Australian War Memorial

Sound Collection

TRANSCRIPT
OF
ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

S02298

Thomas Henry John Hollis as a rifleman 1 Platoon A Company 3rd Battalion The Royal Australian Regiment (3 RAR) and a prisoner of war, Korea 1950-1953, interviewed by Bill Fogarty

Recorded
at: Canberra, ACT
on: 6 March 2002
by: Lenny Preston, Australian War Memorial

Description

Hollis speaks of his family background and Second World War service; his Occupation Force duty in Japan followed by discharge and service with the NSW Police; enlistment for Korea (K) Force and training; joining 3 RAR at Uijongbu on Boxing Day 1950; winter conditions in Korea; operations during withdrawal from the Chinese Army advance; the five-man long-range patrol led by Lieutenant Angus McDonald resulting in capture by Chinese troops; interrogations in Chinese Army forward areas; the transit northwards with other prisoners of war; life in the 'Bean Camp' east of Pyongyang and United Nations (UN) air attacks on that camp; his suffering illness and the effects of frostbite while in captivity; relocating to Camp 5 near Pyoktong where he experienced a week's isolation as punishment; life as a prisoner of war with other UN personnel; stealing food from a Chinese storehouse; the Camp 5 indoctrination program; segregation of officers and non-commissioned officers from other ranks; punishments awarded to prisoners; a Greek soldier as a comrade in captivity; encountering the Australian communist journalist Wilfred Burchett at Camp 5; medical facilities; why he and other prisoners survived; encounters with Chinese camp staff over prisoner discipline; reactions to the Truce and repatriation prospects; repatriation procedures followed; debriefing by the Australian army system in Japan; the return trip to Australia; discharge and civilian employment; a much later visit to Japan.

Transcribed by: C.L. Soames, August 2002

Disclaimer

The Australian War Memorial is not responsible either for the accuracy of matters discussed or opinions expressed by speakers, which are for the reader to judge.

Transcript methodology

Please note that the printed word can never fully convey all the meaning of speech, and may lead to misinterpretation. Readers concerned with the expressive elements of speech should refer to the audio record.
It is strongly recommended that readers listen to the sound recording whilst reading the transcript, at least in part, or for critical sections.

Readers of this transcript of interview should bear in mind that it is a verbatim transcript of the spoken word and reflects the informal conversational style that is inherent in oral records. Unless indicated, the names of places and people are as spoken, regardless of whether this is formally correct or not – e.g. 'world war two' (as spoken) would not be changed in transcription to 'second world war' (the official conflict term).

A few changes or additions may be made by the transcriber or proof-reader. Such changes are usually indicated by square brackets, thus: [ ] to clearly indicate a difference between the sound record and the transcript. A double dash (- -) indicates an unfinished sentence.

Copyright

Copyright in this transcript, and the sound recording from which it was made, is held by the Australian War Memorial or the donors, and is administered by:

Australian War Memorial
GPO Box 345

Identification: This is Tape Number 1 of an interview with Mr Tom Hollis, conducted by Bill Fogarty, recorded at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. The topics covered are the Korean War.

Tom, thank you very much for coming along to become part of our Korean oral history program. First of all, could you describe a bit of your family background, where you grew up and went to school, et cetera.

Well, I was born in the Glebe, would you believe, and ran around there till I was five years of age. My sister and I were boarded out to people up at a place called Norway, which is the other side of Oberon - pretty bare times in 1930. Anyhow, we stayed with those people for four years and then went back to our mother at Tamworth, and went to school there.

When I was about twelve we moved from Tamworth down to Singleton where I went to school. I can't remember exactly, but we stayed there for a while and then - I had a sister who was married and she was working at - or her husband was working on the orchards at Gosford - so I finished up going down there and - on the dairy farms, I worked all my young life on dairy farms, and then I went to Gosford and worked on the orchards there. Of course, Manpower was in - I was seventeen and I was trying to get into the Army.

What year were you born?

1925.

Right.

In '43 I filled my Army papers in, expecting to be called up, but being protected - I was on an orchard and they wouldn't call me up. So I left the job. I used to go up in New Lambton office where they used to do exams for Army and all that jazz, and eventually the Manpower officer said, 'Where do you work?' and I said, 'I'm unemployed' - well, you couldn't be unemployed, but I was. He said, 'I'll either put you in gaol or in the Army', I said, 'Put me in the Army, that's what I'm trying to do.'

Well, next week I got a letter saying, 'Bring a cut lunch and report to barracks', so I did. I put my age up nine months, but by that time I was eighteen - by the time I got in I was eighteen. Well, then they sent us to Cowra to do our recruit training. When that was finished, after three months, they sent us to Bathurst to do our advanced training, or the beginning of our commando training - I volunteered for commandos. I passed the board that selects you - and we did our initial commando training at Bathurst.

Well, then they moved us to Canungra - 1st Australian Commando Training Squadron at Canungra. I did a couple of months there, and I come out of there the fittest man in the Army - unbelievable - unbelievable, that training - and then I was sent to Ravenshoe to where the 9 Div was, and went to 11 Squadron, which was attached to the 9th Division - well, it was called the 9th Regiment, they had the 2/4 Independent Company - which they changed the names of all the independent companies and called them commando squadrons - and we had 11 and 12 which were new squadrons.

We were there for - oh, I can't remember how long, I suppose eight months, maybe longer - and we finally went overseas to Morotai. We were on Morotai for about a month and then we

hopped on to the *Manoora* and I went into action on Labuan Island in British North Borneo, off the *Manoora* - over the ropes on the side - I don't think they do that any more, they have vehicles to take them ashore in today.

But yeah, do all that, and then when the war ended they called for volunteers for occupation of Germany; I volunteered for that and that fell through. Then they called (for volunteers) for occupation of Japan, so I finished up in 66 Battalion. And I came home in ...

Were you involved in the jack-up on Morotai?

I was the marker - I was the marker.

Would you like to explain what you thought about it?

Well, they wouldn't send us to Japan, they kept us on Morotai, and all we were doing, we were mounting guards and all this jazz. Well, I was in B Company; my company commander was Benny O'Dowd, who has now passed on - very good soldier, that old man.

Is he still alive?

No, he's dead, yeah, he died - he went blind.

Benny O'Dowd?

I beg your pardon, Archie Denness[1].

Oh, Archie Denness, yes.

Archie Denness - no, I'm getting mixed up with Benny. Yeah, anyhow, I did an NCO's course there and became a lance jack, and they finally sent us over to Japan. Well, they had nothing, we went to an old Army camp at Kaitaichi, which is now a garlic factory. We went into these old wooden huts, and they had a forty-four gallon drum in the middle of the floor - freezing cold - freezing cold because it was, might have been March, something like that, it was still very cold.

Anyhow, I came home in '47 and I got discharged and went straight into the Police Force.

New South Wales Police Force?

Yeah - and I was there till 1950 when I resigned and went back in the Army. Prior to that, I'd got married in '49. And I went back in the Army, volunteered for Korea, and ...

Did you do any initial training in Australia when you enlisted for K Force?

Yeah, we did our initial training up at Ingleburn - which is all gone now, of course - but we did our initial training - because we were all trained troops, they called us Special Force when they first started it, then they changed it to K Force later. But at the early stages you had to be a

[1] Captain Archer Peterson Denness, Officer Commanding C and later Support Company 3 RAR

returned soldier to get in it. I, with a mate of mine, joined up and we went on 15 August, which was the day the Second World War ended. I was through first and, of course, you go through Intelligence, they ask you why you want to go, and all this jazz, you know. And they said, 'Oh, yeah, you are accepted; sign here.' Well, I said, 'I'm working.' I said, 'I want a couple of weeks leave' - I'd picked up a spare-time job while I was waiting, so I didn't sign. My little mate that went with me, he got killed when he come home at Ingleburn. He signed, he took his two weeks' leave and got paid for it; Tom took his two weeks' leave and got nothing. So when I came back it was 29 August and I signed up. That's where we went and did our reviser course at Ingleburn.

Finally, they sent the first troops over by plane, but when they had a battalion up to strength - they kept us sitting there - and they finally sent us on a little boat called the [*Chang Ti*] - and I'll tell you, it was a little boat! - and there was fifty-four ORs and Major Ray - he was the only officer. I never met him after that, after we got to Japan. It took a month, we went via Manila and all this jazz, and Hong Kong. It was like a slow boat to China.

Anyhow, we finally got into Japan and they sent us to Haramura to finish our training off. Then everyone was going to Korea, and Tom's left in Japan and couldn't understand why. When I said something to the captain, he put me on guard. I finally said to him - and all these guys from Victoria that had smaller numbers, he was sending them before they sent New South Welshmen. He said, 'They must have joined up before you, the numbers are smaller.' Well, population-wise, come on - and he was a captain! - so I don't know how he went, but I think he eventually got to the Battalion. Anyhow, I didn't (inaudible) till Boxing Day 1950. We were at a place called Uijongbu - and I requested to go to 1 Section, 1 Platoon, A Company. So that's where I went.

