

# THE ARMY MUSEUM OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

*ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME*

MAJOR OLEG KATARSK1

An interview by Lt Col Jack McRoberts



***Q: I see that you were called up for active service in December 1941. Now what were you doing over.....?***

R: I .... well, my parents were refugees from the First World War, they were White Russians and they fled via France. Actually it's a long story but they joined a Russian warship which was going to Vladivostok to join the White Armies which were fighting the Reds in Russia from Siberia. But my mother and father had only gotten as far as Japan when the White Armies collapsed. The Japanese Government grabbed the ship and gave the officers the choice of either instructing at the Military Academies or fending for themselves. As my father didn't want to instruct the Japanese in whatever he knew about warfare, they were stranded in some Japanese fishing village.

Anyway, to make a long story short they met a Dutch captain from some ship who said "Why don't you go to the Dutch East Indies? We need people - we are opening up the colonies there", and that's how they came to the Dutch East Indies.

My father, who was a mining engineer, joined the government - the Dutch Colonial Government - in the Mining Department and I was born in Timor whilst my father was there. My brother had been born earlier in Japan. Anyway, my parents were stateless.

In 1933 my father was on top of the Merapi which is one of the active volcanoes in Java, and due to his efforts quite a lot of villagers who had settled on the mountains were able to escape the lava flows and the Dutch Government sent him a - well they thanked him for his efforts - and the Dutch Queen on her birthday, offered my parents Dutch citizenship which they accepted. That was when the war broke out in the Pacific.

I was at school- I was in my last year of high school. I had just done my final exams for my Intermediate when the war broke out on the 8<sup>th</sup> December in the Pacific, so I was called up on the 12<sup>th</sup> and joined an Infantry Company of the Dutch Colonial Army and we were given a quick sort of course. None of the Allies were prepared for this war.

Because I had a driver's license I was selected for a special job and sent to the central part of Java - we lived in Bandung in the Western part. This was a secret airfield that they were building for the B17s - the American B17s.

Also the General Motors factory, which was in what is now Jakarta - known then as Batavia - was transferred inland, close to where this secret airfield was. At first we were delivering trucks that came off the production line to the various Army units.

Later on we were actively involved with transporting blue metal and all sorts of stuff for the airfield. The airfield defence consisted of 'Dads Army' type people - they were thirty elderly people who were called up under a Lieutenant - and we were added to them to do the transport.

When the airfield was finished one plane landed, a P40, and took off again. One of the interesting things was that the hangars were made out of teak there was plenty of teak but no metal. So they built these hangars out of teak, beautiful teak - enormous hangars.

***Q: What about the roofing material?***

R: The roofing material was corrugated iron, but the rest - the uprights and the crossmembers etcetera - were all teak.

*Q: What a waste of teak - a lovely timber.*

R: What we also had to do was put explosive charges all over the place. Anyway, we finished the work there, and for about four or five days we didn't hear anything.

We had enough to eat, but there was no contact with Headquarters, so finally the Lieutenant rang Headquarters which was way behind us in Surakarta and got a Japanese on the phone because they had already passed by us.

We then proceeded to blow up the airport.

We decided that 3 persons per truck were going to try to get through to Western Java where we thought they were going to continue the fight. Anyway, we left. We saw the Japanese on the side - we didn't know they were Japanese -we waved to them and they waved back.

We got to the lines anyway and we struck the tail end of a group of Allied personnel led by an American doctor - Doctor Wassell - who was leading some American anti-aircraft gunners and Australians to the port of Chilatchap where allegedly there were some ships to take them to Australia.

We joined the end of the queue, but by the time we got to Chilatchap everything was on fire, the bombs had just dropped and the ships were lying half sunk in the harbour. Anyway, the three of us, the sergeant, the corporal and myself - I was a private - we got the truck, turned it around and went to the railway line which crosses the whole of Java.

When we got near the railway line we ran out of petrol and dumped the truck in a ravine and walked up to the railway line. One train was still going from Central Java to Western Java and we got on that train and finished up in Bandung.

Bandung was being bombed by Japanese planes. Our planes were all shot down because half of them had been used in Malaya, and those that we had were very old fashioned. Most of them were very old ones.

I then was put on an ambulance, to guide it to the mountains where there was a little bit of resistance against the Japanese, but we were completely untrained and unsure.

Anyway, I finished up going back to Bandung, where a funny thing happened. When we arrived in Bandung we went to the Depot Battalion to present ourselves to the authorities in Western Java, We reported to a Major who said, "I haven't got room for you here, why don't you go back to your unit." We said, "Well, that's the problem. Our unit is behind the Japanese lines". He said "Yes, but that's not my problem is it?"

And there I was eighteen years old, and in those days to me an officer was practically God - and he gives me an answer like that- I grew up very fast.

*Q: Yes. You would, Indeed!*

R: Anyway, I was then given a truck and I was to take the rations to the various units, but I heard that they had capitulated. Wavell and his staff had left for Ceylon on the last few planes. When I arrived at his headquarters all we found was parade uniforms etcetera laying around the area which they had left behind. It was a complete and utter shambles.

Anyway, I was picked up by an MP in Bandung and told to report to the nearest military institution. I went there and I as told that all I had to go there for was to register as an ex-soldier, Anyway, I went in and the gates closed behind me and I was a prisoner of war. in the beginning it wasn't that ad, although the rumours were rife that the Japanese were going to kill\_us, one and all etc.

We were sent from Bandung to Chilatchap to clean up the harbour etc. And there the reign of terror really began. In Bandung at first, just to impress us, they bayoneted three of our members in front of us - we all had to stand and look at it.

**Q: Now Changi, you were there for about a fortnight and then into...**

R: Thailand -Burma Railway, yes. The Japanese programme was as follows: They had a group cutting out the jungle, followed by a group behind which due the actual sand and placed it where the railway was going to come and then the next group came up with the rails and put the rails down.

The Australians were involved - there was a very small group of Australian machine gunners and some transport personnel mostly from Queensland. They were with us because here were only seven of us and thirty of them, and they were attached to us, although usually it was -he reverse, because there were more Allied troops than Dutch troops. Anyway, they went with us as far - almost as far as Three Pagodas Pass. Most of the other Australians were involved in what they called "Hellfire Pass", on the Kwai River.

**Q: Now, when you were in the camps, say, in Java, were you segregated with "other ranks" in one area and the officers elsewhere**

R: Not at first. That was another thing. At first we weren't segregated but the officers tried to segregate themselves. Later on they did segregate us, as soon as we got a bit organised they segregated us, and also they segregated us all during the rest of our prison time.

**Q: Everyone had to work irrespective of rank I suppose.**

R: No. The officers were supposed to help the supervision, although the officers were beaten just as much as we were. But they didn't do the actual shovelling and cutting ?

The trouble was that the Thailand jungle is a jungle of various types of trees and there was a lot of bamboo with very sharp thorns, and it cut us and our clothes.

We had to crawl underneath these things and every scratch gave you a tropical ulcer. The stench in the camp of all those rotting bodies was something terrible.

**Q: Right. Now, I'm just trying to get an idea of the sort of questions I will be asking you next time and we will spend more time on detail. We'll talk about, I think initially, your family and school life. What it was like living in the Dutch East Indies at that time. Did you have servants? What your quality of life was. Then we'll go on to the war and more or less what you've told me about as a private in a Dutch infantry battalion. Then going to work in Java on the ports and some of**

those sorts of things. I will ask about Changi and the railway in detail. Then to Japan and then work on that way. So that's the sort of format. Are you comfortable with that ?

R: Oh yes that's all right. There are certain things I don't like talking about, not because I am hiding something but because it made such an impression that .....

Q: Yes. Well that's basically the reason I asked the question earlier on, are there some parts of your Service experience, particularly on the POW side, you don't want to talk about ?  
Once the tape starts running, I don't want to ask those questions which might embarrass you. You just tell me that part, and we can move around it.

R: No that's all right. I'll tell you if we get to one of those things.

Q: Yes, sure.

*END OF TAPE LABELLED "INTRODUCTION" - UNDATED ( Interviewer not identified, but probably Mr Jim Tippetts - see letter dated 19 February 1992.)*

**Major Oleg Katarski** was born on 28 January 1923 and called up for active service on 12 December 1941, in the Netherlands East Indies Army, His unit was an infantry battalion depot, Bandung, Java, NET. The overall commander South-West Pacific, was General Wavell. Pte Katarski was captured by Japanese forces on 12 March 1942.

#### IN JAPANESE PRISON CAMPS

JAVA	12 Mar 1942 to 3 Jan 1943
SINGAPORE/CHANGI	7 Jan 1943 to 23 Jan 1943
THAILAND-BURMA RAILWAY CAMPS	28 Jan 1943 to 14 Jun 1944,

Transport Singapore-Japan	Jun/Jul 44
JAPAN - CAMP 17, KYUSHU	3 Jul 1944 to 30 Aug 1945
UNDER AMERICAN COMMAND	30 Aug 1945 to 30 Sep 1945
UNDER DUTCH COMMAND	30 Sep 1945 to 11 Aug 1946

**HONORABLE DISCHARGE:** 1 Dec 1946 (Rank - Private)

#### **Enlisted Australian Army Reserve (CMF)**

**Australian Intelligence Corps** Aug 57 (Rank - Private) commissioned 21 Jul 60 (Rank - 2Lt)

**Retired** 12 Oct 72 (Rank - MAJ)

Q: Major Katarski, would you tell me your parents' names and where they were born.

R: Yes. My father's name was Boris Katarski. He was the son of a Russian General, and he was born in Suwalki, which is a town on the Polish/Russian border. At present it is in Poland, The family was an old military family and they had been involved with the Army for, I would say, the last three hundred years. My mother's name was Nadia Katarski - actually Nadia Zabłudowski and she was sent to France for her education when she was about ten years old. This was the practice in those days for the well off families to send their children to France for their education.

