ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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INTERVIEWEES:	ERIC SMITH & LACHLAN MacLEAN
INTERVIEWER:	BILL FOGARTY
SUMMARY:	PERSONAL EXPERIENCES IN JAPAN WITH BCOF AS YOUNG LIEUTENANTS AT THE END OF WORLD WAR II.
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START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

Identification: This is Tape No. 1 of an interview with Lachlan MacLean and Eric Smith, conducted by Bill Fogarty, recorded on 21 September 1994 at the Australian War Memorial. The topics covered in this tape are: early training at Duntroon, the Royal Military College, the end of the Second World War, and the formation of the units to go to Japan which became known as BCOF. I'll start with talking to Lachlan MacLean.

Lachlan, could you please tell us a bit about yourself, your family, where you went to school, how you joined the army, and what you were like at Duntroon before you went to Wewak?

LM: My father was a long-term public servant who'd been with the Department of the Army all his life; in fact, he'd started in the permanent army, as it was prior to 1914 - well prior to that - and I think he decided, about the time of my birth, what my future career was going to be.

I was educated at the Scot's College, Sydney, and for a very brief time at Scot's College in Melbourne, and I then had a short period as a private soldier before going into the Royal Military College at the beginning of 1943. I graduated from there in December 1944, and after the usual young officers' courses at the School of Signals and the Jungle Training Centre in Canungra, I arrived in New Guinea and joined the 6 Division as the signal officer for the 2/6th Cavalry Commando Regiment, just in time for the end of the Second World War.

For a young regular officer this abrupt end to the practice of my chosen profession was not greeted with the same enthusiasm as that displayed by my rather war-weary colleagues at the time, and I remember feeling that after years of training for the real thing, it was disappointing to be faced so quickly with the prospect of Saturday afternoon soldiering with the CMF.

What was the feeling like within the unit when the war ended? I mean, you arrive full of fire and brimstone, ready to soldier on, and three months later it's all over; how did you cope with the change of fact that you were all gung ho, and everyone else is not?

LM: (Laughs) I suppose, initially, I went along with their exultation and delight that the war was really over, but it left you a bit like a flat soda-water bottle, I suppose; all the anticipation suddenly went out of everything. Nobody had shot at me, and life was very quiet and peaceful.

Because of this, was that the reason that you decided that you'd like to soldier on in some capacity?

LM: Yes. We went down - the Regiment went down - for the big surrender parade at Wewak on Cape [Wam], and we saw old General

Adachi hand over his sword; and it was after that parade that I think a few of us, a few of my classmates - we met up there - and there was a buzz going around about the probability of an occupation force being formed. Most of them had arrived about the same time that I had, and we were still feeling a bit disappointed about things. I remember we rushed off with a lot of excitement after hearing this buzz to some mystified officer up in the divisional headquarters, and put our names down for some force he'd never heard about at all that might go and occupy Japan.

> What was the first you heard that you had been selected to be in what was to become the occupation force?

LM: I can't remember actually how it came about; I can remember what happened when the word did come through that I had to go back to Lae and join some mysterious regiment I'd never heard about then. And I remember flying down on a very nasty afternoon, and a very uncomfortable aeroplane, leaving the Commando Regiment and going back to Lae where I found myself appointed as OC of a despatch rider section; and that didn't really excite me very much at all, it didn't live up to, or the prospects of despatch riding didn't live up to, the section I'd just left. And that was with 26 LFC Signals which were being formed as the base signal regiment to go to Japan, and that was the first conformation that I had that I was appointed to this occupation force, if it ever got off the ground.

> Alright, thank you very much. I now turn to Eric Smith. Eric, could you tell us something about your family life before you went to Duntroon, and how you actually ended up in Wewak?

ES: Yes, I will Bill. In my own case I think I was twelve when I decided I'd like to go to [armsee]. I discussed this with my father - I can't remember who brought the subject up, whether he did or I did - but anyway, it was very early on, and I aimed myself through schooling to achieve that end. My father was a disabled war veteran of World War I, he was shot and blinded on Gallipoli - in fact, never did see me. We were great mates, and we did many things together: we rode together, we fished together, did lots of things. Although incapacitated with blindness, he was very capable of doing many things; he was also a very good advisor to me from my point of view.

So from that point of view, strange as it may seem, as the war didn't treat him very well, he was most enthusiastic about a military career for me. So, in fact, I too, I went into Sydney Boy's High School, and from there to the Royal Military College in the same class as Lachlan. We arrived in February 1943 and graduated in December 1944.

After graduation there were several - I graduated into infantry - and there were several little courses we had to do. I remember we had a month at Cowra with Recruit Training - that was my first platoon, a platoon of recruits; and then up to Canungra where there were various cadres and courses carried

out; and from Canungra I was posted to the 2/3rd Battalion in New Guinea which was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Ian Hutchinson.

I must say, I didn't receive a very fond welcome. There was, at that time, some antipathy between the AIF and the Staff Corps. I didn't know much about it, being very young at the time, but it wasn't much of a welcome; in fact, I think I arrived and subsequently Bruce [Trenry] came to the same battalion, had the same welcome. I barely had time to put my kit bag down before they sent me out on a patrol into a swamp where there were supposed to be some Japanese snipers. I can't remember whether I was more frightened of snipers or the crocodiles. Anyway, it worked out fine, and in due course that particular phase finished.

We then went with the Battalion up into the Prince Alexander Ranges. I was sitting on Mount [Shigrangu] when the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Somebody in the Division had said at that time that all patrols had to be officer led - which is a very stupid thing, as you would know, because one officer going to a different platoon, they don't know the people, they don't know you - but I was the only lieutenant in A Company 2/3rd Battalion, so I was leading patrols every day, and it wasn't a very good idea, I think.

Anyway, along with everybody else in the Battalion I was pleased when the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. At that time we thought the Japanese deserved what they got, and from our point of view the war in the Pacific looked as though its final chapter would be an invasion of Japan which, we thought, would result in terrible casualties to our forces. Also, from my own personal point of view, the 2/3rd Battalion had been warned to take over the lead in the advance over the Prince Alexander Ranges; A Company was to lead within the Battalion, and my platoon was to be the advanced guard of A Company.

At that time infantry platoon commanders in 6 Division had a life expectancy of 15 days in action, that was the average. So looking back now, fifty years later, I'm still of the opinion the Japanese deserved the atom bomb. At that time anyway, they were a cruel, ruthless lot, who ruined the lives of millions of people from China to Australia.

> What was the feeling like in the Unit when the announcement was made that the war had now ended?

ES: There was a feeling of slight disbelief. The rumour was that one bomb had wiped out a city, and it seemed inconceivable because at that time we were dropping big bombs of 500 pounds - 200 pounds - 500 pounds was a big bomb - and something that wiped out a city was very hard to comprehend; the words 'atom bomb' had never entered my vocabulary and those around me, we didn't even know what it meant. So there was incredulity there, and it took a little while for it to sink in, that these bombs were sufficiently big to finish the war.

What did the troops themselves think now that it was over? What was the feeling, the morale?

ES: Actually, I'm really not too sure of that. I think most of us were relieved, but I can remember one soldier saying to me, 'I came out of the depression, I've got a wife and two children; here I am in the army, I earn £7:2 a week; wherever will I be able to earn so much again?', so I suppose there was an economic aspect to it for some people.

And what was it that determined the you would put your name forward to go [part] to the occupation force?

ES: Well, in my own case I was a regular officer, as Lachlan was, and although I was glad that the Japanese had collected the atom bomb at that time, and I was also pleased that that particular phase of the war was over, I was disappointed to think that the whole show was finished because, after all, that was my profession, and I would have preferred to have soldiered on a little longer ... I've lost track of the question.

Well, how did you come to put your name forward then?

ES: The situation there was a bit different for me, I suppose. My CO, Lieutenant Colonel Ian Hutchinson, was appointed as commanding officer of one of the battalions to be raised to go to BCOF. Eventually that battalion became the 67 Battalion, and further along the line the name was changed to 3RAR - 'Old Faithful'. The Battalion headquarters and one company was to be raised in New Guinea from the New Guinea Force of 6 Division at Wewak; the other elements of the Battalion were to be raised elsewhere.

Colonel Hutchinson wasted no time about setting about his task. He called for volunteers immediately and began processing, and then began interviewing them. And there were many nominations, many more people nominated than there were vacancies to fill. He needed to set up his headquarters quickly, so it was natural for him to choose those he knew, and this is what happened: he chose Major Len [Downing] from the 2/11th Battalion as his second in command; then he chose his own adjutant, Bill [Corey], as adjutant of the new battalion, the 67 Battalion; then he chose myself as assistant adjutant - he didn't ask me if I wished to volunteer; in fact, I did want to volunteer, but he didn't ask me, he just chose me - and he took his orderly room sergeant and made him the new orderly room sergeant of the new battalion. And so it went on, he filled position after position from his own headquarters of those who wished to go - Lieutenant Bruce [Trenerley], Lieutenant Darcy Lachlan, filled appointments, as did Warrant Officer 'Darky' Griffith, and many others, all of these from the 2/3rd Australian Infantry Battalion.

So almost immediately he had a working headquarters filled with people who knew their jobs and who knew each other, so from the beginning you could say the pulse of the new battalion was beating very strongly.

Alright, if we leave it there and we go back to Lachlan. Lachlan, you were at Lae, in a sig unit, ready to go on from there. Can you describe how you went from there to Morotai, and what happened at Morotai?