I dug in with a bloke named Ivan List - who has passed on since then - and ...

> Can you describe the conditions at the time, when you arrived in the Battalion - the climatic conditions?

Well, it was freezing cold, it was Christmas time (laughs) - it's reversed to ours, as you know, and I mean, I'd been in Japan in 'Occupation', but I didn't sort of feel the cold as much in Japan (as I did) in Korea. And when I got to Korea it was the coldest winter they'd had in forty years, everything was frozen, you couldn't dig a hole in the ground, the ground froze three foot thick. So with the old shovels we had - they said, 'Oh, you've got to get one of these American entrenching tools' - well, they were the little shovels that bend in half. The only way you could get one was to find a dead noggy or whatever - which I did, I found a dead noggy and took his shovel.

We moved out of there on New Year's Day and advanced to fill in a hole that the 6 Div blokes had left - they had got hit by the Chinese and they 'bugged out', and we went up to fill the hole in. Anyhow, that was a funny old day, that one. But when we finally came down off the hill - because we had to dig into the Chinese lines - and there were Chinamen everywhere. They used to wear little green uniforms, and little green helmets, you know. Because the ROKs (Republic of North Korea soldiers) were going over the big hill to our left, facing north, they said ...

> This is the Republic of Korea Army?

Yeah - South Koreans - these were (inaudible) crack troops. All you could see was a line of troops going over the top of this mountain. And they said, 'Don't fire at the ...' - they told us not to fire at the Chinamen, and some of them were about fifty yards away, behind bushes and all

this - they were running all over the place, there was heaps of them.

Anyhow, they said, 'The troops up on top of the hill might fire back.' Well, knowing noggies, they dropped their bloody gear and everything when they get hit; they don't worry about picking up their weapons, they just take off, head south. My section come out - we only had one tank and my section come out on the tank. Well, they'd already put a roadblock in behind us, which apparently Don Company had cleared - lost a couple of blokes wounded, lost a jeep. By the time we got out it was pretty dark and we just sort of laid on the ground till next morning - and the artillery zeroed in with smoke shells, just in case the Chows followed us down. That was my first experience of the Chinese Army. I'll tell you what, there was a lot of them - lot of them.

Anyhow, then we got to a place - after the 75 Mile Strategic Withdrawal - you know what that is?

Yeah.

We got to a place called 'The Schoolhouse' - of course, there was a schoolhouse there, they called it 'The Schoolhouse' - and we put in a perimeter there. Well, you didn't know who was on your right, or who was on your left, because they could be here tonight and gone in the morning. You know, you finished up on your own.

So they were sending out company patrols to Ichon from there. Well, the first time the Company - I didn't go, I stayed on the line, then the second time I went, naturally, I went. So when we got up there, it was just on dark because we had to clear all the hills on the way up and make sure there was no Chinese on them. By the time we got to the position - they'd been doing it for about two weeks - they decided that Van Fleet[2] wanted a patrol just to find the Chinamen. They wanted a thirty-man, and Angus McDonald, our platoon commander, he said he couldn't take a thirty-man patrol because it was so bad, the snow, you couldn't travel that far - long, long patrol. And I guess, they picked ... Paddy said, 'I'll pick out five men'. So he picked ex-commandos and I happened to be one of them.

I went back to hand my rifle in and get an Owen gun, and my section commander, who was Don Buck, he volunteered to go. So we did the patrol, and we got back ...

So there's five of you, now you go forward ...

Yeah, we were ...

... to a defended position; how far forward did you go, in miles?

About twenty. When we came out of our position we didn't wait - like, you know, you think someone would have woke up. We came down the road from the position which was on a rise, and that's where the houses started, and the first house had a light on. So we go in there and check our maps, and when we went in there there was about twelve young orientals in white clothing. And they were all joking, and laughing, and going on, and we are looking at our maps, not realising who they were - or we assumed who they were. They were either North Koreans or

[2] General James Alward Van Fleet, Commanding General Eighth US Army 1951-1953.

Chinese.

Anyhow, we did our maps and they were walked out, and took off, and went right around the ...

This is at night-time?

Oh, yeah - right around the perimeter of the village - big, big village - around this valley and up over the mountains on the other side. We got to the foot of the mountains because smoke - we had to have a little crawl before we got up the mountain. And we climbed the mountain, and as we got to the top of the mountain we nearly got blown off with the wind - the wind was unbelievable. Being on the protected side, on the south side, on the southern side, we didn't get hit by the wind until we got to the top. And when we got to the top I looked back to where the position was - which was a long, long way away - and in the distance you could see tracer bullets - see, well, they are machine guns. The boys were having a bit of fun, they looked back and said, 'Oh, yeah' - didn't take any notice of it, just thought that somebody's fired a few shots.

Anyhow, we dropped down - and the road was supposed to go straight ahead by the Japanese maps, and they were all wrong, and we finished up in a frozen creek, and we are slipping and sliding around, looking for the road. So we come to these two houses and Angus McDonald said to me, 'Strike out of those two houses, Tom.' So I take the lead and get across the paddy fields to the houses, and we hear all this snoring going on - and they were full of Chinese, and we were the only silly buggers out in the cold, the Chinese were snoring their heads off.

So we finally got up the embankment - because there was an embankment there - and Angus McDonald had a rifle. So it pushed him up, and then he put the rifle down and pulled each one of us up, like, you know. Me, being the tallest, I helped to push them up and I was the last up. And there was a sig wire ran across the road, and we followed that right to the top of the hill. At the top of the hill there was a dugout - Japanese style, big round one - and they are all snoring in that. So (since it was a) recce patrol, you don't stir them up, so we dropped down the other side of the valley, down this hill, came right back around the valley to where the company had been - because we didn't know at this stage that they'd gone. By that time I estimated it was three in the morning, but apparently it was later, it was four.

In the winter time in these places, these cold places, you can see for miles at night-time, and you can see out over the snow, and all these black figures - there were a lot of black figures around, we are in the middle of them. I thought, they've got to be Chinamen, they couldn't be anybody else.

Anyhow, we'd been on our feet for about twenty-two hours, and a couple of guys were pretty hard up like, you know. So we decided to go through the village, which was on our right - because we had to go over this big hill, and there was no way in the world we could have climbed the hill, we were too exhausted. So we did the old house-to-house bit, and I thought, this is a waste of time because everybody is in bed anyhow. So we decided to pull into a Korean house and wait till daybreak to see what was happening. There was no sound, no sound of firing or anything.

So we went in this house and it had two rooms. We got one noggy in one room, but the other bloke got away. Angus said, 'Look out the back, Tom, and see if we can get out.' I looked out the back and there was a rise there, just looked like a little rise because the snow had all fallen over, and you couldn't see. It was about a ten foot wall; they'd kept the little hill away and built

the house there. So I said, 'Yes, pretty right.' Anyhow, next thing we heard this grunting - huh! huh! huh! So Buck was at the front door, and he looked out the front door and there was a heap of Chinamen there.

Prior to that - prior to that - when we decided what we were going to do I said, 'We are so exhausted, what about we strike straight up the centre of the village.' He said, 'Righto, lead off.' So when we got about a quarter of the way through the village, I look ahead and there's somebody in front of us. So I put my hand up, which means 'stop', and he said, 'What's the matter?' I said, 'We are following somebody.' When that somebody turned off, it was a sixty man Chinese patrol, and that's when we ducked back and went to the village and then went into the room. Of course, the Korean went and got the Chinese and they surrounded the hut, and all this grunting and carrying on. We got out and, oh, blimey, they were everywhere.

Angus finally got up on this little mountain, or little hill, and he said, 'Oh, mate, they are everywhere; I think we'll have to throw them down.' And that's how we got taken, but they took all our weapons off us and disarmed us, then gave us to a young Chinese kid, I suppose, of about twelve or thirteen, to take us back. Of course, I'm the leading man and I've got a shovel in my hand, and I'm saying to Angus, 'It will only take one hit, Angus, and, you know ...' - 'Oh, you'd better be careful.' Luckily I didn't hit him in the head with it because they shoot you for that - but we might have got away, we might not have. He took us back to ...

You weren't tied up or anything?

No, no, no - just walked - we couldn't have done anything, you couldn't have run away, we were too exhausted.

Anyhow, we just walked behind him and went back - I think we came to something like brigade headquarters or something, and they lined us up there. Of course, by this time it was daylight. They put us in a room - Angus still had all the maps on him of where our position was - and, of course, there was furniture in this room, and there was like an old Korean chest of drawers against the wall where Angus was. So he said, 'Keep your eye out' - because he had like a pair of like tank pants with pockets in the legs. So he took the maps out of the pockets and he slid them behind this wall unit type of thing - which they would never have found. So we only stayed there, I think, that day, and that night they moved us back - and I think it would have been divisional headquarters - and they kept us there, oh, possibly two to three weeks.

