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Identification: This is Tape Number 1 of an interview with Major General Morrison (Rtd), conducted by Colonel Chinn (Rtd), recorded on 2 October 2001 at the Australian War Memorial. The topics covered on this tape are experience in Korea as a platoon commander 3 RAR, in the headquarters of Australian Army component in Japan, and back in Korea with Headquarters 28 Brigade.

Alan, thank you very much for coming in this morning and giving us all your time with this interview. We look forward to it and it'll contribute a lot to the oral history of the Korean War.

Thank you, David.

The introduction, from your point of view, and the recording I'll now read, Major General A L Morrison AO DSO MBE (Rtd), graduated from RMC Duntroon in 1947. He served with 2 RAR in the 'Occupation' of Japan in 1948 and returned to Australia with that battalion in the same year. He served with 3 RAR in Korea in 1950-51; with Headquarters Australian Army component in Japan in 1951-52; and then in Korea again in 1952-53 as Staff Captain Headquarters 28 British Commonwealth Infantry Brigade. His subsequent career included a variety of instructional, regimental and staff postings, as well as attendance at courses in Australia and overseas. His command appointments comprised CO 9 RAR in 1967-69, including his tour of duty in Vietnam; command of 1 Task Force in Australia in 1976-77, and commandant RMC Duntroon in 1977-81. He was appointed Chief of Personnel Army in 1981. His distinguished military career was followed by the appointment of Services Member of the Repatriation Commission from 1981-1989.

We'll launch right into the topics, Alan. The first topic deals with your service background, experience, as well as training which were preparation for service with 3 RAR and the headquarters in Japan and Korea.

Thank you, David. I'm now speaking after I've returned from Japan - the 'Occupation' of Japan - to Australia, and then we were warned to go back to Japan on an individual basis to help 3 RAR expand to its proper establishment within that war.

I got back up to Japan in July of 1950 - was it July?

July was when they were committed to it.

Yes, the operation. The war had begun in June.

June, I think it had - that's right, end of June.

If not, it was the month after.

I went to Hiro - where I had been in barracks previously in the 'Occupation' of Japan - and I went back to that, and that's where we started from. I was made Platoon Commander commanding

4 Platoon in B Company of 3 RAR at that stage, where, in my earlier time in Japan, I had been with 2 RAR - 2 Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment.

It was a peculiar arrangement to get ready - reinforce and get ready - in such a very - a lot of people were needed in order to reinforce 3 RAR. It had been eaten down to, oh, I would suggest no more than half the battalion strength, and so there was a massive influx from 1 RAR in Australia and 2 RAR in Australia of young fellows like me, and young soldiers who were similar, into Japan at that time.

We knew that we were going to deploy some time in about September - or that was estimated and it turned out to be true. So for the period from July that you arrived - or maybe August - you had to then organise a battalion into a fighting, marching, and cohesively, in those one or two months that were available. That it happened was by the grace of God, good luck, and everything else, I think. They were trained soldiers and gradually you got cohesion. I was with a platoon commander 4 Platoon, B Company, of 3 RAR.

They did the training by a circular motion. For two or three days you'd do the advance - one or two days - some time later you'd do the attack, then you'd do the defence, then you'd do the withdrawal, in a round-robin episode, with umpires going around to try and spot the soldiers with the weaknesses, if possible - getting ready for needles at the same time, to go across to all those preliminary and essential items in administration that had to be done - wills - all this was superimposed, all inside that two months. So in essence it was a conglomeration of things that were being done that somehow fitted into place.

The way they did the training in Japan was to get one company to demonstrate how to advance to contact, for example, while we all sat there and watched, and then each of the three companies would then go and practise it somewhere else. And so it went on with the (inaudible), the contact sort of thing, the withdrawal, and all the rest of it. And that was it.

We got onto - I've forgotten the name of the ship - do you remember the name of the ship?

No, I can't think of the name.

I could tell you it as it comes to mind in a minute, but I've forgotten it at the moment.

We went across on 27-28 September and arrived in Korea at Pusan where the American band played the tune, 'If I knew you were coming I'd have baked a cake', and it had always played that song for everybody coming in.

We got off the boat, got onto a train which was there, and went to Taegu - T-A-E-G-U - which had been a cornerstone of the 'Pusan Box'. The enemy had advanced down as far as Taegu and it had been held there. With the arrival of the massive American

effort of troops, and the Australians and all, and the rest, the enemy were forced to withdraw and go north. By the time we got there the enemy had been gone much further north, in fact, it passed back through Seoul, the capital, and back towards where the dividing line is now between North and South Korea. And there it held.

A few days later we flew from Taegu up to Seoul - if I remember correctly - and there we got ready again to advance up the peninsula. And indeed, if I jump ahead, I mean, we went right up the peninsula, to around the corner, to not far from the Yalu River where there was the border with communist China.

> You were Platoon Commander for 4 Platoon all the way through that?

All that time.

> But the contacts occurred, or the actions occurred, on the 'Pusan Box' were, from what I understand of it, not major contacts.

None at all.

> It was really patrolling to look for guerilla forces.

Patrolling, and they'd all gone, they'd all withdrawn north, and there really was no - oh, I'm sorry. Ken Hummerston was killed, and his driver, in a Bren gun carrier; it ran over a mine. I remember correctly now - sorry, these things come back a bit slowly - and he was killed. His wife had been in the 'Occupation' of Japan, she was still there. But it was that sort of thing, but we really did have no contact on the way up. Some of us flew into the capital - and there we stayed for a week or so. It is difficult to remember just how long it is - you might know how long we stayed. And then it was decided that we would go up the western road, up and advance through into North Korea.

> What was your initial reaction to service in Korea, the operational environment? - you were getting into it once you left Seoul - but as a young platoon commander and your first experience of operations, what was your reaction to ...?