LM: Yes. Just continuing for a fraction of a second on the situation at Lae. I think this is significant because what set all this up - I mentioned, perhaps, that I was a bit apathetic about taking over the despatch rider section, and I think this must have been obvious to my CO, Colonel Stan Hill, who said, 'Right, we'll burn of some of this keenness and exuberance by making you look after the physical fitness of this newly-formed regiment. So we started with PT and that sort of thing, much to the amusement of the Lae garrison which was rather inclined to think, now, the war's over, Christmas is coming, we want to be home and out of this for Christmas. So on the one hand you had this newly-formed force with a lot of enthusiasm, and doing all the military things, physical training and so forth, surrounded in the Lae area by a lot of people who weren't terribly interested in this. So you had a direct contrast immediately.

Also coming in and joining the regiment, and the units that were being formed around us, it was noticeable the number of regular officers, just as Eric has mentioned - senior NCOs and warrant officers who were forming part and parcel of this. So right from the outset I was conscious of a slight change in emphasis: here soldering was starting to change from being an obligation to people who were looking at it, possibly, even as a post-war career, and this was the first indication one had of something I really believe, and that is that BCOF was the genesis of the Australian Regular Army, and we owe a lot, at the present time, to what happened at that stage.

Well, we didn't do very much in Lae except gather people together, form them into subunits, and collect a very small amount of equipment and a few vehicles before the beginning of November when we embarked in the LSI Kanimbla for a four- or five-day trip across to Morotai. And that's where I first came in contact with the very redoubtable major from the 67 Battalion, Ian Ferguson - I B Ferguson - who left, or he managed to strike awe into any [sublieutenant] who was in his immediate presence, and certainly he struck it into me.

Anyway, at the end of quite a pleasant sort of voyage we disembarked at night in Morotai, and were led to a very barren section, as I remember it, where we set up a scratch camp under bare canvas, and woke up the next morning to find our old friends from 67 Battalion were right alongside us doing exactly the same thing. That was our introduction to Morotai, and I think of it here as 'never to be forgotten Morotai', and that's where the early excitement of BCOF - it started to wear a bit thin for a while, and the burgeoning discipline of a fully volunteer force was really tested to extremes by a prolonged wait in rather desolate circumstances. However, it was, for me, a time when fortune, even if it didn't smile at me, it looked a little bit favourably.

Perhaps you could describe, or explain, what Morotai was, why it was chosen as a place to assemble the BCOF force, and what was happening all around you while you were getting ready to go to Japan.

LM: Morotai was a fairly logical centre because the bulk of the force was to come from the 7 and the 9 Divisions who were in Borneo - Tarakan - and a relatively small proportion of it was to come from the 6 Division in New Guinea. I think this, essentially, was why Morotai was chosen as the central point.

Concurrently with our arrival into the area for onward movement north, of course, was a tremendous amount of activity coming the other way, of repatriated troops coming out of Malaya, or about to, and High Point returnee soldiers from Borneo going back home to Australia. There was also a rather reluctant group being brought in from New Guinea who thought that they should be going home and found themselves deposited in Morotai to caretake things there. I remember one shipload that arrived one night and certainly had no intention of getting off the ship until they were locked below. Eggs and bacon were fried upstairs until their hunger got the best of them, and that was the end of that little mutiny.

And these were people being brought in as guard duties and xxx?

Yes.

To run the base?

LM: Just to look after the base, yes, while the transit south and transit north took place.

Morotai was a rather busy place with planes landing, and also ships arriving?

LM: Yes.

So it was a transit island?

LM: Very much so, yes. There were two very active airstrips there, in [Wama] and [Peto], and the bay was very full of ships coming and going.

When did it start to really go off the rails with relations with the troops that had found that they, instead of moving straight on to Japan, suddenly found themselves stuck at Morotai?

LM: Stuck there - I suppose it would be by December, mid December - coming up towards Christmas - that they started to get a little bit restless. I don't remember being very conscious of this at the time because I'd just changed units, very fortunately. I was up at the main force headquarters area one day - I say main force headquarters area because we had a

number of headquarters collocated in the one place, the headquarters of BCOF, BCOF subareas, and the headquarters of 34 Brigade, were all in the one area - and I was up there one day and I met a Major Norman McLoud - 'Tosca', as we knew him - who'd been an instructor at RMC in our time, and a very popular one I would say. He asked me what I was doing, and it very quickly twigged that perhaps I wasn't as happy with these dispatch riding jobs as I could be, and he said that he had a job for a second in command of the Brigade Signals Squadron, would I be interested. Within about three days I was there, and I joined one of the happiest headquarters and most efficient units that I've ever had the fortune to serve with, and I regard that as a really fortunate moment.

Now, the troops in the Signals Squadron were very well trained, very enthusiastic, and they came from some of the more extrovert parts of he army - Division of Signals, Beach Signals, and some special force signals groups that were around. They were all very keen, and I didn't notice amongst them - I can't remember noticing amongst them - any dissatisfaction. This was probably because they had to work their normal shifts, all day, all night, and they didn't get much chance to grumble; we were very, very busy at that time, not as busy as we were about to become, but nevertheless, very busy. And I wasn't conscious of anything until after Christmas when - I suppose it wouldn't be more than forty-eight hours before - this great parade, this great 'jack-up' parade, took place, that we were told that it was going to happen, and that officers were politely asked not to be there.

By whom?

LM: The NCOs told us that it was going to happen, and please just leave it alone. And then the word spread amongst the officers that this was happening, and that the brigadier would handle the parade. So that was the fist we knew of it, and the circumstances in which we came to hear of it. But even from the outset there was never any suggestion of any mutinous conduct or any bad feeling that I can recollect; it was all rather politely arranged, if I can use such a strange term in a military context.

Could you describe what actually happened on the day they held the parade? Did you observe it?

LM: No, I didn't. We knew that we were not to be part of it. To the best of our knowledge the troops marched off in an orderly fashion under their NCOs. I'm sure that our switchboards were still manned, so I don't think any essential duty was stopped. We just sat and waited for them to come back and, as I recall, they were back by about midday, and whatever had been resolved was resolved, the thing was over and they got on with their duty, and we just carried on as though nothing much had happened, but obviously something significant had.

Now, could you describe then how you left Morotai and went on to Japan, what had you been told would be your duties

when you got to Japan, and what were you expecting to have to do when you got there?

LM: (Laughs) That's a very good question because we knew nothing, that's the short answer as I recall. We were going to be a brigade signals squadron working as a brigade signals squadron in a different place, and whatever that was going to involve we would find out when we got there. There was no special briefing as to our reception, we were going armed, we may have to do some sort of policing action, we may get involved in some other sort of action. No, we had no idea whatsoever as to what was likely to happen when we got there.

So you went by ship?

LM: Yes. The advance party went off in early January - it must have been mid January actually - and then the main body left at the end of the month, or early in February, in a flotilla - three American victory ships, the [Taos Victory], the [Perpetual Victory], and the [Stanford Victory], two lovely big British LSIs, the [Glen Earn] and the [Glen Gyle] - I say lovely because them being British they had beer on board which the Americans we were with didn't have. And those who drew the short straw got two LSTs to rough it in. This convoy left in early February, I think it was.

Okay, I'll leave it there and go back to you, Eric. When we left you you had just been involved in the formation of the battalion that was going to become part of the Brigade, and you were still at Wewak. Can you describe how you went from there to Morotai, and your experiences at Morotai?

ES: Yes. We remained several more weeks in Wewak before embarking on the Kanimbla for the short voyage to Morotai. At this time Ian Hutchinson asked for a fortnights leave in Australia. Regrettably, he was not given that fortnights leave - he had a family and a couple of children - and subsequent events show he was still in Wewak perhaps five weeks later, so there was ample time really for him to have gone down for a couple of weeks and come back. The result of this was that he decided to take his resignation and return to Australia. So when we finally left Wewak, Battalion Headquarters and Headquarters Company, we didn't have a commanding officer. This was the situation when we arrived at Morotai. All the other elements of the Battalion came together at Morotai, but no commanding officer. After perhaps a week or ten days a Major D R Jackson arrived to take command.

I sidetrack here to say that it was many weeks later before D R Jackson was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel - an interesting little facet on the side, I think. In fact, we were in Japan before his promotion came through.

On Morotai I was in a battalion, and we didn't have quite the same information like we had at the Brigade Headquarters. We spent about - my recollection is roughly three months, perhaps

a little less, but about three months at Morotai. The Brigade came together and settled down quickly; very little training was carried out, and normal administrative parades in the morning followed by a little drill and sport of some kind. Nothing much was organised, no information was forthcoming at all in relation to our date of departure to Japan. Long before Christmas all arrangements in the Battalion had been noted for embarkation, and I'm sure that was probably the same in other units. A swimming carnival was organised and various other sporting activities took place.

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

ES: It was about this time I saw my first Japanese. A working party of twelve men arrived in our lines one morning, probably sent down from Brigade Headquarters because we weren't expecting them. Anyway, they were told to clean out the Battalion area, and I was surprised at the speed and thoroughness with which they completed this task; not a matchstick or a cigarette but was to be seen in the Battalion after only a couple of hours. They were dressed in army clothes, and they had these strange sandshoes with the big toes separated from the four other toes, the same footprint that had frightened us before in New Guinea.