We were only there a couple of days and they separated - oh, they interrogated us. They took us down to a hut, one by one, and interrogated us. Now, I don't know what McDonald, Light, and Buckland said, but when I went down there they said like if you were put back in the line - because these are high-ranking officers and they could speak English - and if you were put back in the line, what would you do? Well, being who I am, I said, 'I'll go back in the line and keep fighting, we come over here to fight youse.' 'Oh, yeah.' So apparently, when Buckland went down he said similar words; that's when they segregated us and they took the other three away. They put them into an indoctrination camp somewhere and only kept them for three weeks and then they let them go. So they said Buck and I needed further education.

So they moved us back - we used to do a lot of night work there, going back and carrying rice down to the front for the front-line troops because all the front-line troops ate rice.

Was this just your little group or were you with other prisoners of war?

No, at this stage there was three because they brought a Greek in; the day after we were taken they brought in [Antonius Sandrinius]. He was standing outside this hut we were in - because they'd heated the floors by lighting - you know the crown houses, like, where you light the fire at one end and it heats the floor - it was quite warm. And I heard, looked out the door, and this fellow is standing there, and he's got all American gear on, and I said, 'Come inside, Yank', and nothing happened. Anyhow, I said, 'I'll close the door', so I closed the door, and finally the Chinese pushed him into the room and he sat down. I looked at him and I said, 'He's not a Yank, he's too dark' - his dark complexion, you know. And I said, 'Where are you from?' and he hit himself on the chest and said, 'Me Greek soldier.' Wow, we've got a Greek with us - and that's all the English he could speak.

Anyhow, he stayed with us right through our interment. Anyhow, after a couple of weeks they moved us back further and we met a group of Chinese, it was their duty to take us back to the Yalu, and on the way they were picking up prisoners here, and a couple there. We finally got into a group of about fifty. By this time - oh, we'd gone through a big town, I think it was called Choiwon, and it had been a big depot for rice supplies and all that - and the B29s had bombed it the day before. When we got there, oh, the bomb holes were that big there was a big, three-ton truck upside down in the bottom of the hole, you had to look down to the truck; that's how big the bombs they were using. Of course, the North Korean Army was all there, and all their furry - they used to wear furry hats - and they wanted, right or wrong, would the Chinese give us over to them because they would have shot us like, you know. Anyhow, the Chows stuck with us and saved our lives. We finally got to a place called Suan which is east of Pyongyang, and that's the camp that we called 'The Bean Camp'.

Now, they used to give us canary seed - millet seed - twice a day, under tennis ball size, with maybe three or four soya beans in them - well, sometimes they were green, or whatever, but that's the only thing that kept you alive, the soya beans. We naturally called it 'The Bean Camp'.

We used to go on work details at night, and it finished up - it had been an old Japanese mining camp, and huts were just like ordinary army huts you see today, or in the old days, only they were made out of mud - they finished up with about 800 blokes in this camp. Well, I got paraded to the colonel in charge of the camp whose father was a colonel in the Kuomintang Army, and I assume he had been in the Kuomintang Army but he changed over to the Reds. We sat out on the porch of this house, which was his headquarters, and he spoke the best English you ever heard in your life - offered me a cigarette, which I took - but I wanted him to mark the camps as POW camps, but he said, 'Oh, we can't do that. We did that before and the American imperialists bombed them.' Well, that's all you've got because they hated the Yanks. So I just went back to the camp and we carried on.

Well, we stayed there ...

What would be a daily routine in the camp?

In that camp?

Yeah.

Well, the daily routine was at night, you went out at night because you couldn't move around in the daytime because we had superiority of the air. If you moved by day, particularly with the

snow, well, the old Mustangs would get you like, you know, because a pilot in a plane, if you stand still, can't see you, but if you move, he sees your shadow; and that's when they swoop on you, see. Of course, all the Chinese had white capes they used to put over themselves and just squat down on the snow when planes came over, but the Australian Army wasn't that effective, they just had khaki.

We moved back, as I said, to Suan, stayed there for about three weeks. You went out at night and carted wood, it was to cook your own food - there was no way of cooking your own food.

How was the camp organised, like an army unit?

There was no organisation at all.

Just your own little group?

Whoever was in the hut, or the room, someone took charge, or whatever. Someone had to get - they had boxes they used to put these millet seed balls and stuff in, like, you know, you'd go over that and then they'd give you so many for so many men like, you know. That's how they dished the tucker out. But then you had to come back and supervise the dishing of it out because there was a lot of hungry people there, mate, and they would have just stuck right into it; so you supervised that.

Did you make people line up?

Well, you didn't have to because you were all in the one - there might only be ten or twelve of you, see, in a room. You just sort of made sure everyone - someone had to take over and make sure everybody got the right quantity of food.

I reckon it was about Kapyong time - prior to that we set about the aeroplanes coming - can't be bombed here, there's a hill there, and there's a hill here, and a hill there, they can't get in. The South Africans found a way, they came straight down and they dropped two or three rockets and killed thirty-eight people - Americans mainly. I reckon it was about Kapyong time because they thought that they were going to move north. They moved 700 of us out over a couple of night period, north, and 100 stayed behind because we were burying forty men a day there and it was always someone dying. They had a couple of huts to put the dead in. Well, by this stage, I was about nine stone by this stage because of the intake of the tucker we had.

They decided to move us out. Don Buck was sick, we left him behind, and in all about 100 others. God knows what happened to them, but Buck survived, but he had like - well, I don't know what it was, it was bronchitis or something, but he was delirious. I had to sit in a corner and hold him up, with his head on his shoulder, because he used to go delirious. And being an old - he used to work for Federal Matches as a timber cutter before the war - Second World War - and he laid down, he'd be singing out that there were black snakes, and all this jazz, like, you know.

Anyhow, I nursed him for three days or nights. Finally, we just got him on his feet when we had to pull out and leave him. Out of the 700 - we went from village to village - and of course, they scrounged whatever food they could get off the Koreans, they didn't have any supply of food. They scrounged what tucker they could get, and if there was anything left over they made you carry it for the next meal. And they finally got us to Chong Son which was finally called Camp

1.

So you are basically in groups of how many in this march?

Oh, well, on the march they had a guard every ten men. I didn't tell you that part, but before we got to Pyongyang everybody had dysentery. I used to trot ahead and drop my daks before - I didn't want to come to the end of the line because when we were near Pyongyang this fellow had sort of fallen out, and of course, they just put the bayonet through him. I don't know how he got in, he came in to where the hut I was in in this village, and he said, 'Whatever you do ...' - an American - 'Whatever you do, don't drop out.' I said, 'Well, everybody's dropping their daks like'; he said, 'Don't go behind the last man', because they were just shooting them. Anyhow, they bayoneted him, he died that night. 'Make sure you run up the line before you drop your pants because you are gone.'

And all this is, you are walking at night through the snow on the roads?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Daytime they'd put you in villages somewhere. We went into - I don't know the name of the village, of course - they took us in this village, they took us right up the centre of this big, big village, up the centre of the village, and it came to a sort of a dip in the top of the hill. Just around the corner there was about six huts, and they crammed us all - of course, there's a lot of blokes dying all the time - and they crammed us into these huts, and that day 77 Squadron came over and they knocked the bloody hell out of this village. They were coming over and doing their lap around, right where our six houses were, and go down, and come around, and come back up again. You'd hear the machine guns going - we were just over the rise. And the last plane, that afternoon, came over, and the last house in the row we were in, he fired one burst and killed a Chinaman - 'Mr Precision' called a Chinaman - and there was no grief about it, it was just another - but, you know, you can't believe that all that time they never hit these houses, and they were all full of prisoners. And the last one - and you could see them - they were that low that you could stand under the eaves of the houses - you know, the straw hangs down - you could stand there and look like that, and you could see the pilots going right and left, looking right and left, for something to shoot at. And the last bloke fired a burst into the last house and killed a Chinaman.

Anyhow, we finally got to Camp 1, or Chong San is it was called - Chong Son or Chong San[3] - and we were in pretty bad shape. That's where I met all these fellows with no toes - Americans - it was frostbite. See, we used to carry spare socks inside our shirt, and the Americans had those rubber snow packs, as they called them, and as soon as you stop your feet froze. So there were a lot of blokes getting around with no toes - the Koreans would just cut them off with a pair of scissors.

And there was a little American there - and he would have only been seventeen, I suppose - but he'd always wanted to join the Marines. So his parents signed him up and he joined the Marines; the next thing he knows, he is in Korea. Well, his feet got frostbitten, and they were frostbitten up to his ankles, and the North Koreans held him down and sawed his feet off with a hacksaw - no anaesthetic, no nothing - and he used to crawl around on his hands and knees with a quarter inch of bone sticking out the end - they had no bandages. I gave him one of my undershirts to tear up to make bandages out of - unbelievable young fellow. But he got a pair of snow packs

[3] Chong Son

and he made cups for the bottoms of his feet.

