room and in the haversacks of the people who may need these things. However, strangely enough when we got to Bandung none of these people volunteered to return it. Despite many requests we got I would think about 10 per cent and this was a insight in human nature. People thought right that they don't know whose got it, we can hang onto it. Bandages, and ointments and applications. It was certainly a revelation to me. I didn't think people could possibly be capable of that.

But we moved from Bandung to Singapore in the bottom of a tram steamer of some sort. So thickly populated on the bottom of this xxx that literally if somebody walked from A to B to go to the toilet they had to walk over bodies. And since many of them had diarrhoea it wasn't a pleasant experience for the people that they were walking over because they couldn't always get there. And if it was necessary for anybody to turn it was more convenient for everybody to turn. You know we were so closely packed. Some people would stand at the end. The crowding was similar going from Singapore up to Thailand on the bottom of railway carriages where some of them were hanging out. And unfortunately I can remember one chap sitting with his legs hanging out in order to ease the congestion and approaching a siding and hitting his leg on the siding resulting in quite a nasty wound at that time. Major Corlette I think attended to him at that time.

Of course, I've forgotten the name of the place that that journey took us to but.

Ban Pong was it, Ban Pong in Thailand.

Yeah Ban Pong, that's it. And we were loaded in trucks there and a convoy that was enveloped in dust, we went to Hintok. Again we were sickly populated in the backs of trucks and the dust was almost unbearable. And then of course we spent some time in Hintok. At this stage I'd become separated from Tim Godley who'd been ... I'd been with him since Syria. He'd joined us in Syria and he was with us all the time and a very excellent and genuine and honest and sympathetic doctor he was.

Could you elaborate even more so on him please?

Well he ... he had a sympathetic ear for the patients. He treated them as a friends or a little reserve rather than treating them, as the British medical officers did, with a lot of military discipline, saluting and what not. To me at that time he appeared to have the capacity to sort out the wheat from the chaff. He'd sort out the difficult patients, just put

them to one side, then rush the others through the routine things and then come back and spend a lot of time and thought on the people who warranted it. Which I thought at the time was a very good method of operation and handling. A good modus operandi. And I enjoyed working with him. He allowed me a great deal of freedom in the general management of the RAP. And he had a ready ear and was always provide any information that he could. Just had to be asked, he was always available for answering these simple questions.

But I didn't see him from the time we left Singapore until just on one brief occasion, for a few minutes in xxx. He came there and brought up some money which was given to Ben Griff who was a paymaster to distribute among the orderlies. I can remember - this is irrelevant - but I can remember Ben Griff saying to him, 'Don't worry about Red Sheedy I'll look after him'. Consequently my money was dispersed among all the other orderlies. Ben Griff unfortunately never looked after me at any stage and certainly didn't give me any money. So I just had to bear that little inconvenience.

At Hintok, this was the first time I was out on the road. Weary Dunlop was there and he had plenty of medical orderlies. He had an abundance of them and consequently myself and a chap called Corrie I think must have appeared at that stage - a medical orderly. We were out on the work force and I didn't like that at all. I felt that, I didn't mind how hard I worked as an RAP orderly, particularly with a bit of time to do swatting with the ultimate hope of being able to do medicine, but I certainly didn't like working out, doing this manual labour. Consequently I approached Weary Dunlop and I said, 'Well look the place is crawling with medical orderlies and the possibility of me ever functioning again as a medical orderly while we're prisoners of war is remote. And with the starvation and disease about I may not survive at all but I'd like to make a break for it. I don't feel that I'm leaving anybody in the lurch. There were plenty of over people doing my job. I can't get a job'. And he agreed to it reluctantly. Consequently I disposed of almost everything I had of any value at all in order to acquire a tomahawk and a pair of shoes and a rough map. And I was organised to make an escape bid having previously snuck out of camp on many occasions, gone up the river to get the lay of the land and to make some preparation to cross the river because I thought that the thing to do was to leave fairly early in the evening as soon as it was dark and then to sneak up to a pre-arranged spot, throw some bamboos together which had been collected and xxx and tie them together. So that I could just get across the river with my rather low quality paraphernalia. Because I felt that that was a problem. I had gone up previously on several occasions and I'd dived into the river from a fairly high rock. I'd been told that there were no crocodiles at that level of the river that they were all further down but you were a bit apprehensive about it. Cause when I dived into this deep pool there's a hell of swirl just beneath me and I realised it was a crocodile and I was a bit terrified and swam like hell to the middle. There was no prospect of getting back to that rock again and I wasn't beating any records and I was travelling pretty fast, and by the time I got to the centre I realised if the thing had

