LEONARD JOSEPH BIRCHALL

Experiences as a Prisoner-of-War in the Far East, 1942-1945

Interviewed by

Charles G. Roland, M.D.

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Oral History Archives

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Leonard Joseph Birchall, Kingston, Ontario, 22 February 1986

Leonard Joseph Birchall:

The first night we had the....

Charles G. Roland, M.D.:

This was which camp?

L.J.B.:

This was in Yokohama, this first working camp we were in. Again, you'll be able to clue it in by reading those notes and so on. We arrived in there and there was a chap named Bardoniette, who was my navigator. He and I were the only two officers that came from this [Camp] Ofuna, which was a special naval questioning camp. There was also a couple of others of my crew. There was a chap named Catlin, and a fellow named Phillips, but they were sergeants, so they were down at the Other Ranks part of the camp. There was one little room for officers.

Then, suddenly, in came this great big influx of these guys who had been on these hell ships coming up from Hong Kong, and starved and beaten and what-not as well. But just full of hate. Not just [towards] the officers, but the Japanese, everybody -- they were still fighting. God! these officers -- Cecil Otway from the Royal Engineers and Jimmy Ford from the Royal Scots -- they got me on the side and said, they told me, they said, "If you go out there, if you say the wrong thing, you'll be out behind the sheds and dead inside of 5 minutes. We tell you now." And they meant it. I knew, after I met them, after I stood up in front of these guys, that it was true. I said [to myself], "You're going to have to fight like a hawk to get these guys to

have any respect for anything. There's no way of enforcing discipline -- you're in real trouble."

So I had to go out, and we had the food dished out. It was the first food they'd had in I don't know how long. It was just a bowl of rice and some soup. We said, "All right, you guys dish the soup and the rice out. Here are the officers' bowls." There were six of us. I said, "Here are six bowls. You guys put the food in, divy it out as you can, and we're not going to touch it; you go ahead and do it -- our bowls are there. Now, anybody thinks that we got more than you did, you change it. We're not going to touch ours until everybody has been served and is happy. We're going to do this every meal from here on out."

Of course, they didn't believe you. Some of the guys, they had tried you on when we told them this -- the officers told me they were going to do this; they'd take a spoonful out of their bowl and then come up and say, "Here, look what I got and look what you got." We'd just say, "Look, forget it; take mine, no problem. Put yours down and away you go." And we did this.

They began to believe us. The next thing we did was we said, "Now, there's going to be problems with the guards and what have you, but the minute you get into trouble with the guard, you yell like hell and the closest officer is going to jump between you and the guard. You get lost. We'll take the beating and try to sort things out, and you do this."

I guess it took us, oh, damn near a year, but by that time we had it around, we made it awful plain, that either we were all going to make it or none of us, it was not going to be, "The Officers, and if you guys happen to, well, God bless you."

This again, from the medical point of view, was a real problem. We had nothing. We had no drugs. We had no medicine. The Japs wouldn't give us anything. We had no issues, although there were bags of Red Cross parcels, and we knew this, which we found out later on, but right at the start we had nothing. So we went out on a, on a just a request of the troops and said, "How about this? We have a doctor." This was Dr. James. He was a little old fellow who'd been in Shanghai and came down to Hong Kong, Hong Kong Volunteer Reserves, and was captured. We said, "We've got him. He's got nothing, though; he can't help you. Turn in all your medicines to us. We'll control them. We'll have a list of it all made. Anybody, at any time, can come in and check and see how the drugs have been used or medicines. We're wide open but we're going to have to hold our own parades because the Japanese wouldn't allow us do anything like this. But we'll do this."

Now, as I point out in the paper, it was awful tough because, while you had one drug, it might not be what you wanted. You could trade it for what you did need, when the time came. This was the difference between life and death in a lot of cases. So these guys, they were very reluctant. It took us a long time, but once the faith and so on came back, and our medical parades started to work, and they started to find out that we were doing what we could for them. Any guy that was sick was immediately on half rations as far as the Japanese were concerned, where they needed food. So we made sure that they would say, we'd say "Fine, the Japanese are going to be there, so here's your bowl of

half rations, but you just go around the corner and there's another, extra bowl."

We started that, we started out stealing and we said, "Whenever you are going out to steal, we'll send an officer out with you on the working party. Any problems, the officer will take the bash, the beating, and the blame. You guys bring it in and when you bring it in you turn it in to us, to the officers, and we will give you half back again. That's yours to do whatever you like with, the other half goes into the camp. We'll keep a record so that you know that we, the officers, aren't eating the sugar and so on. That it's used completely and only for the sick. Now, the guy is sick, he's going to get some rice with a little oil on it and some sugar. We're going to fix that up and this is how we'll do it. Anybody that is sick, you come to us with the bowl and say, 'This guy is sick, and can I have a little something,' and we'll give you whatever we've got." And we did this.

The net result was that over that first winter -- which was horrible, because our bodies hadn't adjusted to it -- some guys, strangely enough, their bodies just couldn't take the food, couldn't get the value out of it. It would just go through undigested. They just went chunggg! from 200 pounds down. Other people, like myself, I was fortunate, my body just seemed to be able to take the food and take every bloody drop out of it. So I could exist on less, really, that the other guys could.

But here we were this winter, and I think we figured that that first winter in Japan, about 35% of the POWs died from cold, no clothing, improper clothing, no medicine, lack of food, slave

labor, you name it. By the time we finished....

C.G.R.:

Was this '42-43 or '43-'44?

L.J.B.:

No, we're talking now '42 going into '43. That was the worst one. But after we got over that winter, those that survived that, their bodies were more or less acclimatized. That weeded the ones who weren't going to make it, it weeded them out. That winter we lost 3 out of about 325. The Japanese came down all over us, wanting to know how the hell this was done; they had doctors, they had all this God damn business in there. This was when we first ran into this noxima, this treatment of the burning. We ran into that God damn thing. We had to stop that.

C.G.R.:

Moxibustion, or....

L.J.B.:

As I recall the expression, it was called noxima. Maybe that's not the right pronunciation, but we ran into that the first time, when they said to us that they were bringing in this doctor to assist us and so on, and he was a specialist and what have you. We had an awful lot of trouble with ulcers, stomach ulcers. I don't know why, we just couldn't track it down.

But the doctor had a theory, for what it was worth, that our stomachs, because we had so little food, were contracting to a great extent. As a result of this the thing was wrinkling up and little bits of food might get in the wrinkles and this would cause infection and what not. The next thing you knew, you had

popped this great big bloody ulcer, which were all bleeding ulcers. They were really bad for us because our bodies just couldn't fight back. We didn't have the ability to do this. We were very, very suceptible to gangrene and things like that, so when these guys had these ulcers, they were very, very obvious. The doctor could find them without any, too much problem. At least he told me this.

Anyway, here we were with this guy coming in. So we said, "All right, what we'll do is we'll take three very obvious cases -- no question as to what the hell is wrong with him. We'll get this guy to have a look at them. We'll watch him and make damn sure what he's doing is all right. If he can take these very obvious cases, and maybe he can use some drugs and help -- all right, let's do this." Jesus! we got this poor bugger in with the ulcers, and I'll never forget as long as I live, they started in on him and bared down his tummy and what not. Then he took a black pencil and he started putting "X's" on the guys tummy. And I said, "Oh, Kaufman, what in the hell is he doing?" He said, "I don't know any better than you." [laughter] Putting these "X's" on his tummy. The next thing he did was he brought out this, like a putty, like a grey putty, like a plasticine. He had a long string and he took off hunks of this and put one of these on each one of these spots. Then he lit this long taper like the things that we use for singeing your hair. He hit the first one and it went off just like a, do you remember the old type of flash guns they had, where they put a powder in it and pulled a trigger -- it just went off like that -- boom! This guy had a first-degree burn about the size of a 25-cent piece!

We took one look at this and we immediately grabbed the guy off the table [laughter] and then started out, and of course, all hell broke loose. The guards beat us and bashed us and what not and we just said, "No damn way is this guy, this quack, going to continue." Thank God, from then on in we fought it. We never had any more of that noxima in our camp. An awful lot of guys had it and, oh, a lot of the prisoners died from it because the wounds were just infected and in no time flat they'd gone out of control completely. But that was the only time we had that -- that one session -- and from then on in we said, "No bloody way!"