We were on a bit of a creek, and we dug toilets across this little creek and put a couple of little sticks across, and he used to go on his hands and knees over the toilet, and all that jazz - on his hands and knees all the time.

Anyhow, we were there and blokes were dying. I suppose, in that village, there would be 1,200 died, I suppose - it was just a little village, no wire or nothing, just a village - well, where are you going to go? - too sick to go anywhere.

Anyhow, I'm laying there this day and I heard all this noise, and I thought, that sounds like British marching songs - and they were whistling. And I sat up and I looked down south, and here's all these blokes in khaki coming up the road. Of course, the Chinese told us we'd been liberated from the yoke of the imperialist warmongers. I thought, God, we've been recaptured - it was the Gloucesters, there was 600 of them.

So they came in to that camp, and then I moved out with a couple of other fellows from that camp and went to Pyoktong which finished up Camp 5. They didn't know anything about Australia, they didn't even know what Australia was. Anyhow, they put me in a room for a week, in a dark room - it was that dark you couldn't find [the way to] feel yourself around the wall. I was there for a week before they come and got me out. They used to push a bit of tucker in.

What did you do to deserve to be put in there?

Nothing - nothing - but I suppose my record followed me from the other camp because they used to give you questions on pieces of paper, and you'd answer them, like, with all sorts of answers; it was a big laugh. Maybe they had a record of me, or something, or something I'd done, or hadn't done, or whatever, you know. Of course, I had bronchitis very bad and I'd lost my voice - I had laryngitis. Well, this camp they used to teach you to sing patriotic songs, like ['Dong fang hung, Wei lei shen, Chun wa churiaga Mao Tse-tung']; that's 'The sun in the east, The sun in the west, China gave birth to Mao Tse-tung'. And I couldn't sing because I had no voice - well, I couldn't sing anyhow, but I had no voice at all. They didn't realise that I couldn't, they thought I was just joking, and they stuck me - when we went to Camp 5 they stuck me in this room for about a week.

They finally let me out and put me with other prisoners, but I wouldn't say I was British, see, I said I was Australian. And with the uniform - they looked at my old uniform, my old long uniform, they said, 'You Blitish' (*sic*) I said, 'No, I'm not British, I'm an Australian.' They had a company of Poms there, and England's always been a sort of a socialist block. I didn't want to get mixed up with them, so I said, 'No, no', and they put me with ninety American negroes - brother! - every time my hand went in I only got half a ration and I couldn't understand why. So I said to this fellow who was dishing the tucker out - and he was what we call out here a 'creamy', he was only a half-caste negro. And I said, 'Why is he getting two spoonfuls, and he is getting two spoonfuls, and I'm only getting one?' He looked up and he said, 'Youse white, boy.' I didn't know what he was talking about, I didn't know what discrimination was and I was twenty-five, twenty-six, and didn't know what race discrimination was. Bloody learnt the hard way, mate - learnt the hard way. So I just moved out of there, I got away from them. The Chinese said, 'Where are you going?' I said, 'I'm getting away from them', because they used to try and cause dissension between different nationalities.

So I moved out of there and I went and plopped myself with some Yanks. Everything went off alright, I didn't complain or nothing like that, I just thought, bugger this. I'm the only Aussie there, and then all of a sudden Keith Gwyther came - he would have (been) taken on Kapyong. He came in the camp - and of course, being with Americans for so long I became Americanised and I was speaking like an American, like with the accent and all that jazz - because nobody could understand us, our accent, so I had to sort of change to the American accent. And he walked in the camp and introduced himself. We sort of got together then, and then a month or a couple after, Buck and Parker are along.

They didn't put us all together, they segregated us. They put Gwyther and Parker together in one section of the company, and they put us in the company with all odds and sods and they called them the United Nations Company because there were Puertoricans and Uruguayans, and all Spanish speaking people - Mexicans - a lot of these people were in the American Army, but they are all different nationalities. Buck and I were put together, but they put us up with the Frenchmen - there were about thirty-five Frenchmen there. The Korean hut had a little room on one end, which we sort of blocked off and made that for our own hut, with the Frenchmen on the main part of the hut.

So the Chinese had a big rally down in the village proper one day, and at the side of the headquarters was these two big pine logs. I thought to myself, I could use them. So I threw one on my shoulder and raced off back to where the hut was that Buck was in. And the Frenchmen had an old handsaw, one of those hoop saws. So I measured off, I said, 'Cut this up', so they cut it up and I raced back and got the other one, and they cut that up. I made a double bunk bed out of them, in the little room, and Buck used to sleep on the top and I used to sleep on the bottom.

But to get the boards to go across, there was a big shed in the middle of the camp, and nobody knew what was in this shed. And some of these Puerto Ricans said, 'We've got to get into that shed.' So me, being the tallest around, I said, 'Okay, I'll take about two on my shoulders', so I get up against the wall and the Puerto Rican climbs up on my shoulder, another bloke goes up on top of him, and they pull the window out - it was like a slat window. They pulled that out, and the shed was full of biscuits, like our dog biscuits, and new sandshoes.

I said, 'Well, get a box of the biscuits, but I want the wood' - because the box is about two foot six square, in lengths, ideal for beds. So I got the timber and they got the biscuits. I said, 'Leave the sandshoes around' - 'But we need shoes' - I said, 'Yeah, but what are the Chinese going to say when they see them - where did you get them?' So we left the shoes there and took them a heap of biscuits, and put the thing back in the shed and Tom got his bed. So we had beds to sleep on and all we had to do was keep the lice down because you had nothing to keep body lice down, even then, and that was pretty late in the time. Oh, yeah, a lot of blokes died up there, mate.

> What was your routine there? Did they make you work, or did they just make you go and do indoctrination lectures?

Camp 5 was an indoctrination camp. We even built a parade ground out of the side of a rise - well, each company built their own parade ground. And eventually, near the end, they put in a soccer field - the Poms used to play soccer - they gave them a ball and whatever, you know. We were right on the Yalu.

> That was the one that was on the river there.

Yeah.

It's a backed-up part of the river, wasn't it?

Yeah. Well, actually, it was backed-up in the [Siphon] Dam, but it's still a part of Yalu. Anyhow, as the Chinese said, 'The American imperialists, they cannot bomb the dam, they cannot bomb the dam' - so they struck under the dam and blew the power house out.

But they used to pull us out, about eight in the morning, on the parade ground. And of course, you had your bit of breakfast, whatever it was, there, mainly - you know what sorghum is, don't you? - you know the seed off sorghum? - well, that was the main diet there. Like Camp 1, that was all sorghum seed too, and there was more of it than there was millet - I don't think there is any more value in it. They fed us that, and then they'd put you out on the parade ground - well, you only got two meals a day, they don't have midday meals - but they'd give you four hours study there, and all these 'instructors', and they'd call them, all spoke English. They had blackboards, and they had all the 'isms' - Engelsism, and Marxism, Stalinism. They'd be bashing this into you, and then they'd make you take notes. So then you take the notes and then they'd collect them all up - of course, you had to put your name on them, they'd collect them all up and they'd take them back. I don't know what they did with them, but if they come back next day, and they raced in on the lot because they weren't studying properly. If anybody misbehaved they'd pull them into gear.

Then they sorted me out because I could speak English, and they wanted me to read - they used to mark a paper, like the *Shanghai News*, *The London Daily Worker*, which were communist papers; they'd mark sections out in red ink and get me to read it to other prisoners. Well, I could speak pretty fast at times, and we were with Americans, and sitting up there - and even the negroes - and you'd rattle it off and they wouldn't understand one word of what you were saying - they wouldn't understand one word. But I used to always open up, I'd read it first. They had like 'The People', as they called themselves, knocking jets down with bloody stones and all this as they flew up valleys and all that. Of course, the first expression of mine was, 'What bullshit'. Anyhow, I'd read it out to them.

In the end they sort of stopped - about a year before the war ended they stopped the indoctrination, they stopped all that classwork on the paddocks, and all that, but they still made you study. So this guy - you either had to call them Instructor, Mr, or Sir. Well, I couldn't see myself calling a bloody Chinaman - any of those, being our enemy - and this particular bloke, he had a real big chin, we used to call him Horsehead. Anyhow, he comes over and he drags me out of the hut, and we are walking across this parade ground and he said what he wanted me to do. I just had enough, and I said, 'Hey, Kwong, I've had enough of this.' I said, 'I didn't come here to preach this bloody stuff, I came here to fight against it.' He said, 'What you mean? What you mean?' I said, 'I volunteered to come to Korea, I'm not a conscript, I'm not like the Americans, they are conscripted into the army. I volunteered to come and fight against communism.' Well, that was attention.

So he had me standing to attention in the middle of the parade ground, in the summertime, for oh, twenty hours, unbelievable - unbelievable. In the end he took me up to the headquarters and gave me a heap of paper, and he said I should write an article, firstly, on what I thought of the Chinese People's Volunteers - because all those Chinese people are (not) volunteers, they are all conscripts too, mate, they didn't volunteer. They come along, and if a family had two, one went,

if it had three, two went, or if they say no, they all go. That's how they got their volunteer army.