Waiting to get into it, and not being there just for that, but to make contact. There was also an edge to it, and there was also - anticipation is quite difficult, you know, you are being very careful, there was no bravado after that, but there was the waiting for what had to be done.

The travel up the road, going up towards Sinanju, and the ones at the top, we rode in jeeps, we were on tanks - generally on tanks, sometimes in troop carriers - and so it was really - and it went along the road, nothing like we'd learned before, what we should be doing - deployed - but it was up the road and we could advance quicker.

If I could stop here I'd like to open the map a little bit so as I can refresh just for a minute please.

Okay.

(break in interview)

We passed through Seoul and went further north, and I can remember, we got just over the border of the dividing line between North and South Korea, at a place called Kaesong - K-A-E-S-O-N-G - and we went and gradually we went up to Sariwon where we had a bit of an action for a start - and this is the remnants of the retreating North Korean Army, and there were shots and shells, but no-one got hurt, not that I can recall. But it allowed us to go to quite - we began to get more alert, more composed, more effective, in relation to military procedure and operations, even though at times you sat on tanks, or you sat in convoys with the trucks at the back, driven by the Americans. And gradually we progressed up the road towards Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea.

We got through Pyongyang. There were people - the population - who would give us a 'raspberry' in some form or other as we passed, but that was about all, and nothing very serious. And then you got as far as Yongju and Sukchon. I suppose it was at Sukchon, in that area, and Sinanju, where the major issues were being done. If one looks at a map of Korea at that time it is just towards the boundary of the Yalu River, which divided China from North Korea, there was resistance on that western road, as much as there was resistance on the eastern side by the American troops coming up that way.

It must have been at Sinanju or Pakchong - I really do forget - but if we can stop just for a minute I'll get that clear.

(break in interview)

The Commonwealth Division was still leading all the way up the peninsula - which was quite an honour, with the battalions.

You were part of 27 Brigade?

27 Brigade, commanded by Brigadier Coad - C-O-A-D. We were in the van when we got to a place, to a bridgehead, across the Chongchon River at Sinanju. These bridges had been blown (up) - they were big concrete bridges, but they'd been blown. One part of our battalion tried to go across a ford in that way. I was ordered to take my platoon across the Broken Bridge of the river when we got to Pakchong - the bridge was at Pakchong. It was a very big bridge, very long, but it had the best spans down so you really had to struggle up the spans, up the thing to get on top. I led my platoon up the slopes beyond the bridge and suddenly I was ambushed entirely by fire from the enemy on either side of the road. It was not very accurate - I mean, they must have been as scared as anybody else was - and so as this particular history, if I might read the thing for the purposes of the tape.

(reads:) 'I had two section, Lieutenant A L Morrison, and two sections of B Company's 4 Platoon across the river by climbing the broken span of a partially demolished, concrete, main-road bridge. When the Australians reached the west bank a group of about fifty (North) Koreans came down from high ground, on the right, with their hands raised in the air in surrender. As they neared 4 Platoon the enemy, still hidden on the high ground, opened heavy but inaccurate fire on the would-be prisoners and the Australians. A Mosquito artillery spotter aircraft reported that there were at least two enemy companies on the high ground overlooking the crossing, so Lieutenant Morrison withdrew his men back across the river with ten prisoners.'

Well, withdrawal was the wise decision. That was really my first introduction to proper fire and fighting as a young soldier in those days - and off we went and we withdrew. It was at the time when the Chinese communists were coming in, and they were starting to come down, down the western flank of - western side of the Korean peninsula - and it was for that purpose we started to fall back and had to get into some degree of control rather than the spread-out nature of the advance, up the western coast.

Did you find that the battalion's training in Japan was right on net for what you were doing?

Yes, indeed, it was.

And how ready do you think the battalion was for operations? The time some of the battalions spent in the Middle East in World War II, the battalion really only had not much more than two months.

No.

I guess the CO would have liked to have done a lot more.

Colonel Green would, he was a marvellous man, very effective CO - very effective CO. He led that and forced that into its procedures by its demonstrations, by making sure this is the way you do it, by being very exact in detail and pushing it forward. He'd had a great reputation in the Second World War as a battalion commander - and perhaps we might just delay here.

CO of 67 Battalion - that was in Japan - was Colonel Walsh, but they decided that this very well tried CO from the Second World War was much preferable, at this stage, because of the rapid nature of having to do things, and trying to get the cohesion of teams from 1, 2 and 3 RAR at that stage, all melded together - support companies and things - all melded together, and he, in fact, did that.

Bill Keys was the adjutant of the battalion at that stage, if that's any use on the tape, and he was a very, very good adjutant of the battalion.

And the whole of the impact of the Chinese coming in rather threw us a little bit and we began ... we stayed there for a

little while, but then had to withdraw because the Chinese build up to come down the western flank to protect the brotherhood of the North Koreans, that sort of deal.

> I was looking at Question 5 there, adjustment to cold weather. At this stage the weather is getting colder and you didn't have cold-weather clothing ...

Yes.

> ... and you were to encounter the real Korean winter.

It was at the start because here we were, in November at this particular time, doing that, and it was cold. The temperature in January and February got down to -50° Fahrenheit - about -25° to -30° Centigrade. We wore, in those things, boots, over boots, and wet-weather things over that. I used, certainly, clothes, underwear, clothes - thermal wear to keep warm. You had to wear three loads of gloves to keep your hands warm otherwise you'd freeze. I suppose it was -25° Centigrade in those times - and we rode on tanks, and it was absolutely ... well, everybody experienced it, even the North Koreans I would imagine, and the Chinese Communist Army. That really did slow down operations in lots of regards, David - and things were different in the summer because you'd get the blazing heat of up to 100° Fahrenheit at the same time as that.