But we then got on to -- because we were a central camp, [so] we didn't work on just one particular job, we worked on about five or six items. I gather, going back to when I was back on the war crimes, not war crimes but on this deal, on the last visit, I find that pretty well all the camps we worked at, or jobs we worked at, were all pretty well for the Nippon Kokon Company. There was the Assano dockyards, there was an oil plant, railway yards where we worked unloading the railway cars and boats. We worked making bricks, fire bricks. We worked in an electrical plant. We worked in a plant where they made landing craft. We worked in the old Diamond T Truck plant, and that sort of thing. But as far as I can gather, most of them were under this Nippon Kokon Company, which was one of the big, big conglomerates -- still is, today, in Japan.

So we were able to go out and we'd get hold of the head guy; we would send out the honcho, the head prisoner -- sergeant or whatever -- who would be in charge of the group. He would go out

and he would case the job; go in and see what was going on and find out if there was any of the Japs that we'd been working with who might be susceptible to a little bribe or whatever -- friendly and what have you -- or what there was in the way of stealing and so on. He would case it and come back in and tell us the whole story. From then on in, we'd develop that job. We'd steal on one job and we'd sell out on another.

We'd even sell through the fence. We were right in the center of Yokohama. We false-nailed the fence which was around this big baseball stadium where we were. I went back and the stadium is still there. We falsed-nailed it and we would get the guys, the fellows, the Japs, they'd come around and we'd open the fence and sell them. The three things they couldn't get were soap, cooking oil, and sugar -- those three things they couldn't get. These we could steal without any problem.

We used to take a piece of bamboo and sharpen it up, and you would strap it to your wrist. Then you'd have these socks that they issued to us -- just old cotton tubes -- there was no heel or anything. We couldn't wear them they were so damn uncomfortable and what not. We'd take those and tie them to the end of the tube. These sacks were 100-kilo sacks that we had to carry -- 220 pounds. You'd run up the piles and up the boards and pile them, or you'd load them into freighters, or you'd take them up aboard them. Rice, sugar, you name it, whatever. Whenever you carried these things (the sacks were made out of rice straw), as you put your hand on it to balance it, you'd shove the hunk of bamboo up into it, the pipe, and down the sack would fill, and then you'd get down and then you'd have a look

and see what the hell was in the sack. If it was worth while then fine, then you'd keep loading. But if it wasn't then you wouldn't bother any more. So this is how we would get our sugar.

We worked in this oil plant; we used to steal the oil, putting it in the bottles and into canteens and what have you. We made soap in there, which was the third thing; we made this out of coconut oil. They had caustic in there for purifying the oils, and we used that to make the soap. We cooked it up on top of the furnaces. So we would trade that stuff off.

We found out, through friendly interpreters and so on, that there was a type of sulfanilamide that you could get. It was a pill. They could get us sulfanilamide, which we would trade off. Also we could get vitamins. We could get some injectable vitamins. Vitamin B was the big thing that we needed, for beriberi and so on.

Now, the Japanese guards, they liked their rice polished. The Japs don't like unpolished rice. So the rice would come in in the big sacks, and they would immediately take the sacks of rice. We'd load them onto these little 2-wheeled bicycle trailers that they had over there. We would take these sacks of rice and take them down to the polisher. I guess they had some kind of a deal going with the polisher where they'd give him five sacks of unpolished rice and he'd give them back three polished, so he'd have his cut. Because there was no money changed hands -- they didn't have this. This was how it was done. But we found out that the polishings were just left on the floor. So we would take extra sacks with us, empty sacks. While they were polishing

we would go along and ask if we could pick this up, and they'd say, "Sure." We're cleaning up the floor for them. So we'd fill the damn sacks with this rice polishings, which was a very good source of the brawn and the vitamin B. We'd bring that back. So we had that.

Also, whenever we got potatoes the Japs didn't like the covering [skin] of the potatoes. So we got all the peelings and so on. That was another source of vitamin B. It was the vitamin A, and vitamin C and I don't know what it was, which vitamin it was, for the eyes.

An awful lot of our guys went blind. I forget which vitamin that was, but we could get that, in an injectable form. Some of the guys had syringes and so on which they had brought up from Hong Kong, and which they turned in to us. We used those. The doctor had it worked out pretty well, he kept a very close chart on all the POWs. He could tell pretty well, within a matter of a couple of days, when a guy's mouth was going to break out with pellagra or scurvy, whatever. Your mouth would just go boom! One day it's fine and the next day it's raw meat.

This sort of thing -- you'd start to break out in boils -- just awful! And boils, I mean you couldn't get your hand over the damn thing, it was that big. When they did break, you could put your fist into it. This sort of thing, he kept a chart on these guys. "Now this fellow, if we don't give him a shot, by two days from now he's not going to be able to eat or anything like that." So we'd have to watch it so we didn't waste it, because he claimed, for what it's worth, that if he shot the guy with the vitamins and he didn't really need it at that time it

was wasted. That it had to be hit just at the crucial point. Then we got maximum benefit out of these vitamins. He kept a chart on all these guys. It was amazing how well it worked. But gangrene and so on, you just couldn't combat that.

This beriberi with your feet, the painful feet that you got, it was just awful. You walked the floor, night after night. The guys would walk the floor on the cold cement, which was all right, that was not too bad. But they started, originally, putting their feet into buckets of water, and in no time flat the God damn feet would get infected. We had them there with the toes just floating off, and so on. One guy had all his toe bones in a bag around his neck. The bones! I think the damn things had just gone with this gangrene that had set in.

Once that set in, the only thing we could do, we had no anesthetics or anything, was we just had to chop his foot off. This we had to do as best we could, and just got the old meat cleaver, stole it out of the kitchen, and started to work. Hold the guy down and clean the flesh around, and bang! off it comes -- the only thing you could do. The final camp we came out of, Ken Gaudin was in this one, we had a lot of guys with no feet and some guys with no hands, a lot of them blind from this lack of vitamin E or whatever it was. But you just couldn't control it. We controlled it as best we possibly could, but it would get beyond that at times. Strangely enough, it never seemed to come back. Even this beriberi, which I gather infected the nerve ends and your feet and your hands and so on, you got these hot feet. I still get hot feet. An awful lot of prisoners still do -- I've

talked to a lot of them.

C.G.R.:

Yes, I've talked to some, too.

L.J.B.:

Oh Christ! In the summertime, you get tired and you get excited or something or other, or you're under stress, and boy you've got to get your feet out from under those covers because it's just pain. You've got to get them out there into the cold breeze. I still get up occasionally. I have to walk the floors with those feet, down here in the basement on the cold floor. It just never goes. The guys that went blind, their eyes went down and never came back. The nerve ends dead, I guess.

C.G.R.:

Could I just go back a little? Tell me, because I didn't get it at the beginning of this tape, would you just tell me again which camp this was and who were the men, where did the men come from?

L.J.B.:

Oh, well, it's all in that paper as well. This was the first working camp we went to after I got out of this special questioning camp which the navy ran, where you weren't a prisoner of war. You were on the firing line -- they could kill you any time.

C.G.R.:

That was Ofuna?

L.J.B.:

Yes, that was Ofuna. It didn't matter anyway, because I was <u>never</u> reported by the Red Cross and I don't think any of us were.

We were always, right up to the very end, finding letters for guys that had died long, long ago. They had never reported this. I don't think any of us were ever reported. I know I wasn't.

So we went from Ofuna, I went from Ofuna to this camp in Yokohama, which was the working camp in the stadium. The first group that came up were from Hong Kong. They were Middlesex Regiment, Royal Scots, Royal Engineers, some Royal Navy, but no Canadians, they were all Brits. The officers, one was in the Royal Engineers, one was in the Royal Scots, and one was Royal Navy, and this other fellow, the doctor, was Hong Kong Volunteers [Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps].

So then shortly after, I guess about six months after we'd been there, the first batch came up from the Philippines. These were the guys from Bataan and the Bataan [Death] March and all that sort of thing. They came up. Then we had bits and pieces come in, like some guys from Wake Island. But these people usually came through from the navy. We had some guys from Atu and Kiska and this sort of thing -- they came in. But some of those had been processed through Ofuna and some had not. Some came direct to us and some went through the Ofuna channels.

Ofuna was a living dictionary, if you will, that the navy kept. They kept the most up-to-date guys [who were] in the jobs that they were interested in. Survivors of the Exeter and the Houston and that group were all in there. The Captain of the Exeter, Gordon was there. The top guy of the Houston, Mayer, he was there. There was a submarine commander, Hirt, Dave Hirt was there. Another one, Blin, who was the commander of a destroyer.

They had the torpedo officers, they had the electrics officers, and so on. My group, we were long-range maritime flying. We weren't about to get out of there until they got [captured] somebody a little bit more current. When they got a new guy, somebody more current, then they brought them in; you were then let go and the new guy was in.