Anyhow, I wrote a heap of nonsense about I thought the way they attacked across open paddy fields, and all this jazz, I told them what a great show it was, and I put it in the letter. I said it's a Bren gunner's dream. Anyhow, they didn't even pick that up, you know - they didn't pick that up. I never, ever wrote anything that knocked our side, I even brought that - that was done on rice paper - you know what rice paper is? - that real fine paper, it was done on that. And I had an old Eversharp pen that I'd taken off a Jap in 'Occupation', and I still had it and I had it in my pocket - they hadn't found it. I had it in my pocket and I pulled a rubber out of it, and I rolled that bit of paper up and I put it in my pen. When they come back looking for it, 'Where is it?' - 'I don't know, you had it, I didn't touch it.' Anyhow, I said that somebody must have picked it up.

I've got a bit on the internet, and it's in that, that what's-his-name put on there? - he put me on the internet. When I came out I gave it to Intelligence - they won't even see it, so I mean to say, you could have written anything for them.

You didn't keep the pen, did you?

Actually, it got stolen when I came home; when I came home, somebody knocked it off.

When did you make your pipe?

I didn't make my pipe, that's a mistake on the museum's part. That was given to me.

It was a gift to you, was it?

The Chinese gave everybody - because we smoked, and all you got was dust, and you didn't have any paper, and the paper on the walls of the huts, it was too thick to smoke. They were using those little pocket bibles for cigarette paper, see. Anyhow, I finally got presented with this little pipe. There was a cigarette holder - I think I gave it ...

It's here.

Yeah - that was handmade, the Greek made that, he made that, he made that for me. The other three, eventually - he wrote me a letter - I've still got the letter at home that he wrote me, when he went back - he came from Piraeus which is the seaport of Athens. When he went home there was no work - his father was a wharf labourer or something, there was no work. And I said, 'Tony, if you want to come to Australia, write me a letter.' So Tony writes me a letter and it's in Greek. So I thought - I knew where it came from because I'd told him to write to me. So I went into town - at the time I knew the head of the Greek community, big man that used to bail the Greeks out if they got locked up. So I went and saw him and he deciphered it, he said he wants to come to Australia.

My wife and I had just bought our house, and I didn't have any money. Parker, Buck and Gwyther paid his fare out, and naturally, he went to Melbourne. So when he was here about a year he came back to pay the money back to those guys - he'd paid Gwyther because he's a Victorian, big dairy farmer - and he was going back to pay Buck and Parker their money back, and he came to my house. And I heard these footsteps coming down the path.

In those days the wife and I were both working, trying to buy our house, and it was pretty rough

- I couldn't even afford a lawn-mower. I heard these footsteps coming down the path and I thought - of course, I didn't know he was here. I thought, if I didn't know better, I'd say that was the Greek. And the doorbell - it was one of those old ring doorbells in those days, not like the modern things we've got today where you press a button - opened the door, and what is it? He said, 'Arkadas' - 'arkadas' is Turkish for friend - of course, we had Turks in the camp, you know. Anyhow, he came in and we had a meal; I took him down the club and had a couple of beers; then he got on the train and went off to pay the other guys back.

Well, that's the last time I saw him because when I retired in '85 we decided not to do any work around the house - Dutch took a couple of years, in '87 we bought a caravan and decided to go around Australia. And Parker rang me from Darwin, he said, 'If you are going down to Victoria, don't go to see the Greek.' I said, 'Why?' He said, 'He's been dead for twenty years, got killed in a car accident.' He'd only come in as a labourer, and he'd got himself a couple of trucks, and working on his own, and all this jazz, and he had a car accident and got killed. He'd got married in the meantime and had a couple of kids, I think.

I believe in that camp you had a run-in with Burchett.

Oh.

Would you like to describe that?

Wilfred Burchett - can't tell you the language I used, but I mean to say - of course, we knew who he was. We had a bloke named Winnington, who was a top-line communist from Britain, and Monica Felton, an old lady with a gammy leg, who'd been wounded in the Battle of Britain, and all this jazz, and she was a red-hot com, she came in. The grapevine in the camp is unbelievable, the whispers would get around, and of course, one of the worst offences was to be a rumour monger. They said, 'You mustn't spread rumours because it's derogatory for the other prisoners, you mustn't do that.'

Anyhow, they said, 'Wilfred Burchett's in the camp', so we didn't pay much attention. We called the headquarters and they said, 'You are going to be interviewed by an Australian correspondent.' They put up a Yankee tent, collapsible table and chairs - there's only four of us and I'm the last one in - I think there was Gwyther, Parker, Buck and myself. So we go in - and of course, being last in, he's standing right there, and he put his claw out to me to shake hands, and I just looked at him. He said, 'I'm an Australian correspondent.' I said, 'You are a what?' He said, 'I'm an Australian correspondent.' I said, 'You are no Australian, you bastard, you're a f-ing so-and-so traitor to the country.' And he looked at me. Old Don Buck gave me a kick in the shins, he said, 'Shut up', then I gave him another mouthful, you know. Well, I'm not educated, but Buck hardly had any education at all. And he kicked me again, and he said, 'You'll get us all bloody killed; shut up.'

Anyhow, Buck said, 'You are a communist'; he said, 'No, I'm not'; 'But,' he said, 'you are a communist sympathiser' - and he agreed to that. Of course, I am mouthing off again at him. He said, 'I can see it's no good talking to you fellows', so he let us go. But we expected to get a rebuff from the Chows, but nothing was said because Chinese were funny. You could do something really bad against them, and they didn't seem to comprehend what you were doing and they wouldn't say anything. You'd think, oh, I'll be in trouble for this.

Every night they had a parade in Camp 5, and we had a company commander, a little old

Chinaman, and his wife, used to live in a hut in the camp. He used to beat the living daylights out of her, you'd hear her screaming like, you know. He used to get up on a mound of dirt and give a lecture in Chinese. Well, by the time the interpreter translated it all, you'd be standing there for two hours. We were getting a bit jack of this. So this night he got up and he said, 'Every imperialist country has American bases in it', and, of course, big-mouth said, 'Not in my country.' 'Who said that?' I said, 'I did. No American bases in my country.' 'Headquarters! Headquarters!'

So they take me to headquarters and they put me in this room. This old man is sitting the other side of the table with his interpreter, and they kept repeating this, and I kept saying, 'Not in my country.' Eventually, he spat in my face and said, 'If you don't agree with me I'll see you starved', and I said to the interpreter, 'I agree with him - I agree with him.' 'No, no, you go back and think about it.'

This is before they segregated NCOs and officers from the ORs. So they segregated - I can't remember when, but they built an officers' camp and a sergeants' camp, and they got the senior ranks away from the ORs because they couldn't get the ORs to do any propaganda, they were frightened of their senior officers and senior NCOs.

There was a Sergeant Anderson, a Pommy - and I went back to where I was, then it was dark like - and I said, 'Christ, I'm in big trouble', and he said, 'What have you done? What have you done now?' I told him what had happened; he said, 'Look, whatever they want you to write, write it.' 'I'm not writing that bloody propaganda.' He said, 'All you've got to say is what you are led to believe or what you've read in those communist papers - you are in the clear.' Anyhow, I said, 'Oh, you know ...' That's when they sent me back and got me to write this article about the Chinese People's Volunteers.

But prior to that, they used to call him 'Itchy' because he was always scratching his private parts, and we think he had the crabs. So after that they used to call me 'Spitty Itchy'. But oh, yeah, dangerous old man, but gees, he used to give his wife a round of the table.

> Did you think, while you were a prisoner, that the war would go on and you'd not be released? Did any war news get to you at all?

No, they'd put speakers in the camp and all they gave, they read the news from Shanghai, and all it was was communist propaganda. There was no news about anything that was happening anywhere, only about like one of the people had knocked a jet down with a stone, a load of nonsense - all the nonsense. But that's the only outside information that we got.

There was a bloke named Green who was a collaborator, he was kept in the village - a Pommy - I don't know what mob he was with, but on a line - but he was a member of the communist party before, he was on reserve. See, what they did, the British, when the Korean War broke out they called up all their reserves from the Second World War. Well, some of them old blokes had been almost twelve years in the army and only had a couple of months to go, and they threw them back in the forces. This bloke went up and he said, 'You can't send me to Korea', and they said,' Why?' He said, 'I'm a member of the communist party, I can't go over there and fight against them. They said, 'You are a what?' He said, 'A member of the communist party.' They said, 'This is Britain, it's a democracy; every person is entitled to their own political beliefs', and they threw him in uniform and said, 'See how this fits.'

Anyhow, when he got over there, when he got taken prisoner - he could have been with the Ulster Rifles, I don't know - but when he got taken prisoner he told them who he was and they kept him in the village. He did a lot of propaganda to appease people and all this jazz, you know. Every now and then he'd come into the camp and Tom would sidle up alongside him and say, 'G'day, how are you going?' - 'Oh, not bad' - 'What's happening?' - 'Nothing'. I tried to pick his brain, but couldn't get anything out of him, wouldn't tell anything.