wanted me it would have got me so I calmed down and went across the other side. When I got to the other side the mud was thickly imprinted with cat tracks and I mean the panthers were - because I'd seen a panther on one occasion there and tigers had been seen there. So I thought, 'Well Sheedy if you're going to make an escape bid you've got to get used to this sort of thing'. So clutching my pointed stick I walked up the track a mile or two and decided I'd had enough for that day and came back and subsequently prepared this raft and scattered around so it couldn't be easily seen there.

However on the day that I was due to make this escape bid I gathered all my utensils together and I was quite prepared to go. I had a rough idea of the terrain and I felt I could make my way to the sea and perhaps take it from there. But I, as I say, within 24 hours of the time that I was scheduled to do this the Japanese decided to change camp and go from [Konyu] to Hintok. And ... Weary then decided that I was a bad risk. He felt that if I had left and my departure would me immediately noticed on the following parade and there was a great deal of risk in letting me go so unfortunately that scheme fell through. And he created the present of putting me under arrest because he felt that if I was under arrest I wouldn't take off. Because it was certainly very tempting to go ahead no matter what but I mean the Japanese had the uncomfortable habit of making everybody stand out in the sun and belting them if there was any misdemeanour of this sort. So that fell through and we moved up to Hintok.

And at Hintok I was out on the road almost all of the time. It was a great rarity for me to be performing any sort of function as a medical orderly, until the cholera hit us and the first chap with cholera had died. The second chap named Walker who was a medical orderly and he looked as if he was dying when they carried me in. And at this stage we hadn't inserted any drips into anyone because there was a poor supply of material suitable for forming them. But he decided that he'd put his first drip into me and I was fairly dehydrated at this stage and people were coming in with cholera and vomiting up huge amounts of vomit and passing tremendous quantities of liquid faeces. So they constructed some normal saline. They did this simply by getting some salt water and boiling it down and filtering it through some mosquito cloth material that had been boiled itself. Then they formed the drip simply by getting hot wire, putting it around a bottle and then plunging it in cold water which makes it snap off at the level. They then connected the stethoscope tubing to the neck of the bottle and then directly into a needle so there was no drip ... no drip chamber of any sort. And Weary spent at least an hour getting into my right [cubicle fossil] where there's still a pigmented mark without local anaesthetic because they didn't have any at the time. And eventually managed and got the thing running. And I can always remember that drip. I can remember lying there because there was no top on it and there was moths flopping around and of course a moth or two fell in and I was looking at these moths fluttering around in my drip chamber. However it must have been effective that infusion of moths feathers because I had a hell of a rigor. I'd previously experienced rigors with malaria but this was the daddy of all

rigors.

I can remember Weary coming and looking down at this stage and saying to the staff, 'Oh you may as well take it out. He's not going to survive in any case'.

Oh gosh, that'd be about the last straw.

However as I say this infusion of moth feathers must have been good stuff. Perhaps we should have bottled it because I woke up the next morning feeling excellent.

How remarkable.

Had an appetite. At this stage food was fairly scarce but soon afterwards as I was convalescing the herdsters that were driving yaks up the river. It was a practice of some of our guys who were a bit stronger than what the cholera victims, to go out and wait until a yak was a little bit behind the others or off to one side and hit it with an axe and just stun it or kill it and just stay quiet until the rest of the herd had moved on. And by this means we were able to get several yaks and this meant that the time I was convalescing there was a relative abundance of meat about. So consequently I was working as an orderly in the cholera camp but working double shifts so I could get an extra meal or two. And I actually went up to nearly fourteen stone. Which was incredible.

Wasn't it.

I rapidly lost it later on when I had ...

What had you been in civilian life?

I'd been about six stone at that stage.

No I'm sorry before you joined up?

