JOHN WYETT - Tape 1 Side 1

Identification: this is an interview with John Wyett recorded in Hobart on 12th April 1984.

What were the circumstances that led to you going to Outram Road? In other words, what was the, er, as it was a military prison you must have, must have been a bad boy in some way.

Oh yes, the Nips didn't like me very much, any more than they liked ?Bill, of course, but, er (cough) - no, they finally came in and arrested me, the Kempei, Kempei-tai people came in and arrested me, just as we were getting ourselves tidied up to go into a special, a special little dinner that we'd arranged because it was, er, I've forgotten now whether it was Christmas or, or New Year's Eve, but it was one of those two, and, er, we'd all saved up little bits of rations here and there to, to make a little bit of a festivity of it, and er, in fact we were, two or three of us were just standing around waiting to go in when these people descended upon us, rushed into the place. They'd obviously been watching me because they came straight up and two of them grabbed me and, er, then they started ri.. riffling through my , my various possessions such as they were, and I had a packing case set up as a, as a desk because of - there was quite a bit of administrative work to be done in running the camp of course, and I had been going through the various chaps really, trying to single out sufficient people who would be sufficiently fit that we could fall into some kind of a fighting unit, taking the view that, er, if anything were to suddenly happen and the Nips wanted to come in and annihilate us we were going to put up a hit of a show of our own. So part of thi8 process of sorting the fit from the not so fit fell to my lot and also to organising them into units, picking out commanders for those particular units and then allotting tasks to them according to any particular emergency that might arise. Which was part of my normal job of course as general staff. And, er, so I had a little bit of, er, paper work with regard to this sort of thing, er, and I was using this box as a desk. That was one of the activities which I found out later they, er, they were well aware

of.

Do you know how? They were aware of it?

Yes, I know how. If you like we'll leave that till a little later and I'll tell you how, how this information came into my possession and how I managed to get it back to the camp. But, er, this was one of the reasons why they wanted me. They had about five charges against me altogether. I had every intention of making my way back to Australia if I could see the faintest possibility of doing so, we all felt that Australia was in grave danger and, er, we were most concerned about it, in fact I think it's fair to say the chaps were far more concerned about the threat to Australia than they were about being in the bag themselves.

Did you have any specific plans for escape or ..

Oh yes. Yes. Yes I felt it all the more keenly because I'd only recently graduated from the command and staff college at Quetta in Baluchistan, which was one of THE Command and Staff Colleges of the world.

John Masters territory?

Yes. And - yes, it was a tremendous course. And, er, I was able to put it into pretty good effect during the fighting. I've got to confess that I, I really got a thrill out of, er, the camping, because coming newly from the College where we'd been dealing with these things in theory, you immediately put it into effect, put it into effect in a very big way. And, er, it was really quite a tremendous experience to come from the theory straight into the practice in that way. Anyway, I felt that the Australian Government had spent a whole lot of time, money and trouble in bringing my military education up to this level. I was the only non-Regular soldier on the course. And I thought, well, it's not going to be much use to anybody while I'm locked up here. That was another

1/1 reason why I wanted to get out and get back to Australia. And, er, I'd managed to get hold of a couple of hand grenades that I'd found somewhere and, er, linked up with an Air Force chappie who, who'd come in from Timor, had been shot down there and *we* were - we had noticed certain aircraft flying in Singapore that the Nips had captured, and one of them was a type of aircraft that this fellow had been flying when he was shot down. So we said, well, let's go to the aerodrome and pinch it, fly it back to Australia. And then we realised we couldn't fly it back to Australia because it didn't have those, that many miles in the tank, and we managed to get hold of a page out of a kid's school atlas that somebody had and, er, we reckoned that we could get to the Cocos Islands and this was going, this was going to be the map that was going to navigates to the Cocos! Anyway the Nips, as we found out later, were fully aware of all this and, er, they, they came in this. evening about six o'clock -

Just - sorry, just say "they came" - we had a crack -

Oh yes.

They came -

They rushed into the camp just about six p.m. and as I say, these two fellows were holding me, one on either side, while these other chaps were - I had a tin trunk with a few things in it, they were riffling through that, I had a compass and a few other things, but they were looking for papers, and they were so single minded, the old Nip, that, er, if they're looking for papers they will completely overlook other things. They simply - I had some, had a roll of film that I'd taken, er, I had a compass, various other incriminating items we weren't supposed to have - they just tossed these to one side because they were looking for the papers. Anyway, then they were going through the papers that were on my desk and that was a very tricky one, because I had only minutes before been sitting down writing the briefest possible message I could to get a, a wireless message

1/1 out on a quite important topic. That evening a fellow had been rushed back to the camp from the, er, from a working party in Singapore, with a very badly inflamed and swollen eye, and this fellow had brought back to the camp a message for me (coughs) to the effect that the Nips were loading troops and equipment onto Red Cross ships, in a very big way. This was the invasion that went, went south into Java and on to New Guinea. And so the, er, man in charge of this particular detachment was a Captain Curlewis who was one of my G3s, er, later on became a judge in Sydney, Sir Adrian Curlewis -

I've interviewed him -

Have you?

-- this programme

Right. Well, Curly reckoned that this ought to be got back to the camp and, er, they called for volunteers to put some battery acid in a bloke's eye. And, er, so one chap said OK, I'll do it, and so then they got another couple of fellows to stage a fight and when the Nips rushed in to separate these people fighting, they turned on the Nips, got themselves very badly bashed up, but in all the fracas a couple of other fellows moved in and got some acid out of the battery of the car and, er, put it in this bloke's eye. Well, you can imagine what happened to his eye. So they then paraded him up to the Nip guard and they said, you know, this man very sick, have to take him back to the camp. Anyway they did, they got away with it, they put him in a car, rushed him back to the camp. He brought the news to me. Well (cough), I had a, a secret wireless transmitter which had been, been set up by, er, a fellow who was a pretty experienced wireless hand from Perth, and over the months the various working parties had been into Singapore and scrounged little bits of this and little bits of that and this fellow was able to assemble a transmitter. And they had been in touch with a couple of fellows from the First Indian Corps who, er,

1/1 themselves had been radio hams, and before they left India to sail for Malaya they'd made an arrangement with some friends of theirs that if anything happened they would try and transmit on a certain wavelength on a certain hour at a certain day of the week. They told me about this, so, er, this fellow was able to get his transmitter going and on this particular wavelength. Well, in order to hide the transmitter we, we went into the, we broke out of the camp and we used to sneak out of the camp in the wee small hours of the morning and, er, we went to a, a battery of 16 inch guns which had been destroyed, they were naval guns, they were the famous guns that were pointing the wrong way. Well, below these guns was a tremendous labyrinth of, of workings dug into the ground, tunnels and so forth, used for the storage of ammunition and all of the things necessary for the working of these huge guns. And when the Navy spiked them and left, they, er, flooded these tunnels. Well, we were able to walk through the tunnels, up - the water was about up to our necks. And of course the Nip being shorter, he couldn't. So we reckoned this was not a bad spot to put this transmitter. And we used to wade through these damn tunnels up to our necks in water and on the wall there was an ireon ?plate screwed onto the wall, and when we unscrewed this we found that behind it was all the switch gear, and in the switch gear, in order to keep it dry, there were bags of silica gel. So we were able to take the silica gel out and we got it back to the camp, dried it out, put it back into this place, installed the wireless set in there, you see. So when we used to want to transmit, we'd go down uns.. unbolt the plate and get the old set working. Well, we found later, of course, the Nips had detected this transmission; they didn't quite know where it was coming from, they knew -

Oh, you actually got, you actually got the signal out?

We got the signal out, but, er, we've never heard whether it was ever received (laughs). We transmitted it. I think possibly our equipment was a bit too weak to cover the distance. Anyhow, when I got this particular message back I was,

1/1 as I say, sitting down writing in the smallest possible number of words this message, which I simply addressed to Bennett, Australia, and I signed it Quetta John, because he'd know who that was. I had this actually written on a piece of paper. And these Nips started to rush over towards my desk and I thought, my God, if they get that bit of paper I'm, I'm sunk. So – at this particular time these guards holding me, seeing nothing much was doing and I was standing quite still, had sort of let me go and I was just standing between them. So I just casually sort of stepped towards this desk and I could see it would be quite silly to pick up that particular bit of paper, so I picked up the whole pile of papers. As I did so I scrumpled this small piece of paper up into my hand and I turned to Phil Head, who was standing nearby - Phil Head, oddly enough, also became a judge back in Sydney in later years. And, er, handed him the whole file - no, I didn't scrumple up the paper, I handed him the whole file and said "Get rid of the top bit". And, er, Phil, calm as, calm as you like, er, just simply put up his hand, folded it - fortunately it was a very small piece of paper - folded it into his palm like that just as the Nips saw what was going on, rushed over, grabbed it out of his hand - of course they got the pile of reasonably harmless papers and Phil just sort of put his hand down by his side with this bit of paper in it. And, er, he took a bit of a risk in doing it too. So -

Well that, that would have been a death sentence for you, wouldn't it, that one.

Oh, well, yes, it was the death sentence anyhow, er, but that one would have, I'd never have got out of it. I managed to get put of the death sentence as you probably gathered, since I'm sitting here, but (laughs) I'd never have got out of it if they'd got that bit of paper. But, er -

Right, so we'll pick it up - so there you are, um, Philip Head has managed to, er, get rid of this bit of paper - how did he get rid of it, by the way?

1/1 Oh, he just sort of scrunched it up into his hand and held it there. What he did with it subsequently I don't know, because they, er, they bundled me into a, er, into a staff car that they had standing by and, er, whisked me off out of the camp. I'll, er, I'll never forget the guards face when we were – he stepped, when the car drove up, he naturally stepped forward to check it and one of these Nips just leaned out of the window and leered at him, really, and he said "Kempei-tai", just like that. And do you know that guard's face went absolutely white and he started to tremble like this. They, er, Kempei-tai had such a, such a reputation, such a hold on every, all the troops, that they were, they were terrified of them. This was the Nip discipline, of course. Because they had Kempei-tai people seeded right through every unit, so that nobody could do a thing without them knowing about it. Anyhow, they, they rushed me into town _ and, er, then they bunged me into a cell at the Kempei-tai headquarters. This cell had about 14 people in it, altogether, it was quite a small cell. And, er, we had to sit in this cell all day with our backs against the wall. And we were touching one another, you know, the cell was quite full -

How many of you were taken away at this stage?