C.G.R.:

What were they doing there?

L.J.B.:

Questioning. Every God damn day. They brought down teams from the Japanese Navy Headquarters in Tokyo and Yukosta, and Yukosta was the big area. The big navy base was in Yukosta. They came down from there to question you as to what was going on, any problems that were disturbing them, and this sort of thing. They came in and questioned you every day. We were in little cells with tatami mats, which are six <u>shoku</u>, about 6 feet by 3 feet. So they'd put two of these, there were two tatami mats in the room. So you were about 6 feet by 6 feet.

There was a light on all the time, 24 hours a day, in our window. You weren't allowed to speak any English at all, except in the questioning and then through an intrepreter. You couldn't speak to one another. You were picked at, taken out and paraded around this little tiny compound they had, and you were beaten from the time you got up till the time you went back to bed. They would come in any hour of the day or night that they felt like it and beat the hell out of you.

Food was starvation, the lowest of ever that we had. Your health just went down all the time you were there. If you didn't

get out in six months you weren't going to get out -- you'd die in that place.

They had these questioning teams. Now, when the questioning team came down the first thing they did was take everybody out of their cell, beat the hell out of them, and then select the guys they wanted to go in. Then, when the guys came out, you were all beaten again and put back into your cells. This was Ofuna, and this was the purpose of that camp.

C.G.R.:

I see.

L.J.B.:

I went back on the war crimes [trials] on that one, and that [Ofuna] got one of the highest percentages of death sentences that we got, of any camp. But it wasn't until you got out of there that they said, "Now, once the army took you over they were responsible for all POWs." It wasn't until you got into their hands that you were, <u>supposedly</u>, a POW. But then they never did report you, so it didn't make any difference.

C.G.R.:

So it wasn't like the German business where each service looked after it's own POWs?

L.J.B.:

No, no, no, oh no, no, no. The navy had <u>no</u> POWs. If they picked any of them up out at sea or whatever, and came back in, they'd go to one of two places, either direct to one of the working camps or else Ofuna. Now, they also tried very, very hard to keep people within, let's say, a two- or three-month time

frame of when you were captured, so that nobody captured a year later on got so as to be able to tell you what the hell was going on in that war. So that you were all in the same sort of time frame.

This special discipline camp that I ended up in, in the Tokyo area, I ended up there in Omori -- there they had special compounds for guys like the B29 guys who were in there. "Pappy" Boyington was one of the guys in the special camp. They were completely cordoned off, although we got through to them during the nights and what not; you got down and you got through the drains and what not into these fellows to find out what the hell was going on.

There was a couple of guys, they made mistakes of course. One guy suddenly arrived in this discipline camp and was out in the main compound, who had been in the Battle of Midway. He knew the whole bloody story of Midway and how they'd gotten shellacked. Christ! he was there about a month before they realized this and then he was really whipped out of there fast. But this was the kind of thing.

C.G.R.:

Presumedly at Ofuna they weren't terribly impressed with "Name, rank, and serial number."

L.J.B.:

Oh no, hell no. There was none of that, not ever, even from the minute we were picked up there was none of that. We were beaten every night, when we were picked up, and taken for questioning, every night. Now, out of the six of us who were alive [from the crew], three were very badly shot up and three

not too bad. The three that weren't too bad, we were taken up every night, individually, and beaten and questioned, and we were questioned with no rights, no nothing. They could care less.

C.G.R.:

I assume you <u>told</u> them things, did you....?

L.J.B.:

No, what we did was we fabricated a whole story. We knew that we weren't going to get by with just shutting up; we had to fabricate a complete story of how we had gotten from England out to Ceylon, because they knew we were from Ceylon. We had to tell them how we came out by boat, so that we wouldn't reveal to them the air route that we were using to go out through, and how we had gotten out. We came out by boat and we got into Calcutta and then we took a train down from there down to Ceylon.

We'd gotten into Colombo, and we had taken off from Colombo not Lake Kogalla. They never did find the little lake that we operated out of, which was the flying boat base -- they never did find that. We told them that we had operated right out of Colombo.

However, we had only just gotten there one day and we took off the next day on the trip, which was just about right. We landed one day and we took off, they gave us a 24-hour standdown, and then the next day we were off on our trip. So we were only there 48 hours.

But we told them that we were only there the 24, and they gave us an airplane and said, "Away you go." We took off in the middle of the night. Christ, we didn't know what was in the

harbor or anything else. Because they were looking for the British fleet, which they didn't find, which had gone down to that Addu atoll, which they had hidden away. That was the only thing that saved the British fleet, was the fact that our message got back and that gave them a chance to get the hell out and get away before they got in there. Otherwise it would have been another Pearl Harbor.

C.G.R.:

Well, maybe you'd just go from there and tell me how you ended up being captured.

L.J.B.:

Oh! Well, we were out doing our patrol. Again it's not in that....Are you interested in that part or just the medical side. Or in the whole thing?

C.G.R.:

I'm interested in the whole thing.

L.J.B.:

Well then, in that case you better take this whole thing. This gives the Battle of the Indian Ocean and so on. You can send it all back. I didn't think you were interested in that part. I thought you were only interested from where we got captured.

C.G.R.:

Well, that's my primary interest but the background is, at the very least, of general interest.

L.J.B.:

It's the whole battle and everything else, of the Indian Ocean -- it's all written up in there so there's no problem with

that one. It will save you having to sit and listen and read it all again.

C.G.R.:

OK, how long were you at Yokohama then, approximately?

L.J.B.:

About two years we were there. Eventually, what they did with this camp, this baseball camp, they broke it up and put us into the working camps, which was the general thing that they had done.

You have to understand the Japanese army and how it operates. In the Japanese army, if you're a commanding officer of a regiment or whatever, you go to the headquarters and you say, "I need umpty-ump bucks to keep me going for the year." They would say, "Well, you asked for x-dollars, you're now getting x minus y dollars in a year, and you've got find out the rest, whatever the hell, and do it yourself." Out of that you've got to buy everything. You have to pay for your housing in the barracks. You've got to find barracks, you've got to rent them, you've got to fix them up and maybe buy the buggers. You've got to buy all your own food. You've got to buy all your own rifles, and all your own ammunition, all your uniforms, everything. It says right there.

Now, you want to get some rifles you'll have to go back to army stores and say, "I want 100 rifles," and they say, "That's so many yen." You pay off the yen. It's this way -- it's not the way we run things.

Now, net result of this is that you had a lot of units who

were extremely wealthy, extremely wealthy. They owned their own barracks, they owned everything. When they were moved, let's say, from there to Mukden or over into China, the unit that replaced them had to rent those barracks and what not from them, you see. Whenever you got an issue of clothing the clothing came on in, the uniforms came in. The first guys to get their uniforms would be the officers. They would have a look at the stuff and then they would say, "I like that. That's my size," put it on -- that's good. Take off their old one, frayed and torn, and put it down. Sergeants would come along next and say, "Well, that's better than the one I've got." Down it would go till the poor son-of-a-bitch at the end -- he was always in rags and tatters, you see. This was the way the system worked.

Now, when they got hold of the prisoners-of-war, those they sold out -- not sold out but rented out, whatever you will -- as slave labor. They would then charge the company that they were renting these troops out to, for working, for so many yen per hour, per day, or whatever. Out of this they would then use that money to pay for the food, supposedly the clothing and the heating and whatnot of the prisoners. OK?

The prisoners got bugger all, nothing. It was real slave labor. The company would say, "I need 50 men today." If there were only 30 who were physically capable of even walking, only 30, they would then say, "No, we want 50." So they'd go through the barrack blocks and bash and beat the guys who were lying there sick and could hardly move, until they'd get up on their feet and go out on the job. Plus the fact they only got half rations, and this sort of nonense, if they were sick. So this

was the reasoning, and this was the purpose I found out, behind all this stuff that was going on, this slave labor that they had. That's why some of the places were real vicious -- because they were short of money, and the more the guys went out and worked, the more money the regiment had, the better they lived, and so on.

C.G.R.:

The less food they gave, the more of that money they <u>kept</u> for themselves.

L.J.B.:

That's right, and which they could spend on food and so on for themselves, for their regiment. This is how it worked. This was the difference in the system and this was what we were under.

C.G.R.:

That's like English regiments in the 17th century. A colonel owned his own regiment and bought the uniforms and so on.

L.J.B.:

That's right, they did, that's right -- raised his own regiment and went on with it, yes. These they didn't raise themselves, this was just a regiment that was there, but the commanding officer, the officers, they had to do this. This is how it all worked. That's why we were really up against it with these characters -- especially in the mining camps, we went through real hell.