As she grew up, when she was about seventeen or eighteen, the First World War started and she remained in France. My father was serving on the Russian Front and his last posting was on the Finnish border when the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk, between the Germans and the Russians, was signed. He stayed at this post even after the officers were released from their oath of Allegiance to the Czar, when the Czar was replaced by the Kerenski Government.

However, my father was approached by his soldiers one day and they informed him that soldiers' councils, which had been set up by the Bolsheviki, had condemned all officers to death and he was told to try to get over the border. As he was released from his Oath of Allegiance he did flee with another friend, a brother officer. He fled to Finland, Sweden and Norway, where he was picked up by British Liaison Officers and taken to Britain. From there he went to France, where they had a Russian battalion. This Russian battalion was under French command and stayed there until the end of the war. During his leave periods he went to Paris where, for obvious reasons, he tried to visit Russian families. That's how he met my mother and they were duly married in Paris.

In 1919, at the end of the war, there was a Russian warship in one of the French ports and the idea was that the warship would convey Russian officers to the Siberian Front in Vladivostok to aid the corps of General Kolchack who was advancing through Siberia against the Red Army.

There were three White Armies, actually, opposing the Red Armies. One from the West, one from the South of Russia and one from the East, from Siberia.

My Grandfather happened to be in the Southern Army, but of course all contact between father and son had been lost.

However, the Communists were very well organised and they had mustered some agent provocateurs on the warship. The officers were allowed to bring their wives along because in those days Vladivostok was on the other side of the world and it would be years before they would be able to join their families otherwise.

When the ship reached Ceylon a mutiny broke out on board which was subdued with British help and the rebels were put in a British prison.

The ship continued on. When it reached Japan unfortunately the big powers, Britain, America and France, withdrew their support of the White Armies and the Kolchack Army collapsed.

The Japanese government confiscated the warship. As previously related, the officers were given the choice either to teach in the Japanese military academies or fend for themselves. My father refused to aid the Japanese and they were therefore stranded in a small Japanese village.

**Q: This would have been very difficult at that time, wouldn't it? Because Japan was a very isolated country.**

R: They were just emerging and trying to learn all the military arts as well as the production techniques etc of the West.. Another problem was, of course, that they, -my parents - did not speak Japanese. However, Britain had "International Water Police" to check ships on the weapons embargo which had been decided among the Allies and they offered my father a position as an Inspector.

In 1920 my brother, my older brother, was born in Japan. In 1921 the International organisation was terminated and my parents were left to their own devices. They were fortunate in meeting a Dutch captain of a Dutch civilian shipping line who offered them passage to the Dutch East Indies where allegedly they required a lot of people to help.

With their last money they purchased their passage to Batavia, as Jakarta was called in those days, and in Batavia they stayed in one of the big hotels and were told that when they were able to they could pay for their stay in the hotel.

**Q: Well, that was very nice, wasn't it.**

R: Yes. They had a problem that, of course, they didn't speak Dutch. However, the Dutch spoke German and French, so my parents could get around. Batavia in those days was also full of refugees from all parts of the world. Germans who fled after the war, Austrians, Belgians who were Flemish and the Flemish Movement had just been beaten in Belgium and a lot of the leaders of the Flemish Movement were condemned to death and fled to the Dutch East Indies. Also Hungarians and a lot of other nationalities were present.

**Q: It would have made it a very interesting life, wouldn't it ?**

R: It was. Suddenly Batavia became very important. My father got a job with the Dutch government as a supervisor in a coal mine. The refugees mostly got jobs that the Dutch felt were beneath their status as colonials.

He was sent to Timor in the first instance and that is where I was born in 1923.

His next posting was a little Island near the south of Borneo where they had a coal mine which was worked by native "lifers" - it was a prison island - and the supervisors were government personnel.

We were there until about 1926 and, as one moved up in the government one came closer to Java. So finally, in 1926, we were transferred to Bandung in Java where the head office of the mining department was. My father worked there until his death in 1939.

**Q: What are your memories of your early life as a child ?**

R: Actually, our life was very good, although my parents were obviously struggling. They didn't have the background that the Dutch people around us had, as far as money, possessions etc, but it was a very happy life. We had a lot of freedom, we had servants, we had a cook, we had a gardener, we had a maid, and life was easy. Although there are no servants in Australia, life was very much like a lot of my Australian friends had when they were young. Pleasures were simple pleasures - cheap - but we weren't restricted in any way. We had a very happy upbringing.

**Q: Were there any other children in the family, apart from your brother**

R: No. Only the two of us.

**Q: And your mother. What did she do after your father died ?**

R: Well, my mother had always been very artistically inclined and she was very impressed with Asian Art and in fact she got to know quite a lot of different styles of Asian art.

She was approached by some native manufacturers who didn't have the knack or the knowledge on how to sell or how to handle their art and she started a shop of Eastern art which very soon became quite a well known shop.

It even was a tourist stop for tourists who visited the Dutch East Indies. She had mainly Indonesian art, but also some Chinese art in the shop. In those days the government employees got leave to Europe which as six months leave every six years and later on it was every four years.

Now during our second leave in 1938/39 my father had a heart attack -he had angina - and died in Brussels. In one way it was fortunate that my mother had this shop because she wasn't financially embarrassed and my brother went to the Academy of Fine Arts in Holland while I went to high school in Java, in Bandung.

**Q: Could you explain a little bit about your school life.**

R: Yes. That was also quite interesting because there were two systems. The government school system which had primary and secondary schooling as well as a private system which was run by either Protestant or Catholic denominations - they were usually the better schools.

I was fortunate that in Bandung there was a school where most of the better off Dutch, as well as foreigners who were there representing their country, sent their children and we had a very interesting school. It had a Latin Department as well as a mathematical side. The esprit de corps was extremely good and now fifty years later after the school has been non existent for forty five years we still have a social club. We still have a reunion every two years,- not that I have been to very many - I've been to two in the last forty years.

**Q: Is that in Western Australia?**

R: No. The reunions are normally in Holland. People come from all over the world and the last one was this year in Bandung. Where the school was, there is now an Indonesian private school, which tries to emulate and follow the tradition of the old school.

**Q: Very interesting. And did you go ?**

R: I didn't go because I had an operation and unfortunately the doctor wouldn't let me go.

**Q: That would have been a very interesting visit, wouldn't it.**

R: It would, yes.

**Q: Never mind, next time.**

R: O.K.

**Q: You had just finished high school when the Pacific War broke out. What were the feelings at home, at this time ?**

R: Well, like everywhere else, we had a Spitfire Fund, we were donating our pots and pans and were caught up in the normal propaganda rush. However, we were completely unprepared

because you must realise that the Dutch Colonial Army was a paramilitary police force rather than an Army, with the training to keep order in the colonies rather than fight an outside enemy. We had an Air Force. We had a Navy. The Navy was probably the best organised of the Armed Forces. The Air Force had Glenn Martin Bombers which were very old fashioned. We had a few Curtiss planes and we had a lot of biplanes.

**Q: Did you feel vulnerable. Or did you think it wouldn't happen to you - the war ?**

R: Well, we thought that the British and American forces and we counted Australia as part of Britain, would be strong enough to withstand the Japanese because our knowledge of the Japanese was that of interior goods and our propaganda told us that they couldn't see properly. They couldn't march properly etc. So we had a complete misunderstanding of their power and strength.

*NOTE : Considerable interference at beginning of tape - no voices audible for some time and then too much interference to decipher any of the early comments.*

R: We were armed with rifles made in 1895 and only in February 1942 were we issued with Lee Enfields. The Regulars were well trained under the circumstances but essentially the Army was a paramilitary police force rather than any sort of defence against another power.

*NOTE : More interference, here - tape not audible - question from interviewer not audible and some of the response not clear.*

R: After the fall of Singapore, there was only the Dutch East Indies between Japan and Australia to stand against the Japanese. We felt rather abandoned. However, what happened was - two months after my call up, I was selected because I had a driver's licence.

We didn't know what it was all about, but we were sent to central Java to the City of Solo, Surakarta ~ for short it's called Solo. This was a little independent area where there was a Sultan who was in charge. What had happened was that the General Motors factory in Jakarta - called Batavia in those days - was transferred "holusbolus" with all equipment to Central Java where they were producing GMC trucks and they went to various units as soon as they were assembled.

Our task was to drive these trucks which were virtually half finished. They were truck a with a steering wheel, a dashboard and a flat tray but no cabin because they didn't have the time to finish the cabins. we delivered these to various units - Dutch as well as Australian, and some American units which had arrived. I believe the American units were anti-aircraft units. Anyway, one day we were delivering trucks to a unit allegedly north of our position when we saw a mountain stream with a lot of people swimming in it. We waved to them and they waved back. Suddenly our leading vehicle stopped and the driver shouted "Japanese" - they were Japanese troops who had already got that far. We managed to turn around and get back. It was a very confused time.

**Q: Was this at the time that you were transporting trucks to the airfield ?**

R: Yes, no, not yet. I was then sent to a secret airfield we were building for the B17s which were allegedly going to arrive. The airport was guarded by one platoon of Home Guard, mostly elderly people under the command of a Lieutenant.

**Q: Like a "Dads Army" ?**

R: Like Dad's Army. We were the personnel helping the construction under command of a sergeant. The airfield was very well built. The hangars were made of teak. I've never seen anything like it. When the airfield was finished, one Curtiss interceptor aeroplane landed to test the tarmac and then flew away. The Lieutenant in charge of the "Dads Army" boys rang headquarters but he was answered by a Japanese - they had already passed us by. We were then instructed to try to get back to Western Java with three people - three men to a truck.