I was about ten though I dropped down to six.

Ten, though that would have been oedema wouldn't it from beri-beri, water logging?

No, no. As I say there was an abundance of food just for the cholera den at that time and I worked two shifts, almost twenty-four hours a day. All I did was work and eat, no sorry, it was twelve stone.

Twelve stone.

And this wasn't oedema this was fairly healthy. So I was lucky at that stage. However when I left the cholera camp and just went back on the road again and later on we went down to Tarsau where I functioned as a sergeant in charge of one of the huts. Because Weary had preceded us down there and he'd set up his organisation and he had introduced other people who weren't medical orderlies into medical orderlies jobs because he needed them at that stage and he was loathe to supplant any of these people who'd done a very job with new staff. So again Corrie

and I found ourselves in the non-medical situation.

When we shifted from there and went to Chungkai I think it was.

Chungkai, it could be yeah.

And stopped over night and then went on to Nakum Patom. At Nakum Patom I was in charge of the RAP there and remained in some sort of medical job. First with McNealie and Meldrum at the RAP at Nakum Patom. These were British medical officers. Although these chaps did a very good job I thought and they were very conscientious and hard working but they were the military doctor who demanded discipline and I can remember Meldrum particularly - and McNealie was almost as bad - becoming berserk when the routine questioning of people of malaria - he'd say, 'How many attacks of malaria have you had?' - and although I used to see the line up and say, 'Now you're going to be asked this question. If you can't remember pull a figure out of the air but for God sake don't stand there for five minutes because the doctors get impatient'. Well I remember Meldrum getting a chap by the scruff of his neck - I doubt whether he had a shirt on - and running him right down the length of the hut, he was so angry at this delay. So the British medical officers were hard working, conscientious there but they were fairly demanding and they liked a lot more discipline. There wasn't the camaraderie that they had with the Australian doctors.

Then I moved from that job to being in charge of the chemist shop as it were and I think I was in that job until we were eventually liberated. Christmas 1944 I was given the enviable job of making a brew and I knew nothing about brewing alcohol but most people around there did, because I was a teetotaller at that stage.

Now I'm sorry did you say at Nakum Patom or ...?

Nakum Patom, yes.

It's still there, yes?

Still there, yes. It remained there until the end. So in order to make this brew I had some instructions from the local cook and one or two of the chronic alcoholics around the place. And we got some potato peel and a bit of yeast and a bit of sugar from the cook house and it was going splendidly until I thought that I'd make it a bit stronger by putting some alcohol in it which we had and that just turned it to vinegar. So we started again and we had an excellent brew and because I was chief brewer I was given two water bottles full of this whereas all the other collaborators were only given one water bottle full. And rather inadvisably, because I was a teetotaller - I'd only had about one bottle of beer in my entire career and these were under circumstances where there was no water to drink when we were bombed at Java and I'd given my water away - so I thought I could handle a glass or two of this and I took my two water bottles and I was violently ill even with about a half glass of it. But the other boys, who were accustomed to drinking, had no trouble at all. They had a marvellous time.

They promptly got my share as well of course.

And during this time at Nakum Patom most of my spare time, every spare minute I had, was spent studying Latin and French and German. I did German also to Leaving standard but I wasn't required to sit for it. But I could speak it fluently with George Brooks and this other chap, who's name I've forgotten, teaching us and myself, just the three of us. And having previously done Latin and French and George Brooks being versatile with French and other languages too. We were good pupils and we got through it in three months quite easily and doing very well speaking German with each other all the time. Coates of course could speak German too. How well I don't know but probably better than what I could at the time.