> I guess you were wearing the pile caps - in fact, I think the Korean Memorial has a soldier in a pile cap which Colin Kahn said they were very keen to get. This chap was Australian dressed, but the pile cap was so significant of the bitter cold of Korea ...

It was.

> ... you needed it over your ears ...

Yes, you did.

> ... for warmth and so on.

And one of the great problems was hearing.

> That's right.

So there was no counterbalance to that, you had to be warm enough to be alert, and of course, there were problems, you had to keep occasionally opening up to hear in advance. It was very cold, very cold indeed.

We were pushed back after a little while because it was then - there was a move for the Chinese communists to cut us off, so we came back down the western road in the reverse way that we went up it, because the Chinese communists really did thrust down through the centre, down. There was the eastern side, and through the centre, which was mountainous, and then the western side. And we all then had to withdraw, and we withdrew by

truck, leapfrogging from defensive position to defensive position on the way back.

It was about this stage that Lieutenant Colonel Green was killed.

Oh, Colonel Green was killed at the top, just after the Battle of the Broken Bridge. He was killed with a - of course, a shell hit the tree and ricocheted. He was the only one killed - went through him and killed him.

Eric Larson - I don't know if you would know Eric Larson - but he was a platoon commander on my left, he was in a class below me at RMC, he was killed in that.

Oh, we had to do an attack - I'm sorry, I forgot to mention that, it comes back to me. They told us that there were wounded Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders on a hill where the enemy was, and they decided that we would have to attack to get them back. And B Company of the battalion - 3 RAR - had to do it. I was on the right flank - I was in the right-hand forward platoon - Eric Larson was commanding the left-hand forward platoon - and I've forgotten who was commanding the reserve platoon - Darcy Laughlin was certainly there, and so was the OC.

That was Max Thirlwell, was it?

That was Max Thirlwell. And we had to attack in the afternoon over open paddy fields - no vegetation at all, except just about that high. And it was the most eerie thing because we were told we couldn't use artillery or mortar fire - of course, our soldiers were there, they were probably captured. So we did a silent attack, on a broad daylight afternoon. We went off at two o'clock in the afternoon and we got to the top at about four o'clock - and there was no artillery fire, it was just rifle fire. It was quite eerie to find yourself attacking with no firepower. When we got there we found that the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders weren't there at all.

How did the North Koreans react to this? What was their defence like?

Fine, they shot, but I think they were more scared because we looked the more dreadfully organised one, and they scampered away very quickly when we got near to them.

So by and large the North Koreans weren't any great opposition as you'd gone forward.

Not then, no. They knew ... they were in very small parcels. They tried a guerilla attack, hence the fire fight that killed Eric Larson and wounded some of the other fellows. It wasn't substantial, and we were moving as quickly as we could to get on top of the hill so that we could drive them off.

So both your experiences at the Broken Bridge and in this attack, the North Koreans didn't handle things as well as

we would have handled them.

No, no, not at all. The question is, we didn't quite know whether they were North Koreans or Chinese.

No, that's right.

We didn't know at the time. We ventured to believe that they were North Koreans rather than Chinese because the Chinese, I don't think, had come down quite that far at that time.

When you were attacking without artillery and mortar fire supporting you, did you have fixed bayonets?

Yes.

There is an incredible psychological effect on people seeing those long bayonets on the end of the .303 rifle coming towards them.

Yes - and it was ten metres between each man.

You cover a lot of ground that way.

And we covered a lot of ground which made the attack quite impressive. I was in the forward right platoon as platoon commander. When you look back from when we got onto the objective and pushed the enemy off, it showed just how brazen the attack was really. If the enemy had had machine gun fire it would have been very difficult, but they didn't.

It was your own fire and movement, I guess, but that was about all you had.

But you couldn't do fire and movement because you had nothing (nowhere) to hide.

No, that's right.

You could lie down and let them shoot you while you were lying down. The best thing was to try and get there up the hills as quickly as possible. The most oddest attack I've ever done.

At that stage of the game, how would you look at the performance of the members of the battalion? They'd blended themselves together at this stage, they'd been in various forms of action against the North Koreans.

It was a well trained battalion very quickly. We did demonstrations, practise, and all that sort of thing, before we got to Korea. It served its purpose in a marvellous way and the CO really did weld it together in the most magnificent way. But they'd all been trained, they'd all had service - we didn't take recruits into 3 RAR at that time.

So really it was the CO's style of leading and training, combined with the good military experience of all ranks, in fact.

Of all ranks who had had it in the past was great.

It brings out that point very strongly about what you can do with good leadership and good basic ...

Basic training - trained people.

Experience even of World War II, I suppose, too.

It had got soft because of the 'Occupation' of Japan had got soft after all those things had been finished, but it rejuvenated and came back very well indeed, and people, when the reinforcements came up, they were well trained.

I suppose it was almost like - I suppose you could draw the parallel with the Western Desert with the battalions, say, 6 Division - had to work up sort of a series of operations against Italian forces, and later on how they struck the Germans. In this case you were striking North Koreans as you advanced ...

Yes.

... and this was a good break in to operations when the Chinese came through.

Very much so.

What was the reaction to the first contacts with the Chinese? Were they distinctly different from the Koreans in their aggressiveness, their abilities?

Ah, their ability was much greater in war and in the attack, and in the persistence in attack, and it was a shattering blow, and it caused us all to withdraw when they came in. And we went almost back down as far as 'The Pusan Box' before we advanced again. But, then, of course, we also had a lot of firepower. And when I did the Battle of the Broken Bridge, for example - and I should have mentioned it - we had aircraft support, the Chinese did not.

It makes a difference.

It makes a big difference.

It does, yeah.

The air force, and the Australian Air Force, were very good in this respect and they deserve a great feather in their cap for what they did.

The artillery support in the battalion initially, I think, was American; it wasn't until a bit later ...

Yes, that's true.

... that 16 Field Regiment ...