**Q: Before you did that did you destroy the airfield that ..?**

R: I was just coming to it. We stacked all the petrol that was there in the hangars and we had explosives in the tarmac. As the airfield blew up and burned we drove away in a westerly direction. There was a film recently - or at least was shown here recently. It was called the story of Dr Wassell, an American doctor who arrived in Java and who took charge of the American contingent. The story is about their flight across Java to the port of Chilatchap in the south where they got on one of the last ships which took them to Australia. Well, we got caught up in the tail end of their convoy. There were Australians, Americans and a few Dutch troops in the convoy. However, we were in the tail end. By the time we reached Chilatchap, the town was being strafed and bombed and the ships were sunk in the harbour, We decided to try and reach Western Java. We arrived at the town of Maos which was a railway junction and noticed there was one train standing still, facing west. We sabotaged the truck, pushed it into a ravine and got on that train. The train left for Western Java and during the night it stopped once because it went off the rails. The fifth columnists had sabotaged the rail. However, it wasn't a very big repair job and the railway personnel very quickly got the train back on the rails.

**Q: Would there have been many of you on that train ?**

R: No. There were about three of us.

**Q: And what was the train carrying ?**

R: It was the last express from east to west. It carried the usual complement of Indonesian passengers, mail, etc.

**.Q: How long would it take you to do that journey normally ?**

R: Normally it's - I understand it's a two or three day journey.

**Q: How long did it take you this time**

R: Well, it took us two days to get back to Bandung.

**Q: And did you get some food along the way, or did you carry your own ?**

R: No, no. We didn't have any food, but at the various stations there were Indonesians selling all sorts of things.

**Q: Do you remember how you felt on this journey. were you confused?**

R: Very confused. Because we didn't know what was happening. We had no news from anywhere. Of course, rumours were rife, but no one knew exactly what was happening The three

of us were the sergeant in charge, the corporal, his assistant ' and myself. We arrived in Bandung during an air-raid. When the air raid was over we went to our Depot Battalion where we were paraded in front of a major.

When we reported he said "The best thing for you people is to go back to your own unit". We explained to him that our unit was behind the Japanese lines, so it was behind the Japanese lines and didn't exist anymore. Whereupon he answered "Well, that's none of my bloody business.." You can imagine the effect it had on a nineteen year old who looked up at the seniors as the people who would give him advice.

Anyway, I was then sent to a mobile unit which was also in charge of the ambulance and I was sent in an ambulance to Lembang and beyond because the Japanese were attacking our ground forces there, causing many casualties.

I was driving back with a casualty to Bandung to the hospital, when I was stopped by military police who suggested that I was driving too fast. Of course, there were some words between myself and the military police and I was put on report.

I was then transferred out of the ambulance unit back to my first unit in the mountains south of Bandung where I was given a truck and the job of resupplying the various platoons which were located around the area in the jungle.

**Q: Where did you get those from - Bandung?**

R: No. From the headquarters which was near the tea plantation.

**Q: And what were these troops doing ?**

R: They were in small units spread out around in the jungle to try and stop any circular movement of the Japanese around Bandung.

**Q: What were their feelings ? Were they depressed or ....**

R: they felt very depressed because we heard a lot of rumours which were all contradictory. We heard that the Japanese were killing all women and children in all the towns that they took. We obviously had family etc in Bandung and we were very worried.

**Q: How long did this go on ?**

R: This went on for about a week. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 1942 our Commanding Officer told us that unfortunately we had to surrender and capitulate. However, there were plans for guerrilla warfare and one of our generals - General Schilling - decided to move outside the corridor where the Japan- had said the surrender had to take place. We decided to join him.

**Q: Many of you ?**

R: No. Very few, but there were three of us who had been at school together and we decided to walk to the area. When we got about twenty kilometres away we found cars on the side of the road abandoned. We managed to get one started and decided first to go to Bandung, to see how our families were. However, we ran out of petrol very quickly and slept in one of the bungalows which were in the area and were the holiday homes of the well-to-do. Next day we caught up with another group who had a motor car and we joined them. They were well armed with

weapons we had not seen before. They had tommy-guns, automatics and so we decided to join them.

**Q: Where had they got their arms from, then ?**

R: Well from the various Depots. We then drove into Bandung which was completely calm. There were no Japanese in the area and our own military police were looking after the traffic etc. On my way to my home I was stopped by military police and told to report to the nearest military depot as otherwise I would be considered a deserter. I went and reported and they told me to stay overnight, it was "only a matter of administration and no problems, you can go home tomorrow". However, the next day the Japanese arrived, we were put in the back of a truck and taken into Bandung to one of the big military depots where we were told we were prisoners of war.

**Q: So you actually never got home ?**

R: No. I never got home.

**Q: Did you resent the fact that you ?**

R: Of course I did. Yes, very much so because I could have stayed at home and I could have seen my mother. However, the first few weeks weren't all that bad. There was plenty of food and in fact the Japanese even allowed a visit from the family.

On the last visit my mother came with food and civilian clothes which were very welcome, but that was all. Then the Japanese started putting barbed wire around the camp and the orders became more and more ruthless. Virtually for every offence there was a death penalty and on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April, three of our comrades who had been smuggling food and stuff from the outside were caught.

We had to parade and in front of us they were bayoneted to death. I understand that at the same time everywhere there were prisoners of the Japanese, from Malaya down, to the former Dutch East Indies, where the same thing happened in practically all the camps, so it must have been an official order to set an example.

**Q: It must have been devastating for you - a young man of nineteen ?**

R: It was terrible. The next day we were told that we had twenty four hours to get our heads shaven and we were told we were not allowed any paper, pencils or anything else.

R: They established various prisoner of war camps. In Bandung there was - I would say the biggest camp. The Australian troops were housed in my old high school which had been turned into a hospital - an emergency hospital - and then later on a prison camp for the Australians. I believe that the civilian population, the Dutch, were very good to the Australian soldiers who were imprisoned there, trying to bring them food and various sorts of things.

**Q: Food was very short, was it ?**

R: Well, it wasn't so much that it was short but the cooks were probably not geared for such an enormous number of people. They were very disorganised. There was a lot of corruption and of course the food that we got was all rice. Not that we didn't like it or weren't used to it, but it

wasn't the normal food that we ate. However very soon the food situation became worse and then one day we were told to be ready next morning for transport.

We were paraded to the station where we boarded the train. There were only goods wagons. We were put in and went to an unknown destination. Of course, you've got to understand that up till then we were the colonial power. We were used to travelling in luxury. We were used to travelling in motor cars in front of the local population and suddenly we were treated worse than coolies and there was a big psychological impact as well. We finished up in Chilatchap which was the harbour in the south of Java from where the last ships went to Australia.

**Q: When you say "we" - about how many of you were there?**

R: I would say over two thousand (2,000) of us. We were in the camp, in the town itself here we were taken out daily. We were allowed to wear only a pair of shorts and we were then sent to the harbour to clean up the rubble and everything from the buildings that were bombed. We were then marched back to our camp through the city in front of the population and the Japanese tried to denigrate us a little bit further by beating us whilst we were going through the city in front of the native population.

**Q: What was the ... did you get any reaction from the native population ?**

R: Yes. At first they were stunned. They couldn't understand that the Japanese would treat us that way. Later on the younger People especially, became very pro-Japanese. However, the older population tried to help us wherever they could. We were then subjected to a reign of terror for two months, and after two months we were transferred to another camp close to the beach where before the Dutch Army had been trying to build a new base.

This camp was quite good as far as a camp was concerned, but not as far as the treatment or the food was concerned. Food was very scarce and as far as treatment was concerned, we were called on parade at odd times. Sometimes it was at two o'clock in the morning and we had to stand to attention for thirteen and a half hours whilst the Japanese soldiers walked through the ranks and kicked and beat people until they fainted.

All the while they had machine guns trained around us, and this went on for quite a while. Then there was a change in command and suddenly the Japanese said that we had to do a lot of callisthenics because that was good for us. The food improved slightly and we weren't sent on too many work parties. We couldn't understand what was happening but the obvious thing was that they were fattening us up for Thailand or Burma.

**Q: How did you occupy yourself ? When you weren't doing callisthenics or working, were you allowed to sit around and talk or .... ?**

R: Well, yes we did, although we thought of various things to do. The Japanese asked for geologists and as my father had been a geologist, I said I had been a geologist. They never questioned that one so young could have been a geologist, but anyway, the end result was that we had to dig water pits because there was a shortage of water in the camp. They asked for concert pianists, and one concert pianist who was with us had to shift a piano in the Commander's office.

**Q: And play?**

R: No, just shift it. Anyway, by the end of 1942 we were again put on a train. Not all of us because by that time we had quite a few sick people and those who had been affected by the bad food situation. But the young ones ~ the strong ones - were put on a train and we were taken from Chilatchap to Jakarta.

They had lined up a few young Indonesians along the railway line near Chilatchap who were making gestures as if they were cutting their throats - but it was obviously a Japanese ploy. We were then sent to Jakarta where we were housed in big hangars or sheds in the harbour where after a few days, we boarded a Japanese cargo ship bound for Singapore. The accommodation was , in the hold and was, to was to our way of thinking, very bad. However we didn't know exactly what bad accommodation was at that early stage.

When we arrived in Singapore we were picked up by trucks driven by Indian soldiers , who had defected to the Japanese and taken to Changi camp where we were housed in C Block. We then came directly under British command - under our own officers - but still under British command : After about two or three weeks we were again taken to the railway station and put in wagons and goods wagons and we were on our way to Thailand.

**Q: Did you know you were going to Thailand?**

R: We didn't know where we were going. It was a terrible thing because the wagons were made of corrugated iron which were burning hot during the day. Forty two people to a wagon and at night it was very, very cold. Of course, by that time we didn't have very many clothes, only the uniform we were wearing and maybe a spare.

**Q: Did the train stop during the day for comfort. .... ?**

R: It stopped once or twice during the day for comfort and for food. The food was very bad. Very unhygienically prepared and served.