McAlis.. they got McAlis.. - no, they didn't get McAlister as a matter of fact, they, they arrested another unfortunate Englishman whose name was McAlister, and, er (laughs) he was a bit mystified, er, very wroth, and - but quite early in the piece they let him go, they, er, they pulled me out and took me into the room where they had this chap and, er, I said he's got absolutely nothing to do with it, don't be silly, let him go. And, or, so they did. And they got another Englishman as well, er, I don't know why they got him. Anyway I managed to get him off the hook too, and, er, then a few days later they got the real McAlister, who was the Air Force bloke, and, er, brought him in. But they put him in a separate cell, they wouldn't allow us to be together. And, er, here we had a tremendous stroke of luck really, because they used to take people out every day from, they'd come in and take somebody out of the room, and bundle them

1/1 upstairs, and the room immediately above this particular cell was where they questioned people, and, er, you'd hear the bumps and the crashes and the yells. They talk about the stolidity of the Chinese - my gosh, they weren't too stolid when these boys got hold of them. I was the only European in the cell, the rest of them were all Malays, Tamils, Chinese (clears through), a well known Sikh in Singapore, ??Gowen Singh, a Chinese woman - quite a mixture of people. Well, sitting in this cell all day, when you weren't being questioned, er, these Chinese I noticed were talking to one another across the room when the guard wasn't looking, and they were using this deaf and dumb sign language. So I thought, well, this could be handy. So I got one of these chaps to, to teach me. And, er, by the greatest good fortune McAlister had done the same thing in his cell, which was across the other side of the passage and along from where my cell was. Now the cell had a grating, grating door, you could - I found that I could, by getting myself into a certain position, I could look through the grating and just see the grating of the other cell. And, er, we'd been there some time, er, when this happened, but, er, I managed to get into communication by this means with McAlister. But in the meantime I'd been very perturbed because during the course of the questioning, er, I was astonished at just how much these fellows knew. They knew every little detail of what I was doing, they knew all about this organisation in the camp, er, and I thought to myself, well, it won't be long before all the rest of the chaps are in here with me, you see, all of us involved in this organisation part. And, er, I racked my brains as to how I could get a message out to the camp, you see. Well, one day they brought the old Sikh back, they'd been giving him quite a time upstairs and, er, he was in a, rather a bad way, he was bleeding, his hair was all over the place, and they just chucked him into the cell, where he collapsed. And, er, then the Nip got, guard got very concerned, I could see him getting agitated and I thought, well, he's going to , he's going off for a doctor before long. So I lay down on the floor and, er, started to roll a - oh, they gave us, er, funny little mat things that we could, we could sleep on, and, er, I wrapped this thing around myself and started rolling about, trying to work up as much of a sweat as I could, and, er, sure enough after a while the Nip doctor arrives. And when

1/1 he'd finished - while he was tending to Singh, I could see him glancing over in my direction, and this, by this time I was letting out a few moans and, er, trying to look as sick as possible, and when he had finished with Ghan Singh he came over to me. And, er, oh they'd clad us by this time in a very short pair or shorts and a little short shirt thing. And, er, he started feeling around my tummy and he put his hand on my forehead - thank God he didn't have a thermometer. My forehead was pretty hot and sweaty, due to this exercise I'd been doing. And, er, every time he came over on the right side I'd give a wince, and, er, then I had my right knee drawn up, which I happened to know was a characteristic sign of an appendix - if you put an appendix patient down on his back, his right knee comes up automatically because of the, of the pain and the inflammation and the effect on the muscles, it's a more or less involuntary action and the knee comes up. Well, while he was fooling around he very quietly put his hand on my knee and just - so I allowed it to be pressed down very gradually, do you see. He apparently thought, well, the patient's not noticing what I am doing. So patient allowed his knee to be pushed right down, meanwhile he was continuing his, his examination. I gently brought the knee up again, do you see, and I noticed him glancing at this, I could see, I thought, well, so far so good, he's a bit impressed. And, er, then he did something that I was quite unaware of, it's some diagnostic test apparently there, you, he wormed his fingers quite deep into my abdomen on the left side. I thought gosh, what do you do now? And then quite suddenly he let, let go. Well, you think pretty quickly under these particular circumstances and I thought well, if I've got an inflamed thing on the right side, it doesn't matter what happens anywhere else, the pain's going to be there. So I 19t-out a hell of a yell and grabbed my right side. Actually it convinced him. He shouted out something to the guard, so he came in and they helped me to my feet, rushed me out to a car (clears throat) - excuse me. They put, put me in the front seat next to the driver and two guards and the doctor got into the back seat. And I allowed my head to sort of loll back and I did a bit of a moan, and, er - the only bit of kindness I've ever seen in a Jap, this doctor started stroking my forehead.

1/1 And, er, you know, was being quite sympathetic (laughs). Actually I felt a bit of a heel, really. And, er, so we, er, we got out to the camp just as dusk was falling and -

Right. Well, we might just --
The kind guard stroking your forehead.

Oh, coming back to the camp, yes. Well -

Will you come forward -

How's that?

That's fine.

They, er, they drove straight over to the camp hospital. Everybody was lined up, because they, everyone, they had a counting of heads every night, you see. And, er, this car pulled up, to the astonishment of everyone, and, er, then the Japs shouted out for a stretcher, and a stretcher was brought and I was gently sort of helped out of the car and laid down on a stretcher in front of everyone, Nips standing all around, and, er, they called for a doctor, and Charles Osborne came forward. He was a surgeon in Melbourne. And, er, he was our senior surgeon in the, in the hospital. And, er, he kneeled down on the stretcher beside me and he was sort of feeling around and he put his head on my chest, as though to listen to my heart. So our faces were pretty close together and he said, he said John, is this real or is it a fake?". I said "It's a fake, you fool". "Oh", he said, "I thought it was". He said "I'll have to take it out". I said "Well, take it out, it's no damn good anyway". "OK, cock", he said. So they then proceeded to do this and, er, that meant that I was in hospital for a, for a little while, recuperating from this operation, able to, er, convey my information to Charles, who promptly, promptly let Black Jack know and all the chaps so that they were able to go for cover, and, er -

1/1 Just a, just a second - sorry, can you come in just a fraction, I'm sorry.

Yes.

Could you - how quickly, after you got in - I mean, did you deliver the message right then and there - because maybe they might, they might have just taken you straight back again, or - how long did you wait before you gave that message? After he put his head on your chest?

I - well, I said to him, "I've got some information for you".. He said "Yes, I guess you have", but he said "It will have to wait, son". Because they rushed me straight in and did me immediately, you see, with the Nip, Nip doctor looking on actually. Afterwards old Charles said, er, he said "You must have had a bit of appendix trouble at some time because", he said, " there were a lot of adhesions and so forth and", he said, "I was very proud to be able to display it", he said, "I must confess you had me pretty frightened". So it was really when I came, you know, the next day really, that I was able to tell him all about it. Oh no, there wasn't any danger of them rushing be straight back, because I wasn't in any fit state to do so by the time they'd carved me up. And, er –

So the tenor of the message was that there'd been an enormous leak somewhere, and that, er, and that, er -

I was able to tell them the nature of the leak, you see, because I'd, I'd been able to observe from my cell that there was a, a cane lounge thing in the passage, along the passage a little bit, and every, every morning a, er, what appeared to be an Indonesian - you see, at this time we had a whole lot of Indonesian troops had come through into the, into Changi. And they were clad in jungle greens the same as the Nips were. And, er -

Sorry, I'm just going to have to -

END OF SIDE 1

JOHN WYETT - Side 2

1/2 ...this cane lounge and promptly go to sleep. He'd sleep there most of the day and then he'd disappear and of course I realised that, er, these fellows were simply walking around the camp all night listening, picking up bits and pieces of information, and of course our chaps can't tell the difference between a, a Japanese and an Indonesian, and, er, so they really had their information people right throughout the camp, they must have had a, they must have had about a dozen of them. And that's how they got such detailed information of everything that was going on, you see. And that was another reason why I had to get this information back to the camp, you see, because our people all unsuspecting, well, you know, we even had a, a meeting of officers to brief them on what our plans were and so forth, and a, er, even had a, you know, a couple of these fellows directly at the meeting. (laughs). As I found out later.

Bit sloppy, one might be tempted to say!

Well, you know, it was a bit, bit difficult under the circumstances. Anyway, I got that information back, and then they, they used to come out every day and inspect me and, and after about a week they, they whipped me back in again. Well, it was at this (clears throat), it was at this particular time that this second bit of luck came our way, when I had manoeuvred myself into a position where I could see through the grating into the grating of McAlister's cell, which was a, rather a bigger one than the one I was in and had more people in it, and he'd done the same kind of thing. So that we were able to see one another, at some little distance. And I started this deaf and dumb sign language, and to my intense delight he answered, he'd done exactly the same thing that I'd done, he'd got one of these Chinese boys to teach him.

What an extraordinary coincidence.

Well, I suppose, you know, you, you take every possible opportunity of anything

1/2 that's going under these circumstances that might be useful to you. So I was able to say to Mac, look, we can't continue forever with this sort of treatment that they're giving us, because it was pretty rugged, and, er, there's just so much the human system can stand, you see. And it was getting more rugged every day. I said, I think the best way to throw these people is to - I'll pretend to break down and admit that we were planning an escape. I said, they can't do much to us on the basis of that because they didn't pick us up outside the camp, we were still inside the camp when they, when they got us, so we hadn't actually escaped; the only thing that they could charge us with was planning an escape. I said, if you admit something, then they're more likely not to press too hard on the other counts. And so I said, I'll put on this act in a-day or two's time, after they've given us, you know, some of the more rigorous treatment, and I'll say, well, I can't stand any more, I'm ready to confess, and -

(not heard) just say - and then I'll, and then I'll confess, just go back to that.

I said, just make sure that the story you tell is exactly the same story that I told, because they'll come to you, ask you, question you on this. If we can get two stories that coincide and since we've obviously had no means of communicating with one another, then it's a pretty believable tale.

And all this done, abcde-

Yes, all done with the hands. And interrupted of course, as the guards walked backwards and forwards or peeped through, it took a while to get the whole thing through, but fortunately we were in position long enough to be able to do it. Well, er -

Before you go on, would you just describe the kind of interrogation techniques and tortures and so on that was going on at that time.