Anyway, by about Christmas the soldiers were bored; they were bored with the waiting and they were incensed at the lack of information. Somewhere early in January occurred the strangest event I was ever to see in my army life; some called it a riot, some a mutiny, some a rebellion, some a jack-up - I think jack-up is probably the best word. The exact date alludes me, but this is what happened, this is what happened from my battalion's point of view. In our battalion lines all the soldiers came out of their tents at dusk one evening. I remember, they were like bees milling about, and close together like a dense crowd at a football match. I pushed through the mob to see what was going on at the centre, and to my surprise found the RAP sergeant, whom I'd assessed as a very quiet individual, fiercely haranguing the mob within his hearing range. He stopped when I worked my way to the front, but I failed to find out what he was saying.

There was some trepidation in the mess that night as something was obviously going on and none of us knew much about it - none of us knew anything about it. In the morning at about eight o'clock I was standing at the front of my tent when the whole battalion began to march through the lines and onto the road leading to Brigade Headquarters. There were no officers, no supernumeraries in position, and no-one calling the step. They were marching in column, company after company, completely silent except for the muted fall of marching feet. It was eerie. Then I noticed that adjacent units were doing the same - 4,000 men marched into the Brigade parade ground without any orders being called, but in perfect military formation nevertheless.

On the Brigade parade ground they formed up as if it was a formal parade, and then stood still. I do not know how they communicated their wishes through the brigade commander, but shortly afterwards he stood on the podium and addressed them. It was a protest at being kept waiting at Morotai, needlessly, from the point of view of the soldiers, and I must say I agreed with them. Looking back now I expect shipping priority was given to those people who were being sent home from the different theatres in the islands for Christmas.

Now, the protest had an almost immediate effect as Mr Ford, the Minister for the Army, appeared a few days later, as if by magic. He addressed the formation in three or four different areas. I sat with 67 Battalion and neighbouring units on a grassy embankment while Mr Ford orated from an improvised stage. As he spoke he rocked back and forth, from toe to heel, heel to toe. I remember, he had a figure like a pear and he was dressed in a light summer suit with army gaiters around his ankles, and he cut a very unsoldierly figure; but, of course, he was not a soldier, he was merely a politician.

I don't remember the substance of his address, but very soon afterwards ships began to arrive and the Brigade commenced embarkation for Japan. I myself was appointed OC of the rear party of 67 Battalion which meant, in effect, with a platoon and the quartermaster, that we had to pull down the tents and pack them up, return them to ordinance, get rid of the messes and all the other gear that a battalion leaves when it departs.

There is one interesting sideline to this. The Indonesians at this time had not emerged from their colonial period, and a more recent Japanese domination, and the poor devils had very little; in fact, they had almost nothing so far as I could see. Two or three times each day about thirty Indonesians would sneak towards the shortening tent lines, intent upon stealing anything they could. I or the quartermaster, taking turns about, would sit at a vantage point overlooking the unit area and fire one shot into the air, whereupon they would all run away and hide. I was surprised that they never realised that no rounds ever came near them.

The Stanford Victory returned after a round trip to Japan, and along with other rear parties and several other units I embarked. The Stanford Victory was the liberty ship, that is, a welded, no frills affair, built strictly for wartime use with a limited life. Officers were nine to a cabin, three sets of bunks, three tiers high - it was very hot and stuffy. The ship was manned by the US Navy. I was surprised to find they had only two meals a day, no provision being made for lunch; this is apparently their standard practice. The troops were in hammocks below deck with little space between the hammocks.

In all, however, it was a pleasant and easy trip except for one rough spell. I played cards for most of the time with Ian [Wilton], and Peter [Sedden], and one other, and kept a running score which was in the thousands by the time we disembarked.

What had you been told would be your role when you got there, and what did you understand would be the reception?

ES: We were not told anything at all because I don't believe anybody knew. And subsequently, when we got to Japan, there had been nothing written, or laid down, or promulgated, for several months on the rules that the occupation force were to follow. And we knew nothing about the Japanese except - I don't know if I said earlier, but there was a good deal of hate for the Japanese, which wasn't the case in subsequent conflicts; it wasn't the case in Korea, or Indonesia, or Vietnam - I don't remember hate, I remember a certain amount of admiration in many cases, but here there was actual hate, and it actually deepened later when we learnt how they treated our prisoners of war. But we weren't told what our job was to be, we didn't know; we didn't know whether we'd be fighting people who were guerillas in the hills, or whether the population would accept us. There was even talk amongst my own colleagues as to whether the Japanese would try to poison our food or the water. So what I am saying is, nobody really knew anything at all - Japan was a fairly closed book before the war, and the happenings of the war didn't endear us to them. And we didn't know the answer; we didn't know what we were doing or to be doing, and nobody, inside the Battalion anyway, told us.

Now, when you arrived in Japan, what was the task you were given then, and what was your accommodation like? I believe it left a bit to be desired to start with.

ES: Well, let's deal with the accommodation first, that was of interest. In my own case, we arrived in the Stanford Victory, and about ten miles from land we could smell it, could actually smell Japan. As we got closer the smell got stronger and stronger, and subsequently, of course, we found it was their agricultural method of honey pots, which was human excreta, and animal excreta, going into the paddocks at that time. We got to the wharf and I, along with all the others, lined the side; we wanted to see what the Japanese looked like because up to that point I'd only seen the twelve I've mentioned, and they looked like wharf labourers anywhere else in the world, dressed in scruffy old clothes, but they were quick and efficient. The ship was tied up, there was a band there, no familiar faces, movement control seemed to handle it. And off we got.

We carried a pack and a kit bag, and I remember somebody said, 'Put your kit bags here and they'll be taken by truck up to the railway station, and you'll get them at your barracks'. So we all piled our kit bags where we were told, and then we marched in a column of threes up to Kure Railway Station, about a mile or a mile and a half as I remember. As we went along we were very curious to see how the Japanese were, and how they looked, and we were a little surprised to find that every now and again one of them would wave to us - that surprised me personally, I think it surprised others. On Kure Railway Station I observed that almost all of the Japanese were wearing white face masks over their nose and mouth. At that time I thought it was

because of the smell, but subsequently I learnt it was a hygiene measure. At certain times of the year they tended to do this at that time, to protect themselves from germs, because there were a lot of them all living close together.

Anyway, we got on the train and we went to Kaitaichi, only about twenty miles down south (?) of Kure. We got off the train - by this time it was about four in the afternoon, and it was cold. I remember Captain Guy [Faucet], whom Lachlan has mentioned, from Brigade Headquarters, stood up on a railway truck, an open railway truck, and addressed us. He said, 'It's only a couple of hundred yards to your barracks ...' - we could see these great warehouses ahead of us - 'Unfortunately, your kit bags ...' - which contained our two blankets - '... they've been hooked to a truck and then gone to Tokyo'. So our kit bags were gone, and our blankets were gone, and right about then it began to snow. So it was a bit of an unfortunate beginning, but we were allotted space in the warehouse.

I had a huge room with a concrete floor; I shared it with one other, Lieutenant Tom [Miller] - later on he became a professor and a noted academic. We had this great room and our packs, and nothing else. We hunted round and found a couple of stretchers, and a greatcoat each. I'm not sure now where they came from, but that's what we had that night. There was food, the kitchens were set up, and we had our dixies, so we had food.

In the morning I awoke to, again, one of the strangest things that I can recall. I awoke and saw a young woman standing over Tom Miller, and she had in her hands two things - I couldn't see what it was in that instant. I leapt out of bed thinking, here is one of the Japanese about to attack us, you see, and this young woman had a mug of hot water in one hand and a shaving brush in the other, and she was about to shave Tom while he was still in bed thinking, perhaps, that was one of the duties that was required of her. And then we found out subsequently that the advance party had hired housemaids on a certain proportionate basis, and this young woman had come in to clean the place up, but there wasn't much to clean up. That was our actual arrival.

About three days later we moved elsewhere in Kaitaichi into a proper barracks, and the allocation there was two sublieutenants to one room, captains and majors, and above, had a room each. But it was good accommodation - wooden barracks. We had quite a lot of accommodation though, and there was room for the messes, and room for kitchens, and sports rooms, and it was all there, and it was very good.

> You mentioned it was snowing, so it was cold. How were the barracks and that heated?

ES: There was no heating then, there was no heating at all, there was just these great, empty - they weren't even barracks, they were warehouses, with high ceilings - wooden buildings and concrete floors, and nothing in them at all - there was no heating, it was cold. But three or four days later we moved

into a wooden barracks at Kaitaichi; they weren't heated ether, that I recall. The rooms were smaller - I think we had heating in the messes. Except for those first three days, I don't recall the weather having been a disturbing factor, although it was cold. I guess we kept ourselves warm, but I can't remember how.

> Alright, we'll now go back to Lachlan. Can you give us your description of your reception when you got there, and the tasks that then your unit had to undertake?

LM: Yes. The day of arrival, of course, was one of a lot of excitement. We arrived very early in the morning, and everybody was up very early.

I'd make a point, before going on, that those officers who had been serving in New Guinea, and Borneo and so on, had left their main kit back in Australia in kit stores, and what the moths had left had been brought forward to us at the beginning of the year. But we did, as Eric says, had remarkably little. They'd scraped round in Australia to see what they could find in the way of cold-weather clothing for us, and I think this amounted to a service dress, a greatcoat, from somewhere we had green hide gauntlets; they had found some peculiar white socks with padding in the bottom of them, I don't know what they were for; a rubber wallet, and most extraordinary of all, as a special issue, was a bakelite matchbox with a compass in the top of it. Now, what this was all for, I don't know, but that was our special issue to go to Japan in.