**Q: Did you have your pannikins or did you just sort of.... ?**

R: Yes. We had our dixies. We then arrived in Banpong where we were each given a handful of small bananas. We thought, you know, Christmas had come and ate all the bananas. Little did we know that that was our meal for the whole day. We were then marched and marched until about midday, whilst left and right people were falling out because we had slept badly in the train, we had people with fever etc and the Japanese were very brutal during that march.

We were then loaded onto trucks and driven to a camp which was called Tarso, which was upcountry from the rail station in Banpong. Tarso was a camp where Australian prisoners were also located. We were not allowed to speak to them or communicate in any other form. We had to sleep just on the bare ground - there was no accommodation for us and we only got some water by the grace of one of the Japanese guards.

Next morning the trucks carried on through river beds because there were no roads and we finished up finally in a place called Kinsayo. In Kinsayo we were greeted by Australian and British troops and were told that it was the end of the railway so far.

**Q : When you say "well was that all the prisoners ?**

R: That was the seven hundred Dutch

**Q: From Java ?**

R: Yes. Seven hundred Dutch prisoners, We were there for three days and then were marched off into the jungle to a place called Rintin. Now Rintin was the nightmare of nightmares. It was a valley where the whole railway line was virtually running along a river, the Mayhem and the river was in a depressed part of the countryside.

The roads, or whatever we called roads, were virtually bush tracks through which the Japanese moved to Burma. Our task was to cut down the jungle to make an open space for the next group who would build the dyke so that they could put the railway lines on top. We were therefore the most forward group.

**Q: Did you camp there at night ? Or did you go back to ... ?**

R: No, we camped there at night and we soon built some huts of bamboo which was plentiful there.

By that time people started dying and we didn't know that from the Burma side other prisoners were building the railway towards us.

Three of our people disappeared and tried to get to India. However, there is a range of mountains and only one pass - the Three Pagodas Pass.

They walked in a circle and arrived back at our camp about a month later. They came in during the night because there was no fence around the camp.

We were all too weak to run away anyway. They joined us for meals etcetera. However, the Japanese realised there was something wrong and they gave the officer in charge the order to report.

He then gave these three people the choice of trying to flee again or report which they did. They were duly executed the next day.

*NOTE: Quite a lot of background noise and 'blank tape' here Major Katarski continued, but it was very hard to pick up commentary in this section.*

R: At that time about ten people died each day. We were too weak to dig graves and could only manage shallow trenches.

The dead were collected and next morning wrapped in sheets and buried.

We had no medicine to help the sick. One of our people went onto the track where he saw prisoners being moved down from Burma, mingled with them and asked them if they had any medicine. He got a few antibiotic pills which helped against all sorts of infections.

The doctor tried to give the worst patients one tablet each. I got one and maybe that's why I survived.

Anyway, the Japanese decided to break camp and told us to move out to the track - whoever could get to the track would be moved. During the night some of my friends moved me

to the track, so next morning the trucks were there and we were driven back to Kinsayo, whilst the people who were still able to work were moved further up towards Three Pagodas Pass.

**Q: Major Katarski could you begin telling us about your health at this stage ?**

R: Yes. My health was extremely bad.

As I mentioned before I had scurvy due to lack of vitamins, because we were down to eating rotten rice, leaves and flowers.

There was a lot of beriberi in the camp. I was fortunate. You either got beriberi or you got what they called neuritis. Neuritis was an affliction of the nerves mainly in your legs. It was very painful, but apart from that and being a bit crippling, it didn't affect you in any other way.

However, with beriberi you swelled up and retained all the fluid in your body. Ultimately you died of it. There was also malaria and it was rather strange that the Japanese gave the doctors a quantity of pills, which relieved colics. During the malarial periods and during the times that we were suffering from dysentery and similar illnesses, they would give us one or two malaria pills - quinine pills.

**Q: I guess they wanted you as workers - they didn't want you ill.**

R: Sure. But I don't think they cared about how many people died. In fact at that stage a lot of Asian workers were also brought in to help on the railway.

Most of the heavy work was done by the prisoners of war, such as the cutting through Hellfire Pass by the Australians, cutting the jungle in front of the railway rails by my group and also making bridges and in general working as pioneers in front of the troops that followed us.

**Q: Were they kept separately from your people - the Asians**

R: The Asians. Yes, they were. It is rather interesting to note that recently there was a picture in the paper. that they found a mound in Thailand containing skeletons, dioxies, oil lamps, etc. It was obviously a mass grave but they didn't know what happened. I do know because at that time cholera was sweeping down the river and the Japanese had a tremendous fear of epidemics - not so much for us but for their troops who obviously would have to go along that same route. So what happened was that certain camps which had a ninety percent illness rate amongst the Asian workers were declared dead.

The huts would be soaked in petrol, ringed with machine guns and burnt. Whether the people were dead or dying didn't matter. Then of course there were no bulldozers in these days, but they would cover it with a little bit of sand and the jungle did the rest. It was obviously one of these camps that they have found.

**Q: How long were you working in these conditions ?**

R: Only for two and a half months, but most of the prisoners who didn't succumb to the worst illnesses worked there for two and a half years.

**Q: Why only two and a half months for you ?**

R: Because I got very sick with scurvy, dysentery and also malaria.

The Japanese themselves, or rather the Korean guards, who were far worse than the Japanese because they were treated by the Japanese as second-class citizens, took it out on us.

To amuse themselves they would, for instance, if during your work you had to stop work and go somewhere behind a bush, they would cover you with mud and make you stand to attention in the sun till the mud dried and caked and tore your skin.

Of course, this was a future source of jungle sores - tropical ulcers. In the case of a malaria patient they would put him in the river and say "Well, cool off". He would then have to stand in the river for one or two hours, which wasn't very conducive to his health.

Anyway when I was evacuated, I was put in the back of a truck. As I explained before there were no proper roads, so by the time I and the others got to the next stop, we had to remove two or three of our comrades who had died in the process during the night.

The shocks were too much for their intestines and they bled to death. We were taken back to Kinsayo up river, where we noticed that there were extra huts and there were quite a lot of prisoners concentrated there.

We were then taken to what is popularly called the Bridge on the River Kwai which was down country on another river which joined the river where we worked further down.

**Q: were you ill all this time ?**

R: Yes then and while we were evacuated down country. When we arrived in Tamarkan Camp - which is the camp on the River Kwai ~ we were given soup which we hadn't had for a long time. The food was, if not plentiful-, better than we'd had for the last few months. However the next morning the Japanese told us "Seeing you all could walk to the trucks (which was one of the conditions of evacuation) "Your camp is actually Chungkai, which four or five miles further down the railway track and you better walk there"

It took me all 1 day to drag myself from sleeper to sleeper to the other camp. Chungkai was a hospital camp where at that stage there were about three thousand allied prisoners, mostly British, a small group of Australians and Dutch '

The conditions in Chungkai were quite good with very little interference by the Japanese. Our food was mainly rice with plenty of vegetables. One could buy eggs if one had some money and there was an opportunity to do black-marketing which was very dangerous because if you were caught you were shot.

**Q: Did you have any money ?**

R: Well, the officers were paid ~ it I'm not mistaken ~ about five or four ticals a day or a week. The men were paid ten cents a day.

**Q: Who paid you ?**

R: The Japanese. Also the British prisoners had a few Thai contacts outside the camp who because they had access to banking outlets were able to obtain sums of money clandestinely. In fact, they had quite a good spy network. They had hidden radios etc. The prisoners here had not been up

country where you couldn't carry very much and due to the searches etc you finished up only with a loin cloth. They still had their uniforms and quite a few of their personal goods.

**Q: Why the difference ? Why were they kept there?**

R: I don't know. I think they had to have someone building the base camps and the hospital camps to house the prisoners who were sick and were being brought back.

**Q: And was the housing quite reasonable?**

R: Well, the housing was self-built. We built bamboo huts which were about a hundred to two hundred feet long with bamboo walls and sort of a platform where each man had about two and a half feet to call his own.

**Q: While you are there, were you in bed most of the time ?**

R: At the beginning, yes because I couldn't walk. Fortunately, due to the better conditions and my youth, within one or two months I got better, put on weight and became quite healthy. Of course, I was still plagued with malaria attacks but they were only of nuisance value in comparison to what I'd had before.

**Q: And was the medical treatment good ? Did you have aspirins and things like that ?**

R: No. We had a hospital and we had an operating theatre. Ether was not available or maybe only in one or two instances.

Mostly, people were either held down or knocked out before an operation. The stench of the rotting bodies on the living prisoners was so bad that one would get sick being anywhere near the huts and vomit before you got used to it. People were literally rotting away whilst still alive.

**Q: At that stage, did you have particular mates or did you sort of stay away from that ?**

R: Yes. Mateship was what got you through. It was exceptionally strong amongst the Australian troops. Far less amongst the British troops and sort of in between amongst the Dutch people. Don't forget that the Dutch Army was the Colonial Army. There were full blood Dutch prisoners and a lot of Eurasian prisoners here, in the Dutch colonies, were regarded in the same social strata as Dutchmen. There was no difference between a Eurasian and a full-blood Dutchman. However the lower ranks, or rather the people of mostly Indonesian blood, were not accepted as much as the other Eurasians by our allies.

At that stage, various people who were worried that they would lose all humanity started getting together and they got together with some of my Dutch friends and some English officers and we decided to speak a different language each day, purely to keep our minds alive, because we were not allowed paper or pencils or anything else. We discussed things like post-war politics and ideas and in fact it was quite a pleasant interlude, whilst in that camp.

**Q: How long were you in that camp ?**

R: I was there from about May until - if I'm not mistaken December or January of the next year. In other words about seven or eight months.

**Q: And your health was improving all the time ?**

R: My health was improving. The only fear we had was of having to go back up country because that was a death sentence.

One tried everything to avoid being told to go back. I was fortunate that I was in a group that was building new barracks for the sick people coming from up country. The prisoners that were coming down in general, had worse and worse conditions of health. The last few couldn't even be evacuated by truck, but were brought down the river by barge. It was pitiful to see these wrecks. We had to carry them into camp and mostly they died the next day.

