

TJW Had there been much propaganda one way or the other?

MP None that had any impact. What, you mean Japanese propaganda?

TJW Yes.

MP None that really . . . no, no, had no impact on me that I can remember. I mean one <sup>didn't</sup> really know what we were going to expect.

TJW Had you noticed Japanese intelligence activity?

MP I hadn't, no. Whether our counter intelligence boys knew quite a lot about it . . . When I say I hadn't I mean I knew that all the people . . . there were Japanese who kept shops, or had a barber's shop, or this, that and the other over the whole of the Peninsula and one knew that they weren't up to any good but it wasn't my business to try and catch them I mean. But I think we probably knew who was spying - in quotes - but there wasn't much you could do about it till the war started and they were locked up most of them if they hadn't gone off into the bush which most of them did I think.

TJW At what stage did you move your HQ from the golf course to Fort Canning?

MP Oh when the Japanese were about a third of the way down Singapore Island having got on shore - they were really quite local by the time we eventually got out of it.

TJW When did you have your road accident, the one which . . .

MP Well, that was soon after my wife left actually. I was coming back from the Sime Road headquarters in my car going home [to] the house in Holland Road and we had no lights . . . or more accurately we had pin-point sidelights was the only lights we had, and I woke up to find myself underneath an Australian mobile laundry and bath unit 10 tonner, or 3 tonner, with a twisted steering wheel in my chest. I surfaced eventually and was taken

/to ...

to a hospital who said there wasn't anything they could do for me. In fact I think I was reasonably badly concussed but I was jolly lucky to get out of it alive. I went back and saw the motor car a couple of days later and it really was a very nasty mess indeed. And I've been assured by my naval side-kick after the war that I was not totally compos for some days afterwards.

TJW At what stage was the PRINCE OF WALES sunk, was that . . .

MP Oh that was very early in the piece. My wife and daughter had gone up to live with my naval side-kick and his wife up at Kranji Wireless Station where my wife was working on a wireless intelligence job. And that was the hell of a shock the night when . . . I heard it soon after it had happened obviously through the sort of operations room machinery. And I remember ringing up my wife and asking if she'd heard and they were in a very sad state of shock up at Kranji Wireless Station - not surprisingly. And I remember that I wasn't supposed to be going up that night. I did, I drove up to see these two girls, my naval side-kick's wife and my wife, and it was a very shattering experience altogether. And I remember going up two days later I think it was and finding that Kranji was being guarded by Royal Marines, which it never had been before, all of whom had come off PRINCE OF WALES. And I found that the OC of the detachment sitting in the office in Kranji Wireless Station looking like the wrath of God poor man - he was absolutely out on his feet - was a chap I hadn't seen since I'd been in the army class at school with him. But they were in a state of shock as you can imagine having had their ship sunk under them and most of them had swum for some time I think. So that was a dreary incident. It was almost as shattering, I think it was probably more shattering for us in Singapore than it was even in this country in England where I know it had the most appalling impact because that was our Navy, that was all there was.

TJW And it was then you presumably realised that Singapore perhaps wouldn't last?

MP Well, yes, I suppose that it all built up by degrees.

TJW When the Japanese crossed over on to Singapore Island what was the reaction in the HQ?

MP Do you know we were all so damned tired by then that it was just one more sock in the eye I think. I don't know that one felt much worse than one felt the day before. One found it difficult to believe that they'd done it so easily, I think that was the main reaction.

TJW What was the fate of the HQ on the golf course?

MP We put a match to it, in fact I personally put a match to some of it - it was rather fun. The GSOI and I were ordered, when everybody else had got out, to see that the thing was properly destroyed. And I remember setting the exchange on fire, the telephone exchange, and we burnt a few other huts as well as far as I remember. And then we had to go to Flagstaff House where the GO C in C lived in order to collect what was in those days called a secrephone which was security equipment on his telephone which I had to go and rescue - God knows why because we'd lost umpteen of them by then. And I remember filling the boot of the car with some part of the contents of his cellar as his house sergeant didn't know what to do with it so we suggested we'd take it away. And we got it back to Fort Canning and then some so and so pinched it out of the boot of the car and we never saw it again which was a bad thing.