It was 155s not 105s, so there was a big bang for the buck, I suppose, if you would like to call it, but the problem was the fire support was too far out.

That's right, would have to be.

So if the Chinese got in under the cover of that there was nothing else you could do about it.

Not like 105s, or even your own mortars.

We had mortars - we had mortars - the Mortar Platoon had 3 inch mortars - they are not noted for their accuracy particularly, but they were good. All in all it worked pretty well in the thing before finally it settled down.

What were the Chinese like - what was the Chinese supporting fire like? Did they make a lot of use of artillery and mortar fire?

Yes - they made reasonable use of artillery and mortar fire. They were very much inclined to be machine-like of going forward, going forward, falling. There was no finesse about much of what they did, when they attacked they attacked as though life was a bit cheaper on their side, if I could put it that way.

That's a good coverage of that though, I think. You mentioned the death of Colonel Green - and he was replaced initially by Lieutenant Colonel Walsh, and then very shortly after that, Major Ferguson, the 2IC, was appointed to take over. Could you just describe how those changes affected 3 RAR? I realise they took place very quickly; I suppose Walsh was only commanding for about five days, I think, from what I've read of it.

Colonel Walsh was the CO of 3 RAR before the war, but the powers that be said that they really needed someone far more familiar with attacks and operations than Colonel Walsh. So they brought in Colonel Green. He was a very experienced CO - very experienced. When he was killed, not long afterwards, Colonel Walsh came back, but was only there for five days - he was relieved.

Major Ferguson was promoted to ...

Lieutenant Colonel, commanding officer.

It was really too quick to have that much effect on the battalion's morale, I suppose. Loss of Green would have shattered people a bit.

The loss of Green did.

Great leader.

But there were some very good soldiers. For example, on one of

the great withdrawals there was a fellow called Benny O'Dowd. Benny O'Dowd, at one stage, withdrew the whole battalion from a very difficult position - and he was OC A Company - but he was a very experienced soldier. The battalion did very well, but in a rather chaotic way in that regard. And when the things changed in June of 1951 then they came in with getting more deliberate commanding officers. So it ran well for the time, by the time June came it was getting back in order, and of course, it was getting nearer then towards the static case rather than the mobile areas.

> General Hassett then took over in about June - he took over from Ferguson, didn't he?

He took over from Ferguson in June of 1951.

> I gather that Ferguson was very highly regarded by the soldiers, but was a tough man, very blunt. I've heard various anecdotes of his ... he rubbed some platoon commander up later - a general - rubbed him up the wrong way by making some remark about 'You were lucky to get away with that' or something. It was meant in good spirit, of course, but a good caution to a young subaltern too, I suppose.

Yes, yes, yes.

> Quite a character.

He was a character - he was nowhere in the class of Green, Green was outstanding. I hate to say that, I'm not trying to put him down, but if you were asking for a view, one way or the other. And the battalion was well served because they had some tried and true people like Benny O'Dowd, Max Thirlwell, and all the rest of it. People would have come up from ... joined the battalion, and it melded well together in my view, despite the very small time it had to offer that before they went into action.

> Question 11: What sort of circumstances of the operational environment put most strain on the battalion? Was it the weather - and I guess a combination of these - but whether enemy harassing fire, patrolling, and the casualties? Did these constitute the greatest strain from the operational point of view?

Yes, but there was one other, there was the individual relief from 3 RAR.

> That's right.

That meant that you were never stationary, whereas 2 RAR and 3 RAR, when they came down - sorry, 1 RAR and 2 RAR, I beg your pardon - they came up as cohesive battalions and went back as cohesive battalions, whereas 3 RAR had this continual rolling changeover - which is quite disconcerting because fellows say, 'Oh, gosh, you should have been here yesterday', or, 'You poor old fellow, you've got eleven months to go and I'm going home

tomorrow', all those sort of things that can disturb some people - not very often. There was nothing you could do about it, you couldn't get a fourth battalion in that regard. They learnt their lesson in Vietnam, of course, much later, but it was quite concerning.

> Brigadier Jim Shelton mentioned the turnover of people after the twelve months, or the period that they'd done in Korea, then the Battle of Kapyong, the anniversary of that, meant that a number of other people were going out who'd been reinforcements to replace the casualties. That was one other event too which, I think, was quite significant in terms of replacements coming through as a bulk.

In fact, I think 3 RAR did very well to remain as stable as it did in that regard. It is a very difficult time for a CO to try and run on a rolling stone sort of rest-and-relief type program.

> How important was patrolling, from your point of view, to 27 Brigade, and the offensive and defensive actions that you were involved in? Was there much patrolling done in both the advance ...?

We did patrol when we were up in North Korea, but you are now coming back down to South Korea.

> As you went to the South as well.

Down to South Korea and we came into the stabilised positions on the lines that existed there with attacks coming in, and the patrolling battle became, after the first year of the war, and things settled down, it was a patrolling battle in the platoon commanders' war - and occasional company commanders' war - in a very deep and thoughtful way. It took a lot out of a lot of the platoon commanders, and the soldiers. Sometimes there were company operations, and sometimes it was repulsing the enemy. So it expressed everything that you could do within military contact, short of having to put up with heavy bombs or any of the old things like that.

Yes it did, yes, R&R was important - rest and relief to break, coming back to Japan for five days for rest and recuperation which, I believe, was very essential. And there was a spirit of camaraderie within the battalions that allowed what you do on rest and relief, and when you go back, and it joins in with ... that spirit then goes through. In fact, difficult in all the battalions; 3 RAR was the most difficult because you also had not only rest and relief - rest periods back in Japan - you had people coming and going all the time in the reinforcement area. It is not the ideal way to do it.

> But the problems of the evacuation of our own casualties and dead from contacts fought around positions, was that much of a problem? - particularly in the extremes of winter there would always be a concern for getting our wounded out, and the dead as well. Do you recall that

being a great problem?