2/1 Well, when they first got me, they simply took me into a room at their head-quarters and, er, the Kempei-tai chief turned out to be, was interrogating me, and what they did, then, they simply sat you in an ordinary straight backed chair and wound, just wound rope around you and the chair until you were completely bound hand and foot to the chair. And then they'd just bash you, you know, bash you over the head, and then he - but this particular, this was the night they got me, you see. So, er, I couldn't, I just simply wouldn't answer anything. And he got absolutely furious after about half an hour of this, he took his broad, heavy leather belt off and started bashing me, using the buckle end of that, and, er, as he'd sort of slash at me with this he'd simply knock me over, you see, you could do nothing to save yourself. The chair and myself were sort of rolling around the room and being kicked. It was one of the things that contributed to this neck trouble that puzzled me ever since, because they - anyway, that's another story later, because he kept bashing, and then they'd, you'd pass out and they'd sit up the chair and then they'd pour a bucket of water over you and bring you round and then the whole thing would start again. He finally got so annoyed, he pulled out his sword and started hitting me with this, and use the back of it on the, on the neck, and he must have cracked a couple of vertebrae, because I was, I was out to it for about three days after that, they just took me and chucked me into a cell in town and, er, when I came to they put me **in** this other cell I've been describing. But when they'd take you out, they'd take you upstairs and, er, oh the treatment varied a good deal. One of their favourite ones was to bind you to a chair in the way I've just described, but leave your hands free, and then they'd attach wires to each wrist - is there someone (coughs)

Right, you were describing that the initial interview, if we could so describe it, was being bound to the chair and being bashed with the sword on the neck and kicked around the floor, and then you were about to go on to the other things that they did.

Ah yes. Then the more general treatment that you used to get every - not every day, somet[imes] they'd leave you for a day or so and then come and get you again,

2/1 but, er, the - this electrical treatment was one I disliked quite a lot, because he had a, um, some kind of an instrument and he'd turn the, turn the current on gradually and you'd start to shake, and then he'd make it more and more intense and finally your whole body would, the whole lot of your muscles would be contracted and you'd practically lift the chair off the ground, you know, you were just rigid. And then he'd switch the current off suddenly, like that, and you'd go flop back. And you're just sort of getting your breath again and she goes zzzzzzzz and he'd zizz it up again. He'd keep this up, it was, er - I've disliked electric shocks ever since, as a result of this. Then I -

How were you getting the shock? I mean, was it -

He had wires attached to each wrist, you see. And, er, what sort of a source they used for it I don't know, it was a, must have been some kind of an alternating source because it, it used to shake your whole body. And then they'd go on with their questioning. And, er, then they'd undo you from the chair and you'd say thank God that's over, you think you're going back to your cell, and they suddenly chuck you on the ground and, er, put a cloth over your face and, er, pour water over it, keep pouring water over it until you were sort of stifling, er, you couldn't get your breath because they'd pull this thing down, and when you were just practically choked they'd sort of relieve it for a minute and then some of the water would go down into your lungs and you'd cough and you'd splutter and then they'd start it all again. Another favourite one was to, er, put a funnel down your neck and pour water down it until your tummy was full of water and then they'd just jump on your tummy. And, er, that was very painful indeed, and God knows what it did to one's innards, but, er - the whole - I came to the conclusion that the, the whole technique was based on not having any outside evidence of the treatment. Everything they did didn't, it didn't break your arm, it didn't scare you - of course the original one when he lost his temper left a - but they, you know, they were sort of scars that would heal. But the fact that they'd jumped on your tummy and distorted things, er, is something that doesn't show, do you see. They were very, er, very clever in their methods of treatment like that.

2/1 They weren't., they weren't so fussy at times when they, er, when they didn't worry about killing people. There was one occasion when they, they brought in a pretty little Chinese woman, who was obviously very pregnant, and, er, they simply tied her to a wall and beat her across the tummy with, with broomsticks. And she had an abortion on the spot, she was screaming of course, and the Nips were laughing their heads off, they thought it was tremendous fun. And she died actually on the spot. Another time they caught a Tamil, tied him up (clears throat) tied him up between two trees, and, er, let him swing there like a hammock, then they got a can of petrol and poured it on him and set alight to him. Again tremendous excitement and fun. I saw them do it one time to a pet dog, they were a most extraordinary race of people. They, they'd been - this was before they got me and took me away from Changi, but this pet dog had been following them around and they were petting it, and, er, this had been going on for some weeks. And one day these Nips were standing round looking at a pile of burning leaves. And suddenly one of them picked up the dog, and another one produced some string, they tied its legs together and threw it into the middle of the burning, burning heap. And, er, the dog sort of kicked and screamed, finally the string burnt through and the dog sort of got off the heap and was just running round and round in circles yelping until finally it dropped over dead. And the Nips were holding their sides with laughter. To them it was the funniest thing you can imagine. They, er -

Where was all this going on - is that -

Oh well, I'm digressing a bit, I'm really doing - that went on -

But the torture that, that - were you in Out... you're not in Outram Road at this stage are you?

Oh yes.

You are, sorry. OK. If you wouldn't mind just putting a sentence to that effect.

2/1 I see, yes. Well, I digressed a bit when I was talking about what they did to the dog and what they did to the Tamil and so forth. When I was in the actual Outram Road headquarters, they'd take us out and take us to a room above where, which was their interrogation room. And that's where all this water treatment and the electrical treatment and various other methods that they used took place.

While we are on this, just go through the other methods, because we might, you know, might as well get the inventory complete. You described the water torture and suffocation, jumping on your stomach, the binding up with ropes and beating. Did they do the carrot and the stick one, where they soften up and give you a cigarette and then do something else, or were -

Oh yes, they'd change from - they were the main ones I've just described, you see, but they'd - yes, they would. As I say, you'd stop the electrical treatment, and they might even give you a, a drink of cold tea, and then quite unexpectedly, bash, they'd get into the other ones, you see. As you say, the carrot and stick arrangement. But, er, this obviously couldn't continue, do you see. They were doing the same to McAlister.

How long had this gone on at this stage, before you managed to get the tick-tack communication?

Oh, er, it had gone on for over a month. That's why I say, we couldn't realise, you know, it couldn't go on forever, and sooner or later they'd probably get something on us which they could, could hang a charge to. It was then that we managed to get this communication between us, so that, er, oh, altogether we were with them for about, I suppose three months. And then there was this trial which took place, er, when they'd -

I'm sorry, is that before - the trial - had - when did you sort of break down and -

2/1 Oh I see, yes -

Could you, could you describe that?

Yes, well now, after a bit over two months, I put on this act of breaking down and confessing.

What was the torture being applied at the time?

Oh, I couldn't tell you the particular one. I'd, I'd purposely annoyed them actually a bit at the beginning so that they, I'd have a pretty good excuse for breaking down. Oh, they'd gone through the whole routine, do you see, and so I was feeling pretty groggy by the time I, I put on this act. But they were absolutely delighted. They literally jumped for joy, er, when I gave them this, and, er -

What did you say?

They brought in - oh, I said that I couldn't stand it any longer, that I was prepared to confess, we were planning an escape and what is more I was prepared to issue an order to Flight-Lieutenant McAlister that he had to confess too, and, er, as I said, they were overjoyed at this, gave me a drink of lemon tea, and, er, forthwith marched me downstairs - McAlister was dragged out of his cell and he was placed in a cell, on his own, a smaller cell, and made to stand facing the, the grille door. I was placed in front of the grille door on, in the passage side, with these guards all round me. And, er, I said "Flight Lieutenant McAlister, I am about to give you an order. And you are to confess to these Japanese all that we were planning to do." And McAlister put on a tremendous act, he said "I'm not taking orders from any bloody Army officer", he said, "You might be senior to me, but as far as I'm concerned I'm Air Force and I'm not going to take orders from you". I said "You jolly well will", and we

2/1 had a slanging match at one another, do you see, and I said "You insubordinate little bastard, you will", do you see, and the Nips were smiling at one another and rubbing their hands. And, er, I said "You've got to do it, McAlister, because this is an order". And finally he rather grudgingly agreed that he would, do you see. So they shot him upstairs then and of course he gave them the same story. And from that moment all the, all the treatment stopped, we didn't have any more. And, er, then the big trial began in the Supreme Court in Singapore. And, er, that was an absolute charade. They had five people on the bench, there was, er, Major General Saito was the, was a member of the bench, there was a colonel, there was a sergeant, er, there was a private and a major. And these were the five people, and in this, er, most impressive courtroom, this"- it was completely lined in sculptured cork. There was a raised dais at the end, with five throne - like chairs on it - big, impressive chairs. And, er, the wall at the back of it was curved rather like an ?ear of Damocles to, er, catch the voices of the court, you see, and reflect them down to where the judges were sitting. Very impressive set-up. But a pretty, pretty scrungy looking lot of judges, we thought. McAlister and I were arraigned down on the floor, so that we could look up at these mighty people, and there was an interpreter in a box just down in front, and we had to stand to attention while they read out - they had a dossier, honestly it would be about two inches thick, all done in Japanese lettering. And they went through this thing in Japanese. We had to stand there and listen to all this. And, er, on the afternoon of the second day, er, McAlister looked at the, at the general, and he said - the interpreter was sort of droning on, do you see – he said "You know, I can't understand a word of what this little yellow monkey's saying" Well! That interpreter literally fell down in a fit. He was on the floor frothing at the mouth, to think that anyone could be so undisciplined as to say this to this mighty court. The court was not amused. It broke up, and we were taken off back to our cells - we were taken back in a car. When they took us down there, they did one thing that I've never forgiven the Nips for. Er, they had not allowed - you see, after three months, our hair had grown lank, we had straggly beards on, we had no means of washing and, er, we were, you know, a pretty disheveled sort of pair. And they tied our hands behind our backs, and, er - with just this short

2/1 pair of pants and a short little shirt thing, er, nothing on our feet - they'd lined up the populace of Singapore and we were driven through the streets with a whip like a pair of dogs. In, and they'd lined the whole populace up to see it. And, er, I've never forgiven them for that; never would, never could, it was a most degrading, degrading and unnecessary thing to do. Anyway, we were there in the court and the court broke up so they shot us back to our cells. Well then a day or so later they started all over again. And, er, that took about three days. And, er, then finally the court adjourned, and we were left standing there, and about five minutes later they came back with great solemnity and, er, pronounced the death sentence, we were both to be beheaded. So, er, we were then carted off and, er, to Outram Road this time, Outram Road gaol, not the Kempei-tai headquarters. And we were each placed separately in a condemned cell, and, er, left in these condemned cells for a month.