TJW So how long were you in Fort Canning until the surrender took place?

MP Well, after that I can't remember it couldn't have been more than about a week I shouldn't think - if that. It was a matter of a few days.

TJW And how did you become aware of the end of the fighting, or the surrender?

MP Well, we saw . . . obviously in the headquarters we saw the comings and goings of General Percival going off to see the Japanese and this, that and the other, and we realised that the thing was over. And there were various boating events being organised to escape from the Island and I was lucky enough to be included in one of them but unlucky enough to have . . . the boat was either destroyed or pinched, I'm not sure which, but anyhow it didn't exist by the time the time came so I didn't get away in that. And I think it's just as well because remarkably few of the boats did get away successfully.

/They ...

They may have got as far as Java or Sumatra but they didn't get much further and so I don't think one was much worse off. But no, I don't think that anybody who hasn't experienced it can visualise the sort of state of punch drunkenness that one is in when a place like Singapore surrenders you really don't know what's going on. To start with you're whacked, physically exhausted, and you're mentally absolutely battered. And I know I was so tired I didn't know what to do, people talk about traumatic experiences and that was one. I shall never forget what a remarkable sight it was from the top of Fort Canning Hill from which you could see almost three hundred and sixty degrees round from north to south and east to west. And I went up after we'd surrendered and there was flame and fire for just about every degree of the three hundred and sixty. Singapore was on fire and to the south the islands, many of which had oil tanks on them, were on fire and it was a sort of Dante's Inferno scene which I shall never forget. And there was no water to put out the fires in Singapore City either. Trauma the answer to your question.

TJW What did you do, I mean when the surrender had . . .

MP Well, I really don't have any clear recollection at all. I know we slept that night, or tried to. I think we did, I think we were all so damned tired we did. And then, I suppose it wasn't the following day it must have been twenty-four hours later I should think, we were ordered to march to Changi, or walk to Changi. Which we duly did, a sad cavalcade trudged away across to Changi to the eastern tip of the Island.

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TJW How large was the group of people with whom you marched to Changi?

MP Well, I think there were a hundred thousand of us altogether and I don't know the lump that I marched with how many there were in it. I suppose it was the Headquarters Malaya Command lump. I really don't know the answer to that question. But I think it was a fairly continuous procession - rather unimpressive one too.

TJW What was the feeling among the people as you marched, did you talk much?

/Well ...

MP Well, punch drunk as far as I can remember. No, I don't think one talked much, can't remember.

TJW Had you at any stage been prepared for the eventuality of being taken a prisoner.

MP No.

TJW So you had no idea of what . . .

MP Not really, we didn't know what the hell . . . I mean even if one had read about it before I don't think anybody had any idea what being a prisoner of war with the Japanese was going to be like as they had quite different standards about what was honourable and what wasn't and prisoner of war was the lowest form of life, I mean it really didn't deserve to live at all. And they were applying no different standards to us that they would have applied to their own prisoners of war.

TJW What was the scene like at Changi when you arrived?

MP Well, it looked rather like a military cantonment in the highlands of Singapore in 1942. I mean it wasn't severely damaged, as far as I remember water mains had all gone for a burton anyhow there was no water coming into Singapore Island anyway, and power lines were down and knocked about but most of the accommodation was unscathed. There may have been the odd chip off it but by and large there was very little damage done to Changi.

TJW And people were standing around in groups, were they, or being organised?