Not really, not while I was there, not that as I understood it. I mean, some were a bit difficult, some even got killed on the valley floor when the line became static - when the whole front became static and there were high hills, and paddy fields, and high hills, and you were patrolling in all those. Yes, there were difficulties, but it they always brought back the bodies and the wounded - there might have been one or two. Prisoners of war, of course, were caught - some of our fellows went into the prisoner of war camps - but they were very particular to bring back the casualties. If you don't do that the morale of the soldiers drops enormously, and, David, it would be absolutely dreadful.

I believe the Chinese were quite gallant, especially in the more static positions where they saw us, if we waved stretchers or gave some indication that we wanted to recover casualties, they wouldn't fire, they would allow stretcher parties to in fact bring the body, or the casualty, in. Once they got inside the wire they would open up again, but they were quite understanding of that, and I guess we did the same thing for them.

I suppose so, but I've not heard about that.

I've never heard about the Australians, but I've heard several times about the Chinese doing this.

I hadn't heard that, no, quite frankly. That was at a stage when I came back into the ... in some months, a year or so later in that. You are right, they did.

I think at Maryang San, conversely, the Chinese, a vast number of bodies - when they'd got onto the top of Maryang San - somebody mentioned this that there was a sort of unspoken truce that they allowed the Chinese to come and recover their own bodies quite close to our positions.

You know, I've never asked that question. I'm sorry, I don't know the answer.

Not to worry - it's part of this kaleidoscope of ...

Because I was then back in brigade headquarters ...

That's right.

... as the staff captain. Yes, I suppose they did. Of course, if you got a body, you didn't want a body lying out in front going getting rotten and all the rest of it, those sorts of things, so there must have been some arrangement, but how they did it, I'm afraid you'd have to ask somebody else.

How about your own evacuation though? I understand you were evacuated when you left 3 RAR, it was an evacuation due to an eye condition.

Eye condition, yes. Something happened in my eye that put me on the hospital ship for seven weeks. Yes, and then from that I went back to Japan. In that I was on the *USS Repose*. They evacuated me as though I was an American in that regard. You went to an American doctor because the RMO of the battalion would send you back and say, 'Go back behind and get someone to have a look at that', and the young fellow has a look at that and says, 'Oh, gosh, I'm not going to touch that', and so you went back along the American chain. And the American chain was very good, there is no question about that. There was a lot of people got lost in the American chain and it took some time to get them back in that regard because it depended, at that time, on which way they took you. I happened to go onto the *USS Repose* which was fortuitous for me at that time because the US Navy hospital ship was equipped for everything, including things to look after eyes - my right eye which had gone bung.

But through the MASHes, and the MASH - which wasn't quite like the television program - they were very good also - very good. They were under strain a lot of the time as they evacuated. Of course, when things stabilised down it became routine - once it got on to the 38th parallel things stabilised and it was just the normal - if you were shot you came back under your resources.

> Did you see much of the other battalions of the brigade in this time, you time with 3 RAR, to make any comparison between the status or abilities of those other battalions - the British battalions - although you had the Canadian battalion with you too, didn't you?

No, that was 25 Brigade - we were with 28 Brigade. When we came back from the withdrawal - just let me think - the Royal Fusiliers - not the Royal Fusiliers - Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, and the ... Can you stop for a minute please.

(break in interview)

... but not all that crash hot, but the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were, and the ...

> Were the Gloucesters part of the brigade?

The Gloucesters were part of 29 Brigade.

> The King's Own Scottish Borderers didn't come in till later when Maryang San was on, I think.

No, they didn't. I'll just see if I've got something that will help me a bit more than this - a lot of people - it's just so silly ...

When we got 1, 2 and 3 Battalions - when we got two battalions - and the British battalion, didn't we? - wasn't that right?

> In fact, at one stage 28 Brigade had four battalions, two Australian, and there were two British.

And two British, yes, there were.

It was a square brigade, it was a bit unusual.

It was, it was indeed, and they are the ones that I'm after. I know there had been the Royal Fusiliers, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, the ...

Nick Carter - do you know Carter? - Nick Carter, he lives here, he was a ...

Wasn't Durham, was it?

Durham Light Infantry - Peter Jeffries - Durham Light Infantry was one of ours, you are quite right, that's the one.

I think Mike Casey was serving, he served in the DLI at the same time with the other battalions.

The Durham Light Infantry and there was also ... Peter Jeffries was his name, he was the CO of the Durham Light Infantry - and the Royal Fusiliers, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders - these are the battalions that were once connected with 27/28 Brigade - certainly the original ones - the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were 27 Brigade, and then 28 Brigade came in and we became part of 28 Brigade. And it's just not here ... sorry old fellow.

Not to worry.

Got another question though: Were there any events ...

You ought to start him up again.

Better start him up, yeah.

The other topic was, Were there any events which caused amusement or light relief in 3 RAR during your tour of duty?

I looked at that and I couldn't think of anything terribly funny - much to the success of that. There was a lot of funny incidents when the people were back on R&R ...

I can imagine.

... in that way, but I can't recollect any funny incidents that occurred. I came back onto the brigade headquarters - of course, that was on my second tour.

That's right.

That's because Tom Daly nailed me. I was the Staff Captain (Military Secretary) (at Headquarters Australian Army Component, Japan) and I went in and saw Tom Daly[1] when he came

[1] Brigadier T J Daly, Commander 28th British Commonwealth Brigade, 1952-1953.

up to see my own brigadier, and I said, 'Here's a signal.' Of course, John - the fellow designed to be the staff captain of the brigade - John Andrew - living here in town - had to go home. He was recalled home and so I said, 'Captain Andrew has to go home, sir.' My brigadier said, 'I suppose you want a replacement, Tom', and he said, 'What about Alby?' I said, 'Sir, I'd like to go back, but I would prefer to go back into the battalion.' And he fixed me with that glare and he said, 'You learn much more on my headquarters', and I didn't have the stomach to change it over.