There was a tremendous shortage of paper at that time and everybody smoked, or almost everybody smoked, I didn't. I was fairly pure at that stage. I didn't smoke or drink or go out with bad woman. And it was very hard for me to get it because the boys developed the art of splitting paper. Getting a razor blade and work on the corner, split it in two and gradually have a very thin sheet which they then used for cigarette paper. And perhaps the most dangerous time of our career as prisoners of war was not when we were being housed by the Nipponese but when there was a shortage of tobacco. I didn't smoke but the boys tried everything they could get their hands on - bits of cane, lairs and they were becoming very irritable to the point where on the mess line for example, people for so irritable you could buy a fight like that. Easy. And if a snake went across the camp the boys were in no danger because they were pretty fast tracking it down but the people who got it were in danger because there was such a competition among the hunters to get to that snake, which I never tasted myself. They ate snake, and fish and mussels from the river if they could get them and they ... at one stage at Hintok particularly they were fairly keen on herbs and things around the place. And there were some Dutchmen who thought they knew all about herbs. We used to follow the trend of what they ate we tended to eat, rather reservedly because most of us felt we'd like to see how they got on before we barged into eating local vegetables from the jungle. And a couple of them died in Hintok as I remember and after that our enthusiasm for eating various jungle plants dropped very rapidly.

How about the Japanese language? Did you learn that with that facility for languages?

We were compelled to count I think up to one hundred and to learn a few Japanese words so that we could be given instructions and that we knew what they were talking about. But I hated the Japanese so much that I was determined not to learn one single word in Japanese I wasn't compelled to.

That you didn't have to.

And I didn't. I spent a lot of time doing these other things and studying. Although a lot of my mathematics was done in the sand because of the shortage of paper, a lot of my studying, learning French and German, my vocab, I would do at night in

order to get enough time to do it. This meant I had to use a little coconut oil lamp which was just a jar with a bung of some sort in it and a wick coming through. And this used to work. I used to do this under the blankets. I used to have this underneath my blankets and my mates would be watching out for Japanese and if you weren't asleep when he came ... when the guards came around I'd have adequate warning. But I did many hours of work with these flickering oil lamps which was quite effective and would keep me busy and get my mind off of things. We used to walk around the place you know. If the Japs would bash us around we'd say, '[Ce't libre battage Japane]', or something like that and describe him in French and this kept our vocabularies going. George Coates and myself.

> And so far as the studies was concerned you got a fair amount of encouragement did you, or discouragement from some people? Did you ...

I got a tremendous amount of encouragement from people like Brooks, and Walker and Bombardier Bomford. Some of the others were a bit critical. They didn't really have much patience for somebody who'd left school at ten and a half and thought he could do French. Nevertheless they were quite expert unfortunately a bit too intellectual and little less tolerant than some of these other people. Anything else you want me to enlarge on?

> Let's see.

Casting my mind back to the time we were at Tarsau I can remember one or two amusing episodes. There was the scorpion incident. Since scorpions are fairly large in that area and there are many of them I had spoken to the various doctors about the management of scorpion stings. I'd been advised although they were large scorpions they were no where near as toxic as those generally found in Australia which were smaller but more dangerous. I'd been told that no treatment was required but it may be a gesture to put some Condy's crystals on them. Consequently my attitude towards potential scorpion bites as a medical orderly was a fairly mild unconcerned one.

And at about midnight one night I was sleeping in the room I occupied as being in charge of the chemical and drugs and whatnot there. At midnight or thereabouts this chap appeared. I've forgotten his name although I should never have forgotten it. In a situation of dire distress he was sweating with shock and concern and he'd been bitten by a scorpion. Now the circumstances are amusing because of the shortage of materials and containers. It was customary for everybody to make themselves a little night bamboo by cutting out one segment of a bamboo and leaving the top open and the bottom formed by the next partition. And people used to use this as a pee bamboo and this chap had woken in the middle of the night. Dropped it into the top of the bamboo and the scorpion had neatly seized his glans penis. And he was terrified, absolutely terrified. Unfortunately I'd burst out laughing at this and this wasn't well received at all. And I found it necessary to call the MO, who I think was McNealie at the time, to come and have a look at it and he just reassured the chap. But he never forgave me

this individual at me laughing. It amused most people in the camp. And at that time the Japanese were becoming more tolerant and permitting us to put on a vaudeville type of show every now and then. And at the next vaudeville show this song came out. I can remember it went, '... and the moral of the story is very plain to see, look into the pee pot before you have a pee'. And there were several verses of this song. But nobody will forget that guy. He was terrified.