You had no reason at all to believe that the sentence wasn't going to be carried out, had you, at this stage?

Oh no, at this stage I thought to myself, well, I'll get myself as fit as I can under the circumstances and - they had a pretty rigid discipline in the Outram Road Gaol as you've probably heard from others, you weren't allowed to move, you had to sit at the far end of this narrow cell, on the floor, facing the door at the far end, which had a slot in it, and, er, you had to put your hands on your lap and you weren't even allowed to twiddle your thumbs, if they caught you doing that they'd come in and bash you up. You had to sit like that all day. At night there were three plants that you were allowed to put on the floor and that was your bed. And, er - anyway, they kept us there for a month, er, still giving us a reasonable amount of food -

What was it, can you remember?

Yes, they used to come in with a, with a ball of rice, like a little cannon ball. And then sometimes they would give you a, er, a tiny piece of fish with it.

Actually, while we were in the Outram Road part, while this interrogation was going on, everybody was getting pretty bedraggled, I got a piece of fish one day which had a nice bit of backbone in it'. And I managed to secrete this and, er, I made everybody in the, in the cell comb their hair with this fish bone. And it was quite extraordinary, er, the effect that it had, you know, the Chinese perked up and, you know, everybody was pretty dejected and bedraggled, but the, the whole atmosphere changed just with combing their hair with a bit of fish bone.

This was in the headquarters -

Yes, this was in the headquarters, I flipped back a bit, do you see, to -

Yes. Just - if you wouldn't mind just making it clear by saying "I remember when 4 was in the" - you know, other place, that - you don't have to tell the whole story, just say I remember -

I remember when, er, I managed to get a piece of fish bone with my ration, I secreted the fish bone and, er, it was a piece of fish backbone which was rather like a comb, and I made all the chaps in the, in the cell comb their hair with this thing when the guard wasn't looking. The, er, the effect on them was quite electrical really, they perked up out of their dejection and even got a few smiles out of them and - we kept this up for quite a while actually, until the, er, the guard spotted the piece of fish bone one day and that was, that was quite a heyday for me, it took me about a day to recover from that one. But, er - just these little things that occur, you know, that make a big difference to, you know, to people's morale. Anyway, I've, I've digressed.

Anyway, so there you are, you're a month in solitary confinement, no contact with McAlister at all?

Oh no, no contact with anybody. And, er, then, on the - I'm not quite sure of the date, but I think it was 29th April, er, our sent.. - which was the Emperor's

2/1 birthday -

This is forty - three? Forty four? (Pause)

Forty two we went into the bag. Forty, er, they picked me up - it would be forty three, yes.

Would you mind just saying, on 29th April 1943 -

Yes. As I remember it, about 29th April 1943, that date being the Emperor's birthday, er, they came along and told us that our sentence had been commuted from death sentence to 20 years' solitary confinement. And took us out of the condemned cell, and we were then placed in another cell, rather similar but farther along the block.

With, with McAlister?

Oh, no, solitary. We were each placed in separate cells and there were other chaps in other cells as well. And, er, they used to bring along a little bowl of food each day, and they'd poke this bowl through the slot in the, in the door, and they, they used to - they had the whole thing worked out very accurately really, because they'd give you a little bit of rice and they'd give you a little bit of soupy stuff which consisted of some sort of green leaves boiled up in a thin sort of soup, that was the kind of ration. There wasn't, it wasn't really enough and you could, you could see yourself wasting away. Er - well, just to flip back a little bit, while I was still in that condemned cell, I thought, well, they're going to come for me and lead me out of this, I'll give them a bit of a run for their money. So I was exercising as much as I could when the Nip wasn't looking. And I worked out a plot that I would try and grab one of the, er, guard's bayonets and, er, and have a go at him - I even thought, well now, if I can do that and grab his liver and get a bit of that it will give me a little bit more energy - sounds

2/1 a frightful thing, but it was, you know, all part of the plot. And I had noticed a drainpipe on the outer wall, er, which was covered in barbed wire, and I thought, well, that would give me a handhold, and even if I get a bit torn about I can climb up that, they might get me before I get over the top of it but at least I'll, I'll get a couple of them first. Then I, er, I found that when they came in to sort of take the slop bucket, which you had to use as a lavatory, er, there was a, a lock on the door had a wide, a two inch wide tongue that clipped shut. So I'd managed to rip the, a bit of the lining of the pocket of my shorts out, and I found that if I were quick when the Nip went out and his back was turned, he was slamming the door behind him, if I slipped this piece of cloth into the tongue of the lock as it came, as the door clanged shut, er, then, when all was quiet and the Nip was, the guard was along the other end, I'd give this thing a tug, I could open the door. And, er, so I practised this several times until I had it pretty well perfected. And I thought, well this can be jolly useful too. And, er - unfortunately they found my piece of cloth, bashed me up, put paid to that particular one.

I did hear you right when you said you were planning to get the guard's liver, did I, to give you a bit more energy?

Mm.

Yes. It sounds a bit gruesome now, but it sounded perfectly -

-- at the risk of overgilding the lily there, would you just say that you planned to, what grab the guard's bayonet - just, just go through that bit again, because I think that's -

Oh well, when I found I could get the door open, I thought well now, it should be comparatively easy to surprise that guard when he's just past the door by pulling the door open, grabbing his bayonet, and, er, I can finish him off pretty

2/1 quickly, and probably do it without arousing too much of an alarm, then I'm going to cut his liver out, and, er, have a bit of that to give me a bit more energy to tackle the others when they came, you see. (laughs)

End of side 2 tape 1.

JOHN WYETT - Tape 2, Side 1

2/1 Identification: Tape 2 with John Wyett. So you, you did your month in-the condemned cell - was the food better in the condemned cell, by the way, than it was -

Yes. Oh yes, yes. The food was quite reasonable, that was enough to sustain one. But, er, when you go into the solitary confinement cell and you started on your 20 years stint, er, they used to grade the food in such a way, it was pretty accurately done, you gradually find yourself losing weight, you can see your muscles wasting away. The system obviously, you see, draws on all kinds of reserves under those circumstances until finally it starts to eat-up itself and, er, this was done purposely of course, because, er, you'd be in such a weakened state that you couldn't be much of a nuisance to them. Well, then various diseases started to occur because of, not only the paucity of the diet, but it's entirely unbalanced nature. There was virtually no protein **in** it and insufficient carbohydrate and, well just no fat. So you are virtually living on starch. So the first symptoms to occur were beriberi, and, er, you know, your tummy would start to swell and you'd get all the classical symptoms of beriberi setting in. Now when that occurred, you'd find that a few soya beans would appear mixed in with the little bit of rice that you got, and, er, then gradually as you got better, as the beriberi subsided a bit, you'd find the soya beans would disappear. I was so interested in this, I managed to scratch a graph on the, in the plaster on the wall of the cell, and, er, actually did a graph according to the number of beans that appeared, and I divided it in vertical lines which were, would be periods of time, and, er, as this graph sort of developed you could see a distinct pattern in it as to what they were up to. And I might say that those soya beans had a most remarkable effect, with the distended abdomen and other signs of beriberi, it would only take a few days and a very few soya beans before you started to pass urine in a big way and getting rid of all the oedema that had occurred, do you see, and, er, you know, you really went down like a balloon, a pricked balloon. And the beans would stop and the process would go on again. Well, then I got, the next thing that happened to me was the pellagra, and that was a most

2/1 peculiar thing, you, the whole of your body became covered in, in scales like a fish, really, with these lesions, and a certain amount of serum escapes from the, the blood vessels and the cells, and it comes out as a yellowish sticky exudate on the skin, and when this dries, it seems to dry into a pattern like scales, and my shorts became so impregnated with this stuff that I could, I could literally take them off and they were so stiff with it that I could sort of, I amused myself by standing them on the floor, and they'd sort of stand up and look at me, they were so, er, full of this horrible liquid. And of course it, er, one started to stink a bit with all this. And, er, then you got weaker and weaker until finally I was unable to feed my spiders any more, which was a, a bit of a blow to me. You see, we all became infected with lice and, er, I used to capture these lice and found a couple of spiders up on the wall in the corner, and, er, was able to feed these lice to the spiders when the, the guard wasn't about, and the - it was most interesting to see the old spider getting fatter and fatter on all these lice, and we, these two spiders and myself became quite friendly until I got to the stage where I couldn't keep that up any more. But another interesting thing that occurred to me that might interest you was, er, in the early stages when I got into this solitary confinement cell, I thought, I wonder if one can develop some means of communication, er, to get messages around the gaol. That was a matter, you know, how do you go about that. To my delight -

Just a minute - (Pause) Yes - just repeat, if you don't mind, you started to get interested in finding some way to communicate.

Yes, well, to my delight, er, very late one night I heard a faint tapping on the wall of my cell. And, er, recognised this as a Morse code. The chap next door was trying to get in touch with me. He turned out to be a, a British major who had been, been captured up near Kuala Lumpur, and, er, he was quite unaware of, of the events that had taken place from then on, up to the time of our surrender. And, er -

- you take it from "he was quite unaware" - just go back to that?

2/1 He was quite unaware of the sequence of events that had happened up until the time of the surrender of Singapore, er, so I was able to, er, well, what we had done, we had torn a button off, off these shorts, and were using the button to tap on the wall. Er, so over a period, of, oh, quite a, quite a considerable period of time, because the means of communication is slow under these circumstances - I was able to give him all the details of the fighting, and I knew them pretty well because being on the General Staff I was involved in the planning and I was also around the, the fronts the whole time, you see, so I, I had the overall picture. So I was able to give him a sort of historical survey of what had happened, which interested him, and he was able to tell me all about his, er, experiences -

Did you know Morse?

Yes, but I didn't know I knew it as well as that, er, it's surprising how it comes back to you under the circumstances. Oh yes, we made a point amongst the officers, actually, of insisting that everybody bring themselves up to date on the Morse code, that was part of our general training.

Now as I understand it, you, in this new phase of solitary confinement, you're still supposed to sit like a good boy and not actually do anything in the cell -

Mm.

And I think they had these soft soled shoes, didn't they, where they'd come along and peep in and ma.. make sure you -

Yeah, well, usually stockinged feet actually, on these stone floors, they were quite silent and, er -

So you were supposed to sit there and not do anything until - did you get over - I'm jumping ahead, sorry. Just carry on with what you were going to say about

2/1 your communication exercise.