Better not argue with him.

No, no, no - and the answer was, that was the truth.

That was it, yeah.

That was the truth. But I can't remember anything. There were within the battalions, but not ... it wasn't when I was with the battalion because it was pretty serious, but later on there were lots of goings on within those battalions that were very amusing, but not ones that I could recollect.

What about the events, and perhaps administrative actions, which had the most significant effects on the raising or lowering of morale within 3 RAR? I suppose one of those you've already addressed in the sense of the rotation of personnel ...

Rotation of personnel.

... rotation through R&R or replacement, and so on.

David, that would have been the only one, I think; I don't think anyone got upset about those things. You got upset about loss of life and wounds, and things of that nature, they were in the natural order of things. I can't imagine anything, I have no recollection at all of things disturbing people to almost the point of exasperation.

I suppose, in a sense, you were so well administered that the administration was probably a reflection of all the experience our fellows had had in World War II ...

Yes, that's absolutely true.

... what was important from the soldiers' point of view, and that type of thing.

And the fellows that had volunteered to come in and go to war, the fellows who wanted to go to war, they weren't about to complain about anything in that regard, they were there to do that. The soldiers were remarkably well trained, even the younger ones were, and the older ones led the younger ones, and it was just one of those things that made it very standard. That's 3 RAR.

If you look at 1 and 2 RAR, when they were coming through and

doing those sorts of things, they probably had some, but again, everybody was keen to go in because no-one went to Korea without having signed forms that he was prepared to go.

Volunteering.

You had to volunteer. I probably had to volunteer twice or three times to make sure your right, and there really was no change. And so with that background, and the people all wanting to be there, it meant that the battalion remained very stable all the way.

Wonderful set-up.

The last question on your time in 3 RAR was to ask you, can you think of anyone who probably had the most influence on you during your tour of duty with the battalion? Was it your batman, you CO, your company commander?

Certainly Green.

Green, was it?

Certainly Green. Certainly, when I was with the battalion, I was impressed with - Max Thirlwell was a very quiet fellow, nothing glamorous about him, but he was steady as a rock.

That's right.

I think Benny O'Dowd certainly was very impressive, very impressive - funny chap, Benny.

I'm interviewing him on Friday, in fact.

But a marvellous soldier - marvellous soldier.

I saw part of his interview on tape - his story of his time of enlistment, I think, with the 2/11th and through the war in the South-West Pacific, and so on - a very impressive character - and he was also, I think, the SI Battle Wing at Canungra when 2 RAR cadre officers, and NCOs, and I, were going through, before we took the companies through.

That's right.

He was a great influence, just the right man at that place - and combined with George Wharfe, you couldn't get a better combination.

George Wharfe was a bit severe, but Benny O'Dowd, on the practical level, was just a thorough soldier, a very fine person. We worked together in Headquarters Aust Army Component - Benny and I were both staff captains. I went back to Korea and Benny went home later on.

To return to that question then, dealing with your

experiences as Staff Captain, the Australian Army Component - that was Headquarters BCFK (British Commonwealth Forces Korea)?

In Hiro - no, no, we were Australian Army Component, we went straight back to Australia, we did not go anywhere near BCFK, that was the British.

So could you talk about your time as Staff Captain in the Australian Army Component?

It was a headquarters which had a brigadier, a major and two captains - Ian Campbell was the brigadier there, the major was - can't remember, sorry. Benny O'Dowd was one - Algy Clarke came in and replaced Benny O'Dowd. Here it comes again with names - Jim Hughes was also staff captain with me at one stage. Jim replaced me.

Did he?

Jim replaced me, and our communications were generally - mostly - directly to Australia. He implied the reinforcement side, he implied the officers' side, the reports and all those other sorts of things - the administration of the Australians - and we were not subject to the British Commonwealth Occupation Force ...

BCFK.

BCFK at all. But we would have a relationship to the general - the commander of the whole force - General ...

Bridgeford[2], was it?

Yes, Bridgeford was one, but before that was 'Red Robbie'[3].

That's right, 'Robbie'. That would have been a good experience, being to the battalion as a platoon commander, then getting into a staff captain's responsibility.

Yes.

A good experience to see what assistance you could give as a staff officer.

That's right, and that was marvellous. And then from there I went back to Korea again with Tom Daly.

That was after your replacement, and Tom Daly said you are

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[2] Lieutenant General Sir William Bridgeford, Commander-in-Chief British Commonwealth Forces Korea (BCFK) 1951-1953.

[3] Lieutenant General Sir Horace Robertson, Commander-in-Chief British Commonwealth Occupation Forces (BCOF) Japan 1946-1951.

the man for it.

He said, 'What about Alby?' and I said, 'I want to go to the battalion', and he said, 'You'll learn more', and I wasn't going to say anything about that. And Tom Daly and I have been good friends ever since. It really was good, I saw everything, so I saw it at battalion level and brigade level. And he was masterful, he was a marvellous commander of 28 Brigade, absolutely.

You mentioned that one of the characteristics of 28 Brigade Headquarters was that it had to have almost national components to look after the - at least the two - the British and Australian component ...

Yes.

... in terms of administration. Did that increase the size of the headquarters?

Yes, it did, and gave us two staff captains. For example - on the minor level - there was Rex King-Clarke was the DQ - DAA and QMG[4] - and then Jimmy Boone was the Staff Captain Brit, and I was the Staff Captain Aust, and it was in that framework that we ran the headquarters in Korea, on the administrative side; and it was great fun - it was great fun. I learnt an enormous amount about what you had to do in those times. Old Rex King-Clarke was one of those very delightful men who knew a lot and was very gentle, but he could get what he wanted very easily. Jimmy Boone was extraordinarily efficient.