MP No, they were organised into where they were going to go and live. And I mean for instance I found myself being directed to a quarter which I think had been a major's quarter in which there were, I think I'm right in saying, sixty or seventy people made it their base - of all ranks. It was basically an officers' mess but there were quite a lot of soldiers involved. And one set to as the British Army always does to make the best of

what there was there. And by slow degrees organisation came out of the chaos. It started as chaos but organisation did start to come out of it. I mean over the weeks and eventually months really quite a . . . in fact a couple of years later there was the most efficient organisation to make the best of what there was.

TJW Who was doing the organising at the beginning?

MP Well, all the military hierarchy, I mean the various headquarters. I mean the areas were given to the various formations and the particular area I was in was . . . I think there were two houses which were being used by Headquarters Malaya Command. But the military organisation was told to get on with it, the normal standard divisional headquarters and what have you.

TJW What did you see of the Japanese?

MP Very little, extraordinarily little. The camp developed in due course they put . . . well, we put barbed-wire at the behest of the Japanese round various areas so it wasn't all one great lump. And the outside of these areas was patrolled by . . . or at least the roads, the links between them, had sentries on them originally Japanese but eventually renegade Sikhs. I may say not Sikh soldiers by and large but people who'd been conducting buses or driving buses in Singapore and that sort of thing. And the so-called Indian National Army who were a traitorous organisation and they'd found guards under Japanese orders. And really one saw very little of them.

TJW What was your first job that you were given?

MP The first and really <sup>about</sup> the only job I had for a bit was that I was invited to go and collect, at the orders of the Japanese, I was ordered to collect all the radios in the camp. And I suppose I was quite well chosen because I could at least guess which were worth keeping and which weren't. And I had a three ton lorry and I went round. People were told to put their radios out on the side of the road so I went and collected them and if there were any that I thought might be useful I told people to take them back, and if they didn't want them I told them where to take them - somebody

/who, . . .

who would be pleased to have them.

TJW Where was that?

MP Well, people concealed them wherever they were living, I mean that was really what it came to. I think it's difficult to realise we moved into a cantonment which had been occupied by a coast regiment and a searchlight regiment - gunners and sappers - and it had everything in it that you can imagine in the shape of electricity supply, the houses were full of furniture, the workshops were full of tools, everything you can think of in the cantonment was there, with minor exceptions, when we walked in including all the radios. But this was really how we started to have any means of making clandestine radios.

TJW What sort of food supplies were allowed in?

MP To start with we had taken in quite a lot of stuff with us of our own rations and the Japanese gave us rice. And we started with what subsequently one would have thought were very adequate rations but they got thinner and thinner as time went on and eventually quite soon we'd eaten up all the bully and that sort of thing. But one tin of bully to fifty men's rissoles I seem to remember was one meal we had, oh, I suppose a few weeks after we'd got in so that it was really something to make the rice taste and nothing else. But in those early days we didn't know how to behave other than merely to use rice instead of spuds and we missed everything else because we had so little of it. Salt was a problem too I remember.

TJW Was there any drink, I mean was there water and . . . ?

MP The water mains some of them were damaged I think but certainly the main water came across the causeway from Johore Baharu into the Island and that was cut so that the whole of Singapore was short of water, and the whole of Singapore Island was short of water, and we were short too. I presume there may have been, I don't remember, the odd resources actually out Changi way which we presumably lived on.

TJW And what about cigarettes?

/Oh ...

MP. Oh well, they lasted as long as our rations lasted is what it came to which wasn't very long.

TJW After you'd finished your job of collecting the radios what did you have to do next, I mean were you given any other jobs or did you just sort of . . .

MP Well, I was helping another Joe in running the messing in this particular quarter that I was living in for quite a little while, and that was really all I did. One was tidying up sort of records up to a point of records of what had gone on. I remember my boss wrote citations for various people. And we did a certain amount of office work, that sort of work. I know I brought back a copy of the citations he'd written when I eventually came out of the bag.

TJW And did you do training, or physical exercises, that sort of thing?