Now, I mention that we were leaving with this, the residue of dengue, malaria, tropical itches and sores and other things, and we left from equatorial Morotai for the middle of a harsh Japanese winter, and the morning that we arrived it was, as Eric has said, snowing - there was snow on the hills all around - and the Taos Victory that I was on entered the Inland Sea with the early morning light revealing the rusting wreckage of Kure and its harbour full of sunken naval vessels which showed up very starkly against the background of grey clouds, white snow, on the hills and the islands around it.

The ship pulled in to the wharf - and a member of our advance party was Sergeant Les [Huppets], who was a very old soldier, and he was a great man in that he very kindly led a still rather inexperienced sublieutenant, very tactfully and discreetly; and I called over the side to him and I asked him what the state of line communications was, more as a joke than anything else. He said, 'We've got one in, Sir; it's to the brewery at Hiroshima', and all the signalmen around me gave him the big thumbs-up at that, that was obviously a well-done job.

However, like Eric has said, with this rather tentative feeling as to what was going to happen, we'd rolled blankets up for that night, and these we dropped over the side into an open series of railway trucks that were pulled up alongside the ship, and we marched off into town and left the blankets in the railway trucks. That day we relearnt an old lesson and learnt a

new one; and the old one is, never get separated from your kit, and the new one is, that in any occupied country there is going to be a black market, because that night, when we got into our accommodation, there were no railway trucks, no blankets, no heating, and a great bare warehouse for the officers to sleep in, like an enormous dormitory, and nothing at all. I was unfortunate enough to be the Brigade Headquarters duty officer, and a fair amount of the opprobrium for this situation seemed to rub off on me.

Anyway, round about midnight, this day one, the Brigade major, 'Tosca' McLoud came up and said, 'We've found one truck; it's up in the Kaitaichi Station - get it!'. So off I went with an interpreter that the linguist had found for us, up to the station, and the station master said, yes, the truck was there - and we could see it - but he had no engine to pull it in, and there were no engines around the place. In fact, the only engine he could think of was one that was due at Hiroshima in a few minutes pulling the Tokyo Express.

Now, I was probably full of the power of occupying a country at this stage, but also I was more terrified of 'Tosca' McLoud, so I said, 'That's just about the right sized engine for my truck'. Whether it was the engine from the Tokyo Express, whether it was one other that he found, I don't know, but about midnight or a little after our one truck, with one blanket each, was towed from Kaitaichi Station down into the warehouse siding, and we had a blanket for the night.

So that was the first night of the occupation: very cold, very miserable, in this great barn with a tiny little heater of some sort in the middle, and about - it must have been twenty-odd morose officers with one blanket each, lying on their cots (laughs). And that was our introduction to Japan.

> Alright, now you've arrived in Japan, and obviously the Brigade starts to shake itself out and start to operate on the series of activities that they were involved in. Can you tell me what it was like as you set up in Brigade Headquarters, and what the feeling was there about the role that they'd now been given?

LM: We suddenly realised that we had to convert, very quickly, from the rather crude and elementary field type communications that we'd been providing, with the little bits of field equipment and small switchboards, field cable, and that sort of thing, because the Brigade was very dispersed. We had Eric's battalion, which was close to us, but still perhaps three miles away; we had another battalion way over on the other side of Kure, and a third one was up country, miles away. So we had to send off large - relatively large for us - wireless detachments, to each of these separated battalions, to start with, so that they could operate day and night.

Then we had to provide dispatch rider facilities which, because of the dispersion, stopped being dispatch riders and became couriers who had to ride on trains or whatever they could ride

on to get to these places. Then, because of the static nature of the occupation, and the large number of subunits and strange offices doing strange functions, military government and all these other sort of things that cropped up. We had so many more people that the demand on the switchboards exceeded our capacity, and the number of calls exceeded the operator's capabilities, and manpower became stretched to the absolute limit. Everybody was taking his turn: I was a switchboard operator one minute, a wireless operator the next, and this went right through; and the linesmen were called in to be dispatch riders - everybody was doing everybody else's job to try and xxx. It was a very hectic initial time. I suppose, to that extent, it took your mind of anything else because you either worked or you slept at that stage, as far as we were concerned.

> And about that time, obviously, you would start to come in contact with the ordinary Japanese people in the surrounding area.

LM: Not so much. I suppose those who got a rare bit of leave might have encountered them in shops or about the streets. We had a few [Nesai] Japanese, girls who had been in America and were repatriated to Japan, and could speak English. Two or three of those were very soon recruited as typists to help the linguists and translators. Yes, we came in contact with a couple of those.

I think the first couple of Japanese that we really met were police and firemen, and that was because these warehouses that we were put into - about a hundred-odd feet long, and about twenty or thirty feet wide, of raw pine, with no heating - the improvised heating in one of them was bound to go up, and it went up one night very soon after we got there. We woke up and the whole sky was alight with this magnificent blaze. Nobody was hurt, and there were no firefighting facilities except a few buckets. And two funny things happened. In the middle of this enormous conflagration, a Japanese policeman, the first probably that we'd seen, arrived on the scene with a paper lantern lit by a candle - which seemed to be a bit futile - and then the Japanese fire brigade eventually crept down in the most Keystone Kops type fire-engine you could imagine, and it pulled up right alongside a big canal, drain type canal, that ran through this warehouse complex. The Japanese firemen, being very regimental, dismounted to the order of the driver, the driver and two of them on to the land, and the other three dismounted into the icy canal on the other side. So they were our early associations with Japanese.

> Now, the Brigade was part of a larger unit which came under the British detachments?

LM: No. The three, or the national components - the British Commonwealth components - with the headquarters at BCOF: an Australian Infantry Brigade group; the British Indian Division, which had divisional headquarters, and one British brigade, and one Indian brigade; and a New Zealand infantry brigade,

slightly minus. They were the three essential components of it. The overall headquarters was on Eta-jima Island off Kure; our area - the Australian area - centred round Kure and Kaitaichi at that stage, later at Hiro; the New Zealanders further down to the south-west in [Chimna Saeki]; and the British brigade originally was at Hiro where the Australians later went, but they moved up country to Fukuyama, I think it was; and the Indian brigade went to the north of the island.

The whole British Commonwealth Occupation Force was under the command of General Robinson, is that correct?

LM: Yes, General Robinson.

Quite a colourful character in the Australian Army?

LM: Yes.

He'd been your divisional commander, I assume, at New Guinea.

LM: Yes, yes.

And now he turns up as a lieutenant general in command of all of BCOF. Can you tell us anything about the feeling of having 'Red Robbie' in charge? What did the troops think about that?

LM: (Laughs) That's a very interesting question. He had a tremendous reputation, and I think the average Australian soldier likes to have somebody who's got a colourful reputation. They may not agree with some of his dictates at times, but I think 'Red Robbie' was respected as a professional soldier, as a strong character - what would you think Eric?

ES: Well, I would agree. I had a particular personal experience with 'Red Robbie' on his arrival which filled me with terror then, and even now I look back on it and think he was a terror too because 'Red Robbie' was a fierce fellow. And he was respected, there is no question about that, but he put up with no nonsense, and very little of anything as a matter of fact.

My own personal experience with him was this: when he came to Kaitaichi to inspect either the Battalion or anybody else there, I was on the guard of honour to welcome him. There were three officers: Captain 'Wings' Nichols in command, [Calendar] on the right, and myself on the left. Just before 'Robbie' appeared round the corner, about fifteen minutes before, 'Wings' Nichols got sick. Exactly why he got sick, or how he got sick, I don't know, but I've got my suspicions to this day - I think sheer terror made him sick - and suddenly I was the guard commander, which meant I had the questions to answer and I was completely unprepared for this.

At the time there was a controversy about uniforms going on - how many uniforms - whether they had two uniforms or three uniforms. Anyway, I saluted 'Robbie' and said, 'Would you like

to inspect the guard, Sir?', and he said, 'Of course, that's what I came for'. That sort of put me down to start with. And we began the inspection, and we'd got to about the third soldier and he said, pointing to this particular fellow, 'How many suits of summer or winter gear has this fellow got?'. I thought, my goodness me - 'Robbie' expected you to have the platoon commander's notebook - I didn't even know the soldier! - it was a composite battalion from the Battalion. So I said, 'Two, Sir', and he said, 'You should have three'; then he turned to the solder and said, 'How many have you got, soldier?' - the soldier said, 'Two, Sir'. And subsequently I found that guy and asked him, I said, 'How many have you really got?' - he said, 'I've got one' (laughs). So he backed me up.

Anyway, 'Robbie' was very colourful and very strong, probably the right man at the right time, I think, because I think he had to deal with the Americans, and he could do that fairly well too.

> That might be a good point where we can cease this particular tape and have a bit of a break, and then we will go on with another tape.

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

START OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A

> Identification: This is Tape No. 2 of an interview with Lachlan MacLean and Eric Smith, conducted by Bill Fogarty, recorded on 21 September 1994 at the Australian War Memorial. Topics covered on this tape are the activities of BCOF within the occupying forces on Japan.
>
> If we could start with you, Lachlan. The Brigade Headquarters are set up, and you obviously then start to have your first impressions of the Japanese; could you describe those?