And on another occasion there was a rather amusing episode involving the occupants of what we used to call the nut house. If you weren't a nut and in the nut house there was one way of avoiding work by for example walking around and whistling at imaginary dogs and things. And a number of people in this hut which was called the nut house and at that stage we were being exposed to the risk of bombing and I think Chungkai had been bombed at this stage and we could hear the bombs landing. And one of these individuals in the nut house had woken up in the middle of the night and had reached up to do or grab something and knocked down a container of some sort, a metallic container with a hell of a lot of noise. And people thought that this was an air-raid warning so everybody in the nut house dived out into these trenches which were half filled with water from recent rains. And they made so much noise in exiting that the fever spread around the camp like a wild fire. And within about five minutes everybody in the camp was out in slit trenches in these rather boggy slit trenches. It took some time for the news to spread. The Japanese were terrified because they thought they had a general unexpected uprising on their hands. And fortunately they were too confused to start shooting. It was instantaneous, total camp reaction to a couple of nuts that made that commotion.

I can recall an episode which I think occurred in Tarsau and women weren't immediately available to prisoners of war and further more they were so famished and impoverished that they spent most of their time talking about food rather than about women. But this was kept fairly quiet but as I recall one of the chaps did manage to have intercourse with one of the ladies and they were riddled with venereal disease. He then contracted syphilis I'm told and became so concerned because no treatment was available that he put his head on a railway line somewhere and was decapitated. Details of this were fairly hushed up I think. In the interests of the xxx and whatnot.

On another occasion, this was at Tarsau, towards the end of our incarceration the Japanese permitted local workers to come in to build these Attap huts with timber floors stretching from one end of the hut to the other. And they brought their wives of course. And the custom was to work for fifty minutes, or fifty-five minutes and then have five or ten minutes yasmi, or rest. During one of these rest periods one of our prisoners of wars found himself in one of these huts alone with one of the natives. And they were fairly obliging even though it was probably a free one. And he was caught having intercourse with this native woman by the Japanese guard who promptly marched him up the camp commander. We thought he would certainly be beheaded or shot because this was, to us, a tremendous sin against Japanese discipline but with the total unexpectedness

of the Japanese reacting to these circumstances the camp commander said to the guard, 'Was it during the yasmi?', and the guard said, 'Yes'. And he said, 'All right, it doesn't matter'. Had it occurred during working hours the chap would have found himself on a ...

On another occasion just before I developed cholera in Hintok I felt as though I wasn't a very strong, and I felt as though I was going to be in a great deal of trouble unless I could get something to eat. I thought well the only thing I've got left to sell is my blanket. I'll sneak out one of these nights and sell it to one of these workers in the camps quite close and just see what I could get for it. So I did this and I haggled for a while and I think I got about three and a half [tiggles]. The value of the tiggle was about a penny I think but you could do a fair bit with the currency of current low value at the time. You could buy bananas and a little bit of food and it would make the difference between staying alive and not. So I snuck out in the dead of night and approached one of these and made myself known because I thought they might react adversely to someone appearing in the middle of the night. Haggled with the man and his wife and having reached an agreement and having got my three and a half tiggles or whatever it was, the father then proposed that I give him the money back and shag his daughter and I wasn't going to be in that for several reasons. For one I was extremely ill and (b) I'd had no experience with woman at all at that tender age and three I felt that there was a real danger of being killed during the intercourse. Of the native then saying he came in and raped my daughter. But there was no physical possibility of that occurring. So that they were available to anybody that had the strength I suppose.

And the finance.

That's right. I think perhaps we'd better stop for a minute.

I recall one rather tragic episode that occurred at Tarsau during the time when I was actually out doing some mathematics with Bombardier Bomford. And I remember it because it was felt that had I been there in the hut it wouldn't have happened. But I think it was a rather dubious and inaccurate assumption. This particular patient had cerebral malaria and he was unable to be found for sometime and since there was very few places you could go in a camp it was a bit of a mystery. Eventually somebody walked over to the latrine and found a head bobbing out of the faecal residue there and the chap demented with cerebral malaria had apparently gagged himself. He'd tied his hands together and had just slipped down into the latrine and committed suicide.

Medical supplies were fairly scarce at that stage and it was current medical practice to assess a person with malaria very carefully and if he was going to die, withhold it, because it was going to be a waste of medication. But if he was seriously ill and salvageable he was likely to get some of this limited quinine. If he was mildly ill and not desperately ill he wouldn't be given any. Medication became more easily available towards the end. But it was fairly desperate at one stage.