Anyhow, when it ended I was - because I used to wander all over the camp - which was illegal, but I used to do it. When Guthrie was shot down he came in the camp, and they said that a pilot was up in such and such an area. So I waited till dark and I went up there, and I was singing out, 'Is there an Aussie here? Is there an Aussie here?' He said, 'Yeah, here.' So I went into the hut and he is in there on his own, and I got talking to him. I said, 'At this stage of the game ...' - because he thought they might have knocked him off, being a pilot, with all that propaganda about germ warfare, which didn't happen. He was worried about that. I said, 'They won't knock you off now, at this stage of the game, no matter what you've done, because it's too late in the war now to start shooting people.'

I mean, up till the time I was taken they used to shoot them, if they were wounded; they just shot them on the ground, just from where they lay, and shot them. That's how lucky Donnelly was to survive because late in the game - see, he was knocked off in January '53 - well, like, they weren't shooting anybody then, they weren't really taking prisoners then, although they were making contact, it was on the fixed lines. I mean, our blokes did a lot of patrolling, got a lot of blokes killed patrolling, like poor old Tony Poole. He got there today, and they wanted to patrol next night - and it was pitch black dark. The Chows either opened up or they walked into an ambush and they scattered, and poor old Tony Poole didn't know where he was, so he just sat down, waited till daylight come and a Chinaman come and picked him up - didn't know where he was, or where he was going, or nothing. That's the way it is, you go out on a patrol and they scatter you - you should know where south is at least (laughs).

> Well, when Guthrie came, did he give you an idea of what had been going on in the communication for trying to get a truce, and all that? Did he bring that sort of news to you?

Well, not to the extent that we knew much about what was happening, I don't think people really worried about it at that stage because they had been talking for two years, and that was just peace talks. But I don't think there was that much news around that Guthrie could tell me anyhow.

Anyhow, I saw him again, I think, before he was taken out and sent to the officers' camp. Then they brought in Drummond, and I just saw him for a few moments - because it was pretty dangerous what I was doing. If the guards caught you, you were in big trouble; you are not supposed to wander round the camp, particularly at night. They used to mount the guard, and they used to march thirty Chinamen down this track to mount the guard from inside the camp, and they are all armed. We used to sit on the bank - because there was a bit of a bank there - and we used to sit on the bank and think, like, if anything happened and it got to the stage where we had to get out, we'd try and overpower the guard and get their weapons. But luckily it didn't come to that - it would have been some fun. It would have been fun trying to get blokes to do it too, I suppose, but you never know.

But this guy, this Green fellow, I said - when it was over - I said, 'Not going to report you' -

'Can't do nothing for me, Tom,' he said, 'but you can think yourself lucky.' I said, 'Why?' He said, 'The things you done as a prisoner of war! They often came to me and asked me about you, and I told them you were confused.' I said, 'Still going to report you.' He said, 'I don't think they would have kept you for good', and he said, 'Maybe ten years.' Well, that gave me a bit of a shock, I didn't think I was that bad.

But see, the first I knew something was happening - we were on a bit of a rise where we were and you had to walk down to go to the toilet. We finally got permission to build proper army latrines - they are only pits - but prior to that they were just doing their business all over the camp. Nobody seemed to have any idea about hygiene. Well, I was in the Army for seven years and two weeks, and Buck and I got together and said, 'How about we go to them and ask, and can we build long trenches, dig long trenches?' We only dug them about twelve foot long, I suppose, and about six foot deep, and about eighteen inches (to) two foot wide, and then we put sticks across for them to stand on, and then eventually we put a roof over it - they brought in Koreans and they thatched the roof.

But I'm walking down towards the toilet and I saw these Koreans working on a house - on a mud house - where we lived. Well, they didn't used to do that, we used to do all that. So speaking a bit of Japanese I went over and I said, 'Kon-nichi wa' to them, and they said, 'Kon-nichi wa' to me - which is 'good day'. And I said, '[Dano senso, hor kari masica]', which is 'What do you know about the war?' - 'senso' is war, see - and 'Do you understand?' They said, '[Sinamashta]', which is 'finished', and I said, 'Sina?' They said, 'Sinamashta'. So I said, '[Hontu des?]' - which means 'Are you telling the truth?' - 'Hi hontu, sinamashta'.

Of course, then I went back to Buck and I said, 'The war's over', he said, 'Oh, you and your bloody rumours, they'll finish up shooting you for rumour mongering.' I said, 'Well, I just spoke to the Koreans down there - and they all speak Japanese - I spoke to them in Japanese and they said the war's over.' So we didn't know for about a week. I saw all these Chinese with cameras and I said, 'Bet they are going to tell you the war's over.'

They put everybody in one big evening parade - all the Filipinos in the front - and I said to the Aussies, 'Get down the bloody back and get your head down, you don't want to be in these photos.' So we moved down the back and got away from the cameras, and they announced the war was over. Well, then they had the Filipinos jumping up and yahooing, and going on - I said, 'Christ! I don't want to be in that'. So that's how we found the war was over, but tell you what, it was a long two years and seven months - buried a lot of blokes up there, mate.

In 'The Bean Camp' the ground was so hard - and we didn't have anything to dig with - they had a pick that was broken with a piece of tree branch in it as a handle, we had a shovel which was the other way instead of being pointed - and you go up there, and you were carrying these people, particularly negroes, and you didn't have stretchers like you see today. Even in that tape I gave you they show you stretchers - didn't have those sort of stretchers, they were just what they called burlap bags, which are made out of rice straw - right? - two of those with a couple of branches of trees - and they were so skinny you'd throw two on. It was like being in Belsen. They were so bad that when they died they used to put them in this hut. Well, you'd go and take two, or whatever you reckon you could carry, and you'd put a stone there because when you come back the hole is supposed to be full. And you'd cart them up the gully and try and dig a hole. Well, if you got a foot you were lucky. You throw a big American negro in a hole like that and his feet are sticking out. So I used to give them a smack in the shins with a pick and break their shins to bend their feet over. It might sound callous, but you can't have all those feet

sticking out of the ground. So that's what we used to do, and throw a bit of dirt over them and go back and get another load.

> Did they have any medical activity in the camp at all, like doctor, or was that organised within the prisoners?

Didn't even have a bandaid. From the time I was taken prisoner till the time I got out, the only time I saw anything with a red cross on was in Camp 5, and it was a Chinese woman to look after the Chinese, not prisoners. We had nothing. Parker carried a wound - well, I didn't know he'd been wounded, but he said he was wounded or something - and he carried a wound for two years. I saw an American - and he was an American Indian, actually - and he'd been shot through the wrist, and that wound had never been touched - well, it was his left wrist because he was still picking pieces of bone out of it - and he got taken in October, or something, 1950, so he was taken three months before me. So he would have had three years there and never had any medical treatment whatsoever.

See, on the march we were on - as I still say, the 'death march' - blokes were just dying. I mean, they'd put you in these huts, and then when they want to pull you out at night to go on the march, blokes were just laying on the floor, and you'd go in and they were dead. No-one knew why they died, or what they died from, or whatever. I mean, it could have been a broken heart, but they were dead. But there was no medical (facilities) there, none at all. That's why I said, in '50, before I was taken, if you were wounded they just shot you, leave you on the ground.

When we got up near Sinanju I was so crook they threw me on a truck with a heap of other blokes - there were Koreans driving. I thought, this is great - but being given back to the Koreans like, you know. And as they died on the truck you just threw them onto the side of the road and left them there. So what happened to them, I wouldn't know. No doubt, the Koreans took their clothing, but what happened to the bodies, no-one will ever know. They might have put a few stones over them or something - that's just along the side of the road - so you wouldn't know. You couldn't have - you know the bit about dog tags, you bury one with them - you couldn't have carried the amount of dog tags to bring them back because there was too many.

> Why is it then, do you think, the Australians survived - because we only had the one that died?

Yes ... but ...

> What was it in our character that was different to the Americans and the British?

I know why I survived, and it wasn't like the man that made the first movie of me, said it was my wife and child. I said no, it was my commando training - I was a commando in the Second World War and I'll never forget that training. But that's how I stayed alive because I was taught how to look after my body. But see, a lot of those Americans, when the Korean War started they were like everybody else, they never had an army either, and they sent those troops from Japan, and they were clerks and all this. One bloke we had with us was - he was Polish descent, they called him 'Polack' by that because he was Polish descent - and he'd been in Japan, God knows how many years - he was married to a Japanese and he spoke perfect Japanese, and we used him as our interpreter. He'd never fired a rifle - he had never fired a rifle - he was a clerk. When he got taken prisoner he was lost - well, we were all lost, even the Chinese were lost - I think they were wandering all over North Korea before they found where they were going to take us - but

there were a lot of troops that hadn't seen anything at all. They just threw them in and sent them to Korea, little wonder that the Chows and the Koreans ran over them, because the old word, 'bug out', you said that, they are all gone. You wonder what happens, you wonder, and Australians are just brought up different to that. See, I think if you've got a bunch of American soldiers and train them - and we trained them - well, I'm not saying they are not good soldiers, but they would be just as good a soldier as any Australian. It's just the way you are trained. But that dropping your arms and running bit, I can't handle that.