MP Yes, I seem to remember we . . . I hadn't thought of it from that day to this but I think probably we did do PT we were sort of keen. I think that was one of the things that people wisely said that we should try and do. I think we probably did PT every morning but I'm not sure.

TJW Did you move pretty freely around the camp?

MP Within one's own area, yes. You couldn't move between areas except under escort as far as I remember.

TJW Were you ever interrogated about radio . . .

MP I was taken into Changi Gaol which was a Japanese headquarters at that stage - they'd released all the prisoners. And they were administering the prison camps from there originally. And we were invited to write . . . various people were taken in there and kept in there for twenty-four hours and told to write about whatever it was. And I think I was invited to write about corps signals in the British Army. And one allowed one's imagination to spread a bit. But otherwise I was never interrogated, no.

/And ...



TJW And did the ranks continue to live <sup>mixed</sup> together or did you separate out?

MP Throughout the whole of the time I was in the bag officers lived separate from the soldiers as far as conditions allowed, I mean the hierarchy was maintained. It varied a great deal as time went on obviously but basically at that stage there were officers' messes, there were sergeants' messes and the men's messes basically. But one saw a lot of the soldiers all the time, I mean one lived with them, couldn't help it.

TJW Did you manage to get any messages out to indicate to your family that you had been taken prisoner?

MP No, absolutely no possibility of communication outside Singapore at all. There were links into Singapore town via working parties, some people who had . . . well, I can remember one officer who has a Chinese wife who kept in touch with her for a very long time through the medium of working parties. I remember eating a very good pineapple that she sent in once.

TJW What were the working parties doing?

MP I think they went in to try and . . . well, to begin to clear up Singapore which was in a hell of a state. I mean it had been bombed to blazes and been fought through and a lot of it had been on fire and it was a mess.

TJW Did anyone try to escape from Changi?

MP I honestly don't know, I'm sure people did. I didn't have contact with anybody that did. In the early days I would have thought that unless you got away before we actually got to Changi which a number of people did, and I already said few of them were successful, one or two were but not many, I think once you got to Changi there was a tendency to stop and take a deep breath for a bit - that's if you hadn't tried to get away before you were marched to Changi. Subsequently people had ideas about it but I think . . . there were very few attempts I think because I think people realised that frankly it wasn't on.

/What ...

TJW What sort of precautions did the Japanese take to discourage or prevent escape?

MP Really nothing except if they did catch anybody they either shot them or threatened to. They made it quite clear that they weren't going to have anything of it. But it's a long way from Singapore to anywhere if you . . . the nearest place is Ceylon which it was.

TJW Can you describe how they tried to make you sign a form?

MP Yes. The captains and the kings, everything above the rank of lieutenant-colonel was removed and most of them were taken up to Korea or Japan and the forces in the camp at Changi were left under the command of one Australian and one British full colonel. And fairly soon after this happened which must have been I suppose . . . sometime during the summer anyway, the summer months, July, August I suppose it was about that of '42 the Japanese said that everybody was to sign a form saying that they wouldn't escape. And very properly it was decided that they could do what they liked with the bits of paper we weren't having anything to do with them. And this went on for some time this argy-bargy and eventually the Japanese said "Right, all the men go to Selarang". Selarang being what had been the Gordon's barracks and it had about I suppose five or six barrack blocks round a fairly normal sized barrack square. The Australians at that time were in Selarang Barracks and they and the whole of the British set up were ordered into the Selarang Square and barbed-wire was put round the outside and <sup>we</sup> were told there we would stay - however many thousand of us there were and it was a lot of tens of thousands - until we signed these bits of paper. And the bits of the square that weren't being slept on were dug for latrines and it was altogether very unhygenic and really rather nasty.

There were some light incidents: there was a splendid scene of Japanese madly building a machine-gun post at one corner of the outside of the road which went round the perimeter and immediately across the road there were some Brits equally busy building a chicken house for some chickens that they'd acquired from somewhere. And a photograph was taken of this which I regrettably haven't got a copy of.