Going back to Garut at one stage some people came in from the jungle - people who'd attempted to escape, a couple of them - and had been caught by the Japanese and delivered to us. One of them had malaria quite badly and Tim Godly felt that if he could get some intravenous quinine into him he may be salvageable. He did this by getting ordinary tablets of quinine and pounding them up and then boiling them thoroughly and then filtering them through something and then injecting them intravenously. The chap recovered whether it was because or despite, because of or despite of it I don't know, but he certainly recovered. And he was a desperately ill guy in that primitive hospital in Garut.

END OF TAPE - SIDE A

START OF TAPE - SIDE B

This is reel two of the interview with Doctor Redmond Sheedy.

Just glancing over the names of these various medical officers who were prisoners of war I find that my memory fails me with many of them that I must of known. Perhaps not very well. I can remember Major Fisher quite well. He was a very efficient surgeon I thought, very conscientious, and I remember him mostly because of his beautiful shiny boots. Boots were pretty hard to come by but he had them. And he had an orderly that kept them in top class order. He was meticulous, I feel, both in his medical practice and also in his personal hygiene and his general appearance.

Syd Kranz was an identity that nobody will ever forget. Bluntly spoken to the point and rapidly so in his surgical procedures. I remember a Dutchman walking into his set up at Tarsau. Syd had just examined somebody rectally and diagnosed piles and when the Dutch officer came in Syd was looking in his mouth at his tonsils. And as the Dutch officer approached he said, this chap's got piles. The Dutch officer turned to his colleague and said, 'I've heard of some clever Australian bastards but this one diagnoses piles by looking down their throat'. And he was very blunt and very conscientious and I think that beneath his rough exterior he had a heart of gold.

Albert Coates of course was the identity in charge of Nakum Patom. Very competent, capable, a very blunt speech. A very competent and decisive surgeon but also with the capacity to handle the Japanese. It wasn't really shared by Syd who was too bluntly spoken in my view. But Coates had the capacity and the endurance and diplomacy and restraint to deal with them.

Hazelton I remember, he used to be in charge of the so-called laboratory at Tarsau. And he had people running around doing haemoglobin counts with a fairly primitive apparatus.

Nobody will forget Weary Dunlop who was absolutely infatigable. He himself of course had some ailments such as an extensive ulcer on the leg which was treated with charcoal. Not that it did any good but he had to follow the lead he'd indicated at

the other places because charcoal could be made available. And if you had diarrhoea you got it. If you were had constipation you got it. If you had an ulcer you got it. But it may have done some good if only keep people busy putting it on.

I can remember Moon as a very human, approachable and very efficient and dedicated doctor. As was Corlette. Working hard and always available at any time for medical service to the prisoners of war.

We've spoken about Tim Godley who has a nephew at Tumby Bay actually.

Just returning to Albert Coates, I can remember one of his famous statements when I was asking about the spread of infectious diseases, diarrhoea and what not, and he indicated that the big trouble with the human race was that 'their arse was too close to their mouth'. In his blunt words, that's verbatim.

I can recall G.W. Chapman, who was a chemist at Nakum Patom, and who assisted me a great deal in the study of elementary botany. He was an expert able to recall a lot of abstruse science about botany simply by working his brain for a minute or two. He seemed to have a capacity to recall things he must have learnt many years ago and not exercised of an elementary botanical nature. And as I recall he was the person that was responsible for introducing gastric tubes. Extracting gastric HCl and probably concentrating this for the use of soldering.

> Did he tell you about his background. He came from Oxford. I've got a feeling he was a Don or something like that. He was quite a high ...

Oh he's a very erudite ...

> Person, yes.

I am reminded of an interesting episode that occurred at Tarsau where it was our custom to wander down to the river and bathe in the flowing river. It flowed more rapidly in the centre of course and only the brave and the strong would go out to their waist level in order to wash while the sick individuals would wash close to the shore. And these people who used to wash their ulcers in shallow water, close to shore would frequently find fish moving in and debriding their tropical ulcers, not an entirely painless experience.