C.G.R.:

I gather, yes. I've talked to a lot of the Canadians who were up at some of the camps up on the north shore, and it was

pretty grim.

L.J.B.:

Yes, really rough.

C.G.R.:

Do you know anything about the organizational chart, as it were, the Japanese organizational chart for POW camps?

L.J.B.:

No. I didn't get into that. It was all fairly clear. The guys who were on the war crimes, they had the lines of command pretty well down and they were able to bring some of the people who were in charge up at the top into account. But guys at the top said, "Gee, we didn't know what was going on down below, nobody told us." It got down to this nonsense about you actually had to get the guy that did it and then work from him on up, and you had a hell of a time doing this.

[Gen. Douglas] MacArthur didn't want to muddy the waters. He was dead against it, and strangely enough old Herbert Norman, who was the Canadian guy over there, he was dead against any war crimes, trials, any recriminations, any....His thesis was -- and I found this out when I was back on this last trip, one of the chaps in the Canadian Embassy told me that he had found this paper in amongst the papers of the Canadian Embassy, a paper written by Herbert Norman to General MacArthur stressing the fact we should not have <u>any</u> war criminals. Just say everything is forgotten and forgiven and there is no problem, with the Emperor sitting there, and we're all nice lovey-doves and we all bow to one another and that's what we're going to do. He was dead against this.

MacArthur was sort of that way too. But he wanted it to appear that justice was being done. He had to do this because of the Americans. The Americans were not going to let those guys get away with what they had done.

C.G.R.:

No. Not after Bataan.

L.J.B.:

After Bataan and all that stuff, and the atrocities that came out in Santo Tomas and all that sort of nonsense that had gone on. All the war crimes up in Japan itself. They were not going to let them get away with this. So MacArthur, because of the political pressure and the scene back home, had to do <u>something</u>.

What he did do was he brought in all the sharpest Chicago lawyers that he could get. They were there on the defence. They had all the facilities, everything. Whereas the people on the prosecution team had <u>nothing</u>. We couldn't even get a doctor to testify on our behalf. It was just hell on wheels.

Now, one camp we went back on, which was Shinagawa, and when I was back there I was testifying, I was brought back to testify, pure and simply on the Yokohama camp because of this Japanese guard that I had beaten up, who had been abusing the sick and what not. So they got me back as a witness in that particular camp.

After I got back there, then the prosecution found out that I was able to identify this guard -- they called him "Shithead," and he'd move from camp to camp. I was able to track him across,

and we were able to correlate some of the statements that they'd gotten from prisoners back in the United States and Canada, whatever, but whom MacArthur would not allow to come back. He would only allow the odd one to come back.

However, we got into this Shinagawa, which was the hospital. Takuda was the doctor there. We were determined we were going to get that God damn camp. We all sat around one night [saying], "How the hell are we going to do this?" So we decided to try it as a camp, instead of individuals -- try the whole God damn thing as one big camp and bring it all in, boom! one day. We got all the statements lined up, we got everything all done. We got ourselves an Australian Judge Advocate, Judge Advocate General, and we really, really stacked and loaded this thing. We got ourselves the best lawyer fellow, prosecution guy, we could get, and we got the whole thing primed.

The defence guys said, "Oh this trial is going to last, oh, nine months anyway. You're crazy to do this. Why don't you try them individually?" We said, "No, no, we're going to try this, just for size." We went down one morning to Yokohama, to the trial. We started at 9 o'clock and by 5 o'clock that night we had the death sentence for about 90% of them and the rest got life imprisonment [laughter]. We turned around and came back. We had some drinks at the club and then we went back.

I was staying at the Myichi Hotel, I walked in and here were two of the biggest service policemen you ever saw in your life. They said, "Are you Birchall." I said, "Yes," and they said, "Pack your bags, you're out." They put me on the train that night, and I was shipped on down to the Australian area, down at

Kuri, and I was out. The rest of the prosecution team, they were out within a week. They fired the whole God damn bunch of them -- old MacArthur did.

C.G.R.:

Too efficient.

L.J.B.:

Well, as I say, he did not want to ruffle the feathers of the Japanese. The major war crimes [trials] were just fantastic -- it was a show! They had kleig lights going. They'd bring in all the school kids, they would be trooped on in. The Japanese lawyers would jump up and down and oh they put on a big -- it was just like a three-ring circus. The kids loved to go there and see this. This was pure and simply to show that this was how justice was done and this is how everybody got the free break, and in fact they bent over backwards and so on, the whole schamoz. It was sickening in that when you thought, if the shoe was on the other foot, it would just have been a, they'd have just stood you up and, bang!

This is why I am so livid on this deal, and fighting it so hard, this compensation for the [Canadian] Japanese. When you think back to the war on the west coast, when the war broke out, Pearl Harbor, Atu, Kiska, submarines going up and down -- we had nothing on that west coast, all they had to do was draw in a battleship with a whole flock of troop ships in behind, and that would have been it.

Sitting on that west coast were all these Japanese who had pictures of the Emperor and they all carried little flags. Their

fundamental, or their basic citizenship was Japanese, then after that came whatever. Today, even today, they call themselves Japanese Canadians. Japanese first. So this is the whole prime thing. So you say to yourself, "If that battleship and troops had come in would they have stood on the shore with the rifles and the pitchforks and killed any son-of-a-gun that came ashore, or would they be waving their little flags." You couldn't take a chance. So we moved them off the west coast.

Nobody died; nobody suffered from malnutrition, lack of clothing, lack of housing, lack of anything -- medical treatment, they had everything, but they were moved off the west coast. The end of the war, they were allowed to make their claims and there was a big Royal Commission, and everybody put in their claims for housing, cars, boats, fishing nets, anything. I've got a copy of that report.

Now we turn to the other side. We were sitting in Japan as POWs; a POW, I figure, if you're a service man you take what's coming. But it wasn't just us. There were civilians there in Yokohama at that race track. It was loaded with civilians and so on. Now, not only us, not only the POWs, but the also the civilians, dug great big underground chambers. You dug a great big ditch. They put a bamboo net or lattice-work over the top, you took the dirt you dug out, you put that on top. This they said, was air-raid shelters to protect you. They put two machine guns at the entrance and they had gas canisters down inside. In no time flat, when you started to question this, which I did, they just said, "We're going to kill you. The minute the first Allied troop puts his foot on the shores here, we don't have

time. We cannot be bothered with camp, we can't look after you and we're not going to have you standing behind us while we're trying to fight ahead of us." So every living one of us was going to be killed. This is the difference between us over there -- and now these guys, these clowns, are asking for money!

This is where I get awful hot under the collar, and I'm raising hell with them about it. I hope that the government...I think I've got enough public support on the thing. I'm going to get the whole union in it, not the union, but the Legion in behind me. They'll say, "Look, you do this and this will be the last day that you people are in power and I'll tell you right now."

C.G.R.:

I must say I agree totally.

I'd like you to tell me what you will about Shinagawa, but before you do I want to turn the tape over because I think I've used all the material on that first side there.

[End of side 1]

L.J.B.:

I think this Barbed Wire Surgeon, which is Weinstein's book [Alfred A. Weinstein, Barbed-Wire Surgeon, The Macmillan Co., New York, 1948], gives you about as close an inside as to what went on in that camp as anything. I was never stationed in the camp. I got in and out of the camp, I took statements from the prisoners that went there.

We sent, we tested it out, because we were always trying anything to get anything we possibly could, so we took a POW.

They told us when we were in Yokohama, they said, "Now there's this hospital and you can send your guys there, sick people there." So we took one fellow who wasn't too badly off. We said, "Are you prepared to go and just see what this is about? You can 'recover' very quickly and you can get back to working." You know, "I'm now fit, I can go work, don't keep me here. Geez, I can work like a dog, there's no problem at all." You run around the camp and put on the show. But meanwhile we'll cart you in on one of these bicycle trailers, and you're awful sick when we get you there, OK?" So we did this.

Christ! he came back in about three days, and he said, "Holy mackerel, that's a slaughterhouse." So we then made the decision, and we talked this all over with the camp. We talked first of all with the doctors and made an assessment. Then one night, what we used to do at night was we had our own guards worked out so that they would keep track of where the Japanese guards were. We knew which Japs could understand English and which ones couldn't, you see, and when we would get the Japanese guards who couldn't speak any English or understand English, then we would have these meetings of the camp and I would get up and talk to them.