LM: Kaitaichi at that time, as we've mentioned, was cold, it was a dismal area. Our warehouse complex that served as a headquarters, and barracks, and everything else, sat on a flat coastal strip between the hills and the Inland Sea, on a little strip that was so narrow at times that the railway line connecting Hiro and [at least] Kure and Kaitaichi often ran through tunnels where a spur ran sheer into the water. There was a little pocket handkerchief of arable land here and there, and it was obvious that some sort of crop and some fishing was done, and there were some rather maudlin looking little grey wooden houses, and it was around all this that we saw our first Japanese peasant sort of life. Typical of this, and to our amazement, when we passed through a little village called [Teno], was the site of wrinkled old women, their heads in scarves, shapeless pyjama sort of clothes, and feet in the inevitable 'Mark I' thongs, with a wooden cradle loaded with two railway sleepers on their backs.

Inevitably, in what I now recall as a massive, sullen, grey,

and miserable looking people, I think the children will always stand out: little boys in rather shabby navy type school uniforms, the universal basin-cut hair of the girls in sailor collars and blue skirts, and the remarkable appeal of the babies who appeared out of a bundle rolled on their mother's shoulders. And I'm sure that most of us, at that early stage, felt the first glimmerings of sympathy for a race which, until then, had appeared to us with all the endearing characteristics of a funnel-web spider.

That was how we first saw them, passing through them, and seeing them in this miserable sort of grey, colourless mob of people against a background of destruction - vast destruction.

> So it was at this point that you suddenly realised the enormity of the destruction that had occurred to Japan as a result of the war?

LM: Yes, I think that's the thing, the enormity, and the widespread effect - this was before we'd even seen Hiroshima. Everywhere around the Kure area was just a mass of tangled rusting metal, the burnt-out factories, and levelled rubble - ships - sunken ships - some standing out of the water, some still destroyed on the slipways where they were being built. It was a scale of destruction that I wasn't prepared for - I don't know about Eric.

> At this stage, after you'd been there a while, I believe the Brigade headquarters had to move, and you ended up in an Indian division headquarters.

LM: In the spring we moved from Kaitaichi across to Hiro where the British Divisional Headquarters was, and we took over their area as they moved further up country. To set up the Brigade headquarters I took a large part of the Signals Squadron across to do the cabling, and setting up the switchboards, and establishing the various things that we had to do from the new site. And this was a complete eye-opener because we'd gone in to Kaitaichi into a mass of warehouses, and from the inexperience, I suppose, of the Australians in being an occupying power, we'd accepted this as our lot. When I went into, and joined, the British Indian Divisional Headquarters I walked into what was obviously, or had been, some form of properly established headquarters building, and surrounding it there was a small village.

The administrative officer that I spoke to in the Divisional Signals Regiment said, right, now the first thing you'll need is a house. I was absolutely stunned at the prospect of a house, and I said, 'Yes, yes, that would be very nice'. So he took me down to the village, and we looked over several houses and decided that this one would be suitable; and it was, it was a two-bedroomed Japanese house with a sitting room, a kitchen, and a small room out the back that had a large brick copper which was fed from outside the house. The copper, I found afterwards, was to bath in, and we called it 'the pots boiling missionary'. But that house was allocated to me, complete with

two attendants, two middle-aged Japanese women - [Yashimoto san] and [Takako san] - and they were there to stoke the boiler and bring it up to a sufficient temperature for me to have a bath in, wash my clothes, and generally keep house. This, to a young twenty year old sublieutenant (laughs) was quite extraordinary, but nevertheless, most acceptable.

I also found that dinner in the mess of this regiment was at night, at about 9 o'clock - never before - and meals, it being a British Indian division, were curry at least twice a day. Now, that was great, I enjoyed curry, and I learnt to cook it, and enjoy it even more at their hands.

> The house that you occupied: did they move the Japanese out ...

LM: Yes.

> ... or had they already gone?

LM: No. When the British people moved in, their quartering people, with years of experience, said, right, we are going to need so many houses for this sort of purpose, you people find somewhere else. So the Japanese went out and the headquarters moved in, and it was roughly on the scale of one house per officer; and warrant officers, obviously, shared a house, and sergeants might have been two or three to a house. The troops had quite good barracks because they had managed to take over a Japanese barrack area.

> Do you think this arrangement that the British, or the Indian Division, adopted was a direct result of the fact that the British had been occupying various areas throughout the Indian subcontinent, and other places in the world, for many years?

LM: For many years, I'm sure. They knew the routine, they were also lucky in the draw of getting Hiro, obviously, in the first instance, but that, with hindsight, it may have been a tacit arrangement that they would have it on a short-term basis, and then we would take it afterwards. Anyway, we moved into this luxurious establishment, and the troops were much better housed. My signalmen were very pleased to bear their new lot. They also got a tremendous amount of assistance from the xxx Signal Regiment who had some people with a lot more experience in many ways, and over a lot longer period - there was some very old soldiers amongst them - and they were a great help. We set about, in our own way, establishing ourselves, getting ready for our own headquarters when it moved in. Gradually the xxx Headquarters moved out, and the situation was reversed, and they left me with an Indian light wireless detachment to look after.

> When the Australians took over the whole area, and the brigade headquarters occupied, was there any change in the activity in regards to the quartering?

LM: Not immediately, and for quite some time it stayed as it was; but, inevitably, something had to happen, so the Australian attitude was, right, we'll put you all back in barracks, but we'll build a barracks and first of all pull down the houses (laughs). So we finished up in a brand new officers' building, one room each, and lost the privilege of the houses.

> Could you describe a normal daily routine of your activities, your work, at the Brigade Headquarters?

LM: Yes. The first thing, after breakfast, I suppose, full of the enthusiasm of a young regular officer, I used to make sure, I tried to turn out the best guardsmen in the Corps of Signals, so we had an extended drill parade for every signalman who wasn't on duty in the mornings, and that was the first part of the day.

Then, most of my time was out, in this early period, on line work. We had a tremendous amount to learn: the protection of these long lines, the use of civilian lines, the protection against electrical strike, lightning strike, and these sort of things - all these new wonders that we had to take into account. And memory tells me that most of the time was spent on learning and employing line construction techniques.

We also had to clean up a tremendous amount of American mess. The Americans had left a lot of light-weight field cables and lines lying around the place - they'd been in there before us - and this mess had to be tidied up. Sadly, in this early time, I had our first casualty through doing this. A lot of it was strung on 12,000 volt Japanese electricity pylons, and one afternoon a linesman, Signalman Reed, who was clearing this from one of the pylons - it was quite a hot afternoon - and he must have climbed a little bit too high, and he was electrocuted and killed trying to tidy this up. So that was our first casualty.

> What was the feeling within the unit, that here they were, not at war any more, but we're still suffering casualties?

LM: Of course, there was a fair amount of shock, really. After all, as you suggest, the war was over and we'd come to realise that, in many respects, the Japanese were not attacking us. Although, even as I say that, we had a lot of cables connecting us back to the base - we'd taken over Japanese cable systems - and we did suffer a lot of sabotage. They would cut this, they would dig it up, they would remove links of the cable, so we were conscious, even as I say that, of some sabotage at the time.

> Alright, we might leave it there and go to Eric. Last tape we were talking about 'Red Robbie', and that was your experiences there; but what were your first experiences when you came in contact with the ordinary Japanese?

ES: Well, my impression of the Japanese is pretty much the way Lachlan has described it. They were beaten - unquestionably

they were beaten - their clothing was ragged - the Japanese women still wore kimonos when, I suppose, they had them, and in the fields they wore baggy pants and padded jackets. But the impression I had was that they were utterly defeated.

The women worked on the roads, they carried heavy loads - the men worked hard too, so far as I could see, but I was surprised how hard the women worked. Everything was grey: the houses were grey, the roofs were grey, the roads were terrible - muddy roads, and the few bitumen roads that existed were full of potholes. It was one hell of a mess.

And everywhere they were endeavouring to cultivate where they could so that footpaths were cultivated too, and a track of about twenty-five centimetres wound down each footpath - there was cultivation in every little spot that they could get something to grow, obviously because they were starving. And, in fact, they were starving - they were starving, they didn't have food - and those who worked in the barracks, worked for the army, were privileged because first, they had jobs, and secondly, part of their emolument was one meal a day, and I suspect that some of them had two meals a day. That was a great saver for them.

Inflation was rife. I can remember when we first arrived there we still had our own - it was either guilders or our own money - and the Japanese currency exchange rate was thirty yen to the pound, whereas the reality was it was about 260 to the pound. A bar of chocolate, which cost then 1/- I think, in those days, could be exchanged on the black market for twenty times that amount of money - a bar of chocolate would buy a woman. Although there was no fraternisation rule, and it was enforced in so far as it was possible, it wasn't really possible with four, and five, and six, and ten thousand troops. It wasn't long before the VD rate began to go up, and up, and up, and in those early stages women were bought with food. And subsequently food was changed for black-market money, and so it went on and on. I remember that quite clearly because in each of the platoon areas we had a barometer, and the barometer indicated the VD rate; and the VD rate went up through the top of the barometer and started again, and up the second and third time. It was very sad really, but if you take thousands of young men, and put them in a place where there are no women of their own, and forbid women to them, well, the next thing there's going to be brothels, that's all that's really left for them - that's the reality of life.

I'd like to say this too: in Kaitaichi, right behind our barracks, was a Mitsubishi factory, and I went into that Mitsubishi factory shortly after we got to Kaitaichi, and it was full of lathes - maybe two or three hundred lathes - and they all had chalk marks on them. Some had UK, some had USSR, and a third one had US, they were the three. I went back into that Mitsubishi factory about ten days later, and the only ones that remained were those with US and UK, the USSR ones had all gone, they'd taken the lot, and they'd done it very quickly - not one or two, they took them all - they'd all gone. I

remember that clearly. Out of that particular Mitsubishi factory I remember we got our bayonets - not silver ...