And the brigade had quite a mix of people. As well as Australians and British, you had the New Zealand Artillery Regiment and the Indian Field Ambulance as well.

Indian Field Ambulance - all the ones that didn't come out in any cohesive form. And that was very interesting, going around the Indian Field Ambulance and down into all the places that you deal with in the administrative side, et cetera. So it was grand.

A great experience.

It really was, David - and it was great experience for me.

I'm sorry I can't tell you too much about all those things - well, I can, but, you know, it was just there, it was just working well, there was never any arguments. Even when the general used to come up - I used to talk to him often in the mess because he liked coming up to our brigade where Tom Daly was - and then after Tom Daly came General ...

Wilton?

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[4] Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General (DAA & QMG), the staff officer rank major responsible for personnel and logistic staff rations.

Hughes ... General ... Sorry, stop a minute.

(break in interview)

General Wilton - Brigadier Wilton[5]. And he - Wilton - used to say to me, 'Come on, we'll go and do a reconnaissance' - 'Where are we going?' - he said, 'You've got to learn' - and so there was this quiet man - they all called him 'Happy Jack' because he didn't say anything.

That's right.

And there he said, 'Come on with me, Come on with me, Alby, we'll go and do that.' And then he and I would talk about things. And Tom Daly had ... and so I had a charmed life.

You got a year in the posting?

No, because I was now coming towards the third year in the area I had nine months. So I went in 1950 - let me think - I went there in August '50 and came home in July '53, so it was about ten months.

Great experience.

Expanding - tremendous.

Apart from the operational experience in the battalion, it was on the two headquarters.

Yes, in there and all the other headquarters - base and support - all that sort of thing. It was just magical, David, magical.

You saw the great range of activities from the base area through the operational brigade headquarters to the battalion.

Yes, it is.

A great mix.

And having served in the battalion when I was there, and having my initiation for fire and all the rest of those things, doing those sort of things.

I was going to ask you - and I think you could say these things ran extremely well, so there were no problems - but looking at the medical facilities and the nature of illnesses, I guess frostbite was critical in terms of winter.

Yes, very.

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[5] Brigadier J G N Wilton, Commander 28th British Commonwealth Brigade 1953.

Obviously gunshot wounds, shrapnel wounds, all those types of things.

Yes.

But was there anything else that was of great significance in casualties?

No, I think they were generally fit - I can't remember any idea of infectious diseases, I can't think of anything that happened in that regard.

Was summer bad for rashes or sunburn?

Rashes, sunburn, they were all that sort of thing - burns and things like that. There were the things that would normally happen in the framework - we'd kill, wounded, things associated with that - it was the normal things that would go on. And the Indian Field Ambulance was commanded by - the adjutant was Ranjurar, and there was a colonel whose name I can't think of - marvellous men, absolutely devoted to 28 Brigade, and really they were part and parcel of all that.

I gather General Daly, as the brigade commander, once was concerned that they were too far forward. I think the Indian Field Ambulance commander was concerned about being too far back, he couldn't do the job as well as he wanted to. I think our General Daly said he was quite happy to accept, if the Field Ambulance commander wanted to be far enough forward like that it was (A) to be part of the action and (B) to be able to deal with the casualties.

And deal with the casualties and patch them up to send them back on the way. No, you see, they were marvellous, and I used to go down and have tea with them. Well, it's like anything you do in those sorts of things, you go down and have a visit and go down and see if they are alright.

That's right, good for morale.

And they were right - and Major Chatterjee, someone like that - beautiful, they were marvellous people. But, in fact, everything we had there was harmonious. I can't remember any real frictions, except in the early parts with the sacking of Colonel Walsh and that sort of thing, but that was the difficult time. But otherwise there was a friendliness and cohesion, and a thorough professional way of running an operation, which one wouldn't have expected because it was drawn up in such an *ad hoc* style of trying to take everything that's there, and anything that's coming, in that way and suddenly find the cohesion it worked with was out of this world in every way.

It gives you a good feeling to see it working like that, that's the way it should work, and in training in peacetime you can't really believe that things can work that way.

No. Well, the New Zealanders were good - very good - in the Vietnam War I had a New Zealand battery; they were very parsimonious with firing weapons because they were paying, but at this other stage we were paying so it was a marked difference between the two - but you needn't necessarily put that in the script of the tape. Yeah, I had a good time.

Can you think of what would be your most testing or trying time you had as a platoon commander? I mean, the Broken Bridge was one, but what was one time that sticks in your memory as being the toughest or most critical time as a platoon commander?

I think all that advance and the scraps we got into. For example, the Broken Bridge, the paddy fields, all the rest of those things; trying to look after - going out on patrols, all in foreign country, all with the possibility of - not being scared necessarily of the North Koreans, but when the threat of the Chinese communists coming through, down to protect their brotherhood in the south. There were some things alert, the withdrawal was quite harassing in ways because I don't like withdrawals very much. But we got out of that easily enough as we came back down south. There were some heavy incidents with the firing, but nothing very much because the time we were coming back down we were in the very cold, the start of the very cold, and coming south, whereas the battles were more on in the summers, of June-July - May-June-July.

The hills - have you been to Korea?

No, I haven't, no.

The hills are very tall, very high, and they are very hard to get up - and the porterage and all the rest of it - the protection of those hills in the winter time, sitting on the top.

I suppose the wind-chill factor too.

The wind-chill factor. But you had your platoon - we had our company. No, nothing more than that - I couldn't say anything more than that - it was part of the cohesive whole.

As you time as a staff officer, what were the most testing times? Was there any particular time a testing time in Korea as a staff officer?

No.

It was routine and teamwork took things through?