Oh yes, yes. Well, I said to him, I reckon we ought to try and get all the chaps organised in some way, er, I wonder if we can, if enough of them know Morse code to sort of get around the block, you see. Well, we each tried our, our neighbour on the other side, but to no avail. Er, but then later on - or by the way, just to finish the, the story about talking to my next door neighbour; they caught me one day with my button and, er, so they went round, they bashed me up, took the button away, cut all the buttons off and then went round and cut everybody else's buttons off, do you see, so, er - those walls were so thick that unless you had something rather hard like that to, to make a sharp noise – your knuckle was no good at all, you couldn't hear it. So, er, I'm afraid our telephone was cut off.

They were aware of what you were doing, were they? I mean, they caught you tapping?

Yes. He must have heard it, I think, because it was, you know, absolute silence in this block, quite an eerie silence, except, you know, sometimes when a chap got sick and was letting out noises. But, er - then I thought, well, you could look through this, this slit in the door, and see two or three of the other doors on the other side. And I found, oddly enough, that there was the odd fellow who, who knew this deaf and dumb sign language. And eventually we were able, by means of-the fellow diagonally opposite me knew it, er, I suppose out of a dozen or so fellows that were there, there must have been about only two of us who really knew it, but even under those circumstances we were able to teach the others. They finally cottoned on and we went through the alphabet and over and over it and finally we got to the stage where I was able to get a message right round that, that block in a matter of about five minutes. And I thought, well, this could be useful. Er, well then we were, unfortunately somebody was copped on that one, and they were a bit more vigilant about it. Then of course people started to get sick, and, er, so much so - one of our fellows was - they let one fellow die. Er, they wouldn't let anybody of any sort of senior rank die,

2/1 but there was one of the other ranks got pretty sick and he got, er, he got ringworm, and this damned ringworm spread over the whole of his body, and, er, finally he was in such agony with it, he was just so irritable, he was literally tearing great junks of flesh off his arms and, er, died, and I thought this was going a bit too far so I demanded to see the, the gaol commandant. And, er, eventually they took me out of my cell and, er, he had come along, and, er, the boys used to call him the Rat - faced him, and complained, I said the rations are not enough, people are getting very sick and are dying, and, er, as far as I was concerned, that allowing this other fellow to die was barbaric, and demanded that he do something about it. Well - yes, that's right, I'd - they'd pulled one of these fellows out of his cell, and I managed to - he was so emaciated that even though I was not very strong at the time, I was able to pick him up and I held him, I was holding him in my arms, facing this commandant, and I said, just look what you have done. And he didn't speak English, but he had an interpreter there. And all he did was leer at me, and grin, and then he just barked an order and I, they grabbed me and started beating me up, put me back in the cell and then a couple of them came in and they kept at me until I passed out, I don't know how long I was out. Well, then they kept me without any food or water for about three days after that for being a naughty boy. So I didn't really, really didn't achieve very much. Also they wouldn't, I'd got , picked up amoebic dysentery by this time and, er, they wouldn't empty the slop pail and the cell absolutely stank and I stank and - and then I got to the stage where, er, I found I couldn't stand, I was lying on the floor of the cell and - had a most peculiar experience. You've heard, heard about when people get very old, they can recall quite vividly circumstances that occurred in their early years. Er, exactly the same thing occurred to me. I became practically - I was detached from my body, the real me was perched on the wall up there in the corner, and this filthy body that was on the floor was nothing to do with me at all, I was up there. Er, looking down on this thing. And I recalled at that time things that I didn't know I knew. I can remember one of them now, when I was a very small child, er, my parents caught be drinking out of the dog's howl, water bowl, and I was severely reprimanded for it, and I thought at the time how distinctly unfair they

1/2 were, because - you know, one of those silly little things, I suppose I wouldn't have been more than about three, three to four years of age at the time. I didn't know I knew it, but this came back to me, it's remained with me ever since, I've remembered it. Things of that kind, with startling clarity. And, er, well then I got to the stage - that was when I got to the stage where they thought I was going to, going to die. I was half dead anyway. And it was then that they took me back to, back to Changi camp.

Right. Now we've moved that - that's towards the end of that period. But there are a few things I want to, a few things I want to ask you about that period. Rod Wells - Rod Wells said that he thought that the policy was that - oh, they've been ?picked up - I'll just carry on with the question while this is going on - the policy was that, it was - that in fact you were supposed to serve out your sentence, but the sentence wasn't given lightly, it wasn't just an excuse to starve you to death, but it was administratively inconvenient if you died and therefore they didn't want you to die in the, in Outram Road, because they were, it was a military prison and records had to be kept and there would be please explains and, you know, if somebody died before they'd finished their sentence. Do you accord with that or is that -

Oh definitely, the Kempei-tai had a definite policy that - the Kempei-tai wanted to appear to the world as, as disciplined people, they wanted to keep their slate completely clean. This is why they did not want people to die on their hands. They weren't a bit worried about people dying, but, as long as they couldn't be held responsible for it, do you see. The reason why they took me eventually out to Changi camp was that they would be able to say, well, after all, we did all we could, and if your own doctors couldn't save him, er, why blame us? This was, this was tie policy behind it all, it was as clear as anything. Now you've asked me as to whether I felt that the sentence was a, was a purely nominal one. Er, I don't think so, because when we had the pleasure of putting the Nips into the bag in Singapore, a, a friend of mine in a British transport company came to me in hospital and he said, come on, Digger, let's go in to Singapore. I was

2/1 well enough to move about a bit at this time. And I said, Well, two things, Bill - his name was Bill Anchor - I said, Two things, Bill - one, nobody's supposed to leave the camp, and secondly, how the dickens do you think we're going to get in there. He said, Well, as far as one is concerned, I think we can forget that; as far as two is concerned, I've got a jeep. I said Right, let's go. So we did. We drove in to Singapore, and I suppose we were a bit foolhardy, but we drove into the concentration area where all these Nips were being put. And we were there in amongst them. They all - they had their weapons, they were just streaming in. And, er, one of them I recognised as a Japanese staff officer, who had been interrogating me a bit in the early stages. Er, this is before we went into, before the Kempei-tai people got me. The staff officer was wanting to know a lot of, a lot of particulars that I wasn't prepared to give him. And, er, he also appeared on the scene after the Kempei-tai crowd had me, they were trying to get hold of military information from me. And, er, low and behold, here was this chap. And with, you know, with all the arrogance in the world, he turned to me and he said "One of these days you will finish your sentence". And I think this is something that the average Australian ought to know about, because they've got to realise that the Japanese, like most Orientals, have learnt the art of long term patience. And also planning a long term objective and working steadfastly and quietly towards it. And, er, there was not the slightest doubt in my mind that this man was imbued with this particular spirit and I think the Japanese nation as a whole is. I think the whole of their post-war policy has indicated this. You've only got to look at the clever way in which they got rid of MacArthur. They did - they not only did everything that MacArthur asked them to do, they did twice as much as he asked them to do. Until finally he was able to announce to to world, the Japanese are a changed people. One of the most ridiculous statements that have ever been issu.. uttered, in my opinion.

Well, Russell Braddon's just written a book, The Other Hundred Years War, in which he makes the same point, of how a chap once said to him, at about this moment that you saw your staff officer, he saw one of the Burma Railway people there, and he said - who'd had a conversation with him about we will win, even if

2/1 this war lasts a hundred years, and he said, what about your hundred years war now? And the Jap said, Ninety six to go.

Yes. Yes. Oh, there's no doubt about it, you see. They've also learned that there's a great deal of conquering that can be done economically without wars, and they've been extremely successful in that.

Right, but back to -

Oh yes.

- this particular incident, and what was your response, by the way, can you remember, to this staff officer who said that one day you'll finish your sentence?

No, I'm not sure that I was prepared to carry on the conversation wit- him, circumstances were such that, you know, things were moving pretty quickly and I wasn't very interested in striking up a conversation with this bloke any way, it was really a sort of remark flung at me as he went, went by.

Now, Rod Wells also made the point that once you were in Outram Road, you weren't subject to - that if you obeyed the rules you didn't, you weren't ill treated, but if you were, if you disobeyed the rules, you were. But not in a sadistic way, I mean, it was just, like a very strict prison with rules. Was that how, was that your your feeling or not?

Yes, I think so. Yes, I think that's right. Er, in the upstairs portion of this same block that we were in, they used to put their own prisoners. And they treated them very strictly, admittedly they, they took them out and exercised them every day, and they fed them jolly well and all the rest of it. But, er, they were quite strict with them. No, I think that it was a matter of an extraordinarily rigid gaol discipline. But if you went against them - you see, I told you about the time when I, I managed to complain to the commandant. Well, part of the

2/1 punishment they gave me on that, they made me go in and go down on my hands and knees and scrub out the cell of this man that had died from this ringworm in agony, and in amongst all the - mind you, he, they hadn't touched his cell for the best part of a month, and there was blood and flesh and excreta, you've got - it's just an indescribable thing and I was made to go down on my hands and knees and scrub this thing out as part of my punishment, for daring to even complain. I mean, that was the rigidity. There was a - yes, I think Rod's got a point there. Provided you were, er, well, cleverer than I was and prepared to recognise this and obey the rules, not be a naughty boy, they - yes they left you alone.

The point he was making I think, that it wasn't - I mean, you did it hard, but it wasn't sort of sadistic brutality, it was, it was, of course in a sense sadistic brutality, but, but in their eyes, you were simply undergoing a tough -

Serving out a sentence. That's right. Under the conditions imposed. Yes, I think that's, I think that's fairly right. Um - I probably brought a lot of, a lot of my woes upon myself. But, er, I don't know, I just, I just didn't like the circumstances at all and I didn't like the people very much.

The question of whenever you got out of your cell - I think Rod said that he was taken out for a so-called wash, where you had to go, you had thirty seconds or something to dip water over yourself -

Yes.

When did you get out of the cell during the day?

Oh well, er, I didn't get out actually as much as the others, because, er, I suppose they felt that, I suppose they felt that they had to sort of perhaps make me a little bit more amenable, I don't know. But there were times when I was taken out. Usually in the morning, they'd take you out, as you say, allow you to have a much needed wash, herd you around like sheep and, and, er, if you

2/1 weren't quick they'd, they'd bash you. McAlister was a bit the same as I was I think, and not prepared to be too docile about things, er, they used - I remember one time they gave him a hell of a bashing with a, with the back of a sword, er, purely because he refused to, to jump when they said jump. He wasn't, shall we say, openly insubordinate, he just wasn't hurrying enough to suit them. And they very quickly made that, that apparent, that you had to be absolutely conform to the, sort of letter of what they wanted. But if you did, well then you managed at least to escape a beating.