In camp itself - in Chungkai - we had a cemetery. Every day we were allowed to either bury or burn the dead. The Last Post was heard every day and there were Church meetings etc. So the camp there was much better because there was no heavy work. Most of the work consisted of either building huts or gathering timber from the surrounding countryside.

**Q: How many meals a day did you have ?**

R: We had three meals a day. Plus we were allowed to buy from a camp canteen which had things like Malacca sugar and eggs, but most of the stuff that we bought for our meals was smuggled in.

Tobacco was smuggled in by a group of Australians, Scots and Dutchmen. I used to go to the river, hide myself when the work groups were coming back and then negotiate with Thais coming past in boats for dried fish. Dried fish was sold in bags and what I used to do was leave money somewhere on the side of the river and come back early in the morning. There would be a bag of salt fish which I would bring into camp and then prepare it over a little fire and sell the fish at ten cents each.

**Q: Did the guards allow you to do that ?**

R: Well, the guards didn't interfere in camp. It was done very surreptitiously, but they didn't interfere that much inside the camps.

Then a rumour was started that we were all going to be evacuated to another camp - Nakamphatong - further south. We also noticed an increase in Allied air activity and also people coming down were telling us about attacks up river and in Burma.

From the Burmese side we also noticed one or two prisoner convoys coming back.

**Q: This must have given you good heart: ?**

R: Yes it did. We also had information from the "Bangkok Times" which in various ways we got into the camp. Also, clandestine radios picked up a lot of information. I told the Japanese guard - or the Korean guard - who was in charge of our building group that I would teach him English but as I had no books I asked if he could bring in a paper so I could teach him English. He brought in the "Bangkok Times".

**Q: ( Not heard)**

R: No, I had no choice. And yet he sort of opened up and he was quite good.

He hated the Japanese. He was a Korean who wasn't a very keen soldier because very often, when we were tired or said that we were tired or we had better things to do - such as buy fruit or something from the natives - he would say to a few of us "You go and let us know if the guards are coming and you go ahead and do what you like".

So, you know, there was no pressure in that camp. We didn't have to build the railway or anything like that

**Q: Of course the Japanese and the Koreans themselves were under pressure to get the railway built, weren't they ?**

R: That's right.

**Q: Not that that makes their behaviour right and forgivable ?**

R: No. You see, I think an English or German company had surveyed the idea of putting that railway through and of course politics came into it, because a railway from Thailand to Burma would reduce the importance of Singapore. So it was in the British interests not to have that railway built.

But the company which was retained by the Thai Government said the cost of building the railway would be prohibitive. And yet the Japanese built it in three and a half years.

**Q: Was it actually finished ?**

R: Oh yes, yes. But when you think of it, you know, we sabotaged so much. We put rotten things in the bridge buildings and the bridge structures. Later on we had to check oil drums for their vehicles etc in Burma and we had to replace the flanges underneath the cap because the rubber had rotted or whatever happens to rubber when it is in touch with oil.

We had to put a ring of asbestos in, cut it off and screw the cap back on, but instead of throwing the rubber out we threw the old rubber in the oil and that contaminated the oil. We stole food from the Japanese stores. We did all sorts of little things but there were thousands of people involved, so ultimately it was more a morale booster than anything else.

**Q: Were any prisoners punished for doing this if they were caught ?**

R: Oh yes. If you were caught, you were very badly punished.

You were beaten up and ... But the Japanese were, as far as that's concerned, very stupid, very childish. They had no idea of security. They were many contradictions.

For years before the War they had hairdressers, photographers who were in the Dutch East Indies, in India, in Malaya and even in Australia, who were mapping and taking photographs and taking weather maps and they had better maps than we had. Yet, their intelligence was very bad. Their security was bad.

**Q: Did you need good security in your situation though ?**

R: Maybe they did because one bit of information is useless but a lot of information put together forms a picture and I'm sure that the British officers who got the information in, also got the intelligence out. But it amazed me. I knew very little about military things. The fact that I grew up in the Colony meant that at an early age I knew how to shoot a rifle because I went hunting and I knew how to fish. I knew a little bit about living off the land which someone from a city in Europe wouldn't know, and that helped me in my survival.

**Q: You said that there were rumours of movement. Was there indeed movement?**

R: Yes. Well, I think in January we were moved to Nakamphatong. Nong Pladuk at first - Nong Pladuk 1.

Nong Pladuk was a railwayhead. There was a camp there and we were put in the camp and were told that we would have to build another camp quite near, to house about ten thousand prisoners of war.

We moved within about a month to the area where the new camp was going to be and started building. Indeed very soon a lot of people from various camps were gathered together in Nong Pladuk 2.

Whilst we were there and building the camp we had fairly good rations and we were left fairly much to ourselves. However, when the camp was finished and people started arriving from Burma and other places in Thailand we were sent out on working parties cleaning up their ammunition depots which is of course against the Geneva Convention. We had to load ammunition. We had to load food and oil for troops in Burma. We sabotaged and stole as much as we could.

One funny incident happened. A Scot by the name of McAllister, who had been in our black market group in Chungkal, was caught outside - at least the Japanese found out that he was out of the camp with one of his mates apparently working on the black market. They ringed the camp so that they would catch him when he came back. However, he found out about it and instead of going back to the camp he went to Nong Pladuk 1 and gave himself up to the Camp Commandant there.

And here were all the guards waiting to shoot him down and in drives the Camp Commandant of Nong Pladuk 2 in his car with McAllister and his mate in the back. Of course they couldn't shoot him. He got beaten up and got all sorts of punishment but at least he came out alive.

**Q: Why did they choose the other Camp Commandant to report to Was he a kinder sort of fellow ?**

R: Well, I think there was rivalry between the two Commandants.

McAllister played on that rivalry. Of course, the Commandant of Nong Pladuk 1 had saved face, while our Commandant had lost face.

Anyway, we were in Nong Pladuk for a while and then we heard that we had to go further down country and build a camp at Nakamphatong. However, strong rumours were also circulating that they were sending some healthy, or relatively healthy, people to Japan and indeed

we were on parade one day - we had parades every morning and every evening - when a group of Japanese came and just picked out seven hundred of us.

We were given some shorty pyjama pants, a pair of Japanese sandals and were told that we were going to form a new party.

Among the seven hundred there was a group of Australians who had been near our camps or in our camp for the past year and a half. They were also sent with us. The group consisted of a Lieutenant in charge of about thirty or forty other ranks. There was also a small group of British prisoners.

Incidentally just digressing for one second, amongst the doctors that we had met and who were in charge of the various camps were Weary Dunlop and Doctor Moon who really did a lot.

We had made instruments from aluminium spoons etc. Some of us had bits of glass put together and made lenses and microscopes of them.

All in all, they did a lot of good work with these instruments. Anyway, that's just an aside. We were put on a train back to Singapore. Cattle wagons again but instead of going to Changi we were taken to the sewers of Singapore, which was called River Valley Camp. We were kept apart from the other prisoners at Changi.

We met some groups who looked at us in horror, because, although we thought that we were healthy, we must have looked terrible to them.

We were then put aboard five ships. I was fortunate I was put on board the "Aramis" a French passenger liner and we were kept in the holds - the forward hold. There were a lot of Japanese economists and their girlfriends or wives on board going back to Japan.

**Q: Going back to Japan from Singapore ?**

R: From Singapore. Apart from our own gear we had to carry a bundle of rubber on board with us. This was an easy way for them to aid the war effort and bring rubber into Japan. The holds were closed and within two days the sweat was about four inches high on the floors of the hold. We were covered in big heat blisters and one of our group suffocated and died. The Japanese then opened up part of the hold so that a little bit of air could come in.

**Q: Were you fed ?**

R: We were fed. In fact we were fed better than we had ever been fed. We were fed by the Japanese Navy who were in charge of the ship.

However, by the time we reached the Ryukyu Islands, (just before you come to Kyushu in Japan proper) we were the only ship left - the others had been torpedoed and sunk.

We were put ashore in Moji in Kyushu and on going ashore we were taken to a special facility, where they had hot water, one basin of very hot water and another basin of carbolic acid in water and we were deloused. We had to swim in both the pools which probably was a very good thing.

They did it to protect themselves and protect their country, but for us it was a good thing. We were then allocated into smaller groups which went to various camps and I was sent to Camp No. 17 Fukuoka in Omuta. Omuta was a coal mining town.

**Q: Did you have much contact with the Japanese people, or only your guards ?**

R: Only our guards. We were not allowed to have contact with the Japanese, but frankly we weren't particularly interested in contacting the Japanese.

**Q: What was your morale like ?**

R Our morale was high because although the ships were torpedoed and we were sorry for our friends, it meant that the war was being brought home to Japan. Also, on arrival, there was a bombardment whilst we were still in the ship and part of the town was bombed. It meant that for the first time we saw real Allied action close by.

**Q: About how many of you were on your ship ?**

R: I would say about seven hundred.

**Q: And what was your health like when you got off the ship**

R: Fair. In terms of being prisoners of war it was fairly good because they had picked out the healthy ones to go on this transfer.

**Q: How did you get from your ship to the camp?**

R: To Omuta ? In the train. In a passenger train and for the first time we experienced the Japanese train system which ran exactly on time even during the War. We were put in normal train wagons. on arrival in Omuta we were taken to a very clean, very well built prisoner of war camp. It was run by the Mitsui Corporation. In fact we were handed over to the Mitsui concern.

Baron Mitsui lived in Omuta and he was the owner of the Mitsui group. They tried to give us good conditions but conditions in Japan in those days were not too good. The camp was an American camp. There were mainly American prisoners of war from the Philippines. They were survivors of the death march of the time and they welcomed us with bean soup, which was quite tasty and we were very appreciative of it.