/But ...

But to cut a long story short we were there for some days and the health hazard was really appalling and eventually the doctor said "Look, you simply can't go on doing this, if you do then people are going to be dying like flies". And so the unfortunate Colonel Holmes, who had been commanding the Manchesters before he was made a full colonel in order to do this particular job when the generals and people went, formed up to the Japanese and said "All right, we'll sign under duress" - which the lawyers said would mean that it didn't apply anyway - and so we did and then we were all allowed to go back again. It was an extraordinary interlude, it didn't do the Japanese any good and it didn't do us any good either.

TJW Did anyone actually die?

MP Oh yes, people were dying when we were on the square but I daresay they would have died anyway. I can't remember figures I mean I never had any record of this.

TJW And how were you eating during that period?

MP Well, we were eating the same as we had been before as far as I remember, I can't remember really and truly, let's face it it's a long time ago.

TJW Back in Changi how soon was it before you managed to set up your news service?

MP Well, there was a news service of a kind almost as soon as we got in there as far as I remember. It started by . . . obviously the headquarters wanted to know what was going on outside so it was set up officially. There were a hell of a lot of free-lance radios, I mean as I say the place was littered with the radios, the ones I hadn't picked up. And every other house had a radio in it I suppose, this gradually died out. Every other house is exaggeration but there were a hell of a lot about. There was the one that supplied headquarters command which was the house that I was in came from . . . Singapore Fortress Signals were running one which was supplying Headquarters Singapore Area, I think it was called in those days, which were the troops who had belonged to the garrison of the fortress is really what it comes to.

/And ...

And gradually the others, the free-lances, died out over a term of months if not years and the official services went on. I suppose I saw news, I mean typed news, within a week, ten days of getting in there and it went on and on and on. Eventually obviously we stopped typing it. But in those early days as I say you hardly saw a Japanese actually in the camp.

TJW What were the penalties for being discovered with a radio?

MP I believe, though it wasn't anywhere near me, I believe some chaps were actually shot for it. But certainly the threats were of that kind even if they weren't carried out. But I believe there were in fact some people though it wasn't anywhere near where I was were in fact shot for running radios. The argument being that you know they could have been transmitting and acting as spies and you shoot spies that was the argument - not a bad one really if you're on the Japanese side.

TJW Why did most of the radios go out of commission?

MP Well, either they hadn't got the power which was . . . there was no electricity in that camp at that time and so a lot of these radios that people had couldn't be used, only if they had battery radios could they be used initially and then of course the batteries ran out. And then in God's good time the sets themselves packed up. And except when you were in Changi and there was power which came in in due course it wasn't easy to run a radio anyway. I think I gave the wrong impression when I said there were dozens of radios working from the word go, they weren't of course because there wasn't any power and nearly all the sets you found in private houses were mains driven and not battery driven. So it wasn't until electric light came back into the camp that people really were able to run radios.

TJW Did you have to use subterfuge to get the power for your radio?

MP Yes. I moved from Headquarters Malaya Command mess to Singapore Fortress Signals mess. There were I think seven officers left of that particular party living in a soldier's quarter and I joined them and a chap called James Mudie who had been a BBC engineer seconded to the Malayan Broadcasting Company and had been a volunteer was in that particular mess. And he was

/running ...

running the official Fortress Singapore Area radio. And he was detailed even though he wasn't a sapper to assist with the renewal of the distribution system for the electricity in the camp. Because the Japanese agreed that we could start the power station going again - the sappers started the power station going again. And we were allowed to have power into the hospital and obviously all the Japanese houses had power put into them. And they agreed that the hospital could have it. And James Mudie was put in charge of helping with the distribution which was very handy because we got tired of charging the batteries to work our particular radio by taking them up to the hospital and he was able to organise power distribution into this particular quarter which we had by mending one or two bits of wire. And so we had mains power into this quarter and in order to conceal it from the opposition and still have light to play bridge by, or whatever, in the evening we put a transformer into a car battery and connected the car battery apparently to a twelve volt bulb and piped two hundred and twenty volts into the other side of the transformer and thereby had what appeared to be a battery driven light which in fact was mains driven - which was very satisfactory. And it also enabled us to have another more powerful mains driven set to take the news.