So you got out for a wash -did you ever do any of the toilet bucket routine, go to other people's cells to collect the -

No. No. No, I, er - I wouldn't have minded that, it would have given me a chance to, er, you know, have a chat and pass the word around, even though you were carefully supervised. No, I didn't get a chance at that.

Did you get a chance to acquire any food by any other means other than what was passed in the cell door?

Oh no, absolutely no communication of any sort anywhere.

Some of them used to snatch some green leaves, I think. There was hemp picking that went on somewhere - you were never, you never even got -

No, oh no, I didn't, I didn't get any of, any of those amusements.

Talking of that - I'll just -

END OF SIDE 1 TAPE 2.

JOHN WYETT - TAPE 2 Side 2

2/2 ... a shit bucket and, and absolutely nothing else?

Yes, yes.

So, you know, how did you organise yourself mentally?

Well, you've just got to draw on your mental resources and, er - you see, where I was rather fortunate actually, er, I happened to - well, I'd had a training in pharmacy, I graduated in Pharmacy, then I, er, embarked on a Science course, completed a Science course, er, of which chemistry was one of my major subjects, er, and zoology. Which gives you a, a lot of, shall we say food for thought, things to reflect upon. Er, you know, you go over lectures you had, the information that you picked up in the, over fairly long years at the University. Er - one of the things I, I did, I thought to myself, if one could devise a solid fuel for, for an aircraft engine, you could turn a four stroke engine into a two stroke, which means you could double the power for the same amount of weight. And, er, I thought, well now this is, this could be quite a brainwave, and what kind of a solid fuel? I thought all right, well, something like cordite which you can make in the form of a, of a long thread, you could devise a mechanism for just poking a little bit of cordite into the top of a, the top of a piston, that could be exploded, so there's no problem there, you don't even have to have another cycle to draw air in, because, er, an explosive has got its own oxygen built into it. And, er, I got quite excited about this. Well, then you've got to go back through your memory, you've got to remember the periodic table of elements, you've got to remember the atomic weight of various elements. And, er, since you've got nothing to write on and nothing to do sums on, you've got to go over and over it in your mind until you've got it indelibly fixed, the figures attaching to the various atoms which make up the formula of the explosive that you're going to use. Right, well then you add up all those atomic weights in your mind, er, and you've got the weight of the charge that you'd need to put into the engine, and, er,

oh, I had this developed to a fairly high, fairly high stage, when suddenly the dreadful realisation came upon me that, er, the aircraft engine doesn't have to carry its oxygen around with it, it. just simply sucks it in from the atmosphere, whereas in my method, the fuel had to contain all that weight of oxygen in it and so my, my grand theory rather collapsed. But I'd, at least I'd had the amusement, and it takes quite a long time as you can imagine, dredging up from your memory all this series of atomic weights and then the number of atoms that you require, multiplying them in your mind, adding them all up, memorizing that kind of figure while you get on to another one, er - so you've got to go over it a few times to fix it. All of which, er, took up quite a useful amount of time.

Did you divide up your time, did you give yourself a session of say that, and then alternating it with, say, trying to remember scenes from your childhood or - did you sort of divvy up your mental time?

Oh no, I kept right at it, because, er, to, I mean the interruption of sleep was bad enough, because next day you had to go over a hell of a lot of it to, to recall it. So any interruption, I used to, er, I used to resent, because it interrupted your chain of thought and, er, the masses of figures that you had stored away in your little computer. So - no, that kept me quite absorbed for quite a while. Well, then when I realised that there wasn't much future in developing this, this thing, I said all right, well I'll - I was rather, rather keen on building hi-fi sets and things, you know, before the war, this is before, you know; record playing had reached the stage it has today, where nobody would dream of building his own, own hi-fi because the state of the technology is, has got quite beyond the amateur stage. But before the war it hadn't reached that stage and you could build a, er, a jolly sight better player than, record player than you could buy, if you spent the time and the money on it. Which prompted the thought in my mind - also at this stage you, there was no such thing as a decent record changer. So I thought, well now, I'll. I'll set about devising a record changer. And, er, that occupied me to a great extent. But

2/2 that required a certain amount of visual representation and I didn't know how the hell I was going to overcome that particular problem. But actually I managed to flake off a little bit of plaster off the wall and, er, I used the back of my sleeping board, and this bit of plaster as a piece of chalk, and started doing diagrams on that. This all had to be done in a very surreptitious manner because you were under constant surveillance, of course. But, er, a lot of this was done at night, because, er - see, the light was left burning in your cell all night. And the guards weren't quite so vigilant then. And, er, you had to stand these boards up leaning against the wall during the daytime. So you were able to just sort of, when the guard wasn't looking, just turn the board a bit to get a look at your diagram, turn it back again, and that gave you the mental picture to sort of keep you going on the next stage. Well, they eventually found my diagrams and that was a bit of a woeful day. Oh, but things like that - I can't recall now, they -

What happened when they discovered your diagrams?

Oh, bashed me to pieces. Took my boards away, wouldn't even let me, give me boards to sleep on for quite a while.

McGregor said that, in his book - he's dead now, unfortunately - that sometimes he would get so bored, and he obviously didn't have the intellectual resources that others had to deal with this type of thing - and he would sometimes do something to engender a bashing simply to break the monotony.

Break the monotony, yes. Yes. Yes, I know some of the fellows, you know, would do that. You're driven to the stage of desperation. No, I never got to that stage, actually. I always had so many plans I wanted to, er, think out and put into effect (laughed).

What happened to the record changer?

2/2 Oh, well, I could remember quite a bit of it actually when I got home, and I found that a friend of mine - probably a friend of yours, by the name of Waterworth, had, er, invented and patented a record changer, which was rather along different lines from mine, but, er - he was a bit ahead of me on that one. I - my plans were delayed. Through circumstances beyond my control.

Right. So if you wouldn't mind describing - because I haven't got from you, although other people have talked about it - what you were allowed to do in your cell in terms of the daily routine. Right, so the light's burning - well, just describe it - you might even begin by saying how the light is on all the time.

(Pause) What, the daily routine of the cell.

Well, sort of - not so much the daily routine but what you were permitted to do in the confines of your cell in the day, in the daytime, the physical -

You literally weren't allowed to do anything, or I wasn't. You just had to sit still. You weren't even allowed to stride up and down your cell to get a bit of exercise. That wasn't allowed. Er, apart from the bit of food they used to poke in, occasionally, and you were, you were allowed to use your slop bucket - quite, apart from those two activities, er, you just simply sat there and stared into space all day long. As I say, you weren't even allowed to twiddle your thumbs. If you moved your thumbs like that they'd come in and bash you up.

What did you have in the cell?

I had a - had these three boards, about seven feet long, that you put down at night, and which was your bed. And they just simply lay flat on the stone floor. There were two very thin cotton blankets, which had to be folded up and placed at the foot of the boards when they were stood up against the wall. Er, there was a square block of wood which would be about a foot long, and about four inches square,

2/2 which you were supposed to use as a pillow. And, er, that was all, apart from the slop bucket of course. There was nothing else. But one learnt after a while to, er, sleep in such a position that you could, you could manage on this rather hard bed, either flat on one's back - my neck was still troubling me quite a bit then from this other bother that it had, so actually then and ever since I've had to sleep flat on my back, I can sleep no other way. And without a pillow.

What effect on you did it - what effect, was the light being on all the time, what effect did that have?

Oh, it, it gave one a fitful kind of sleep -

Begin by saying the light was on -

I see. They left the light on all night in one's cell. The light consisted of a single bulb, without any kind of shade around it, er, in the centre of the ceiling which was fairly tall, so you had this virtual pinpoint of light -

It was on in the cell all the time? You describe it.

Oh yes. So you've got this sort of pinpoint light shining down into your eyes the whole night, which, er, well, it does interfere with one's sleep naturally, as you can imagine, so that you get a fitful sleep during the night. Er - I think it's all part of the system, really, to, er, to keep you quiescent, shall we say. Wear down your resistance so that you're no nuisance to them. And I suppose part of the punishment. Also they need a light to be able to supervise you.

What was your lowest ebb?

Oh, I think the lowest ebb was at the time when, as I say, I became sort of mentally detached from my body and I was a perfectly logical human being - human

2/2 something, sitting up there on the, on the wall, and looking down at myself.

That in parapsychological terms is a classical description of what they call the out of the body experience, where you, you are in fact looking down at your own self.

Oh?

Sometimes happens during an operation, you know, or when somebody nearly dies, they - did you have a connection of any sort between you and your body or were -

No, it was a completely separate entity really, this body that was down there was something that I really didn't want to own really, it was in a pretty bad state and here was I, a perfectly normal, normal being, er, up there on the wall. I didn't realise what you've just told me, you know, that this is a reasonably common experience, but, er -

Yes, it is an uncommon experience, but it has been described by other people.

Has it? Mm, yes. So I suppose you could say that, that would be ones lowest ebb, I suppose it's as close as you could get to passing out altogether.

Yes, you may at that point have been very close to death.

I think I was actually, because, er, I was completely distended and blown up with beriberi; when they finally got me out to Changi and they started draining some of this liquid out of my system, I, I lost over a stone in weight in 24 hours.

How did you get out of - who made the decision - did you have any part in this, or were you simply so obviously ill that they - how did you get out?

Oh well, they just came and carted me out; they had to carry me out. And, er, I,

2/2 I had, had no part in it. I had only a small amount of consciousness of it then.

Some people did take the risk of feigning illness to get out.

Oh yes, yes.

But if you got that wrong, you lost meals and, and you probably - it was a very critical thing, I mean if you left it too late you might die, and if you did it too early and they woke up to it, you'd lose those meals and slip further back.

That's right, yes, yes.

In your case, events were taken out of your hands.

Oh yes. I, I used to try and, when we did have this communication going, advise the fellows against trying that sort of thing, because it had no future anyway. Because if they did manage to get away with it, they might get back into, into Changi for short periods, but the moment they picked up in health a little bit, back they'd go into, into the cells to finish their sentence. This is what happened to McAlister. You see (truck passing?) - Good God!