**Q: What about your clothing at this stage ? You left Singapore in (unclear here)**

R: (*Beginning of response unclear*) The Mitsui concern gave each of us a work uniform as well as a set of clothes for our holidays which we never got. However, the working conditions weren't so good. We had to work ten-twelve hours a day, which meant ten hours in the mine together with one hour getting to the mine and one to return, eat and go to sleep.

Conditions in the coal mine were terrible. The mine was partly underneath the sea, under the seabed. It was closed before the war because of the dangerous conditions but as the Japanese needed every bit of coal they opened the mine again and sent us to work the mine.

R: The work was actually assigned to the different nationalities. The British prisoners had to work in a copper foundry, which was very hot work and I think quite dangerous because of the fumes and they were only dressed in shorts whilst working in their foundry. However, they were above ground.

The small Dutch group worked above ground insofar that they were loading the trains with the coal that came out of the mine. The Americans and the Australians worked in the coalmine itself and the depth a prisoner worked at depended on what the Japanese thought of a particular prisoner.

They obviously didn't like the Australians' sense of humour, or unity or whatever, and they were usually working in the deepest parts of the mine. At that stage, because I was ill when I arrived in the camp, I was allocated to the kitchen staff.

The Americans didn't like any other nationality to work in their kitchens because kitchen personnel, due to the fact that they were close to the food, were an elite group and they tried to keep that for themselves. In the kitchen, apart from the Americans, were two Dutchmen - I was one of them - two Australians and two British soldiers. We were looked at with suspicion by the Americans and very soon they found some reason for transferring us out of the kitchen back into the workforce - the workforce in the coalmine.

**Q: Could you eat a little bit more if you worked in the kitchen ?**

R: Yes, you could eat more.

As well as that the Americans paid for their favours for various things in food. This was controlled by the officer in charge of the kitchen who was an American naval officer. He was aided by a Sergeant Major from the American Army who had a very loud voice and was collaborating with the Japanese.

Unfortunately the other officers were kept outside this elite group. The American commander was a major who was fairly weak and, although quite a nice person, he wasn't strong enough to stand up to this small group who were virtually running this camp.

As the American forces advanced towards Japan itself, the Japanese in our camp felt that the set up posed an internal threat to them. So they decided to send most of the officers to Manchuria - to prison camps up there. The officer in charge of the Dutch contingent was a padre with the rank of Captain.

The Australians were under a Lieutenant. The British were also under a Lieutenant and the Americans of course kept the Major in charge as well as the naval officer and the Sergeant Major. The camp from then on was completely in the hands of this little group.

**Q: How many an were there in the camp ?**

R: There were seventeen hundred prisoners in the camp and the bulk of the prisoners were American. From about the beginning of 1945, we noticed the air raids became more frequent. More and more planes were involved in each raid and the Japanese had fewer planes to oppose the American Air Force.

**Q: Because of this *did* the demeanour of the Japanese guards alter ?**

R: No, it didn't. Unfortunately the Japanese guards, as such were their "Dads Army" equivalent and mainly unfit for Army service. They showed quite a bit of inferiority complex and took it out on the prisoners whenever they could.

For instance there was an incendiary raid on the little town of Omuta, and the nose cones of the incendiary bombs were found in and around the town. The guards used to bring them in, connect them to a machine which produced electricity and then pick on anyone who

wasn't standing straight or didn't salute properly and he would spend the night in the guard house connected to the machine while they took turns in producing electricity and laughing when these prisoners were screaming.

In fact, they picked on one prisoner in particular, and he eventually went mad - he went completely crazy. Also it was winter and it was extremely cold but in the mine where due to lack of air and the work it was very hot until we came out. Then we had to again undress in the snow and stand to attention whilst they were counting us. This wasn't very good for our health.

**Q: How long would you have been standing there ? Did it depend on the .... ?**

R: It depended on their mood. Quite a few people died of pneumonia and of course the Mitsui concern tried to help us ' but they were, of course, subservient to the Army and couldn't do much.

Another example was a Japanese engineer, who worked for the Mitsui company and helped the prisoners occasionally with extra food or a blanket. He was found out and demoted to foreman instead of engineer, which made him lose face. He also worked in the deepest part of the coalmine.

When I was transferred out of the kitchen, the American officer decided that we had broken some law that he had imposed on the camp and told us that if he could he would have condemned us to death but, as an alternative, he would send us to the lowest part of the mine, indeed happened.

**Q: What were the working conditions ? How did you work ?**

R: It was very difficult, because the mines, as I said, had been closed for so many years and the mine tunnels were low to accommodate the average small Japanese rather than the bigger Europeans.

During the time the mine had been closed most of the corridors had collapsed and they were only about three or four feet high anyway. We had to crawl in and gradually widen and open up these corridors again.

They were still fairly low and if you had to carry a tree trunk - a pole which was used to prop up what we called the ceiling of the corridor, you carried that on your neck whilst crouching. Under these conditions our muscles were affected and much permanent damage was caused. This is one of the reasons why my spine has been affected since the war.

**Q: How long was your work day**

R: The work day was twelve hours. You worked for ten hours and it took one hour to get to the mine and one hour to get back and eat.

**Q: Did you travel on foot ?**

R: Yes. We walked to the mine and we walked back from the mine.

**Q: Did you have food in the middle of that stretch?**

R: We carried a little wooden box which was called an "obento" in which there was some rice mixed with buckwheat and some seaweed which was salted in soya sauce. That was the meal we had in the coalmine itself.

**Q: Did you have contact with prisoners from other nations at this time in the mine ?**

R: Only with our own camp. Because only our camp was near that coalmine. We worked in small groups. The Australians were usually at the coal face, shovelling the coal into large troughs. These troughs were about a metre long and fitted into each other along the length of the corridor. In the trough was a big iron chain, also a length of about a metre with a bent nail and this chain went around a generator at the end of the coal face.

The generator moved the chain and as they shovelled the coal into the trough, the chain pulled the coal back to the main corridor where it was loaded on to a belt.

However, my job was to start and stop the chain and replace the bent nails because they wore out within a matter of fifteen to twenty minutes, which gave the coal shovellers-the Australians in this case a chance to rest while I was fitting the nail.

**Q: So you didn't work too fast ?**

R: I tried to work as slow as I could. One day, as I was trying to replace a nail the chain got caught in the generator and pulled the whole generator out of its position.

The ceiling collapsed and as we were under the seabed the corridor filled up with water to our shoulders and I would say that the cushion of air in between the water and the ceiling held the water down to that level.

Of course, there were no lights. We had individual lights on our caps and a lot of the lights went out because the batteries on our belts were flooded and useless. About an hour later they managed to push a pipe through and pump enough air in to bring the water level down after which they dug us out.

**Q: Was there panic at the time ?**

R: There was no panic. Everyone was very quiet. I don't know about the others, but it left me with claustrophobia for the rest of my life. Also, we had quite a lot of accidents when the ceiling collapsed onto people, either maiming or killing them. Although I must say, we didn't have as many dead as we had in Thailand or Burma.

**Q: Did you have good medical treatment**

R: No. The medical treatment was very, very basic, it was better than Thailand, but very basic.

**Q: With your own doctors ?**

R: With our own doctors and occasionally a Japanese doctor would come in.

**Q: What about medicines and things like that ? Were they available ?**

R: Not in great supply. We had, for instance, a visit by either Swiss, Danish or Swedish people who came to visit our camp. Before they came, we were ordered to put on our spare uniforms which we weren't normally allowed to wear, a dentist's chair mysteriously appeared in the

hospital and as I had a toothache at that time I was put in the chair whilst the Japanese doctor drilled a hole in my tooth.

**Q: I hope with some sort of anaesthetic ?**

R: With no anaesthetic and not only that. As soon as the visitor had gone I was told to leave. He didn't plug the hole or anything and I had an abscess after that. I'm sure that the Red Cross representative was aware of these things but couldn't say very much. We also received an occasional Red Cross parcel which we had to divide up between thirty of us.

These parcels were meant to be one per person but I don't know what happened to the rest of the parcels.

**Q: Were there thirty in your hut ?**

R: No. I think it was an arbitrary number. I think our hut contained about fifty people. In little rooms with tatami mats and paper walls, but a lot better than the huts we had in Thailand. One of the jobs of the sick people was to stick fly paper over the holes in the walls and they were given tapioca flour as glue.

Very soon the Japanese stopped that practice, because the sick prisoners ate the tapioca flour. From then on they would put so much salt in that it was inedible. I remember the last Christmas and New Year meal in 1945 when we were told that we would get a banquet. We were given whale meat which I must say, was quite tasty. We were also given about a quarter glass of beer each. This was all donated by the Mitsui concern not by the Japanese Army.

As we progressed through the year the air raids became more frequent and finally in about May we saw the "thousand plane" air raids, which were very heartening to us. But the Japanese made us prepare a tunnel in the top end of the coalmine with a gas pipe leading into it. We presumed that, in case of an invasion we would be put in the tunnel and they would open the gas pipes. However, it never came to that. In the meantime I was working in the coalmine and I was suffering from terrible back pains. One day I couldn't walk and they had to bring me out of the coalmine ...

R: ....They brought me into the camp. The American doctor, who was actually doing his one year practice after studying at university before the war, did a spinal puncture on me which was quite difficult because he had no proper instruments nor xray pictures.

He drew some lines on my back with tailor's chalk and did the puncture.

He did have a microscope and told me that I had polio. I was paralysed from my waist down and as they didn't have a big hospital they put me in the barracks with people suffering from TB and other infectious diseases.

While I was there - I was there for about three or four days - we had an air raid with incendiary bombs and half the town and half the camp was burnt down to the ground. Our barracks was burnt down and when they moved me I noticed that I could move my big toe.

With encouragement from the male nurses I tried to move it and exercise it. Gradually the feeling came back in my legs and I eventually started to walk again. AS soon as I could walk I was told that I had to work with other people who were convalescing at the top of the coalmine near the harbour, shovelling coal into train wagons.