We had a great big room; what this was was a part underneath the baseball stadium, underneath the seats, we were in there, which had been just a great big open area. I guess it had little stalls and things around, I don't know, at one time -- it was just a big open room which they had now put in these three-layered tiers of bunks, with these tatami mats, where the guys slept -- you had three feet by six feet and that was your total

living space, if you were lucky -- that was the maximum. It could go down to anywhere to a foot and a half per person width and six feet long.

Anyway, I would then tell the guards, if they were Japanese -- and by then my Japanese was good enough that I could get a message across to them -- I would tell them that I was now going to give the prisoners hell for disobeying the regulations, and the old Japs would say, "That's a good thing."

So then I'd get up and we'd discuss some of these things, and I would tell them, "Look, it may sound all right, this hospital, but we've just had the guy back and it's a death house. Only as a very, very last resort, when there's absolutely nothing we can do for you any more, then and only then will we ever send anybody to that hospital."

That's what we did, and the guys that went there from our place, they died within a matter of hours after getting there. They were beyond being hurt any more. They couldn't be tortured, which this guy used to do all the time. He had no medical knowledge, he wasn't a doctor, he wasn't anything. He used to sit around reading the odd book or two, and then try out all these things that he read -- operations without any anesthetics, lumbar punctures, putting in spinal injections of urine and so on, and then as the guys would go crawling around, using them for bayonet practice. It was just awful what went on there. So we didn't do this, we didn't send anybody there.

The only time that I got there, actually got into the camp, was when we took some of our prisoners there on their last legs.

Also I got in there when we took some of them down from Omori, from the discipline camp, we had some in there and we took them down. Also we took supplies from Omori.

What they used to do was, they took all the Red Cross parcels. They did not permit the Red Cross to distribute or do anything with their Red Cross parcels. All the parcels, all the supplies, had to be turned over to the Japanese Red Cross, who were then responsible for the distribution. I think over the entire three-and-a-half years, I probably got the total equivalent of about three Red Cross parcels, individual parcels, that entire time.

What they did was, they brought in the Red Cross parcels and they put them into a big warehouse. Then the prisoners were taken in and we had to pull the parcels apart and repackage them into great big boxes. All the butter into one box, all the cigarettes into another box, all the chocolate into another box. They were then all repackaged and relabelled and shipped out to their own troops. Medicine was the same way. Personal parcels all the same way, all the clothing, everything. All the personal packages that people sent, came in and were given over to the Japanese Red Cross. They were then put in, we had to pull those apart. Clothing into here, and anything else, all the little bits and pieces were all put out -- we got nothing out this. And we had to do all of this.

We found, in Yokohama we knew where the warehouse was, where this was going on, because we were being employed to go there. As I say, we could get out of the camp through the fence at night. Where the hell are we going to go in the daytime, with

our faces. But during the night, if it was a real black and stormy and what not night, we'd take off and go. We had a guy named Jeremiah who was a professional cat thief, and we'd get him over there and he'd go up the wall and in the window and open the door and then we would load ourselves and close the thing up and come back again.

C.G.R.:

He was what kind of thief?

L.J.B.:

Cat thief. He could go right up the wall. I've never seen anything like it. He's an English guy. He was from the Middlesex Regiment. He, I guess, was up on a charge in England and the judge gave him an alternative, "You either do five years in jail or you join the Middlesex Regiment, which is on it's way to Hong Kong." He said, "I'm a patriotic citizen!" [laughter]. A lot of these fellows were put into the services that way. Hell of a nice guy, but Jesus! he could steal anything anywhere. A godsend to us, a godsend.

In fact, after the war I got a letter, airmail special delivery, from a judge in England who said this fellow Jeremiah was up in front of him and was awaiting sentence. He had given me as a reference [laughter]. He'd been stealing, had been caught breaking and entering and so on. So I wrote back that he was responsible for a lot of guys being alive today, without any question; anything you can do. Well, I guess he got a pretty light sentence [laughter].

But this we did and we got in and we broke in there. We

also found the warehouse which the Germans used for resupplying their ships and what not, these battleships that came into the ports. They had amenities and stuff with them there. We found this place and we broke into that and got stuff.

C.G.R.:

OK. How did you come to go to Omori?

L.B.J.:

Well, as I say, this main Yokohama camp was where I beat up the Japanese guard for beating up the prisoners. For that, I did a week or so in solitary. The usual punishments -- they hung you by the thumbs, and they beat the Jesus out of you, and you didn't get any food, and so on. Then they took me to Omori, to this special camp, for trial. I went through a God damn kangaroo court. I asked for a Swiss representative. I was stupid. They beat the hell out of me and I wasn't allowed anything anyway. Then they said they were going to shoot me, and took me out to shoot me. Then they changed their minds and they brought me back, and then they were going to cut my head off, and took me out, and the blade came down past my head. Then they said, "No, we changed our minds." Then I went in back in a couple of weeks.

Then they broke up that camp and, instead of us doing all these jobs, they broke the camp up and sent us to the individual jobs where we were actually working. You lived on that job and you worked on that job. This was when I was sent, one of the jobs we were working on was the Assano dockyards, which I think came under the Japanese navy, but it was part of the Nippon Kokon Company. We lived up on a camp on the Yama, which is the little mountain range from Yokohama, like an escarpment, that runs from

Yokohama to Tokyo, and we were up on top of that. Once again, they started this nonsense with the sick, forcing them out, and it was getting pretty bad. The guys, the prisoners said, "Let's not get into any more of this nonsense. You've had enough, one more session like that and you're gone, and you're no value to us any more."

However, they took one fellow who had TB and who had these ulcers and whatnot, and was really badly sick. They made him go to work. They brought him back that night on a two-wheeled cart. He was vomiting blood and so on, and he died a couple of days later from this. So I said, "That's it, finished." So we agreed that night that we'd have a sit-down strike. That if they started to touch the sick the next day, everybody was to sit down, and I was going to tell the guards that nobody was going to move until I said so, and they could do what the hell they liked. They could kill the whole God damn bunch of us and nobody was going to move until I gave the word. And I wasn't going to give the word until all the sick were permitted to stay in the barracks.

Well, you can imagine what happened. Jesus! all hell broke loose. But we stuck to it, the bunch of us. I told the troops, "Don't, for Christ sake! let me down. No matter what they do to me, you just stay." So they did, and eventually we got the word across. They said, "All right, all the sick back into the barracks." They were all right. Whereupon the troops left. Well, about two hours later, in they marched a gang of goons. The doctor and I were taken -- this is Dr. Kaufman -- he and I

were moved right there and then.

He was sent to Shinagawa and I was sent to this Omori, to this discipline camp, where they really worked me over. I was the bad boy for quite some time. I had to work all night in the kitchens and then all day in the little workshops that they had in the camps. I was given no sleep whatsoever. This went on for a couple of weeks. You just slept on your feet.

The slightest infraction of anything, anywhere, and I had to stand on the hot stoves, these great big stoves that they cook the rice. They were like a great big oven with an iron bell down inside. They put in the water and so on, and then you put the fire in underneath the boiled water, and what not. But they're made out of firebrick and cement. You had to stand on top of that God damn stove in your bare feet, holding on to two big buckets of water in order to get the weight on your feet. You just stood there. And this was with our painful feet and so on. It was just hell. We did that for a couple of hours at a time and so on. The slightest thing, they'd beat you and so on.

This went on for a couple of weeks until, fortunately for me, but unfortunately for them, in came old Weinstein, and Kaufman, and they came in, so now the heat was more or less off of me and was onto these poor crackers. So they took the rap, and then the next, they held on till somebody else came in. But it was a special discipline camp.

But we ran a culture of amebic dysentery in there, which we fed to some of the guards, this one that we didn't like, that we knew we were going to have to get. One of the guys, during one of the air raids -- we were out on a little island, it was a

piece of recovered sand, oh, I guess about 50-75 feet off of the mainland, and there was a little tiny wooden bridge which took you into Omori, where we were. Aneda airport was right next to us. On this little piece of land, they had an ack-ack battery at one end of it, the searchlight at the other, and our camp in between, which looked exactly like an army camp, so that we were targets for any bombing or whatever.

But the Japanese people seemed to have the impression that we were immune to bombing. That the bombers knew where we were. So the minute any bombing raid started, all the crowds would come across this God damn bridge. They'd be packed from our fence right out into the water, right up to their necks, just a solid mass of people.

During one of these nights, when all the lights and everything else were out, we got one of the guards -- a real vicious rotten son-of-a-bitch --we got him and took him outside the fence and put his head down under the water. The next morning he was found there drowned. We said, "The civilians must have gotten that poor fellow." He was just hell on wheels. But the word soon got around; the guards said, "Oh boy, this can happen to me, too." But there was nothing they could do about it.