Go back to saying this happened -

Yeah well, this is precisely what happened to McAlister. H e was, he got pretty sick and he was evacuated out to Changi. And he and I were, were together then, of course, in the hospital set-up there. Well, the Kempei-tai used to come out at regular intervals and inspect us to see whether we were ready to go back. And, oh, a very nice fellow with the name of Huxtable, you've probably heard of Charles Huxtable, have you? Flying Doctor and all that. Charles was a most remarkable man, he got a, he got a Military Cross as a doctor in World War I and he got a bar to his Military Cross as a doctor in World War I; now this is

2/2 a quite extraordinary achievement for a doctor to get a Military Cross anyway, because as you know it's, it's for valour and not for just service. Well, Charles had to get himself mixed up in World War II as well, and he was attached to this hospital. Well Charles came along one evening, sneaked into us, and he said "Look, Mac, you're looking too fit, we've got to do something about it". And Tickler, another Air Force bloke, had come along with him, and Charles said "I think what I'll do is break your foot, and then you won't be able to walk", and so Mac said "Oh, that's a good idea". And anyway about, oh, about three o'clock one morning Charles came along together with Tinkler, and old Mac went out with them. Charles had managed to scrounge a little bit of cocaine from somewhere or other, he injected this into Mac's foot, but he only had a trifling amount, and, er, they put his foot over the edge of the concrete antimalarial drain, and bashed it with a sledge hammer. And, er, it, old Mac - they brought old Mac back in rather a bad state, actually, dragged him back, chucked him into bed, and, er, old Tink and Charles were sitting around giggling about this for a few minutes afterwards, and, er, Charles said "Well, I suppose it's not a very good thing for a, for a doctor to go purposely smashing his patient's foot or getting it smashed with a seven pound sledge hammer", and old Tink gave a bit of a giggle and said "You know, Charles, it wasn't a seven pound sledge hammer at all, it was a 14 pound one". Well, old Mac's foot got into a pretty bad way - they broke several bones in it and - it didn't help old Mac much either, his general condition wasn't improved by it. And, er, shortly after that the Nips came out to take him back, they'd decided to take him back, came out for him, and found him in this state, and that kept old Mac back in Changi, oh, for another, best part of another couple of months. They came and got him in the end and he was in, actually in Outram Road, when the end came, but he was, he didn't go back for very long. But I, I'm telling you about this because it illustrates the fact that there was no point in these boys starving themselves to get out there, because in a very short time they'd be back again. And, er, so I said to them, look, there's no future in it, it's far better to stick it out. But of course some of them decided to give it a go, some of them with bad results, one or two of them got away with

2/2 it, but it was only temporary.

So you actually had to have something physically wrong with you, I mean, which you had to go -

Or you had to be so physically wrong with you that they were afraid you were going to die. They just let this other fellow die I've told you about because they wanted it to be a lesson to the other chaps. Who - there were several of them at that time who were making themselves sick to the point - well, as you mentioned, with the idea of getting evacuated. So the old Nip obviously said to himself, well, I'll teach these fellows a lesson, I'll just let one of them die, and he let, they let him die under the very horrible circumstances I told you about.

Rod Wells described an occasion where, with this awful pellagra and other, scabies and lice and God knows what else, and he said you'd itch and itch and itch until you'd get to the point where he would tear himself to pieces, scratching - knowing that it was going to be terrible pain, but he had this five minutes of relief, and then the pain would start and then gradually the sores and the scabs would all heal and the whole cycle would start all over again. Do you recall anything like that?

Well, here again I thought that the - it's obviously not a good thing to scratch, as Rod so rightly said, it gets to the stage of being intolerable. No, I used a form of, I suppose you might call it self-hypnotism, and, er, told myself it wasn't itching, and managed by a mental process not to alleviate the itching, but to get myself into a point where I could restrain myself from scratching. But it was a, it was quite a distinct mental process to do it.

In what way do you think that experience of being, going through all that torture and solitary confinement and so on - do you think that changed you in any way as a person, or was -

2/2 Oh yes, I think so, I think I'm a better person for it. I think I'm more tolerant - not that I can claim to be a tolerant person, but I'm more tolerant than I was. No, I think those of us who were lucky. enough to come out of it have benefited by it in certain ways, I don't think - I think it's left its mark physically; mentally I - oh, I don't know how you've got me talking so much about this, it's something I never have talked about. Er, put it this way. Things that fuss other people I don't think fuss us to quite the same extent, because you can say to yourself, well, I've seen worse. And there's practically nothing that can happen to you in civilian life which - to which you can't apply that criterion, you can simply say, well, I've seen plenty worse than that. Why fuss? So that I think is a very distinct mental advantage that some of us got as a result of it. A bit of a tough way of getting it, it's an experience I wouldn't want to repeat. But, er, put it this way, I don't resent it in one way, I, I do resent the, er, the unnecessary suffering that the Nips inflicted upon us, it was unnecessary, it was sadistic. Part of their, part of their nature, part of their makeup, that's why I told you about that incident of their pet dog, er, you've got to understand it a bit from their point of view. I, er, have always said to myself, well, there's no point in hating the Japanese, hate, I think anyone would agree, is really a self-destructive thing. I was also influenced very, to a very great extent by something that a Chinese said to me right at the end, before we were leaving, his name was ?Tah Chung, and he was one of these incredible Singaporean Chinese who had built up a very big business, he was one of the Singaporean millionaires, he lived in a big house in Singapore surrounded by a big wall, he used to help our troops quite a lot. And he was periodically visited by the Japanese and they raided his house, but he was always clever enough to leave one item of value that they could pinch, but all his main items of value he managed to secrete away. And because he left something for them to take, they didn't search for anything further. He was one of these very clever fellows. He didn't speak any English , he - but he did ask Bill Anker and Bon Rogers and myself to go out and have dinner with him one night just before we left and we went in to his house and it was a typically Chinese meal with the women standing behind your chair, only the men sat down. When we were going

2/2 we were standing in the moonlight on the veranda of his house, and these long steps leading down towards the gate and the compound. And he had, he'd put on his mandarin robes and he had his long. pigtail down his back - I can see him now, his hands folded inside the sleeves of his, his robe in that sort of classical Chinese fashion, and he was bowing and saying something to me in Chinese and his son, Wong Tah Chung, who spoke very good English, he was a Cambridge graduate, he - well educated man, he said "Father is saying "Major Wyett, we must not hate these Japanese, we must try and teach them to be good. Good night." And I went away with my head in a whirl and I thought to myself, people talk about the heathen Chinese, you know, what a Christian remark from a man who'd suffered pretty severely at their hands. And that, I've tried to follow that philosophy. And, er, in fact I was, I suppose I was one of the very early ones to own a Japanese car in Hobart, I used to get ragged about that quite a lot. But I took the view, well, we've got to trade with these people, we've got to learn to understand them if we want them to buy our materials, then's we've got to buy some of theirs, and if the Government decide to let their cars into Australia it's the Government's decision, not mine. And I thought I'd pretty well mastered this until one time I was in San Francisco and a friend of mine had said, now when you're there, go to the Mark Hopkins Hotel, go to the top of the Mark and have a drink and enjoy the view. And when you come down, go across the road to the Fairmont Hotel and go to that downstairs bar, it's really worth seeing. And I remembered this and I was half way across the road when I saw flying outside the entrance to the Fairmont the American flag and the Japanese flag. And I suddenly remembered reading in the press that morning that the Crown Prince of Japan was the first time ever making a visit to the United States. And when I saw this flag I was right in the middle of crossing the road. I found I had turned around and was walking away from that hotel in an action which was entirely unconscious. I was not aware of what I was doing. In fact, when I saw the Mark Hopkins Hotel in front of me, I got the surprise of my life to realise that I'd turned around; and I thought to myself, well, maybe your philosophy hasn't worked after all.

2/2 But you meet Japanese people now, you don't have a problem, do you, about meeting Japanese people?

Oh no, I meet them, I get along with them. I try and be just as polite to them as they invariably are to us. But I realise at the back of my mind that you've got to be aware that they have certain objectives, we have certain objectives. And the two don't coincide altogether. And one of these days if the opportunity comes they will definitely come to Australia if someone else doesn't bag it before them.

Were you at all times confident in your mind that you would survive?

Never had a moment's hesitation. Never for one moment.

Just put it, if you don't mind saying that you thought you would survive.

Well, you've asked me did I think I would survive; it, the thought didn't consciously enter my mind, that I wasn't going to survive. I mean, I just took that for granted that I would survive. And sort of took it from there. There wasn't, it wasn't a matter of, er, of if we would get off the island, of if we would get back to Australia, it was purely a matter of when. Er, and I think this was pretty much in the minds of, of all the chaps. You know, may it come soon, but certainly it will come.

And even in the darkest times of, of the Outram Road experience -

You can't give up. I've seen people give up in hundreds. Er, when the Indonesian troops came -

- run out of -

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE 2

JOHN WYETT - Tape 3 Side 1

3/1 Interview with John Wyett, tape 3. Sorry. I interrupted you.

You were asking me about, er, whether I or most of us had doubts about our ultimate survival and I've explained to you that, you know, as far as I'm concerned it just didn't occur to me, as I was going to survive any way. Er, but I have seen - it was a matter of simply not giving up. Er, now this seems to be a characteristic which is shared by the Australian and the British, perhaps to a much greater extent than with some of the other people of other countries. I think both the British and the Australians were just too bloody-minded to give up. They weren't going to let this thing get them down, they weren't going to let Nip beat them. But I can't say the same thing for many of the Indonesian troops that came through, a lot of them had mixed blood in them of course, you know. Now I've seen them give up and literally lie down and die, under the same circumstances where Australian and British troops survived. Purely because they refused to lie down and die. Now it was very much a mental process with a lot of those chaps that died unnecessarily. But I, I can say I never saw it in any of our Australian troops nor in any of the British troops.

I have interviewed people who have instanced occasions where their friends on the Railway just "I'm not going", and done that. Rare, but there are occasional examples. Let's go on to finish with - you were saying about, before we started to record, about the Australians setting an example as POWs and I wonder if you could develop that, that line.