While we were near the harbour we could see across the inland sea. on the other side was the isthmus behind which was the town of Nagasaki.

It was, as the crow flies, between forty and sixty kilometres away, maybe a little bit more.

One day in August while we were there we noticed an aeroplane coming in after an air raid alarm and we saw a puff of smoke go up with tremendous force and speed, with red flames in the top. We thought that ammunition works were hit.

However, this was the atom bomb on Nagasaki. We noticed that the daylight was diminished by a darkening of the sky and in the upper atmosphere we could distinguish things flying around.

Later on we were told the result of the Hiroshima bombardment.

Anyway, two days after we were told by the Japanese that we had a holiday and we would stop working. Of course rumours were rife that the war was over. However, we waited another week until they finally told us that the war had ended.

**Q: What was your reaction to that ?**

R: Well, we were so pleased that finally after all those years, three and a half years, we would go home. Little did we know that the world had changed in the meantime. However, the Americans ordered us to mark the camp with a "P" and a "W" and very soon we started getting air supplies by parachute.

**Q: When you said "the Americans", were these outside .... ?**

R: No. The American Army the free troops. They couldn't come near our camp because of a typhoon.

It took quite a while before the first American troops came to our camp. In the meantime we had organised a military police unit because all the civil authorities had collapsed. There were no police except for the Kempeitei' - the secret police.

There was nothing functioning. We travelled in groups of four - one American, one Australian, a Dutchman and an Englishman - to keep order so that whoever created the disturbance would be addressed by his own nationality.

**Q: Was this while you were in your camp ?**

R: No. Outside the camp. Because by that time most of our people went outside and into town. The Japanese were very well behaved. They were like beaten dogs after this. The population itself couldn't understand what was happening. During one of our patrols we found a group of Chinese prisoners. Out of the thirty - almost thirty years of warfare there were about one thousand prisoners left. They had been used for bayonet practice; they had been used and abused by the Japanese and they were living for revenge only. We had to protect the citizens of the town against these Chinese ex-prisoners.

**Q: How did you do that ?**

R: By patrolling and stopping them. They would listen to us, but they would not listen to the Japanese. They raided the warehouses which contained beer and foodstuffs and in general stole watches from the citizens etc.

Very soon we were all told that we would be evacuated to Nagasaki and indeed on about the 30<sup>th</sup> August we boarded the trains for Nagasaki.

Coming in to Nagasaki we were just awed by the destruction. Nagasaki is built in a valley which leads to the sea, and the valley was like a big scorched hole in the ground. Only the rails were left. Stakes were there, but nothing else. Iron poles had melted and evaporated. Buildings on the edge of the impact area were standing, but leaning sideways and in the centre there was nothing - not even bricks.

Obviously, the Americans didn't realise at that stage that there was a danger of contamination by radiation because we were told on arrival in the harbour to have a shower. We were given a cake of soap and told not to come out of the showers until we used up all the soap. Coming out of the showers, we were given a brand new American uniform. Our own clothes were burnt, We were then deloused, before we got dressed of course and were taken onto the pier where we could see the American fleet - or at least part of it.

We were told to select our ship. The sick people went on a hospital ship and the rest 'of us chose our ship. I happened to select a little destroyer because with my prisoner mentality, I thought on a small ship I wouldn't have to share my food with so many people I finished up on the USS Smith, a destroyer with about fifteen Australians and a few Dutchmen. We were welcomed like long-lost family by the crew and that evening we were shown some films on the upper deck.

The next morning we sailed out of Nagasaki harbour for Okinawa. However, that night we were caught in a typhoon which damaged our ship and we had to wait for another ship to tow us into Okinawa. On arrival we were put up in an American camp.

It was interesting to note that when the Americans took the island of Okinawa there were about three airfields. We arrived there two months later and there were something like ten, all with Coca Cola fountains and canteens. We were very impressed by the efficiency of the American Army.

**Q: Were you transferred into another camp ?**

R: Yes. We were in a camp with other ex-prisoners. While in Okinawa, watching barges coming in with prisoners from Japan, I noticed some prisoners waving to me and suddenly someone yelled "tovaritch", knowing that I was of Russian descent.

It was one of the Naval Officers who had been sent to Manchuria. He told me that they had been freed by Russian troops, some of which were females.

They were the shock troops and he told me that they didn't ask questions, they just shot every Japanese they met. His words were "I'd rather eat with them than fight them!" Anyway, after about three days, myself and some of my mates decided that the waiting took too long, so we hitchhiked on one of the trucks coming Past to one of the airfields, here e were asked what we were doing. We said we wanted to go home and that we were ex prisoners of war. Whereupon the American officer told us that the C-47s, which were outside, were going to Manila the next

day. He said we should ask the pilot, who was asleep in the plane whether he could take us. So next morning, we were told to **board the** plane and there was an unbroken chain of aeroplanes flying between Okinawa and the Philippines. This is a six hour flight, so you can imagine how many planes were involved.

**Q: Just to move all the prisoners ?**

R: Well, I don't know who they were moving, but there was an unbroken chain flying. We had no permission to leave our friends, but we were just so anxious to get home. On arrival in Manila we were told to stay in the plane until a truck arrived to drive us wherever they were going to take us. We thought that we were going to be punished for leaving as we had done. However, we were taken to a gate which was decorated with all the flags of the Allied nations and with the words "Hail, our returned heroes".

We then met the delegation of the American and Allied press representatives and were given coffee and doughnuts. We were interviewed here and there and then taken to an American camp. We were told that, as far as the Dutch personnel were concerned, from that moment we were in the American Army. The Australians went to the same camp but stayed under Australian command. We spent about two or three weeks in that camp and then we were moved to another camp, to the Fifth Replacement Depot of the American Army. I must say that Army life there was fantastic. Food, as we had not even imagined in our wildest dreams. We had medical attention and although we were about twenty miles out of Manila we could come and go as we wanted. There were trucks going in and out of Manila all the time. We had a ball.

**Q: How did your bodies react to all of a sudden having good food?**

R: Not very well. We were sick of course after the first few meals, but as I said we had medical attention and we were given needles against all diseases that one could think of. I am sure that the food in our Mess hall was probably according to a diet which was prescribed by the medical profession there.

We very soon picked up in our health and after about a month and a half the Dutch personnel were told to assemble in the hall to listen to an officer who had come from London to address us. He told us -that they were embarrassed about the numbers that had survived. At this we all got up as one man and walked out of the hall.

We were later told that we had misunderstood and it wasn't meant to be the way we thought it was. Anyway, a few days later we were told to get our kitbags and we were going to be sent back to the Dutch East Indies. We boarded the British aircraft carrier, HMAS Implacable and once on board we were told we were going to Balikpapan because we were still in the Army and the Army was needed. Personally, I believe this was against the Geneva Convention, to use ex prisoners for a military role.

However, on arrival in Balikpapan we were picked up by the Australian troops, taken to a camp and given weapons by the Australian troops who were leaving within a few weeks. We were to take over the guard duties, act as prison guards and do patrols, because there were still some Japanese in the jungle.

**Q: How did you feel about that ?**

R: Well, we were very unhappy about it, but by that time we realised that the Dutch East Indies were no longer a colony and we were to fight the Indonesians. However, most of us had relatives on Java and we obviously wanted to know how they were. Gradually, the letters began to arrive to say who had survived the camps. It turned out that my mother had been put in a Prison camp for women. My brother had been taken prisoner and was taken to Timor and Flores and later on evacuated back to Java. I managed to get a few days off and, as a lot of my previous school mates had been lucky enough to join the Air Force at the beginning of the war and were flying from Balikpapan to Java. I managed to get a seat on a B-25 bomber and flew to Java to visit my mother who allegedly was in a critical condition.

**Q: Major Katarski, what about your feelings when you flew in to see your mother again ?**

R: Well, of course I was apprehensive after having being away for a long time from home. Also, when I left I was a boy and when I came back I was a man. Things had changed so drastically that everything seemed to be different. Anyway, my mother was fortunately out of danger and was transferred to a big hotel in Jakarta which used to be called the Hotel Deslandes and which was now a convalescent home or hospital. Of course, it was fantastic to find my mother again and hear that she was better than she had been. I also found my brother who was at that stage a guard in one of the camps for women. They stayed in those camps because they were the safest places to be, but instead of Japanese guards they had our own guards, as well as some British troops.

Unfortunately, at that stage there was a political aspect to the whole thing. The British, who had colonies in Malaya and South East Asia, and the Dutch had always been rivals in economic terms. At that stage I'm sure Britain still hoped to recoup her possessions and build them up. So the British troops who were in charge would not give permission for the Dutch troops to come back to Java allegedly for operational reasons. But I'm sure that they wanted to give their own colonies an advantage over the Dutch colonies.

I was on Java in Jakarta for about two weeks. Then my mother and my brother, who had been declared unfit by the Army, were evacuated to Australia so that I returned to my unit in Balikpapan where I stayed until the end of January. We were then sent to the Celebes where there were still ten thousand Japanese troops in the hinterland and there was a fairly large Japanese airfield. Our task was to re-establish Dutch sovereignty over that part of the archipelago and at the same time evacuate the Japanese troops, send them back to Japan as well as administer law and order in the islands.

**Q: Did you feel any resentment towards the Japanese**

R: Well, I'd say, yes. Especially when we heard and saw for ourselves the atrocities they had committed against the civilians and also against the prisoners who had been on the various islands. At the same time the Indonesians were, of course, opposing the Allied forces, not only on Java but also in the islands. So it became virtually a protracted guerrilla war in the jungles of Celebes. Celebes is an outer island, Java was of course the main island of the Dutch colonies and the infrastructure was well established in Java. However, Celebes was mostly jungle and the Japanese had a plan in case they would lose the war, to start a rebellion amongst all the colonised countries at the same time. However, due to a lack of coordination it didn't start simultaneously. The revolt in India took a long time. Malaya was uncoordinated and the only place where the revolt against the former colonial powers was successful was in French Indochina and in the Dutch East Indies.