TJW Where did you conceal your radio?

MP Well, there were a number of places but that particular one which I imagine you're referring to was in the roof of the bathroom of this house which had a steeply sloping roof with an asbestos sheeting ceiling inside it. And we were able to make a panel of one of these asbestos sheets which slid and we found that there was room for the set to sit on top of the wall underneath the roof and behind the ceiling which really made a very good hidy-hole indeed for it. The trouble was that the day that we eventually finished this job - I was by then holding spanners for James Mudie - we carried an extremely heavy set which was a GEC Overseas 10 which weighed about as much as a twenty-two inch television chassis weighs now I suppose. Carrying it up to the top of the ladder to put it in to sit on the top of the wall and we discovered to our horror that though there was room for it once we'd got it in there to get it over the top of the wall, between the top of the wall and the roof, there was fractionally not enough room to do it, and this was really rather tiresome. So we tried to take some tiles out of the roof and they were very interlocking variety and it was extremely difficult but we did eventually manage to get

the requisite number, which was four or five I suppose, tiles out of the middle of the roof to make a hole near to the top of the wall so that we could lift this damned set over the top and get it into position. And this we did and for some reason which I've never worked out we covered it with a yellow duster to conceal it which we felt was necessary because as one stood at the top of the ladder with one's head protruding through the roof at eye level, about twenty yards away, there was a road up the side of a mill and we rather wondered whether the Japanese would come and walk past it.

Anyhow having got it up there we decided we must try and put these damned tiles back again. We quite seriously didn't think we were going to be able to but we thought we must have a try. And I said I'd have a go and so I started. And while I was doing it James said "I will go and see if there are any little men about, any Nips about". And he went out and looked round the house the other side and by the time he'd got back all the tiles had gone back. This was not skill at all it was just that they happened to go back one, two, three, four, five just like that, it was unbelievable. I was still standing at the top of the ladder sweating when this happened. And James came into the bathroom in a state of hysteria and I remonstrated with him and I said "I know it was a great relief to see that the tiles had gone back but I didn't think it was all that funny". And he handed to me at the top of the ladder a chit which had been sent down from my British company clerk saying that the Japanese wished to have a return of expert roofers and tilers and on the back I was expected to sign a thing which said that we hadn't got any - so I could understand his laughter.

TJW Was there much sickness in Changi Gaol?

MP In . . . ?

TJW In Changi Camp?

MP In Changi Camp, Changi Gaol was a long time on. Yes, I suppose by peacetime standards there probably was I think. People had, oh, tummy upsets and couldn't get used to the diet and that sort of thing. But compared to what happened later on really the answer is no. I mean there was, there was an increase over peacetime standards but not a great increase.

/Did ...

TJW Did you have any difficulty yourself in adjusting to the diet of rice?

MP Well, one found oneself unable to spend one's after breakfast penny for some weeks. And then as soon as it settled down I personally was extremely fortunate that my tummy seemed to enjoy eating rice and the whole of one's body's metabolism settled down and I came out of prison camp eventually . . . having at one stage lost a stone and a bit probably I came out with almost the same weight as I went in simply because my machinery had learnt to get whatever there was out of what little we were given to eat.

TJW What sort of entertainments were organised in the camp?