LM: Chromed.

ES: Chromed - we got our bayonets chromed. I think it was the only thing that we got out of it, and the Russians got all the gear, and I think the Americans and the UK left their gear so Japan could sort of kick on again. But I can recall that quite clearly.

> So after you'd been there a while, you then start to actually go out and, as a platoon, take over certain areas. Where did your platoon go to, and what were your duties?

ES: I was in C Company, and it was commanded by a Captain [Lukin]; Lieutenant 'Nugget' [Emmet] was the second in command; Lieutenants Calendar and Ridley were the other two platoon commanders, and myself; and we were stationed in [Ujina] which is a suburb of Hiroshima. And Hiroshima was flattened, it was simply flattened right down. The only thing standing in Hiroshima were graveyards; the marble in the headstones didn't seem to be affected by the bomb - they all stood - you could see the cemeteries fairly clearly without even moving about very much. There were two or three major buildings still standing, but all the woodwork had been burnt out from inside them, and the metal was twisted - and it was just a pile of rubble, pretty much as Lachlan has described for Kure, but it was done in this case with one bomb - just a pile of rubble, nothing much there - street, after street, after street, and all that was on the sides was rubble.

But Ujina, where we were, was about three miles from the centre of the city, or four miles, and there were trams running out there, and in this there was a seaside suburb right on the edge of the Inland Sea. We took over an existing barracks there, and we had a small mess, and a barracks, dormitory style, for the men. And the routine was this - there were three jobs: one of the lieutenants, each six weeks, looked after the training, and, in fact, that lieutenant designed the training program; the second job was to receive the incoming Japanese Army and supervise their discharge; and the third job was to receive, into huge barracks, the slave labour forces that were being assembled from all over Japan, and place them on the ships, and return them to their homelands, which was mostly Okinawa and Korea - they were predominantly the slave labour.

I'll come back to the first job. The training officer trained the company, and usually it was a route march in the morning and sport in the afternoon, but every little while we'd get a direction from Battalion Headquarters to go and check out a certain area, and we'd run patrols out. I remember one time we searched for jewellery - didn't find much, but we were told that there was a lot of hidden jewellery in a place and we searched there. Another time - quite often - we used to search caves for hidden weapons and explosives. We used to find some

and I'd report it. I guess it was somebody higher up the scale of things attended to it.

And on one of these patrols I had the rather interesting experience of finding a building, which I searched, and found it was a mint. This delighted me because I thought I found a mint that nobody knows about, and there it is, all mine for the moment. I went inside - the staff were there - it wasn't working - and six great machines, like one-armed bandits, but about five or six times as high, were there. The machines were loaded with little slot coins; you'd pull the handle and proper coins came out the bottom. So we amused ourselves, the whole platoon; we pulled these coins for a while, and money fell out all over the floor. There was one room there, it was like Aladdin's cave, with bags and bags of money, as much as you could pick up - it was worth about £2 because the machines would only make one tenth of one yen, and it was really worthless. But anyway, that was reported, and various other things that we found. Mostly we were searching for arms; we'd found some, but not nearly as many as we had expected.

When you took the patrols out, were the patrols armed in a full fighting patrol activity, or were they just side arms?

ES: No, we used to go with rifles and bayonets, and no ammunition - rifles, bayonets, no ammunition (laughs), and marching ...

In battle order.

ES: In battle order - battle order, but we didn't have ammunition, that was too dangerous.

No even you, as a platoon commander?

ES: Even I, as a platoon commander, I didn't have any ammunition. So I guess, by this time, I suppose by now, six or eight weeks had gone by and perhaps we'd realized that they weren't going to shoot us down, or poison our water or food - anyway, we certainly didn't have any ammunition. I don't believe there was any ammunition in our company - we were a detached company, perhaps twenty miles away from Battalion Headquarters - if there was I never saw it. Perhaps the CSM had some and didn't tell us. I don't think, by that time, we were thinking about it so very much.

One of the more interesting jobs, of course, was discharging the Japanese Army. They would arrive on ships, sometimes huge ships, often named Maru something or other. And then, if that happened to be your duty for that six weeks, you'd go out to the ship and you'd first inspect the ship for cleanliness and hygiene. And I have to say, invariably these ships were spotless - they were just simply clean, just as clean as they could be. And the captain would invite you down to his cabin, and he'd always have some little special goodie; it might be a mango from the tropics, or a bottle of brandy he'd found

somewhere, but always he'd entertain you somehow; and this was a great job and much sought after.

Then he'd come back to the wharf and all the Japanese soldiers would arrive, officers mixed amongst them, and NCOs. They'd get to the end of this very long pier - and there were two Japanese girls at the end of the pier, and one would hand an orange to a soldier, and the other would hand a note of ten yen to the soldier. They'd march along the pier into a great barrack-like room where they were squirted from head to toe with DDT - and really squirted, the place was just a mass of fumes, you know, of DDT. After that they were asked whether they lived north, south, east, or west, and they were put on a train going roughly in the direction where they said. They pointed out that they didn't care too much whether they got to their correct destination or whether they didn't, just so long as it was roughly where they wanted to go, that was good enough - and that was their discharge.

> Were these soldiers that were returning from parts of South-East Asia - where they'd obviously been with the Japanese Army - did they come back as units? Did they come back in uniform? Did they come back with the xxx on?

ES: They came back in units, and they came back in uniform, and they came back with weapons - but we took the weapons off them. I don't suppose they all had weapons, but many did.

There were a few little incidents. I can remember we always had several soldiers at the end of the wharf with these two young girls, and I can remember one fellow arriving with his batman, the batman carrying all the gear, and the soldier taking off saying, 'Here, you carry your own gear, the war's over' - so I remember that particular little incident. I remember they came as units for the most part, and they were well disciplined, they were very quiet - very quiet, didn't have anything to say - they didn't present any threat at any time. And I can remember at one time as many as twenty-three ships being in the harbour - always there were ten or fifteen every day, and this went on for months, and months, and months - these people came back.

And the other job was the slave labour. In a barracks in Ujina it housed 15,000 people, and it had a very big administrative staff of Japanese - we supervised this - a twenty year old lieutenant supervised this - one of the three of us. The procedure was that if they were Okinawans to be repatriated to Okinawa, we'd put them in one great batch; if they were to go to Korea, we'd put them in another batch. There were so many came in, so quickly, that there was no way to sort them out into family groups; they were sorted out into groups of twelve, and twelve went to each room, and one person was appointed, merely by pointing at him, by saying, 'You are in charge of that room' - and so it went on.

> Through an interpreter?

ES: Through an interpreter - through a Nesai interpreter - and you really expected xxx - and they had [tatami] mats to lie on, but I don't believe there was any bedding of any kind, they just lay on these mats - it was pretty basic. I think they ate rice for the most part - rice and a little fish. But they were in fairly good spirits because they were going home.

How did they arrive - train?

ES: Came by train - they came in by train. I suspect that further up the command channel there was an organisation that got these people, wherever they were, and put them on the trains which they sent to Ujina, and then we took them off the trains, put them into the barracks, and we put the Japanese Army - discharged - onto the same trains, and sent them off north, south, east and west. I think that's roughly how it worked.

I point out to you, there was no military government instructions on how these people were to be treated, and that the decisions were made by twenty year old lieutenants as to how they would be handled. And if you take a situation where you've got 15,000 people in a barracks, men and women and children - and they are mixed, not necessarily families, or [families under the same roof], you can anticipate there will be trouble - and there was trouble; perhaps less than you'd expect, but there was trouble every day, just the same. The first thing in the morning you'd walk along these huge corridors, and wherever there was difficulty in a room, that particular person appointed to be in charge of it would step forward, you'd listen to what he had to say, and instantly hand out a decision - and often that decision was a punishment which one made up at the time.

What would be the type of complaint they'd make?

ES: One man might say, 'Another person in this room attacked my wife with a knife' - or, 'This fellow over here tried to rape my wife, or rape my daughter' - or, 'This fellow was fighting, and took food from me' - theft was another one; there was theft, usually, of clothing - they didn't have much, so I suppose it was precious, what they had. Those things I remember. There were probably other things, but they were predominant.

What sort of punishment would you hand out?

ES: Well now, that's pretty interesting. I pose you a question here: If someone said to you, 'In that room there there was an attack last night, and this man killed my wife', what would you do? How would you punish him? Anyway, I leave that in the air. And then the next thing I say to you, if it was sufficiently severe, you might hand out a year's jail, or two year's jail, or you might give him six months, depending how you saw it, how severe it seemed to be. But all these things were done in a matter of minutes; there wasn't quite the orderly rooms we know in the army where all the evidence was presented, you had to

assess the case as best you could.

> And where did they go to do those sentences? I mean, who administered that?

ES: The Japanese administered that, and they went to Japanese gaols. However they got released from them, or however the sentences were recorded, I don't know.

> Do you think it might have been that it was a round robin? - they'd march them away, round the back steps, and wait till you'd gone on and bring them back the next day, so they went on the ship as usual.

ES: It's absolutely possible, but my own impression is that the Japanese were very - they were industrious, and they were trying very hard to do as they were told, so I don't really know - I don't know the answer to that question at all. Perhaps justice wasn't served, perhaps it was - I can't tell you.