I was on the island for about a year. Finally, towards the end of August 1946 I was able to get out of the Army because fortunately, I had passed my high school leaving exam before the war

and had stated my intention to go to university. Those like me were allowed extended leave to go to university and of course, I had to go to Holland for that.

**Q: Could you tell me, when you were in the Celebes, were you fighting under Dutch Officers or were you part of the American**

R: No, no. With Dutch officers. As soon as we landed in Balikpapan. at the end of 1945, we were back under Dutch command.

**Q: Was the force a large one ?**

R: Yes. I would say there was almost a division. The difference there was that the people who came back fro. The Philippines, all had American uniforms - later on we got Australian uniforms as well.

Those who came from other parts of South East Asia wore British uniforms, but all were part of the Dutch Colonial Army.

Towards the end of 1946, Holland was sending Dutch troops to Indonesia to oppose the Indonesians and gradually the old colonial Army personnel were sent home - either back to Holland, or if they lived in Indonesia, back to wherever they came from.

**Q: Because you wanted to go to university did you return to Holland ?**

R: Yes. I had the choice of waiting for a Navy troopship to go back, or to muster on one of the ships that was taking the women and children who came out of the various Japanese prison camps, back to Holland. I decided to take the latter option and worked my way back to Holland. On arrival, I was sent to a military camp in central Holland, where I was officially demobbed insofar as they called it "extended leave". In other words, they could call me up any time they liked.

Fortunately, I was never called up and I could start my studies. In Holland I looked up my old acquaintances who had also been evacuated. I met my future wife at this time. She was the daughter of a family I knew and she had been in prison camp as well. In one way this was good, because she could understand what I had been through, far better than someone, who had not had the same experience.

**Q What was your health like at this stage ?**

R: In Holland, while I was studying, I suddenly experienced a mental breakdown insofar as I had complete amnesia.

Fortunately, the doctors there realised that what I'd been through was probably the cause and prescribed a course of vitamins to improve my health. Gradually my memory returned and in fact, got so good that although I had to terminate my studies at the university, I managed to get on to a training course for overseas representatives which was designed for both government and private business. I passed with fairly high grades and was accepted by the Royal Dutch Airlines as an employee.

**Q: Were you married at this stage ?**

*R:* No. I had met my future wife, but I wasn't married at that stage. However, the pay was so low that I couldn't get married. I managed to get a job with a large multi national company which had interests in Indonesia as well as in other parts of the world. Because of my knowledge of Indonesia I was sent there as an overseas representative.

I then married my fiancée and we were sent by this company to the Celebes, to Macassar - or as it is called "Ujung Panjang". While in the Celebes I was on leave in the mountains because it was nice and cool, when a rebellion started against the Indonesian Government and we were caught by the rebels. There was a handful of white people who were staying at the hotel and we were all lined up by the rebels. However, I recognised the type of people that these rebels were. They were mostly Ambonese and excolonial Army personnel. Once I made them understand that I knew who they were, we were treated as long lost family by these people.

**Q: Were you in a prison camp once again ?**

*R:* No, no. Just in the hotel. It was just for a few days. We were then taken back. They pushed the Indonesian Army off the Island and we were taken back to Macassar, to our own home by these rebels.

The company had just built a new two storey house for us on the beach front. When the Indonesian Army came back and landed on the Island, they had to range their guns and our house, sticking out from the shore, was an ideal spot to shoot at. So we spent one week on the staircase, which was in the middle of the house, with about twenty six people who had run in to our place when they started shelling. We spent one week on the staircase, while slowly our new house was crumbling around us. I was fortunate that, representing the company, I managed to get some cases of foodstuff and drink into the house so that we weren't starving.

A week later the Indonesian Army reestablished itself but at first we were not allowed to communicate with the outside world. Finally a week later we were allowed to contact our head office and we had a visit from one of our directors who, because of what we had been through, transferred us to other parts of Indonesia.

**Q: How did you react to a situation like this ? It is like something from the past: I guess ?**

*R:* That's right ! The problem was that we were suddenly put into a situation where we were unarmed - we couldn't do anything. We had wives, there were children and it was a very difficult situation. However, by then I had had enough of Indonesia, and on New Year's Day 1951 I tendered my resignation to the company. I had been to the Australian Embassy to see whether I could migrate to Australia because my brother was still in Western Australia.

My mother, in the meantime, had gone back to Holland because she had most of her friends there and she couldn't get a Dutch pension in Australia at that stage.

I was told by the Australian Embassy that I was eligible for the ex Allied Serviceman Migration Scheme and I managed to get onto that Scheme so long as I paid for my own trip. So I paid for two tickets for my wife and myself to Perth, on Qantas and flew to Perth via Darwin.

**Q: Apart from the fact that your brother and mother had been in Australia, you seem to have an affinity with the Australians from your prisoner of war experiences ?**

R: Yes. First of all, I couldn't get used to the idea of living in Holland, where everything was small and where there were so many people living on top of each other. Australia seemed to appeal to me as far as climate and size were concerned. Also, of course, the fact that my brother was there. At that stage he was working for "The West Australian" - was the reason why I came to Perth in particular.

**Q: What were your feelings when you landed here ?**

R: Well. My first impression was not too good insofar as we boarded a DC3 in Darwin after flying to Australia in a Constellation.

That plane flew from Darwin to Wyndham where, of course, the airfield is outside Wyndham with just a corrugated gravel strip. There were four poles, a corrugated iron roof and a man on a horse with a few bags which had "HMS Mail" written on it.

The plane left Wyndham and landed in Derby. To me it seemed that I had landed on the same strip again because there was the same man with a big bag and nothing else but desert. I said to my wife "What have we done ?"

We then flew to Broome, which was very similar in those days and when we finally saw the lights of Perth to us it seemed that we finally arrived in civilisation again. My brother lived in Cannington which at that stage, was just outside the metro area.

After Jakarta, where every night there were shots fired and the Dutch weren't too welcome, it was heaven. I got work very quickly as a sales representative. I tried the Army, but they didn't want anyone - they reckoned the war was over.

**Q : They had too many men wanting to go into the Army I suppose?**

R: Yes, that's right. So I started work as a representative. One of the clauses in the Ex Services Migration Scheme was that in case of war I would have to join the Army and although the Korean War had started when we arrived in Australia, there was no reason for me to join the Army.

R: In 1957 I had a visit from someone I didn't know, who introduced himself as a member of the Australian Army Reserve and he asked me would I join the Reserve, as I had some experience in anti-guerrilla warfare and jungle operations.

I was reluctant to join any Army at that stage. However, by that time I had two children and I didn't want them to go through the same thing that I had gone through. I reported to Western Command where the Intelligence Corps had a very small unit, or at least, they were trying to form a small unit. I joined as a private in August 1957 and in 1958.

I was promoted Corporal in the same unit. It was then called the 11<sup>th</sup> Field Security Unit. In 1960 I sat for a Commission and on passing was commissioned as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the Australian Army.

Our unit was very small. It had two officers and thirty other ranks. It was an independent unit and when the officer in charge, a captain left, I took his place. By that time I was a lieutenant and was promoted to temporary captain to be able to run the unit. I went to various courses in the Eastern States to a foreign Army course where there were Vietnamese Ranger officers, British officers as well as Australian officers.

When I returned to Perth the unit had assumed more importance than it used to have because it was now part of an integrated CMF/Regular unit. In 1974, I was promoted to Major. The unit at that stage was no longer a Field Security Unit but had become a Counter Intelligence Unit. I left the unit because of my age. I had received an extension. Normally, retiring age is forty eight but I had had a two year extension and I was fifty when I left the Army.



Major Katarski second from the left rear rank.

Q: You must have met some fascinating people during your time in the Dutch Army?

R: I did. I met some interesting British officers. I didn't meet any officers above the rank of Lieutenant in the Australian Army simply because most of the Australian officers seemed to be subordinate to the British officers. There was a difference between the Officer Corps then and now, as far as outlook was concerned.

In those days I think the Officer Corps was trying to emulate British officers. These days, they are definitely an Australian Officer Corps.

Q: A natural evolution from the colonial days really, isn't it?

R: Yes.

Q: What about compensation because of your health ?

R: Unfortunately the Dutch had a big problem. They were losing their colonies and, therefore, they were losing their main income in Holland.

Holland was devastated due to the war and most of the income was derived from the colonies. They had no scheme designed to support ex-Army personnel who returned from the War. Added

to which was another problem and that was that having lived in the colonies, I belonged to the Colonial Army which after the loss of the Indonesian colonies was no longer a standing Army.

People who returned healthy and stayed healthy or never complained never received anything. In fact, when I was in Australia in the 1950s I received a letter from the Dutch Government stating that I had been paid in Manila in American dollars in 1945-46 and according to the then 1950s exchange rate I had been overpaid and would I please get in touch with the Dutch Consul to see how I could pay back whatever I had been overpaid.

You can imagine my feelings and my answer. I finished up writing to the Dutch Consul General. As well, I also sent a copy to the RSL, of which I was a member as an Allied soldier. I very quickly got a reply, but I never got any compensation. It was a difficult position for the Dutch Government but of course I was a victim and I looked at it from a different point of view.

**Q: Were you disillusioned by their attitude ?**

R: I was very disillusioned and this only confirmed my resolve to become an Australian citizen. One of the advantages of having arrived here as an ex-serviceman was that although one had to wait a number of years, I believe it was five years - before one could become an Australian citizen in those days, I could deduct the years that I had been under either British or Australian command or in the Australian area of responsibility (South East Asia), from the waiting time. which meant that I arrived here in February 1951 and I was naturalised in 1955.

**Q: Did you ever receive any compensation from the Dutch Government ?**

R: Yes. After forty years, I finally received a disability allowance.

**END**



Oleg as the young soldier