Things came forward automatically, things were available automatically, ask and you did receive in the vast majority of things - do and it did happen - there was no griping about anything, no complaints about anything. One saw the spirit of the soldiers and the officers in the line, when they were doing this excessive patrolling when it became a patrolling war after the first twelve months; it became a patrolling war for the

next two years with some cut and thrust.

The thing that did give me great concern was whether the platoon commanders were getting worn out because the platoon commanders were going out. Now, they certainly got some great experience, but it was a very testing time for them - commanding their soldiers out on patrol. Of course, if you didn't patrol you were mad, you had to be protecting. I thought the platoon commanders - it became a great platoon commanders'/platoon sergeants' war in the issues, and I think great credit to those people who served as platoon commanders - at that stage, it wasn't in my time, but when the line stabilised and it was winning the patrolling battle.

> There seemed to be quite a noticeable number of more Military Crosses awarded in a year of duty than there would have been, say, in Vietnam - not in Vietnam, there was a different ration system, I suppose, in Vietnam. Just reading through the official history, some of the fellows I know personally - apart from yourself - but so many Military Crosses seemed to be awarded to platoon commanders.

My word - and some of them had the most enormous battles with the patrols from the enemy, trying to control the land between. You had to repel them. If you didn't patrol they would be up on your wire, and so it was a real battle of the no-man's-land there, and it was extraordinarily extensive, and it was extraordinarily long, and I think great credit goes to any of those patrol commanders - generally platoon commanders. Sometimes they did company patrols and that sort of deal - sweeping and doing that sort of thing. It was dealing with mines and location of minefields, the night was alive with it. It was an extraordinarily difficult war. I have great admiration for the patrol commanders of those times - the young lieutenants who were coming up out of the military college, doing their training and going down that way. It was a testing time for them and I thought they carried it out magnificently.

In our day, when I was there, we were on the move and it was just not the same as having battles like - you had battles in which ground was lost or ground was won, but that patrolling was very demanding.

> Constant demand. I gather - General Daly spoke about this - I think in 28 Brigade he was not very happy about taking over a sector which had been held by the Canadian brigade because the Canadians didn't patrol apparently as much as we did. So when 28 Brigade got into the line where the Canadians had been there was always a patrol battle to get control again ...

We did.

> ... because the Canadians hadn't patrolled extensively.

I can see it that way - the answer to that is absolutely so, they were not as aggressive, and they were not as good as us at

patrolling. And winning back the patrol, you had to win back no-man's-land, and you controlled no-man's-land, as the Chinese, the communists had done - tried to do. It really was a patrolling battle for the last eighteen months, two years.

As staff captain you would have seen the effects of that.

Yes, I'd seen the effects, but I didn't have to do it ...

No, that's right.

... which was the sad part. The battalions did it - and relief, they sometimes went out on company patrol, or 2IC took them out when the platoon commanders (inaudible). It really was a platoon commanders' war and I think the platoon commanders of that era deserve great credit.

They did.

When you've got fellows like Charlie Yacopetti who was captured, these sorts of deals - the other ones who were captured. I think great kudos and great honour should go to them.

Are there any other recollections, of interest or observations you'd like to offer, to round off the interview, Alan?

I don't think so, David, I think you've covered most things.

You've covered most things - we've ranged wide and far.

I'm terribly sorry for forgetting some of the things.

No, that's understandable.

Memory dims a little bit.

I've got notes to work from, otherwise ...

You did those notes beautifully, and thank you for that. I've been trying to read that book again, but ... The air force were marvellous, particularly in the initial stages. If I can say that the number of times that I got out of trouble because of the air force striking and putting a ground attack in in front of me. I forgot to mention that, I think - a very great honour to the air force because when you are stuck and find suddenly there was ...

The Battle of the Broken Bridge, for example - I didn't tell you - they brought air in and blasted that to get me out. Now, thank you - thank you - I could still get down the pillars, they were still there, and they really blasted the hills around. My twenty soldiers I got out.

And your ten prisoners.

And the ten prisoners - and that was due to the air force. So

great praise for the fighter pilots - great praise for them. I didn't do that well enough in the time when we were speaking. I probably have the same sort of recollections that I need to come back and say, David, put some comment in about these other great people, but I don't think I can recall any at the moment.

That's a good point to finish with over the air force.

The air force, yes - great - the Australian Air Force. Then in the other battles, of course, we had a lot of Americans, and we had Australians flying as observers in American aircraft.

So I believe, yes.

And I can remember, Hatfield was in one of those - a chap called Hatfield - and he did that. We pushed them across there.

They were sort of back seat in the forward air control aircraft.

That's right, yes. It was a peculiar arrangement; how well it worked, I'm not sure, but it seemed to be okay and they seemed to be satisfied with the job that they could do, and the American pilots would do for you. The Americans - initially, particularly - and British later, I suppose - were pretty gung ho - typical fighter pilots initially, if I could put it that way, when they were doing it on their own. When we've got an Australian passenger in the back they are more observation aircraft rather than fighting aircraft, and doing it that way, and directing the planes, directing the fighters onto a target, and that was the issue. That's why they took Australians up when there were Australian influences to do it that way. The Australian would get all the information and suggest to the pilot what might happen.

It gives you a lot of confidence on the ground to know that there's an Australian observer in that American aircraft.

Exactly because ...

We speak the same language.

And they know where the limits are.

That's right.

Of course, a number of us got shot at by people who thought we were someone else, but that didn't cause any trouble as far as I was concerned. But the observers, yeah.

Who else? Naval bombardments, I suppose we had some of those too from the ships, but fortunately we had them out far enough. Otherwise it was exciting times.

I imagine it was.

I'd forgotten all about these things until you asked me, and

trying to get it all back into shape is difficult.

Very difficult.

Difficult, David.

You did very well, Alan. Thanks ever so much for coming in, it was must enjoyable.

It's a pleasure.

Great interview and look forward to reading the transcript.

10/02