Whenever the aircraft, whenever the B29s came over -- and we could tell when they were on a photographic job taking pictures of what had happened -- we'd all run out and stand on the parade ground. We had it all figured out so it spelled POW on the parade ground. We were all there looking up at the B29, and the

Japs didn't know what the hell we were doing. So we were sure that on the pictures -- and I've got a book there with all the prison camps which they had lined in, and ours was there, so they knew where it was. But then they burnt that place flat. The whole area was just flat. That's when they moved me out to this camp up in the mountains.

C.G.R.:

This was what, the fire storms?

L.J.B.:

Yes. Boy, they were just awful! Yokohama was a whole day -- just started in the morning and went on all God damn day, just row, after row, after row, of B29s coming right through. It just lasted all day until there was just nothing but smoke, as high as you could see and as far as you could see, and the whole of Yokohama went for a jump. But all the camps in this Yokohama area, where we were, we knew it was coming, and so we studied each camp, each one of the places, all the working jobs, because we didn't know we were going to be broken up at that time, but we studied. We said, "If the raids come and you're going to be out on the job, we better find out what the hell you are going to do."

At this oil plant, now here they ran a synthetic gasoline out of sunflower seeds. All this oil, castor oil, peanut oil, rapeseed oil, everything just a mass of oil, gas, and crap. We said, "Boy, this is going to be rough."

So I went to this job when they were setting up their air raid precautions. I went down to this thing and they put me in charge of a group, and there were three of us, prisoners. I had

this great big God damn piece of bamboo. It must have been about, oh, ten feet long. On the end of it there was a whole bunch of rice straw tied. The other two guys had buckets, the idea being [laughter] that when the air raid siren went off, they went over and got buckets of water, and then they'd come back and be with me, with this big pole. When an incendiary came down I was to rush over and dip the straw in there and put it on top of the incendiary. So we said, "Fine and dandy!"

Came the day of the test -- the Japanese are not very clever people -- and we watched the guys going around, this test team. We watched the fellow burying the little smoke pots, you see, and putting long fuses that he would hide behind the door. So we watched this [laughter]. We got our pole, we got our buckets. Jesus! the whistle went off. Christ! I dipped this thing in the bucket, I am just about one inch over the top of that guy with the smoke pot. He lights, he starts his watch and he lights the fuse, and Christ! the minute he lights the fuse, bang! I've got the thing down. The smoke pot never even went off -- we put the fuse out. We got top marks. For the whole of Yokohama, the whole, for us, this team, ofthree of us! [laughter]

So we were all waltzed into the manager's office. Oh, everybody's bowing and scraping, and Christ! we got sweet cakes and a cup of tea for this, you see, and they got me cigarettes [laughter]. They had one guy there who could speak English, acting as the interpeter; he asked me what I thought about this air raid bit. I said, "Have you ever seen an incendiary bomb?" "No." I said, "Well, I have. I saw them in England." I said,

"Those things would hit on the concrete and they would burn through concrete that thick, right straight through to the other side, and still be burning." I said, "If you think anybody in their right mind is going to connect themselves by a hunk of bamboo pole," I said, "you'd end up with the worst burnt hands you ever saw in your life. It would be just like a torch. The thing you do is get the hell out of there as fast you can. You don't do this." "Oh," he says, "Oh I don't believe that." I said, "You'll find out." Then the napalm started. It was just, just hideous what went on in that place. You have no idea.

I was in Omori when all this happened, and we had to go out after those fire raids, try to do what we could, or they would get us to try and do what we could. One of their main fire engines was a Durant car. They had built up, all around the Durant, a big framework of bamboo, and they had put rice straw to camouflage it. Now why they were camouflaging a God damn fire engine I'll never know. This thing used to sit out, oh, about a couple of blocks away from where we would come on to the mainland and then take off for work. We used to pass this thing.

I loved this old Durant. My father used to sell those things, way, way, way back when. I said, "Geez, there's an old Durant." I could recognize it. Here's all this big, big basketwork over the top of the God damn thing. Right after the fire raid we went out and we looked, this thing hadn't moved one inch out of the bloody place, because it just went up like a torch [laughter].

They had them building air raid shelters. Now the way they built their air raid shelters was the same as we built them in

camp. They would come out, the Japs would come out -- because they don't have much land -- and they would dig a little ditch, put some bamboo basket work over this, put the dirt over the top of the basket work, and when the bombs came down they would dive underneath this thing. Cripes, two seconds flat they're dead and the earth fell down on top of them and buried them.

The dead bodies that were around, they just couldn't cope with them because they had no proper arrangements. They kicked them, all the dead bodies, into the canals. We had to have a constant patrol, 24 hours a day, on our little island, to kick the dead bodies off the God damn Island, all the time. After the raids started it was from then on in, because they were just floating around the whole harbor, all over the place was these bloody dead bodies. You went down the streets, you would see piles of what looked like railway ties which had been creosoted -- you know how we have our railroad done. They weren't. They were dead bodies. With their kimonos and so on, the kind of clothing that they had -- the flash burns. And their little straw sandals, running through fire!

You'd go out, as we did, and you would see them, maybe ten or twelve tied together with rice straw ropes to their hands. Their hands are all burnt, their feet all burnt, and their faces flashed burnt so they couldn't see. One guy leading these people as they stumbled along, trying to get them to some place where they could get help. They had nothing.

It was just hideous and horrible to see the results of that. While you said, "You guys asked for that," it was awful hard to

stomach it. You kept saying to yourself, "For Christ sake give up! It's only going to get worse. Give up." On and on and on they went. It was just horrible, in the extreme, to see this.

Getting back to Yokohama a bit, we cased all these camps and we drew up a very safe, sound, or what we thought was the best air raid plan that we could. In all those camps that were in Yokohama when the raid came, that great big raid that day, there wasn't one POW died, of my group that went to those camps, that they all stuck to their plan. In fact, at the oil plant they had it worked out there was a pier just near by, they grabbed the cooking bells, which were essential, they grabbed the cooking bells, they grabbed the rice, they grabbed whatever they could, and the buckets and so on for getting water, also. Out they went, out on to this God damn pier. Then they all dove in the water and stayed down in the water, under the water. They were the only group that had any food, had any water, had anything. All the civilians who were in that area, that managed to survive, came out, and the prisoners kept them alive until the Japanese could get in to them, which was two or three days. They kept them alive. They were the only ones that had any food, had anything, and they survived the whole thing. It was amazing.

So where do we go from here? Is that it?

C.G.R.:

Well, if we could take a few more minutes.

L.J.B.:

Yes, sure.

C.G.R.:

Why not just take yourself along in time. You said you were

sent up, I think, to.....

L.J.B.:

Oh, we went up the mountains. Well, this is after they burnt out Tokyo and they took us up to a place called Suwa.

C.G.R.:

This was what, April, May of '45?

L.J.B.:

It was in May, in around that time, the end of May. We went up, they put us into boxcars. I had a group of Canadians with me at this point. This was the first and only time I had a group of Canadians in my camp.

They put us in these boxcars. We went for 48 hours up into the mountains. This was an open face mine; we were up on one hill and we had to come down the side of the mountain, across the valley and up the other side to this open face mine, where they dug out -- I don't know what kind or ore it was, but there was a big endless chain which came from about two or three mountain ranges or hills back. We came across the hills. Great big tubs on this endless chain. The tubs would come around and the guys would have to fill this. They would blast out and dig out the ore, put it on the little carts, bring it out to the loading platform, put them on the tubs and the tubs would go back to wherever the smelter was. This was the Nippon Kokon Company.

We got to this camp after about 48 hours, cold, raining, miserable up in the mountains. The camp wasn't anywhere near finished. The buildings weren't finished. There was no cooking facilites. The iron bells were lying down on the ground. There

was no water, there was nothing. So we were faced with this. I went in and I said to the guys -- I had Dutchmen, I had some Americans, I had some Brits and so on with me, and this Canadian group. I went in and I said, "Who's prepared to try to help?" The Canadians said, to a man, "We'll come and get the kitchens going."

So out we went. We got the God damn bells, we braced them on rocks, and so on. We tore down some of the other buildings that we thought were of no value and used the wood. We managed to boil some water and get some rice going. Then we got some soup going. The next morning, when we saw this place, all they had for biffys and so on was just holes dug in the ground. The water was coming down and everything was just mush all over. It was just hell.

Our water supply came down off of a whole flock of rice paddie fields, which were all fertilized with human execretion all the way down. So we had to boil every drop of water that we came anywhere near for drinking or eating.