On one occasion one of the stronger and braver individuals washing out in the midstream flew in with a roar of pain, partially circumcised by a fish. I think the circumcision description was a little exaggerated but we thought that he lost a substantial amount of his foreskin on that occasion.

I can recall the mass graves at Hintok. We had to march out to the railway and pass through the hospital area where sick parades would be conducted by the Japanese. The doctors would recommend certain people as unfit for work but ultimately the decision was taken by the Japanese guards who would just walk

along and say, 'You, you, you, you', and off they'd go to work. On one occasion a person selected by the Japanese to work actually fell dead on parade.

The English arrived; people who'd marched up from Singapore and were very, very sick, very enfeebled. We thought we were sick and we were hungry but they were much worse, they were just skeletons. And they would forage in our rubbish bins and believe me anything that went into our rubbish bins was almost inedible. The worst of the potato peelings if in fact there were any there. And they had a fairly heavy mortality rate and walking through this so-called hospital camp, or this camping area in order to approach this limestone ridge we had to ascend in order to get out to the jungle which led to the railway, frequently we would find people who had died overnight. Having got to the latrine they couldn't get back or alternatively they couldn't quite get there. The death rate was so high that the officers who were responsible for digging the graves were unable to cope with the influx of candidates for burial and consequently the dead were buried in a mass grave.

I can recall this limestone ridge as being quite a problem for the sick to ascend. And on one occasion one of these people driven out to work in this enfeebled state had managed to ascend this ladder of the limestone ridge only to stagger probably as soon as he got to the top to one side. I encountered him when I arrived exhausted at the top of this climb and moved over to see if I could assist him. He was at this stage covered with a blanket of mosquitoes so thick that it literally appeared to be a grey blanket and every bear inch of his skin was covered. He wore a G-string and nothing else so he was very thickly covered indeed. It would have been difficult to put a pencil between any spot - between mosquitoes. However he died within a few minutes I would think. My attempts to assist him were obstructed by the Japanese guard who just belted me back onto the track where George ... George Crooks and I ...

Now these mosquitoes ...

George Crooks and I discussed the situation in French. These were mosquitoes unaccustomed to blood I would think. But they had to have blood to fertilise of course and they were living on jungle juices and the prospect of an immobile prisoner of war was too much for them to resist.

Well now, how did you fair as far as the mosquitoes were concerned? They'd be out to bite you too wouldn't they?

Yes. We all had trouble with mosquitoes. Most of us were down to G-strings. Very few people had shorts or anything more formidable or protective than a G-string. And this G-string had to serve the function of a cloak of modesty and also as a face washer when we were under the type of shower which had been made by running a stream of water along bamboos. So we used to use this as a face washer and general body washer and then ring it out and put it on as a G-string. So that, on the way out to the railway all you could see in front of you there was a bare bottom thickly strewn with these ulcers which had

resulted from mosquito bites which had become infected and broken down. And everybody's bottom looked the same. It was just a mass of red blobs in various stages of ulceration.

Red, do you know what part of the line you were working on? Was it somewhere about compressor cutting or Hintok bridge site?

Well we approached it from Hintok and it certainly was a cutting. And our job was to go out there and following the explosions just gather the dirt and the rocks in the little baskets with two handles and carry them to the side and throw them over the edge. In the same way as you see natives doing it now. I wasn't on the jackhammer very often which was probably a good thing because I would have been terribly scared of it hitting not the hammer but the hand. Not the jack but the drill or whatever it was but the hand that held it and this had occurred. Mostly the stronger, the bigger people were selected as I recall for the sledge hammer work. And they would drill the holes and the dynamite would be inserted. We'd move out briefly while the explosion occurred and then return. Working fifty minutes or fifty-five minutes in every hour. If they didn't like us they would cut this yasmi or rest period out.

I remember on one occasion we had a rather vocal Japanese guard. Limited in his vocabulary but determined to say something and he was describing the various places that had been bombed and destroyed by the Japanese. And so he was talking about Sydney and Melbourne. And one prisoner of war said, 'Bomb bomb Adelaide?' and the guard said, 'Yes, bomb bomb Adelaide'. 'Bomb bomb Perth?', 'Yes, bomb bomb Perth'. 'Bomb bomb bullshit?', 'Yes, bomb bomb bullshit'.