Er - I think I've probably covered it really. We started off by insisting that, that our troops shaved. And, er, beards were allowed to some of the naval personnel that had come through, because it was a naval tradition. But those few beards that were allowed had to be kept trimmed and neat. As far as all the Army personnel were concerned, they were to shave and that was that. And, er, there

3/1 was all kinds of ingenuity developed about achieving this shaving every day, but there again the ingenuity of the Australian came to his rescue and he was able, able to do so.. Then this gradually, I think frankly we shamed a lot of British troops into it. And then they gradually adopted the same as ourselves. Because they, they looked absolutely terrible alongside our fellows in the early stages. Then eventually we all sort of came together in the, in the one sort of spirit of doing it. I don't say this in any derogatory sense as far as the English are concerned; you take the average Australian who goes away for a week to his weekend shack on a fishing expedition, I mean, one of his delights is not to shave. Er, and some people don't do that. I, no matter what the circumstances, I have always shaved all my life, no matter where I might happen to be, because I just like to, er, well , to be as neat and tidy as possible, it's part of my makeup. It became part of the make-up of our Australian troops because we ordered them to do so; and that spread to the British. Now this might sound a very trivial thing, but I told you about the uplift of morale that occurred in this cell with the Chinese and the Tamils and all the rest of them when I, the simple process of giving them a bit of fish backbone to comb their hair and tidy themselves up, when he saw the fellow across the way with his hair all neat and tidy instead of it being all draggled and everywhere, it was a good sight that lifted his spirits, lifted his morale."--And this had a, an effect which went right through the camp and stayed in the camp. Because not only the shaving, but the general tidiness. We would get fellows with a tailoring background, for argument's sake, and we would make certain that what rags we had were always kept neat and tidy. Er, we were also able to, er, to develop certain things. For instance the, the dentist came to us and said, well, there's not much that we can do to help the chaps with their teeth because we just haven't the gear, and one of the things that they lacked particularly was amalgam for filling the teeth. Well amalgam, as you probably know, is an alloy of, er, of copper, silver and mercury. And when these were mixed together into a paste they could put it into the tooth and it sets. Well, they didn't have any of this. Well, we were able to provide it for, both for British troops and ourselves. We got some chaps to sneak out of the camp at night and cut down some telephone wires, and that gave us our copper. And the

3/1 fellows that went into Singapore on working parties, some of them wore working in the Singapore cool stores, and there were various thermometers about the place. We said, we want some thermometers, please, so these chaps by devious means were able to smuggle these back into the camp, that gave us our mercury. Then it was a question of where do you get the silver. Well, I remembered that I'd seen one of the Gordon Highlanders struggling into camp when we first went in, carrying a huge silver cup. Now when they were falling back down the peninsula, he'd gone into the, to the Spotted Dog in Kuala Lumpur, and he'd noticed this large silver cup and he just fell so much in love with it that he stuffed it into his haversack and he'd lugged it all the way down in the campaign, during the fighting, he'd lugged it out to Changi; and when we went along to him and we said, we want your cup, he literally broke down and cried, the poor devil. Because we took it from him and cut it up. Well, then we had to find a means of melting the copper and the silver together to form this, this alloy, so we said to the chaps, next time you're passing through a road cutting and you see some of that pale coloured clay, bring some back. And by this means we were able to fashion a crucible and bake it. Then we said right, well, now we need a blowtorch to, er, to melt this in the crucible. In the meantime we'd got hold of a file, and so they filed the copper up into a fine, finely divided state, and filed the silver up, and these were mixed together in the crucible. How to melt it? Well, we got some of the engineer boys to fashion a blowtorch, and then we needed some gas for it. So we said, well, right ho, we can use petrol vapour as the gas; - how to get the petrol? So the ration truck used to come, drive in every day with the rations for the camp. So we got one of the fellows to hit one of the Jap guards over the head with a log of wood, and, er, this started a hell of a, hell of a fuss. The other guards came rushing in, some of the other fellows we'd tipped off to join in the brawl - during the melee, some of the boys just went and milked the petrol tank, do you see; that gave us our petrol. So by this means with the blowtorch we melted a little globule of this, these two metals together, and then when that had cooled it was filed, finely divided, broke one of the thermometers, missed the mercury with it and there's the amalgam for the dentist.

3/1 This is just one example of a bit of Australian ingenuity. Then we wanted vitamin A, and as you know, they've got big palm oil plantations in Malaya and I don't know whether you've ever seen palm oil, but it's a bright orangey colour. And that orange colour is, is due to provitamin A, it's a carotene which in the body is converted into vitamin A and of which the diet was entirely lacking. So we said - we knew that the Nips were short of soap. And out of the goodness of our hearts we offered to make some soap for them. So we said, now bring us in large quantities of palm oil, and we got a few chemists, industrial chemists together and we arranged a counterflow system using - told the Nips we wanted the ?whole of (to get hold of?) baths out of bombed houses and so forth, we lined these up in a counterflow process whereby the water goes through that way, the - and wood ashes from the fires, cooking fires, comes through the other way. So we leached a lye out of, out of the wood ashes, and boiled this up with the palm oil and made it into soap. And since we realised the Nips wouldn't know how much palm oil was needed to make so much soap, for every pound of soap that was made, we had about 20 pounds of palm oil, which was, we managed to put into the diet. And that gave us some vitamin A for the troops. Countering beriberi, we - I set up a, set up a yeast centre. And we saved a little bit of, of the sugar and flour out of the rations and, er, talking to some of the scientists from Malaya, er, one of them mentioned to me that the wild yeasts that occur on fruits in Malaya are very, er, very right in vitamin B when they ferment things. So, er, we sent some of the chaps out of the camp at night to collect some wild mangoes and various wild berries rather like a grape, brought them back, cultivated the wild yeasts from them and eventually we had quite a big batch of fermenting liquor which we were able to dole out to the troops which were full of yeast and gave them their vitamin, vitamin Bl. It didn't give them the vitamin B6 complex, but when we were, when we were getting retrobulbar neuritis and chaps were going blind – and this is an irreversible reaction actually, once, once the vitamin B6 complex gets lacking to a certain stage the, the optic nerve begins to degenerate, and once it's degenerated it won't regenerate, so that it's permanent blindness, and we were alarmed at the increasing frequency of this. What we used to do with that, we used to send troops out cutting this long lalang grass, got hold of an old

3/1 truck engine and the engineers fixed that up so that you could feed this grass into the cylinders, then they'd screw the head back on again and they'd get a team of blokes cranking it, and that compressed the grass and this dark browny-green foul-smelling liquid was expressed out of the grass. And, er, it was absolutely vile, it had a horrible smell and it had a, an equally objectionable taste. But it was full of this vitamin B6. And we literally had to line the fellows up who were showing symptoms and, er, stand over them while they drank it. And, er, there's many a chap today with his sight that owes it to the fact that we made him drink this foul extract of the lalang grass.

And that was in the first twelve months, wasn't it -

Yes, that was all happening - (both speak at once)

Now when you came out and you were in hospital, er, were you a, a very sick man, but did they have to adopt any ruses and so on to keep you there? How, how was it that you managed to stay in Changi for, for the rest of the time?

Er - I think I stayed there because I, er, I was in a pretty, pretty bad way. Some of the fellows managed it. One of them put on a, a, a really good act of going mad, and helping in all this was a man who's never head the recognition that he should and that was a Dr. Rogers. When the troops were put into Changi Gaol and separated from the officers, one medical man was allowed to go into the camp and attend any sick ones there, but only one. Because at this stage the Nips wanted complete segregation. So rather than order anybody to go into the gaol, er, I wasn't part of this at the time because I was in the hands of the Kempei-tai, but they called for volunteers amongst the medical men to go in. Well, there were Kempei-tai people coming in periodically looking at our little bunch, the bad boys, and of course they had their spies and their guards around everywhere, it wasn't a pleasant place to go into. And, er, there was a certain amount of understandable reluctance on the part of most of the medical officers to volunteer for this job. Old Bon Rogers just didn't hesitate, he said "I'll go, I'll do it".

3/1 And the work that he did amongst the men was absolutely terrific. The Nips would come in and they'd say, I want 30 men for a working party. And old Bon would put his stethoscope around his neck - not in his ears at all - men would parade past him and he'd go through the motions of putting his stethoscope in these fellows' chests and he'd say "Heart condition, that man's sick", do you see. Well, the morale effect on the men when they saw him putting on this act, do you see, and the Nips didn't pick it up, do you see and - oh, they thought he was absolutely Christmas. Buck Rogers, they used to call him. He used to get up to all these sort of tricks. Well of course he was the fellow that was also looking after us, in our little, er, high security section. And we had a fellow by the name of Mikardo(?), he was a sort of half Portuguese from Argentina, and he was a bit of an actor. He was getting to the stage where he had to go back. Bon said "Why don't you put on a mad act?", do you see, and he gave him a few tips of what to do and - oh, this, when they came out, this fellow put on a terrific act of going mad, do you see, and Bon had put him up to it, he said "Now you go and grab one of those Nips by the throat". And this fellow did this, do you see, went raving mad and went for the Nip, do you see - I might mention at this stage that the Nip had a, a, an almost holy regard for the insane. One of their own troops in Outram Road went mad, er, bashed himself to death against the door, er, and they more or less had a day of mourning. They came round and gave each of us a tiny piece of butterscotch - a most extraordinary ceremonial, honouring the man whose spirit had gone mad. So it was pretty easy, if you could put on a convincing act. And of course when old Mishado went for, went for this Nip, Bon came rushing up and bashed Mishado across the jaw and, and told him to behave himself and go and sit down and, and you know, ordered him, rushed, roared at him and so forth, and laid him down on his bed and then sort of soothed him off and the Nips were tremendously impressed with all this, do you see. You know, it's just another one of those things that, er, the chaps got up to. As far as I was concerned, I did, didn't have to do very much.

Well, you were just very sick.

3/1 I was a bit, yes.

And what - at that stage, you know, when you collapsed and they got you out, you, you were suffering from beriberi, pellagra, er -

Scabies, you name it - amoebic dysentery. Yes, there wasn't much of me left, I suppose.

Have there been any long term behavioural effects - for instance, Rod Wells spends 20 minutes under the shower every morning, washing, he just - he can't help it, you know - and he's still doing it, you know. Do you know any things that have stayed with you?

Not, not consciously. I think perhaps - an aversion to talking about it. I mean, you've managed to get me in on this, but many people have tried and I haven't done so. Er - I think that the experience was probably a little bit grim and, er, you know, I'll be - I think I'll probably go and take a couple of Valiums after this lot!

I have left a few sleepless nights behind me, as a matter of fact, on, on this -

Yes, well I only hope in your, in your programme you don't, you don't make a sort of horror story out of it. I think there's too much horror stuff in the journalistic field these days; if it can be done in such a way that it's objective I think probably some good could come out of it.

We were interested in the mechanics of survival, basically; but in order to, in order to talk about that, you have to of course indicate what people are surviving from. And so -

That's right. Yes. Yes. Yes.

3/1 But anyway - we will leave it there, at that.

All right. OK.