So the officers, we immediately set up that we would go out and chop down a tree, cut down a big tree, bring it in and chop it up for wood, in order to have fires for that night. We were doing this every day. The men, in the meantime, had to walk down the side of the mountain and up this side. We had no shoes, or anything else. Other than the rice, we were supposed to get millet seed, and we were supposed to get soya beans, a mixture of millet seed, rice, and soya beans. They told us that there were no soya beans. So instead of giving us double something else, they cut us down to a two-thirds rations. We only had millet and

rice. For the soup and so on, they told us that we had to go down to half ration on this miso paste, which is fermented soya beans; you mix that with water and that was it. Nothing to go into it.

So the guys started eating grass and what not. Then, unfortunately, they ran into a poisonous type of weed or something, and the next thing I knew were sick and dying. Where we count on the summertime to build yourself up for the winter, instead of that we were going down, down, down. We had guys dying and what-have-you. We just had to do something.

So, unfortunately, we had some Dutchmen, Dutch East Indies guys, with us. I don't say all the Dutch East Indies are bad like this, but these guys, they were rats, you couldn't trust them. They'd sell their soul for anything to the Japanese and what not. So we couldn't let them anywhere near this operation. We recruited three stealing teams and we got that going. One team would go out, and the other team would sit back by the fence on the outside. The other team would be on the inside of the fence. Out they'd go and see what the hell they could find. We found vegetables, we found potatoes. They would go along the rows of potatoes and dig underneath and get the potatoes out and leave the plants on top. Daikons, which is the Japanese white radish, and so on, we got those.

We also found the warehouse with the soya beans, these extra soya beans and millet and stuff which the Japanese were hoarding, our supplies; but they had them in this God damn warehouse off the camp. So we got into that and got into the center of the

pile. We were stealing out on the center of the pile and just stuffing it back with old empty sacks. Eventually they were going to catch up. We thought, well, when the day comes, all right, we'll face up to that, but in the meantime we just had to do this to keep alive.

At the same time there was a little Hawaiian-born Japanese guy there, that we had contacted at one of the previous camps. He knew about the prisoners and what not, and we contacted him. He had been originally connected to the job but they kicked him off the job, the Japs did. But he lived in that area.

So we got hold of him and he came in from time to time and told us about the stuff that was going on. He told us that the Japanese knew that there was stealing going on but they blamed, there were a whole lot of Koreans, which they also used as slave labor up in there. They weren't prisoners of war, they were called "volunteer laborers" or some God damn thing. They accused them of doing this stealing. So we were getting away with it because they never believed we could get in and out of the camp. This was going on.

He was the guy that came in the one night and said that the Emperor had just announced that the war was over; however, that the Japanese Army was not accepting this and they were going to revolt and so on, because of the Emperor and what have you. He said that the chances were that we were all going to be killed right off the bat. They weren't going to take any chances with prisoners. We were all going to go for the chop. So we decided we had to make a move -- if we were going to make a move we had to make a move that night.

So I went in and went over -- we waited till it was all quiet on the western front -- and then we went into the Japanese commander's office, where he was asleep, and went in, and I just went in and took his sword and woke him up and said, "The war's over and we're in charge." Now, he agreed, he went along with this. We took all the guards. We had our own guards ready, and we went and moved in on the guardhouse and we took over the guard house and we took all their rifles and stuff and put them all in the guardroom and kept them there. We took over the camp.

Then we got paint and started painting "POWs" on the roof and so on, and tried to get extra food, going out into the countryside and just taking whatever the hell we needed. We got us a horse and we got a cow and things like this. Then the biscuit bombers came in. Now, they couldn't get at us, the big ones, the B29s, couldn't, but the little torpedo bombers came in up the valley and then turned and came up the side of the valley and dropped the stuff into our camp.

After we'd had about two weeks of this, of building up our strength and what not, we then commandeered a whole flock of trucks, and we found out the railway schedule. So we got the trucks and we went down, late one night, to the railway station. The train came through for Tokyo. Well, when the train stopped we just commandeered the coaches that we needed, put everybody on board, and down we went to Tokyo. We got in the next day. We got in there and got out at the rail station and there was nobody around.

So we commandeered some more trucks, because a lot of the

guys, as I say, had no feet, no hands, and were blind. We got the sick and the wounded on to the trucks and there was an electric railway line that runs from Tokyo to Yokohama. So we knew where this was and so we moseyed over to that, and again commandeered whatever railway coaches we needed to cart them in.

Down we went to Yokohama, and we got out of the train and went out in front of the railroad station, and I've got a picture of the railroad at this time, I went out and got the actual pictures of that railway station, on this last trip. We got out, and we had made flags out of old pieces of sheet and crayons. So we got out and we sat out in front of the railway stations with our flags. Eventually an American guy came along in a jeep, took one look and asked us what the hell the story was. We told him. In no time flat, busses and trucks, and then they took us off down to the godowns and processed us through.

C.G.R.:

How have you been since the war?

L.J.B.:

Not too bad. As I say, my feet and what not, but I feel that it's catching up. This last year I've had one son of a bitch of a lot of problems. I had a collapsed lung, and pleurisy, pneumonia. I've just had surgery for a great big bloody abscess that formed for no good reason. I had a terrible allergy and my feet all swelled up, and my hands went all kooky, and what have you.

I figure that I'm one of the lucky ones. But I don't know how many years of normal life one year of prisoner-of-war life is equal to -- maybe two, three, or whatever. So you add that on to

my age -- and I'm 71 this year -- so you add all those extra years on, it's coming. The Hong Kong Volunteers and the Far East POWs, which I belong to, the one over in the UK, now, especially, Jesus, the death list is much higher than people normally of our age. The Americans are the same way, they find. Every once in a while, for no good reason, all at once a batch of them will die. When I was down in Washington, way, way, back, suddenly for no good reason they called me up and said, "Get out here right away to Walter Reed [Hospital]." I'd go out and say, "What's the problem." "Well, we just had a batch of about 10 guys go for the chop, and we wonder what's going on," and they'd take you in and go all over you again. It goes like this.

I was down at Milwaukee, at their annual reunion last year, and there had just been a batch of guys from the Philippines, they were gone. They don't know. They're still finding these tropical parasites in some of the guys.

C.G.R.:

Yes. Strongyloidiasis?

L.J.B.:

Yes, they're still finding it.

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(COPY)

128 Welborne Ave.
Kingston, Ontario K7M 4E9

January 17, 1985

The Honourable Flora MacDonald
38 Clarence Street
Kingston, Ontario
K7L 1W9

Dear

This year (1985) is the 40th Anniversary of the end of W.W.II together with the liberation of all the internees and P-O-Ws who managed to survive. Hence the memories of those wartime years and the horrible experiences come flooding back with great intensity. The attached clipping from the Whig Standard (Monday, 14 January '85) has also brought this strongly to mind and hence the reason for my letter.

I do not disagree that during the war there were many instances when drastic measures had to be taken due to circumstances which left little alternative. The sudden infamous actions of the Japanese with the bombing of Pearl Harbour and attacks on undefended as well as defended areas in the far east, all without a declaration of war, shocked us all into a state of having to over-react. It also cannot be denied that Japan had a very efficient espionage network and fifth column throughout the world prior to the beginning of the war and this became most evident with the commencement of hostilities. Time did not permit the screening and definite identification of the guilty leaving only the alternative of mass action with the full knowledge that under the circumstances the good must suffer along with the bad. It was necessary to err on the side of over-reaction at least until we were able to respond to the threat we faced.

In taking the actions we did, we were as humane as was possible. To my knowledge no one died of malnutrition, starvation, lack of medical treatment, lack of adequate housing, clothing or amenities. On the other side of the coin the Japanese never recognized any international conventions, laws or regulations in the treatment of the non-combatants they encountered. The factual evidence is available in a multitude of documents including those of the War Trials. The treatment of the civilian internees in Santa Thomas prison in Manila is beyond description as is that of those in Hong Kong, Singapore, Java, etc., etc. One very graphic and accurate description is that given by Agnes Newton Keith in her book "Three Came Home". This is the factual account of a woman and her baby living in internment in Borneo with Nuns, nurses, teachers, etc., whose only crime was their nationality background. I enclose a copy of "The Knights of Bushido, a short history of Japanese war crimes" by Lord Russell of Liverpool. The book is an excellent short course on the problem under discussion and in particular I commend to your reading the most pertinent chapters as follows:-

Chapter X - The Civilian Internment Camps P.205

Chapter XI - War Crimes on the High Seas P.213

Chapter XII - Cannibolism Vivisection and Mutilation P.233

Chapter XIII - Atrocities against the Civilian Population under Japanese Occupation P.241

I returned to Japan to participate in the prosectuion of the war crimes trials and during this time I asked a Japanese why they treated their prisoners and internees in such an inhuman way in complete defiance and disregard of all worldly opinion. His reply was that the victor of a war writes its own rules and regulations by which the war was fought, after the war is over. Japan was confident it would win and therefore would answer to no one for its actions. Under these circumstances can you imagine what would have happened here in Canada if such had been the case? I am certain that those docile innocent Japanese who were interned would have immediately become the same savage criminals who started and fought the undeclared war against us.