MP This developed as time went on, not merely entertainments but . . . We had a lot of people in the Volunteers who'd been brought in masquerading as soldiers into the camp from the University of Singapore, Raffles University. And just before parties were taken away from the camp in order to go up and build the Burma Railway the University of Changi was just about to start. They had organised the courses and this, that and the other, and the quality of instruction that was available there . . . it was thought, and I believe it would have been true, is that if you had in fact taken a degree course at this particular university in Changi Gaol (sic) that it might well have been recognised when we got out of the bag at the end. But in the event it was literally a matter of weeks as far as I remember, if not days, before it was due to open for the first time with various courses the Japanese started to order parties away from Changi and up the railway and round the world, but mostly up to Thailand and Burma, and this put paid to that.

REEL 04

MP But at the time that these parties were sent off there had been a good deal of entertainment. There was a lot of talent in the camp, there were Covent Garden opera singers and you name it, there were people there. And the entertainment gradually got itself organised though not to the sophisticated degree that it did a year later or more. But the resources of a citizen army, plus a regular army, plus a volunteer army from a place like Malaya there was a most astonishing variety of talent amongst it which in due course we organised and made the most of.

/What ...

TJW What sort of productions were undertaken?

MP Well, in those days I honestly can't remember what sort of productions because there weren't theatres and things. Subsequently theatres were built and you name it almost anything was done, I mean plays were written and revues were written. When I got back from the railway a good deal later I can't remember what the first production was that I saw but it was a thing which had been on in London just before the war and it was done absolutely brilliantly a lot of it by professional actors.

TJW When was F Force ordered?

MP F Force which was the one that I eventually went with was ordered to go in about April '43. And we were told we were going to go to a better camp and that we could take everything that we needed and that we should take a band and 'Uncle Tom Cobley' and the last is actually literally true we were told we could take a band, not that we had one. And we were told we were going to really a much better place. In the event we got into a train in Singapore Station and went up to Bampong in Thailand, which took us several days, in cattle trucks with more than the eight horses forty men of World War One. I can't remember how many there were but there were more than forty per truck I know. And by the time we got to Bampong, because on the way we had been able to acquire fresh fruit and stuff which we weren't used to, there were a hell of a lot of upset tummies about the place and life was really rather unattractive.

TJW When you say upset tummies, do you mean dysentery?

MP Not dysentery just upset tummies I mean at that stage actually. I mean dysentery is a specific complaint as doctors will tell you which is caused by a bacillus, or whatever you call it, whereas an ordinary upset tum you can get from eating too much fruit - which we did.

TJW So it was comparatively slight at that point?

MP Yes, <sup>but</sup> equally unattractive in a crowded railway truck.

/Did ...



TJW Did you sleep in the trucks?

MP We did, lived and moved and had our being in the trucks, yes. When we got to Bampong we were searched and we were told that we could take nothing that we couldn't carry. And we then walked for a hundred and eighty-five miles, I think it was about fourteen, fifteen miles a night - we marched at night and roughly alternate nights we marched. And soldiers were put to work in the sort of staging camps, if you could call them that, the areas in which we staged. And less than halfway up the monsoon broke and it rained and it rained.

TJW What sort of terrain was it?

MP Well, it started really on Thailand roads and gradually we got into the jungle which was literally just a cleared track, up to your hocks in mud and with pouring rain with men so unfit that some of them had to be carried as soon as you started - and it was a pretty unattractive exercise.

TJW How had people qualified for F Force, had they volunteered or . . . ?

MP The British headquarters was told to find however many chaps it was and so they said well various units would produce so many chaps. And in the Malaya Signal Company that I was in, <sup>or</sup> the Fortress Signal Company, we were told to find however many it was because they reckoned that that was as many really fit chaps as we'd find. And we said "No, we want to go. We're all of us going if any of us are going so let's all go". And so we took more than we'd originally been asked for in order just to stay in one piece and left very few chaps behind who really weren't well. And other units did the same. So we had a lot of chaps who weren't all frightfully fit when we started.

TJW Were you looking forward to it as you thought it was a better place?

MP It was going to be a change anyway which was something which one always looked forward to. But we also believed what we were told at that stage, we never did again but we did then because we thought we were going to a better place - it was far from.