> So how did you allocate them to go on the ships? Was that part of your job, or was that done by an administrative xxx?

ES: That was done by the Japanese; there were about sixty in that administrative office. One we got them into barracks for the xxx barracks, the Okinawans xxx the Japanese processed them onto the ships. When you look back on it, we provided the overall directive, we provided the discipline, but the real administrative work was done by the Japanese.

> Alright, we might leave it there and go back to Lachlan. Eric was telling us about his experience with the return of the Japanese soldiers; at Brigade Headquarters did you have any contact with them at all?

LM: Very little, although one of the duties that fell to us, along with every other unit, was our turn as train guards, and we had to provide people to act on the trains. There were two functions in this. First of all, there were the sort of commuter service between Hiroshima and Kure, troops being on leave and so forth. There was a guard put on each train so that there was no trouble between the Japanese population and the allied troops who were travelling on the train. Now, we took our turn in that, and in the early part I used to ride, occasionally, with a guard - up and down, up and down, dead boring - nothing.

Fortunately for me, although unfortunately for my OC, he went ill and was repatriated to Australia early in 1946, and I inherited the Squadron, which was rather nice, and very surprising, and I came off a lot of those sort of things, so I didn't do very much of it.

One thing in connection with Eric's description was told to me by another classmate of ours who was in a different battalion. And you asked earlier about association with the Americans. The

American military police were always terribly officious, and seemed to know no laws of differentiation between officers and other ranks. One of our contemporaries was doing a train guard, bringing - he obviously brought the slave labourers down to the embarkation port, and then would guard the train load of passengers, returnee Japanese soldiers, going the other way. At some point along the line the train stopped at a station, and there were American military police on the station. He got off, whereupon they produced pistols and ordered him back onto the train. I remember him saying that his platoon sergeant called out through the window, to the American military police, and said they'd better put their pistols away and have a look at the train. And there were thirty rifles levelled at them from the windows of the train. That was one little confrontation that we had with American authority at that time.

Were they to know whether you had ammunition or not?

LM: (Laughs) I don't know, but certainly that happened. Now ... I'm sorry.

We were just talking about the trains that were carrying the [prisoners] back.

LM: Yes.

Now, after things start to really settle down, and you've been there probably six, nine, months, et cetera ...

LM: Yes.

... did you get a feeling, or did you get any indication, as to how long you'd be there? Or how did you find out that your time might be up and you might have to come back to Australia?

LM: Oh, well, there was no indication at all. As far as we were concerned the occupation was a prolonged thing which would go on, and on, and on, and on - just for how long, we had no idea. There were emerging signs of the [regularness] of the army developing. I remember, the first signs of training the regular officers started to emerge at this time, and people were being called in for short courses that were being run at the Brigade Headquarters, and we were taking an interest in making professional - really professional - soldiers out of the Brigade's officers.

One big thing that did start to loom towards the end of the year was home leave, very largely on a return basis, because most of the troops had been away from Australia for eighteen months by this time. And even those who may not have been away from Australia for so long had certainly been away from home, getting on for two years. So home leave started to take on a big incentive, and the first drafts went off, I think, round about October or November for home leave. I know that I hadn't thought about it, and although it was getting on for two years since I'd been at home - what, with the courses and service

hear and there - I hadn't thought of any leave, particularly as I had inherited the Squadron, and there were no other officers to help for a while. Then another one turned up, but I still thought there was no - I didn't think about leave until about a fortnight before Christmas (when) the dear old Kanimbla came back in again with a new draft direct from Australia, and it brought an extra officer, in this case, John Williamson who'd been in the class behind us at RMC. He turned up to join the Squadron, and my friend 'Tosca' McLoud said, well, you might as well go home for Christmas. So I was one of the very lucky ones who came back at the end of 1946 on Kanimbla, just in time for Christmas.

> You were talking about before, the way in which the army then started to get itself together as a regular professional group, and think about itself as a professional group. This must have meant, then, they were starting to think about promotions for people; were they running promotion courses and that type of activity?

LM: When I got back, in January '47, back to the Headquarters, all sorts of things seemed to be starting to be thought about - there was even talk of families coming up, and this led to a lot of planning for where they were going to live, how they were going to live, how they were going to be housed, their conditions - that was on one side of the thing. Also, obviously, the Staff College must have been starting up in Australia, and the first pre-Staff College training courses - yes, they started. I can remember being called on to run some on voice procedure, and things like that; and other people were doing lectures to coach those who would go off to - must have been the 1948 Staff College.

> I have seen photographs that had me absolutely amazed for a while, and that had Royal Military College, and they were definitely in Japan. It turned out that they actually set up a wing of the Royal Military College in Japan so that people could progress through the ranks, and do a course, so that they had that course from the Royal Military College.

LM: Ah, these would have been the wings, but this would be a later time - that wouldn't have been for another two or three years, when what we call the 'knife and fork courses' were started - that would have been later still. No, the accent did start to swing round to unit training everywhere, I think, right throughout the Brigade because by that time, I suspect, Eric, the inspection of a lot of factories, depots ...

ES: It was all finished.

LM: ... had all finished, and something had to be done with the aim in view of starting a regular army proper, then it was time to get down to xxx training.

> You mentioned that they had a new draft arrive in Japan for BCOF.

LM: Yes.

And these had been people direct from Australia?

LM: Yes.

They had not been part of the Second World War? They were enlistees for that, or just people who opted not to take their discharge but go to Japan? Or a mixture?

LM: I think it was a great mixture; there were people who'd been serving in Australia and hadn't got away to the war; there were people who'd been away at the war and were back in Australia when the war ended; and there were people who came in after the war finished, and had gone through the normal procedures - well after the war finished because some of them weren't recruited until 1946 and so on. But they were reinforcement drafts, and I can remember them being very grateful for them because, at long last, we got an increase in establishment, more bodies on the ground, and life was a lot easier when this new draft turned up.

You came back to Australia for Christmas; what was your feeling as you came back to Australia, and how did you perceive what the country was going through at that time? - because you'd been away for, as you just said, a number of years.

LM: I felt it rather glum, I think; it was a bit depressing in some respects. I suppose it was Christmas time, and I was very pleased to be home for a short time.

Were the people in Australia interested in what you were doing in Japan?

LM: No; I think that that was the last thing they were interested in, and the first indications that I had of this: we were coming on Kanimbla, and we were due in on a Saturday - I think we were due to arrive on Saturday - but word had got through to the ship that the buses that were needed to take us off the ship and take us out to Marrickville were required for a cricket match, or something, so we were not to arrive on the Saturday; and we couldn't come in on Sunday because the wharfage dues were double what they would have been on the Saturday - in other words, don't come until Monday. And in any case, the cricket was still on Monday morning, so we couldn't have the buses until after 11 o'clock, or something, on Monday morning.

So we were taken on an extended cruise of the New South Wales coastline, about half a mile off shore, at about five knots, for two tantalizing days, watching people surfing and everything, and so on, and being held up. So no, the army was a very low priority. To be still in uniform caused a bit of derision around town, and I know that I was pretty hasty in buying myself a sports coat and a pair of pants, which was

about all I could get at that time.

Rationing was still in, of course.

LM: Yes - all those sort of things were.

You were saying you were quick to get out of uniform; why was that? What prompted you to do that?

LM: Well, as I say, there was a certain amount of derision - what we were still doing in the army.

From whom?

LM: It's hard to remember, but people on trams.

ES: I'd like just to add to that. That was a very strong feeling at the time. I also noticed that, and there was antagonism - I think the word could be as strong as antagonism - towards those people who were still in uniform. But why it should be so, it's hard to know.

LM: It was noticeable then; it was much more noticeable in Melbourne eighteen months later. In Melbourne it was almost dangerous to wear a uniform.

So you go back to Japan, and you then stay there for another eighteen months?

LM: No, I stayed there till towards the end of the year.

Right, towards the end of the year.

LM: And by that time the role of the army had been fairly well established, what was going to happen with it; and the CMF was about to be recreated, and those regular young officers that they could get their hands on, with two or three years service, were about to become the adjutants of all the CMF units back in Australia. So the good times were over, and we were rounded up and brought back.

When you went back, and you came back and you saw Japan again, did you feel that progress had been made? What I'm saying is, did you naturally feel ...

LM: Oh, very much.

... that the place was just slowly coming up, or did you wake up one morning and look about and say, it's all back together again?

LM: No; I think it was a very, very slow process, but certainly, by the beginning of '47 you could see some order starting to come of it. The rubble was still about, but was being cleared up; the wrecks were still there in some places. But in Hiro, opposite where their headquarters had been, there had been large factories, and these, which were just rusting

steel hulks, that had been tidied up.

END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A

START OF TAPE TWO - SIDE B

The Australian married quarters area had been built on the site - a place called [Nichimuro] - Rainbow Village - had gone in on top of that, rather nice simple little cottages that they put up for them. We had a small hand in that, putting in public telephones for them in the village. But generally speaking, the Japanese were starting - and there was a tremendous way to go - but things were getting organised.

> In hindsight now, what would you say had been the highlight of your service as an officer in BCOF?

LM: I suppose the establishment in Hiro, going across and, out of the gloom of Kaitaichi, into the better conditions in Hiro. Naturally, getting command of the Squadron was the real highlight - I was still only twenty at this stage - was I twenty?

ES: Yes, we were all twenty - yes, twenty is right. I had my twenty-fist birthday ...