> In the camp though, did the Australians work together as a cohesive group for the good of the group, whereas perhaps some of the other nations, they just were more individuals?

No, we didn't really have to work together because we were together anyhow - Aussies always stick together.

> That's what I mean.

We all stick together, but we didn't have to tell one another what to do. The only time I ever seen that was when they'd call you up to 'headquarters' - and I was always the first on the list - and they'd read all this propaganda to you and they'd want you to sign it. I said, 'Oh, can't sign that. When I get home they'll shoot me.' As the general said - I got called up before these - I didn't know what they were, I knew they were pretty high-ranking Chinese officers - and I got called up and they were sitting in this tent - there was about six of them, big, fuzzy hats on.

And, of course - at this stage we'd been issued with light clothing; they issued us with light pants and coat, and a little cap - and, of course, when I went inside I took my cap off and I sat down. They had an interpreter there and they questioned me on a lot of different things - on me behaviour in the camp and about refusing to sign propaganda peace talks, and all this. And I said, 'If I sign that I could be shot when I get home', and this general, through the interpreter, said, 'You could be shot here.' (laughs) They said, 'And you didn't even salute us.' And I said to the interpreter, 'I didn't have a hat on. I'm an Australian, we are trained on British lines, we don't salute without a hat' - the Yanks salute with bare head. I said to him - because I was surprised when he said, 'You didn't salute us' because I had my hat in my hand - my little cap in me hand. The interpreter, when he told them, they sort of copped it fair and sweet because they must have known about - well, they only had to go to Hong Kong to see British troops any time, to know that we were trained on the British lines. When they finally said - because as I learned a bit of Cantonese, and they didn't know where I came from, I said, '[Wadi] ...' - which means 'me' in Cantonese - '... [Ortaleah]' - which means 'Australia'. And they said, '[Simma]' - which means 'I beg your pardon' - and I said, 'Wadi Ortaleah' - 'Oh, oh, needi' - which means 'you' - '... Italia' - and of course 'mayo' is - I said, 'Mayo, mayo, ortaleah' - called me an Italian, and I'm not an Italian, I'm an Australian. But they just said, 'Abudzador, abudzador' - which means, 'I don't understand' - but they didn't know where Australia was. Like when we were first taken - because we had moustaches - got an Army moustache, you know, curled up at the ends - and all these kids were coming down - and they were only kids in the army, they'd never seen a white man - they'd never seen a white man. They'd come along and pull your moustache - because they don't have hair on their face - they'd come along and pull your moustache and all this, and oh, carry on, yeah. They'd all line up looking at you in the shed like you were at the zoo like, you know, because they'd never seen a white man. They defend the area that's being attacked, that's where they defend it from - and they've got a lot of people to defend it with.

When you were told, on the parade, the war had ended, what was the sequence of events from there until you were released, and how were you released?

Well, they just sent us back to where our companies, as they called them, were, and you just would wait until your name was called. And they'd just call up - they called up on the first batch - well, the first instance was a 'Little Switch', sick and wounded. We had a Dutchman who was a collaborator - he come out of the Dutch Army, he was a Dutch medic - sergeant medic - and he was kept down in the village too, he didn't come into the camp. I'd known him from 'The Bean Camp', I'd known him for a long while. He was a sad man - a big bloke. He came to me and he said, 'I'm going home.' And I said, 'You're going home?' He said, 'Yes, sick and wounded.' I said, 'Where are you sick?' 'Oh,' he said, 'my eyes, my eyes.' I said, 'You're joking.' They let him go on 'Little Switch' - sick and wounded, because they were frightened (of) what might happen to the collaborators. They let him out early. But as Van Fleet said, 'You've given us all your collaborators, now give us your sick and wounded.' No, blokes (who) came out with us had been wounded for three years - as I said, for three years.

And how did they move you from that camp?

They put us in a truck and they took us to the train line somewhere - I can't think where - and it wasn't a great distance away, possibly a day or two, and put us on a train - because we came back down through Camp 1.

There was a fellow that I had made friends with in Camp 5, his name was Wesley Little, and he was an American Indian, and we became friends - and they got the wrong bloke, they grabbed him and sent him to Camp 1 because they'd made a labour camp out of Camp 1, and I reckon they got the wrong bloke. They went to send me back there and they got him and sent him back there. But all they did was made them work in the mountains, carting wood and stuff like that, you know. But as I came out, that's the last time I saw him. The road went right past the huts and he was standing out there. I was in the back of this truck and I just happened to see him, sang out to him and waved, and that was the last time I saw him.

We went to the States in '98 and I struck an American who said he was in Camp 5. Tom didn't know him but said he was a prisoner of war - he had a shirt on like an American flag- but after I met him I only had a few words to say and he had to go, he had to catch his transport. So I don't know whether he was a prisoner of war or not, but he made out to the Yanks - his own people - he was a prisoner of war.

What did the Chinese tell you when they were releasing you, that they'd won the war or anything like that?

No, no, didn't tell us anything. When we got to Panmunjom - or I assume it was Panmunjom - they had these tents with wooden platform beds in them. They put us in those, and it was only overnight because the next day they put us on trucks and they brought us down - well, it must have been before Panmunjom because they brought us down into Panmunjom to release us. They had Chinese guards, but I'd never seen those Chinese before. We didn't say anything because we didn't know if they could speak English or not, so we didn't want to say anything against the People, as they call themselves because they thought they might have whipped us back. So Gwyther and I kept our mouths shut until we got off the trucks. I saw an Australian officer there I'd known in 'Occupation', he was still in the Army, and he was there to welcome us home. Then we came through Freedom Village which, I think, might be on that tape I gave you.

They had a big sign up 'Freedom Village'. I was shaking that much the Yanks - as you came through the Yanks handed you a packet of cigarettes and a box of matches, or something, and I was shaking so much I could hardly hold them. But oh, that was a relief to get past them.

When I was in New York I was given an American flag that had flown over the White House, especially for presentation to me. In the car I've got a copy of the scroll - I've had that box hanging on the wall in my lounge room. It's something the Yanks said, like, this is what you did, sort of thing.

What was the reception the Australian forces gave you?

When? (laughs) I'm still waiting to be welcomed home.

So what actually happened after you came out of the American system?

Well, they put us in a camp overnight, I think, and flew us to Japan the next day - and we went to Hiro. See, Buck and Parker, even though they only got out three days before Gwyther and I, I asked them to stay back so we could go home together - which they did, but they were getting a bit toey too because we were under interrogation from our side when we came out.

That's what I wanted to ask you about ...

Oh, yeah.

... whether you'd been debriefed or whatever they wanted to call it?

Oh, yeah - whatever you want to call it - they'd take you in and, I suppose, it took the best part of maybe two days - because you were segregated from everybody else - and they made sure you were clean before they let you go amongst the others like, you know. But oh, yeah, our Intelligence ...

Was that done by Australians or Americans?

No, Australians, yeah. I finally got a clearance when I got home, years after, from a mate of mine who was in - what do you call it? - under-cover mob.

ASIO?

Yeah. He said, 'You are right, you've got a clearance' - because everything went to ASIO too, like, to make sure that the records all went there. Don Buck tried to get a job at the Woomera Rocket Range and they wouldn't employ him, he wasn't allowed to have a - I don't suppose any of us were - have a job where any defence, or anything like that, because he had been a prisoner of the communists. I mean, that was a bit of a blow, particularly to him. They finished up on the rice fields in Darwin growing rice.

So when you were interrogated they asked you what sort of questions?

Oh, I can't remember now, but mainly they asked you how you were treated by them and what they did when they interrogated you, and all this thing. I don't know whether you know, but when an enemy interrogates you they all try to intimidate you in some way or other, whether it's

a Luger on the table, or an open knife, or something like that. It's always there, theirs, like, and they make sure you can see it there when they are interrogating you on their side. But they just asked us things like that, what they did when they interrogated you, and did they display any arms, or anything like that, you know. It was just a general conversation sort of thing.

Was that taken down? Was there a script?

Everything is taken down, yeah. The only thing that wasn't taken down was the article, they wouldn't take it, they didn't want to know about it. But everything was typed down, yeah. Well, I mean, that's how, I suppose, it got to ASIO.

How did you get back to Australia?

Flew - they used to have aeroplanes with propellers in those days. We landed at Labuan and I went to the war cemetery there because I went and saw some of the guys that was killed out of my unit, took photos of their headstones and brass plaques. I went back there in - I went back to Borneo in - my wife and I, just us - in ... oh, '99, I think. We did a trip back to Labuan.