(laughs) Well coming back to the cutting you were working can you remember whether the walls were about fifty feet high? Really or only about ten feet high?

No, they would be about fifty feet high and we were cutting into the side of this.

And there were no jackhammers there, no power tools there at all. Is that right?

No power tools, just the sledge hammer and the drill.

And, that would have been Hell Fire Pass?

Yes. That's right.

That's where the memorial is now.

We had among us, somebody who I didn't know personally, but who was a rather formidable boxer who had some rather high status in boxing. He would have been a medium weight I would think. He was returning from another party and going through our party which would have been at Hell Fire Pass as you have described it. And he fell foul of one of the Japanese guards for not bowing and he was then stood up while these Japanese belted

hell out of him. Just hitting with his fist repeatedly and also knocking his chin from side to side in the manner that the Japanese were accustomed to belt. They would stand us in front of them, hit us across the face with one fist and as we went to one side they'd knock us back so it was a yoyo sort of oscillating form of punishment. We all felt that this chap had restrained himself quite considerably knowing full well that he was capable of dropping the Japanese with one punch.

> And he ... How about, you would have a lot of injuries on the line from the limestone because it forms a cutting edge when it flakes and breaks?

Yes most people had some form of foot injury. A lot of them were barefoot. I would think that most of them were barefoot and most of them were bare arsed and most of them were barely alive. But they, I can remember from people coming back from this Hell Fire Pass without any form of protection over their feet. They were forced to go out in their bare feet. The only medication that was available was coconut oil and if you had strips of mosquito netting you could soak strips of mosquito netting in coconut oil and circle the feet with it. But I can remember the people coming back from this area on their hands and feet - in other words crawling.

> Crawling back to camp virtually.

But there were a lot of minor injuries of course and they tended to become infected and become ulcerated and some of them extended from the ankles to the knees. And this is where at Tarsau a lot of these had to be amputated under the existing conditions. There was no formal amputation at the optimal site. They just cut it off where they could and preserved what they could. I can remember these ulcers being dressed. At this stage I was in Tarsau as a sergeant in charge of a hut, not doing any medical work because of the super abundance of other people in that job already. We could hear people all over the camp. All over the camp you could hear these people screaming as their ulcers were dressed. They were simply moistened down, the mosquito netting removed and replaced and any excess slough being cut out. There was no method of relieving the pain. There was no local anaesthetic and this wouldn't have been practical it just would have formed another site to become infected. And of course some of those died and some of them had successful amputees and at Nakum Patom ... amputations was the word I should have used. And at Nakum Patom, Bob Fox and a team of carpenters and carpenters aids were making quite acceptable artificial legs that they could stump about on for that time.

> And did you witness some of that surgery in any of the camps?

No, I wasn't with the team at the time. I was just an interested watcher on the balcony as it were. I can remember Weary Dunlop performing an operation for a perforated peptic ulcer. This was at Konyu and it was by the light provided by just an ordinary fire - heap of wood burning. And this was done under local anaesthetic as I recall or very limited amount

of general. Now that was a successful one. I actually was functioning as an orderly for a day or two during this chap's convalescence and he recovered in the immediate analysis but I don't know what happened to him eventually.

Is that the one performed by the light of hurricane lamps at night?

By the light of hurricane lamps and also by the light provided by a camp fire built closely which was a two-edged sword with smoke around the place.

And the Japs, some of the Japs witnessed it too?

Yes they were there.

I can recall a British Major at Tarsau who instructed me in Latin who was very tolerant, very skilful, very communicative with the art of teaching Latin, who died subsequently because of acute cerebral malaria I believe. Certainly he died quickly. As I recall he was a BBC broadcaster with a flare for describing cricket and Swanson I think is his name, or was his name. I remember the day that reporting to him for my afternoon's instruction in Latin and he apologised quite profusely in a very gentlemanly like manner - quite unmindful of his own medical condition and quite upset of putting me to some inconvenience - and yet he died that night. He was so sick.

How extraordinary. As you say, 'Extraordinary gentleman'. That completes the interview with Doctor Red Sheedy.

END OF TAPE - SIDE B - END OF INTERVIEW

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