LM: Twenty-one - yes, I had my twenty-fist birthday there.

ES: My twenty-fist birthday was there too.

LM: Yes, so at twenty one, and this one had one's own command, and an active job, and a very extensive job. I even found out at one stage that I had control of all the Japanese radio stations in the Hiroshima province, and my technical knowledge at that time was about zilch. I used to go into these stations, look terribly knowledgeable, and peer at the valves, and I wouldn't have known (laughs) what the things meant; but one had a certain amount of front.

> Were you involved, or in any way active, in what obviously was a ploy to demonstrate democracy to the Japanese people? You were talking about radio stations before; we have within the collection here material that related to Japanese broadcasts telling them about Australia, and what a democracy is about. Did you have any involvement in that?

LM: No, no. I treated that very lightly. What we were doing was just ensuring that they were complying with international broadcasting standards, and that their radiated power was such, and their frequencies were kept within certain tolerances, and these sort of things. That was as far as the control of the radio stations were concerned. What their content or their programming was, I had no association with it at all.

> Now, what could you say then to a person who said, look, it was a waste of time, Australia should never have gone

to BCOF, we should have all just come home and let the Japanese sink or swim?

LM: I've had cause to think on this in later years. BCOF was a tremendously important thing as far as Australia was concerned. Prior to the Second World War Australia had a voice in the Imperial War Councils in Britain. During the war it had taken part in various war councils, and so forth, but never had Australia had command of anything in its own right. Just before BCOF left from Morotai a body called JCOSA - the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Australia - came into being, and under that Australia was given a mandate for the command and administrative control of BCOF. That was the fist time in history that Australia had such an authority, and it had the command and administrative control of Australian, British, Indian and New Zealand forces, and the responsibility was vested in the Australian higher defence machinery. So this was a very, very significant thing as far as Australia was concerned.

Secondly, Chifley, at the time, was adamant that Australia should take a much greater part in British Commonwealth defence, and he was delighted to go along with this mandate that was given to BCOF, and to JCOSA.

So from establishing ourselves as a credible country, capable of mounting an operation, I think that BCOF was a remarkably good experiment, and within a few years - only three or four years later - the whole [ANZAN] structure came to fruition, basing itself so much on the BCOF experiment. And I would say that internationally, Australia came of age through BCOF, in a military sense.

Thank you. We now move back to Eric. When we were talking to you last time you were a young platoon commander, dishing out legal justice left, right and centre. Apparently, then, there would be an end to the number of the trains that came in with the workers on it and that went out again with the soldiers on it - returning soldiers. What was the next role the Battalion had after that sphere had finished?

ES: Well, there obviously had to be an end to it - but I left to come home to Australia in September of 1947, along with Lachlan and all the other young officers who were swept up to become adjutants back in Australia with the CMF. And at that time the ships were still coming in, discharging the Japanese Army, and the slave labour camp of 15,000 was still full. So what happened after that, I don't know. There was an awful lot of slave labour which you never hear about very much, or read about in the papers, but they were shipped out in ship loads - but they kept coming. So what happened after that, I don't know; to September 1947 I was still doing those jobs, so I can't say what happened beyond that.

So you come back to Australia. Obviously, that was because you were being put on for a promotion course?

ES: Our particular class happened to be about the age and seniority to be trained as adjutants to start the CMF battalions which were being raised in 1948, and we came back and did various schools and courses to acquit ourselves for that particular job.

> What was your introduction back into Australia? What was your feeling like then? What was your understanding of what the populace in Australia thought about your actions?

ES: I don't think the population thought anything about it at all (laughs); I think that it was completely negative; I don't think anybody gave it a thought. But I found that there was actual hostility to people in uniforms, and I quickly got into civilian clothes also. That lasted for a number of years actually. There were shortages: you had to have coupons to buy clothes; petrol rationing was very still very much in force - I didn't own a car, and I don't think many people did, but those who did own cars before, right up to about 1950 or '51, there was petrol rationing - it was severe; couldn't get building materials to build, build houses; there was no accommodation. I know when I got married we couldn't even find a room to live in. This went right on into the early '50s.

In the '50s Australia began to pick up, and I think all the deferred pay began to make its presence felt and the economy picked up, but in the '40s it was pretty dead, there wasn't much doing in Australia - that was my impression anyway.

> What would you say was the highlight of your period in Japan?

ES: Well, I had a number of individual ones, and I'll relate a couple more to you in a moment, but for me personally, I think I had a degree of responsibility, as a twenty year old lieutenant in BCOF, which I never achieved again, ever (laughs) - not as a colonel, or any time afterwards.

LM: I'd endorse that.

ES: Yes. So it was just tremendous. In fact, I didn't particularly want to come home on leave, I was right into this occupation, having a good time, and there were new challenges all the time - it was tremendous. But a couple of them I'll mention to you.

While I was stationed at Hiroshima - Ujina, which is a suburb of Hiroshima - two doctors came across and stayed in our company mess for six weeks, and they were sent across [for the Hearse Newspapers]. Captain Lukin, our company commander, told me to take my platoon and go and round up 500 victims of the atomic bomb so these people could interview them. Well, I took my platoon and I went all over Hiroshima on foot, and spent days, and days, and days, and days at this, and I managed to round up thirty - thirty people who'd been victims of the atomic bomb. There wasn't much wrong with those people - I had

an interpreter with me. We interviewed people everywhere, we got leads, we chased them up, but I couldn't find anybody. Either they were all killed, or they'd all been cured, or they'd all gone. But these people sat at table with us, breakfast, lunch and dinner, and we discussed all the things that they talked about, and all the things that they were trying to find. Never once was the word 'radiation' mentioned, but when they got back into America and first began to produce all these articles, suddenly we found the word 'radiation' was part of it; and some of the articles they wrote surprised me because it didn't seem to be the way it was on the ground (laughs). Anyway, I just put that in because it actually happened, and I found it interesting and fascinating.

Another thing that I think is worth pointing out at this time is that I, with my platoon of thirty, were sent down to a barracks at Otake - and this was a divisional barracks, a huge place - and I occupied the admiral's room. And I had a great bank of telephones, none of which I used because I didn't know how to use them, and I didn't have anybody to ring, but it looked very impressive - and a house-girl there to look after me who was an untouchable. And in the weeks I spent there, which was about eight, I never saw her once, I didn't ever see her. The routine was: I'd leave my clothes there, and when I'd go out of the room, she'd come in, take them away, wash them, put them back in the cupboard when I was not about - and my shoes were clean - everything was done, but never once did I see that woman. We talk about untouchables in India, but there they were, and I believe that she was the daughter of a shoemaker who handled skins of animals. But an interesting little sidelight.

Another one at Otake was this too. The black market was in full swing by this time, and I was approached by a particular person - a Japanese person - who wanted to take the glass out of the windows of the barracks. He offered me - I've forgotten how much - 60,000 yen, I think - a great deal of money it seemed, although inflation, of course, didn't make it worth 60,000 in the real sense. But, of course, I said no, this is not on - get the hell out of the place - show your face here again and I'll arrest you. Anyway, I spent weeks and weeks, night after night after that; there would be a disturbance at one end of the barracks, I'd run down there with some of my platoon, and he'd steal the glass from the other end - and it went on, and on, and on. Finally, I came to think, I wish the devil I'd let him take the glass because we didn't get much sleep, he got the glass, and we didn't get anything at all. So anyway, that's just a little thing that happened.

And another one, I think, was in a little village called Shobara. I was sent to Shobara as a platoon commander, taking my platoon with me, and we occupied this town, and it turned out to be a town in the mountains out of Hiroshima where a lot of the victims of the atomic bomb had been sent, and they'd been put in schools - and most of them had died. By the time I got there there was nobody living who'd been injured by the bomb. Anyway, I occupied this place for a while - for six or

seven weeks - and each morning I had a conference with the police chief, the fire chief, and the mayor; and each morning the conference went along the same lines: I reported what happened the day before - which was usually nothing - and I told them what I had to do for the next day, which usually was the same thing, and then I would say, 'Alright, now you make sure that a crate of beer gets delivered to my house, and several crates to the barracks', and every morning this would happen. They'd send the beer to the two destinations, and a little sake.

While there, there was a bit of an unfortunate incident. One of my sections, led by a corporal - the whole section - misappropriated a train, an actual train. They took this thing over and drove it madly along the train line for some sixty miles or so, and this created no end of a problem. By the time it got to the CO it created a terrible problem for me. I didn't know that they'd actually done it at the time I was in formed that this had happened. Apparently they had drunk a lot of sake and they had just taken the train, passengers and all - how it didn't end in a terrible disaster ...

They kept the driver, or they drove it themselves?

ES: They kept the driver, and drove it themselves - but I don't know how they handled the signals. You get a lot of young men and they do get a bit wild sometimes - that was a bit excessive, of course. We were lucky to get out of it without any real trouble, I think.

I could go on for a long, long time about little things that happened, but I think, basically, I've covered the main things.

What do you believe was the importance of BCOF?

ES: I support everything that Lachlan said, and I think, in addition, it was the exact time when the Australian Regular Army had its birth. The Interim Army was formed then, and the Australian Army, as we have it today, I believe was born then. I don't think it was born earlier, I think it was born right there in the days of BCOF, and we began, for the first time - I'll choose my words carefully - we began to get a great deal of professionalism into the army at that time.

Thank you. I think that's where we'll finish - thank you very much.

END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE B - END OF INTERVIEW

1/95