I've got a commando mate that did a return trip after fifty years, with a group, to British North Borneo - what used to be British North Borneo - the wife and I were in Darwin, we didn't know anything about it. It was a celebration of the fiftieth year of the cessation of hostilities. So when we came home and I saw Phil - Phil Knight's his name - he was in my unit, he was a bandsman in my unit, but he was in Intelligence - and he said, 'Oh, yeah, I did a trip back.' Well, he gave me the name of a Chinese fellow who was born on Labuan, and he knew all about the war; even though he was born two years after the Second World War ended, he knew all about the war because his mother and father had taught him. Anyhow, he had aerial shots of everything, all the actions we'd been in. And Phil said, 'This is his card.'

Well, when we landed, the big hotel we went to, he's at the airport - with a piece of paper with your name on it, like they all have - but as soon as he saw me, six foot three with an Army slouch hat on, didn't need my name because I was the only Aussie there. So he claimed me and he put our gear in the back of this little Kombi. And, of course, Phil said, 'Now, when you go there you've got to look up [Willy Tio], this bloke is marvellous, he's unbelievable, he'll take you anywhere, do anything for you.' Oh, yeah. So we put our gear in the truck and he said, 'I am your guide, and my name is Willy Tio.' So we've met Willy Tio.

Well, for four days - we were only on the island six days because it was only a ten-day trip or something - and he took us all over the island, took us up to what they called The Pocket where everyone was getting killed. I went to the cemetery and put poppies on all the ... on the headstones of the blokes that had been killed out of my mob.

And so you flew from Labuan back to Sydney?

To Darwin.

To Darwin?

Yeah. And the plane pulls up, and over the PA comes Private Hollis: 'Report up front, Customs wants you'. I thought, I've got nothing; what's going on? So I go up the front and who's there? Ted Light; Teddy Light was in Customs and at the time he was the Director of Customs in

Darwin. I've got a photo in the car of us all sitting together in the Qantas hut, having a drink - you can't see Buck because he's just out of the shot, but there's Gwyther, and Parker. We were welcomed home by the Minister for the Territories, or something, the old bloke they tried to shoot - what was his name? - Calwell. He'd been to a cocktail party, his wife was up the back, and he stood in front of me and spat all over me - I don't know a word he said - and just shook hands and that was that, that was our welcome home.

And when you got to Sydney?

Yeah. And we had ... can't think who the general was now - there was two generals - this guy had been in Japan - this Australian 34 Brigade, in 'Occupation' - he was there - I can't think of his name.

Not Campbell?

Oh, way back, they'd all be dead now. Anyhow, I got off the plane. I was so surprised the amount of people there to welcome us home, who we didn't know, just Australians - I don't think I even saluted the general - got an unbelievable shock. I've got the tape at home - you'd have that tape here.

Yeah.

You'd have that tape here. And that's where I said, on that tape - because where I took me son, or picked me son up - who was three and a bit, or whatever - as I turned around, like that, that's where that tape ended and that was me, yeah. I've got that on tape somewhere at home because that came out of Cinesound.

How did the Army administration treat you? You'd been a prisoner of war for nearly three years, you'd only signed on for two.

Didn't even come into it - didn't even come into it.

What about your pay and all that sort of stuff?

Oh, pay went on - pay went on - but they just paid us out and that was it.

You just walked out the door?

That was it. We came home; we got off the plane, we came home, we were welcomed by our relations. One of the things they did I thought wasn't bloody right - I didn't feel anything at all about the girl - they brought up a girl in a Red Cross uniform and she was Chinese, to welcome us home. I thought that was a bit rich. It's all on tape, yeah, she welcomed us home. But a lot of people out there, they put us in a hire car, drove us to me mother-in-law's place in Glebe, dropped us off; that was the end of that. I stayed in the Army, I went into Concord.

That was what I was just going to say, you stayed on in the Army for a while?

Only until I was fit enough to get out.

Ah, that was the next thing I was going to ask. Did they give you a medical or anything

like that?

I finished up in Concord because I had a lot of problems with me feet, and me back, and all this jazz, you know. I've still got the same problems, they've never cured them, but now I've got arthritis in the left foot. As me doctor said, you are going to die with it because they can't do anything about it. I've had orthopaedic shoes for a lot of years. Since they've taken it away from Veteran's Affairs where the Australians used to make the shoes, I can't get these people to make me a pair of shoes to fit me. I put a piece of paper on the floor and draw around it to make a pair of shoes of it. I'll tell you, this pair I've had for eight years. You are entitled, every four years or something, new shoes. Since they've been making them outside, and they are all ethnic people that make them, can't make shoes to fit me.

When you were in Concord did the Army look after you, or anything like that, or did they just leave it to you?

It was an Army hospital then.

Oh, it was still the Army's hospital?

Yeah, yeah. We had all those nice sisters with their red capes, and when you spoke to them you stood to attention because they were lieutenants and all that. But that's changed a lot. How long has it been since you've been to Concord? - it's pretty sad out there, mate, public hospital.

When did you get out of the Army?

That's a good question; I think it was about the same time as I got out in the Second World War, about November '53 - August, September, October, November - yeah, about November '53, I think. I got out the same time in the Second World War, in '47, and about the same time from the Korean War, which added up to three years and eight months, Second World War, and three years and four months in the Korean War, so it give me seven years.

Yeah, they dropped us off and I got out of the Army, they didn't want to know you, that was it. That's why they call it the forgotten war, they completely forgot it. I've never had any contact from anybody from the Army - well, you are discharged, you are a civilian.

Did you join the police force again?

No, no, no, I joined the Fire Brigade.

Fire Brigade?

Yeah. I wasn't very well when I came home and I hung around for a while and I got a couple of jobs, or a job, and then I met an old fellow - I was working for Macquarie Stevedoring Company - and I met an old fellow, retired fire officer, and when he saw the size of me he said, 'What are you doing working down here?' I said, 'I've got to work somewhere, I haven't got a trade or anything.' He said, 'Why don't you join the Fire Brigade.' I said, 'The what?' He said, 'The Fire Brigade.' And I said, 'What's that?' (laughs) - didn't even know what the Fire Brigade was. Anyhow, he told me where to go, down to headquarters. So I went down there and I enquired about it - of course, where I was working I was doing a lot of overtime, I was getting a lot of money - and when I went down to join the Fire Brigade it was £11 a week. Well, I walked

away because I couldn't live on that. I used to give my wife £11 a week to keep house and she was working.

So I went home and I had a talk to her, and she said, 'Oh, it's up to you, whatever you want to do.' I said, 'Oh, I don't know.' She said, 'Well, give it a go and see how it goes.' So I went down and joined the Fire Brigade, the best thing I ever did - best thing I ever did. I was only in it for nearly thirteen years - I was discharged as medically unfit, but mainly from war-caused disability.

Have you been back to Korea?

Went back in '98.

What did you think when you arrived?

Well, see, I'm different to other people, I didn't go to Korea to fight for the Koreans, I went to Korea to fight against communism. When Gilligan organised this trip, and the wife wanted to go - and he rang me up, Vince rang me up - you know Vince, don't you? he's the preso (president?) of (inaudible). He said, 'Why don't you come, big fellow?' 'Oh,' I said, 'I don't think I want to go back to Korea, Vince. I don't, I saw enough of it while I was there, it as all mud and slush' - because Korea was destroyed, absolutely destroyed. Anyhow, they talked me into it, so I rang them up and said, 'Oh, I've decided to come on that trip.' No, Frank [Sash] took that - Frank Sash - Gilligan took us to America.

So we went and we had a good time. We went to Seoul and did bus trips. I couldn't believe - well, like, what are you going to say? - it was fifty years of something, or forty-five years, and they'd rebuilt the place - couldn't believe how they'd rebuilt it - well, they are still building it. And all those big expressways that you used to go through, and the buses used to pay their toll - you know what they are, don't you?

Runways?

Airstrips (laughs) - although that was pretty bright of the Yanks. Yeah, you come to this big concrete strip and you look down as far as your eye can see - jets - four jets. Yeah, that was pretty clever, I thought. Oh, yeah, it was a good experience, I suppose. The Korean people have never forgotten, they still, even today, if you meet some Korean people and say that you fought in the Korean War, they thank you.

I was over getting a gas jet for an old copper that my wife and I, we boiled our Christmas puddings for the family - last year it was eight - and I had to turn an old copper from coal gas into Portagas. I went over to get a jet to put in it and this Korean bloke - could hardly speak English - and he was standing there and he was trying to talk to the white fellow, and what he wanted; he wanted to make a barbecue. When the bloke went to get the parts I said to him, I said, 'What country are you from?' He said, 'Korea.' I said, 'Oh, I fought for your country, I was in the Korean War.' Well, he bowed, just like a Jap; he bowed and he shook my hand, and he thanked me. What's going on? He was thanking me for going to Korea and fighting for them - someone had to go, didn't they.

That might be a good place where we could end. Thank you very much, Tom, and thank you for coming along.

My pleasure.

08/02