One other point, the news clipping states, "However, no Japanese Canadian was ever convicted of treasonous offences in Canada". One of the interpreters in a Tokyo camp was a 2nd generation Japanese-Canadian having been born and brought up on the west coast. He boasted that he had owned and operated a fishing fleet which had been financed by Japan and he submitted regular full detailed reports to the Japanese Consulate on all marine traffic, coastal defences, facilities, etc. Just prior to the out-break of war he was given an all expense paid holiday back in Japan where he became an advisor to the Japanese Navy. After he was completely de-briefed he was given a job as an interpreter at the Asano Dockyards, a Naval installation. In the beginning he was as arrogant as he could be, telling us how Japan would win the war, the Japanese were the superior race and what they would do to Canada. He not only condoned but praised and incited the maltreatment of P-O-Ws. It was in this camp that I held a sit-down strike to prevent the savage beatings of sick prisoners. He had it all worked out as to which member of his family, still resident in Canada, would get which job such as Mayor of Vancouver, Chief of Police, etc. To say that the members of this man's family were not sympathetic to Japan is ludicrous. I did try to find him after the war but he had disappeared into the masses.

Thus, I return to the attached clipping. As a Canadian I do not now will I ever apologize for the actions which had to be taken as a result of circumstances thrust upon us. To my mind they were absolutely necessary but we did then in as humane a way as was possible. Those of Japanese descent who are raising such a hue and cry are only able to do this because of the humane treatment given to them and their parents. The same is not possible in the case of the tens of thousands who suffered beyond description under the Japanese for exactly the same fault of nationality background. How can they ever be compensated for what they had to endure and which resulted in the horrible deaths of non-combatant men, women and children. I am not aware of any compensation by the Japanese government or an apology to these people.

I am positive I speak for all those who encountered such treatment during the war when I say an apology for the actions taken by Canada is nothing more than a sheer lack of moral fibre on the part of the government. I never encountered any apology of any description from the Japanese, even during the War Trials, or even the slightest indication of sorrow or regret on the part of the Japanese. And now to even consider the thought of using tax-payers money to provide compensation borders on the insane. As the Bishop of Singapore said in reference to the treatment given to non-combatants, civilians and especially the P-O-Ws who died by the thousands working on the Burma-Thialand railway - "We should forgive but not forget". Indeed we can never forget nor will any one who was subjected to this treatment ever forgive.

Sincerely,

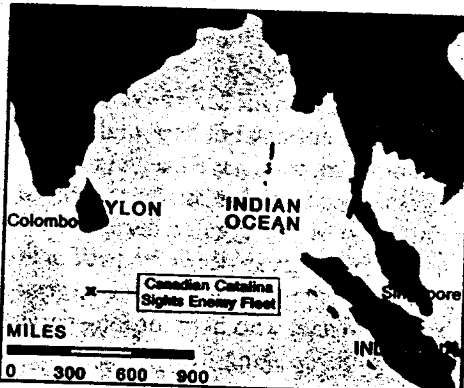
L. J. Birchall
Air Commodore (Ret'd)

FIN: ED. A.R. BYERS, WESTMOUNT, QUE., THE READERS DIGEST ASSOC. LTD., 1986

BIRCHALL

Closeup:

The savior of Ceylon



Although their country was not to play a major role in the Pacific war, Canadians got into it in many ways as individuals or in small groups. The most crucial figure of them all was an RCAF pilot who fought there only briefly and didn't know for years what he'd achieved.

In early 1942 the Japanese surged forward. Malaya was overrun. Singapore fell. The Philippines, Burma, Java, Borneo, Sumatra were invaded. As April opened, a large Japanese naval force sped west across the Indian Ocean toward the strategic island of Ceylon with its British naval base.

At the same time a Catalina flying boat, piloted by Sqdn. Ldr. Leonard J. Birchall of St. Catharines, Ont., was flying to Ceylon on a posting to the tropics. Only a few weeks before, his 413 Squadron had been patrolling off the Norwegian coast in freezing weather.

On April 4, the squadron was ordered out on reconnaissance over the Indian Ocean. From Birchall's diary:

. . . Our task was to be in a position approximately 250 miles southeast of Ceylon at first light and to patrol this area during daylight to ensure that no enemy shipping, especially carriers, approached close enough to run in during the night and launch an air strike at first light against Ceylon.

During the day we received a message to change course to due south of Ceylon. About one hour before our patrol was finished, the moon came up and we decided to extend our patrol time to get an exact astro fix by using moon and sun shots. This took us about 350 miles due south of Ceylon.

As we were preparing to return, we noticed to the extreme south a small dot on the horizon. With lots of fuel, we turned to identify it. Just as we got close enough to identify it with binoculars, we noticed several more ships. Our identification proved them to be Japanese: battleships, aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers and troop carriers in convoy. Being at a low altitude, we had managed to get under the enemy outer air screen and close enough to identify all the ships, their position, course and speed.

We immediately coded a message and started transmission. During this time, Japanese aircraft spotted us. We were halfway through our required third transmission when a shell destroyed our wireless equipment and seriously injured the wireless operator. There was no cloud cover or other protection, and we were now under constant attack. Shells set fire to our internal tanks. We managed to get the fire out, and then another started, and the aircraft began to break up. Due to our low altitude it was impossible to bail out but I got the aircraft down on the water before the tail fell off.

All the time we were under constant strafing. The crew managed to evacuate the aircraft with the exception of one air gunner whose leg was severed. He, unfortunately, went down with the plane. Eight of us swam away from burning gasoline spread out over the water. Two were seriously injured and unconscious and we had them in life jackets. The strafing continued and we had to dive each time the enemy fired. The two in life jackets could not do this and were killed. This left six of us and we stayed in a group until a destroyer put out a boat to pick us up. Three were badly wounded. The rest of us, although we had several wounds, were fairly well off.

The Japanese had picked us up to find out whether we had been able to send a warning, and to obtain information on the defenses of Ceylon. We denied having gotten a message away and said we had only arrived in Colombo the day before and had no knowledge of the defenses. Despite severe beatings we stuck to our story and it appeared to be accepted. We were placed in the forward paint locker w three could lie down, two could sit and had to stand. We remained like this three days during the attack on Ceylon were given no medical treatment and a cup of soup each day.

Following the attack we were transfe to the aircraft carrier *Akagi.* We arrive Yokohama the day after the famous Jin Doolittle air raid on Tokyo. We were raded before the populace who vented t anger on us. It was not until the end of war that I found out our message had ten through and had been of value. . .

LEONARD J. BIRCH

It had indeed. On receipt of Bircha message, Ceylon went into a fever of ac ity. As Leslie Roberts records in *Th Shall Be Wings:*

. . . Merchantmen in Colombo harbor w ordered to sea to escape. Defenses w mounted. Thirty-six Hurricanes, recen arrived, were put on instant alert. A s ond Catalina, sent out to keep watch the Japanese fleet, did not return, but ported the enemy's changed position.

When the Japanese launched a great attack on the city on Easter Sunday, w 50 bombers and as many Zero fighters, was repulsed with great losses to the enen though the port and city suffered substant damage and the Royal Navy lost two cru ers and a destroyer to low-flying bombers

It was the first check to the Japane drive through the Far East; they retired a did not come back. A single Canadi Catalina and its crew had averted a seco Pearl Harbor. Birchall was awarded th DFC as "the savior of Ceylon." . . .

•

He was later awarded the Order of th British Empire for his conduct as a prisone He took brutal treatment because he re peatedly intervened when the Japanese bea prisoners or denied them medical treatmen

But Birchall's greatest tribute involve no award at all. Someone once asked Win ston Churchill what he considered the mos dangerous moment of the war. He said hi greatest alarm came when he heard th Japanese fleet was heading for Ceylon a a time when the Germans were threatening to seize control of Egypt. Ceylon would give the Japanese control of the Indian Ocean. This, added to enemy control of Egypt, would "close the ring" and make the future black indeed. Disaster was prevented, said Churchill, by the man who spotted the Japanese fleet. His was "one of the most important single contributions to victory."